

**Bangor University**

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **Queer tactical diaspora: Reading Caribbean Queer Narratives**

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*Award date:*  
2010

*Awarding institution:*  
Bangor University

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PhD thesis

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# QUEER TACTICAL DIASPORA

## *Reading Caribbean Queer Narratives*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Justin Edwards, without whom this study would not have been possible. It all began at the English Department at the University of Copenhagen. Professor Edwards's supervision of my Master's Thesis on Tony Kushner and his queer politics was incredibly insightful and stimulating. However, it was Professor Edwards's interest, research and involvement in the area of postcolonial studies that inspired me to take on a PhD study in this exciting field. With his encouragement and support, I made my way to the University of Wales, Bangor, where a new stage of my life began. His generous and gracious guidance, his insights and constructive criticisms, and his tremendous moral support have not only helped me persist through rough and tough times but have also made my study tremendously rewarding. I thank him for that.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at Roskilde University for offering me their insights, concerns and criticisms. Their support and kind words were extremely helpful. I thank Dr Lars Jensen for reading the final draft in the nick of time.

I thank my friends and family for sticking it out with me during the less cheerful stages of my PhD. Without their support I would never have been able to cope with the hard moments in life. I want to particularly thank my parents, Ljiljana and David, for their endless love, support and encouragement.



## ABSTRACT

Acquiring a wide currency in the 1990s as a term designating non-normative practices and identity formations, queer studies challenged dominant knowledges and social hierarchies of heteronormativity as well as the sexual homogeneity of earlier feminist critique. Whilst acknowledging the impact and efficacy of queer theory, this thesis poses the question: how can queer studies be utilised beyond the borders of Euro-America? More precisely, what happens when we intersect queer studies with postcolonial studies? This thesis argues that by exploring the interstices between the two fields, we are able to create a new field of academic research in which social and cultural meanings of sexuality become the main objects of colonial, historical and literary study. By combining queer and postcolonial studies, this thesis questions the validity of both fields. It exposes and explores their shortcomings by looking at the queer diasporic narratives in and from the Caribbean. Queer, diaspora and nation work as central elements, as the thesis investigates the Western notions of sexual identity and belongingness alongside postcolonial deployments of nation, diaspora and sexuality.

The focus of this thesis is on the literary genre of queer diasporic literature; that is, diasporic fictions that propose alternative formulations of home and diaspora. One of the main arguments is that queer diasporic fictions challenge hegemonic formulations and constructions of diasporic identity. Thus, they have the potential of adding to the genre of diasporic narratives a queer take on sexuality as well as the nation. Employing the notion of *queer tactical diaspora* as a methodology, the thesis moves from one theoretical and geographical Caribbean space to the next, deconstructing the developmental model of non-heterosexuality while combining the movement of sexuality with the developmental passage from one fixed boundary into another. By employing queer tactical diaspora, the thesis investigates how narratives of the Caribbean diaspora queer and displace the Eurocentric deployments of sexuality in postcolonial fiction. Defying firm groundings within either diaspora or queer studies, this work employs a range of theoretical paradigms in order to reach the goal of disrupting the Eurocentric notions of sexual diasporic narratives.

By building on the already existing theories of gender and postcolonial studies, this thesis suggests that the method of queer tactical diaspora allows for a more agile and flexible investigation into the workings of normative gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. Queer



tactical diaspora adds to the broader theories of postcolonialism and gender studies a new method of analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (2006), Alison Donnell suggests a ‘new and urgent demand that critics should address in their theorisations of difference, as well as an exciting body of writing that is just beginning to be documented and analysed’. What Donnell calls attention to is the ‘recent and important development in Anglocreole Caribbean literature—namely the articulation and inscription of diverse sexual identities within a body of creative writing’ (181). The recent developments in Caribbean fiction, where an increasing attention is paid to the workings of sexuality within Caribbean space, oblige us to investigate how sexuality, alongside race, class, gender and ethnicity, becomes a constitutive part of making a national community. Indeed, the canonical Caribbean writing from 1950s onwards rarely challenges the formation of normative heterosexual gender and sexuality. Trinidad-born Samuel Selvon’s 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners*, for instance, which details the life of young West Indian working-class males in post-World War II London, addresses the complexity of the West Indian migrant experience of metropolitan life.<sup>1</sup> As they are trying to establish economic and cultural security in 1950s London, Selvon presents the young men as they embrace London and the excitement of the new. Selvon’s account of the West Indians characters, however, is also a sexualised one. Moses, the protagonist, and his friends, the ‘boys’, are constantly on the prowl, pursuing White women who are not only the objects of their desires but are also characterised by their ethnicity (‘English’, ‘Austrian’).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the assertion of Black masculinity comes at the expense of the Black female experience which is caricatured in the image of Tolroy’s ‘ma’ and Tanty, the Caribbean matriarch. The novel engages in the formation of Black identity as constructed through silencing and marginalising the position of women and the reproduction of dominant masculine and racial discourses, as the ‘boys’ are portrayed as sexually promiscuous, confirming the stereotypical image created by the dominant White culture. In terms of (non-normative) sexuality, the novel shows evidence of humiliation and ridicule of homosexuality. This is seen in the amusement and laughter that pervades the depiction of the

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<sup>1</sup> James Procter argues that in *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon provides his characters a ‘discursive knowledge of the metropolis, a knowledge that has been acquired through a range of social institutional apparatuses in colonial Trinidad. [...] It is by illuminating the city as a discursive site that Selvon is able to open London up and make it susceptible to a rewriting, to alternative signifying processes’ (52).

<sup>2</sup> Procter links Galahad’s love affair with the city’s women to his love affair with the city itself: ‘Both the female body and the “body” of the metropolis become eroticised “sites” of a fetishistic surveillance and exploration by “the boys”’ (52).



incident when Captain (Cap) mistakes the drag queen Bon Soir for a female prostitute.<sup>3</sup> The representation of the Caribbean diaspora in Selvon's novel, a representation permeated with the language of masculinity and sexualisation, reflects not only the 'exoticisation' of Black identity by the dominant White culture but also the 'liberation' of the Caribbean characters from the ruthless London winter. Selvon uses stream of consciousness to represent a reallocation of Standard English to a diasporised language located within the dominant culture. Moreover, contrary to the beginning of the novel which opens on a 'one grim winter evening', the stream of consciousness section of the novel, which begins during the British summer, is also permeated by the images of sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the compulsory heterosexuality and hypermasculinity expressed in the objectification of women's bodies from the perspective of the Black working-class male, the language of reallocation is also surrounded by homophobia, which is seen by the representation of the 'pansy'.<sup>5</sup> The overt hypermasculinity and homophobia in the novel serve to distance non-heterosexuality from the Caribbean identity, relegating it to a position of decadence and dissipation which can only be found at the colonial 'centre'. The humiliation and laughter surrounding the depictions of non-normative sexuality are means of 'empowering' the Black identity through the 'celebration' of (heteronormative) sexuality. Thus Selvon's novel, despite its important articulations of the West Indian migrant experience in London as a collective subcultural community, reproduces dominant masculine and racial discourses at the expense of (Black) women and non-heterosexual subjectivities.<sup>6</sup>

*The Lonely Londoners* is a text that articulates, via the language of hypermasculinity and homophobia, the specific experiences of marginalised and diasporic (West Indian) groups of (male) individuals found at the colonial 'centre' in the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Caribbean writing from the

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<sup>3</sup> 'Moses start one set of laughing, and the old Cap laugh too. ... Since that time all the boys greeting Captain: "Bon Soir"' (Selvon 40).

<sup>4</sup> 'Oh what a time it is when summer come to the city and all them girls throw away heavy winter coats and wearing light summer frocks so you could see the legs and shapes that was hiding away from the cold blasts' (Selvon 85).

<sup>5</sup> 'One night Moses meet a pansy by Marble Arch tube station and from the way the test look at him Moses know because you could always tell these tests unless you real green you have a lovely tie the pansy say yes Moses say you have a lovely hat yes Moses say you have a very nice coat yes Moses say everything I have is nice I like you the pansy say I like you too Moses say and all this time he want to dead with laugh' (Selvon 91-92).

<sup>6</sup> I do not dismiss the importance of the Black female characters in Selvon's novel. I only emphasise the dominant masculine and racial discourses in his text.

<sup>7</sup> Selvon is merely one of the authors within the 1950s' London Caribbean literary scene that excludes Black female experience and identity. Others include George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Edward Ricardo Brathwaite.



1980s to the present day, on the other hand, addresses the issues of sexuality, whether normative or non-normative, as an element that not only defines the boundaries of national and cultural identity, but also one that talks back to earlier Caribbean writing which neglected the discussion of non-normative sexuality on the basis that it was foreign to the region.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, the discussions of gender and sexuality, whether normative or not, are present in all writing. What makes the recent developments in Caribbean writing interesting, however, is not merely the inclusion of 'queer' sexuality within Caribbean space—these texts also offer an investigation into the historical processes embedded in the determination of social and cultural meanings of sexuality in the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup> By exploring the historical shaping of sexuality in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean geography, these texts offer an ability to expose and alter the representations of gender and sexuality that mark sexual inscriptions upon non-procreative bodies as part of an attempt at decolonisation. Moreover, recent Caribbean writers offer a view into the colonial past as a way of historicising the present, revealing, for instance, the stigmatisation of non-procreative sexualities not merely as an issue of sex but more as a question of the strength and health of the nation-state. So, the question arises: how do the Caribbean writers insert (queer) sexuality into the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition and by what means? Moreover, where and how do we situate this writing in terms of the longer worldwide tradition of (Anglophone) postcolonial literature? In the case studies that follow, I explore how the Caribbean can be placed within the field of queer diaspora; that is, diaspora reconceptualised in terms of queerness and affiliation.<sup>10</sup> By 'placing' Caribbean writing I mean conceptualising it within a new dynamic field, calibrated to take account of queer sexuality as a political means, not simply placing it within a tradition of 'queer' or 'postcolonial Caribbean writing'. Queer and postcolonial writing is already abundant, but when combined, the two seemingly disparate fields open up an entire new domain where social and cultural meanings of sexuality within Caribbean space become objects of historical, colonial and literary investigations.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the most prominent Caribbean writers addressing the issues of sexuality include Audre Lorde, Shani Mootoo, Dionne Brand, H. Nigel Thomas, Jamaica Kincaid, Makeda Silvera, Patricia Powell and Lawrence Scott. I discuss nativity and non-nativity of non-heterosexuality in the Caribbean in Chapter Four.

<sup>9</sup> The choice of using *queer* as the adjective to describe homosexuality or same-sex relations is based on its ability to cross categories and avoid classification. Although I use the term as an indicator of the oppositional space outside heteronormativity, I am aware, however, that being part of Western terminology and originating within a US context, the term possibly fixes sexual binaries. Relying on the ability of 'queer' to transcend gender positioning and exhibit slippages in meaning in ways that terms 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' do not, I will continue to use the term despite its Eurocentric connotations.

<sup>10</sup> By queer diaspora I mean queer diasporic writing.



In this thesis, I propose that by exploring the interstices between the fields of queer studies and postcolonial/diaspora studies, we are able to create a new field of academic research in which social and cultural meanings of sexuality become the main objects of colonial, historical and literary study. Queer theory, a Western concept grounded in specific cultural and theoretical discourses surrounding gay and lesbian identity, is nevertheless firmly fixed within the boundaries of Eurocentricity. Therefore, its utilisation beyond the borders of Euro-America runs the risk of universalising the Western notions of sexuality identity. Diaspora studies, on the other hand, a contentious term which implies a breakdown of the notion of the nation, is admittedly overarching and unspecific. Therefore, I question the validity of the two studies, as I combine the two academic fields in order to explore their mutual shortcomings. By combining queer and diaspora, I conduct an enquiry into the workings, the underpinnings and the validity of both terms, as I look at the queer diasporic narratives in and from the Caribbean. Juxtaposing queerness, nation and belonging, I intend to merge queer and postcolonial studies by opening up both disciplines and making them permeable to other contexts and perspectives. Thus, the questions of queer, diaspora and nation will work as central elements in my thesis, as I investigate the Western notions of sexual identity and belongingness alongside postcolonial deployments of nation, diaspora, and ultimately, sexuality.

In an article in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (1993), Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman note the complex relationship between queerness, nationhood and identity. 'Queer Nation has taken up the project of coordinating a new nationality', they contend, and although its relation to nationhood is 'multiple and ambiguous', Queer Nation, according to Berlant and Freeman, takes 'as much from the insurgent nationalisms of oppressed peoples as from the revolutionary idealism of the United States' ('Queer Nationality', 195). Being the product of specific cultural and theoretical discourses surrounding gay and lesbian identity, queer studies problematise, through the poststructuralist lens, the gay liberationist and lesbian feminist understandings of identity, sexuality and power relations. The non-specificity of the term 'queer' guards it against the exclusionist tendencies of categories such as 'gay' and 'lesbian', in that the elusive and vague definitions of queer politics make it a powerful tool for challenging normative (sexual) knowledges and deconstructing sexualities based on the notions of identity politics: 'Access to the post-structuralist theorisation of identity as provisional and contingent, coupled with a growing awareness of the limitations of identity categories in terms of political representation,



enabled queer to emerge as a new form of personal identification and political organisation' (Jagose 1997, 77-78). Arguing for the linking of state and nation with queerness, as Berlant and Freedman suggest, is a much-needed action that combats the politics of the state by challenging the discourses surrounding queer subjectivities' access to citizenship and national subjectivity. Moreover, the authors suggest that Queer Nation's self-entitlement within the public sphere redefines and reterritorialises citizenship and nationality by 'claiming the nation for pleasure' (195). The disjunction between citizenship and national subjectivity, where queer subjectivities are granted access to the former but denied from the latter, is an aspect which Queer Nation seeks to exploit. The linking of queer and state by the means of this disjunction, however, runs the risk of relegating all queer subjectivities to the status of identification with either citizenship or nationality. Moreover, as 'queer' becomes the only marker of difference between its citizens, Queer Nation remains bound to the generalising logic of American citizenship based on sexual object-choice and individual self-identity. What is needed, instead, is a more complex negotiation of queer citizenship and national belongingness based on multiple national spaces that require transnational and evasive theorisations of sexuality, the state and the nation. Required is a decentring of the dominant Euro-American paradigms and the globalisation of the 'queer' identity based not on visibility but on the displacement of the Western sexual conventions and the reworking of (queer) pleasures and desires that emanate from non-Western territories.

Indeed, the politics of Queer Nation are directly linked to my arguments about queer diaspora, in that my analysis of the Western notions of sexual identity and belongingness are closely tied to my readings of queer Caribbean writing. Juxtaposing Queer Nation with queer diaspora allows me to decentre dominant Euro-American paradigms in order to make them more permeable to the questions of colonialism, race and the nation-state. Thus, queer diaspora (and queer Caribbean writing) breaks down the generalising logic of the global 'gay' identity, as it disintegrates the colonial narratives of development and progress that deem all 'other' sexual practices as underdeveloped and non-modern. By resituating the Euro-American conventions of encoding homosexuality, queer diaspora challenges Queer Nation's claims to citizenship, defying Eurocentric and colonial notions of belonging. The queer diasporic imagery redrafts what it means to be 'home', placing queer subjectivity as a vital part of the makings of a national community. By deconstructing the relationship between ethnicity and national belonging, queer diaspora 'diasporises' the notion of a Queer Nation.



In her landmark work, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005), Gayatri Gopinath examines non-normative sexualities in South Asian and Diasporic Culture. 'If conventional diasporic discourse is marked by...[a] backward glance', she writes, ... '[then] a queer diaspora mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes' (4). Adding theorisations of gender and sexuality to the histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism and migration, Gopinath incorporates the questions of desire and the body within the histories of racist and colonialist violence that still resonate loudly in the present. 'Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history', Gopinath adds, 'what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles' (4). Taking its cue from Gopinath's assertion, my thesis builds on the existing theorisations of gender and postcolonial studies, in that it pays attention to the highly intricate interstices between queer memories and diasporic spaces. Moreover, the thesis adds to the abundant fields of queer and postcolonial studies by intersecting them, in order not only to render their ability to work together but also to expose their weaknesses and highly contested underpinnings. However, the question arises: why do the fields of queer studies and postcolonial studies need to intersect and to what purposes? Gopinath partly answers this question by analysing the colonialist violence of the past that reverberates on the contemporary South Asian public cultural scene.<sup>11</sup> I, however, expand this view to incorporate the questions of validity in the postcolonial world of the workings of queer studies and their Eurocentric underpinnings, as they run the risk of universalising the experience of the unmarked White, male body. Queer studies, a strand of social and literary critique which draws heavily on French poststructuralism and deconstruction, is, after all, a Western academic exercise. However, when coupled with the admittedly overarching field of diaspora studies, the discipline exhibits the possibility of opening up its borders and becoming permeable to other contexts, disciplines and worldviews.

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<sup>11</sup> Gopinath builds the term 'public culture' upon Arjun Appadurai and Carole Breckenridge's definition of it as a space within culture where 'tensions and contradiction between national sites and transnational cultural processes' take place (cited in Gopinath 2005, 20). A few examples of South Asian public culture featured in *Impossible Desires* include the Indian Canadian filmmaker Ian Rashid's 1996 short film *Surviving Sabu*, the South Asian diasporic feminist filmmaker Mira Nair's 2001 film *Monsoon Wedding*, and the British Bangladeshi writer Monica Ali's 2003 novel *Brick Lane*.



More important, it exposes the significance of focusing on the differences *between* bodies as they are both juxtaposed and positioned together.<sup>12</sup>

Queer diaspora—a relatively recent term within the studies of gender and postcolonial studies—is a field which deserves further explanation. But how does one go about explaining queer diaspora? First, in terms of semantics, the term consists of two separate and ostensibly different words: *queer*—coming through Scottish to Low German and Old High German words based on the Proto-Indo-European base *twerk-*: ‘to turn, to twist’, and *diaspora*: from the Greek *diasperien*, from *dia*, meaning across, and *speirein*, meaning to sow or scatter. The combination of turning/twisting and scattering suggests that what we are dealing with involves movement, change and variation, terms which eschew quick understandings and complete comprehensibility. So how does one set about investigating the amalgam of two concepts which, in and by themselves, do not provide conclusive results? One of the aims of this thesis is exactly that: to investigate the ability of queer diaspora to complement and to expand each individual terrain, queering diaspora and diasporising the queer. In fact, a platform for investigation of the intersection of queer and diaspora has begun to be constructed. David L. Eng contends that queer diaspora forces us to rethink the problematic of home and belonging in terms of sexuality and displacement (2003, 4). Eng is one of the most prominent critics arguing for the ability of queer diaspora to intervene in the discourses of traditional family structures and the organisation of national and transnational communities. Gopinath is another critic who argues that queer diaspora allows for the vocalisation of queer female desire rendered impossible within the diasporic and state nationalisms that dictate and legislate heterosexuality.<sup>13</sup> Common to these voices is the importance of queer investigations of the discourses on diaspora as well as the importance of sustaining critique of how queer studies realises the potential of its own investigations of the workings of gender and sexuality without imposing the self-centricity of European and North American onto other regions of

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<sup>12</sup> One of the interesting criticisms of the esotericism of queer critique comes from the field of English Studies and the *National Council of Teachers in English* in the UK: ‘Although queer theory in the early 1990s, like the so-called “high” theory of the 1980s that preceded it, spoke of the decentring of subjectivity and the dismantling of identity categories, such a position has not been sufficiently self-reflexive about its own elitism. Certainly there is far less to lose if one speaks of “gay” or “lesbian” in white, middle-class, Western terms, but in communities of color, for example, where racial and (homo)sexual positions have yet to be more fully inscribed on the social register, the stakes in claiming the contestation of identity categories a priori cannot be so easily maintained without taking into account the specificities of personal and cultural history and lived experience’ (Spurlin 11-12).

<sup>13</sup> Other prominent advocates of the decentring of Whiteness and the Euro-American centricity in theorising gender and sexuality include Roderick Fergusson, Martin F. Manalansan and José Muñoz.



the world. Thus, one of my main research questions is how (self)-critical queer diaspora can create new transnational spaces of belonging, producing new geographies of desire based on multiple deterritorialised sites of exchange. I seek to address this question by focusing on the approach to queer diaspora, in that queer diasporic re-membering, which constitutes the intersections between the theories of diaspora and those of queer, requires us to look at sexuality both as a mobile entity and as a mobile tactic of deterritorialisation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the overall theme of the thesis is the interrogation of the multiple intersections between place and body.

Cultural meanings of sexuality can appear in various forms and so can diasporic writing. From state legislation to newspaper articles to fictional accounts—the definitions of sexuality can be found in a wide variety of cultural texts.<sup>15</sup> As with the accounts of sexuality, diaspora narratives vary depending on the form and context. Although they can, of course, be non-fictional (e.g. memoirs or travelogues), my focus is on diasporic fictions; that is, the literary genre of queer diasporic literature which proposes, through fiction, an alternative formulation of home and diaspora. The texts that work as case studies for my thesis challenge the hegemonic formulations and constructions of diasporic identity, re-inscribing and remembering ‘differently’. Above all, the genre of queer diasporic fiction works in connection with other disciplines and conventions, continuing and disintegrating literary traditions (e.g. exile and immigrant literature), and making its own mark on literary inscriptions of home, diaspora and sexuality. Thus, my choice of focusing on this particular genre is based on its ability to remap and re-imagine the notions of home and belonging. In addition, the genre has the potential and the capability of adding to the genre of diasporic narratives a queer take on sexuality as well as the nation. In line with my argument for the intersection of queer and postcolonial studies, queer diasporic fiction also allows for a reconsideration of queer and diasporic cultural texts within the framework of diaspora and migration studies as well as textual and cultural analysis. The genre sets the stage for the joining of other academic fields (such as the queer of colour critique or women of colour feminism) to the studies of the physical and psychological transformation of the body through movement and migration. It is

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<sup>14</sup> The hyphen in ‘re-membering’ takes its cue from Anne-Marie Fortier who argues that re-membering places is ‘the processes through which spaces of belonging – imagined and physical – are inhabited, in the literal sense of dwelling, in the sense of populating or “membering” spaces with ghosts from the past, and in the sense of manufacturing . . . subjects’ (128).

<sup>15</sup> In the case of my project, the more important question is what constitutes ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ sexuality. This will be addressed throughout my thesis.



the imaginative landscapes of queer diasporic fiction that allow for a troubling of hegemonic and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality based on colonial and racist structures, as well as imagining a queer space and a different mode of belonging inclusive of gay, lesbian and transgendered subjectivities. Such landscapes would certainly facilitate alternative formulations of gendered and sexual subjectivity.

The choice of focusing on Caribbean queer narratives and the ways geography and sexuality are used in these narratives requires explanation. Certainly, giving attention to only Caribbean queer narratives implies a certain level of generalisation, as narratives from other parts of the world (e.g. the Indian or African queer narrative) are not given their own voice.<sup>16</sup> However, I believe that my emphasis on a particular literary geography of the Caribbean must be seen in its specific and regional context. More important, by grounding my research in one specific region I add cultural and historical specificity to the studies of diaspora.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, my emphasis on Caribbean queer narratives prevents a too wide opening of the geography of the project which certainly would diffuse the scope of the thesis. This is not to say that there is no border crossing in my work. In fact, all of the narratives that I analyse cross multiple borders—from the Caribbean to India, from Canada to Britain. These are all diasporic texts whose form and subject matter ground them ‘elsewhere’, in other regions and geographies, but which nonetheless share firm grounding within the Caribbean geography. For instance, the work of the Guyanese author and literary critic Wilson Harris, in which he proposes *syncretism* as a Caribbean literary and cultural counterpart to Homi Bhabha’s concept of *hybridity*, eschews knowledge-based conclusiveness of colonial representation and inserts spaces in-between as *sites* that disintegrate uniformity and expose otherness within the mental images of homogeneity. My employment of sites rather than places emphasises the importance of tactics in rediscovering Caribbean cultural resources based outside the philosophical and geographical space of Euro-America. Harris’s theorisations of the Caribbean literary scene work as a response to Western philosophical ontology, in that he points out that the traditional Western narrative is inadequate in capturing the dialectical relationship between the human being and the landscape that surrounds it, the latter being

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<sup>16</sup> For an excellent interrogation of home, nostalgia and desire in a South Asian queer narrative, see Shyam Selvadurai’s 1994 novel *Funny Boy*.

<sup>17</sup> I do not suggest that my readings of Caribbean queer narratives are based on specific historical events. Rather, one of the main arguments of my thesis is that diaspora studies need to be grounded in specific regional contexts lest it become purely theoretical.



vital for African cultural recognition in the Caribbean. My emphasis on Harris's non-Western critique is based on his use of landscape and I argue throughout the thesis that landscape becomes an 'interrogative space' in which a pre-Columbian, New World African past is recalled and reworked into a site of 'contrasting spaces'. This reallocation of the imagination of the Caribbean literary scene towards an emphasis on the contrasts in places and culture becomes an important element in my analyses of novels which comprise the empirical data of this work. My 'diasporising' of the Western philosophical ontology complements my argument about the need for a diasporised queer theory, as diaspora and queerness both imply a strategic place as a starting point for the development of both identity and sexuality. Thus, queer diaspora works as a challenge to place, strategy and Western ontology, as it enables, via movement and the moving body, the multiple philosophical, cultural and sexual crossings on the dividing lines between Western/non-Western, pre-/post-Columbian and homo/hetero. More important, I suggest that queer diaspora facilitates the move away from the generalised theorisations of postcoloniality towards historically and geographically specific discourses on contested/contrasted spaces that are racialised, sexualised and gendered.<sup>18</sup>

The methodology of this thesis will follow along the lines of what I call *queer tactical diaspora*. In *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire* (1980) (*The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)), Michel de Certeau distinguishes between the concepts of strategy and tactics, where the former is an entity typically linked with institutions and certain structures of power grounded physically in their site of operation, as opposed to tactics, which are fragmented (consisting of individuals or groups) and are not bound to any specific site of operation—their makeshift nature relies on the improper and subverts the 'mappable' space of strategy.<sup>19</sup> Since Certeau's work informs my thinking throughout the thesis I will move from one theoretical and geographical Caribbean space to the next, never fully 'comprehending' the physical and psychological space of queer diaspora.<sup>20</sup> Since queer diaspora deals with movement, slippages and changeability, the notions of queer tactical diaspora is a significantly potent means for

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<sup>18</sup> Expressing his hope for what he calls 'postcolonial diasporas', David Chariandy argues that the 'appearance of "the postcolonial diasporas" would [...] mark a (not-so?) new disenchantment with nation-based articulations of postcolonialism'. Chariandy argues that postcolonial studies need to disassociate themselves from the nation-state and work towards 'better read[ing] and animat[ing] the cultural politics of specific racialized collectivities' (1).

<sup>19</sup> A more in-depth view of Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics can be found in Chapter One. For an interesting reading of the use of Certeau and Foucault within feminist strategic essentialism, see Colebrook 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Certeau's tactics is only one means of theorising of the Caribbean queer narrative. For instance, I also employ Henri Lefebvre's theorisations of space. See Lefebvre 1991.



deconstructing the developmental model of non-heterosexuality, combining the movement of sexuality (queer/tactics) with the developmental passage from one fixed boundary into another (diaspora/strategy).<sup>21</sup> Taking my cue from Gopinath's contentions about the mobilisation of the memories of the past in order to exhibit the displacement of the originary homelands, I add to the existing scholarship by allowing, via crossings of space, a re-symbolisation of attachment/detachment to a certain territory. Queer tactical diaspora reworks strategy and makes claim to a nation and home by inserting queerness as a constitutive part of making a national community. My contention is that the insertion of tactics within the wider debates on diaspora and gender studies introduces mobility as well as local historicity to the existing scholarship, highlighting the body not as a signifier of connection but of difference. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that mobility ensures difference and marks out dissimilarity and dislocation as a means for contesting the strategy's grasp on place. Queer memories contain the ability to trespass borders and incorporate space as a way of mapping out the interstices between place and body. Therefore, looking at queer desire and the queer body in terms of geography allows me to investigate what can be gained by employing queer tactical diaspora as a tool for abrading the normative workings of 'proper' place.<sup>22</sup>

Focusing on five case studies in contemporary Caribbean postcolonial fiction, my thesis focuses on the concepts of Caribbean geography in terms of queer tactical diaspora; that is, the question of how narratives of the Caribbean diaspora queer and displace the Eurocentric deployments of sexuality in postcolonial fiction. By employing the Western concept of deterritorialisation in order to displace national, racial and sexual knowledges, the thesis tactically 'diasporises' those very Eurocentric concepts in order to expose their grounding in the Euro-American colonial imagery. My analysis of Shani Mootoo's 1994 novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* employs the concept of queer tactical diaspora as a means of exposing the imperialist notions of Caribbean space as the biblical Garden of Eden.<sup>23</sup> In Mootoo's novel, the notion of space, geography and the garden is vital to my employment of

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<sup>21</sup> By the developmental model I mean the 'coming out story', which is 'both the most distinctive form of les-bi-gay life writing and that which most invokes classical forms and traditions of autobiography as narratives of revelation and conversion. Reworking a history of forced confession, coming out has expressed the political and historical moment of early gay liberation and lesbian feminism' (Jolly 474).

<sup>22</sup> Terms such as 'queer memories', 'queer desire' and the 'queer body' will be defined in later chapters.

<sup>23</sup> Abandoned by the early European explorers in the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, the hope of recovering the original Garden of Eden persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the form of emerging scientific, ethnographic and travel discourses. For a fascinating insight into the pastoral in Caribbean literature and criticism, see Dash 1998.



tactics as a means for imploding the European pastoral vision of the New World. Moreover, by means of queer tactical diaspora, the garden emerges as a site where past histories are evoked not as they truly were but also as they could have been. Thus, the garden becomes both real and unreal, metaphorical as well as physical, following the lines of Certeau's tactics as it strips away strategy's grasp on place. As an important element of queer diaspora, sexuality emerges as a mobile element that intertwines personal and public histories: the novel's two storylines are juxtaposed as complementing and not opposing each other. Keeping in mind Gopinath's insistence on mobilising questions of past and memory for radical purposes, I argue that queer re-membering serves as a political tool for unearthing silenced histories and proposing alternative notions of citizenship, sexuality and the nation-state. One of my main arguments is that the image of the garden, both real and unreal, becomes a metaphor and a site of hybridity in which history, geography and personal and public narratives intertwine. Employing the garden in such ways offers the possibility of connecting it with contemporary debates on place and identity. In fact, I argue that in order to employ the garden as a means for the deterritorialisation of the relationship between diaspora and queer, we must ensure that the essentialist readings of land and identity retain a strong connection to place. In other words, it is vital that the more rooted and essentialist narratives of identity are not simply replaced by the more deterritorialised, postmodern readings of space.<sup>24</sup> Keeping both terms in play, I show how a rereading of the Caribbean garden reveals the mutual interdependence of place and displacement and, as argued in Chapter Three, the interdependence of roots and routes.

*Cereus Blooms at Night*, a novel which is rich in themes ranging from geography, identity and belonging, is particularly apt for my implementation of queer (self)-critique, both in terms of 'queering' the postcolonial as well as 'postcolonising' the queer.<sup>25</sup> First, queering the postcolonial inserts non-heterosexual desire within the space of the Caribbean, an aspect which corresponds to the tradition of recent Caribbean literature that serves as a response to earlier West Indian narratives. Second, diasporising the queer involves challenging Western formulations of Caribbean culture as homophobic and heterosexist based on the assumed parallel between Caribbean culture and heterosexuality and Western culture and

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<sup>24</sup> For a critique of the postmodern devaluation of space, see Massey (1994) and Kaplan (1994).

<sup>25</sup> I use the terms 'queering' and 'postcolonising' as a means for intersecting queer and postcolonial studies, in accordance with my arguments for opening up borders and exposing Eurocentricity within queer and postcolonial studies.



homosexuality.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the two strands of critique, which are especially relevant when viewed in connection to Selvon's narratives of highly masculinised and exoticised Black identity, complement and expand each other by opening up and altering representations of gender and sexuality.

My emphasis on landscape and its importance for the queering of the Caribbean narrative builds not only upon Harris's theorisations of Caribbean space but also on Édouard Glissant's *Le Discours antillais* (1981). Here Glissant argues that the challenge to the generalising universality of the Western philosophy and ideology requires us to insist on *remaining where we are* (Glissant 139); that is, we must gain knowledge in a way that would account for and include the cultural and political specificity of a particular region.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, my analyses remain 'rooted' in the Caribbean landscape, not as an anti-colonial nationalist practice where a non-European landscape serves as a foundation for an inherent national identity, but as a postcolonial theorisation of landscape that critically reworks the European traditions of rootedness without adhering to negritude literature of a prelapsarian past. Harris and Glissant's theorisations of space serve as a backdrop to my analysis of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, in that sexuality and diasporic queerness in particular, become a method for deconstructing the dichotomous logic of the dominant Euro-American paradigms within gender and sexuality studies. I also employ Mootoo's most recent novel, *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008) as a case study for investigating the workings of the Caribbean landscape on diasporic queerness. *Valmiki's Daughter*, although similar in themes to *Cereus Blooms At Night*, adds tourism and transnational capital to the theorisations of Caribbean diaspora and identity. By way of queer tactical diaspora, Mootoo uses the Caribbean landscape as a framing device and a symbol of the relationship between colonial and neocolonial notions of 'proper' male and female sexuality. Her exploration of tourism and transnational capital, I argue, reverses the traditional Western exoticising gaze on the Black male and female body into an exoticisation of the norms of Western 'high culture' on behalf of the non-Western subject. *Valmiki's Daughter* is also part of Caribbean diasporic queer

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<sup>26</sup> For a critique of the globalisation of 'gay' identity that replicates a colonial narrative of progress and development and progress by juxtaposing 'other' cultures, communities and practices with the Eurocentric model of sexual identity, see Manalansan 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Glissant's call should not and must not be seen as call for nationalist closure. Instead, it works as a critique of the Eurocentric notions of universality where travelling and dwelling are recognised as aspects of the same spatial practice. It provides another model of expression of the Caribbean landscape, rooted *within* the Caribbean landscape and not within the Euro-American imagination of Caribbean space.



literature that responds to earlier Caribbean writing by queering the excessively masculine Caribbean narrative of V. S. Naipaul's 1961 novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. Thus, I frame Chapter Two as 'reaction', both in terms of sexuality and writing, to earlier Caribbean narratives of West Indian (sexual) identity.

My use of queer tactical diaspora as a method of inserting queerness within the makings of a national community builds, among other things, upon Glissant's notions of the 'language of landscape' as a means for adding cultural specificity to Caribbean space.<sup>28</sup> However, if queer tactical diaspora 'trespasses borders' as a way of mapping out the interstices between place and body, how does it cross the aqueous borders that surround and constitute the Caribbean? If landscape is history, what do we make of the sea that surrounds this history? In Chapter Three, I make use of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's notion of 'tidalectics' as a means of re-theorising geography, taking on an alternative historiography which challenges the linear model of colonial progress. More precisely, Brathwaite employs the ebb and flow movement of the sea as a model for investigating island history in terms of nautical routes and oceanic imaginary, allowing the sea to make its mark on the making of island history and Caribbean syncretism. The shift from Glissant's language of landscape to what I call the 'language of seascape' allows me to interrogate the aquatic history of the 'Black Atlantic', not only as a tool for dismantling Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity but also as a means for displacing postcolonial and neocolonial deployments of normative gendering and sexuality.<sup>29</sup> The use of the language of seascape is found in Dionne Brand's 1996 novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, a novel which, I argue, utilises the theorisations of space made by Harris and Glissant and couples them with Brathwaite's tidalectics in order to introduce queer sexuality as both a destabilising and a connecting trope of resistance against oppression, racism and neocolonialism of female and queer African/Caribbean bodies in Canada. The coupling of the language of landscape and the

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<sup>28</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 145. I have already stated that I will focus heavily on the Caribbean landscape. However, Glissant's emphasis on language in connection with landscape will serve as a motif throughout the thesis.

<sup>29</sup> In his most prominent work, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy suggests that the Black Atlantic addresses 'the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world' (3). Here, Gilroy breaks the primary connection of Black America with Africa, focusing [in this case] on the Black British population and its migration in the aftermath of European colonial decline. Foregrounding histories of migration, exploration and crossings, Gilroy presents the image of the ship—as a symbol of motion and travel—drawing attention to the Middle Passage and on the various projects of a redemptive return to an African homeland. My emphasis on the movement and the sea is closely related to Gilroy's project.



language of seascape enables me to add to my original contention that queer tactical diaspora, whether based on land and/or the sea imagery, allows the Caribbean author to create a space for the Caribbean queer by means of rewriting and re-imagining space. This time, however, the vital cultural specificity which forms the foundation for my notion of the queer tactical diaspora, is found in the repetitive narrative progression of *In Another Place, Not Here*, where the pages of the novel rock back and forth like waves of the sea, inserting the Middle Passage into the imagination of its characters.

The ocean-like motion of the novel is also characteristic of the methodology I use in the thesis. Queer tactical diaspora combines queerness with diaspora while simultaneously diasporising queer narratives. It also offers an alternative approach in terms of methodology—my close readings of texts open up theoretical paradigms and use Caribbean fiction to illustrate theory while also shedding new light on Caribbean fiction from the perspective of queer diaspora. In compliance with the theme and content, I defy firm groundings within either diaspora or queer studies. Being queer tactical by nature, this work employs a range of theoretical paradigms in order to reach the goal of disrupting the postcolonial (and thus still Eurocentric) notions of sexual diasporic narratives, where the dichotomy between nation/diaspora and heterosexuality/homosexuality is maintained. Thus, my theoretical choices rest on my conviction that when viewed queerly, these binaries are disrupted by the very same theories and methodologies that underpin them. In addition, there are several close readings of texts that work in a queer and tactical fashion, disrupting the traditional divide between theoretical and textual thesis, and instead foregrounding multiple theoretical paradigms in order to present its case more convincingly.<sup>30</sup> The use of Glissant's language of landscape coupled with Brathwaite's language of seascape is one example of my tactical readings. Here, the two 'languages' are used both to unsettle and disengage Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity as well as to subvert and displace Western deployments of normative gendering and sexuality.<sup>31</sup> The fact that there exists a range of

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<sup>30</sup> Investigation of the dominant diasporic and nationalist ideologies which forms the basis for my analysis of the working of sexuality in the primary work, requires the use of numerous theoretical paradigms that make possible the questioning of and challenge to those very ideologies.

<sup>31</sup> My use of the 'languages' works as a response to John. C. Hawley's call for renewed postcolonial studies. In the introduction to *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, Hawley writes: 'It is time that the burgeoning field of postcolonial studies addresses the effects of colonization and neocolonialism on the sexualities and sexual relations both of those designated elsewhere as subalterns, and of those whose position as members of the ruling class persisted or persists regardless of their own possibly "deviant" status within their own cultures' (13-14).



reading paradigms in my work must be seen in terms of their theme and content, since these languages work towards the mutual goal of responding to earlier critiques of postcolonialism and reworking them into a more nuanced analysis, sensitive to the highly intricate workings of gender and sexuality within postcolonial narratives. In Chapter Three, for instance, I argue that Brand's use of liquid imagery in the description of the city of Toronto is a response to Harris's contrasting spaces, as the characters of Elizete and Verlia both lay claims to the nation-state, the former claiming land and the latter employing the tactics of anti-White revolutionary politics. The use of liquid imagery works as a renewed theorisation of space in which gender and sexuality exhibit the ability to alter territory and create a new language for understanding sexual desire.

My case studies are sensitive to the specificity of a Caribbean literary context as all of the primary literature responds or 'writes back' to earlier representations of Caribbean and sexual identity. This writing back acts as a reaction to 'root texts' in which particular histories have been neglected or silenced. Thus, the narratives that I emphasise employ intertextuality as a means of reformatting the original texts by inserting elements that are not present in the root text. Therefore, writing back becomes not a 'precise' expression of the colonial past but a postcolonial version of history that resists the colonial relationship to culture and sexuality. In Chapter Four, I analyse H. Nigel Thomas's 1993 novel *Spirits in the Dark* in terms of queer tactical diaspora, suggesting that Thomas rewrites colonising fictions in order to expose the incompatibility of queer identity and the decolonising politics of the Caribbean.<sup>32</sup> While Chapters Two and Three are conceived around the notions of language of landscape and the language of seascape, Chapter Four is framed by what I term the *language of seandscape*; that is, the addition of tidalectics<sup>33</sup> to the theorisations of Caribbean landscape in terms of 'staying put'.<sup>34</sup> By staging *Spirits in the Dark* as a queer Caribbean Bildungsroman, Thomas, I argue, subverts the European literary tradition by breaking down its master codes of imperialism.<sup>35</sup> The novel's protagonist re-opens African 'nature' as a means of sabotaging the Bildungsroman by mimicking its dialectic between individual and society, this time caught

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<sup>32</sup> The term decolonising politics is ambiguous, in that both the 'coloniser' and the 'colonised' work towards decolonisation. In terms of the definition of ('proper') sexuality their methods appear to be similar.

<sup>33</sup> Tidalectics adds the theoretical and the physical presence of the sea (Black Atlantic) to the theorisations of the Caribbean landscape. I will explore tidalectics further in Chapter Four.

<sup>34</sup> By staying put I mean continuing Glissant's tradition of 'remaining where we are'.

<sup>35</sup> The *Bildungsroman* is traditionally a Western literary narrative of the nineteenth century, relating the development of a male protagonist who matures through the process of various ups and downs of life.



between Eurocentric colonial values and African cultural and spiritual legacy. In terms of sexuality, however, Thomas employs the language of sealandscapes to foreground his protagonist's queer sexuality, exhibiting the incompatibility between being a Caribbean colonial subject and a homosexual. This places Thomas's novel within the tradition of the Caribbean queer diaspora, where sexuality plays an important role in shaping the lives of the characters of the Caribbean narrative, thus acting as a response to earlier Caribbean writing and the traditional Eurocentric narratives of character development. If the colonial project was based on the notion of homogeneity within and between the colonising and the colonised worlds, then deconstructing this homogeneity requires an exposure of the contrasting spaces; that is, the creation of space for overcoming binary thinking in terms of belonging. Gopinath argues for the necessity of examining queer (female) desire 'rendered impossible' within the 'diasporic and state nationalisms' that dictate the 'disciplining [of] female sexuality and legislate heterosexuality'.<sup>36</sup> I argue that the colonial subject's sexuality is disciplined via the impossibility of colonial homosexuality; thus, by rendering queer desire within the Caribbean (queer) space, Thomas negotiates contradictions that destabilise the homogeneity of normative heterosexuality.

In Chapter Four, I complement my reading of Thomas's novel by including the Antigua-born Jamaica Kincaid's 1983 novel *Annie John* to further examine the reciprocal relationship between postcolonial and queer studies.<sup>37</sup> This is mainly based on the overall theme of the chapter, namely the reworking of the European literary traditions in terms of identity formation. Like Thomas's novel, which rewrites colonising fictions and disintegrates the master codes of imperialism, Kincaid incorporates the codes of the Bildungsroman, and more important, includes the notion of the coming out story as a formative element of a (Western) gay narrative. The gay development from stifling heterosexuality to a liberating homosexuality correlates with my earlier arguments on the necessity of opening up queer studies to a broader analysis, taking account of other disciplines and contexts.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as Thomas's novel sutures the Western narrative of the Bildungsroman into Caribbean space while simultaneously queering the male tradition of the coming out narrative, Kincaid's novel

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<sup>36</sup> Gopinath 2005, 164.

<sup>37</sup> Throughout my thesis, I will include several works by Jamaica Kincaid, in that the form and content of her writing corresponds, in numerous respects, to the overall aim of my project.

<sup>38</sup> The transition from the restraining heterosexuality to the 'freedom' of homosexuality is a transitional trope of the Western coming out narrative. Certainly, the coming out process varies on the individual and the time and place, but its progression typically corresponds to the notions of 'sexual liberation'.



bends the Western tradition into a female narrative of queer desire between two girls. The importance of Kincaid's novel in terms of sexuality comes into full view when seen in comparison with Thomas's novel, in that her protagonist notes neither a gay/lesbian identity nor a time from which she can trace her emerging queerness. Moreover, both novels make use of the language of sealand to, in Thomas's case, identify European imaginative logic of the Caribbean and reject it in favour of cultural recourses outside of the Caribbean; and, in the case of Kincaid, to incorporate the writings of Glissant and Harris with the production of female (queer) narratives. By employing the notion of tidalectics, Kincaid answers Gopinath's call for the investigation of queer female sexuality within diasporic and state nationalisms by revising the relationship between colonial femininity and domesticity. This is done by the use of the sea (and especially the Atlantic) to expose the materiality and the trauma of the Middle Passage. By fusing Caribbean space with the subversion of Western literary traditions, Thomas and Kincaid create a queer resistance to the colonial and gender conventions that place same-sex desire as a temporary stage of identity development. Thus, the language of sealand links the two novels: Thomas and Kincaid suture the Bildungsroman, the Atlantic and the coming out narrative in order to route/root their novels deep within Caribbean space. This works, I argue, as an act of resistance to the colonising notions of masculinity and femininity and, as the overall theme of my work suggests, sexuality.

Earlier in the Introduction, I suggested that Caribbean writing from the 1980s to the present day uses sexuality to write back to earlier Caribbean writing which failed to address the workings of non-normative sexuality. In order to tie the argument of the naturalness of sexuality vs. geographical space to the overall theme of Chapter Four<sup>39</sup>, I emphasise the writing of Frantz Fanon who in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) argues that homosexuality is a European export.<sup>40</sup> Fanon's writing, like that of Samuel Selvon, serves as a reference point for *Spirit in the Dark* and *Annie John*, as Thomas and Kincaid employ male and female queer desire, respectively, in order to challenge Fanon's notions of a 'natural' Caribbean male sexuality, and, as Kincaid's novel suggests, the phallogentricity of earlier Caribbean writing. In terms of the overall theme of my thesis—queer tactical diaspora—Fanon's assertion also works as a reference point for the aim of queer tactical diaspora as well as the queering of

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<sup>39</sup> I discuss the assertions of the naturalness of homosexuality in terms of the 'West and the Rest' in Chapter One.

<sup>40</sup> Fanon takes the Freudian approach to the analysis of race and gender relations; that is, he adopts a highly phallogentric and heteronormative perspective.



postcolonial literature. If the decolonising assertion of the homosexual absence in the Caribbean installs compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchal stereotypes and phallogentric institutions, queer tactical diaspora challenges and destabilises these assertions by reworking the Caribbean traditions, landscape and the language of Caribbean history.

In the Chapter Five, I analyse Lawrence Scott's 1998 novel *Aelred's Sin* as the final case study. The inclusion of *Aelred's Sin* is based on what I argue is the central theme of the novel: writing as an instigator of homosexual recognition. If all of these case studies employ (queer) narratives as a means for re-remembering and re-inscribing the geography of 'home' and 'away', Scott's novel continues this tradition by situating, on centre stage, the narrative of its main character as well as his younger brother, the narrator, who pieces together the story of a seventeen-year-old man who in 1960 leaves the Caribbean island of Les Deux Isles (Scott's fictional name for Trinidad and Tobago) and joins Ashton Park monastery in England. The narrator's vital use of his older brother's letters, memoirs and journals in order to reconstruct Aelred's life testifies to the ability of re-remembering to alter the materiality of place as well as to instigate queer recognition by linking characters across time, eras and geographies. Scott's use of multiple narrative frames includes the insertion of several untold (hi)stories into the narrative of Aelred's life. First, it situates queer desire in Caribbean space and thus challenges a decolonising politics which emphasises the unnaturalness of homosexuality. Second, the narrator's framing of his brother's life testifies to the potential of queer narratives to instigate identification which discloses the intricate stories that are interwoven within each other and uncovers other 'factors' that go into the making of a sexual identity.

What are these factors? In terms of queer diaspora, Scott's use of mirroring links the (postcolonial) sexual politics of Les Deux Isles (and thus Aelred's position as a postcolonial queer subject) to the British colonial project. Here, several histories are transposed onto the other, testifying to the simultaneous dialogues that occur between the tropes of displacement, race and slavery. Mirroring superimposes racism, homophobia and the colonial project with the (re)construction of silenced and untold histories. Tacticality, however, is that which allows the mirroring of stories to take place. The use of doubling and inversion in the novel transgresses the boundaries between the Black and the queer body; the intersection of Black and queer diasporises queer sexuality while it inserts homosexuality onto the Black body. In both cases, the novel writes back to earlier Caribbean writing which installs heteronormativity by positing that homosexuality is a Western import. Scott's novel employs queer tactical diaspora as it merges the issues of nationality, sexuality and race as a means of critiquing the



Euro-American paradigms of sexual liberation as well as idea of a transnational Queer Nation. This is in line with my arguments in the previous chapter about the Western coming out story as a narrative of gay development from stifling heterosexuality to liberating homosexuality. Exposing the colonial and sexual conventions that still exist in the postcolonial present, Scott emphasises the construction of narrative and writing for a critique of Eurocentric and colonial notions of belonging as well as for the creation of spaces in-between, where tolerant identification can occur. Inserting queerness as a constitutive part of making a national community, *Aelred's Sin* transgresses sexual and racial divides via empathetic identification. It is a novel which is queer tactical by nature, employing various theoretical paradigms in order to disrupt the Eurocentric notions of sexual diasporic narratives. Scott's novel transgresses sexual and racial divides, reworking the strategic claim to a nation by inserting queerness as a constitutive part of making a national community. Importantly, I investigate *Aelred's Sin* as a queer tactical novel which uses diasporic narratives and various theoretical paradigms in order to disrupt the Eurocentric notions of sexual diasporic narratives.

Overall, the notions of queer diaspora and queer tactical diaspora work on several levels, using a range of theoretical paradigms. This is vital if queer tactical diaspora is to respond to earlier critiques of gender and postcolonial studies. The difference between the notions of queer diaspora and queer tactical diaspora is the methodology of movement, for the latter employs movement in two ways: the movement of bodies across geographical territories as well as the movement of theoretical thought across a range of reading practices.<sup>41</sup> Theories of geography and philosophy in the following chapters focus almost exclusively on reading and analysing fictional accounts of the diaspora narrative, developing postcolonial reading practices that employ the theorisation of gender and sexuality and gender studies and use the postcolonial as the overall framework for the analyses of queer sexuality. According to queer tactical diaspora, a novel like Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* must not be read exclusively as an example of postcolonial fiction which contains elements of gender theory. On the contrary, Mootoo's novel comprises the elements of both, making it neither an exclusively postcolonial nor a solely queer novel. Due to the tactical nature of the text, in which memory, movement and the moving body are fused into a queer synergy, *Cereus* re-creates and re-members spatiality differently, metamorphosing the materiality of place and destabilising that

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<sup>41</sup> Although queer diaspora stresses 'being on the move', my emphasis on tacticality in queer tactical diaspora offers a deeper understanding of the theoretical movement across academic disciplines, not only across geographical locations.

which is vital to queer diaspora: the distinction between home and away, 'here' and 'there'. Hence, the fundamental element of queer tactical diaspora is tacticality, in that it provides a conceptual space which spans academic disciplines. This enables it to critique the discourses of decolonisation and heteronormative sexuality as well as the Whiteness and the naturalness of Euro-American identity paradigms of queer theory. I hope that the analyses provided here allow for a deeper understanding of an entire range of 'texts' that stand outside of 'Caribbean queer writing'. Due to the non-placedness of queer tactical diaspora, texts from other geographical, philosophical and contextual territories can be read through this theoretical lens, deconstructing the gendered, nationalist and sexual narratives of hegemonic traditions and ideologies.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> By 'texts', I do not only refer to fiction but to any kind of creative work (for example visual arts, documentary making, poetry, etc.).





## CHAPTER ONE: THEORISING QUEER DIASPORAS

Fifteen years after the first emergence of queer theory in academia and subsequently into political consciousness, David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Esteban Muñoz ask: 'what's queer about queer studies now?' (2005, 1).<sup>43</sup> Rethinking the political utility of the term queer, they call for a 'renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional [...] calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent'. The urge to map out a new political terrain for queer studies, a terrain that insists on a broadened consideration of the late-twentieth-century global crises, is suggestive of the necessity and inevitability of queer studies to open up its boundaries, render itself porous, and broaden the field beyond the borders of Euro-Americanism. Particularly important is the ability of queer theory to generate alternate critical genealogies outside its traditional relationship of English as the *lingua franca* of queer studies and to maintain openness to literatures from outside the US nation-state as the conceptual frame for queer interrogations.

Acquiring a political currency in the 1990s as a term designating non-normative practices and identity formations, queer theory (drawing heavily on French poststructuralism and deconstruction as a method of literary and social critique) challenged dominant knowledges, the social hierarchies of heteronormativity and the sexual homogeneity of earlier feminist critique. Particularly significant was the disruption of the homo/hetero binary as a figure of the Foucauldian power/knowledge dyad, exposing and emphasising the multiplicity and fluidity of sexualities. Located at the crux of the anti-essentialist critique of postmodern identities, queer theory calls attention to the vast diversity within the various sexual 'categories', urging a shift towards imaging sexuality in relation to the cultural politics of knowledge. However, the disrupting of dominant hegemonic discourses which destabilised fixed notions of identity, had the unfortunate effect of unmarking the difference between

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<sup>43</sup> The question is posed in a special double issue of *Social Text* which reassesses the political utility of the term *queer*. As the cover of the issue reveals, the contributors undoubtedly believe that queer studies (once again) are applicable as a social critique of the contemporary politics of identity, family, and kinship: 'The contemporary mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity—as a mass-mediated consumer lifestyle and an embattled legal category—demands a renewal of queer studies that also considers the global crises of the late twentieth century. These crises, which are shaping national manifestations of sexual, racial, and gendered hierarchies, include the ascendance and triumph of neoliberalism; the clash of religious fundamentalisms, nationalisms, and patriotisms; and the return to "moral values" and "family values" as deterrents to political debate, economic redistribution, and cultural dissent'. (Description on cover)



gender, race and religion. The theorisation of sexuality as the only political variable has (justifiably) not had great resonance with lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people for whom overcoming oppression as marginalised subjects involves a theorisation of multiple subjectivities and modes of being. As an attempt to address the question of dichotomous logic, I argue not only for a shift of focus from sexuality to other aspects of subjectivity and identity, thereby ushering an intersectional approach directed towards issues of class, ethnicity and 'race', but also a third disciplinary configuration in conjunction with queer studies—diaspora. The latter, I argue, holds the potential of overcoming some of the pitfalls of the parochialisms and 'Whiteness' within queer studies and expanding queer theory beyond the borders of Euro-Americanism.

### QUEER DIASPORA

Closely related to the issues of intersectionality within queer theory (and subsequently diaspora studies) is the much longer history of immigration scholarship and its focus on how race, class and gender affect numerous migration processes.<sup>44</sup> This history, however, has virtually ignored the connections between heteronormativity, sexuality and migration. Immigration scholarship, with its focus in various social regulations, especially those related to the issues of 'race', class and ethnicity, overlooks Foucault's characterisation of sexuality as a 'dense transfer point for relations of power', a point which becomes a focus of social regulation and biopower (1990, 103). Moreover the conflation of sexuality with gender reinforces the normativity of opposite object choice. The pitfalls of such gender-centred analyses are the unfortunate reinscriptions of heteronormativity, affirming Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's caveat that 'the question of gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each can be expressed only in terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question' (30).

Understanding sexuality, whether within migration studies or other scholarly disciplines, requires an understanding of the efforts to regulate sexuality for the benefit of the proper formation of the individual and the 'regulation of populations, through the far-reaching effects of its activity' (Foucault 1990, 145). The development of sexual typologies and the subsequent attention to 'deviant' sexualities has laid the foundation for the belief that deviant sexuality is a marker of an innate identity. According to Foucault the medial analyses of non-

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<sup>44</sup> Eithne Luibhéid urges a queer take on immigration scholarship. See Luibhéid 2004.

procreative sex came to replace the religious associations of sodomy with sin: 'the nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form [...] The homosexual was now a species' (1990, 43). More important, efforts to regulate sexuality have not been unrelated to the efforts to control other aspects of subjectivity, such as class, gender and 'race'. We need to keep in mind that, especially within migration studies, intersectionality is pertinent for the further studies of queer migration and the implication of sexuality in multiple relations of power, domination and resistance. Eithne Luibhéid reminds us that 'sexuality is an axis of power that structures all aspects of international migration. It is centrally implicated in—but not reducible to—the gender, racial, class, cultural, and legal inequalities that immigrants continually negotiate. [...] Yet in most immigration scholarship, sexuality and heteronormativity remain ignored, trivialized, derided, or conflated with gender' (232). On the one hand, Luibhéid calls for an expansion of the areas of research in migration studies to address heteronormativity and the normalising regimes in aspects of migration and, on the other, for focusing studies of sexuality on 'international immigration's centrality to the making of "modern" gay, lesbian, and queer identities, communities, cultures, and politics' (233).

In his critique of queer theory's engagement with Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* as the principal text in studies of sexuality, Roderick A. Ferguson points to earlier strands of sexual formations (including women of colour feminism) as vital constituents of a dialogical connection between epistemological understandings of sexuality and racial sexual modernity. Arguing against the take on sexuality as an object that can be controlled and administered, Ferguson calls for an alienation and differentiation of sexuality as a means of classing, gendering and racialising it. In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004), Ferguson unravels the convergence of multiple disparate ideologies and their maintenance of heteronormativity: 'As the site of identification, culture becomes the terrain in which formations seemingly antagonistic to liberalism, like Marxism and revolutionary nationalism, converge with liberal ideology, precisely through their identification with gender and sexual norms and ideals' (3). Here, Ferguson posits non-heteronormative racialised subjects as a starting point for a in-depth challenge to the sexual and racial normativity of the modern nation-state. More important, his framing of 'queer of color critique' offers a broadening of queer critique to incorporate the transaction between diaspora and nation, challenging the parochialism of queer studies and exposing the heteronormative dimensions of imperialism and nation-states.



As I argue in the Introduction, theorising the intersections between the theories of diaspora and queer studies requires looking at sexuality as a mobile tactic of deterritorialising the relationship between diaspora and queer. By the means of tactical deterritorialisation, we are able to challenge the restrictive binary of the local/global identity. The movement between geographical territories is hereby presented as a theoretically significant factor in the construction and discussion of sexuality. Moreover, translocation enters the picture as an element in the transformation of sexualities that are on the move—indeed, the local and global effects of various diasporas force us to turn our attention towards re-inventions and re-negotiations of sexualities in new places and new territories.<sup>45</sup> Diaspora forces us to acknowledge that ‘sexuality is not only not essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; *sexuality is on the move*’ (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000, 2, my emphasis). Therefore I delve deeper into the relationship between sexuality and ‘being on the move’ and ask what is at stake when the terms diaspora and queer collide. More important, I seek to map out the intervening space of queer re-memories and diasporic spaces, or what I call *queer tactical diaspora*; that is, the multiple intersections and slippages between place and body. As body acts upon a place and place acts upon a body, I examine the multiple identifications that occur in the process and the various transformations those very places go through. This is significant for not only the interrogation of multiple discourses of queer movement and their ability to unsettle the balance between home and away—by metamorphosing the materiality of place we are able to destabilise the static place and ultimately the developmental model of queer identity. Introducing a tactical space enables us to re-create and re-member place differently, stripping off the certainty of strategy’s grasp on place. But before such deterritorialisation can come into effect, we need to work on the intersections between queer studies and diaspora studies, or what is becoming known as queer diaspora. My emphasis on tacticality adds to queer diaspora the vital notions of movement between not only geographical locations but also theoretical paradigms (from queer and diaspora theory to postcolonial studies to psychoanalysis to poststructuralism). This, along with analyses of fictional queer narratives, fuses the aforementioned theoretical paradigms, deterritorialising the relationship between diaspora and queer.

Queer diaspora, according to Eng, ‘investigates what might be gained politically by reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and

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<sup>45</sup> Movement between territories and/or theoretical paradigms works as a motif throughout my thesis.



biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency' (2003, 4). As a result, queer diaspora 'emerges as a concept providing new methods of contesting traditional family and kinship structures—of reorganizing national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments' (2003, 4). Although they denote highly contested terrain, when combined, the terms queer and diaspora exhibit the ability to contest the imperialist notions of sexual, racial and national immigrations. Linking the questions of state and nation, queer diaspora enables us to rethink the problematic of home and belonging in terms of sexuality and displacement. This is not to say that these two terms are simply steadfast refusals of homeland—both queer and diaspora, as argued earlier, employ discourses and narratives of home as a site of familiarity. Traditionally described as forced movement away from an original (heterosexual) 'home', queer diaspora offers a far more in-depth challenge to the narratives of sexual exile and estrangement—narratives that place queer subjects outside the 'traditional' home. While some queer theorists dismiss the idea of queer diaspora in that 'there is no locale to wander from' (Warner, xvii), others describe it as a 'traumatic displacement from the lost heterosexual "origin"' (Eng 2007, 205), reinforcing the idea of the heterosexual family as the original site of trauma. However, if queer subjects constitute a different diaspora in that the originary site of trauma is not a site of coherence, queer diaspora, as a consequence, reverses the traditional notion of home as origin into home as destination. Indeed, both queer and diaspora compel us to rethink the question of home and belonging, not only in terms of migration as homecoming but also in regard to queering home not as a site of trauma but as a site of a queer possibility: 'suspended between an "in" and "out" of the closet—between origin and destination, and between private and public space—queer entitlements to home and a nation-state remain doubtful' (208.). Thinking about transnational queer culture diasporically offers a renewed insight into the multiple tactical spaces located within the spatio-temporal spaces of queer belonging. Caught between the restraining local and the ever-expanding global this tactical space affords a promising ability of reconfiguration and recomposition of the local, cultural and national differences and collectivities within the queer diaspora space.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Avtar Brah defines *diaspora space* as 'the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes' (178). Brah's central argument is that 'diaspora space as a conceptual category is "inhabited" not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept



Framing queer sexuality diasporically is not an uncomplicated process. The apparent dangers within queer diaspora, despite its efforts to expand queer theory and expand its borders beyond Euro-Americanism, is the reconstitution of neocolonialist relations between 'the west and the rest' (Gopinath 1996, 265). Conjectures about the passivity of the non-Euro-American queer risk the assumptions of framing a non-Western encounter with queer culture and politics as purely an imitation and an unmodified display of the influence of Euro-American discourses of gay/lesbian and queer cultures. The self-centricity of European and North American definition of what constitutes queer sexuality and culture is one of the apparent dangers of embracing queer diaspora as a trope of racial, sexual, cultural and economic equality between all queer subjects. The concealment of inequality and power across geographical borders runs the risk of reinstating cultural and colonial dominance on the part of 'the West'. Viewing the constituency of queer groupings in, for instance, US and the Philippines as homogenous exposes, in contrast, the long historical and cultural dominance of the West over the other, reinstating the differences between 'us' and 'them' across the diasporic imagination.<sup>47</sup> In response, we need to interrogate the power structures that operate within the 'community' and, at the same time, unearth the tendencies to obscure the racial, ethnic, class and gender-based power relations within and between the diasporised communities. A critical interrogation into queer diaspora allows us an insight into the travelling bodies and their freedom and access to movement as well as the opposing construction of differentiation and homogenisation in the production of the queer signifier.

'Whose queerness?', Gopinath asks in her caveat that same-sex eroticism exists and signifies differently in different diasporic contexts (1996, 263). Certainly, the export of Western sexual and cultural paradigms to the non-West attests to the power of global structures of imperialism and neocolonialism in shaping the ways queer subjects negotiate their sexual identity across various diasporas. Queer diaspora challenges the notion that queerness and queer visibility is solely a Western import, an alien and unknown concept in other parts of the world. In the world of transnationalism and the constant border crossings,

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of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put" (181, emphasis in original).

<sup>47</sup> Using a case study of Filipina migrant workers in order to examine the historical and theoretical development of sexuality in migration research, Martin F. Manalansan IV argues that 'the queer perspective [in migration research] suggests that sexuality is not an all-encompassing reality but one that intersects with and through other social, economic, and cultural practices and identities. At the same time, a queer notion of sexuality enables migration research to go beyond normative and universalized family patterns and biological rationales' (243).



ideologies and images of 'gay' identity and practices are becoming ever-more problematic. The globalisation of gay and lesbian 'liberation', by privileging Western definition of same-sex sexual practices, runs the risk of marginalising non-Western sexual practices as 'pre-modern' or somehow unliberated. Coding the practices that do not conform to the Western developmental notions of 'coming out' as homophobic or non-progressive, exposes the neocolonising assumptions of sexuality on the part of the queer Western subjects, reinforcing hierarchical relations between the urban centre and the rural periphery. Particularly within the discourses of what constitutes 'gay' identity we find the homonormativity of certain strands of Euro-American queer studies that privilege White male subjectivity while relegating the non-White, racialised subject to the periphery of modern sexuality. The definition of sexuality and society in terms of temporality, where the unliberated (closeted) pre-gay subject becomes aware of his/her homosexuality and works his/her way to the recognition and liberation (outing) of her homosexual desire, is an area where queer diaspora needs to focus its attention and make diaspora more supple in relation to questions of race, migration and colonialism. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said points out that in the late twentieth century the United States has become a paramount imperial power, with the Western fiction and mass media as the primary weapons for conquest and domination of other cultures. Indeed, it appears that this pre-eminence has influenced the dissemination of queer theory as well. The marking of the United States by a colonising gay identity erases the global cultural differences and imperial power relations. Some of the examples of the gay US activist imperialism include the 'Global Celebration of Pride and Protest' at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the 1995 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Celebration Parade and Festival called 'A World without Borders', and the 1996 Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Pride Celebration with the theme 'Pride without Borders'. Moreover, the paternalistic activist astuteness of lesbian and gay activists that judge the level of 'progress' of another country in terms of the 'universal' trajectory of the Stonewall riots, the coming out narrative and identity politics and inherent civil rights, unfortunately situates a putatively universal and ahistorical transcendent gay identity. Similarly, some literary projects attempt to locate a lesbian or gay 'past' into a linear and unified gay tradition, imposing a specifically Western and imperialist teleology of sexuality and liberation onto historically, culturally and traditionally diverse subjects, reinforcing the centeredness of the Euro-American academia. Indeed, the



teleological, Western-centred developmental narrative of coming out and recognising one's homosexuality places other forms of non-gay identity at the fringes of 'civilised' sexuality.<sup>48</sup> The Euro-Americanness of queer theory, with its focus on the (White) bourgeois assumptions and the transnational lesbian and gay movement, needs to incorporate a critique of its own universalising categories if it is not to replicate the neo-colonising assumptions in relation to non-Western sexual practices. Thus, queer theory needs the diasporising and diasporic framework in order to decentre the dominant Euro-American paradigms, a framework that will work in contradistinction to the globalisation and internationalisation of 'gay' identity, specifically in relation to the narrative of development and progress that places non-Western sexual practices as non-modern. Western assumptions about terms like gay, lesbian, the closet and homophobia need to be interrogated, while the view that these are naturally given concepts require that we place them within the context of their specific national histories. Sexual practices that are not organised around visibility are assumed to be closeted or repressed while the lack of publicly identified gay people implies that the society in question is predominantly homophobic and hostile towards homosexuality.

Diasporising queerness, however, is not a one-way transmission of queer styles and cultures. The consumption of queerness on the part of non-Western queer subjects is not solely a meagre mimicry, a periodic repetition incapable of displacing conventions. On the contrary, queer diasporic reading practices can adapt and translate queer styles and cultures into productive and creative acts that have the power to displace imperialistic conventions and rework the multiple (queer) pleasures and desires that stem from non-Western territories. Popularising the idea of 'global flows', Arjun Appadurai argues that 'the new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries)' (31). One of the key elements of Appadurai's argument is that these flows are disjunctive and chaotic, allowing for a renewed understanding of geography. The multiplicity of flows, Appadurai argues, recreates and transforms geographical spaces, deconstructing simple models of centre-periphery. Queer diaspora, in a similar vein, reworks the emptying out of political and sexual agency of non-Western subjectivities and produces a site of pleasure consigned to the geographical terrains

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<sup>48</sup> As an extension of Western developmental narrative of coming out lies the notion of a Queer Nation which, as I argue in the Introduction, is based on the assumptions about individual self-identity and the generalising logic of American citizenship.



outside Europe and the US. Pleasure, by means of queer diasporic readings, is reclaimed and reinvented by the very subjects caught under the logic of the Western colonial and imperial imagination. Certainly, the flow of commodities and identities is not one-way (from the West to the rest)—it is a multiple exchange that reinvents (and recontests) queerness and ethnicity. A critical queer diaspora bends and unties the generalised notions of queer subjects, producing and reproducing new geographies of desire, based not on a stable one-way transfer of ideas and identifications but on multiple, fertile, de- and reterritorialised sites of exchange. It opens up a possibility for constructing a creative dialogue between existing power structures in order to deconstruct those very constructs and create new transnational spaces of belonging to consider the multiple ways in which individuals move between and within those spaces. The manifold ways by which desire and attachment come about within these sites of flow and mobility, the manner in which diasporic identities are contested and renewed, is one of the vital tactics of queer diaspora.

Rinaldo Walcott, drawing on Slavoj Žižek's notion of 'the national thing' as the collective enjoyment of national myths, expresses the concern that the nation-centeredness of the Black Studies project in the US thwarts the promising potential of diaspora studies to work in conjunction with the Black Studies project. Arguing that the Black Studies in the US has evolved into a site for the national enjoyment of a 'black thing', Walcott cautions against conceiving and locating the 'thing' mainly within the confines of a specific nation: 'To what extent is African American Studies coterminous with Black Studies, and what are the implications of this presumed correlation for people of African descent who are neither U.S. African American nor North American?' (2004, 108). Walcott is interested in expanding Black Studies by inviting cultural studies and diaspora discourses to join in and voice their desires and pleasures, mediated through (but not exclusively) the relation to African American presence. Indeed, the incursion of diaspora into Black Studies allows for a new flow of Black desires, confined not just within the borders of the US but also the sites of trans-Atlantic slavery, an economy of desire mediated through the relationship between national, global, postcolonial and migrant subjectivities. This appropriation would expand the 'nation thing' beyond its borders and restrictions, exposing the multiplicity and complexity of Black subjectivity where difference within Blackness is tolerated and cultivated. Walcott's line of reasoning is crucial in relation to my arguments for the queer diasporic reading practices and their ability to displace imperialist conventions in that queer diasporic reading practices are 'both local and beyond the local' (2004, 119). More important, Walcott's



'diaspora queer speaker' is a transgressing reading practice that uncovers other sites of belonging both within and outside the borders of the nation-state, facilitating a transnational flow of images and desires. These images, or imaginary spaces, are located within the nation-state, but the outcome of their appropriation is unpredictable and inconsistent, thwarting off restrictive and all-encompassing readings. The identifications and disidentifications within the local exhibit the ability for a transformation of imaginary spaces beyond the borders of the nation-state. Moreover, arguing for a destabilisation of any too-easy assumptions and sameness with Black discourses so as to promote a diaspora reading of Black cultural artefacts and exchanges that reforms strategies of specific nations, Walcott draws on what Giorgio Agamben calls a 'whatever' of Black cultural studies.<sup>49</sup> The 'whatever' of Black Studies is important, I argue, not only for the re-evaluation and re-invention of the discourses in the context of the study of Black peoples, but also for the re-assessment and renewal of dominant queer diasporic readings that posit belonging within and outside national borders. Agamben's *quelconque* or *qualconque*, which Michael Hardt translates as 'whatever', refers to that which is neither particular nor general; it is being 'such as it is' (66). In terms of language and writing Agamben points to the whatever singularity which calls into question the pre-eminence of linguistic conventions, including the representation of the subject, the 'I'. This singularity, according to Agamben, has an 'inessential commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence' (18-19). The adjective-pronoun *quelconque*, with its Italian and French idiomatic origins, has many uses in Italian that are rather awkward in English—one could also translate it as 'so-what'. This second connotation can function as a self-effacing tool not only within Black Studies which Walcott refers to, but also within diasporic, cultural, queer and other relations of sociality where belonging is thought of in manners of being and not as an ontological tool for ordering essences and polarisations.<sup>50</sup> Agamben does not, however, refuse ontological experiences of being all together, but his philosophising proposes

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<sup>49</sup> Walcott argues: 'The "whatever" of Black Studies is too disturbing to tolerate for some. It is not a simple and uncomplicated whatever. It is a "whatever" that refuses the regulating and restricting confines of the study of black peoples' (2004, 117).

<sup>50</sup> In the Translator's Notes of *The Coming Community*, Michael Hardt remarks: 'Whatever (*qualunque*). This adjective-pronoun has many uses in Italian that are rather awkward in English. The thematic centrality of the term, however, has required that we preserve its position every time it occurs in the text. The corresponding French term (*qualconque*) has a resonance in the work of other contemporary philosophers, such as Gilles Deleuze and Alan Badiou, that unfortunately may be lost on English readers because various translations have rendered it differently, as "particular" in some cases and "general" in others. As Agamben makes clear, however, "whatever" (*qualunque* or *qualconque*) refers precisely to that which is neither particular nor general, neither individual nor generic' (107).



a utilisation of being and its specificity while refusing those specifications to engulf and denote an intrinsic quality. Walcott's formulation of the 'whatever' (and of the 'so-what') is helpful in my theorisations of belonging and the heterotopic spaces of inbetweenness that I explore in the following chapter.

The transformations of place and the various identifications that occur in the process force us to interrogate the various meanings of the queer diasporic body within the discourse of colonialism, race, gender and sexuality. Bringing together the lines of queer re-memories and diasporic spaces, I suggest, enables us to re-member histories of racist and colonial violence that continue to resonate in the present. Queer diasporic re-membering queers the otherwise traditionally backward-looking diasporic discourse, or what Stuart Hall calls the 'overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for "times past"' and activates a different past, one fraught with memories of uprooting, displacement and exile' ('Diaspora', 245). The queer bodily desire points towards dislocation via the queer body in order to bring past memories into the present and modify them as well as transform the very spaces created in the diasporic invocations of the imaginary homeland. The need for a queer diasporic reading is particularly apt when seen in conjunction with diaspora's gaze towards 'lost (heterosexual) origins' and its expression of the conventional diasporic and national imaginaries that naturalise the relationship between nationalism and heterosexuality.<sup>51</sup> I argue that re-membering transforms—indeed *translates*—the national discourses of 'originality' and 'purity' into queer versions of the primary texts, inventing and re-conceiving notions of 'home' and home-land. Thus, the concept of queer diaspora and queer diasporic reading destabilises the tranquillity and immobility of place, blasphemising spaces of purity, tradition and authenticity of home.<sup>52</sup> For the queer diasporic (racialised) body, home, a site fraught with oppressing structures of community space, becomes a tactical space ready to be reworked from within. Dislodging the heterosexual logic of the nation-state is one of the tactical means of creating diasporic spaces within the oppressing structures, for it generates possibilities and desires within a queer subjectivity. Queer diaspora lays claims to the nation and home by reinscribing the heterosexual home as a site of homoeroticism not alien to the workings of a community. The queer diasporic imagery, by resignifying what it means to be 'home', reinstates queer

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<sup>51</sup> For more on lost heterosexual origins, see Eng 1997.

<sup>52</sup> Here, tacticality is what enables us to investigate 'primary texts' in the form of queer diasporic narratives. Neither particular nor general, the queer diasporic narratives that I analyse in my thesis re-member and re-inscribe the past and the nation differently.



subjectivity as a vital part of the makings of a national community, while simultaneously recollecting the queer subjectivity within the historically shared national past and memory. This conceptual space, which I call tactical diaspora, caught between 'here' and 'there', levels a powerful critique of the discourses of tradition and purity within national and diasporic ideologies.

Queer diaspora blasphemes the purity of place. By treating place this way I employ Michel de Certeau's distinctions between strategy and tactics as a theoretical tool for de- and reterritorialising belonging and location. Strategies, according to Certeau, 'pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time', while *tactics* '[rely] on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power' (1984, 38-39, emphasis in original). Strategy relies on the creation and assertion of a particular identity in the given space; tactics, on the other hand, does not rely on the 'proper' place but suggests a temporary and fragmentary projection over a terrain 'without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance' (xix).<sup>53</sup> Strategic rationalisation, according to Certeau, 'seeks first of all to distinguish its "own" place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an "environment"' (36). Indeed, strategy involves an assertion and maintenance of a fixed place as well as a strategic assertion of identity. Tactics, on the other hand, have the ability to erode the proper place as they, in their very enactment, deny the permanent adoption of place as identity. Employing time as a transitory element, tactics destabilise the static place by regulating the timing of power as flow. As opposed to the 'proper' which symbolises the 'triumph of place over time' (36), tactics reject the developmental model of non-heterosexuality, enabling a flow of desire not relegated to the stability of proper place but as a timeless and drifting current created at the interstices of body and place. The movement of sexuality enables a creation of desire based, but not rooted in, the exchange of bodies and flows across space. Diaspora, in the terms of strategy, becomes a developmental passage from one fixed boundary into another, a dislocation based on belonging to the secure identities and territories of residence. Seen in the light of tactical manoeuvring, I argue that diaspora exhibits the ability to alter territory, to allow queer desires to appear, and ultimately, to destabilise nation-states. Examining the tropes and discourses that diasporic bodies carry

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<sup>53</sup> In the following section, I will employ Certeau's theorisations of space as a vital part of my arguments on the tacticality of movement.



across borders and into/onto the territories they come to inhabit, I suggest that tactical diasporic movement threatens the maintenance of nation-states by weakening the fixed territorial boundaries and removing the certainty of strategy's stronghold on place. The crossing and re-crossing of spaces allows a re-symbolisation of attachment/detachment to a certain territory—tactical theorisations and queerness sanction a discursive as well as material space for new desires and subjectivities found at the interstices between space/body/time. Tactical diaspora and queerness reworks the strategic allegiances of space by laying claims to nation and home, reinstating queerness as a necessary part of making a national community.

## BODY

A vital part of the discussions of tactical diaspora is the notion of the body as a signifier of difference, implicated in multiple contexts of race, class, religion and gender.<sup>54</sup> Bodies are not naturally pre-given or involved in the body/mind dualism; they materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other both familiar and strange bodies. But how do we differentiate between the familiar and the strange in terms of the materiality of the body? One approach is an extension of my earlier argument of skin as the boundary line between the inside and outside of bodily space. Building on Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the child's accession into the realm of subjectivity occurs through the process of assuming a body image, Judith Butler argues that the materialisation of the body takes place through the production of boundaries and fixity.<sup>55</sup> As bodily gestures and habits come to constitute bodily matter and form, the cultural and social differences between bodies are read by the effects those differences have on the surface of the skin. More important, however, are the *effects* of skins as boundary and fixity. The Lacanian body-image structures the child's identification to its own body and to others which 'rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in the play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment—the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him' (*Écrits: A Selection*, 1). In 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', the child's misrecognition of itself creates an *imaginary anatomy* emphasising the temporal and spatial process of (mis)identification between the outside and

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<sup>54</sup> Here, I employ the term *tactical diaspora* only in order to make a distinction from queer tactical diaspora since this is an introductory stage of the thesis. With the introduction of queerness in the subsequent chapters, I will refer to queer tactical diaspora exclusively.

<sup>55</sup> Although Judith Butler is considered one of the pioneers of queer theory, I employ her theorisations only sparsely, since I focus not on the intricacies of queer theory but its shortcomings.



the inside of the body.<sup>56</sup> Noticeably, Frantz Fanon, in his reworking of Lacan's theory of identification, points out that the subject's encounter with the body-image and the subsequent differentiation from the Other is already a racial encounter between the White subject and the Black subject. Fanon suggests that the relationship between the ego and the materiality of other bodies is coterminous with the racialised relationship between the White ego and the Black Other: 'when one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the inassimilable' (1968, 161 n. 25). Fanon's reworking of Lacan's theory offers an important challenge to the dialectic of self-othering as a general theory, or as abstract, in that he suggests that the embodied subject and the persons excluded from its identification are already constituted in terms of social difference. This reworking illuminates the markings and effects of various histories of other bodies onto the bodily image of the subject, rejecting a theory of the generalised other as an image of bodily integrity. Rather, the body-image is constituted through its differentiation from other bodies and *between* other bodies. This, I argue, is significant for the discussion of the 'general' theory on the human body; bodies are marked by their privilege in the social sphere. Therefore, a body that appears unmarked (as opposed to marked and thus different) is the one that appears to be '*at-home* or *in-place*', incorporated effortlessly into its social surroundings, e.g. White, middle-class, male' (Ahmed 2000, 46, emphasis in original).<sup>57</sup> Marked bodies, on the other hand, manifested through their difference, are thus excluded from the formations of the social space, the homeland, by the means of their separation from the bodies-at-home or bodies-in-place. This reworking challenges Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notion of *inter-embodiment* or *inter-corporeality* where the means of a body-experience is the encounter with other bodies: 'why would this generality [reversibility of touch], which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake

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<sup>56</sup> Certainly, the use of Lacanian psychoanalysis in terms of diaspora is problematic, not only due to its interest in Freudian theory but also its exportation outside Western geography. My inclusion of Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, is based on its impact on the construction of otherness in modern Western philosophy. Thus, it should be seen in connection with Frantz Fanon's reworking of the dialectic of self-othering.

<sup>57</sup> In her theorisations of difference between bodies, Ahmed argues that the skin of the body is not simply a visual signifier of difference. 'The skin is also a border or boundary, supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside; or in Frantz Fanon's terms, the skin becomes *a seal*' (44-45, emphasis in original). However, she continues: 'But, as a border or a frame, the skin performs that peculiar destabilising logic, calling into question the exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject's becoming (or falling into) the other' (45).



too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching' (1968, 142). Merleau-Ponty emphasises embodiment as fleshy and material but also as worldly, in touch with the intimate workings of the world of other bodies. Here, apart from being seen, bodies can be touched—the processes that make the body into a subjective 'my body' are the very ones opening the body onto the world full of other bodies. While Merleau-Ponty's approach calls attention to the experiences of interconnection, making public the very intimate and 'private' workings of the body, it nevertheless risks the grouping of 'bodies' into a collective 'we'. According to Ahmed, the sense of touch 'opens bodies to other bodies (touchability as exposure, sociality as body)' and 'differentiates between bodies, a differentiation, which complicates the corporeal generosity that allows us to move easily from "my body" to "our body"' (48). Ahmed's argument corresponds to my assertion that the body is not a signifier of connection but of difference. How does the *inter-corporeality* engage with the questions of social differentiation gendered and racialised bodies? As Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological accounts of lived embodiment run the risk of universalising the experience of the unmarked body, I stress the differences *between* the bodies as they are both juxtaposed and positioned together. Since different bodies are touched differently by other bodies, eschewing the shared experience of having a marked or an unmarked body, the skin becomes the site of familiarity and strangeness, but also social difference.

The marking of bodies is closely tied to the notion of belonging, or what Elspeth Probyn calls a 'sociology of the skin' (5). Belonging, apart from symbolising affective community making, is here presented as that which is thought through theorisations of power, class, gender and being. By reimagining and displacing belonging 'outside' identity, Probyn attempts to make visible the 'ongoing inbetweenness' amongst different elements, highlighting the necessity of 'getting at the minuteness of *movement* that occurs in the everyday processes of articulation' (6, my emphasis). The (re)formation of bodily and social space involves surprising encounters with other bodies, shifting the boundaries of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Most important, the physical elements of space, where the marking of inhabitable space involves a creation of home, is a decisive factor for the production of uninhabitable and unliveable spaces.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, we need to focus on the social privilege of the unmarked bodies' ability to effortlessly move in and between places. These bodies that

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<sup>58</sup> Probyn's theorisations of the sociology of the skin and the proximity of bodies are dependent on the notions of space; that is, the construction and deconstruction of spaces. In the next sections, I explore space in more detail.



matter, by their very familiarity and 'intactness', make it necessary to reread and reform the contour of the home as the site of familiarity and dwelling of the unmarked bodies. In connection with this, Probyn's theorisation of living on the 'outside' as entailing a 'proximity to others as well as the drawing of new frontiers' (4). She evokes this proximity by accounting for the summer months in Montréal where people emerge on their balconies after a long winter sleep and live, at least for an instant, on the 'outside'. The balcony becomes the site of a visible inbetweenness, proving passage towards the spatial and affective proximity of strangers acting upon each other differences. Here, belonging, along with movement, enables us to interrogate what it means to be home, and more important, how desire and becoming facilitate a re-imagination of identity and home. In this sense, belonging suggests not only a desire for the other but also a 'heightened sensibility to the sensibilities, to being captured by other manners of being and desires for becoming-other' (5). Thus, subjectivity is stretched beyond the limits of the skin and the interiority of the self, living on the skin. By displacing subjectivity from becoming towards otherness, Probyn creates a space where belonging 'make[s] [the] skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants' (6).

This proximity to others, to strangers, to 'outsiders', this fleshy encounter that involves immediacy with other bodies, considers belonging in terms of movement where the conceptual space of inbetweenness, ensnared between categories of specificity, works to dislodge those very categories and to introduce another kind of space where classification, order and classes collapse. In order to my arguments about tactical diaspora, I introduce Foucault's *heterotopia*, which he describes as 'disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance' (1994, xviii).<sup>59</sup> Heterotopias are seen in contrast to utopias, which 'afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled, region in which they are able to unfold' (xviii). Clearly, heterotopias offer an analytical space where identity and polarization are contested, where belonging is not constrained by language, order, and myths. More important, utopias are fabled spaces running evenly with discourse, whereas heterotopias

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<sup>59</sup> The inclusion of Foucault's notion of heterotopia works as an introduction to the intricate workings of space that challenge the dichotomy of what is considered 'real' and 'unreal'. I am aware, however, of the risks involved in employing postmodern notions of space as a means of theorising diaspora. It will become apparent in the subsequent chapters that my use of postmodern space theory is based on cultural and historic specificity, allowing me to rework Westerns theorisations of space by revealing their Eurocentric underpinnings.



'desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences' (xviii). Ever since Galileo opened up the mediaeval space of emplacement, where ground and stability were replaced by an infinite movement, space is an anxiety that continues to interest modern European philosophy. Since a thing's place is nothing but a point in its movement, the dissipation of a stable place has caused a breakdown of many other spaces: private/public, inside/outside, work/leisure, family/society. The heterogeneous space that we live in, the space that 'claws and gnaws at us' bestows upon us a 'set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another' ('Spaces', 23). Indeed, belonging and space, a space which coincides with Foucault's notion of heterotopia, provides a fertile ground for an examination of space in movement and movement in space. Wedged between movement and space, between inside and outside, heterotopia is a paradoxical and an impossible site where spatiality and movement endow thinking via and along the skin, transforming and re-forming certain orders and orderings of sociality and belonging. Heterotopic spaces are both sites and counter-sites in which the 'real' sites of culture are represented, contested and reverted: 'places of this kind are *outside* of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (24, my emphasis). In the following section I look at various theorisations of space as a way of connecting in-between spaces to my arguments about tactical movement from one space to another.

## SPACE

In his account of the post-war cinema, Gilles Deleuze points to the 'any-spaces-whatever' as spaces that lack any fixity that specifies particular spaces in the field of realism, places that are unconstrained by any permanent lines of relation.<sup>60</sup> These any-spaces-whatever 'no longer [have] coordinates, they [are] pure potential', showing only 'pure Powers and Qualities, independently of the states of things or milieux which actualise them' (2005a, 123). This imagining of a world without space, Deleuze argues, was distinctive to post-war theorists, artists and filmmakers. The deserted streets, the waste lands, the shabby buildings, presented in film the emptiness and termination of city and people. According to Deleuze, 'in

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<sup>60</sup> My use of Deleuzian (as well as Guattarian) philosophy is purposely restricted due to its embeddedness in Western thought. However, I include Deleuze and Guattari merely as a complement to the theorisations of space by Foucault and more important, Michel de Certeau. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari, although constituting a somewhat significant part of my arguments on space, rather serve as reference points to my arguments on the effectiveness of tactical diaspora.



these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters were stirring, a kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers' (2005b, xi). At stake in these reflections is the theorisation of space and the premises of its habitability, in the spatial effects space had on modern individuals and the effect the individual had on space.

Post-war theories of space, in contrast, reversed the dyad by asking: could individuals affect space? Deleuze, along with Certeau, Foucault, Marc Augé, is concerned with the theorisations of space where space is not a preconditional effect of individual existence but as constitutively uninhabitable, a space that opens up possibilities as much as it forecloses the constitution of lived space. Certeau's theorisations of the pavement, the grid of the city seen from the vantage point high above, is one way of breaking away from the polarity of earlier thinking, challenging the homeliness of place and opening up the possibilities to contest the uninhabitability of space.<sup>61</sup> Tracking the meandering and errant traces of people moving about in a city Certeau argues that these traces, rather than conforming to the statistical investigation of the dominant orderings of the social, in fact constitute resistance to the dominant social specifications for behaviour. Echoing Deleuze, Certeau employs space as a method of acting through the spatial field by re-mapping and deterritorialising space, of making a way through the interwoven grid of the city and people. The pedestrian moves about, walks down the street and, swerving in a trope-like manner, challenges the limits and nets of discipline. For Certeau the moving about in a city exposes the 'clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline"' (xiv-xv).<sup>62</sup> This grid, a position in 'space and time', exhibits a vast array of choices that can be traced or followed from the above (xiii). The curves and traces, which traverse the city in a myriad of networks also leave dissimilar tracks behind, removing the agency of time from the dominant social specifications for behaviour, enabling a possibility of resistance by the means of human agency.

Correspondingly, in Deleuze and Guattari's work, we see a proliferation of new concepts of space and a subsequent re-configuration of the spatial field, specifically regarding

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<sup>61</sup> According to Certeau, footsteps in the city constitute a space of enunciation: 'They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They wave places together. [...] They are not localized; it is rather that they spatialize' (97).

<sup>62</sup> Imbuing action with thought, Certeau employs J. L. Austin's speech-act theory to incorporate spoken and mobile articulation; whether it is walking or speaking, the act still implements a language system that the individual body vitalises and employs to its own needs.



the spatial assemblage of planes, lines and the points of variation between these.<sup>63</sup> Just as a piece of work is a spatial assemblage of planes its mental representation is thereby substituted by a rhizomatic thinking of the semiotic and material flows: 'There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)' (2004, 25). As a result, we can think of the book as a spatial field of representation that no longer has a centre but only a middle without ends or margins. This appropriation of space is important as it removes any 'a priori' conditions that space might impose onto the particular assemblages in which it appears. Accordingly, each assemblage involves two kinds of space: 'smooth space and striated space—nomad space and sedentary space—the space in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the State apparatus—are not of the same nature' (2004, 524). It is important to note, however, that the two spaces are neither opposed nor contradictory in time. While the war machine is 'prior' to the state, it is not a past relegated to history. Rather, any composition is a melange of both smooth and striated space; any dualisms and oppositions between the two hinder better understanding and analysis of space: 'the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space, striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space' (2004, 524). These theorisations of space, much like the post-war theorisations of individual and space, create a map, or mapping, situated within lines of segmentarity in which social space is constituted by territorial and lineal segmentations. Although these highly philosophical theories of space are grounded in European philosophy, they can nevertheless be used outside the space of Euro-America. By mediating between different theorisations of diaspora and space as a way of rethinking the ideas of spatial, gendered and national belonging, tactical diaspora allows us to create new spaces for thinking about national identity. According to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 'theorizations of diaspora need not, and should not, be divorced from cultural and historical specificity. Diasporic transversals question the rigidities of identity itself – religious, ethnic, gendered, national' (2003, 3). By employing and deterritorialising various

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<sup>63</sup> Deleuze and Guattari employ highly sophisticated notions of space in their articulations of units of measure: 'All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure. *Stratometers, deleometers, BwO units of density, BwO units of convergence*: Not only do these constitute a quantification of writing, but they define writing as always the measure of something else. Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come' (5, emphasis in original).



theories of diaspora, nation and belonging, tactical diaspora 'marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which the parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and – as diaspora suggests – are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming' (3).

The theorisations of space articulated by Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari, I argue, are valuable not only for the problems of habitation for the modern subject and its recognition under the regime of representation, but also for mapping out the interstices between queer memories and diasporic spaces. Certeau's refinement of the anti-disciplinary actions and enunciations caused by the movement of body through space, brilliantly demonstrated in the distinction between the strategic and the tactical, corresponds to Deleuze's concepts of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation which enable us to think through (and come to grips with) the new generation of spaces that do not confer the sense of belonging or habitability. Tactical diaspora, as a momentary disruption of the strategic structures, with no particular goal of its own, operates against the workings of the normative, abrading the force of the strategic, suspending its influence. Being the perpetual force of resistance to the normative, tactics are always alert to the direction, force and flow of the strategic. The dependence of strategy upon 'proper' place is revealed and affected by the dependency of tactics upon time: 'because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that much be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities"' (Certeau xix). Tactics, then, can re-envision and reterritorialise belonging, so it becomes a vital tool for the consideration of national, racial and sexual immigration, particularly in relation to home.<sup>64</sup>

While I am aware of the recent critiques and implications of the Deleuzian concepts of 'nomad thought' and 'body without organs' within the context of postcoloniality, I would nevertheless argue that employing poststructural theories does not necessarily disallow the possibility of effective indigenous politics or a delegitimisation of 'experience' or 'local knowledge'. Deleuze's impact on contemporary social and political theory is documented by the sheer volume of writings within poststructuralist theories, privileging notions of mobility,

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<sup>64</sup> Although the theorisations of space made by Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari are highly philosophical and imbedded in Western spatial tradition, they can nevertheless be used as a means of displacing national, racial and sexual knowledges. This will become apparent in the following chapters in which I employ my case studies as a method of tactically diasporising Eurocentric knowledges and the Euro-American colonial imagery.



movement and becoming over those of essences and stable subjectivities and identities.<sup>65</sup> With their radical reworkings of philosophy and the critiques of psychoanalytic processes, Deleuze and Guattari have produced some of the most provocative and innovative political texts within the field of poststructuralism and postmodernism, rupturing the dominant social practices and knowledges. Most remarkable is their imagining of different social spaces and sites of subjectivity, notably, the radical displacement in terms of dwelling, or what they call *detritorialisation*. Deterritorialisation, a term that appears throughout their oeuvre, is first described as the dispersal of desire in capitalist formations (*Anti-Oedipus*) and is closely linked to the notion of nomad thought, signifying the importance of displacement and the modes it entails. Intimately related to the notions of displacement is the botanical metaphor of the root-like rhizome (I focus on botany and its implications for my arguments on space in the following chapters) which, fragmenting roots and dispersing substance, destabilises conventional trees and genealogies, and ultimately, origins and endings. Resisting the workings of the state-apparatus the rhizome maintains a disordered and lawless relationship with space and subjectivity. Indeed, the 'becoming minor' aspect of deterritorialisation, where nomads have the ability and access to 'absolute movement', appears to be somewhat of a quixotic image of what it means to 'be' like the rhizome. As Caren Kaplan argues, the notion that nomads are distinct from migrants who move in determined and located ways is paradoxical in that 'the nomad can be seen to be the one who "does not move" in that the nomad's movements cannot be tracked or linked to a starting point or end point' (89). A symbol of complete deterritorialisation the nomad does not engage in reterritorialisation which Deleuze and Guattari saw as a critical component to language, and while it embodies the ultimate intermezzo zone, eschewing dwelling and being, the nomad constitutes the relation with the earth in terms of reterritorialisation in that he has 'no paths, or land'. The nomad is a 'local absolute, an absolute that is manifested locally, and engendered in a series of local operation of varying orientations: desert, steppe, ice, sea' (2006, 422).<sup>66</sup> In addition,

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<sup>65</sup> The evidence of this can be seen in the number of recent publications of 'Reader's Guides' to Deleuzian philosophy, as well as Deleuzian connections to spatial and visual thinking. See, for instance, Joe Hughes, *Deleuze's "Difference and Repetition": A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009); Damian Sutton and David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze Reframed: A Guide for the Arts Student* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> Kaplan challenges one of Deleuze and Guattari's notions of nomadic movement, which she argues is closely tied to modernist versions of colonial discourse, namely the notion of 'becoming minor'. She states: 'In their emphasis upon linguistic "escape" and "lines of flight," Deleuze and Guattari roam into realms of nostalgia, searching for a way to detour Western civilization. Their theory of "becoming minor" evokes this Euro-



Kaplan argues that the open and barren locales such as steppe and desert are not only prerequisites for the imperialist imaginary but also the primary sites of the Euro-American aesthetic sublime. Indeed, in modernist thinking, mobile tribes such as bedouins, gypsies and, in this case, nomads, have always been located outside the metropolitan centres, their mobility and the ability to stay outside culture (i.e. closer to nature) being foregrounded as that which is remote to metropolitan modernity. This line of reasoning certainly positions these romanticised figures within the colonialist, modernist discourse of the Other which is natural, uncomplicated and far removed from industrialisation, yet pure, always on the move and entirely independent. The relationship between the Deleuze's positionality vis-à-vis modernist thought is an important issue that has rarely been addressed within Euro-American cultural and literary criticism. In the same vein, I suggest that, in order to utilise Deleuzian theories without reproducing the neocolonial conditions of theoretical articulations, we need to undermine generic categories and hegemonic critical practices and ultimately open up the discourse of the politics of cultural production and make room for a critique of poststructuralist Eurocentrism and exoticisations. But more important I would like to argue that the adaptation of nomad thought need not necessarily be the focal area within Western cultural elite—feminist and queer theories, among others, now have the ability to take on the theoretical tools of Euro-American modern and postmodern thought and appropriate them in a way that they can both raise and address the questions of location in the production and consumption of theory, not only in Western but also in 'local' contexts. Therefore, I argue that by means of queer tactical diaspora we are able to appropriate and adapt poststructuralist exoticisation of movement, in order to challenge both the European imperialist imagery of nomadic displacement and the traditional heterosexual notions of home as origin. In other words, queer tactical diaspora enables a queer critique of movement, origins and belonging in terms of the binary between inside and outside, centre and periphery. Transgressing Euro-American cultural and literary criticism, queer tactical diaspora 'diasporises' imperial conventions of Deleuzian theories by uncovering sites of belonging within and beyond the 'local'. In addition, deconstructing the relations between the urban centre and the rural

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American modernist move of utopian flight from the worst excesses of capitalism. "Becoming minor" is a strategy that only makes sense to the central, major, or powerful, yet it is presented as an imperative for "us all". [...] Becoming minor, a utopian process of letting go or privileged identities and practices, requires emulating the ways and modes of modernity's "others". Yet, like all imperialist discourses, these spaces and identities are produced through their imagining; that is, the production of sites of escape or decolonization for the colonizers signals a kind of theoretical tourism', (88).



periphery in connection to gay identity, queer tactical diaspora re-symbolises attachment to particular territory without adhering to Western developmental notions of unliberated/liberated sexual identity.

Although the abstract world of Deleuzian theory seems to be 'rooted' in academia only, its renditions and subsequent deployments can more than aptly be employed outside the universities and into the social justices of the 'real world'. Apart from the deconstruction of binary oppositions, which have been identified by numerous feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Susan Griffin as central to the maintenance of hierarchal systems of domination within and outside colonial spaces, Deleuzian theories can also be deployed to enhance 'local' knowledges by conceptualising subjectivity that allows for notions of embodiment and bodily experience through its projector in movement and mobility. Walcott's diaspora queer speaker is particularly apt here, since it allows for a reading of movement that transgresses nation-states. I suggest that queer tactical reading situates the local within its cultural context, allowing a deterritorialisation that eschews generalising notions of movement and nomadism. Julie Wuthnow, in her examination of the implication of Deleuzian deconstruction of coherent and self-identical subjectivity, argues that the poststructuralist theorising disallows the possibility of effective indigenous politics through its lack of accountability to a 'politics of location' and its implicit reproduction of a universalised Western subject. This, I argue, is where queer tactical diaspora comes into effect. By mapping the intervening space between queer re-memories and diasporic spaces, queer tactical diasporising sutures Certeau's theorisations of the distinction between the strategic and the tactical to Deleuze's notions of deterritorialisation. As a consequence, we are able to generate new 'local' spaces that challenge belonging and habitability as well as create new trajectories that defy the forces of the strategic. Wuthnow contends that Deleuze's privileging of the nomadic marginalises knowledges that are relegated to the periphery of hegemonic epistemologies: 'The nomad cannot simply define herself as outside of this political ordering of knowledge and, through inattention to the implications of her own positioning as another rendition of the universalised western subject, the nomad perpetuates the hegemony of western ways of knowing and being' (2002, 190). Instead, Wuthnow proposes a 'conceptualization of subjectivity that allows for notions of embodiment, location and history that avoid essentialisms, thus legitimizing historicized and situated 'experience' as a ground for the production of knowledge and political action' (194). While this analysis justifiably aims at deconstructing essentialisms, I argue that it is nevertheless aimed at the questions of



the representation of the indigenous and local 'voice' and 'experience', thus, on a certain level, reinstating binary divisions. Certainly, the versions of politically grounded theories presented by postcolonial feminist thinkers such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty or Jacqui M. Alexander are not solely concerned with voicing the experiences of the local.<sup>67</sup> Wuthnow argues that while theorists like Rosi Braidotti and Paul Patton deploy Deleuzian notions of nomad thought by claiming accountability and location, their different takes on nomad thought ultimately lead to universalising and colonising gestures that in actuality marginalise local knowledges and 'prioritize theoretical validation over political exigencies and disallow representation of "experiences"—all with very problematic consequences for the enablement of robust versions of indigenous politics' (194). While I agree that the 'local' need not be based on an essentialised notion of place any more than the concept of 'experience' on an essentialised notion of embodiment, the creation of an oppositional relationship between poststructuralism and indigenous politics appears to be just as counterproductive. The concept of nomad thought, however rooted within Western philosophy, need not necessarily be applicable to/directed towards only the local, the marginal and the 'somewhere out there'. While Alexander and Mohanty are right to point out that 'localised questions of experience, identity, culture, and history, which enable us to understand specific processes of domination and subordination, are often dismissed by postmodern theories as reiterations of cultural "essence" or unified, stable identity' (xvii), the postcolonial and feminist (and queer) theories are nevertheless able to appropriate Deleuzian theorisations and scatter them in various directions across centres and margins. Taking us through a conceptual journey concerning place in *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (1993), Edward S. Casey remarks: 'on every kind of journey, one moves between heterogeneous places. A beginning-place and an end-place may stand out as the most conspicuous part of a journey—they delimit the diurnal aspect, the daily duration, the *diēs*, of the journey—but the in-between places are just as interesting, and sometimes more so' (275). In a similar vein, Deleuze and Guattari describe the 'Dispar'; that is, a divergent and heterotopic spatiality, as 'a field, a heterogeneous *smooth space* [...] wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy

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<sup>67</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty or Jacqui M. Alexander are editors of the prominent 1996 collection of essays entitled *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, which features influential feminist analyses of the questions of sexual and gender politics, economic and cultural marginality in the 'West' and in the 'Third World'.



space without “counting” it’ (*Plateaus*, 409, my emphasis). Here, both the in-between places and the ‘Dispars’, the disparate, are directly linked to tactical diaspora, as they refuse and challenge binaries between home and away as well as here and there. In fact, by means of tactical diaspora, we are able to formulate a new political agency ‘grounded’ in the local but without being ‘rooted’ in it. Here, places in-between are linked independently of any determined path with no predetermined trajectory—when journeying, maintaining bodily contact with the underlying earth is what creates an unpremeditated engagement with a particular place: ‘disparateness of place reigns over the self-identity of space and the punctuality of time’ (Casey 276). In the same manner, Deleuzian theories can and must be taken up by ‘local’ theorists in order not only to claim space for the subaltern subjectivities but also as a method for deconstructing the universalised Western subject. *Nomad thought, body without organs*, the *rhizome* and the notion of *becoming*, although formulated by Western philosophy, are concepts that must be taken on by the indigenous, local and the ‘marginal’, employing and developing its roots without them taking over its essence. Political agency is necessary and the adoption of these concepts detaches them from their Euro-American origins, proving the marginal with the means for redeploying them within the spatial and temporal framework on the side of the local. Time and space, past and present, are the very concepts where Deleuzian theory functions as a method of facilitating local action. According to Stuart Hall, ‘The homeland is not waiting back there for the new ethics to discover it. There is a past to be learned about, but the past is now seen, and has to be grasped as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated, It is grasped through memory. It is grasped through desire. It is grasped through reconstruction’ (1991, 38). Grasping and reconstructing the past entails a reconstruction of memory, which, in the characteristically modern manner, is conceived as exclusively time-bound.<sup>68</sup> In making space the active agent for the recollection of the past Deleuzian theories emerge as effective and renewed agencies for the politics of location: ‘The inherent localism of memory also obtains for narration, in which places, instead of being merely settings or scenes, are active agents of commemoration [...]. In learning of narrated times and places—times-of-places and places-in-times—we acquire a distinctive form of *local* knowledge’ (Casey 277, my emphasis).

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<sup>68</sup> Reconstruction of memory, or re-membling, serves as a motif throughout the thesis, as all of my case studies employ memory as a vital factor in the construction of (queer) narratives.



In terms of diaspora and the appropriation of Deleuzian and poststructuralist theories, it seems imperative that we should look at the concept of nomad thought and the ways it is described and employed by Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>69</sup> In his preface to *A Thousand Plateaus* the American translator and commentator Brian Massumi states that nomad thought 'synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity[...]. The modus operandi for nomad thought is affirmation, even when its apparent object is negative' (2004, xiii). While this formulation certainly presents an encouraging picture of what it means to think in terms of synthesis and appropriation, we still need to be aware that inherent in this line of theorising is the danger of defining what it means *not* to think nomadically. If nomadic thought, or nomadology, is that which cannot be pinned down or explained in a representational method, how can we differentiate it from that which it is not? In his discussions of the legality and utility of nomad thought Christopher L. Miller points out that, because *A Thousand Plateaus* does not contain any significant number of African or Asian oral or written nomadic sources, their text is to a large extent a 'reflection of the epistemological paradox of nomadology: nomads don't represent themselves in writing, they must be represented' (176). Moreover, asserting that in *Plateaus* the archive of nomadic thought is overwhelmingly academic, resting primarily on the work of European 'high' culture, Miller poses the question: 'What, if anything, does this project of nomadology have to do with real *and* "actual" nomads?' (177). The question is certainly valid in terms of representation as it directs us towards difficulties in accepting fully Deleuze's argument. However, by means of tactical diaspora, we are able to employ the project of nomad thought to create new transnational spaces of belonging without adhering to European notions of a universalised subject. By 'diasporising' Western philosophical ontology, tactical diaspora challenges place and strategy as it introduces mobility as well as local historicity to existing scholarship on diaspora. By refusing grounding in either here or there, tactical diaspora expands Deleuze's nomadism beyond the borders of Euro-America. In other words, tactical diaspora adds accountability to politics of location by

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<sup>69</sup> Although I place great emphasis on Deleuzian notion of nomad thought, it is only in order to emphasise its embeddedness in Western academic and philosophical thought. I do not employ nomad thought or nomadism in my analyses of case studies nor do I wish to situate it as vital to my articulation of queer tactical diaspora. On the contrary, I employ Deleuzian theorisations of space merely as a philosophical introduction to the workings of tacticality within queer studies, especially in terms of questioning the validity in the postcolonial world of the workings of queer studies and their Eurocentric underpinnings. The inclusion of the Western academic notion of nomadism in my introduction emphasises the problematics of its implementation in postcolonial studies, as it runs the risk of universalising both the movement of the metropolitan subjectivity and the experience of movement of the unmarked White, male body.



facilitating a transnational flow of images that defies the borders of a nation-state, displacing European imperial and cultural conventions.

Is the nonrepresentationalism of nomadology able to account for the 'real' nomads who also might have something to say? Miller's answer is a clear 'no', in that the abstractness of Deleuze's nomadic art is far removed from those of the real nomads. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari's work is abstract and a product of European high thought and culture, and its arguments about what constitutes a nomad and nomadic thought could be said to be nothing more than mere mediations on what 'else' is out there. As Miller rightly points out, most of their quotations stem from their Western intellectual counterparts (e.g. Hume, Nietzsche and Bergson) while sources outside Euro-America receive little if no attention. But does this abstract nomadism remove any possible agency on the behalf of those who might consider themselves nomads or those who believe that nomadism might act as another way of accounting for the postmodern state of mobility? I would say no. While Deleuze and Guattari use anthropological sources (in this case anthropology as the science of identity is seen as that which stands in direct opposition to nomadism), revealing ethnographic roots in their texts, their anthropology is free-floating and non-referential. As Miller points out: 'It is an intellectual nomadism and a nomadism for intellectuals' (177). More important, the non-referentiality of their theorising stands in stark contrast to that very representational discipline of anthropology, which has dealt with nomadism so far. Certainly, Deleuze and Guattari's metaphorical mapping of space can be read within the context of Euro-American discourses of modernism, emphasising the advantages of distance and the valorisation of displacement and mobility. Kaplan contends that the legacy of high imperialism within Euro-American poststructuralist theories demonstrates that the terms of postmodernism do not always stand in contrast to the workings of modernity. In fact, Kaplan argues that 'the circulation of powerful modern tropes within postmodern discourses of displacement suggests that postmodernity operates through a contradictory, discontinuous, and uneven process of connection with modernity' (23). Keeping this in mind, I argue that our task seems to be a call for the *historically specific* applications of the term 'deterritorialisation' and a denunciation of the generalised notion of nomadism where writing, theorising and reading is released from the constraints of culture, nation, class and gender. Moreover, we need to argue for versions of poststructuralism that 'destabilize colonial discourses as overtly as they deconstruct logocentrism' (24).



I argue that exploring the interstices between queer studies and diaspora studies allows us to create a new field of academic study that, on the one hand, broadens the field of queer studies beyond the borders of Euro-Americanism and, on the other, grounds diasporic studies in historical and cultural specificities of a particular region.<sup>70</sup> This, I argue, allows for a more complex negotiation of citizenship and national belonging based on multiple national spaces that displace Western sexual conventions. Investigations of space are vital to my argument, since transgressing the borders of nation-states involves more than a developmental passage from one fixed boundary into another. What is required is a renewed understanding of space based not on strategic static place but on multiple crossings and re-crossings of spaces that reproduce and re-symbolise attachment to certain territory. In addition, by investigating what happens to the queer body while it re-crosses borders, we are able to explore the impact of the movement of sexuality on territories of residence. In other words, by employing the notion of queer tactical diaspora to investigate space, sexuality and movement of queer desire, we are able to create new spaces of belonging that challenge and alter notions of fixed boundaries and ultimately lay claims to nation and home, based not on origin, filiation and a stable one-way transfer of ideas and identifications, but on destination, affiliation and multiple deterritorialised sites of exchange. In the next chapter, I focus on the use of queer tactical diaspora in Shani Mootoo's novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008). Mootoo's texts, I argue, employ queer tactical diaspora as a means of exposing imperialist notions of Caribbean space as the biblical Garden of Eden. The use of space and sexuality in the two texts exhibits the ability of queer re-membering to alter space, as the image of the garden is used as a means of deterritorialising the relationship between diaspora and queer. Thus, in Chapter Two, I use queer tactical diaspora as a method of 'queering' the postcolonial as well as 'postcolonising' the queer.

## THE CARIBBEAN META-ARCHIPELAGO

As a way of moving from the broader accounts of diaspora to the specific context of the Caribbean, I introduce the concept of the meta-archipelago which will serve as an extension, and a crucial part of, my theorisations of tactical diaspora, located within the spatio-temporal spaces of queer belonging. This space, as mentioned earlier, reconfigures and recomposes the restraining local and the expanding global, cultural and national differences

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<sup>70</sup> Once again, I do not suggest that my thesis is based on historical events but rather that diaspora studies run the risk of becoming purely theoretical unless they are grounded in specific regional contexts.



and collectivities within the queer diaspora space. How can theories of space be used for the articulations of home, both within and outside Caribbean space, and how can queer subjectivities that are on the move, intersect, employ and alter our understanding of the notion of postcoloniality, queer theories and queer studies? Having already mentioned the postmodern theories of space developed by Michel Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, I would like to introduce another Western philosopher whose work on the 'trialectics of spatiality' (Soja 1996) has contributed immensely to a renewed understanding of public and private space.<sup>71</sup> Henri Lefebvre's work offers a way of theorising the politics of space as it is perceived, conceived and lived. Identifying three 'moments' in the production of space—*spatial practice*—*representations of space*—*representational spaces*—Lefebvre interconnects these moments in order to emphasise a renewed approach to perceiving space.<sup>72</sup> Spatial practice, according to Lefebvre, refers to the ways we perceive ourselves within our surroundings and the means by which we appropriate and utilise this space. This socially produced space is described as *perceived* space, open to limits, description and measurement. Within this space we find symbols and ideas (i.e. representations of space) that are associated with knowledges and institutions. This is a dominant space that tends to work towards a verbal intellectualisation of *conceived* space, where signs, codes and knowledge are constituted through the deciphering of the spatial practice, resulting in control over the production of spatial knowledge. Representational spaces are relational spaces that are directly *lived* through their associated images and symbols.<sup>73</sup> These spaces are seen as distinct from the other two in that they contain the elements of both but 'need obey no rules of

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<sup>71</sup> My introduction of Lefebvre at this stage of the thesis serves as a preface to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's notion of the 'meta-archipelago', which I will analyse in the following section. Although I am aware of the risk involved in employing yet another Western theorisation of space, I nevertheless use Lefebvre as a springboard for an involvement with non-Western geographers such as Rojo. This, I believe, provides a 'balanced' input on the perception of Caribbean space.

<sup>72</sup> In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues: 'from a philosophy of space revised and corrected by mathematic [...] the modern field of inquiry known as epistemology has inherited and adopted the notion that the status of space is that of a 'metal thing' or 'mental space'. At the same time, set theory, as the supposed logic of that place, has exercised a fascination not only upon philosophers but also upon writers and linguists. The result has been a broad proliferation of sets (*ensembles*), some practical, some historical. [...] No limits at all have been set on the generalization of the concept of mental space' (3). Furthermore, Lefebvre adds: 'We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that. [...] Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly fundamental epistemological studies is not only the idea of 'man' but also that of space—the fact that 'space' is mentioned on every page notwithstanding' (3).

<sup>73</sup> In Donald Nicholson-Smith's (1991) English translation of Lefebvre's (1974) *The Production of Space*, lived space is translated as 'representational spaces'. However, 'spaces of representation' is the term most commonly used by Edward W. Soja (1996, 10) as a way of distinguishing it from representations of space (conceptualised space). I will also use 'spaces of representation' as the term for lived space.



consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imagery and symbolic elements, they have their source in history of each individual belonging to that people' (41). Arranging these moments allows Lefebvre to suggest that, contrary to the traditional view that space is lived before it is conceptualised, representation precedes practice and the perception of space. Lefebvre argues that the production of space is dominated by representational spaces that serve as identifications of what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. Along with the three moments of social space, Lefebvre identifies the *body* as an vital part of his theorisations: '[T]he relationship to a space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa. Considered overall, social practice presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work' (40). Rather than defining bodies through space, Lefebvre examines how bodies create or produce space. Lefebvre's articulations of the production of space are closely related to bodies that are sexed and gendered, despite that in his work he fails to pay close/critical attention to the production of (hetero)sexual bodies within various social spaces (Brown 2000).<sup>74</sup> Lefebvre certainly acknowledges the role of sexuality in the production of space and my aim here is not to introduce a critique of his theories but to add the notions of gender and sexuality to the production of social space with the intent of illuminating the relationship between the concept of tactical diaspora with the diasporised space of the Caribbean. The task is certainly not an easy one but by appropriating these theorisations of space and those of queer theory, we can see how Shani Mootoo's novel constructs new notions of home and belonging.

The concepts of space found in Lefebvre and Certeau point to the practice of the everyday, which functions both as a means of domination in the late capitalist world but also as a possibility of resistance. Utilising tactics instead of strategy, we are able to better understand the Caribbean as a space with *and* without borders, where fluidity *and* rootedness coincide in the space *between* Foucault's understanding of utopia and heterotopia. According to Soja, the trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality of Lefebvre's theories of space exhibit

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<sup>74</sup> Engaging in Lefebvre's writing vis-à-vis the closet, Michael P. Brown argues: 'Lefebvre was especially interested in understanding the fundamental spatiality of all social processes. He was especially suspicious about using only vision to detect the production of space. Since the closet metaphor often turns on a visual trope (its contents being unseen), his work seems especially apposite. Lefebvre certainly did not ignore the role that sexuality played in the production of space in capitalist society. In spite of the numerous references to sexuality in his writing, Lefebvre has surprisingly little to say about the relationship between different forms of sexuality and urban space' (58).



the ability to disintegrate the dual mode of thinking about space as Firstspace (concrete materiality of spatial forms) and Secondspace (thoughtful representation of human spatiality in mental forms). This points towards a 'thirthing' of the spatial imagination which complicates the material and mental spaces, ultimately pushing towards Thirdspace which Soja sees as 'simultaneously real and imagined and more (both and also...)' (1996, 11). According to Soja, 'the exploration of Thirdspace can be described and inscribed in journeys to "real-and-imagined" (or perhaps "realandimagined"?) places' (1996, 11). My focus on the betweenness of spaces points towards a consideration of the Caribbean inhabiting what Antonio Benítez-Rojo terms a 'meta-archipelago'—but with sexuality as the focal point. Consisting of a chain of islands, the Caribbean, according to Benítez-Rojo, has been seen throughout history as a harmonious unity of islands, charted on a map as diverse but still in unison with its geographical surroundings. Diverse and heterogeneous, the Caribbean invites us to consider it as a place of syncretism and uprootedness, lacking historical continuity and historiography. This view, however, runs the risk of simply repeating the colonialist demand that the heterogeneity and fragmentation of the islands be reduced to a single entity, geographically situated in a neat array of disjointed wholes. This neo-colonialist view is incapable of capturing the richness of the Caribbean reality, in that the Caribbean possesses neither a centre nor a boundary. It is a fluidity that reinscribes the sense of belonging, significantly re-mapping Western notions of territory and identity. According to Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean is not a collection of islands but a mixture of different phenomena such as 'unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification' (2) that cannot easily be joined in an easy symbiosis. The assemblage of islands, of middles, corresponds to Deleuze's notions of space where we no longer find centres, only middles without ends or margins. Benítez-Rojo employs movement and fluidity as a means of transforming the Caribbean archipelago into a meta-archipelago, where middles form a decentred whole without abandoning the historical and cultural sharedness of the region. Within the space of the Caribbean archipelago, within its 'generalized 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' (3). Benítez-Rojo's emphasis on repetition relates to Certeau and Lefebvre's notions of the



everyday where every repetition entails a thirding of the spatial imaginations, complicating notions of centres and boundaries, pushing towards a difference while remaining the same.<sup>75</sup>

The repetition of the islands and the involvement of bodies in the production of space invite us to consider the role of sexuality and gender within the production of lived space. Especially significant are the physical and psychological borders that signify the construction of diasporic space. But how can/does sexuality destabilise these borders? To better illustrate the constraining gender/sexed production of the social spaces/borders, I want to pair Lefebvre's analysis of social space with Judith Butler's analysis of identity as performative. If tactical diaspora exhibits the interstices between space and body, then combining the theorisations of Lefebvre and Butler would serve as a theoretical and a practical tool for the investigations of the representations of space/discourse in the production of concrete abstractions/the citation of norms.<sup>76</sup> Mutually constituted, space and identity serve as tools for the representation and the discourse of bodies, where both the production and the constitution of bodies constitute develop performative spaces. Coupling the production of social space with performative acts of gendered and sexed bodies presents us with the possibility of redoing and re-imagining the interstices between place and body. I do not suggest that Lefebvre's theorising is purely practical and Butler's purely theoretical. Both are critical of the all-encompassing views that material effects cannot be separated from the construction of identity and social practice. While Butler focuses on the discursive constructions of normative sexuality, arguing that they often have material effects inseparable from social reality, Lefebvre focuses on social practices as they are played out within the construction and production of space. Both theorists, however, pay close attention to the discursive elements that, while dominating the production of space and appearing to be fully intelligible, often serve to obscure the spatial and material elements in the construction of identity and social space. The dis-membered Caribbean body, by the means of appropriation of Lefebvre and

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<sup>75</sup> One could argue that in terms of the Deleuzian theory of space, Caribbean space becomes a rhizome, lacking fixed boundaries and containing multiple centres, removing itself as the periphery/centre of the Western imperial gaze and reinserting peripheral dynamic geographies as centres in their own right. Caribbean space smoothens the neo-colonialist striated space, creating an assemblage rather than a map, where the nonhierarchical and acented meta-archipelago allows for a reclaiming and a re-imagining of Caribbean space as inhabitable by those subjectivities who, finding themselves in their dis/locations, sometimes may not seem to 'belong'.

<sup>76</sup> Of course, since pairing of Lefebvre and Butler introduces performativity of gender as well as the workings of sexuality into the picture, it also queers the notion of tactical diaspora, bringing it closer to the overall theme of the thesis. Looking at the intervening space where Lefebvre's 'moments of "truth"' and Butler's 'subversive (bodily) acts' merge, we are presented with the possibility of redoing gender and sexuality, and at the same time, reworking the way sexuality works on space and the way space works on sexuality.



Certeau's theorisations of space, along with Butler's notions of gender performativity, is remembered and reassembled in new geographical configurations.<sup>77</sup>

## REMAINING WHERE WE ARE

The fluidity of Benítez-Rojo's Caribbean meta-archipelago brings us to the tactical remembering found in the writing of Jamaica Kincaid. In *My Garden (Book)* (1999), a series of essays concerning gardens and plants, Kincaid writes about the history of gardens, different gardening catalogues, garden books, and her own gardens. Particularly, Kincaid is interested in the garden and its connection to history, colonisation and imperialism, and the way the mourning and the re-membrance of the garden can function not only as an act of resistance but also as a means for appropriating the Western institution of botany to voice an untold history of exploitation.<sup>78</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala's garden becomes a site on which we can delve deeper into the notions of the Caribbean paradisaal garden and interrogate the myths of place and the 'self-conscious thematization of the conventions of ethnographic, travel, and scientific exploration narratives' (Casteel 18).<sup>79</sup> Removing the strategic place, Kincaid ushers a theoretical as well as a material heterotopic space for new desires and subjectivities found at the interstices between space, body and time. For Kincaid, as well as Certeau, space is an effect and a practice rather than a given structure.<sup>80</sup> Kincaid's *Garden* is more about the practice of gardening and garden making rather than her actual garden. Although Kincaid and Mootoo draw on past experiences in order to awaken memory as a means of recapturing the past, both writers experience difficulties, pain and frustration in the process. Especially Kincaid's gardening process, which causes great worries and involves failed attempts at growing plants, can be seen as both a

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<sup>77</sup> Although the impact of the work of Judith Butler on gender studies on the whole is immense, I will not go into great detail about the workings of performance and performativity. I simply include these notions as one of the numerous elements in the deconstruction of colonial notions of gender.

<sup>78</sup> Ramón E. Soto-Crespo notes: 'Kincaid's allegory of the postcolonial garden as a space of resistance is not constrained by Antigua history but includes the greater Caribbean cultural experience, in the same way that her garden in the diaspora attempts to represent not just Antigua but the overall map of the Caribbean Sea, including its many islands' (357, n. 8).

<sup>79</sup> The trajectory from postmodern theorisations of body and space in Chapter One to the implementation of those theorisations in connection to the garden in this chapter is a deliberate move. Since garden serves as a symbol of imperialism and the colonial project, I examine the implications of employing Eurocentric theorisations of space and the body as well as the garden as a means of connecting those to the overall analysis of gender and postcolonial studies.

<sup>80</sup> In the case of Kincaid, this is seen in her 1988 text *A Small Place*, where Kincaid exposes the small island of Antigua as a *place* (inhabitable and lived) as opposed to *space*, which is mappable and subject to exploration. I will analyse Kincaid's text in the next chapter.



creative but also an unproductive and a difficult practice. A practice that, although unsuccessful and filled with worry, brings joy and satisfaction in its fruitlessness: 'How agitated I am when I am in the garden, and how happy I am to be so agitated. How vexed I often am when I am in the garden, and how happy I am to be vexed. What to do? Nothing works just the way I thought it would' (2001, 14). By employing Lefebvre and Certeau's theories of space, I argue that Kincaid's enjoyment of vexation about the failed attempts to employ the garden as a site for pleasure points towards the refusal of the pleasures of imagination as a means of re-'capturing' (i.e. a means to know and to 'understand'). As a result, the use of imagination exclusively does not offer a constructive critique of colonialism and instead points to the neo-colonial Enlightenment concepts of knowing.<sup>81</sup> Here, I want to bring in Édouard Glissant, whose theorisations of space are similar to those of Kincaid, in that he too offers anti-essentialist readings of postcolonial space. In his 1981 collection *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays (Le Discours antillais)* in which he theorises the notions of the postcolonial, Glissant writes:

What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships [...] In the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between the inside and the outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. A Caribbean imagination liberates us from being smothered. (139)

Glissant offers a renewed way of *understanding* and *knowing* (postcolonial) space where the will to understand and to know space leads away from knowledge. In other words, Glissant warns against employing the imagination to understand the postcolonial. In a similar vein, Kincaid rejects the pleasures of imagination to re-capture the past and the present. Thus, reading Glissant and Kincaid together suggests a new approach to understanding (postcolonial) space. In addition, we can compare Glissant's view of the Caribbean to Benítez-Rojo's notions of the meta-archipelago, which reveals an interesting correlation between the histories of the openness of the Caribbean with the historical 'facts' of the colonisation of that same region. For Glissant, the Caribbean is a site of convergence of the histories of colonialism, negritude and pan-Africanism. Glissant calls attention to the fluidity and transformation of identity, and by looking at the complexity of Caribbean space, he

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<sup>81</sup> The aim of Kincaid's gardening practice is twofold. First, the enjoyment of the failure of the garden as a site for pleasure signifies the refusal of the desire of the imagination to map knowledge. Second, the worry and vexation she experiences in the garden work as metaphoric devices for the merging of her own history with the effects of colonial history and transplantation.



investigates the historical and political density of the Caribbean and the postcolonial world. Moreover, Glissant brings in both nature and the human involvement in the creation of the Caribbean identity, placing human agency in the construction of its landscape: 'The crab-filled swamps, the flatness of the plantations, the factories overgrown with grass: the land contracts, and the cactus, and the cold-out sands' (9).<sup>82</sup> Glissant's incorporation of identity within the theorisations of space correlates to Benítez-Rojo's repeating island which, serving as a bridge between South and North America and thus reinforcing the closeness of history and imagination, is 'a machine of spume that links the narrative of the search for El Dorado with the narrative of the finding of El Dorado; or if you like, the discourse of myth with the discourse of history' (4). Both Glissant and Benítez-Rojo look at the narrative of the Caribbean landscape as a means of gaining knowledge, not from the Eurocentric notions of a postmodern condition, but from a renewed understanding that stems from both the local *and* the global, the historical *and* the mythical contexts. According to Glissant,

It is difficult to separate theoretically the notion of oppressive dignity from the oppressive reality of private property. This makes sublimation necessary. This explains why Western philosophy and ideology all aim for a *generalizing universality*. [...] A generalizing universality is ambitious enough to allow for the sublimation of individual dignity based on the reality of private property. It is also the ultimate weapon in the process of depersonalizing a vulnerable people. The first reaction [against this] is the stubborn insistence of remaining where you are'. (1999, 138-139)

Glissant's Caribbean is very different from that of Roumain. In fact, Glissant's call for staying put does not imply a nationalist closure. Instead, remaining where we are allows us to gain knowledge about the crossing of cultures in a way that would account for and include culture and politics of the particular region. Moreover, by looking at landscape as a result of human agency and vice versa (i.e. a Caribbean landscape that is shaped both by nature and human involvement) we can connect Glissant's work to Lefebvre's (and Soja's) theories of space. In contrast to the anti-colonial nationalist practice of linking culture to landscape and claiming a non-European landscape as a foundation for an inherent national identity, Glissant proposes a

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<sup>82</sup> Isabel Hoving argues that by comparing the roots of mangroves with those of the European oak, Glissant points to the density of the entangled roots of the mangrove which, by living in soil and in water, stand as counterparts to the immobility and firmness of the deep roots of the oak. Argues Hoving: 'Glissant refers to Caribbean plants and trees to illustrate his model. Mangroves, for example, with their entangled roots and branches, living in water and in soil, function as the counterpart to the strong European oak with its deep roots and unambiguous trunk, which serves as a model for a strong, autonomous identity. Following Deleuze, Glissant differentiates *identité-racine* (root-identity) and *identité-relation*, and with the help of this last concept he invites us to understand identity as the effect of relations, rather than as the cause of relations' (2002, 126-127).



postcolonial theorisation of landscape that critically reworks the European traditions of rootedness without adhering to the negritude literature of a prelapsarian past.

Returning to the connection between Kincaid and Glissant, I want to look at the abstract conceptualisations of space in Glissant's writing; his insistence on the images of the Caribbean landscape lack the concreteness of the lived space. Moreover, the openness of Glissant's landscape can also be seen as an invitation to a radical anti-essentialist view of the postcolonial condition, rooted in the imagined conceptions of perceived space (Secondspace). Isabel Hoving, analysing the connections between the theorisations of (lived) space by Glissant and Kincaid, suggests that, when read together, the two authors present a cross-cultural world where heterogeneity stands as 'an invitation to refrain from any quick understanding. [...] If one reads these texts as if they are about roads to insight they can be heard to invite us to *stay, to live* in the complexity of specific places, places that are always cross-cultural transnational, interdisciplinary' (135, emphasis in original).<sup>83</sup> Hoving views Glissant's insistence on remaining where we are as a specific knowledge practice where the cross-cultural world is represented as highly concrete and at the same time highly abstract: 'I would describe such knowledge practice as situated, as interdisciplinary (for such knowledge production one needs political analysis, historiography, botanics, poetry, cultural analysis etc.), as dialogical; as inevitably politically aware, and aiming at political insights; but also eager for the idiosyncratic' (135).

Accordingly, I argue that Kincaid's exploration of the Caribbean landscape, and subsequently the Caribbean garden, adds the local and the global to Glissant's work, making the transition towards transnationalism (specific, concrete relations) without neglecting the postcolonial (general cultural characteristics) effects of the globalising world. Regarding Kincaid's explorations as a *practice* appears to be a highly apt term for further examinations of how she (Mootoo as well) employs the landscape as a means of theorising space. Kincaid's space is a practice of a Lefebrian kind. Situated between the perceived and conceptualised, between the real and the imagined, Kincaid's gardening process/practice exposes the real effects of the colonial transplantation, denaturalising the connection between landscape and

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<sup>83</sup> Hoving cites Chris Bongie for whom Glissant's conceptualisations of space are 'founded upon a sense of our distance from the very thing that we cannot salvage but open which we must learn to survive' (cited in Hoving, 128). Bongie is critical of what he views as Glissant's perpetuation of Césaire's unproblematic connection to the earth. Hoving argues that the criticism directed towards Glissant tends to emphasise the inconcreteness and the general cultural characteristics of the postmodern world, without privileging the material dimensions rooted in the political, historical, economical and cultural materialities of specific regions.



inherent identity. Simultaneously, it exposes the failure of imagination to generate pleasure, since the desire to see and understand the garden inevitably leads to the regeneration and a continuation of the Enlightenment ideals of mapping knowledge. Interestingly, and as a consequence, Kincaid presents neither an anti-essentialist nor an Enlightenment vision of the Caribbean landscape. In fact, for Kincaid they both represent the colonial dream of the well-structured Garden of Eden in which the native landscape is in need of taming and control. For Kincaid the idea of the Edenic garden symbolises domination and control, and rather than taking recourse to an anti-colonial discourse of opposition, Kincaid does away with the image of the Garden. Closing the essay 'The Garden in Eden', she admits that 'Eden is [...] so rich in comfort, it tempts me to cause discomfort; I am in a state of constant discomfort and I like this state so much I would like to share it' (2001, 229). Situating herself in the Thirdspace between the Firstspace of the anti-colonial discourse and the Secondspace of the Enlightenment ideal, Kincaid emphasises that what gives her pleasure is the notion of acting. 'What to do?', she keeps asking herself. The pleasure she gets from gardening lies not in the visual beauty of her garden but in the fact that discomfort, although bringing vexation and nuisance, is productive as it forces her to find new spaces and directions.<sup>84</sup> Much like Lefebvre, Kincaid does not look for pleasure in the perceived or the conceived spaces—creating new spaces in the spaces in-between results in the discovery of a new set of complex spaces that act as a springboard for future actions. This space is different from that of Glissant, but by adding the dimension of the lived space (shaped by the material, political, historical and economical processes) to the theories of space offered by Glissant, Kincaid exhibits the possibility for the creation of Thirdspace and therefore a new set of concrete, material and uncontrollable actions.

## TRADITION IN DEPTH

Glissant's insistence on remaining in the Caribbean corresponds to my contention that theorisations of space and identity need to be situated outside the philosophical and geographical space of Euro-America. The theories of space and postcolonialism put forward by Certeau and Lefebvre are certainly appropriate for my argument, but by delving into the space outside Euro-Americanness we are able to confront and rework the centeredness of

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<sup>84</sup> Kincaid's 2005 travel narrative *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya*, documenting Kincaid's journey from the US to Nepal to gather seeds for her garden in Vermont, employs similar notions of space. This text, however, falls into the genre of postcolonial travel writing.



those paradigms, paying close attention to the discourses that challenge Eurocentricity but do not propose a nationalist or an anti-essential closure.<sup>85</sup> Although the 'creolisation' of culture and language has been a prevailing preoccupation in the literary criticism within the space of the Caribbean, several other theories, such as syncretism and *créolité*, have also found their foothold in the articulation of difference and social diversity as a part of the Caribbean heterogeneity. Wilson Harris's study of *syncretism*, Glissant's *antillanité* or *poétique de la relation* (cross-cultural poetics), and Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant's *créolité*, although different concepts and modes of scrutiny, all share the belief in the liberating dynamic of creolisation.<sup>86</sup> The concept of hybridity, as developed by Bhabha, is an intermediary force that unsettles the 'knowledge'-based conclusiveness of colonial representation by producing spaces in-between the dominant paradigms where unauthorised and denied knowledges emerge and become audible/visible. Creating a cultural clash between the 'old' and the 'new', the in-between of culture produces social inequalities between the dominant national culture, paving way for 'the emergence of an "interstitial" agency' that creates a 'dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty' (Bhabha 1996, 58). In the context of the Caribbean, much in the same manner as with Bhabha only within a particular geography, the concept of creolisation has been seen as a specifically Caribbean issue dealing with the in-between states of belonging. Thus, as much as hybridity is a non-localised term, so is creolisation a term belonging strictly to the Caribbean. Here, the counter-hegemonic potential of creolisation lies in its being a site rather than a space.<sup>87</sup> Common to these theorists, however, is the belief in the liberating process of creolisation originating from non-hierarchical and unrestricted interaction of cultures: 'It is from this dynamic that creolization becomes a power for reversing the processes of acculturation (or assimilation), deculturation, discontinuity, and marginalization that have affected the entire Caribbean' (Balutansky and Sourieau 5).

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<sup>85</sup> I do not propose a non-Western perspective as that which is 'alternative' or 'different' to the West. Rather, I simply expand the theories of space beyond the borders of Euro-America.

<sup>86</sup> See Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (1983) for a discussion of syncretism, and Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar (1990), for a discussion of *créolité*. I will discuss the work of Harris in the following pages.

<sup>87</sup> Apart from Benítez-Rojo and Glissant's notion of creolisation as an unceasing/repeating moment of a constant emergence of new cultural forms, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's creolisation is a finite process whose completion only allows a subversion of Euro-colonial hegemony. Aisha Khan argues: 'For Brathwaite, creolization unfinished is disempowering; its completion is what allows the subversion of Euro-colonial hegemony, rather than the power of creolization deriving from its never being consummated' (168).



Wilson Harris argues that the potential of syncretism, which is based on the heterogeneity of all cultures and societies, is constrained and denied by acts of homogeneity. Telling of his childhood in British Guyana, Harris explains that 'the term *Creole* was implicitly or covertly hurled at us like a metaphoric brick (designed to alert us to our impure lineage and mixed race) by the pure-blooded tenants' (1998, 23). Moreover, Harris argues:

Creoleness made me aware of the complex labyrinth of the family of humankind into which I was born in the twentieth century [...]. As a consequence, therefore, in the eyes of the depraved tenant of the New World creoleness was so internalized yet suppressed that scapegoats become the order of the day. Creoleness became a form of self-deceptive division even as it harbored within itself a potential for the renaissance of community. (1998, 23)

Looking at the violent past of the Caribbean, Harris sees Caribbean mythologies as having traditions that 'bear upon cross-cultural capacities for genuine change in communities beset by complex dangers and whose antecedents are diverse' (1983, xv). Without dichotomising polarising the role of coloniser and colonised, Harris posits the cross-cultural capacity of creoleness as a means of exposing and illuminating the otherness within the mental images of homogeneity:

It is necessary to make clear within the fabric of imaginative exploration ... that homogeneity is a biological hypothesis that relates to all mankind to a basic or primordial ancestor, but as a cultural model, exercised by a ruling ethnic group, it tends to become an organ of conquest and division because of *imposed* unity that actually subsists on the suppression of others. (1983, xviii)

Rediscovering the cultural resources based in the mythological past the Caribbean creoleness allows for the rejuvenation of a heterogenous community. Although he contends that monolithic discourses silence differences, Harris does not valorise heterogeneity as an 'authentic' voice of the Caribbean. Instead, he points towards the incompleteness of all images, whether they are homogenous or heterogenous:

The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs, or bridges of community. (1983, xviii)

The importance of Harris's theory is seen in its relation to Glissant's 'language of landscape' which the latter perceives as crucial for the missing African cultural recognition in the Caribbean. For Glissant, the significance of landscape is evident in his insistence that Caribbean writers should establish a dialectic between culture and the natural world: 'people did not relate even a mythical chronology of this land to their knowledge of this country, and



so nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness' (1999, 63). Much in the same manner as Kincaid's investigations of the hybridity and creolisation of plants, Harris suggests that the natural world is not simply a geographical setting for human history but a vital part of the symbolic language.<sup>88</sup> Harris calls for writers (and poets) to deepen their perception of landscape and to consider Caribbean space as a dialectical relationship between the human and nature.<sup>89</sup> His critique of the stasis of place and time points towards the two ideas that are crucial to understanding his writing: the 'victim stasis' and the 'novel of consolidation of character'.<sup>90</sup> More important, a closer inspection of these concepts show Harris's sophisticated development of the concepts deriving from the 'Third World' as a response to the (post)modernist understanding of a cultural crisis. Undermining linear time, space and sequence, Harris employs syncretism as a means of altering the conventional understandings of memory and identity. Speaking about the Caribbean novel, Harris remarks that 'there are certain areas of the world in which one is aware that people who live there are conscious of themselves as persons who have been exploited' (qtd. in Drake 7). However, he also remarks that the traditional Western narrative is inadequate in capturing these facts: 'The facts are true, but a syndrome occurs which in relating itself to the facts becomes something other than the facts. A certain psychological stasis is born, what I call the "victim stasis"' (Drake 7). The narrative of the relationship between the victim and the victimiser creates a homogenous and stifling setting in which both the victim and the victimiser become involved in a perpetual cycle of historical repetition:

An alteration needs to occur in the texture of the novel to allow these juxtapositions to play in such a manner that the creation of a vision through and beyond stasis, which I see as immensely pertinent to the late twentieth-century novel, may occur through an alternation in the settled fabric of realism that consolidates victor and victim... without that subjective alternation the community is doomed to perpetuate an endless reinforcement of conflict. (Drake 7)

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<sup>88</sup> Harris explains his notion of the 'landscape of the imagination' in an anecdote: 'A friend of mine recently told me that in conversation with a certain high-ranking Guyanese official and politician, he discovered that the politician saw the landscape as nothing more than the boundaries of his constituency. The ideal artist or scientist for him, therefore, was someone who conformed to an immediate governing stasis of place and time. [...] This is but a small illustration of landscape of the imagination which can be unravelled to lay bare many complex rooms and dimensions that have a profound bearing on Caribbean man as a civilisation-making animal, as an architect or a poet' (1999, 174).

<sup>89</sup> Harris's call is related to my arguments on the importance of landscape for the investigations of the narratives of home and away.

<sup>90</sup> My emphasis on the novel of consolidation of character as the novel as a genre is based on its significance for my later analysis of the Western narrative of the 'coming out story' in terms of Caribbean queer narratives as well as the Western tradition of the Bildungsroman.



As an attempt at working on the traditional binaries, Harris's fiction contains the narrative structures and dialogic settings that serve as focal points for the encounter between the victim and the victimiser, the self and the Other, the native and the alien, where the dialogue between the seemingly opposing entities results in a recognition of the interchangeability of these very concepts.

Since the intersection between the familiar and the unfamiliar is 'alien' to the classical nineteenth-century realist novel, Harris reworks the European realist novel by means of opening the syntax of classical realism and introducing a reopened 'nature' of human society in relation to forces neither natural nor social but situated somewhere in-between.<sup>91</sup> Related to Bhabha's belatedness—a 'time-lag'—Harris's writing forces us to read differently, somewhere in-between time and space. Serving as a 'hole' in modernist thought, Harris's work is an 'interrogative space' (Bhabha 1992, 59) in which a pre-Columbian, New World African past is recalled into a language of place that Harris himself terms 'iconic landscape' (qtd. in Emery 111). Harris's use of the term iconic 'immediately spatializes what we expect to be narrativized temporally and lends a ritual connotation to the space set into view, the landscape as sacred memorial image and as a setting for acts of memory' (Emery 111). For Harris, the landscape implies that nature is 'co-productive with human culture', and cultural texts are 'produced and read through a "view" of nature which opens onto a profound cross-cultural and cross-spatial imagination' (Emery 111). This means, in terms of space, that we must 'probe the function of roots as a criterion of creativity and capacity to digest and liberate *contrasting spaces*' ('A Talk on the Subjective Imagination' 57, my emphasis). The move towards contrasting spaces implies a breakdown of both the homogenous setting of the victim stasis and the consolidation novel. In fact, the turn to landscape exhibits the ability to re-naturalise social relations as well as reveal the natural landscape 'as a cultural text co-existent with the eroded histories of "obscure individuals" and to counter the dominant history of conquest through the resurrection of "conquered peoples"' (Emery 112).<sup>92</sup> The use of landscape in Harris's writing extends to the writings of Shani Mootoo and Jamaica Kincaid,

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<sup>91</sup> The importance of Harris's work can be seen in the shift away from the European philosophical work and towards a sophisticated adaptation and literary expression of attitudes situated in non-European traditions.

<sup>92</sup> Harris's writing involves a reallocation of the imagination of the Caribbean novel towards an investigation and emphasis on the contrasts in culture, times and places, as opposed to the homogenous imperatives of the Caribbean sense of self, culture and identity deriving from the colonial traditions and legacy. This shift is important for my call for the expansion of the theorisations of space and those of gender and sexuality beyond the geographical (as well as philosophical) borders of Euro-Americanism.



as the focus of *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *My Garden*, although constructed as a reconstruction of a singularly Caribbean setting, lies not on the particular geographic or historical boundaries of the West Indies but is related to a multi-relationality of the postcolonial and a transnational space.<sup>93</sup> Most important, via 'contrasting spaces', Harris points towards a reconsideration of the imperialist paradigm of the pre-Columbian/post-Columbian, in that it only allows for history to be situated on either side of the line. Harris's spaces re-envision the Caribbean present via repeated crossings over this dividing line. The rewriting of colonising fictions involves an inclusion of differences and contrasts, and via communal efforts, suggests alternatives to hegemonic devices of homogeneity that continue to dominate in the Caribbean and other postcolonial regions.

The reflections on the impact of space on history and identity made both by Western (Lefebvre, Certeau) and non-Western (Harris, Glissant) theorists, attest to the importance and the imminence of the move away from generalised debates regarding postcoloniality towards more historically and geographically specific forms of discourse analysis. More precisely, the move enables us to focus on the contested (contrasted) spaces that are racialised, sexualised and gendered, in that, as we have seen above, space is a vital factor in the production of power and history. The move towards the Caribbean involves remaining in Caribbean space and simultaneously questioning the (Eurocentric) imaginative logic of the Caribbean bordering on the pre-Columbian/post-Columbian divide. Moreover, by employing Harris's call for a creative revival of the sedimented cultural resources, the heterogeneous community can liberate the homogenous contrasting spaces and work towards a postcolonial redefinition not only of history and identity but also gender, sexuality and belonging. By looking at sexuality within theorisations of Caribbean space, we can turn toward an emphasis on (diasporic) queerness as a method for deconstructing the dichotomous logic of the dominant Euro-American paradigms in theorising local and transnational sexuality. By turning towards a 'native tradition of depth' and away from the European novel of consolidation of character, we are able to analyse Caribbean space in less traditionally postmodern and more transnational and dialogic terms. According to Harris,

The post-modernists have discarded depth, they have discarded the unconscious, thus all they are involved in is a game, a kind of game, whereas what I am saying is not just

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<sup>93</sup> Although I emphasise Mootoo and Kincaid's work in connection with Harris's theorisations of space, I will not analyse their work through this perspective. I merely wish to highlight the possibility of viewing *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *My Garden* as parts of the syncretic project.



a game. I am convinced that there is a tradition in depth which returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have vanished, and that it creates a fiction in the ways in which the creative imagination comes into dialogue with clues of revisionary moment. ('Literacy and the Imagination—A Talk' 27)<sup>94</sup>

Harris's *The Carnival Trilogy*, consisting of *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990), is significant: it situates the multiplicity of bodies in relation to each other and the space around them. More important, Harris disrupts European forms of literature and knowledge and draws on complex understandings of gender and gendered bodies. Although the trilogy is of an allegorical nature with its epic proportions and focus on Guyana as the 'New Forest', 'Harris moves toward more global concerns, toward formulating a heterogeneous community that breaks out of the violence and oppression of its history' (Johnson 124). Moreover, the focus on the body in relation to space and time 'gestures toward more open-ended concepts of gender and the body than he does in earlier works to formulate an even more inclusive, cross-cultural community' (Johnson 124). Harris's emphasis on the body in space works in conjunction with the Caribbean landscape, in that the bodies in *The Carnival Trilogy* are also connected to other bodies and landscapes, opening the Caribbean body to a more complex understanding of gender: 'Not only is Glass [the protagonist of *The Infinite Rehearsal*] [...] aware of the effects of both the conquering body as well as the conquered body in their relation to past and present landscapes, constellations and world, the spiritual Ghost or IT [a guiding figure] embodies both victimizer and victimized, male and female, and extends down through the sea and out to the stars' (Johnson 134). Harris's emphasis on the simultaneity of genders, the past (as much as the present) presents a challenge to the nationalist dichotomies of belonging and non-belonging which grew out of European imperial projects. In his attempt to produce an alternative to the dichotomies of past/present, pre-Columbian/post-Columbian, male/female, Harris moves beyond the framework of a solely national identity and points towards a transnational, more inclusive, cross-cultural understanding of community that exists in the spaces between and in the dichotomies. Although his work gives the impression of being abstract and not grounded in 'reality', *The Infinite Rehearsal*, according to Krishna Ray Lewis, 'emanates from two historical realities of the Caribbean: its hybridized culture of the

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<sup>94</sup> Applying the traditions of depth to our discussion of gender and postcolonial studies invites us to consider the spatiality of Caribbean narratives in terms of syncretism, where gender and sexuality become a dichotomous contrasting space in need of further investigation.



Caribbean and the ensuing necessity for multivocalism in a postcolonial examination, and a crisis in self-representation in response to a sense of deprivation' (86).<sup>95</sup>

One important aspect of my study of the notions of Caribbean space in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is the consideration of the rhetoric of nationalism and the requirement of consolidated identities based on categories of sex, gender, race and colour. The realism of the post-independence anti-colonial narratives, which favoured itself as opposed to and different from the colonial narratives of oppression and domination, was based on the nineteenth-century classic realist texts. Despite being centred on Caribbean instead of English landscapes, these narratives failed to overturn the colonial imperative of encoding monolithic national identities and hierarchical gender systems.<sup>96</sup> Only in his recent work does Harris pay attention to gender and the simultaneity of genders. The articulations of Caribbean creolisation emphasise the cultural, racial and linguistic differences and the dynamics of cross-cultural possibilities for resistance and creativity. However, looking at these significant factors runs the risk of relegating the notions of sex and gender to a status lesser than those of culture and 'race'. The images of heterosexual exoticism and masculinist images of Antillean identity in particular, lead us to consider some of the Caribbean women's writing and their response to the existing theories of creolisation. The development of new, feminist modes of speaking of Caribbean difference and heterogeneity, exhibits the possibility of contesting masculinist articulation of Caribbean nationhood by focusing on the issues of privilege, authority and status within the neocolonial paradigms. Rather than opposing the hierarchical discourse of family established by the nineteenth-century colonial ideology, these theorists work against the hierarchical systems of gender categories, limitations and hegemony. In a manner akin to Harris's, feminist theorists utilise the connection among peoples who have experienced/are experiencing similar colonial or neocolonial oppression as a way of cutting across geographical and political boundaries, foregrounding transnational communities and revising the notions of the nation in terms of family and heterosexuality. Instead, these writers employ Harris and Glissant's notions of geography (landscape in particular) as a means of

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<sup>95</sup> I draw on Harris's *Trilogy* not as a vital element of my analysis of the Caribbean narrative but as a means of highlighting non-Eurocentric notions of landscape and identity. In the following passages, I will focus on women's Caribbean writing which is not grounded in Euro-American imagery.

<sup>96</sup> One of the postcolonial texts is V. S. Naipaul's 1961 novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. According to Gopinath, 'Naipaul is the father figure, canonized by a Western literary establishment and castigated by postcolonial writers and critics, who casts a long shadow over the field of postcolonial and diasporic literature' (2005, 69). I will be looking at *A House for Mr Biswas* in the next chapter.



making connections with the 'native peoples' who still stand inscribed in the Caribbean landscape. In his attempt to encourage Caribbean writers to re-establish the dialectic between landscape and history, culture and nature, Glissant reminds us that in the absence of African cultural recognition, the Caribbean landscape is 'its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history' (1999, 11). Adhering to Glissant's emphasis on landscape as an important factor that places emphasis on the Caribbean rather than European perspectives, post-independence (feminist) Caribbean writers employ landscape as a central metaphor for the reimagination of the Caribbean literary narrative. The important difference between Glissant/Harris and these writers is that the latter place emphasis on gender and sexuality as well as race and colour.

Erna Brodber, a Jamaican who left her place of birth for the United States during the nationalist era of the 1960s, shares Jamaica Kincaid's objective of re-imagining Caribbean geography alongside Caribbean narratives in her fiction. More important is Brodber's creolised view of the Caribbean in which the Caribbean landscape, the Caribbean (meta)archipelago and the cross-cultural communities, all work to place a Caribbean identity within the geography of the Caribbean as opposed to the (neo)colonial view of identity caught between 'motherlands'.<sup>97</sup> Utilising and reworking Harris's ideas of the healing characteristics of syncretism, Brodber focuses on narration and structure as a means of dealing with the multiple voices and communities that occupy and inhabit the gendered space of the Caribbean. This is especially significant for my discussion of Mootoo's text where narration, structure and voicing play a vital role in the articulations of Caribbean space, identity, nationhood and belonging. Brodber's novel *Myal* (1988) is a text that emphasises syncretism by focusing on those liminal spaces (contrasting spaces) where partiality and multiplicity are the means for creating resistance against the homogenous elements that stifle the heterogeneous community's rediscovering its own sedimented cultural recourses. Although highly influenced by Harris, Brodber takes syncretism a step further by exploring the sexual exploitation of women and the historical, political, economic and spiritual violence and crises in the context of colonial annexation of Jamaica. Paralleling Harris's *Trilogy*, Brodber constructs her novel around a crisis/rejuvenation dyad, where the violence caused by the colonial control of Jamaica results in spirit thievery (zombification) and, as a consequence, a

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<sup>97</sup> Another shared aspect between the two writers is the focus on gender and sexuality as a field that has generally been neglected in the 'creolisation theories'. Cf. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, Wilson and Brathwaite.



marking of colonialism, patriarchy, nationhood and control on the bodies of the two women. Much in the same way as Anita suffered spirit possession from a secret obeah man (Mass Levi), Ella's own spirit is being 'thieved' by Selwyn Langley who uses Ella for his own imaginative colonisation of her community. The two women in the novel, Anita and Ella, are both victims of spirit thievery as their voices are silenced and denied, and, according to Gina Wisker, it takes 'an exorcism of misleading education practices as well as an exorcism of illegitimate power practices and an exorcism of our reading practices to enable a new, constantly metamorphosing, dynamic set of alternative readings to emerge' (411). By examining the simultaneity of oppression, Brodber employs the theme of spirit thievery to embody racial, sexual and colonial domination. More important, by employing two female protagonists Brodber manages to reread Harris's syncretism as a means of healing the community, and by keeping gender at the forefront, Brodber reveals the connections between patriarchy and colonialism. As the various members of the community gather their resources to heal Anita and Ella, we are presented with the religion of myalism as the medium for resisting the psychic and material violence of imperialism and neocolonialism.<sup>98</sup> As the characters unite (although separately) in their efforts to combat obeah, they also change the history of the religions, in that the myal community creates space for the involvement of members of different religions—Ole African (necromancer), Reverend Simpson (Baptist minister), Maydene Brassington (White wife of Methodist minister), Mass Cyrus (myalist) and Miss Gatha (Kumina priestess). As these characters join forces to combat the larger spirit thievery of colonialism, we witness the cross-cultural and syncretic elements of the Caribbean heterogeneity. By including Maydene, an ostensibly colonial subjectivity, into the group of community healers, Brodber follows in the footsteps of Wilson Harris in her refusal of the victim/victimiser dyad, emphasising multiplicity and heterogeneity as a means of healing the community from imperialist forces.

My aim is not to produce an analysis of Brodber's text but simply to point out that syncretism, in the manner articulated by Harris and developed further in Brodber's novel, allows us to view *Cereus Blooms at Night* as a part of this syncretic project. Brodber's emphasis on multiplicity is reminiscent of Mootoo's narrative of Mala's abuse. Both novels

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<sup>98</sup> A religious practice originating in eighteenth-century Jamaica, myalism is a syncretic form of religion which is rooted in Africa but has been appropriated to the creolised Caribbean. Valued for its healing qualities, myalism is used for both spiritual possession and dispossession and is 'often regarded as corrective of evil obeah practices' (Feng 2002, 156).



defy coherent narratives as a way of (re)-capturing the past. In addition, Brodber follows in the footsteps of Wilson Harris and suggests that communal interpretation of an event yields more constructive results. In *Cereus*, we are not sure who articulates what, as Tyler appears to be a highly unreliable narrator. In *Myal*, we are reminded (several times) that 'the half has never been told'. Apart from the apparent warning against closed interpretations, the phrase also suggests that diverse strategies and different perspectives are necessary for a change and a healing to occur.<sup>99</sup> The importance of partial knowledge is evident in the novel. Like in *Cereus*, we are not presented with an omniscient narrator. Instead, the narrator appears to share many traits with Mootoo's narrator whose knowledge is both limited and fragmented. Much like in Kincaid's *Garden* and Mootoo's *Cereus*, imaginative readings of the colonialist critique are refused, and the reader is encouraged to gradually piece together the story from the information received from various characters. Instead of creating an imagined space as a setting for her story, Brodber creates a space of representation where dialogue and difference broaden the scope of the novel. The heterogeneity of community, the multiplicity of points of view, as well as the partiality of knowledge, emphasise Brodber's continuation and reworking of Wilson Harris's call for poetics of difference as a means of opening the imperialist and neocolonial homogeneity. By accenting the cross-cultural capacity of syncretism to expose the otherness within the heterogonous community, Brodber re-reads this model through a feminist critique of communal crisis and posits gender at the forefront of the struggle.

Brodber, in the same manner as Wilson Harris, Édouard Glissant and Jamaica Kincaid, repositions some of the postmodern theoretical configurations through which issues of identity and place are constructed. As a parallel and a counterpart to the traditional metanarratives of global migrancy, Brodber's fiction reterritorialises the Black Atlantic model by paying close attention to locally specific geographies.<sup>100</sup> In other words, Brodber is attentive to Glissant's call for 'remaining in the Caribbean' as a means of intervention into the theoretical debates over the interaction of local and global, and by utilising Caribbean creolisation she manages to link the geography of creolised identities to a historical past. Therefore, by focusing on small communities within the Caribbean, we are given an

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<sup>99</sup> Each of the characters has a different interpretation of the meaning of the phrase: to Ella, it means the Grove Town unrest has not ended despite the rocks not falling on Anita's roof; to Dan and Willie, it means future resistance; to Euphemia, it means that rocks will fall again.

<sup>100</sup> I will be looking at the Black Atlantic in Chapter Three.



opportunity to view place not as static and originary but as both 'rooted' *and* 'routed'.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, and as I mentioned earlier, by looking at the connection to place as a relation to geography *as well as* history, we can view the island of Lantanacamara in *Cereus Bloom at Night* as both a localised and yet profoundly diasporised space. Although Harris points to syncretism as a heterogenous element that works against the homogenous imperatives within neocolonising paradigms, it is important to note that despite the diverse experiences, voices and histories that have shaped the Caribbean, differences of class and gender still point towards reserved privileges and social exclusions. These differences, I argue, stem from the lack of investigation of other cultural elements that play a crucial role in defining the relationship between the West and the Caribbean. Tracing *other* (European) stories and histories is one of the main themes of *Myal*, particularly those that are silenced or disavowed by the prevailing dichotomies of race, gender and sexuality. According to Gilroy, the Black Atlantic traces how 'the history of blacks in the West and the social movements that have affirmed and rewritten that history can provide a lesson which is not restricted to blacks' (223). For Brodber, this history is open and unrestricted from the very beginning. Interrelational and intersubjective, Brodber's Caribbean community is geographically and historically open to the routed as well as rooted ebb and flow of peoples. Working within the Caribbean as a means of recovery of the Black experience and its connection across the African diaspora, Brodber acknowledges the European Other as an important constituent of a community and a nation. By incorporating contrasting spaces in terms of geography, sexuality and belonging, Brodber theorises the *rooted* local as well as the *routed* transnational.

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<sup>101</sup> In Chapter Three, I will argue that the project of rooting and routing place allows for a more nuanced and intricate investigation of the relationship between identity and place, particularly in relation to the dyad of the land and the sea.



## CHAPTER TWO: SHANI MOOTOO'S QUEER TACTICAL DIASPORAS IN *CEREUS BLOOMS AT NIGHT* AND *VALMIKI'S DAUGHTER*

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

- Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Remembering is different from looking back. We can look back sideways and not bring things into full view.

- M. Jacqui Alexander, 'Remembering *This Bridge*'

Advocating tactical deterritorialisation as an exigency which exhibits the potential to query and queer the notion of structured rule, I believe, requires a renewed and non-West orientated understanding of Deleuze's philosophy.<sup>102</sup> An understanding that involves taking a step past deterritorialisation and re-membering differently, making space for a new territory within the dominant discourses where reinvention and re-imagination can create a new outlook for a different and a 'wrong' future. Knowing the world 'other-wise' challenges the colonial and neocolonial epistemes and ontologies. This new knowledge can take many forms: national, racial, sexual. More important, imagining a subject or a community differently necessitates a new mode of historical memory, one that does not involve totalitarian accounts of national belonging but one that challenges racial, masculine and heteronormative assumptions of what it means to belong to a group, a country or a nation. Tactical diaspora takes Eurocentric philosophies a step further and offers another mode of historical memory that eschews resolution and totality and instead proposes a doctrine of irresolution, uncertainty and unknowability. Tactics allow us to re-imagine and reform not only belonging but also bodily and social space, creating an inhabitable space that entails a creation of home. Also, the reimagining and displacing belonging, as mentioned earlier, points to the significance of movement of various bodies across various spaces and the encounters that occur between them. Therefore, to emphasise and account for the above, I look at Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, in order to examine the ways in which the novel incorporates and expands Western philosophy in its various attempts to re-member the

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<sup>102</sup> Tactical deterritorialisation implies tactical diasporising, since the theme of my thesis is queer tactical diaspora. Therefore, and as mentioned earlier, my arguments about Deleuzian deterritorialisation and theory do not serve as a 'counterparts' to what I am about to argue. Instead, they work as starting points for my articulation of what I believe to be the next step in queer and postcolonial studies.



colonial past and to queer the neocolonial present.<sup>103</sup> I trace the recurring themes of belonging and cultural (sexual) citizenship in the novel, as they are closely connected to the notions of culture, place and body. Movement of bodies across various places is one of the central themes in the novel, as its focus on sexuality and the Caribbean diaspora is crucial to the discussions of cultural and sexual belonging. More important, I look at how epistemic and ontological tactics exhibit the ability of not only knowing the world differently, thus challenging dominant norms and expectations, but also expanding Westernised notions of postcoloniality by exposing their Eurocentric underpinnings. Decolonisation, in Mootoo's novel, is a tactical move of subverting and displacing postcolonial and neocolonial deployments of normative gendering and sexuality, as they make space for alternative modes of affiliation and the seemingly impossible desires to emerge and begin to challenge, to unsettle, to queer.

### ***CEREUS BLOOMS AT NIGHT***

*Cereus Blooms at Night* is set in the town of Paradise on the fictional, dreamlike Caribbean island Lantanacamara. Colonised by the 'Shivering Northern Wetlands' (SNW), the town's schools, missionary churches and sugar plantations have all been created and named by the colonisers. All of the characters in the novel live on and cross various physical and psychological borders, which exhibits multiple sites of exile and dislocation.<sup>104</sup> One of the central characters, Mala, has Indo-Caribbean parents who are descendents of indentured labourers brought from India to fill the economic void created by the abolition of the slave trade, while the White Christian Thoroughlys have come from the SNW to educate the 'uncivilised' Indians at their mission school. Meanwhile, Mala's mother develops a passionate relationship with a White woman named Lavinia, which results in her leaving Mala, her sister Asha, and their Mission-educated father, Chandin, during the escape from the island, first to the SNW then to Canada. Asha's trajectory of movement is equivalent to her mother's, as she too leaves the island for the SNW and then to Canada. This time, however, it is to run away from her father's rape and abuse. Meanwhile, Ambrosia, the daughter of Mala's suitor, Ambrose, is 'transformed' flawlessly into a man, Otoh, who falls in love with

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<sup>103</sup> *Cereus Blooms at Night* is Shani Mootoo's first published novel. It was a finalist for the 1997 Giller Prize, the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. Her other novels include *The Predicament of or* (2001), *He Drown She In the Sea* (2005), which was long listed for the international IMAPC Dublin Literary Award, and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), which serves as a case study for my thesis.

<sup>104</sup> The crossing of multiple borders works closely with my arguments about queer tactical diaspora.



Mala's nurse, Tyler. Tyler, escaping the dangers he faces on Lantanacamara, leaves and receives an education abroad where his 'perversion' acts as a distraction from his 'foreignness' (1999, 47-48). These boundary crossings emphasise not only the multiplicity of identity on Lantanacamara but also the decolonising politics in the Caribbean landscape. Thus the notions of citizenship on Lantanacamara are closely tied to the notions of what constitute natural and unnatural sexuality. Moreover, the sites of multiple identities and histories, only visible through travel, through distance from the site of erasure, call attention to the importance of geography, of place and space and the multiple transformations various bodies go through during the process of acquiring citizenship. Sexuality, in *Cereus*, is what links the various identities and narratives, challenging the imperial and neocolonial assumptions of what constitutes sexuality, and investigating the questions of knowledge, power and representation and the violence inherent in those assumptions. More important, I argue that within these violent geographies Mootoo exhibits faith and belief in a citizenship inclusive of gay, lesbian and transgendered subjectivities by creating a queer space within the Caribbean diaspora. This citizenship, however, does not represent a complete history of national belonging but points more in the direction of an epistemic crisis, questioning the possibility of an all-inclusive and absolute record of belonging.<sup>105</sup> The novel points towards an unknown and unpredictable future, eschewing all-knowing and resolute epistemes, whether they are queer or not. Mootoo refuses to romanticise queerness through a vision of an all-inclusive site of diasporic belonging.

*Cereus* is a novel fraught with different histories. Sexuality is merely one out of many narratives that permeate the novel. Closely tied to sexuality, however, are the stories of exile, resistance, incest, rape, queer desire and the multiple legacies of imperialism, such as colonial science, missionary theology, slavery, and indentured labour. Also prominent is the language of natural history with its emphasis on identification, classification and normativity. Consider, for instance, the narrator's scientific description of Mala's unruly garden: 'At first, Aves, Hexapoda, Gastropoda, and Reptilia burrowed instinctively into nooks and crevices. They realized eventually that they had no cause to hide. Mala permitted them to roam boldly and to multiply at leisure throughout her property' (1999, 128). The scientific language describing the various plants, birds and insects, which is maintained throughout the novel (although not

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<sup>105</sup> Here, Mootoo sets forth a queer alternative to Berlant and Freeman's notions of the Queer Nation. In *Cereus*, this involves multiple sites of connection and affiliation, based not on nationality and/or sexuality but on desire and affinity across the history of slavery, colonialism and exploitation.



preserved in its original manner), embodies the novel's complex relationship with colonial and neocolonial scientific discourses.<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, the very normativity of the colonial discourses (violent geographies) produces sites of insurgency and counter-history within the language of natural science, turning it upside down and muddling the untainted garden of colonialism.<sup>107</sup> Even the colonial landscape of Lantanacamara (think of its transplantation and hybridisation) is preserved only to be used to usher a new, queer cartography, where a remembered past and an alternatively realistic present are reworked, coexisting side by side in an ambiguous physical space. Remembrance of the colonial past is hereby presented not as a historically 'correct' rendition but as a mechanism and a catalyst for new modes of queerness, affiliation and social contingency.<sup>108</sup>

Cultural belonging on the island of Lantanacamara (patterned after pre-independence Trinidad) is reserved solely to the heterosexual notions of family kinship and affinity, where gay men's and lesbians' inclusivity in culture is denied by the homophobic and heterosexist allocations of Caribbean cultural citizenship. The various transformations and movements on the island exhibit the incompatibility of queer identity and the Caribbean decolonising politics. However, because of characters' multiplicity of identity, the novel complicates the divide between natural and unnatural sexuality. Importantly, the troubling of the divide between 'perverse' and 'natural' is mirrored in the landscape where metamorphoses of identity reflect the metamorphoses of the backdrop of Lantanacamara.<sup>109</sup> The island thus becomes a site for the articulation of a utopian queer community, linking queer subjects to the official history of imaginative decolonisation. This utopian community, however, does not represent an alternative history of sexual 'deviants' but offers a site for a re-creation of identities. The unpredictability of sexuality on Lantanacamara parallels other border crossing

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<sup>106</sup> Grace Kyungwon Hong notes: 'In [Mootoo's novel] the language of natural history produces a normative structure but necessarily also becomes the vocabulary through which alternatives to this structure are described. [...] When Mala finally gets a visitor after decades of living alone [...] the visitor notices "decades of dust; clumps of matted cobwebs; old cavities eaten away by wood lice. [...] An old glass aquarium lay on its side". [...] The aquarium exists alongside the unfettered proliferation, reproduction, decay, and decomposition that happen in Mala's house and garden. This novel does not purport to shun outright the language of natural history. Instead, it uses it, while turning it on its side' (74).

<sup>107</sup> Similarly, in Jamaica Kincaid's 1985 novel *Annie John* (which I analyse in Chapter Four), the character of Annie John portrays the spread of European empire as a force that shrouds the Caribbean in darkness. Thus, the Western image of a Caribbean paradise is turned into a lost paradise.

<sup>108</sup> This is in line with Eng's arguments about queer diaspora. See Eng 2003.

<sup>109</sup> This is seen in the image Mala's garden and house, which with the abundance of overripe fruit, rotting vegetation and overpowering odours, overripe fruit, rotting vegetation of decay, represent a Gothic landscape. I will expand my arguments about the garden in the following sections.



identities, such as Otoh who, after 'flawlessly' metamorphosing into a man, becomes attractive to both men and women and has 'the ability to imagine many sides of a dilemma [...] and the vexing inability to make up his mind' (1999, 110). Moreover, the meaning of his name—short for 'on the one hand, on the other hand'—reflects the inbetweenness of identity and indicates the mutability of sexuality. I suggest that Otoh's non-normative gendering hints at queerness as the quintessential example of the colonial condition. The questions of sexual identity are closely linked with the notion of liminality as the novel disrupts the ideas of naturalness and perversity. Naturalness is best exemplified in the descriptions of the 'natural' world of Mala's garden, where birds, insects and plants are allowed to roam freely. Mala's house is not only surrounded by nature but also by the smell of decay from the bodies of insects and the decaying corpse of her father. The vivid life found in the garden is contrasted with death, only to reinforce the sense of life and energy that Mala experiences there: according to the narrator, the scent had the aroma of 'life refusing to end. It was the aroma of *transformation*' (1999, 128, my emphasis). Transformation, the metamorphosis of identity and the linking of characters to the natural world do not only apply for Mala; the unfolding of rare cereus flower occurs as Mala, Otoh and Tyler are brought together in the novel. Furthermore, upon entering her garden Otoh mistakes Mala 'for a shrub' (1999, 155). The association between Mala and the other (queer) characters links them with the natural world, situating queer identity within Caribbean space.

Working on Black women's writing and the re-negotiation of identities, Carole Boyce Davies remarks: 'My mother's journeys redefine space. Her annual migrations, between the Caribbean and the United States, are ones of persistent re-membering and re-connection [...] Hers is a deliberate and fundamental migration that defies the sense of specific locations that even her children would want to force on her' (1). Crossing the geographies of belonging enables Davies's mother to traverse boundaries, to redefine space and geography and ultimately to defy the terms and rules of dominant discourses. Interestingly, Davies points to her mother's agency, her activeness and her migratory subjectivity. Davies's mother incorporates several identities, not all of which are constituted as harmonious. In fact, they are anything but. Correspondingly, in *Cereus*, the dominant discourses are the ones concerning 'reality' and 'true' representation of the natural world, of time and space, and the way knowledge is generated and transmitted. Placing the fictive island of Lantanacamara at the heart of the novel enables Mootoo to defy these discourses, to reflect upon knowledge, reality and representation and to push beyond what is known, in order to imagine, redefine and re-



member differently. Lantanacamara, as an imaginary island, is *not* Trinidad but merely a version of it. It is not an already-known place. Rather, it is a space unnamed, unimagined and unspecified from the dominant (Wetlandish) point of view. Lantanacamara, and ultimately the Caribbean, become spaces outside the norms of the colonisers' episteme. Similar to Davies's mother, Mootoo provides her Black female characters with subjectivity that is conceived outside the terms of domination and subordination.<sup>110</sup> The inbetweenness and smoothness of space in Davies and Mootoo suggests that Black female writing cannot be structured in terms of one specific place. It exists across geographies and times, eluding specification. Davies argues that 'in the same way as diaspora assumes expansiveness and elsewhere-ness, migrations of the Black female subject pursue the path of movement outside the terms of dominant discourses' (37). Asserting agency within her characters to remember differently, Mootoo not only exhibits defiance against dominant discourses, but by crossing the bounds of place, time, history and consciousness, she pushes against the silences of the untold and towards imagining a different future. Shattering the boundaries of the geopolitical spaces traditionally defined through citizenship, Mootoo creates new diasporic spaces, *tactical* spaces, where home and belongingness can be attained by the means of redefining identity away from exclusion and marginality.

Citizenship, especially in terms of sex and sexuality, is what generates the links between place, culture and belonging in Mootoo's novel. By engaging in a critique of homophobia in Caribbean space, Mootoo creates a semi-utopian space for her queer characters, and asserting a sense of ownership over the Caribbean cultural space, she explores the connections between sexuality and the nation-state. In her analysis of the nationalism and sexuality within Caribbean space along with a reading of legal texts in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas, M. Jacqui Alexander points out that the Caribbean states, in order to assert their legitimacy, naturalise heterosexuality by criminalising gays and lesbians by the means of

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<sup>110</sup> Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994), which spans across several academic fields from Black feminism to literary theory, is an excellent examination of Black women's writing. Writing about her mother's journeys, Davies writes: 'She also lives in that in-between space that is neither here nor there, locating herself in the communities where her children, grandchildren, family and friends reside. [...] In each home place, she sets up a network of relationships based on kin, community, spirituality and a fundamental presence organized around service and disruption of the very specific norms of that community' (1). The place 'in-between', the 'neither here not there', is one of the vital elements of queer tactical diaspora and the narratives that I analyse in my thesis.



exclusion from the Caribbean citizenship.<sup>111</sup> Marking sexual inscriptions upon non-procreative bodies these states enforce racialised legislation as a part of the attempts at a decolonisation and reconstruction of the self. Arguing that the criminalisation of these bodies functions as a technology of control, Alexander contends, nonetheless, that the stigmatisation of non-procreative sex is not just about sex. In fact, it is more related to the notions of what kind of sexuality imperils the nation and what kind promotes citizenship. According to Alexander, 'not just (any)body can be a citizen any more, for *some* bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused heterosexual imperative of citizenship, *these* bodies, according to the state, post a profound threat to the very survival of the nation' (1994, 6, emphasis in original). Posing a profound threat to the survival of the nation, these bodies are viewed as anti-national and in need of regulation. Policing the sexual and reinscribing the inherited constructions of masculinity and femininity, the state transmits the need for transnational capital in terms of both commodification of sexual bodies and of regulation of what it means to practice 'natural' sexuality.<sup>112</sup> According to Alexander, citizenship continues to be premised within heterosexuality and heteromascularity. Thus, deviant sexualities are produced in the service of a transnational economy. In the contexts of Trinidad and Tobago, sexuality and propriety are the dominant discourses that are transmitted from the colonial past into the postcolonial present. Ironically, the transition from the colonial era to the postcolonial one is mediated by an anti-colonial nationalist movement which *preserves* the notions of propriety and morality established in the colonial era. The Caribbean nation-states' attempt at a fortification of the sense of a national identity circumvents the flow of global processes that are rapidly transforming the ways that nations imagine themselves. Undermining privatisation and the transnational economic restructuring, these states denounce 'deviant' sexualities, such as homosexuals, prostitutes and sexualised women, as the exclusive source of the dissolution of the nation-state.<sup>113</sup>

The archetypical source of state legitimation is thus grounded in the notions of the heterosexual family which the state views as fundamental to nation building. Fixing heterosexuality, however, involves a distinction between natural heterosexuality and the

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<sup>111</sup> Alexander's text has been used as the basis for a wide variety of academic analyses, particularly in queer studies. See, for instance, Chin (1997) and Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai (2002).

<sup>112</sup> I look at the issues of transnational capital and tourism in the next chapter.

<sup>113</sup> This point works as a motif through Gopinath's *Impossible Desires*.



unnatural promiscuous sex, which is reinforced by the fiction about promiscuity and the unnaturalness of gay and lesbian identity. As a result, non-conjugal heterosexual relations, such as rape or incest, are conflated with same-sex relations, establishing a link between criminality and homosexuality: 'by criminalizing perverted heterosexual sex, the legislation aims to expunge criminal elements from the heterosexual so that it could return to its originary and superior moral position' (1994, 10). Eroticising the dissolution of the nation, the state produces mythic versions and visions of Trinidad and Tobago when there were ostensibly no lesbians, gays or people with AIDS. The conflation of sexuality and international capital are the processes that, evoking the colonial discourses of morality and propriety, constitute the notions of the state and the respectable masculinity. As the colonial rule included racialising and sexualising the population, it also meant that the racial categories and hierarchies of Blackness and Whiteness were naturalised.<sup>114</sup> More precisely, Whiteness was naturalised, while Blackness and Black bodies were sexualised, thus criminalising Black masculinity. Collapsing identities into bodies, the colonial rule sexualised the Black women's bodies as having an 'unruly' and wild sexuality while the Black male exhibited a hypersexualised identity, demonising Black bodies and subjecting them to control. Inheriting from the colonial rule the notions of civilisation and morality based on sexualised and gendered norms, the anti-colonial rhetoric of the postcolonial nation-state exhibits precisely the moralistic and White middle-class ideology that was the basis for the colonial rule: 'It would indeed require a complicated set of cognitive and ideological reversals for the British to turn the savage into the civilized, to turn those believed incapable of rule into reliable rulers. Herein lies the significance of socialization into British norms, British manners, British parliamentary modes of governance; into conjugal marriage and the "science" of domesticity' (12).<sup>115</sup>

Female sexuality, in particular, is the site where the socialisation into respectability helps shape the colonialist middle-class beliefs about the body, normality and virility. The import of the imperialist definitions of morality is evident in the production of a specifically

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<sup>114</sup> I will look at the 'imperial gaze' from the West onto 'the rest' in the next chapter.

<sup>115</sup> In her pivotal work *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), Anne McClintock argues: 'In the colonies, the mission station became a threshold institution for transforming domesticity rooted in European gender and class roles into domesticity as controlling a colonised people. Through the rituals of domesticity, increasingly global and more often than not violent, animals, women and colonised peoples were wrested from their putatively 'natural' yet 'unreasonable' state of 'savagery' and inducted through the domestic progress narrative into a hierarchical relation to white men' (35).



East Indian national identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Viewed as a challenge to the solely Afro-Trinidadian definitions of national identity, the East Indian nationalist discourse was similarly centred on the imperialist definitions of natural and unnatural sexuality, mainly in terms of women's sexuality in relation to popular culture. Gopinath notes that the basis for the nationalist claims to East Indian identity in Trinidad were the ideas of sexual propriety and the disciplining of 'deviant' sexualities. The increasing popularity of chutney, a form of popular music and dance performed by Indo-Trinidadian female family members as a wedding celebration preparing the bride-to-be for her role as a wife, caused in the early 1990s a furore in the articles and columns of Trinidad's East Indian newspapers (Gopinath 161).<sup>116</sup> Centred on the issues of private and public space, the chutney controversy evolved around the notions of the Indian women's performance outside the confines of their homes and in the sphere of public space. The move from the private to public instigated immediate criticism from the culturally conservative Hindu organisations in Trinidad, denouncing chutney and its roots as improper and indecent. Tejaswini Niranjana argues that the East Indian nationalist discourses created the notion of a 'pure' Hindu identity by denouncing chutney as 'vulgar' and 'obscene', expressing immorality and lack of propriety. More important, the public dance performed by middle-aged Indian women exposed the discursive regulation of Indian women's sexuality not only as heterosexual but also as virtuous, chaste and private. At the heart of the debate, according to Niranjana, lay the colonial claims for respectable female sexuality, enclosed within the confines of the home, formerly introduced during the Indian indentureship in the Caribbean: 'Indian tradition (and Indian women) in Trinidad become to be defined as that which is not, cannot be allowed to become, African' (130). Consequently, the consolidation of the East Indian Trinidadian nationalism over its African counterpart re-enacts the heteronormative and colonialist notions of female sexuality within the space of public culture, resorting to discourses of sexual propriety and civility.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the consolidation of Trinidadian postcolonial nationalism demands a coincident production of

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<sup>116</sup> Gopinath's critique on what she terms the 'chutney polemic' in Trinidad, is partly a result of 'the implicit heteronormativity of some of the scholarship that documents it', and partly because it reveals the 'necessity of an analysis of diasporic public cultures that is at once both feminist and queer' (164).

<sup>117</sup> Sahadeo Basdeo and Brinsley Samaroo note: 'During the period of Indian indentureship to the British, French and Dutch Caribbean (1838-1920) approximately 500,000 *girmityas* (agreement signers) made the long journey of just over 10,000 miles across the *kala pani*. Most of the labourers remained in the region after the end of their bondage. About 25 per cent returned to India after fulfilling their five or 10-year contracts. Today, the descendents of the indentured workers are spread over the whole Caribbean space, forming a majority in Guyana and substantial minorities in Trinidad and Tobago as well as Suriname. In the other smaller Caribbean states, East Indians form groups in population which are predominately Afro-Caribbean' (96).



both unruly sexualities and female nationalist subjects, demonstrating the necessity and the centrality of discourses of women's sexuality to nationalist definitions of Indianness in Trinidad. According to Niranjana, however, at the base of the discourses of women's sexuality stands chutney as an embodiment of Indian women's sexual autonomy from the Hindu male elite. Niranjana notes that chutney, representing the fear of miscegenation between Indian women and Afro-Trinidadian men, becomes 'a metonym for the supposed increase in the relationships between Indian women and African men (128). Gopinath, on the other hand, is critical of the presumption that 'Indo-Caribbean women's sexuality is always and everywhere heterosexual' (163), urging alternative ways to imagine women's sexuality that may exceed the heterosexual parameters out in place by the national discourses. Gopinath reveals the necessity for examining *queer female* desire which is rendered impossible within the diasporic and state nationalisms that dictate the disciplining female sexuality and legislate heterosexuality. In her attempt to expand the feminist readings of chutney as a diasporic cultural practice which run the risk of replicating the nationalist framings of gender and sexuality as heterosexual, Gopinath insists on a queer feminist reading that pinpoints those bodies, desires and subjects which are deemed impossible within the dominant diasporic logic: 'These queer incursions into diasporic public culture reterritorialize the home by transforming it into a site where non-heteronormative desires and practices are articulated and performed' (164). In a manner akin to Gopinath's, *Cereus Blooms at Night* produces alternative forms of affinity and affiliation that exceed the pathologisation of 'uncivilised' or 'unruly' sexualities. Since non-heterosexual and queer identities are produced and pathologised by the nationalist discourses on Lantanacamara, *Cereus* becomes a record of alternative identities and sexualities that emerge from the confines of morality and propriety. Indeed, Mootoo's novel works its way from the discourses of contemporary postcolonial nationalisms back to the colonial past and towards new modes of affiliation based on affinity, shared sexuality and national queerness.

The political and the legal categories used by state-nationalisms to render certain identities as criminal or anti-national find their archetypal source of state legitimation in the heterosexual family, where the consolidation of domesticity works as a basis for proper citizenship. Indeed, looking at the level of productivity in certain bodies, the state managers sanction the heterosexual conjugal monogamy by warding off non-productive sexualities that



threaten to corrode their efforts in the construction of a 'pure' nation.<sup>118</sup> Women's sexual agency and erotic autonomy is seen as a challenge and a threat to the ideological notion of a nuclear family which perpetuates the fiction that the family is the foundation for a healthy society. The political and the legal categories that contribute to the erosion, denial or criminalisation of certain groups or identities are one of focal points of *Cereus Blooms at Night*. The various sites of exile and dislocation experienced on Lantanacamara contribute to Mootoo's exploration of those identities that have been erased by the dominant discourses. By centring a female character, Mootoo's novel relates to Alexander's discussion of heteropatriarchy within the state, where the colonial inheritance infiltrates the decolonising politics of the postcolonial nation-states by forefronting patriarchy and civility while simultaneously deploying forced regulation against non-approved forms of femininity. The female diasporic subjectivity in Mootoo's novel challenges the masculine articulations of nationhood and belonging by revising and re-imagining the geographical and historical discourses that control and regulate Caribbean female sexuality. As I mentioned earlier, looking at sexuality as a mobile tactic of deterritorialising the relationship between diaspora and queer requires a renewed focus on movement and migration where the restrictive binary of local/global is released towards a synthesis between the two categories. *Cereus* presents movement between geographical territories as a significant factor for the challenge to the neocolonising notions of proper sexuality and nation building. The non-heteronormative sexualities, so abundant in the novel, travel between, within and away from the space of home, transforming the notions of belonging and rootedness.

Tactical diasporising—one which maps out the interstices between queer re-memories and diasporic spaces—can be found in Mootoo's definitions of Lantanacamara as a national allegory of Trinidad. By naming a town Paradise, Mootoo reflects on and recreates the imperialist notions of the Caribbean as the biblical Garden of Eden, a pastoral motif of a recovery of a lost essence. The historical associations of the garden with the science of botany as a colonial project, along with the emergence of naturism, ethnography and travel

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<sup>118</sup> On a definition of sexual intercourse in the Trinidad and Tobago Act, Alexander notes: 'Heterosexual sex, even while dysfunctional (as in rape in marriage, domestic violence and incest), assumes the power of natural law only in relation to sex which is defined in negation to it (what natural sexual intercourse is not) and in those instances where desire presumably becomes so corrupt that it expresses itself as bestiality. In other words, heterosexual practices carry the weight of the natural only in relational terms and ultimately, one might argue, only in its power to designate as unnatural those practices which disrupt marriage and certain dominant notions of conjugal family. Beyond that, sexual intercourse remains necessarily, remarkably unclarified' (1994, 9-10).



discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, points towards an allegorical characterisation of the novel, where the associations above are merely a commentary on European exploration narratives of the Caribbean. Serving as an extended metaphor, an allegorical narrative functions as a mediator between past and present and fact and fiction, speaking cultural and historical truths via the medium of stories, fables and other narratives.<sup>119</sup> Through fiction, allegories work as a site for memory, remembrance and re-membering. Consequently the island of Lantanacamara is abundant with stories from the past, all of which are entangled with history and the present. But the idyllic garden of *Cereus* is shown to be tainted by colonisation, exploitation, decay and death. As a result, Mootoo's invocations of the Caribbean's association with the paradisaical garden is a tactical move of invoking past histories in terms of an allegory, in order not to simply retell the past but to cross the bounds of history, truth, consciousness, time and space, and bring forth alternative voices, unknown truths and silences that continue to resonate in the present. Thus, the novel is not simply allegorical, in that it presents an individual story of domination and abuse and as metaphor for the imperialist control of Caribbean space. Rather, Mala's story is both personal and public; the novel's two 'storylines' are juxtaposed not as opposites but as connected with one another. Mootoo contrasts the two narratives to draw the lines of connection between them, inviting the readers to the collective memory on Lantanacamara, escaping the confines of time and place, yet without discarding their impact onto the bodies of her characters.

In 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multination Capitalism', Fredric Jameson argues: 'All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel' (1986, 69).<sup>120</sup> Jameson's claims that 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-

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<sup>119</sup> In 'Allegory and Dialectics: A Match Made in Romance', Doris Sommer notes: 'A standard definition of allegory [...] would describe two parallel levels of signification: transcendent and immanent. These are temporally differentiated, with the latter revealing or "repeating" the anterior level of meaning (either trying desperately to become the former or looking on from a meta-narrative distance at the futility of any desire for stable meaning). [...] My use of allegory to describe mutually constructive meanings will necessarily be vexed; but it is a term I can hardly avoid because the translatability assumed between love stories and national development amounts to an *allegorical relationship between personal and political narratives*', (63, my emphasis).

<sup>120</sup> I am aware of the risks involved in projecting postmodern theories onto Caribbean space. Nonetheless, I use Western definitions of the national allegories of the so-called 'Third World' only to reveal their Eurocentric underpinnings. This is a vital aspect of my readings of queer diasporic narratives, as they employ Eurocentric definitions of diasporic narratives only to deconstruct them by the means of queer tactical diaspora.



world culture and society' are clearly disputed in *Cereus*, in that the generalising statement about all 'Third World' literature, which creates a tidy opposition between the 'First' and the 'Third' World, presupposes an equality and sameness between all the subjectivities, desires and affinities within the 'Third World' nation. Mootoo's novel does not quite fit into the category of a national allegory. Rather, it works to dissolve and challenge the nationalist and imperialist notions of 'First' and 'Third' worlds, introducing tactical space as a means for re-creating and re-membering place differently, metamorphosing the materiality of place and destabilising the distinction between home and away, 'here' and 'there'. Mootoo employs the image of the garden as a metaphor and a site of hybridity where history, geography, botany, politics and personal narratives intertwine. Thus, I read Mootoo's novel as appropriating Paul de Man's notion of 'allegory of reading' to a postcolonial context, revealing the classical philosophical oppositions within Western readings and understanding of texts and dissolving those towards a more complex knowledge and interpretation of the personal and public histories of colonisation in the Caribbean. De Man views the history of literature as consisting of heterogeneous moments, each exhibiting temporal and liminal differences that work towards a deconstruction of closed circuits of meaning and ontological accounts of history, pointing towards 'limitations of textual authority' (99). In the context of *Cereus*, however, we can see how allegory allows personal narratives to stand for larger political and historical conditions on Lantanacamara. Mootoo uses the garden as a metaphor that connects subjectivities and identities in terms of personal and collective memories.

### **BODIES, SPACES AND THE GARDEN**

It was that time of day when all you have lost is heaviest in your mind: your mother, if you have lost her; your home, if you have lost it; the voices of people who might have loved you or who you only wish had loved you; the places in which something good, something you cannot forget, happened to you.

Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Employing tactics as a method of creating fertile grounds for redefining space enables a formation of cross-cultural and non-heteronormative connections between spaces and bodies. The close connection between Jamaica Kincaid's mourning of her mother and of a home/homeland demonstrates that the ability to remember 'the places in which something good, something you cannot forget, happened to you' goes beyond the traditional narratives of remembrance. Here, re-remembrance allows a creation of new sites and modes of affiliation.



Akin to Davies's recollection of her mother's journeys, Kincaid bestows upon her own mother and herself an active agency by which an alternative remembrance is possible due to its traversing of boundaries. This 're-membrance' becomes less a psychological condition of loss and more a political tool for unearthing silenced histories and alternative notions of citizenship, sexuality and the nation-state. Tactical re-membling removes strategy's grasp on place and instead ushers a discursive as well as material space for new desires and subjectivities found at the interstices between space/body/time. Mala's garden is fruitful and unruly. We find rare birds, insects and various plants. Indeed, Mala seems more in touch with the vegetable life than with the rest of the inhabitants on Lantanacamara. Mootoo's landscape is an ironic one: appealing to the imperialist notions of the Edenic garden, Mootoo calls into question the assumptions about identity and place by exposing the myths of the garden to the outside world of history and exploitation. Mootoo's treatment of the garden is closely connected to the contemporary debates concerning place and identity; or, more precisely, the connection between identity and a particular territory. The site where this connection becomes disengaged, however, is when the moving body comes into contact with the various geographies of inhabitation. Mootoo's centring of the garden, I believe, challenges Western theorisations of space by looking at the history of the concept of the garden, focusing on the modern tropes within postmodern discourses.<sup>121</sup> According to Casteel, 'the garden is not easily assimilable to a postmodern reading of space, for in contrast to "non-places" such as airport lounges and theme parks which are characterized by their ephemerality and lack of concern with identity [...] the garden suggests fullness and density, foundations and origins. Unlike the borderland, another favourite of recent criticism, the garden points towards interiority and enclosure as well as towards edges and margins' (13-14). This theory offers a historically specific application of the term nomad in which the Caribbean setting creates the backdrop for the colonial articulations of botany and botanical visions of the Americas. For many cultures across time, the garden has functioned as a site of self-reflection, or 'cultural reflexivity' (Crozier 627), as well as a space for the articulation of the economic and social relationships. The garden is also connected to the notion of hybridity, both in the metaphorical sense (the hybridisation of cultures) and the literal and historical sense (racial hybridity). However, the garden in Mootoo's (as well as Kincaid's) work functions as not only an imperial trope but also as paradise, a slave plantation, a burial ground and a site of remembrance and mourning.

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<sup>121</sup> See Kaplan's *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*.



Evoking the themes of movement, exile and displacement, Mootoo's garden, via its connection to regeneration and femininity, produces sites of resistance and affiliation, pointing towards a re-evaluation and re-structuring of the Western concepts of the garden as a gendered and colonisable space. Particularly significant is the utility of the garden to establish the link between human beings and the natural physical world. John Dixon Hunt suggests that the garden as a cultural object, apart from altering its surroundings by its presence, is a 'bridge' between art and nature. Invented in societies undergoing quite dramatic transitions, the gardening tradition can be understood as cultural 'texts', like art or paintings, representing the world beyond their beds.<sup>122</sup> As an important addition to Hunt's contention, Crozier notes that gardens 'can be experienced from within as well as observed from without, something that applies equally to contemporary and extant historical gardens' (628).

The European pastoral vision of the New World as the new Eden becomes an important tool for considering the notions of the garden and what it came to symbolise within Caribbean space. More important, in reflections upon the tactical usage of space in *Cereus*, we should turn our attention towards negritude literature and the search for pre-colonial origins of Caribbean writing.<sup>123</sup> According to J. Michael Dash, 'modernity first manifested itself in the Caribbean with independent Haiti's utopian dream of technological progress. Modernity was an emancipatory discourse. It signalled the end of the oppressive hierarchies of the Old World and the Recognition of a New American spatiality' (61). No longer oriented towards technological progress, the modernist discourses within Caribbean space at the turn of the twentieth century pointed towards a fantasy of rediscovery of a mythical Caribbean past. The existentialist theorisations of the 1930s, motivated by the reactions to the catastrophe caused by World War I, were closely related to the nationalist movements in the Caribbean. Moreover, as modern technology was associated with machinery of horror, Caribbean negritude turned towards a radical poetics of rediscovering the connection between the natural world and Caribbean space. Influenced by the Harlem Renaissance, the negritude

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<sup>122</sup> In 'The Garden as a Cultural Object', Hunt states: 'gardens are created, adapted, or used to provide spaces and forms of a ritual or symbolic nature that inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour having an implied continuity with the past; indeed, they often seek to establish continuity with a suitable historic past that could be objective, not idealized but is largely factitious' (19).

<sup>123</sup> Negritude, is a literary movement of the 1930s (influenced by the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s), began as a protest among French-speaking African and Caribbean Black thinkers and writers living in Paris against the French colonial rule. Its leading figures were Léopold Sédar Senghor (elected first president of the Republic of Senegal in 1960), Martinican Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas from French Guiana. The movement looked at critically at assimilation and Western values and began to reassess African culture.



movement appropriated the Old World vision of the New World as the place of lost origins that could be recovered by challenging the epistemology of the scientific knowledge and celebrating a new, natural reality. Aimé Césaire, for instance, discards plurality and hybridisation in the Caribbean, arguing for a politics and a poetics of origination and a new beginning. According to Dash, Césaire's 'Poetry and Knowledge', which questions Eurocentric knowledges and proposes poetry as a starting point for the new beginning, where purity can be rediscovered by discarding metamorphosis and change, is an essay about 'an apocalyptic self-invention, a radical other who, while breaking with an older tradition of modernity and fleeing the oppression of modernization, founds a new, original reality' (63).<sup>124</sup>

The notion of the rediscovery of the lost paradise is crucial for understanding the significance of the garden in Caribbean space and a history that has occurred in this space. Even more significant, I argue, is the *lack* of the cultural and historical specificity, resulting in the obliteration and silencing of subjectivities and identities that adhere to different notions of citizenship and belonging. The myth of the Caribbean prelapsarian past becomes nostalgia for a dreamlike bygone era where unity can be revived and relived, where the New World, drawing on African origins, would become a new Eden, eschewing not only the mechanical and the technological advances but also any historical or artificial influences. This New World is indeed imaginary—it is a search for a Caribbean utopia. Challenging the Western oppressive system of knowledge is hereby replaced by a new, closed system of alternative knowledge which is remarkably similar to that of the West. Moreover, the new imaginative world of the Caribbean is closely related to the Western notions of the discovery of the Garden of Eden in the Americas as the brave new world. This new world, the *other* world, would be an *absolute* world, distinct from any Western influence or authority. In his 1986 work *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*, Peter Hulme argues that 'in a variety of ways the "discovery of America" has been inscribed as a beginning. It is the first of the great "discoveries" that form the cornerstones of the conventional narrative of European history over the last five centuries: America is, typically, the "New World" or later

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<sup>124</sup> Dash notes: 'Rather than a rehash of the rhetoric of the European avant-garde, "Poetry and Knowledge" is both profoundly Caribbean and American in its engagement with the problematics of an American identity and the impulse to define a defiant Caribbean other. Césaire's definition of the otherness can be seen as an elaboration of an idea that first emerged in Caribbean poetry in the work of Léon-Gontran Damas of French Guyana. Damas's *Pigments* contains early fantasies of establishing a primal innocence outside of history, discourse, and language itself. Damas's veneration of feeling and expressivity led him to imagine a world of pure essences, a prelapsarian void in which the ideal of being *negrè* could be preserved. [...] *Pigments* is a desperate appeal for the emergence of a natural voice of otherness', 63.



the "Virgin Land" (1). Here, Hulme argues that the imaginary utopian space of the New World forecloses differences and involvement with the West and asserts an autonomous and homogenous identity: "'America', the single allegorical character, combines the terms 'native' and 'land' to create an identity that dissimulates the existence of any relationship at all between the two at the moment of their encounter with Europe' (1). The replication and re-appropriation of the European vision of the New World by poetics and the renewed contact with nature reinscribes the binary of nature/culture and reinforces the primitive/civilised binary of European approach towards the New World. The pastoral motifs of a lost essence obstruct a more historically and culturally specific engagement with the actual conditions of the Caribbean. The appropriation of the gardening motif in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, however, engages and deconstructs the Western notions of the Garden of Eden without obfuscating the cultural, historical and hybridising conditions of Caribbean space. I suggest that Mootoo's novel reinscribes and reworks one of the great (and more traditional) New World pastoral narratives, namely, Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* (1944). In Roumain, the main protagonist is on a quest for a lost paradise: Manuel, a Haitian hero, in pursuit of a lost time, returns to his motherland after a period of exile to heal the Haitian community and implement a new knowledge and a different set of meaning to the villagers of Fonds Rouge. Devoid of historical and social context, the novel fits within the New World pastoral narrative of a lost paradise where a new order and truth can be inscribed. Dash's impressive reading of *Masters of the Dew* identifies a strong influence of anthropology as a part of the strong Latin American tradition of the rewriting of time, space and identity. Imposing a new narrative that has no traces of (or need for) any historical or social verification, Roumain's novel, under a strong anthropological influence, proposes a new beginning and a new origin for Haitian society, seemingly far removed from the Western discourses of modernist and technological advances responsible for the two World Wars and the occupation of Haiti. According to Dash, 'in his desire to articulate a new truth about Haitian society, Roumain conceives of a language, or rather a metalanguage, that would reorient the primal images of sun, tree, earth, man, and water. This new discourse is grounded in the land and etched into the surface of the landscape by the cutting edges of various tools' (78). Interestingly, while Manuel becomes the 'father' of the new society, all diversity, which is seen only as a fragmented state of fallen world, vanishes. Wielding absolute power, the figure of the transmitter of knowledge of



culture becomes the author of the Haitian prelapsarian truth. History starts anew with the new leader.<sup>125</sup> Much like Césaire's poet, Roumain's hero employs an Edenic vision as a starting point for a new arcadian society. Challenging Western notions of knowledge and categorisation, which are viewed as oppressive and colonising, the New World pastoral inserts an Adamic motif of the lost paradise as a new hegemonic system that eschews history in favour of a New World Other and its unanimous voice. The absoluteness of the expression of the arcadian order, which serves as a means for combating the Western tyranny of reason, leads to a formation of another closed system of 'primordial' values. The imposition of the authoritative voice of the New World Other as distinct and homogenous, devoid of any involvement with Western values or reasoning, will, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, be shown to be not only ahistorical and ethnographic, but also, ironically, imperialist, anthropological and neocolonialist.

Before expanding Mootoo's use of the garden and delving deeper into the details about her means of historicising the Caribbean, it is necessary to introduce a critical history of *Cereus Blooms at Night* and the various analyses of Mootoo's transformation of the New World pastoral narratives. My arguments about the metamorphosing of the materiality of place and the destabilising of the distinction between home and away, which introduces a tactical space as a means for re-creating and re-remembering place differently, are a continuation of the existing critical scholarship on not only Mootoo's works but also on the general theorisations of space, diaspora and queer theory. In her analysis of Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Gisèle Pineau's *The Drifting of Spirits*, Sarah Philips Casteel remarks: 'The mutual interdependence of place and displacement is signalled in Pineau's and Mootoo's novels by the fact that, although both novels take place in the Caribbean, the Caribbean location is set against the backdrop of a diasporic, global context [...]' (25). Moreover, focusing on the garden as a site of this displacement, Casteel observes that, in the traditional New World pastoral, 'the garden is the place where exile comes to an end. Pineau and Mootoo, on the other hand, highlight the historical dimensions of the garden—its relationship to colonial rule, the plantation system, and the circulation of plants and people—so that the garden itself becomes the signifier of exile and displacement' (25). Several other critics note the themes of history and displacement in Mootoo's novel. Vivian M. May remarks that

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<sup>125</sup> According to Dash, 'one can argue that given the powerful legitimizing authority of Manuel, *Masters of the Dew* can be read as a Caribbean version of the "dictator" novel', 78.



'Mootoo plays with [the] paradisaal motif, neither inverting it nor dismissing it but, rather, subverting it' (3). Noting the importance of knowledge and the scientific language in the novel, May pinpoints the sites of strategic and wilful ignorance in Reverend Thoroughly as a means of objectifying others with the intention of maintaining ontological inequality. Although adopting Chandin as his 'son', it becomes clear that the Reverend does not consider his relationship with Chandin in familial terms. Utilising Chandin, who has managed to adopt SNW mannerism, grammar and behaviour to an uncanny extent, as a means to promote their church and missionary schools, the Thoroughlys develop a system of wilful ignorance where Chandin's utility appears twofold: he functions both as a symbol of appropriate assimilation for the other Indians in labour camps, and as a model of the in-need-of-rescue non-Christian Other. However, wilful ignorance is not only reserved for the Thoroughlys. The 'open secret' of Chandin's rape of his daughters is known to everyone on Lantanacamara, yet the silence surrounding the rape deafens the island. The community's knowledge of Mala's suffering and the subsequent inaction of the inhabitants in preventing Chandin's rape (which is attributed to the 'suffering' Chandin was subjected to by his wife) exemplifies the wilful ignorance of all other moral issues except the ones concerning sexuality and propriety. According to May, 'passive in the face of knowing what they would rather not-know, and therefore, in the end, choosing not to know, the community has shunned Mala and has participated in her violation via wilful ignorance. Passivity is another locus of wilful ignorance, another means by which the status quo is maintained' (116).<sup>126</sup>

The notions of belonging in *Cereus* are investigated by Heather Smyth who argues that Mootoo 'challenges formulations of Caribbean culture that rely on an assumed parallel between Caribbean or African-based culture and heterosexuality on the one hand, and between European or imperialistic culture and homosexuality on the other' (143). Arguing that Mootoo's work brings forth renewed notions of cultural citizenship, severed from the homophobic and heterosexist allocations of Caribbean cultural space and more attached to the anti-racist politics of including Caribbean gay men and women into the citizenship, Smyth emphasises movement as the means of accentuating the fluid forms of identity and border

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<sup>126</sup> May adds: 'We see this in particular with Ambrose, who supposedly loved Mala dearly and intimately. After all, the community knew abstractly what went on in the Ramchandin house, but Ambrose knew specifically—he walked in on Chandin raping and trying to kill Mala and saw Mala defending herself and trying to kill her father (she succeeds, but it is unclear as to whether Ambrose realizes this—hence Mala's eagerness many years later to show Chandin's corpse to Otoh, who she thinks is Ambrose)' (116).



crossing in *Cereus*. Presenting sexuality as a fluid form of identity, Mootoo parallels sexual indeterminacy with other forms of boundary-traversing subjectivities, emphasising identities that live in the space of the 'in-between', both in terms of sexuality and liminality: 'Through a "both/and" approach to sexuality, Mootoo uses the flexibility of queer identity as a decolonizing tool' (151). This liminality provides Mootoo with a site for the investigations of sexuality by the means of utopianism, where queer subjects can find space for the performance of their identities. The utopia is not a traditional one, however. Lantanacamara, a site fraught with history, violence, colonialism and abuse, also becomes a site where decolonisation does not require uniformity but demands a diversification and a deeper understanding of Caribbean experience.

Paralleling sexual indeterminacy with boundary crossing, and the appropriation of the gardening motif in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, with its focus on space and the dialogue with history, is closely associated with Foucault's notions of heterotopia; that is, places that are both sites and counter-sites. As an extension of the earlier argument that the garden functions as a site of self-reflection, I contend that Mootoo's garden also functions as a mirror space caught between a utopia and a heterotopia. According to Foucault, 'between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the *mirror*. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. [...] But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy' (1986, 24, my emphasis). As an extension of Foucault's argument, the appropriation of the garden as both paradisaic and historical allows Mootoo to articulate a new narrative of belonging where the connections to the geographies of place are retained in a slightly different manner and where the deterritorialisation of place coincides with Edward W. Soja's demand for 'an historical and geographical materialism attuned to the contemporary political and theoretical challenges' (1989, 6).<sup>127</sup> The retention of the (deterritorialised) pastoral imagery allows Mootoo to rework the rootedness and hybridity of the garden towards a renewed understanding of belonging rooted in *both* traditional narratives of identity *and* a 'more flexible and balanced critical theory the re-entwines the

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<sup>127</sup> Here, it is important to emphasise Foucault's notions of utopia(s) as they too are unreal places: 'Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces' (1986, 24).



making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies' (1989, 11).<sup>128</sup>

Creating a fictional island setting allows Mootoo to *mirror* a different reality. Pushing back against what is 'real' and what is not, the island of Lantanacamara, like that of the writing of Jamaica Kincaid, signals the 'reality' of hybridity and creates a heterotopic space where history, connection and affiliation are reflected in both real and unreal dimensions.<sup>129</sup> Mootoo's garden bears a resemblance to Kincaid's in that it allows the writer to draw on past memories and to reawaken memory into an active agent for recapturing the past and transforming it into a dynamic force capable of reconnection and rehabilitation. In Mootoo's novel, memory itself becomes hybridised, and because it exhibits the possibilities for connection with the past, it needs to be reawakened. Memory, according to Alexander, is what is missing:

Who were we? As Trinidadians we did not all come on the same ship as the national(ist) myth held. Some of us, Indian, had been captured/brought under indenture to work on plantations evacuated after the "end" of slavery, with the broken promise of return to Calcutta, Bombay, Madras. A colonial betrayal pushed under the surface, constantly testing Indian loyalty to Trinidad, the home of forced adoption [...]. Some blacks captured/sold from a geography so vast the details would daunt memory and produce a forgetting so deep we had forgotten that we had forgotten. Missing memory. (2002, 86)

For Mootoo, Mala's garden, located within the larger context of Caribbean space, becomes a site of memory, where movement and boundary crossing intersect the sexual and the social (dis)enfranchisement found on the island of Lantanacamara. Memory, however, must be seen in connection with space, in that boundary crossing and the multiplicity of identity within the Indo-Caribbean context of the novel exhibit the ability to alter our understanding of the concept of (queer) diaspora.

If Mala's garden functions as a heterotopic space, it does not, however, disavow the psychological and the physical sensations of a home. The notion of 'home', or of feeling at home, is closely related to the notion of borders, whether they are psychical or psychological.<sup>130</sup> Home spaces and borders, which are abundant in Mootoo's novel and are almost always related to (hetero)sexuality, are constantly being constructed and destructed.

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<sup>128</sup> This, I believe, is one of the key elements of queer tactical diaspora—the emphasis on both traditional narratives as well as the ones where history is re-remembered 'other-wise'.

<sup>129</sup> I will focus on some of the writing of Jamaica Kincaid as part of my arguments about the implementation of history and cultural specificity.

<sup>130</sup> For more on home, see Ahmed.



The White missionary home of Ernest Thoroughly, the 'native' home of Chandin's parents, and Chandin's own home in which he incarcerates Mala and Asha, are spaces that are reworked and deterritorialized by the means of movement. Then, there are outside home spaces, like Britain and Canada, which serve to place the island of Lantanacamara into the larger context of diaspora and diasporic movement. Common to them are the borders constructed in terms of colonial domesticity, patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Considering the Caribbean as a Thirdspace and a space *in-between* is vital to our understanding of the importance of space and territoriality in Mootoo's novel. In fact, we could identify the island of Lantanacamara as a *counterspace* due to its fragmentation and non-centeredness. According to Soja, counterspaces are 'spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from the subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning' (1996, 68). Mootoo's novel, I argue, displaces traditional territorial markers of identity by locating and dislocating Lantanacamara and its inhabitants within and outside the larger context of the trialectic between the Caribbean, Canada and Britain. Moreover, we might compare Bhabha's notion of 'cultural liminality—within the nation' with Elsie Mohanty's comment about her son's/daughter's sexuality ambiguity within the space of the Caribbean diaspora: 'you are not the first or the only one of your kind in this place. You grow up here and you don't realize almost everybody in this place wish they could be somebody or something else' (1999, 238). Mohanty's comment links the binary structures inherent in colonialism with the sexual politics of a postcolonial nation, emphasising the importance of boundary crossings not only in terms of racial and social alienation but also in terms of gender and sexuality. Moving beyond the traditional emphasis on race, Mootoo focuses on the importance and the ramifications of going 'beyond' one spatial territory and on to another. In the same manner, Bhabha, commenting on the state of the postcolonial diaspora, argues that "'Beyond" signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going *beyond*—are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced' (2004, 6). Important to note, however, is Bhabha's emphasis on the displacement of the present by the means of repetition, in which the everyday practices (in *Cereus*) involve a thirding of the island of Lantanacamara, making it into a space where the traditional othering of subjectivities found on the margins is reworked—characters living on the margins are grouped and placed at both the centre and on the periphery of the social affiliation of both Lantanacamara and the Caribbean. Traditionally seen as inhabiting an immobilised present,



the (Caribbean) postcolonial space, by the means of tactical displacement and repetition, becomes a site where the mobile future (in this instance represented in the image of Canada) is returned to the present and reworked from within.<sup>131</sup>

How does the repetition of the borders of the lived space on Lantanacamara work? After Asha runs away from the house in which her and her older sister are caught, Mala is left alone in the house whose borders are determined by its powerful master Chandin. Building a restricted territory for his two daughters, Chandin uses chicken wire to construct a space in which he would possess and dominate his children but also guard them (and himself) from the outside intrusion of Sarah and Lavinia's eventual return. The creation of psychical borders turns the Ramchandin home from homely to unhomely. The strict policing of physical borders of this perceived space does not result in a more powerful sense of security. On the contrary, the reinforcement of borders creates a space that is unstable, repressive and violent. Chandin's Firstspace, however, is not only limited to the confines of the Ramchandin residence. In his attempt to recreate the domestic family life based on the image of the Thoroughly home, Chandin re-enacts the Caribbean history of domination and enslavement, resulting in sexual abuse and violence within the confines of the constructed borders. According to Bhabha, 'the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting' (2004, 13). The division and the repetition of borders between public and private space attest to the power in creating and maintaining the relationship between centre and margin in terms of belonging to a nation and a home. Ostracised from feeling comfort within the confines of her father's home, Mala is also displaced from the centre within the public realm of the playground: not wanting 'bad people' in the playground, Walter creates a border by drawing a line in the sand, separating himself from Mala by the means of the physically visible border in the ground. As a result of this border formation, Mala is displaced from the centre onto the margin due to her family history. For Mala, the homely place does not exist. Both the public and the private spaces have, with the creation and maintaining of borders, become unhomely and uncanny.

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<sup>131</sup> Bhabha notes: 'The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities' (2004, 6).



Whoever has the ability to create and enforce borders also gains access to power and control. Mala's attempt to create her own space is thwarted by Walter who, ridiculing her failed effort, re-establishes himself as the creator of borders: "Is you how draw the line? Or me? I draw the line. I go where I want. Who have stick in their hand? You or me? Go home. Go!" (1999, 86). According Justin D. Edwards, 'this line in the sand is a provocation, but it also maps out a vision of land that divides the spaces of centre and margin, privilege and ostracization' (137). Banished from the homely home, Mala cannot go home, for such a place does not exist. Instead, after her father's death (we as readers must assume that he died of injuries or starvation), Mala becomes the one who controls and organises space. Terrified of her father's return she takes up residence on the veranda outside the house, creating a space that would keep her far enough away from not only Ramchandin inside the house but also the inhabitants of Lantanacamara outside the residence compound. Thus, Mala's space on the veranda becomes a liveable Thirdspace, caught in-between the symbolic and the natural worlds. Sheltered from the Firstspace of the outside world, Mala seems to inherit her mother's garden as a feminine space of refuge from the symbolic world. In this liminal space Mala establishes a connection with the natural world of birds, insects and plants, trying to heal her damaged female psyche. This image of the garden situates it within Lefebvre's conceived space, in which 'projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies' (Soja 1996, 79) are made entirely via thought. In this view, Mala's garden, ripe with natural imagery, becomes a Secondspace which, according to Soja, 'is the interpretive locale of the creative artist and artful architect, visually or literally re-presenting the world in the image of their subjective *imaginaries*' (1996, 79, my emphasis). Although Mala appears to be in full harmony with the natural world of the garden (*The wings of a gull flapping through the air titillated her soul and awakened her toes and knobby knees, the palms of her withered hands, deep inside her womb, her vagina, lungs, stomach, heart*) (1999, 126-127, Mootoo's italics), she is nevertheless tied to the symbolic order of culture. As she waits for the cereus flower to bloom in the moonlit night, Mala is described as a 'concert director [...] witnessing the slow dance of huge, white cereus buds', remaining merely an attentive spectator, attending a beautiful performance, a 'choreography of petal and sepal' (1999, 134). Mala's garden is not a place outside history. It is firmly situated within the history and geography of the Caribbean. Moreover, in terms of Lefebvre's theorisations of space, it comprises both a perceived place (a place pervaded by the foul odour coming from the downstairs sewing room) and a conceived space (Mala's remembrance of her traumatic



childhood and the subsequent physical anxieties she experiences in the garden). Mala's creation of her own space on the veranda, however, places her in an in-between space where she could represent the world via her own artistic imaginary. After the choreographed display of the blooming cereus, Mala, according to the narrator, 'kept her eyes closed. Fortified by the night's display she wove memories. She remembered a little and imagined a great deal' (1999, 142). Thus, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo creates a literary and a fictional counterspace where the Caribbean, by the means of its non-centeredness, allows for a formation of spaces of representation that signal openness and a mode of in-betweenness that resist dominance, subordination and knowability. For Lefebvre, spaces of representation are intertwined with the real and the imagined. They are spaces of the periphery and the centre, in which struggles for liberation and emancipation are performed individually and collectively, through mind as much as the body. According to Lefebvre,

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action, of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (42)

Mala's garden, being the macrocosm of the wider context of the Caribbean, occupies the space between reality and fantasy, between magic and realism, where neither one nor the other takes on the dominant role. It is a place where magic realism provides different standpoints not only from a temporal perspective (taking us to the past and back again to the present) but also from a spatial one. Otoh is the only one who dares to enter Mala's counterspace on the veranda. But his entry into the space between the unsafe 'outside' and the locked-down 'below' of the house entails a remembrance and a breaking into the violent past of her childhood. As Mala reconstructs the elaborate rescue of the innocent Pohpoh via her daydreaming, Otoh enters the garden, which is described as a 'lost jungle, and except for the odours he would have sworn he was in a paradise' (1999, 155). When he finally sees her, Mala is sitting 'in a rocking chair, beside the tree, her eyes closed. Her figure was all but lost in the blueness of the mudra's trunk' (1999, 155). Otoh's invasion of Mala's (counter)space is at first described as a continuation of the hallucinatory visions of both Otoh and Mala, in which Mala dreams about Pohpoh while Otoh stares in disbelief at the old woman of whom his father had such high regard. As the odd couple begin to dance to the sound of Dixieland jazz, the space of Mala's veranda turns into a fairytale vision of a couple dancing and



remembering past times.<sup>132</sup> As she leads him from the space of the veranda to the daunting space of the cellar, the fairytale vision turns into a gothic nightmare, resulting in a public invasion of Mala's residence by the outside space of Lantanacamara.<sup>133</sup> Warding off the invasion of her private space Mala returns briefly to the imaginary of rescuing Pohpoh by sitting under the mudra tree but the physical invasion of the Ramchandin residence results in her fantasies remaining just that. Without the physical (and the psychological) space of the veranda, Mala's counterspace shatters, and as a consequence, her identity fractures, resulting in the division between the adult Mala and the child Pohpoh. The islanders' entrance into the house also causes a temporal disturbance where the division between the past and the present is blurred. Mala's remembering becomes influenced by the intruding police officers whose actions result in a reconfiguration of her memory: 'Mala remembered. She heard the voices of the police. She reconfigured what they said to match her story of how she saved Pohpoh that day' (1999, 75). Moreover, as both the police and Mala view the decomposing body, they see it as both dead and alive. To the young Pohpoh, Ramchandin is not only alive, he still poses a threat, while the police see the body as evidence of a crime and Mala's unstable mental condition. The blurring of borders and the creation of liminality and non-centeredness creates a counterspace in which an artistic imaginary represents the world in a non-linear and fragmented space. This space, however, works against an incursion of one space into the other. In fact, it works in-between spaces of magic and realism, neither rejecting the realism of the death of Ramchandin nor subordinating the temporal dislocations and artistic imaginaries of Mala's remembrance to the state of a mental condition. Overall, the homely sensation of the Ramchandin residence is only made homely by the creation of another space, situated in-between the borders of magic and realism. In *Cereus*, the creation and the maintaining of borders acts as a means of both sustaining and deconstructing the relationship between centre and margin, in terms of not only national but also sexual belonging. More

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<sup>132</sup> This vision, however, is nothing more than a case of mistaken identity in which Mala is drawn to Otoh as his is dressed like and resembles his father, while Otoh is drawn to Mala's world of romantic remembrance.

<sup>133</sup> Edwards argues that 'gothicism has been used to represent atrocious acts that lie at the heart of a traumatic event. Gothic discourse is thus often invoked in the aftermath of a traumatic moment to represent the instability of fragmented self. Implied here is the gothic trope of the return of the repressed. Trauma, like the gothic, follows this pattern—the re-emergence of something terrifying that lies beneath the surface and threatens to forever haunt its host, unexpectedly rising up from the depths of the self or the community' (132). As a consequence, Edwards contends that *Cereus* is gothic text in that Mala's traumatic event 'cannot be precisely grasped, never fully comprehended or articulated by Mala or Tyler' (133, emphasis in original). Thus, 'it shares with the gothic a language that tries to express something that can never be known. [...] In the figure of the trauma, we can recognize a history that is not directly referential—it is not graspable within the basic models of experience and reference' (133).



important, however, the novel attests to Lefebvre's assertion that representational spaces are alive and dynamic, resisting domination from perceived and conceived spaces (of Lantanacamara and the Caribbean), while simultaneously remaining grounded in their cultural specificity. The combination of Otoh's view of Mala's garden as a paradise and the horrific discovery of Ramchandin's corpse underneath the house attests to the illusiveness and the reality of life on Lantanacamara.

The intrusion of public space into the 'paradise' of Mala's garden along with its subsequent destruction forces Mala to construct new borders in order to protect herself from the outside world. Piling furniture in front of the window in the Alms House, Mala reconstructs the physical borders of her childhood. According to Tyler, 'Every night Miss Ramchandin would build and every morning I would deconstruct' (1999, 78). In order to find and construct a counterspace that would keep her safe, Mala replicates borders made of chairs and tables that kept Ramchandin locked in the cellar below the house. In order to shelter herself from him, Mala 'locks' Ramchandin away from her, creating a safe place for her to construct a countersite in which she would be able to cope with the remnants and the memories of her traumatic childhood.<sup>134</sup> In fact, Mala speaks the unspeakable. For upon his entrance into the cellar and his encounter with Ramchandin's body, Otoh is unable to speak. It is not until after they leave the unutterable space of the cellar and enter the space of the veranda that Mala who begins to talk, asking Otoh: 'Do you want water?' (1999, 164). Still, Otoh is unable to speak, and only after escaping the Ramchandin residence beyond Mala's territory (into the symbolic world of the island) is he able to utter the words: 'a body, *it* have a body in the house' (1999, 166, my emphasis), relegating Mala once again to the state of a mad woman. Thus, escaping the double illusion of objectivism and subjectivism situated in the perceived and conceived spaces of representation, Mootoo installs counterspaces as a means of dealing with the traumas of the past and documenting the history of abuse and violation caused by the personal and private history of colonialism in the present.

How does Kincaid's lived space relate to *Cereus Blooms at Night* and the national and sexual politics of Lantanacamara? Like Kincaid, Mootoo employs fiction to theorise and act upon the Caribbean landscape. By means of writing, Mootoo presents the microcosm of Mala's garden (the veranda) and the macrocosm of the island of the Caribbean as a lived

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<sup>134</sup> This involves not a symbolic process of dealing with language of representation but an artistic attempt at capturing the horrors of the past by the means of creating a space in which representation is reworked from the sites of the 'real' and the 'unreal'



space where coherence and transparency are in short supply. Not only do most of the inhabitants of Lantanacamara live on or cross social and sexual borders, but the territorial borders of the island are also illusive. More important, however, is the question of narration, as Mootoo's novel, although fictional, lacks the usual unity and coherence found in the imagined space of prose. The juxtaposition of Mootoo's narrator/relater Tyler and Jamaica Kincaid, with their insistent efforts to relate as well as to disturb and to confuse, exhibits the importance of lived space, as they attempt to relate the imaginative act of writing with the physical act of gardening/material frustration. Moreover, the space of inbetweenness and the sense of suspension with which we as readers are faced, correlates to Glissant and Kincaid's cross-cultural world represented not as real or imagined space but as a lived space. Mala's story and that of the island of Lantanacamara does not result in unity. In fact, as a site on which one can act, it becomes a space which is unknown and unmapped but where one can examine and rework historical, cultural and sexual 'practices'.

As Nurse Tyler takes upon him the task of reconstructing the history of abuse buried deep in Mala's mind, we are presented with the notion that the past/truth can be rediscovered and preserved by the means of narration only.<sup>135</sup> Tyler's story appears in the form of an open letter to Mala's sister, Asha, in which he tries to reconstruct Mala's seeming unintelligible ramblings into a coherent narrative of her violent past. Soon we discover that Tyler is an unreliable narrator who, being involved in his own issues of sexual identity, sees the need to repeatedly remind himself to keep his focus on Mala's story. The complexity of Mala's story, however, does not allow for a coherent narrative, regardless of how much Tyler tries to appeal to our imagination. Just as much as Mala's identity story is split between the innocent Pohpoh and the adult Mala, so is Tyler split between narrating his own and Mala's story. Attempting to keep the past and the present apart, Tyler attempts to appropriate and segregate the spaces between himself and Mala, between the past and the present. Although aware that 'being the narrator who also existed on the periphery of the events, I am bound to be present' (1999, 3), Tyler still attempts to create a coherent narrative and place the unspeakable acts into a language that can be understood. This is seen in Mala's disjointed words, which are recognised as nonsense by Tyler: 'She rambled under her breath all day and night'. However, not long after, Tyler realises that in Mala's chattering there is a narrative that needs to be

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<sup>135</sup> Tyler begins the narrative by stating: 'By setting this story down, I, Tyler—that is how am I known, simply as Tyler, or if you wanted to be formal, Nurse Tyler—am placing trust in the power of the printed word to reach many people' (1999, 3).



recorded: 'I began to recognise in her mutterings elements of legendary rumours. I had Mr. Hector run me the errand of acquiring a notebook, and I started to jot down everything she said, no matter how erratic her train of thought appeared to be' (1999, 99). Since Mala's traumatic memories cannot be expressed in verbal language, Tyler undertakes the task of 'sifting, cutting and sewing' the fragments of the story, giving the reader cause for vexation as we are not completely sure who articulates what and when. Reminiscent of Kincaid's aggravation about the failed attempts to employ the garden as a site for pleasure, Mootoo, it seems, expresses similar emphasis on the refusal of the pleasures of imagination as a means of re-'capturing' the past (i.e. a means to know and to 'understand').<sup>136</sup> Ostensibly Tyler's narration-making process of knowing and relating is to a certain extent unsuccessful, but by vexing her readers Mootoo refuses to offer a constructive critique of colonialism via the use of imagination. Instead, she creates a space of representation in which she manages to 'relate' the traumatic past of not only Mala but also the entire island of Lantanacamara. This lived space allows Mootoo to broaden the scope of the novel from the national and sexual politics of Lantanacamara to the concepts of multi-relationality in postcolonial space. Here, I return to Butler's notions of gender performativity as well as Lefebvre and Certeau's theories of space, as a means of re-membering and reassembling the dis-membered Caribbean body. By looking at Tyler who, apart from being one of the 'queer' characters in the novel, occupies the important role of a 'relater' of the story of Mala Ramchandin, we are able to find and excavate the 'subversive bodily acts' within the production of social space and the gendered and sexed bodies on Lantanacamara.<sup>137</sup> Through Mala *and* Tyler we are able to re-member and reassemble the Caribbean body into new geographical configurations.

Describing his own gendered identity, Tyler portrays himself as 'not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and non-existence' (1999, 77). This intermediate and ambiguous state of being caught between opposing categories points to a space within Mootoo's text where dislocation based on belonging allows for a creation of sites where queerness, non-belonging and ambiguity are reworked in favour of different sexual subject formations.<sup>138</sup> The 'shared queerness' that Tyler

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<sup>136</sup> We do not know how or where Tyler gets his information. Some of it does come from Mala but we never get the entire 'truth' about Tyler's sources.

<sup>137</sup> 'Subversive Bodily Acts' is the name of Chapter 3 of Butler's 1990 work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>138</sup> I do not argue that Tyler by definition embodies Butlerian notions of queerness. Rather, in the following passages I focus on the theorisations of space and gender rooted outside the geographical and philosophical



senses between himself and Mala reflects a range of estrangements found on Lantanacamara. As various characters experience non-belongingness, the novel appears to present Lantanacamara as a space for a utopic community of outsiders who, by mutual recognition, find selfhood and a sense of belonging on the island. Otoh, who seems to embody the distinctively racial and sexual formation instigated by the contradiction of the colonial condition, shares Mala and Tyler's queerness due to his non-normative gendering: 'even the nurse and the doctor who attended his birth, on seeing him later, marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl' (1999, 110). Despite the ostensible connection between Lantanacamara's outsiders, Mootoo does not allow a coherent narrative of structure and closure in her 'relating' of the national and sexual politics of Lantanacamara. Tyler's plea for Asha to return to her sister at the end of the novel remains just that. In fact, the connection between Tyler and Mala depends on their estrangement from the island. Moreover, as their connection strengthens, it is expanded to the characters around them. Mr Hector, the gardener of the Paradise Alms House, who upon seeing the 'crossdressed' Tyler is reminded of his forced separation from his older 'kind of funny' brother, also establishes a connection with Tyler: "'Well, I never! If I didn't know better ... I wish my brother could meet you too. Christ where he is, I wonder? Where my brother? By any chance, you know my brother?'" (1999, 248). This connection is both similar and divergent from that between Tyler and Mala, in that Mr Hector's longing for his brother is directly connected with Tyler 'every time I see you, my heart does break [...] Is like you bring Randy back to me, boy' (1999, 72-73), as well as it is aggravated by the immediate lack of consolation and solace that this connection generates: 'I watching you and I want to ask you so many questions but I don't even know what it is I want to know. I want to know something but I don't now what' (1999, 74). The sense of 'community' between Mr Hector and Tyler, which results in the resurrection and the exacerbation of the severed ties between Mr Hector and his brother, creates a space for a renewed sense of knowledge and belongingness. Here the dislocation from the national and the geographical boundaries results in a failure to heal and also a possibility of a creation of new belongingness, imploding the traditional heterosexual modes of affiliation with a nation-state. Like Kincaid, Mootoo vexes her readers by not assuaging the sense of loss and non-belongingness and, in turn, exacerbates the sensation of estrangement that facilitates the

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space (and scope) of Euro-Americanness as a means of broadening and expanding the Eurocentricity of queer studies.



formation of community forged via disidentification with and the contradiction of national and sexual spaces.<sup>139</sup>

Tyler, described by himself as that which cannot be known or categorised, says: 'I was preoccupied with trying to understand what was natural and what was perverse, and who said what and why' (1999, 48). This generates, in terms of sexuality, an excess of categorisation between the natural and the unnatural, and in return produces spaces in-between the knowable and controllable Firstspace and its imaginative representation of Secondspace. In short, Mootoo and Kincaid resist the notion of imagined space, in that the transnational space of the Caribbean, be it on Lantanacamara or in Vermont, cannot be fully grasped or understood. Their Caribbean is that of Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago where the opaqueness of its landscape and its characters makes it an impossible space. The density of such a space produces unanticipated modes of affiliation and collectivity that do not guarantee national modes of belonging. Instead, they create space for the queer racialised subjects to (re)produce 'those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable [caught between Firstspace and Secondspace] within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries' (Gopinath 2005, 11). Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago is a space in which characters are opaque to each other and where transparency is replaced with ambiguity. More important, we can connect Tyler, as a queer character and relater of Mala's story, to Glissant and Kincaid's notions of the Caribbean as that which cannot be fully grasped from any one vantage point. Tyler's own personal history, which is intertwined within Mala's narrative of her violent past, shows that within this space where characters are opaque to each other, there is space for affiliation rooted in ambiguity. The shifting of narrative between past and present, magic and realism, attests to the refusal of transparency, where the rejection of visibility becomes a productive element for a reconceptualisation of Caribbean space. The notion of opaqueness of the Caribbean can be seen in Kincaid's garden:

I had begun to dig up, or to have dug up for me, parts of the lawn in the back of the house and parts of the lawn in the front of the house into the most peculiar ungardenlike shapes. These beds [...] were odd in shape, odd in relation to the way flower beds usually look in a garden [...]. I wanted a garden that looked like something I had in my mind's eye, but exactly what that might be I did not know and

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<sup>139</sup> In her arguments on estrangement and affiliation, Hong notes that 'natural history provides the language for "deviance" through its establishment of normative modes'. Hong links this to the imagery of nature which describes 'a different mode of affiliation, one forged through disidentification, alienation, and contradiction, rather than through resolution. In so doing, the novel narrates a notion of community that does not promise limitless incorporation and thus erase exclusion and differentiation', (97).



even now do not know. And this must be why: the garden for me is so bound up with words about the garden [...] that any set idea of the garden [...] is a provocation to me. (2001, 7)

Kincaid's garden lacks the unity used to control it. The joy Kincaid gets from the provocation of the inability to fully grasp the garden, results in the realisation that the Caribbean garden, by the means of its shape, resists control of the imagination and insists on acting upon it: 'it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it' (2001, 8). Here, we witness Kincaid's exploration of lived space as that which belongs to the Caribbean geography but which cannot be understood as a having a fixed shape. The anti-aesthetics of the garden, its refusal of the shapely, can also be found in Glissant, who laments the loss of shapelessness, in that it results in the termination of action. He calls for acting upon and the refusal of the shapely landscape in the same manner that Kincaid remembers her shapeless garden: 'All these flowers have disappeared [...] The land has lost its smells. [...] The flowers that grow today are cultivated for export. [...] But they are heavy also, full, lasting. [...] These flowers delight us. But they have no fragrance. They are nothing but shape and color. I am struck by the fate of flowers. The shapelessness yielding to the shapely' (1999, 51-52). Both Glissant and Kincaid employ lived space as a means of representing the Caribbean (landscape) not as a real (First)space or the imagined (Second)space but as a lived transnational space. This is directly linked to my arguments on tactical diaspora which 'diasporises' Eurocentric concepts of space, exposing their grounding in the Euro-American colonial imagery. The Caribbean meta-archipelago, as described by Benítez-Rojo, is not a harmonious unity of islands but an amalgam of different phenomena, 'rooted' in the historical and cultural sharedness of the region. Correspondingly, the language of landscape found in Kincaid and Glissant suggests that the landscape of the Caribbean is both highly abstract and tremendously material, something that also becomes apparent in the shapelessness of the characters in Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

Although Glissant and Kincaid invite us to look at the landscape while 'remaining where we are' they do not propose a nationalist closure nor an anti-essentialist approach towards understanding the Caribbean. Instead, they warn us against imagination as a postmodern means of 'capturing' the postcolonial world. In the same manner, Mootoo, by 'queering' her characters, implodes both the imaginative logic of the Caribbean as a place of syncretism and uprootedness, lacking historical continuity and historiography, and the



realistic view of the Caribbean being a harmonious unity of islands, ravaged by its colonial past. By appropriating Mootoo's diasporic tactics towards Kincaid and Glissant's invitations to view Caribbean space by remaining *within* the Caribbean's geography, along with Judith Butler's notions of gender performativity, it is possible to see the complexity, the in-betweenness and the existence and non-existence of the space of the Caribbean. Moreover, by centring sexuality and gender within the production of lived space in the Caribbean, Mootoo invites us to investigate the interstices of place and body by the means of tactical displacement and repetition in the novel. By delving deeper into the character of Tyler, especially by looking at the complexity and the opaqueness of his identity in relation to other characters on Lantanacamara, we can work towards a postcolonial redefinition of gender, sexuality and belongingness. By considering Glissant and Kincaid's refusal of the imaginative logic of the Caribbean, it becomes possible to emphasise (diasporic) queerness as a method for deconstructing the dichotomous logic of the dominant Euro-American paradigms in theorising sexuality locally and transnationally. By queering sexuality *and* space, a dynamic reading of Mootoo's novel emerges. A reading that, while employing Western notions of sexuality, space and identity, is also critical of existing textual discourses as a route to understanding the postcolonial. Remaining *in* the Caribbean and by employing the notions of Thirdspace, Mootoo manages to remain critical of any singular understandings of the Caribbean while simultaneously making space for alternative readings and interpretations of sexuality, gender, affiliation, subjectivity, culture and national belonging that are not visible (imaginative) within the standard mappings of space, nation and diaspora.

### **VALMIKI'S DAUGHTER: A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO THE CARIBBEAN**

I began this chapter by arguing that the movement of bodies across various places is one of the central themes in Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Bloom at Night*, as it emphasises the role of sexuality in the discussions of cultural and sexual belonging in the Caribbean diaspora. The female characters in the novel, by the means of queer affinity and desire, destabilise and alter the Caribbean geography. *Cereus Bloom at Night* localises, diasporises and alters space, dislocating the island of Lantanacamara and its inhabitants within and outside the larger context of the trialectic between the Caribbean, Canada and Britain. While *Cereus Bloom at Night* is centred on the language of landscape, especially due to its setting in the town of Paradise on the fictional, dreamlike Caribbean island Lantanacamara, in Mootoo's most recent novel, *Valmiki's Daughter*, the action unfolds on the named island of Trinidad



among members of the affluent Indian class whose ancestors rose out of their positions as indentured labourers in the cane and cacao fields. As in her first novel, Mootoo's attention to sexuality and travel is crucial to the discussions of cultural and national belonging in Trinidad.

Mootoo's eponymous character is a well-respected physician, married to Devika with two daughters, Viveka and Vashti, and who, despite his extensive womanising, has a passion for men. Valmiki's first love was Tony, a fellow student at medical college, whom Valmiki left despite their plans to spend their lives together, as Valmiki was determined that upon qualifying he would return home and 'fall into whatever role was expected of him' or at least 'adopt some form of numbing complacency' (2008, 67). His eldest daughter Viveka (Valmiki's daughter), a 20-year-old student at the University of West Indies, although romantically involved with the mixed-race Elliot, is uncertain about her own sexuality. Nayan Prakash, a friend of Viveka's, whose family owns a cacao plantation, has recently returned from Canada with a degree and a French wife who becomes a token of respectability and admiration of the entire town. In addition, she also becomes the object of Viveka's sexual desire as the two women contemplate leaving Trinidad and having a family together. Once again, the sites of multiple identities and histories, only visible through travel and sexual experience, call attention to the importance of geography, places and spaces as well as the multiple transformations through which bodies go. Among the issues of class, race and gender, sexuality is what links the various narratives and identities, investigating imperial and neocolonial notions of what constitutes normative sexuality. *Valmiki's Daughter* explores the questions of knowledge, power and representation based on 'proper sexuality'. More importantly, however, it exposes the risk and danger of creating queer space within the Caribbean geography.

Mootoo's shift from naming a town Paradise in the fictional island of Lantanacamara to specifying the 'reality' of the factual town of San Fernando in the island of Trinidad, works as a means for reallocating the focus of her investigation into the 'realities' of sexuality in the Caribbean. If Lantanacamara serves as a national allegory of Trinidad, a point I argue, where the interstices between queer re-memories and diasporic spaces work as part of the *tactical diaspora*, the town of San Fernando is Mootoo's way of foregrounding transnational capitalism in the construction of 'proper' masculinity and femininity in Caribbean space.



More important, her mock tour-guide tone addresses the question of tourism and the role of transnational capital in shaping the view of 'proper' sexuality in Trinidad.<sup>140</sup> As suggested in my analysis of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Jacqui M. Alexander argues that by policing and constructing inherited meanings of masculinity and femininity the state transmits the need for transnational capital in terms of the commodification of sexual bodies. However, since citizenship in Trinidad and Tobago continues to be premised within heterosexuality and heteromascularity while sexuality and propriety simultaneously remain the dominant discourses transmitted from the colonial past into the postcolonial present, the anti-colonial nationalism maintains the notions of propriety and morality established in the colonial era. Thus, the state denounces 'deviant' sexualities, such as homosexuality, prostitution and sexualised women, as the source of the dissolution of the nation-state.<sup>141</sup> At the same time, Mootoo's mock tour-guide, written in the second person, serves as a structure for the novel as all four sections frame the narrative by addressing the reader directly. Each of the four sections entitled '*Your Journey*' speaks to the movement of the reader as he/she 'tours' the Trinidadian landscape. The direct address to the non-Trinidadian reader (like her naming a town Paradise which reflects and recreates the imperialist notions of the Caribbean as the biblical Garden of Eden), distances the narrative at an exotic remove. This, I argue, frames the narrative as a travel brochure, serving as a means for Mootoo to expose life in Trinidad to non-Trinidadian readers in a layer of irony and subversion. *Valmiki's Daughter* works not as a holiday catalogue for Western tourists but as an investigation of the effects of class, race, history and landscape on the notions of proper sexuality in Trinidad.

The move towards employing street and town names in the novel is exemplified in the first section of the first chapter entitled '*San Fernando, 24 Hours*', where we are introduced to the Trinidadian landscape and the major characters in the novel. The description of the characters, however, adopts the same mock tourist-tone as it introduces the Krishnus and the Prakashs in an objective manner, only scraping the surface of their intricate personalities: 'It is here you find the residences of the city's more prosperous citizens, including Dr. Krishnu—

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<sup>140</sup> The mock tour-guide tone works clearly as a reference to Jamaica Kincaid's text *A Small Place* (1988), a point into which I will look in greater detail in the following sections.

<sup>141</sup> Alexander's arguments on the construction of deviant sexuality is a vital tool for my analysis of Mootoo's construction of Trinidad, both in terms of the impact of transnational capital as well as the narrative structure of *Valmiki's Daughter*.



who, with his wife and their two children, lives in an architect-designed house' (2008, 13).

Mootoo's tone matches that with which she describes the town of San Fernando:

If you stand on one of the triangular traffic islands at the top the Chancery Lane just in front of the San Fernando General Hospital (where the southern arm of the lane becomes Broadway Avenue, and Harris Promenade, with its official and public buildings, and commemorative statues, shoots upwards), you would get the best, most all-encompassing views of the town. (2008, 7)

The objective and distanced tone of the description of the town is undercut, however, by the seriousness of the encounter between Valmiki's youngest daughter Vashti and her sister's former friend, Merle Bedi, who now lives on the street 'giv[ing] her body to men, right here in the promenade, behind statues at night and in the bushes in the day, in exchange for a cigarette or money to buy a flask of rum' (2008, 22). The narrator reveals Vashti's inner thoughts as she runs into Merle thinking: "But if she is doing this sort of thing, what they say about her can't be true then. It can't be so that she is a buller. If is women she like, how come she doing it with man?" (2008, 23). Vashti questions the rumours of Merle's homosexuality by highlighting the paradox of the town's view of her and their disdain for her (heterosexual) promiscuity. Immediately after, however, Vashti's thoughts return to the realities of the situation as she thinks that "maybe is not a bad thing, then. That might cure her. And from such a family, too. It is killing her parents. No wonder they put she out the house". Here, 'promiscuity' (Merle Bedi) and 'innocence' (school children going for lunch) are closely positioned, complicating the division between spaces of propriety and impropriety. This correlates with David Eng's notion that both queer and diaspora compel us to rethink the question of home and belonging, not only in terms of migration as homecoming but also in regard to queering home as a site of a queer possibility: 'suspended between an "in" and "out" of the closet—between origin and destination, and between private and public space—queer entitlements to home and a nation-state remain doubtful' (1997, 32). Mootoo's insertion of Merle's queerness into the public space of 'promenades' and 'statues' complicates the division between propriety and impropriety in terms of private and public space since, we are told, Viveka and Vashti would 'sit in the living room and listen to this woman play Beethoven on the piano. And Debussy. "Au Clair de la Lune." Their favourite' (2008, 23). In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Walter draws a line in the sand, displacing Mala from the centre within the public realm of the playground. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, Merle, who was once included in the sphere of propriety and proper femininity, is expelled from the private sphere of domesticity



due to the anguish she suffered from Miss Seukeran's rejection.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, since Merle develops her love for Miss Seukeran within the public ground of the school—a space that informs the colonial view of proper masculinity and femininity—the novel stresses the importance of queering the public (colonial) spaces as a means of destabilising the dichotomy between private/public and propriety and impropriety. Even the school children themselves are aware of the constructedness of the divide between these formations. As they head out to lunch the narrator informs us:

When they [the school girls] cross the boundary line of the gate that separates the world of commodities and desires from that, supposedly, of learning and restraint, the girls seem, one by one, to take a vertiginous step, to misstep, falter, and land a little off to the side, or illogically, too far forward. (2008, 20)

Seemingly caught between and outside of these worlds, Merle's character serves as a reminder of the severe penalty one faces if caught transgressing the constructedness of the social norms. Therefore, we are told,

The rendezvous between students from the two schools, orchestrated to look like little more than a coincidental line-ups of boys and girls who happen to find themselves elbow to elbow, lasts not more than ten minutes. [...] Boys and girls take care not to be caught chatting or directly facing each other or acting as if these meetings have been planned. But those ten minutes will be the stuff that keeps them from hearing anything that goes on in class that afternoon, and the stuff, too, of that evening's, that night's, confused and excited longings. (2008, 21)

The narrator's description of the division between spaces continues at the end of the encounter between Vashti and Merle in which Vashti, refusing to take a note from Merle to Miss Seukeran, enters the convent which, we are told, 'shares a wall with the cinema next door and if you listen just now, you will hear the lunchtime programming begin. The cinema's walls are not soundproof, and in every direction the soundtrack of movie trailers can be heard above traffic sounds, and the laughter and chatter of student, vendors, and passersby' (2008, 24). The fragile division between the space of the convent and that of the cinema attests to the tenuous boundary between designated spaces, especially in terms of the production of proper masculinity/femininity and sexuality within those spaces. Ultimately, like in Mootoo's first novel, the division and the repetition of borders between public and private space attest to the power of creating and maintaining the relationship between centre and margin in terms of belonging to a nation and to a home.

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<sup>142</sup> By hiding in the shrubs away from the public eye Merle, like Mala, is displaced from the centre onto the margin due to her family history.



In *Cereus Blooms at Night* we are witness to the divisions between Mala's garden and that of the public space of Paradise. In Mootoo's latest novel, the symbol and a site of colonialism and cultural and historical oppression is the Library Corner, the last and once-grand strip of the official buildings on either side of which there are now 'private commercial structures that were built not to impress or to contribute culturally to the community in which they exist, but with materials and design meant purely to maximize the money-making potential of every square inch' (2008, 24).<sup>143</sup> The El Dorado Park in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is in *Valmiki's Daughter* changed to San Fernando Hill which was once a 'magnificent natural promontory and wildlife paradise in the heart of the town', but is now disfigured with 'treeless trails that ensnare it, tractors and trucks crawling up and down its raw bruised sides, moving whole cubic acres of its yellow and white bedrock daily, its most perfect beauty pulverized for a most singular profit' (2008, 25). Moreover, as the reader 'tours' the Trinidadian landscape he/she is introduced to the divisions of spaces based on race, social standing and financial income. 'Your Journey, Part Two' frames Chapter Two of the book, as it introduces the reader to Luminada Heights, a prosperous quarter of San Fernando where the Krishnus and the Prakashs live. The narrator, speaking directly to the reader, describes Luminada Heights as a 'social lesson in itself' as it tells us 'something more about town and country' (2008, 187). As opposed to her first novel where the fictional, dreamlike Caribbean island Lantanacamara serves as the background for the exploration of the notions of sexual belonging and multiple sites of exile and dislocation, Mootoo frames her latest novel in Trinidad explicitly in order to introduce the reader to the workings of the contemporary Trinidadian society. Within the narrative and Trinidadian society, we find the Krishnus and the Prakashs who are not only the victims to the racial, sexual and class-related divisions of Trinidad but who also uphold these boundaries. Relating the journey to Luminada Heights the narrator begins the voyage from the San Fernando General Hospital on to the rolling hills where we are advised to ignore, if we can, 'the barefoot wiry man in the red merino vest and torn trousers meandering dangerously in a drugged stupor down the middle of the road, his unkempt wiry hair making him look that much more fearful' (2008, 188). As the narrator

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<sup>143</sup> In Chapter Four, I will argue that H. Nigel Thomas's 1993 novel *Spirits in the Dark* juxtaposes the divide between the public library of Isabella and the Atlantic as the element of the realness and the trauma of the Middle Passage. As a consequence of the creation and maintaining of borders, in both novels, the public and the private spaces become confused, unhomey and uncanny. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, however, the division between spaces takes place in terms of transnational capital and the construction of proper sexuality as a result of the neocolonialism in the Caribbean.



takes us to Luminada Heights, marking out the social divisions between the impoverished and the prosperous, we are introduced to the changing landscape as the view of the Gulf of Paria changes the higher we climb in altitude:

Slowly, perhaps, but surely, these lands with exceptional views, on which squatters live in huts and shacks with no running water or electricity, will give way to the kinds of homes that are built just a little farther on—the ones with gardens designed for entertaining, all angled just so, to take advantage of the view of the gulf. (2008, 188)

Placing the Krishnu residence within the prosperity of the Luminada Heights, Mootoo sets the scene for the exploration of the racial *as well as* social elements in the construction of cultural and sexual belonging in Trinidad. If in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the cultural belonging on the island of Lantanacamara is reserved solely to the heterosexual family of kinship and affinity, where queer inclusivity in culture is denied by the homophobic and heterosexist allocations of Caribbean cultural citizenship, *Valmiki's Daughter* explores the workings of the same notions within the context of contemporary post-independence Trinidad where transnational capital comes into contact with the politics of decolonisation.

#### GAZING AT THE TRINIDADIAN BODY

Setting the scene for the explorations of the Trinidadian landscape through the lens of capital and class, Mootoo installs Valmiki's daughter Viveka as a character who seeks to challenge the heterosexual notions of female sexuality. *Valmiki's Daughter* introduces us to both female and male characters who find themselves torn between adhering to the values of proper sexuality and cultural belonging, and exploring their queer affinity and desire. The novel sets the scene for the exploration of queer sexuality by individual family members who, apart from serving the role of devoted fathers, mothers, daughters and sons, are in need of negotiating their role in society in terms of social standing and proper sexuality. As class, race and ethnicity play a pivotal role in the construction of subjectivities, the Trinidadian landscape serves as a framing device which sets the scene and contributes to the overall sense of hardship, suffocation and adversity in performing queer sexuality.<sup>144</sup>

As she decides to walk down the hill from Luminada Heights to take a taxi to the university, Viveka notes the social, cultural and historical conditions of the present-day

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<sup>144</sup> I will argue that the landscape serves as a symbol of the relationship between the colonial and neocolonial notions of proper male and female sexuality in a transnational context.



Trinidad. Not being familiar with public transportation and interacting with 'lower-ranking' citizens, Viveka's senses are overwhelmed by the intensity of San Fernando:

The combination of rain and heat intensified the pollution caused by exhaust from the jam of cars. The hospital's incinerators spewed their noxious gases into the sodden air. The nearer smells of urine, unwashed bodies, and too highly perfumed ones produced a dizzying cocktail that finally got the better of her. She was about to act as if she had just remembered something and quickly head inside the gates to one of the wards to which her father sometimes sent his patients. (2008, 84)

The feeling of asphyxiation and the stifling heat of the island frames Viveka's journey across the Trinidadian landscape as she contemplates her father's strange relationship with Saul and her disputes with her mother and sister regarding 'proper' femininity. Viveka's view of her father is that of both a brave man and a coward, as he is brave enough to venture into the forest but not brave enough to confront his wife. Moreover, as Viveka tours the Trinidadian landscape in the public space of a taxi she contemplates the incongruity between her mother's image of a ladylike woman and her own notions of female independence, particularly her relationship and desire for Miss Russell. The drive in the taxi allows Viveka to distance and disassociate herself from her family which she calls a 'hypocritical mess' (2008, 98), as her reflection on her desire for Miss Russell disrupts the division between private and public space. Furthermore, the drive links queer sexuality to class and social ranking as they play a crucial role in shaping the notions of what constitutes proper subjectivity and cultural belonging. Viveka's memory of her old friend Merle Bedi and the after-effects of her desire for Miss Seukeran installs an aspect of foreboding and danger in confessing non-heterosexual desire both within the private and the public space. Mootoo frames Viveka as a character who is aware that a public confession of queer desire would have catastrophic consequences. After Merle Bedi's confession to Viveka of her desire to kiss Miss Seukeran, for instance, we are told:

Viveka understood something of it. That kind of talk, she felt, could get them both in trouble. A clash of thoughts, incomplete ones, incomplete-able ones, resounded in her head. She would be implicated in Merle's craziness: there was Viveka's very public and close association with Merle, Viveka's well-known affinity for sports and things *mannish*. And there was Viveka's coinciding acne problem, and in the instant of Merle Bedi saying she wanted to kiss Miss Seukeran, Viveka knew that she, too, had wanted to throw the discus and javelin because it was her way of kissing Miss Russell. (2008, 95)

Viveka is aware of the consequences of a public confession and acts according to the 'Thirdspace' as a means for creating sites of queer affinity caught between the real and the imagined. Seeing what the inhabitants of San Fernando view as proper sexuality acts as



Firstspace and what Merle Bedi views as her confession of queer desire as Secondspace, Viveka negotiates her own queerness by mediating her affinity through multiple sites of possibility and impossibility. Viewing Merle's confession as a social suicide, Viveka 'stood up, looked down at Merle, and snapped, "I wouldn't go around announcing that if I were you"' (2008, 95). As in Mootoo's first novel, I employ the notions of Thirdspace to refrain from simplistic readings of the Caribbean while simultaneously making space for alternative readings and interpretations of sexuality, gender and affiliation unimaginable within the standard mappings of space, nation and sexuality.

Speaking directly to the American and European tourists who journey to Trinidad in search of a holiday ('Imagine you are a tourist let down from the sky, blindfolded, in the middle of a weekday [...] your senses would be bombarded at once' (2008, 7)), Mootoo directly references Jamaica Kincaid's text *A Small Place* (1988), in which the narrator chronicles the experiences and thoughts of the reader as a hypothetical tourist in Antigua.<sup>145</sup> Kincaid addresses the reader as 'you', describing what the reader might see and think as a visitor to the island: 'If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see' (2000, 3). This approach works to 'typecast' the reader in the eyes of the Antiguan, in that the reader is seen not as an individual but as a stereotype. Moreover, Kincaid's literary technique also compels the reader to consider the ways in which he or she in reality corresponds to the stereotype of the typical tourist. Kincaid's reversal of the traditional gaze from the West to 'the rest', showing the tourist-readers the spectacles they make of themselves in the eyes of the Antiguan, can be also found in Mootoo's novel, as she invites the readers to partake in the journey through the aural and visual melee of people, sounds and smells in the beautiful landscape of Trinidad. Much in the same way that Kincaid favours ordinariness by rejecting the normative otherness of small places, Mootoo disrupts the exoticising gaze of the White Western tourist by relocating and restructuring Trinidad from a theoretical (mappable) space to an inhabitable place (of dwelling). At the core of both texts we find the status of the

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<sup>145</sup> *A Small Place* is a narrative condemning the European cultural prejudice and the neocolonial forces of tourism. In the text, Kincaid expresses displacement in terms of anger, discontent and loss, as she candidly explores the impact of slavery and tourism in Antigua. Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan characterise *A Small Place* as a form of 'countertravel writing', in which the writer 'directs a sustained assault against the reader, designed not merely to jolt him or her out of a familiar sense complacency, but to associate that complacency with the process of travel and the genre of travel writing' (2000, 50).



Caribbean in the global economy, as both authors focus on tourism as a means for exoticising the Caribbean.<sup>146</sup>

In addition to tourism, *A Small Place* also addresses the issues of diaspora. Fusing tourism with colonial practices, Kincaid introduces the ocean, not as a place of relaxation and wonder but as a risk to one's health. Subverting the (neo)colonial images of the see-through water of the Caribbean beaches, Kincaid turns the ocean into a nauseating mass, as she exposes the result of the colonial practices: there is no sewage system! The result is the pollution of the colonial ideal of the lost Paradise by excrement and urine:

You must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it. You must not wonder where your bathwater went when you pulled the stopper. You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is no proper sewage-disposal system. (2000, 13-14)

Beginning with the polluted image of the clean Caribbean Sea, Kincaid moves on to the image of the Black slaves, brought from Africa on the perilous ocean: 'But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up' (2000, 14). Here, Kincaid links travel, tourism and diaspora by alluding to the Middle Passage where millions of enslaved Africans lost their lives on route to slavery. Moreover, by connecting this information with the section on the sewage system, Kincaid employs the notions of the ocean as a link between waste and lost African lives.<sup>147</sup> In the second section of the text, the contemporary tourist is linked with the past English coloniser, as the personal lives of the tourists are tied with the culture, politics and history of Antigua. Apart from expressing anger at the British, Kincaid attacks her fellow Antiguan for perpetuating the power relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Still celebrating Queen Victoria's birthday, the Antiguan, Kincaid argues, display a distorted historical narrative, as they are unaware of both the symbolism of the holiday and

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<sup>146</sup> Both texts emphasise Caribbean history and the implications of the tourist's gaze for the representation of Caribbean space/place. If *A Small Place* refuses to characterise and pinpoint a certain Antiguan identity, *Valmiki's Daughter* takes this approach further by highlighting the workings of sexuality within the Trinidadian space/place as it is inhabited by 'natives' of the island.

<sup>147</sup> In Chapter Three, I employ the image of the ocean as a means for the articulation of the Caribbean geography and history as well as island history and syncretism within the Caribbean. The notion of *tidalectics*, I argue, works as a tool for pointing out the neocolonialist paradigm of imaginative readings of colonialist critique, offering a critical view on the sea/land relationship that marks the colonial vision of island isolation and indigeneity.



the image of the monarch as the force that imposed the loss of Antiguan culture. According to Kincaid, one can only understand Antigua's current situation through an awareness of history and/of colonisation, in that twentieth-century tourism can only be understood in the context of nineteenth-century imperialism. As an example of contemporary exploitation of Antigua Kincaid uses Barclay's Bank to link the establishment of Western economic institutions with nineteenth-century slavery and colonisation: 'The Barclay Brothers, who started Barclay's Bank, were slave-traders. That is how they made their money. When the English outlawed the slave trade, the Barclay Brothers went into banking. It made them even richer. It's possible that when they saw how rich banking made them, they gave themselves a good beating for opposing an end to slave trading' (2000, 25-26). Linking nineteenth- and twentieth-century exploitation of Antigua, Kincaid highlights the continuing forms of imperialism in the Caribbean.

By drawing links between colonisation, migration, consumption, tourism and representation in order to track different forms of material mobility that constitutes Caribbean space, Mimi Sheller broadens the concept of travel in and out of the Caribbean to include various kinds of mobility:

The ties that bind the Caribbean to other places [...] are premised on everyday practices of consumption that occur through economies of movement, touch, and taste in overlapping fields of economic consumption, political consumption, and cultural consumption. In recognising such circuits of consumption it becomes evident how various mobilities are crucial not only to the formation of world systems of trade and production, but also to the constitution of world systems of consumption. (4-5)

Sheller does not look at the Caribbean as a particular mappable space. Rather, she sees it as 'an effect, a fantasy, a set of practices, and a context' (5). This investigative tactic is suggestive of Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago. Unlike Benítez-Rojo, however, Sheller adds a substantial emphasis on 'the emotive and figurative moorings of the colonial relations that shaped economic, cultural, material, and human exchanges between the North Atlantic region and the Caribbean' (7). Sheller employs Jacqui M. Alexander's arguments about the commodification of sexual bodies in Trinidad and Tobago to point out that the nineteenth-century origins of imperial sex tourism informs the contemporary production of the Caribbean as a site of pleasure. The Western consumption of Black and Brown bodies, according to Sheller, which introduced the body as a site of conflict and control in the nineteenth century, can be found in the contemporary forms ranging from package tours to sex tourism. What is particular to these contemporary bodily gazes is the proximity of the consuming and the



consumed bodies, as travel and tourism bring the imperial centre and periphery closer together. The notion of the Caribbean as a site of relaxation—‘Still standing, looking out the window, you see yourself lying on the beach, enjoying the amazing sun (a sun so powerful and yet so beautiful, the way it is always overhead as if on permanent guard, ready to stamp out any cloud that dares to darken and so empty rain on you and ruin your holiday’ (*A Small Place*, 13)—reinforces the imaginary geography in which the Caribbean becomes a site of careless pleasure, unconstrained by civilisation and more ‘in touch with nature’. More important, in terms of sexuality, the European fantasies of the tropics, which are closely allied with the experiences of transgression, are directly linked with sexual encounters with the exotic ‘others’. The sexualisation of exotic bodies, according to Sheller, has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion in which sex tourism turns the long history of sexual exploitation under colonial rule into a contemporary neocolonial fantasy of ‘embodied racism[s]’ (165). Sheller argues:

These ‘embodied racisms’ draw on a long history of objectification through the tourist gaze and the circulation of travel texts...[which] are not simply historical documentation of the colonial relation...but are the narrative and imaginative subtext to contemporary forms of relation between Northern consumers and Caribbean (sex) workers. (165)

The objectification of the sexualised/racialised Other occurs in a chocolate-coated tourist gaze: ‘You think of these incredible [...] women, ranging in colour from white chocolate to dark chocolate, available to you at the subtle nod of your head or touch-of-your-hat’ (165). The image of the chocolate signifies the status of the sex workers as commodities manufactured as tropical pleasures for the European and North American tourists.

In *Valmiki’s Daughter*, we find the image of the chocolate serving as a motif throughout the entire book, especially around the character of Nayan.<sup>148</sup> After seeing Anick’s parents’ enjoying high-quality chocolate, Nayan, son of a successful cacao farmer, begins dreaming of refining his cacao so that it would surpass that of the rivalling countries and become the main ingredient in the world’s top-ranked chocolates. For Nayan, Anick’s parents—Armand and Mimi Thiebert—represent the high culture and class to which he aspires, and although he was able to gain respect whilst studying in Canada, Nayan feels that he lacks self-confidence during his stay in France. The respect he enjoyed in Canada,

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<sup>148</sup> In this section and the next, respectively, I argue that the image of chocolate works as symbol of both the exoticising gaze of the West as well as the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean.



however, was based on his wealth. According to him, his friends accepted him 'in good part because of how flush—and generous—he was even while he appeared to be what the mother of one of them had flirtatiously called "charmingly unpretentious"' (2008, 242). Although aware that his friendship with his Canadian friends was made possible due to his wealth, Nayan's stay in Canada did not offer the kind of experiences that Trinidadians like himself sought. More precisely, Nayan found the question of income less important in Canada than in Trinidad:

There was too much blending of all the races and classes on the streets of Toronto. It seemed as if almost anybody—with hard work or a good dose of luck—could make leaps in economic status. This meant that people who worked in Trinidad as store clerks or as servants [...] went to Canada [...] and returned to Trinidad, having come to expect a standard of commodities and services that only the wealthier Trinidadians had access to. This irked the Trinidadians who had been born into ready-made comfort. (2008, 241-242)

The opportunity to climb the social ladder due to higher income disrupts the class divisions between higher- and lower-class citizens in Trinidad—something that forces Nayan to search for the notions of propriety and respectability elsewhere. In terms of sexuality, however, we see the perpetuation and the simultaneous reversal of the colonial gaze, as it becomes apparent that Nayan has found the source of respectability in Anick—proving that his attraction to her is based solely on class:

What truly pleased him [Nayan] was the fact that he, a brown-skinned fellow from a smallish town in Trinidad, was walking through the famous institution, in Paris, with a beautiful Frenchwomen, repeating after her French words whose meanings he cared less about than that she was exaggeratedly forming them with her lips, showing him the position of her tongue, touching her throat, as she tried to explain to him how to make a sound or pronounce a phrase. (2008, 213)

The exoticising gaze of the West is hereby reworked into the exoticisation of the cultural norms of Western 'high' culture on the behalf of the non-Western male, for Nayan and Ram Prakash, Nayan's father, who opposes Nayan's marriage, are impressed by Anick's social standing: he [Nayan's father] was not unaware of the prestige Anick's Frenchness, her beauty and charm, brought to his family' (2008, 233). Moreover, the exoticisation of Anick brings the attention of the entire business community: 'People built parties around Anick. They threw these parties after making sure that she was available' (2008, 233).<sup>149</sup> Because Nayan

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<sup>149</sup> The desire for economic and cultural capital in Trinidad corresponds to Alexander's arguments about commodification of sexual bodies in Trinidad and Tobago; only in Mootoo's novel the exoticising gaze is found in the eyes of the previously colonised. As a consequence, the adoption of the exoticising gaze reinforces the



views French culture as superior or 'uncontaminated' by the 'blending of races and classes', he reinforces the cultural and economic divide between the West and the Rest. In *Valmiki's Daughter* the exoticising gaze is not entirely reversed from the active 'Rest' to the passive West. After her relationship with her former lover Anna Marie ended, Anick was harassed by several men at a restaurant in Whistler in Canada. But Nayan was different and 'unusual'. We are told that apart from Nayan being 'nice enough, foreign enough' for Anick, he was also 'sufficiently different from the other men' (2008, 232), which was one of the reasons why Anick let him approach her. Anick's view of Nayan as different and 'foreign' reinforces the view of the 'other' inasmuch as it places her as culturally dominant European compared to the culturally inferior Trinidadian. More important, once in Trinidad and initially disliking the overwhelming attention of the local community, Anick begins to take pleasure in the luxury she is now able to acquire due to Nayan's wealth:

She had joined a family with what seemed like a bottomless pool of cash at their disposal. She began to have her clothing designed especially for her by a well-known designer in the north of the island whose clients were often photographed by the local paparazzi for the society pages of the daily newspapers and for the Caribbean's glossy lifestyle magazines. (2008, 234)

Anick's enjoyment of Nayan's wealth highlights the cultural as well as economic dominance of the West is evocative of Jamaica Kincaid's arguments on the accessibility and the consumption of Caribbean culture and bodies for the enjoyment of the Western tourist. In Mootoo's novel, however, even the reversal of the imperial gaze from the colonised onto the coloniser reinforces the cultural dominance on the part of the West as the local inhabitants themselves uphold the division between the 'West and the rest'. This dominance is seen in Anick's 'empowerment' as her interaction with other people reduces Nayan's sense of self to the culturally inferior: 'He felt as if Anick were trying to reeducate him in her ways, to her liking' (2008, 234). Nayan's 'reeducation', however, must also be seen in terms of gender and sexuality, as Anick's mobility is only granted on the basis of her race and social standing: 'Nayan felt acutely that Anick was embarrassed by him and his family. [...] He was no longer Ram Prakash's son. He was Anick's husband' (2008, 235). In contrast, Shanti, wife of Nayan's friend Baldwin (Bally) Kissoon, does not have the freedom to socialise or choose her role in society. As Bally himself reminds Nayan: 'children tamed a woman. [...] You know

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colonial notions of propriety, in that Western notions of class once again become the norm upon which the non-West identifies itself.



why I marry Shanti? [...] You don't see them hips, boy? Don't get me wrong. She is a good girl. I know she isn't a beauty queen, but she born to be a mother' (2008, 248-249). Bally's advice relegates a woman to the role of a mother, and if Nayan wishes to preserve his superiority in marriage, he should 'have "two or three children"'. According to Bally, Nayan should not "waste time in that department. It will occupy your wife" (2008, 249). Apart from the apparent issues of the notions of proper femininity within Caribbean space, the issue of proper sexuality makes its mark upon Nayan, as he begins to remind himself that Anick's prior romantic relationship has indeed been a queer one.

If Mootoo reworks the exoticising gaze of the West in terms of exoticisation of the norms of Western high culture on the behalf of the non-Western male, she adds to the transfiguration of the exoticisation from male to female and from class to sexuality. This is seen in the figure of Viveka who, once again, employs the notion of Thirdspace as a means for deconstructing the cultural and sexual divide between the West/Caribbean and homo/hetero. One of the first instances of queer desire between Anick and Viveka revolves around the issue of language. When Viveka invites Nayan and Anick to dinner (an invitation Nayan turns down due to a 'previous engagement'), the two women find themselves on the patio bonding over philosophy, literature and fine arts. Subsequently, as Anick initiates the French conversation practice they had begun by phone, Viveka feels an intimacy she never experienced—not even when kissing Elliot, her boyfriend: 'It was Anick who eventually called the impromptu session to a close and the two women reverted to English. It was as if they had been in a movie theatre, watching something beautiful yet a little illicit, and suddenly the movie had ended and the lights had come on' (2008, 258). The subtly erotic exchange between the women attests to the importance of creating sites of queer affinity caught between the real and the imagined. Just as the two women were initiating their queer interaction 'Nayan rolled his car up, Viveka could see him making his way in drunken bliss to the door. Anick appeared suddenly sober in the glare of his presence' (2008, 258). Nayan's entrance immediately installs the realness of Firstspace, as the two women revert to their 'usual selves'. As Nayan and Anick exit the scene Viveka lies in her bed, thinking of what had transpired between her and Anick. Her recollection of the night's events shows the amalgam of, at times, contrary sensations:

[Viveka] felt a suffocating weight in her chest, heat coursing up and down her body. In the quiet that fell between her and Anick, Viveka's legs tensed. She wanted to cry and laugh at the same time. Anick turned to her. Viveka hoped more than anything



that her face gave nothing away of these delightful and terrifying sensations. (2008, 259)

Since a confession of her desire for Anick would result in the expulsion from her family and the society around her, Viveka seeks alternative readings and interpretations of sexuality, unimaginable within the standard mappings of space, nation and sexuality.<sup>150</sup> This is seen in the events during (and immediately after) the queer encounter between the two women. As Nayan approaches the premises, the erotic tension between the two women intensifies: 'There was an awkward moment, and then Anick said, "I feel something. Do you feel what I feel?" [...] "An earthquake?" Viveka had snapped over a chuckle of indignation, and just then Nayan's car had pulled up outside' (2008, 259). Moreover we are told that the queer tension between the two women is due not only to the eroticism of the situation but also the immediate danger it entails, as a disclosure of the their relationship is a threat not only to the heterosexual workings of the Trinidadian marriage but also their own place within the Trinidadian society: 'Anick looked as if her heart had stopped beating. She made a sound, somewhere between a wince and a truncated gasp. Viveka didn't know if this was in response to her words or to Nayan's arrival' (2008, 260).

Viveka's sexual feelings for Anick should also be seen in relation to Nayan's gaze in terms of the exoticisation of the high-class White female. If Nayan, the Trinidadian male, desires Anick for her social standing and respectability, Viveka desires Anick in part because she is the female object of her queer desire and in part because of Anick's femininity. In short, Viveka's desire for Anick cannot solely be seen in terms of queer desire, in that she too performs the exoticisation of the Western female in terms of sexuality. Mootoo's reworking of the Western exoticising gaze into an exoticisation of Western high culture from a heterosexual male point of view, is not the only instance where Western notions of respectability and proper sexuality are exoticised. For Mootoo constructs her novel around the issues of transnational capital and the commodification of sexual bodies in relation to world systems of consumption. More important, she reframes the argument by reversing the colonial gaze from the West to 'the Rest'. As a consequence, Mootoo's novel must be seen in connection to the nineteenth-century origins of imperial sex tourism as well as the context of nineteenth-century indentured labour, in that the proximity of the consuming and the

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<sup>150</sup> As we have seen earlier, Viveka negotiates her own queerness by mediating her affinity through multiple sites of possibility and impossibility.



consumed bodies brings the imperial centre and the colonial periphery closer together. Mootoo clearly positions Viveka's sexuality queerly, in that the sensations she exhibits when with Anick significantly differ from when she is with her boyfriend Elliot. Reliving her previous encounter with Anick, Viveka is overcome with feelings of immense sexual desire:

It was weakness, daunting and wonderful, that began in her toes and washed quickly upwards, to land between her legs, gripping her there in ecstasy, and then it made its way back down again. Over and over. She put the back of the hand that had held Anick's to her mouth, and with her lips closed brushed it. As if it had a mind of its own, her mouth opened and again brushed the skin of that hand. She came down hard now, her parted lips to that hand, teeth pressing into skin, and this made her cry out. (2008, 260)

The intensity of her desire is unmistakably unequalled by her sexual feelings towards Elliot, who fails to arouse her beyond the point of a confusing sexual stimulus:

He lowered his crotch to hers. Hard as a sump of guava wood there, he pressed into her pubic area. She felt a tingle in her lower back, and her pelvis, as if it suddenly had a mind and agenda quite apart from her, lurched forward to meet him. It felt horribly good. An uncontrollable desire and the dregs of her reserve co-mingled. ... She placed her hands on his waist intending to push him away, to quell the rising quake of his body against hers, to put an end to an unintentional desire swelling in her and betraying her... She had experienced in her breasts and pubic area an awakening that in moments made her want to lose her mind in pleasure, yet now it was as if a bulldozer had run over and crushed a part of her. (2008, 103-104)

The day after her rendezvous with Anick, Viveka once again shows that she is aware of the consequences of queer desire, as she is relieved when Anick tells her that she will be unable to visit Viveka any time soon: 'This was a small but painful relief to Viveka. Thoughts of Merle Bedi's fate played in her mind' (2008, 261). The intrusion of the realities of Firstspace positions Viveka as a character who comprehends the dangers of homosexual revelation. Moreover the excitement of the awakened queer desire in Viveka is reminiscent of the pleasure and agitation Nayan experiences when Anick socialises with the Trinidadian business elite. The image of the White Western female generates feelings of both excitement and danger:

As the next few days passed, Viveka oscillated between two poles. She decided one minute to still whatever thoughts and feelings Anick Prakash had stirred in her. Such thoughts and feelings were dangerous tricksters out to trip her up and land her, like Merle, out on her own, family-less. And Anick Prakash, being the root of such thought, was even more dangerous. A troublemaker. Brave. Stupid. Disrespectful of Trinidad, its people, its ways. (2008, 261)

Viveka's confusion relegates Anick outside the Trinidadian space (which is seen as pure and having its own traditions) to the position of an outsider wreaking havoc on Trinidadian



society.<sup>151</sup> However, 'there was always the other pole: the desire to see, speak with, touch Anick Prakash was like the pull of a tidal wave against which Viveka decidedly did *not* want any cautioning or power' (2008, 261). The confusion of queer desire, strong emotions and antagonistic feelings towards Anick shows signs of the fusion of First-, Second- and Thirdspace, as they all play a significant part in shaping Viveka's reality. The time apart from Anick allows Viveka to contemplate her situation not only regarding her relationship with Anick but also Helen and her interest in volleyball. Withdrawing from all of the above, Viveka becomes conscious of 'the reality of the larger situation' as she becomes 'appalled at her herself—appalled that she had not been affronted by Anick's disloyalty to her husband, to Viveka's friendship with Nayan, to the Prakashs' closeness to the Krishnus. She didn't know who she felt more loathing for, herself or Anick' (2008, 262). As Anick withdraws from Viveka, leaving her in a state of confusion and uncertainty, Viveka reminds herself of Merle Bedi and the consequences in betraying her family for an outsider—one that does not belong to the Trinidad the same she does. However, Viveka's feelings of betrayal are connected to Anick's beauty and her embodiment of what both Viveka and her mother see as the embodiment of proper femininity.

Mimi Sheller's arguments on the proximity of the consuming and the consumed bodies can be traced in Devika and Viveka's view of Anick's White body. Devika, a traditional upper-class island housewife, and her daughter, a more 'progressive' and 'unladylike' looking student who enjoys playing volleyball with other women, are both in awe of Anick's beauty and her ladylike features. Upon meeting Anick for the first time Devika notices Anick's peculiar pronunciation of English words and her impressive appearance:

Devika watched the model-like features of the young woman, her long neck, minute waist—stomach flat, flat, flat—and the provocatively protruding pelvic bones. Anick's nose was slim and ran straight down, no bumps, or humps—a perfect angle. The skin on her face was flawless. There was not even a blemish from, say, a scratched pimple. Had she never had chicken pox? Her complexion was not fatty or puffy. It was thin, lean skin, her eyes were brown, and although Devika had seen brown eyes on white women countless times, she noticed that Anick's were unusually alert—a well-mannered and unthreatening alertness. [...] She thanked God that Viveka was not home, for next to this beauty Viveka would be rendered even plainer than she already was. (2008, 140)

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<sup>151</sup> Viveka contemplates the notions of proper femininity and sexuality much in the same manner Nayan reflects the role of the husband and a wife in a (normative) marriage.



Devika's ideas of what constitutes proper femininity clearly differ in the image of Anick compared to her own daughter Viveka, who she sees as plain and not exhibiting ladylike traits.<sup>152</sup> Viveka, albeit directly opposed to her mother's view of proper femininity, is also impressed with and attracted to Anick's expression of femininity. As she sees Anick for the first time Viveka cannot help being affected by Anick's beauty: 'Anick was even more beautiful than anyone had said she was. Viveka found she couldn't look her in the eyes' (2008, 198). The exoticisation of Anick becomes for Viveka more than just a matter of appearance—it becomes a matter of culture, class and identity:

Neither Anick nor Nayan was any taller than she, but still she felt short and unrealized, almost childlike, in front of them. She had the near-paralyzing sense that her slippers were insubstantial, that the kurta she wore, and that an hour before had made her feel different, exotic even, had suddenly become baggy on her. Its style, fabric, colours—in a flash, as if midnight in a fairy tale had arrived—had all turned dowdy. She felt that she did indeed look just so, as her mother had said. (2008, 199)

Viveka's disassociation from her mother's notions of proper femininity as well as priding herself in her distinction from those women, is hereby diminished to a mere fantasy, as Viveka herself realises that standing next to Anick 'had put the lie to this illusion' (2008, 199). Her desire for Anick is revealed to be more than just an awakening of a queer desire—her feelings for Anick must be seen in cultural and social terms, as well as in terms of sexuality. Looking at herself in the mirror Viveka sees that her torso 'wasn't flabby at all. It was firm, rather. It was just shapeless. It was a barrel of a torso she had. More like her father's than her mother's. She muttered a dry, "Thanks, Dad"' (2008, 200). In comparison, after her encounter with Anick, during which they spoke French as a secret and incomprehensible-to-the-outside-world queer encounter, where Viveka feels loathing for herself and Anick, we are told that

Viveka noticed that her face seemed to be getting more angular. She stood in front of the mirror and pulled her hair back so that its length disappeared. She was even more certain how that she looked like Anand would have, had he been alive. [...] Should she, she wondered, dress more like a woman and look rather ungainly, ugly even, or dress the way she liked to dress, in her T-shirts, jeans, slippers, her long hair parted to one side and left hanging down, no jewellery save perhaps for a single plain ring? Like this, she was almost invisible. She preferred it that way. It was as if she had slipped into a crack where there was no gender-name for what she was. (2008, 262-263)

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<sup>152</sup> This is one of the reasons for Devika's disdain for Viveka's playing sports, which Devika sees as contributing to Viveka's mannish appearance.



It becomes clear that Viveka views Anick as one possessing and embodying proper femininity, despite her aspirations to disassociate herself from these notions. Moreover, due to Anick's femininity and her esteemed position within the business elite of San Fernando, Viveka is positioned as being outside of proper femininity and does not belong within male or female genders. Viveka becomes genderless and the category of gender namelessness is precisely the queer Thirdspace she attempts to create in order to negotiate her queer sexuality within heteronormative Trinidadian expectations of sexual desire. Viveka's weakness is something which she attempts to rework into a strong point by resuming contact with Helen and taking up volleyball again. More important, we are told:

She would study, too. She was refining her goal of becoming a literary critic, and was currently enjoying the notion of becoming a Naipaul scholar. She would embark on a study of early East Indian communal life in Trinidad, in the countryside, in the town and in the city, and she would theorize on the gulf between the cacao Indian and the sugar Indian. It would be one small step toward understanding Naipaul's work and Naipaul himself. (2008, 263)

Viveka's emphasis on V. S. Naipaul's writing in terms of the communal life in Trinidad, I argue, must be seen in connection to her queerness and gender namelessness. In fact, Viveka's queer desire for Anick can be seen as a response to and a continuation of Naipaul's framing of the Trinidadian sexuality within a heteronormative notions of proper masculinity, femininity and sexuality.<sup>153</sup>

## DIASPORIC MOVEMENTS

In the same manner as Kincaid links travel, tourism and diaspora in *A Small Place*, Mootoo, in *Valmiki's Daughter*, employs the image of chocolate to emphasise the Indian diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago. In the section 'Viveka and Nayan and Anick', where Viveka is invited to dinner at Nayan and Anick's home, Nayan narrates the story of 'how Anick got to Canada, how he and she had met, and how he had gone to France to meet Anick's parents' (2008, 204). Interestingly, chocolate appears to be the instigator of the narrative of the history of Trinidad, allowing Mootoo to establish the diasporic elements of her latest novel: 'Anick returned with a slice of chocolate cake for each of them just as Nayan was saying that he enjoyed telling Anick about the toucans and the leaping howler monkeys that one heard and saw while sitting on the porch of Chayu, the family house on the forest-like cacao state' (2008, 211). The use of the chocolate motif associates Anick with the long

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<sup>153</sup> I will explore this point in more detail in the following sections.



history of French colonisation of Trinidad, as it links her to the position as a (former) coloniser: 'he uttered to Anick the words *agouti, lappe, anthurium, baliser, mapipire, chaconia*. And Anick [...] was mesmerized. She had recognized words related to the forest and to the cacao trade as French, and then he had remembered that cacao was one of the principal products of the French colonizers' (2008, 211). The perpetuation and the simultaneous reversal of the colonial gaze, a theme I developed in the previous section, from Nayan to Anick to Nayan must be seen in the colonial and diasporic history of Trinidad: 'Nayan and Anick had been tickled by the notion of kinship in that early Indian-French history. Chocolate, he told Viveka, details and tales of the cacao estate, the remnants of its Frenchness, and all that a tropical island had to offer, were the method and madness of his courting' (2008, 211). Moreover, the exoticisation of Anick on the part of Nayan (as well as Viveka) introduces (queer) sexuality into the discussion of Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. This serves as a link to the overall theme of my argument—connecting sexuality, nationhood and identity. The diasporic elements in Mootoo's novel are made explicit in Nayan's encounter with Anick's parents who 'had asked him about his family, their origins' (2008, 214). Not wishing to reveal that he is a descendent of indentured field workers, Nayan says that 'his ancestors had immigrated to Trinidad less than a century ago, from northern India'. Upon being asked if they went as 'indentured labourers after the abolishment of slavery [...] to replace the slave work force', Nayan is forced to admit that the estate 'had been in the family for three generations, bought from a French planter in the 1930s' (2008, 214).<sup>154</sup> Mootoo's description of the Indian diaspora in Trinidad is closely tied to the exoticisation of the character Anick, both on the part of Nayan, who views her in terms of culture and social standing, and Viveka, who expresses her queer desire towards Anick in terms ('proper') femininity. By positioning Anick as the link between the two characters, Mootoo skilfully interweaves Indian diaspora into Caribbean space by intersecting the narratives of class, race and sexuality. Moreover, by bringing transnational capitalism into the construction of masculinity and femininity in Caribbean space, Mootoo manages to reflect the postcolonial

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<sup>154</sup> Nayan was aware that his grandfather, Deudnath Prakash, came to Trinidad from India, but he was not aware of the circumstances surrounding his arrival until his father revealed that Deudnath came to work as an indentured labourer. Instead of going to sugar canes he was sent to Rio Claro to work in a cacao estate—Chayu—the very one that Nayan's father owns. When his indentureship contract ended, he became one of the Hindu-speaking managers, eventually buying the estate from its French owner with the earnings from his employment there.



state of Trinidad and its own perception, as a former colony, of the construction and policing of normative heterosexuality.

While sexuality and propriety remain the dominant discourses transmitted from the colonial past to the postcolonial present, the diasporic elements in the novel reveal the perpetuation of French colonial authority over Trinidad. After Ram Prakash suffers a heart attack, it is decided that Nayan and Anick should move to Chayu in Rio Claro as a way of ameliorating the tension that has built up between them. Anick, we are told, ‘welcomed the idea of living in a house that had French origins. [...] She would restore Chayu—not to the way the Prakashes had kept it, but to its origins’ (2008, 273). After giving notice to the caretaker and his wife, Anick ‘hired an architect, who put together a team that included an historian and restoration contractors, and together they came up with a plan to restore Chayu to its colonial origins’ (2008, 276). After several months of house restoration, Nayan and Anick are finally ‘able to move to “Chaillou”’. One of the restorers had found that time and weather had rubbed almost smooth an incised text on the gable of the pavilion-like entrance to the house. A wax rubbing revealed the words “*Le Ciel de Chaillou*” (2008, 278-279). Here, Mootoo connects Trinidad’s colonial past with its postcolonial present, where a French notion of the Paradise-like Trinidad is perpetuated in the present by Anick’s enthusiasm about moving into a French plantation house. Like in *Cereus Blooms At Night*, where I employ tactical diaspora as a means for mapping out the interstices queer re-memories and diasporic spaces (in which the town of Paradise recreates the imperialist notions of the Caribbean as the biblical Garden of Eden), in *Valmiki’s Daughter*, I argue, Mootoo inserts Chayu/Chaillou as a pastoral motif of a recovery of a lost essence. After learning of the real name of the plantation house, Anick ‘told her father of the discovery [...], [to which] he immediately replied, “But of course, Chaillou must refer to David Chaillou, France’s first official chocolatier, appointed to the court of chocoholic Queer Marie Therese”’ (2008, 279). The historical association of Chayu with the French colonial project acts as a mediator between the past and the present, speaking cultural and historical truths, much like Mootoo’s notions of Lantanacamara acts as a national allegory of Trinidad, working as a site for memory, remembrance and remembering.<sup>155</sup> ‘It was a pleasant irony to Anick that she had ended up living in this particular estate, this particular house’, the narrator informs us. ‘The discovery of the name of the house

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<sup>155</sup> As Mootoo invokes the Caribbean’s association with the paradisaical garden in *Cereus*—a tactical move of re-telling the past as a means of crossing the bounds of history and truth—in *Valmiki’s Daughter*, she continues to explore the notion of colonial authority as a metaphor for the imperialist domination of Caribbean space.



was, to her mind, like unearthing an umbilical cord to France. It gave her a humorous sense of “right of presence” (2008, 279). Anick’s privilege as a French woman, married to the owner of one of the largest properties in Rio Claro, is one of the elements that facilitates the perpetuation of the colonial presence in Trinidad and the coloniser’s ‘right of presence’ in the Caribbean. In addition, as she becomes more comfortable living in Chayu, Anick settles into the position of a privileged White woman. This is seen when Viveka, after being invited to Chayu by Nayan, is being given a tour of the house by Anick: ‘The whole area smell of cacao. In the daytime, when is hot, the air is sweet. Everything, everything is cacao. Is like you want to bath in it’, says Anick. ‘Don’t you get tired of it’, asks Viveka. ‘No, of course not. Is not like chocolate. Chocolate you only have a small piece of and is enough. But, of course, that has to be very good chocolate. [...] A small piece of good quality chocolate goes a long way’ (2008, 290), Anick asserts. Mootoo constructs the character of Anick as a natural part of Chayu, positioning her as a link between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Moreover, the presence of Viveka in Chayu attests to the importance of sexuality within the colonial/postcolonial space. This is seen in following episode where Viveka enters Anick’s room and looks out the window ‘onto a sloping darkness’. As they are both looking into the distance, Anick says: ‘Is too dark, but in the daytime when you can see the rows of cacao, is *the most beautiful sight*’ (2008, 292.emphasis in original). Here, Mootoo links Anick’s French past and the vision of the cacao, the plantation, and the Caribbean with divine beauty, revealing the imperial vision of the Caribbean as heavenly place.

Interestingly, Mootoo installs queer sexuality as an important element of Chayu, as Anick turns to Viveka and says: ‘You hear birds, and the monkeys, and other animals, and see colours like in a carnival. The leaves of the cacao plant are like jade. You know jade? And then in between you see little flecks of bright, bright, bright yellow, and this red—’ (2008, 292). Subsequently, we are told that ‘she held a hand out to Viveka and rubbed her forefinger and thumb together as if the red was a substance, “like fire or glass. Come in daytime, I show you”’ (2008, 292). The encounter between the two women foreshadows further queer encounters, and more important, it intertwines the elements of desire, sexuality, colonialism and diaspora into the physical and metaphysical space of Chayu. Interestingly, it is the space of the garden which once again becomes a site of queer desire. After Anick shows Viveka the view from the bedroom, she asks: ‘You want I show you my little garden? Is pitch-black but I think you can still see something’ (2008, 293). Anick considers the garden as a space of her own, a space which defies (hetero)normative control. As she explains: ‘In any case, is nice



outside. Sometimes I like it out there better than to be inside all the time. Nayan, he don't like to go in the forest. Is his, yet he only go to see how cacao growing and he come right back' (2008, 293). The garden and the forest serve as sites of queer desire, which is seen in the following paragraph where we are witness to the emerging desire between Anick and Viveka.<sup>156</sup> Making their way deeper into the forest, Viveka begins to show signs of nervousness:

Anick's hand felt quite strong, and it was warm as she pulled Viveka farther down the path. Then, suddenly, Anick stopped and pulled Viveka closer, gripping her hand tighter yet. Blood pounded in Viveka's hand, and her ears and cheeks turned hot. She could hardly breathe. (2008, 293)

The encounter climaxes with Anick pulling 'Viveka's head toward her, and before Viveka had time to be really sure that Anick had actually kissed the back of her head, Anick released her hand from over Viveka's eyes'. If Chayu symbolises the colonial authority of France over Trinidad, the space around it serves as a symbol of queer desire, shown in the increasing queer encounters between Anick and Viveka. Sneaking off into the forest appears to be the means by which the two women are able to pursue their desire. Importantly, leading up to their 'full' sexual encounter, the two women walk down a path on the plantation, finding on either side of the path 'straight row[s] of carefully spaced cacao trees. [...] The rows of straight lines offered *an attractive perspective* from the path, a dizzying feeling of motion, as the two women swept past' (2008, 317, emphasis mine). In the midst of the cacao plantation the women finally get a glance of it—'*une cabine*'. A shack, which was previously used by the workers on the plantation had been made (by Nayan) into Anick's private space. Apart from representing a queer Thirdspace, Mootoo installs the shack at the site which connects Trinidad's postcolonial present with its colonial past. Intersecting the *queer* and the *postcolonial* allows Mootoo to insert queer sexuality into Caribbean space as well as historicise the queer markings of White and non-White bodies. By offering a view into the colonial past as a way of historicising the present, Mootoo intersects the queer and the postcolonial as a means of sustaining critique of both. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, this is seen in the event following Anick and Viveka's sexual encounter, when the two women 'rolled out of bed and went to the kitchen, drank water, ate squares of chocolate from the stack that Anick had hidden away, pieces of bars sent to her by her parents' (2008, 323). Enjoying post-coital

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<sup>156</sup> Another interesting point is that Anick links Valmiki with the queer space of the forest by adding: 'Your father, he like the forest, no?' (2008, 293).



chocolate, the two women submerge their queer desire deep within the colonial remnant of indentured labour.

In order to address the question of how (self)-critical queer diaspora can create new transnational spaces of belonging, we must focus on the method of queer diaspora itself. In other words, we are required to look at sexuality both as a mobile entity and as a mobile tactic of deterritorialisation. Thus, interrogating the multiple intersections between place and body as well as queer *and* diaspora allows us to intersect queer and postcolonial studies and reconsider queer and diasporic cultural texts within the framework of diaspora and migration studies as well as textual and cultural analysis. The genre of queer diasporic fiction, like Mootoo's novels, allows for a troubling of hegemonic and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality based on the colonial structures. However, as the scene of the queer encounter between Anick and Viveka at Chayu illustrates, challenging heteronormativity must not disregard cultural specificity or the colonial resonance in the postcolonial present, with special emphasis on the diasporic elements that constitute the making of a diasporic community. As the following section will show, the intersection of queerness and the narratives of Caribbean diaspora displaces the Eurocentric deployments of sexuality in postcolonial fiction, attesting to the ability of tactics to intervene in the studies of queerness and diaspora.

## DECOLONISING V. S. NAIPAUL

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes:

Let me observe at once that I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there 'men dressed like women' or 'godmothers'. Generally they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any 'he-man' and they are not impervious to the allures of women – fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. (1968, 128, n.)

Caribbean homosexuality is, according to Fanon, a European export; this is due to the Oedipal complex being culturally and psychologically foreign to the Antilles, so homosexuality does not exist in the region. The only digression from this 'fact' is the presence of cross-dressing men who, despite being attracted to other men, possess 'proper masculinity' and therefore cannot resist (heterosexual) women. Clearly, Fanon reinserts heteronormativity and proper masculinity within Caribbean space, excluding the homosexual as a European and foreign



form of sexuality. Taking my cue from Fanon's argument about homosexuality in the Caribbean I begin this section by arguing that in *Valmiki's Daughter*, Shani Mootoo installs the (queer) character of Viveka as a response to V. S. Naipaul's 1961 novel *A House of Mr Biswas*.<sup>157</sup> This is a novel set in Trinidad which traces the life of its protagonist Mr Mohun Biswas as he tries and fails to find a home by building his own house. Although Naipaul's novel is about the theme of creating a home in a postcolonial state, the overall framework of the novel is reminiscent of Fanon's framing of colonial masculinity in terms of the absence of the Oedipus complex. Thus, Biswas's failure to create a home is also a failure to create and sustain a postcolonial masculinity. As Gopinath argues, Mr Biswas's attempt to construct a house 'is simultaneously an attempt to construct a fortified masculinity that can withstand the emasculating power of women and the general chaos of colonial existence' (2005, 71). Interestingly, Gopinath argues that, in terms of gender, Naipaul's novel

underscores Fanon's assertion that the oedipal drama fails to hold the same explanatory power for racialized male subjectification given the black father's inability to access phallic power: the hapless Mr. Biswas is consistently characterized as embodying a degraded, weak, and soft masculinity that leaves his son without a model of viable masculinity to inherit'. (2005, 71-72)

Fanon's framing of (homo)sexuality within Caribbean space is a decolonising assertion of the homosexual absence. Just as Gopinath argues that Fanon views the Oedipus complex as non-existent in the Caribbean, I argue that Mootoo's intertextual framing of failed heterosexuality in the character of Viveka acts as a response both to Fanon and Naipaul's assertions of masculinity and natural heterosexuality within Caribbean space. Naipaul frames the character of Mr Biswas as emasculated, impotent and fragmented, placed at the mercy of the Tulsis and especially the overpowering control of his mother-in-law, the matriarch Mrs Tulsi. Inasmuch

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<sup>157</sup> The notions of proper sexuality and the absence of queer desire in Naipaul's writing are explicitly mentioned in Mootoo's novel. After her first unsatisfactory performance of heterosexuality with her boyfriend, Viveka meets Elliot once again with disappointing results—this time within the framework of V. S. Naipaul and his writing: 'The next time they were alone together, Elliot leaned against the counter of his student apartment, again strapping her arms against her body. She was nervous and rambled on about one of the Trinidadian authors she'd been reading. He slipped one hand under her shirt' (2008, 104). The fusion of uncomfortable heterosexuality and Naipaul is significant as the intertextuality between Mootoo's and Naipaul's writing serves as a response from one author to another. 'He makes Indians out to be ugly, stupid, concerned only with their narrow knife-edged slice of life. He's criticizing his ancestors, but there are my ancestors too, and by implication he's criticizing me' (2008, 104-105), Viveka tells Elliot. The implications of Naipaul's criticism, according to Viveka, is that the entire Indian-Trinidadian population is positioned as a single group, concerned only with their own minute slice of life. 'And yet, I keep wanting to read on', Viveka continues. 'He gets it right, but so what? Does he have to write it at all? I don't think he really hates us so much as he is gravely disappointed in what we have not become' (2008, 105). Her involuntary indulgence in reading Naipaul intrigues Elliot, who asks: 'And what is that?'. 'I don't know. White? Brighter whiter than the conqueror himself?', Viveka replies (2005, 105).



Mr Biswas finds himself within the contested space of being a colonised male subject and under the authority of an emasculating woman, Naipaul continues Fanon's investigations of the impact of colonialism on failed racialised masculinities.<sup>158</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I argued that in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo contests Fredrick Jameson's argument that all 'third-world' texts are allegorical in nature. By employing the image of the garden as a metaphor and a site of hybridity, where history, geography, botany, politics and personal narratives intertwine, Mootoo challenges Jameson's view of national allegories, in that the tactical space of Mootoo's novel metamorphoses the materiality of place and destabilises the distinction between home and away. By appropriating Paul de Man's 'allegory of reading' in a postcolonial context, Mootoo exhibits a complex intertwining of personal and public histories within Caribbean space. According to the literary critic Vijay Mishra, *A House for Mr Biswas* can be read as a 'diasporic allegory' which, apart from being a rewriting of Jameson's national allegory, are 'texts that situate themselves as mediated aesthetic renditions of the experience of the plantation-Indian diaspora, which experience does not mean that "indenture history" is a static backdrop' (94). For Mishra, Naipaul's text is a 'mixed, sprawling, quasi-epic, "hyphenated" text, so very sad and tragic and yet bursting with immensely comic moments' (94). Worthy of note, however, is Mishra's insistence that Naipaul's text is an epic, an argument based on Amitav Ghosh's contention that the novel displaces and then re-creates 'the Indian' with the space of Hanuman House, insinuating an 'epic relationship but without an epic text'. The importance of Mishra's reading of *A House for Mr Biswas* is that the 'transference/transformation [in Naipaul's text] means that India gets internalized and then projected onto another geographical space without so much as a hint of dissonance' (94). In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, on the other hand, Shani Mootoo uses the garden as a metaphor that connects subjectivities and identities in terms of personal and collective memories, reworking it into an allegory that allows personal narratives to stand for larger political and historical conditions on Lantanacamara. In fact, *Cereus Blooms at Night* works as a quasi-epic, but Mootoo's novel, although imaginary, is ripe with dissonance, for it appropriates the gardening motif without obfuscating the cultural,

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<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, Viveka's criticism of Naipaul's writing occurs at the same time as she fails to perform successfully the heteronormative notions of proper sexuality. In fact, the amalgam of failed heterosexuality and Naipaul is a vital element in Mootoo's writing, as she combines the tropes of masculinity and failed domestic space as a means of queering the Trinidadian space and employing Thirdspace in order to refrain from any quick understandings of the Caribbean.



historical and hybridising conditions of Caribbean space.<sup>159</sup> In *Cereus*, however, Mootoo places dissonance at the heart of her novel, as it complicates the notion of belonging on the part of the subjectivities and identities that adhere to alternative beliefs in citizenship and belonging. According to Ghosh, if an 'absent epic' were ever to be written 'it would be a shabby, bedraggled, melancholy kind of an epic—but still formally, an epic it would have to be' (qtd. in Mishra 94). Mishra, building upon Ghosh's contention, argues that in the diaspora, even an epic undergoes 'a whole series of displacements that result in the construction of new sites of metaphors'. He then continues:

But the shabbiness of the displacement has another kind of epic authority because the textual source of the originary symbols is not the text of Sanskrit high culture (the absent epic text of Ghosh) but 'degraded' epic fragments from the *Rāmacaritamānas* of Tulsidasa, a late-sixteenth-century vernacular rendition of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* in Avadhi—and this, too, as memorially reconstructed by the indentured labourers. Consequently, it is an already contaminated epic, in the Avadhi vernacular, that gets written out in the 'infinitely reproducible space' of Hanuman House in *A House for Mr Biswas* through an act of pseudo-sacralization. (95)

For Mishra, Naipaul's novel represents an already displaced text in that the traditional Sanskrit texts are modified, their 'context and historical specificity lost to another kind of utility' (96). However, I argue that although Naipaul's text can appear both as an uncontaminated (absent epic) and a contaminated (shabby in a positive sense) text, the space of the novel does not allow a deconstruction of colonial and postcolonial masculinity in terms of natural and unnatural heterosexuality. Despite the fact that the space of Naipaul's novel is 'an arena [...] where the history of the old Indian diaspora is played out' (Mishra 96), Naipaul nevertheless frames masculinity and natural heterosexuality within Caribbean space, not allowing queerness to enter as it is not 'inherent' to this space.

Mishra's reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa* brings us to Viveka's father.<sup>160</sup> If Naipaul constructs an absent epic in the form of *A House for Mr Biswas*, Mootoo builds her 'epic' on a character who, besides being the 'patriarch' of the household, is also a person who exhibits and performs queer sexuality. According to Gopinath, 'Naipaul recognizes that within a colonial system of gender, possessing a viable masculinity is intimately tied to the ownership of property in the form of an idealized domestic space' (2005, 73). The domestic space of

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<sup>159</sup> Dissonance is the force that drives Mootoo's novel, for it opposes nostalgia for a dreamlike bygone era where unity can be revived and relived, where the New World, drawing on the Indian origins, would become a new Eden.

<sup>160</sup> Valmiki is the name of author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, an ancient Sanskrit epic.



Mootoo's novel, however, is governed by Valmiki's wife Devika, who not only suspects that her husband is seeing a man but is also confronted with that fact. 'Naipaul also recognizes that both masculinity and housing are invariably denied to the colonized male subject' (2005, 73), continues Gopinath. The access to masculinity and housing for Valmiki, however, is denied not because of his status as a previously colonised male but because of his sexual orientation. In fact, Valmiki's access to domesticity and 'proper' masculinity is prohibited by his status as a colonised male and because of the social and cultural workings of the Trinidadian society. Although the poet Valmiki is revered as a 'first poet' of Sanskrit poetry, writing poetry in San Fernando is viewed as a feminine trait. During the narrator's mock tour-guide description of the city, we are told that:

A tall, thin man, of Indian origin but with pale yellowish skin, circles the box [speaker's corner] [...] He is balding. And he appears to be talking to himself. He is not like the other people who make Harris Promenade their home, but he is often found here... He had been a bright young English literature teacher who wrote what some people called poetry—and, indeed, a foreign magazine had published some lines of his writing, and paid him, too. [...] Other teachers at school ridiculed him, his family teased him, and his students lost respect for him. They joked behind his back that he was a mamsy-pamsy writer of flowery lines. (2008, 17)

The unnamed man's access to masculinity and housing is clearly precluded, not by the fact that he is 'of Indian origin' but because writing poetry is seen as an effeminate occupation, not worthy of being a career. Notion of what constitutes proper sexuality, it seems, is the factor that determines access to masculinity and housing. Valmiki, dreaming of Tony and subsequently his current lover Saul, realises that Saul's comfort is limited: 'He could not offer Valmiki more than the physical—a respite from home, certainly, but always a shortlived respite and always on the sly' (2008, 27). As a well-respected physician and a member of the Trinidadian upper class Valmiki does not crave domesticity and access to housing. Masculinity, on the surface, is also not that which he desires, in that he appears to be a compulsive womaniser. In fact, the root of Valmiki's plight is the sensation of being trapped:

It was that [being considered a healing god by his patients], but not only that, which provoked within him such resistance to being where he was and contributed to his feeling of being trapped. Nor was it merely the altercation with Viveka that morning, nor the one immediately afterwards with his wife. And nor was it the troublesome one the previous night with both Devika and Viveka. After all, not a day seemed to go by without some unpleasantness from one, if not both, of them. No, it was the weight of pretence. The weight of responsibility in general. (2008, 28)

Valmiki realises that acting out colonial and postcolonial masculinity is merely a performance—one that he does not even enjoy, as he bemoans his decision of to leave Tony,



never again experiencing a 'hard body to butt against. No shared knowledge of a particular touch or wanting' (2008, 69). Moreover, Valmiki realises that his decision to make overtures to Devika, which ensured him the treatment of admiration and 'respect of a boy who was to embark on the natural journey of a man', resulted in shaping him in the image of a 'married man, a regular man with the usual ordinary expectations imposed on him. He was to be a father. To have a clockwork life [...] He would turn into a man who was dead in spirit but whose physical body was trapped in everyday Trinidadian limbo' (2008, 69). Marriage, signifying the end of adolescence and a destination for the 'natural' development of a man, is the cause of Valmiki's entrapment. The hero of Mootoo's epic, a well-respected physician, realises that his respectability stems from his social status and his abiding to the mores of respectability. Thus, the character of Valmiki, I argue, serves as a response to Naipaul's hero, Mr Biswas, who is not granted access to masculinity and housing based on the fact that he is a colonised man. Mootoo's hero, on the other hand, does not enjoy access to housing, as he realises that the ownership of property, although ostensibly granting access to respectability, does not ensure access to masculinity—it merely entails the death of the human spirit.

Certainly, the notion of proper masculinity is a matter that has troubled Valmiki from his early childhood, especially in terms of his relationship with his father. When he was twelve, we are told, 'his uncles, his father's brothers, used to unleash their curled thumbs and middle fingers at his ears, flick the tips and make him run squealing' (2008, 31). Valmiki's troubles with his uncles, however, were not ameliorated by his father, who was a 'soft but strict man' (2008, 31). On the contrary, as a way of proving himself to the three boys from school 'who have ridiculed him so much', Valmiki lets the boys inside his father's barn in order to give them 'something of his that they themselves did not have' (2008, 33). After milking one of the cows and giving each of the boys a bottle of freshly squeezed milk to take home, Valmiki feels as he has proven and sustained his masculinity. This, of course, is tied to the hierarchies of class as 'these boys, whose fathers were labourers on the sugar-cane estates or in the nearby sugar factory, and whose mothers were government-paid water carriers for the road works programs, had the ability to easily make him feel inferior, powerless' (2008, 34-35). Consequently, during the barn adventure, Valmiki 'suddenly realized that he had the power to be more benevolent than they, and he decided that he would exercise this power' (2008, 35). Valmiki's sense of empowerment stems from his feeling superior to the boys, and he achieves this by allowing them to participate in an activity which they otherwise would not have been able to take part in due to their social status. However, that night, we are told,



Valmiki's father whipped him 'on his raw backside with a guava switch for not staying in to do his homework, for going into the barn, for taking boys from the village there, for showing off, for getting cow dung on his hands and on his pants, for milking a cow' (2008, 38). Valmiki's punishment, it seems, was a consequence of exactly that which he was encouraged to do—prove his masculinity. Moreover, Valmiki's excessive attempts at acquiring the status of a dominant male is, in a financial sense, seen as a failure: "You BETTER LEARN the VALUE of business FAST, you hear?", says Valmiki's father. More important, it is closely tied to corporeal punishment: "And take THIS! For not being MAN enough to STAND UP to those boys, for LETTING OTHER children lead you into doing wrong" (2008, 38). Valmiki's negotiation of masculinity fails in that his allowing the boys into the barn is seen as a feminine trait whereby Valmiki, instead of *allowing* the boys into the barn, is in reality *coerced* into doing so. "Bayta, don't mind your pappa", says Valmiki's mother. "He have a temper. He love you, child, but he find you too soft" (2008, 39). In his father's view, Valmiki is a feminine boy unable to sustain a masculine stance.<sup>161</sup> Carrying out the difficult task of performing postcolonial masculinity, Valmiki realises, appears to be an impossible undertaking: 'Valmiki was perplexed at the softness his parents saw in him, and from then on he pondered how he might fix that' (2008, 39).

The heroes in Mootoo' and Naipaul's novels appear to share the struggle of acquiring masculinity. Mootoo, however, frames Valmiki around queerness and failed masculinity, responding to the patriarchal and heteronormative framings of colonial masculinity and domesticity in Naipaul's novel. *Valmiki's Daughter* is a novel which complicates the notions of belonging within Caribbean space in that its characters are torn between adhering on the one hand to the values of proper sexuality and cultural belonging, and on the other to their queer affinity and desire. As Mootoo explores the workings of queer sexuality experienced by individual family members she also frames the novel within a long history of Indian-Trinidadian writing, exposing the complexities of postcolonial belonging and the impact of colonial notions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality in contemporary Trinidad. Mootoo, I argue, employs queer tactical diaspora in order to queer a previously unmarked and unquestioned Caribbean heterosexuality, arguing that homosexuality is neither a European export nor an indigenous identity. Sexuality, whether queer or heteronormative, is rendered as

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<sup>161</sup> He is also a boy who is not aware of class structures he has broken by giving free milk to those who were 'accustomed to buying it' (2008, 38).



a marker of affinity, desire and affiliation. Important to note, however, is the impact of class and transnational capital on sexual desire, in that the negotiation of postcolonial identity in terms of sexuality cannot be devoid of these markers. The impact of Indian-Trinidadian writing on Mootoo's novel is seen, as I have previously mentioned, in the intertextuality of Naipaul and Mootoo. Apart from the explicit mention of Naipaul's novel by Viveka, the importance of Naipaul's text comes into view in the character of Valmiki's deceased son, Anand, who was 'a sickly boy from the day he was born until he died at age five' (2008, 39). Anand, of course, is also the name of Mr Biswas's son in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The naming of Mr Biswas's son is worthy of mention: 'Shama gave birth to a son. He was not given the names that had been written on the endpaper of the *Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare*. Seth suggested that the boy should be called Anand, and Mr Biswas, who had prepared no new names, agreed' (1992, 184). As the character of Mr Biswas is 'modeled on Naipaul's own father' (Gopinath 2005, 71) and the character of Anand on Naipaul himself, the inclusion of a character of a son called Anand in *Valmiki's Daughter* is an important element for the exploration of postcolonial masculinity in the postcolonial Caribbean space. Naipaul's Anand is subjected to his father's business, abuse, neuroticism, and the belief and disbelief in religions—elements which he employs in order to alter his own behaviour and understanding of the world.<sup>162</sup> Frantz Fanon argues: 'Because it is a systemized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: "Who am I in reality?"' (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 182). The importance of Anand's naming is accentuated as both fundamental and ironic, in that it displays the contrast between the traditionalism of the Hanuman House and Mr Biswas's Eurocentric avocation. Ultimately, the name given to the child is the Sanskrit word for 'happiness', so terribly unlike its bearer who is weak, doleful and maudlin. Consequently, Anand becomes the one who is affected by his father but who also shares his father's quest for a house, deconstructing both himself and his father as he attains awareness of the world through his father's failures. Likewise, Anand is subjected to the influence of multiple mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles, as he negotiates his way through manifold influences. Valmiki's Anand, on the other hand, dies already at the age of five. The circumstances surrounding his death are unclear—we are told via Viveka's (confused) recollections that he

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<sup>162</sup> Thus, the father becomes Anand's primary influence which, paradoxically, moulds Anand into an overly-affected character.



died around the time the Krishnus held a party, around which she saw Valmiki “on top of” Pia Moretti’. For Valmiki, on the other hand, the death of his son is closely tied to his sense of his own masculinity, as the wish to escape his current life triggers an imaginative response to the sensation of feeling trapped:

Back then, he hadn’t wanted to be where he was right now, that was for sure. If his own son were still alive, he couldn’t help but think— [...] he would have that second got into his car and taken the boy of school, driven with him to the foot of the San Fernando Hill or into the forested lands of the central hills, and taken him hunting, or at least to catch birds there. This, in spite of the fact that he had never actually taken his son anywhere [...]. (2008, 39)

Thus, Mootoo’s epic hero not only fails to perform colonial or postcolonial masculinity— Valmiki performs queer sexuality and mourns the choice of leaving his true (male) lover for the ‘proper’ sexuality to which Frantz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul attest. By ‘killing off’ Valmiki’s male successor, Mootoo inserts, in the character of Viveka, a queer femininity within Caribbean space as she stands to inherit Valmiki’s masculinity. Thus, Viveka and Anand become foils in their attempts to achieve postcolonial masculinity. Anand, being a ‘sickly’ postcolonial male child, never achieves this goal, and his role is passed on to Viveka who recognises the influence of her father on her performance of gender roles. The previously mentioned dissociation on the behalf of Viveka from her mother’s notions of proper femininity situates her closer to her father, in terms of her views on femininity and her physical appearance. The sardonic phrase ‘Thanks, Dad’, as she looks at herself in the mirror, shows Viveka’s awareness of her proximity to her father, despite the fact that she attempts to distance herself from both parents.<sup>163</sup> During the course of *Valmiki’s Daughter* in which Viveka begins to spend more time with Anick, Devika voices her disapproval of her daughter’s increasing interest in ‘a married woman’. Interestingly, her dissatisfaction with the course of events is seen as a direct result of Valmiki’s queerness: “‘It is you who is to blame. You know damn well that you are the one who has brought this on us. [...] You and your daughter are going to ruin us”, Devika carried on. “How dare you do this to me? You should not have returned here after you finished medical school. You knew even then, didn’t you, you knew that you were...” But she couldn’t finish’ (2008, 341). For Devika, Valmiki’s direct heir is his daughter, whom she views has inherited his ‘disease’ and is the cause of the dissolution of at least one marriage. Here, I argue, Mootoo places within a long tradition of

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<sup>163</sup> In the same manner in which Naipaul’s Anand is constructed and deconstructed by his father and vice versa, Viveka constructs and deconstructs Valmiki, attaining awareness of the world through her father’s failures.



Indian-Caribbean writing a queer female character who installs queerness at the heart of Caribbean space. Thus, she reveals the constructedness of 'indigenous' Caribbean sexuality and exposes the patriarchal and neocolonial notions of 'proper' sexuality and gender roles in the decolonising writing of Fanon and Naipaul. The ghost of both writers and their literary creations haunts Mootoo's novel as her (queer) characters are directly influenced by the characters of the Indian-Trinidadian past: 'In Devika's eyes, Viveka had begun to dress exactly like the person she kept hoping her daughter would not turn into. With no discussion, let alone permission, Viveka cut her hair short. Her parents were irked, yet curious in site of themselves. Now Devika, too, saw the ghost of Anand in their daughter' (2008, 340).



### CHAPTER THREE: TIDALECTICS: THE QUEER MOVEMENTS OF DIONNE BRAND

You want to hear my history? Ask the sea.

Derek Walcott, 'The Sea is History'

In this chapter I return to my discussion of deterritorialisation of the Black Atlantic emphasised in the previous chapter. This is based on my arguments that diasporic deterritorialisation presents us with an opportunity to pay close attention to local geographies and investigate the complex relationship between geography and history.<sup>164</sup> The notion of the sea, that fluid mass that encloses and renders all geographical locations as islands, enables us to focus on a new, dynamic model of geography. I argue that the project of *rooting* and *routing* place allows for a more nuanced and intricate investigation of the relationship between land and sea.<sup>165</sup> Glissant's view that landscape is history, in terms of a geographical emphasis from the Caribbean rather than European perspectives, is also appropriately applied to the sea. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's theory of *tidalectics*, I argue, is particularly important for the articulation of Caribbean geography and history as well as island history and syncretism within Caribbean space. According to Elizabeth M. Deloughrey, tidalectics is a 'methodological tool that foregrounds how a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production, proving the framework for exploring the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots' (2007, 2). By extending Glissant's 'stubborn insistence on *remaining where you are*' as a first reaction against the Western philosophy's generalising universality, Brathwaite develops a renewed theorisation of geography which takes on an 'alternative' historiography to linear model of colonial progress. This theorisation serves as a development of Glissant's articulations of movement described as an interplay between the beach and the ocean as a circular and repetitive movement of ebb and flow. This circular repetitive trajectory works as a powerful trope for reconfiguring the geographical borders and Western notions of home, nation and belonging. 'Rejecting the notion of the [Hegelian] dialectic' (Naylor 1999, 145), Brathwaite invokes the continual movement of the sea as a cyclical model for disintegrating

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<sup>164</sup> So far I have looked at texts that destabilise and alter Caribbean geography in terms of landscape. In this chapter I turn to the sea, in that I argue that queer tactical diaspora can/must also be applied to the interplay between the land and the sea.

<sup>165</sup> In the same manner as Brodber's fiction repositions the postmodern notions of identity and place, a rooted/routed exploration of movement displays the ability to redo and rework national frameworks by destabilising the constricting local and the all-encompassing global.



the relationship between the dialectic of inside/outside and land/sea. Therefore, moving beyond the restricting national and regional frameworks, tidalectics allows us to foreground the shared histories of Caribbean geography in a way that encompasses the interrelations between island/continent and island/island. By investigating the imaginary space of the tropical island, tidalectics points to the neocolonialist paradigm of imaginative readings of colonialist critique, and offers a critical view on the sea/land relationship that marks the colonial vision of island isolation and indigeneity. Like the work of Mootoo, Kincaid, Glissant and Harris, Brathwaite's theory of the sea offers an insight to the heterogeneity of community by accenting the cross-cultural capacity of syncretism and aquatic metaphors. Common to these theories is the idea of movement based on ebb and flow, suggestive of Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago. Brathwaite's tidalectics, however, expands this idea to encompass the autonomy of the historical and geographical elements between islands. What connects the syncretic elements of the Caribbean islands is the idea of the submarine roots. Glissant writes: 'Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches' (1989, 67). Glissant's underwater connectivity, which is an expansion of Brathwaite's notions that 'unity is submarine' (1989, 67), takes the colonial discursive construction of the tropical island space as a starting point and adds the notion of the nautical routes of the oceanic imaginary. Tidalectics re-routes/re-roots the Black Atlantic and opens the isolating imaginary of the island towards alternatives to confining myths of island genealogy. The fluidity and the perpetual movement of the sea, analogous to Brodber's reworking of Harris's poetics of difference, decentres the imperialist and neocolonial homogeneity, and accents the syncretism/tidalectics as a cross-cultural power for exposing otherness and difference within the heterogonous community. Deloughrey writes:

Focusing on seascape rather than landscape as the fluid space of historical production allows us to complicate the nation-state, which encodes a rigid hierarchy of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity for its representative subjects. Because the surface of the ocean is unmarked by its human history and thus cannot be monumentalized in the tradition of colonial landscapes, a turn to the seas as history can produce an equalizing effect. (21)

Shifting the focus to seascape, or island landscapes, allows for a change in the cultural and geographic production of islands—migration within and between the Pacific and the Caribbean islands is a significant trope for the investigation of roots and routes within these geographies. However, sedimentation and border policing, despite being at the centre of the



tidalectic examinations, reveals itself to be a significant element in the process of migration and settlement as constitutive of the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity, sea and land. Therefore, tidalectics cannot (and must not) be seen as a valorisation of fluidity and movement as a space beyond territorialisation.<sup>166</sup> Employing the notion of tidalectics creates a fluid space for the interrogation of routes and roots, with special emphasis on gender and sexuality. This space, although related closely to Western philosophy, is here reworked via a conflation of Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago and Glissant's notion of submarine roots into a cross-cultural amalgam of a submarine rhizome.

### **TIDALECTICS: *IN ANOTHER PLACE, NOT HERE***

In Chapter Two I analysed Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Valmiki's Daughter* as novels that trace themes of cultural, sexual and national belonging both within the space of Caribbean and transnationalism. In this chapter, I carry on the contention that the notion of queer tactical diaspora (as a conceptual space for investigating the interstices between body and place) levels a powerful critique at the discourses of tradition and purity within the national and diasporic ideologies. But where Chapter Two placed emphasis on creolisation and Édouard Glissant's notions of 'language of landscape', I begin this chapter by shifting the focus from land to sea by examining the idea of tidalectics, or what I call 'language of seascape', as a means for knowing and 'mapping' the world differently. While challenging Westernised ideas of postcoloniality requires an expansion of Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity, subverting and displacing postcolonial and neocolonial deployments of normative gendering and sexuality allows for alternative modes of affiliation and desires to emerge. Tidalectics, although a transoceanic tool, should not be seen as counterpart to the theories of space in Lefebvre, Glissant and Kincaid. In fact, the terrestrial and the aqueous spaces are closely related through what Brathwaite terms 'nation language'—a uniting (patois) language born out of the experience of slavery, plantation and oppression in the Caribbean. Nation language is 'an English which is not the standard, imported educated English, but that of the *submerged* surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the

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<sup>166</sup> Specifically, the postmodern favouring of diasporic routes runs the risk of neglecting the historical roots in the midst of fluid transoceanic movement. A special emphasis placed on gender and sexuality, as I argue in Chapter One, counteracts the traditionally masculine agency of world travel, drawing attention to the gendered conflation of women with land and, as a consequence, land with national belonging.



perception of contemporary Caribbean people' (1984, 13, my emphasis). Employing nation language as a marker of cross-cultural fluidity enables the Caribbean writer to speak another language and to resist, by creating a subversive response to the linguistic and cultural system that imposed enslavement and oppression, the suppression of African history by the English language. Therefore, I focus my subversion and destabilisation by looking closely at Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), as a text that employs diaspora and queerness as a means for rethinking the problematic of home and belonging in terms of displacement and sexuality. Utilising the theorisations of space made by Glissant, Harris and Kincaid, I argue that Brand's text voices the oppression, racism and neocolonialism of female and queer African/Caribbean bodies in Canada. Moreover, by employing the notions of tidalectics and nation language, I argue that Brand re-routes/roots the history of Caribbean women. Submarine roots and 'mother tongue' allow Brand to use sexuality as both destabilising *and* connecting trope of resistance and affiliation. (Queer) sexuality emerges as an expression of change, destabilisation and desire that alters territory, combats oppression and destabilises nation-states.<sup>167</sup>

What is the space of *In Another Place, Not Here*? What is the 'another place'? And where is 'here'? Brand's representations of space are reflected in the non-linear narrative of the novel, as the first part of the section 'Elizete, beckoned' introduces the unnamed Caribbean island strongly resembling Grenada and to the [hi]story of Elizete who as a child is abandoned by her unnamed mother in the yard of a prosperous but iron-fisted mistress who feeds and clothes the child. When the mistress dies, Elizete is given in marriage to Isaiah, a stern farmer who whips her when she strays away from the farm. Taking refuge from the bleakness of the situation Elizete daydreams of a flight away from the farm; that is, until Verlia enters the island and transforms Elizete's life. Throughout 'Elizete, beckoned', we are introduced to four hundred years' history of the Caribbean, with the first slaves being brought over from Africa. In the midst of Elizete and other characters' longing for home, for escape and for the sense of belonging, the narrative progresses in a repetitive motion of back and forth, from side to side, echoing the repetitive motion of the waves of the sea. Both the

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<sup>167</sup> Sexuality is particularly important for the discussion of the notions of home. Who belongs in *In Another Place, Not Here*? And who does not? Exploring the questions of belonging and the creation of places/spaces, Brand's text poses the question: where and what is home? Rooms, streets and places are abundant in the novel, but the issues of national belonging and identity are left in the open. Creating space for the Caribbean queer stands before numerous challenges but by writing, imagining and envisioning, Brand presents a text that exhibits the possibility of altering space altogether.



narrative and the characters' imaginations are immersed in the fullness of the sea and the realness of the Middle Passage:

All the way here, Adela, registering the stench of the ship, must have memorize the road to find she way out and the road was not only solid ground but water too [...] So long she had time to balance the oceans and measure how much mouthful she would have to swallow to get back... For Adela was remembering that and long before that, back to the ship. (1996, 21)

A narrator for much of the novel, Elizete tells in snippets the story of Adela who was taken against her will and transported to the Caribbean. Even though she knows Adela through stories passed down through her family, Elizete feels a strong spiritual connection with her. Adela's sense of connection with Africa 'the place she miss must have been full and living' (1996, 20) is here contrasted to the estrangement and loss within Caribbean space. The sense of place, closely connected to the fluidity of the sea, becomes mediated and subsequently unlocatable, taking on different and contradicting forms.<sup>168</sup> For Adela, the barren and unyielding space of the Caribbean is segregated from the 'place she miss'. Elizete remarks: 'I think deep about how a place name Nowhere could make sense and I discover that Adela had to make her mind empty to conceive it' (1996, 20). Amidst the placelessness of the island and the personal dissolution we find the Atlantic as the force that beckons, both physically and spiritually. Recalling the trauma of the Middle Passage, the ocean emerges as a site of an imagined community, while on the other side of this aquatic space lies Africa, a place both imaginable and unimaginable, and a frequent occurrence in the tales passed down by old women. Adela's refusal to recognise the geographical space of the island also results in her forgetting 'she tongue'. Having no other way of remembering her, Elizete recalls Adele's name as the only means of keeping her memory. In fact, Adele's loss of name occurred much earlier with her forced displacement from Africa: 'She could not hold on to the turquoise sea what bring she here. Everything pour out of she eyes in a dry, dry river. Everything turn to lime and sharp bones, and she didn't catch sheself until it was she true name slipping away' (1996, 22). Since her violent displacement Adela has been lost, but Elizete takes on the task of reconnecting the severed links between her and the earth, making Nowhere into a Somewhere, into a Here. Elizete's narrative of Adela's disintegration is described in her shutting off from the space/place of Here. For Adela, Caribbean geography does not exist,

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<sup>168</sup> Adela's estrangement from the space of the Caribbean is all encompassing, resulting in personal dissolution and mental and (ostensibly) physical loss of sight and connection.



since she exists in a state of isolation. Much like the imaginary space of the tropical island isolated from the outside world, Adela's remoteness results in her body shutting down: 'Her heart just shut. It shut for rain, it shut for light, it shut for water and it shut for the rest of what follow. Adela feel something harder than stone and more evil than sense. Here.' (1996, 22). In order to overcome the sensation of placelessness, Brand bestows upon Elizete an element of connection with the earth, nurturing the relationship between Elizete and the island within the image of birth and mothering. The relationship between Elizete and the island stands in contrast to Adela's isolation, and in a tidalectic manner of investigating the imaginary space of the tropical island, it offers a critical view of the relationship between history and land, as well as land and sea. Foregrounding the shared histories of Caribbean geography in a way that it encompasses the interrelations between island/continent and island/island, Brand employs the notions of the landscape only to foreground the oceanic elements of its constitution. Adela's sensation of something harder than stone points not only to her dissolution and loss but also to the eventual reworking of the stone/hardness trope by introducing the idea of fluidity, non-fixedness and tidalectics into the cross-cultural accounts of home, belonging and affiliation.

Earlier, I argued that Jamaica Kincaid's exploration of the Caribbean landscape and garden added to Glissant's work on the specificity of the local and global transnationalism. I also argued that Kincaid's space, especially her garden, is situated between the perceived and the conceptualised, between the real and the imagined, serving as a tool for exposing the effects of colonial transplantation and the failure of the imagination to envisage the garden outside the Enlightenment ideals of mapping knowledge. In a similar manner, the character of Elizete exhibits qualities that resemble those of Kincaid, in that her explorations of connection do not rely on conceptualised notions of belonging.

Rather, Elizete discovers that exploring the spaces in-between allows her to create a new set of complex (lived) spaces. In this way, she is able to create Somewhere out of Nowhere. Elizete's discovery of the necessity of creating new spaces did not come willingly. Contemplating running away from the hardship of the sugar cane field and an abusive master, Elizete dreams of Maracaibo, imagining it to be 'a place with thick and dense vine and alive like veins under my feet. I dream the vine, green and plump, blood running through it and me too running running, spilling blood [...] Is like nowhere else' (1996, 12). After learning about Adela's affliction and the consequences of running away Elizete changes her mind, concentrating instead on spaces within spaces. Communicating with Adela spiritually Elizete



realises: 'Where you see nowhere I must see everything. Where you leave all that emptiness I must fill it up. Now I calculating' (1996, 24). Elizete's calculations begin with giving names to the natural world around her. Trees, plants and stones, the surroundings that left Adela lost and disillusioned, are given names, importance, meaning and most important, a sense of belonging: 'If I say these names for Adela it might bring back she memory of herself and she true name. And perhaps I also would not feel lonely for something I don't remember' (1996, 24).<sup>169</sup> Adela's blindness, due to the constructedness of the empty space around her, serves as an answer to Adela's personal dissolution regarding the meaning and emptiness of place: 'Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full of fullness, everything yielding, the milk of yams, dasheen bursting blue flesh. Sometimes the green overwhelm me too Adela, it rise wet and infinite on both sides of me as a vault of bamboo and immortelle and teak' (1996, 24). The realness of Elizete's lived space, however, can be seen in her feelings of agitation and discordance with the place she inhabits: 'Though often and still I know the feeling what Adela feel when she reach, the purposelessness of recalling come big in my throat, for the place beautiful but at the same time you think how a place like this make so much unhappiness' (1996, 25). Adding the real dimension of the island serves as a means for overcoming the binary of viewing space as either perceived or conceptualised. Like Kincaid, Brand exhibits the possibility of creating a new set of concrete, material and uncontrollable actions that rework and re-theorise postmodern notions of belonging, identity and place. Moreover, Elizete's naming (giving meaning to her surroundings) serves as a deconstruction of essentialist and anti-essentialist ideals of geography and space; she remains conflicted about 'here' but realises the ability to form a connection with place allows her to travel beyond here and to another place 'there'.

The representations of space and the notions of home and belonging to create a connection with the land are seen in Elizete's affiliation with the samaan tree. Indigenous to India and brought to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century by the British as part of the colonial project, the samaan tree is a 'wide and high' tree in front of house of the 'woman I [Elizete] was given to'. Resembling a woman with her hands in the air the tree becomes a symbol of the nurturing relationship between Elizete and the land. Born under the tree Elizete sees it as her mother: 'A samaan is a tree with majesty and I think of this samaan as my

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<sup>169</sup> I view Elizete's creation of a space in-between space, a lived Thirdspace, as a reply to Kincaid's question 'what to do?' about the failed attempts to capture and understand the space of the Caribbean.



mother. Until the woman I was given to come home the field the samaan was my mother' (1996, 17). The reclamation and naturalisation of the samaan tree, as well as the imagery of protection connected to it, creates a space for a rebirth and a reconnection between her and the land. Overcoming Adela's affliction of loss and the lack of attachment Elizete achieves, by the means of creating alternative spaces, a familial relation with her surroundings.<sup>170</sup> Brand's use of space-within-space results, as seen in Kincaid's fiction, in the creation of a new set of complex spaces that act as a springboard for future actions.

## THE OCEAN

The Atlantic, yawning blue out of my window on the Playas de Este and beyond the bridge, pulls my eyes away from the oral histories and into its own memory. I am a little girl growing beside the same ocean on the other island some years before.

Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* (20-21)

The repetitive and ocean-like motion of the novel introduces us not only to the realness and the trauma of the Middle Passage but also to the sea as a catalyst for the psychological and physical escape from loss, dissolution and pain experienced by female characters in the novel. Apart from connecting Elizete with Adela, the sea also joins the two women via the land and, as we will see later, the richness and fullness of the sea also parallel the character of Verlia. Who beckons Elizete in the beginning of the novel? More precisely, what beckons her? Brand's interrelational and intersubjective island community gestures towards the ebb and flow of peoples, employing submarine roots for an alternative navigation to and between not only surrounding islands but also between the West Indies and North America. As Erna Brodber works within the Caribbean to recover the Black experience and its connection across the African diaspora, Brand employs the sea, as well as tidalectics, to resituate the sense of identity and belonging in terms of territory as well as gender and sexuality. Apart from setting in motion the idea of rootedness and connection with the land, Elizete looks beyond the restricted territory of the island and towards the depths of the sea in her attempts to find a home. Embarking upon great voyages, Elizete becomes a counterpart and necessity to other characters who are more closely identified with the sea, and more important, to the idea of fluidity and expansiveness. In the same manner as Brodber theorises

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<sup>170</sup> By already knowing the name of the samaan tree (we do not know how she learned of its name) Elizete herself becomes a character with the ability to name, to connect and to relate—in essence, to be born into 'this place'.



roots/routes by employing contrasting spaces, Brand utilises the notions of land and sea to rework and expand the constricting spaces of the Caribbean and North America. In order to unsettle and disengage Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity, Brand uses liquid imagery to subvert and displace postcolonial and neocolonial deployments of normative gendering and sexuality.<sup>171</sup>

The character of Verlia serves as the embodiment of Brand's articulation of liquid imagery. In the beginning of the novel when Elizete first lays her eyes on her, Verlia is not only engulfed in watery images—she becomes water: 'From the word she speak to me and the sweat running down she in that sun [...] I look up. That woman like a drink of cool water [...] I see she. Hot cool and wet [...] See she sweat, sweat like sugar [...] I see Verl coming, like a shower of rain coming that could just wash me cool' (1996, 3-4). It is significant, however, that Elizete's desire washes over Verlia partly because of the sexual attraction Elizete feels towards her and partly because of Elizete's view of Verlia as a metaphor of escape and freedom from the backbreaking work of cutting and harvesting sugarcane. Elizete's initial sighting of Verlia, which always occurs at earth-level—she consistently remarks 'I look up'—is immersed in the queerness of lesbian desire and the revolutionary socialist imperatives.<sup>172</sup> There is urgency in Elizete's words: 'one afternoon as I look up saying to myself, how many more days these poor feet of mine can take this field' (1996, 3). The fact that Verlia is like a 'drink of cool water' elevates her from the level of the sugarcane field and, more important, connects her to the opening word of the novel: grace. In Verlia, Elizete sees grace as it beckons her from across the field. However, the romantic imagery of Verlia as Elizete's saviour 'elevating' her from off the ground level is immediately undermined by the realness of the field: 'I sink the machete in my foot, careless, blood blooming in the stalks of cane, a sweet ripe smell wash me faint. With pain' (1996, 3-4). The materiality of the body and the field marks the relationship between Elizete and Verlia with danger and adversity. Moreover, the anxious interaction between the two women brings into focus the patriarchal imagery of female body as it problematises the relationship between the woman and the land. In the same way that Mootoo reworks the gardening motifs of the Caribbean by reinscribing and reworking the New World pastoral narratives of Jacques Roumain, Brand pairs the earth imagery (Elizete) with the water imagery (Verlia) in order to employ and shift the focus from

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<sup>171</sup> The use of liquid imagery must not be seen as simply a postmodern notion of fluid identity. Rather, it works as a tactical means of queering diasporic narratives.

<sup>172</sup> Here, I use the term lesbian simply as a marker of female-to-female sexual attraction.



female bodies onto the historical and cultural workings of the Caribbean. If the depiction of women in Roumain's texts is laden with the idyllic imagery of Edenic virginity, the interaction between Elizete and Verlia in Brand's novel is immersed in the images of queer desire which conjure associations with exploitation, memory, freedom and revolution.

Brand's language of seascape and her focus on the unnamed island in the Caribbean attest not only to the importance of the rhythmic movements of the sea but also to the creation of a queer space of belonging. As I noted earlier, the creation of space is expressed in the taking possession of the land, by naming and claiming one's place in it. In the same way that Elizete claims land in the Caribbean, Verlia, with her involvement in the Black Power Movement, lays claims to the world of Toronto/Canada. Described as a city divided into two parts—the White and the Other—Toronto is a space where ownership cannot easily be asserted. Interestingly, the two worlds in the city of Toronto are constructed in the image of an island and a shore. While the White world is 'so opaque that she [Verlia] ignores it as much as she can', the other world, which is 'growing steadily at its borders' is the one 'she knows and lives in' (1996, 180).<sup>173</sup> In a remarkable reversal of geography, however, Toronto becomes a fluid territory that defies ownership and knowability: 'If you live here you can never say that you know the other world, the white world, with certainty. It is always changing on you though it stays the same, immovable' (1996, 180). The city's refusal to be named is also seen in Elizete's failed attempts to make connection with the land. Walking down Toronto's streets Elizete feels lost and alienated: 'She did not know the city, would never know it because she wasn't looking at it. Who could see?' (1996, 49). Elizete's blindness is reminiscent of Adela's distanced and unseeing relation with the Caribbean island as Elizete's loss of connection with the city stems from its unreal nature. For Elizete the city is simply not there. It is not 'here'—it becomes Nowhere:

After months she still saw no birds to speak of or the same birds, no river to speak of, no mountains to speak of, no grass to speak of, no moon to speak of. Especially no moon. And no ocean or sea. No sounds that was the usual sound, no chorus of beetles, crickets, frogs beginning with night, ending with morning, and since this was how she knew signs of things, she was lost. (1996, 68)

As Elizete desperately tries to get to the sea, which she sees as a marker of familiarity and attachment, Verlia sees the city's inhabitants as submerged so deeply that she 'cannot imagine

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<sup>173</sup> One could argue that Brand constructs the secretive White world, with conversations 'not understandable', as an island surrounded by the oceanic force of Verlia's world pounding at its shores, abrading its landscape.



[...] that any one of them could surface long enough to notice another human being' (1996, 181). The use of liquid imagery in the descriptions of both the island and Toronto exhibits Brand's complex theorisations of belonging in/and space, as places themselves appear to be both existent and non-existent.<sup>174</sup> As Brand expands the representations of space and those of gender and sexuality beyond the geographical borders of Euro-Americanism, she makes clear that the use of language, especially the language of tidalectics and seascape, can remake and redo space. As Elizete's sense of belonging within the space of Caribbean is made possible with her insistence upon naming and laying claim to the land, Verlia's sense of belonging is situated in the revolutionary anti-White world tactics of the Movement. The oscillation between the two strategies, as well as between land and sea, roots and routes, and past and present, illustrates Brand's watery engagement with the cartographic mapping of belonging across spaces and oceans. The contrasting spaces of both the island and the city of Toronto function as tools for deconstructing the hegemonic devices of homogeneity as the interplay between the beach and the ocean as a circular and repetitive movement of ebb and flow erodes the psychological borders between the two places. Moreover, the fluid and unknowable world of Toronto creates a parallel to Brathwaite's continual movement of the sea as a cyclical model for disintegrating the relationship between the dialectic of inside/outside and land/sea. Brathwaite's insistence that nation language resists the linguistic and cultural system of hegemony is reflected in Brand's use of language to create maps, identifications and place. Elizete's desire to weave family stories, to name, reminds us of the importance of naming and the transformative power of language to create a coherent narrative of roots and belonging in a place. Mapmaking by the means of tidalectics allows Brand to construct a new space in which gender and sexuality, apart from exhibiting the ability to alter geography, create a new language for understanding sexual desire.<sup>175</sup>

In Chapter One, I emphasised Gopinath's argument about the importance and the necessity for examining queer female desire rendered impossible within the diasporic and state nationalisms which dictate the disciplining female sexuality and legislate heterosexuality. Pinpointing queer bodes and desires that fall into this 'impossible' category,

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<sup>174</sup> Here, I would like to argue, we see Brand's own theorisations of Harris's contrasting spaces, where probing the function of roots results in both familiarity and disidentification with place. Thus, Brand's novel serves as a response to Harris's call for a re-naturalisation of social relations and a reallocation of the imagination of the Caribbean novel.

<sup>175</sup> The transformative modes of erotic connection between Elizete and Verlia align sexual expression with wider forms of human relations such as freedom, violence, exploitation and discrimination.



Gopinath contends that the production of alternative affiliations exhibits the possibility of reworking and redoing the nationalist (heterosexual) frameworks. In Brand's novel, the rendering of the desires, practices and affinities between the female characters presents an alternative landscape/seascape, caught between the impossible geographies of the West Indies and North America. Brand's depictions of geography are similar to those of Mootoo and Kincaid in that the geography of *In Another Place, Not Here* mirrors 'reality', pushing back against what is 'real' and what is not real and creating a space where history and connection point in several directions. While Mootoo employs the image of the garden to draw on past memories, Brand uses the image of the sea to connect with history and recapture the past. 'Grounded' in the movement of the sea, a movement that transforms marginal spaces into creolised spaces of differences and connection, Brand's novel incorporates Brathwaite's notions of nation language and tidalectics as well as queer sexuality and affiliation to resituate the sense of identity of its characters, deconstructing and creating spaces within spaces as well as acting as a resistant force against the dominant hegemony, racism, patriarchy and imposing heterosexuality. Viewing space as both real and unreal, literal and imaginative, Brand uses language to (re)create a map and exhibit the importance of language for the process of mapmaking, obscuring identity boundaries and expanding the criteria for belonging. More important, however, Brand's use of language points to the limits of language itself, examining the potential of language to both reproduce history's violence and to open up its potential for transformation. The intangibility of the liquid imagery not only transgresses the heterosexual, patriarchal and hegemonic discourse of identity and belonging—it also points to the limits of portrayal and the crisis of representation. Therefore, investigating Brand's use of language, her representations of movement, diaspora and identity as well as her mapping of space, are vital for understanding *In Another Place, Not Here*.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), a theoretical and semi-autobiographical meditation on memory, travel, belonging and identity, Brand describes the door(ways) through which people were taken onto slave ships: 'Imagining our ancestors stepping through these portals one senses people stepping out into nothing; one senses a surreal space, an inexplicable space. One imagines people so stunned by their circumstances, so heartbroken as to refuse reality. Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable space' (20). Serving as a metaphor for the slave ships on their way from West Africa, the door of no return is a horrific place of forgotten origin imbued with slavery, violence and capitalism. Later in the text, however, Brand elaborates: 'The door, of course, is not on the continent but in the



mind; not a physical place—though it is—but a space in the imagination’ (2001, 96-97). Both a physical and a psychic place, the door becomes a paradox: how does one remember what one has been taught to forget? Signifying roots/routes of the Middle Passage the door itself becomes, in its realness and unrealness, an absence. In order to write, name and map this absence, Brand employs the image of the ocean and the sea as a means for exploring the submarine roots/routes of the Middle Passage. The emphasis on absence and the spatiality of the door/submarine roots points to the possibility of reworking and transforming the limiting space of forgetting into an enabling space of remembrance. Employing maps through water is Brand’s way of enabling the creative inheritance of the door to open the unyielding materiality of history and unhinge the creative possibility of the door. Identifying Jamaica Kincaid’s writing as ‘unfixing the fixed’ (*Bread Out of Stone* 45), Brand uses the image of water and fluidity to unfix the constricting materiality of the door and to liquefy the colonising epistemology of the language used to describe the Black experience and the African consciousness. ‘We have no ancestry except the black water and the Door of No Return. They signify space and not land’ (2001, 61), writes Brand. Tracing ancestral genealogy as it exists in the imagination, Brand investigates the ability of maps and mapping to creatively subdue the sense of loss and to provoke a sense of self-creation and make explicit of a particular connection to place and history. While the condition of the African Diaspora appears irreparable, Brand suggests that ‘to live in the Black Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction, a creation of empires, and also self-creation. It is to be a being living inside and outside herself’ (2001, 18).

The notion of unfixing the fixed and living between inside and outside requires us to delve into Brand’s depictions of space, if we are to decipher the complex and ambiguous workings of *In Another Place, Not Here*. The concept of creativity and self-creation, as we have seen earlier, lies in the use of language and naming in order to surpass the condition of loss and detachment. Constructing countersites within the spaces of the real and unreal becomes Brand’s artistic attempt at capturing the horrors of the past. ‘This dreary door which I’ve been thinking about’, Brand writes, ‘though its effects are unremitting, does not claim the human being unremittingly. All that emanates from it is not dread but also creativity’ (*Map* 42).<sup>176</sup> In the manner akin to Mootoo, Brand situates her characters between the perceived and

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<sup>176</sup> Elizete’s naming as a creation of a space in-between space, as well as Verlia’s laying claim of the space of Toronto, involve a creation of a ‘space-within-space’, similar to that of Mootoo in which representation is



conceived spaces of representation and installs counterspaces as a means of dealing with the traumas of the past and documenting the history of loss, detachment, racism and violence in the present lives of the descendants of the people who passed through the door of no return. Brand's creative work is a map of Adele, Elizete and Verlia's life, their desires and affinities as well as their sense of detachment and loss. Creating maps, however, involves a creative engagement with the surroundings, both terrestrial and aqueous. But how does one map the sea? Water, according to Brand, is 'feared and loved'. It signifies 'beginnings that can be noted through a name or a set of family stories that extend farther into the past than five hundred or so years' (*Map 5*). The ambivalence of the beginnings, however, mark a territory in this watery path where the contested space of the sea gives rise to an investigation of a 'creation space—The Door of No Return, a place emptied of beginnings—as a site of belonging or unbelonging' (*Map 6*). Both in history and the imagination the aqueous and fluid characteristics of the sea mark out an equivocal terrain for the bridging of the past and the present: it marks the hope for a home and a desire for belonging as well as a refusal of a singular origin. In addition, the sea marks out the necessity of re-memory and the rediscovery of the Middle Passage. With this in mind, we can examine Brand's appropriation of the practice of mapping as a means for laying claims to space, history and memory.

Even though both *A Map to the Door of No Return* and *In Another Place* engage with the complexities of seascape to explore the submarine roots/routes of the Middle Passage, Brand's 1999 novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* employs to a much greater extent the image of the ocean as a space for the rediscovery of the Middle Passage. Gopinath's call for the necessity and the importance of examining queer female desire rendered impossible within diasporic and state nationalisms appears to be answered in *At the Full*, as the reclaiming of home, kinship and collective identity emerges as a site of queered affinities and ancestral lines. The diagram that maps Marie Ursule's familial lines before the novel even begins, exhibits Brand's use of spatiality and sexuality where the patriarchal paradigms of imperial cartography are resigned to the sidelines. Kamena's character is pushed to the periphery as the ancestral tree diagram traces the matriarchal ancestry where sexual activity allows for the creation of transgressive and homely spaces. Orchestrating a mass suicide of slaves on a plantation, Marie Ursule sends her daughter Bola with Bola's father Kamena to a

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reworked from the sites of the 'real' and the 'unreal'. This is one of the instances where tacticality comes into full view.



secret free place on the island as she prepares for the rebellious act of resistance by releasing her body from the space of colonisation. As she is about to die as punishment for her insubordination, Marie Ursule exclaims: 'This is but a drink of water to what I have already suffered' (1999, 24).<sup>177</sup> Because the roots of Bola's family tree extend in various directions across the world (to Africa as well as Asia and Europe), Brand's Atlantic creates dispersions and connections across queer female affiliations that are both literal and figurative. Brand bestows in the character of Bola a figure of the sea as the force that, much like the oceanic force of Verlia's world pounding at the shores of the White world of Toronto, abrades the landscape of colonialism. Once again, in a remarkable reversal of geography, Bola and the sea, like Verlia and water, become virtually interchangeable entities. Not only is Bola characterised before the novel begins as the one 'whose eyes wept an ocean and who loved whales', but after Bola saw the sea, 'walking into a house was like walking into a wall, a barrier to the open, because this is what Marie Ursule had seen in the child's eyes, the sea, and a journey to be made that melts the body. She had seen the child in the sea' (1999, 44). Bola's father, on the other hand, who is present in the ancestral diagram but is not incorporated into the lineage, does not form a bond with the water. In fact, in his search for Terre Bouillante (his failed cartographical attempts to find his way back to the Maroon colony led him on an impossible mission), Kamena 'had turned into a skeleton searching for his Maroonage' (1999, 60). For Kamena who, we are told in the diagram, is 'marooned to his last direction', the sea is heavy like the tears. Fleeing it, Kamena heads inwards into the landscape, away from the present and into the traumatic past of the Middle Passage. Kamena's attempts to follow the traces of trauma are useless: 'The last day she [Bola] recalled of him, he was burnt up with walking and dried away with crying, starved with remembering' (1999, 60). Unaware of the present and with his eyes turned towards the past, Kamena's detachment from the sea signals his disidentification, disillusionment and ultimate death. For Kamena, the Maroon settlement becomes a site of oppression, but for Bola, who arrives at the convent where nuns enslaved her mother, the settlement becomes a site of resistance. Although the nuns died long ago, Bola still feels their presence in the dusty ruins of the convent. However, as the time passes, Bola's connection with the sea slowly erases the

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<sup>177</sup> This statement will prove crucial to Brand's reworking of the Black Atlantic through the means of tidalectics, as Marie Ursule's daughter Bola, who will become the new matriarch of the Black Atlantic, expands and queers the Atlantic towards fragmented, forgotten and unknown networks, while simultaneously pointing back towards the island and its women as the centre stage for this diasporic space.



nuns' control of Culebra Bay and creates her own space: 'Rounding the semicircle, the other horizon is the sea, and this is where Bola spends most her days now. Going down the riverbed to its mouth open to the sea, she feels the desire of the river drying to the ocean, pebbles giving way to broken shells and sand. She can reach the sea' (1999, 58). Culebra Bay, a site of both oppression and resistance, attests to Brand's representations of space in which the imperial and patriarchal mapping of ancestral lines is reworked in favour of a fluid cartography where the creation of in-between spaces demands an engagement with both the land and the sea. In the case of Terre Bouillante and Culebra Bay, Brand once again confirms that water and the sea are both 'feared and loved'.

Bola's fluid character, much like that of Verlia, seems to answer Gopinath's call for queerness within heterosexuality and patriarchy. Not only have Bola and those in search of the ocean replaced the dusty remains of the nuns, but more important, Bola has also replaced their sexuality with that of her own. The chaste and virtuous sexuality of the nuns is replaced by Bola's numerous sexual cravings: 'She was not faithful to sorrow only to a muscular yearning for everything her eyes touched. What her eyes touched she craved, craved raw like a tongue, and pinned to one look [...] one wave, one man, one woman with a fish basket, one moment (1999, 67). Bola's sexual encounters, however, do not merely stand in contrast with the imperial notions of chaste sexuality—Bola's sexuality populates Culebra Bay, breaking the apparent dichotomy between chastity and lasciviousness.<sup>178</sup> More important, the roots and routes of Bola's sexuality result in the creation of queer desire found in the character of Cordelia who is overridden by a 'sudden and big lust' (1999, 99). Her desire, which appears as something bestowed on her, is submerged in liquid imagery. Cordelia's husband, the quiet and decent Emmanuel Greaves, who, at the moment Cordelia asks him to marry her, becomes 'bathed in gold dust', is relegated to the same place/space as Kamena. Not understanding and fearing Cordelia's sexual desire, Emmanuel becomes associated with dryness and passivity, eventually being submerged under Cordelia's lust and desire. The lust in Cordelia's body distances her from the orderliness of Emmanuel, releasing the fluid workings of her body towards a queer desire of being 'unfixed' and freeing her body. Subsumed by Cordelia's body and lust on Sunday mornings, Emmanuel becomes alienated from their house which becomes

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<sup>178</sup> In addition, Bola's sexuality creates new connections across the Atlantic as Bola's descendants disperse in new directions, seeking new roots and routes across the oceans.



a site of resistance against the notions of proper sexuality. Cordelia's lust creates a space within the domain of the proper domesticity for the impossible female desire to emerge:

And Cordelia who never took Emmanuel for her equal rode him toward her lust, handling him and making him fit in the gullies and places in her body. She made him as tangible as needed. She needed to break her own body open and wring its water out towards the ends of the room so that she was not in a room and not riding Emmanuel Greaves but riding the ocean's waves, her flesh coming off like warm bread in her fingers and floating out to sea. When Cordelia rode on Sundays it was the only time she did not have order and her legs wide and liquid carried her to another shore. (1999, 107-108)

Searching for the sea, Cordelia reverses the oppression of the Greaves residence into a space of sexuality, queerness and female empowerment. As seen earlier, the sea serves as both a figure of oppression and domination as well as a site of resistance and queer desire.

Culebra Bay, Grenada, Toronto (and Canada) are places refigured by Brand's use of tidalectics to construct maps that sketch the outlines of both the Caribbean and Canada and the relationship between them. In the same manner that Bola searches for the sea, Elizete, in *In Another Place, Not Here*, looks towards the water: 'She decided to get away from the mall and the Gladstone and began to walk the maze of streets trying to get out to the sea' (1996, 56). Her search, however, is intertwined with her spatial claim to the city of Toronto. According to Rinaldo Walcott,

*In Another Place* is literally and symbolically a historical and contemporary map/guide to (Black) Toronto. Bathurst, St. Clair Avenue, Oakwood, Danford, Regent Park, Avenue Road, Yorkville, Yonge Street, these names exist alongside names of places and spaces in the Caribbean. The Gladstone Hotel, Van Dong Restaurant, Canadian National, factories, rooming houses, barber shops, parks and dance halls (The Paramount), are signifier which locate place, names that reconfigure and claim, make one's presence felt. (1997, 47-48)

This historical map is traced in both *In Another Place, Not Here* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Elizete's loss and alienation in Canada is paralleled in *At the Full* in the character of Eula who describes the city of Toronto as being 'at the end of the world [...] It is rubble. It is where everyone has been swept up, all of it, all of us are debris, things that a land cleaning itself spits out. It is the end of the world here' (1996, 238). Elizete finds herself in Canada partly because of Verlia, the object of her queer desire, while Eula's being in Canada is partially the result of Bola's lust and the arbitrariness of the travels undertaken by her numerous offspring. In both novels women's sexuality allows for the redrawing of maps and finding in-between spaces that claim both the Caribbean seascape and the urban landscape of Canada. In fact, as we have seen in the character of Verlia, the oceanic force of the Movement



constructs the city of Toronto as an island, surrounded by the fluid workings of the other world. 'She finds a room in a house on a street off Bathurst', we are told in *In Another Place*. 'She chooses this street because of the barber shops on Bathurst' (1996, 155).<sup>179</sup> In *Bread Out of Stone* (1994), a collection of essays exploring the issues of power, geography, race, gender, and sexuality, Brand writes an entire essay on Bathurst, giving it home-like qualities: 'Bathurst Subway. I say it like home [...] Funny how home is the first place you look for if you are running from it, you are nevertheless always running toward it' (67). Feeling 'at home' Verlia views the White world of Toronto as submerged in the ocean, just as Brand in her essay on Bathurst describes the first migrants of Blacks arriving on Bathurst Street in the 1960s: 'They first took you to Bathurst and Bloor to locate you, your place, the point from which you would meet this country. And your relationship to it was clear since this was the only oasis of Blacks in the miles and miles to be learned of in the *white desert* that was the city' (1994, 68-69, my emphasis). Brand's emphasis on the dryness of the city (with its barren landscape) makes the city a deserted and a lifeless space as well as a fluid territory that defies ownership. Once again, the water/sea imagery becomes ambiguous in that it is both feared and loved, as the landscape of the city turns from island to the sea, constantly changing shapes and meanings. In Verlia's case, however, Bathurst Street with its numerous barbers remains a masculine space where patriarchal Black nationalism stands in contrast to her as an activist and a queer. Nevertheless, the fluidity of her character manages to incorporate and re-inscribe not only the nationalist workings of the Movement as well as the boundaries of Blackness but also the physical borders of Canada.

Where does the fluidity of Brand's map lead us? Brand's queer tactics of mapmaking, as we have witnessed, lies not in the geographical configurations of territory but in the cultural and historical formations of community where syncretism, synthesis and affiliation allow for a new poetic space of home. Elaborating on the traumas of the door of no return, Brand writes: 'I've collected these fragments [...] disparate and sometimes only related by sound or intuition, vision or aesthetic [...] by relying on random shards of history and unwritten memoir [...] I am constructing a map of the region, paying attention to faces, to the *unknowable*, to unintended acts of *returning*, to impressions of doorways' (2001, 19, my emphasis). Brand's emphasis on the returning acts of the sea points towards her occupation

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<sup>179</sup> According to Walcott, Bathurst 'is important for a number of reasons, chief among them being the assertion and insertion of a black presence in Toronto, one that refuses to be silenced, to be made invisible and to exist solely on the margins of North American society' (1997, 47).



with the image of the sea as uncanny. The notion of the sea as that which is repressed can be seen in her evocations of the Middle Passage: 'I first heard the word *Sargasso* in a history class when I was a child. It described the unending water across which Europeans sailed, bringing people and goods to the Caribbean. The water was supposedly treacherous and sickening, and sailors and ships and cargo were often lost there' (2001, 85). Here, Brand evokes the water as something to be feared and dreaded—she depicts the deceitful path from European points of view, a path that carries death with it. Later in the text, however, Brand writes: 'I imagined dead sailors, dead ships. I only imagined later dead slaves, suicidal and murdered, strangled [...] Then I imagined multitudes, throngs, wandering the bottom of the ocean, eyeless and handless, cuffed and cuffed' (2001, 85-86). Waking up and finding herself at a point of asphyxiation, Brand repeats the terrifying sensations of loss, anxiety, alienation, despair and, most important, death. In *The Arrivants* (1988), an epic-poetic trilogy about the African-New World diaspora, Brathwaite writes of the Middle Passage: 'For the land has lost the memory of the most secret places. / We see the moon but cannot remember its meaning. / A dark skin is a chain but it cannot recall the name / of its tribe (164). Brathwaite's Middle Passage is similar to Brand's in its evocation of that horrific passage and the traumas of the past. Where Brand's uncanny sea differs from Brathwaite's is in its evocation of loss and the tracing of the severed ties between past and present. The sea as a fluid, watery path evokes the Middle Passage *as well as* the desire for home and belonging. At the end of *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, for instance, Bola speaks of the moon, filling it with meaning, and more importantly, departs from Brathwaite's notions of the moon as devoid of meaning:

At the full and change of the moon. Everything get measured here by the moon. And when it was a good moon, as it was big and round and the rim of it was white with clouds, they say that it was not a good day for the leaving. A good day was at the end of the moon's rounds when the evening come dark, so dark as they could pass the medicine without discovery [...] Full-moon nights, your mother slip away to find the medicine. (1999, 296)

Meaning is also seen in Bola's Black Atlantic, shown in Eula's letter to her deceased mother as desire for

one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line I can trace [...] One line like the one in your palm with all the places where something happened and is remembered. I would like one like full of people who have no reason to forget anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because the line would be constant, unchangeable. A line that I can reach for in my brain when I feel off kilter. Something to pull me back. I want a village and a seashore and a rock out in the ocean and the certainty that when the moon is in full the sea will rise and for



that whole time I will be watching what all of my ancestry have watched for, for all ages. (1999, 246-247)

The Door, a symbol for the historical moment that haunts the Black consciousness in the diaspora, defies identification as well as circumvention. Marking the end of roots and beginnings, the Door also becomes a creation space/place for Blacks in the diaspora.<sup>180</sup> The uncanny, that which is so strange yet so familiar, is a characteristic Brand assigns to the door as well as to the sea. More important, she allocates the uncanny feeling to geography as well as history: 'Black experience in any modern city or town in the Americas in a haunting. One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. Where one stands in a society seems always related to this historical experience' (2001, 25). The context of the city, or cityscape, is shown to be both immersed in history as well as apt for change. If in a reversal of geography Brand constructs the city of Toronto as a fluid territory that defies ownership and knowability, in *A Map* this perspective comes into view in Brand's discussion of origins and the city: 'A city is a place where old migrants transmogrify into citizens with disappeared origins who look at new migrants as if at strangers, forgetting their own flights. And the new migrants remain immigrants until they too can disappear their origins' (2001, 63). The mixing of old immigrants with the new, the fusion of old origins with the new, transforms the city from a dry desert into a wide salty sea. The abrasion of the city of Toronto felt by new immigrants allows for the creation of a queer space of belonging where origins are contested and ruptured, where the submersion of people within the dark deep waters of the city defies any preset notions of a Canadian origin. The queer ripping apart of Toronto is the effect of the collision of multiple identities that share the community of Atlantic roots/routes and who are able to create spaces of resistance within the uncanny spaces of the city. Resisting being claimed by history, drawing new maps within haunting territories and allowing for new affiliations to arise, Brand constructs new modes of thinking belonging, geography and sexuality that point us in new directions and new ways of thinking about maps.

## QUEERING THE BLACK ATLANTIC

In Chapter One, I discussed the workings of queer tactical diaspora as a conceptual tool for analysing the discourses of tradition and purity within national and diasporic

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<sup>180</sup> Here, Brand introduces diaspora to her tactical queering of the Black Atlantic.



ideologies. This space, in which we find new desires and subjectivities that are located at the intersections between space, body and time, is itself located, or 'caught', between 'here' and 'there'. 'In another place, not here', Brand writes in *No Language Is Neutral* (1990), a collection of poetry that fuses language with the history of slavery as well as female same-sex eroticism, 'a woman might touch / something between beauty and nowhere, back there / and here might pass hand over hand her own / trembling life' (31). This reterritorialises the normalising strategies of the conventional 'queer' geography, both physically and metaphorically. It critiques the discourses of not only origins and traditions but also the established politics of immigration and home-space.<sup>181</sup> Here, I would like to return to Roderick Ferguson's call for a lived space of the Black queer experience ('queer of colour critique') as an important convergence of diaspora and queer that contests the Euro-Americanness of queer studies and posits Blackness and Black (diasporic) queerness at the centre, both as a Black 'branch' of queer theory and as a real and necessary action. Levelling a critique at queer studies and African diaspora studies, Black queerness locates itself in-between the two. Dionne Brand's emphasis on the ocean, I argue, serves as an important step towards imploding the narrow conceptions of Blackness, origins, sexuality and belonging. As it excavates the metaphorical and the historical records of the Middle Passage, Brand creates new maps, metaphorical as well as physical, placing fluid identities at the centre. Brand's fluidity, however, stands in contrast to the 'fluidity' of Euro-American queer studies in that her liquid imagery is not a postmodern expression of the constructedness of gender but a material baggage that continues to haunt the (queer) Black experience in the present. Brand's writing queers queer studies, not as another academic exercise of deconstruction but as an involvement and an exploration of the unimaginable, the all-encompassing, the ever-present.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes: 'Perpetual displacement constitutes *fluidity of identities* that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the right to claim naturalized or essentialist gender identities' (1999, 176, my emphasis). Butler's metaphors of fluidity, however, do not appear to move outside the unmarked North American geography—questions of race and colour are conspicuously absent from her early formulations of 'gender trouble'.

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<sup>181</sup> Brand's musing about the lack of comfortable spaces for the Black lesbian is more than just a metaphorical call for the substantiation of queer and hybrid identities. It is a concrete and painful experience that engenders desire and resistance as well as loss and despair.



In addition to Gopinath's original question 'whose queerness?', I would like to ask: whose fluidity? According to the queer theorist Brad Epps,

Queer theory tends to place great stock in movement, especially when it is movement against, beyond, or away from rules and regulations, norms and conventions, borders and limits. [...] It is not alone, yet queer theory [...] presents movement, *fluid movement*, as the liberational undoing of regulatory disciplinarity. For it is my contention that by insistently setting its sights on *fluidity*, by taking it as that which at once denies and affirms disciplinary power, queer theory performs a little magic of its own. (413, my emphasis)

Although the magic of queer theory seems to be its disloyalty to any regulatory discipline, its preoccupation with unmarked Whiteness and naturalness of Euro-American identity paradigms sabotages the promise of liberational fluidity and designates colour to the periphery of the global north. In the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler acknowledges that 'racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit', and her addition calls for an engagement with the issues of race and gender. Despite the acknowledgement that 'the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race' (xvi), Butler assigns the role of race a secondary position in relation to the already established theory. Thus, the fluidity of identity performs poor magic, for the theories of race, postcoloniality and, most important, history, are not viewed as central to queer theory but as a subsequent addition. Yet placing diaspora alongside queer (not as an addition but as a constituting factor) allows us to bring to the surface that which has been submerged and silenced by the Whiteness of queer theory. The fluidity of queer theory, as we have seen, is not as fluid as it appears to be. Making it fluid requires us to dig deep into the history and geography of sexuality and race.

Brand's interest in the workings of history is illustrated in her exploration of the cultural production of the present by means of rupturing. (Re)capturing past memories in contemporary Canada, Brand expresses her desire for 'relief from the persistent trope of colonialism. To be without this story of captivity, to dis-remember it' (2001, 42). Being released from captivity is, then, to record what takes place on the other side of the Door. This spatialised image is more than just a metaphorical musing over the state of fluidity of the Black diasporised subject. For Brand, 'queering' diaspora is about queering the body in space and abrading the space of belonging through water imagery: 'To reclaim the Black body from



that domesticated, captive, open space is the creative project always underway' (2001, 43).<sup>182</sup> The magic of queer theory is not the magic of fluid movement against rules or regulations but recognition that 'sexual difference is no more primary than racial or ethnic difference and that one cannot apprehend sexual difference outside of the racial and ethnic frames by which it is articulated' (Butler 2004, 10). Creating new maps through history and desire rooted/routed in the Middle Passage and the Black Atlantic adds the materiality that queer theory fails to address. Bringing the Caribbean and the Atlantic to Canada queers the open spaces of North American belonging and ruptures Eurocentric notions of fluidity based on unmarked models of sexuality and humanity. Instead, Brand installs the Caribbean and African diaspora in the unmarked spaces of Toronto, tracing the specific and the historical contours of Black (queer) existence. The creation of Black spaces of resistance perpetuates her uncanny city, turning it into both a desert and a sea, reterritorialising the material engagements that shape racialised, gendered, nationalised and sexualised subjectivities and affiliations within the Black diaspora.

*In Another Place* adds to the dryness/fluidity dyad by means of the geographical and metaphorical positioning of Toronto's Bathurst Street as a site of Black presence and resistance. It 'stand[s] in as a ritualistic locus for migrant Caribbean peoples [...] who live in the in-between, neither here nor elsewhere, redraw[ing] and rechart[ing] the places/spaces that they occupy' (Walcott 1997, 45). Likewise, the Black festival and parade Caribana embody the realness of the body, the Black (queer) experience and the haunting presence of the Door.<sup>183</sup> Both geographies point towards representations of space in which the creation of spaces of resistance are connected to the image of the sea as a site of release as well as captivity. Brand asks: 'How to describe this mix of utter, hopeless pain and elation leaning against the door? Caribana, on Lakeshore Boulevard, in the city of Toronto' (2001, 41). Re-sketching the outlines of the city, the significance of Brand's inclusion of Caribana is twofold: to map the relationship between the Caribbean and Canada, and to reveal the historical and cultural alienation and loss within the Black subjectivities in Toronto. Brand writes:

The carnival itself is situated in slavery. It was a celebration of Black liberation from forced labour [...] Here, dancing along the lakeshore, there is ecstasy, abandon, the graceful intelligence of the body. Well, perhaps it's not such a paradox after all. Though the meanings are always slipping. (2001, 41-42)

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<sup>182</sup> As we saw earlier, Brand transforms the uncanny city of Toronto through the haunted vision of the sea. Transforming the dry desert into a fluid sea, Brand historicises and makes 'real' the 'liberational undoing of regulatory disciplinarity' through the fluidity of the Middle Passage, the Black Atlantic and the realness of the 'door of no return'.

<sup>183</sup> Caribana is an annual (summer) festival of Caribbean culture held in Toronto, Canada.



By pointing to the slippage in meaning, from ecstasy to abandon, Brand emphasises the marginalisation of the Caribbean diaspora: what appears to be a claiming of space and ownership, slips, in reality, into a cultural placement of the Black consciousness on the periphery of the 'White world' of the city. Conversely, the fact that the carnival is situated on the 'shore' of Lake Ontario, which is conceived as the symbolic sea, points to another slippage in meaning—a queer meaning—where the fluidity of the water transforms the dryness of the White city and inserts Black presence as a wave that washes over the desert, creating a new, historical map of the city. In this context, Elizete's search for the water potentially leads her to the local 'Atlantic'—Lake Ontario—where water, once again, serves as a site of oppression and resistance: 'Each day she travelled another street further and further into the maze; she thought that she could smell the sea as she moved along the grid of pavements and alleys and houses all the same' (1996, 53). As she walks through the streets of Toronto, searching for her grace, her rupture and eventually that which is on the other side of the Door, Elizete digs deep into the history and geography of sexuality and race. Thus, through the character of Verlia as well as Elizete, Brand adds cultural specificity to queer theory, although the latter is never explicitly mentioned and is only present when we add those fluid slippages to the backdrops of both Canada and the Caribbean.

## SUGAR AND SALT

The interlocking relationship of the island and the sea in Toronto symbolises the fluid meanings that defy transitional readings of space and sexuality. Here, I want to focus on the images of sugar and salt as symbols of Brand's ambivalent, yet provocative, means of tactically using language, turning it against its own assumptions and foundations. In fact, the relationship between sugar and salt becomes, in a way, a relationship between land and island, landscape and seascape. 'She she sweet, sweet like sugar' (1996, 4), exclaims Elizete when she sets her eyes on Verlia in the cane field. Later in the text, we are told that Verlia 'would wake up with a need to taste sugar' (1996, 147).<sup>184</sup> In *In Another Place*, however, the sugar and sweetness are, by the means of liquid imagery, attributed to sites of comfort and pleasure.

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<sup>184</sup> Meredith Gadsby argues on the meaning of sugar in the Caribbean: 'Those who controlled European society during the period of slavery certainly also controlled the meaning of sugar to the populations of enslaved Africans. For these people, therefore, sugar "meant" exploitation, abuse, theft of bodies, and of course death', (42). We may compare Gadsby's arguments to the Ursuline nuns' enterprise in Culebra Bay: 'The Caribbean taught the nuns [...] how to multiply ground and tonloads of sugar and cocoa and [...] anything they turned their hand and someone else's labour to' (1999, 37-38).



More important, I argue, in the character of Verlia, Brand combines the notions of water and sugar to confront the static, landlocked hegemony of the White world. Finding herself in the midst of Whiteness, Verlia sees this geography as the 'sublime territory of rage. Such rage it would hawk and spit out a glass-throated ocean, islands choking; so much' it would long for a continent to wash up on and to chastise' (1996, 43). The liquid imagery of Verlia's world, washing up against the shores of the White world, is related to her involvement in the emancipatory Black Movement, which on 'May twenty-fifth, nineteen seventy-three' is described as a 'crowd gathering like a sea, the skein of it situating from the park at Christie and Bloor to Harbord and Bathurst' (1996, 167). Important to note, however, is Brand's use of the sugar imagery in the description of Verlia and the Movement:

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 the shock and strangeness of her skin shaking sugar. The crowd like sugar down her back [...] all of her feels like melting into it, sugar. "Power to the People!" The crowd and her voice sugaring. [...] They invent sugar. She marches along with the crowd, without the pain in her chest'. (1996, 167-168)

The sensation in Verlia's chest—the liquid sugar—is the result of her submission into the collective identity of the Black crowd. It is also a sublime territory of rage, unthinkable and unimaginable to the White world. In fact, the narrator explains the relationship between the two worlds in terms of the geographical parallel between herself and her aunt and uncle: 'She cannot see [...] how they think that she should live with them quietly dying in acceptance [...] cutting herself off from any growing, solidifying when she wants to liquefy, to make fluid, grow into her Black self' (1996, 148-149). The sweetness of Verlia's Black self incorporates the images of sugar and Black identity, suggesting not only the sensation of comfort and empowerment but also the link that connects the past with the present. The backbreaking work of harvesting sugar cane on the plantation—with its evocation of historical slavery—is by the means of liquid (sugar) imagery transposed into the present-day Toronto and reworked into an emancipatory struggle. It is the figure and the notion of collectivity that enables Verlia to experience the sensation of emancipation and struggle. Reading anti-colonial theories and social critiques of the bourgeois society, Verlia finds the quote that will serve as a guiding principle for her fluid relation to the White world: 'In the struggle for liberation "Individualism is the first to disappear"' (1996, 158). Ridding herself of her individual subjectivity, Verlia becomes part of the collective movement. This transformation, however, is not solely metaphorical. Brand's efforts to expose materiality in present theories of identity,



sexuality and space, are seen in the materialisation of the fluid character of Verlia. Confined in a prison cell, Verlia finds herself surrounded by concrete walls, which causes her to panic and feel asphyxiated. When released, Verlia contemplates saying something to the police officer who undid her shoulder, 'something tipping off the tongue full of all her anger but peaceful in the end', but eventually decides to use her corporeality, and 'her finger marking his face, an old gesture marking an enemy [...] she spat on the floor in front of him. "Never have a day's peace. Look for me everywhere"' (1996, 184). Pamela McCallum and Christian Olbey characterise the sense of collectivity expressed in the Brand's novel as a continuation of the neoslave narrative which 'retell[s] the stories of slavery in narratives marked by postmodern formal innovations' (1999, 163). More important, they argue that the utopianism in Verlia's emancipatory actions—apart from being subverted and turned into a tragedy at the end of the novel—lies 'in the articulation and exploration of the persistent markings of the past on the present' (1999, 177).

The presence of sugar in the fluid, Black collectivity also conjures up salt as the substance that is most closely connected to the sea. Verlia's sweetness and fluidity, her sense of collectivity and political action, are once again contrasted with the character of Elizete who, apart from being associated with the earth, is also related to the crystalline substance of salt. In fact, all female characters in the text are associated with salt, which becomes a figure of connection, preservation and memory.<sup>185</sup> In this novel, the image of salt is closely connected to the Middle Passage and the sense of abandon. Left in the yard of the old mistress, Elizete is at first shooed away from the door, 'Go away girl. Go away spirit', but having nowhere to go Elizete 'stood still, scared of moving, scared of standing still, her face scarred salt. The woman peering at her from the kitchen. The woman beckoned' (1996, 45). Elizete's connection to the sea and salt is ambivalent—although she searches for the sea as a place of connection, it also serves as a painful reminder of the history of the Middle Passage, attesting to Brand's emphasis on fluid meanings. Closely related to geographical space, the sea and salt appear as a force that beckons, refusing to let go as the old woman summons from the space of the kitchen. If Verlia is drenched in a shower of sweet imagery, Elizete is embalmed in the imagery of salt which appears as a haunting sensation, a relic of history that calls her from all sides, seasoning the experience of rootlessness, separation and exile. Among

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<sup>185</sup> The presence of salt and salt imagery is evident in numerous works by Caribbean writers—amongst those are a few who use salt in the titles of their work, e.g. Édouard Glissant, *Black Salt* (1960); Earl Lovelace, *Salt: A Novel* (1996); Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads* (2003).



the glassy buildings of Toronto, Elizete is haunted by a strange sensation which she cannot identify or trace: 'When she arrived, before she knew herself and it came tied to a tree, standing against the wall, filling the water bucket at the standpipe, beckoned across the yard when darkness was gathering and her face crusting into salt, now walking this street in another country' (1996, 53). Salt attests to the materialisation of the metaphor of the sea and the Middle Passage, giving the symbol of Diaspora a historical context. Elizete's haunting sensation is the same uncanny feeling Brand feels towards the 'return' of the sea. Like Brathwaite's, Brand's sea is ubiquitous; it haunts, connects and contains bodies through both memories and the material conditions of the Black Atlantic. However, by delving into the specificities of the Black Caribbean experience in Canada, Brand explores the significance of the sugar/salt imagery by constructing a map of the region, and paying attention to the uncanny, the unknowable and the multiple doorways for the creation of a poetics of home.<sup>186</sup> Looking back to the legacies of slavery, Brand points towards 'elsewhereness', where the Eurocentric categories of origins, cartography and belonging are reworked into a diasporic vision that is not easily locatable. The slippages in meaning and the ambivalence of the notions of fluidity and solidity of salt and sugar, are Brand's means of articulating presences, subjectivities and histories found across a variety of borders and boundaries. In *Black Salt* (1960), a collection of poems about memory and forgetting, Glissant excavates the meaning of sea and salt in the Caribbean imaginary, attributing the two to the silencing of the suffering of the Middle Passage. It begins:

*to the sea*

*For the salt it means.  
Brilliance and bitterness once again.  
Lights in distress on its expanse. Profusion. The theme, knotted  
with foam and brine, is pure idea. Monotony: a tireless murmur  
cracked by a cry.  
There is—on the delta—is a river where the word piles up—the  
poem—and where salt is purified. (61)*

The relationship between splendour and bitterness indicates the closeness of pleasure and pain in the sea. The vastness of the water becomes a theme in the memory of the Black Diaspora, haunting the Black subjectivity and lingering in the imagination. Formed by it, Glissant confronts the sea as a survivor of its silences. The 'word' is the silenced voice of those at the

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<sup>186</sup> The series of 'repetitions' of the sea in Brand's writing evoke Benítez-Rojo's notion of the repeating island where syncretism works as a repeating narrative of connection between Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, South and North America.



sea and, as a poet, Glissant takes on the role of the navigator who sails towards pure waters, devoid of the salt which devours the souls of the enslaved. In *In Another Place*, Elizete, closely related to the earth, is also shaped and haunted by the sea, whose salt eats away at her face. However, when she arrives in Toronto, Elizete transposes her sense of non-belonging and rootlessness onto the White city, reversing the relation in the geography between the Caribbean and Canada:

If you live here you notice that nothing ties people together. [...] Things are made up. Not one face here tells you a story. [...] They do not say, I have come back as my great-great-grandmother [...] salt turned my blood thin and made me weak. [...] If you live in this city, nobody knows anybody so you could be anybody. (1996, 65-66)

As Toronto becomes engulfed in salt imagery Brand turns into a navigator who steers her characters through the unknowable and uncanny city streets. Reversing the geography of Toronto from a landlocked city to a glassy island, Brand inserts queer desires and affiliations within the history of the Black Atlantic and North America. Queer desires are present for the purpose of exploring the underpinnings of power, not only in terms of sexuality but also in terms of history, discourse and knowledge. 'I think that women learn about sexual pleasure from women', writes Brand. The codes of heterosexuality are 'only necessary where there is variation, questions of power. The need to regulate reveals the possible. Despite all this, I think we catch a glimpse, we apprehend a gesture' (*Bread Out of Stone*, 33). This gesture is possible through language and the fluid workings of action and desire. Like Glissant, writing the unwritten and voicing the silenced, Brand uses poetics to excavate the queer desire that is rooted in the history of silence, exploitation, abuse and death. Verlia, who moves in a fluid, shapeless manner, embodies the queer desire that confronts the Black Atlantic, despite its horror, making a connection to that which is lost, producing a different map and a different geography. Verlia becomes Glissant's river where the word exposes the possibility of sweetening the salt and transforming Toronto into a queer delta:

Sometime she feels Abena fold her wholly and they are stooping, doubled and kneaded in sweat and where she begins and Abena ends the skin does not break off, yet it does, but rides in oil and rolls. The floor is wet with their sweat and oil and the slick of limbs and their shake and sudden, sudden sweet hastes. Her own mouth suddenly too, soft and greedy, in its own suck and circles. So much water. The room is full of water. Her hands are salt. Her hands are slippery. And the room is so full of water she is frightened. (1996, 187-188)

Salt serves as a unifying element through which the female characters smell and taste the bitterness of the Middle Passage. The sweetness and the saltiness of the room with the two bodies inextricably entangled together, demonstrates the complexity and the connectedness of



history and desire. Brand's answer to Glissant's delta is a queer rupture where the paradox of the door of no return is reworked into a queer excavation of submarine routes/roots. As mentioned earlier, Brand places emphasis on absence in order to transform the limiting space of forgetting into an enabling space of remembrance. Unfixing the solid constricting materiality of the Door, Brand employs queer language to liquefy Black identity in the diaspora and provoke a sense of self-creation to construct a map for the Black subjectivities living in the fictional world of the diaspora. Thus the physical space of Toronto becomes a territory that needs to be unhinged, reconstructed and made into a fluid geography, bringing the Middle Passage closer to its shores. The uncanny Door, however, despite its unknowability, calls for action and resistance towards being entirely claimed by history. By creating alternative maps, which are rooted/routed in the same history, Brand foregrounds the possibility of change. Creating her own tidalectics, Brand employs the sea and salt to root her characters with the same history but with a collective consciousness, creating spaces for political action and resistance. Her characters use language to resist and to challenge that which is rendered impossible—belonging based on a forgotten origin. Tracing ancestral genealogy which exists in the imagination, Brand's ambiguities create maps that creatively subdue the sense of detachment from place and provoke a connection to place and history. Queer desire enables a voicing of the silenced subjectivities and a confrontation with the Middle Passage as that which haunts the imagination of Black identities in the diaspora.

Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms At Night*, with its challenge to the untainted garden of colonialism, develops a new, queer cartography that re-members the past and creates an alternatively realistic present. The rediscovery of the lost paradise allows Mootoo to appropriate the gardening motif in *Cereus Blooms at Night* in order to engage and deconstruct the Western idea of the Garden of Eden without obfuscating the cultural, historical and hybridising conditions of Caribbean space. By metamorphosing the materiality of place and destabilising of the distinction between home and away, Mootoo *mirrors* a 'different' reality. Here, Mootoo creates a heterotopic space where history, connection and affiliation are both 'real' and 'unreal'. Mootoo's garden resembles that of Jamaica Kincaid, as it allows the writer to draw on past memories and to reawaken memory as an active agent for recapturing the past and transforming it into a dynamic force capable of reconnection and rehabilitation. Dionne Brand, on the other hand, although continuing the tradition of investigating the interstices between sexuality, place and body (queer tactical diaspora), turns her attention towards the sea as the element that re-routes/roots the history of the Caribbean in a diasporic context.



Revising Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics, a tool for exploring the complex and shifting entanglements between sea and land, Brand employs the 'language of seascape' to rethink the problematic relationship between home and belonging in terms of displacement and sexuality. By placing queer sexuality and the language of seascape at the forefront, Brand offers a theorisation of geography that alters space/place and installs a different mode of affiliation and belonging. Focusing on the (unnamed) Caribbean island, Brand represents the Atlantic as the force that reinstalls history and recalls the trauma of the Middle Passage. Elaborating on Kincaid's question 'What to do?', Brand's novel creates a new set of concrete and uncontrollable actions that rework and re-theorise postmodern notions of place and identity. *In Another Place* serves, then, as a continuation of Glissant's call for 'remaining where we are', for the focus remains within Caribbean space, albeit taking us across multiple geographies and continents. By focusing on the Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity, the novel, although rooted/routed in the Caribbean, expands its constricting spaces and introduces liquid imagery as a means for subverting, and displacing postcolonial and neocolonial deployments of normative gendering and sexuality.

Whereas Mootoo reworks the New World pastoral narratives of Jacques Roumain, Brand sexualises the theme through the erotic pairing of the earth and water, between Elizete and Verlia. Roumain's vision of a new order is based on a new discourse which reorients the landscape towards a Prelapsarian past, inserting an Adamic motif of the lost paradise as a new hegemonic system. Placing the erotic relationship between two women at the forefront of her novel, Brand reworks this Edenic view of an arcadian society and undermines romantic sentimentality with the historical context of imperialism and neocolonialism. Eschewing ethnographic and ahistorical accounts of the homogenous New World Other, Brand employs the language of seascape to inhabit the White world of Toronto, inserting a queer (diasporic) space of belonging. By reversing its Black and White geography, Brand's Toronto becomes both a dry barren desert *as well as* a fluid territory that defies ownership and knowability. In addition, Brand's reworking of space connects her to Wilson Harris's notion of contrasting spaces, in which cultural texts are 'opened' by a profound cross-cultural and cross-spatial imagination. This interrogative space is an imaginative daring which probes the nature of



roots and re-naturalises Caribbean geography and social relations within that space.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, Brand expands the theorisations of space and those of gender and sexuality beyond the geographical (as well as philosophical) borders of Euro-Americanism by adding material concerns to the questions of sexual identity and affiliation. Focusing on the uncanny door of no return, Brand does not simply employ the sea as a reflection on the impossibility of bridging the gap between the past and the present. For Brand, the role of water is equivocal: it is both a means for evoking the sense of loss and the desire for home and belonging.

Brand's use of sugar and salt, the sensations of sugar and sweetness, salt and memory, submerges Elizete and Verlia in the brutal images of sweat and forced labour while maintaining the same spatiality for an erotic and loving relationship between them. Sugar and salt connect the fluidity of sea with the sensuality of queer connection, making space for a new map which is based both in the Caribbean and Canada. Brand, the navigator, steers her characters through the uncanny streets of Toronto, reversing its geography and inserting queer desire and affiliation into the history of the Black Atlantic and North America. The salt haunts while sugar sweetens, but both elements are necessary for the investigation of the materiality of the Middle Passage as well as the ability to make new connections by confronting and queering the Black Atlantic. Although the salt is haunting, facing the sea and the door of no return appears to be means by which Brand attempts to recover that which is lost. By confronting horror, Brand creates a new (queer) geography.

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<sup>187</sup> Just as Harris's reallocation of the imagination of the Caribbean novel places emphasis on the contrasts in culture within the geographical space of the Caribbean, Brand's work, by the means of alternate geography and language, continues this legacy and broadens it to include gender and (queer) sexuality.







## CHAPTER FOUR: LANGUAGE OF SEALANDSCAPE: QUEERING THE BILDUNGSROMAN IN NIGEL THOMAS AND JAMAICA KINCAID

In this chapter, I analyse H. Nigel Thomas's 1993 novel *Spirits in the Dark* and Jamaica Kincaid's 1983 novel *Annie John* in terms of queer tactical diaspora. In other words, I argue that both authors create tactical space for overcoming binary thinking in terms of cultural and sexual belonging. I contend that Thomas and Kincaid use what I call *language of seandscape* to challenge and subvert the European literary tradition of the Bildungsroman. By using tactics, both authors create contrasting spaces that rework space and sexuality and break down the homogeneity within and between the colonising and the colonised worlds. Queer tactical diaspora allows Thomas and Kincaid to rewrite colonising fictions by queering the male tradition of the coming out narrative as well as to insert queer female desire within Caribbean space. Through tactics, Thomas and Kincaid are able to create queer resistance to colonial and gender conventions and to route/root their novels deep within Caribbean space.

*Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here* create fictional settings to construct and mirror reality; thus a heterotopic space is represented, where the reawakening of memory connects history with the present.<sup>188</sup> Unhinging and reconstructing physical space becomes a means for making geography fluid, introducing hybridity and porous boundaries through numerous movements and intersections. H. Nigel Thomas's quest novel *Spirits in the Dark* (1993) takes place on the fictional Caribbean island of Isabella. It traces the life of Jerome Quashee, a member of the impoverished Black underclass, from early childhood to middle age. Strongly resembling St Vincent, the island becomes a backdrop for the historical, sexual, racist, gendered and (neo)colonial context of the pre- and post-independence Caribbean. Cultural belonging, whether in the fictional Trinidad, Grenada or St Vincent, appears to be reserved solely for the heterosexual family where any 'homosexual/deviant' behaviour is severely punished. Attending to the differences and contradictions within the Isabellan society, Thomas creates a utopian vision of an inclusionary (queer) society by interrogating the contrasting spaces found on the island. Examining oppressive political structures as well as heterosexist, patriarchal and Eurocentric ideologies, Thomas attempts to imagine a decolonised and inclusive Caribbean identity. Following in the footsteps of Wilson Harris and reconsidering the imperialist paradigm of a pre-Columbian/post-Columbian

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<sup>188</sup> I have purposely left out *Valmiki's Daughter* in that it explicitly references Trinidadian geography.



identity, Thomas re-envisioning the Caribbean present through repeated crossings over the dividing line between an indigenous 'natural' sexuality and a 'foreign' queer subjectivity. By rewriting colonising fictions, Thomas explores the differences between and within cultures, pointing towards syncretism and the community as alternatives to hegemonic devices of homogeneity that continue to dominate Isabella. Thomas thus exposes the incompatibility of queer identity and Caribbean's decolonising politics by depicting an intricate (third)spacing of the lines between Caribbean and European, inscribing a decolonised 'indigenous' gay subject within the text while not allowing the utopian gesture to overshadow the island's homophobia. Exhibiting acute sensitivity to the ambiguous and contradictory spaces within Isabellian culture, Thomas points to these spaces as potentially offering new, enabling social and cultural relations.

### ***SPIRITS IN THE DARK: LANGUAGE OF SEALANDSCAPE***

Thomas's rewriting of colonising fictions by continually crossing the dividing line of indigeneity and foreignness is perhaps best exemplified in my reading of *Spirits in the Dark* as a Caribbean Bildungsroman in which the author traces the journey of Jerome Quashee from childhood to manhood, from innocence to experience, and from confusion to clarity.<sup>189</sup> Belonging to the impoverished underclass, Jerome finds himself in a society that de-values Blackness and privileges Whiteness and colonial values. The representation of childhood is central to Thomas's novel: the staging of a young man/child trying to make sense of the chaotic reality that surrounds him, is an ostensible continuation of the European nineteenth-century coming-of-age novel which describes the development of a single protagonist in a linear plot structure. Moreover, the evolution of a child from one state to another is an image reiterated in the colonial enterprise and the imperialist project. According to Jo-Ann Wallace,

an idea of "the child" is a *necessary precondition* of imperialism—that is, that the West had to invent for itself 'the child' before it could think a specifically colonialist imperialism [...] it was an idea of "the child"—of the not yet fully evolved or consequential subject—which made thinkable a colonial apparatus dedicated to, in [Thomas] Macaulay's words, "the improvement of colonized peoples". (1994, 176, emphasis in original)<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Taking the centre stage in the novel, however, is also non-heteronormative sexuality, as Jerome tries to confront the island's unjust, racist, classist and homophobic culture.

<sup>190</sup> The reasons for the inclusion of a European narrative form into the postcolonial novel are equivocal; child narratives, apart from perhaps presenting the nostalgia experienced by the adult writer living in exile, can symbolise the first years of the new nations' independence. This could certainly be applied to Thomas's novel as the narrative moves from pre- to post-independence Isabella Island, where changes are evident in both the national and international political arena.



The European narrative form of the Bildungsroman in *Spirits in the Dark* is, I suggest, closely related to Wilson Harris's call for the breaking down of the *victim stasis* by reworking the European 'novel of consolidation of character'. Harris argues that the 'landscape of imagination' can be used as a response to the (post)modernist understanding of cultural crisis by undermining linear time, space and sequence. Therefore, by employing syncretism as a means of altering the conventional understandings of memory and identity, Thomas follows Harris by incorporating the master codes of imperialism in order to sabotage and rework them.

One of the ways of sabotaging the codes of imperialism—what Harris describes as the homogenous relationship between victim and victimiser—is the revision of the syntax of classical realism and a reopened 'nature' of human society in relation to forces situated in-between the social and the 'natural'. Like Harris, Thomas positions his novel in the lag between time and space, where the iconic landscape revises the European Bildungsroman and inserts a dialectical structure. More precisely, the character of Jerome, who experiences several mental breakdowns, realises that his psychic convalescence can only occur if he sloughs off the Eurocentric (neo)colonial values and embraces his African cultural and spiritual legacy. Jerome's re-opening of his African 'nature' sabotages the traditional Bildungsroman by mimicking its dialectic between protagonist and society/family, and by inserting colonialism as a non-dialectical component within the overarching dyad of coloniser/colonised. Because Jerome, despite his intellect, cannot escape the racism and inequalities of Isabellan society, Thomas foregrounds the angst of the colonised subject resulting from double consciousness.<sup>191</sup> Caught in the victim/victimiser dyad, Jerome is fixed in a metaphorical in-between space. It is only when he attempts to resolve his angst by looking towards Africa for spiritual healing that Jerome is able to confront colonisation by adopting and adapting the literary expressions and attitudes of non-European traditions. By exposing the encounter with European norms, Thomas points towards Africa as a psychosocial necessity for overcoming double consciousness and psycho-cultural dislocation, as well as a means for achieving psycho-spiritual wholeness. For Thomas, like Harris, syncretism allows for the reproduction and a re-opening of cultural texts in a cross-cultural

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<sup>191</sup> Paul Gilroy opens *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* with the line: 'Striving to be both European and Black requires some specific forms of double consciousness' (1).



and cross-spatial imagination. As I argue, Thomas's text lays claims to an imaginative daring where space and sexuality are reworked to focus on roots, not to imply universality but to re-naturalise social relations. Focusing on contrasting spaces, Thomas incorporates culture, space and time in his exploration of the colonial and imperial legacies on Isabella Island.

Previously, I argued that Shani Mootoo focalised *Cereus Blooms at Night* in the language of landscape, whereas Dionne Brand focuses on the language of seascape in *In Another Place, Not Here*. In this chapter, I extend these contentions by arguing that H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* is a novel situated in the space between the language of landscape and language of seascape. By incorporating his novel within language of sealandscape, Thomas continues Glissant's tradition of 'remaining in the Caribbean'. However, Thomas also adds the important aspect of the language of sea/landscape which identifies the European imaginative logic of the Caribbean that borders on the pre-Columbian/post-Columbian divide. The language of sea/landscape rejects this logic in favour of a sedimented cultural resources located outside Caribbean space.<sup>192</sup> By incorporating Africa as the source of Jerome's spiritual and psychological health, Thomas calls for a heterogeneous community for liberating homogenous spaces, and working towards a postcolonial redefinition of history, identity and sexuality. Mimicking the European colonial discourse of temporal progression from primitivism to enlightenment, Thomas's text points towards Thirdspace—a space in-between intellectualism and spirituality—as a space of psychic healing from double consciousness. Jerome's progress from intellectualism to spiritualism reverses the European developmental logic and reinserts African legacy as a significant and necessary element of psychological healing from the colonial dislocation. Resisting colonising processes, he suggests, involves an interrogation of colonial intellectual developments as well as a re-discovery of the African cultural and spiritual legacies. One such intellectual development is evident within the space of the public library where we are introduced to the role of language in colonial subjugation.<sup>193</sup> Entering the town library and insisting on reading a book, Jerome is reprimanded for his 'bad English': "There's no such thing as *mantain*. That's bad English. And you mustn't say *t'ing*; the proper word is *thing*"

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<sup>192</sup> By employing the language of sealandscape, I attempt to broaden the theorisations of Caribbean geography outside Euro-America, whilst expanding the workings of queer studies to incorporate Caribbean narratives of postcolonial sexuality.

<sup>193</sup> Emphasising Jerome's psycho-cultural dislocation, Thomas places Jerome within the historical tradition of subjugation, exploitation and psychological manipulation of the colonised peoples.



[...] When he walked the half mile home he thought about bad English and good English and decided that he would speak good English, the English the librarian spoke. Not the English his mother spoke, for she said mantain and t'ing' (6). The exchange between Jerome and the librarian attests to the intellectual coercion within the colonial education system that normalises the subordination and mental confusion of the colonised. Moreover, the language of colonial development adds to self-hatred and the devaluation of the native self on the part of the colonised. Jerome's acceptance of 'good English' fuels his oppression; his insistence on British speech patterns, according to his mother, alienates him from his people. This does not only apply to Jerome but to all the characters who, by adhering to the colonial logic of intellectual enlightenment, accept the notions of 'good' and 'bad' English. This also applies to the market women who only desire the best for their children:

They boasted about their in secondary schools, oversees, in nursing school, in the civil service. They were proud their children didn't speak "bad". That was why they slaved day in and day out to make a better life for them. [...] Over the years, as he understood what was going on, he found it funnier and funnier that these women spoke dialect and their children replied in standard English—were expected to reply in standard English. (19)

Jerome's acceptance of British speech alienates him from his people and also contributes to his mental breakdown due to his double consciousness. Jerome's intellectual development does not begin until Chapter Two, where we are introduced to the public library, which was 'a small, two-storey cement building rising off the weed-covered sidewalk, adjoining the abattoir that smelt of cattle dung and decaying blood'. Behind the library, which is surrounded by the natural images of weed, cattle and dung, lies the 'churning, angry, blue Atlantic' (5). Here, Thomas couples Jerome's mental state with the language of seandscape: situating the library, as a way of colonising the people of Isabella, alongside the Atlantic (the closeness and the trauma of the Middle Passage), Thomas juxtaposes Jerome's intellectual and spiritual development. By prefiguring Jerome's spiritual development on the opening pages of the novel, Thomas presents a reversal of the conventional European Bildungsroman and the identificatory development of spiritual healing situated across the Atlantic. Thus, Thomas reverses the direction of the Middle Passage, pointing towards the sea *and* the land as catalysts for psychological and physical escape from the loss, dissolution and pain experienced by colonised peoples in the novel.

The Thirdspace found in Thomas's novel revolves around the dichotomy of intellectualism/spirituality which is replayed in the imagery of the land and the sea. Creating a



space in-between the dichotomy involves an interrogation of the European Enlightenment ideas of development and the conflicting impulses of colonisation. Glissant's call for remaining in the Caribbean is reflected in Thomas's emphasis on the distinction between the city and the countryside. During one of Jerome's first encounters with the city, we are told of his amazement with the crowdedness of the capital and the difference in landscape between the city and the countryside: 'It was a new experience. Instead of the large plains of sugar cane, sometimes green, sometimes brown, he now looked at the buildings crowded upon one another' (15). The dichotomy between city and countryside is explicit but the following description of the people in the city resembles Elizete's haunting encounter with the city of Toronto: 'Most times the people's faces seemed as blank as the asphalt streets on which they were standing or walking [...] The people did not speak to anyone they did not know and they didn't seem to have feelings. It was the first time he heard the expression "nothing for nothing"' (1996, 15). Jerome's sense of difference and alienation from the capital situates him, like Elizete, within the language of landscape. But beyond the description of the city, Jerome's relationship to the sea is a marker of familiarity: 'The sea, too, was calm, almost like water in a tub. Not like the Atlantic where he came from. It shouted, it pounded the shore, it made you know it was there' (15). Within the contrasting spaces of city and village, Thomas inserts the Atlantic as a force that surrounds the city, abrading its shores like the symbolic Atlantic-Lake Ontario-pounding at the shores of Toronto. A little later when Jerome walks to the edge of the promontory, he sees 'the sea become its usual royal blue, the land green, and the mountains grey'. This is followed by an internal monologue (written in italics) of the narrator who, in the present, recounts his relationship to the sea:

*The sea had always fascinated him. Since he was around eight he'd often climb the hill a hundred yards outside his village to look at its corrugated blue, white-flecked surface. When it pounded the shore on windy nights it left him with a vague haunting fear. In August, when it was calmest, he would go into the shallow parts because there were whirlpools just outside the shore and bury his body in it and enjoy the sac-like feeling of the water around him. (18, Thomas's italics)*

As in Mootoo's novel the ocean is always present; it sways menacingly both on the shores of the fictional islands and within the minds of the characters. However, in Thomas's novel the sea is continuously coupled with the descriptions of the land, as they mark the language of sealandscape, exhibiting the possibility of altering traditional understandings of geography



and space.<sup>194</sup> It is only because of Jerome's psychic breakdown that he is able to recognise the collective crises that stem from double consciousness. For Jerome, embracing his African legacy involves an interrogation of both the colonising and the decolonising aspects of Caribbean identity—the oscillation between the two allows Thomas to deconstruct the hegemonic devices of homogeneity with the interplay between the land and the ocean as a circular and repetitive movement of ebb and flow that erodes the psychological borders between Eurocentricity and African spirituality. More important, Thomas employs (homo)sexuality as yet another means of resisting the binary thinking of universal and native sexuality. Creating what Timothy Chin calls 'interstitial space' (1997, 138), Thomas interrogates the relationship between Jerome's queer sexuality and the restrictive sexual structures in *Isabella*. Jerome's psychic breakdown—his 'descent into madness'—reflects his unstable position as both a Caribbean colonial subject and a homosexual.

Jerome's sexuality comes to view in his self-imposed isolation *in* mother earth, as he descends into the dark cave, depriving himself of all the senses. This journey is both physical and metaphorical as his descent into mother earth is also a walk backwards into his childhood: 'This cave was exactly as his mother's womb would have been' (3). Going back *into* earth/his buried psyche, Jerome reflects on the colonial educational system, the imposed heterosexuality and his homosexuality, and eventually emerges from the womb with a new understanding of his African heritage. While dreaming in a state of hunger (he decided to fast), Jerome sees his grandmother standing on a wave and pointing towards a 'smoke-grey outline of land'. Upon her asking him 'Yo' see the land in the distance?', Jerome replies with the question: 'This is heaven?' (202). The movement from a dream-state to reality points seemingly towards an understanding of geography situated in a journey from Lefebvre's Firstspace (concrete materiality of spatial forms) to Secondspace (thoughtful representation of human spatiality in mental forms). Jerome's new understanding of his sexuality, however, does not inscribe him with the discourse of an 'indigenous' homosexuality. Although Jerome emerges from the cave with the realisation that he had 'put the sex part o [his] life 'pon a trash hear just fo' please society' (198), this does not suggest that he is a decolonised indigenous gay subject who has come to terms with his homosexuality. On the contrary, the utopian

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<sup>194</sup> One could argue that the fragmentation between Jerome in the past and in the present demonstrates the potential of in-between space to reconsider colonialism and begin to embrace contrasting spaces as instigators of resistance and healing.



(Secondspace) undertones are undercut by Pointer Francis who reminds Jerome of the pervasive homophobia on the island:

Yo' just come back from the journey, fresh and clean, yo' seeing the world a little bit like a little child. Think 'bout it and I sure yo' will agree with me that is better to keep those things to yo' self. [...] most o' the brethren ain't grown enough fo' understand why you is how yo' is and fo' accept yo' as yo' is. (212-213)

Once again we see that only a thirthing of the spatial imagination, complicating the mental and the material spaces, can push the geography of the Caribbean towards a space of inbetweenness. Only when the unity of Isabella is broken into a meta-archipelago, caught within the language of both landscape and seascape, can we begin to see a formation of inhabitable spaces.<sup>195</sup> Creating inhabitable spaces, however, is a difficult task, as Jerome's recollection of homophobia and sexism on Isabella demonstrates. Jerome's memory of his gay cousin Boy Boy, 'who was a constant point of reference for what the society would not accept' (94), exhibits the enforcement of normative heterosexuality by physical violence. After Boy Boy arranges to meet a young man in a cane field, he experiences the realities of the 'real world' on Isabella:

When he [Boy Boy] got there, there were ten of them. They took turns bugging him; one even used a beer bottle; then they beat him into unconsciousness and left him there. He'd refused to name the young men. But everyone knew who they were because they'd bragged about what they'd done—everything but the bugging. (199)

Thomas's inclusion of the physical violence that is connected to non-heteronormative behaviour resists imagined spaces, inserting the realities of Firstspace to interrogate the colonising aspects of Caribbean identity.

Nonetheless, Firstspace in *Spirits in the Dark*, although closely related to the imagined representation of human spatiality of Secondspace, does not appear as a stable factor throughout Isabellan community. Harris's representations of contrasting spaces as 'interrogative space' is seen in Jerome's recollection of the market women who, while selling their food, 'would be seated like queens on wooden crates, surveying their heaps of tannias, dasheens, yams, sweet peppers, carrots, string beans' (19). Amongst the women, however, there was a man they called Sprat who got more customers than the women and thus, because of the fierce competition between the vendors, is the target of homophobic remarks and

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<sup>195</sup> Pointer Francis's reminder of the 'real world, with real people', emphasises Certeau and Lefebvre's notions of the everyday, pointing towards the necessity of creating space inhabitable by those who find themselves in dis/locations of non-belonging.



insults. Despite the adversity and the competition between Sprat and the women, Jerome observes that 'Sprat loaned Melia [one of the women with whom he was quarrelling] ten dollars to buy some ground provisions somebody was selling at a bargain'. In addition, observing that one day Sprat was not at the market, Jerome learns that Sprat was at home with a flu and that 'three of the women had been to see him. One said he would be out the next week and she was buying supplies for him that day' (22). The display of social relations that go beyond the homophobic ideologies of heteronormativity attests to the implosion of the division between First- and Secondspace, emphasising contrasting spaces that pose a contradiction to the colonising aspects of homogeneity. These sites of ambiguity and contradiction are, according to Harris, spaces where differences are lived and negotiated. This contradictory (and impossible) space enables unanticipated modes of affiliation and collectivity that do not guarantee national modes of belonging but instead, according to Gopinath, create space for (queer) subjects to reproduce desires and practices that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries. The creation of these spaces involves a thirding of the spatial imaginations where contradictions overcome binary thinking and re-imagining Caribbean space inhabitable by those who do not 'belong'. Much Mootoo's and Kincaid's Caribbean, Thomas's *Isabella* becomes opaque and not fully grasped or understood. Negotiating contradictions involves new connections and affiliations that unsettle/queer the homogenous and stifling binarism of normative heterosexuality.

### **QUEERING SPIRITS IN THE DARK**

The formative coming out story of a (Western) gay identity is an archetypal narrative of gay development from a stifling heterosexuality to a liberating homosexuality. According to Ken Plummer, coming out refers to a 'process of moving from a heterosexual (and confused) identity, telling the stories of other given in childhood, to a strong, positive and accepting sense of identity as gay being given to one through awareness of the gay community in later life' (84). Although he places gay identity formation and a gay community at the core of the coming out narrative, Plummer adds that it is also a 'momentous, frequently painful experience in any gay person's life. [...] Experiencing it will dramatically reshape the



life-route: life will never be the same again' (84).<sup>196</sup> These seemingly opposite accounts of the coming out narrative—a process as well as an event—are crucial to our understanding of the Bildungsroman as a Western genre of identity formation, a better understanding of the self. If a coming out story is 'a tale concerned with establishing a sense of who one really is' (Plummer 85-86), constructing a narrative of one's identity becomes the main goal of the storyteller who adjusts the elements of the plot to fit the story and constructs, by the means of appropriating the past and the present, a coherent whole. Therefore, the storyteller is a revisionist, rewriting and re-appropriating the elements to construct an identity detached from the binaristic journey from shame to pride which fixes a stable view of the pre-outed self. In *Spirits in the Dark*, Jerome's coming out narrative and element of the modernist Bildungsroman are Thomas's means of suturing the two predominantly Western concepts of identity formation within the contextual space of the Caribbean. By queering the European model of conversion from confusion to clarity, Thomas re-envisioned and revised the Bildungsroman and queered the male tradition of re-inscribing masculinity in the form of a coming out narrative. As opposed to Dionne Brand, Thomas places at the centre of his novel a male character who, by the means of his sex and gender, presents a story of identity formation within the context of (neo)colonialism seen through the lens of anti-colonial notions of sexuality and 'proper' masculinity.

Written in the third-person, Thomas's novel is told by an omniscient narrator who, as the ultimate 'authority', conveys Jerome's story of sexual awakening and orientation.<sup>197</sup> The narrative is following Plummer's arguments, a process of moving from one place to another, mimicking the coming out story but altering it in order to rework and displace the conventions of identity formation. Jerome's story is a narrative of becoming, a never quite completed process in which the individual constructs himself/herself as a subject of discourse. Testing the conventions of the Western coming out story, Thomas disintegrates the binaries of identity/community, heterosexuality/homosexuality and primitive/enlightened by

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<sup>196</sup> Plummer notes: 'Finding the "coming out" story is usually the most momentous moment in any gay and lesbian lie. Given both heterosexism and homophobia at work, those who may later in life "go gay" will initially be socialised to believe that they are heterosexual; nagging feelings of being different may emerge very early in childhood or adolescence, but a clear sense of being gay will only unfold later. Gays and lesbians typically feel that they have been given all the wrong stories and that they are living a lie' (84).

<sup>197</sup> Thomas's use of a third person narrator appears as a disruption of the conventions of the first-person narratives of coming out stories, re-articulating notions of exile and sexual subjectivity. Not only is the narrative told by a narrator who may or may not be the adult Jerome—it begins *in media res*, disrupting the linear narrative.



incorporating Western conventions and queering them with elements of the Caribbean/West African traditions. While *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here* centre on female characters who, by the means of community, affinity and queer desire, destabilise and alter both the Caribbean and the Canadian geography, Thomas's novel is unique: it is a masculine narrative that negotiates the emerging (gay) manhood of its protagonist Jerome Quashee.<sup>198</sup> *Spirits in the Dark* is centred mostly on the decolonising notions of masculinity, heterosexuality and nationalism, eschewing the means used by Mootoo and Brand which insert queer femininity into the heterosexual spaces in the Caribbean. Instead, Thomas works against compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchal stereotypes and phallogentric institutions, destabilising them through the Western Bildungsroman and the traditional male narratives of coming out. This method is significantly different from the earlier novelists in that, although it attempts to exhibit the process of gender production, maintenance and reinvention, it still remains timid about its commitments towards destabilising heterosexuality within the female sphere.<sup>199</sup>

The first occurrence of queerness in Thomas's novel appears alongside notions of masculinity/compulsory heterosexuality as well as the (intersectional) geographical space. The narrator's description of Jerome's childhood friend Errol juxtaposes Jerome's emerging homosexuality with Errol's ideas of 'proper' masculinity:

Many times he wondered how different his life would have been if he had been like Errol. *He did not want to think about Errol. At twelve Errol quit school to work in the fields. Years later he loaded and unloaded a truck. [...] And he [Jerome] dreamt about him [Errol] when he had his first wet dream. Peter was the only other guy that happened with'.* (12, Thomas's italics)

In Thomas's novel, according to Daniel Coleman, 'the young protagonist's growing recognition and acceptance of his own homosexuality displaces his gender, race, class, ethnicity, and even nationality in ways that question the prior claims of each of these categories of identification' (167). Coleman's argument focuses on Jerome's emerging queerness within the intersectional space of Isabella where hard manual labour is submerged under the formative notions of race, class, ethnicity and, ultimately, masculinity. Immediately

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<sup>198</sup> While Mootoo's novel localises and diasporises space, displacing traditional territorial markers of identity by locating and dislocating Lantanacamera and its inhabitants within and outside the larger context of the trialectic between the Caribbean, Canada and Britain, Brand's text reverses (queers) the geography of the Black Atlantic by incorporating tidalectics as an investigation of the materiality of the Middle Passage and the possibility of creating new connections within queer desire.

<sup>199</sup> None of the (few) female characters in the novel exhibit any signs of 'queerness'.



after the description of Jerome's queerness the narrator recounts Errol's race and ethnicity along with the material conditions surrounding him:

Errol lived in the first shack after you crossed the canal bridge. They were all squatters, living in thatched mud houses on the edge of the canefields where most of them worked. Errol was light-skinned, oval-faced, and had semi-straight hair. His mother was half-Indian and his father, whom Errol did not know, was said to have been half-Portuguese. From the time Errol was nine, he would interrupt school in November, when the arrowroot season started, and would come back in January. (12)

Jerome's sexuality, whether hetero or homo, is firmly incorporated into race, class and ethnicity, as well the material living conditions on the island. The following passage shows that 'proper' masculinity is also connected to geography and space. During the school holiday, the narrator recounts the first encounter between Jerome's emerging homosexuality and the imposing heteronormativity on the island:

At nights during the august holidays from high school [...] he [Jerome] sometimes stood behind the hibiscus hedge to listen to Errol and the other boys bantering. There was an open extension to their hut, where the man who lived with Errol's mother kept his donkey. In front of it was a pile of stones where his mother bleached her clothes. Errol and his friends sat there, especially on moonlit evenings, and talked and talked. One night while he listened, Pinchman was saying, "Man, me drop me trousers and she see what curl out, and she bawl, 'Murder, haul back on yo' trousers!'"

So what yo' do?" Errol asked.

"Man, me hit she 'pon the backside, and me say, 'Shut up!' and me push she down and me open she leg and me shove it in and she double up under me."

They all laughed, even he. (12)

Here, Thomas connects masculinity and 'proper' sexuality to geography and spatialisation. Sitting outside the hut—a traditional female homespace of domesticity—the boys converse about proper and improper sexuality and masculinity. The public space outside the hut is occupied by the man who lives with Errol's mother (in actuality it is his donkey who occupies the space), while Errol's mother is only referenced as inhabiting the public space in terms of labour. The boys' gendered spatialisation of the public sphere relegates the domestic sphere to femininity and tradition and effeminises Jerome as the banter intensifies to incorporate masculinity and heterosexuality (contrasted with the feminised homosexuality):

"But serious now, wha' wrong with Jerome?" Pinchman asked.

"He got nothing in his trousers," Errol said. "I hear that when yo' read too much book, it does shrivel up and break off."

Mullet said, "Pamela say she pulled him down 'pon she one time, and' he get up an' run an' bawl fo' his mother." (13)

The traditionally 'outer' male space of progress, politics and materiality is hereby contrasted with effeminate homosexuality, naturalising the former and relegating the latter to the



periphery. In Thomas's text, however, the binary between the outer and the inner, natural and unnatural, is reworked through the geographical queering of both spheres. Hiding behind the hedges, Jerome is drawn to the male-dominated banter, listening to himself as the topic of conversation and relating his own emerging homosexuality to the boys' ideas about proper masculinity. Thomas, however, ends this scene with Jerome dreaming about Errol and having his first wet dream. Here, he reconfigures the gendered spatialisation of male/female space by revealing how non-normative and queer desires and pleasures arise within highly masculine and heteronormative spaces.

### QUEERING *ANNIE JOHN*

I would like to examine the binarism between the male coming out story and the female diasporising of space by adding to my analysis a novel that queers the coming out narrative of its female protagonist, thus complicating the relationship between the traditionally male Bildungsroman and the typically female queering of desire across diasporic space. The change in focus from a male to a female protagonist, I argue, is a tactical response to Frantz Fanon's assertion that homosexuality is a European export. Therefore, I frame H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* and Jamaica Kincaid's 1985 novel *Annie John* as individual responses to Fanon's assertion of the homosexual absence in the Caribbean.<sup>200</sup> My inclusion of *Annie John*, a novel which inserts female homosexuality into Caribbean space, challenges Fanon's heteronormative and phallogentric decolonising politics. *Annie John* traces the development of the title character who progresses from childhood into adulthood (from the age of ten to the age of seventeen). Annie's development, however, is immersed within the notions of colonial masculinity and femininity and, more important, queer sexuality. Where Thomas's novel focuses on the male protagonist and the decolonising notions of masculinity and 'proper' sexuality, Kincaid's text queers the traditional male narrative as it bends the Bildungsroman into a narrative of desire between girls, queering the progression of the male coming-of-age narrative. 'I loved very much—and so used to torment

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<sup>200</sup> Fanon's construction of Black masculinity is predicated on the assumption that Black femininity is naturally heterosexual. Based on his own interpretation of women's sexual fantasies Fanon asserts that the 'person I love [a Black female] will strengthen me by endorsing my assumption of my manhood, while the need to earn the admiration of the love of others will erect a value-making superstructure on my whole vision of the world' (1968, 31). Fanon's theory of Black masculinity is predicated not only on the (natural) heterosexuality but also the submission of the Black female who, by the means of her feminine desire for a male, recovers the masculinity of the colonised male. As a consequence Fanon's theorisations of proper Caribbean masculinity and femininity dispossesses the female desire of any agency, particularly in terms of queer desire.



until she cried—a girl named Sonia’, says Annie John (1997, 7). Her first confession of love for Sonia, a slow-witted girl whom Annie adores and pesters at school, includes elements of attraction as well as cruelty. ‘I would [...] stare and stare at her, narrowing and opening wide my eyes until she began to fidget under my gaze. Then I would pull at the hair on her arms and legs—gently at first, and then awfully hard, holding it up taut with the tips of my fingers until she cried out’ (1997, 7). Annie’s fascination with Sonia, imbued with hostility as well as attraction, is reminiscent of Jerome’s attraction to Errol, in that homosexual desire is expressed through domination and violence based on desire.<sup>201</sup> In both cases, the queering of normative (heterosexual) behaviour occurs within the realm of the surrounding material conditions—the interplay between Annie and Sonia occurs in the schoolyard; that is, within that institution which serves to impose and continue colonial values and principles. Here, Kincaid uses tactics as a way of emphasising the contrasting space between the school (Firstspace) and queer desire (Secondspace). Through tactics, Kincaid creates a contrasting Thirdspace that implodes colonising homogeneity. Similarly to Thomas, Kincaid uses Thirdspace to allow unanticipated modes of connection and affiliation. But more important, Kincaid’s novel is both a counterpart as well as an antithesis to *Spirits in the Dark*: it follows the chronological development of a protagonist, queering its way through colonial constructions of masculinity and femininity, and simultaneously focuses on a female character.

Queering normative sexuality within the scope of the coming out narrative, Kincaid documents the material conditions of race and class. Just as important, though, is the fact that Annie finds and develops her love for Sonia at school—a public space which informs the colonial vision of proper masculinity and femininity. ‘At recess, I would buy her a sweet—something called a frozen joy—with money I had stolen from my mother’s purse’ (1997, 7), Annie says. In this passage, we are told that her desire for Sonia is developed within the compounds of the school, but she disassociates *and* ties her queer desire to her mother; her mother (and ‘proper’ femininity) is not found on the premises, but the money she steals from her situates her within the mother/daughter relationship. In addition, because Annie and Sonia are poor and Black Antiguan girls, Annie’s ‘affluence’ (having money to buy sweets) becomes a subversive mimicry of the colonial power on behalf of the girls; the power

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<sup>201</sup> Jerome’s homosexual attraction to Errol is compounded by the formative notions of race, class and ethnicity, while Annie’s fascination with Sonia is turned into an erotic child-play.



relationship between them is submerged in queer desire found at the heart of one the most formative and (hetero)normative spaces in Annie's life, the school. Annie's queer attraction to Sonia is formative of her lesbian sexuality and identity, but whereas Thomas depicts Jerome's emergent homosexuality, Kincaid represents Annie's sexuality as a rejection of colonial identity and proper sexuality. In fact, while Annie's desire for her female friends occurs within a series of repetitions and reprisals, her resistance to heteronormativity and colonial domesticity is not a reactionary one. Showing her daughter how to store linen, for instance, Annie's mother expects her daughter to live in a house—'Of course, in your house you might choose another way' (1997, 28)—and use the linen folded and stored neatly. Annie's response, however, is to make the bed in her own way, noting: 'I had placed the bedspread on my bed in a lopsided way so that the embroidery was not in the center of my bed, the way it should have been' (1997, 29-30). Annie's re-appropriation of the values passed on to her by her mother within the scope of the quotidian is a re-visioning of colonial domesticity. For by rejecting homemaking, Annie re-visions and pluralises the normalcy found in the colonial household.

Annie's re-visioning is an important response to the conventional constructions of femininity and 'proper' sexuality. In relation to Thomas's novel, which invokes and challenges the traditional Bildungsroman, Kincaid's representation of Annie queers the European tradition by subverting the temporal progression of the coming out narrative; Annie does not take on a gay/lesbian identity or point to a time when she can locate her emerging queerness. Immediately after her re-visioning of proper domesticity, Annie describes her encounter with the all-girls' class in her school: 'I like a girl named Albertine, and I liked a girl named Gweneth. At the end of the day, Gwen and I were in love, and so we walked home arm in arm together (1997, 33).<sup>202</sup> The row of *phases* that Annie goes through is suggestive of the coming-of-age narrative which positions her queer desire as a stage on the road to marriage and placing oneself in a community. However, Annie's falling in love with Gweneth is described as a series of multiple events, eschewing an orderly narrative progression by 'unfixing the fixed'. Since we are unable to find the 'origins' of Annie's love for Gweneth,

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<sup>202</sup> This passage is important not only because it exhibits queerness found at the compound of the school but also because the sequence of events in which Annie replaces Sonia with Gwen mimics the temporal progression of the Bildungsroman.



we are also unable to excavate the 'causes' of its effect.<sup>203</sup> Any simple progression towards a coherent narrative of self is subverted by Annie's attempts to narrate her own life. Since there are several highly elusive origins, Kincaid's novel unfixes the constricting notions of 'proper' femininity and sexuality even as she constructs the narrative within the frame of an ostensibly coherent temporal progression. This literary construction, however, will prove to be vital for my argument about altering, through the language of sealand, traditional understandings of geography and space. The creation and re-creation of a narrative of self as a literary construction, in terms of the coming out story, is crucial for both *Annie John* and *Spirits in the Dark*. Re-scripting the paths drawn by the colonial notions of proper sexuality, both authors employ 'symbolic tactical diaspora' to construct narratives that dislocate the fixedness of the Caribbean through repeated crossings of the diving line between 'natural' and 'unnatural' subjectivity, and point towards the incompatibility of queer identity and Caribbean decolonising politics.<sup>204</sup>

The rewriting or writing back that occurs in both novels queers the male tradition of the Bildungsroman as they establish queer desire as an alternative to homogenous heterosexuality. Beginning his novel *in media res*, Thomas eschews the progression of the coming out narrative; Kincaid, on the other hand, allows Annie to rewrite her own story, refusing the etiological narratives of origin. When combined, both novels offer a different understanding of sexuality—one which rejects the colonial notions of 'proper' gender and inserts a queer narrative that modifies Western constructions of cause and effect. Earlier, I argued that Thomas's novel, while committed to exposing compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchal stereotypes and phallogentric institutions in St Vincent, remains timid about its commitments to destabilising heterosexuality within the female sphere. But we can read Kincaid's novel as adding queer femininity to Thomas's text, while simultaneously employing similar ways of queering compulsory heterosexuality in the Caribbean. One of Thomas's approaches to destabilising patriarchal and phallogentric institutions is to employ

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<sup>203</sup> Keja Valens argues: 'Annie John's falling in love with Gwen appears as a logical sequence of events, mirroring the progression of a traditional coming-of-age narrative. The relationship between Annie John and Gwen also seems to move beyond a pleasure-pain dynamic, as if that were "just a stage." However, any straightforward progression of Annie John's love for Gwen is quickly muddled in the repetitions and reprisals that it undergoes' (128). Valens argues that because Kincaid's text rejects a neat narrative progression, it 'refuses an etiological model even as it enacts it, going back to a place where all origins are elusive at best, and the origin is just another fiction anyway' (128).

<sup>204</sup> Braziel and Mannur argue that to speak of diaspora is 'to speak of and for all movements [...] and for all dislocations, even symbolic ones' (3).



the language of sealandscape where the language of sea and landscape, found in the writings of Édouard Glissant and Wilson Harris, identifies the European imaginative logic of the Caribbean but rejects it in favour of sedimented cultural resources located outside Caribbean space. Language of sealandscape is also present in Kincaid's novel, for it fluidly reproduces alternative life narratives. In an assignment given to her by her teacher, Annie produces a written narrative of her life, mimicking the autobiographical Western narratives of origins and causes. Before recounting a swim with her mother to the class Annie tells of the 'truth' of her and other girls' stories: 'Things went on [...] all so playful, all so imaginative. I began to wonder about what I had written, for it was the opposite of playful and the opposite of imaginative. What I had written was heartfelt, and, except for the very end, it was all too true' (1997, 41). Annie's narrative involves an element of reality and fantasy, (First- and Secondspace), as she attempts to find a space in-between the realities of Antigua and the imaginativeness of the fantasies of the Caribbean. Annie's story, in which her mother swims beyond her reach, is marked by a panic and fear of the menacing ocean that surrounds her. Like the Atlantic in *Spirits in the Dark*, the ocean in *Annie John* is a frightening mass of water. Describing her mother as 'superior swimmer' Annie links her mother to the Atlantic: 'When she plunged into the seawater, it was as if she had always lived there' (1997, 42). Subsequently she describes herself as her mother's direct opposite: 'I, on the other hand, could not swim at all. In fact, if I was in water up to my knees I was sure that I was drowning' (1997, 42). Annie's traumatic encounter with the sea, which leaves her with the fear of being separated from her mother, causes her to dream and visualise the Atlantic as the force that separates her from her parents. Annie's story is important, for it exhibits Kincaid's use of tidalectics as both an investigation of the materiality of the Middle Passage as well as a possibility for creating new connections within queer desire. This is seen in Annie's writing of her own ending in which her mother returns to comfort her. Not only does she alter the progression of events, Annie also connects her story to Gwen, thus rewriting her life story. The subsequent passage of Annie's love for Gwen establishes queer love and desire as an alternative to the future planned by Annie's mother:

As we walked back to the classroom, I in the air, my classmates on the ground, jostling each other to say some words of appreciation and congratulation to me, my head felt funny, as if it had swelled up to the size of, and weighed no more than, a blown-up balloon. Often I had been told by my mother not to feel proud of anything I had done and in the next breath that I couldn't feel enough pride about something I had done. Now I tossed from one to the other: my head bowed down to the ground, my head high up in the air. I looked at these girls surrounding me, my heart filled with



just-sprung-up love, and I wished then and there to spend the rest of my life only with them. (1997, 45)

Annie delights in rewriting her story and altering the path drawn by her mother, fusing the creative process of determining when events begin and end, with the queer love found at the all-girls' school. Using tidalectics, Kincaid employs the homogenous coming out narrative only to queer it; she allows her protagonist to subtly follow her mother's path in order to alter it slightly. Thus, through (queer) tactics, Kincaid re-members and re-inscribes both the geography of 'home' and 'away' and the developmental model of non-heterosexuality. More importantly, I argue, Annie's revision of colonial femininity and domesticity is a process which does not have a beginning. Describing the girls' shared sexuality as a course of action that is merely a part of the daily routine in the all-girls' school, Annie trivialises her deviation from the heterosexual model of development, breaking down the boundary between homosocial and homoerotic behaviour:

It was in a nook of some old tombstones—a place discovered by girls going to our school long before we were born—shaded by trees with trunks so thick it would take four arm's lengths to encircle them, that we would sit and talk about the things we said were on our minds that day. On our minds every day were our breasts and their refusal to budge out of our chests. (1997, 49-50)

Extending the girls' homoerotic behaviour beyond the compounds of the school (into the public space of their after-school activities), Kincaid queers the normative heterosexuality of colonial Antigua. Furthermore, Kincaid suggests that the girls' creation of Thirdspace is not a new tactic but rather a long tradition of Thirdspacing conducted by generations of schoolgirls and their ancestors. Here, Kincaid employs queer tactical diaspora to queer normative heterosexuality and emphasise local historicity as important elements of Caribbean sexual identity. Through tactics, Kincaid ties the resistance to heteronormativity to the resistance of former slaves against their former colonial masters. Although it could merely stand in as an alternative route to heterosexual adulthood, the girls' queer involvement is not relegated to the status of inferiority or subordination; it is a strong and preferred alternative to the otherwise 'universal' heterosexuality. This is seen in the girls' exclusion of boys from their homoerotic play: 'On hearing somewhere that if a boy rubbed your breasts they would quickly swell up, I passed along this news. Since in the world we occupied and hoped forever to occupy boys were banished, we had to make do with ourselves' (1997, 50). Gender exclusivity is preferred by the girls and Annie makes it clear that their desires are closely connected to history and taking control of colonial geography: 'What perfection we found in each other, sitting on



those tombstones of long-dead people who had been the masters of our ancestors!' (1997, 50). This passage illustrates her rewriting of history and the deterritorialisation of colonial geography as well as (proper) colonial control of bodies and desires. Moreover, as Annie elaborates, the resistance to history, to colonialism and slavery is closely connected to her resistance to heteronormativity:

We were sure that the much-talked-about future that everybody was preparing us for would never come, for we had such a powerful feeling against it, and why shouldn't our will prevail this time? Sometimes when we looked at each other, it was all we could do not to cry out with happiness. (1997, 50)

The amalgam of queer female resistance to heteronormativity echoes Thomas's (male) novel, for the resistance to colonial constructions of gender (as well as the temporal formation of proper identity) are found in the reworking of the binaries between homo- and heterosexuality as well as natural and unnatural. As Jerome hides behind the hedges in *Spirits in the Dark* and listens to the boys' male-dominated banter, he is drawn to their conversation which provokes the desire of his wet dream. This is done not as a defying act of resistance against the colonial or domestic orders but more as a quotidian performance of illuminating the fragile dividing lines between homo- and heterosexuality. Much in the same manner, Annie, who develops a love relationship with Gwen through their daily walks to school, reconfigures colonial domesticity through a reworking of daily routines. In both novels the reconfiguration of gender and sexual spatialisation is firmly incorporated with the issues of race, class and ethnicity, as well the material living conditions on the islands. Annie's resistance to her mother's 'proper' femininity cannot be divorced from the historicity of revolts of former slaves against their former masters, which functions as an extension and an expression of a slave revolt. If Jerome, in *Spirits in the Dark*, reveals the development of non-normative desires and pleasures within the most masculine and heteronormative spaces, *Annie John* reconfigures those spaces that are seen as formative of 'proper' sexuality and subject development. Moreover, as Annie ostensibly appears to aspire to some of the qualities advocated by her mother, she queers those very notions by rewriting them to suit her own needs and pleasures. Talking about her love for Gwen, Annie remarks: 'I said I could not wait for us to grow up so that we could live in a house of our own. I had already picked out the house. It was a grey one, with many rooms, and it was in the lane where all the houses had



high, well-trimmed hedges' (1997, 51).<sup>205</sup> Annie's aspiration to become the writer of her own life—she compares herself to Enid Blyton—appears not as a continuation of a colonial literary tradition but as an appropriation of them. Annie situates her desires, sexuality and femininity deep within Caribbean space, carefully appropriating Western traditions of literary and personal development to suit her desire. Writing her own future, Annie employs the traditions that have colonised her ancestors and rewrites them so they are neither directly oppositional nor merely complicit.

Kincaid's firm positioning of her novel and her characters within Caribbean space is only one element of her re-appropriation of the Western literary tropes. Returning to the traditions of the Bildungsroman, I suggest that by fusing Caribbean space with the subversion of Western literary traditions Kincaid creates a queer resistance to the colonial social and gender conventions that position same-sex desire as a temporary stage in a developmental sequence. As Annie's love for Gwen fades after she begins to menstruate, it is superseded by a new desire for the Red Girl. The shift to another object of desire defies the temporal progression model as it delays Annie's 'eventual return' to heterosexual desire. This time, however, the object of her desire is a girl who occupies a space outside social convention where social transgression and gender nonconformity are not hidden from view:

What a beautiful thing I saw standing before me. Her face was big and round and red, like a moon—a red moon. She had big, broad, flat feet, and they were naked to the bare ground; her dress was dirty, the shirt and blouse tearing away from each other at one side; the red hair that I had first seen standing up on her head was matted and tangled; her hands were big and fat, and her fingernails held at least ten anthills of dirt under them. And on top of that, she had such an unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life. (1997, 57)

The Red Girl's rejection of colonial norms serves more as a sexual rather than a social resistance and for Annie it signals not only an assertion of will independent of her mother but also a strong sexual attraction. The Red Girl's sexual autonomy is reminiscent of that of Xuela Richardson in Kincaid's 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother*, who via her 'indecent' appearance and smell resists the interpellation and social conformity imposed on Caribbean women:

I loved the smell of the thin dirt behind my ears, the smell of my unwashed mouth, the smell that came between my legs, the smell in the pits of my arms, the smell of my

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<sup>205</sup> If Annie's dream of living in a well-trimmed hedge appears as a continuation of her mother's plans for her, it will become apparent that not only does Annie replace her male partner with a female one, but she also situates her house firmly within Caribbean space, following Glissant's call for Caribbean authors to remain in the Caribbean.



unwashed feet. Whatever about me caused offense, whatever was native to me, whatever I could not help and was not a moral failing—those things about me I loved with the fervor of the devoted' (1996, 32-33)

Xuela's resistance, however, moves from social autonomy to sexual pleasure: 'This scene of me placing my hand between my legs and then enjoying the smell of myself and Monsieur Labatte watching me lasted until the usual sudden falling of the dark, and so when he came closer to me and asked me to remove my clothes, I said, quite sure of myself, knowing what it was I wanted, that it was too dark, I could not see' (1996, 70).

The re-appropriation of the Western canon found in Kincaid's novel points towards a geographical deterritorialisation of Western literary traditions. As Thomas's novel indicates the contrasting spaces within Isabellan society, Kincaid's novel aims to occupy colonial geography by re-appropriating the Western literary traditions and placing Caribbean space at the centre stage. The language of sealandscapes found in *Spirits in the Dark* is evident in Jerome's self-imposed isolation in 'mother earth', during which he fasts and imagines his grandmother appearing:

She held his hand and they were standing in a shore where waves were crashing loudly. "Come," she said. But he was afraid, always afraid of deep water, he remembered.

"Well, yo' not going to get there if yo don' walk the water." She stood on a wave, her hand stretched out to him, but as he stepped onto the water he sank and awakened. (202)

Jerome's anxiety about the water is reminiscent of Annie's fear of the sea. Both characters view the ocean as a force that is menacing, separating the characters from that which is known and familiar to them. In *Spirits in the Dark*, however, Jerome overcomes his fear of the ocean by relying on the guidance of the Spiritualists to connect him to his 'African heritage'. Jerome's ritual experience transforms and redeems him, enabling him to confront the oppressive political and restrictive sexual structures on the island and imagine a decolonised Caribbean reality. In Kincaid's novel, the dismantling of restrictive sexual and gender structures takes place through a sexual seizing of space, where the relationship between the land and the sea serves as a decolonising reterritorialisation of Western literary traditions. Finding pleasure in-between and within the oppressive colonial spaces allows Annie and the Red Girl to mimic and to alter the correlation between coloniser/colonised and



the West/the Caribbean.<sup>206</sup> Annie and the Red Girl occupy an old lighthouse as the spatial geography on which their queer relationship takes place. Thus, Kincaid explicitly incorporates Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) as the correlating text in which characters attempt to find a room of their own. Not only is the lighthouse a forbidden place for Annie, it is a symbol of her mother's propagation of colonial rules:

The Red Girl and I walked to the top of the hill behind my house. At the top of the hill was an old lighthouse. It must have been a useful lighthouse at one time, but now it was just there for mothers to say to their children, "Don't play at the lighthouse," my own mother leading the chorus, I am sure. (1997, 58)

Annie re-appropriates the geography of the lighthouse as she makes it a playground for her same-sex love. The lighthouse, though, was also used by colonial powers to navigate the slave ships through the Middle Passage, and as such Kincaid invokes the history of Antigua as an important station for the colonial powers' merchant ships. Serving as an intermediary between the land and the sea, the lighthouse integrated into the language of sealandscape, as the now dilapidated and abandoned lighthouse stands as a reminder of the decline of the colonial rule. However, Annie's mother forbids the re-appropriation of the lighthouse. In this, she participates in the continuation of colonial rule over the island. 'Whenever I did go to the lighthouse behind my mother's back, I would have to gather up all my courage to go to the top, the height made me so dizzy' (1997, 58), Annie says of her previous attempts at taking control of the colonial space. This time, however, with the Red Girl and the love between them, Annie is able to reterritorialise the colonial space: 'now I marched up boldly up behind the Red Girl as if at the top were my own room, with all my familiar comforts waiting for me' (1997, 58-59). As the girls enter the lighthouse they gain a new point of view and, via language of sealandscape, they see the island differently:

At the top we stood on the balcony and looked out towards the sea. We could see some boats coming and going; we could see some children our own age coming home from games; we could see some sheep being driven home from pasture; we could see my father coming home from work. (1997, 59)

As the girls overlook the island and its inhabitants they also gain authority over it, taking control away from the colonising powers and offering the love between two girls as a way of gaining ownership of the island. The intertextuality between Kincaid's and Woolf's texts is

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<sup>206</sup> By closing each chapter of her book with the suggestion that the events taking place have already occurred in the previous chapters, thus disrupting the linear temporal progression, Kincaid also brings in an intertextual reference as a means of dislocating the Western literary canon.



seen in the establishment of an alternative geography—one that allows a creation of (Third)spaces/rooms in the Caribbean where (queer) women can write and develop and, by the means of queer affiliation, create a space of habitation.

As a result, I argue that Thomas's and Kincaid's novels employ male and female queer desire, respectively, as a means of re-appropriating the Western canon by queering of the Bildungsroman *as well as* inserting a queer presence within Caribbean geography. This is a response to Frantz Fanon's decolonising assertion of the homosexual absence in the Caribbean. Inhabiting the homosexual absence offers Thomas and Kincaid the language of sealandscapes as a postcolonial/queer approach to working against compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchal stereotypes and phallogentric institutions. These tactics of queer tactical diaspora destabilise the abovementioned categories and work to insert a queer presence as a Thirdspace in-between the geographies of the West and the rest.







## CHAPTER FIVE: RESHAPING THE PAST IN LAWRENCE SCOTT'S *AELRED'S SIN*

Throughout my thesis I have examined how Caribbean writers insert (queer) sexuality into the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition and do so in a tactical way. As I have suggested, queer tactical diaspora has offered a way of reworking the strategic claim to nationhood and home by inserting queerness as a constitutive part of making a national community.<sup>207</sup> In Chapters Two and Three, I argued that the languages of landscape and seascape add historical context to Caribbean space and alter theories of cultural geography based on a linear model of colonial progress. Investigations of island history by way of the Black Atlantic provide a trajectory to dismantle Eurocentric notions of diaspora and indigeneity by focusing on nautical routes and oceanic imaginary. Thus, I have drawn on Glissant's language of landscape and Brathwaite's language of seascape to displace Western constructions of normative gender and sexuality. This was connected in Chapter Four to the notion of sealandscapes found in Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* and Kincaid's *Annie John*, both of which employ the language of sealandscapes to foreground the two protagonists' queer sexuality. One of the most important aspects of both novels (indeed in all the texts I analyse) is the act of rewriting and re-membering to alter colonising fictions and challenge the master codes of imperialism. By, for instance, imitating the Western Bildungsroman and adding the coming out story to it, or imploding the European pastoral vision of the New World, these Caribbean writers employ a European imaginative logic in order to subvert and challenge the colonial and neocolonial notions of 'proper' male and female sexuality. By challenging the colonial relegation of same-sex desire as either a temporary stage of identity formation or as belonging only to the space outside the Caribbean, these writers successfully insert queerness within diasporic narratives and diasporise queer Caribbean narratives, making an important contribution to the disciplines of gender, queer and postcolonial studies.

In this chapter, I argue that Lawrence Scott's 1998 novel *Aelred's Sin* places emphasis on writing as a means of homosexual recognition. In fact, by initiating a tradition of male homoerotics, Scott positions the Caribbean queer narrative as a place where, through writing, a tactical homosexual identification can be articulated.<sup>208</sup> All of the texts discussed in my

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<sup>207</sup> Certainly, via the notions of mobility and movement, queer writing produces difference and emphasises dissimilarity and dislocation as a means for contesting the strategy's grasp on place.

<sup>208</sup> I do not want to imply that Scott's *Aelred's Sin* is the first Caribbean novel to emphasise male homoerotics. Indeed, as I argue in Chapter Four, H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* (which was published five years prior



thesis demonstrate an engagement with the issues of colonialism and sexual politics. In these texts, the act of writing, whether in terms of re-membering or re-imagining, excavates personal loss and trauma, colonial and neocolonial prejudices or the policing of sexual and racial identities. *Aelred's Sin*, on the other hand, besides overtly demonstrating male homoerotics, is also explicit about its treatment of sexual prejudice and the sexual encounter between male characters. Apart from the explicit nature of Scott's representation of sexuality between men, the novel fits comfortably into the tradition of queer Caribbean writing, for it unearths the repressed violence and physical and psychological aggression within the dominant discourses surrounding 'proper' sexuality. What separates Scott's text from the others is that it deals only with male characters and emphasises the practice of writing as a means for instigating homosexual recognition; that is, the awareness of queer sexuality.<sup>209</sup> Through the queer narrative, and subsequently writing itself, we are able to gain insights into queer identification, and through alliances and affiliation based on trauma and guilt, we glimpse a new (queer) perspective on the workings of queer sexuality in the Caribbean. In addition, *Aelred's Sin* falls into the genre of queer diasporic literature that proposes alternative formulations of home and diaspora. For Scott's novel interrogates multiple intersections between place and body as it takes us from the lush landscape of Les Deux Isles to the monastery in Ashton Park. In the midst of homosexual identification, Scott installs diaspora as the overall framework for the investigations of home and belonging in terms of sexuality. Later in this chapter, I will focus on Scott's intersecting of queer and postcolonial studies, as his fiction enables a reconsideration of queer and diasporic cultural texts within the framework of diaspora studies.

## WRITING HOMOSEXUAL IDENTIFICATION

*Aelred's Sin*, which won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best book in 1998, explores homoerotic love in the Caribbean and in a Benedictine Monastery in England. Its narrator, Robert de la Borde, arrives in England in 1980s from the imagined Caribbean setting

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to Scott's novel) presents a male protagonist who is forced to repress his emerging homosexuality out of fear of a generally homophobic society as well as a desire not to disgrace his family by being termed a 'buller'. Sexuality, as I argue, is closely tied to learned colonial values of class and race, as the protagonist Jerome, who experiences several mental breakdowns, realises that his psychic convalescence can only occur if he sloughs off the Eurocentric (neo)colonial values and embraces his African cultural and spiritual heritage.

<sup>209</sup> I argue that the queer Caribbean narrative serves as a conduit for identification of queer sexuality. This is important for the instigation of heterosexual tolerance of homosexuality and as a means of highlighting the role of the dominant colonial powers in instigating violence towards homoeroticism.



of Les Deux Isles (Scott's fictional name for Trinidad and Tobago) after hearing about the death of his older brother, Jean-Marc, who left Les Deux Isles at the age of seventeen to join Ashton Park Monastery in the 1960s.<sup>210</sup> Throughout the novel, Robert re-traces the steps of his brother who takes on the name of Aelred, after a ninth-century Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx whose book *Spiritual Friendship* explores erotic love between men and the possibility of an intimate friendship within the 'uncorrupted' context of the monastic existence. Robert reconstructs Jean-Marc's life through his letters, memoirs, journals, anecdotes and interviews; thus, by 're-membering' Jean-Marc's life, Robert comes to terms with the death of his older brother and his own homophobia. Robert's reassembling of his brother's life serves a twofold purpose. First, like the other case studies in my thesis, it exhibits the queer diasporic re-membering which recreates and metamorphoses the materiality of place. Second, it initiates a revisiting of Robert's own role in his brother's life, connecting him, through his own guilt and trauma, with Aelred and the characters Ted and Benedict. Overall, Robert's reconstruction of Aelred's life is another example of the role of tactics in the workings of queer diaspora. Not only does queer tactical diaspora alter territory and displace notions of heterosexual origins, but it also combines the movement of sexuality with the developmental passage from one fixed boundary to another, thus inserting (queer) sexuality within the distinction between home and away, 'here' and 'there'. Accordingly, Robert's tactical revisiting and reconstructing of his brother's life in the Caribbean and England adds another dimension to the literary project of Scott's book: it connects the reader with both Aelred and Robert, as Robert realises his role in shaping Aelred's life as well as the predicament of the late realisation of his faults. Robert's tactical reconstruction of his brother's life emphasises the role of writing as a means of identification, for he discloses the intricacies of stories that are interwoven within each other, underlining the multi-layered narrative structure of *Aelred's Sin*. His task is to 'uncover' the untold stories, one of which is his brother's queer desire. This, as we will learn, is only one of possibly countless stories that offer an insight into Jean-Marc's life. Obviously, it is too late for both brothers, but through writing, Robert is able to gain insight to his role in shaping his brother's destiny. More important, he is able to connect his brother's journals with those of Aelred of Rievaulx,

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<sup>210</sup> By creating fictional names for islands Scott follows the same tradition as *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here*.



linking the two Aelreds and re-interpreting their writings to signify love and affinity rather than transgression and impropriety.

Before I explore Scott's structuring of *Aelred's Sin*, I would like to return to the languages of sealandscape.<sup>211</sup> For Scott begins his novel with a Prologue, in which we find a description of the Caribbean landscape:

High above the plains, sheer from the valleys, the forested mountains climbed to summits in the clouds. This was a wild place. The green enamel cracked into rock face and crumpled under the force of cataracts, waterfalls, cascades. The rivers surged around ancient stones, pulling at the roots of old trees; dragging at the mountains, at their might and wildness. (17)

Here, Scott juxtaposes the Caribbean landscape with wilderness, and he appears to mimic the European literary tradition of the folk tale, which contains, among various other motifs, the descriptions of dreamlike places.<sup>212</sup> The fantastical, 'unreal' depiction of the Caribbean is, of course, evocative of the European pastoral vision of the New World as it corresponds to the motif of a recovery of a lost essence.<sup>213</sup> Scott's framing of the novel in terms of the New World pastoral tradition places it within the Caribbean literary tradition where Western literary traditions are imitated for the purpose of subverting and altering them. Interestingly, Scott continues the New World pastoral with the insertion of Christianity in Caribbean landscape: 'On one of those plateaux, which you come upon with astonishment and relief, wild grasses blowing in the breeze, trees called Immortelle, a small band of men built a cloister and a church in glass and mud' (17). In this 'wild and uninhabitable place', the monks, we are told, 'harnessed the natural fertility of the ground for the provision of food and beauty. [...] They fashioned spaces of light and shadow; shade from the heat, gardens with flowers and shrubs' (17-18). Taming the wilderness and inhabiting the uninhabitable places, the monks install peaceful and gentle 'civilisation' in this uncultivated space. Moreover, trying to 'detach themselves from the mortals' the monks become 'attached to higher qualities', creating not civilisation but a piece of divinity on earth: 'This was a paradise, a cloistered heaven'. More important, by not limiting themselves to merely inhabiting a small

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<sup>211</sup> This is vital for my analysis of Scott's novel in terms of queer tactical diaspora, for the tacticality of language enables a stronger emphasis on writing as a means of homosexual identification.

<sup>212</sup> The forest, symbolising darkness and the unknown, is one of the typical fairy tale motifs (cf. Brothers Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*)

<sup>213</sup> The idea of a 'lost essence' corresponds to Kincaid's investigations of the European notion of a 'lost paradise', a recurring element in *A Small Place* and *Annie John*.



portion of the land, the monks 'built a school for boys. They hoped that some of these young boys would join them' (18).

The Prologue introduces us to the idyllic imagery of Caribbean landscape, but it also interlocks with many themes discussed in my other readings. For Scott's treatment of Caribbean space in the first two pages of the novel represents the landscape as closely connected to the contemporary debates concerning place and identity, and which will link identity and territory throughout the novel. The discussion of dwelling also suggests that movement (and especially the idea of the moving body) enables disengagement with and a displacement of the connection between identity and territory. This appears in the description of the twelve-year-old boy who 'left the old wooden school, which smelt of coconut oil and which leant against the big stone church of Notre-Dame de Grace to go to the school in the mountains, following his best friend and the ideals of the monk, Dom Maurus' (18). Framing the boy (who will later on be identified as the main character Jean-Marc) as belonging to Caribbean space emphasises his transition to England and the displacement and transformation he goes through in the process. In fact, the narrator tells of the boy's first movement from 'the land of the sugar-cane fields and the old racatang town which tumbled down to the sea' to the monastery, where he became 'sick, homesick. He wouldn't eat' (19-20). The boy's despair and displacement prompts the monastery infirmarian, Dom Placid, to tell him a story about another boy of great beauty and manners (later identified as Saint Aelred), who was schooled with the sons of the king of Scotland, on the king's request. Interestingly, it is Saint Aelred's troubled relationship with young boys and especially with one particular youth which sparks an intense interest in Jean-Marc. Aelred's decision to join a monastery in order to 'confess his love without fear' and his subsequent writing of *Spiritual Friendship* as a guide on how 'a love of one man for another may be embraced, how their hands may touch and how the kiss of love may be given' (23-24), instigates the little boy's pursuit of love, connecting him with Aelred and the territory where Aelred's love takes place. The series of events reveal the multiple narrative frames that relate direction to the depictions of landscape and the overall theme of writing as homosexual identification. For Robert's framing of his brother's story in which Jean-Marc is situated firmly in the Caribbean landscape works as a two-pronged response to the homophobia and intolerance Jean-Marc faced as a young boy on Les Deux Isles. First, it locates queer desire in Caribbean space, counteracting the decolonising politics of the postcolonial nation-state which emphasises the transgression of homosexuality and promotes heterosexual citizenship. Second, Robert, by beginning his



brother's story with an emphasis on sexuality, exhibits homosexual identification through a queer narrative written by a heterosexual author.<sup>214</sup>

It is Robert who uncovers the ignored and silenced (hi)stories. In the chapter titled 'The Portrait', Jean-Marc discovers a painting in Ashton Park, depicting a little Black boy kneeling 'in a decorative manner at the duke's feet' (77).<sup>215</sup> The boy, 'dressed in red satins and gold silks', who is 'smiling up to the duke' was 'a diminutive, his master's doll' (78). The duke, on the other hand, is 'not even looking at the boy; he looked out over the world beyond the frame of the painting' (78). Jean-Marc becomes infatuated with the painting, especially the representation of duke's superiority and the dehumanisation of the Black boy: 'The admiration in the boy's eyes was the same as that in the face of the master's dog which knelt at his feet on the other side of the painting. It was looking up plaintively' (78).<sup>216</sup> Moreover, as Jean-Marc gazes into the portrait he feels his own face 'superimposed upon that of the boy whose face shone from beneath, so that the black face seemed to be his own' (78). As Jean-Marc metamorphoses into the Black boy, he recalls past memories of accusations from his childhood friends of his 'superior' social status: 'all you French Creole!' (79). Instantaneously, Jean-Marc's recollection of the accusations from his Black friends merge with the memories of his Black nurse Toinette who narrates the story of Mungo—an African boy who is transported to the Caribbean and attempts to escape slavery. Here, Scott intersects the dehumanisation of the Black body with the dehumanisation of the queer body. This is also seen in the coupling of the boy's name, *Mungo*, with *Ashton Park*. The reference to the Scottish explorer Mungo Park and the African Association works as a method for linking the British colonial project with Aelred's position as a postcolonial subject.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, later in the novel, Jean-Marc discovers a grave marked with the letter J, and he begins to create a narrative of the life of the boy in the picture, calling him Jordan. The reference to the river

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<sup>214</sup> Robert's account is not merely a simple story of his unfortunate brother; it is, according to the narrator, a 'hagiographic' account of 'life and love [...] written in blood, blue, like Quink ink. [...] One story lies within another' (24). Seen in retrospect from Robert's point of view, Jean-Marc's life becomes the life of a saint, elevating him to the status of his ninth-century counterpart.

<sup>215</sup> Scott's image is based on John Riley's 1690 painting *Charles Seymour, 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset*. For more information on this painting and others, see Dabydeen 1985.

<sup>216</sup> 'The configuration of white master/mistress, dog, and black servant, is frequent in English painting', writes Dabydeen. In Riley's painting, 'black servant boy and black dog adopt the same attitude of admiration for their Master. The black and the dog are mirror images of each other. ... A hierarchy of power relationships is being revealed: the superior white (superior in social and human terms) is surrounded by inferior creatures, the black and the dog, who share more or less the same status' (26).

<sup>217</sup> The African Association was a British upper-class association of explorers (founded in 1788) dedicated to the exploration of West Africa which at the time was largely 'uncharted'.



Jordan is an allusion to the main mission of the African Association: to discover and map the origin and course of the Niger River and ultimately find the lost city of Timbuktu. Here, we witness the 'shared histories' I examined in the previous chapters, but also the participation in multiple histories, each transposed onto the other. As Jean-Marc (re)constructs the narrative of Jordan's life, he uncovers dialogues between the postcolonial tropes of displacement, slavery and racial difference. According to Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson, 'what connects Aelred's memories to theirs [his Black friends, Mungo and Jordan] is not so much a "shared racial essence" but what Gilroy calls "shared histories and geographic movements"' (2004, 89). Scott frames the 'The Portrait' as an identificatory device, as the creation of narrative serves as a means of identification. By disclosing the intricacies of stories that are woven together, Robert uncovers the untold story of his brother in the same way as Jean-Marc, by the means of imaginative reconstruction, creates the story of Jordan (whose name is both imposed and provisional, thus demonstrating the impossibility of recovery of his real name). The two 'narratives' share the tropes of identification, queerness as well as historical/geographical representations (particularly in terms of the conflation of *Mungo* and *Ashton Park*). Moreover, the insertion of the Black Atlantic into the story of Aelred/Jordan links the triangular trade with the queer narrative.<sup>218</sup> As Aelred identifies with Jordan through skin colour, he imagines Jordan telling his stories to Miss Amy, his White mistress, and describing the experience of slavery: 'Is here in Ashton Park I tell them the story of where I come from and the voyage I make. She say, suck your thumb and sleep. That women is called Miss Amy from Somerset, and she nice nice. My thumb crack' (242). Here, as in the previous literary works I examined, queer re-membering serves as a means of hybridising space where history, geography and personal/public narratives intertwine.

## MIRRORING HISTORIES

Robert's account of his brother's life is a means for homosexual recognition; that is, the awareness of queer sexuality is understood through the practice of writing. Apart from instigating heterosexual 'tolerance' of homosexuality, the Caribbean queer narrative is a conduit for the identification of queer sexuality where the process of mirroring enables a

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<sup>218</sup> In fact, the intermingling of race and sexuality is seen in the mirroring of Aelred and Jordan, as race initially becomes a factor connecting the two characters: 'Jordan was blacker than the boys he [Aelred] had known at school' (122). Here, we recall Aelred's friend and lover Ted, who reminds Aelred: "'I'm blacker than you'" (119).



queer perspective. As I have shown, the superimposition of Jean-Marc's image upon that of the Black boy combines the movement of sexuality with the developmental passage from one fixed boundary into another. This mirroring corresponds to the workings of tactical diaspora, where memories of the past are mobilised in order to displace originary homelands (and thus re-symbolise attachment/detachment to a certain territory). In addition, the process of writing and the subsequent creation of narratives work as a significantly potent means for employing the developmental model of non-heterosexuality. Indeed, by destabilising spatial boundaries through queer tactical diaspora, Scott inserts tactics within the wider debates on diaspora and gender studies, for mobility and local historicity emphasise the inseparability of race and homosexuality in the postcolonial discourses on identity and belonging. The overall structure of *Aelred's Sin*, where Aelred's outward projection (from Les Deux Isles to England, from monastery to the world outside) is reflected in the backward glance of his own memoirs and journals as well as his brother's literary production, is reminiscent of the Western coming out narrative.<sup>219</sup> The employment of developmental homosexuality in *Aelred's Sin*, I suggest, works as a method of linking race with homosexuality; queer tactical diaspora allows for an investigation and the deconstruction of the policing of racial and sexual borders. Recognising the collared and contained Black body in the portrait, Aelred realises that Blackness is under constant control, a fact which is juxtaposed with Father Justin's mantra: "Never in twos, always in threes" (136). While the latter exemplifies the strict regulation and surveillance of the gay body by the Church, the former is placed within the framework of White racial superiority. In addition, as Joe, Jean-Marc's friend points out, the State has taken over the role of controlling the gay body: 'That's what it was like then, Joe says. You were arrested. You were imprisoned and fined. You were shamed, insulted, beaten up. Not that it does not take place now' (173). In order to break down the carefully guarded line between homosocial and homoerotic behaviour, Aelred engages in (explicit) homosexual acts with Brother Edward, a White and blonde novice at the monastery. This is yet another instance of Scott's use of mirroring as a means for inserting queerness into the racial imaginary of Ashton Park. For Aelred's Caribbean lover's statement "I'm blacker than you" stands in stark contrast to his new English lover Edward, who is described as 'tall with blond hair. He had bright blue eyes and very white skin' (158). Scott's mimicking of the coming out narrative as well as the

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<sup>219</sup> Like Thomas in *Spirits in the Dark*, I argue that Scott's employs the (Western) gay convention of coming out as a response to Frantz Fanon's identification of homosexuality as a European export.



inflection of the narratives of Jordan and Aelred, where inversion and doubling enables a recognition and sharedness of narratives, corresponds to the potential and capability of queer tactical diaspora to rework the strategic, staking claim to a nation and home and inserting queerness as a constitutive part of the community. More important, Scott's use of queer narratives (by a heterosexual narrator) exhibits the ability of queer tactical diaspora to trespass borders and incorporate space as a way of mapping out the interstices between place and body. Moreover, the use of inversion and doubling (tacticality) in *Aelred's Sin* highlights race and queerness within the wider debates on diaspora and gender studies, in that it adds mobility and local history to the already existing scholarship.<sup>220</sup>

*Aelred's Sin* responds to Terry Goldie's critique of queer theory and postcolonial studies and the focus on overarching categories such as 'race' and 'queer questions': '[It is] less than surprising that texts that represent the specific contexts of homosexual experience in what is usually constituted as postcolonial countries are almost never considered [by most critiques]' (22). Goldie is critical of the tendency to read 'race' and 'ethnicity' in a strictly (African)-American context: 'The universal homosexual is one feature of queer theory, in which the social configuration of homosexuality becomes a very minor element in contrast with a universal sexual orientation which not surprisingly looks very American' (21). In *Aelred's Sin*, the configuration of homosexuality occurs at the intersection of 'queer' and 'Black', as Aelred gazes at the picture of Jordan while Benedict stares at 'his naked legs' (81). Later in the text, Edward, observes Aelred for the first time, and remarks to Benedict: "'He's very dark'" (161). Here, Benedict and Edward gaze at and desire Aelred's Black body. In both cases, a transgression occurs where the queer body is read in terms of race while the Black body is read in terms of homosexuality. Consequently, the intersection of Black and queer works as a means of diasporising queer desire and assigning homosexuality to the Black body. Thus, Scott's mirroring technique serves as a response to Goldie's call for a diasporised queer theory and Frantz Fanon's contention that homosexuality is a specifically White 'problem'. In terms of the conventional diasporic discourse, which is marked by a glance back to an idealised past, Scott's novel intervenes in the discourses of queer sexuality and diaspora studies by incorporating the questions of desire and the body within the histories of racist,

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<sup>220</sup> The term 'inversion' was used in nineteenth-century sexology to refer to homosexuality. Sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), described homosexuality not only as congenital but also hereditary and degenerative. Reversal of gender traits or sexual inversion is, according to Krafft-Ebing, 'a result of neuro-psychical degeneration' (cited in Gibson 85).



colonialist and homophobic violence that still resonate loudly in the present. By the means of outing—both in terms of geography (Aelred's developmental movement from Les Deux Isles to England) as well as subjectivity (the excavation of untold stories)—Scott mirrors different histories to document recognition and identification. But, Scott's novel is also particularly apt for existing theories of gender and postcolonialism, for it focuses on the highly intricate interstices between queer memories and diasporic spaces.

Throughout my thesis I question the validity in the postcolonial world of the workings of queer studies and their Eurocentric underpinnings, for they run the risk of universalising the experience of the unmarked White, male body. Since queer studies is mostly a Western academic exercise, I argue that it must be coupled with the (admittedly overarching) field of diaspora studies if it is to open its borders and become permeable to other contexts and disciplines. In *Aelred's Sin*, the coupling of queerness and diaspora is seen in the mirroring of the sodomisation of Jordan and Aelred (Jean-Marc), as both characters experience the same fate as a result of their 'otherness'—Jordan, an African slave, and Aelred, a homosexual. In fact, the act of sodomy acts as a force that maintains the unambiguous lines between White/Black and heterosexual/homosexual. 'Master Walter come back drunk from a drinking bout. [...] He is stumbling around in the stable with his breeches down and he is calling wildly for his little nigger boy. [...] He is standing over me' (368-369), Jordan's story goes. After the act sodomy, Jordan relates: 'But I cannot sleep when Master Walter revive and he drag me to the room with the peeping hole and the contraptions and where he hang me against the wall to whip me. He remember who I is' (369). Here, White supremacy is exerted over the Black body by the means of sexual violence, while in the case of Ted and Jean-Marc, the compulsory heterosexuality of the school is enforced by the same means. In both cases, male heterosexuality is rendered superior through the acts of sodomy and the subsequent feminisation of the enslaved Black body and the homosexual body; they are rendered impossible within the context of compulsory White heterosexuality.<sup>221</sup>

The connection between queerness and the Black body in *Aelred's Sin* corresponds to the process of writing as a means of identification. From the instant they are branded as 'bullers', Ted and Jean-Marc's bodies are marked as queer and consequently displaced from the heteronormativity of the school. For Ted and Jean-Marc, the identification of

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<sup>221</sup> Here, Scott links the postcolonial body with the homosexual body, coupling the aforementioned decolonising politics of the solely heterosexual Caribbean with the Western notions of queerness.



homosexuality results in an increasing harassment and ostracisation, resulting in the gang-rape which interestingly is narrated in two versions: one in Robert's voice and the other in Jean-Marc's writing in his journal. In the first version, Robert overhears the senior boys bragging about raping Ted and Jean-Marc: 'They had it coming to them. If that's what they want. If that's what they like, the bullers. If that's where they want to take it. Let them. Did you hear them? Like they were asking for it. PLEASE was louder than STOP. Did you hear them?' (308), Robert's account of 'The Raid' is, according to him, different from Jean-Marc's 'embellished' version from his own journal:

*We are both crying and looking at each other. Made to lie side by side face down. Stripped naked. Pinned down. We enter each other's eyes, watery. Here in this luminous eye we see only each other. This is where we have curled, into each other's eyes. To hide. [...] We leave our bodies on the ground and ascend above them and look down. We look down. They are used by them. Utterly. We utter nothing. Someone says PLEASE. Someone says STOP. One goes in, one comes out. One goes in, one comes out. There is a crown in there. (356, Scott's italics)*

Jean-Marc's version differs from Robert matter-of-fact account of the rape, attesting to the importance of narration and story-telling for the process of identification. In fact, Robert explicitly states that he is able to pick up Jean-Marc's 'implicit and explicit meanings in his writing', recognising that Jean-Marc's writing is poetic: 'his poetry is a poetry of pain' (358). Through poetry, Robert is able to reconstruct Jean-Marc's life and experience homosexual recognition, which ultimately forces him to acknowledge his compliance in Jean-Marc's ostracisation and abuse.<sup>222</sup> Importantly, the end of Jean-Marc's 'poetic' narrative of 'The Raid' demonstrates that it is not merely an overstated rendition of the gang rape, but it is just as 'factual' as Robert's account. This is seen in Jean-Marc's conflation of homosexual violence with his and Ted's re-birth in the River Jordan:

*I want to feel. Don't touch me. Who says that? Where do we go?  
We stumble down to the river. Look at what's happened.  
The rock pool runs red with our blood. This is my blood which shall be poured out for you. Blood over blue stones.  
We wash our bodies in the River Jordan. (357, Scott's italics)*

Apart from connecting him to Jordan (the Black boy in the painting), the River Jordan implies re-birth and multiplicity. Depicting Jean-Marc with religious undertones, Scott emphasises the importance of Jean-Marc's re-birth and the site of hybridity, self-reflection and the dialogues

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<sup>222</sup> Writing and narration, Robert admits, has forced him to 'eat my words. Testaments' (357).



between the postcolonial tropes of displacement, slavery and racial difference. In fact, Robert initially identifies Aelred's account of his life as poetic:

J. M., Aelred. It is Aelred the young monk, not my brother J. M., who found this poetry in himself even here in the cold of winter. He found these high words, as he calls them, in the high hills, from the tall palms, from the palmistes. He called them that, 'high words'. He had begun to mix it all up. 'In the valley below, the River Jordan over blue-veined rocks like the blue of Quink ink.' High words. He writes them, the kind of words he writes as poetry, the kind of words I saw in the lavatory: lick, suck. (129)

After identifying Aelred's language, Robert acknowledges the impact of Aelred's poetry and the subsequent change to his view of homosexuality, queer desire and the postcolonial queer body: 'I eat his words. I am drunk with his blood. Words of blood soak into desk tops, on to lavatory walls. Messages. They were marooned in their desire. I become a poet' (129). Aelred's language and his narration of what happened at the day of 'The Raid' attest to the space of language in the Caribbean (queer) narrative for homosexual recognition and tolerant identification. Scott's emphasis on Robert and Aelred connects the two characters in terms of homophobic abuse and violence, but also compassion and empathy. Although initially unable to understand Aelred's life choices, it is by writing that Robert gains an awareness of the sexual and racial dynamics that contributed to his own persecution of Aelred on Les Deux Isles. Through Aelred's 'poetry', Robert is able to see his own past through the eyes of his brother, a past where homophobia and Black oppression become sites of knowledge and awareness:

I feel sad and lonely, I wanted to take care of them now. I wanted the details of their love to be named. Aelred of Rievaulx had tried to name his sin, writing to his sister. This is hagiographic tale, not a pornographic story. It is of the passion of those whose young love was inspired by saints and who were wrestling with their nature. His words lead me. I eat them, before I can digest their meaning. I look out on his world. It falls under his gaze, now my gaze. (221)

Scott's emphasis on writing and homosexual identification, then, corresponds to queer tactical diaspora, for *Aelred's Sin* is a novel that transgresses the racial and sexual divides through empathetic identification, crossing national, racial and sexual borders. Moreover, Scott's novel reworks the strategic by staking claim to nation, race and sexuality by inserting queerness as a constitutive part of a national community. In *Aelred's Sin*, queer memories trespass borders and incorporate literary space as a way of mapping out the interstices between race, sexuality and identity.



## OUTING DIASPORA

In *Aelred's Sin*, Robert's re-construction of his older brother's life re-maps and re-imagines notions of home and belonging. Emphasising the practice of writing as a means for homosexual recognition, Robert is a conduit for identifying queer sexuality, since Robert himself was an integral part of the violence enforced by the dominant colonial power against homoeroticism. In order to make it more in line with my arguments about queer tactical diaspora, in this section I will focus explicitly on the diasporic elements of the novel. In agreement with the overall argument of my thesis, I read *Aelred's Sin* neither as the fiction that illustrates my theory nor as a novel seen from the perspective of queer diaspora. Instead, defying a firm grounding within either diaspora or queer studies, the novel is queer and tactical in its goal of disrupting the Eurocentric notions of sexual diasporic narratives where the dichotomies between nation and diaspora, and heterosexuality and homosexuality, are maintained. Queer tactical diaspora allows me to disrupt and dislocate these binaries, employing the same theories and methodologies that underpin them.

The diasporic elements of *Aelred's Sin* are tied to the Western coming out story as a narrative of gay development from heterosexuality (which is viewed as oppressive) to homosexuality (which is viewed as liberating and cathartic). As a result, the coming out story is a method of constructing a narrative of one's identity in which the storyteller adjusts the plot, by the means of appropriating the past and the present, to fit the story into a coherent narrative structure. As I argued earlier, the storyteller is a revisionist who rewrites and re-adjusts elements in order to construct an identity formation that is detached from the binary thinking of a transition from shame to pride. In Scott's novel, however, the storyteller is not Jean-Marc but his brother, who not only participated in violence against homosexuality but who is currently, according to himself, 'eat[ing] his [Jean-Marc's] words' (112). The novel's narrative structure, which rests on a heterosexual man's realisation (and gradual acceptance) of his brother's homosexuality, adds to the traditional coming out story by including self-criticism, for the novel's homoeroticism is overwritten by the once-homophobic man's awareness and recognition of an 'unnatural' homosexuality. Interestingly, Robert highlights both the seemingly transitional narrative of Jean-Marc's life from the oppressive Les Deux Isles to the ostensibly liberated England, and the diasporic movement between the two territories surrounding it: 'I have the journals and now my own stories. I reconstruct, I tell his life. It begins to change something in me. It begins to change me writing this. Write it to



understand it: that was his method. [...] I eat his words. He moves between here and there' (112).

The movement between here and there is established early in the novel through the difference between the landscapes of Les Deux Isles and England. Jean-Marc's movement from one territory to another, however, begins with his movement from the stone church of Notre-Dame de Grace to the school in the mountains, 'following his best friend and the ideals of the monk, Don Maurus' (18). Consequently, in the chapter entitled 'The Clothing', the young boy moves from being Jean-Marc de la Borde of Le Deux Isles to Aelred of Ashton Park, England. Jean-Marc/Aelred's displacement is emphasised by his memories of home (Malgretoute), triggered by his brown suit and his white cotton shirt, which 'smelt of his home far away. They smelt of his mother and father, his brother and sisters, whom he had left. They smelt of his country. They smelt of heat and sunshine and haze and rising up to a blue sky above green can fields and the shade of the cocoa hills' (29). Subsequently, the transition is followed by doubts about Ashton Park: 'What was he doing here? [...] He smelt that smell of travelling in aeroplanes on the sleeve of his jacket. There was a musty smell of Ashton Park, then of his home Malgretoute: in spite of everything' (29). The movement from one territory to another is repeated once again at the end of the novel when Aelred begins yet another movement—out of the monastery and to a 'civilian' life with his lover, the former monk Edward. In the chapter called 'The Flat, Bristol' we are told of Jean-Marc's exit from Ashton Park and Edward's eventual death by AIDS. Thus, the transitions between the stone church to the school in the mountains, to Ashton Park and ultimately Bristol, highlight a subjectivity on the move; that is, Jean Marc's body as a marker of difference, implicated in multiple contexts and mobilities of race, class and sexuality.<sup>223</sup> Employing queer tactical diaspora allows us to read *Aelred's Sin* in terms of geography and sexuality, as a means of abrading the normative workings of 'proper' place and 'proper' sexuality. As Jean-Marc's body moves from one territory to another, it demonstrates how queer diasporic fiction can create alternative formulations of home and diaspora. In Chapter Two, I suggested that being on the move allows the body to create multiple sites of connection, acting upon a place and ultimately metamorphosing both the materiality of place and rootedness of a body in a place. In *Aelred's Sin* though, Jean-Marc's mobility allows him to form new sites of connection and

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<sup>223</sup> The focus on the body is in line with my overall argument about the ability of queer memories to trespass borders and incorporate space as a way of mapping out the interstices between place and body.



affiliation—sites that are rooted in the Middle Passage, the Caribbean diaspora and (post)colonial homophobia. By constructing a retrospective look at Jean-Marc's moves from the Caribbean to England through his brother's eyes, Scott destabilises the static place, and even more important, he questions the developmental model of queer identity.

By focusing on the motif of coming out, I do not want to suggest that Scott's novel is simply an addition to the postcolonial technique of rewriting colonising fictions as a means of exposing the erasure of queer identity and the decolonising politics of the Caribbean. Rather, Scott employs diaspora not only as a method of subverting the European literary tradition of the Bildungsroman but also as a means of merging with the field of postcolonial studies, queerness and homoeroticism—themes rejected by Frantz Fanon as being inherently European. Contrary to Samuel Selvon, who represents the Caribbean diaspora with the language of hypermasculinity and sexualisation, where Black identity is exoticised by a dominant White culture, Lawrence Scott presents a Caribbean diaspora intertwined with the conflicting issues of race, class and sexuality. *Aelred's Sin* exposes the racial and sexual underpinnings of both Les Deux Isles, as a previously colonised space, and the Ashton Park Monastery, the colonising force that relegates the Caribbean as the Other. Jean-Marc's access to a home is prohibited by the erasure of queerness within both the Caribbean subjectivity as well as the monastic life in Ashton Park. Therefore, his transitions from one space to another is a movement 'outward', towards a space that accommodates his queer desires. Les Deux Isles and the monastic order do not match Jean-Marc's codes of morality, which would regulate expressions of affinity and belonging. In both cases Jean-Marc is forced to move to another space, this time the world outside the cloister and which, according to himself, is 'not much different' than the life in Les Deux Isles or in the monastery: 'We can't hold hands in the street. We worry about being caught sleeping together. It's worse [...] in some ways' (440-441). In the 'Epilogue', Joe expresses many of the 'ironies' surrounding Jean-Marc's 'coming out' in the 1960s. Before he does so, though, Robert narrates the scene in which Joe displays a photograph of Jean-Marc, Edward and himself:

1967! The year of consenting adults! Joe said cynically. On the steps of the student union in Bristol. That's where we all met. Edward read history, J. M. English and History and me, Sociology and Politics. We were educated for the sixties: '68 was Paris and Prague! We went through everything together. That story you've been piecing together, Joe said, is a horror show as far as I'm concerned. (439-440)

The reference to the sexual liberalism of the 1960s alludes to the 1969 Stonewall Riots, frequently posited as the foundation for the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement in



the US. Since queer theory and queer studies problematise, through the poststructuralist lens, the gay liberationist and lesbian feminist understandings of identity, sexuality and power relations, the queer take on Jean-Marc's position would posit sexualities based on the notions of identity politics ('gay' and 'lesbian') as being exclusive and too limited. The elusive and vague definitions of queer and queer politics may make it a powerful tool for challenging normative (sexual) knowledges. In addition, the linking of queer politics and nationhood appears to be a serious contender for the deconstruction of the discourses surrounding queer subjectivities' access to citizenship and national subjectivity. However, as I mention in Chapter Two, although Berlant and Freeman posit Queer Nation as a tool for excavating the disjunction between citizenship and national subjectivity, the idea of Queer Nation is tied to the Western logic of citizenship based on sexual object-choice and individual self-identity. But, if we decentre Euro-American paradigms founded on visibility, the displacement of Western sexual conventions and the reworking of queer pleasures and desires might be sensitive to non-Western territories.<sup>224</sup>

In *Aelred's Sin*, though, the disjunction between the Euro-American notions of queer citizenship and non-Western queer desire is transposed onto the contrast between Jean-Marc's 'excitement of radical sexual liberalism in Europe' and the seafront in Barmouth, Wales: 'It was hot. The hillsides near the estuary were purple with rhododendrons and shimmering with yellow gorse. High mountains sheer to the Irish Sea. In the distance mountains in haze. Reminds me of islands, J. M. said' (440). The scene at the seafront in Barmouth (an emblematic borderline space) is crucial for our understanding of *Aelred's Sin* as a novel that is critical of Euro-American paradigms of both sexual liberation and Queer Nation, for it merges nationality, sexuality and race by juxtaposing Les Deux Isles with Wales. This synthesis is done through the sea (especially the Atlantic) and exposes the materiality and trauma of the Middle Passage. In this, Scott employs the language of seandscape as a link that sutures the Atlantic with the coming out narrative in order to route/root his novel deep within Caribbean culture and space. Also, the language of seandscape links H. Nigel Thomas's and Jamaica Kincaid's novels; *Aelred's Sin* depicts the Atlantic as a way of connecting the landscapes of Les Deux Isles and Wales in order to complicate the relationship between ethnicity and national belonging by mixing sexuality with diaspora. This is shown in the following scene

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<sup>224</sup> I include a critique of the linking of queer and state by the means of this disjunction, based on the risk of the relegation of all queer subjectivities to the status of identification with either citizenship or nationality.



when Jean-Marc attends a funfair and sees a 'black guy playing a steel tenor pan' (441). Here, several trajectories of identity connect Jean-Marc's status as a homosexual, an immigrant and a racialised Other to Caribbean space and diaspora. Jean-Marc's connection to the music is so powerful that he exclaims: 'God that music! I've not heard it in years. I would know it anywhere'. In his encouraging Jean-Marc to ask the man where he is from, Edward exclaims in jest: 'Bet his name is Jordan' (441). The inclusion of Jordan in the scene ties the colonial and postcolonial themes of mirroring that is present in Ashton Park, suturing Jean-Marc to Jordan (the African slave in the portrait) to Mungo (the runaway slave) to Ted (his mixed race childhood lover in *Les Deux Isles*). Furthermore, the linking of the four figures is also achieved through representation of homophobic violence and the construction of body as a racialised Other. As Edward associates Jean-Marc with the Black Atlantic while the music is playing, the connection is reinforced by Jean-Marc himself who exclaims: 'Calypso, man! Hear that calypso music!' (441). Thus, on the one hand, Scott problematises the universal figures of Blackness and queerness by complicating the notion of a stable identity. On the other, he deconstructs the relationship between ethnicity and national belonging by diasporising the idea of Queer Nation.

If calypso highlights the Caribbean diaspora in Wales, connecting Jean-Marc via the Atlantic to *Les Deux Isles*, Edward's observation of the discriminatory sign on the seawall is yet another trajectory of exile. But this time it places Jean-Marc's status as Other in terms of sexuality.<sup>225</sup> For, the proximity of calypso and the homophobia of the colonial centre are made possible by the presence of the Atlantic—a force that is a site of connection and disconnection, belonging and misrecognition, familiarity and unfamiliarity. The duality of the Atlantic is also seen in Jean-Marc's association with calypso, as it exhibits both his connection to *Les Deux Isles* as well as his estrangement from the islands. Moreover, calypso highlights Jean-Marc's expulsion from Ashton Park, seen in Jean-Marc and Edward's presence in Barmouth, and lastly, the discriminatory words written on the seawall underline his 'outing' as 'queer' by the colonial centre (the 'mother country'). In all three instances, Scott depicts the Atlantic as a vessel for exposing the failure of the 'coming out' theme to

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<sup>225</sup> Joe notices the word 'QUEER' written on the wall of the seafront (p. 441). Furthermore, while walking on the seafront, Jean-Marc, Edward and Joe sing in unison 'Under the boardwalk, down by the sea...', a song about carefree love by The Drifters. The irony, of course, is that while the trio adamantly reject the closet space, they are nonetheless relegated to the position of the (homosexual) Other, as the song serves as a metaphor for heterosexual love.



accommodate Jean-Marc's queer desires and provide him with a space of belonging that exists in-between the heterosexist codes that constantly control, constrain and relegate his Otherness. Once again, the Western literary tradition and the coming out narrative are subverted and exposed as founded on Eurocentric and colonial paradigms of who belongs and who is 'outed' as the Other. While Thomas and Kincaid create a queer resistance against the colonial and gender conventions that place same-sex desire as a temporary stage in identity development, Scott exposes the colonial and sexual conventions that exist in the postcolonial present, not as an overt act of resistance but more as a method of highlighting the importance of writing as a means of facilitating heterosexual identification. This, I argue, is an important step for the positioning the Caribbean space within narratives of tolerant identification.

I have suggested that queer tactical diaspora works as a conceptual tool for analysing the discourses of tradition and purity within national and diasporic ideologies. This queer tactical space, in which we find new desires and subjectivities that are located at the interstices between space, body and time, is itself located between 'here' and 'there'. I have also argued that reterritorialising the normalising strategies of conventional tactics exhibit the ability to 'queer' geography, both physically and metaphorically. In Chapter Three, I argued that queer tactical diaspora serves as a critique of the discourses of not only origins and traditions but also the established politics of immigration and home-space. Tidalectics in Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, I claimed, routes and roots place, allowing for a more nuanced and intricate investigation of the relationship between land and sea. Brand's emphasis on the lack of inhabitable spaces for the Black lesbian, based on concrete and painful experiences, engenders desire and resistance as well as loss and despair. By placing Elizete and Verlia in the paradigm of a dryness/fluidity dyad, Brand employs the language of tidalectics to depict queer desire as emerging out of exploitation, memory, freedom, revolution and transnational capitalism. In Brand's writing this is seen in the Caribana Festival, which highlights the 'realness' of the body and the Black (queer) experience, and Toronto's Bathurst Street, a space for Caribbean peoples caught in the in-between space of 'here' and 'there'. Both geographies rework (and create new) space in relation to the image of the sea as a site of release as well as captivity.

Similarly, in the Barmouth scene in *Aelred's Sin*, Scott employs the ocean as a means for accentuating the marginalisation of the queer Caribbean diaspora, partly due to its location on the periphery of the 'White' world, and partly because of Jean-Marc's reluctance to speak to the musician. In fact, echoing Brand's depiction of Caribana, which works as both a



mapping of the relationship between the Caribbean and Canada, and as an uncovering of the historical and cultural alienation and loss within the Black subjectivities in Toronto, Scott's inclusion of the pan player at the funfair highlights Aelred's dislocation from his Caribbean home and mother country. Although it appears that Jean-Marc/Aelred's 'timidity' prevents him from learning the player's nationality, Scott places the encounter between the two 'countrymen' within the context of Jean-Marc's ancestral connection with the White plantocracy in Les Deux Isles as well as his personal history of (sexual) displacement and abuse. Despite Aelred's 'identification' with calypso and the Caribbean diaspora in Barmouth, he is still prevented from gaining access to the community of Caribbean diaspora based on his social status as belonging to the White Creole elite.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, his 'sexual orientation' prevents Jean-Marc from connecting with the musician, for the history of colonial abuse and homophobic violence interweave in this crucial scene. If *Caribana* which, according to Brand, is 'situated in slavery', works as 'a celebration of Black liberation from forced labour' (2001, 41), the Caribbean diaspora in Scott's novel intersects dislocation from the 'mother island', the incompatibility of inherited religion and the inherent homophobia of the colonial centre. While Lake Ontario is a 'symbolic Atlantic', allowing the fluidity of the water to abrade the dryness of the White city and insert Black presence into a new, historical map of the city, the scene in Barmouth demonstrates that neither coming out (into the secular world) nor leaving a homophobic homeland engenders a sense of belonging for a White, Creole, queer identity. Instead, Scott suggests that Jean-Marc's racial, social and homosexual identities can only be articulated in a queer narrative of a Caribbean diaspora which re-excavates, restructures and rewrites his life. This re-structuring, however, does not entail a reconstruction of his life 'as it really was' but only as partially routed/rooted in a specific cultural and historical context.

By the means of queer tactical diaspora, Scott is able to place a heterosexual narrator as a storyteller who re-integrates his older brother into the family structure, Caribbean space and the Caribbean diaspora in Britain, while the object of his narrative re-constructs another narrative; namely, that of Jordan. Taken together the two narratives sustain each other, as Robert employs the story of Jean-Marc to better understand his brother, while Jean-Marc

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<sup>226</sup> Based on Jean-Marc and Robert's Creole status, Scott links the Black Power movement of the 1970, a violent marker of African presence in Les Deux Isles, with their alienation from the Black community: 'He asked me didn't I think it was interesting, disturbing, that there were no African names of any real significance, no place names? Had I not thought about why that was? At the time, I said I hadn't. We wiped out their history, he said. Long time ago I might've said, And a good thing too. I don't think that now. But 1970 and Black Power was still a memory for all of us at Malgretoute, a hard lesson' (108).



constructs the story of Jordan. The two seemingly independent narratives (the lost and silenced histories of the African presence in the Caribbean and the queer Caribbean diaspora in Britain) are joined together through queer tactical diaspora. As a consequence and as a testimony to the effectiveness of Scott's structuring of the novel in terms of homosexual identification, Robert's relationship to his brother and to the Caribbean is transformed. Robert's narrative of Jean-Marc's diaspora forces him to (once again) 'eat his words'. Writing queer diaspora, Robert learns, is a powerful force that makes him 'drunk with his [Jean-Marc's] blood. Words of blood soak into desk tops, on to lavatory walls. Messages. They were marooned in their desire. I become a poet. Cacao planter sing your calypso boy. Leave these matters to the poet. Then a world litany of abuse: queers, faggots' (129).<sup>227</sup> Intertwining poetry and abuse, the queer Caribbean diaspora narrative gives voice to erasures of the past. If Selvon's highly (hetero)sexualised narrative articulates a West Indian migrant experience in London as a collective subcultural community, Scott's novel talks back to this formulation of Caribbean and sexual identity by re-articulating the Caribbean landscape. Thus, by queer tactical diaspora, Scott's novel moves across geographical territories as well as across a wide range of theoretical paradigms.

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<sup>227</sup> Compare to Selvon's representation of the 'pansy'—see note 3.



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have focussed on recent developments in Caribbean writing in which queer sexuality occupies Caribbean space. Investigating the historical processes that determine the social and cultural meanings of sexuality, I read these texts as exhibiting, exposing and changing the sexual representations of bodies as part of a decolonising process within Caribbean nation-states. By revealing the importance of procreative sexuality in terms of the strength and health of the nation-states, these texts offer an insight into the historical workings of 'proper' sexuality in determining who belongs to the nation and who is stigmatised as outside the heteronormative norm. Through representations of queer diaspora, these texts appropriate and queer Caribbean space, reconceptualising it in terms of sexuality and affiliation. Queer diaspora, then, helps us to reconceptualise the fields of gender studies and postcolonial studies by exploring the interstices between them as well as their mutual shortcomings. These two ostensibly disparate fields, I argued, exhibit the possibility of creating an entirely new field of academic research where social and cultural meanings of sexuality become the main objects of colonial, historical and literary study. The intersection of academic fields, however, does not entail their eradication. Rather, I seek to build on the already existing theories of gender and postcolonial studies and, by paying attention to the intricate interstices between them, I add to both fields a new method of analysis.

I chose to look at one particular geographical space, namely, the Caribbean. My choice is based not only on the fascinating and highly complex history of the Caribbean as the Garden of Eden but also on the multifaceted definitions of sexuality in this postcolonial region. Since cultural meanings of sexuality in the Caribbean appear in various shapes and are formed by the colonial understandings of gender and sexuality, investigating texts that challenge hegemonic formulations of sexuality become even more constructive when they include other aspects of identity formation. The formulations of home and away, belonging and stigmatisation, are some of the elements upon which Caribbean narratives shed light. Certainly, the Caribbean can be defined in multiple ways but my definition restricts it to certain island nations within Caribbean space including, for instance, Jamaica, Antigua and Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>228</sup> On the other hand, the idea that the Caribbean is a single place is not

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<sup>228</sup> Mimi Sheller points to two definitions of the Caribbean. The usual, which is 'the island groupings of the Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, and the Bahamas, plus certain coastal zones of South and Central America



only misleading and erroneous—it also ignores various kinds of mobilities (people, texts, images, knowledge) within the region. My focus, however, as I have shown throughout my thesis, rests on the idea that the Caribbean geography is both real and imaginary, in that it has throughout history been denaturalised and renaturalised as a ‘natural paradise’, the Garden of Eden. In addition, the notion of a narrative with which my thesis deals is that of a fictional diasporic narrative; that is, belonging to the literary genre that proposes fiction as a means of formulating an alternative notion of home and diaspora. As a result, my notion of a queer tactical diaspora works as a means for adding to the genre of diasporic fiction a certain queerness that destabilises it, exposing it and making it susceptible to other cultural texts and academic fields. More precisely, the tacticality of queer tactical diaspora, as opposed to simply queer diaspora, makes it a strong candidate in the effort to disturb the imaginative landscape of queer diasporic fictions, since it is not confined to a certain genre or an academic discipline.<sup>229</sup> Queer tactical diaspora, as I have shown in my thesis, introduces tactics, mobility and local historicity to the existing scholarship, as it at the same time deconstructs the developmental coming out story. Trespassing borders between home and away, queer tactical diaspora exposes what is at stake when the body crosses multiple geographies. More important, the choice of employing queer tactical diaspora lies in its ability to expose the Eurocentricity of postcolonial deployments of sexuality.

I began this thesis with Alison Donnell’s call to critics, in which she urges greater emphasis on recent articulation of diverse sexual identities in Anglocreole Caribbean writing. Accordingly, I placed significant emphasis on recent queer Caribbean writing, following Donnell’s argument that ‘writers and critics have both initiated and negotiated the changing demands and orientations of right-bearing discourses across the twentieth century, offering distinctive and differentiated versions of nationalism, feminism, class politics and ethnic solidarity in such a way as to speak to and for the complexities of Caribbean history and place’ (244). By extension, I suggest that queer tactical diaspora crosses various theoretical paradigms and allows for a more agile and flexible investigation into the workings of

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sharing a cultural and historical relation to the island plantation societies (e.g. Suriname, Guyana, Belize)’, and her own, which entails perceiving the Caribbean as ‘an effect, a fantasy, a set of practices, and a context’ (5).

<sup>229</sup> Diasporic fiction is an exhaustive field, as it ranges from being non-fictional (memoirs, dairy entries, travelogues) to being fictional (fictional narratives in my thesis). My focus, however, was on the Caribbean queer narratives; that is, fictional texts written by authors living ‘abroad’ but who are still deeply involved in the Caribbean—most of my case studies are written by authors living in Canada (Mootoo, Brand, Thomas). By writing narratives of movement, belonging and (queer) sexuality, these authors disturb Caribbean space both in terms of geography and philosophy.



normative gender and sexuality in the Caribbean and the broader theories of postcolonialism and gender studies.

While diasporising queerness is not an uncomplicated process, the opening up of queer borders allows for a deconstruction of colonial structures of the 'the West and the rest' and a subsequent creation of transnational spaces in-between. The Western constructions of sexuality based on temporality, where the closeted subject becomes aware of his or her emerging homosexuality, is one of the areas where queer tactical diaspora comes into view. By imploding the (White) bourgeois assumptions about the transnational gay and lesbian subject, queer tactical diaspora creates a space between the (Western) internalisation of gay identity and the non-modern practices of the non-West.<sup>230</sup> Thus, the articulation of sexual identity in the Caribbean becomes caught in this in-between space where affiliation and belonging become intertwined. As a result, the use and the effect of queer tactical diaspora in the in-between space is twofold. First, it interrogates the power structures that position colonial subjects as either closeted or oppressed. Second, it investigates the sites of pleasure that emanate from the creation of new geographies of desire based on affinity, shared sexuality and national queerness. Overall, queer tactical diaspora becomes a means for decentring Whiteness and Euro-American sexual paradigms as it points towards a tactical method of employing dissimilarity and dislocation as a way of theorising postcolonial sexuality.

How do we employ the notion of queer tactical diaspora in future research in gender and postcolonial studies? Once again I return to David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Esteban Muñoz, who posed the question: 'What's queer about queer studies now?' (1). Answering their own question with a 'renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional', the group responds: 'A lot' (3). Their answer is grounded in the belief that queer scholars who 'examine the limits of queer epistemology, the denaturalizing potential of queer diasporas, and the emergent assumptions of what could be called queer liberalism [...] rethink queer critique in relation to a number of historical emergencies [...] of both national and global consequence' (1). The fact that queer studies rests on intersectionality exhibits the importance of including other forms of critique into investigations of sexuality outside the geographical and ontological space of Europe and

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<sup>230</sup> As I argued earlier, sexual practices that are not organised around visibility are assumed to be closeted or repressed. In addition, the lack of publicly identified gay people appears to imply that the society in question is predominantly homophobic and hostile towards homosexuality.



North America. In fact, queer tactical diaspora does to queer diaspora what queer epistemology, queer diaspora and queer liberalism do to queer studies—namely, it employs a wider range of theoretical paradigms across various geographies. Queer tactical diaspora deconstructs the dichotomies between diaspora/nation and homosexuality/heterosexuality, for it enables close readings of texts that defy categorisation. Theories of sexuality, whether homo-, hetero-, queer- or trans-, must be done with an acute sensitivity and awareness of the cultural, social and geographical specificity. Otherwise, we as theorists run the risk of naturalising and reinforcing the centeredness of the Euro-American identity paradigms, ultimately projecting Euro-American discourses of gay/lesbian and queer cultures to the ‘non-West’.

If queer diaspora runs the risk of promoting European and North American definitions of what constitutes queer sexuality, how can tacticality provide answers to this challenge? The movement of bodies across geographical territories creates sites of resistance in terms of desire, affiliation and belonging. Thus, by disregarding these sites we also discount the numerous ‘alternative’ formulations of sexuality, home and diaspora that stem from ‘outside’ Europe and the US. As a result, decentring and diasporising the dominant Euro-American paradigms requires us to move across geographies *as well as* various academic fields. Tacticality also allows us to cross theoretical paradigms, making use of whatever means are available and necessary in order to interrogate the social constructions of transnational sexuality. This entails engagement in various forms of narratives, whether in the shape of fiction, narratives, memoirs or travelogues, as sources of information that propose and investigate formulations of home and diaspora that do not ascribe to dominant notions of sexual identity.

The continuation of the study of queer tactical diaspora to include geographies outside the Caribbean archipelago is the next step in a more wide-ranging study of queer diasporic narratives. An emphasis on Asian or Indian diaspora in Britain, for instance, would also offer new insights into formulations of home, belonging and sexuality.<sup>231</sup> This work has begun with investigations of Asian transnationalism and queer social movements in the US, but this needs to extend beyond North America. Queer tactical diaspora is, then, a tool for broadening and

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<sup>231</sup> I intentionally use the vague and elusive categories ‘Asian’ and ‘Indian’ as a means of emphasising the complexity and the need for other contexts in which queer tactical diaspora can be useful.



diasporising queer investigations to include geographies such as Britain, Canada, South America and elsewhere while sustaining social, historical and cultural critique.







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