

Bookkeeping: Discourses of Debt in Caribbean Canadian Literature

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Department of English and Film Studies  
University of Alberta

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of debt and obligation in works of Caribbean Canadian literature published between 1997 and 2007. It uses these representations to discuss the relationship between postcolonial, global, and diasporic approaches to cultural studies. These disciplinary distinctions draw explicit and implicit divisions between the colonial, the postcolonial, and the transnational as discrete historical moments in a teleologic progression. Against such divisions, literary works by David Chariandy, Ramabai Espinet, Dionne Brand, and Nalo Hopkinson suggest that colonial pasts do not remain in the past but continue to overdetermine the ‘transnational’ present. Intriguingly, each of these authors uses the language of debt and obligation to describe these temporal and geographical entanglements.

This thesis draws on new economic criticism, memory studies, theories of recognition, treaty citizenship, and Afro-pessimism to argue firstly that Caribbean Canadian literature’s representations of debt refute emerging neo-Marxist theories of debt’s governmentality offered in response to the 2008 global financial crisis, and secondly, that they expose diaspora studies’ underlying valuation of individual autonomy and possessive individualism. By representing colonial pasts as outstanding and unpayable debts, fictional and nonfictional works dispute the seemingly clean breaks contemporary scholarship and political debates can draw between *colonial* pasts and *transnational* futures.

Debt, at its simplest, is any exchange not brought to completion; Canada’s present is a space of incomplete—and incompletable—cultural, economic, and intellectual exchanges. *Bookkeeping: Discourses of Debt in Caribbean Canadian Literature* offers an anti-colonial critique of the transnational present and asks what it means to live ethically amid the colonial aftermath’s systemic debts as they entangle past and future, nations and diasporas, bodies and archives, as well as political emancipation and consumer agency.

## PREFACE

An edited version of this thesis's first chapter, "Amortizing Memory: Debt as a Mnemonic Device in Diaspora," is published in *Small Axe*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2017. The published article's title is "Amortizing Memory: Debt as a Mnemonic Device in Caribbean Canadian Literature."

## DEDICATION

The student is not home, out of time, out of place, without credit, in bad debt. The student is a bad debtor threatened with credit. The student runs from credit. Credit pursues the student, offering to match credit for debt, until enough debts and enough credits have piled up. But the student has a habit, a bad habit. She studies. She studies but she does not learn. If she learned they could measure her progress, establish her attributes, give her credit. But the student keeps studying, keeps planning to study, keeps running to study, keeps studying a plan, keeps elaborating a debt. The student does not intend to pay.

---Stefano Harney and Fred Moten

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have accumulated a lot of debts while writing this dissertation, some of which are financial and some of which are much more complex and interesting. For reasons I trust will become clear to this thesis's readers, I have come to think of these second debts as defining my community. They cannot be paid back, cleared, or settled, but they can be acknowledged, engaged with, and passed forward. This includes my debt to Turtle Island's First Nations, particularly the Treaty 6 and Métis peoples on whose traditional territory, ᑭᓴᓴᑦᓴᓴᑦᓴᓴᑦ (Amiskwacîwâskahikan), I have lived the past 7 years. May my obligations to this land and its communities guide actions and scholarship going forward. ᑭᓴᓴᑦᓴᓴᑦᓴᓴᑦ (kinanâskomitin)! I also have an incalculable debt to the Caribbean Canadian writers who make this research possible and who share their stories despite profound barriers. Any critical conscious I have results from reading these authors. My obligations to this literature have made my scholarship possible.

My next debts are to my supervisor and mentor, Stephen Slemon, who gives us some sense of what Anansi would be like as an Emeritus professor, and my committee members, Teresa Zackodnik and Heather Zwicker, whose engagement has refined my research and polished who I am as a colleague. Their collective guidance has honed this dissertation's strengths and helped minimize its weaknesses. Special thanks to Laura Beard from the University of Alberta's department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies and David Chariandy from Simon Fraser University, my external examiners: I am so grateful for your time, your consideration, your insights. Thank you for pushing me to be better. Thank you for serving not just as my committee, but as a community to whom I am accountable as well.

I want to express my gratitude to Katherine Binhammer, Marie Carrière, Cecily Devereux, Corrinne Harol, Eddy Kent, Sarah Krotz, Ian MacLaren, Keavy Martin, Julie Rak, Peter Sinnema, and Terri Tomsy: each of you have spent your time with me, guided me, laughed with me, and made these years in the Department of English and Film Studies meaningful. I am so glad I chose to come here. I am so glad to have worked with each of you. Big thanks also to Kim Brown and Mary Marshall Durrell, the pillars our department rests on.

Support from my friends have kept me going throughout these studies. Neale Barnholden, Brent Bellamy, Rob Chabassol, Trevor Chow-Fraser, Thomas Dessein, Ashley Dryburgh, Anna Dow, Carmyn Effa, Alex Elise, Theo Finigan, Helen Frost, Libe García Zarranz, Dominique Hetú, Brandon Kerfoot, Rob Jackson, Marcelle Kosman, Derritt Mason, Hannah McGregor, Katherine

Meloche, Todd Merkley, Clare Mulcahy, Lisa Ann Robertson, Natasha Rombough, Anna Sajecki, Laura Schechter, Michelle Sims, Jana Smith Elford, Melissa Stephens, Stephen Tchir, Kaitlin Trimble, and Nick van Orden: you made Edmonton my home. I cherish our conversations, dinners, impromptu dance parties, schemes, dog walks, gif threads, coffee dates, clothing swaps, bar nights, office time, and every book you've lent me. To my SCT friends, including Phil Dickenson, Lisa Haynes, and Thomas West III: thank you for sharing what was both the most intellectually rigorous and ridiculously fun summer of my studies. I want to extend special thanks to Michaela Henry, Gylnnis Morgan, and Orly Lael Netzer: in reading my work, writing with me for hours on end, and travelling the world with me, you three have helped me in incalculable ways. I plan on doing everything I can to continue these exchanges of mutual support for years to come.

This thesis was completed with financial assistance from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the University of Alberta, and the Department of English and Film Studies. I also want to thank the Canadian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, the Mikinaakominis/TransCanadas Conference, and the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English for showcasing my research on graduate student plenaries and prize panels: these opportunities have fuelled this thesis from its tentative beginnings to its final revisions. It is an honour to have so much support from across CanLit's scholarly community.

I dedicate this thesis to my families: to my mum, Karen McLean, and my sister, Emma van der Marel; to Ter, Trish, and Clea Young as well as Cole and Jude Campbell; and to Liam Young. You are my dearest friend, my most generous editor, my symbiopoetic life partner. How wonderful to have found each other. Elbowing you in the chest at that Virginia Woolves' soccer practice was the best foul I've ever committed.

Last of all, to Fozzie Bear, a wee dog who has surely earned a literature degree by osmosis while spending the last three years wedged between me and my laptop.

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## GOING INTO DEBT: AN INTRODUCTION

But of all evils, to borrow money is perhaps the worst. If of a friend, he ceases to be one the moment you feel that you are bound to him by the heavy clog of obligation. If of a usurer, the interest, in this country, soon doubles the original sum, and you owe an increasing debt, which in time swallows up all you possess.

When we first came to the colony, nothing surprised me more than the extent to which this pernicious custom was carried, both by the native Canadians, the European settlers, and the lower order of Americans. Many of the latter had spied out the goodness of the land, and *borrowed* various portions of it, without so much as asking leave of the absentee owners. Unfortunately, our new home was surrounded by these odious squatters, whom we found as ignorant as savages, without their courtesy and kindness.

---Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, 59.

Ey! I only hope they understand  
I am only a calypsonian  
What I say may be very small  
But I know that poor people ent pleased at all.  
We are looking for a betterment,  
That is why we choose a new government.  
But they raise on the food before we could talk,  
And they raise taxi fare so we bound to walk.

But still I don't want them to catch cold sweat [No, Doctor, no!]  
Because this mango wood talk is not a threat [No, Doctor, no!]  
But still they must remember we support them in September  
They better come good [Good, good]  
I have no intention of throwing down my mango wood.

---The Mighty Sparrow, "No, Doctor, No!"

What is owed in the colonial aftermath? This question initiates many of postcolonial studies' most significant moments of self-reflection and redirection. 'What is owed?' runs down the center of discipline-defining scholarship by Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. It echoes through Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" as well as the Mighty Sparrow's "No, Doctor, No!"<sup>1</sup> 'What is owed?' is integral to what Leela Gandhi characterizes as anxieties over the field's motivation by "postcolonial revenge" (x) and proves paramount to ongoing debates over reparation and reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Trinidadian Calypsonian the Mighty Sparrow wrote "No, Doctor, No!" (1957), excerpted in this chapter's second epigraph, to voice concerns that Dr. Eric Williams's People's National Movement party would raise taxes on food and transportation to facilitate Trinidad and Tobago's official state decolonization, ignoring their poorer constituents after being elected into the newly independent nation's parliament.

Perhaps most importantly, the question of what is owed in the colonial aftermath resides at the heart of postcolonial critique's emancipatory project. In *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality*, David Scott describes how "[i]n the anticolonial story, colonial power had been understood principally in the register of a social, economic, and political force blocking the path to freedom and self-determination of the colonized. The colonized had been *dispossessed*, materially and psychologically, and the task of the anti-colonial project was the *restoration* of the colonized to full *self-possession*" (11; emphasis added). The language of owing, of debt, resounds through Scott's portrayal of anticolonial thought's ideological motor: colonial dispossessions necessitated a body of cultural criticism that would work to restore colonized subjects' self-possession on both material and metaphysical planes. This body of criticism would do so by re-imagining the world that resulted from colonial projects and colonial discourse alike.

Although animated by this emancipatory drive, the outcomes of these re-imaginings are proving increasingly uncertain as postcolonial thought's critical purchase—and the post-colonial nation-state's political purchase—lessen amid the prevailing discourses of neoliberal globalization and transnationalism.<sup>2</sup> In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai suggests the most profound change globalization has made to individuals' daily lives is evident in their ability to imagine previously inconceivable futures for themselves (6).<sup>3</sup> Lily Cho has since observed that Canadian literary scholars have largely *stopped* imagining postcolonial futures ("Dreaming" 177-8). It is here that postcolonial critique finds itself, increasingly eclipsed by discourses oriented around the global and transnational. This disciplinary shift expands my opening question from 'what is owed in the colonial aftermath?'

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use both 'postcolonial' and 'post-colonial': the former names the field of inquiry and distances itself from the temporalizing 'post-'; the latter emphasizes this temporal marker and is predominantly used in my discussions of the post-colonial nation-state, that is, the nation-state after official decolonization and national independence.

<sup>3</sup> Appadurai's understanding of this newfound imagination emphasizes its possibilities, but such re-imaginings can also imbed less liberating beliefs. As Simon Gikandi proposes, "globalization might, after all, be a discourse of failure and atrophy.... there seems to be a powerful disjuncture between global narratives and images that attract postcolonial critics and another set of narratives and images which do not exactly fit into a theoretical apparatus that seems bent on difference and hybridity" ("Globalization" 639).

to include ‘and whither emancipation since the transnational turn?’

Situated amidst these overarching disciplinary shifts, this thesis dovetails an examination of debt’s evocations in contemporary Caribbean Canadian literature with a critical analysis of the temporal divisions—colonial, postcolonial, transnational, global, modern, postmodern, neoliberal—cultural studies uses to organize history in the wake of Occidental colonialism. Much literary scholarship posits temporal breaks between ‘the colonial,’ ‘the postcolonial,’ and ‘the global,’ divides that are repeatedly denied by novels like David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* and Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*, wherein colonial and post-colonial ‘pasts’ reach into the transnational present; or the poetic, fictional, and autobiographic works of Dionne Brand, whose narratives travel peripatetically through circum-Atlantic history while refusing to suggest national belonging or linear plots can re-order life in the colonial aftermath; or Nalo Hopkinson’s Afrofuturistic speculative fiction wherein Canada’s imagined futures remain overdetermined by colonialism’s lingering inequities. In these literary works, colonial pasts refuse to remain in the past and insistently enter the transnational present. Surprisingly, unexpectedly, crucially, colonial pasts enter the transnational present in each of these authors’ works through discourses of financial debt and moral obligation.

There are any number of ways to explain debt’s recurring evocations in this body of diasporic literature, but I read debt as a contact zone where, in Mary Louise Pratt’s words, “disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4). That said, this normally spatial concept needs one adaptation when thinking about debt’s evocation in Caribbean Canadian literature: rather than connecting temporally or geographically concurrent communities, as Pratt’s contact zones do, debt additionally links past, present, and future. Presenting the past as an outstanding debt is one way fictional and nonfictional accounts dispute the breaks contemporary scholarship and political debates alike draw between *colonial* pasts and *transnational* futures. This thesis pushes back against such conceptual

divides and uses Caribbean Canadian literature to instead analyse what Homi Bhabha describes as “the poignant proximity of the incomplete project of decolonization to the dispossessed subjects of globalization” (“Framing Fanon” xxvii-xxviii). Its five chapters examine how discourses of debt are deployed in a multiply identified and fractious diasporic community. My primary texts, David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* (2007), Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Dionne Brand’s *Land to Light On* (1997), *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001), *What We All Long For* (2005), and *Inventory* (2006), as well as Nalo Hopkinson’s “A Habit of Waste” (2001) and *The New Moon’s Arms* (2007) are not singularly colonial, postcolonial, or transnational in their concerns, but they collectively insist that colonialism’s unsettled debts continue to shape how we conceptualize diasporic memory, recognition, and futurity. The literature emerging from this particular diasporic community compounds rather than resolves the question of ‘what is owed?’ in the colonial aftermath.

#### WHY DEBT? WHY NOW? WHY CARIBBEAN CANADIAN LITERATURE?

As with many of the conceptual borders addressed in this thesis, the timelines, nations, and textual materials considered here are more permeable than any introductory framing can suggest; allowing for such fluidity, I focus on Anglo-Caribbean-Canadian literature to anchor this analysis to a level of historical coherence based on colonial rule.<sup>4</sup> Even in ‘globalized times,’ the Caribbean and Canada are connected as former colonies of an empire whose inheritances—or debts, depending on one’s positionality—expand beyond shared language or imperial nostalgia: trade agreements,

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<sup>4</sup> Histories of development, independence, and anti-colonial thought vary significantly between the English, Spanish, French, and Dutch Caribbean and coalesce in response to colonial—hence linguistically—dominant powers. Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* provides useful descriptions of the differences between Spanish and English plantation systems as well as the contradistinctions (architectural, infrastructural, cultural) such variance has produced. For a historical reflection on differences between European states’ systems of colonial rule, B.W. Higman discusses the varying colonial strategies that overlap and diverge across the archipelago. A comparative study examining how narratives of debt and indebtedness trace similar or different paths across the Caribbean’s English, Spanish, French, and Dutch colonies could valuably illuminate derivations in how debt and obligation are formulated between European nations’ colonial practices but resides outside this thesis’s scope. Instead, I aim to trace debt’s currency within ‘Commonwealth’ relations—itsself a telling denomination when considering what is owed in the colonial aftermath.

development programs, and immigration policies within the British Commonwealth keep paths between its former colonies well worn, subtly directing subjects' mobility.<sup>5</sup>

The Anglo-Caribbean literary tradition is shaped by the works of C.L.R. James, Samuel Selvon, Una Marson, George Lamming, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Jean Rhys, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, Louise Bennett, Earl Lovelace, Fred D'Aguiar, Cyril Dabydeen, Austin Clarke, Shani Mootoo, Marlon James, Wayde Compton, Jean 'Binta' Breeze, Olive Senior, George Elliott Clarke, M. NourbeSe Philip, and D'bi Young.<sup>6</sup> Within this larger archive, I limit my primary focus to works by David Chariandy, Ramabai Espinet, Dionne Brand, and Nalo Hopkinson. These four authors' novels, autobiographies, short stories, and poetry collectively attest to debt's pervasiveness across the breadth of recent Anglo-Caribbean literature without presenting a singular or unified stance on questions of material debt or moral obligation.

My primary texts were all published between 1997 and 2007, a relatively narrow historical window that shapes this research in two significant ways. First, though published at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the works studied here explore the Middle Passage and Kala pani crossings as well as the chattel slavery and indentureship that followed; they address the British Emancipation Act of 1833 as well as the Commonwealth Caribbean's independence movements in the 1950s and 1960s; their narratives span the rise of postcolonial critique as well as the emergence of official state

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<sup>5</sup> Britain's 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act limited immigration from the Caribbean that had been encouraged by the British Nationality Act of 1948 which granted British citizenship to individuals from not-yet-independent commonwealth nations to overcome the labour shortages resulting from World War II. These new limits effectively re-routed many Caribbean immigrants to other Commonwealth nations, a shift in global migration patterns encouraged by Canada's 1962 Immigration Act and its 1967 reforms, two of the first legislative acts that encouraged non-European immigration to Canada.

<sup>6</sup> This range of authors is intentionally non-cohesive: while an author or their family may immigrate to Canada via the US or Europe or locations other than the Caribbean, their work can still draw extensively from Caribbean thought, cosmologies, and spirituality, as is the case with Wayde Compton's *Performance Bond* poems, which allude to figures from Haitian vodun though Compton himself claims no Caribbean ancestry. What is more important to me is that the Caribbean remains as a point of cultural departure in each of these authors' works. Restricting these discussions to an individual author's (or their family's) last point of national departure makes little sense when such departures are not themselves indicative of some encompassing cultural amnesia or dis-inheritance; the very concept of diaspora suggests such cultural connections are capable of spanning more than one migration or landing in a series of global moves. To think otherwise is strong evidence of this thesis's central concern, that transnational diasporas are perceived as divorcing the diasporic subject from longer colonial histories.

multiculturalism in 1980s Canada.<sup>7</sup> By representing these pasts from a historical moment (the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and from a geopolitical site (Canada) that are both framed—problematically, I suggest—as uniquely transnational, Caribbean Canadian authors draw connections between colonialism and neoliberal globalism that upend the temporal logic integral to Canadian diaspora studies and finance capital alike.

Second, each of the texts analyzed here were published *before* the 2008 global financial crisis and resulting Occupy Wall Street movement, events that inspired the emergent field of neo-Marxist debt studies I engage with throughout. I do not read Caribbean Canadian works' emphasis on debt as somehow prophetic of the 2008 crash or as engaging directly with the operations of contemporary finance capital, but I am interested in the counter-history of the economic present Caribbean Canadian authors can offer. This body of literature productively complicates discussions of debt and obligation, particularly those responding to the 2008 crash, by demonstrating that these discussions tend to whitewash debt's colonial origins and overlook its racialized operations. Central to the emerging field of neo-Marxist debt studies is David Graeber's anthropological tome *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. Its definition of debt circulates widely in neo-Marxist responses to this most recent financial crisis:

Debt is a very specific thing, and it arises from very specific situations. It first requires a relationship between two people who do not consider each other fundamentally different sorts of being, who are at least potential equals, who *are* equals in those ways that are really important, and who are not currently in a state of equality—but for whom there is some way to set matters straight.

This means that there is no such thing as a genuinely unpayable debt. If there was no conceivable way to salvage the situation, we wouldn't be calling it a 'debt'.... we call it a 'debt' because it *can* be paid, equality *can* be restored....

During the time that the debt remains unpaid, the logic of hierarchy takes hold. There is no reciprocity....

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<sup>7</sup> The 1955 Bandung Conference and the 2001 World Conference against Racism (also known as Durban I) provide significant temporal markers for economic decolonization and the reparations movement respectively. The anti-colonial aims of both conferences were largely subsumed by Western economic interference, the focus of Scott's research.

.... if the debtor cannot do what it takes to restore herself to equality, there is obviously something wrong with her; it must be her fault. (120-121)

Graber illuminates the binaries (debtor and creditor), hegemonies (debts exist between fundamentally equal parties), teleologies (debts can, should, must end), and moralities (unpaid debts speak to the character of the debtor, not the creditor) that are compressed in the term 'debt'.<sup>8</sup> His definition also confirms that this thesis is not a study of Western financial traditions or strictly economic approaches to debt. Rather, I examine how Caribbean Canadian literature upends debt's financial logic by tampering with its operational binaries and temporal logic.

In Graeber's definition, financial debts originate in mutual agreements; the authors I address are clear that little was mutual about Europe's colonial projects or their lingering consequences. He contends debt involves mutual risks to lender and borrower; current IMF and World Bank conditionality policies such as 'sovereign immunity' situate their program's risks firmly on the borrowers' side of the equation, deepening the financial, human, and environmental deficits of already indebted nations.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly for this thesis, Graeber argues that true debts can be paid off, cleared, settled and depend on implicit timelines and endpoints; Caribbean Canadian literature depicts colonialism's debts as incompletable exchanges that, in their incompleteness, tether past and future, so-called First- and Third-Worlds, children and parents, and the subjects of nations and diasporas to one another.

The straw man definition Graber sets up in the above quote supports his ultimate conclusion about contemporary finance capital: because the predatory loans responsible for the 2008

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<sup>8</sup> We see a shift here in the obligations that structure relations between individuals in the term's earliest applications to its 18th century connotations that delineate relations between individuals and states or companies. The timelines implied by 'finance,' the idea that financial exchanges are the end and not origin of debts, are integral to that term, as demonstrated by the etymology of 'finance': "from *finer* 'make an end, settle a debt,' from *fin* 'end'.... The original sense was 'payment of a debt, compensation, or ransom'; later 'taxation, revenue'" (*Oxford Dictionaries*).

<sup>9</sup> A similar argument about the relative location of economic risk can be made about the predatory loans offered to (largely dictatorial) Third-World governments in the wake of the 1973 OPEC oil crisis, loans the populations of these indebted countries are still paying off. For more on how the risks of the finance economy fall disproportionately on subaltern subjects and post-colonial nations rather than their creditors, see James Heintz and Radhika Balakrishnan's "Debt, Power and Crisis: Social Stratification and the Inequitable Governance of Financial Markets" (387-409) in *American Quarterly's* special Fall 2012 issue *Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime*.

global financial crisis do not operate according to the moral principles that govern *true* debt, they do not warrant repayment. “Nothing would be more important,” he argues, “than to wipe the slate clean for everyone, mark a break with our accustomed morality, and start again” (391). Caribbean Canadian literature and contemporary calls for reparation similarly contend that colonial history was predatory and immoral, but do not arrive at a similar call for Jubilee; instead, they suggest that colonialism’s outstanding debts have spun so far beyond financial boundaries and grown so entangled in practices of memory, community formation, and recognition that any strictly financial clearing of this historical slate is at best impossible and at worst a willful denial of colonialism’s continuing power.

One vein of argumentation would suggest that Caribbean Canadian literature’s emphasis on debt flags some unique relationship between our historical moment and indebtedness; it has been vitally important to me that this project not take such a causal approach. My argument is not that debt is a major concern in contemporary life and thus a major concern in contemporary literature; such a causal interpretation would emphasize neoliberalism’s uniqueness rather than its historical repetitions. Even if finance capital’s recent experiments with debt and credit are remarkable for their scale and scope, debt itself—whether expressed as ethical indebtedness or strictly financial obligations—has shaped power relations between citizens, non-citizens, and nations long before this most recent global financial crisis. Likewise, a thematic reading could only conclude similar representations of debt will be found in all literature written during or around global financial crises, when they are not. As with Victorian-era bankruptcy novels or Early Modern usury texts, Caribbean Canadian literature reflects a contemporary economic real through its content—not to mention its production and circulation. My aim, then, is not to define debt outside of this literary frame of reference, but to understand what debt’s evocations do to, for, and in Caribbean Canadian literature.

To understand what I mean by ‘discourses of debt,’ it helps to turn to a literary example,



though the one I open with is not from a Caribbean Canadian text, but *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison's masterwork of historiographic metafiction. *Beloved* explores the intimate horrors of life under American slavery through, Sethe, an enslaved mother whose escape cross the Mason-Dixon line is interrupted by her daughter's birth. The first of Sethe's children born outside of the commodified dehumanizations of the Southern plantation, this daughter is an integral figure of emancipated Black futurity. That said, she is also born, as Morrison writes, "on the wrong side of the [Ohio] river" (106), signaling the liminal nature of her emancipation. As importantly, the child, Denver, is named after the white run-away who helps Sethe make her way North, a naming that "made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it. But who she owed or what to pay it with eluded her" (91). This unpayable debt both asserts Denver's freedom and entangles her in obligations to others—particular others, such as the white indentured girl; unknown national others, such as the distant city her name references; and Black others, the community of freed slaves who help her and Sethe cross the Ohio river.

In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidiya Hartman argues that with the abolition of slavery, "the freed came into 'possession' of themselves and basic civil rights.... However, despite the symbolic bestowal of humanity that accompanied the acquisition of rights, the legacy of freedom was an ambivalent one" (120). In the American context, this ambivalence stems from the fact that emancipation resulted in a flood of new, inescapable, and unpayable social debts, or, as Hartman writes of Reconstruction, "to be free was to be a debtor—that is, obliged and duty-bound to others" (*Scenes* 131). To be emancipated in *Beloved* is likewise to be indebted. Stamp Paid, another of the novel's semi-emancipated characters, is caught in this bind: "Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son.... With that gift, he decided he didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off" (218). Like Denver, emancipation negates rather than secures Stamp Paid's claim to

debtlessness. His freedom is not freedom from others, *per se*, but brings him into newfound obligations:

He thought it would make him rambunctious, renegade—a drunkard even, the debtlessness, and in a way it did. But there was nothing to do with it. Work well; work poorly. Work a little; work not at all. Make sense; make none. Sleep, wake up; like somebody, dislike others. It didn't seem much of a way to live and it brought him no satisfaction. So he extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery. Beaten runaways? He ferried them and rendered them paid for; gave them their own bill of sale, so to speak. 'You paid it; now life owes you.' (218)

For Stamp Paid, one is *either* the indebted slave *or* the free creditor. His extension of debtlessness to the formerly enslaved, his assertion that life owes them, only generates more debts, more known and unknown communities, all of which leave him wondering if “he had misnamed himself and there was yet another debt owed” (218). This character's central failing is that he thinks of freedom as debtlessness: having adopted liberal notions of possessive individualism, Stamp Paid fears debt, fears obligations to others, fears community, and thus keeps running tallies of what everyone is owed and owes him.

Hartman writes of Reconstruction that “emancipation appears less a grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjugation” (6). Assertions of debtless independence prove just as illusory in the neoliberal present: this same tangle of freedom and obligation defines transnational diaspora. While global migrations can potentially emancipate diasporic subjects from certain consequences of colonial history and certain failures of the post-colonial nation-state, they also enmesh global diaspora in new debts and old obligations. In this historical moment, Caribbean Canadian literature is testing what it means to be free in debt and to be indebted by ‘freedom’ amid globalization's diasporic displacements.

Morrison's *Beloved* was the first work wherein I noticed colonial history's unpayable debts; it has not been the last. While I provide a more thorough analysis of David Chariandy's novel

*Soucouyant* in chapter one, I want to underscore the scene that convinced me Caribbean Canadian literature could sustain an extended analysis of debt and obligation. Mrs. Christopher, an otherwise minor character in Chariandy's novel, proves remarkable when she presents its nameless teenaged narrator with her account books wherein she has recorded the entirety of her life since immigrating to Canada in financial terms. These accounts have deep historical resonances: diasporic life is traced, tallied, and arguably commoditized here, reduced to the costs of its maintenance in calculations that harken back to circum-Atlantic ledgers registering slaves purchased and years of indentured labour owed. The narrator is caught off guard when Mrs. Christopher demands he pay the "\$345,033.48" (148) Canada owes her for her repeated marginalization: "The years you weren't paid minimum wage? Have you lost your mind? I'm not responsible for what happened to you in the past! I wasn't even close to being alive in 1963...!" (148). Her response, "Well, you is alive right now!" (148) corroborates a trans-generational transmission of debt and obligations from earlier to later generations that is notable given *Soucouyant's* subtitle, "A Novel of Forgetting."

As with Denver's and Stamp Paid's naming in *Beloved*, something seems lost in Mrs. Christopher's conversions between material debts and metaphysical obligations. Her ledgers record—but also reduce—bigotry, misogyny, and systemic racism through their financial metrics; she then passes these debts on to a similarly racialized subject who is himself marginalized in Canada. The complexity of this literary ledger exemplifies why debt is such an important organizing problematic in Caribbean Canadian literature: while Mrs. Christopher remains owed for her marginalizations, no one, *Soucouyant* suggests, could pay her bills or settle these debts. Instead, money owed figures as necessary but insufficient to encapsulate the losses experienced by this woman's life in Canada. Coding her dehumanization in financial terms also demonstrates the absurdity of market rationality when applied to everyday life. Such logic is not only unable to address the natal losses colonial encounter engendered for Afro-Caribbeans but entrenches these losses in globalization's

diasporas as well.

What, then, do debt's evocations demonstrate about the relationship between colonial, postcolonial, and transnational times? If these debts cannot be paid back, are they actually debts? Why this referent, this return to and circulation of a name, 'debt,' that is not what it describes? I do not believe Caribbean Canadian literature's tendency to call that which is not debt 'debt' is the product of some collective carelessness or oversight. Rather, this literary archive connects globalization's shifting economic realities—the rise of neoliberal political economies, the dominance of consumer culture, wage slavery's persistence for the sake of capitalist markets—to colonial history and the failures of the post-colonial nation-state. To what ends, then, is the metaphorical evocation of economic referents employed, smuggled in and out of recognition, or imagined in *this* body of diasporic literature? These questions initiate my research.

As this twinned reading of *Beloved* and *Soucouyant* demonstrates, Caribbean Canadian literature does not have an exclusive claim on literary discussions of debt. I am not proposing concerns with debt are unique to this community, only that the Caribbean Canadian diaspora has a particular and historically intoned relationship with discourses of finance capital.<sup>10</sup> This literary archive challenges us reconsider diasporic subjectivity's resistant and liberatory potential in a historical moment wherein, as Paul Gilroy describes, “consumerism has largely superseded the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and... politics itself affords few meaningful possibilities for either redress or progress” (*Darker* 8). Counterintuitively, these circumstances mean “the state becomes more important than ever, as the only global institution to which non-corporate agents have some political claim and access” (Modovoi 172-3). Beyond challenging literature scholars to consider the

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<sup>10</sup> Debt is not some unifying or canonical marker of this literary archive: Trinidadian Canadian André Alexis's Scotiabank Giller Prize and Rogers Writer's Trust Fiction prize winning novel *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) does not fundamentally engage with questions of debt or the relationship between colonial and transnational thought; this does not make it less Caribbean Canadian. Similar arguments can be made about Rabindranath Maharaj's *The Amazing Absorbing Boy* (2010) or Shani Mootoo's collective works. I am not suggesting that debt does not appear in these works at all or that they cannot be used to think about the relationship between colonial, postcolonial, and transnational discourse, only that they have not played this role in my own thinking.

complexity of settler-colonial sites in tandem with diasporic critique, this literary archive destabilizes many of *financial* debt's basic tenets, and thus illuminates "the informal, individual acts of symbolic redress" (Gilroy, *Darker* 21) that are called on to address marginality, violence, and loss in neoliberal times.

#### DIASPORA'S DEBTS, DEBT'S DIASPORAS: A HISTORY

Focusing on debt both limits this thesis's textual scope and expands its critical horizons. My primary theoretical investments are in postcolonial, globalization, and diaspora studies, three approaches I plait to better understand each in relation to one another. That said, this thesis also follows debt through its primary texts in order to engage with *their* overarching concerns, leading to chapters organized around memory studies, theories of recognition, and Afrofuturism. Here, I want to offer a brief retrospective that explains postcolonial, globalization, and diaspora studies' intersections as I have come to understand them by starting in the present historical moment, an interregnum space Scott describes as "after postcoloniality" (*Refashioning* 10).

As a theoretical concept, 'after postcoloniality' does not draw firm lines between past and present in the same ways descriptors the frame the present as 'global' or 'transnational' do. Instead, it sees the present as an interstitial moment with no clear antecedent. "The problem-space of the anticolonial project," Scott explains, "had been defined by the demand for political decolonization, the demand for the overthrow of colonial power. Its goal was the achievement of political sovereignty" (*Refashioning* 11). As such, postcolonial criticism has hinged on the liberatory potential of the geographically-bound nation-state. However, with the collapse of the anti-imperialist sovereignty movement and seeming ineffectiveness of critique "defined in relation to Marxism and cultural nationalism" (Scott, *Refashioning* 10), "it is no longer clear what 'overcoming' Western power actually means" (Scott, *Refashioning* 14). Scott asks whether the lessening of the hopes associated with the postcolonial nation-state—encapsulated by the unfulfilled promise of the Bandung Conference

and West Indian Federation—marks the logical end of anti-colonial critique. His response is not necessarily, but, with the economic foundering of so many former colonies, postcolonial critique's target has necessarily shifted: "This crisis ushers in a new problem-space and produces a new demand on postcolonial criticism" (Scott, *Refashioning* 14-5).

Rather than suggesting anticolonial critique will fade with the economic sovereignty of postcolonial nation-states or retreading colonial discourse analysis' well-worn paths, Scott proposes examining the "problem-space that defines our present" (*Refashioning* 224) by asking "how (colonial) power altered the terrain on which accommodation/resistance was *possible* in the first place" (*Refashioning* 16). This terrain includes notions of agential individuality and boundary-crossing resistance integral to globalization and diaspora studies. Colonial power is at play, I believe, in the clean lines cultural scholarship draws between national and diasporic communities, in celebratory readings that interpret diaspora as exemplifying individual autonomy, and in discussions that assume post-national freedom is an eventual but inevitable future. Colonialism's lasting power in cultural scholarship is perhaps most evident, then, in this scholarship's temporal logic.

Since the early 1990s, postcolonial thought has been engrossed by the temporalizing '*post-*' that has been so key to—and so vexing for—the field's critical identity. Troubling this legacy, Ato Quayson argues that "closer scrutiny of the *postcolonial* suggests that it contains mutually reinforcing periodizing and spatial functions" (342) as the temporal categories central to the study of world literatures are themselves "organized around often unacknowledged spatial motifs" (342). Collectively, Quayson and Scott highlight the nation-state's centrality to anticolonial thought while questioning its legacy in securing anticolonial emancipation. If postcolonial critique is to remain applicable in an age of transnational diasporas and neoliberal economies, then the field's core logic cannot, Quayson warns, be periodized along temporal lines that disabuse the sociopolitical dimensions of space making: "postcolonial literary studies... cannot restrict itself to dates or

periods, since the dates automatically imply historical, epoch-making events *and* the inauguration of various spatial relations” (347). To remain viable, then, postcolonial thought’s emancipatory work needs to shift away from the teleologic project embedded in the decolonized nation-state.

This does not mean, however, that anticolonial concerns are somehow settled by transnational diaspora. Instead, a new problem—and new problem-space—arises for postcolonial thought when formerly colonized subjects disperse along diasporic routes that have themselves been mapped out by colonialism’s lasting inequalities.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean Canadian literature’s representations of debt underscore the ways in which “neoliberal architectures and discourses of dispossession act on earlier forms of racial and colonial subjugation” (Chakravartty & da Silva 369), a particularly potent argument in Canadian contexts. I see two opposing desires in Canadian diaspora studies’ discussions of history and time: one, which I associate with Scott and the mobilization of postcolonial thought, that traces colonial power’s continuing expressions via diasporic communities; the other, which I push off against, subsumes postcolonial politics as anachronistic and irrelevant in globalized times, clearing the transnational slate of its colonial and postcolonial history. This second tendency has troubling roots in settler-invader nationalism where “declaring [certain experiences of diaspora] to be in the past works precisely within a racist regime where the linear march of time and progress want to situate the dispossessed simply as an unfortunate feature of the non-modern” (Cho, *Eating Chinese* 79).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This document’s limits prevent me from offering a historical overview of diaspora studies, as I have chosen instead to dedicate the majority of this introduction’s historical overview to tracing Caribbean critiques of globalization studies. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin’s “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity” (1993), Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1993), and James Clifford’s “Diasporas” (1994) are foundational. These works, alongside Rogers Brubaker’s “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” (2005), offer overviews of diaspora studies’ emergence and shifting applications.

<sup>12</sup> Embracing the transnational may be an ideal way to distance the settler-invader nation from its unsettled colonial history, a real danger exemplified by Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s statement that, “We [Canada]... have no history of colonialism” (qtd. in David Ljunggren 2009). Harper made this comment a little more than a year after offering his official apology for Canada’s Residential School system. This was also the press conference in which he announced Toronto would host the 2010 G20 summit, a confluence of gestures that suggests with apology comes erasure, as if the colonial history that held Canada back has been cleared through apology, allowing the nation to enter a new phase of global prosperity. Spivak argues “we forget that postnationalist (NGO) talk is a way to cover over the decimation of the state as instrument of redistribution and redress. To think transnationality as labour migrancy, rather than one of the

How, then, might Canadian diaspora studies understand the colonial, the postcolonial, and the transnational in relation to one another? Global power's transition away from the nation-state and towards the market correspond with shifts to finance capital's base premises. In his globalization studies-defining *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey argued that the representational crises intoned by collapse of Bretton Woods, elimination of the gold standard, and conversion of the U.S dollar into a fiat currency gave rise to postmodernist aesthetics: "The central value system, to which capitalism has always appealed to validate and gauge its actions, is dematerialized and shifting, time horizons are collapsing, and it is hard to tell exactly what space we are in when it comes to assessing causes and effects, meanings or values" (297). This observation (changes in how value is represented correspond to changes in how value is understood) has had unintentional but significant consequences for how cultural scholarship constellates postcolonial and global eras relative to one another: following Harvey, globalization studies tends to frame aesthetic and political shifts in relation to discourses of modernism and postmodernism, thus tethering a supposedly global epochs to Eurocentric classifications.

Postcolonial scholars, in general, and Caribbean scholarship, in particular, have worked to dismantle periodizing claims that link anti- and postcolonial thought to modernity via the nation-state and globalization to postmodernity via the dissolution of national boundaries.<sup>13</sup> Simon Gikandi argues that while European modernity was born of the Caribbean's colonial exploitation, this forced parturition has left the region with profound ambivalence towards discourses of modernity as well as

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latest forms of appearance of postmodern capital, is to work, however remotely, in the ideological interest of the financialization of the globe" (263). Her observations, however, might be contradicted by the Canadian example: this nation seems increasingly comfortable with (if not effective at) gestures of redress. We seem to have moved into a global era of national apology. There are reasons to be skeptical of this move: Nytagodien and Neal's South African-based research on Truth and Reconciliation hearings suggests they proved more comforting and emotionally liberating for the beneficiaries of historical traumas rather than their victims (2004).

<sup>13</sup> I am thinking here of Simon During's "Waiting for the Post: Modernity, Colonization, and Writing" (1989), Arun Mukerjee's "Whose Postcolonialism and Whose Postmodernity?" (1990), Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" (1991), and Homi Bhabha's "How Newness Enters the World" and "Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism" both from *The Location of Culture* (1994).



modernist forms (*Writing* 253). Though the Caribbean proved fertile ground for Europe's conceptions of its own modernity, these same conceptions rendered the region's artistic production seemingly anachronistic. Discussing the resulting difficulty of approaching the Caribbean through (post)modernist philosophies, Antonio Benítez-Rojo reasons that "Caribbean discourse is in many respects prestructuralist and preindustrial" (23), and thus remains on the periphery of modern *and* postmodern thought (151-2). Scholarship's tendency to systematize the Caribbean's "political, economic, social, and anthropological dynamics" (Benítez-Rojo 1) through discourses of modernism and postmodernism come up against a fundamental impossibility, he continues, of trying to fit an already-illusory concept of comprehensive 'Caribbean-ness' into modernist or postmodernist structures (Benítez-Rojo 2). Such Eurocentric classificatory modes prove unable to understand the region's political, economic, and cultural realities as anything other than resistant to Western readings (Benítez-Rojo 17).<sup>14</sup> Known for their revisionist—often read as resistant—tendencies, Caribbean texts are also critically celebrated for challenging Western delineations of history: "Caribbean writers have... [weakened] the foundational status of the Western narrative, [exposing]... 'the metaphysical and rationalist pretensions' of Western modernity and its absolutist theory of history" (Gikandi, *Writing* 253).

Ironically, while anticolonial Caribbean thought has destabilized Western delineations of history, the Caribbean's own post-colonial futures have arguably been derailed by global economic

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<sup>14</sup> Benítez-Rojo warns against reducing the Caribbean to a liberatory space of cultural mixing. Such readings often fail to address the political and economic exchanges that foster hybrid cultural expressions: "The Caribbean should be seen not just as a stage where syncretic musical and dance performances are put on, but also a space invested with syncretic forms of understanding that connect to political, economic, and social power" (163). He expands: "the space of 'a certain kind of way' is explained by poststructuralist thought as episteme—for example Derrida's notion of *differance*—while Caribbean discourse, as well as being capable of occupying it in theoretical terms, floods it with a poetic and vital stream navigated by Eros and Dionysus, by Oshun and Elegua, by the Great Mother of the Arawaks and the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, all of them defusing violence, the blind violence with which the Caribbean social dynamics collide, the violence organized by slavery, despotic colonialism, and the Plantation" (23). Benítez-Rojo's image of an overwhelming flood is instructive here: debt's multiple expressions, be they financial, moral, literary, social within cultures of obligation and obligations to culture, similarly overwhelm attempts to delineate any debt's particular origins or ultimate repayment. The point seems to be not to settle these debts, not to render payment, so much as to note the multiple confluences that overburden strictly financial understandings of indebtedness in transnational times.

shifts originating in Western political economy. Since the 1970s, modes of representing value have dematerialized; neoliberal economic policies have been entrenched in western democracies' state operations; and finance capital markets have surged, collapsed, and linger largely unchallenged.<sup>15</sup> Enlightenment conceptualizations of the nation-state, what Dipesh Chakrabarty tellingly describes as a 'global inheritance' (5), underwent a critical re-theorization in the light of neoliberal economics.<sup>16</sup> Ania Loomba notes the fundamental irony that the nation-state—exploitative in the interest of its own expansion during colonization—becomes *the* source of anticolonial empowerment in the form of the post-colonial nation-state; she observes the further irony that the historical moment that marks the birth of the postcolonial nation in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s—the moment of its emancipatory potential—is also when nation-states' power and sovereignty are profoundly undercut by the emerging forces of transnational capital (189). Despite these seemingly sweeping changes to contemporary economic systems and notions of national power, colonialism's imbalances not only persist but appear fortified.

As importantly, neoliberal devaluations of national power and sovereignty occurred at the exact historical moment Europe's former colonies were testing their recently secured national, political, and economic independence. Discussing the concurrent moment in the United States, Paul

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<sup>15</sup> New economic critics posit financial epochs that claim newness in often contradictory, ways. For example, David Graeber contends we may be on the edge of a new economic cycle that moves away from the values encoded in a bullion economy and towards those of a credit economy. Jean-Joseph Goux's "Cash, Check, of Charge?" (1989) similarly proposes that we are entering a new age of the credit economy since the collapse of the Gold Standard in the 1970s. It proves difficult to assess the validity of Graeber or Goux's cycles, though, without formal knowledge of economic theory. Alternatively, Ian Baucom and Mary Poovey contend that the credit economy emerged in the early 17th century, with Baucom arguing that its emergence through the transatlantic slave trade is no accident. Indeed, Baucom's central argument in *Spectres of the Atlantic* is that finance capital's speculative markets could not have emerged without the transatlantic slave trade and its insurance of enslaved humans. None of these delineations of economic history align. Assessing the validity of such claims lie beyond the scope of this project but help account for the conflation of monetary value and immaterial forms of representation I see throughout Caribbean Canadian literature.

<sup>16</sup> Discussions that present the globalized nation-state as entering into historically unprecedented relations with trans- or multinational corporations, for example, overlook that many former colonies were governed, controlled, and owned by corporations (the British East India Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and national variations on the West India Company included). The corporate multinational is historically coeval and always already central to European colonialism, not a somehow uniquely modern or postmodern phenomenon. The exception is not, I suggest here, transnational capital's influence over geographically-bound states, but rather the economically sovereign nation-state.

Gilroy describes a conflation of political and consumer freedoms ongoing during the civil rights movement: “African Americans were being interpolated as consumers long before they acquired citizenship rights. Those two contrasting opportunities to demonstrate their freedom, one political the other commercial, became entangled” (*Darker* 9). Political emancipation and consumer freedoms have only grown further entangled under neoliberal systems of finance capital that are “grounded,” Hall argues, “in the ‘free possessive individual’, with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive” (“The Neoliberal Revolution” 9).

Transnational capital’s disruption of the post-colonial nation-state and political freedom is the basis of both Stephanie Black’s *Life and Debt* (2001) documentary as well as Gayatri Spivak’s critiques of economic globalization:

What do I understand today by a ‘transnational world?’ That it is impossible for the new and developing states, the newly decolonizing or the old decolonizing nations, to escape the orthodox constraints of a ‘neo-liberal’ world economic system which, in the name of Development, and now ‘sustainable development’, removes all barriers between itself and fragile national economies, so that any possibility of building for social redistribution is severely damaged. (245)

The transnational turn in world economic systems and academic discourse alike implicitly organizes ‘the colonial,’ ‘the postcolonial,’ and ‘the global’ as distinct historical moments in a teleologic progression. Loomba, Gilroy, Hall, and Spivak each encourage more nuanced readings that approach colonialism, postcolonialism, and transnationalism as ongoing and concurrent ideological trajectories. As importantly, they collectively suggest these trajectories are now navigated on increasingly individual, as opposed to national, levels.

When ‘post-colonial’ subjects depart the post-colonial nation-state and disperse along the routes of transnational migration, their colonial baggage appears lost or left behind. They land as transnational subjects. Against such conceptual breaks, Gikandi reminds scholars, those too quick to celebrate transnational syncretism while distancing themselves from postcolonialism’s unfulfilled emancipatory projects, that for many diasporic subjects “the identification with globality is not

ethical but material: they [individuals in globalization's migrations] do not seek to occupy the interstitial spaces between nations and cultures, but to leave what they consider to be a failed polity for a successful one" ("Globalization" 643). Hall similarly describes contemporary transnationalism as individuals' attempts to settle colonialism's lasting disparities: "People just calculate for themselves that the only thing to do is buy a one way plane ticket . . . trying to resolve what is the global misdistribution of material and symbolic goods" ("Subjects" 269). Both suggest the transnational turn, whether in literary analysis or world economic systems has not cleared colonial history's slate; rather, colonialism's outstanding debts have individualized and gone global.

Globalization's diasporas are one way the debts owed to and by formerly colonized nations now devolve onto individual subjects. Hartman traces a similar devolution of rights and responsibilities onto newly emancipated slaves during the Reconstruction: "the advent of freedom marked the transition from the pained and minimally sensate existence of the slave to the burdened individuality of the responsible and encumbered freed person" (*Scenes* 116-117).<sup>17</sup> Like newly emancipated slaves in the postbellum United States, transnational mobility and the post-colonial nation-state's economic collapse have rendered individual subjects responsible for addressing global imbalances on their own. This means that colonialism's unsettled debts have not remained hemmed within former colonies' national borders, but fray along diasporic routes.

One of this thesis' overarching concerns is that contemporary diasporas have become a mechanism by which postcolonial and transnational eras are simultaneously conceived in relation to—and cleaved apart from—one another. This tendency is most evident in early discussions of transnational migration that, in avoiding questions of postcoloniality, made colonial 'pasts' appear

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<sup>17</sup> Hartman similarly contends that that in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, "[t]he ascribed responsibility of the liberal individual served to displace the nation's responsibility for providing and ensuring the rights and privileges conferred by the Reconstruction Amendments and shifted the burden of duty onto the freed. It was their duty to prove their worthiness for freedom rather than the nation's duty to guarantee, at minimum, the exercise of liberty and equality, if not opportunities for livelihood other than debt-peonage" (*Scenes* 118).

freshly irrelevant in a world defined by cosmopolitan hybridity and permeable national boundaries. This vision of global citizenship as resistant and revolutionary is lauded by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2005), works that draw firm but faulty distinctions between historical and contemporary diasporas. *Empire*, for example, compares the supposedly agency-driven nature of contemporary diasporas to historical diaspora's lack of aegis: "The multitude must be able to *decide* if, when and where it moves. It must have the *right* also to stay still and enjoy one place rather than being *forced* constantly to be on the move. The general right to control its own movement is the multitude's ultimate *demand* for global citizenship" (400; emphasis added). Such theorizations are not inherently malicious but searching for a lynchpin to bring down exploitative systems of finance capital, a hope originally hung on post-colonial nationalism and increasingly on post-nationalism and the 'global citizen.' Descriptions of contemporary diasporas *as* global citizenship in praxis ("Autonomous movement is what defines their place proper to the multitude" [Hardt & Negri 396-7]), idealize individual subject's agency as distinguishing oppressive past from liberating present, colonial migration from transnational diaspora.

Some of the strongest challenges against teleologic narratives that present transnationalism as an epochal rupture arise from a chorus within diaspora studies that assert see globalization does not inherently free individuals from the binds of capitalist accumulation, nationalism, or anti-Blackness. Vijay Mishra troubles readings like Hardt and Negri's by contesting its temporal-cum-moral logic: "[t]o understand diasporas," he argues, "necessitates tampering with idealist notions of the exemplariness of diasporas in the modern world" (8). Cho adds that "'old' diasporas of indenture and slavery are not fully distinct from 'new' ones of jet-fueled transnational mobility. Rather, these diasporas are contemporaneous" (*Eating Chinese* 11). Spivak registers similar suspicions about distinctions between 'old' and 'new' diasporas, arguing that "[i]n this new transnationality, what is usually meant by 'the new diaspora,' the new scattering of the seeds of 'developing' nations,

so that they can take root on developed ground?... What were the old diasporas, before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational?" (245). Her conclusion, "are the new diasporas quite new? Every rupture is also a repetition" (Spivak 248), questions scholarship that approaches contemporary transnationalism as a novel historical rupture.

Although celebrations of 'new' diasporas present the diasporic citizen as destabilizing global capital through migration, displacement, endless movement, it is crucial to remember that contemporary diasporas and nation-states alike are deeply imbricated in the flows of capital. National boundaries may now be less of a mediating reality for subjects whose belonging within the nation is always already secure, yet they remain firm and violently enforceable for those whose belonging is not. They thicken and thin along class and racial lines as well as colonial coordinates, an irony that undercuts sunny claims about transnationalism's supposed universality. Consequently, certain subjects within the multitude—the racialized, the female, the Indigenous, the 'illegal,' the queer, the child—pass unevenly through globalization's flows:

The Afghan refugee in Australia or the Fiji-Indian who is illegally ensconced in Vancouver is neither global nor (hyper)mobile. Her condition, unlike those of the upwardly mobile professionals in Silicon Valley, is not unlike those of people under indenture, for she has to work in sweatshops during graveyard shifts or, as in the case of the illegal, cannot leave Vancouver, as she has no access to a passport. (Mishra 14)

Leerom Medovoi adds it would be a mistake to "view global capital as 'attacking the state'" (168) insofar as global capital relies on nation-states to uphold legal precedents that protect private property, fund supra-national institutions such as the World Trade Organization and World Bank, and, most grimly, are the only legitimate abettors of violence against citizens.

What I have mapped out in this section is a scholarly split between those who perceive globalization as "defined by a dramatic kind of rupture from the past in which the flow of economic and cultural forces have swamped the borders of nation-states, that the development of electronic media forms in particular have changed entirely the nature, of social, cultural, economic and political

relations” (Jay 33), and those who approach globalization as a phenomena with a long, repetitious history and see it “as a significant acceleration of forces that have been in play since at least the sixteenth century and that are not simply Western in their origin” (Jay 33). This thesis aligns itself with the latter camp. My concern about historicizations that break colonial and global moments off from one another is inseparable from this project’s Canadian roots. I worry that in Canadian literature studies, diasporic authors, texts, and communities are the edge Jay’s former scholarly camp uses to cleave ‘the colonial’ and ‘the transnational’ into not only discrete communities, but discrete temporal moments and racial communities as well. Research that distinguishes between historical and contemporary diasporas along agential or affective lines is neither innocent nor apolitical because it suggests globalization’s diasporas or transnational migration somehow settle colonialism’s lingering consequences.

It is difficult to discuss transnational-Canadian literature without returning to the nation’s settler-invader histories.<sup>18</sup> As Cho argues, “the desire to keep the past in the past is also the desire to keep the past from intruding into the present” (*Eating Chinese* 10). This desire is easy to track through Canadian cultural production. Narratives that divorce Canada’s colonial and transnational diasporas from one another feed settler-colonial nations’ historically intoned desires for clean—or at least cleared—historical slates. As an alternative, I approach Canada as a complex post-colony to ask not only what debts Caribbean Canadian communities remain owed in Canada, but what debts racialized diasporic communities owe Indigenous peoples and lands.

Within postcolonial studies, debates remain ongoing over the field’s tendency to discuss *either* literature’s cultural *or* its economic elements at the other’s expense; I am more interested in Caribbean Canadian literature’s conflation of economic and cultural referents. Rather than taking

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<sup>18</sup> The term ‘settler-invader,’ as Brydon explains in her “Reading Postcoloniality,” (177) is a small corrective for the more common but eliding designation ‘settler societies,’ which quietly evacuates Canada’s First Nations from narratives of colonization.

either a materialist or a culturalist approach, this project assumes cultural hybridity runs parallel to economic globalization, or, as Jay writes, that

[t]he process we call globalization is characterized by the *conflation* of cultural and economic forms. When commodities travel, culture travels, and cultural forms are nothing if not commodities. The study of globalization, therefore, requires an approach that is neither narrowly culturalist nor materialist, but rather operates with an understanding of the interdependence and interrelationship of the two. (34)<sup>19</sup>

Kit Dobson similarly argues it is unwise to think of “literature or culture... outside of the system of economic exchange” (*Transnational Canadas* 12). His logic and my object of study—representations of debt in Caribbean Canadian literature—leads me to the school of new economic criticism as a model for conducting culturalist analyses of a materialist phenomenon (and vice versa).

#### DERIVATIVE DISCOURSES, DISCOURSE DERIVATIVES: ON METHOD

New economic criticism begins with the base premise that economic systems and literary production are mutually constitutive. This approach, Mary Poovey explains, examines how representational systems (i.e. money, capitalism) contain and convey ideas (i.e. free market individualism, the effacement of labour), and asks how these ideas become operative “in and through the writing in which they are formulated and received” (11-12).<sup>20</sup> Stress falls on how

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<sup>19</sup> “[T]he emphasis on culture in postcolonial theory,” extends Gikandi, “hinders the recognition of the global experience as a structural experience (produced out of the complex interaction of politics, economics, the social, and the like)” (“Globalization” 644). This critique of postcolonial studies’ focus on cultural objects—especially literature—is similar those offered in Dirlík’s *The Postcolonial Aura* (1997) and Harry Harootunian’s “Postcoloniality’s Unconscious/ Area Studies Desire” (1999), a line of inquiry that hints at uncertainty with the very focus of cultural studies: is the study of representational fields such as literature worthwhile or is a focus on cultural forms, those that refract empirical phenomenon, just a displacement of scholarship’s fundamental object of study? The ‘culturalist’ versus ‘materialist’ dichotomy on which this debate hinges seems absurd in its simplifications, but these debates underlying question, how does scholarly inquiry shape the object it examines, warrants sustained consideration. Gilroy’s reflections on this tension are central to how I think about conducting a culturalist analysis of economic phenomenon. He argues that his focus on contemporary moral economies within, for example, African American car culture, is not “to downplay the fundamental significance or scope of political economy, but to contest the limited place provided in that paradigm for questions of morality and popular culture. Those components of social and economic interaction lie at the heart of the critique of consumer capitalism and its freedoms which supplies my initial focus” (*Darker* 7).

<sup>20</sup> Most new economic criticism focuses on historical literatures that easily fit within national and temporal categorizations. Its major studies examine popular texts with wide circulations, a focus prescribed by the field’s investment in understanding how thought about political economy is popularized through literature and texts. In short, new economic criticism tends to study socially dominant discourses. Examining debt’s evocations in contemporary Caribbean Canadian literature offers neither the historical hindsight nor the patterns of circulation typically central to



economic ideas become socially recognizable and usable through literature. My research asks how debt—integral to colonial power—has become socially usable in Caribbean Canadian literature and what ideas discourses of debt convey about global diaspora in the colonial aftermath. I take a new economic approach to Caribbean Canadian literature’s representations of debt as opposed to a neo-Marxist approach largely because, as Poovey proposes, new economic critique specifically asks how acts of representation both perpetuate and complicate notions of economic value.

With the rise of securitized finance capital and fall of the welfare state, debtor-creditor relations have become a superordinate in neoliberal times. Neoliberalism’s power, to borrow neo-Marxist critic Maurizio Lazzarato’s phrasing, is “founded on a logic of debt” (25). This logic surfaced with the subprime housing crash and has fuelled a surge of popular and academic examinations of indebtedness. These include Lazzarato’s *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2012), Richard Dienst’s *The Bonds of Debt* (2011), Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011), as well as Margaret Atwood’s literary essays *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2008). The first three of these works offer neo-Marxist’s responses to the sub-prime housing crisis and Occupy Wall Street movement.

Neo-Marxist critique approaches debt as a system of biopolitical control, one “exercised neither through repression nor through ideology...the debtor is ‘free,’ but his actions, his behavior are confined to the limits defined by the debt he has entered into” (Lazzarato 31). Dienst similarly describes debt’s power as “forging countless short circuits between the macro and the micro, indebtedness becomes something like a whole ‘structure of feeling,’ whereby humans find themselves owing their existence (along with the lives of other beings) ever more fully to the economic apparatus that claims to control life as such” (29). Collectively, this body of scholarship contends that debt “acts as a ‘capture,’ ‘predation,’ and ‘extraction’ machine on the whole of society,

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new economic critique. This disjunction, however, allows my research to critique and adapt aspects of the field’s application for contemporary literary studies.

as an instrument for macroeconomic prescription and management, and functions as a mechanism for income redistribution. It also functions as a mechanism for the production and ‘government’ of collective and individual subjectivities” (Lazzarato 29). Although these Foucauldian arguments foreground debt’s governmentality within neoliberal cultures, they do not broach debt’s colonial histories or ask how these histories continue to colour contemporary indebtedness.

The debts I trace through Caribbean Canadian literature alternatively expose the colonial notions that permeate neoliberalism’s valuation of autonomy and continue to circulate in our assumptions about possessive individualism’s normativity. Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005) both contend that debt’s capacity to govern individual behaviour is modelled on the circum-Atlantic slave trade and its operational notions of subjectivity. Throughout *The Black Jacobins* (1938), C.L.R. James traces how debt influenced various factions’ allegiances to either the French or revolutionary blocs during the San Domingo revolution. Tim Armstrong argues plantation slavery is premised on notions of the slave as an indebted non-subject whose humanity was foreclosed as property (38).<sup>21</sup> Anticolonial scholarship is clear that debt’s subjugating powers are not novel to this particular historical moment but that these powers were tested and refined throughout colonial history as well as the overdeveloped world’s interactions with underdeveloped nations. Haiti serves as the most obvious and radical example of both claims.<sup>22</sup>

Neo-Marxist debt theory largely avoids debt’s colonial deployments, focusing instead on the seeming novelty of the most recent European and American debt crises.<sup>23</sup> What Dienst, Graeber,

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<sup>21</sup> The practice of buying oneself out of slavery is frequently debated in studies of American slavery and debt (see Samira Kawash’s “Fugitive Properties” [1999] and Jennifer Rae Greeson’s “The Prehistory of Possessive Individualism” [2012]). Questions within these critiques often fall on whether the acts of manumission reaffirmed slavery’s commodification of Black subjects or presented a sly, market-based resistance against an economy of enslaved debt.

<sup>22</sup> For an analysis that focuses specifically on Haiti, see Sibylle Fischer’s *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.

<sup>23</sup> The same can be argued of Atwood’s readings of literary debt, which focuses on Victorian, Euro-Canadian, and American literature. It is not clear if Dienst is as conscious of his Western frames as is Lazzarato. Graeber’s sprawling analysis is insistently global, but while the examples he draws from arise from Asian, Middle Eastern, as well as Western cultures of indebtedness, his conclusions focus on contemporary debt crises in North America and Europe.

and Lazzarato find remarkable about the emerging ‘logic of debt’ is that it operates so effectively in present-day Europe and the United States, national inheritors of successful labour rights activism. Here, individual identity is reduced to its relation with capital. The resulting readings push racial, gendered, linguistic, and national identifications out of critical focus, causing critical oversights that limit neo-Marxist theories of debt’s governmentality. Challenging this tendency, Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s *Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime* special issue of *American Quarterly* (2012) examines the 2008 crash through the “dual lens of race and empire” (364). Their approach reveals that the subprime housing crash disproportionately affected African American and Latina/o borrowers who were respectively 76% and 71% more likely to experience foreclosure than the white debtors who made up the statistical majority of at-risk borrowers (382). Chakravartty and Ferreira da Silva demonstrate that debt’s governmentality exerts disproportional force on racialized subjects, a finding that makes these subjects’ absence in contemporary neo-Marxist theories of debt troubling.<sup>24</sup>

As I read my primary texts, I found they did not adhere to neo-Marxist critique’s organizing logic. Tidying gestures that describe debt as a universal condition—“Even those too poor to have access to credit must pay interest to creditors through the reimbursement of public debt; even countries too poor for a Welfare State must repay their debts” (Lazzarato 32)—and a reduction of debtor-creditor relations to clear binaries, “creditor-debtor, capital-labor, welfare programs-users, businesses-consumer relations,” (Lazzarato 32) do not hold in Caribbean Canadian literature’s representations of debt where individuals and states *simultaneously* occupy the positions of debtor and creditor. As importantly, they do so across material *and* moral vectors of indebtedness.

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<sup>24</sup> Race plays an undeniable role in mediating economic crises within Western nations, so it is frustratingly unclear—or perhaps more accurately, unstudied—whether similar prejudices are at work on a global scale. For example, it is unclear how the global financial crisis impacted the economies of Caribbean nations that entered the downturn laden with debts accrued during or soon after decolonization; most discussions of the recent crisis have limited their discussions to Western markets; the crisis’s consequences for underdeveloped nations remains a lacuna within news media and academic critique alike.

Neo-Marxist interpretations focus on debt as it arises between corporations and individuals, an approach tailored to explaining debt's power over white, middle-class, Western subjects. This does not mean neo-Marxism is not interested in the relationship between moral and material debt. Indeed, critical reflections emerging from the Occupy Wall Street movement and responding to the 2008 global financial crisis emphasize that financial debts foster a sense of moral indebtedness. However, these responses see such vectors as unidirectional. Working from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, Lazzarato argues that debt enforces an economic structure on the production of the self, especially the moral self (34); Dienst emphasizes that the contradictions within creditor-debtor relations encode internal "targets for infidelity to the current order of things" (157) and that revolutionary resistance will result from moral outrage about debt's contemporary abuses; Graeber arrives at a similar disavowal of neoliberal affects of indebtedness and concludes "[n]othing would be more important than to wipe the slate clean for everyone, to mark a break with our accustomed morality, and start again" (391). These are astute assessments of the odious nature of contemporary consumer credit—offered by lenders who never expected repayment in order to capitalize on default. That said, these arguments overlook debt's larger connotations, its capacity to act as a form of memory, recognition, community.

The losses I explore in my readings of Caribbean Canadian literature have largely slid from the quantifiable realm of fiduciary compensation and into a less tangible realm of affect where redress is more symbolic than literal. This is not because Afro-Canadian experiences do not justify financial reparations.<sup>25</sup> While these neo-Marxist theorists do turn to a biblical-style Jubilee and a clearing of financial debts as the only solution for the current "crisis of indebtedness" (Dienst 13),

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<sup>25</sup> In 2004 the United Nations ruled that families whose homes were destroyed in the razing of Halifax's Africville were entitled to reparations from the Canadian government. For more on international calls for reparation and debt forgiveness for former colonies, see Naomi Kline's "Minority Death Match: Jews, blacks, and the post-racial presidency" (2009). Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham's *Reconciling Canada: Historical Injustices and the Contemporary Culture of Redress* also provides valuable reflections on Canadian practices of national apology.

the desire to clear one's debts—excitingly, surprisingly, unexpectedly—is not an overarching project in the works of Caribbean Canadian literature examined here.<sup>26</sup> Instead, as Hartman's discussion of the Reconstruction suggests that “the entanglements of bondage and liberty shaped the liberal imagination of freedom, fueled the emergence and expansion of capitalism, and spawned proprietorial conceptions of the self. This vexed genealogy of freedom plagued the great event of Emancipation, or as it was described in messianic and populist terms, Jubilee” (*Scenes* 115). For Hartman, Jubilee cloaks how entangled freedom and obligation are within liberal notions of possessive individualism. ‘Liberal imagination of freedom,’ ‘emergence and expansion of capitalism,’ and ‘proprietorial conceptions of the self’ are all sites where colonial power has altered “the terrain on which [anticolonial] accommodation/resistance was *possible* in the first place” (Scott, *Refashioning* 16).

This entanglement of colonial power and ‘Jubilee’ helps explain why Caribbean Canadian literature's debts *cannot be* paid back, *cannot be* settled. I am most interested in what *kind* of losses reparations can address, and what *kind* of losses can they not. In the United States and Canada, calls for reparations focus on material losses when they emphasize compensation for the unwaged labor of slaves and interned Japanese citizens, or years spent in residential schools for Canada's First Nations. In each of example, reparations privilege (provable) *material* losses suffered by *individuals*. As such, they arguably reinforce a neoliberal logic of possessive individualism while shifting attention from collective rights to individual freedoms.<sup>27</sup> Reparations as we currently conceive of them do not

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<sup>26</sup> Discussions of jubilee and debt forgiveness evoke reparations. While this project emphasizes “the informal... acts of symbolic redress” (Gilroy, *Darker* 21) that arise in the colonial aftermath, reparations are not outside of its analytical scope. Arguments for and against formal reparations expose our lasting uncertainties over complicity with colonial systems: what of the corporations, the insurance companies for instance, that made slavery financially secure, and what are their financial obligations to histories of exploitation, Deadria Farmer-Paellmann asks through her legal activism? How do systems of reparation acknowledge African slavers' role in the transatlantic trade, a concern raised by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (2010)?

<sup>27</sup> As intriguingly, deeply uncertain translations occur when harmful experiences are framed in terms of monetary compensation (\$3000 per year in a residential school; \$21 000 for surviving members of the interned Japanese community), figures that expose reparations' conceptual limits.

imagine compensation for a climate of racism or the collective traumas that permeates wronged communities. As such, reparations address individual experiences of material loss but not cultural losses or the unknown/un-provable traumas of colonial encounter that remain unassailable at a profound and immaterial level.<sup>28</sup>

Jubilee-type gestures attempt to clear histories of struggle, loss, and displacement; the Caribbean Canadian literary works I address suggest colonial history's debts have spun out so far beyond financial referents, have so deeply penetrated acts of cultural production and resistance, that strictly financial attempts to address indebtedness is incongruous. The discourses of debt I trace here are so deeply entangled in the creation and maintenance of community, history, identity, and memory that a Jubilee-like clearing appears not only impossible but undesirable. Poovey describes new economic criticism as a methodological approach that asks how economic concepts (such as debt) become socially useful for communities (such as the diasporic, Caribbean Canadian authors, characters, and a broader Canadian reading public) in their historical context (neoliberal times). From this methodological perspective, Caribbean Canadian literature's unpayable debts are representing colonialism as an incompletable project that, in its incompleteness, binds contemporary but disparate communities—Canada's racialized, white, and Indigenous peoples—to one another. This body of literature issues an activist call for recognition, a demand that the consequences of colonial history be taken seriously as forces that shape the present.

Finally, I resist neo-Marxist debt scholarship's pull because of its tendency to reduce economic systems' power to their ability to hail *individuals* along class lines: when framed as autonomous consumers and workers, indebted subjects' positionality in *mutually indebted*

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<sup>28</sup> The question remains: can financial reparations address non-financial forms of loss? The difference between legal reparations, which come with an acknowledgement of criminal liability often paired with a formal apology, and legal settlement, which comes with no apology or necessary acceptance of legal liability is also worth noting.

communities falls out of critical focus.<sup>29</sup> Gilroy points to this reductive tendency in both African American studies' vindicationist and insurrectionary camps, which "resolved the complex issue of capitalism and its relationship to racial divisions...either by pursuing the expansion of African American access to capitalism's bounty or by dreaming of the system's overthrow. In both cases, the interpretive significance of slaves having themselves once been commodities was set quietly aside" (*Darker* 9). Understanding indebted subjects *only* in relation to finance capital ironically reinforces neoliberal understandings of the individual as a propertied, proprietorial subject, one whose moral hailings can be upended when their market freedoms—or freedom from the market—are defended.

Even as financial debts spin out into the realm of affective control—an argument central to critiques by Dienst, Lazzarato, and Graeber—I see a return to simplifying financial referents throughout this scholarship: debts must (or, in the case of predatory loans, mustn't) be repaid. Neo-Marxist scholarship's turn to Jubilee as *the* resolution for indebtedness actually plays into market-driven teleologies of individual progress and growth: the desire to be debt-free is also the desire to be extricated from social obligations and their informing histories. "Castration or Decapitation?" (1981), Hélène Cixous's reading of Freud's Oedipus complex, alternatively presents the desire to be free of debt as the desire to be free from family, from community, and from larger social obligations:

Obligation is submission to the enormous weight of the other's generosity, is being threatened by a blessing... and a blessing is always evil when it comes from someone else. For the moment you receive something you are effectively 'open' to the other, and if you are a man you have only one wish, and that is hastily to return the gift, to break the circuit of exchange that could have no end...to be nobody's child, to owe

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<sup>29</sup> Dienst struggles with this duality when he writes: "We live between two debts. On the one hand, there is the ineradicable debt described by Agamben that comes from having or being a potentiality that we can never really possess.... On the other hand, there is the full array of as yet unreckoned debts that constitute the complex historical situation in which we live, ranging from unresolved family romances and the duties of identity to the very persistent obligations imposed by the dominant forms of political and economic power" (156-57). Though recognizing this multiplicity of debts and the ways in which they constitute community, his conclusion, that all the confluences and contradictions within debt require its subjects to mobilize against the predations of finance capital's exploitations, is something of a *non sequitur*.

no one a thing. (250)<sup>30</sup>

By thinking of debt in strictly financial terms and working to free the ostensibly autonomous individual from their obligation to others, neo-Marxist debt scholarship is actually playing into patriarchal, imperial, and neoliberal ways of thinking.<sup>31</sup>

Rather than focusing on comparatively clear-cut financial debts, then, a new economic approach lets me underscore without attempting to resolve the messy conversions and connotations that happen when moral obligations are caged in pecuniary terms and vice versa. My critiques of neo-Marxist theorizations of indebtedness are ultimately a call for more specificity and awareness of the ways colonial history shapes debt's contemporary connotations for Canada's multiply identified communities. Incompleteness and unsettleability are precisely the point of such discourses of debt, discourses that show how obligation binds individuals to their Others, past and present, in often unwanted ways. Rather than asking why the global financial crisis has not resulted in larger ideological or political crises—the questions for so much contemporary neo-Marxist critique—I explore how an internally divided diasporic community understands and represents neoliberalism's logic. Catachresis and conflation are key: Caribbean Canadian literature shows how entangled colonial and postcolonial pasts remain in the transnational present's material and moral logic through debt.

#### DOUBLE-ENTRY BOOKKEEPING: DEBT'S ANTICOLONIAL POLITICS

My analysis hinges on Caribbean Canadian literature's promisingly problematic connotations

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<sup>30</sup> Cixous's reference to generosity brings two other French theorists to mind: can a debt, like Marcel Mauss' gift (*Essai Sur le Don*, 1925) be forgiven without further obligation, or does the forgiven debt become, like Derrida's conceptualization of the gift (*Writing and Difference* (1978); *Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money* [1992]; *The Gift of Death* [1995]) another modality of control, another incompletionable exchange? Are forgiven debts just lingering obligations whose unconditionally is an impossibility? This may just be another form of non-freedom, another logic of control, for those whose debts are 'forgiven,' and also raises questions about who occupies what side of the creditor-debtor binary in colonial history.

<sup>31</sup> Equivalencies between the moral and financial, affective and pecuniary debts only ever seem to be established so that symbolic debts can be paid off, settled. Symbolic debts, though, are threatening precisely because they do not allow for any clarity as to who owes what to whom and raise wonderfully messy questions about the rates of exchange between the material and immaterial realms of obligation.



of material debts and moral obligations. Within these literary works, debt is at times explicitly economic (money owed, the marginalized financial conditions of former colonies and diasporic subjects) and at times deeply abstract (affects of indebtedness, moral obligations, (non)recognition). I have come to see debt's entangled moral and material vectors through Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), works that excavate debt's colonial specificities and begin to fill the gaps I see in contemporary neo-Marxist critique.

Fanon's writing can seem overburdened with the language of debt and credit: *The Wretched of the Earth's* "On Violence" describes European imperialism's immunological and evangelical inroads into Africa as "part of the same balance sheet" (7), contends that "the skin of a colonist is not worth more than the 'native's'" (10), describes colonized subjects as needing to "pawn some of [their] own intellectual possessions" (13) to survive colonization, and concludes that colonies' cultural traditions are obsessed with rituals of "possession and dispossession" (20) largely because of imperial history. It is in Fanon's discussions of remembrance and postcolonial futurity, though, where debt's colonial aporias begin to show. Describing the human costs of struggles for national independence, Fanon argues that "[t]he colonized... do not keep accounts. They register the enormous gaps left in their ranks as a kind of necessary evil. Since they have decided to respond with violence, they admit the consequences. Their one demand is that they are not asked to keep accounts for others as well" (*Wretched* 49). Within five pages, though, Fanon presents precisely one of these accounts, tallying the credit side of the colonial ledger by translating colonial lives lost into Europe's financial gains: "European opulence is literally a scandal for it was built on the backs of slaves, it fed on the blood of slaves, and it owes its very existence to the soil and subsoil of the underdeveloped world. Europe's well-being and progress were built with the sweat and corpses of blacks, Arabs, Indians, and Asians. This we are determined never to forget" (53-4). Fanon's seeming about-face here is not faulty but speaks to debt's fractal nature: *The Wretched of the Earth* illuminates the difficulty of

distinguishing between material and moral debts as colonizer and colonized simultaneously play the roles of debtor and creditor across multiple vectors of indebtedness.

In these passages, Fanon struggles to balance debt and credit, remembrance and forgetting, the wealth of European nations and the exploitation of colonized nations. Caught between his demand the colonized not be held to account for their colonizers' losses while maintaining that Europe has been built *by and on* the bodies of the enslaved, Fanon is trying to resolve colonialism's accounts wherein material gain and immaterial loss are part of the same currency. His trouble converting material and immaterial accounts comes into sharper focus with *Black Skin's* reflections on reparations. Framed by an epigraph from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that contends revolutionary futures cannot be fuelled by memories of a past that never imagined such radical change, *Black Skin* concludes with series of questions concerning the decolonized, racialized subject's rights: "I have neither the right nor the duty to demand reparations for my subjugated ancestors," (203) asks "Am I going to ask today's white men to answer for the slave traders of the seventeenth century? / Am I going to try by every means available to cause guilt to burgeon their souls?" (204), and concludes that "I have not the right to put down roots. I have not the right to admit the slightest patch of being into my existence. I have not the right to become mired by the determinations of the past. / I am not a slave to slavery that dehumanized my ancestors" (204-5). Fanon's style makes it difficult to decipher whether these statements are scornful or rhetorical (perhaps his uncertainty with what to do with colonial history *is* the point here), but the rights he cannot claim are strung together by the same question: who owes what to whom in the colonial aftermath?

Amid this uncertainty, Fanon makes one overarching claim for Black subjects: "I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behaviour from the other. / And one duty: the duty never to let my decisions renounce freedom" (204). True to his epigraph, Fanon tries

not look backwards at the ways colonizing powers have renounced the freedom of the colonized, focusing instead on the historical binds that will continue to delimit formerly colonized subjects' freedom into the post-colonial future. To achieve future freedoms, he concludes, "I, a man of colour, insofar as I have the possibility of existing absolutely, have not the right to confine myself in a world of retroactive reparations" (205). Here, past debts constrict the colonized's freedom—not as Europe's *debtors*, importantly, but as its *creditors*—binding both to mutually inseparable futures. To call for reparations in this passage is to demand payment an outstanding moral debt that will never come—either because of the unwillingness of the colonizers or the impossibility of settling such enormous ethical obligations—and thus can only constrict the formerly colonized's future freedom. Here the colonized, European society's creditors, are bound to the colonial past in ways that Fanon sees as limiting their future. This leads him to initially reject the idea of reparations.

Given this emancipatory claim, it seems surprising that *The Wretched of the Earth* not only returns to but actively demands reparations. Fanon observes that national "[i]ndependence has certainly brought the colonized peoples moral reparation and recognized their dignity" (40), but presses that material reparations are needed for true decolonization, to restore the colonial world to its pre-colonial potential, that is:

Colonialism and imperialism have not settled their debt to us once they have withdrawn their flag and police force from our territories. For centuries the capitalists have behaved like real war criminals in the underdeveloped world. Deportation, massacres, forced labor, and slavery were the primary methods used by capitalism to increase its gold and diamond reserves, and establish wealth and power. Not so long ago, Nazism transformed the whole of Europe into a genuine colony. The governments of various European nations demanded reparations and the redistribution in money and kind for their stolen treasures.... At the end of that war the Europeans were adamant about one thing: 'Germany will pay.' (57)

This shift in Fanon's discussion of reparations arises as post-colonial states begin gaining national independence. As he argues, 'moral reparations' of human freedom do little to alleviate the material

impoverishment of Europe's former colonies.<sup>32</sup>

Though critical readers could decry these contradictions, I see Fanon's reasoning as evidence of the impossibility of disentangling colonialism's material and metaphysical debts or resolving colonies' simultaneous roles as Europe's creditors and debtors. Instead, a much more complex kind of double-entry historical bookkeeping is necessary in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Echoing his earlier *Black Skins*, Fanon writes that "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The riches which are choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples. The ports of Holland, the docks in Bordeaux and Liverpool owe their importance to the trade and deportation of millions of slaves" (58-9), foregrounding the material conditions that entangle his post-colonial present and the colonial past. Fanon's shifting stance on reparations appears inflected by his desire for the colonized to be free from the affect of indebtedness—again, as Europe's creditors—in *Black Skin* and the later emerging demand for material reparations that help the post-colony move into a state of emancipation and independence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He signals three registers—memory, recognition, and futurity—that are integral to anticolonial emancipation.

Conversions from the material to the metaphysical and back again vex Fanon's stance on reparations. They are also vitally important to understanding debt's emergence time and time again in Caribbean Canadian literature.<sup>33</sup> Like W.E.B Du Bois's 'double-consciousness,' Fanon attests to

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<sup>32</sup> For individuals within a postcolonial society to be free of the affective burdens of the creditors of colonial history, the postcolonial nation-state needs the material means to imagine itself differently, those it is deprived of by colonial history. Bhabha suggests Fanon's "style of thinking and writing operates by creating repeated disjunctions—followed by proximate juxtapositions—between the will of the political agent and the desire of the psycho-affective subject" (xxxvii). This demand, "a 'right' to equitable development... at a time when dual economies are celebrated as though they were global economies" (Bhabha xviii) means that settling colonies' metaphysical indebtedness is not an adequate substitute for lingering material debts, and vice versa: reparations are both an absolute limit and absolutely necessary for post-colonial emancipation here.

<sup>33</sup> In his analysis of the gift in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, Jacques Derrida argues for the impossibility of the gift as a gesture outside of systems of economic exchange, as the 'gift,' under any typical circumstances, always generates an obligation, a debt to be repaid. Crucially, this obligation exists not only when the gift is materially returned, but also when a translation is made from the material to a sense of gratitude or perceived obligation: "if the present is present... as *present*, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift. Why? Because he gives back, in the place, let us say, of the thing itself, a symbolic equivalent.... The symbolic opens and constitutes the order of exchange and of debt" (13). Derrida focuses on how feelings of gratitude annul the gift: if gratitude annuls the gift because it is through gratitude the

the double-entry bookkeeping the formerly-colonized perform as they tally colonial history's debts and credits *for* colonizer *and* colonized alike. Debt can be exceptionally exploitative and exact intense control over indebted subjects, but debt can also, postcolonial analysis reminds us, be appropriated and imagined in subversive ways. Graeber contends that unlike under conditions of slavery, true debts occur only between fundamentally equal subjects: "To be a slave, or lower-caste, is to be intrinsically inferior. We are dealing with relations of unadulterated hierarchy. In the case of debt, we are dealing with two individuals who begin as equal parties to a contract" (86). The Caribbean Canadian texts I study here come to a different conclusion: debts are inherently relational. To claim a debt exists is to insist on a point of connection not only between inherently unequal parties—debt inevitably brings *un-equals*, not those who exist in a state of equality, together—but also between past events and present conditions.<sup>34</sup> Mutual indebtedness, then, is the basis for relationships that cross racial, generational, national, and temporal boundaries.

Fanon desired to establish a world wherein decolonization could foster a system of international solidarity, a desire that is proving coterminous with the Bandung conference and failures of the non-alignment movement. In his introduction to Grove Press's 2005 reprint of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha acknowledges the seemingly outdated nature of Fanon's distinction between self and other, but argues this is *the* time to return to Fanon precisely because the conditions of colonial wretchedness persist in a world shaped by globalized finance capital: "New

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nature of the gift is perceived, constituting the gift's symbolic return, then what goes on in the translation of the material gift—which is always already a debt—into the symbolic order? What happens when a debt, perhaps a simpler referent than Derrida's gift, is passed down through generations and migrations, moving back and forth between financial obligation and the symbolic order of indebtedness through conversions that have not been traced or tallied?

<sup>34</sup> This is a point of disagreement between Graeber, who argues debts exist only between equals, and the Invisible Committee, who argue in *The Coming Insurrection* that "[t]he power of money is to connect those who are unconnected, to link strangers as strangers and thus, by making everything equivalent, to put everything into circulation. The cost of money's capacity to connect everything is the superficiality of the connection where deception is the rule. Distrust is the basis of the credit relation. The reign of money is, therefore, always the reign of control" (117-118). This disconnect hints at another aporia: debt it brings together both equals and unequals, and risks making those who are unequal equals, and those who are equal unequals.

global empires rise to enforce their own civilizing missions in the name of democracy and free markets where once progress and development were seen as the shibboleths of a modernized, westernized salvation. As if such civic, public goods were exportable commodities” (x-xi). Colonialism and neoliberalism, two seemingly differentiated systems, maintain the poverty and disenfranchisement of the same groups of people while doing little to reduce, re-imagine, or rend existing boundaries of human wretchedness.

### JOINT ACCOUNTS: CHAPTERS

While debt very obviously serves as a metric for tracing obligation, it is also inseparable from notions of temporal and individual progress. Consequently, this thesis focuses on questions of time and sovereignty in the colonial aftermath. Time and sovereignty are not new problems for anticolonial thought but have been repeatedly debated in discussions of post-colonial nationhood and tested through Third World solidarity movements. They have not, however, been approached in relation to the simultaneously diasporic and settler-colonial contexts I examine here. Caribbean Canadian literature presents a new problem-space for thinking about time and sovereignty in relation to colonial history *and* transnational futurity, one that is rooted in plantation and settler colonization.

The research that follows proceeds along a temporal arc that moves from memory, to discourses of recognition, to diasporic literature’s imagined futures. I follow debt through my chosen Caribbean Canadian texts wherein colonial pasts are taken up in the language of financial debt. As importantly, indebtedness evokes an ethic of accountability that prevents colonial injustices from being forgotten or suppressed. My first chapter, “Amortizing Memory: Debt as Mnemonic Device in Diaspora” asks what happens when history is represented as an outstanding debt, or, more specifically, what happens to history when literature and calls for reparation alike describe colonial pasts as an *outstanding* but *unpayable* debt. David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* and Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge* as well as the Caribbean Community Secretariat and Ta-Nehisi Coates

recent calls for reparations provide this chapter its objects of study. In both novels, diaspora's not-exclusively-financial losses—the cultural erasures, historical traumas, and societal exclusions synonymous with marginalized migration—are tallied in diasporic characters' financial records. These debt ledgers act as mnemonic literary devices and preserve otherwise shameful or repressed memories from amortization. Neither novel offers a simplistic celebration of diaspora's capacity for remembrance in the face of nation-states' desires to forget, however, but illuminate how nations and diasporas alike disavow certain histories.

These fictional debt ledgers have another significant consequence for contemporary theorizations of 'diasporic memory': diaspora studies has come to privilege certain forms, methodologies, and communities as the locations of 'true memory,' even going so far as to define diasporic identity through particular memory practices. While embodied memory has become a not-so-subtle marker of diasporic subjectivity, *The Swinging Bridge*, *Souconyant*, and contemporary calls for reparations expose embodied memory's instability and examine how diasporic communities negotiate memory's embodied *and* archival manifestations.<sup>35</sup>

Over chapters two through four, I turn to recognition's (im)possibility after colonization. Dionne Brand guides my understanding recognition and its site-specific complexities in Canada. At a textual level, her fictional, poetic, and autobiographic works question the limited—and limiting—recognition Canada grants to racialized, female, queer, and diasporic subjects. At a supra-textual

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<sup>35</sup> Diasporic melancholia is intimately involved in the traumatic debts of colonialism, but my discussion of debt in Caribbean Canadian literature is distinct from ongoing investigations of melancholic loss. Evá Tettenborn's "Melancholia as Resistance in Contemporary African American Literature" offers a valuable examination of Freudian definitions of mourning and the act of identifying self as subject in slave narratives: "The uneasy relationship between Freud-based theories of melancholia and African American literature becomes evident if one turns to the status of the subject and the lost object as well as modes of subjection and objectification under slavery. Both mourning and melancholia presuppose the existence of a subject who has lost an object. Without *subjectivity* and the subject's attachments to an object, neither mourning nor melancholia are possible" (107). The ability to enter into debt, like the ability to experience melancholia in Tettenborn's analysis, enacts a claim to a consumer subjectivity: to be in debt, to owe, enacts a kind of resistance to economic systems that historically denied racialized subjects access to credit; these resistances may now, however, play into a neoliberal logic of debt, as described by Lazzarato, wherein indebtedness acts as a form of biopolitical governmentality of racialized subjects.

level, Brand's representations appear at odds with her reception: arguably the most nationally and internationally recognizable Caribbean Canadian author, Brand's works frequent national award lists and post-secondary curricula. She was Toronto's Poet Laureate from 2009-12; *Land to Light On* won a Governor's General Award for poetry (1997) as well as a Trillium Award (1998); she is currently a professor and University Research Chair in the School of English and Theater Studies at the University of Guelph and, as of 2017, the newly-named chief poetry editor at McClelland & Stewart. These positions and honours are more than biographical fodder: they highlight the strained ambivalence that holds Brand—and similarly racialized, diasporic subjects—at the core of Canada's literary institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Between these positions and her writing, Brand shows that recognition is fracturing in complex and unanticipated ways as Canada mediates its simultaneously settler-colonial and transnational narratives. In interviews, Brand rejects categorizations that situate either herself or her works on the periphery of the Canadian nation and its literary traditions, particularly when these traditions are imagined as orbiting a Euro-Canadian centre: "I don't consider myself on any 'margin,' on the margin of Canadian literature. I'm sitting right in the middle of Black literature, because that's who I read, that's who I respond to" ("The Language of Resistance" 14). Peter Dickinson references this claim when he argues Brand should not be interpreted as a Canadian author because such readings inevitably ignore her 'unlocatability': "Brand's race, gender, and sexuality necessarily preclude full participation in national citizenship, and thus prevent her from ever 'being' a Canadian writer... [she] remains a 'borderline' case" (161). Smaro Kamboureli similarly reasons that while some may interpret the centrality of an author like Brand to Canada's literary institutions as evidence

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<sup>36</sup> Here I would include authors like André Alexis, Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Mordechai Richler, Rawi Hage, Joy Kogawa, George Elliott Clarke, Fred Wah, Austin Clarke, Dany Laferrière, Lawrence Hill, Malcom Gladwell, Esi Edugyan, and Wayson Choy. This is a partial and imperfect list of authors who have won major literary awards, taught at Canadian universities, held positions as provincial and national poet laureates, and whose works are commonly taught in postsecondary surveys of Canadian literature, but it gives some sense of the centrality of diasporic and racialized individuals to these institutions.



that “ethnic writing has always been part of the [Canadian] canon” (163), such interpretations only affirm “the magnanimity of the majority culture whose celebration of diversity becomes yet another way of containing it” (164). Brand, it seems, is simultaneously at the centre of literary production in Canada and explicitly severed from the nation’s literary traditions.

Dickenson and Kamboureli critique celebratory readings of her inclusions a little more than multicultural containment, contending Brand should not be read as a Canadian author. This argument’s value lies in demonstrating, firstly, that national categories do not hold under critical scrutiny and, secondly, that Blackness and Canadianness remain antithetical. I am not as interested in troubling national categories or showing their fallacies as I am in settler-colonialism’s transnational adaptations, but I take Dickenson’s and Kamboureli’s concerns with recognition seriously: how should Brand—a Black, queer, diasporic woman—be recognized as a subject of literary analysis? This question sparks my investigation of how diasporic subjects are, can, and might be recognized in relation to Canada’s literary traditions. Instead of asking whether Brand can (or should) be read as a ‘Canadian’ author, I ask how diasporic criticism’s readings of her work reproduce settler-colonial notions of subjectivity, recognizability, and land.

The three interconnected chapters I offer on Brand demonstrate how a settler-colonial logic circulates within, alongside, and through theories of diasporic post-nationalism. In chapter two, “Recognition as Obligation,” I argue that Brand’s works not only resist colonial discourses of recognition, but build on anti-colonial theory to critique racialized subjects’ continuing nonrecognition in globalisation’s diasporas. Focusing on *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), this chapter first traces how Enlightenment theories of recognition entangle freedom and obligation, then shows how these tangles permeate recognition’s anticolonial, multicultural, and poststructural critique. *At the Full* poses a classically anticolonial critique of colonial discourses of recognition, but additionally lays the groundwork for Brand’s own resistant theory of subject and community

formation, a theory that rejects possessive individualism in favour of dispossession.

Chapter three, “Sovereign Immunity: Branding Canadian Diaspora Studies” proposes, firstly, that dispossession is *the* organizing principle of subjectivity in Brand’s works and secondly, that Brand’s emphasis on dispossession has influenced how Canadian diaspora studies frames post-nationalism’s ethics. In *Inventory* and *What We All Long For*, Black diasporic subjects cannot secure recognition through either their originary or adopted nation-states; they can, however, recognize themselves and one another through their common dispossessions. In both works, Black subjects resist identities—and obligations—imposed from without while forming self-recognizing communities of similarly dispossessed subjects. In response, literary criticism has developed a series of fractal citizenships—diasporic citizenship (Cho), affective citizenship (Brydon), urban and global citizenship (Dobson)—to discuss whether recognition can be imagined apart from formal citizenship in the traditional nation-state. I understand the appeal of Brand’s resistant and dispossessed subjects to Canadian diaspora studies. However, the field’s anti-national embrace of dispossession—particularly its celebrations of post-national landlessness—place its baseline logic at odds with Indigenous decolonization, aligning fractal citizenship with settler-colonialism’s reterritorializations.

Undertaking a thesis on debt and obligation in Caribbean Canadian literature without seriously engaging with questions of Indigenous displacement and settler-colonialism’s outstanding debts only affirms the temporal and communal breaks this research set out to identify and challenge. Accordingly, my fourth chapter, “‘No harm to me, I think’: Debt and Freedom on Native Land,” contends that diaspora studies’ celebratory readings of a-territoriality overwrite Indigenous concerns with territorial decolonization. By comparing the fractal notions of citizenship identified in the previous chapter to James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson’s ‘treaty citizenship,’ this chapter maps disconnects between diaspora and Indigenous studies’ deontologies: Canadian diaspora studies and

Indigenous cultural studies have come to understand community—and obligation—in contradictory ways. More simply, diaspora studies' post-national claims are not inherently anticolonial and Indigenous studies' anticolonial arguments are not necessarily post-national. By drawing on *Land to Light On* and *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, this chapter demonstrates how diaspora studies' post-national arguments not only reiterate settler-colonialism's proprietorial notions of subjectivity, but decenter Brand's own Blackness. Her works sustain this extended analysis because they expose the largely uncharted intersections and disconnects between diasporic and Indigenous cultural studies in Canada.

My fifth chapter, "Speculative Futures: Nalo Hopkinson's Postcolonial Horizons" turns from memory and contemporary debates over recognition to questions of futurity. Financial debts operate under given teleologies: without progressive notions of time, debts lose their value to creditors (who loan in the present to benefit in/from the future) and debtors (who borrow in the present in the hopes of securing a better future). Despite this temporal logic, Caribbean Canadian literature's representations of debt often refute the notion of chronological progress, insisting instead on debt as a repeating and chronic state of material marginalization. In effect, this body of diasporic literature challenges not just Western delineations of history, but anticolonial narratives of national emancipation and neoliberal narratives of financial progress as well. Through their content and form, Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction, particularly her short story "A Habit of Waste" (1999) and novel *The New Moon's Arms* (2007) challenge the concept of a globalized future wherein colonial history is settled once and for all. She consciously labels her style "*postcolonial* speculative fiction" (*So Long Been Dreaming*), a naming that suggests even the most fantastical futures cannot be detached from colonialism's unsettled consequences. Saidiya Hartman's and Hortense J. Spillers' theories of Afro-pessimism also assert that colonial pasts—and their anti-Black violence—will linger in any and all globalized futures premised colonial notions of normativity or progress. Like Hartman

and Spillers, Hopkinson's speculative works explore how Afro-diasporic subjects negotiate these historical entanglements. Unlike Hartman's and Spiller's historicist arguments, Hopkinson does this exploratory work through speculative fiction.

CHAPTER ONE  
AMORTIZING MEMORY: DEBT AS A MNEMONIC DEVICE IN DIASPORA

Debt has emerged as one of the dominant forms of un-freedom that limit individuals and nations at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; debt also proves a mnemonic device *par excellence*, one that connects past and present by preserving politicizing histories of systemic marginalization into the future. In September 2013, fourteen of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat's member states formally announced they were pursuing reparations from the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Ten months after CARICOM made its legal suit public, *The Atlantic* published Ta-Nehisi Coates's popularly-acclaimed "The Case for Reparations," a narrative essay that delineates how white supremacy is woven into—and operates through—the United States' financial systems. Limited access to finance capital, Coates demonstrates, has forced Black Americans to rely on predatory loans and mortgages. The resulting transgenerational debts and evermore restricted access to credit simultaneously curbs and localizes Black homeownership, perpetuating plantation slavery's segregation of African American subjects (59). For Coates and CARICOM alike, credit's inaccessibility has become *the* mechanism through which race and economic marginalization re-coalesce in the ostensibly decolonized Caribbean and post-civil rights United States.

While the scale and scope of their projects differ, Coates's synthesis of longstanding reparatory advocacy and CARICOM's call for formal reparation both test the relationship between debt and memory: who, they ask, is obliged to remember what in the colonial aftermath? What obligations remain outstanding? They also face the same problem: both are trying to *prove* that the ongoing socioeconomic marginalization of the ostensibly decolonized Black Atlantic is a direct result

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<sup>1</sup> With its permanent headquarters in Georgetown, Guyana, CARICOM is an international organization that works to promote trade between Caribbean states and coordinate on foreign policy matters. CARICOM has 15 member-states (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) but Haiti is not participating in this reparations suit.

of colonial pasts whose inequalities remain unsettled.

Discursive evocations of debt are not restricted to calls for reparations, of course: David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007) and Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) explore the entanglement of colonial and neo-colonial pasts in the transnational present, and they do so through diasporic characters' financial records. In these novels, immaterial losses synonymous with marginalized migration—cultural erasure, historical trauma, and social exclusion—are preserved as debts. In both, diasporic debt ledgers preserve otherwise repressed or forgotten memories. Neither Chariandy nor Espinet offer simplistic celebrations of diaspora's capacity to remember in the face of nation-states' desires to forget, though: by preserving diasporic pasts within financial records, *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge* instead illuminate how nations *and* diasporas strategically disavow certain histories.

These novels' debt ledgers pose two challenges for contemporary literary scholarship: first, these particular representations of debt trouble not only the distinctions scholarship draws between colonial past and transnational present but between diasporic and national communities as well, emphasizing the inseparability of these historical moments and communities. Second, and more unexpectedly, tracing debt through these texts and geopolitical debates shows that diasporic criticism has come to favour embodied memory over archival history, a scholarly tendency that risks stiffening diaspora into an identificatory category whose communal boundaries are defined by specific memory practices. Although diaspora studies increasingly privilege certain individuals, methodologies, and communities as sites of 'true' or 'authentic' memory, *The Swinging Bridge* and *Soucouyant* expose these sites' instability by exploring how diasporic subjects arbitrate between memory's embodied and archival manifestations.

Two-parts bildungsroman, one-part supernatural mystery, *Soucouyant* follows its nameless narrator's developing awareness of the historical traces that shape his life as a second-generation

Indo-Afro-Trinidadian-Canadian. Set in Scarborough just after the Multiculturalism Act passes in 1989, *Soucouyant* is also a national coming of age narrative about Canadian multiculturalism's at-best ambivalent manifestations. These individual and national developments anchor a narrative that is focused on memory and its loss: Adele, the narrator's Trinidadian-born mother, has early onset dementia. *Soucouyant*'s subtitle, *A Novel of Forgetting*, references this operating conflict, one of the many losses that make *Soucouyant*'s nameless narrator a sympathetic character.<sup>2</sup> Beyond struggling to care for Adele, the teenaged narrator's father dies in an industrial accident and his older brother leaves when unable to manage Adele's increasingly erratic behaviour. In the aftermath of all this loss, the narrator himself leaves home at 16 for Toronto where he encounters the same racism and perilous working conditions his parents faced after immigrating to Canada in the 1960s, leading Daniel Coleman to argue that the "[r]epeated racist events endured...by Adele and the other racialized characters...remind us that the traumas of colonial racism are redoubled across the generations in Canada many years later" ("Epistemological Cross-Talk" 56). After two years in the city, he returns home broke and discouraged. The novel begins with this return.

Although set in the 1980s, periodic flashbacks to Adele's Trinidadian childhood in the 1940s and life in 1960s Toronto give *Soucouyant* its non-chronological and associative structure. Adele's scattered memories of having seen a soucouyant, Caribbean folk creature akin to a succubus who appears as an old woman by day but sheds her skin and transforms into a flying ball of fire at night, punctuate the novel. These fragmented, preternatural memories recode the life-altering trauma Adele experienced as a child: after their small plot of land near Chaguaramas was appropriated by an allied airbase during World War II, Adele's mother is reduced to working as a prostitute for the base's American soldiers. Adele's memories of having seen a soucouyant are a traumatic re-

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<sup>2</sup> Or, as Jennifer Bowering Delisle interprets the subtitle, "While the cover proclaims this as a 'novel of forgetting, it is a novel not of convenient national forgettings, or immigrant assimilation. Rather it is a novel of "forgetting to forget," of the process of constructing identity through cultural memory" (19).

mediation of accidentally immolating her mother while trying to escape their impoverished village life (193). The novel's spectral soucouyant thus operates as "a figure for the way historical trauma continues to haunt subsequent generations—the horrific event not only permanently disfigures the narrator's grandmother, but also scars and sucks the lifeblood from Adele's memory" (Coleman, "Epistemological Cross-Talk" 55-6). The discrimination Adele, the narrator, and their contemporaries face from Toronto's landlords, business owners, and larger Canadian community speak to colonial history's repetition and reiteration in 'multicultural' Canada.<sup>3</sup>

*The Swinging Bridge* is also about a Trinidadian family struggling with memory and its erasure after diaspora, but Espinet focuses on the social and historical effacement of diasporic subjects who counter their communities' accepted narratives. The novel's narrator, Mona Singh, is an Indo-Trinidadian Canadian and self-described "nowarian" (152, 263, 303) who works as a documentary film editor in Montreal.<sup>4</sup> The novel's first section, "Borrowed Time," focuses on her relationship with her older brother Kello, "[t]he glue that held our family together" (15), after he discloses he is dying from HIV AIDS. Afraid of outing himself as bisexual, Kello tells his parents, children, and estranged wife he is dying of lymphoma, one of the novel's many elisions of sexual identity for the sake of middle-class respectability. Learning of Kello's closeted life drives Mona to reflect on her own rootlessness and frustrated personal relationships. She traces both their struggles to their abusive childhood and sale of the family's hard-won land in rural Trinidad, a loss that instigates Mona's sense of perpetual non-belonging thereafter.

The Singh family's fraught gain and subsequent loss of the Manahambre Road property mirrors the Indo-Trinidadian community's indentured arrival and subsequent struggle to achieve belonging and political legitimacy in Trinidad. Da-Da, the Singh's patriarch, justifies selling the home

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<sup>3</sup> Chariandy's novel does not reach back into Trinidad's colonial past but focuses instead on the Caribbean's experiences of WWII modernity, post-independence migration, and relationship with discourses of Canadian multiculturalism.

<sup>4</sup> Like Chariandy's narrator, Mona's life in Canada and return to Trinidad are punctuated by racist encounters and xenophobic abuse.



to pursue a cosmopolitan life in Port of Spain not possible in Trinidad's rural townships (57).<sup>5</sup> Mona, however, knows her father sold their home to free himself from the property's crushing mortgage, passed to him from his own father and necessitated to settle a lien against the land's previous owner: this trans-generational mortgage, "taken out in a panic by Pappy [Mona's paternal grandfather] to pay the money lender, should never have been the family's burden of debt" (122). A then nine-year-old Kello confronts Da-Da when he drunkenly announces he's sold the family's land one Christmas: "You can't sell all we own, this house and Pappy house and all the land and leave everybody with nothing!" (21). Da-Da's violent response—he nearly beats Kello to death before his own father knocks him unconscious—culminates in Mona's lifelong alienation thereafter: "I never put down roots again after Manahambre Road" (204). Selling the Manahambre road home breaks the mortgage that Mona, as a child, thought bound their family together: "I always found the word *moggage* enticing and imagined it wrapping the house tightly with strong threads that would keep it safe, even through earthquake and hurricane. Our house was a safe place, wrapped like a cocoon with moggage threads.... But the big row changed that. The shaking that day burst the moggage threads" (24). "[I]n dismantling the binding threads of family and 'moggage'," Njelle Hamilton argues "[Da-Da] uproots Mona and the family from the land where their navel strings (umbilical cords), symbolic of anchoring and belonging, are buried. This first uprooting becomes the root of their ceaseless unbelonging in the world" (76-7).<sup>6</sup>

Like Hamilton, much scholarship characterizes diasporic children's homing instincts as sentimental and nostalgic. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller use the term diaspora to describe distinct geographic sites but also the "radical distance that separates the past and the present" (4) as

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<sup>5</sup> A Naipaul-esque father figure, Da-Da is at first desirous to participate in but later disillusioned by Eric William's 'All ah we is one' multicultural vision for Trinidad. For a reading of Da-Da and Indo-Trinidadian exclusions from Trinidadian state multiculturalism, see Chelva Kanaganayakam's review of *The Swinging Bridge*, "Closing the Circle" published in the 2006 *Literature of the South Asian Diaspora* special edition of *Canadian Literature*.

<sup>6</sup> Mona's childhood mispronunciation of 'moggage' is one of the few times Espinet uses national language within the Indo-Caribbean community's dialog.

well.<sup>7</sup> Their concept of ‘postmemory’ reasons that the second generation’s lure to return to their parents’ homeland risks projection, over identification with, and appropriation of this last site of diasporic departure. *The Swinging Bridge* complicates readings of return-as-nostalgic by instead foregrounding land’s material value. From his deathbed, Kello asks Mona to reclaim the family’s lost property in Trinidad (53), but she is not affectively invested in this project: “I couldn’t help trying to tell him how ownership meant nothing to me.... Of course, the land was no longer in the countryside, so Kello was showing good business sense. But beyond that, I thought, he was manifesting a powerful masculine drive to possess, to control, even in the face of a terminal illness” (56). Espinet does not present Kello’s desire to regain lost homelands as a sentimental so much as an economic pursuit. His intention to re-develop the land into up-market townhouses for the formerly rural South’s burgeoning middle-class attempts instead to overwrite the financial instability that cost the Singh family this land in the first place. As Mona reflects, Kello “felt the deepest need to forget the past, to banish uncertainty, to reinvent himself in comfort and financial security” (127). Conveniently, the sibling’s illegitimate second cousin Bess is a real estate agent in Trinidad and she easily negotiates the land’s re-purchase. *The Swinging Bridge*’s operating conflict is not unfulfillable diasporic struggles to reclaim lost homelands, then, but recuperating memory and financial stability amidst diasporic displacements, sexual shame, and patriarchal control.

Both *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge* explore the intimacies of memory loss—whether individual or communal—amid diasporic families experiencing historical trauma, cultural erasure, and societal exclusion. Amid these disorienting losses and returns, otherwise forgotten histories of diasporic displacement are recorded, passed between generations and across nations, through diasporic women’s financial records. Chariandy’s narrator seems owed for the many losses that

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<sup>7</sup> Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Spivak’s “Who Claims Alterity?,” and Robin Cohen’s *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* present diasporic nostalgia as a largely negative, inhibiting affect. Lily Cho pushes back against such characterizations, arguing they pathologize diasporic loss and melancholia as sentimental and debilitating.

define his life; instead, he is presented with an unexpected and disturbing bill from Mrs. Christopher, a fellow member of the Caribbean Canadian diaspora and Adele's friend who, in the narrator's two-year absence, became Adele's default caretaker. Between them, an extraordinary exchange occurs.

When Chariandy's narrator attempts to repay this otherwise minor character for caring for his mother, Mrs. Christopher informs him his offer of \$10,000 is "not enough" (147). Though he anticipates surprised gratitude for this unsolicited gesture, Mrs. Christopher instead presents Chariandy's narrator with an account of every expense she incurred while looking after Adele:

She shows me the math. It's long and complex, but the subtotals are clear enough. "In-home care at standard wages for 254 weeks." (The hours of each week here written most carefully in different coloured inks.) "General living costs for patient." (Also broken down weekly.) "Monies earmarked and available to be drawn out of Adele's bank account on a monthly basis for precisely these services and necessities." And finally, "Payment Owing." I'm looking here at the figure: \$100,344.10. She's actually included the ten cents. (147–48)

As significantly, the \$100,344.10 Mrs. Christopher is owed for caring for Adele "is just the latest subtotal" (148). She also keeps a larger tab that tallies not the care required by an individual losing her memory but her own memories of exploitation and discrimination in Canada. Recording the entirety of her life—every job that paid less than minimum wage, every apartment she was denied, every exploitative act—Mrs. Christopher settles on a total amount owing of \$345,033.48 (148). She presents this total to the narrator as his debt.

A similar financial record appears at *The Swinging Bridge's* conclusion. Set primarily in basements and narrated through analeptic passages, Espinet's novel is steeped in hypermemesis; as Rodolphe Solbiac summarizes, "[l]ife on Manahambre Road is . . . largely restored from the attic" (233). Despite regaining the family's lost land, Mona still feels directionless and decides to stay in Trinidad. She moves in with her cousin Bess, then discovers her grandmother Lily's shop books in Bess's basement. As Mona reads these domestic records, she realizes Lily secretly recorded her own mother's clandestine history in these grocery accounts. Hidden between credit tallies for boxes of

cockset and pounds of flour are the only remaining accounts of the Singh family's matriarch, an indentured labourer named Gainer Beharry (272).

From Lily's shop books, Mona learns that Gainer refused an arranged marriage in India at the age of thirteen and crossed the *Kala pani* alone in 1879.<sup>8</sup> The unaccompanied passage earns Gainer the title *rand*, denoting "a widow, but also a harlot" (294) in the Indo-Trinidadian community. Unsubstantiated intimations of sexual disgrace excise this woman from the family's records, making Lily's shop books the only remaining account of Gainer's life. These financial records include "words at the back, Hindi-sounding words in verse form, like the bhajans that were sung as hymns in the early days" (273). They are transcriptions of songs Gainer wrote while crossing the Atlantic and that she performed to supplement her indenture wages on arriving in Trinidad. Gainer was celebrated for her performances which were adapted in part from the *Ramayana* and explicitly sexual in their content, but she is forbidden from singing upon marrying Joshua, Mona's maternal great-grandfather. Joshua, an Indo-Caribbean Presbyterian and moneylender, demanded Gainer stop performing in adherence to his (profitable) religious conversion.

In each work, financial records facilitate their narrators' ultimate confrontation with repressed diasporic pasts. Little has been said in the existing readings of these works, though, about Mrs. Christopher's debt ledgers or Lily's shop books. Coleman argues *Souconyant* draws on Caribbean spiritualism to challenge Western epistemologies of memory ("Epistemological Cross-Talk" 68) and Jennifer Delisle emphasizes how 'cultural memory' passes between generation, a transition that is "crucial for preserving these unofficial stories and exposing the human impact of colonialism and

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<sup>8</sup> Structurally, *The Swinging Bridge* has three main sections narrated by Mona. These are separated by three interludes that are written as third-person retellings of Gainer's life. The first of these recounts Gainer's refusal to marry an elderly husband, the violence she experiences as an unmarried woman in India, and her decision to cross the *Kala pani* (a term that translates to the "dark waters" between India and the Americas). The second focuses on an attempted sexual assault by a French sailor while onboard the ship, an attack interrupted by a fellow indentured laborer named Jeevan who is marooned for intervening. The final section describes Gainer's financial independence and social freedom on arriving in Trinidad, a period of relative autonomy followed by her restrictive marriage to Joshua, Mona's great-grandfather.

military occupation” (10). Despite their focus on *Soucouyant*’s complex depictions of memory and forgetting, neither Coleman nor Delisle address Mrs. Christopher’s debt ledgers. Solbiac suggests we understand memory’s recovery in *The Swinging Bridge* via “Maurice Halbwachs’ work on social memory, the process by which individual memories turn into a collective diasporic memory” (230), but I am not convinced Espinet’s text settles on a collective understanding of the Indo-Trinidadian past just as I am unsettled by what “diasporic memory” ultimately signifies. Njelle Hamilton mentions Lily’s shop books in her reading of *The Swinging Bridge* but dismisses their significance as *financial* records: “This personal document is particularly interesting for its mask-like form; behind the shopkeeping minutiae lurks a journal, a secret space of female agency and interiority” (89). Although complex archival documents, these debt ledgers prove easy to overlook. What, then, is their significance? Why record diasporic pasts alongside (or as) financial debts?

In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida contends not only that we relate to the past through acts of “archivization” but additionally that “archivization produces as much as it records the event” (17). Following Derrida, my sense is that it is neither accidental nor incidental that Caribbean Canadian literature and calls for reparatory justice represent the colonial past as an outstanding debt. This turn to discourses and logic of financial obligation is complex as it arguably conflates colonial pasts’ moral and material consequences: what happens to historical injustices when they are converted into the symbolic order of finance, or when not-strictly-material losses are organized into a calculable, quantified total owed? Given the impossibility of enumerating unknown suffering, given that such calculations arguably cleave past and present while reproducing the very value systems that legitimated the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the first place, what makes contemporary calls for reparations or these diasporic debt ledgers worth considering?

I find an answer to these questions in an unexpected place: CARICOM’s and Coates’s suggestion that colonialism’s and race-based slavery’s debts will not be repaid because they cannot

be repaid. Denzil Douglas, prime minister of St. Kitts and Nevis at the time CARICOM announced its suit, summarized that even though histories of genocide and slavery “cannot be quantified,” they must be rectified: “We are convinced the deleterious effects which, even now, are translated into much hardship and poverty for the descendants of our ancestors, must be resolved” (para. 39). Coates’s essay concludes that reparations are necessary, but not because they will finally resolve American histories of racism. Indeed, he questions whether America has sufficient resources to offer adequate reparations to its Black citizens: “after a serious discussion and debate...we may find that the country can never fully repay African Americans” (69). Despite this limitation, Coates contends reparations are the only way to reorient the ethics of communal life in a post-slaving society:

Won’t reparations divide us? Not any more than we are already divided. The wealth gap merely puts a number on something we feel but cannot say—that American prosperity was ill-gotten and selective in its distribution. What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts. What is needed is a healing of the American psyche and the banishment of white guilt.

What I’m talking about is more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I’m talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal. (70)

When colonial relationships are understood within the framework of debt, past acts and present conditions are tethered across disparate communities, bringing a new relationality out of the totalizing moral relationship that exists between debtor and creditor. In effect, these recent calls for reparations and the two novels studied here draw community out of the language of debt.

Rather than posing a problem, then, the conflation of moral and material obligations is key to reparatory projects and contemporary Caribbean Canadian literature’s historical claims. It helps to consider debt’s division into financial and ethical categories here: financial debts generate extensive records because it proves so difficult to impel a debtor to pay back what is owed without material proof of obligation. In *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Margaret Atwood observes what Socrates lamented in *Phaedrus*: “writing and written numbers are—among other things—extensions

of the memory” (76). A debt is only powerful, only carries ethical purchase, Atwood suggests, insofar as it is remembered. Accordingly, ledgers, tally sticks, promissory notes, loan contracts, digital databases, and every other means derived to record debt matter *because* their matter attests to the connection between past and present, credit and obligation. However, as material archives, debt records are subject to all the weaknesses born of materiality; they are, Atwood observes, often the first things destroyed in a coup or revolution: no record, no memory, no obligation (147).<sup>9</sup> When the records that act as material evidence of memory are destroyed, the future is released from its obligations to the past.

Despite these physical weaknesses, it seems apropos that material archives trace material debts; it remains far less clear how nonfinancial—or not strictly financial—debts are remembered. These kinds of debts, which I imperfectly discuss throughout this thesis as ethical obligations, are much more difficult to define and substantiate than their strictly financial corollaries. It is also harder to call in an ethical obligation: when moral and immaterial debts compel redress, it is often not because some record demands it, but rather because some shared ethic, some shared sense of equity’s value, compels a reckoning of past actions and present conditions. Perhaps most tangibly, it is the relationships and communities that afforded social credit in the first place that risk foreclosure when ethical obligations are not reciprocated.

So, why this turn to discourses of debt in reparatory debates and Caribbean Canadian literature? Not all obligations termed “debts” find themselves requited, but to claim a debt exists names an animating relationship into existence: whether moral, material, or both, debt binds creditor and debtor as well as past and present in established systems of obligation. Reparations aim to shift

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<sup>9</sup> Atwood notes marginalized communities often fall into the unenviable role of serving as a state or its citizens’ creditors. I would add that national moneylenders are often members of diasporic communities, such as the Jews in medieval Europe or East Indians in Uganda. Once a nation’s debts become burdensome, diasporic creditors—and their records—are easier to dismiss, deny, and expatriate than non-diasporic citizens, as demonstrated by Idi Amin’s expulsion of Uganda’s East Indian citizens in 1972.

how intersecting communities relate to their unresolved pasts by addressing the material inequalities that simultaneously perpetuate and evince colonial history's repeating marginalizations. Calls for reparation inspire debates over the contested territory between moral and material obligation. Amid these debates, uncertainty gathers firstly around colonial history's relative remoteness, and secondly around which communities are bound to remember what pasts. Who is accountable for imperial history's consequences? What does accountability for this history entail? In effect, CARICOM and Coates, Espinet and Chariandy all face the same problem: they are working to *prove* the inseparability of colonial past and transnational present.

While literary and cultural scholars draw on the language of 'the colonial,' 'the postcolonial,' and 'the transnational' to mark a temporal distinction between past and present, contemporary calls for reparations contest these organizing terms and the clean historical breaks they presume, insisting instead that colonial history continues to restrict the transnational present and that anticolonialism's emancipatory projects remain unfinished and unfulfilled. By drawing on discourses of debt, arguments for reparations try to show these temporal entanglements, to demonstrate not only that outstanding obligations bring the colonial past into the transnational present, but that different communities experience the consequences of pasts in different, but ultimately material, ways.

Do diasporic communities alone bear an obligation to memory? Diasporic memory is often presented as an ethical practice for relating to the past, so does this ethic shape only diasporic communities' notions of history, or those held by the national communities they transverse as well? If so, shared obligations to memory could be a basis for transculturation. Both these novels and contemporary reparations debates work to reimagine community through debt and obligation. For all their similarities, though, *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge* actually arrive at two different conclusions about diasporic communities' limits, limits defined by obligation.



## MARGINAL RETURNS: NATIONAL HISTORY, DIASPORIC MEMORY

*The Swinging Bridge* and *Soucouyant* are textual vantage points from which to survey current critical discussions about diasporic and national memory practices. I am most interested in what these discussions say about the (perceived) relationship that exists between diasporic and national communities. Appreciating these novels' acts of fictional bookkeeping requires literary studies to evaluate its existing understandings of 'diasporic memory,' a key term in contemporary scholarship. Amid disciplinary debates over where and how to draw limits around diaspora ("If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctly so. The term loses its discriminating power—its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions" [Brubaker 3]), memory has become a shibboleth for evaluating diasporic identity. Nation-states and diasporas alike are solidified through collective acts of remembrance and forgetting, yet literary criticism sees significant differences in the motives and consequences of national versus diasporic remembrance, differences that are qualified in ethical terms.

Delisle, for example, argues that diasporic memory contradicts pleasant but toothless affirmations of Canadian multiculturalism: in *Soucouyant*, "the second generation participates in an active construction of the past that does not preserve racial difference but witnesses and memorializes its wounds, and provides rich alternative memories to whitewashed versions of Canada" (18). In this analysis, memory is the purview of the diaspora while history belongs to the nation-state. As importantly, Delisle's reading presents diasporic memory as ethical in nature and faultless in expression, neither perpetuating difference nor accepting the elisions of national narratives. Most importantly, diasporas' memory, an 'active construction of the past,' witnesses *against* Canada's whitewashed official history. In this reading, ethical investments distinguish between diasporic memory and national history. However, such polarizations pose a problem for diasporic characters like Adele, Gainer, and Kello, who demonstrate diasporic memory's fragility when it is

perceived as only living and embodied; likewise, Mrs. Christopher's ledgers and Lily's shop books demonstrate that diasporic communities draw not just on embodied memory, but on textual, archival history as well. These novels upend interpretations wherein diasporic memory exists apart from national history or that distinguish between national and diasporic communities via their supposedly distinct memory practices.

One reason extant analyses of *The Swinging Bridge* and *Soucouyant* overlook these novels' debt ledgers lies in diaspora studies' emphasis on embodied memory as a moral corrective for archival history. Memory-work has become a known quality of diasporic texts as well as a known quantity of their analysis. Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser, and Yolande Jansen assert that "[m]emory must be seen as a privileged carrier of diasporic identity" (3-4), a seemingly incontrovertible and benign claim. Avatar Brah similarly argues "diaspora delineates a field of identifications where 'imagined communities' are forged within and out of a confluence of narratives from annals of collective memory and re-memory" (193). By evoking Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, though, Brah reminds her readers that acts of memory, re-memory, and textual circulation shape diasporic *and* national identity alike. Despite diasporic and national identity's common mediation through acts of remembrance and forgetting, there is a disciplinary tendency to abridge diasporic and national acts of remembrance as a dichotomy: embodied memory versus archival history.

Drawing community-based distinctions between "memory" and "history" is not unique to diaspora studies. Instead, such distinctions proved germinal to memory study's field-defining texts such as Maurice Halbwachs's 1952 *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and Pierre Nora's "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*." Nora's essay, an analysis of modernity's unique fabrication of the pastness of the past, led the vanguard of memory studies' 1990s resurgence. Nora contends France (and national communities more generally) have moved away from memory as an embodied and lived tradition. In place of living memory, he proposes nations now favour history,

the past crystallized in specific sites of commemoration or memorialization: “The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility.... We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (Nora 7).

The dichotomy Nora presents between living memory and historical sensibility is largely perceived as untenable in contemporary memory studies because of the absolute distinctions it draws. Similarly, Halbwachs’s theorizations of *mémoire collective* were invaluable for wresting memory studies away from its originary ethnocentricity, but the field distances itself from his distinctions between history as “abstract, totalizing, and ‘dead’” and memory as “particular, meaningful, and ‘lived’” (Erl 6). Astrid Erl elaborates that “[t]he whole question of ‘history and/or/as memory’ is simply not a very fruitful approach to cultural representations of the past. It is a dead end in memory studies” (7). For diaspora studies, however, ‘history’ has become a not-so-subtle shorthand for national communities’ eliding and totalizing representations of the past, whereas ‘memory’ evokes ethically charged and living relationships with that past, the past remembered correct(ive)ly. This polarization is not only untroubled but arguably galvanizes diaspora studies’ current memory-work.

In examining why “the subject of diaspora does not map easily onto the subject of citizenship” (“DC: Contradictions and Possibilities” 94), Lily Cho suggests that diasporic subjects, unlike national citizens, retain a unique “obligation to memory” (106). Vijay Mishra likewise proposes that “[i]f for the dominant community diasporas signify their own lapsed enjoyment of the ‘Nation Thing,’ for diasporas facing up to their own ghosts, their own traumas, their own memories is a *necessary ethical condition*.... We constantly revisit our trauma as part of *our ethical relationship* to the ghosts of diaspora” (16; emphasis added). Cho’s and Mishra’s claims hinge on the same contention: while national communities are not bound to act according to an ethics of remembrance, diasporic communities are. In turn, memory-practices informed by ethical obligations and ethical obligations

to memory become *the* basis of diasporic identity: “Diasporic subjectivities emerge not simply from the fact of geographical displacement, but also from the ways in which forgotten or suppressed pasts continue to shape the present” (Cho, “DC: Contradictions and Possibilities” 106).

Kit Dobson similarly distinguishes between national history and diasporic memory in an interview with Chariandy when he proposes Adele’s memory loss parallels diasporic cultural displacement (811) and suggests her dementia “prevents the protagonist from confidently believing he has accessed or understood her past in any authoritative manner” (812). Through this line of questioning, Dobson proposes forgetting and uncertainty informs personal, diasporic memory in *Soucouyant*. Chariandy’s response, however, is less wed to drawing firm distinctions between history and memory, body and archive:

the novel possesses an anxious relationship with something we might call history, and a concomitant investment in the question and ethics of cultural memory.... If the novel indeed tries to demure from ‘history,’ understood, as Derek Walcott very cannily put it, as a discourse that ‘expiates and excuses’ the evil pragmatics of war and Imperialism, then it does very squarely suggest that one important role as a writer, particularly a ‘minority’ writer, is to be a custodian of cultural memory, though always a critical one.... dementia also enabled me to explore the fragility and endurance of cultural memory. (812-3)

Presented as a critical undertaking, forgetting and remembering have different consequences across Canada’s hegemonic and minoritized communities. While Chariandy upholds ‘cultural memory’ as able to refute histories that ‘expiate and excuse,’ I read this response as troubling too-simple dichotomies between nationalized history and diasporic memory: Chariandy asserts the novel’s discomfort with the suggestion that forgetting is a harmful or unethical way of relating to (traumatic) pasts, but additionally highlights the pressure diasporic subjects and communities are under to serve as bastions of memory.

As a theoretical concept, “diasporic memory” operates according to the belief that ethical action in the present is predicated on specific ways of knowing the past, but this line of reasoning

does not originate in diaspora studies' memory-work, memory studies' 1980s resurgence, or even that field's original texts. Rather, a much older theorization of memory's ethical value is instructive here: by dividing history and memory along ethical lines, diaspora studies is restaging Socratic debates over ethical intellectualism, those explored in Plato's *Theaetetus*. Tomasz Mazur summarizes these distinctions in his study "The Value of Memory—The Memory of Value":

Plato represents the notion of memory through the metaphor of an aviary to illustrate that there are two ways of storing knowledge as memory: having and possessing. Socrates states that "if a man has bought a coat and owns it, but is not wearing it, we should say he possesses it without having it about him." "Having" is then connected with being, and "possessing" is connected with intellectual handling. Thus, "having" is a special modus of remembering, and we can call it the "wearing" of memory, since the Greek word *echein* ("εχειν) was commonly used in reference to wearing a garment. The problem is that most people only possess knowledge about goodness without having it about them or wearing it. (239-40)

In diaspora studies' memory-work, history is the past possessed by the state. National archives and state memorials, where history is available for intellectual handling but not worn in any intimate or personal sense, exemplify nation-states' possession of the past. In contrast, literary scholarship often describes diasporic communities' memories as had, worn, and embodied by diasporic individuals. *This* relationship with memory prescribes diasporas' ethical engagements with the past *and* the present. Whereas possessed memory does not inform ethical action, 'diasporic memory,' a worn practice, a way of being in the world, does.<sup>10</sup>

An ethic of remembrance—and an ethics informed by remembrance—is used to distinguish between national and diasporic identity. The force of this distinction is such that diasporas' and

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<sup>10</sup> Mazur's description evokes African American novelist, essayist, and poet James Baldwin's reflection on music's centrality to memory within Afro-diasporic communities: "Music is our witness, and our ally. The beat is the confession which recognizes, changes and conquers time. Then, history becomes a garment we can wear and share, and not a cloak in which to hide; and time becomes a friend" (159). Baldwin's work would be a strong primary source for future research into racialized and diasporic communities' ethical practices of worn memory.

nation-states' mutually constitutive nature has largely fallen out of scholarly focus.<sup>11</sup> I read diaspora studies' reinforcement of memory-history binaries as a resistant reaction against memory studies' limited insights into non-nationally bound communities. Nora, for example, presents national communities as the normative social containers in which the past is stored. Building from Halbwachs's work on collective memory, Nora proposes the "acceleration of History" (7) brought about by global communication technologies and newly independent nations' democratization is paralleled by *milieus de mémoire's* conversion into *lieux de memoir*, sites of memory. In national contexts, *memories* become memory, parsed to serve a singular national narrative. That said, collective memory's singularity belies its sub-structural disjunctions and elisions, and the resulting *lieux de mémoire* limit what Nora portrays as living or embodied memory (11). Here, we see that troubling generalizations about diasporic communities inform memory studies' foundational texts: Nora, writing in the early 1990s, proposed that globalization's technologies and migrations impel the adverse separation and replacement of *acts of memory* by *acts of history*. It is important to be clear that Nora does not blame global migrations for the erosion of nation-states' *milieus de mémoire*. Rather, on the few occasions diasporic communities are discussed in his work, they appear as exceptions to the national rule: Nora references the Jewish diaspora in France, "bound in daily devotion to the rituals of tradition" (8), as an alternative to nations' historiographic tendencies which convert *memories* into history. Nora turns toward diasporas—communities he champions for living *in memory* and not, as nation-states do, *through history*—to discuss nation-states' loss of living tradition.

Diasporic critique is well aware that memory studies' restricted focus on national communities has limited its insights into diasporic memory practices. As Jennifer Terry argues, "[r]ather than [Jan] Assmann's 'immovable figures . . . and stores of knowledge' or indeed Nora's

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<sup>11</sup> Settler-colonial migrations to Canada are rarely framed as diasporas. Likewise, contemporary migration from the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Europe is rarely discussed as part of the ongoing colonization of the indigenous territories the Canadian state occupies.

territorialized sites, we [in diaspora studies] need other paradigms to accommodate and account for such adapting, transnational narratives of memory” (483). That said, awareness of memory studies’ nationalizing tendencies has neither culminated in a troubling of Nora’s theorizations nor a dissection of the binary (national versus diasporic identity) they perpetuate. Instead, diaspora studies’ memory work reinforces these distinctions.<sup>12</sup>

By working within memory studies’ outdated binaries, diasporic criticism not only emphasizes diasporas’ capacity for ethical memory practices that correct, resist, or trouble ‘History,’ then, but implies diasporic memory’s value lies in remembering against the state. This makes Terry’s phrasing—the need to *account* for memory’s alternative paradigms—all the more noteworthy: by dismissing material archives in favour of embodied memory, Canadian diaspora studies contests not just national history’s ethic, but their methodologies—textual archivization—as well.

A consequence of favouring memory over history is that diaspora studies now embraces certain sites of memory while overlooking others. In a passage noteworthy for its abstractions and implied ethical values, Nora defines “true memory”—which diasporas possess and national communities are losing—as “[that] which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (13). By contrast, as modern memory passes through the machinations of history, it becomes “above all, archival” (Nora 13). While rejecting national communities’ historicizing tendencies and consequent ethical deferrals, diaspora studies has come to panegyricize

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<sup>12</sup> See Cho, who reasons that “Nora’s differentiation between history and memory marks a crucial possibility because it contests the notion that the only way to remember the past is to historicize it. He proposes the possibility of an alternative remembering that resides outside of history and yet still within the realm of shared communal knowledge” (*Eating Chinese* 147). This argument does not question memory studies’ underdeveloped contention that diasporas live in memory so much as it reinforces (diasporic) memory’s value as (national) history’s foil.

nonarchival and non-textual memory, installing the diasporic body *the* site of ethically engaged counter-memory.<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, embodied memory is not national narratives' Achilles heel. Reflecting on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process, Achille Mbembe observes that national archives have the paradoxical ability to construct and dismantle the state from within: "On the one hand, there is no state without archives—without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state. The reason is simple. More than on its ability to recall, the power of the state rests on its ability to consume time, that is, to abolish the archive and anaesthetise the past" (23). As he excavates tensions between state remembrance and state forgetting, Mbembe's description of the state's need to control its past is revealing: "The act that creates the state is an act of 'chronophagy.' It is a radical act because consuming the past makes it possible to be free from all debt" (23). Again, what we find when looking for a point of connection between states' historiographical tendencies and repressed colonial pasts is the language debt and obligation.

Beyond the fact that his discussion of the relative ethics of history versus memory builds on discourses of financial debt, Mbembe reminds his readers that archives are double-edged and rarely coherent. Diasporic scholarship, though, remains more comfortable embracing bodies as *the* location of counter-memory rather than exploring national archives' critical potential. I read this hesitancy about archival methods and sites as evidence of diaspora studies' anticolonial roots. As Cho argues, characterizations of history-as-legitimate and memory-as-suspect are predicated on "the European Enlightenment's denial of sensual memory as a form of history" (*Eating Chinese* 153) and she works

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<sup>13</sup> My critique is not of counter-memory or its challenges to official state narratives. Counter-memory is invaluable for anticolonial, feminist, indigenous, and queer critiques of national narratives, those that justify the exclusion of—and violence against—nondominant bodies. Rather, I am concerned with where diaspora studies locates counter memory and who this locating work includes/excludes from the field's consideration.



to decolonize remembrance by recuperating sensual memory.<sup>14</sup> That said, Cho also takes up Nora's polarizing terms when she concludes it is only through "true" memory, "recuperated from history," that "diasporic communities pose a challenge to dominant cultural power" (*Eating Chinese* 155). This contention is part of a broader project ongoing in works including Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*, and Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* to wrestle diasporic communities' experiences of nostalgia and memory away from their characterization as sentimental or pathological. This work is both necessary and utterly compelling.<sup>15</sup> What I want to challenge, however, are two consequences of this approach: first, in celebrating embodied memory, diasporic literary criticism is distancing itself from textual archives, including those it studies. Second, and more troublingly, counter-memory is becoming a not-so-subtle litmus test for diasporic identity.

*Souconyant* is instructive on this point because it presents racialized and white Canadians alike as simultaneously diasporic and national subjects. Dobson contends that *Souconyant*'s narrator "silences his black Caribbean mother's conversation with her own memories by insisting that 'there are no ghosts' in the Scarborough, Ontario, neighbourhood in which they live" (*Transnational* ix), a line, as Dobson elaborates, that echoes Susanna Moodie's canonical narrative of settler colonialism, *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852). Dobson draws on this literary connection, and the narrator's ironic repetition of a settler-colonial ideology of an empty land without an identifiable history, to argue belonging in Canada is predicated on ethnocentric possessions of space and time. I want to take Dobson's reading in a slightly different direction to propose this textual echo draws a subtle parallel

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<sup>14</sup> For Cho, sensory experiences, such as the flavours that make the past viscerally present in Fred Wah's poetry, are an alternative to the Enlightenment's abstract and impersonal emphasis on archival memory.

<sup>15</sup> All four contend diasporas' supposedly melancholic relations with the past—marked by a refusal to forget, move on, or assimilate loss—are not the pathological expression of communities who cling to a past that is past: rather, these works argue the conditions of loss have yet to be redressed as marginalization remains ongoing for diasporic communities. Melancholia becomes an embodied affect through which the racialized body resists manipulations by national imperatives to happiness or teleologic progress, preserving losses that remain present in these communities' present.

between Canada's past and present diasporas, unsettling the racial distinctions that parse diasporic and national communities in Canada: at what point, *Soucouyant* asks, does the diasporic community, like the English and Scottish diasporas signified by Moodie, become nationalized? Are contemporary diasporas, those Mrs. Christopher and Adele's family represent, the extension of Canada's colonization? Moreover, what role do historical texts like *Roughing it* play in naturalizing—and nationalizing—certain diasporic communities and precluding others?

This line troubles diasporic memory's supposedly inborn ethics in settler-colonial contexts. Set in the fictional, predominantly white community of Old Port Junction, "The *Traditional Community by the Lake*" (60), *Soucouyant* presents this Toronto suburb a wry example of the indigenizing narratives Euro-Canadians use to overwrite their migratory roots. Old Port Junction forgets its diasporic histories and instead cultivates a sense of autochthon-aity through nostalgic bric-a-brac: "antique lawn ornaments and the sort of 'rustic' fencing you can buy at hardware stores. Many post boxes bore silhouette illustrations of horses and buggies as well as family names in old-fashioned scripts" (60). The town's Heritage Day parade, whose "flyers explained that *everyone* was invited to participate, since the Heritage Day parade was being revamped to recognize 'people of multicultural backgrounds,' and 'not just Canadians'" (60), further overwrites Euro-Canadian's diasporic origins by naturalizing their presence. Adele's memory loss is *Soucouyant's* narrative engine, yet the novel repeatedly juxtaposes her dementia with settler-colonial Canada's strategic forgetfulness. White Canadians, *Soucouyant* suggests, willfully forget their own diasporic roots and routes.

One of the narrator's few positive interactions in Port Junction comes in his childhood friendship with a local librarian, Ms. Cameron. She demonstrates she is critically aware of Canada's colonial history and foregrounds white Canadian's diasporic origins when she reads a historical poetry collection, *Our Place, Our Heart*, with the narrator. The fictional poetry collection includes

“The Scarborough Settler’s Lament” (104-5), a poem written in the 1800s that describes a white settler’s sense of unbelonging in Canada and melancholic longing for Scotland, paralleling Canada’s European settlers and contemporary diasporic subjects. Although diasporic subjects’ complex obligation to memory *can* be intensely ethical, *Souconyant* is clear that diasporic dispersals do not in and of themselves guarantee ethical memories. To attribute ethical memory’s presence to diasporic experience ignores that both Moodie’s *Roughing it* and Ms. Cameron’s fictional “The Scarborough Settler’s Lament” are written by diasporic authors and describe their non-belonging. Canadian literature is, in this sense, deeply diasporic. At issue, then, is not whether diasporic memory is different from national history, but how diasporic memory becomes national history in Canada and the role race plays in streamlining and deferring this process.

Literary analyses need to consider the role of the text in diasporic memory. Cho contends that “[o]ne way we can read for diasporic resistance lies in their stubborn attention to memory. Diasporic communities can be understood as constituted by the imminence of memory rather than by the backward browsings of historicism” (*Eating Chinese* 155). Here, diasporic identity is rooted to subjects’ embodiment of memory, while national identity is not only singular but materially calcified via historicist mechanisms. I understand the need to recuperate memorial affects such as melancholia from pathologization, but such stark distinctions pose a unique problem for literary scholars: if national pasts are archived, material history and diasporic pasts are living, embodied memory, then diasporic literature sits uncomfortably apart from—but descriptive of—the diasporic body’s memory. Diasporic texts, whether fictional or nonfictional, exist in the interstitial space between the archival history of their material form and the embodied memory their content evokes.<sup>16</sup> It is not just the body, then, but also the text that remembers the body remembering.

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<sup>16</sup> Cho’s work on sensuous memory helps exemplify this tension. Drawing from Fred Wah’s biotext *Diamond Grill*—a poetic examination of race and belonging that centers on Wah’s experience growing up in the Chinese Canadian diaspora—Cho flags taste as a somatic trigger of nostalgic memory, “a means through which the body bears the record

Textual representations necessarily reside outside the body yet remain the literary critic's primary access point to 'diasporic memory.' As such, literary texts do not provide unmediated access to 'diasporic memory,' but representations of such memory.

As an alternative to embodied memory, Terry's "When the Sea of Living Memory has Receded" describes fiction's capacity to fulfill the "need to remember and honor those who have been discounted and forgotten and to offer up a monument or memorial of sorts in the novel itself" (477).<sup>17</sup> Rather than dismissing archives or texts as inherently nationalized and thus ethically compromised, Terry proposes we consider how archived pasts animate diasporic subjects just as diasporic subjects animate archives. Julia Creet similarly reflects that

[w]ithin an archive, documents may well serve to keep memories in motion; at the same time, the archive can also be the place where memories become frozen and inert. Yet, without archived testimony, memory will sooner or later expire. Both states are states of stasis; in other words, within or without the archive, stasis is the end of memory and movement its condition. Archives required the motion of bodies sifting through their contents and moving them about, literally unsettling the dust that tends to collect. Assumed to be the most stable of locations, archives are, in the end, surprisingly mobile. (22)

Archives' and embodied memory's mutual animations are not inherently nationalistic or resistant. Rather than upholding comparative and competitive theories of national versus diasporic memory, then, literary scholars need to consider how polarizations of memory and history obscure both the ways national and diasporic communities brush up against, transect, and become mutually constitutive of one another and racism's ability to preclude such processes.

Through their debt ledgers, Chariandy's *Soucouyant* and Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* present diverse memory-scapes and refuse to pigeonhole diasporic identity within limited memory practices

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of an experience rooted in the materiality of the day-to-day" (*Eating Chinese* 153). Her emphasis falls on how the body remembers in Wah's poetry.

<sup>17</sup> Terry's title references a line from Nora's "History and Memory" that reads: "if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire*—moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned. No longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on a shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (12).

or singular communities. These novels do not reinforce dichotomies between living and archived memory or diasporic and national identity; instead, they moil these lines by showing how colonial dispossessions persist in—and adapt to—transnational diasporas. As living memory breaks down and is lost, both novels turn to financial records to preserve otherwise overwritten narratives of diasporic displacement. These novel’s fictional debt ledgers are not invested in separating past from present, but in exploring their ongoing entanglements.

#### HISTORY IN ARREARS: EMBODIED MEMORY’S LIMITS

As a critical concept, “diasporic memory” has gained significant and troubling traction in academic discourse. This traction originates in the concept’s ability to distinguish ‘authentic’ diasporic identities from somehow inauthentic or extinguished ones, a use that undermines the field’s foundational dismissal of diasporic *or* national categories as stable, inherent determinants of identity: “Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact,” Stuart Hall wrote in the field-defining “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” “we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, ‘cultural identity,’ lays claim” (222). Hall’s logic echoes through Brah’s contention that diaspora is not an identity but an analytic value, “a conceptual mapping which defies the search for originary absolutes or genuine and authentic manifestations of a stable, pre-given, unchanging identity; for pristine, pure customs and traditions or unsullied, glorious pasts” (193).<sup>18</sup> By first accepting and then reinforcing a polarization of history and memory, contemporary diaspora studies instead brackets “diasporic identity” within less contentious and more amorphous practices of diasporic memory. “No diaspora without memory,” contend Baronian, Besser, and Jansen: “Forgetting the trans-local

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<sup>18</sup> Brah holds both contradictory impulses—the idea that diasporas are defined by specific memory practices (193) and the idea that diaspora is an analytic value that defies any attempt to pigeonhole identity to given characteristics and practices (193)—simultaneously.

diasporic connections means the ultimate disbandment of diasporic identity” (4). If not ethnic absolutism, the concept of diasporic memory suggests growing diasporic absolutism, a stiffening of “diaspora” from an analytic value into an identificatory category via the field’s memory-work.

Debt’s relationship to history and memory shows that colonial pasts continue to circulate in transnational times. Aleida Assmann observes that “[t]he tension between the pastness of the past and its presence is... key to understanding the dynamics of cultural memory” (98); while memory studies as practiced by Assmann and many of her contemporaries did not theorize the dynamics of cultural memory outside of singular, nationally identified communities, diaspora studies can now examine the frictions that arise around the relative pastness of certain pasts as transnational communities flow around, across, and into one another.<sup>19</sup> Without undertaking this work, those who use the term ‘diasporic memory’ uncritically risk asserting that diasporic subjects are those who remember; those who forget cease to be properly—or usefully—diasporic. As such, ‘diasporic memory’ poses a problem not only for fictional characters such as Chariandy’s Adele but for all circum-Caribbean subjects whose identities hinge on what they—or their bodies—can remember.

Questions of diasporic memory and the specter of the usefully diasporic body also haunt CARICOM’s call for reparations. Ralph Gonsalves, prime minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and secretariat chair at the time of CARICOM’s call for reparations, describes the genocide of the Caribbean’s indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade, its consequent plantation infrastructure, and Caribbean nations’ impoverishment upon independence as “a psychological, historical, socio-economic, and developmental wound that is, for CARICOM, fourteen nations wide and 400 years deep” (para. 5). CARICOM contends this history has condemned the Caribbean to enduring poverty whose effects range from the underdevelopment of state institutions to Caribbean citizens’ chronically compromised health. Reparations attest to the

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<sup>19</sup> I am thinking of Jan Assmann as well as Nora here.

synchronic nature of past, present, and future, often experienced simultaneously in the socio-economic afterlives of Britain and Europe's former colonies. Despite overwhelming evidence of regional underdevelopment, though, the debates reparations inspire demonstrate that uncertainty still gathers around identifying who—quite literally what bodies—can prove colonial history's outstanding obligations.

North American media responses to CARICOM's call for reparations were perhaps predictably dismissive but illuminate the significant differences between the perceived circumscription of transatlantic imperialism's consequences. In a *New York Times* article titled "Caribbean Nations to Seek Reparations, Putting Price on Damage of Slavery," Stephen Castle argues CARICOM's case should—and will—fail, since the human trafficking, slavery, and genocide *sine qua non* to the transatlantic trade were internationally lawful at the time of their practice.<sup>20</sup> Castle also observes that unlike other contemporary reparation suits, such as the case successfully brought forward by Kenyan survivors of British torture during the Mau Mau uprising, "there are no victims of slavery to present in court."<sup>21</sup> Using the absence of the right victims—bodies that crossed the Middle Passage<sup>2</sup> that wore shackles and felt whips<sup>2</sup>—to foreground slavery's historical remoteness,

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<sup>20</sup> Roger O'Keefe, deputy director of the Lauterpacht Center for International Law at Cambridge University, similarly defends slavery's historical legality. His arguments resound throughout much anti-reparation discourse. For a critical analysis of this legalistic reasoning, see Hilary Beckles, "The Case for Reparations" in *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. Countering Castle, CARICOM has cautiously worked not to 'put a price on slavery,' by orienting discussions of reparation justice around future equalization. On 11 March 2014, the organization issued a press release titled "CARICOM Nations Unanimously Approve 10 Point Plan for Slavery Reparations" which ideates programs to repair the systemic underdevelopment of the Caribbean. These include repatriation and African cultural awareness programs, illiteracy eradication, improved public health services, funding for cultural and industrial institutions, a technology transfer program focusing on the technological literacy and employability of Caribbean youth, and an Indigenous peoples' development program. Cancelling the Caribbean's outstanding public debts, which release describes domestic and international debts as "fiscal entrapment," is this plan's tenth point. CARICOM argues the region's "debt cycle properly belongs to the imperial governments who have made no sustained attempt to deal with debilitating colonial legacies. Support for the payment of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt are necessary reparatory actions." As such, CARICOM's plan refuses to locate liability in the past.

<sup>21</sup> CARICOM has engaged Leigh Day, the British law firm that successfully represented Mau Mau torture survivors in their case for reparations against Britain.

Castle reasons that responsibility for the Caribbean's colonization has passed with those bodies beyond contemporary nations' legal and moral obligations.<sup>22</sup>

Castle's reasoning is one of the more pernicious examples of how appeals to a transnational world order sever present marginalizations from their colonial roots. More generally, debates over reparations demonstrate that colonialism's consequences are perceived and experienced in materially different ways across multiply identified transnational communities. The colonial tendency to perceive non-Western Others as living in "temporal spaces they do not themselves occupy" (Appadurai 29) originally rendered non-European cultures a-temporal expressions of the West's own teleologic progressivism. Castle's and similar anti-reparations arguments ironically condemn CARICOM for precisely this temporal distance when arguing a globalized world *should* share a single chronotope, where colonial pasts remain in the past and do not restrict the forward march of (certain) cultures, (certain) capital, and (certain) ideologies. Contrastingly, Appadurai contends globalization effectively enmeshes past, present, and future, forcibly destabilizing teleologic chronotopes: "[t]he past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios" (29). There remains a firm refusal on the part of Western nations to acknowledge that the colonial past continues to materially overdetermine a global present caught within developmental projects that perpetuate national and personal debts.

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<sup>22</sup> Reverse calculations of a total owed arguably reinforce the separation of colonial past and transnational present while replicating African subjects' imagined (lack of) value. CARICOM's circumspect approach, of course, is not universal. An article by Balford Henry published in *The Jamaican Observer* a year after CARICOM's initial announcement argues Jamaica is entitled to £2.3 trillion of a projected £7.5 trillion owed to the Caribbean for reparations. These estimates, taken from a documentary titled *The Empire Pays Back* replicates the three-point formula Robert Beckford lays out in his film to calculate this final £7.5 trillion owed. He includes recompense firstly for the unwaged labor of slaves, secondly estimates Europe's economic enrichment from slave trade and plantation revenue, and thirdly attempts to calculate human suffering based on compensation offered in wrongful imprisonment suits: "Using the estimate £12,500 average compensation granted to a British citizen for bondage in prison and/or wrongful imprisonment, multiplied by the average 20 years of labor for an enslaved African, the total cost for an individual African would be £250,000. When this is multiplied by the estimated number of Africans who survived the Middle Passage, plus those who were born into slavery, the total cost for pain and suffering is estimated at £1 trillion" (Henry par. 15). These rough calculations spur more uncertainty than perspicuity. Henry notes that this total does not account for the lives lost in the crossing. Likewise, the parallel drawn between enslaved Africans and wrongfully accused prisoners comes dangerously close to affirming both the transatlantic slave trade as a faulty but somehow just system as well as accepting the prison-industrial complex's racialized logic.



A consequence of this refusal is that imperial history's socioeconomic deficits, which are not dislocated as the Middle Passage's missing bodies, remain underdiscussed. Castle avoids what Hilary Beckles illustrates in his 2013 monograph *Britain's Black Debt*: slave labor fostered the ongoing economic success of many of Britain's wealthiest businesses, institutions, and families (168-70).<sup>23</sup> Beckles, a major proponent for the Caribbean reparations movement and representative of CARICOM at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, additionally pushes back against Castle's logic by observing there is no statute of limitations on crimes against humanity.<sup>24</sup>

Skepticism of Caribbean calls for reparations hinge on logistical concerns: how much? Who would benefit? What is the legal precedence? More epistemological questions about how reparations may shift relations between former-colonizer and former-colonized are not taken up by the popular press: can financial reparations actually restore the historical imbalances or is a greater reimagining of current global economic systems needed for Caribbean nations to achieve their financial potential on their own terms? How would such reparations address non-material forms of loss—the destruction of language and cultural forms, for example, the loss of indigenous populations—or traumas of dehumanization central to the European slave trade that remain unassuageable at a profound and immaterial level? While these questions complicate CARICOM's call, reparations still seem a sly and acute appropriation of a neoliberal logic that reduces any and all issues to matter for cost-benefit analysis.

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<sup>23</sup> Beckles's claims are confirmed by University College of London-based *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership* database, which states that "colonial slavery shaped modern Britain and we all still live with its legacies. The slave-owners were one very important means by which the fruits of slavery were transmitted to metropolitan Britain" (para. 1). The database, available at [www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs), allows users to search by family name, corporation, or addresses, and provides records of how much financial compensation slaveholders received upon the state-mandated emancipation of their human property. Unlike their owners, slaves received no financial compensation upon emancipation.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (also known as Durban II), a conference both Canada and the United States withdrew from, see Naomi Klein, "Minority Death Match: Jews, Blacks, and the 'Post-racial' Presidency," *Harper's*, September 2009. Klein chronicles how calls for reparations at Durban II, a movement lead by Beckles and CARICOM, resulted in many Western nations' withdrawal, including Canada and the United States.

Despite seemingly clear-cut sites of over- and underdevelopment, questions of memory still coalesce in debates over the Caribbean's call for reparations, with CARICOM and Castle both reading absences in the historical record as support for their claims. A consequence of this hunt for living memory is that the Black Atlantic's bodies are read as animated archives and expected to embody not only subjective memory but objective history as well. One piece of support CARICOM cites in its call for reparations is epidemiological studies that compare Afro-Caribbean's hypertension and type 2 diabetes rates to their relatively low presentation in West African citizens. CARICOM presents these statistical differences as a "direct result of [Afro-Caribbean citizens'] nutritional exposure, endemic inhumane physical and emotional brutalization and other aspects of the stress experience of slavery and post slavery apartheid" ("CARICOM Reparations Commission Press Statement"). Beyond living lives indelibly shaped by colonial legacies, then, Afro-Caribbean bodies are read as transcribing of colonial history's supposedly nebulous violence into accounts written out in aneurysms, hyperglycemia, and infarctions.

CARICOM's case underscores the contradictory pressures circum-Caribbean subjects face to forget the unforgettable and remember the unrecorded. The weight of memory falls disproportionately on diasporic bodies in literary criticism as well. What happens when these bodies break down, or if they can no longer hold—or never held—ethical counter-memory? If diasporic subjects willfully or unwillingly forget, is this the end of diasporic identity? Does the end of diasporic identity flag the end of ethical engagements with marginalizing pasts? Far from hypothetical, these questions are central to *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge*: the Singh family's diasporic origins are remembered from material traces and not living memory, which has been violently suppressed in every generation of women since Gainder; Adele's early-onset dementia is not just a metaphorical evocation of memories lost in diaspora but additionally attests to embodied memory's limits and material fragility.

These texts demonstrate that the theoretical concept of ‘diasporic memory’ places enormous pressure on diasporic bodies to remember—and remember in properly subversive ways. Critical readings of *Soucouyant* redeem Adele’s dementia as the only appropriate response to her traumatic childhood memories (Coleman, “Epistemological Cross-Talk” 58), but Adele’s early-onset dementia supports two additional conclusions: first, diasporic cultural studies’ use of ‘diasporic memory’ polarizes not only memory and history but mind and body as well; second, Adele and Kello demonstrate that embodied memory is subject to all the material weaknesses that compromise traditional archives. Diasporic literary scholars must reorient the reading strategies we bring to representations of memory in texts like *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge* by asking what it is that diasporic criticism gets from its discussions of diasporic subjects’ memory.

*Soucouyant*’s narrator observes that Adele’s dementia not only causes her to forget but to also remember painful events better left forgotten: “During our lives, we struggle to forget. And it’s foolish to assume that forgetting is altogether a bad thing. . . . Forgetting can sometimes be the most creative and life-sustaining thing we can ever hope to accomplish” (32). Here, creative and sustaining acts of forgetting are not the sole purview of the nation-state, but necessary for individual diasporic subjects as well. The narrator then offers a striking image that initially seems to affirm diaspora studies’ existing binaries between memory and history, body and material archive, but actually speaks to their mutual relationship: “Memory is a bruise still tender. History is a rusted pile of blades and manacles” (32). While memory is painfully embodied by the novel’s diasporic characters—marked by mysterious bruises throughout the novel, the only evidence a soucouyant leaves after attacking her sleeping victims—Chariandy’s metaphorical image insists on history and memory’s inseparability: history marks bodies, and bodies, in turn, negotiate history’s consequences through strategic acts of remembrance *and* forgetting.

Chariandy challenges literary analysis to nuance its existing claims about memory in diasporic texts because *Soucouyant* does not embrace only the diasporic body nor entirely reject textual archives; instead, it privileges diverse memory-scapes over memorial monocultures. The novel begins as the nameless narrator returns home after a two-year absence. Adele has forgotten him, but he brings himself back into her memory through his body: “Here. Press your fingers against the walnut-shaped lump of bone at the side of my knee,” he says, holding his mother’s hand against his leg. Adele comes to recognize her son through their shared, uncommon physiology: “‘He have strange bones,’ she says. ‘Quarrels deep in he flesh.... He grandmother too’” (8). This distinctive bone, the family’s “body’s trick” (117), loops memory through the diasporic body. Here, the physical body absolutely acts as a site and a source of memory and connects the narrator to his matrilineal family.

When embodied memory finds itself compromised by dementia in *Soucouyant* and time’s passage in *The Swinging Bridge*, debt emerges as a vital source of archivization. In *The Swinging Bridge*, no living relation remembers Gainer. Moreover, an embarrassed male relative has literally ripped any references to this woman from the Singh family’s official history (271).<sup>25</sup> Gainer is an example of how the Indo-Caribbean diaspora excises compromising women from its sanctioned narratives. Such excisions make Lily’s shop books, unofficial records which secretly pass on Gainer’s songs and life story, all the more significant. There is also a sly irony in these financial records as they preserve not just overwritten and supposedly shameful histories but favored narratives of family prosperity as well: in addition to Gainer’s songs, Lily’s accounts are evidence of the Singh family’s seemingly limitless credit within the Indo-Trinidadian community. Mona reads them “with endless

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<sup>25</sup> Espinet’s description of Gainer’s extraction from the family book highlights the willful elision of women *in* the Indo-Caribbean diaspora *by* the Indo-Caribbean diaspora: “I read the official story of the family. There was a family tree at the very front with no mention of [cousin] Bess. And at the end of the final page was a three-sentence history of Gainer: *Lily’s mother was named Gainer. She came from India in the nineteenth century. She died in childbirth.* That was all. I looked underneath the metal holders and saw the telltale marks of pages torn out. Were they pages with the songs? Perhaps Grandpa Jamesie had taken his private revenge. This was the only one I could find and he had ripped out the songs. I found myself overcome by anger that felt like a personal violation” (*The Swinging Bridge*, 271).

pleasure,” remembering her “countless errands to the village shop with these books” and how “the shopkeeper gave Grandma Lil unlimited credit” (271–72) on account of the family’s perceived middle-class respectability. This credit, however, comes at the Singh women’s expense: Lily, Muddie (Mona’s mother), Bess, and Mona all experience sexual desires, relationships, and assaults they have to deny lest they compromise the family’s social standing. In *The Swinging Bridge*, social credit—class- and gender-sanctioned behavior—converts into financial credit; this conversion necessitates the Singh women—and later Kello—hide their sexual experiences.

In both novels, archival appearances prove deceiving. Lily’s accounts are overlooked in critical analyses of Espinet’s novel perhaps because they appear everyday, avowedly non-literary documents. Likewise, it is only because Lily’s accounts appear banal domestic records that they can preserve Gainer’s songs: Mona reflects that “Jamesie [Mona’s grandfather] would not have come near [Lily’s] household records” (275). Gainer’s illicit songs, as well as the family’s matriarchal history, survive because Lily’s financial records hide a salacious history as an easily overlooked account of gendered labor.

Mrs. Christopher’s debt ledgers are similarly strategic archives. They record every exploitation and denigration she experiences while working as domestic laborer in Toronto since the 1960s in explicitly financial terms:

Mrs Christopher flips back a dozen or so pages in her notebook and shows me headings such as “Wages Received as a Domestic worker with Allowances for Room and Board” and then “Minimum Wage for Landed Status Workers in Canada.” There are neat dates beside each weekly entry, and I notice one dated 24/07/1963. Mrs Christopher then flips forward to the final written page in her journal and touched the tip of her tongue to the corner of her mouth while doing a quick calculation. Total amount owing: \$345,033.48. (148)

Here, social exclusions and economic marginalization share the same account: Mrs. Christopher records both in financial terms. Her bookkeeping emphasizes material realities over the cultural stereotypes of Black womanhood. By tallying what she remains owed for Adele’s care, Mrs.

Christopher upends “the mammy tradition” of Black women as caretakers who “smooth everything over” (Walcott 54), de-sentimentalizing the supposed imperatives of Black femininity, what the narrator describes earlier in the novel as “the strength of the black women of her generation” (132), into dollars and cents. Like Lily’s grocery accounts, Mrs. Christopher’s ledgers are remarkable precisely because of their mundanity: they attest to Canada’s profound disavowals of racialized immigrants as well as these disavowals’ normalcy. Such exploitations are business as usual, so to speak, of a Canadian nation whose accepted economic and immigration practices exploit migrant subjects as a matter of routine.

#### THE DEBTS THAT BIND: INDEBTED COMMUNITIES

Debts are powerful only insofar as they are remembered. Proving imperial past and transnational present are connected has become such a large part of emancipatory arguments in an era eager to see the memory, if not the consequences, of colonial history settled. Although the post-millennial period is marked by national apologies and reconciliation movements that acknowledge the ways in which individual, communal, and national relationships remain structured by the past’s systemic injustices, formal apologies and their consequent reparations have not been offered to the majority of Britain and Europe’s former colonies, including the Caribbean. Likewise, official apologies circulate with greater ease within states rather than across national borders. Britain has recently offered a ‘Statements of Regret’ to its former plantation colonies, but this gesture’s terminology suggests a final resolution to, rather than a reimagining of, relations between colonizer and colonized. Beckles dismisses this response as attempting to bracket historical events which remain ongoing in both the Caribbean’s underdevelopment and Britain’s financial stability: “The case for reparations should be made against the British state and a select group of its national institutions, such as the merchant houses banks, insurance companies and the church of England. These institutions exist today. Their slave-derived wealth is not in question” (163). Material and

ethical obligations are twined within reparation's logic: financial compensation acts as an integral but incomplete vector for the serious recognition of colonial history's consequences just as gestures of public recognition fail to address these histories' material disparities.

Ethical and material obligations have drifted into one another as the Caribbean's national and diasporic communities struggle with the colonial past's consequences, those that structure the presents experienced and futures imagined by diasporic communities. Chariandy's and Espinet's novels demonstrate that colonialism's moral and material obligations are viscerally conflated in the contemporary world, making the desire to dissect colonial injustice into strictly ethical or financial categories appear puerile. Acts of financial reparation necessarily enact uncomfortable conversions between material and not-strictly-material forms of loss, exposing our genuine struggle to name, tally, and address non-material, or not-strictly-material, debts.

Mrs. Christopher's seemingly malaprop conversion of ethical obligations into financial debts in *Soucouyant* are a useful example of this tendency's critical potential, particularly if her conflation is read not as incidental but imperative: beyond recording her personal history in Canada, these ledgers additionally delineate community amid seamless conversions of moral and material obligation. As Coates argues of predatory mortgages in the US, discrepancies between Mrs. Christopher's salary and what she is owed per the national minimum wage fuse socio- and economic marginalization in Canada. By monetizing women's morally impelled but unpaid labor as caretakers, her ledgers calculate what women in the Caribbean Canadian diaspora remain owed as formal laborers and citizens. 'Quantifications' of the past require the concretization of abstract losses in financial terms, soliciting measurements that arguably reproduce the systems of economic value responsible for the transatlantic trade. When reparations' emphasis on legal and financial forms of redress reduce any and all injustice to a cost-benefit analysis, they appear to rely on a distinctly neoliberal logic. The resulting deadlock over reparatory justice underscores the paucity of any

alternative, communally-recognized means for addressing injustices that span nations and generations.

In this way, Mrs. Christopher's debts exact a formal claim on legal belonging that extends beyond placating discourses of multicultural inclusion. The novel's nameless narrator experiences similar discrimination as he looks for work and navigates the educational, medical, and economic institutions in a post-Multiculturalism Act Canada; through this repetition, *Soucouyant* shows that a shift towards inclusive discourses does not translate into equality. Instead, racist and xenophobic thinking have financial and structural consequences that accumulate overtime; evolutions in Canada's national discourses do little to address the material consequences of these discriminatory accumulations. Despite their novels' similar use of debt records to record diasporic histories, then, Chariandy and Espinet arrive at very different conclusions concerning who is obliged to remember what in the colonial aftermath. Espinet's novel focuses on diasporic communities' ethical obligations to remember the causes and conditions of their displacement; Chariandy's focuses on what obligations the larger Canadian community has to remembering a multiplicity of diasporic pasts.

Though her tallies risk appearing reductive, the conversion of non-material losses into financial debt is not without valuable literary yields: Mrs. Christopher's debt ledgers accrue interest in the forms of memory and community; although a relatively minor character, these ledgers make her the ultimate arbiter of identity in *Soucouyant*. The narrator notes she speaks in the most elaborate patois in his presence, "not to communicate with Mother, who speaks the language of a different nation anyways, but to exclude me from conversation as well as berate me for my lack of culture and *airs*" (86-7). Her use of patois distinguishes between characters as properly Caribbean or complicitly Canadian. The narrator originally refuses to pay Mrs. Christopher's total owed, a response she reads as evidence of his indoctrination into a strategically forgetful Canadian identity: "You think you blood alone mean you ought to be rich with plenty monies? Is that what they teach you in that



white-man school? I know what I deserve. You just check that math.... You mighta have money and learn high-high talk and whatnot. You might have a happy life with plenty food and clothes, but don't you dare talk like that in my house" (149). While her reference to blood and the narrator's happy life appear incongruous given the racism and loss he experiences throughout the novel, Mrs. Christopher sees this second-generation teenager as the inheritor of Canada's privileges and possibilities.

By presenting her bills to the narrator, Mrs. Christopher highlights his contradictory identity as both Canadian and diasporic, effectively marking him as the embodiment of the nation. Once identified as her debtor, the narrator is both the subject of Canadian discrimination as well as the beneficiary and inheritor of the nation's perceived obligations—obligations to first-generation Canadians and obligations to Canada's larger colonial history as well. The narrator reflects he was mistaken to have "expected gratitude, just simple gratitude, from this woman" (148), a wry echo of his own childhood lessons in immigrants' expected gratitude (101) and his mother's lessons in racial indebtedness to American soldiers during World War II (188) that suggest he has indeed forgotten his diasporic origins and expects gratitude from diasporic immigrants. His aporetic position illuminates debt's capacity to entangle the nation and diaspora within a single subject. Mrs. Christopher's debts are *the* condition of his transculturation.

When the narrator challenges Mrs. Christopher's misreading of his identity, she dismisses his desire to settle the past—his or hers—through a strictly financial reckoning:

"That's it, isn't it?" I say, nodding madly, "You think I've had it easy. You think I haven't paid any price at all. And so you want me to pay for what *you've* experienced. You want me to pay for all the things that have happened to *you*. *Then* you'll be satisfied. *Then* you'll finally be happy."

She looks coolly at me and sighs.

"No, child," she says. "That won't make me happy. Justice don't never make anyone happy. Is just justice." (149; emphasis original)

The narrator's aporetic position as both debtor (indebted to Mrs. Christopher and other first-generation migrants for her care and sacrifices) and creditor (owed for the exclusions and abuses he similarly experiences through state institutions and employers) illuminates the entanglement of his national and diasporic identities.

Unlike *Souconyant*, *The Swinging Bridge*'s representations of debt do not underscore national and diasporic community's intersections or transculturations so much as their divisions. Debtors are often portrayed as endangered by their creditor's will, but Espinet reverses this relation, suggesting the role of creditor comes with its own dangers. Shortly after Mona enters high school in Trinidad, a succession of female students are raped. Mona's mother warns her against taking taxis or busses alone and admonishes her to avoid men, but Mona is still lured into an attempted sexual assault when an Afro-Trinidadian man named Sonny claims he owes her mother money (42). He uses his supposed indebtedness to convince Mona to accompany him away from town:

Muddie did not lend people money, but suppose she had? Suppose he had come to fix something at the house and had asked to borrow a few dollars, and now wanted to pay her back? He would easily recognize me, but I had never paid any attention to the workmen who came to our home sometimes or repaired the road nearby. I suddenly remembered Muddie's admonishing words after I had passed my big exam at the end of last term.

'You feel you too great now that you going to start high school. Because you win free books and free school you feel you reach. You feel you too great suddenly. But you can't stop having respect for ordinary people, not while yuh living in this house. You not greater than everybody, yuh hear?'

The poor man just wanted to repay a few dollars. (42)

The exchange tests Mona's middle-class politesse and awareness of communal boundaries: torn between limiting her exposure to sexual risk and behaving respectfully lest she be perceived as thinking highly of herself, Mona is entrapped. The tension between modesty and respectfulness—integral to Da-Da and Muddie's Presbyterian, middle-class standing—and not her own sexuality ultimately endangers Mona. At the same time, Mona's perceived sexuality endangers the family's social and financial credit. Although she escapes the attempted attack, Muddie warns her to never

speak about what happened, arguing “Nobody will ever believe you didn’t go with that man under that bush” (46). Muddie herself never speaks of her brother-in-law’s sexual assaults (36) which Mona witnesses as a child.

In this scene, an imagined relationship between debtor and creditor establishes a false community of trust between a middle-class Indo-Trinidadian girl and a working-class Afro-Trinidadian man. When Mona calls for help, Sonny shames her for failing to collect on his non-existent debt: “Now yuh have to go back with yuh hand swinging... And tell yuh mudder if she want the money to come and collect it she self. Me eh dealing with no lil gyul again. All ah allyuh so damn harden” (45). Muddie blames Mona’s lack of social awareness for Sonny’s attack: “You ever see me even talking to a man like that? I would ever lend money to a man like that? Where would I even go to meet that kind of man?” (45). Espinet later elaborates that each of Trinidad’s communities have their own systems for credit and finance: “Money was needed and banks were for white people, for the local whites and high-browns. Not for poor people, coolie people and black people.... Black people had their Friendly Societies—all Indians had was their money lenders” (253). Debts and the extension of financial credit help delineate community in both Mona’s attempted rape and the family’s larger history as Indo-Caribbean creditors. Mona’s ‘mistake,’ then, is to have imagined a community bound by obligations existed between her family and the rest of Trinidadian society, especially the lower-class Afro-Caribbean community.

These experiences suggest financial debt delineates the Indo-Trinidadian community. As an adult, Mona also debates the relative value of individual versus communal memory, gaining from exchanges between the two. She works as a documentary film researcher for a Montreal-based studio that specializes in films about Canada’s immigrant communities. *The Swinging Bridge* begins with her disillusionment concerning a documentary about the women of the Haitian-Canadian diaspora: Mona asserts the film should include references to Cecile Fatiman, whose role in the Bois

Caiman ritual instigated the Haitian Revolution; to her great frustration, though, Carene, the film's St. Lucian-Canadian director, decides the reference is too obscure, causing Mona to reflect: "[t]he thought of yet another woman edited out of history made me angry. And I saw an obvious connection between Fatiman's act... and the lives of these Haitian women who had found their way to Montreal" (11).

By *The Swinging Bridge's* conclusion, Mona decides to become a documentary filmmaker herself: "My research was yielding gold this time, gold that would make sense of my own life. The outlines of my own film began to form themselves in my mind—a film about the crossing of the *Kala pani*. Gainder's crossing" (293-4). It is difficult to overlook her pecuniary phrasing: preoccupied with the work of turning individual and private *memories* into a public *historical* archive that corrects perceptions of women in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, *The Swinging Bridge* celebrates the conversion of diasporic memory into legitimized, official 'history'. This work helps Mona establish a previously elusive personal identity, that of a documentary filmmaker and affirms the value of correcting diasporic communities' misrepresentations—whether imposed from without or originating from within.<sup>26</sup>

However, while *The Swinging Bridge* emphasizes recovery of lost pasts as an ethical imperative, it also suggests deferrals of remembrance are necessary for communal comfort and individual pride. At the novel's conclusion, Mona wants to include a performance of Gainder's songs at Diwali celebrations that Bess organizes in Trinidad. Like the director Cariene before her, though, Bess demurs: "You see, Mona, the grand picture is still what everybody wants. The righteous Indian family, intact, coming across the *kala pani* together. Like the way migration is presented today. Not

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<sup>26</sup> In "The Invisible Woman in West Indian Literature," an article published fourteen years before *The Swinging Bridge*, Espinet documents a lack of representative female characters in the Indo-Caribbean literary tradition: "evidence is accumulating from historical and sociological studies that the prevalent notion of Indian female personality as submissive, shy and timid is a fallacy and that from the earliest waves of immigration, the majority of women who made the journey across the *Kala pani* did so independently" (116). Filling existing gaps in the literary representations of Indo-Caribbean women and correcting misrepresentations becomes an imperative in this novel; forgetting has little ethical value here, whereas it does in *Soucyant*.

this story. Not a journey of widows looking for a new life. Wife murder? Beatings? You must be mad, they would say” (297). Given the novel’s emphasis on recovery and recuperation of lost pasts, it is strange that the novel’s conclusion seemingly affirms Bess’ decision not to include the songs or the histories of gendered violence they evince. Mona reflects that

[Bess’s] decision not to tell the story of Gainder’s life at the bazaar had shown her awareness clearly. Not now, she had said, maybe later. It would be impolitic for anybody now to suggest that most Indians had not immigrated as families, or that once they had arrived, they had not set up families post-haste. To Indian men and others too, the idea of unattached women, especially in those early days, would conjure up one image—that of the whore. (301)

Mona’s acceptance of historical belatedness, the idea such obfuscations and elisions can only be addressed with time, arguably traps the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora in cycles of self-censure and eventual recovery. This approach is problematic for a character like Kello, whose AIDS diagnosis spurs Mona’s diasporic return. The promise of diasporic memory’s eventual recovery rests on archival documents, though, those discovered once repressive living memory has passed. As Mona reflects, there is no evidence of her brother’s queer identity, “No photographs of Kello on his own, the man alive, the man fully himself” (303). Unanchored from archival documentation, it seems Kello’s identity will not be recovered as Gainder’s was through her songs.

Because this novel is unclear whether Kello’s elision is problematic or necessary, *The Swinging Bridge* ends seemingly uncertain of its own investments in remembering and forgetting: Mona acknowledges Bess’s logic that justifies public forgetting of private histories, and yet her own documentary project is fueled by a seeming moral imperative to publicly validate otherwise hidden pasts. Espinet offers no resolution to this tension, no corrective for diasporic communities’ strategic acts of forgetting and remembrance. Left in uncertainty, Kello’s is another diasporic identity to which the novel says, “Not now... maybe later” (301).

In *The Swinging Bridge*, material archives are necessary but insufficient to spur ethical engagements with unethical pasts. As Hamilton argues about Lily’s transcriptions of Gainder’s

songs, such archives need to be sounded out, voiced, and embodied to effect change: “Writing sound is not enough; such records, as their vinyl namesakes, remain silent until played or read, until transmuted from silent writing back into sound. They must be sounded so that they can challenge national, ethnic, and historical orthodoxies” (84). While Gainder’s songs remain silent in the family’s shop books and unperformed at Bess’s Diwali celebrations, Mona intends to re-embodiment them in her nascent documentary; by sounding out the past in documentary form, Mona simultaneously embodies and re-archives Gainder’s history, a both/and rather than either/or approach to archival history and embodied memory.

By contrast, the exchange between Chariandy’s narrator and Mrs. Christopher brings little catharsis from the injustices at play within her ledgers. Impoverishing himself, the narrator gives Mrs. Christopher all he has after selling Adele’s house; his payment, \$53,000, comes nowhere near Mrs. Christopher’s total owing, and although she claims she will “forgive [him] the rest” (149), there is no sense that anything has been settled between the two or that colonial history’s larger systemic marginalizations have been addressed. Through Mrs. Christopher’s bills, *Souconyant* dismisses Canada’s ability to “settle” its histories of discrimination. No one, the novel suggests, could pay these bills or settle these debts. Instead, left unsettled, they spin out into community- and identity-forming obligations.

The major difference between these novels, then, is that for Espinet, memory-debts circulate within—not between—communities: the Indo-Trinidadian community is morally obliged to remember its own histories of gendered violence. By contrast, *Souconyant*’s depictions of debt-as-memory become a call for ethical transculturation, one issued not only to racialized, diasporic characters within the novel but to its heterogeneous readership as well. Community-specific archives and memorial projects resolve diasporic loss on an individual, not communal, level in *The Swinging Bridge*, where memory is arguably historicized and is intellectually handled as a possession that

enriches Mona's future. Impoverished—indeed impoverishing—relationships with diasporic loss are necessitated in *Soucouyant*, where memory's value lies in its ability to impel ethical behavior from Chariandy's narrator and his readers. The difference hinges on where each author ultimately locates the ethical obligation to remember.

#### AGAINST AMORTIZATION

In Chariandy's *Soucouyant* and Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*, marginalizing pasts are preserved and passed on as financial debts. Conflations of economic and moral obligations are *the* condition of such memories' conservation. These texts additionally counter diaspora studies privileging of embodied memory as *the* defining quality of diasporic identity by first exploring embodied memory's fragility and, second, then showing how Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian diasporas mediate between embodied histories *and* archival memories. Here, debt ledgers reside outside diasporic bodies but record the violations and manipulations those bodies bear in explicitly financial terms. In each novel, the conflation of material debts *and* moral indebtedness are passed on as community-defining ethical obligations.

In the colonial aftermath, past and future, financial and ethical debts, and the subjects of nations and diasporas are so thoroughly entangled that the idea of colonial history's ultimate settlement is at best nonsensical and at worst a strategic disavowal of that history's systemic propagation.<sup>27</sup> In defining debt, David Graeber presumes equality between debtor and creditor, arguing that "loans between rich and poor [are] something else" because "unlike status distinctions like caste or slavery, the line between rich and poor was never precisely drawn" (86). Coates's

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<sup>27</sup> Coates and Beckles come to different conclusions about reparations' capacity to break the present off from the past. For Beckles, reparations will "[shatter] the silence surrounding these crimes against humanity and [are], finally, about fairness, justice and closure" (*Britain's Black Debt* 171). Coates is more reserved and portrays the reparatory process as marking the beginning of a new collective conscience about colonial pasts, but not those pasts' ultimate closure when he calls for a 'spiritual reckoning in "The Case for reparations" (70). His conclusion is another purposeful conflation of moral and material obligations that suggests some final settlement is untenable if it is only financial in nature.

synthesizing work and CARICOM's legal case suggest this line is redrawn as class and race re-fuse in the post-emancipation, post-civil rights, and transnational world.

Calls for reparations and literary bookkeeping alike ask where—geographically, temporally, ideologically—the unquestioned hierarchy of slavery connects with contemporary systems of finance capital. Debt is this contact zone. It connects the excessive wealth of the rich and the financial marginalization of the poor as well as systems of unquestioned hierarchy (indenture and slavery under colonialism) to systems of supposed political equality (those that exist between the rich and poor, or transnational corporation and citizen-subjects under neoliberal capitalism). *Soucouyant, The Swinging Bridge*, and calls for reparation emerging from the contemporary Black Atlantic destabilize strictly financial conceptualizations of debt just as they disorder the linear temporality strictly financial debts depend on. That said, they still agree with Graeber's conclusion: "A debt," he writes, "is just an exchange that has not been brought to completion" (86). When represented as an outstanding debt, the colonial aftermath becomes a space of exchanges—material, cultural, metaphorical—not brought to completion; calls for reparation and acts of literary bookkeeping ask what it means to live—and live ethically—amid colonial history's unsettleable debts.



## CHAPTER TWO RECOGNITION AS OBLIGATION

I have obligations to a “freedom to come,” as Rinaldo Walcott calls it. I think of writing as an obligation to that. A pleasure, certainly, but a willing obligation to a future world, or to imagining a future world, so I will use all the tools at my disposal, at least all the ones I love.

---Dionne Brand in conversation with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

What purpose do binary distinctions between moral obligations and material debts serve? Can moral indebtedness be discussed or theorized outside of material referents, or do all obligations—even those framed as ethical debts—rest on material underpinnings? In *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, David Graeber traces this division of moral and material debt to Western and Eastern religious traditions: “the language of the marketplace has come to pervade every aspect of human life.... both Vedic and Christian teachings thus end up making the same curious move: first describing all morality as debt, but then, in their curious manner of doing so, demonstrating that morality cannot really be reduced to debt, that it must be grounded in something else” (89). Nation-states, he expands, have largely replaced the deities to whom subjects owe their lives: “Governments... have become the guardians of the debt that all citizens have to one another. This debt is the essence of society itself” (56). While Graeber ultimately dismisses the suggestion that subjects are indebted to gods or governments, my focus on diasporic literature directs me towards a different series of questions: in an era of post- and transnationalism, to whom, if anyone, are diasporic subjects indebted? Is it possible to recognize debts owed to a community that is not one’s own? If debt is the ‘essence of society,’ what happens when national societies fail to recognize certain debts, and, by extension, certain subjects?

Recognition, these questions demonstrate, is an unexpected but necessary starting point for examining binary understandings of moral and material obligation. Recognition is also a capacious concept in its own right that evokes varied intellectual traditions that attempt to describe the (at-

times subtle and interpersonal and at-times explicit and formal) how we delineate identity, regard, and validation. As such, recognition remains of great consequence in a world organized around Manichean distinctions of self and other. At its simplest, though, ‘recognition’ is a way of speaking about who is *owed* what by virtue of who they are: ‘recognition’ names the social alchemy whereby subjectivity translates into obligations, and where obligations are subjectivity’s basis. “Just as money has been the hard currency for which women and slaves have been exchanged (directly and indirectly),” Kelly Oliver writes, “recognition is the soft currency with which oppressed people are exchanged.... recognition, like capital, is essential to the economy of domination” (23). In Canadian contexts, Oliver’s economy of domination shows itself most clearly when recognition is withheld along racial, ethnic, gendered, socioeconomic, and linguistic lines.

Trinidadian-Canadian author Dionne Brand’s works repeatedly explore the economies through which ‘recognition’ (and its binding obligations) are withheld from diasporic and racialized subjects. Her *Land to Light On* (1997) begins amidst a verbal assault, one of many encounters with nonrecognition that justify the narrator’s “alienation from the hope of social changes that would free her from a set of interrelated oppressions” (Forster 161):

If you come out and you see nothing recognizable,  
if the stars stark and brazen like glass,  
already done decide you cannot read them.  
If the trees don’t flower and colour refuse to limn  
when a white man in a red truck on a rural road  
jumps out at you, screaming his exact hatred  
of the world, his faith extravagant and earnest  
and he threatens, something about your cunt,  
you do not recover, you think of Malcolm  
on this snow drifted road, you think,  
“Is really so evil they is then  
that one of them in a red truck can split your heart  
open, crush a day in fog?” (4)

“I ii: I have been losing roads” tallies the racial, sexual, socioeconomic, and linguistic shibboleths that determine who is—and who is not—recognizable in Canada. The poem begins with the

narrator's seeming failure to recognize where she is: disoriented by stars that imply her illiteracy and stress her accent, unfamiliar with her surroundings, and exposed in an otherwise empty landscape, the narrator is then attacked by a man marked by Canada's national colours, red and white, as he drives by on an isolated country road (li. 5). Rural Canada proves environmentally and socially hostile for this narrator, whose heart is split through enjambment and the unanticipated but historied violence of white on Black (li. 9), male on female (li. 8). In closing, though, "I ii" calls its opening into question. Addressing herself and implicitly her reader in the second person, Brand's narrator asks who has failed to recognize whom: has her failure to read the stars and anticipate the hostility of others somehow predicated this assault, or does her attacker's failure to recognize her—as a Canadian, a citizen, a subject—instigate and typify his violence? If recognition guarantees obligation between subjects, then nonrecognition allows obligations to be withheld; "I ii" accordingly shows how nonrecognition excludes Black subjects from liberal individualism in Canada.

This chapter and the two that follow present an extended study of contemporary economies of recognition via Caribbean Canadian literature. I am interested firstly in how Brand presents recognition across her works, secondly in how diasporic literary scholarship in Canada has itself come to understand recognition via Brand's works, and thirdly what this relationship demonstrates about how diasporic criticism elides Indigenous scholarship's discourses of recognition. From the outset, I want draw a clear distinction between *recognition of obligation* (a primary concern in chapter one) and *recognition as obligation* (the focus of my readings here).<sup>1</sup> This distinction marks a reorientation away from explicitly financial signs and symbols, but does not mean what follows focuses exclusively on a-material or ethical obligations. Instead, imagining the material and the moral

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to debt ledgers in *Soucouyant* and *The Swinging Bridge*. Both novels are concerned with colonial pasts' ability to overdetermine the postcolonial and transnational present and challenge their readers to recognize obligations that remain outstanding. Brand's works similarly address colonial pasts that shape the present, but in reading her work, I am focused on the economies of recognition that allow certain obligations to be withheld from colonized and/or racialized peoples, what I call recognition *as* obligation.

as opposite sides of debt's spectrum only dematerializes certain obligations while reifying others.

Recognition, as *Land to Light On* suggests, cannot be separated from material context, the literal land on which subjects stand. Since the Enlightenment, the liberal democratic subject has been inseparable from ownership predicated, as Brenna Bhandar summarizes, on gendered, racial, and class distinctions: "in order to be a proper political subject one had to own property, and in order to own property, one had to be in possession of certain qualities in the requisite degrees, such as whiteness and maleness, which determined whether one could own property" (229).<sup>3</sup> In liberal democratic philosophy, subjects' status as recognizable, is inseparable from land and property. This poses a significant problem for Black diasporic subjects, those dispossessed of land, language, lineage, material, and philosophical wealth.

In contemporary contexts, Wayde Compton names the role that place plays in establishing subjects' recognizability "the semiotics of context" (37). Philosophical debates routed through Enlightenment theories of liberal humanism overlook physical space's contextual influence over subjectivity, but is of utmost importance when thinking about recognition in colonized sites like Canada and the Caribbean. This chapter accordingly begins with the assumption that recognition does not exceed this baseline material logic—neither in Enlightenment discourses of liberal subjectivity nor Indigenous moral philosophy. Instead, discourses of recognition return time and again to the material world. Even more concretely, recognition consistently leads back to land.

As they navigate a globalized world's shifting semiotics of context, Brand's characters' encounter Oliver's 'soft currencies' of identity, validation, and domination. These encounters show that nonrecognition results from *and* perpetuates Black subjects' dispossession. Like *Land to Light On*'s "I ii," Brand's autobiographical *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001) returns via rural roads to the hostilities she, a Black women, faces in Canada. While living in the

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<sup>3</sup> Bhandar's essay compares Indigenous land claims in Canada to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

predominantly white township of Burnt River, Ontario, Brand describes fearing a local mechanic, a man who may ignore or attack her because she is “[a] thing he does not *reconizē*” (141; emphasis added). Describing herself as ‘a thing,’ object and not subject, Brand evokes her childhood English lessons from an uncle who would chide her nation-language-inflected constructions: “‘It’ could never ‘have’” (124) he instructs her.<sup>4</sup> These grammar lessons manifest as life lessons in Burnt River: misrecognized as object, not subject, Brand is unable to take or to have in Canada. This powerful tautology fuses the nonrecognition and material dispossession of Black *and* Indigenous subjects: because the non-possessive ‘it’ is not recognized, Brand as ‘it’ can never possess and therefore never belong in a settler-colonial state where belonging and possessiveness are mutually constitutive.

Oscillating between latent and manifest violence, *Map*’s mechanic and *Land to Light On*’s man in the red truck are metonymies for Canada’s white-settler majority that has willfully forgotten their diasporic origins. Such forgetting, as Coleman argues in *White Civility*, is a strategic act of self-indigenization, one that reifies Canadian identity in Euro-Canadian’s phenotypical whiteness (11-12). Settler-colonial subjects cannot recognize Black subjects as fellow Canadians without confronting their own diasporic routes and genocidal roots, making Brand’s presence particularly troubling in rural Canada: as a Black woman, Brand is an embodied reminder that the Canadian state is premised on violent, ongoing, white supremacist colonial (dis)possessions. These settler-colonial territorial (dis)possessions are not only unavailable to Brand, but their pursuit additionally perpetuates the ethno-nationalist logic responsible for her perceived non-belonging in the first place.

*Land to Light On* and *Map* demonstrate that top-down political gestures and legislation such as official state multiculturalism have not guaranteed racialized Canadians’ recognition, particularly in rural Canada. Describing Burnt River as “country where people mind their own business; they are as cold and forbidding as the landscape. They live out here free from the city, they guard their

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<sup>4</sup> The Spanish verbs her uncle demands she conjugate and define during these grammar sessions, “tener” and “llevar” are verbs of possession, translating as “to have” and “to take,” respectively.

‘property’” (145) and using scare quotes that undercut ‘property’ and its synonyms throughout *Map*’s rural passages, Brand dismisses such territorial possessions and the nationalist belonging they afford. As importantly, these rural passages contend that the animosity Brand and her autobiographic narrator in *Land to Light On* encounter does not simply flag individual racism but originates in Canada’s settler-colonial history: Black women’s nonrecognition is not presented as the exclusive product of individual agential actors (white, male, settler-subjects), but locations as well, evoking Compton’s semiotics of context. Collectively, *Land to Light On* and *Map* suggest settler-colonial understandings of space are integral to Black women’s nonrecognition.

Brand alludes to the mechanic’s settler-colonial cultural inheritance when she reflects that “[w]e accumulate information over our lives which bring various things into solidity, into view. What I am afraid of is that... the mechanic walks up and takes my face for a target, my arm for something to bite, my car for a bear. He cannot see me when I come into the gas station; he sees something else” (*Map* 141). Misrecognition, as importantly, is not unidirectional in *Map* as Brand acknowledges that she misrecognizes the mechanic as well: “Some days, when I go to the gas station, I have not put him together either” (141). Described as a wilderness blazon, “His face is a mobile mass, I cannot make out his eyes, his hair is straw, dried grass stumbling towards me...he is streaking towards me like a cloud,” (141-2) the mechanic’s unpredictability and potential violence mimics the territory he occupies.<sup>5</sup> By conflating the mechanic and the landscape, Brand parallels rural Canadians’ hostility with the spaces they occupy: “I fear the people more than the elements, which are themselves brutal” (143).

I see a pregnant repetition in these mutual misrecognitions: while describing her alienation from rural Canada and its *indigenized* inhabitants, Brand reiterates the tropes that define settler-

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<sup>5</sup> A blazon is the Petrarchan poetic technique in which a woman’s physical attributes are exaggerated and compared to various precious stones or valuable objects. Brand’s blazon here offers an ironic parody of the technique and its emphasis of female beauty as a form of recognizable value measured in gold or gemstones: the mechanic’s value is tied to the land, but ephemeral and not something he can claim or exchange as his own.

colonial literature. “A fundamental problematic for settler cultures,” Lee Frew observes, “[is] their alienation from the land relative to indigenous populations.... this is the very connection nations have traditionally used rhetorically to naturalize their legitimacy and sovereignty” (282). Brand’s alienation from land is a starting point from which to consider Black literature’s entanglement in Canadian settler-colonialism.

With Brand, though, such an analysis hits a clear blockade: seemingly unlike archetypal Euro-Canadian settlers whose “clear agenda [is] to erase this separation of belonging” (Goldie 12), Brand rejects recognition, belonging, and all their prerequisite (dis)possessions: “I don’t want no fucking country... I’m giving up on land to light on” (li.11, “V.vi”) her narrator famously declares in *Land to Light On*. This rejection of the nation-state and all its supposed benefits has become integral to what scholars interchangeably label Brand’s post-national, transnational, anti-national, and diasporic politics. The result, however, are scholarly readings that parse Canada into settler-colonial and transnational moments via Black literature. Here, I begin to depart from existing Brand scholarship: while ‘giving up on land to light on’ has been celebrated in readings of her works as the antithesis of settler-colonialism’s territorial appropriations, I want to propose that Brand’s complex acts of refusal are being used by diasporic critique to distance itself from the nation-state *and* the demands of Indigenous kinship.

Cultural scholars invested in diasporic literature’s anti-colonial potential need to think very carefully about how they broker transnational labels to critique settler-colonial nation-states. Alan Lawson, an early defender of studying settler-colonial sites through postcolonial theoretical frameworks, observes that in settler societies “[t]he national is what replaces the Indigenous and in so doing conceals its participation in colonization by nominating a new colonized subject: the colonizer or settler-invader” (160). Building on Lawson, settler-colonies are happy to embrace post- and transnational labels that distance a globalized present from colonial histories, dispossessions,

and debts. This use of transnational rhetoric conceals ongoing processes of territorial appropriation and displacement.

What is at stake diasporic literary criticism reterritorializes sites of Indigenous colonization to afford trans- and post-national resistance? What does it mean for this literary discipline to give up on land—to give up on possessive claims to belonging, that is—when land is simultaneously the nation-state *and* Indigenous territory? How might we understand Afro-diasporic claims to post-national community alongside Indigenous scholarship that underscores the ethical obligations that arise from land's shared occupation? More pressingly, can Afro-diasporic subjects have obligations to others if Blackness's non-recognition perpetually places Black bodies, futures, and culture at risk of imminent violence?

These questions are at odds with existing diasporic and transnational literary critique which, at the risk of generalization, has tended to celebrate displacement, continuous motion, and global circulation as resistant and ethical alternatives to national belonging. As Rinaldo Walcott argues, though, such a critical repositioning is needed to understand the specificities of Afro-diasporic displacement: “Because black Canadians are generally not imagined as a constitutive element of the normative Canadian in the public sphere, and simultaneously, because the Middle Passage, slavery and the various traumatic after-effects continue to affect black peoples, black Canadians understand and make sense of themselves in relation to a much more expansive notion of blackness than national terms and conditions of identity, ethnicity and nationality tend to allow” (“Salted Cod,” n.p.). In asking these questions, then, I am working to take the particularities and specificities of not only settler-colonial sites, but Canadian anti-Blackness, seriously.

My proposal is that we approach contemporary transnationalism as the latest stage of Canada's settler-colonization. This means studying settler-colonialism not as an historical event but an ongoing system of relational practices, where, as Glen Sean Coulthard describes, “power—in this



case interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (6-7). One other encounter Brand has with (mis)recognition while living in Burnt River Brand similarly asks where Afro-diasporic subjects fit relative to Canada’s settler-colonial relational practices: after feeling an Indigenous spirit pass over her cabin one night, Brand reflects that although the presence “was not a peaceful thing, it meant no harm to me, I think” (*Map* 151). Her hesitant ‘I think’ draws attention to the uncertain relationship between First Nations and Black communities in Canada. Suspended between colonial history’s manifold hauntings and her own post-national identifications, this passage challenges scholars to clearly articulate why Black diasporic subjects do not occupy Canadian space as settler-subjects.

I want to be clear that neither Brand nor her works endorse settler-colonial relations or their hierarchies. I situate her within Coulthard’s sedimented social relations to demonstrate that diaspora studies’ post-national critiques can simultaneously challenge national categories while perpetuating settler-colonial understandings of recognizability, subjectivity, and land. Diasporic critique’s willingness to give up on land—the basis of community, political efficacy, and subjectivity itself in much Indigenous scholarship—only distances the field from Indigenous concerns.

The ethics of giving up on land are not transparent. Neither is transnational scholarship’s desire to imagine diaspora as the ethical alternative to national power. Diasporic cultural criticism can resist the power of the nation-state *and* enshrine liberal philosophy’s valuation of autonomous individuality, a tendency that permeates discussions of post- and transnationalism’s resistant possibilities that overlook land. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Édouard Glissant observes that “[t]he permutations of cultural contact change more quickly than any one theory could account for. No theory of cultural contact is conducive to generalizations. Its operation is further intensified by the

emergence of minorities that identify themselves as such” (19 n. 2). Brand’s works exemplify Gilssant’s claim and the problems it poses for diasporic scholarship that discounts race—or, more specifically, Canadian anti-Blackness— by foregrounding the uncertainties that gather when Indigenous and racialized diasporic communities, histories, dispossessions intersect. Settler-colonialism and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous territory are racialized-diasporic and post-national concerns. As Dickinson notes, “the politics of location cannot be separated from the politics of ‘production and reception’” (161). This leaves Canadian literary scholarship to consider how settler-colonialism’s ongoing processes are cloaked by post-national discourse, a troubling possibility that requires diasporic critics read against existing assumptions about diasporic post-nationalism’s ethical distinctions by refocusing on race in settler-colonial sites.

#### IN SEARCH OF COMMON GROUND: INDIGENOUS AND DIASPORIC DISCOURSES OF RECOGNITION

Considering material and moral debts’ separation unexpectedly exposes a rift between Indigenous and diasporic theories of recognition that speaks to two very different understandings of obligation, decolonization, and subjectivity that circulate in Canadian literature’s diasporic and Indigenous camps. Amid the multicultural debates of the 1980s and 1990s, the language of ‘recognition’ re-emerged with critical force in anti-racism scholarship. Immigrant communities’ calls to be recognized as Canadians have remained steady and potent since then, as seen in scholarly and creative calls for Canadian’s to recognize the historical depth and geographical breadth of racialized communities’ presence in Canada. Rinaldo Walcott observes in *Black Like Who?* that “many people continue to believe that any black presence in Canada is a recent and urban one.... Canadian state institutions and official narratives attempt to render blackness outside of those same narratives, and... constrain blackness through discourses of Canadian benevolence” (43-4). He is not alone in connecting marginalization to the Canadian state’s failure to recognize—and active elisions of—non-white Canadian’s historical presence.

Since 2002, performance artist Camille Turner has given walking tours of Toronto's Grange district that show how the city overwrites its Black history. She delivers these tours as Miss Canadiana, a beauty queen complete with ball gown and tiara, underscoring Black subjects' oscillation between erasure and hyper-visibility in the Canadian commons. In Vancouver, Wayne Compton's East Side memorial project works to bring civic recognition to Hogan's Alley, one of the city's only historically Black neighbourhoods, a block bulldozed in the 1970s for an almost immediately defunct viaduct development. Walcott, Turner, and Compton challenge Canada's geographic and embodied conceptions by flagging the national narratives that overwrite Black subjects' historical presence in Canada. All three anchor Black communities to specific spaces and places, highlighting mis- and nonrecognition's capacity to distort how Canada's white majority and racialized minorities perceive their relative belonging in national narratives and spaces.

These scholars, artists, and activists are clear that Black communities are not recognized in Canada; they are not, however, issuing a simple call to be recognized by—and thus included in—the Canadian nation. Instead, their projects and research demonstrate the profound anti-Blackness of contemporary Canada and signal the impossibility of recognition-as-inclusion for Black subjects. As Walcott writes in *Queer Returns*, “[f]or the former slave, indentured servant, and the hybrids of all sorts in the ‘archipelagoes of poverty’ the struggle to be human is one conditioned by the terms upon which European discourses could both be internalized and turned upside down to produce them as subjects worthy of being considered Man, if only tangentially so” (73-4). Inclusion within the nation-state and, as Walcott alludes, Euro-humanist discourses of ‘the citizen,’ has never guaranteed rights or freedom to Afro-diasporic subjects insofar as both the nation-state and the citizen-subject are premised on the exclusion of Blackness.

Indigenous scholars issue similar dismissals of recognition's socio-political value. Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014) and Coulthard's *Red*

*Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) present recognition as a fundamentally disabling discourse that undercuts Indigenous assertions of territorial and political sovereignty. Politicians and academics, Simpson observes, freely recognize Indigenous *culture*, but “[have] difficulty *viewing* Indigeneity as possibly nationalist. Rather, Indigeneity is imagined as something entrapped within the analytics of ‘minoritization,’ a statistical model for the apprehension of (now) racialized populations ‘within’ nation-states” (17-8).<sup>6</sup> Simpson and Coulthard argue decolonization will not be furthered insofar as settler-states offer *cultural recognition* in lieu of *political recognition*—political sovereignty and territory, that is. Like Oliver’s ‘soft economy of domination,’ cultural recognition and the liberal discourses it upholds subvert Indigenous land-based demands: “instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual recognition*, the liberal politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (Coulthard 3). For Coulthard and alike, such gestures of recognition ironically refuse to recognize Indigenous sovereignty. Canada’s increasing comfort with discourses of recognition suggests “colonial relations of power are no longer reproduced primarily through overtly coercive means, but rather through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation” (Coulthard 15).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Literary scholarship confirms Simpson’s point every time it uses terms like ‘diasporic’ and ‘racialized’ in unintentionally misleading ways: just as not all diasporic communities in Canada are racialized, not all racialized communities are diasporic. This sleight amalgamates Canada’s Indigenous peoples and the dispossessions that originate in their cultural genocide with all ‘visible minorities’ in Canada. Brand’s collaborative *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism* (1986), co-edited with Krisantha Sri Bhagguyadatt, would provide an interesting case study of such racial amalgamations. The work contains anonymous interviews with both racialized-diasporic and Indigenous contributors on topics such as ‘Childhood’ and ‘The Culture of the Everyday,’ but does not distinguish between Indigenous and racialized-diasporic speakers. The collection ultimately presents experiences of racism as profoundly common, emphasizing the commonalities these experiences forge between diasporic-racialized communities and Indigenous peoples, glossing their differences.

<sup>7</sup> This claim has garnered its own critique. Contra Coulthard, many Indigenous scholars are clear that this power continues to express itself in overtly violent means, particularly against Indigenous women.

Recognition, this summary demonstrates, not sought by Canada's similarly overwritten—but un-similarly situated—Black and Indigenous scholars. This thesis enters uncharted critical territory, though, by asking what obligations exist between Black subjects and First Nations in Canada.<sup>8</sup> One reason for this scholarly gap is disciplinary: transnational and diasporic literary analyses tend to imagine themselves as alternatives to *both* national *and* postcolonial approaches to literature, and consequently avoid framing racialized diaspora in relation to Indigenous displacement. Similarly, when Indigenous scholarship uses the catchall 'non-Indigenous' to describe those who occupy traditional territory, an approach Taiaiake Alfred uses in his introduction to Coulthard's *Red Skins* and that Gail Valaskakis applies throughout *Indian Country*, the term's capaciousness is unclear: "non-Indigenous" may intentionally minimize the particularities of Black subjects' occupation of traditional territory.

Anti-colonial scholars know that narratives of a clean temporal break between the 'settler-colonial past' and 'transnational present' surreptitiously keep Euro-Canadians from recognizing themselves as the beneficiaries of Indigenous peoples' multifaceted dispossessions. Such spatiotemporal brackets have another significant, if unintended, consequence: when the 'colonial' is temporalized as past and mapped as rural, and the 'transnational' is imagined as present and mapped as urban—delineations that are themselves a colonial hangover—these categories' perceived communities are imagined apart from one another. As a result, contemporary scholarship has cleared little intellectual ground to discuss recognition *between* Canada's racialized diasporic and Indigenous communities, leaving anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-national scholars with a stunted critical familiarity with these communities' intersections and reciprocal animations.<sup>9</sup>

Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih attribute such gaps to postcolonial inquiry, which they

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<sup>8</sup> Few critical responses apart from Maia Joseph's "Wondering into Country" (2007) and Lee Frew's "Settler Nationalism and the Foreign: The Representation of the Exogene in Ernest Thompson Seton's *Two Little Savages* and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*" (2013) address Brand's representations of diasporic and indigenous intersections.

<sup>9</sup> This approach additionally dismisses the notion that plantation and settler colonialism are mutually exclusive processes.

characterize as “overly concerned with vertical analysis... where the vertical power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is the main object of analysis” (11). They offer ‘minor transnationalism’ as an alternative approach that focuses on exchanges between peripheral sites and subjects, a concept that may help reorient debates over ‘vertical’ recognition in Canadian cultural studies: what happens when struggles for recognition arise not between radically unequal vertical communities, but between differing horizontal communities, those who have been denied social, cultural, and political recognition?<sup>11</sup> Brand’s *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) offers an example of what a reorientation towards minor (mis)recognition looks like when she describes the Caribbean as a place where “no one truly belongs... except the Arawak close to extinction and the Carib retreating into denser interiors down the South American Main. The rest are cargoes of human beings without a recognizable landscape, whether they are slaves or masters” (36). Here, slavery and the appropriation of Indigenous land splits the seemingly homogeneous subject of nonrecognition in two: Indigenous people who belong but are dispossessed of their land, and African bondsmen who do not belong, but are likewise dispossessed of their land.<sup>12</sup>

Recognition’s legal and social determinants gather around whiteness in Canada. Continuous pressure to address a white social dominant has consequently warped Canadian cultural studies, precluding analyses of non-dominant communities’ intersections. This tendency has notable consequences for Brand’s work. Walcott, for example, describes Brand as moving beyond “literary tropes of ‘Roughing it in the bush’ and ‘survival’ (...tropes which deny First Nations presence)” (51-2), underscoring the significance of urban settings and post-national cosmo-politics to diasporic

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<sup>11</sup> The tendency to overlook lateral relations contributed to the preclusion of settler-colonial sites such as Canada, Australia, and South Africa from analysis in early 1990s postcolonial studies. More broadly, though, I would add that this vertical preoccupation also surfaces in transnational and diasporic critique as well, a tendency that hints at globalization studies’ postcolonial lineage as well as its lingering Eurocentrism.

<sup>12</sup> As with *Map*’s Burnt River passages, *At the Full* asks whether common dispossessions afford diasporic African and Indigenous communities’ common ground on which to engage in and exchange reciprocal recognition—an impossibility, works such as Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* argue, between these communities and colonial ‘masters,’ a reading I develop over chapter three and four.

literary critique. This argument—Black Canadian literature has moved beyond settler-colonialism’s concerns and representational tropes—is invested in situating Brand outside of a national canon defined by texts like Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* and Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*. It does not address the actual decolonization of land in Canada. Diasporic criticism appears invested in critiques of the nation-state at the expense of Indigenous sovereignty and land-based resurgence.

Contra Walcott, tropes such as ‘survival’ and ‘roughing it’ pervade *Map*’s depictions of rural Canada, though it is important to note that this work was published four years after *Black Like Who?*. In *Map*, as Maia Joseph observes, Brand directly alludes to Susanna Moodie when she refers to her time in Burnt River as life “[in] the bush” (143, 147, 149), and thus “draws on the old national trope of survival in an inhospitable landscape, employing it to interrogate the possibility of her own emotional survival, which at certain points she seems to tie directly to her uncomfortable positioning within the nation” (82). “There is a way that land defeats you,” Brand writes of Burnt River, “just the sum of it... you notice its width. When it’s covered in snow, you know that it is hardly sleeping. It is like a huge brown-backed being waiting” (*Map* 145-6). The ambiguously racialized presence Brand alludes to here, the “brown-backed being” (146)—is this a Black body? An Indigenous body? Neither?—accentuates that, in North America, settler-colonial territorial occupations are white supremacist.<sup>13</sup>

This ambiguity convinces me that “to overlook the particularity of the settler site, to collapse it into some larger unspecified narrative” (Lawson 151) in what contemporary literary criticism now considers a uniquely ‘global’ or ‘transnational’ era “is to engage in a disavowal of the actual process of colonization, a self-serving forgetting of the entangled agency of one’s history as a subject with

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<sup>13</sup> Like Walcott, Brand acknowledges Indigenous erasures in her writing. One characteristic of settler-colonial texts is that they write any Indigenous presence out of Canada, and acknowledgement is often seen as an anti-colonial gesture. That said, settler-colonial practices of erasure are not exclusively a matter of representation, but also occupation and engulfment. This is part of the larger critiques of recognition Coulthard and Simpson present: acknowledgement does not decolonize land in any tangible way.

that of the displaced Native/colonized subject” (Lawson 151). As a relational system, not a singular event, settler-colonial exertions of power are capacious enough to *both* incorporate racialized diasporic subjects in national projects *and* preclude their recognition. Anti-colonial critique, then, “cannot... cease at those historical moments of independence” (Lawson 154). I approach the ‘transnational turn’ as one such moment.

At their most critical, Brand’s works offer an anti-colonial critique of the transnational present, a critique “driven by the power that remains in [colonial] discourse” (Lawson 154). However, “[b]ecause the postcolonial situation is always already mediated,” as Lawson elaborates, “it is forever in the process of being remediated.... the remedy will always be incomplete” (154). Transnationalism, globalism, and diaspora are part of this remediation. They do not break the present off from its ontological state of being postcolonial; rather, all three attempt to mediate and re-mediate colonial discourse in the present. If settler-colonial power is not temporally bound, then we must consider how it warps anti-colonial *and* post-national resistance today. This includes the post-national resistance Brand scholarship offers against Canadian nationalism.

#### RECOGNITION IN THE COLONIAL, POST-COLONIAL, AND MULTICULTURAL POLITY: ENLIGHTENMENT ROOTS

My aims for the remainder of this chapter are two-fold: first, I want to excavate the largely unacknowledged role debt and obligation play in existing theories of recognition. Second, I want to demonstrate that by resisting multicultural theories of recognition, diasporic criticism in Canada ironically affirms Enlightenment-cum-Liberal thought’s valuation of possessive individualism. My reasoning for this return to Enlightenment thought aligns with Walcott’s argument that, “in a post-9/11 world, a re-engagement with European modernity’s genes of the human is required. This re-engagement must negotiate a number of overlapping and contradictory flows and contexts” (*Queer Returns* 83). Like Stamp Paid in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, resistance against liberal theories of



recognition reinforces a debt-free notion of diasporic subjectivity; by aligning itself with settler-colonial notions of debtlessness, diasporic critique finds itself at odds with Indigenous decolonization.

Debt and obligation lie at the heart of Enlightenment theories of liberal democratic subjectivity and logically re-surface throughout discussions of recognition, be they Hegel's dialectic, Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial critiques of recognition, or Judith Butler's post-structural examinations of who counts as a recognizable subject. Debt is central to—but largely unacknowledged in—these philosophers' discussions of subject formation because material and immaterial obligations are snarled together in the dialectical core of Enlightenment theories of recognition.<sup>14</sup> The remainder of this chapter unpacks this claim by showing how debt runs through Hegelian, Fanonian, multicultural, and poststructural theories of recognition. It is also important to flag here that from Hegel's initial theorizations to Fanon's anti-colonial critiques to contemporary discourses of 'multicultural tolerance' and poststructural subjectification, recognition progressively dematerializes: property—particularly land—is decoupled from recognizable subjectivity as contemporary theories of recognition grow (literally) ungrounded.<sup>15</sup> Although this dematerialization of recognition seems progressive, it has significant consequences for Indigenous land-based struggles: by willfully overlooking recognition's territorial anchors, seemingly anti-colonial criticism decouples recognition from land, and thus undercuts calls for Indigenous territorial sovereignty.

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<sup>14</sup> I have reservations about beginning with European traditions in order to discuss Brand and competing diasporic and Indigenous interpretations of recognition. I trust my readers are clear that the European Enlightenment is not the only relevant intellectual tradition at play in contemporary discussions of recognition. Diana Brydon notes that "Edouard Glissant's 'poetics of relation' and Kamau Brathwaite's 'tidalectics'...move closer to characterizing the emotional geographies of Brand's social philosophy" (998), while Coulthard's 'grounded normativity,' a concept I turn to in my fourth chapter, offers an Indigenous alternative that focuses on how subjectivity is determined by land. That said, a Eurocentric tradition informs Brand and diasporic critique's resistance against existing discourses of recognition, an irony that lies at the heart of anti-colonial oppositionality itself.

<sup>15</sup> Brand's works similarly dematerialize recognition by presenting dispossession as a resistant alternative to citizenship (the focus of my following chapter, "Sovereign Immunity: Branding Canadian Diaspora Studies"). Resisting national communities appears liberatory but doing so deploys racialized diasporic subjects' post-national identifications to separate subjectivity and recognition from land.

Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) is frequently read as a meditation on transgenerational transmissions of trauma.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, though, I read *At the Full* as presenting an indirect but extensive meditation on recognition's theoretical evolutions: as its narrative traces Afro-Caribbean characters' nonrecognition from Enlightenment to emancipation to the postcolonial nationalist moment and across their transnational migrations, *At the Full* poses classic postcolonial rebuttals to Liberal recognition's limits. However, while this novel presents an original critique of dialectical recognition's multicultural and post-national failures, it ultimately affirms an autonomous vision of diasporic subjectivity. Brand's emphasis on Black women's autonomous individualism is resistant and liberatory; what poses a problem, however, is that diasporic literary criticism has begun presenting dispossession as the basis of solidarity between diasporic and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Contemporary liberal theories of recognition separate material and moral obligations as land is replaced by rights, citizenship, and increasingly post-national resistance, thus eliding land's political purchase in 'post-national' times.

Hegel's theorization of recognition's role in subject formation in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) remains academically salient. A transcendental *bildungsroman*, *Phenomenology* proceeds from *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796-7), Johann Gottlieb Fichte's analyses of then-fledgling Social Contract theories, which argues Rousseau's social contract and Kantian deontological ethics presume recognition without examining its role in subject formation. Hegel builds on Fichte's claims in *Phenomenology* (1807) and later *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) by arguing recognition is central to—but under-examined in—the social contract's theorization of the rights-bearing, free subject. As Robert Williams summarizes:

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<sup>16</sup> For examples of such readings, see Lauren Gantz "Archiving the Door of No Return in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*," Julia Grandison's "Bridging the Past and the Future: Rethinking the Temporal Assumptions of Trauma Theory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*," and Maureen Moynagh's "The Melancholic Structure of Memory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*."

This nexus of freedom and recognition—that freedom requires recognition of the other for its self-realization—is part of the legacy Hegel inherits from Fichte. . . . For Hegel, as for Fichte, right is constituted through recognition, namely recognition of freedom’s presence in the world. Owing to their freedom, human beings may be capable of rights, but these rights remain mere possibilities unless they become actual in the medium of recognition, and in this sense recognition is the foundation of right. (2)

Rights—the obligations an individual owes and is owed by virtue of their subjectivity—simultaneously *arise from* and *demarcate* recognizable subjectivity. This understanding of the liberal, democratic, rights-bearing subject defines contemporary debates over recognition; what now appears under-explored is the role property—specifically land—plays in Enlightenment theories of recognition as well as their postcolonial and poststructural rebuttals. Contra Williams, I am arguing that Hegelian theories of recognition are predicated on private property and rest on submerged material foundations. In effect, property and not recognition is “the foundation of right” in Hegel.<sup>17</sup>

*Phenomenology*’s “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage,” more commonly referred to as the Master-Slave dialectic, asserts that recognition is a dialectical process: the subject “exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (§178). It is important to remember from the outset that the Hegelian dialectic does not describe mutual recognition’s achievement, but rather the causes and consequences of mutual recognition’s failure. In his progress towards absolute knowledge, *Phenomenology*’s everyman passes through a mean stage marked by inequality not mutuality, “one being only the *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*” (§185). Those whose desires for recognition are unrequited exist in a state of ‘being-for-self,’ self-certainty without the truth of acknowledgement in the actions of the other (§186); self-conscious but still *independent objects* enter an unavoidable struggle to the death: “it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won” (§187).

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<sup>17</sup> While discourses of ‘recognition’ remain integral to nationally-secured rights and freedoms, they notably contain their own historically intoned elisions. Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* (1988) and Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract* (1997) have since examined the gendered presuppositions and racial exclusions intrinsic to Enlightenment formulations of the rights’ bearing subject.

*At the Full* begins as this struggle reaches its fatal climax. Set in 1820s Trinidad, the novel's opening chapter focuses on Marie Ursule, a slave who, having survived a succession of masters, rebellions, and retaliatory punishments, organizes a final mass suicide of her latest owner, M. de Lambert's, slaves (5). With this beginning, *At the Full* poses a classically anti-colonial challenge to *Phenomenology's* atomistic social identities: master and slave, Brand asserts, are roles the trans-Atlantic slave trade assigns long before any struggle between individuals can arise.<sup>18</sup> For Marie Ursule, freedom is still fundamentally dialectic: freedom is not freedom, this character suggests, unless recognized by others. Such dialectical notions are not universal in *At the Full*: Brand describes Trinidad's indigenous Caribs as "becoming ancient and extinct," (2) "vanishing," (2) and "moving reluctantly towards memory" (3). The disappearing and historically-bound native are common tropes that reinforce the erasure of Indigenous peoples in settler-invader texts.<sup>19</sup> I make this rejoinder to voice two reminders: first, plantation- and settler-colonialism were never mutually exclusive but often overlapping practices. Second, the myth of the vanishing native has yet to die out in North or South American contexts.

Kamena, father of Marie Ursule's only remaining child, a daughter named Bola, runs away from de Lambert's plantation hours before this mass suicide takes place. Brand describes him as wanting to escape into "lightness" (7), "willing to leave their presence, *consider the debt void*, just for some peace" (55; emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> If interpreted through Hegel's dialectic, he and the Caribs avoid

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<sup>18</sup> In this Brand's novel is aligned with Fanon, who likewise does not see Hegel's ur-master and slave as representations of mastery or enslavement under colonialism, an argument I develop later in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Like the Indigenous peoples of North America whose presence is denied through myths of the vanishing native, the Caribs of the lesser Antilles and Arawak of the Orinoco valley and coastal regions remain a strong presence—as communities, as a linguistic influence, as a genetic inheritance—in the Caribbean. As with Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Locono are one of North-Eastern South America's fastest growing populations.

<sup>20</sup> Marie Ursule's enslavement is similarly framed as a debt for which she remains owed: when sold by the spectral and magic-realist Ursuline nuns of Culebra Bay to de Lambert, Marie Ursule says, "You going to live long. Take the money from him. You *owe* me an eternity" (12; emphasis added). This obligation, another demand for recognition, is also a curse: the multiply indebted nuns haunt their clandestine estate, mired in unpaid debts and unrequited obligations. Their land was purchased "from the filibusters, not telling their king, not showing it on the accounts, and living longer than they were supposed to live, not letting their king know that either, not showing their longevity in their books; a century of taxes unpaid" (41). Long after they die, the nuns linger as man-o-war birds and shadows that haunt Bola and her

their respective struggles to the death as slave-subjects who accept life under slavery rather than risk death and freedom.<sup>21</sup> Rather than disappearing like the Caribs or escaping to the fabled Terre Bouillante marronage with Kamena, Marie Ursule's freedom is only possible through dialectical recognition: "[She] wanted peace too but nothing that could be settled in escape" (7).

The painless poison she makes to facilitate the Sans Peur's suicide comes from Trinidad's Indigenous inhabitants: "*Woorara*, the Caribs had told her, was simple and quick, though it had taken her years to collect" (2). Collecting this poison becomes an act of self-consciousness and freedom: "She gathered woorara the way anyone else might gather flowers, the way one gathers scents or small wishes and fondness.... she had been diligent and faithful the way any collector would be, any fervent lover. Scientific. Passionate" (1). Marie Ursule's work collecting the Carib poison occupies what Homi Bhabha describes as that area

between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.... the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence... both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (*The Location of Culture* 86)

*At the Full* destabilizes Hegel's claim that "servitude has the lord for its essential reality" (§194) as Marie Ursule's actions are never solely de Lamberts'. Instead, De Lambert's 'essential reality' is never totalizing. In *At the Full*, colonial subjectivity is partial, incomplete, and thus threatening.

Because of Brand's characterization of Marie Ursule, *At the Full*'s characters cannot be read as a direct cipher for Hegel's 'trembling' and 'unmanned' (§194) slave. Unlike this figure, Marie

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descendants who remain at the Culebra Bay estate.

<sup>21</sup> For Hegel, such subjects enter a phase of limited, immediate self-consciousness: "The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person* but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (§187).

Ursule and her tellingly named fellow resistors, the “Sans Peur,” do not fear death. After facilitating their palliated suicide, Marie Ursule waits to be discovered, “[wanting] to see the face of de Lambert and the rest.... to vow to them that it was she, Marie Ursule, who had devastated them” (18). She claims personal responsibility for—or, in the dialectic’s terms, identifies with the product of—her poison-gathering labour; however, this assertion of subjecthood only results in Marie Ursule’s more brutal execution.<sup>22</sup> *Phenomenology* presents death as the ultimate abrogation of subjectivity, “the natural negation of consciousness, negation without *independence*, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition” (§188; emphasis added). Read through Hegel, the Sans Peur’s suicidal rebellion fail to interrupt struggles for recognition between radically unequal subjects.

Here, a literary analysis can consider representation in ways strictly philosophical discussions cannot: representation is key. Caught, beaten, and condemned to hang, Marie Ursule “[confesses] gladly to her own name alone” (21). She transitions in and out of recognizability during her execution: “Her hair matted in blood, her face so battered she was *unrecognizable*” (23; emphasis added). The challenge she poses with her final words, “Marie Ursule was about to hang, saying calmly and bluntly, ‘This is but a drink of water to what I have already suffered’” (24), disfigures de Lambert and his men: “their faces [are]... mashed and broken in incredulity and terror and loss and sadness” (23). Hegel argues there is a fundamental lack of reciprocity between master and slave, that “the two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things” (§188). Brand, alternatively, presents

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<sup>22</sup> It remains contested whether the scope Hegel’s master and slave allegory was literal and societal or psychological and individual. As with most anti-colonial interpretations that place Hegel in dialogue with Fanon, I offer a largely literal reading of the challenges *At the Full* poses to the Master-Slave dialectic. That said, the novel also affords a more figurative reading of the dialectic as well: Hegel’s life-or-death struggle occurs within the individual consciousness of de Lambert’s slaves. Brand additionally narrates a dialectical struggle between the body and the mind as the Sans Peur prepare to poison themselves: “They knew that the body was a terrible thing that wanted to live no matter what. It never gave up, it lived for the sake of itself. It was selfish and full of greed. The body could pitifully recover from lashes, from weight and stroke. Only in the head could you kill yourself, never in the body” (17). Read through Hegel, the animal-body cherishes life over freedom, rendering the body slave to the master-mind. This interpretation supports Fanon’s larger indictment of Hegel: recognition, he argues, is not only socially untenable but internally impossible under colonialism’s radical inequalities.

nonrecognition as an act of recoil: even under conditions of radical inequality, Marie Ursule's words—her claims to subjectivity—deface de Lambert, calling his own subjecthood into question. Brand shows this recoil by paralleling Marie Ursule's nonrecognition with that of de Lambert and his men.

This scene's visual mirroring stages the Hegelian dialectic's reversal. *Phenomenology* contends the hierarchies of recognized and recognizing are "self-subverting" (Williams 49), as the master's dominance is baseless insofar as "the object in which the lord has achieved freedom has in reality turned out to be.... not an independent consciousness but a dependent one" (§192). The slave's subordination is likewise undone (if only within the slave's mind) by the same reversal: "Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own.... Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly *for itself*" (§169).<sup>23</sup> This troubling logic sublates slaves' demands for recognition *and* redeems enslaved labour in *Phenomenology*. Although the slave is initially alienated from labour—"what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord" (§191)—Hegel reasons that it is only through labour that the slave can discover independent self-consciousness, or 'being-for-self':

[the bondsman] becomes *for himself* someone *existing on his own account*. In the lord, the being-for-self is an other for the bondsman, or is only *for him* [ie. is not his own]; in fear, the being-for-self is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware *the being-for-self belongs to him, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right*.... Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely his own work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence, that he *acquires a mind of his own*. (§196; emphasis added)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel suggests the hierarchy's reversal is inevitable as "[servitude] does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self, for it has experienced this its own essential nature.... the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*, which consequently is *implicit* in this consciousness" (§194).

<sup>24</sup> Before encountering its other, "[s]elf-consciousness is...simple being-for-self through the exclusion of itself from everything else" (§186). Hegel characterizes this pre-struggle self-consciousness as fundamentally "*independent*" and "[s]ubmerged in the being [or immediacy] of Life" (§186). Independence and immediacy, importantly, are evidence of an underdeveloped individual consciousness, and denote the not-yet recognized object (not subject). Hegel differentiates

This passage has taken on a life of its own in Marxist readings that celebrate labour as the origin of the bondsman's revolutionary consciousness. For this chapter's analysis of debt and obligation, though, I want to stress how the language of possession marks the dialectic's reversal: the bondsman comes to *possess* his labour—if not the products of that labour or the labouring body—which allows 'being-for-self' to *belong* to her. Hegel describes the bondsman as 'acquiring a mind of his own' and existing 'on his own account.' As the slave transitions from being-for-other (a dependent consciousness) to being-for-self (an independent consciousness), then, she transitions from existing as a *dispossessed object* to a *self-possessed subject*. Hegelian being-for-self is a possessive and autonomous state.

In *Phenomenology*, recognition is predicated on the subject's capacity for labour as a relative possession: labour determines all subjects' dependence on—or independence from—others. Hegel attributes independence to servitude when arguing slave subjects are free from dependency.<sup>25</sup> The master, alternatively, depends on the slave for labour and recognition: the former he cannot (or will not) perform himself, the latter he refuses to accept from a slave. The master's resulting material and psychological dependence prevent him from achieving sovereignty. C.B. Macpherson's theory of possessive individualism draws from Hobbes and Locke rather than Hegel, but observes similar anxieties about self-possession and indebtedness as delimiting sovereignty in the social contract and subsequent theories of rights-bearing subjectivity:

The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as *an owner of himself*. . . . The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is the proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from

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between master and slave as "a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is a merely *immediate* consciousness, or consciousness in the form of *thinghood*" (§189). Life and death struggles between master and slave feed on the *independent object's* desire to eradicate otherness and prove oneself "an independent self-consciousness" (§187). Through this struggle, Hegel's master proves dependent on the slave's labour and receives no validation from the slave's recognition. Accordingly, the master is "not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself" (§192).

<sup>25</sup> While the slave's self-consciousness results from her self-possession (literally, as the slave claims her work as a possession), the dialectic avoids work-performing bodies.



dependence on the wills of others, and *freedom is a function of possession*. Society becomes a lot of free equal individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise. Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange.

It cannot be said that the seventeenth-century concepts of freedom, rights, obligations, and justice are all entirely derived from this concept of possession, but it can be shown that they were powerfully shaped by it. (3; emphasis added)

Hegelian scholars may decry the comparison I make here of Hegel with Hobbes, Locke, and Kant as overlooking Hegel's unique emphasis on *interdependence*. Williams, for example, presents Hegel's theories as an alternative to Hobbes' and Kant's celebrations of *independent* subjects, "a friendly corrective to classical liberal individualism: individual freedoms, rights, and so on, are intersubjective-socially secured, and what secures them is being-recognized" (21). My focus on debt and obligation lead me to make this departure from existing Hegelian scholarship, though, and contend that the root of *independence* and *interdependence*'s mutual frustration in his theories lie in a paradox concerning obligation that is embedded in dialectical recognition's linguistic core.

The Master-Slave dialectic emphasizes the importance of 'reciprocal recognition' (§184, §188) but does not explain how subjects progress from false *independence* or disabling *dependence* towards mutual *interdependency*. Instead, *Phenomenology* suggests *dependence* and *independence* alike are antithetical to self-consciousness or freedom: self-possession renders the bondsman *independent* but enslaved, while the possession of others renders the master *dependent* and unselfconscious. I find this tension between independence and dependence easier to see by examining Hegel's terminology: the term '*recognition*' as used in contemporary scholarship does not connote debt or obligation for Hegel's English readers, but *Phenomenology*'s '*anerkennen*' would have for its German readers in the 1800s. Michael Inwood explains this term's significance in his study of Hegelian phraseology:

*Anerkennung* involves not simply the intellectual identification of a thing or person (though it characteristically presupposes such intellectual recognition), but the assignment to it of a positive value and the explicit expression of this assignment....

Other people appear on the scene not in theoretical philosophy, but in practical philosophy, where they are seen as creatures on a par with myself with whom I interact, to whom I *owe* certain duties and who *owe* certain duties to me. (par. 3; emphasis added)

Hegel's '*anerkennen*' fuses recognition of *an other* with obligations owed *to the other that is recognized*.

Accordingly, '*anerkennung*' describes a relationship where obligations extend from positive identifications of *and* with the other; non- or misrecognition allows those same obligations to be withheld.<sup>26</sup>

What, then, do Hegelian subjects recognize in others? What are they indebted to? Andrew Chitty argues Hegelian subjects do not recognize others' unfettered humanity or inherent rights—if they did there would be no struggle for recognition in the first place. Instead, Hegelian subjects recognize others' freedom. As Chitty expands, freedom is only visible in Hegel's works through property: "For property as the existence [*Dasein*] of personality my inner representation and will that something should be mine is not enough; rather this requires that I seize possession of it. The existence [*Dasein*] which my willing thereby acquires includes its discernibility [*Erkennbarkeit*] by others (PR §5 cf. ES §491)" (Hegel trans. and qtd. by Chitty 688). Recognition, then, is not only dialectical for Hegel but deeply possessive: something is mine only insofar as everyone else *recognizes* it as mine and acts accordingly. The Hegelian dialectic thus fuses recognition, possession, and obligation to one another, forging subjects' rights out of their relative material possessions: "for Hegel recognizing another as a person amounts to no more than recognizing the other as a property owner" (Chitty 690).

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<sup>26</sup> Inwood additionally notes that "*Anerkennung* and *anerkennen* overlap the meanings of 'recognition' and 'to recognize', and of 'acknowledgement' and 'to acknowledge', but do not coincide with either pair. *Anerkennen* is a sixteenth-century formation, on the model of the Latin *agnoscere* ('to ascertain, recognize, acknowledge'), and based on the (thirteenth-century) legal sense of *erkennen* ('to judge, find (e.g. a person guilty)'), rather than its older sense of 'to know, cognize'. It thus suggests overt, practical, rather than merely intellectual, recognition" (par. 1). Unlike the German '*anerkennen*,' the English 'recognize' traces its origins to the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century, where it meant to "resume possession of land," a definition integral to my final chapter on Brand's representations of land and Indigeneity.

Debt conflates material and immaterial obligations at the dialectic's core, *the* paradox of Hegelian recognition: freedom lies in obligatory *interdependencies* with others; bondage and indebtedness lie in denying *interdependence*. The slave's independence in bondage, a marker of "absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*" (§194), results from her awareness that she bears obligations to others; she *recognizes* (*anerkennen*) the propertied master. The master, alternatively, withholds recognition and its binding obligations from the unpropertied slave because he is unable (or unwilling) to acknowledge his structural dependence on—and *indebtedness to*—the slave. The master's dependence—but also his dominance—results from his inability to acknowledge his obligations to others; the slave is both subjugated and liberated by the obligations she bears to others.<sup>27</sup>

Like debt's shadowy presence in *anerkennung's* etymology, a similar paradox operates throughout *Phenomenology's* historical moment. "[T]he apparent dominance of the master reverses itself with his awareness that he is in fact totally dependent on the slave," writes Susan Buck-Morss: "[o]ne has only to collectivize the figure of the master in order to see the descriptive pertinence of Hegel's analysis: the slave-holding class is indeed totally dependent on the institution of slavery for the 'overabundance' that constitutes its wealth" (847).<sup>28</sup> Hegel wrote *Phenomenology* during the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), a global trial of Enlightenment values that proved equality, freedom, and private property rights are antithetical. In effect, the Enlightenment's theories of recognition were simultaneously subsidized by slaving economies and destabilized by Haitian struggles for freedom.

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<sup>27</sup> It appears the slave's sense of obligation to others is eclipsed when she becomes a self-possessed subject, "*for himself, someone existing on his own account*" (§196). Here I would like the confirmation of a dedicated Hegelian scholar: it is arguable that the slave is not freed but only achieves dominance over the master. In this case, it is the denial of obligations to others, the denial of intersubjectivity, that enslaves both master and slave within a system of radical inequality.

<sup>28</sup> Buck-Morss similarly observes that interdependency renders individual slaves something other than free, an aporia she traces through Hegel's pre-*Phenomenology of the Spirit* fragments (fn. 79, 846). Her larger point is that even while writing *Phenomenology*, Hegel appears aware of the structural imbalances that preclude mutual *obligations* from extending between master and slave, regardless of whether the slave achieves pure being-for-self. For an extended, psychological reading of this passage, see Butler's "Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection: Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness," from *The Psychic Life of Power*.

News emerging from Saint-Domingue—France’s most valuable colony—preoccupied Europe as Hegel wrote *Phenomenology*, but there are no direct references to Haiti in this work. Jean-Jacques Rousseau similarly begins “On The Social Contract” (1762) by reflecting that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (qtd. in Buck-Morss 830), but never discusses the human slaves whose labour subsidized European society: “He declared all men equal and saw property as the source of inequality, but he never put two and two together to discuss French slavery for economic profit as central to arguments of both property and equality” (Buck-Morss 831). It is symptomatic rather than incidental that Enlightenment thinkers did not recognize their material dependencies on and ethical entanglements with Europe’s Others.

Hegel’s allegory of the master and the slave, it is important to remember, only addresses mutual recognition’s *impossibility* under conditions of radical inequality. Decrying (mis)interpretations of Hegel’s dialectic that downplay this limit, Williams insists “Hegel’s master and slave is but an important first phase of unequal recognition that *must* and *can* be transcended. It is not the final, but merely a transitional, inherently unstable, configuration of intersubjectivity” (10). On finishing *Phenomenology*, then, Hegel was left with the problem of explaining how individuals and societies manage to progress beyond life-and-death conflicts towards functional intersubjectivity and mutual recognition. This problem instigates *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel proposes reciprocal and genuine intersubjectivity *is* possible, but only within an institutional order that guarantees subjects’ rights. This institutional order, he asserts in *Philosophy*, is the (racially, linguistically, religiously) homogenous nation-state, a civil society defined by written and unwritten social contracts: “freedom is actual only as ethical community, that is, the state. As far as Hegel is concerned, the [nation-] state as the realization of freedom constitutes the real refutation of slavery and practices of domination” (Williams 7).

In Hegel's *Philosophy*, citizenship preempts endless struggles for recognition because the nation-state acts as interdependence's guarantor. Nation-states have this power, according to Hegel, because their citizens share common investments in private property: "their recognition of each other as persons amounts to no more than a recognition of each other as property owners" (Chitty 689). The resulting theory of subjectivity is premised on a tautology anti-colonial and feminist scholars are well acquainted with: possessions are the basis of recognition, and recognition is the basis of one's ability to possess. Because they are predicated on possessive individualism, Hegelian theories of liberal subjecthood preclude the recognition of dispossessed subjects.

Nation-states are conditioned not to recognize *all* subjects—immigrants, visitors, citizens, 'illegals'—equally insofar as propertied individuals are *the* subjects of recognition. Many Enlightenment philosophers—and their contemporary students—avoid seeing the contradictions between professed valuations of inalienable human freedom and equality while enshrining private property. This sleight made Europe's slavery-dependent economies possible and continues to fuel xenophobic anxieties over refugees and immigrants today. Such sleights are furthered when considering that Hegel staged his allegory in a philosophical *terra nullius*. By *Philosophy*, Europe's nation-states protect their subjects' rights and freedoms but leave slaves insiders to the *oikos* of the private home and corporate inventories but outsiders to the *oikos* of nation. In *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy* alike, freedom is only achieved through mutual obligations born of the material possession, fostering subjects' and states' *interdependences*. Liberal democratic nation-states rest on the right's bearing subject who is "essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, *owing nothing to society for them*" (Macpherson 3; emphasis added), as citizen subjects' mutual obligations maintain civil order.

In summary, Hegel's citizen-subject perceives himself as indebted to and interdependent on *specific* others, similarly propertied citizens. Hegel's ideally *interdependent* citizen, a variant of

Macpherson's 'possessive individual,' is oblivious of his structural dependencies on—and obligations to—his transnational others. It is not that Hegel valued *independence* over *interdependence* like Rousseau and Kant. Rather, Hegel's theory of recognition draws limits around the European subject's sphere of *interdependence*, limits that protect national, ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic boundaries. Enlightenment Europe's global trade networks distanced possessive individuals from recognizing their transnational (inter)dependencies, precluding European subjects' recognition of (and indebtedness to) extra-national subjects.<sup>29</sup>

### FANONIAN STEM: THE (NON)RECOGNITION OF POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECTS

Unlike *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy of Right*, *At the Full* does not present colonized and racialized subjects' struggles for recognition as a transitional stage that will be surpassed amid teleological, nation-building projects.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Brand's novel traces repeating struggles for recognition across generational planes. Long after emancipation, decolonization, or global migration, this novel's characters remain unrecognized. Marie Ursule's execution accordingly lends itself to two contradictory interpretations. First, it can be read as a successful act of mutual destruction: on hanging, Marie Ursule observes "de Lambert would die too in his own way.... Dead is where everybody was going" (17). Like their paralleled transitions in and out of recognizability, Marie Ursule's literal death is ironically mirrored by de Lambert's social death: "His blood would run the same through him to his generations," but Marie Ursule foresees de Lambert's descendants as "[g]enerations needing a new language," willfully forgetting not only their patriarch but the violent,

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<sup>29</sup> Macpherson's 'society' presumably draws its limits at Europe's boundaries, but his observation can accommodate the Enlightenment's reliance on global trade networks, an additional layer of distance that separates the era's possessive subjects from recognizing their transnational dependencies.

<sup>30</sup> Hegel's redemption of the slave's labour and "initial absolute fear" (§193) unsteadies Williams' suggestion that the dialectic is an intermediary stage subjects pass through while transcending false *independence* and becoming *interdependent*: "it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This *negative* middle term or the formative *activity* is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence.... that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of work] its *own* independence" (§195). *Phenomenology* is unclear whether the slave's labour is *the* portal through which *interdependence* arises (i.e. if permanence should be read as a mark of liberatory progress), or if being-for-self is only the negation of the Lord's power and re-instigation of their struggle. This uncertainty brings questions of debt into dialectic's reversal.

slave-owning legacies that are their patrimony: “His generations would melt into his secrets. They would take other names. They would even forget de Lambert, the man in their faces and in the faces of photographs that would speak of a great family” (19). Just as de Lambert depends on his slaves’ labour, his remembrance depends on social validation of his identity as a slave owner, leaving him to fade beyond recognition within his own family.

A less equilibrium-bent reading of Marie Ursule’s rebellion is also available: *At the Full* demonstrates that the perpetrators of colonial violence and their decedents are content to avoid self-consciousness and forget past violations. Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) presents *this*, the desire to avoid self-consciousness and its resultant obligations, as the fundamental difference between *Phenomenology*’s hypothetical masters Europe’s colonial ones: “For Hegel there is reciprocity; here [in colonized societies] the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work” (195 fn. 10). Like Fanon’s colonizers, de Lambert’s descendants benefit from their slavery and genocide-derived wealth *while* forgetting its origins; self-consciousness and mutual recognition hold little appeal.<sup>31</sup> Marie Ursule’s descendants also take new names, but do so because she has no family name to give. Some forget her rebellion, but their forgetting is not liberating so much as evidence of their multigenerational dispossessions, a lament aired by Eula, Marie Ursule’s Toronto-based great-great-granddaughter: “I would like a single line of ancestry.... one line full of people with no reason to forget anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because the line would be constant, unchangeable” (247). While these two interpretations see Marie Ursule’s rebellion very differently, both assert it is not only Marie Ursule and de Lambert who struggle for recognition amid colonial asymmetries: their descendants are caught in lasting struggles over recognition as well.

As a multi-generation narrative, *At the Full* questions the teleologic, nationalist project

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<sup>31</sup> With deep gratitude to Michaela Henry for bringing this second interpretation to my attention.

embedded in liberal theories of subjectivity. Marie Ursule's rebellion does not interrupt struggles for recognition in any permanent or trans-generational sense. Instead, each of the novel's subsequent generations are stuck negotiating their nonrecognition. Through these generations, Brand narrativizes Fanon's anti-colonial critique of dialectical recognition. It remains debated whether Hegel's *Phenomenology* is principally concerned with recognition's psychological or social realization, but Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* insists colonial (non)recognition is simultaneously social *and* psychological, a catch-22 for racialized subjects for whom colonization has created the 'colonial subjectivity' that desires recognition from Europe and European masters in the first place.

Fanon's *Black Skin* focuses on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but its analysis of emancipation and national independence pre-empt the national communities Hegel champions in his later *Philosophy*. With little faith in nation-states' capacity to guaranty reciprocal recognition to colonized peoples, though Fanon presents a counterargument *Philosophy* did not anticipate: the very concept of the nation-state, whether colonial or post-colonial, entrenches pre-existing struggles for reciprocal recognition between always-already unequal subjects, thereby reaffirming colonial ideology and internalizing colonized peoples' struggles for recognition:

There is no open conflict between White and Black.

One day the white master recognized *without a struggle* the black slave.

But the former slave wants to *have himself recognized*.

There is at the basis of Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be highlighted. (*Black Skin* 191)

Emancipation and national independence may have appeared equalizing in the 1940s and 1950s, but Fanon anticipates both will fail to correct the material inequalities that reify racial difference and uphold recognition's colonial logic: "upheaval did not differentiate the black man. He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another" (*Black Skin* 195).

*Black Skin* accordingly challenges colonized *and* colonizing subjects to "overcome the logic of recognition instilled by the colonial situation" (Oliver 29). *At the Full* narrates Fanon's critique of



top-down recognition beginning with its second chapter's opening transcription of Sir George Fitzgerald Hill's emancipation announcement and its mitigated freedoms (49-50). The novel's narrator calls this proclamation "a slap in the face" (51) to those who remain enslaved under its 'apprenticeship' program and irrelevant to Kamena and Bola, who escape de Lambert's plantation amid the chaos of the Sans Peur's rebellion. For them, Hill's "authority [was] surpassed by the authority of Marie Ursule's act ten years ago" (51).

Living in post-emancipation, pre-independence Trinidad, Marie Ursule's great-grandson Private Samuel Gordon Sones is a further example of how gestures of recognition reinforce colonial hierarchies and culminate in incapacitating, trans-generational dispossession rather than equality. Set during the First World War, Sones's chapter begins with his recruitment as a private in the British army. He and his family see military service as proof that "men of colour were improving their situation and would be repaid" (79). The front, however, proves as racially stratified as the colonies: "the Second West India Regiment was sent to Palestine and Sinai for labour services along with other Black soldiers from the other islands. Anyone with less colour than them could spit and they would have to clean it up" (87). In letters home, Sones writes that Black soldiers are treated "neither as Christians nor as British citizens but as West Indian 'niggers'" (87). Religious, national, and military affiliations do not secure his mutual recognition within the British army.

What ultimately shatters Sones's faith that he or other Black subject can *earn* recognition through service to the Commonwealth is an incident with Michael De Freitas, a white Trinidadian and Sones's childhood friend. De Freitas becomes Sones commanding officer in Palestine. Despite their prior friendship and mutual terror (94), De Freitas refuses to acknowledge Sones in front of the other soldiers. Sones responds by ignoring his orders and is dishonorably discharged: "The man tell me to clean his knife, get his water, clean his clothes, dig the pits. Misconduct! So is not me and he climb the hill on Damieh together? Is not his foot in mud just like mine.... I not tired too?..."

Who more misconduct? The man have no mind!” (75).

Sones’s chapter asserts that individual deaths, like Marie Ursule’s, cannot interrupt the larger ideological systems that preclude Black subjects’ recognition: “He had wanted to kill [De Freitas] right there and then. Yet killing him would not have been sufficient because the man had insulted him and he understood that the insult would stay with him no matter if he knocked De Freitas down or killed him. And he understood that it was his fault. All of it. He deserved it for pushing himself up and thinking that he was more than he was” (95-6). This character’s understanding of recognition is complexly split: having internalized Fanon’s “Fact of Blackness,” Sones accepts his thinghood as “penance unpaid” (74) for ‘thinking he was more than he was.’ At the same time, he concludes nothing will be gained by killing De Freitas or engaging in cyclical struggles for recognition. Like *Black Skin, White Masks*, Sones’s chapter contends that systemic inequalities will not be settled by individual demands for recognition as these demands only re-affirm colonial master’s capacity to (not) acknowledge their others.

Fanon’s primary critique of Hegelian theories of recognition is that they do not anticipate the colonized subject’s desire “to be like his master.... he is less independent than the Hegelian slave.... [who] turns away from the master and turns towards the object [of labour]. Here [the colonized world] the slave turns towards the master and abandons the object” (195 fn.10). Upon returning to Trinidad, Sones, like Bhabha’s ambivalent mimic, dresses in punishing wool suits, and is known as “Englishman... out of admiration that he had been abroad and in the Great War, and... in derision as he had been sent back for misconduct” (85). These simultaneously sly and punishing acts of mimicry are not Sones’s alone, though, but enacted by the nation as Trinidad transitions towards independence. From his expiatory post under a tamarind tree, Sones watches “the sweep of nationalist ideas...the lowering of the Union Jack and the lifting of the blood and earth.... None of

that could soothe him” (96).<sup>32</sup> His disillusionment with national independence echoes Fanon’s critique of postcolonial statehood: “[t]he Black man was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled around him” (194). Just as common citizenship and national allegiances do not grant Sones reciprocal recognition by De Freitas during the war, independent statehood will not afford Trinidad reciprocal recognition by colonizing, white nations thereafter, leaving colonialism’s inequalities to be processed—or fester—on an individual if not national level.

Fanon wrote *Black Skin* in a historical moment when African, Caribbean, and South-East Asian states were broaching national independence. His arguments are grounded in post-colonial nationalist movements of the 1950s. *At the Full*, alternatively, is written in an era defined by globalization, transnational migration, and their mitigated possibilities.<sup>33</sup> After Sones’s chapter, *At the Full* diverges from existing theories to offer a novel critique of recognition, one tailored to the specificities of a transnational world order. Rebellion, emancipation, and national independence fail to secure recognition for Marie Ursule’s descendants; global migrations and shifts in the location of power—from slave owner to commonwealth, nation to post-nation—likewise do not guarantee these racialized subjects’ their proper subjecthood.

As they cross national boundaries and enter transnational flows, Marie Ursule’s descendants

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<sup>32</sup> Where Hegel focused on mutual regard and interdependence, anti-colonial theory has come to celebrate resistance. Despite this desire to laude any and all resistances as worthy of celebration, Sones’s resistance is neither liberatory nor glamorous: he does not escape his nonrecognition nor his sense this nonrecognition is deserved. His internal conflict leaves Sones socially isolated, a passive observer.

<sup>33</sup> Fanon’s writing telescopes from individual to national levels and back again when he argues the colonized “wants his humanity to be challenged; he is looking for a fight; he wants to brawl. But too late: the black Frenchman is doomed to hold his tongue and bare his teeth. We say the black Frenchman because the black Americans are living a different drama. In the Unites States the black man fights and is fought against” (196). Fanon’s ‘slave’ subject is itself split; the ‘black Frenchman’ and ‘black Americans’ are differently interpolated after colonialism, and Fanon characterizes segregation in the United States as notably different from the experience of French colonies that are granted ‘freedom’ of recognition (as with Martinique, declared an overseas department of France in 1947). Still, he contends neither gestures from above nor struggles from below guarantee black subjects’ reciprocal recognition. The black Frenchman, largely precluded from entering into dialectical struggles, internalizes the struggle between master and slave. American blacks, though engaged in outward struggle, are likewise caught affirming existing values and hierarchies, leading to Fanon’s emphasis on reciprocity’s absence as the factor that distinguishes between Hegel’s theories and liminally post-colonial realities.

are repeatedly unable to recognize themselves or one another. Escaping her father's incestuous attacks, the Venezuelan-born Cordelia Rojas unknowingly returns to her native Trinidad where she fails to recognize one cousin, Sones (111), only to marry another (114). The violent and possessive badjohn-cum-Pentecostal revivalist Carlyle Childs, AKA Priest, tests his family's boundaries (141) only to have his own personal boundaries upended upon discovering his doppelgänger in a Florida INS detention camp: "Priest's science at work, to double himself and pretend he was someone else. The boy...had the same face and body only he was darker, his face smoother, and his eyes were not yet secretive" (163). This double is another cousin, Adrian Dovett, who traffics drugs to sustain his own addictions. His travels from Curaçao to Florida, New York to Amsterdam, exemplify globalization's dissolution of national *and* racial borders, though Brand hardly celebrates these transgressions: in Amsterdam, Adrien reflects he "[c]ouldn't tell who was a brother or somebody from Turkey, somebody from Surinam, all the fucking same" (176). While dying of withdrawal in Dam Square, Adrien thinks of his grandfather who was immolated in a well blowout on a Shell oilfield, and his father who was murdered by Shell's anti-union goons; his narrative links Dutch colonialism in the South Caribbean with Royal Dutch Shell's ongoing endangerment of Caribbean workers. Whether exploited to service colonial or transnational capital, the consequences differ little for the Dovett branch of Marie Ursule's family.

*At the Full* builds on Fanon's anti-colonial critiques of recognition by exploring recognition in post-national world systems. Transnational mobility proves neither freeing nor equalizing for this novel's characters. Maya, Adrian's sister, is expected to "become like her mother, 'patient,' and in service" (217) and is sent to study nursing in the Netherlands. Once there, she instead chooses to work a window in Amsterdam's red-light district. Like Cordelia and Bola before her, Maya's chapter emphasizes women's self-recognition through sexuality: "Maya followed the phases of her body, not following them at all but being surprised and recognizing them only after they had arrived or left"

(221). Her window and her sexuality become complex sites of agency and exploitation: both empower her self-recognition; both are compromised by European men's possessive commodification of Black women's bodies. Maya escapes her pimp's violence by marrying a man who "walked her like an exotic, showed her like spun silk from another country.... a man who crossed boundaries and therefore a man who was dangerous" (211). Throughout, Maya debates the inevitability of her commoditization: "Had she been heading for this long before she arrived? Was it laid down...? She had never wanted to be weighed down by anything, especially not a child or for that matter a Flemish man" (224-5).

Eula, Carlyle's sister, is the focus of "Blue Airmail Letter," an epistolary chapter addressed to their dead and illiterate mother. This doubly futile letter home provides a first-person account of Eula's prodigal life in Toronto and focuses on her struggles with the imposed intersubjectivity of motherhood: "I always prided myself, Mama, on being self contained. I could hold all of me in my own hands. My one failing in this was to get pregnant" (249). Anticipating Brand's later *What We All Long For*, this dense narrative concludes by reflecting on Eula's decision to send her daughter, named Bola for her great-great-grandmother, from Canada to Trinidad: "I sent her to the past, to be with you" (247).

*At the Full's* penultimate chapter is narrated by this Bola, a child unable to distinguish time or the boundaries between living and dead, past and present. Bola mourns the grandmother she believes is her mother and is presumed insane for communing with her ghost: "Was our mother someone to be forgotten and abandoned just so, just because she had died?" (271). Like Sones, this Bola grows into a reclusive and isolated adult who, amidst her nightly pilgrimages to Terre Bouillante's cemetery, loses her ability to recognize herself: "when I passed in front of the gasoline station I saw my face in the glass case and it was old. It looked older than who I was and I could not recognize it properly" (274). After emancipation, decolonization, transnational migration, and

diasporic returns, Marie Ursule's descendants live amidst the cumulative inequalities of their nonrecognition. These inequalities internalize—or, to use Fanon's term, 'epidermalize' (*Black Skin* 92)—for each of the novel's characters who cannot secure recognition amid their global displacements.

#### MULTICULTURAL AND POSTSTRUCTURAL BRANCHES: RECOGNITION'S DEMATERIALIZATION

*Philosophy of Right* hypothesized the nation-state would provide reciprocal recognition its basis; the 1990s, an era defined by the abrogation of *Philosophy's* thesis, fostered multiple theories of recognition, including Charles Taylor's Canadian-oriented "The Politics of Recognition" (1994) as well as Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition: The Grammar of Social Conflicts* (1995) and "Recognition and Moral Obligation" (1997). Neither critique the nation-states' monopoly over recognition. Instead, their theories of multicultural recognition overlook Fanon's argument that recognition is non-reciprocal for colonized and racialized peoples. While Taylor grants that "[n]onrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (25), he uses this harm to justify an abstract and dematerialized theory of multicultural recognition: "there are substantial numbers of people who are citizens and also belong to the culture that calls into question our philosophical boundaries. The challenge is to deal with their sense of marginalization without compromising our basic political principles" (63). As Oliver points out, Taylor presumes a position of social dominance and treats "[r]ecognition... [like] a type of market exchange: we give recognition in exchange for something of value to us" (Oliver 45).

Honneth alternatively relies on the triumvirate model Hegel develops in *Philosophy* to argue subjectivity is never fully secured, only mediated through perpetual encounters with (mis)recognition: "it is only due to the cumulative acquisition of basic self-confidence, of self-respect, and of self-esteem... that a person can come to see himself or herself, unconditionally, as

both an autonomous and an individuated being and to identify with his or her goals and desires” (*The Struggle* 169). Teleologic and possessive, Honneth’s subject invests in the ‘cumulative acquisitions’ of autonomy and individuality, caught amid paradoxical desires to establish autonomy through dialogic relations.

These theories epitomize what Coulthard labels “the liberal politics of recognition” (23). Instead of troubling the *desire* for recognition, Taylor and Honneth entrench this desire as normative and, accordingly, leave their subjects eternally “[struggling] to deny their dependence on others” (Oliver 5). Each fail “to significantly modify, let alone transcend” (Coulthard 31) colonial domination’s systemic hierarchies. That said, I see one important difference embedded in these theoretical evolutions, a difference reproduced in *At The Full’s* representations of recognition: Taylor and Honneth disassociate recognition from private property. Brand’s description of post-national subject formation similarly dismiss physical land as recognition’s basis.

It helps to return briefly to *Philosophy’s* argument that *the* reason individuals, families, businesses desire recognition—as made possible through formal belonging in the nation-state—is that recognition secures individuals’ relative possessions:

The real beginning and original foundation of states has been rightly ascribed to the introduction of *agriculture* along with *marriage*, because the principle of agriculture brings with it the formation of the land and in consequence exclusively private property; the nomadic life of savages, who seek their livelihood from place to place, it brings back to the tranquility of private rights and the assured satisfaction of their needs... sexual love is restricted to marriage, and this bond in turn grows into an enduring union, inherently universal, while needs expand into care for family, and personal possessions into family good. Security, consolidation, lasting satisfaction of needs... are nothing but forms of universality, modes in which rationality, the final end and aim, asserts itself in these spheres. (§203)

Hegelian subjects are bound to nation-states by their common will for property, including land; land is only secured through patriarcalized labour. Hegel’s national communities are modeled on the same territorial appropriations that underwrite settler-colonial subjectivity. Private property bears

significant weight in *Philosophy of Right's* justification of national citizenship. It is surprising, then, that neither Honneth nor Taylor emphasize land or property in their respective discussions or recognition.<sup>34</sup> Taylor instead argues that the recognition-seeking subject is defined by (dematerialized) cultural identity: “we give due acknowledgement only to what is universally present—everyone has an identity—through recognizing what is peculiar to each” (39). Honneth substitutes private property with supposedly universal desires for love and regard: “The moral quality of social relations cannot be measured solely in terms of the fair or just distribution of material goods; rather, our notion of justice is also very closely linked to how, and as what, subjects mutually recognize in each other” (“Recognition and Moral Obligation” 17). While Hegel understood freedom as the social recognition of the subject’s *private property*, Honneth and Taylor alternatively understand freedom as the social recognition of the subject’s *cultural identity*, the dematerialized property of the self.

Distancing recognition from property and overlooking material inequality signals recognition theory’s reorientation away from material anchors. Although the field’s shift towards abstract regard may have made mid-1990s discussions of recognition appear equalizing, particularly in comparison to Enlightenment theories that recognize *the propertied subject* and their rights to property but not the *subject-as-property* and their rights to freedom, neither Taylor nor Honneth reconceive of possessive individualism so much as they entrench autonomy as the normative basis of subjecthood. As

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<sup>34</sup> *Philosophy of Right* contends individuals surpass struggles to the death and experience genuinely reciprocal recognition, “recognition of the other as a being with needs” (Chitty 691) only when embedded in the social structure of the nation-state. As Chitty elaborates, “Hegel goes on to develop forms of right that involve obligations to attend to the needs of members of one’s family (PR §171), one’s corporation (PR §252–5), and civil society as a whole (PR §230, §238–42), so that the recognition of the other as a person and property owner is supplemented here by another kind of recognition: recognition of the other as a being with needs” (691). This evolution in Hegel’s thinking about recognition allows for intersubjectivity, a possibility predicated on the possessive individual’s (supposedly universal) desire for private property. Hegel understands the desire for private property as a common goal and *the* basis of familial, corporate, and civil obligations: “At a deep level the role of property and contract for Hegel is thus to overcome ‘ontological estrangement’, at once that between subjects and objects and that between subjects and other subjects” (Chitty 691). In short, material possessions—and their need for protection—give Hegel’s reciprocal commons its communal basis.



‘recognition’ is decoupled from land, ‘culture’ and ‘love’ become more or less fungible currencies exchanged between more or less fungible subjects.<sup>35</sup>

Rejecting such divisions, anti-colonial, feminist, and Marxist thinkers including Nancy Fraser, Himani Bannerji, and Brenna Bhandar have all troubled recognition’s re-branding as an economy of cultural regard. Although she arguably reproduces the same top-down models of recognition as Taylor and Honneth (Oliver 50), Fraser contends that (non)recognition is inseparable from material inequality: “some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them” (29). Materialist counterarguments inform Bannerji’s *The Dark Side of the Nation*, which contends multicultural discourse willfully ignores territory’s role in determining who is—and is not—recognized in Canada: “The issue at stake, in the end, is felt by all sides to be much more than cultural. It is felt to be about the power to define what is Canada or Canadian culture. This power can only come through the actual possession of a geographical territory and the economy of a nation-state” (105). Nation-states’ ability to withhold recognition from racialized subjects result, Bannerji reasons, from the state’s possession of land: “Immigrant demands were not then, or even now, primarily cultural, nor was multiculturalism initially their formulation of the solution to their problems. It began as a state or an official/institutional discourse, and it involved the translation of issues of social and economic injustice into issues of culture” (44). While Bhandar’s geographic scope is more expansive than Bannerji’s, she similarly contends citizenship exists as an *exclusive*—and excluding—political

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<sup>35</sup> This correction returns my thinking to the dialectic’s central ambiguity: it remains contested whether *Phenomenology*’s Master and Slave should be understood literally as a struggle between individuals or allegorically, as understood in Lacanian and psychoanalytic readings. Buck-Morss contends that while Hegel’s reflections on recognition becomes increasingly allegorical over the span of his works (fn. 126 on 864), the Master-Slave dialectic’s inception alongside the Haitian Revolution necessitates a more literal interpretation.

subjectivity insofar as race, ethnicity, ability, and gender overdetermine who counts as a recognizable subject: “The dialectic of recognition is firmly embedded in a nineteenth century, modern conceptualization of the subject and property relations; and, despite the fact that ‘we have never been modern’, a compulsive force of the dialectic of recognition continually sets the scene for the realisation of this subject” (236). Fraser, Bannerji, and Bhandar suggest that existing limitations of who counts as a recognizable subject, whether overt or subtle, originate in Enlightenment understandings of land and its possession.

Tracing these theoretical (d)evolutions shows how dialectical recognition’s central debt-based contradiction—that freedom arises from a subject’s awareness of their obligations to others—troubles contemporary theories of recognition. Uncertainty over these subject-defining debts muddies the most critical analyses of dialectical subjectivity, including Judith Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power* wherein recognition constitutes subjectivity’s possibility: “It is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that one is dependent on power for one’s very formulation, that that formation is impossible without dependency” (61). Here, struggles for recognition are not an intermediary stage that individuals can surpass, but *the* condition of subjectivity. Endless struggles warp what *The Psychic Life* characterizes as an ideally autonomous subject: “The double aspect of subjection appears to lead to a vicious circle: the agency of the subject appears to be an effect of its subordination” (12). Butler is less clear why dependency is an abject state that “builds oppression and abuse into the foundation of subjectivity” (Oliver 62). Where does the viciousness of this circle originate?

Despite describing how subjectification’s mechanics are internalized, Butler’s theory is unsteadied by questions of debt and obligation: “The ‘I’ emerges upon the condition that it deny its formation in dependency, the conditions of its own possibility” (9-10). Butler does not distinguish between normative and extraordinary forms of oppression but, like Honneth, presents oppression as

normative: “[i]f ‘subordination,’ ‘pain,’ ‘trauma,’ ‘subjugation,’ ‘subjection,’ ‘vulnerability,’ ‘susceptibility,’ ‘violence,’ and so forth are all part of the normal and normalizing process of becoming a subject, then how can we distinguish between becoming a subject and being oppressed, abused, or tortured?” (Oliver 65). Like Hegel, Butler presumes that subjects’ dependencies on others are inherently oppressive, the opposite of freedom.

Characterizing *The Psychic Life of Power* as conservatively Hegelian (62), Oliver describes Butler as lamenting the loss of a self-possessed subject that cannot exist—and has never existed—within dialectical models of subjectivity:

Butler’s talk of ownership, and the alienation that comes from being in a world not of one’s own making, presupposes the very self-possessed sovereign notion of subjectivity she argues against.... If the subject is inherently dependent on others, the world, and a language not of its own making, *isn’t it the illusion of autonomy itself and not the facts of dependency that produces alienation?* And if the illusion itself does violence to the fundamental experience of dependency, then isn’t it possible that exorcizing the illusion of self-possession and embracing dependency can abate the violence suffered by the subject in its continual coming to be? (67-8; emphasis added)

Enlightenment philosophy’s possessive individual and its frustrated desire to be free from obligations to others, to society, to global systems of exchange, to the physical planet and its limited resources lingers in poststructuralist critique as well as diasporic and post-national studies. We need an alternative to theories of subjectivity that revile dependency, one wherein mutual obligation—not an impossible return to some non-existent autonomy—are understood as the normative basis of subject formation.<sup>36</sup>

### RECOGNIZING DISPOSSESSION

The fusion of recognition, obligation, and nation—as a social body *and* a physical territory—informs liberal democratic theories of subjectivity. It is somewhat unsurprising that theories predicated on land-as-private-property accept land’s—and recognition’s—maldistribution. They are

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<sup>36</sup> At *The Psychic Life of Power*’s conclusion, Butler concedes that “[s]urvival is a matter of avowing the trace of loss that inaugurates one’s own self....Indeed, by forfeiting that notion of autonomy survival becomes possible” (195).

likewise ill-equipped to interrupt systems that disproportionately dispossess certain subjects by withholding recognition. Rather than interrogating mutual recognition's possessive basis, the mid-1990s theories of liberal recognition fostered a begrudging tolerance comfortable with equivocation and derailed by intersectionality. By flattening all differences into rough equivalencies—everyone is different, no one especially so—liberal theories of recognition leave difference to be assessed, embraced, or rejected on abstract merits. More concretely, these theories of recognition display a fundamental uncertainty over how to value *independence*, *dependence*, and *interdependence* relative to one another.

*At the Full and Change of the Moon* is not preoccupied with normative liberal subjectivity, and Brand refuses to justify her characters' struggles for recognition as an early stage within liberal democracies' teleological march towards equality, focusing instead on dialectical recognition's repeated foreclosures and mitigated possibilities for racialized diasporic peoples. Neither Brand nor this novel's characters occupy normative positions. Instead, their always already non-normativity renders racialized subjects, in Fanon's words, "overdetermined from the outside" (95). Marie Ursule's death arguably frees her from de Lambert, but this 'freedom' cannot not be uncritically celebrated insofar as her family remains caught in systems of unchecked inequality that feed ongoing, cyclical, and pathological struggles for recognition. This is the tragic realization Marie Ursule has upon hanging: "What [she] is leaving she knows she cannot put into a face. Perhaps she can leave it in bones or gestures muscular with dispossession.... The lives of her great-great-grandchildren, their lives would spill all over floors and glass cases and the verandas and the streets in the new world coming" (20). Marie Ursule's legacy, something that 'cannot [be] put into a face,' contained in a museum, domesticated within the private sphere of the home, or contained in the public spaces of the nation, is a legacy of dispossession and misrecognition.

With this line, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* presents the first articulation of Brand's own

theory of subjectivity. This alternative re-emerges at the novel's conclusion. In an otherwise temporally-linear text, *At the Full's* final chapter returns to post-emancipation, pre-independence Trinidad. Rather than suggesting Marie Ursule's descendants' rootlessness and historical losses are the cause of their misrecognitions or epidermalizations, Brand offers a final admonition against economies of recognition fueled by possessive individualism. The novel closes with Bola, Marie Ursule's only surviving child, as she scolds her own children for their possessive desires for patrilineal origins:

Whenever she would take a lover they would skip around him in excitement saying, 'Is he mine, Mama? Is he mine?'

'Yours is the one who smell sweet and give me the palsy.... yours is the one who' skin like gold, yours is the one who wouldn't leave me alone...just like you. No one is anyone's. How much time I must tell you?' (289; ellipsis original)

The possessive individualism embedded in Enlightenment philosophies of recognition, fed on the Middle Passage and Indigenous genocide, is not a viable option for Brand's Afro-diasporic characters. Through Marie Ursule and Bola, Brand proposes a novel theory of recognition, one predicated on dispossession rather than possessive individualism.

Brand's turn to dispossession is a viable Afro-pessimist alternative to possessive individualism. In imagining subjectivity as distinct from land, Brand asks what it means to recognize the materially, socially, and culturally dispossessed given that recognition is so deeply entangled in anti-Black notions of subjectivity. Over my next two chapters, I contend that resistant theories of dispossession-based recognition are not necessarily a solution for the ongoing nonrecognition of formerly colonized subjects: dispossession can both offer Afro-pessimist understandings of subjectivity their basis and be unviable for Indigenous scholars for whom subjectivity and land are inseparable.

Brand continues to meditate on racialized subjects' struggles for recognition by asking whether recognition can be theorized in opposition to the Enlightenment and nation-state's

possessive traditions. *A Map to the Door of No Return*, *Inventory*, and *What We All Long For* explore dispossession as an alternative basis of recognition. Oliver argues that “if we start from the assumption that relations are essentially antagonistic struggles for recognition, then it is no wonder that contemporary theorists spend so much energy trying to imagine how these struggles can lead to compassionate personal relations, ethical social relations, or democratic political relations” (4). In *What We All Long For* and *Inventory*, Brand’s dispossessed subjects attempt to imagine a dialectical subject who is free from the impositions of others, past and present, local and global; these characters, however, have little success. As chapters three and four contend, the desire for relations delimited by dispossession is politically necessary amid a climate of anti-Black violence, but this necessity also severs Black subjects from their immediate communities. Imagining dispossession as the basis of subjectivity resists citizenship as a discourse of legibility. It also ironically reproduces Enlightenment thought’s possessive understandings of land, subjectivity, and relationality.

CHAPTER THREE  
SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY: BRANDING CANADIAN DIASPORA STUDIES

[C]olonialism is an active organizing system. It's alive all the time, continually making and remaking itself through its apparatus of governance. In a sense, it is at work daily through the most mundane exchanges. People say or hear "colonialism," and they think that was in a certain period of a certain system, but they don't see it as an ongoing act.

---Dionne Brand in conversation with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

As a formal expression of recognition, citizenship *should* guarantee rights and freedoms between individuals and the nation-states they occupy, yet as I argue in chapter two, Brand's works assert that citizenship does not guarantee racialized diasporic subjects' mutual recognition or reciprocal obligations. Despite transitioning through colonial, postcolonial, and transnational iterations, the nation-state is neither a source of liberation nor a condition of mutual recognition for *At the Full and Change of the Moon's* characters. Marie Ursule's descendants never anchor to any state and formal citizenship—not itself a given for these characters—does not guarantee their mutual recognition. These claims could be an endpoint rather than a starting position, but between Brand's works and their critical reception, a new subject of recognition and a new post-national claim to subjectivity is beginning to emerge, one that explicitly recognizes those dispossessed by European colonialism. It even has its proper subject—the dispossessed, racialized, non-recognized individual—for whom the territorial and proprietorial nation-state is not the radix of subjecthood.

Like *At the Full*, Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001), *What We All Long For* (2005), and *Inventory* (2006) reiterate that recognition is only extended to those whose race, gender, and class secure their participation in Eurocentric nation-states' possessive traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond showing recognition's continued limits, these works press on *At the Full's* central impasse: while masters and bondsmen may never recognize one another, not even as the citizens of post-

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<sup>1</sup> I consider these works—one autobiographic, one poetic, and one fictional—in concert not only because recognition recurs as a thematic issue across all three or because the existing scholarship uses these formally differentiated texts to discuss Brand's post-national ethics, though both claims are true. More importantly, Brand's works repeatedly reference one another, suggesting a literary interdependence that crosses generic boundaries and has yet to be formally studied. This chapter lays groundwork for these future studies.

colonial nation-states, Brand is more interested in how those dispossessed of their proper subjectivity come to *recognize themselves* and *one another* in the colonial aftermath.

Travelling peripatetically through the facts and fictions that dislocate Brand and other Black subjects from national belonging, *Map* troubles the nation-state as a legitimate—or legitimizing—source of recognition. The Door of No Return, Brand’s metaphorical name for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, encompasses every physical and psychic dislocation that sever land from identity for Afro-diasporic subjects like herself. Mourning these losses, “our grief remains unassuageable at a profound level. No seeing can truly verify the door, no real place can actualize the lost place. Not in any personal sense” (26). She outlines the colonial dispossessions that inform her uneasy relationship with national identity: “[s]ome of us in the Diaspora long so for nation—some continuous thread of biological or communal association, some bloodline or legacy that will cement *our rights to the place we live*. The problem of course is even if those existed...they do not guarantee *nation* for Blacks in the Diaspora” (*Map* 67; emphasis added).<sup>2</sup>

Despite these limits, Brand does not abandon dialectical recognition or its community-forming possibilities, a hope she shares with Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks* describes Fanon’s transition away from desiring the recognition of a withholding colonial master-culture, culminating in his call for Black subjects’ *self-recognition*: “I made up my mind since it was impossible to rid myself of an *innate complex* to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known” (95). Working to recuperate recognition from “the pathology of oppression and domination” (Oliver 23), Fanon reclaims the *autonomous self*, the self-determining self, who does not accept ready-made national identities or allow nation-states

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<sup>2</sup> Although national communities prove compromised and compromising throughout Brand’s works, no singular, encompassing, self-recognizing diasporic community exists in her texts either. She *both* disavows the colonial mentality that sees traditional nation-states as ‘recognizing’ certain subjects while dismissing ‘Others’ *and* exposes diasporic communities’ essentializing tendencies. Diasporas are not inherently politicized or progressive social bodies willing to embrace Brand’s own anti-national, queer, and anti-capitalist politics. Instead, her works suggests that layers of dispossession and dislocation splinter racialized diasporic subjects into a number of competing identifications and nurture a myriad of not-inherently harmonious identities.



to define Black subjects from without. In his referential *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glen Coulthard emphasizes this reformatory principle, Fanon's challenge for colonized peoples to "transcend the fantasy that the settler-state apparatus—a structure of domination *predicated* on ongoing dispossession—is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects" (23).<sup>3</sup>

Lost and luggage-less in Amsterdam, Brand describes encountering two people who come to inspire characters in *At the Full*: "My character Maya stares at me impatiently, waiting for me to *recognize* her.... This window and this woman, the one sitting so casually, find their way into the novel" (*Map* 210; emphasis added). Adrien is based on a man she watches in Dam Square, a man "cold from something missing in his veins.... That is Kamena's boy, the boy lost to directions" (*Map* 211). What is it, then, that Brand recognizes in these two? What does the woman who inspires Maya expect Brand to recognize in her? Race is a primary point of connection that leads Brand to remark on these particular people, "Oh, of course there are Black people here, Curacao, Surinam, the Dutch West Indies" (210). What additionally connects Brand to these two is her missing luggage. Though slight, this loss and her resulting digression through Amsterdam's red-light district remind Brand of the Middle Passage and the natal dispossessions that permanently unsettle Blackness: "to be without luggage. I wonder if this is how they felt in that other century, no familiar thing which would suggest that you decided to travel, you have a destination, a place where you will land and open your suitcase and put your things away and then go outside and see what is there. You will be a traveler.... You will expect *recognition* and interest, even fellowship" (208-9; emphasis added).

A nascent theory of subjectivity emerges in passages like these: travellers' movements denote agency and their possessions assert their claims to subjecthood; however, the Black diaspora's

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<sup>3</sup> Coulthard's *Red Skins, White Masks* draws on Fanon's work to offer an anti-colonial examination *settler* colonialism. This framing may be misleading: Martinique and Algeria, the focus on Fanon's work, are understood and discussed throughout *Black Skin* and *The Wretched of the Earth* as plantation colonies rather than settler colonies; Coulthard's emphasis on land is largely absent in Fanon for this reason. This lack of differentiation is a potential issue with his use of Fanon: it glosses the differences between plantation and settler colonies that mark an incommensurability between Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous scholarship, the focus of the following chapter.

layered dispossessions prevent its members from exerting similar claims to subjectivity via possessions. Fanon, Coulthard, and Brand each investigate how those dispossessed by colonial history come to recognize themselves. My interest is in the leap all three make from self-recognizing *individuals* to self-recognizing *communities*. Fanon's call 'to make myself known' is simultaneously individual and relational, evidence, Bhandar contends, that he "did not abandon his belief in the dialectic of recognition as a (or the) means for the individual to enact his desires for new, inventive self-creation, always in relation with others" (238). Importantly, this resistant self-recognizing community's limits are not immediately obvious: how far does the 'self' in 'self-recognition' extend beyond the Black individual for Fanon? How are relationality's limits more broadly determined in the colonial aftermath and its diasporic remediations?

Like Fanon, Brand believes in the self- and community defining powers of dialectical recognition, but *Map* suggests her sense of community—of who can recognize whom—is more capacious than Fanon's. Discussing miscegenation and gender in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Rey Chow observes that Fanon distinguishes between self and other along not only racial but gendered lines: "for the black man, selfhood and communal relations are entirely intertwined with skin color and race" (37). Brand's *Map, Inventory*, and *What We All Long For* alternatively contend that Black, otherwise racialized minorities, and Indigenous subjects can recognize one another and form communities across lines of racial, ethnic, sexual, linguistic, and even temporal difference *through* their common dispossessions.

Brand populates her writing with characters "[r]uptured from a past by a brutal history of colonization" who are "homeless and in exile, inhabiting an in-between space of 'not nowhere and is'" (Saul 60), identifying with those who have impermanent and distinctly non-possessive relations with the places they live, those who "inhabit temporariness" (*Map* 203). *Map*'s "Man from the Oldest City in the World" builds on her Amsterdam encounters with recognition and shows

dispossessed subjects recognizing one another across lines of diasporic difference. This fragmented meditation on community twines reflections on Pablo Neruda's poetic inner circle, Toronto's homeless population, youth being arraigned at the city's municipal court, a teenaged mother visiting her boyfriend imprisoned for "possession" (107), and the ghettoization of immigrant communities at Lawrence and Bathurst, Kipling and Dixon (street names that speak to Canada's colonial conquest and territorial dispossessions).

What sparks these miscellaneous reflections on self-recognizing communities is chance encounter with mutual recognition: while running late for a reading at the CBC, "from which the national culture emanates... incessant, repetitive European classical music, deracinated jazz tucked away at night, waxy talk so careful, so nervous" (98-9), Brand almost ignores an Ethiopian parking attendant. He stops her, despite her rush, with a joke: "Look, I come from one of the oldest cities in the world. The oldest civilization. They build a parking lot and they think that it is a civilization" (102). Unlike Brand who "[does] not come from any old city" (109), the Ethiopian attendant is connected to his origins in ways she has lost through the Door of No Return; "but for a moment," Brand writes, "I recognize the attendant's 'they.' It is a grim laughter we share" (109-10). Here, mutual recognition across lines of diasporic difference result from the non-recognition they share as Black subjects in Canada. The passage concludes with Brand calling Toronto "this parking lot of a civilization" (107) and declaring herself "*the* citizen of the parking lot" (110; emphasis added), an oddly individuating claim to a community demarcated by impermanence, displacement, and dispossession.

*Map*'s later "Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora" (213-18) further details how mutual recognition arises for diasporic and post-national communities through shared dispossessions. The directions *Map* charts in its ruttier, a poetic form used by sailors to determine direction at sea, lead to

a community of those who “disinherit answers. They owe, own nothing” (213).<sup>6</sup> Described as “tenants of nothing jointly.... [who rent] rooms that disappear.... These people are un-people, de-people.... They disinhabit unvisited walls.... shake with dispossession and bargain, then change their minds.... They are bony with hope, muscular with grief possession” (213-6). Brand’s ruttier describes dispossession as a basis for mutual recognition by unbraiding ‘maroon’ as verb, noun, and adjective: those marooned in the diaspora are dispossessed of their past and their traditional territory *and* they unrecognized where they have landed on account of their immediate communities’ racism. Being marooned is a communal state of resistance predicated on racism-as-non-recognition and every dispossession it entails.

Throughout *Map*, Brand imagines communities bound in resistant solidarity against the histories of dispossession that render subjectivity an exclusive quality. Her dispossessed subjects manifest a resistant alternative to theories of recognition that predicated on possessive individualism and national citizenship. Reorienting subjectivity around dispossessions rather than possessions seems a resistant and hopeful attempt to reclaim recognition from its racial, gendered, and propertied limits. Like all communities, then, Brand’s are defined by their inclusions as well as their limits. Whereas for Hegelian subjects “recognition of each other amounts to no more than a recognition of each other as property owners” (Chitty 689), and Fanon’s concept of community is anchored to race and gender distinctions, Brand recognizes common lacks—such as a lack of recognition born of a lack of possessions—in others. “I am adrift, spilled out, with Adrian and Maya at the end of this century in any city all over the world,” she reflects, “[w]e are all abandoned, all scattered in Marie Ursule’s hopelessness and her skill” (211).<sup>7</sup> While gesturing to the global community Brand recognizes as her own, this line evokes Marie Ursule’s “own theory, *the theory of*

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<sup>6</sup> The ruttier’s reflections on possession and dispossession are routed through Burnt River. Brand writes that “The novel begins because I am sitting in a two-story pine house in the middle of winter...and by this time I have no other skill so I begin to write” (*Map* 212).

<sup>7</sup> Cheryl Harris’ “Whiteness as Property” establishes the legal basis for perceiving whiteness as a material possession.

nothing” (*Map* 208; emphasis added) from *At the Full and Change of the Moon* where common dispossessions are the basis of mutual recognition and *interdependence*.<sup>8</sup> This means that by presenting dispossession as the basis of diasporic and post-national community, Brand ironically re-asserts autonomy, independence, and individual sovereignty as determinants of the dispossessed’s subjectivity.

I model this argument on Chow’s analysis of Fanon’s anti-colonial communities, where “race, in spite of the fact that it is imagined at the revolutionary moment as the utopian communion among people who suffer the same discrimination, nonetheless does not escape the problems structural to all processes of admittance” (38).<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on anti-colonial philosophy’s lasting uncertainty about resistant community’s limits, Chow elaborates that

admittance (into a group) by necessity implies exclusion. What and who must be excluded and why? This fundamental law about community formation is further exacerbated by the postcolonial situation, in which utopian vision and political reality do not exactly correspond. Even though the passionate imagining of a national community must, in theory, oppose the segregational assumptions inherent in colonialism, the practical implication of the postcolonial nation as such cannot but mark new boundaries and reinforce new exclusions. (48)

Chow addresses postcolonial nationalism, but similar questions of admittance trouble diaspora studies’ at-times utopian discussions of trans- and post-national community, particularly when questions of Indigenous landclaims enter consideration.

If recognition is obligation and debt and obligation define community, as I argue in the previous chapter, then our community is those we are indebted to. Those we are not indebted to, those who are not indebted to us, are not our community. *Map*’s ruttier claims those marooned in

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Ursule’s theory of nothing anchors Brand’s representations of dialectic subjectivity. *Inventory* references this theory of nothing when the poem’s narrator reflects on colonial violence’s transnational repetitions: “That’s not a revolution you want, ever, to win, / the theory of nothing, theories of nothing in return” (48). Brand self-referentially attributes her dispossessed subjects’ ethical a-territoriality and directionless-ness that allow individuals’ and communities’ identifications emerge from multiple dispossessions rather than possessions.

<sup>9</sup> Chow adds that race is necessary but not sufficient for Fanon to grant admission to Black women to his revolutionary anti-colonial community: “In an account of black subjecthood that is premised on the irreducible (racial) differences between black and white people, thus, Fanon’s description of the women of color are paradoxically marked by their non-differentiation, their projection (onto femininity) of qualities of indistinguishability and universality” (39).

diaspora “owe, own nothing” (213), a crucial line that imbues dispossession with an unspecified ethical value Brand’s characters use to differentiate between their dispossessed communities and the possessive others they repudiate. The ruttier’s segregational assumptions are born of race-based dispossessions. Reciprocal recognition and interdependence are possible in Brand’s works and arise between those dispossessed by Afro-diasporic dislocations. Using dispossession to mark community’s limits additionally asserts Afro-diasporic subjects’ freedom from communities—and obligations—imposed from without. Brand’s dispossessed subjects assert their *in*dependence and eschew their *inter*dependencies, the same tendency that unsteadies Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and theories of recognition that respond to it; however, they do so in response to histories of race-based violence.<sup>10</sup> Who, then, are Brand’s dispossessed characters indebted to? What obligations (if any) do these characters have to the communities they exceed? Can they owe or be owed? Over the span of this chapter, I address these questions on a disciplinary level and ask how diasporic critique approaches obligation in its discussions of community.

#### FRAGMENTAL CITIZENS VERSUS THE NATION-STATE: DIASPORA STUDIES’ AUTONOMY PROBLEM

Repeated encounters with non-recognition fuel Brand’s skepticism about the psychic sublimations that turn diasporic loss into national sentiments. At worst, such sublimations require Caribbean subjects to forget, disavow, or ‘get over’ the Middle Passage’s losses (42). At best, nation-states’ racially exclusive identities prove ill-fitting and fray under critical scrutiny: “I know many nationalists along this journey.... There are flags and anthems, even a real love for each place—the ways and objects and events which collect into nations. But the Door of No Return opens all nationalisms to their imaginative void” (49). As Brand’s characters struggle to eschew national identities that exclude and contort, literary scholarship has responded (somewhat incongruously) by creating a profusion of new citizenships—diasporic citizens (Cho), global or urban citizens

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power* which she revises in *Precarious Life*.

(Dobson), affective citizens (Brydon), cosmopolitan citizens (Johansen)—in which to collect them. I think of these critical categories as fractal citizenships. Each is inspired by a common question: how should literary scholarship *recognize* the border-crossing individuals and communities that trouble traditional citizenship's categorical rationale?

National boundaries, cultures, and economies are fluctuating in ways Eurocentric theories of subjectivity could not anticipate, boosting the appeal of literary criticism's fractal citizenships: "practices of property ownership and what constitutes property itself, along with prevailing understandings of human subjectivity, have [also] undergone radical changes since the nineteenth century" (Bhandar 236). Despite these changes, Bhandar warns that "the cunning of recognition lies in its ability to circumvent these shifting conditions, to retain its allegiance to a particular (ghostly) subject... to offer up a concept of legal rights that binds emergent subjectivities to the old tombstones of the triumvirate: culture, nation, land" (236). Similarly skeptical about the "shimmering possibilities" attributed to all things diasporic, Cho offers 'diasporic citizenship' as a reminder that 'diaspora' is not simply a "new 'container' for citizenship" and that 'the citizen' is not an ethical catchall ("D.C.: Contradictions and Possibilities" 101). As a critical concept, Cho's 'diasporic citizenship' interrogates the "unfitness" of the term's component parts: "'Diaspora' and 'citizenship' do not fit easily together.... This uneasiness and dissonance could be very productive for thinking through the differential histories of dislocation in Canadian literature" ("D.C.: Contradictions and Possibilities" 101). Like Cho and Bhandar, I see the colonial, patriarchal, and possessive histories that tether subjectivity to citizenship via discourses of recognition. I also see why citizenship continues to function as a discourse of social intelligibility: the citizen, for all its faults and limits, is a *recognizable* and *relational* subject.

Through its fractal citizenships, diasporic critique is interrogating how individuals relate to national communities whose boundaries are always in flux. However, these fractal citizenships begin

to falter as critical concepts when they prove uncritical of their operative assumptions concerning diasporic autonomy and resistance. Readings that tease apart national community's contradictions through Brand's works often do so by using the diasporic subject as an ethical foil for the static, rooted, and depoliticized citizen. Joanne Saul writes that Brand's first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), offers "a potentially new way of envisioning citizenry, both national and global, within a world order dominated by the expansion of global capital" (60), a reading that redeems citizenship by divorcing it from the moral compromises of the nation-state.<sup>11</sup> For Marlene Goldman, Brand develops a "politics and aesthetics of drifting" as "an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state" (13). In turn, Brand's drifting style parries the nation-state's moral weaknesses: "by emphasizing drifting [Brand] underscores the inadequacies of the nation-state, particularly in its responses to demands for social justice in a global era and in its long-standing practices of exclusion" (Goldman 13). Here, diasporic drift begets *ethical* deterritorializations of national space. Contesting drift's non-agential connotations, Joseph focuses on the anti-national challenges posed by Brand's more active 'landings': "Each time that she 'lands' in yet another (post)colonial outpost, she does not simply become reinscribed within its regimes of power; rather, she maps ways of seeing and moving, of making sense of space, that exist in the midst of or despite the systems of power that govern social relations" (77). Whether passive or active, poetic or prosaic, fictional or autobiographical, Brand's works and their representational resistances are consistently characterized as 'ethical.' In each interpretation, Brand establishes autonomy and agency by resisting communities (and obligations) imposed from without.

As a field, diaspora studies is working to understand community formation in a transnational world order. It has dedicated much energy demonstrating that national belonging also secures material belongings. Introducing *Canadian Literature's* special issue on diasporic women's writing

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<sup>11</sup> Other than alluding to this possibility, Saul does not explain how such a divorce would be formalized.



(2008), Sneja Gunew describes communal non-belonging as a violent and predestined experience for Canada's racialized diasporic peoples who exist "in a permanent state of misrecognition in the mirror of the social, but simultaneously [function] as an enduring symbol for the nation-state because this misrecognition is, in a sense, inevitable" (10). Brand's works confirm this claim. Gunew offers a hopeful rejoinder to this inevitability by describing racial misrecognition as a site of structural resistance, "another way of formulating the instability that exists at the core of national cultures or any cultures aspiring to homogeneity" (10). Like Bhabha's description of mimicry, the misrecognition of racialized subjects in Canada demonstrates the incomplete and strategic nature of the nation's multicultural narratives. This instability, I want to add, is not unique to national communities, but troubles *any* community organized around totalizing experiences. This includes communities bound by diasporic dispossession and racialized non-recognition.

While Gunew presents community—whether national or diasporic—as resulting from the shared "ethnic, territorial, and spiritual properties of every one of its members" (3), Roberto Esposito alternatively traces the term to its etymological roots: "*munus*" he observes, "doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. It is a 'pledge' or a 'tribute' that one pays in an obligatory form. The *munus* is the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other" (5).<sup>12</sup> Communities form not only around shared desires, possessions, or belongings, but around common lacks, too: "*communitas* is the totality of persons united not by a 'property' but precisely by an obligation or a debt; not by an 'addition' [*più*] but by a 'subtraction' [*meno*]: by a lack, a limit that is configured as an onus" (Esposito 6). Rather than focusing on common belonging(s) as defining diasporic community, as Gunew and

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<sup>12</sup> Rey Chow uses the opposite definition of community in "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon": "community is linked to the articulation of commonality and consensus; a community is always based on a kind of collective inclusion. In the twentieth century, the paradigm of ideal community formation has been communism, which is the secular version of a holy communion with a larger Being who is always beyond but with whom man nonetheless seeks communication" (36). As Chow elaborates, this concept of common community is also delineated by implied and explicit limits: "there is no community formation without the implicit understanding of who is and who is not to be admitted" (36).

Chow do, I wonder how we might read Caribbean literature in Canada differently if Afro-diasporic and national communities were seen as “united by an ‘obligation,’ in the sense that we say ‘I owe *you* something,’ but not ‘you owe *me* something’” (Esposito 6).

This definition of community is threatening. Obligations to others make individuals “less than the masters of themselves, and that more precisely expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, their subjectivity” (Esposito 7). Communal obligations are an unwelcome reminder of *interdependency*’s inescapability. As Judith Butler proposes in *Precarious Life*, one reason imposed communities evoke critical discomfort is that possessive individualism has become central to contemporary calls for human rights. Appeals to autonomy, bodily integrity, and self-determination are increasingly essential to the rights-bearing subject:

It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy.... It is as true for all claims to be free from racist attacks, physical and verbal, as it is for feminism’s claim to reproductive freedom, and as it surely is for those whose bodies labor under duress, economic and political, under conditions of colonization and occupation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make these claims without recourse to autonomy. I am not suggesting that we cease to make these claims. We have to, we must. (25)

Although appeals to individual autonomy have become integral to anti-racist, anti-misogynistic, and anti-discriminatory activism, Butler notes that subjects are always vulnerable to the actions of others which expose “the thrall in which our relations with others hold us... in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control” (23). Given bodily vulnerability’s inescapability, Butler asks if “there is some other way to live such that one becomes neither affectively dead nor mimetically violent, a way out of the circle of violence altogether. This possibility has to do with demanding a world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated” (*Precarious Life* 42). She tentatively offers vulnerability itself as a basis for universal recognition as it may furnish “a sense of political community of a complex order... by bringing to the fore the

relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22). Brand’s works alternatively demonstrate that the power to make such demands, and bodily vulnerability itself, is always already consolidated in *certain* bodies.

Autonomy has never been easily assumed by Black subjects. *Map* presents this thralldom as uninterrupted since the transatlantic slave trade. “[T]he image which emerges from the Door of No Return,” Brand writes, “is of public property belonging to a public exclusive of the Black bodies which signify it. One is aware of this ownership. One is constantly refuting it, or ignoring it, or troubling it, or parodying it, or tragically reaffirming it” (50).<sup>13</sup> From the Middle Passage to contemporary appropriations of Black culture, Brand shows just how dangerous permeable notions of self and other remain for Black subject. The historical continuity of non-recognition additionally attests to the disproportionate danger Black subjects face when *their* autonomy proves illusory. Even the safety *illusions* of autonomous individuality engender is unevenly distributed along racial lines.

Given that not all bodies’ demands for protection are equally powerful, anti-colonial, feminist, diasporic, and queer scholarship have begun presenting boundary-exceeding self-definitions as resistant and liberating. In *Map*, Brand writes that “[b]elonging does not interest me. I had once thought that it did. Until I examined the underpinnings. One is misled when one looks at the sails and majesty of tall ships instead of their cargo” (85). Reflecting on this passage, Maia Joseph argues that “[Brand’s] reflections on her experiences as a black woman and diasporic subject repeatedly exceed the boundaries of the nation as she explores the possibilities of diasporic community, political community, and artistic community” (75). Contemporary diasporic readings like these are “reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss” (Butler 20) by asserting that shared experiences of violability and non-recognition can foment post-national community and solidarity. However, delineating community through dispossession, loss,

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<sup>13</sup> Ownership culture if not land continues to define subject and non-subject in the transnational world order, and possessive individualism continues to parse colonizing subjects and colonized others.

and violability also reinvigorates fantasies about autonomy as a normative and attainable desire while negating “a vulnerability to the [national] other that is part of bodily life” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 29). This is one reason I struggle with Gunew’s suggestion that diasporic communities are born of inevitable encounters with misrecognition: “diaspora is imagined as much by the nation as those internal to it and in this version spawns those anxieties that quickly turn diasporic individuals and groups into targets. The nation (or other entity) is provoked by whatever glue binds diasporic groups together” (9). For Gunew, this ‘glue’ is misrecognition.

Describing misrecognition as an inevitable experience implies ‘nation’ and ‘diaspora’ are legible, internally coherent, and unchanging identificatory categories. Brand alternatively depicts national and diasporic communities as fundamentally unstable: “A city,” she writes, “is a place where the 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” (*Map* 63). Critical scholarship’s ‘diaspora versus the nation-state’ approach makes it difficult to examine both communities’ dynamic evolutions. When misrecognition defines the relationship between Black diasporas and the white nations they striate, the resulting struggle for recognition—and all its implied violence—is forever stuck on repeat, reproducing the turn towards nationalism in untraditional (i.e. diasporic) sites *ad nauseam*.

I genuinely do not know if it is possible to interrupt this cycle. My sense, though, is that such work would require literary scholars to question recognition’s mechanics, particularly the underlying liberal humanist assumption that all subjects—including Black diasporic subjects—*should* aspire to individual autonomy. Butler asks whether the desire for autonomy risks denying all subjects’ relational constitution: “if I build a notion of ‘autonomy’ on the basis of the denial of this sphere of a primary and unwilled physical proximity with others, then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy?” (*Precarious Life* 26). Esposito reiterates, “if

community is so threatening to the individual integrity of the subject that it puts into relation, nothing else remains for us except to ‘immunize us’ beforehand and, in so doing, to negate the very same foundations of community” (13). For Black subjects, white supremacist national communities are *that threatening* to individual integrity: there is no common basis for debt-based community between white nations and Black subjects insofar as these nations are predicated on negating, disappearing, incarcerating, humiliating, assimilating, and destroying Blackness.

This violence is particularly complex in settler-colonial contexts. “[T]he only way to save oneself [from community],” Esposito writes, “is by breaking cleanly from it; by limiting it in a ‘before’ that cannot be joined to what comes ‘after’; to institute between before and after a border that cannot be crossed without catastrophically falling back again into the condition from which one had wanted to escape” (Esposito 13). Diasporic scholarship is immunizing diasporic literature, communities, and individuals from contamination by Canada’s colonial histories when it draws temporal distinctions between the nation’s colonial, postcolonial, and transnational moments. Yet, this protective impulse *also* seals Canada’s futures off from its unsettled settler colonial obligations.

Like Gunew, diasporic literature scholars critique nation-states for denying their obligations and debts to racialized communities while simultaneously imagining diasporic subjects as ideally free from obligations imposed from without.<sup>14</sup> I appreciate the resistant engine that powers celebrations of diasporic subjectivity as autonomous, radical, and resistant. As Kamboureli contends in *Scandalous Bodies*, diasporic and boundary crossing individuals are uniquely positioned to expose national communities’ moral and political failings (22). However, readings that approach diasporas as inherently oppositional, resistant communities begin to feel misleading when they deny diasporic

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<sup>14</sup> Dobson’s “Struggle Work” and Brydon’s “Affective Citizenship” are the two examples of resistant self-definition this chapter focuses on. Other include Emily Johansen’s discussion of ‘cosmopolitan citizenship’ via *What We All Long For*, Heather Smyth’s examination of ‘sexual citizenship’ in *Another Place, Not Here*, Helke Härting’s work on ‘global citizenship’ in relation to *Thirsty*, Brenda Carr Vellino’s ‘translocal citizenship’ in *Inventory* as well as Paul Barrett’s ‘transnational solidarity’ with regards to the same text, and Marlene Goldman’s discussion of deterritorialization across Brand’s works. Nancy Fraser’s discussion of ‘subaltern counter publics’ gives a non-Brand based articulation of this tendency.

and national communities' *interdependence*. "[T]heories of diaspora," Christine Kim and Sophie McCall observe, "while often critical of the discourses associated with modern, industrialized nation-states, silently [rely] on nation-based imaginings of collectivities.... diaspora and nation are interdependent and mutually constituting" (2).

Brand represents why Black communities need to break themselves off from the nation-state as an act of self-preservation in the face of Canada's anti-Black violence. That said, celebratory readings of her works, reading that assert a Black author like Brand's independence or autonomy, arguably deny her more complex *interdependencies*. Butler asks, "[i]f I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impinging upon them as well, and in ways that are not fully in my control or clearly predictable?" (*Precarious Life* 27). Is it that diasporic literary analysis "cannot will away this vulnerability," but "must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 29)? Or does the corporeal vulnerability of Black subjects', a vulnerability that results from generations of dehumanizing dispossession and violence, an absolute limit on national communities imposed from without? Saidiya Hartman refers to this impossibility as "a structural antagonism" ("The Position of the Unthought" 190): this world, built on the slave-trade's objectification of African bodies, will always pose structurally different danger to Black and white subjects.

Brand's *Inventory* and *What We All Long For* test community's limits as they examine autonomy's and *interdependence's* relative desirability. This makes them ideal for an analysis of how anti-Black violence pre-empts successful interdependencies in the post 9/11 West: on the one hand, Brand's characters attempt to claim inviolability and autonomous subjecthood for themselves in the hopes of avoiding the violent objectification of Black, Asian, and Middle Eastern subjects; on the

other hand, her works acknowledge that while pure autonomy is an impossibility for any subject, its inaccessibility has very different consequences for Black diasporic subjects.

Rather than assuming individual autonomy is a normative aspiration, then, *Inventory* and *What We All Long For* show how deeply entangled assertions of individual autonomy are in liberal notions of modern success, arrival, and security. Esposito describes the ‘modern’ subject as one who dodges their obligations to others, seeking individual freedom and personal autonomy by denying their fundamental *interdependences* with others:

[m]odern individuals truly become that, the perfectly individual, the ‘absolute’ individual, bordered in such a way that they are isolated and protected, but only if they are freed in advance from the ‘debt’ that binds them one to the another; if they are released from, exonerated, or relieved of that contact, which threatens their identity, exposing them to possible conflict with their neighbor, exposing them to the contagion of the relation with others. (13)

This passage helps me see a complex possibility in, and possible complication with, Brand’s dispossessed subjects: if national communities minimize their (recognized) citizens’ obligations to others and restrict interdependence or mutual obligations from crossing national boundaries, then Brand claims this same debt-limiting autonomy for her dispossessed subjects, those who *own nothing* and thus *owe nothing* according to *Map’s* ruttier. As subjects who have had their proper subjectivity denied and remain structurally unable to own, only be owned, Brand’s Black characters have never been ‘absolute’ individuals, calling their structural ability to be indebted to others into question.

At the conclusion of *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Bola admonishes her children for their possessive desires for patrilineal origins, and, by extension, possessive notions of subjecthood. Her warning, “No one is anyone’s,” repudiates slavery’s debasement of Black subjects as property. It also poses a problem for dialectical theories of recognition, and their liberal offshoots, into question. Amid all the violence of her (non)emancipation, Bola favours the vulnerability-limiting possibilities

of individual autonomy over interdependence with others.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary scholarship tends to characterize Brand's rejection of national communities as an *ethical* rejection of citizenship's moral compromises. I agree that Brand's genre-crossing works and her boundary-blurring characters belie singular national identifications, but I do not read their resistance as inherently *ethical*, the latest achievement in some teleologic progress narrative.

My concern is that Brand's *unique* understandings of absence, loss, and displacement—an understanding rooted in Black histories of natal alienation and violent non-belonging—is generalized and diluted in the service of celebratory notions of a post-national ethic. These critical interpretations arise at a moment when, as Christina Sharpe describes, “a discourse of post-race is being instrumentalized to abet the increasingly devastating criminalization of black life and being; a turn that abets and subtends a refusal of black suffering” (“Three Scenes” 136). Brand is only one of a number of contemporary authors who trouble narratives of unifying multiculturalism and soft nationalism by exposing the xenophobic economies of recognition that operate therein. That said, diaspora studies-based analyses cannot afford overlook Brand's specific responses to Canadian and global anti-Blackness in the service of more general claims about post- and transnational emancipation, a discourse inseparable from Afro-diasporic dispossession.

#### AFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP, AN INVENTORY

*Inventory* (1996) is a long-form, single narrator poem and counter-history of the post-9/11 present. *Inventory*'s narrator is conscious that she is entangled in the War on Terror's brutalities, enacted against her will but on her behalf as a Western citizen. She responds by keeping a running tally of the bloodshed she witnesses on T.V.: “twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting in / Amariya, two by roadside bombing, Adhaim, / five by mortars in Afar” (23). The work's title, Diana Brydon explains, references “the standard procedures of a market-oriented inventory against the market

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<sup>15</sup> A similar re-assertion of individual autonomy is integral to Toni Morrison's resolution in *Beloved*.



ethic that has led to the suffering [Brand's narrator] records" (997). *Inventory* uses the account form, "methods of listing and taking stock" (Brydon 997), to record a history of the present and expose Western citizens' complicity with violence against their global Others. Here, "self-recognition entails complicity, co-option, and even the very troubling admission: 'let's at least admit we mean each other / harm, / we intend to do damage' (42)" (*Inventory* qtd. in Brydon 992-3).

Brydon, in turn, uses *Inventory* to describe "the political potential of...mediated experiences for shaping an ethical response to globalizing processes" (997), as the basis of her theory of 'affective citizenship,' which describes as an "emotional register in which injustice lodges itself in the very body of the poet as a special kind of witness" (991). Affective citizenship appears an ethical alternative to Western citizens' emotional and political apathy, an apathy Brydon attributes to liberal subjects' misguided notions of individual autonomy: "*Inventory* shifts the terrain from the personal (with its focus on the autonomous individual as separate from others) to the intimate (that is, to the co-constitutions of subjectivity, image, word, and world and to a self developing through relation)" (997).

As a nation-negating alternative to traditional citizenship, affective citizenship counters "versions of humanism in which white privilege constitutes full humanity, assigning racialized others only provisional acceptance within its parameters" (Brydon 993), a claim that arguably homogenizes both global whiteness and its non-white others. Unlike liberal subjects who are comfortably protected by their illusions of autonomy, affective citizens accept their intersubjectivity, as demonstrated by their expansive—not nationally-bound—sense of community. *Inventory's* narrator models this expansive sense of global community through empathic acts of witnessing:

One year she sat at the television weeping,  
no reason,  
the whole time

and the next, and the next (21)

She also questions the patriotic correctness that informs talking head responses to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks:

we're  
doing the best we can with these people,  
what undeniable hatred fuels them, what else  
can we do, nothing but maim them,  
we do not deserve it, it's out of the blue  
...  
they hate our freedom. (27)

And she is horrified by the West's violent reactions to its vulnerability:

If they're numb over there, and all around her,  
she'll gather the nerve endings  
spilled on the streets, she'll count them like rice grains

she'll keep them for when they're needed. (30).<sup>17</sup>

Differences between *Inventory*'s narrator and her immediate community are integral to Brydon's affective citizenship. She uses Brand's poetic work to map distinctions between traditional citizens (those whose subjectivity is predicated on a false sense of autonomy) and affective citizens (those whose subjectivity is defined by openness, intimacy, and care across geopolitical, cultural, and racial boundaries). Affective citizenship is demarcated by this intimacy: "[u]nlike the personal," Brydon argues, "intimacy requires openness to others" (997).

*Inventory*'s narrator undeniably opens herself to the endless task of witnessing contemporary atrocities. That said, the collection's closing lines underscore that *interdependent* communities and *mutual* recognition are not achieved, nor necessarily desired, by the collection's narrator:

I have nothing soothing to tell you,  
that's not my job,  
my job is to revise and revise this bristling list,  
hourly (100)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This reference to collecting spilled nerves alludes to soucouyant mythology: one way to protect your home from a soucouyant's nighttime invasions is to throw rice in front of your doors and windows. Neurotic and intent against waste, the soucouyant will pause to collect every grain before continuing. Later in this passage, *Inventory* also references the blue glass duppies of Caribbean folklore.

*Inventory*'s period-less ending underscores intimacy's limits: the narrator's vigil is both incomplete and hermetic, demonstrating the significant difference between *openness* (the autonomous subject's goodwill towards or empathy for other subjects) and *interdependence* (mutual recognition's ultimate goal, a negation of autonomous individualism). While interdependence assumes *mutual* obligations as well as *mutual* exchanges of recognition, openness proves individually oriented and unidirectional. This final act of refusal is inseparable from the narrator's racialization, lived experiences, and positioning: she refuses to play a global mammy or offer readers some comforting, redeeming solution for global violence that builds on colonial models that demand care and comfort from Black women.

The distinction between openness and interdependence is foundational to two concerns affective citizenship raises: is affective citizenship an *endpoint* of political engagement, and where is it located as a *site* of political engagement? Carolyn Pedwell's "De-colonizing Empathy: Thinking Affect Transnationally" anchors both concerns. She observes that empathy has come to define an ethical way of being in a globalized community (2). Indeed, the perceived connection between empathy and ethical action is so strong that "creating more or better empathy is now framed as an affective 'solution' to a wide range of social ills and as a central component of building cross-cultural and transnational social justice" (Pedwell 2). However, when "understood in shorthand as the affective ability to 'put oneself in the other's shoes'—[empathy] can easily become a kind of endpoint... a conceptual stoppage in conversation or analysis" (Pedwell 2). By taking up *Inventory*'s Black, queer, and female narrator as a universal model, someone the collection's readers can supposedly identify with, affective citizenship winds up presenting empathy as an endpoint in and

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<sup>18</sup> Lines like these test Butler's suggestion that bodily vulnerability can act as a site from which a universalizing humanism can be re-imagined. Brand's *Inventory* suggests witnessing will never be free from the Enlightenment's racial and gendered baggage, so even if "we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt" (*Precarious Life* 29), the consequences of this vulnerability are experienced very differently along gendered and racial lines.

of itself that leaves readers with “little insight into how empathy emerges and flows through global circuits of power” (Pedwell 2). This limits affective citizenship’s applicability as a theory of post-national community.

On the one hand, affective citizenship takes the connections subjects feel with their global others seriously; on the other hand, it does not address the directionality, contours, or force of empathy’s transnational flows. As *Inventory*’s narrator watches the suffering of her global others, her mediated acts of witnessing and resultant empathy are, like private Sones’s vigil in *At the Full*, isolated and isolating. Brand characterizes these acts of witnessing as self-destructive, bordering on pathological:

she’ll never be able to write them all in time

the paper now, and where’s the hair oil,  
the butter’s gone rancid,  
remember that cat we used to have,  
it disappeared the first day (28)

Beyond the chaos compulsive witnessing causes her personal life, *Inventory*’s narrator is conscious that “[t]he screens” she watches “lacerate our intimacies” (5). The very media—Pedwell’s unexamined circuits, which prove simultaneously technological and geopolitical in *Inventory*—that make witnessing possible also preclude *mutual* recognition between Brand’s narrator and those she witnesses. While *Inventory*’s narrator empathizes with the suffering of global others, she is also aware that those she watches on TV do not see, feel, or witness her back.

Initially wanting to close these distances, the narrator imagines writing letters to everyone she has watched suffer: “if I say in this letter, I’m waiting / to step into another life, / will you come then and find me” (35). Without names, only locations, to address such letters (34), the narrator is unable to close the global, communal, and empathetic gaps that separate herself and those she watches: “all I can offer you... is my brooding hand, / My sodden eyelashes.../ my eyes pinned to your face” (37). The narrator cannot cross the mediated boundaries that separate her from her

global others. Post-national community's "segregational assumptions" (Chow 48) begin to show as *Inventory*'s narrator grows frustrated with her immediate—and mediating—community. When gestures of recognition prove unidirectional and unreciprocated, she redirects her efforts towards differentiation and organization. The result is a critique of mass media's propensity to blur news, fantasy, commercials, reality television, and celebrity gossip in an undifferentiating stream of representation:

there's another life, she listens, each hour, each night,  
behind the flat screen and the news anchor,  
the sleek speeding cars, the burgers, the breaking

celebrity news, unrealities on faraway islands,  
bickering and spiteful,  
each minute so drastic, they win a million dollars (29)

Brydon contends *Inventory* counters this mass media mash-up by turning to another medium, poetry, that allows the narrator to translate the violence represented, and the violence of representation, into an affective response: "The poem re-mediatizes what the poet hears, sees and feels through music, film and the news, and through this process of remixing it, she changes the angle of vision, asserting the power of her *own eye's citizenship and possession of herself and the world*" (1000; emphasis added). Phrasing is important here: this turn to generic categorizations and poetry asserts the narrator's independence and self-possession. Under affective citizenship, the (female, Black, and western) narrator's possessive gaze is not lifted, but has shifted targets: rather than (dis)possessing her global others through violence, the narrator demonstrates *self*-possession through poetry.

Although her vigil does not engender *mutual* recognition, it does foster *self*-recognition. This turn resembles Fanon's argument that colonized subjects must recognize themselves rather than seeking the recognition of a withholding colonial power. We land on a deep irony here: while the possessive individual of Enlightenment-cum-liberal thought denies their inescapable interdependencies on their global others, Black subjects demonstrate their *interdependencies* by

instead turning inwards, emphasizing self-possession and self-recognition while living in amid societies predicated on anti-Black violence. Affective citizenship may be impossible for Black subjects living in white supremacist settler societies.

*Inventory*'s narrator recognizes her dependencies on and the suffering of her global others but cannot extricate herself from the circuits that connect *and* isolate her. Her poetic transcriptions of the 24-hour news cycle fosters her self-possession and self-awareness, but not mutual *interdependences*, an absence that focuses my attention on Brand's representations of community. Identifying as "the wars' last late night witness" (21) distances the narrator from her contemporaries, those she perceives as "perversely accustomed" to mediated violence in ways "she refuses" (29). Although open to her global Others, *Inventory*'s narrator also distinguishes herself from her *affective* Others, Western citizens, who appear irrecoverably disengaged.

As a theory of community, affective citizenship draws limits around *mutual* recognition and *intersubjectivity* along affective-cum-political lines. *Inventory*, by contrast, provides an account of Black self-recognition in the absence of relationality, asserting narrator's autonomy and her sovereign ability to recognize who is and who is not her community. From *Inventory*'s opening pages, this choice is rooted in white supremacist, settler-colonial violence. The narrator reflects on the films watched as a child whose "love stories never contained us" (5) and whose "war epics left us bloody" (5).<sup>19</sup> These (non)representations prime her to witness violence against Black and Indigenous bodies as entertainment:

the black-and-white american movies  
buried themselves in our chests,  
glacial, liquid as love

the way to Wyoming, the sunset in Cheyenne,  
the surreptitious cook fires, the uneasy

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<sup>19</sup> This passage's pronoun is strategically ambiguous: 'us' can be read as a comment on the absence of Afro-Caribbean figures in popular culture as an implied racial category but also highlights a dearth of popular queer love stories, or racialized love-stories, or war narratives without racialized, feminized, queer victims.

sleep of cowboys, the cactus, the tumbleweed,  
the blankets,  
the homicides of Indians  
lit, dimmed, lit, dimmed (1)

Here, no *eye* is neutral and no 'I,' including the Black subject, is disentangled from settler colonialism's ongoing projects.

Brydon reads the collection as challenging us to think about citizenship as “a re-visioned humanism in relation to planetary space[,]...[that] *resists* colonial, liberal, and neo-liberal frames for constructing human responsibilities to public and private worlds” (999-1000; emphasis added). In this interpretation reading, poetry incubates citizenship and affords the citizen's ethical rebirth; Brand's poetry, in particular, becomes a “public sphere” (Brydon 991), as *Inventory's* (politically disengaged) Western readers are Brand's ultimate addressee. Brand's race and *Inventory's* response anti-Black violence falls completely out of focus here.

Contending that *Inventory* addresses its readers seems a neutral claim, but Cho nuances this interpretation's significance by observing that diasporic texts by Black and non-white authors are expected to cultivate readers' critiques of national discourse: “Diasporic literature turns the discussion of the relationship between literature and citizenship away from pedagogical questions and towards those of the formation of citizenship itself” (“D.C. and Deformations of Citizenship” 528). When Brydon proposes that the narrator's admission she is complicit with global violence could “shock [Brand's] readers into a self-recognition that might motivate change” (992) as “the affective recognitions of these cultural intimacies carry global resonances and implications that interact with the particular social poetics that each reader brings to the work and with those that Brand herself carries” (992), anti-national resistance becomes an ethical stance detached from race insofar as “[the narrator's] full, rather than provisional, human citizenship *resists* colonial, liberal, and neoliberal frames for constructing human responsibilities to public and private worlds” (Brydon 1000; emphasis added).

For Brydon, the affective citizenship modeled by *Inventory*'s narrator fixes a problem—Westerners' obliviousness to their global interdependencies. Empathy becomes an affective return on investment that otherwise disengaged citizens get for reading literary works that represent perspectives other than their own. Poetry, in short, makes better citizens. But who gets to be a citizen? Whose citizenship matters? Pedwell notes that “[w]hile empathy, frequently understood by liberals as a universal human quality, is framed as an affective bridge between subjects, cultures or societies, it cannot simply be assumed that it is understood, generated *or felt* the same way in different contexts or by differently positioned subjects” (22). Affective citizenship reproduces Pedwell’s ‘liberal ethics of empathy’ without addressing citizenship’s racial limits. Pedwell cautions scholars to question arguments that frame affect as a universal experience: “empathy, or any other emotion, alone cannot be the *remedy* to complex transnational social inequalities and conflicts, because it is always already bound up with, and produced through, these very relations of power” (27). This leads to the second concern I have with affective citizenship: its reliance on the citizen as a subject constituted through colonial and white supremacist power.

Even when decoupled from the nation-state, diasporic critique’s fractal citizenships huddle around the citizen as a *recognizable* and *relational* subject, one who is defined by dialectical obligations and rights. Cho describes the difficulty of imagining subjectivity outside this language: “We cannot have citizenship without its troubled legacy—without the potential anti-humanism, anti-feminism, and elitism of its origins. And we cannot dispense with citizenship” (“D.C.: Contradictions and Possibilities” 105). Drawing from Giorgio Agamben’s *Means Without Ends*, Cho contends “the loss of citizenship... endangers the guarantee of rights. The only claim that can return the refugee to the relative security and safety of a social existence lies in a claim for citizenship” (“D.C.: Contradictions



and Possibilities” 103).<sup>20</sup> Even while it “brings the originary fiction of sovereignty into crisis” (Agamben 20), then, citizenship structures the ethics of living together. What Brand’s works make clear, however, is that citizenship is not itself a site of safety or security for Black, Middle-Eastern, Palestinian, or Muslim subjects. Affective citizenship arguably glosses these racial limits.

In *Inventory*, the narrator’s openness is mediated through existing circuits of power, a 24-hour news cycle whose scopophilic circuits prove both asymmetrical and unidirectional. Unsurprisingly, then, mutual recognition and *interdependent* community are troubled, not achieved, in this collection. The crucial but unexamined factor that necessitates subjects live together is the physical occupation of land. Physical land also disappears in discussions of affective citizenship. Brydon describes *Inventory*’s narrator as witnessing global atrocities from ‘planetary space,’ a positionality that lets the narrator view the world from the her living room; the world (excepting the collection’s reader) cannot look back on her. ‘Planetary space’ pushes physical land and its implied communities out of critical focus, making affective citizenship a troublingly a-territorial concept. Land is irrelevant when “[t]here is only language and the community of readers that it can create” (Brydon 994). Affective citizens accordingly occupy mediated *spaces* rather than physical *places*. From an Indigenous perspective, this positionality makes affective citizenship and its ethical claims troublingly a-territorial.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout *Inventory*, Brand’s representations of nature are similarly a-territorial, but based in Afrocentric histories of territorial dispossession. The ‘natural,’ physical world only reminds her narrator of colonial and capitalist consumption:

Let us not invoke the natural world,  
it’s ravaged like any battlefield, like any tourist  
island, like any ocean we care to name,

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<sup>20</sup> In *Means Without Ends*, refugees exemplify “the discontinuity of the human and the citizen” (Cho, “D.C.: Contradictions and Possibilities” 102).

<sup>21</sup> Brydon’s own cartographic metaphors, the “complex emotion terrain” (1000) and affective citizens’ occupation of the “emotional registers of the political” (997), belie physical land’s evaporation in her essay.

like oxygen (42)<sup>22</sup>

Diffuse environmental degradations mean no person is un-implicated in the planet's destruction.

Throughout the collection, the 'natural' world appears profoundly artificial. This not only because of its pollution but its mediations and remediations as well. Collectively, nature's unnaturalness convinces the narrator that "the earth was never the earth" (4) and that humans have no real relationship with a natural world that "is not interested in us, / it does what it does, / its own inventory of time, of light and dark" (46). *Inventory* presents humanity as independent from—not interdependent with—nature, dismissing the natural world as a source of political empowerment or community: "we cannot speak of nature...any more, / the earth is corroding with cities" (40). While her empathetic witnessing fosters self-possession predicated on the narrator's awareness of her *interdependencies*, there are also interdependences—including those she shares with the natural world and her immediate and politically disengaged community—that she, as an Afro-diasporic subject uprooted from any originary territory, refutes.

Rather than reading this collection as an extended meditation on affective openness, I see *Inventory* as a poetic reflection on its narrator's ambivalence concerning autonomy, dependence, and interdependence: how does a Black 'individual' come to terms with their interdependencies and entanglements when excluded from the bounds of Enlightenment subjectivity? What happens to this Black individual when Agamben's originary fiction of sovereignty comes into crisis in the post-9/11 West? Affective citizenship suggest a-territorial self-awareness is higher moral ground than the faux-individualism that accompanies untenable claims to autonomy. However, *Inventory's* narrator, a Black woman, is keenly aware of the dehumanizing consequences of rhetorical objectification.

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<sup>22</sup> This reflection on the natural world, and her desire to abandon it, directly precedes the lines that most firmly establish the narrator's affective citizenship for Brydon: "let's at least admit we mean each other / harm, / we intend to do damage" (42).

From an anti-colonial perspective, Enlightenment-cum-liberal conceptualizations of subjectivity predicated on possessive individualism are easy targets for critique. What *Inventory* underscores, however, is that *exclusions* from these categories present their own dangers for Black subjects:

they waited, watched,  
evacuated all our good lyrics  
of the goodness, of the science, the delicious  
being of more than, well more,  
so hard now to separate what was them

from what we were

how imprisoned we are in their ghosts (8-9)

Cultural appropriation cost Black peoples even the illusion of cultural or ethnic autonomy. In *Inventory*, then, ruptures to the fiction of autonomous sovereignty are not a novel experience brought about by transnational media, globalization's compressed spatial and temporal distances, or attacks on the West from both without and within, not for Afro-diasporic subjects.

*Inventory*'s narrator longs for an alternative to the subjectivity-eroding dangers of *interdependence*, where "Angela's unbreakable voice has made jails extinct" (11), and where Black subjects "have never heard 'Redemption Song'... / not willing another empire but history's pulse / measured with another hand" (11). Even as she abhors the violence enacted to protect illusions of autonomy and sovereignty, Brand's narrator asserts that some degree of protection from the violent influence of others is deeply desirable for Afro-diasporic subjects who are systemically denied such protection:

we  
there is no 'we'  
let us separate ourselves now,  
though perhaps we can't, still and again  
too late for that,  
nothing but to continue (42)

*Inventory* speaks to its narrator's ambivalence as she weighs possessive individualism's illusory safety versus global interdependencies' bodily dangers.

Beyond tallying the nightly news, *Inventory* details the narrator's travels to from Miami to Canada (14-17), through Cairo (55-64) and Italy (67-72). In Cairo, a silver seller greets the narrator, "Welcome back, Cousin" (56), and invites her to return to his shop, stating "we have a lot to say to each other" (55). The narrator sees this invitation as more than a sales ploy but never returns. Her refusal says something significant about Afro-diasporic self-recognition in the transnational present: rather than redeeming the fallen citizen subject through ethical encounters with global Others, this passage suggests *Inventory*'s narrator gives up on the fantasy of establishing "cultural mastery or psychic transparency" (Pedwell 20) through empathy. Pedwell offers an alternative to affective unions, one that requires experiencing the foreign without relating to it in an encompassing, self-referential, or containing way. Rather than "clasping what is foreign whole" (*Inventory* 59) and seeking mutual recognition through this silver seller, the narrator states she "needed nothing from the market, / after that" (60). This turn of phrase demonstrates *Inventory*'s narrator does not buy into existing economies of recognition—or even extra-national black markets of regard—but remains skeptical of both. In choosing not to return to the silver seller or accept his gesture of familial recognition, *Inventory*'s narrator favours incommensurability over empathetic economies of recognition.

*Inventory*'s conclusion calls the narrator's *interdependence* with her readers into question: as she states, it is not her job to offer them comfort or redeem them through her endless witnessing (100). Unable to calculate some soothing final tally that settles her global *interdependencies*, the narrator instead "*gives in* to being affected by that which is experienced as 'foreign' in the midst of transnational flows, relations and power structures" (Pedwell 20). Her refusal to play the transnational mammy for Western readers is key: equivalence, redemption, or clearing the reader's

ethical slate is not *Inventory*'s ultimate aim; instead, the collection exposes how simultaneously desirable and impossible self-possession is for Afro-diasporic subjects amid Western negations of non-white subjecthood.

#### URBAN CITIZENSHIP: WHAT SHOULD WE LONG FOR?

*Inventory*'s narrator does not offer an easy route to mutual recognition nor clear-cut lines of anti-colonial, anti-national, or anti-racist solidarity; she does, however, underscore Afro-Caribbean Canadian literature's ambivalence over autonomy and interdependence. Rather than approaching anti-national resistance as the basis of diasporic community, I want to alternatively explore what Brand says about the fault lines *within* diasporic communities.<sup>24</sup> *What We All Long For* proposes diasporic resistance is not an inherently ethical or successful response to national power.<sup>25</sup> Set in Toronto in the early 2000s, the novel focuses on Vietnamese-Canadian Tuyen, Italian-Jamaican-Canadian Carla, Jamaican-Canadian Oku, and Nova Scotia-born Jackie. Brand's individuation of Carla, Oku, and Jackie places Afro-Canadian's differing experiences of racialization and diaspora in dialogue throughout this text. Its narrative focuses most intently, though, on Canadian-born Tuyen whose family was separated from their eldest son (Quy) as they escaped post-war Vietnam.

Larissa Lai characterizes *What We All Long For* as Brand's literary manifestation of "making and claiming a kinship between Black and Asian diasporas.... a generous gesture of relation-making in her part" (203-4). I similarly see this novel as exploring community's possibilities but also its limits across lines of diasporic difference. Unlike Lai, Kit Dobson frames this novel as a narrative about generational shifts in response to non-recognition: "The younger generation feels little belonging to either the Canadian nation or to their ancestral homes; for them, finding community is a specifically urban [as opposed to national] project, and they seek to fracture notions of belonging" ("Struggle

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<sup>24</sup> See Gunew's "Serial Accommodations," Brubaker's "The Diaspora Diaspora," as well as Stuart Hall's discussion of 'oppositional togetherness' in "Diaspora and Cultural Identity."

<sup>25</sup> *What We All Long For* was awarded the 2006 Toronto Book Award as well as the 2006 Harbourfront Festival Prize.

Work” 88). Resistance against non-recognition is the organizing principle of what Dobson terms ‘urban citizenship.’<sup>26</sup> Like affective citizenship, urban citizenship appears a subversive and ethical way of living amid otherwise corrupt(ing) national communities. Dobson evokes Hegel’s endless struggle between master and slave when describing Brand’s characters’ “struggle work” (89) to “[build] culture from below” (89) and lauds their “continual projects, constantly renewing themselves.... constantly [working] to elude the dominant” (90). Urban citizenship, in short, emphasizes the resistance possibilities of boundary-crossing mobility.

*What We All Long For*’s primary characters resist their non-recognition. While their resistance is constant and exhausting, it also foments enclaves of care: “that friendship of opposition to the state of things, and their common oddness, held all of them together” (19). Rather than explaining whether theories of anti-colonial resistance have to adapt to address the specificities of transnational displacement, Dobson presents any and all diasporic resistance as successful insofar as it unites counter-publics against the nation-state. While praising Tuyen, Carla, Jackie and Oku’s “freedom to transgress differences” (“Struggle Work” 96), Dobson insists they are “not limited by the discourses that are handed to them” (“Struggle Work” 89). This fractal notion of citizenship echoes Butler’s description of subject formation in *The Psychic Life of Power* and thus replicates poststructural criticism’s longing for autonomy, coded here as ‘freedom,’ from existing social structures: “[subjects] think themselves into being.... their self-imaginings contrast with those of their parents, and... suggest some of the incomplete but potentially radical politics of forming communities from below today” (Dobson, “Struggle Work” 89). Urban citizenship asserts that autonomy is a normative desire and that autonomous subjects must be protected from the Canadian nation’s imposed *interdependencies*.

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<sup>26</sup> This is a term he adopts and adapts from Saskia Sassen’s work on global cities.

As Dobson suggests, collective differences unite *What We All Long For's* principle characters as they are unable to join

‘regular Canadian life.’ The crucial piece, of course, is that they weren’t the required race. Not that that guaranteed safe passage, and not that one couldn’t twist oneself up into the requisite shape; act the brown-noser, act the fool; go on as if you didn’t feel or sense the rejections, as if you couldn’t feel the animus. They simply failed to see this as a possible way of being in the world. (47)

Tuyen’s parents, Cam and Tuan, are alternatively “defined by the city” (66), hailed like Althusser’s subjects as racialized immigrants: “[a]fter... Quy, it made resigned sense to them that they would lose other parts of themselves. Once they accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food” (67). Dobson focuses on these generational differences and defines Brand’s youth by their resistance against nonrecognition: “The daily reality of being non-white within Canada gives them strong anti-national political consciousness. Their parents, conversely, try to belong to a nation-state that refuses to recognize them because of their ancestry, and are paralyzed, striving for an impossible acceptance alongside a nostalgia for a lost past” (“Struggle Work” 88). As importantly, *What We All Long For's* youth are themselves a divided generational cohort. These internal divides are demonstrated most clearly by the novel’s siblings, each of whom respond very differently to Canada’s assimilatory pressures.

Tuyen and Binh exemplify these divides. Brand describes Binh as “like all businessmen” (123), a capitalist with “a distaste for the straightforward and honest, a mistrust of social welfare, and a religious fervour for what was called the bottom line” (122). These neoliberal values inflect his relationships: “in North American culture,” Brand writes from his perspective, “it was *de rigueur* to love all children equally.... Binh picked up on that lost right and made all efforts to collect it” (124). Tuyen appears comparatively anti-possessive and, most importantly, autonomous: “Tuyen, on the other hand, was made merely curious by [equal love’s] absence. She preferred to explore other aspects of [her] North American birthright, such as independence, free love, and artistic irrelevance”

(125). Binh capitalizes on non-recognition for affective leverage and economic gain; Tuyen distances herself from the imposed obligations of familial *interdependence*. Their differences suggest Brand's novel is concerned with racialized resistance's possibilities as well as diasporic and racialized communities' internal divisions.

Discussing how resistance can spark identity formation, Stuart Hall observes that when "rigid binary, racial logic is being used against us, we certainly know what is wrong with it. But when it seems to be working for us, we find that it's extremely difficult to give it up. We just can't let go of it in good moments, it makes us feel together; we can't imagine what a politics would look like if it wasn't there" ("Subjects in History" 292). Brand's racialized characters form an autonomous, self-recognizing, and profoundly resistant community. As it reflects on the politics of feeling together, *What We All Long For* additionally describes the limits of oppositional togetherness.

Encounters with mis- and nonrecognition punctuate the novel. *What We All Long For* begins as the friends, minus Jackie, ride the train after a night out. The scene consists of Toronto commuters' faulty conjectures about who Tuyen, Oku, and Carla are, what they do, where they have been (3). Brand concludes, "[l]ives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated.... it's hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension" (5). Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku are keenly aware of their misapprehension: beyond the commuters' private reflections, mediated narratives and encounters with official state power remind them they do not pass through the city as freely or unremarkably as phenotypically white Canadians.

Encounters with of non-recognition provide this self-recognizing community with its basis; what holds them together is the threat of their non-recognition, particularly the policing of the novel's Black men. Jamal, Carla's younger brother, is incarcerated for carjacking. Oku attempts to comfort her by referring to arrests as a "rite of passage" (46) for Toronto's Black men, a reflection



on his own wrongful arrests.<sup>27</sup> As an 18-year-old, Oku is tailed and detained by the police while walking home: “He can’t remember if they called him, if they told him to stop. His arms rose easily.... it was like an accustomed embrace” (165). Phaniel Antwi contends that “Oku refuses to be pigeonholed” into the “invented identities” (203) of Black masculinity and instead performs his gender and race strategically: “he adopts and changes masculine codes in order to survive in his environment. The gendered positions he adopts allow him to navigate with relative ease the moving spectrum of black masculinities presented in the novel” (203). Oku’s sly performances, his appeals to strategic essentialism, grant him some protection as he crosses the novel’s differing Afro-Canadian communities. However, I want to suggest that even these successful performances do not guarantee Oku mutual recognition. Instead, they demonstrate that even as Black subjects in general, and Black men in particular, anticipate, mediate, and regulate how others perceive them, they still risk the profound violence of nonrecognition.

Carla, phenotypically lighter than Jamal (106), warns her younger brother that his race will define every interaction he has with Toronto’s police: “you realize you’re black, right? You know what that means? You can’t be in the wrong place at the wrong time” (35).<sup>28</sup> Jamal’s arrests (which the novel suggests are warranted), and Oku’s (which the novel suggests are not) demonstrate that any and all places in Canada are the wrong place for Black men. Oku’s too-familiar encounter with police assumes Black men’s non-recognition; neither he nor Jamal gets to determine how their bodies are recognized. Instead, they can only work—“So much energy put out just fronting” (164)—in their own contradictory ways to mediate their encounters with misrecognition. More bleakly, Oku’s resistance against this non-recognition is neither liberating nor successful so much as

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<sup>27</sup> This is a claim Jackie dismisses as perpetuating Black men’s internalization of their misrecognition (46, 48).

<sup>28</sup> Jamal’s prison nickname, ‘Ghost’ (30), ironically highlights his hyper-visibility as a Black teenager: “Ghost, my ass, [Carla] thought. His ghostliness didn’t stop the police from finding him” (37).

an exhausting necessity imposed from without. In effect, he is defined—pigeonholed even—by both his non-recognition and *his resistance against* non-recognition.

Non-recognition also blares through the novel's mediated narratives. After Korea wins the 2002 World Cup quarter-final, Tuyen is incensed by a television announcer's ignorance about Toronto's ethnic communities: "I didn't know we had a Korea Town in the city" (204). "Asshole," she retorts, "you wouldn't. You fuckers live as if we don't live here" (204). Provoked into identifying across cultural lines, Tuyen's claim to a common 'we' plays on the homogenizing misrecognition of Asian subjects in Canada: "She wasn't Korean, of course, but World Cup made her feel that way. No Vietnamese team had made it, so today she was Korean" (204). Michael Buma interprets her response as "a cross-cultural moment that empowers anyone who identifies with its minority ethos" (16), but adds that the World Cup divides Toronto "back into national and ethnic components.... exposing the idea of borderlessness as a fictional construct and suggesting the extent to which old nationalisms remain in effect despite the post-national outlook of Brand's characters" (17). Resistance against misrecognition spurs *What We All Long For's* racialized characters to establish communities that cross racial and ethnic lines, but their resistance does not liberate any of these characters from racial, national, economic, or generational distinctions: instead, Brand presents Tuyen's cross-cultural identifications, like Oku's code-switching, as reactionary; each resists being defined by the city, but their resistant identifications are limited to colonial notions of self and Other, Canadian and non-Canadian, antipathetic and assimilative.

As a critical concept, "urban citizenship" show how torn Canadian literary criticism is between valuing individual autonomy and mutual interdependence. The first value, individual autonomy, proves unattainable throughout *What We All Long For*: though each of the novel's characters wish otherwise, none live in isolation from their history, their immediate community, or the social constructions (linguistic, economic, or political) imposed from without. The second value,

mutual *interdependence*, has violent consequences for these characters as their *interdependencies* are studded with painful reminders that citizenship, possessive individualism, and subjectivity have never extended equally to all. When they lower the protective barriers of the self (false though such assertions of autonomy are), Tuyen, Jackie, Carla, and Oku risk losing their freedom and even their lives to the violence of non-recognition.

With urban citizenship, Dobson proposes Brand's characters resolve their exclusions by building "communities across borders, rhizomatically connecting to each other without a predetermined logic... linked by their desire for inclusivity, and not limited by the discourses that are handed to them" ("Struggle Work" 94). This claim rests on two premises: first, that these communities are successful; second, that they are inclusive. Rather than reading Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku as successfully resisting the hailings of global capital through continuous motion or by thinking themselves into being, I propose that *What We All Long For* provides insight into racialized diasporic Canadian's contradictory desires for autonomy and *interdependence*. Rita Wong writes that "[o]ppositionality... while logical in the face of racial oppression... still directs energy toward whiteness without necessarily unpacking the specific problematics of racialized subjects who have inherited the violence of colonization" (158). While the novel's characters create a self-recognizing community and crave certain interdependencies, each asserts their autonomy from one another, from their families, and from the larger Canadian nation. These competing desires show the successes *and* limits of a community bound by Hall's oppositional togetherness.

One such problematic concerns the relative desirability of independence and *interdependence*. What *We All Long For*'s core characters establish a fragile intersubjectivity based on historically specific, gendered, class-, and race-based dispossessions. This intersubjectivity, or urban citizenship, allows these characters to cross *some* borders with liberating effects. That said, Brand additionally demonstrates that not all *reterritorializations* are in fact *deterritorializing*, and not all

resistances, refusals, or (e)motions are liberating in and of themselves. Instead, the characters appear bound by reactionary enforcements of communal boundaries throughout.

Tuyen delineates *her* community by distinguishing between herself and Toronto's acculturated immigrants. On meeting Binh's girlfriend, she insists on using her Vietnamese name: "'Ashley?' Tuyen asked with an impolite curiosity. 'Where'd you get a name like that? What's your real name?'" (143). By reiterating the language of non-belonging by reversing this racially-charged question, Tuyen re-inscribes lines of ethnolinguistic exclusion for her own ends. This resistant reversal is not inherently decolonizing or liberating, though.<sup>29</sup> By appropriating the language of (non)belonging to critique Ashley's acculturation, Tuyen restages her own childhood struggles with identity, "[w]hen she... rebelled against the [Vietnamese] language, refusing to speak it. At five she went through a phase of calling herself Tracey because she didn't like anything Vietnamese" (21). Although she reclaims a Vietnamese identity, Tuyen does so by derogating another Vietnamese woman. Her sense of identity is based not only on distinctions between herself and white Canadians, then, but herself and those who believe they can acculturate to Canadian society.

For urban citizens, the very act of struggling constitutes a reterritorialization of Toronto: "That these are continual projects, constantly renewing themselves, is crucial; Brand's deterritorializing project is importantly focused upon urban modes of being that constantly work to elude the dominant" (Dobson 90). In Hegelian terms, urban citizens represent the dialectic's reversal, when master and slave switch rhetorical places; Dobson proposes the novel's characters deploy the same (re)territorializing forces they resist, but supposedly for the right ends. The resulting 'urban citizens,' bound in oppositional togetherness, reinforce distinctions between themselves, Canada's white populace, and those who oscillate in between.

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<sup>29</sup> Oku similarly refers to Rainer-Maria, Jackie's white goth boyfriend, as "Nazi boy" (48).

As a theory of subjectivity, urban citizenship relies on binary understandings of motion and paralysis. Urban citizens' struggles against non-recognition fuel their boundary-crossing motion. This motion, in turn, evinces their freedom: "The self needs to remain in motion, pursuing a Deleuzian line of flight in order to escape the domination of contemporary biopolitics, the process through which the body itself becomes subject to legislation and surveillance" (Dobson, "Struggle Work" 90). Alexis Gumb's analysis of motionlessness in Brand's works alternatively proposes stillness, not motion, contradicts "modernist understanding of movement as progress" (3), thus "[disrupting] the relationship between discourse and progress, [and] offering a much needed pause designed to transform the normalized economic violence of neo-colonialism" (4). Neither motion nor stillness, she notes, are inherently successful expressions of resistance for Black subjects caught in "the paradoxical situation of compelled mobility and the social reproduction of bondage across time" (Gumb 4). Building on Gumb, I believe *What We All Long For's* characters find themselves swept up in the endless motion that defines modern subjectivity *and* dispossession. This irony focuses my attention on one of this novel's least studied elements: its protagonists' troubled relationships.

Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie want to claim individual autonomy *and* form a self-recognizing, interdependent community. These second-, third, and mixed-generation Canadians assert their autonomy against unwanted, and often traumatic, experiences of *interdependence*. As they test the limits of their proper autonomy, though, they also set limits around their individual selves, deferring relationships with families and friends. These blocked relationships demonstrate that resistant assertions of autonomy are not always agential. Interestingly, Brand's descriptions of these failing relationships are also where the language of debt and obligation enters this novel.

*What We All Long For's* families frame love in terms of debt and obligation. Quy, whose name translates to "precious" (65), exposes the affective economies that have shaped the Vu family

since arriving in Canada. Cam and Tuan hid the family's remaining wealth on Quy (6). Their attempts to find Quy are mapped out in monetary markers, the thousands of dollars Cam sends to global hustlers in the hopes of finding her son (116). His loss entangles the family's financial and emotional debts: Brand describes the Vus as bound to one another "[w]ith duty, with obligation, with honour, with an unspoken but vicelike grip of *emotional debt*" (61; emphasis added). Ai and Lam, Tuyen's Vietnam-born sisters, "understood their positions before Quy's loss, understood as a matter of culture; and surely, if they had harboured any hopes of changing that, of living out their fantasies of the North American teenaged rebellion, with Rolling Stones concerts and independence and free sex, Quy's loss squelched those hopes" (125). They never leave home. For Tuyen's older sisters, the family's protective and possessive boundaries are an expression of this familial indebtedness after Quy's loss.<sup>30</sup>

Specific (Quy) and general (pre-migration culture, status, and belonging) diasporic losses coagulate into feelings of indebtedness. In turn, these unshakable obligations fuel Tuyen's need to leave Richmond Hill, a community "where immigrants go to get away from other immigrants" (54). Her father's response threatens Tuyen's autonomy: "She was his possession, like his whole family was" (56), Brand writes from Tuan's perspective. While Tuyen resents her father's possessiveness and the family's binding obligations, "she wanted sensuality, not duty" (61), her financial dependence keeps her tethered to him: "She would have to go to the restaurant later and borrow some money from her father; though she hated giving him another opportunity to scold her and lecture her about dropping out of school, about living downtown, she was desperate and would have to endure it" (126). In effect, material debts bind Tuyen to a family whose affective debts she longs to escape.

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<sup>30</sup> Binh, who also lives at home, "had no feelings of restriction... or urges to find himself" (124). Brand suggests his seemingly untroubled interdependence with the family is his attempt to compensate for Quy's loss and "seal that opening in [their parents'] hearts left by his mythic brother" (124).

Carla and Oku face similar struggles with their families' possessive relationships. Fitz, Oku's father, is the family's sole provider, a role he uses to dominate his son and wife. Although Oku wishes to move out, Fitz dissuades him by conflating Oku's moral and financial obligations to family: "if you want to go give white people your money while you could give it to your own family, fine. Go follow other stupid black people and treat the white people better than your own flesh and blood" (82). When Fitz later demands to see a report card from Oku's Master's program as payment for his room and board, Oku—who dropped out months earlier—attempts to reverse their roles as creditor and debtor: "Your bullshit is tired, man. You should pay us for listening to you crap all over the world every morning.... I don't owe you shit, all right?" (186). Despite Oku's resistance, Fitz's net of financial and ethical obligations keep Oku from either asserting his autonomy or feeling comfortably interdependent on his family.

Carla's family life is similarly framed in terms of affective possession and material obligation: she describes needing to care for Jamal because, as she repeats throughout the novel, "he's mine" (26). This "possessive passion" (236) results from her mother's suicide. When Carla was five and Jamal a baby, Derek, the sibling's father, rejected their mother, Angie, after she threatened to expose their extramarital affair. Abandoned by Derek and disowned by her Italian-Canadian family for their interracial relationship, Angie asks Carla to take care of Jamal before jumping from their apartment's balcony. The loss leaves Carla with a "violent loyalty she *owed* [Angie]" (104; emphasis added).

By comparison, Carla and Jamal only engage with their father in moments of financial need (251). Derek's lack of affective care for his children is framed in financial terms: "You have a lot to pay for" (273), Derek's wife, Nadine, reminds him. She is an interesting character in this respect, as she attempts to leverage emotional debt into a stable relationship. While Derek's infidelity damaged their marriage, it also accrues value for Nadine, who "calculated, counted on [a] streak of conservatism in Derek. When she finally agreed to take his children in, it was another calculation.

That he would never be able to thank her. That would be their pact” (275). Nadine uses Derek’s affair to generate a possessive debt over him: “She wanted him to know just what he would *owe* if she took on the task of caring for Carla and Jamal” (276; emphasis added).

*What We All Long For* presents its readers with three families bound through conflated material and affective debts. Tuyen, Carla, and Oku are desperate to escape these possessive familial relationships, but none achieve the financial independence that would allow them to sever ties with their families. The only member of the novel’s core characters who is not financially dependent on her parents is Jackie. Absent in key textual moments and an outsider to this group of outsiders, Jackie is the novel’s most elusive character. Her family, who moved from Nova Scotia to Toronto in the 1970s, represents both the Africadian community and intra-national diasporas. Her chapters reflect on divisions between Afro-Canadian communities, particularly Toronto’s Scotian and West Indian diasporas (95) as well as the city’s Black police and larger Black communities (98-99). Although she is financially independent, unlike her friends, Brand suggests that even Jackie’s autonomy is an imposed necessity rather than an agential choice. Oku, reflecting on her parents’ struggle to support themselves amid their addictions, reflects that “Jackie.... owed a loyalty to her mother and father. That faithfulness didn’t mean that she wanted to have it burn her as it had them” (265). Although not financially dependent like Tuyen, Carla, or Oku, Jackie remains bound to her family by a sense of moral debt and obligation.

Each of *What We All Long For*’s characters chafe against their obligations to family, and this friction makes their friendship appear comparably mutual, an example of chosen (rather than imposed) *interdependence*. More intimately, though, these friends also long for mutually fulfilling *romantic* relationships, relationships that never solidify between Oku and Jackie or Tuyen and Carla. Oku loves Jackie; she enjoys him sexually but has no interest in pursuing a romantic relationship. When pressed to explain why, Jackie tells Oku “it’s what I want...all I have to give” (194; *ellipsis*



*original*), a comment that sets off a series of “calculations” (194) in Oku’s mind, calculations that similarly punctuate Oku’s relationships with his father who constantly calculates what his son owes him. Carla rebuffs Tuyen’s come-ons, and while Tuyen perceives this resistance as a matter of wearing down Carla’s presumed heterosexuality (50), Carla’s aversion originates in her concerns with Tuyen’s expansive physical and emotional needs. Her private reflections on Tuyen focus on maintaining the barriers, both metaphorical and literal, that separate them as autonomous individuals: “Carla had grown accustomed to Tuyen chiseling all through her sleep. Last night she had dreamed of Tuyen asking ‘What about that wall?’ Meaning the one near Carla’s head. Meaning could she take it down too, could she extend her sculpture through Carla’s place?” (40). Carla asserts her own fragile autonomy, an autonomy threatened by Jamal’s endless need for protection and her mother’s suicide, by maintaining friendship as a barrier between herself and an interdependent relationship with Tuyen.

As with affective citizenship, urban citizenship praises characters for “actively transgressing against borders, while maintaining an openness towards difference and the future, might enable new webs of social relations to form” (Dobson “Struggle Work” 101). Emily Johansen contends that while the novel’s parents “are overly reliant on notions of ‘authenticity,’ the second-generation characters begin to sketch out the possibilities of a territorialized cosmopolitan that allows for a connection with the diasporic cultures of their parents and the multi-ethnic cultures of the globalized city, and that emphasizes mutability over authenticity” (4). Through Carla, however, Brand suggests not all transgressions are liberatory, including her mother’s transgressions of racial and sexual boundaries. Angie’s transgressions cost her the interdependent relationships she had with family and Derek: “She had, yes, crossed a border. But wasn’t that daring! Wasn’t it hopeful? How come she had to disappear for it?” (112). Angie’s suicide highlights the risks that accompany transgressive relationships, and helps account for why Carla maintains friendship—and all its

implied autonomies—between herself and Tuyen: “Tuyen was her best friend. They shared everything, but it was long understood that some things, for both of them, were unknowable, unsharable. It was usually Tuyen who pushed and pulled at the borders of these things” (38). In this novel, boundary crossing friendships still preserve individual character’s autonomy, setting limits around individual characters that stave off the deeper interdependencies that define familial and romantic relationships. Interdependence proves both desired and impossible, rejected and inevitable, thus precluding Jackie and Oku or Tuyen and Carla from entering romantic relationships.

*What We All Long For*’s generational cohort proves internally divided on this front as well. Tuyen does not desire firm, identity-defining boundaries as strongly as Carla, but she still wants to firmly assert autonomy from her family. On first meeting Binh, Carla calls him “gorgeous” (157) and points out the siblings’ similarities. The comparison that unsettles Tuyen: “‘Alike’—the word revolted her; it gave her some unwanted feeling of possession. To be possessed, she thought, not by Binh only but by family, Bo and Mama, Ai and Lam, yes them, and time, the acts that passed in it, the bow, the course of events” (157). These similarities are an unwelcome reminder that Tuyen is neither independent of her family nor autonomous from larger social and historical forces beyond her control. Likewise, the similarities that later emerge between Tuyen, Binh, and Quy demonstrate, Lai argues, the “elision between those of us with all the privileges of the Western world and those without.... What, then, is one to make of one’s Western democratic privilege, fragile though it may be, if our individuality is not so fixed, if we are all stand-ins for one another?” (208-9). Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie’s multifaceted identities trouble national categories, an often-celebrated element of this novel;<sup>31</sup> as Lai proposes, however, Quy troubles the boundaries of the liberal, humanist, citizen subject itself.

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<sup>31</sup> See Johansen, Antwi, as well as Veronica Austin’s “Spaces of Agency,” Jenny James’s “Frayed Ends: Refugee Memory and Bricolage Practices of Repair in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* and Kim Thúy’s *Ru*,” Molly McKibben’s “The Possibilities of Home: Negotiating City Spaces in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*,” and Sylvia Langwald’s

Like Brydon and Dobson, Lai uses Brand's work to discuss transnationalism's ethics and focuses on "what happens to those who fall outside of the liberal humanist conception of the subject" (210). She does not, however, work to redeem citizenship through its post-national re-conception but focuses on the liberal subject's endlessly oscillating boundaries: "The subject I propose is more porous and more collective than the subject of liberal humanism. I offer the glimmering of an ethics of relation that might be useful for breaking out of or, at least, partially exceeding the Subject/Other dichotomy that has been such a problem for Western critical theory and the politics of cultural belonging for such a long time" (187). As a child refugee, Quy exemplifies liberal subjectivity's fragility and serendipitous nature: "[i]n losing the body of his father...he loses entry into Western subjectivity" (Lai 203). Unlike his Canadian siblings, "born into liberal individuality" (Lai 202), Quy has "something non-individual about him, something collective, sad, violent, and spiritual" (Lai 203). He is also, as Lai argues, on the cusp of entering liberal subjecthood: "The boundaries between discrete subjects dissolve.... we are forced to recognize that Quy is also like us, that he isn't purely Other, and that we are responsible to and for him. The edges of our humanist individuality are also rough" (208).

Quy's loss is typically approached as a "traumatic and debilitating event" (Frew 292), making the character an embodied example of diaspora's traumatic losses. Beyond traumatic readings, though, Quy demonstrates that community is not just a matter of personal choice but results from obligations imposed from without. As Lai notes, what makes this character so threatening is that he does not see himself as owing anything or bound by obligations to others: "The conundrum he poses is one of relationship to citizenship.... Brutal, damaged, and utterly uninvested in the truth, he

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"The Self and the City: Narrating 'Glocal' Spaces and Identities in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*"; articles that question this tendency include Joanne Leow's "Beyond the Multiculture: Transnational Toronto in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*," and Lee Frew's "Settler Nationalism and the Foreign."

is simply seeking material advantage for himself” (107). Quy’s present absence and absent presence is not so much a traumatic haunting, then, as a (dis)possession, an example of what happens when a non-subject (someone unbound by obligations to others) passes for a subject. Quy’s reflections on family focus on what he remains owed relative to his Canadian siblings: “I didn’t have anyone sacrifice a whole life for me. Every one of them [his siblings] had that. A city like this is built on that” (137). Murderous and avaricious, Quy threatens to dispossess others of their proper subjectivity, a threat that deepens on reconnecting with Binh: “I know I’m going to take him for everything he’s got. It’s the things that were mine, and he got them double. He’s got my mother and my father and my two sisters” (310-11).<sup>32</sup> Quy’s insistence on trans-generational obligation, ownership, and gratitude makes him a figure of historical debts that become mobile, potent, and threatening in the global present.

Until he becomes a liberal subject bound by mutual debts and obligations, Quy poses a significant and unknowable threat to the Vu family. The novel’s conclusion is intentionally unclear whether this character is the Vu’s missing son or a global hustler intent in bankrupting the family through their need for self-containment. Tuyen and Carla’s uncertain relationship also resurfaces at the novel’s unexpected conclusion, staging a final standoff over the relative value of autonomy and interdependence in a globalized Canada.

After forcing Derek to bail Jamal out of juvenile detention, Carla wants to definitively extricate herself from her family’s possessive ties, accepting she can no longer take care of her younger brother: “She rode through the city, now feeling free. Free of Jamal, free of Derek and Nadine. She would never be free of Angie. She didn’t want to be free of her. She only wanted the memory to lose its pain, not its intensity.... She wasn’t free of Jamal, really, and she didn’t want to

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<sup>32</sup> Quy does not include Tuyen as one of his sisters here.

be—she only wanted to be free of his pain. And of her protectiveness towards him” (313). Dobson describes Carla’s passage through the city as a conclusive assertion of her border-crossing freedom:

Carla has relinquished her younger brother’s difficulties so that he can learn to care for himself, and she is moving towards a future in which she will be free to create sustaining communities, and her friends are discovering ways in which they can remain mobile. Not everyone will escape from the reterritorializing gaze of the society of racialized surveillance, but it remains possible that the freedom for which these characters all long might be realized. (“Struggle Work” 101)

The events that follow, however, suggest that Carla’s motion is both unsustainable and unfulfilling.

After leaving Mimico, Jamal and a friend steal Derek’s Audi and drive to Richmond Hill, intent on boosting more cars. Concurrently, a triumphant Binh and circumspect Tuyen prepare their parents to reunite with the man who claims to be Quy. The novel closes amid profound pathos and dramatic irony: Jamal finds Quy waiting in Binh’s BMW, attacks him, and steals Binh’s car. As Lai notes, this scene is about mutual misrecognition: “Jamal and his friends (sic.) mistake Quy for a wealthy, privileged Asian, adding to his character the last in a battery of tropes concerning the Asian Other” (209). For all the novel’s work to establish mutual recognition across Afro- and Asian-Canadian communities, it ends amid a series of violent and redoubled misrecognitions: neither Jamal, Binh, nor Tuyen recognizes Quy as a global non-subject; Quy is then rendered beyond physical recognition by Jamal’s attack. The novel closes as Quy is discovered by his horrified parents and siblings. Brand does not indicate whether he will survive Jamal’s attack.

Urban citizenship enables a reading that presents *What We All Long For* as a novel about the hopeful possibility of non-national, self-recognizing communities: “it remains possible that the freedom for which these characters all long might be realized” (Dobson “Struggle Work” 102). Johansen adds that rather than “relying solely on counterpublic spaces which are predicated on their own marginalization, these second-generation characters radically reimagine public space, resisting the colonizing hegemony of the city’s white bourgeois elite” (60). Because of its inclusion, I instead read the novel as underscoring mutual recognition’s limits *and* autonomy’s impossibility: Carla’s

longing for autonomy (some freedom from her obligations to care for Jamal) and Tuyen's longing for Carla (her desire for mutual recognition and loving interdependence) are equally impossible. Like Tuyen's *lubaio*, an artistic rendering of the city's longings, these characters' desires remain unfulfilled. *What We All Long For* offers no pat or comforting conclusions but ends amid a complex matrix of obligations that highlight each character's incommensurable desires for autonomy and *interdependence*.

#### WHAT DISPOSSESSION GIVES DIASPORA STUDIES

*A Map to the Door of No Return, Inventory, and What We All Long For* collectively suggest communities form around common misrecognitions, unbelongings, and dispossessions. Brand rejects recognition's territorial and material underpinnings through characters who refuse to treat common possessions as the basis of subjectivity, a rejection that originates in Afro-diasporic subjects' natal dispossessions. Nation-states use non-recognition to withhold obligations from Black in service of their own ideological interests. Land, property, and their uneven distribution are more than just setting here, leaving Brand fundamentally ambivalent about diasporic desires for and against land: "[w]e have no ancestry except the black water. And the Door of No Return. They signify space and not land" (*Map* 61).

While dispossession may be a common ground for recognizing others across (certain) lines of difference, distinguishing between those who own and owe nothing from those who own and are indebted sows a deep tension between autonomous freedom and mutual obligations. Brand's works challenge the exclusions and violence that mar citizenship when nation-states refuse to recognize Black subjects. At the same time, they demonstrate the difficulty, indeed the undesirability, of extricating the individual self from larger, obligation-bound communities. Brand's ambivalence on this point does not undercut her legitimate critiques of the nation-state but is a reminder that Black authors do not owe literary criticism redemptive narratives that save citizenship.

This chapter has focused on dispossession rather than the belonging—and belongings—implied by ‘citizenship’ to re-center Brand’s larger ambivalence about autonomy and *interdependence*. Engaging with Brand’s works means negotiating Canadian literary analysis’s attempts to articulate the field’s own ethical aspirations through her works. Brand’s dispossessed characters reclaim loss—including land’s loss—and reject identifications imposed from without by national communities. This is not, however, a smooth or inherently redeeming process. Diasporic critique short-circuits Afro-Caribbean Canadian literature’s ambivalent negotiations of dependence and interdependence when it more simply attributes ethical value to landlessness itself. For all their valid critiques of the nation-state, then, diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships risk universalizing empathy, devaluing land, and celebrating individual autonomy.

Scholarship that unquestioningly celebrates diasporic and racialized individual’s capacity for autonomous self-definition is attempting, as Butler argues, “to overcome an impressionability and violability that are ineradicable dimensions of human dependency and sociality” (*Precarious Life* xiv), resulting in readings that celebrate post-national citizenship but fail to address individual citizenship’s racial limits. Brand’s works uphold and complicate dispossession as a condition of ethical engagement. Her dispossessed characters pursue *interdependence* and autonomy; they also desire freedom from dependencies, obligations, and complicities imposed from without, impositions that disproportionately endanger non-white subjects.

CHAPTER FOUR  
“NO HARM TO ME, I THINK”:  
DEBT AND FREEDOM ON NATIVE LAND

Colonial violence is always asymmetric. I think it is important then to build mechanisms into our anti-colonial organizing to make sure we are taking care of our communities, acting in solidarity with other communities of resistance, and not just refusing the violence of the colonial world, but relentlessly building liberation out of whatever we have.

---Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in conversation with Dionne Brand

[T]he colonial mythmaking is in constant operation of disappearing [...] bodies—Indigenous bodies and also Black bodies. And it makes symbolic these sets of bodies for its possession of these Americas, if you will. In the case of Black bodies we see the spectre, the emergency of police shootings all across North America—that body was first captured for labour in the colonial project and now is beaten, dragged, shot, or imprisoned as a sign of its non-nation status—of the impossibility of its ever being folded into nation and a sign of its continual possession.

---Dionne Brand in conversation with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

Across Dionne Brand’s fictional, non-fictional, and poetic works, dispossessed subjects recognize one another via common experiences of loss, non-belonging, and misrecognition. *Inventory* and *What We All Long For* describe how those dispossessed of the material and territorial possessions that underwrite liberal subjectivity come to recognize one another. Common dispossessions allow solidarity, kinship, and mutual recognition to arise across lines of *diasporic* difference. Can dispossession also foster solidarity between Indigenous and Black subjects in Canada? *Inventory* (2006) begins with the violence of Hollywood westerns, which burry “the homicides of Indians” (3) in its narrator’s childhood consciousness. The opening pages of *Bread Out of Stone* (1994) compare the police shootings of three Black Torontonians; the 1989 massacre of fourteen female engineering students at Montreal’s École Polytechnique; and the 1971 kidnapping, rape, and murder of Helen Betty Osborne, a Cree woman, by four white men in The Pas, Manitoba (9-10). “Islands Vanish” from *Land to Light On* (1997) juxtaposes the assimilative pressure non-white immigrants face in Canada with settler-colonial re-inscriptions of Indigenous territory: “Something there, written as wilderness, wood, nickel, water, coal, rock, prairie, erased as Athabasca, Algonquin, Salish, Inuit... hooded in Buxton fugitive, Preston Black Loyalist, railroaded to gold mountain,



swimming in *Komagata Maru*... Are we still moving?" (77; ellipsis original).<sup>1</sup> In each, shared experiences of dispossession—loss of homelands and negations of subjectivity—are a point of connection between Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Dispossession is a powerful concept in Brand's works; it is of growing importance to diasporic, post-national, and anti-racist critique as well, fields that are reclaiming loss, trauma, and nostalgia as sites of structural resistance. Like the anti-colonial principles that solidified Aimé Césaire's and Léopold Sédar Senghor's *négritude*, dispossession appears a potential basis for resistant solidarity. Unlike *négritude*'s emphasis on shared racial identity, dispossession has the added advantage of potentially fostering community across lines racial difference, what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney describe as 'being together in homelessness.' "[T]his interplay of the refusal of what has been refused" makes it possible, they suggest, to form an "undercommon appositionality.... Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything" (96).

Dispossession-based and boundary-crossing solidarities align well with analytical frameworks that approach contemporary diasporas as the nation-state's ethical foil. Vijay Mishra observes that cultural scholarship tends to approach diaspora "as the exemplary condition of late modernity... [and as] highly democratic communities for whom domination and territoriality are not the preconditions of 'nationhood'" (1). Readings that uncritically celebrate Brand's "creative, provisional reterritorializations of spaces within the Canadian nation" (Joseph 76) without addressing Afro-diasporic or Indigenous displacement exemplify this scholarly predisposition.<sup>2</sup> The issues of

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<sup>1</sup> Brand references Buxton (or North Buxton, a community for escaped slaves originating in 1849 located in southwest Ontario), Preston (a Black settlement near Dartmouth in Nova Scotia), gold mountain (a Chinese term describing North America's wealth used by those working the trans-Canadian rail road and gold rush), and the *Komagata Maru* (a Japanese steamer that brought 376 citizens of the British Raj to Vancouver in 1914 only to have the majority of passengers denied entry to Canada). All attest to racialized diasporic communities' historical presence in Canada.

<sup>2</sup> See Jason Wiens' "Language Seemed to Split in Two: National Ambivalence(s) in Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral*," Pauline Butling's "Dionne Brand on Struggle and Community, Possibility and Poetry," Bina Toledo Freiwald's "Cartographies of Be/longing: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*," Marlene Goldman's "Mapping the Door of

‘domination’ and ‘territoriality’ Mishra highlights are of unique significance in settler-colonial contexts. In Canada, the appropriation of Indigenous land unsettles nation-state’s—and, this chapter argues, diasporic criticism’s—resistant ethos. Likewise, Canada’s foundational anti-Blackness precludes citizenship as a meaningful discourse of equality, freedom, or security. Conflations of citizenship and emancipation only “conceal the brutal forces of unfreedom, which made freedom an ideal... in the first place” (Walcott, *Queer Returns* 81). Accordingly, seemingly common dispossessions do not align easily in settler-colonial sites.

My concern is that diasporic criticism sidesteps the ongoing settler-occupation of Indigenous land by offering readings of dispossession that assume the loss of pre-colonial homelands fosters solidarity between Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada. This tendency raises “questions regarding immigrant complicity in the colonization of land as well as the possibility of making alliances towards decolonization” (Wong 158-9) and obscures North American anti-Blackness, what Christina Sharpe describes as “pervasive *as* climate” (*In the Wake* 106). Climates of anti-Black violence both necessitate *and* preclude community in *Inventory* and *What We All Long For*. Black authors, Brand included, cannot be asked to identify with a Canadian nation that precludes belonging though latent and explicit climates of violence. At the same time, her physical occupation of Indigenous land muddies ethical lines between diasporic communities’ state-negating politics and settler-colonialism’s state-sustaining projects. On a more disciplinary level, diasporic criticism’s reterritorializations of national space founder against the hard geographies of Indigenous displacement. Indigenous and Black solidarity is absolutely possible, but not inherent. This chapter considers how diaspora studies’ dispossession-based readings, with all their emphasis on resisting the nation, preclude rather than foster this solidarity.

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No return: Deterritorialization and the Work of Dionne Brand,” Ellen Quigley’s “Picking the Deadlock of Legitimacy: Dionne Brand’s ‘noise like the world cracking,’” and Heather Smyth’s “Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*.”

Many interpretations of *Land to Light On* contend the narrator's declaration that she is "giving up on land to light on" is an ultimately resistant and liberating alternative to possessive nationalisms. Kaya Frasier describes this declaration as breaking Brand off from a "group of canonized, white poetic voices" as she "is in fact critiquing the CanLit clichés of vast, menacing landscapes and garrison mentalities" (302). Glossed here is Brand's Blackness: does Brand need to distinguish herself from Canada's white writers if racialization always already precludes her from Canada's national canons? Cheryl Lousley alternatively argues that although "read by most critics as a rejection of the exclusionary politics of nations and nationalisms," the narrator's "refusal to land or belong anywhere in *Land*... [to be] unencumbered by identities or nation-states or gravity, is as pernicious as any nostalgia. The speaker *has landed*; landed in a physical place—an *ecological* place—not just a socio-political space" (50). Lousley's reading highlights the problem of claiming landlessness while occupying Native land; it downplays the natal dispossessions that, for Brand and many Afro-diasporic subjects, make any permanent 'landing' impossible. Both analyses use Brand to trouble the nation. Troubling narratives of multicultural inclusion has arguably become the endpoint of much diasporic criticism in Canada. Troubling the nation does not, however, protect Black or Indigenous bodies; it does not interrupt the carceral state that disproportionately polices these bodies; it does not guarantee self-governance or protection from state violence.

In both cases, I am seeing Canadian diaspora studies, a predominantly white scholarly field, use the works of a Black author to distance 'trans' or 'post-national' Canada from its ongoing anti-Indigenous *and* anti-Black violence. As an alternative, I want to propose that as Brand writes about dispossession on simultaneously national and Indigenous land, she exemplifies what Jodi Byrd describes as a "cacophony" wherein identities and positionalities overlap in ways that unravel "colonial logics that are dependent on binary constructions of settler/native, black/white, and master/slave" (xxxvi). What, then, does Canadian diaspora studies' a-territorial and fractal theories

of citizenship demonstrate about settler-colonialism's trans- and post-national adaptations? In the preceding two chapters, I argued Brand's representations of recognition rest on an a-territorial logic that originates in Afro-diasporic dispossessions. Canadian diaspora studies arguably decenters Brand's Blackness *while* distancing itself from Indigenous territorial concerns when it presents a much more generalized notion of dispossession as *the* basis of resistant solidarity. More concretely, when dispossession becomes *the* defining characteristic of Black *and* Indigenous identity, it is all the more difficult to understand either as ever-evolving and situationally contingent, or, as Stuart Hall describes, "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). "Cultural identities," he elaborates, "come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). In Canada, this 'play' mixes all the complex and cacophonous intersections of Indigeneity, settlerhood, arrivant colonialism, delineating time and thus community through these entangled intersections.

Amid these tangles, diasporic critique's territorial abstentions are neither transparent nor inherently ethical. I believe this argument is necessary in the present historical moment, one uniquely concerned with questions of reconciliation. Although the Canadian nation appears relatively comfortable with the same discourses of reconciliation used in settler-colonial nations such as South Africa, Glen Sean Coulthard asserts Canada is very unlike post-apartheid South Africa insofar as it remains fundamentally 'nontransitional.' "[T]here is no formal period," he argues, "marking an explicit transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present—state-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation tend to ideologically fabricate such a transition by narrowly situating the abuses of settler colonialism firmly in the past.... leaving the *present* structure of colonial rule largely unscathed" (22). I agree with the sweep of Coulthard's observation: insofar as Indigenous

communities remain dispossessed of their land and political sovereignty, no formal distinction can be drawn between Canada's settler-colonial past and present. From my position in literary studies, however, I occasionally see diasporic criticism drawing subtle distinctions between Canada's past and present by presenting post-national landlessness as an ethical alternative to national belonging.<sup>5</sup>

Claiming ethical landlessness for diasporic and dispossessed peoples cleaves Canada into colonial and supposedly no-longer-colonial temporalities, sites, and communities. Len Findlay warns against this tendency in "Always Indigenize! The Radical Humanities in the Postcolonial Canadian University," reminding literary scholars "there is no *hors-Indigene*, no geopolitical or psychic setting, no real or imagined *terra nullius* free from the satisfactions and unsettlements of Indigenous (pre)occupation" (309). My concern is that scholarly discussions, university-level courses, and conferences on diasporic citizenship present racialized diasporic communities as this social space, this *hors-Indigene*, when they suggest 'racialized diasporas' occupy Canada *ethically* by giving up on land and its attendant national identifications.

Diaspora studies' academic value lies in its ability to expose cracks and fissures within nationalist notions of community. As Mishra warns, though, this critical potential does not make diasporic communities the nation-state's ethical foil: "contrary to idealist formulations about diasporas as symbolizing the future nation-state, diasporas are also bastions of reactionary thinking...: some of the strongest support for racialized nation-states has come from diasporas; some of the most exclusionist rhetoric has come from them, too" (8).<sup>7</sup> While Mishra's focus is on diasporas' nationalist tendencies and religious conservatism, I approach what he terms 'reactionary thinking' along a slightly different axis to focus on diaspora studies' post-nationalist claims as a

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter Dickenson's *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada*, Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, and Kit Dobson's *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization*. More recently, Karina Vernon's unpublished work on Black prairie fiction reasons that Afro-Canadian settlers cannot appropriate what they never truly owned.

<sup>7</sup> See Cho's "Diasporic Citizenship and Deformations of Citizenship."

resistant and reactionary discourse.

Resistance, for all its empowering potential, poses a familiar problem for diasporic critique. Insofar as resistance both decries *and* perpetuates the colonial nation-state's operational dichotomies, "the colonizer remains the 'actional' subject locked in their position of superiority as the creator of values, and the colonized remain the subject of 'reaction' locked in their subordinated position whose values remain inversely bound by those of their masters" (Coulthard 142). Diasporic criticism embeds reactionary struggles in its liberatory theories of affective and urban citizenship. A resistant dialectic will not allow diasporic critique—or the communities it conscripts—to overcome imbalances in power or the violence they afford, only sublimate racial inequalities into diffuse post-national communities. The transnational turn in literary studies makes it possible to shift Brand's Afro-diasporic origins and Canada's anti-Black violence out of scholarly focus.

Identifying resistance has become something of a default analysis for diasporic readings of Caribbean Canadian literature. Rather than treating Brand, her works, or their academic analyses as interconnecting cogs in a perpetual resistance machine that churns out strategies for post-national subversion, I am concerned with how resistance itself imbricates all three in settler-colonialism's operative logic. Against narratives of binary struggle between diasporic autonomy and national dependence, Christine Kim and Sophie McCall remind us that "diaspora and nation are interdependent and mutually constituting, just as indigeneity and nation are reciprocally contingent and responsive" (2). In order to tamper "with idealist notions of the exemplariness of diasporas in the modern world" (Mishra 8), then, Canadian diaspora studies needs to acknowledge how the field's claims simultaneously reject nationalism *and* perpetuate settler-colonialism's informing deontologies.

Caribbean Canadian literature can neither clear the slate nor bear the weight of Canadian settler-colonialism. To overlook Afro-diasporas in discussions of the nation's settler-colonial

practices, however, means ignoring how Black literature, in general, and Dionne Brand's works, in particular, are being used by diasporic critique to distance the Canadian nation from its colonial dispossessions. Choosing not to analyze Black literature's entanglement in Canada's settler-colonial reterritorializations also asserts Blackness's non-belonging in Canada, reiterating settler-colonialism's white supremacist power in 'transnational times.'

Of her own neologism, 'diasporic citizenship,' Lily Cho writes that "[a] new phrase will not necessarily get us out of old problems" ("DC: Contradictions and Possibilities" 101); by contrast, the *old problem* I want Brand's *new figures*—her dispossessed subjects—to return our scholarly focus to is land. I focus on land here largely because of Bonita Lawrence and Enaskshi Dua's "Decolonizing Anti-Racism," which observes that although "the core of Indigenous survival and resistance is reclaiming a relationship to land" (242), land's occupation is frequently overlooked in Canadian anti-racism scholarship: "the question of land as contested space is seldom taken up.... it speaks to a reluctance, on the part of non-Natives of any background.... [to] acknowledge that we all share the same land base and yet to question the differential terms on which that land base is occupied is to become aware of the colonial project that is taking place around us" (242).<sup>8</sup>

Lawrence and Dua identify three ways anti-racist scholarship systemically excludes Indigenous concerns. First, when antiracist discourse draws on the temporalizing language of the *postcolonial*, it implies that North America's former colonies are independent and nationally decolonized. If debatably true for states in the Black Atlantic, this temporalizing 'post-' occludes "the ways in which colonialism continues for Aboriginal people in settler nations" (Lawrence and Dua 244).<sup>9</sup> Second, many theorizations of racialized identity "fail to ask, let alone explore, the ways

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence is Mi'kmaw; Dua was born in India and immigrated to Canada at 16.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence and Dua are also clear that the label 'settler nations' should not be limited to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, the countries literary scholarship most commonly constellates through this term: "there is no exploration of how the on-going colonization of Aboriginal peoples shapes contemporary modes of 'race' and racism in

in which these identities have been articulated through the colonization of Aboriginal peoples, or the ways in which the project of appropriating land shaped the emergence of black/Asian/hispanic (sic.) settler formations” (Lawrence and Dua 245), thus reproducing the myth of the vanishing native within North America’s non-white communities.<sup>10</sup> Third, when scholarship arraigns nationalism while glossing Indigenous nationhood, it not only obscures “the contemporary political, social and economic realities of Indigenous peoples, but also fails to address the ways in which diasporic claims are premised on a colonizing social formation” (Lawrence and Dua 246). The conceptual frameworks around the Black Atlantic, the West and the Rest, and post-national critique equate decolonization with anti-racism. This false equivalency leads Lawrence and Dua to the troubling conclusion that “anti-racism is premised on an ongoing colonial project... rather than challenging the on-going colonization of Aboriginal peoples, Canadian anti-racism is furthering contemporary colonial agendas” (238).

The “theoretical segregations” (250) Lawrence and Dua identify in discourses of anti-racism are alive and well in diasporic literary criticism, too, and populate readings that use Brand to praise the liberatory potential of the post-nation without engaging Black (un)freedom in post- and transnational sites. Because of this resistant approach, contemporary diaspora studies exacerbates an existing fissure between Indigenous and Afro-diasporic understanding of land: Dua and Lawrence observe that while former plantation colonies were encouraged to reproduce European models of nationalism and sovereignty, settler-colonialism “denied [Indigenous peoples] even the possibility of regenerating nationhood.... At the heart of Indigenous peoples’ realities, then, is nationhood. Their very survival depends on it” (239). Readings that celebrate diasporas’ rejections of land *as* an anti-colonial stance effectively throw land out with the dirty bathwater that is the settler-colonial nation-

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settler nations (including those settler nations located in the Caribbean where those of African and Asian descent have established political authority)” (245).

<sup>10</sup> Mathur discusses this myth’s reproduction in Canada’s racialized communities in *Cultivating Canada*.



state. Through the very act of resisting national power, then, diasporic reterritorializations can both trouble the nation *and* reiterate Canada's displacement of Indigenous peoples and moral philosophy.

#### DEONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES: DIASPORIC CRITICISM ON TRADITIONAL TERRITORY

Indigenous and diasporic scholarship share common projects. Both fields challenge Canada's non-recognition of minoritized, peripheralized subjects; both show that, whether through malefic traditions of exclusion or toothless gestures of inclusion, the Canadian nation withholds obligations from Indigenous and Black subjects via their non-recognition. That said, each field perceives land's centrality to community very differently. For example, Brand's works ask how communities emerge after profound and irrecoverable losses; diaspora studies, at the risk of generalization, uses her works to drive towards the diasporic autonomism Hardt and Negri idealize in *Empire*, where individual autonomy is the utmost form of resistance and the ultimate marker of freedom. By contrast, Indigenous scholarship's discussions of decolonization underscore the importance of physical land to communal sovereignty.

These differences—diaspora studies' emphasis on boundary-negating autonomy, Indigenous studies' emphasis on land-based communities—flag a fundamental deontological disconnect between these scholarly fields. Deontological ethics, at its simplest, is the study of the normative positions from which a given community assesses morality.<sup>11</sup> Differences between Indigenous and diaspora studies' deontologies—their respective understandings of the moral obligations that govern ethical action—manifest in two contrasting models of subjectivity: diaspora studies' fractal citizenships (the focus of chapter three) and James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson's treaty citizenship.<sup>12</sup> These differing theories of citizenship demonstrate where and why diasporic and

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<sup>11</sup> *An Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* defines deontology as “any ethical theory which takes as primary the concept of duty” (891) and stands in opposition to teleological ethics, wherein “the moral goodness or badness of an action [lies] in its consequences” (906).

<sup>12</sup> Henderson is a member of the Chickasaw nation and has Cheyenne heritage.

Indigenous scholarship disagree about the obligations individuals bear to their larger communities.

If diaspora studies have an overarching project, it is to expose how *all* identities are warped when social legibility is oriented around the Eurocentric, geographically-bound nation-state as “citizenship is always in the process of deformation. Every time citizenship comes close to formation, it is deformed by the tensions of inequality, and of the incomplete transformation from *subjectus* to *subjectum*” (Cho, “DC and Deformations of Citizenship” 533). One reason Brand’s works are so central to Canadian diaspora studies is because they clearly show why nation-based notions of community are intolerable for diasporic Black subjects like herself, those irreparably severed from their own communal origins. In *Map*, Brand explains why the Middle Passage’s dispossessions have culminated in her uneasy relationship with national communities of belonging:

if I reject this notion of origins I have also to reject its mirror, which is the sense of origins used by the powerless to contest power in a society.... they must draw very definite borders both to contain their constituencies as well as, in the case of the powerful, to aggressively exclude the other and, in the case of the powerless, to weakly do the same while waving a white flag to the powerful for inclusion. (69)

Here, Brand sympathizes with marginalized peoples’ desire for national belonging—and all the protection such belonging affords—but remains deeply skeptical about its likelihood for the always already dispossessed. The borders she draws around her characters and her communities result from histories of perpetual anti-Black violence that define not only national community, but the boundaries of the human itself, by excluding Blackness.

It is essential that analyses of Brand’s works are anchored particular histories and ongoing practices of Black Atlantic cultural genocide, not vague generalizations of diasporic dispossession. As importantly, it remains unclear whether Brand’s dispossessed subjects—those who insist on their independence as a matter of self-preservation—can afford the *interdependencies* integral to Indigenous kinship, wherein “individuals do not and could not exist outside of community or the land. Our past, present, and future relationships define who we are and determine what roles we play

as well as responsibilities we have to the community and to the land that sustains it” (Amadahy and Lawrence 117). *The* problem for diasporic critique’s search for shared solidarity, then, is whether the Black diasporas’ defining dispossessions—and resulting appeal of independent autonomy—can be reconciled with Indigenous kinship systems’ inexorable *interdependencies*: can Blackness exist *inside* any community, any land, when both are sustained through violent negations of Black life?

If diasporic criticism only ever presents Black diasporic literature as resistant, if it only ever discusses Black diasporic subjects as self-determining individuals who repudiate national identity, then the field ironically valorizes autonomy and portrays emancipation as an individual, not collective, project. This approach upholds the tenants of liberal individualism. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence describe the problem with readings that slot Black subjects into the role of *either* settler *or* ally:

for groups of peoples to be forcibly transplanted from their own lands and enslaved on other peoples’ lands – as Africans were in the Americas – does not make the enslaved peoples true ‘settlers.’ Even in situations in Canada where Black people, after slavery, attempted settlement as free peoples, the process has been fraught with dispossession and denial of access to land. The reality then is that Black peoples have not been quintessential ‘settlers’ in the White supremacist usage of the word; nevertheless, they have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process. (107)

While *Land to Light On* contests whether Black subjects have ever been ‘free people,’ its narrator also alludes to this complex third space between Indigeneity and settler subjectivity through the collection’s eponymous declaration: “I don’t want no fucking country, here or there and all the way back, I don’t like it, none of it, easy as that. I’m giving up on land to light on” (48). These lines resist national communities and identities imposed from without. They also long for the safety engrained in individualistic, autonomous notions of subjectivity integral to Enlightenment theories of recognition and Western models of citizenship, safety systemically denied Afro-diasporic peoples.

*Land to Light On*’s rejection of ‘country’ is integral to readings that emphasize diaspora’s

ethical distinctions. Sophia Forster reads this declaration as an alternative to “generalized vision[s] of a postcolonial nationalism, which appeals to origins preceding exile, [and] contravenes the particulars of individuals’ histories” (172). Foster is right that Brand rejects collective identities, including those bundled into emancipatory postcolonial nationalisms; however, I am skeptical of readings that uphold liberal individualism and re-center the Eurocentric nation-state. While *Land to Light On*’s narrator gives up on national identities that have never, will never, can never include Black subjects, she also hints at the material realities that undercut a-territoriality’s emancipatory potential. *Land to Light On* suggests it is not possible to extricate oneself from immediate, land-based communities through the narrator’s demotic double negative, “I don’t want no fucking country,” and the passage’s conclusion, “I can’t perfect my own shadow” (48). Although this narrator, and post-national literary scholarship more broadly, resist nation-states that do not recognize racialized diasporic subjects, both exist in a physical world that is the basis of Indigenous moral philosophy and re-coded as national space. Brand’s narrator can no sooner opt out of land and its binding obligations than she can opt out of casting shadows.

Forster, by contrast, reads *Land to Light On*’s central declaration metaphorically: Brand’s narrator is not giving up on literal land, *per se*, but on the exclusionary ideologies that define who is (and who is not) recognized within the Canadian nation-state. Readings of Brand’s works that emphasize “social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic” (McKittrick x) can both resist nationalism *and* dematerialize Indigenous land. This critical tendency concerns Rita Wong, who asks what would happen “if we position indigenous people’s struggles instead of normalized whiteness as the reference point through which we come to articulate our subjectivities?” (159). Her ‘we’ refers to diasporic scholarship as well as Canada’s non-Indigenous and non-white communities, directing both to consider how belonging and subjectivity are theorized not in Western or liberal thought, but in Indigenous moral philosophy. This means reading the term ‘country’ as intentionally

ambiguous: 'country' collapses physical land and the nation-state into one, one way settler-colonial narratives recode land as a national possession.

While diasporic critique tends to subordinate physical land to its national re-inscriptions, Indigenous scholars, authors, and communities do not present land, nation, or nation-state as interchangeable concepts. Indeed, land's non-fungibility is a political necessity insofar as decolonization is not metaphorical, Eve Tuck and Wane Yang argument:

[w]hen metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. (3)

The metaphorical decolonization of concepts, individuals, institutions is not the same as the literal decolonization of land. Tuck and Yang's distinction between metaphorical and territorial decolonization calls diaspora and Indigenous studies' deontological differences into sharper focus: Indigenous scholarship approaches decolonization as a collective and relational process that is inseparable from physical land; diaspora studies, alternatively, is presenting decolonization as a fundamentally individual project, one predicated on resisting identities, obligations, and communities imposed from without.

As they work to describe subjectivity in terms that neither replicate Eurocentric concepts of individual autonomy nor fuel antagonistic deployments of (non)recognition, Indigenous scholars are voicing longstanding but overwritten theories of community and/as relationality. These include Coulthard's 'grounded normativity,' which describes Indigenous resurgence movements as "not only *for* land in the material sense" but "also deeply *informed* by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms" (13); and Henderson's 'terrestrial consciousness,' "the

core of the postcolonial belonging that de-emphasizes citizenship for ecological belonging and responsibilities. Indigenous peoples who were colonized are discovering that belonging to an ecology is our shared purpose, bond, and unity” (433). In both, subjectivity is relational: obligations that originate in land bind *all* its inhabitants to one another and create communities that are capacious and non-negotiable.<sup>13</sup> Under these frameworks, no amount of struggle work, no antagonistic resistance, can free an individual from their intersubjective debts to others because no individual can be free from relations with and obligations to land.

Canadian diasporic criticism alternatively imagines the post-nation as civil commons, one the dispossessed, displaced, and non-recognized can claim as their own. “Brand wants to forge connections between and among communities,” Saul summarizes: “she makes links between members of the Black Diaspora, aboriginal populations in Australia, New Zealand, North America, members of the Jewish diaspora—links between other peoples that have been subjected to imperialism, both past and present, links that are transnational, transglobal” (62). For Saul, resistance links otherwise discrete racial, religious, tribal, and geographic communities, as “these ruptures—and the sharedness of these ruptures—allow for the possibility of imagining alternatives to other people's labels (if we're lucky), and may also serve to transform both the nation and the globe into a space of potential connectedness” (63). Speculative imaginings about what post-national community *could be* have spurred legitimate critiques of the Canadian nation-state, exposed its white supremacy, and demonstrate that Manichean distinctions continue to operate through multicultural and reconciliatory discourse alike. That said, the post-nationalist vision Saul attributes to Brand severs community from land: diasporic-cum-post-national community becomes a matter of shared politics and common struggles, an agential choice that reflects individual autonomy. This vision is also

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<sup>13</sup> For Henderson and Coulthard alike, these obligations extend not only between differing peoples who occupy the same territory, but human and non-human subjects as well, upending Eurocentric theories of subjectivity that dehumanize their others by parsing subjects from animals and culture from nature.

disquietingly post-racial.

I do not question the desire for a commons populated by diasporic citizens (or urban citizens, or affective citizens, or dispossessed subjects), nor do I discount the literal and representational violence that animates this desire. My concern lies with scholarship that approaches diasporic subjects as a-territorial, autonomous, deeply resistant, and thus fundamentally atomized. Not only do these characteristics present diasporic individuals as the pinnacle of liberal democratic subjecthood, the product of a protracted colonial progress narrative; they also conflict with Indigenous decolonization and promote colonialism and its political form (liberalism, neoliberalism) through the very people these forces disenfranchise. In “Reconstructing Canadian Literature,” Christl Verduyn argues “Canada is being reconstructed through the writing of authors like Brand,” and that “[t]his new ‘construct’ of Canada comprises not just, or even primarily, physical or geographical dimensions, but also psychological or emotional dimensions with political passions—as expressed in the writings of Canadians who identify with ethnic or as racial minorities” (109). Here, Black authors re-construct Canada by unshackling the country from its compromising ‘physical and geographical dimensions.’ A similar logic informs Saul’s suggestion that “rootlessness” is the essence of Brand’s ethic: “rootlessness with a difference. Rootlessness as a starting point. As the beginning of a notion of political efficacy” (63). For both, diasporic a-territoriality is an expression of anti-national resistance and community-building solidarity. Who ultimately *benefits* from this unshackling and rootlessness, though? Who *needs* freedom from land, from land’s obligations and imposed relationalities? Rootless does not counter anti-Black violence, so it seems diasporic critique, not diasporic communities, benefit from these readings.

Diasporic criticism can reduce land to little more than nation-states’ territorial anchor. Coulthard is alternatively clear that land is *the* basis of Indigenous anti-colonial resurgence: “[b]y ignoring or downplaying the injustice of colonial dispossession, critical theory and left political

strategy not only risks becoming complicit in the very structures and processes of domination that it ought to oppose, but it also risks overlooking what could prove valuable glimpses into the ethical practices and preconditions required for the construction of a more just and sustainable world order” (12). Brand’s works, of course, are not like the critical theory and left political strategies Coulthard contests. As I argue in chapters two and three, Brand does not minimize colonialism’s dispossessions; indeed, the Black Atlantic’s dispossessions necessitate her anti-colonial and post-national identifications. Importantly, critical readings of Brand’s works align themselves with ‘the very structures and processes of domination’ Coulthard challenges anti-colonial thought to evade by offering analyses that devalue land, discount race, and celebrate resistance as an expression of individual agency. These preoccupations make it more difficult for the field to glimpse Coulthard’s ‘more sustainable and just world order.’

When diasporic criticism assumes diasporic subjects are ideally *independent* from communities imposed from without, this normalization of individual autonomy places the field at odds with Indigenous theories of citizenship. Henderson offers a powerful rejoinder to celebratory readings that present post-nationalism as a fundamentally anticolonial ethic: “[c]ontrary to popular misconceptions,” he writes, “Aboriginal nationhood is defined by Aboriginal law and customs, rather than by any European concept of nationhood” (424). Daniel Heath Justice adds that “[t]o dismiss nationhood from analysis, especially when it is such a concern of Indigenous peoples themselves, once more silences Native voices and perspectives and reinforces the dominative power of Canadian colonialism” (148).<sup>14</sup> Diasporic landlessness, then, is not a foil for—nor an *ethical* antidote to—nationalism’s exclusions. Instead, such a-territorial communities appear “a critical *terra nullius*, a new Virgin Land ready for occupation, effecting a genesis amnesia” (Lawson 154), one reason diaspora studies’ “current strategies of confronting systemic racism that code [racialized

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<sup>14</sup> Heath Justice is a Colorado-born Canadian citizen of the Cherokee Nation.



diasporic] communities as outside of the nation or inconsequential to its well-being are... insufficient for addressing the particular violence directed towards Aboriginal people” (Sehdev 265).

#### DIASPORIC CITIZENS, TREATY CITIZENSHIP

Canadian diaspora studies’ a-territorial notions of citizenship further settler-colonialism’s displacement of Indigenous communities, political theory, and moral philosophy *and* present post-national resistance as a fundamentally post-racial project. Like Alan Lawson’s studies of power in settler colonial sites, I offer this argument not to “reproduce the arithmetical fallacies” or present “a new hierarchy of cultural dominance and subalternity in a numerical,” or temporal “sequence of worlds” (159). Brand cannot be recruited into diaspora studies’ settler-colonial project. I do not “subscribe to the notion that oppressions can be added up, cumulated as in the dubious notion of ‘double colonization.’ Each system of dominance interpolates its subjects differently: these can be added, but not added up” (Lawson 159). Instead, I follow Robinder Kaur Sehdev who challenges scholars to “direct our attention to the power contexts that produce us [Black and Brown subjects in Canada] as simultaneously marginal and dominant” (266). Her reasoning here is relational: Canada’s marginalization of Indigenous and Black communities is reciprocal and mutually sustaining; it maintains both communities’ marginalization by pitting one against the other.

This is one consequence of a long colonial history that divides non-dominant communities against one another in order to conquer each more easily. Academically, Canada’s racialized and Indigenous communities have been imagined, studied, and theorized apart from one another. This break originates in settler-colonial fantasies of Canada as a clean slate for white immigrants, a powerful reterritorializing narrative continues to naturalize whiteness in Canada (Coleman, *White Civility* 3). As Ashok Mathur observes, however, the nation continues to present itself as a *tabula rasa* for contemporary immigrants, a reterritorializing repetition that discourages contemporary arrivants from questioning their occupation of Indigenous territory. “[A] more appropriate metaphor than a

blank slate,” he elaborates, “would be a geographic palimpsest, a land whose history was always alluded to by the tracings and markings that, however obscured or willfully ignored can never be erased. This is the land we came to,” he continues “not a terra nullius but a land weighted by official and unofficial histories, some of which new immigrants are made to understand quite well, and others which remained and remain un-interrogated” (Mathur 3). The ‘Canada-as-clean-slate’ narrative permeates contemporary discussions of reconciliation that “largely centre on the difficult binary of colonizer and colonized, of White settlers and Aboriginal peoples” (Mathur 6), erasing non-white settlers like John Ware and Sir James Douglas from Canadian history while relegating Indigenous concerns to the nation’s past, not its future.<sup>15</sup>

Georges Erasmus reasons that “any discussion of reconciliation must include the perspectives of those who have arrived in more recent days and those who trace their family histories beyond western European colonial states. The reason for this is simple. Aboriginal people have a unique historical relationship with the Crown, and the Crown represents all Canadians” (vii). Importantly, this logic does not acknowledge that the Crown has never represented all Canadians equally: settler-colonialism’s cultural, territorial, and political maneuvers are not uniform but experienced differently by racialized and white Canadians, complicating past discussions of their intersections.<sup>17</sup> In this vein, Amaduahy and Lawrence note that “the presence of older communities of color... is constantly being erased from the Canadian body politic, by a multiculturalism policy that treats all racialized cultural communities as ‘new immigrants’” (115), adding the important rejoinder that “Black Canadians in particular face a nation-state which has continuously excluded large-scale Black settlement, and which, despite the existence of centuries-old Black settlements, continues to construct a vision of Canadian nationhood where Black people are forever marginal

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<sup>15</sup> Unlike Mathur’s credulous immigrant, encouraged by omission and misdirection to ignore Canada’s colonial origins, Brand is both conscious of and appalled by the Indigenous genocide committed by the Canadian nation.

<sup>17</sup> Erasmus is Yellowknife Dene, president of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and former Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

newcomers, always external to the nation” (115). Regardless of Treaty Citizenship’s capacious notions of kinship, a subject’s proximity to whiteness continues to mediate their belonging in Canada.<sup>18</sup>

Malissa Phung acknowledges settler colonialism’s racial gradations when she asks: “If people of colour are settlers, then are they settlers in the same way that the French and British were originally settlers in Canada?... Is [settler identity] a unified monolithic subject position? Or can colonial settlerhood be stratified?” (292). She describes Chinese immigrants, herself included, as the beneficiaries of settler-colonialism, but adds that they can resist the narratives and privileges that encourage non-white, non-Black subjects to play the role of “model immigrants” and “exemplary settlers” in Canada (Phung 294).

Indigenous scholars also draw firm distinctions between racialized diasporas and settler-colonial communities. In *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd offers the term “arrivant,” an adaptation of Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite’s “arrivants,” “to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism... [those who] have functioned within and have resisted the historical project of the colonization of the ‘New World’” (xix). Chelsea Vowel similarly reasons that

the term settler does not, and can never, refer to the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped and sold into chattel slavery. Black people, removed and cut off from their own indigenous lands – literally stripped of their humanity and redefined legally as property – could not be agents of settlement. The fact that slavery has been abolished does not change this history. Although Black people are not all indigenous to the Americas, the Americas are home to the descendants of enslaved African peoples. (23)

Unlike Euro-Canadian settlers, formerly enslaved and indentured subjects “do not have the power to bring with them their laws and customs, which they then apply to the rest of the peoples living in

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<sup>18</sup> Karina Vernon poses a similar question in her paper “‘Making Things Right’: Black Settlement and the Politics of Urban Territory” presented at the 2017 *TransCanadas* conference, where she contends racialized diasporas do not occupy land in Canada as settler-colonial subjects.

Canada” (Vowel 23). Systemic power differentials, or, more plainly, white supremacy distinguishes between white and Black territorial occupations in Canada.

Vowel, Byrd, Phung, Amadahy and Lawrence collectively agree that non-white arrivants inherit the Canadian nation’s settler-colonial legacies, anxieties, and obligations in uneven and racially-contingent ways. Rather than arguing *either* that racialized diasporic subjects continue Canada’s settler-colonization *or* that they represent a radical break from such processes, Sehdev’s “People of Colour in Treaty” emphasizes the unsettling irony that Canada’s territorial dispossessions implicate Black and Brown subjects in the same “colonial processes [that] deeply (and detrimentally) affect us” (265). Given Canadian settler-colonialism’s conscription of non-white subjects, Sehdev makes two important gestures of solidarity with Indigenous decolonization. First, she explicitly grounds the contested middle ground between Indigenous and white settlerhood, that occupied by Canada’s non-white arrivants, in physical land: “Our belonging on this land,” she writes, “is made possible by treaty, and it is therefore incumbent upon us to reconsider our strategies for social justice with treaty in mind” (Sehdev 265). Second, Sehdev acknowledges that diasporic and Indigenous dispossessions do not align as easily as post-national criticism suggests: “we [racialized subjects] must recognize our conflicted position as marginalized settlers and treaty citizens” (265). This grounding leads her to conclude that the failure “to recognize the significance of treaty to Aboriginal political philosophies and practices amounts to another act of colonization” (270). With this claim, Sehdev exposes *the* issue with diaspora studies’ a-territorial notions of citizenship: as they extricate themselves from national communities by claiming a-territoriality, fractal citizens deny their obligations under treaty citizenship. Rather than assuming minoritization is a clear-cut site of solidarity in Canada, then, diasporic literary scholarship must ask whether Black subjects can fit within—and how anti-Black violence complicates inclusion in—the extended kinship structures that inform Indigenous deontologies.

Unlike federal citizenship, treaty citizenship assumes that reciprocal responsibilities—not individual autonomy—is the basis of subjectivity: “instead of promoting abstract rights, the Aboriginal order of kinship implies a distinct form of responsibilities.... Instead of defining a nationality separate from relatives, Aboriginal teachings recognize a web of reciprocal relationships among individuals” (Henderson 425).<sup>21</sup> As a relational theory of subjectivity, Henderson’s treaty citizenship imagines kinship between Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and non-human subjects that share the land. It originates in the deontological belief that subjectivity results from *obligations* to the social and ecological systems that make life possible: “each person has a right to a personal identity as a member of a community, but also has responsibilities to other life forms and to the ecology of the whole. Such kinship was a necessary foundation of Aboriginal sovereignty and order” (Henderson 425). Treaty citizenship requires subjects accept their obligations to others because these obligations, imposed by a natural world, make life possible.

Individuals, communities, and nations not only exert claims to land under Treaty Citizenship, land also imposes bonds of kinship (and all of kinship’s obligations) on its occupants: “This vision of *belonging to the land*, a people, and a family unfolds an alternative vision of society and citizenship. It accentuates relationships—in particular, the responsibilities among families, clans, communities, and nations to a particular ecology.... everyone and everything is part of a whole, in which they are interdependent” (Henderson 425; emphasis added). Henderson’s phrasing—that subjects ‘belong to’ land—introduces an ecological alternative to diaspora studies’ national emphasis. Diasporic, Indigenous, and national communities are not internally consistent or agreed upon, but each has—at key moments and for strategic reasons—insisted on their independence from one another. Canadian anti-Blackness is pervasive. “To belong as black in Canada,” McKittrick writes,

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<sup>21</sup> Henderson unsteadies federal citizenship as the organizing principle of recognition in Canada by distinguishing between “citizenship as a right to political or civil membership” and “citizenship as a right to presence in the territory” (417): while the former can be granted and withheld by the nation-state, the latter extends to all subjects by virtue of their common occupation of land.

“is...to necessarily belong elsewhere.... The geographic terms of being black *in* Canada are, within the context of Canadian colonialism and nation-making, crucially nonphysical geographies unless they are outside the borders of the nation state” (99). Canadian diasporic literary critique has largely embraced these nonphysical geographies: claiming a-territoriality seems a resistant alternative to desiring recognition from—or belonging in—a withholding nation-state. This logic’s analytical purchase is undercut, however, when claims to diasporic citizenship dismiss Indigenous deontologies in favour of debt-free, owing nothing to anyone because one cannot be owed, innocence.

Canadian diasporic scholarship—I am thinking in particular of Gunew’s discussion of non-recognition (9), Dobson’s urban citizenship, and Brydon’s affective citizenship—proposes that a-territorial communities can result from common belongings (and non-belongings). In turn, these belongings (and non-belongings) delimit dispossessed individuals’ debts to others, such as the national others that refuse to recognize Black subjects *as* subjects. Indigenous scholarship alternatively contends community results from shared obligations and debts. These debts, which make subjectivity and life itself possible, cannot be settled or resolved. Roberto Esposito notes a similar conflict between cultures born of the European Enlightenment—those that operate under “the ignored assumption that community is a ‘property’ belonging to the subjects that join them together [*accomuna*]: an attribute, a definition, a predicate that qualifies them as belonging to the same totality” (2)—and the obligation-based understandings of subjectivity preceded Enlightenment philosophy. This turn from obligation to belonging, Esposito reasons, has distanced ‘community’ from its Latin origins in ‘*munus*’. If communities were once assumed to form around common lacks, common debts, common obligations, they now appear premised first and foremost on common

possessions.<sup>23</sup> The first premise holds in treaty citizenship; the second premise underwrites diaspora studies fractal citizenships, wherein common dispossessions are community forming.

A-territorial theories of subjectivity are irreconcilable with Indigenous moral philosophy insofar as they abdicate individuals of these territorially imposed obligations to others. These same a-territorial theories of subjectivity are necessary in the face of anti-Black violence. This chapter's next section shifts from a diasporic to an Afro-pessimist reading to address this disconnect. Before moving on, though, I want to reiterate that this fissure between Indigenous and Canadian diaspora studies results from each field's unique understandings of obligation. Under treaty citizenship, *interdependence* is the starting point, not the end stage, of social relations and ethical action. Heath Justice underscores this point when he compares Indigenous kinship structures to dialogic theories of Western citizenship: "inherently antagonistic sovereignty," he argues, "is counter to the relational worldviews that emphasize cooperation" (149). The notion that community results from possessions that are *common* to each of its member—the notion of community Gunew ascribes to racialized diasporic communities in Canada (9)—is based on liberal notions of the citizen as a possessive individual.<sup>25</sup> Here, loss delimits Black communities and restricts their external obligations, a protective countermove against the violence of non-recognition. In effect, Canadian diaspora studies upholds one of liberal subjectivity's principle shortcomings—the belief that autonomous subjectivity is antithetical to obligations to others—when it treats dispossession as post-national community's basis. Treaty citizenship, alternatively, asserts that the desire to be free of obligations—to others, to

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<sup>23</sup> Esposito traces community's turn away from obligation and towards possession to medieval Europe, "when the lemma *communitas* is associated with the concept of 'belonging' in its contemporary subjective and objective meaning: the community is that which belongs to the collective *and* is that to which it belongs as its own essential type [*genere*]: *communitas entis*?" (9).

<sup>25</sup> Hegel suggests mutual recognition is established through individuals common desires for property: I won't take your land, and you won't take mine. Individuals demonstrate they recognize one another and their interdependence by not violating one another's possessions. Moreover, liberal democratic citizens extend recognition to one another amid national commons that need protection from possessive outsiders: I won't take your country, and you won't take mine. Nation-states made up of possessive individuals demonstrate they recognize one another by not violating one another's possessions.

the natural world, to history—only perpetuates non-recognition’s antagonism and violence.

I want to tentatively gesture at an alternative here, but not one that can be accessed through contemporary diaspora studies that rely on citizenship as a marker of intelligibility. Of contemporary discourses of freedom, Walcott writes that “rights, as organised by and governed through the state, might be said to actually abort a more pure freedom” (*Queer Returns* 95). Henderson, Heath Justice, Coulthard, Harney and Moten collectively suggest this ‘more pure freedom’ may actually be the freedom to be in debt—and constituted through debts—to larger, *interdependent*, ecologically-based communities. This refusal of that which has been refused Black subjects is integral to Afropessimist thought, not diaspora studies. It is no small irony that federal citizenship and diasporic critique’s fractal, resistant, and dispossessed alternatives are tethered to the same rights-bearing, autonomous individual, the modern individual for whom *interdependence* and autonomy are perpetually at odds. This individual perpetually asserts their independence from others. For white Canadians, such assertions of independence are a marker of privilege. For Black Canadians—if there can be a Black Canadian—such assertions are necessary amid the unrelenting violence of their impending de-subjectification, their conversion from *subjectus* to *subjectum*.

#### THE CACOPHONY OF DIASPORIC RETERRITORIALIZATION

In his early studies of settler-colonial literature, Alan Lawson contended “the colonial project is recognizable in the valorized narratives...in which our ambiguously postcolonial cultures characterize themselves and their tendentious histories” (151); one such valorized narrative concerns settlers’ claim to occupy land *ethically*. Fanon’s colonial masters wanted labour more than recognition from colonized subjects.<sup>31</sup> Coulthard’s settler-colonial masters want land rather than recognition

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<sup>31</sup> “For Hegel there is reciprocity; here [in colonized societies] the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 195 fn. 10).



from Indigenous subjects.<sup>32</sup> What diaspora studies' fractal citizens want more than recognition is to be free from land's obligations and ethical compromises. In settler-colonial sites like Canada, diasporic criticism can *both* resist national narratives *and* perpetuate settler-colonialism insofar as post-national aspirations mean giving up on land and the deontologies it informs. Interrupting this cycle will require literary scholars "recognize the resistance in [post]nationalisms while recognizing their concomitant containment. It might be in that simultaneous mediation of power that we can see, too, how [post]nationalist criticism can be co-opted by those imperial institutions" (Lawson 159). By championing a-territorial communities while distancing itself from Indigenous thought and anti-Black violence, Canadian diaspora studies actually fulfills one of settler-colonialism's principle desires—to keep settler subjects from realizing their proper role in Indigenous displacement. This tendency is perhaps most obvious in scholarship that reproduces the settler tradition's "spatial metaphors" (Medovarski 97).

Urban Canada is a key site for such reterritorializing readings. Heather Smyth characterizes "Brand's Toronto" (275) as a decidedly non-national site: "[b]y situating her narrative explicitly in cosmopolitan urban rather than national space, and by exploring a variety of dynamics foregrounding community and identification, Brand offers a vision of a politics of difference that may help us imagine our way out of the limits of multicultural discourse" (274). Here, diasporic reterritorializations beget ethical engagements with unethical systems—the flaccid discourses of multicultural inclusion that reinforce *What We All Long For's* characters' non-belonging in Toronto. What does it mean, though, to say 'Brand's Toronto' is an 'explicitly... cosmopolitan urban' site that exists in contradistinction to 'national space'? Smyth's reading spatializes a temporal divorce, drawing explicit geographic demarcations and implicit temporal demarcations around Brand's characters, breaking them and Toronto itself off from Canada's settler-colonial history.

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<sup>32</sup> "[T]he history and experience of *dispossession*, not proletarianization, has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state" (13).

A similar segregation of Canada's colonial/national and diasporic/transnational sites surfaces in Dickenson's argument that Brand disrupts Canadian nationalism by "reterritorializ[ing]... boundaries in her writing, (dis)placing or (dis)locating the national narrative of subjectivity, for example, into the diaspora of cross-cultural, -racial, -gender, -class, and -erotic identifications" (114). For Smyth and Dickenson, diasporic reterritorializations exact ethical claims to space in the Canadian nation. Their readings turn Toronto and Vancouver into sites of anti-colonial-cum-post-national consciousness but scrub metropolitan Canada of its settler-colonial past, present, and future. Against such post-nationally oriented readings, Lawrence and Dua reiterate that "to speak of Indigenous nationhood is to speak of land as Indigenous, in ways that are neither rhetorical nor metaphorical" (239).

Diasporic literary scholarship frequently describes urban sites as cosmopolitan incubators of new, ethical, and, most importantly, *resistant* citizenships. Resistant reterritorializations are double-edged, though: reclaiming space for those excluded from narratives of Canadian belonging exposes multiculturalism's racialized limits. These reclamations can also obscure urban Canada's settler-colonial particularities, a complexity McKittrick taps into when she describes Brand as "both complicit to and critical of the production of space" (31). Responding to this same complexity in Bhabha's more abstract concept of a 'third space' between colonial poles, Byrd elaborates that while a "third space may open between and within a rupture, [...] it does not disrupt the structure in which the third space originates. Such a scheme does not emphasize an escape from binaries; instead, even as a third space is opened...the dialectical life and death struggle between self/other occurs" (52). Brand can be approached as a diasporic (urban/global/ affective/post-national) citizen *and* a treaty citizen *and* an arrivant settler. All these categories overlap. Their overlaps do not, however, extricate the diasporic criticism that depends on her works from reiterating colonial power. Instead, diaspora studies' a-territorial deontologies—those that extricate authors like Brand from the

nation—distance Canada from its ongoing settler-colonization and using the nation’s racism as foundational to such a move.<sup>36</sup>

The reterritorializing claims and ethical justifications diaspora studies deploys in its post-national arguments are integral to settler-colonial narratives as well, particularly those that present Indigenous displacement as a peaceful, natural, inevitable process. This repetition helps demonstrate why “Bhabha’s ruptured discourse is... difficult to mobilize along the axes of other/others, where racialized and colonized peoples, existing in the same geographical space, interact with one another as well as the colonizer, in what is, essentially a cacophonous proliferation of third spaces” (Byrd 52-3). Brand is clear that the sites she and her characters occupy are simultaneously national space *and* Indigenous land. Beyond critiquing the nation-state’s violent exclusions, *What We All Long For* foregrounds these proliferating third spaces through diasporic Canadians’ ambivalence concerning the Indigenous lands they occupy:

There are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones and Pakistani ones and African ones.... All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because that genealogy is willfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself. They’d only have to look, though, but it could be that what they know hurts them already, and what if they found out something even more damaging? (4)

A rejoinder to celebratory readings of diasporic reterritorializations, this passage asserts that settler-colonial legacies are never far beneath the surface of transnational critique’s championed sites and communities. Instead, Brand presents the ongoing occupation of Indigenous land as diffusing under Toronto’s Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European communities alike.

Jamaican poet Louise Bennett Coverley describes the Windrush generation’s arrival in Britain as “colonizin / Englan in Reverse” (li. 3-4); *What We All Long For* voices no such wry reversal or subversive turn. Instead, the territorial dispossessions of the Mississaugas of the New Credit River, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Huron-Wendat indemnify the entirety of non-

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<sup>36</sup> Many thanks to Teresa Zackodnik for helping me to think through and articulate this claim.

Indigenous Toronto. The city's layered displacements suggest an ambivalent doubling of Indigenous displacement takes place in post-national sites: just as descendants of European and British colonizers find their claims to possessive belonging challenged by racialized Canadians, *What We All Long For's* racialized communities are unsettled by their displacement of Turtle Island's First Peoples.

Beyond exposing the logical inconsistencies that define settler-colonial sites and deconstruct "the coherence of European epistemology" (Lawson 155), such overlaps catch diasporic post-nationalism between two impossibilities: Brand can neither claim to belong to a Canadian nation that refuses to recognize Black subjects, nor can she claim to not relate to the nation(s) whose land she occupies. *Map* underscores these contradictions: Brand resents the Canadian border agents who see her, a Black woman, as nothing but an "invader" (77); rebukes white Canadians who want "to start the clock of social justice only when they arrived" (82); but Brand is also disquieted by her uncertain relationship with displaced Indigenous peoples, including the spirit in Burnt River that means no harm to her, she thinks (151). In her works, Brand presents settler-colonial sites as a contested middle ground between colonial appropriations and transnational reterritorializations, sites that oscillate between both possibilities and their respective anti-Black, anti-Indigenous violence.

Canadian literary scholarship is struggling to address the nuances of these works. Like many, I want to push back against readings that use Brand to bolster hopeful narratives of post-national emancipation but do not "confront the unfreedoms upon which liberal democracy's freedoms are articulated and canonized as normal" (Walcott, *Queer Returns* 101). There is real danger in this approach if 'post-national emancipation' is unanchored from white supremacy. Focusing on how settler-colonial sites trouble post-national resistance, Lee Frew contends that "[r]ather than representing a liberating prospect of a post-national world the protagonists of *What We All Long For* are instead contemporary articulations of the settler subject-position" (290). Frew supports this interpretation by focusing on these characters' self-indigenization: "the process of indigenization is

simultaneously a process of de-exogenization, it is the loss of any number of exogenous traits assigned to these social differences rather than outright membership to a particular social group that is the prerequisite of settler subject status” (283). Here, settlerhood becomes a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse subject position, one that although “[l]ocated between the indigenous that it effaces and the exogenous it abnegates... has consistently imagined itself as exceptional and just” (Frew 295). He concludes settler subjectivity “has always been multicultural as well as appealing” (290) because settlerhood facilitates subjects’ passage into Canadian identity. From an Afro-pessimist perspective, though, Brand’s Black and Asian characters can never secure safe passage into Canadian-ness, not even by effacing and abnegating their exogenous others.

As an alternative, I propose reading Brand’s representations of Black and Indigenous overlaps as exemplifying Byrd’s colonial cacophony, textualizations that help us see “the complex dynamics of colonial discourses that exist horizontally among histories of oppression and inform continued complicities as historical narratives vie for ascendancy as the primary and originary oppression within lands shaped by competing histories of slavery, colonialism, arrival, and indigeneity” (xxxvi). *What We All Long For*’s introductory description of Toronto presents Canada’s colonial history as simultaneously unassimilable by the city’s immigrant communities and self-evident. The displacement of Indigenous communities by diasporas themselves displaced by colonization and its socio-economic sequelae is presented as too much, too painful, for migrant subjects to acknowledge: “These are people who are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop—and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that’s the sacrifice they make” (Brand 4). At the same time, Brand’s narrator *is* capable of this awareness. Who, this contradictory passage asks, needs this pretending, this willful forgetting, and what allows the novel’s narrator to acknowledge Canada’s colonial history otherwise?

The conclusion of *A Map to the Door of No Return* similarly foregrounds the “contradictorily

hegemonic and horizontal struggles... [that] affect peoples as they move and are made to move within empire” (Byrd 53). Brand’s account of a seemingly innocuous bus ride through urban Vancouver begins with the ‘odd recognition’ she feels for the Black bus driver: “This city has few Black people. So few that when they meet on the street they nod to each other in surprise, perhaps delight, certainly some odd recognition” (219). She then extends this ‘odd recognition’ to an Indigenous woman who boards the bus and asks its driver for directions: “That woman asking directions might have known these names several hundred years ago.... Today when she enters the bus she is lost. She looks into the face of another, a man [the driver], who surely must be lost” (219-20). Here, Indigeneity itself is dislocated in urban landscapes reterritorialized by colonization; Brand and the Indigenous woman’s mutual dispossessions and dislocations are common ground, so to speak, for recognition of each other.

Like the Ethiopian parking attendant Brand encounters earlier in *Map*, this vignette spurs her to imagine a counter-community of dispossessed subjects. Joseph this scene as showing how anti-colonial solidarity can arise across lines of originary difference: “the space of landing still holds the potential for the momentary discovery of connection. In the act of querying her relation to others with obscured or unknown histories, Brand refuses to think and feel within divisive narratives of origin, and instead charts provisional alignment via the recognition of non-identical experiences of loss” (89). I agree that Brand imagines a community of mutual recognition and anti-colonial solidarity here, but even this resistant re-imagining reiterates settler-colonialism’s divisive narratives: Brand recognizes the driver because of shared experiences of anti-Black violence. Brand recognizes the Salish woman because of her own experiences of dispossession. Through these mutual recognitions, the bus becomes Bhabha’s third space between the colonial city and those dispossessed by colonialism; however, “even as this third space is opened within the space of the slashed rupture, the dialectical life and death struggle between self/other occurs in the diametric

opposites who must then transverse that third space of enumeration to introduce ambivalence into colonial discourses and their resistances” (Byrd 52).

In *Map*'s bus scene, mutual dispossessions align Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Problematically, the solidarity of the commonly dispossessed this scene imagines comes at land's expense. The 'odd recognition' Brand feels for the Indigenous woman is not invested in decolonizing the land, *per se*, but in establishing a resistant, a-territorial, counter-community: 'Recognizing' Indigenous subjects through her own rejections of land and describing the Salish passenger as “a woman with no country” and “lost, too” (220) suggests Indigenous territorial losses are as complete and irreversible as Afro-diasporic subjects' natal displacements. This comparison of Indigenous land-based struggles and Afro-diasporic rejections of land risks presenting “the colonial project [in Canada as] realized: land has been dispossessed; its owners have been eliminated or absorbed” (Simpson 11-2). “This road,” Brand writes, “may have been a path hundreds of years ago. This jutting of land through which this path travels has lost its true name. It is now surrounded by English Bay, False Creek, and Burrard Inlet. And Granville Street, whose sure name has vanished” (219). Interpellated by the settler-colonial state, the land's names, routes, histories are indecipherable to Brand. As importantly, they are not inherently irrecoverable or unknown by the Coast Salish peoples.<sup>37</sup>

Rather than interpreting this disconnect as a failing on Brand's part, I read it as an example of Byrd's cacophony that “focuses not only on the interactions between colonizers and colonized, but horizontally between different minority oppressions within settler and arrivant landscapes” (54). Protective desires for anti-colonial solidarity keeps Brand-scholarship from asking whether giving up on land—an Afro-pessimistic declaration of post-national freedom—is actually tenable for

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<sup>37</sup> Lee Maracle's “Goodbye Snauq” from *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* (2010) reflects on the Grandville area's Indigenous history, including its traditional use and names. While Maracle's narrator is aware of the losses that result from the land's ongoing colonization, she is clear that this territory's history—its names, its significance, its ironical ability to upend hierarchical relationships—is neither irrecoverable nor misplaced.

Indigenous peoples. The resulting readings present “an elision between colonization and racialization” (Byrd 52), blurring vital distinctions between Afro-diasporic assertions of landlessness and Indigenous land-based nationalism.

If *Map*'s Vancouver scene is interested in land only insofar as land's loss foments post-national community, then the 'strange recognition' Brand extends to the Indigenous passenger is arguably an example of what Coulthard calls “liberal discourse of recognition” (20) which ‘recognize’ Indigenous subjects, but only within frameworks that discount their territorial, legal, and political sovereignty. “Indigenesness,” Heath Justice stresses, “is *not* ethnic difference; it is both cultural and political distinctiveness, defined by land-based genealogical connections and obligations to human and non-human bonds of kinship” (146). What, then, does this conclusion tell us about the possibility of Indigenous and Black solidarity, community, relationality? As an alternative to readings that wrangle these conflicting representations into a harmonious multicultural solidarity, Byrd, quoting Žižek, proposes we approach such moments of antinomy “as irreducible, and conceive the point of radical critique not as a certain determinate position as opposed to another position, but as the irreducible gap between the positions themselves” (54). Such a reading *Map*'s Vancouver scene via Byrd's cacophony suggests while Brand rejects aspects of treaty citizenship—particularly its imposed obligations to anti-Black communities—she also opens ground for solidarity via debts to Indigenous land.

My reasoning here is based on the Vancouver passage's central image: “The bus is full,” Brand writes, “but really there are only four of us on it. The driver through lost paths stops and lets someone on and someone off, people who don't realize that the bus is empty but for...us.... We have perfected something... we all feel it” (221). The bus's white passengers disappear here, a sharp reiteration of Canada's strategic and violent erasures of Indigenous and Black communities. This erasure also draws clear lines of inclusion and exclusion that allow the Grandville bus—indeed, the



commons itself—to be occupied otherwise. Joseph describes this as a “creative reterritorialization” of public space: “the scene on the Granville bus ends... as Brand shifts her focus to another space of landing, elsewhere. In the process, the ‘map’ that the four passengers ‘perfect’ is displaced, made conditional, deterritorialized” (89). Predictably, my concern with diasporic criticism’s embraces of a deterritorialized, post-national, post-racial notion of the commons is that it overlooks the deontological obligations that govern Treaty Citizenship: “[I]n liberal settler states such as Canada,” Coulthard writes, “the ‘commons’ not only belong to somebody—*the First Peoples of the land*—they also deeply inform and sustain indigenous modes of thought and behavior that harbor profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and respectful coexistence” (12). Scholarly discussions that use Brand’s works to champion dispossession as a post-national ethic can only do so by foreclosing discussions of settler-colonialism’s transnational adaptations. Brand herself is not so willing to parse Afro-diasporic and Indigenous concerns.

Solidarities based around territorial loss may galvanize the political edge of diasporic critique’s temporary landings, but these same solidarities contradict the principles of treaty citizenship, where land is the basis of relations with *and* obligations to others. Sharpe points to the problem of obligation, of who is owed and can be obliged, via citizenship. Citizenship assumes “‘we’ are obligated to each other” (“Three Scenes” 141), but Sharpe notes that “the language of ‘we’ and of an obligation...becomes unsustainable” (“Three Scenes” 145) when applied to Black communities. This deontological disconnect over obligation suggests that diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships and Henderson’s treaty citizens do not carry dual passports.

Brand does not owe Canada a more inclusive or less cacophonous representation of easy solidarity, nor is it her responsibilities to resolve the ruptures that distinguish between Afro-diasporic and Indigenous understandings of community in relation to land. Instead, *Map*’s Vancouver scene

presents anti-Black violence as the limit that determines who Brand can, and cannot, see as her community, “a response to those atmospheric pressures and the predictably unpredictable changes in climates that, nonetheless, remain antiblack” (Sharpe, *In the Wake* 107). Throughout *A Map to The Door of No Return*, Brand asserts that for Black subjects, “where one stands is relative to the door of no return and that moment of historical and ongoing rupture” (Sharpe, *In the Wake* 13). In *Map*’s Vancouver scene, Indigenous and Afro-diasporic dispossessions momentarily overlap. They do not have to cohere, or compound, or solidify, or align in some common resistance.

After imagining solidarity with the Black bus driver and Salish woman, Brand claims biological Indigeneity: “It was said in my family that my grandfather was part Carib.... the majority of him was African. There were, too, indefinite parts of him which either hegemony could claim. But there was no war, there never had been, both had settled calmly in my grandfather. They shared a common history” (222). Cynthia Sugars flags this passage as evidence that *Map*’s larger “interrogation of appeals to genetic origination folds back on itself” as Brand “cannot not be haunted by a desire for an authenticating bloodline: if the Door remains forever closed, she turns to New World aboriginals for authentication [sic.] Hence Brand engages in her own version of indigenizing legitimization by asserting her aboriginal (Carib) ancestry through her grandfather” (“(Dis)inheriting the Nation” 187). In response, I want to highlight that Brand describes “[t]he Carib part” of her genealogy as “grateful for its small survival in my grandfather’s face.... The African part of my grandfather carried him as a courtesy and a welcome *obligation* and perhaps also in gratitude himself for sharing with him the knowledge of the islands. My grandfather was an agriculturalist” (222; emphasis added). Here we get a small opening to obligatory communities imposed from without: Afro-diasporic subjects do not bear any obligations to colonial power or the nation-states this power sowed, the bus’s white passengers, but Brand hints at the possibility of obligatory

communities between Black and Indigenous communities, those her Black and Indigenous grandfather embodies.

Brand's representations of Indigenous and diasporic solidarity are ambivalent and contradictory: *What We All Long For* suggests that racialized diasporic communities are the unintended beneficiaries of, and thus perpetually unsettled by, Canada's dispossession of Indigenous land; *Map*'s conclusion alternatively presents dispossession as a common experience that allows Indigenous and diasporic subjects to recognize one another mutually, even if those losses are not as common or mutually experienced as the scene suggests. Collectively, Brand's Toronto and Vancouver are "sites of figural contestation between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized" (Slemon 148) and demonstrate that "the illusion of a stable self/other, here/there binarism" (Slemon 148) is unavailable Canada's Black and otherwise minoritized diasporic communities. All occupy—however unwittingly or unwillingly—Indigenous territory. Unsettled by questions of landownership, non-belonging, and post-national hope, Brand's representations of Indigenous and Black intersections are deeply ambivalent, evidence of *both* her binary-breaking hyphenated identity *and* her arrivant-settler entanglements. Ignoring these entanglements means choosing not to address the ongoing colonization of Indigenous territory that Brand herself flags in *What We All Long For* and *Map*. These passages challenge her critical readers to question how racialized diasporas fit within settler-colonial and Indigenous societies and how anti-Black violence precludes their 'fitting' going forward.<sup>38</sup>

#### RECOGNIZING RESISTANCE, RESISTING AUTONOMY

Collectively, chapters two through four have worked with Brand's representations of recognition to inject specificity into the critical vacuums left by scholarship that, on the one hand,

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<sup>38</sup> This argument is crucial to the initial studies that argue Canadian literature warrants consideration within anti-colonial theoretical frameworks. See Lawson, Lawson and Johnson, and Slemon.

imagines Canada's Indigenous and racialized-diasporic communities apart from one another, and, on the other, treats colonial dispossessions as equivalent and thus solidarity-forming.<sup>46</sup> By asking how we should read Brand by virtue of where she writes from and drawing on five of her works, these chapters build into this final juxtaposition of diaspora studies' largely *independent* and Indigenous studies' largely *interdependent* theories of subjectivity, mapping a significant disconnect between diasporic and Indigenous critique's respective understandings of recognition.<sup>47</sup>

Literary scholars invested in decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-nationalist projects, scholars who want to re-imagine subjectivity's possibilities, have to consider whether the obligations integral to treaty citizenship can serve as a broader basis for decolonial solidarity. For Heath Justice, Indigenous kinship systems imagine racialized and diasporic subjects as potentially belonging in Indigenous territory:

cooperative relationship is central to most Indigenous epistemologies, both contemporary and historical; coercion and racial compartmentalization as foundations for social and political control have little common currency in the vast majority of Aboriginal traditions. When humanity is one of many equal peoples in the world—sharing the right of consciousness and significance with the rest of creation—humility shapes both the individual and communal response to the world, and the values of balanced relationship are more important than any individual achievement, especially those that might threaten that balance. (147)

Here, recognition is (literally) grounded, interdependence is inherent, and mutual obligations extend from the land to *all* its inhabitants.

Heath Justice's emphasis on reclaiming ecological notions of *interdependence* and obligation are not limited to Indigenous epistemology, but are gaining traction in contemporary cultural studies

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<sup>46</sup> Though not addressed to any depth here, I wonder whether settler colonialism should be theorized as an exclusively nationalist project or if it can also be theorized as an individual project. Existing theorizations presume the former, but because an author like Brand can reproduce settler-colonial representations and occupy Indigenous territory while resisting Canadian nationalism, it seems worth asking whether the citizen-subject (regardless of race or personal desire) is always deployed by the state in ways that negate individual agency.

<sup>47</sup> In effect, this chapter answers Northrop Frye's often quoted questions from *The Bush Garden*, "It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'" (222) by condensing them into one: my reading of Brand proposes these questions are inseparable in anti-colonial readings of Canadian literature: who am I *because* I am here?

as well: “by virtue of our environment and by virtue of relationships with other people,” Kelly Oliver writes, “we have ethical requirements rooted in the very possibility of subjectivity itself” (15). “We need to describe subjectivity in ways that support the normative force of ethical obligations to be responsible to others” (Oliver 11) she elaborates, adding that “the responsibility inherent in subjectivity has the double sense of the condition of possibility of response, response-ability, on the one hand, and the ethical obligation to respond and enable response-ability from others born out of that founding possibility, on the other” (Oliver 15). Autonomy’s impossibility does not mean the consequences of denying interdependence are equal or equalizing, though.

Insofar as decolonization, solidarity, and reconciliation are understood as individual projects, diasporic critique will continue to overwrite Indigenous theories of recognition and anti-Black violence in the name of post-national solidarity. Black scholarship, alternatively, questions whether obligation—including the obligation central to treaty citizenship—can serve as a basis for recognition insofar as Afro-diasporic arrivants who have been owned, and as objects cannot owe or be owed. In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman argues that “[slavery] has established a measure of a man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. . . . black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, impoverishment” (6). I want to highlight an important distinction based on Hartman’s reflections here: when *diasporic critique* dismisses the nation-state as a source of community, it is precluding diasporic subjects’ obligations to communities imposed on them from without. When *Black studies* issues a similar refusal of national communities, it reminds us that the ability to owe and be owed is itself a marker of liberal individualism, one denied enslaved Africans in service of the modern nation-state.

Obligation's unevenness thus troubles too simple alliances drawn between Black and Indigenous concerns, alliances that can reiterate (white settler) scholars' twinned desire to escape moral culpability for Indigenous displacement and distance themselves from interrogating liberal humanist values "founded on unfreedoms and not freedoms, as the intellectuals committed to the partial insights of European modernity and its philosophy like to proclaim" (Walcott, *Queer Returns* 97). More specifically, diaspora studies' often unacknowledged investments in autonomous individuality—the (possessive) individual's desire not to be restricted by debts or obligations imposed from without—exacerbates the field's ambivalence about Black and Indigenous relations. This argument, if terse, belies a deeper disciplinary concern: liberal notions of autonomy unsteady diasporic cultural scholarship's discussions of subjectivity by ignoring the anti-Black violence intoned by the very notion of subjectivity itself. Addressing racialized diasporic subjects' entanglements in arrivant-colonialism demonstrates that the autonomous, self-determining, and possessive individual envisioned by Enlightenment theories recognition and Western models of liberal democratic citizenship is alive and well in diaspora studies' fractal citizenships. This subject's necessity, its political force, is very different in diasporic and Black scholarship.

Comparing diaspora and Indigenous studies' deontologies, their differing understandings of debt and obligation, convinces me that diasporic post-nationalism is not inherently anti-colonial and that Indigenous anti-colonialism is not inherently anti-national. Diaspora studies is often presented—indeed, often perceives itself—as an alternative to anti-colonial criticism, but the field is getting tangled in the same frustrated struggles for recognition that stymied anti-colonial philosophy. As Coulthard explains, "negritude's attempt to restore the Native subject as an agent of history through an inversion of colonial discourse remains comfortably within the very binary logic that has played such a crucial role in justifying the colonial relation in the first place" (142). If Canadian diaspora studies cannot think its way out of its 'actional citizen versus reactive non-subject' binaries,

these tangles will only grow.

Troublingly, the anti-national engine that currently powers so much diasporic critique maintain the center/periphery, master/slave, self/other binaries that derailed postcolonial philosophies like *négritude*. “[I]f the structural foundation of colonial rule is at least in part justified through the ideological propagation of racially essentialized binaries,” Coultard observes, “then, in the long run, the logic of *négritude*’s own essentialist ‘revaluation of values’ could undermine its emancipatory potential” (143). Like *négritude*’s ‘revaluation of values,’ diasporic resistance—the resistance embodied in diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships—undermines boundary crossing solidarities, reinforce their own essentializing differences, and ignore Jenny Sharpe’s warnings about resistance’s critical limits: “readings of counter-discourses can all too easily serve an institutional function of securing the dominant narratives. None of us escapes the legacy of a colonial past and its traces in our academic practice” (139).

This is *the* issue diaspora studies must face going forward: if resistance imposes critical limits on diaspora studies, what diasporic alternatives are there to ‘resistance’? What solidarities are possible between racialized and Indigenous peoples outside of resistant discourse? Is it possible to overcome colonialism’s (or nationalism’s, or racism’s) lasting inequalities without perpetuating resistant discourses or their essentializing binaries? Answering these questions will require diasporic critics to examine their understandings of individual autonomy as a normalized aspiration, no small shift as Brand’s *Burnt River* confrontations and Butler’s discussion of autonomy’s centrality to counter-public discourse in *Precarious Life* demonstrate. Diasporic oppositionality, however, is not an alternative to possessive individualism or national citizenship. Emergent discourses of diasporic citizenship—predicated as they are on a-territorial claims—are neither escape route from nor a silver bullet for Canada’s ongoing settler-colonial white supremacy. A more radical alternative requires diasporic critics assert that even in the face of the Black Atlantic’s natal dispossessions,

*interdependent*, obligatory, and mutually indebted communities are born of land's occupation. This insistence on contemporary community refuses to reinforce antagonistic, individualistic, or possessive understandings of subjectivity.

I propose modeling this future work on Indigenous scholarship's relational theories of subject formation, theories that are not inherently resistant but present a rejoinder to a-territorial critique that reinforces the nation-state's power and pre-eminence by discussing its self-defeating qualities *ad nauseam*. In concluding "*Sui Generis* and Treaty Citizenship," Henderson notes that appeals to traditional citizenship are waning as "the frozen ideas of the nation and citizenship appear disconnected and empty" (432), an observation many diasporic critics would agree with. Instead of abandoning land or national identifications, Henderson offers an invitation to treaty citizenship to all subjects who occupy Indigenous land as a rejoinder to Queen Elizabeth II's invitation for Indigenous subjects to accept federal citizenship: "Since no perfect or pure cultural realm has ever existed, the preferred terrestrial consciousness of Aboriginal peoples needs to be intercultural or transcultural. Interculturalism is founded on the idea of the freedom to choose and consent to alliance that respects parallelism, diversity, creativity, and shared power" (432). Henderson's appeal to inter- and transculturation is evidence that Indigenous political philosophy is evolving and adaptable, not ossified by the anti-national *ressentiment* embedded in Canadian diaspora studies' resistant self-positioning.

Against resistance's self-defeating cycles, Oliver similarly suggests it is "not the facts of dependency" (86-7) but the "illusion of autonomy" (68) that prove so dangerous in simultaneously colonial, postcolonial, and transnational sites like Canada. Approaching Brand as a treaty citizen disrupts the national and diasporic categories whose oppositional definitions have not—and will not—address settler colonialism's lasting asymmetries. Rather than operating as a field preoccupied with oppositionality, diasporic scholarship must shift its critical drive towards cacophonous



appositionality and emphasize how multiple identities—racialized non-recognized subject, arrivant, and treaty citizen, in Brand’s case—exist within a single communally and geographically-situated subject.

CHAPTER FIVE  
SPECULATIVE FUTURES: NALO HOPKINSON'S POSTCOLONIAL HORIZONS

This final chapter turns from memory and recognition to Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction and debt's futures, marking a generic shift away from the largely realist fiction and semi-autobiographic works analyzed thus far. Hopkinson's fiction and editorial work expose speculative fiction's core generic assumptions. This approach makes her works particularly valuable for thinking about speculative representation's adherence to—and breaks from—modernist notions of time and progress. Speculative fiction has both been used to support *and* interrogate patriarchal, imperial, and xenophobic master narratives. As Hopkinson herself argues, “stories that take on the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humor, and also with love and respect for the genre of science fiction [make] it possible to think about new ways of doing things” (*So Long* 8-9). The question this chapter is interested in, then, is not *whether* speculative genres can be deployed for anti-colonial or feminist or queer ends, but rather what ends the genre's writers are now imagining: what ‘new ways of doing things’ do Hopkinson's works propose? What do *these* ends tell us about another binary that has gained significant traction in contemporary literary scholarship, the temporal distinctions imagined between ‘colonial/ postcolonial pasts’ and ‘global/post-national futures’?

Hopkinson's speculative works in general, and her novel *The New Moon's Arms* (2007) in particular, refuse the linear chronotopes integral to the operations of finance capital. Her works take on literary realism's linear notion of time and ‘critiques it, perverts it, fucks with it, with irony, with anger, with humor, and also with love and respect,’ staging a debate over postcolonialism's futures through speculative fiction: what, this novel asks, does anti-colonial emancipation look like when the foreseeable future appears both neoliberal and post-national?

My study of Caribbean Canadian literary works arises during a historical moment that is navigating its own uncertain relationship with time and futurity. This relationship's troubles have manifested in spectacular experiments with financial debt. Through its repeated catachresis of economic debt and moral obligation, the Caribbean Canadian texts studied here represent time itself as having stalled, become stuck in the present neoliberal moment, and attest to the breakdown of progressive notions of time in the absence of postcolonialism's emancipatory projects. While debt very obviously measures material and moral obligations, then, it also records the subtle—and not always linear—relationship between past, present, and future as well.

Saidiya Hartman writes that, from the debtor's perspective, "[t]he temporal attributes of indebtedness bind one to the past, since what one owed draws the past into the present," adding that "[i]n this sense, indebtedness confers durability, for the individual is answerable to and liable for past actions and must be abstinent in the present in the hopes of securing the future" (*Scenes* 131). Creditors depend on the stability intoned by twinned notions of progressive time and progressive accumulation: it makes little sense to loan in the present if you do not believe in a future where your debtor will accumulate the wealth that enables them to pay you back. From a neo-Marxist perspective, Maurizio Lazzarato argues that "[d]ebt appropriates not only the present labor time of wage earners and of the population in general, it also pre-empt[s] non-chronological time, each person's future as well as the future of society as a whole" (46–47). More simply, debts delineate time. They act as reminders of the past's non-past-ness *until* a given debt is settled. They also speak to the speculative hope for a debt-free, ideally improved future.

Debtor and creditor alike seem to depend on linear progress between quondam and subsequent time: without this teleologic temporal relationship, debtors will inevitably fail to pay back what is owed, and creditors will have no reason to loan. However, this baseline temporal logic does not hold in the neoliberal present, wherein debtors' failures to pay back what is owed serve their

creditors' interest just as well as debts' progressive amortization. Discussing the 2008 global financial crisis, Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva observe that sub-prime mortgages—like the 'developmental' loans offered to newly decolonized nations across Africa, Asia, and South America in the 1970s and 80s—allow institutional creditors to “profit from calculated ‘mistakes’ (like lending money to persons and nations precisely because they would *not* be able to pay it back)” (364).

Debtors' success or failure are of little consequence in neoliberal economic systems insofar as loans are secured in their creditors' favour. In the present free market system, profits are made not only because of economic developments, new discoveries, or more efficient products; instead, profit results from access to new markets. In the sub-prime mortgage crash, short term profits necessitated the creation of unsustainable markets. While individuals would not be able to pay back these loans, the overall volume of demand for cheap credit momentarily sustained the market. What the 2008 crash demonstrates, then, that neoliberal economics require neither collective progress nor linear time—just access to a sufficient volume of new markets—to be profitable.

Beyond casting ever more doubt on finance capital's ability to regulate itself, predatory financial systems have had two major, if unintended, philosophical consequences: first, the sub-prime mortgages responsible for the 2008 crisis debunk prevailing narratives about debtors' moral failings. Creditors knew they were offering unpayable loans, upending “the assumption that the failure to meet an obligation should necessarily lead to punishment when the lender's profits are secured by betting and spreading the risk globally, *against* the ‘high-risk’ borrower” (Chakravartty and Ferreira da Silva 362).<sup>1</sup> In an era of predatory loans, financial bankruptcy does not signal moral

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<sup>1</sup> In his testimony to Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, law professor Michael Greenberger discussed the role speculative housing futures played in creating the 2008 crash: “By removing the multi-trillion dollar swaps market from the traditional norms of market regulation, a highly speculative derivative bubble was created.... removing all forms of ensuring the normal capital adequacy protections of market regulation, the swaps market permitted trillions of dollars of financial commitments to be made with no assurance that those commitments could be fulfilled beyond the highly illusory AAA ratings of the counterparties in question” (21). Through derivative markets, creditors were able to insure their investments and profit from “the perfectly logical bet... that those who could not afford mortgages would not pay them off” (Greenberger 15), thus assuming little financial risk themselves.

bankruptcy just as financial success does not demonstrate economic-cum-moral acumen. The 2008 global financial crisis reiterates that financial and moral progress are uncoupled from one another.

The second uncalculated repercussion of these ‘calculated mistakes’ is more temporal: the rupture in finance capital’s moral engine has scuttled the progressive principle of modernist space-time as well. In his studies of narrative plotting, Mikhail Bakhtin proposed the concept of the chronotope to describe the relationship between space and time in any given narrative: “[i]n the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope” (84). Bakhtin’s chronotope asks how readers make sense of the relationship between space and time across different narrative forms.<sup>2</sup> This literary concept also makes time’s operations visible in narratives about the 2008 crash, narratives that overwhelmingly suggest neoliberalism’s operational chronotopes are radically different from those integral to modernist realism.

In *Narrating the Global Financial Crisis* (2017), Miriam Meissner contends financial crises expose the internal contradictions of capitalist accumulation: “[t]hese chronotopes of capital manifest a disruption within the perpetual capital circulation that is imperative within capitalism, as well as the complex evolvment of capital devaluation in times of crisis” (151). One internal contradiction concerns what Mary Poovey terms economic writing’s “fact/fiction continuum” (77). Reflecting on the 1720s South Seas Bubble, Poovey notes this market crash “not only exposed the existence of the fact/fiction continuum in a monetary instrument; they also fuelled public intolerance for this continuum *in monetary matters* even though the continuum continued to attract readers to periodicals, secret histories, and satires” (83). The most recent global financial crisis

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<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin used this critical concept to parse differences between literary genres and explain how the relationship between space and time operates very different in, say, a Greek romance relative to a Rabelaisian novel (85).

similarly exposes the fictions at the heart of contemporary finance capital: by mid-September 2008, markets realized the supposedly secure, long-term, AAA-rated mortgages they had invested in would not be amortized. Investors had invested in a future that would not arrive, a seemingly secure future that proved fictitious. Meissner describes the resulting foreclosed properties as “spatial manifestations of what [David] Harvey calls ‘unreal estate’: estate that is real in the sense of material and present, yet unreal in that its economic value and profitability lies in the future, which is highly speculative” (146).

Beyond blurring ‘real’ value and ‘unreal’ futures, these ‘bad debts’ dissolved seemingly separate spheres of household finance and global financialization. Governments’ viability was entangled with the economic futures of citizens that were not their own; the national economies of Iceland and Greece proved dependent on the financial solvency of families in Florida and Nevada; foreclosures on American main streets coincided with bank runs in London and Cyprus. From a chronotopic perspective, these ‘sub-prime’ loans exposed a collapse of not only fact and fiction, but space and time within a neoliberal world system; this collapse of fact and fiction, in turn, negated national boundaries as well as distinctions between the individual and government.

In *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Margaret Atwood dedicates a chapter, “Debt as Plot,” to exploring debt’s narrative logic: “Debt can have [a] kind of entertainment value,” she writes, “when it becomes a motif, not a real-life plot line, but a fictional one” (86).<sup>3</sup> For Atwood, “it’s the nineteenth century in which debt as plot really rages through the fictional pages” (100). Her focus falls on Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, but *Payback*’s case studies could just as easily include *Little Dorrit* or Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* or Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth* and still support Atwood’s overall reading. Addressing a general

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction Atwood draws between ‘real life’ and fictional plotlines addresses how debts often define achievements and milestones. For example, she notes how paying off one’s mortgage gives a narrative purpose to contemporary western life (84).

readership, Atwood does not discuss debt's narrative plotting as a chronotope, though what she traces in her "Debt as Plot" chapter is the relationship between time and space in debt narratives: "The obtaining of goods on credit, the avoidance of payment, the thrill of the chase, the anger at the creditor, and the acting out of victimhood... performs the function of providing a key element in a story-of-my-life game of 'Debtor' plotline" (86). Debt-as-plot is not unique to the Victorian period, of course, but guides early modern usury texts like Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (~1592) as well as William Shakespeare's *A Merchant of Venice* (~1596-1599), not to mention distinctly postmodern works such as Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) and Sophie Kinsella's 'chick-lit' pulp series *The Shopaholic* (2000-2016). Across these varied texts and eras, debt-as-plot operates according to a generally linear logic as each of these works' underlying dramatic question and concerns whether debtors can pay back their debts and what punishments they will receive if they cannot.

Bakhtin's theory of narrative plotting is simultaneously formalist and historicist in its concerns. As an adaptable literary concept, the chronotope can be traced across historical moments and narrative forms, thus showing how "transformations of time concepts and spatial representations reflect radical changes in cultural attitudes and lived experience" (*Bakhtin's Theory* iii). Atwood more simply writes that "[h]ow this kind of debt plot unfolds changes over time, as social conditions, class relations, financial climates, and literary fashions change" (86). In Caribbean Canadian literature, debt has emerged as one of the "fundamental organising metaphors...by which basic conceptions of time and space get translated into narrative terms" (Dentith n.p.). Debt adapts as it is used to "[mediate] between historically created and thus changing conceptions of time and space, and their realisation in the underlying narratives of literary texts" (Dentith n.p.). Caribbean Canadian literature's conflation of material and immaterial obligations connects a simultaneously colonial, postcolonial, and global present to its constitutive colonial, postcolonial, and global pasts.

Linear, progressive chronotopes are typical of debt narratives whose plots operate as something of a countdown until an ultimate (redeeming) repayment or (moralizing) punishment; in the works studied here, modernism's twined notions of temporal, fiscal, and moral progress are proven illusory by the once-colonized world's lasting indebtedness. The story of this change negotiates multiple literary and historic registers, but, when traced through the Caribbean Canadian texts, linear notions of time-as-progress repeatedly collapse under the weight of colonial history's unpayable debts. Works by Chariandy, Espinet, and Brand upend linear narratives wherein colonial or postcolonial pasts are somehow past or where events that occurred elsewhere are mutably detached from Canada's geographic sites, proposing that the passage of time has not—and will not—free the post-, transnational, and diasporic future from colonial history's lingering imbalances.

In concluding with Caribbean Canadian literature's imagined futures via Nalo Hopkinson's speculative works, we might challenge or understandings of anticolonial critique's temporal frontiers, a challenge exemplified by "A Habit of Waste" (1999). Set in a vaguely futuristic Toronto, this short story is narrated by Cynthia, a 28-year-old Canadian-born daughter of Afro-Trinidadian parents. Cynthia works at an urban food bank but loathes its disenfranchised clients; she is embarrassed by her parents' "Banana Boat accents," audible evidence of their failure to assimilate into Canadian society ("They'd come to Canada five years before I was even *born*, for Christ's sake" [188]); and she consumes this future's technologies without engaging with them critically, living an unexamined life in interesting times.

The plot device that makes "A Habit of Waste" speculative fiction is the same one that makes Cynthia so remarkable for anti-colonial debates and critical race studies: Hopkinson's narrator has had her consciousness 'downloaded' out of her Afro-Trinidadian body into that of a perky, white, Princess Diana-esque replacement, one purchased at great expense from a MediPerfiction



catalogue. The narrative begins as the post-transfer Cynthia sees another woman, likely an accident victim unable to afford a designer body, wearing her original 'castoff' on a city trolley:

I studied my former body carefully as it made its way down the centre of the streetcar. I hated what she'd done to the hair—let it go natural for Christ's sake...She had a lot of nerve too, wrapping that behind in a flower-print sarong... Strange, though...Far from looking graceless, her high, round bottom twitched confidently with each step, giving her a proud sexiness I had never had... All the seats on the streetcar were taken. Good. Let the bitch stand. I hoped my fallen arches were giving her hell. (184-5)

Though lighthearted, Hopkinson's story is an incisive meditation on second-generation Canadian's internalized racism. As important are the story's theoretical implications for discussions of time and futurity in the colonial aftermath: "A Habit of Waste" represents Canada as having a distinctly postcolonial future.<sup>4</sup>

What I mean by a 'postcolonial future' is two-fold: first, like many of Hopkinson's works, "A Habit of Waste" presents a future wherein colonial history's consequences, particularly its racial and socioeconomic inequities, remain unsettled. Her works mark a critical departure from literary and cinematic speculative fiction, or SF, wherein racialized characters' presence signals a seemingly inevitable march towards global identifications and inclusiveness. Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon refers to this trope as the "Star-Trekkian universalization of peoples, where color-blindness is the norm" ("*Miindiwag*" 223). It avoids detailing how equality or post-national, post-racial, and post-gendered identifications are achieved and thereby implies they are inevitable. Alondra Nelson adds that the belief "[t]hat race (and gender) distinctions would be eliminated with technology was perhaps the founding fiction of the digital age. The raceless future paradigm, an adjunct of Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' metaphor, was widely supported" (1). Hopkinson's works are likewise skeptical that future technologies will, perforce, resolve colonialism's lasting disparities. In "A Habit

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<sup>4</sup> I've since encountered other texts I believe are doing the similar work. These include Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue" (from *Traplins*, published in 1995), Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), and Wayde Compton's *The Outer Harbour* (2014). I would include all three within a rubric of speculative fiction that presents Canada as having postcolonial futures.

of Waste,” xenophobia, sexual violence, and class inequalities are not settled by scientific advances; rather, the story’s central technology, the MediPerfiction body transfer, only entrenches preexisting racial, gendered, and class inequities in new ways.

Hopkinson’s imagined futures are postcolonial in a second sense as well: her works challenge colonial and patriarchal master narratives by repurposing a genre that has buoyed both. David Higgins summarizes that science fiction has, “with its constant exploration into the unknown and confrontation with the alien Other, historically functioned as an enabling literature of empire” (331). Well aware of science fiction’s colonial deployments, Hopkinson introduces *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2004), an anthology co-edited with Uppinder Mehan, by acknowledging that imperial war, territorial appropriation, and cultural decimation are not speculative experiences for much of the world: “for many of us that is not a thrilling adventure story; it’s non-fiction, and we were on the wrong side of the strange looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of colour writing SF,” she elaborates, “is to be under suspicion of having internalized one’s colonization” (7). This suspicion is rooted in assumptions that SF is the territory of the predominantly white, predominantly male authors and audiences that defined the genre’s pulp prominence. Women were largely absent from these mid-century texts *and* their imagined communities, appearing only on the periphery of these narratives as residents of what Lisa Yaszek labels SF’s “galactic suburbia.” Likewise, popular SF from the 1930s through 60s often aligned male and western interests with the scientific, adventurous, and technologically advanced, while ignoring, infantilizing, or dehumanizing women and racialized subjects.

“A Habit of Waste” responds to dismissive assumptions about the supposedly inherent self-hatred of Black, female, and queer authors of speculative fiction: unlike Cynthia, whose uncritical use of futuristic technologies exposes her own internalized racism, Hopkinson’s story reflects on the genre’s colonial, misogynist, and heteronormative deployments. “By treating these inequalities as

problems with futures, and not as symptoms of temporal or cultural lag,” Leif Sorensen argues, “Hopkinson produces futures that criticize the consensus future constructed within the generic constraints of science fiction” (270).

SF’s deployments in service of colonial, patriarchal, and hetero-normative narratives are well documented. There are also numerous authors—Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Toni Morrison, and Margaret Atwood, to name only a famous few—who ably deploy SF’s generic tools to literalize feminist concepts and anti-racist aspirations, upending the binaries—self-Other, real-fantastical, science-nature, male-female—such master narratives rely on (Hollinger 25). The growing body of racialized and Indigenous SF catalogued in Sheree Thomas’ *Dark Matter* anthologies (2000, 2004), Hopkinson’s own *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000), and Dillon’s *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012) challenges narratives of colonial conquest and Euro-American exceptionalism. Collectively, these anthologies, authors, and a growing body of SF scholarship contend the master’s tools can indeed deconstruct the master’s spaceship. Or, more accurately, they assert that “the collective and accretive social process by which sf has been constructed does not have the kind of coherent form or causality that allows one to talk about origins at all” (Rieder 195): space, technology, fabulism, and futurity are not—and have never been—the possession of any one culture.

#### AFTER POSTCOLONIALITY, AFROFUTURISM, AFRO-PESSIMISM

As the revolutionary possibilities of postcolonial nationhood founder in a neoliberal world order, *The New Moon’s Arms* asks what it means to be free or emancipated today. Debates over anti-colonialism’s contemporary possibilities are central to Hopkinson’s speculative work as well as many theories of Afro-diasporic life. In this chapter, I draw on three approaches to anticolonial futurity and let their insights reveal themselves in contradistinction to one another. These are David Scott’s ‘after postcoloniality,’ an interregnum space defined by the weakening of the national and socialist

discourses “in which oppositional Third World futures were articulated” (*Refashioning* 14); Afrofuturism, a generic category coined by Mark Dery and fleshed out by Alondra Nelson, Marleen S. Barr, and Madhu Dubey to describe SF written from Afro-diasporic perspective; and theories of Afro-pessimism offered by Saidiya Hartman and Hortense J. Spillers, a theoretical positioning that shows how normative, often aspirational concepts like freedom, humanity, and family are premised on anti-Black violence.

After postcoloniality, Afrofuturism, and Afro-pessimism do not progress logically from one another: not all Afrofuturist works are Afro-pessimist, though some distinctly are; after postcoloniality concerns questions of Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism—but expands beyond both frameworks’ African American focus; Afro-pessimism is in some ways future-oriented, but does not necessarily address questions arising from postcolonial nationhood that are integral to after postcoloniality. Hopkinson’s novel brings these theoretical frameworks together; this section introduces each, beginning with ‘after postcoloniality.’

Each of Scott’s most recent theoretical works, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (1999), *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004) and *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (2014), tackle elements of the same question: how should anti-colonial thinkers understand time—particularly the concept of emancipatory futures—given the failures of the postcolonial nation-state? Anti-colonialists must, he argues, re-evaluate the romantic narratives told about the postcolonial nation-state, which has proven to be inadequate to unfolding events and realities since the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the decolonized world’s turn to socialist nationalisms: “we do not inhabit the same political horizons as before.... we have to ask ourselves (postcolonial intellectuals and critics, and critics and intellectuals of the postcolonial) whether we want to continue to pursue this line of preoccupation opened up by postcoloniality” (*Refashioning* 223). For Scott, “we live in tragic times. This, however, is not merely because our world is assailed

by one moral and social catastrophe after another. It is rather because, in Hamlet's memorable phrase, our time is 'out of joint.' The old languages of moral-political vision and hope are no longer in sync with the world they were meant to describe and normatively criticize" (*Conscripts* 2). While narratives about postcolonial nationalism have hitherto been told as epics or romances, the reality of—and problems arising for—contemporary postcolonial nation-states align more closely with the narrative logic of tragedy, which "questions... the view of human history as moving teleologically and transparently toward a determinate end, or as governed by a sovereign and omnisciently rational agent. These views of human history suppose that the past can be cleanly separated from the present, and that reason can be unambiguously disentangled from myth" (Scott, *Conscripts* 12).<sup>5</sup> Existing scholarly, creative, and political discussions of postcolonial nationalism as an emancipatory project have been articulated, Scott proposes, according to the logic of the wrong generic chronotope, that of romance and not tragedy.

Scott's most recent work on the time-space of decolonization observes that modern notions of time, "the collective time of nations and classes and subjects and populations" (5), are not only teleologic but powered by a moral engine as well. Historical time, he contends, is

organized around a notion of discrete but continuous modular change... as a linear, diachronically stretched-out *succession* of cumulative instants, an endless chain of displacements of before and after. Such succession, moreover, is progressive: change *is* improvement. Change, therefore, not only has a formal built-in rhythm of movement and alteration but also a built-in *vector* of moral direction. (Scott, *Omens* 5)

This notion of 'modern historical time' parallels debt's operational logic: modular and progressive changes are needed for debtors to pay creditors back. Both depend on what Scott calls modern

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<sup>5</sup> Scott does not present the tragic time of 'after coloniality' as an argument about narrative chronotopes, but it is easy to map his discussion of decolonization's spatiotemporal logic onto Bakhtin's narrative concept. Scott instead draws on Hayden White's discussions of historical narrative and, using C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* as his example, writes that "anticolonial stories about past, present, and future have typically been emplotted in a distinctive narrative form, one with a distinctive story-potential: that of Romance.... They have largely depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving.... in the wake of the global historico-political and cognitive shifts that have taken place in the past decade or two, I have a doubt about the continued critical salience of this narrative form and its underlying mythos" (*Conscripts* 7-8).

historical time's moral vector: debtors have to believe not only that past, present, and future are linked, but that creditors deserve to be repaid and that non-payment is an ethical failure. Failure to pay back a debt denotes not only the debtor's failure to progress but their failure to progress in a timely, contractual manner. While a modernist worldview defines time through progressive and moral notions, Scott contends such notions never truly held in the colonial, anti-colonial, and ostensibly decolonized world. Consequently, time appears to have stalled for many former colonies and their subjects, whether nation-bound or diasporic: "remains from the past stick unaccountably to the hinges of the temporality we hitherto relied on to furnish ourselves with the confidence that we are in fact going somewhere.... what we are left with are *aftermaths*.... the trace of futures past hangs like the remnant of a voile curtain over what feels uncannily like an endlessly extending present" (*Omens* 6). Contemporary Caribbean Canadian literature's descriptions of debt signal this progressive teleology's failure, as well as the failure of such justice-oriented eschatons. Or, as Mrs. Christopher chides Chariandy's narrator in *Soucouyant*, "Justice don't never make no one happy. Is just justice" (149).

In 1994, Mark Dery defined Afrofuturism as "[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates the images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Alondra Nelson expands on Dery's definition by providing the term's communal genealogy: "Afrofuturism was chosen as the best umbrella for the concerns of 'the list'" (9), a listserv Nelson moderated beginning in 1999 alongside Paul D. Miller, Nalo Hopkinson, Ron Eglash, and David Goldberg. This online community of scholars, authors, and readers was organized around discussions of "sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora" (Nelson 9). While Dery ascribes Afrofuturism to African American artists, Nelson's collaborative definition includes Afro-diasporic creators and

works of fantasy, magic, and fabulism in addition to strict science fiction.<sup>6</sup> Afrofuturism is consistently understood as a temporally-attuned genre, one that examines how “racial identity, and blackness in particular, is [perceived as] the anti-avatar of digital life. Blackness gets constructed as always oppositional to technologically driven chronicles of progress” (Nelson 1). In response, Afrofuturists often oppose what Nelson labels a ‘neocritical’ approach to imagined futures as improvements on the past by playing with realist notions of time and progress to “represent new directions in the study of African diaspora culture that are grounded in the histories of Black communities, rather than seeking to sever all connections to them” (9).

I want to highlight a connection between Nelson’s anti-neocritical arguments and Scott’s ‘after postcoloniality’: both challenge neocritical—if not SF-based—speculations about nationalism’s emancipatory futures in the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and Asia. Many Afrofuturist works discredit the modernist or romantic notions of teleologic, progressive, and morally improving time Scott questions in *Omens of Adversity*. Like Nelson, Almandine Faucheux characterizes skepticism about utopian futures and regressive pasts as a marker of Afrofuturist works, which, by contesting “the idea of linear time...subsequently [subvert] the primitivism/modernity binary” (564). Unlike strictly realist representations and their limiting chronotopes, SF in general, and Afrofuturism in particular, upends the racism-imbued temporal assumptions integral to—and that continue to justify—(neo)colonial violence against racialized subjects.

Concerns about such violence are where Afro-pessimist concerns seep into Afrofuturist representations. In methodological terms, Afro-pessimism is a critical stance that

illuminates the limits and failures of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, such as their reformist ideologies concerning progress and their disastrous integration with bureaucratic machinery. If, as Afro-pessimism shows, it is not possible to affirm Blackness itself without at the same time affirming anti-Black

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<sup>6</sup> This Afro-diasporic inclusion makes it possible to think of the Middle Passage and resulting diasporas as a science fictional experience, an argument established by Kodwo Eshun’s “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism” and further developed by Yatasha L. Womack in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*.

violence, then the attempts at recognition and inclusion in society will only ever result in further social *and real* death. (“Introduction,” *Afro-Pessimism* 10)

Afro-pessimist critique emerged in the late 1980s but is taking on renewed significance in a historical moment when the police shootings and the mass incarceration of Black citizens are widely publicized, criticized, and uninterrupted.<sup>7</sup> Afro-pessimism is not itself a generic category so much as a critical self-positioning from which scholars, critics, and authors approach questions of history and futurity. As such, Afro-pessimist scholarship is not inherently future oriented so much as focused in the ways anti-Black violence grows out of slavery’s de-subjectification of African subjects, an argument initially articulated in Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death* (1982). Afro-pessimist critique traces how slavery’s violence is reproduced in the social institutions, critical notions, and futures that Black subjects’ enslavement has made possible and, like queer theory, reads anti-Black violence as implicit in normativity. Fred Moten contends that the hermeneutic suspicion of Afro-pessimist thought is not only a scholarly or intellectual pursuit but permeates all levels of Black discourse in the United States: “This strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms is essential not only to contemporary black academic discourse but also to the discourses of the barbershop, the beauty shop, and the bookstore” (“The Case of Blackness” 177).

A central concern, perhaps *the* central concern, for Afro-pessimist scholarship is the (im)possibility of emancipation after race-based slavery. In an interview with Frank B. Wilderson III, Saidiya Hartman contends that although it is often assumed that Black American’s emancipation was secured with slavery’s abolition, emancipation remains elusive insofar as freedom is about “more than the desire for inclusion within the limited set of possibilities that the national project provides... once you realize its limits and begin to see its inexorable investment in certain notions of the subject and subjection, then that language of freedom no longer becomes that which rescues the

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<sup>7</sup> There is a significant, if unnamed, Afro-pessimist current running through contemporary Caribbean Canadian literature as well. Brand’s own refusal of recognition and recognition of dispossession seems distinctly Afro-pessimist.



slave from his or her former condition, but the site of the re-elaboration of that condition” (185).<sup>8</sup>

Her arguments resonate with chapter four’s critique of diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships: from an Afro-pessimist perspective, diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships can only re-elaborate non-citizenship and its unending struggles for recognition, not rescue racialized Canadians from non-recognition.

Spillers’ pathbreaking “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” similarly explains that “the project of liberation for African-Americans has found urgency in two passionate motivations that are twinned-1) to break apart, to rupture violently the laws of American behavior that make such syntax possible; 2) to introduce a new semantic field/fold more appropriate to his/her own historic movement” (79). The ‘syntax’ Spillers references here collapses subject and object, living and inanimate, self-possessed and owned, into the enslaved African American. This is the operative syntax of legal and legislative documents that enable race-based slavery in the United States and informs the 1965 Moynihan report on African American family life. Emancipation, under Afro-pessimist thought, cannot be gained through access to or recognition within the category of the human, the free, the self-possessed, the family, all of which are premised on “blackness” as non-human. Instead, whatever potential there is for Black subjects’ emancipation lies in rejecting the ontologies from which Blackness itself has been rejected. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” focuses on rejecting traditions of patrilineal inheritance while looking at the insurgency possible within gendered

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<sup>8</sup> Wilderson and Hartman conclude their conversation about Afro-pessimist thought by debating romantic conceptualizations of reparations and the logic of “focusing one’s appeal to the very state that has inflicted the injury. The reparations movement puts itself in this contradictory or impossible position, because reparations are not going to solve the systemic ongoing production of racial inequality, in material or any other terms. And like inequality, racial domination and racial abjection are produced across generations. In that sense, reparations seem like a very limited reform: a liberal scheme based upon certain notions of commensurability that reinscribe the power of the law and of the state to make right a certain situation, when, clearly, it cannot” (197-8). For Hartman, reparations aim to end racial difference and thus fall into the same idealist trap as Nelson’s neocritics and Scott’s romantic notions of postcolonial future. By contrast, the hope Ta-Nehisi Coates attributes to reparations as a “a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal” (70) demonstrates that his is not an Afro-pessimist stance on reparations or their role in Afro-American futurity.

categories such as ‘the female’ (80), while Hartman’s rejects liberal discourses of possessive individualism, contractual subjects, and proprietorial notions of the self (*Scenes* 6-7).

I see Afro-pessimism and Afrofuturism as iterations of what Scott describes as “the ethical-political experience of the temporal ‘afterness’ of our postcolonial, postsocialist time” (*Omens* 21). As with Dery’s initial definition of Afrofuturism, the editors of *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* trace Afro-pessimist thought through—and attribute it to—the African American critical tradition, but anti-Black violence permeate the African diaspora beyond America’s national boundaries. One of the major critiques this thesis issues, for example, is that Canadian diaspora studies’ affective, global, and urban citizenships arguably affirm the power of Canadian neo-colonialism via the progress narrative embedded in diasporic post-nationalism. Expanding Afro-pessimist critique beyond an American milieu suggests diasporic transnationalism uses American racism as a counterpoint to post-national freedom. This thesis’ own pessimist project, then, has been to deconstruct notions of post-nationalism as an emancipated state by showing how such notions are themselves premised on anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence.

Scott’s work on ‘after postcoloniality’ and the receding horizons of post-national emancipation could be seen as one diasporic iteration of Afro-pessimism: rather than focusing on the “nonevent of emancipation” (Hartman, *Scenes* 116), after postcoloniality examines the nonevent of national decolonization. For Afro-pessimism and after postcoloniality alike, emancipation and decolonization are limited by notions of anti-colonial freedom—whether individual or national—that are always already premised on colonial subjects’/nations’ non-freedom; the most significant difference between their projects, then, is their respective geographic scope: the United States for Afro-pessimist thought, the ostensibly decolonized nations of the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and Asia for after postcoloniality.

Like ‘after postcoloniality,’ Afrofuturism, and Afro-pessimism, Hopkinson’s speculative works examine how Afro-diasporic subjects negotiate colonialism’s consequences across an array of possible futures. Unlike the realist arguments Scott and Hartman put forward, though, Hopkinson navigates questions of Afro-diasporic futurity via speculative fiction, a style whose generic conventions allow her to play with realism’s temporal logic. It is useful here to quote at length from Spillers’ reflections on speculative fiction’s Afro-pessimist possibilities:

the entire gamut of fictions that pose alternative models of reality, including the fictions of science, magic, and the fantastical, might be thought to have something of a prohibitive relationship to certain historical formations....[those] that arise in the world of *realpolitik* bear a critical relationship, one might well believe, to literary realism; if the latter defines narrative strategy and modes of characterization according to mimetically vivid and verifiable principles, engendered by the real world of power relations, then realism would seem to match up well with its origins in the problematic of the everyday. By this logic, African-American literary development would locate its center of gravity in realism. But if there is more than one way to ‘make it real,’ then the work of fantasy and make-believe has a genuine role to play in processes of social construction and identity formation. (“Imaginative Encounters” 4-5)

Beyond writing back to speculative fiction’s colonial and patriarchal associations, “A Habit of Waste” refuses to present a future Canada where pressures to assimilate, race and class-based discrimination, or cultures of sexual violence are resolved through technological or temporal leaps. Instead, the story shows an ostensibly post-racial Canada in that its subjects can opt in or out of racialized identities, but where Cynthia’s body transfer only allows her to transcend the appearances, and not the socioeconomic realities or internalized crises, resultant from Canadian racism. This story offers a simultaneously Afrofuturistic and Afro-pessimistic representation of after postcoloniality because it contends colonialism’s unresolved inequalities and postcolonialism’s unfulfilled desires continue to shape the technologies, communities, and futures that grow out of their foundational anti-Blackness.

Hopkinson makes these critiques deftly in her short stories, but her novels, particularly *The Full Moon's Arms*, offer more elaborate responses to the unique problem-space of after postcoloniality. Spillers' juxtapositions of the 'real' and the fantastical, like Poovey's fact/fiction continuum, are at play throughout the Afro-pessimist stance this Afrofuturist narrative takes towards progressive notions of linear time. Furthering "[t]he Caribbean counterdiscourse of modernity," Sorensen argues that Hopkinson works to correct "the Eurocentric misreading of slavery as a symptom of insufficient modernity. This challenge to the association of modernity and modernization with rationality and egalitarianism disrupts the assumptions that undergird both real-world development projects and fantasies of science-fictional development" (270). More simply, *The Full Moon's Arms* is a novel about refusal: both its flawed narrator and time itself refuse to progress into a neoliberal future, forcing revolution and evolution alike sit back and wait for alternatives to the postcolonial nation-state's mitigated freedoms to present themselves.

#### AFRO-PESSIMIST FUTURE PRESENT: *THE NEW MOON'S ARMS*

Theoretical discussions often characterize SF as distinctly equipped to explore globalization's incommensurate scales. Seo-Young Chu argues its capacity to "[literalize] figures of speech closely associated with globalization" such as Spaceship Earth, the global village, 'global sapiens,' and space-time compression, make the genre "uniquely conducive to thinking and writing about globalization" (88). Higgins is more celebratory when he writes that "more than any other mode of cultural production, the genre [SF] reveals the operations of imperial thinking and generates an imaginative space where cosmopolitan alternatives can emerge" (351), a generalization that lead him to a more sweeping conclusion: "science fiction," Higgins argues, "is always moving toward cosmopolitanism" (352). My reading of *The New Moon's Arms* pushes against this claim.

Higgins's contention that cosmopolitan futures are inevitable demonstrates how easily transnational readings align with 'neocritical' approaches to futurism, those whose "take on identity

[tend] more toward the glorification of the self's dissolving than its hardening" (Nelson 3). Non-white Canadian writers of speculative fiction—I am thinking of Hopkinson's work here as well as Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), Wayde Compton's *The Outer Harbour* (2014), and Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue" (2004)—repeatedly reject neocritical assumptions that Canada is moving towards an inevitably cosmopolitan or egalitarian future where all identities—racialized, gendered, ethnic, Indigenous—blur together. Instead, they dismiss neocriticism's "promise of a placeless, raceless, bodiless near future enabled by technological progress" (Nelson 1) by depicting colonial and racial inequalities as persisting in Canada's imagined futures.<sup>9</sup> "Rather than offering a 'Western' image of the future that is increasingly detached from the past or, equally problematic, a future-primitive perspective that fantasizes an uncomplicated return to ancient culture," works by Hopkinson, Lai, Robinson, and Compton present a "distillation of African diasporic [and Indigenous and Asian] experience, rooted in the past but not weighed down by it, contiguous yet continually transformed" (Nelson 8). Across these authors' speculative narratives, anti-colonial struggles remain ongoing, projected onto a temporal horizon cultural studies and popular SF alike tend to characterize as progressively global, post-national, and cosmopolitan.

*The New Moon's Arms* exemplifies this emerging tradition by stiffening rather than melting the boundaries of the autonomous individual. A largely first-person narrative, Hopkinson's novel is narrated by Calamity Lambkin who, like Cynthia from "A Habit of Waste," is something of an anti-heroine. Formerly Chastity, Calamity changes her name after she becomes pregnant at 15 and the original appears too sardonic. Now 53, she has tense relationships with Ifeoma, her daughter, and Michael, Ifeoma's father. Calamity critiques Ifeoma for shunning traditional femininity (6), getting

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<sup>9</sup> Nelson describes these inequalities as gathering along a "digital divide... gaps in technological access that fall along lines of race, gender, region, and ability but has mostly become a code word for the tech inequities that exist between blacks and whites" (1). Her discussion is limited to African American texts and authors, but the digital divide Nelson identifies in SF could be applied to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities' relative access to technology—from internet connectivity to potable water—in Canada as well.

involved in local politics (168), and investing time and hope in pseudo-scientific hobbies (208): “all the shit she do. If you spill salt, throw some over your left shoulder to keep the jumbies away; don’t step on a crack or you’ll put your grandmother in traction; never wear white shoes after Labour Day” (98). Calamity’s relationship with Michael is similarly strained. Although they are close friends in high school, Chastity is heartbroken when Michael discloses his attraction to their male classmates. In response, she proposes he “test it” (124)—both his sexual orientation and sex itself—with her first. As an adult, Michael embraces his queer identity, as does Ifeoma. Calamity, however, sees Michael’s homosexuality as a personal affront, one that calls her femininity into question and cost her dearly. After Calamity’s father turns her out for refusing to say who impregnated her (152, 157), she has to drop out of school to support herself and Ifeoma: “You ever tried being a nineteen-year-old single mother in this country?... Try renting an apartment. Getting a fucking bank account” (234-44). Calamity’s homophobia-tinged-resentment causes lasting rifts between herself, Michael, and Ifeoma (215), exacerbating an earlier familial loss: her own mother disappeared when Calamity was eight. Throughout the novel, many characters speculate Calamity’s recently deceased father was responsible for her mother’s disappearance.

In terms of the novel’s diegesis, *The New Moon’s Arms* spans four weeks leading up to Cayaba’s national elections. While Calamity “don’t pay much mind to politricks. Never met a politician who wouldn’t try to convince you that salt was sugar” (40), news reports debating Cayaba’s political futures demarcate time’s passage throughout this novel. The incumbent, Garth Johnson, is a free-market neo-conservative described as never losing an election he could buy (40). His Chanel-clad challenger, Caroline Sookdeo-Grant, emphasizes small business loans and economic protectionism over reductions to Cayaba’s national trade barriers (197). Neither option represents an emancipated postcolonial nationalism for Cayaba, though. Both Johnson and Sookdeo-Grant they demonstrate how completely neoliberal economics have curtailed the island-nation’s future. Beyond

these partisan elections, the island is torn between its reliance on tourism—particularly ecological tours that feature its endangered monk seals (“Cayaba’s cash cows” [89])—and Gilmor Saline, a US company that partners with Johnson’s government to boost cell service and provide new ferry services to outlying islands (246), but whose plants pollute the surrounding ocean with bittern, compromise local fisheries, and threaten the island’s already endangered seals. Both sources of national income are badly needed, as the interest on Cayaba’s international debts alone exceeds \$750 million (40).

Amid these familial and national tensions, two extraordinary events occur: first, as Calamity has her first hot flashes of menopause, objects from her past rematerialize around her. Initially, they are small things: a cherished pin, a plate, and childhood toys lost years ago appear out of nowhere. As her hot flashes intensify, more substantial things, including an almond tree she would climb as a child and her father’s cashew grove, lost in a hurricane 45-years earlier along with clues concerning her mother’s disappearance, rematerialize out of the past. The second series of extraordinary events begin when Calamity discovers a small child washed up on a local beach after a storm: “a little brown boy... two, maybe three years old.... his hair as a mess, shells and sand matted in it” (61). The child has webbed fingers, scaly patches between his knees, haws over his eyes, and speaks an unidentifiable language, all evidence he is one of Cayaba’s fabled mermaids. Calamity questions the child’s origins but also believes his parents died in the storm that washed him ashore. More importantly, he presents her with a second chance at motherhood. Calamity re-names the child Agway, applies to be his foster mother, and begins teaching him English with the hope of “[civilizing] him enough to enter the real world” (281).

*The New Moon's Arms* lends itself to eco-critical, queer, feminist, posthumanist, and animal studies-based readings. That said, it is not one of Hopkinson's more well-studied works.<sup>10</sup> I see two reasons for this critical neglect: first, with its references to beached mermaids, selkie folklore, and its narrator's magical menopause, *The New Moon's Arms* is more fantasy than science fiction, making it an outsider text to an always already outsider genre. When asked to explain the difference between science fiction and fantasy, Philip K. Dick famously reasoned that "[f]antasy involves that which general opinion regards as impossible; science fiction involves that which general opinion regards as possible under the right circumstances" (xiv).<sup>11</sup> Speculative genres are validated by their relative proximity to literary realism, a contemporary reiteration of Poovey's fact/fiction continuum. Thus fantasy, where things happen that cannot *really* happen, is generically further afield from literary realism than science fiction, where things could *really* happen through technological advances. The distinctions that readers and critics alike draw between science fiction and fantasy are also highly gendered. Madhu Dubey summarizes that science fiction "has been traditionally perceived as a masculine genre dealing with 'hard' science and valorized over the 'soft' feminine genre of fantasy, driven by the suprarational and putatively antiscientific principles of magic" (32). Faucheux further nuances this critical distinction—wherein genre fiction is seen as radiating outwards from literary realism—with her observation that "many Afrofuturist texts do not fit neatly into the conventions

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<sup>10</sup> Though frequently (and positively) reviewed upon publication, *The New Moon's Arms* has only been addressed in two articles as per drafting this chapter: Giselle Liza Anatol's "The Sea-People of Nalo Hopkinson's *The New Moon's Arms*: Reconceptualizing Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* through Considerations of Myth and Motherhood" and Grace L. Dillion's "Indigenous Scientific Literacies in Nalo Hopkinson's Ceremonial Worlds." Anatol offers a feminist reading of the novel whereas Dillion presents an ecocritical analysis rooted to native cosmology.

<sup>11</sup> In the same letter, Dick goes on to dismiss these differences, writing that "[t]his is in essence a judgment-call, since what is possible and what is not possible is not objectively known but is, rather, a subjective belief on the part of the author and of the reader" (xiv). Atwood showed her subjective beliefs about this difference by using the term 'speculative fiction' to increase the perceived distance between realism and science fiction in her infamous, though off the cuff, comment to a BBC morning program that science fiction was about "talking squids in outer space." She has since labeled her own speculative works 'social science fiction.' Darko Suvin alternatively defined science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" (375), a claim that also works to distance the genre from realist concerns. As John Rieder explains, Suvin was an early Marxist theorist of SF and deplored what he thought of as commercially successful literature. Thus, Suvin defined science fiction as a non-popular, non-financially motivated genre of social rebellion (Rieder 193).



of science fiction and actually borrow from other speculative genres such as fantasy, magical realism, horror” (564). Works by Hopkinson as well as Octavia Butler, Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, Nisi Shawl, and Tananarive Due not only trouble distinctions between realism and speculative representation, then, but blur lines *between* speculative genres as well. In *The New Moon’s Arms*, Hopkinson blends science fiction’s concerns with scientific rationalism (represented by marine biology, medical science, and free-market economics) with the magical powers attributed to its female characters and mythic human-seal hybrids.

The second—and more pressing—reason academic studies overlook *The New Moon’s Arms* is because it does not adhere to the chronotopes expected of Afrofuturist texts. *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and *Midnight Robber* (2000), Hopkinson’s more well-studied pieces, are set in distinctly dystopian and intergalactic futures; *The Salt Roads* (2003), another academically-popular work, spans the 4<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Academic readings celebrate these works for blending science fiction’s technology-oriented concerns with Caribbean vodun, Obeah, Santeria, and folklore. These works are also easier to incorporate into existing discussions of Afrofuturistic SF than *The New Moon’s Arms* because they reproduce the time and space travelling chronotopes expected of this genre. Discussing Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* and *The Salt Roads*, Sorensen contends both teach their readers “to follow narratives that move not straightforwardly, but ‘dubwise’ into the future” (267).<sup>13</sup> Like these works’ dub-wise chronotopes, *The New Moon’s Arms* similarly disrupts “established narrative structures through which we understand modernity and futurity” (Sorensen 269). That said, its contemporary setting violates a key chronotopic marker of Afrofuturist SF: unlike Hopkinson’s previous time-and-space travelling works, *The New Moon’s Arms* is set in the liminal

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<sup>13</sup> Sorensen explains that “[a] dub mix moves forward in a recording while producing disruptive reverberations and loops that disrupt the flow of the original and create new connections among a song’s compositional elements. This vernacular style is a crucial if neglected conceptual resource for Afrofuturism” (267).

present; neither this novel's narrative nor its setting (though imagined) leap forward or backward in time.

The fact Hopkinson violates *this* chronotopic convention makes *The New Moon's Arms* all the more instructive for discussions of temporality and progress after postcoloniality. Questioning genre theory's categorical distinctions, Rieder notes that "[i]n order for a text to be recognized as having generic features, it must allude to a set of strategies, images, or themes that [have] already emerged into the visibility of a conventional or at least repeatable gesture. Genre, therefore, is always found in the middle of things, never at the beginning of them" (196). Hopkinson makes SF's chronotopic conventions all the more visible in her works and calls attention to its absence from *The New Moon's Arms*. Like Rieder, I sense that "pigeonholing [this] text as a member of this or that genre is much less useful than understanding the way it positions itself within a field of generic possibilities" (197). Through Hopkinson's conscious generic positioning, *The New Moon's Arms* takes an Afro-pessimistic stance on the Caribbean's neoliberal futures. The novel refuses neoliberalism's mitigated possibilities by highlighting how, as Scott describes, "the problem of sovereignty [is] considerably widened, having to be rethought in terms of economic independence, popular power, social justice, and cultural dignity" (*Refashioning* 222).

Ifeoma and her husband Clifton fight over Sookdeo-Grant's promise to lessen foreign ownership of Cayaba's hotels. Ifeoma, a desk clerk at one of the larger hotels, sees local ownership as progressive and nationally empowering; however, Clifton worries his own business ventures will suffer under local ownership: "he say I shouldn't be helping her party get into power.... He say if the hotels go, then he and me going to be broke even worse than now" (198). They separate in part because of their relative valuation of individual versus national independence and wealth. Like Clifton, Calamity's appraisal of Sookdeo-Grant's local ownership proposal is tempered, but for different reasons: "Whoever own them, I bet you a rum-and-water still going to cost ten American

dollars at the Tamany” (198). Even local ownership, Calamity concludes, will change little for average Cayabans. Neither Johnson nor Sookdeo-Grant can bring about real change insofar as Cayaba is tethered to the servile global stance of the postcolonial nation-state whose aspirations are undercut by transnational capital, concretized by the American dollars used at Cayaban hotels.

My primary interest is in *The New Moon's Arms* juxtaposition of Cayaba's very real debt crisis and uncertain political future with selkie folklore and its antiheroine's magical menopause. A strong example of what Dubey characterizes as Afrofuturism's "casual incorporation of magical and supernatural phenomenon" (35), this novel's collocation of fabulism and national austerity explores both "the 'counterculture of modernity' Paul Gilroy described as distinctive of Afro-diasporic cultures" (Gilroy qtd. in Dubey 35) and Poovey's fact/fiction continuum within a distinctly neoliberal present.<sup>14</sup> Firm distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and speculation, break down in *The New Moon's Arms*, highlighting the speculative nature of contemporary finance capital.

Collapsed by contiguity, past and present are tangled up in one another throughout this Afrofuturist novel: Calamity's past re-materializes through her hot flashes, a narrative device through which "fictional time lays claim to plasticity... it can retrograde as well as progress" (Spillers, "Imaginative Encounters" 5). Concurrently, national pasts constrain Cayaba through its international debts. Sookdeo-Grant cautions against accepting more loans from the Fiscal Foundation for Worldwide Development, a World Bank-like global agency whose 'aid' costs Cayaba control over its national economy: "*The FFWD demands we reduce trade restriction as a condition of lending us money. This allows foreign multinationals such as Gilmor Saline to grow unchecked in our country, forcing small farmers out of business*" (246). Like loans offered by the International Monetary Fund and InterAmerican Bank to

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<sup>14</sup> In introducing her anthology *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction*, Hopkinson characterizes the intermingling of the mundane and the extraordinary as distinguishing Caribbean fabulism from traditional SF: "Northern science fiction and fantasy come out of a rational and skeptical approach to the world: That which cannot be explained must be proven to exist.... But the Caribbean, much like the rest of the world, tends to have a different worldview: The irrational, the inexplicable, and the mysterious exist side by side with the daily events of life" (xii-xiii).

Jamaica in the 1970s and 80s, the FFWD's aid deepens Cayaba's dependence on transnational corporations. That said, Sookdeo-Grant's solution for these international debts—to offer micro-loans to the nation's salt farmers—only devolves national debts onto individual citizens. None of Cayaba's potential futures are free from their indebted pasts; these debts, in turn, keep the nation and Calamity alike from progressing.

The novel's mermaid-selkies are more open to interpretation. As Giselle Liza Anatol describes, selkies are folk-creatures that appear primarily in Scottish, Irish, and Orkney mythology. Typically female, these animal-human hybrids can

cast off their [seal] skins, and then appear in lithe and seductive human form....their outer coverings must be hidden while the selkies frolic on land, for if they lose the skins, they cannot transform back to their original seal shape and return to the sea. Several tales feature selkie women whose skins are stolen and hidden by men to whom they get married once trapped on land. (Anatol 204)

Colonial pasts resurface through these selkie figures and the third-person passages that detail their history. These passages follow the life of the 'dada hair woman' who was sold into slavery and crossed the Middle Passage 200 years earlier. Her prayers to the Ibo goddess Uhamiri and blood magic transform herself and her fellow enslaved passengers into selkies as their ship founders off Cayaba's coast: "The people's arms flattened out into flexible flippers. The shackles slipped off their wrists.... bodies grew thick and fat. Legs melted together.... faces swelled and transformed: round heads with snouts. Big, liquid eyes" (316). This liberating transformation comes at personal cost to this character, though, as "the women who were called to serve Uhamiri remained barren" (257), underscoring the novel's interest in biological motherhood *and* extended kinship within the Black diaspora.

Beyond importing Celtic folklore into a Caribbean setting and exploring Black Atlantic hybridity, Hopkinson's selkies call attention to slavery's lasting consequences for Afro-diasporic motherhood. Although she never comes to this conclusion herself, the novel suggests Calamity

herself was mothered by one of the island's selkies. Her hot flashes and childhood finding abilities are evidence of her preternatural maternal inheritance. A 'finder' like the dada hair woman, Calamity has the magical ability to perceive lost items and people: when she is close to finding a lost item, or when a cherished object from her past is about to materialize, the joints of her two webbed fingers tingle. These abilities ebb with her mother's disappearance but return with menopause.

Through Calamity's finding abilities, the novel stages a debate over magic and mysticism's appeal versus scientific logic. Convinced of her own rationality relative to other islanders' superstitious beliefs, Calamity dismisses her childhood powers, "finders probably rank right up there with Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster" (73), as well as Ifeoma's pseudoscientific hobbies: "It's like she think...that the marvellous things in this world, the wondrous things, we can find a *trick* to them, you know? And if we work this trick just right, well then, we can control them.... Why you want to control a miracle? Then it won't be a miracle no more!" (98). Despite Calamity's concerns with human control over the supernatural, though, *The New Moon's Arms* suggests such control is illusory at best: Cayaba's citizens are constantly trying to explain away the island's preternatural disruptions. Cayaba's Zooquarium employees file endless incident reports as their 'seals' come and go from their enclosure (26). These 'seals,' themselves "a big mystery" (111), are the subject of misguided academic inquiry. Hector Goonan, a marine biologist from the University of the West Indies, is stymied in his attempts to scientifically explain how a Mediterranean genus came to exist in the Caribbean: "By rights monk seals should even exist, you know. They're phocids, for Christ's sake. In the tropics! They're balanced on an evolutionary knife edge" (111). Those Cayaban's who know of the mermaids' existence cannot speak freely about them: "anybody who work near the sea around Cayaba will buck up one eventually. Fishermen, Coast Guard, Emergency Services. Not the doctors, for the most part.... We all know it. We just don't talk about it" (99). Amid this disenchanting climate, Agway's discovery on the beach and non-human characteristics are

normalized through a more believable story about neglect and abuse: “With all those deformities... maybe his parents are embarrassed about him. They keep the child locked up, sometimes restrained. They don’t teach him language or social skills” (79). Throughout, Hopkinson suggests people favour rational, quantifiable, controllable knowledge over magic or fabulism.

Calamity slowly comes to embrace anti-rationality through Agway, reflecting that she “wanted a world with mermaid boys in it, not one where parents kept their children tied up and locked away” (99). She remains worried, however, about the consequences of believing in magic, as Ifeoma does, in a disenchanted world: “I frighten that hope will disappear” (98). Hopkinson’s evocation of hope returns my attention to postcolonial critique’s emancipatory potential. Describing postcolonial criticism’s struggle to address the emergent problems of a neoliberal world order, Scott writes that

there is now a fundamental crisis in the Third World in which the very coherence of the secular-modern project—with its assurances of progressive social-economic development, with its dependence upon the organizational form of the nation-state, with its sense of the privilege of representative democracy and competitive elections, and so on—can no longer be taken for granted. This crisis ushers in a new problem-space and produces a new demand on postcolonial criticism. (*Refashioning* 14-5)

Cayaba is this new problem-space: its social and economic development, democracy, and sovereignty are all tenuous. Rather than drawing on SF’s magical possibilities to assert her characters anti-essential and boundary crossing possibilities, then, Hopkinson’s mermaids and magical hot flashes test what happens to postcolonial futurity and the hope it intoned amid the ruins of the postcolonial nation in the neoliberal present. Against this disenchanted neoliberal reality, Hopkinson’s selkies present a vision of what diasporic but non-enslaved Black subjectivity could have been: communal, queer, non-possessive, and shapeshifting, these mythological creatures stand in stark distinction to Cayaba’s realities.

The novel’s comparison of human versus selkie family structures is key: while Calamity seems to inherit her magic abilities from her mythical mother, she also inherits possessiveness from

her human father. A local fisherman tells Calamity he'd once joked to her father about sleeping with her mother: "I made the mistake one day and tell him if his wife get bored with him, she could always come to me. He never speak to me again after that" (29). Calamity's response, "Dadda was always jealous for the women in his life" (29) naturalizes her father's possessiveness. This remark and Hopkinson's evocation of selkie folklore direct readers' attention towards family's possessive configuration in the colonial aftermath.

Selkie folktales, as Anatol explains, often concern men's (in)ability to seduce and possess feminine nature and "feature selkie woman whose skins are stolen and hidden by men to whom they get married once trapped on land" (204). *The New Moon's Arms* addresses the consequences of such patriarchal notions—both human possession over nature as well as men's possession of women—through Calamity's mother's disappearance (203). When father's cashew grove rematerializes, Calamity and Ifeoma discover a seal skin concealed in one of the tree's bolls (203-4), and although Calamity suspects the skin played some role in her mother's disappearance—"Maybe they fell out over this.... One of them wanted to tan seal hides to sell, and one didn't" (204)—neither connect this discovery to selkie folklore. It suggests that Calamity's father did not murder her mother—as Calamity fears and locals suspect—but hid her skin so she could not leave their family and return to the sea. It also demonstrates that despite his possessiveness, she left anyways.

Anatol reads this Calamity as exemplifying Black Atlantic hybridity on account of her dual parentage: she "has clearly transcended the borders between the world of the seal-people and the world of the humans, revealing her identity as a true member of the Black Atlantic" (206). My sense is that Hopkinson makes a fairly different gesture through this flawed character: Calamity demonstrates that postcolonial nationalism is not a romantic epic that has enshrined emancipation, resolved global inequalities, or ended anti-Black violence; instead, colonialism's violence not only reverberates throughout a neoliberal world order, but actually concentrates in Calamity's possessive

notions of motherhood and ‘normative’ expectations of family and gender. This is where Afro-pessimist concerns blend into *The New Moon’s Arms’s* speculative elements and where my interpretation of the novel differs from existing readings.

#### BLACK GIRL MAGIC? HOPKINSON’S FLAWED FEMMES

The phrase “Black Girl Magic” began as a Twitter hashtag intended, as Morgan Jerkins summarizes, to counteract the negativity publicly directed at Black women by showcasing their accomplishments (124). A search for #blackgirlmagic will yield endless Beyoncé gifs, references to Ava DuVernay, the Williams sisters, former first lady Michelle Obama (124), as well as celebrations of private citizens’ successes. As Jerkins elaborates, though, this affirmational phrase can also be interpreted as a social media and tech-savvy adaptation of the ‘strong black woman’ stereotype (125), one that celebrates—but also expects—Black women to individually overcome white supremacy by achieving economic, political, artistic, or athletic success *within* a white supremacist society. Calamity is similarly caught up in ‘normative’ notions of successful Black femininity that are imbued with anti-Black violence.

Bigoted, self-contradictory, and full of self-serving intentions, Calamity is very unlike the self-aware and politicized figures often celebrated by transnational and diasporic critique. Neither she nor Cynthia from “A Habit of Waste” play the role of the revolutionary hero, a character type often praised in Black women’s SF. Spillers, for example, writes that “Octavia E. Butler has created entire alternative worlds that uncannily reflect reality and deflect and undermine it at the same time by generating subjects who improve on the available human models” (“Imaginative Encounters” 4). The same cannot be said of Hopkinson’s heroines; instead, her flawed femmes speak to the collapse of anti-colonial heroes and the emancipatory futurity they were expected to deliver.

Scott contends the notion of the revolutionary hero relies on romantic tropes of overcoming colonial power, adding the important caveat that “the efficacy of this [revolutionary] narrative



depends upon the salience of the horizon in relation to which it is constructed... the collapse of that horizon ought to urge us to rethink the narrative and poetic modes in which we imagine the relation between past, presents, and possible futures” (*Conscripts* 19). In addition to the novel’s subversive narrative plotting, then, *The New Moon’s Arms* refuses to ‘improve’ existing human models or work towards revolutionary horizons through Calamity. Instead, this character embodies the uncertainties and the inability to progress that define Scott’s after postcoloniality: “when exactly is it you get stuck?” Ifeoma asks her mother, “‘Cause it seem like you reached a certain place in your life, and you never manage to move on from there” (287).

*The New Moon’s Arms* gives two contrasting representations of this ‘stuck-ness’: one regressive (Calamity’s insistence on normativity), the other based on refusal (the selkie’s disruption of normativity). Hopkinson repurposes “the symbolic identification of women [and Afro-diasporic subjects] with lower animals into a potent literary device for critiquing the gender [and racial] ideology of modern science” (Dubey 33) through the novel’s selkies and most clearly challenges the normativity imbued in scientific progress narratives through Calamity’s faltering attempts to humanize Agway. Like her menopausal manifestations, the child appears anachronistic, out of step with time and evolution. Evelyn, an estranged childhood friend of Calamity’s and the doctor who examines Agway after his discovery, notes in her assessment that “[s]ometimes a reptile is born with haws.... a throwback, you know” (78), and compares the foundling’s webbed fingers to those of an unborn child: “All humans have that in the womb” (135). Agway’s body is framed in regressive terms. His behaviour is similarly read as primitive: Calamity observes it does not “bother him to piss and shit right where he was” (84); he has parasites from eating raw fish (118); and he refuses to wear clothes (281). Discussing *Midnight Robber*, Sorensen notes that Hopkinson confronts her readers “with the spectacle of a Caribbean future that repeats in altered form the traumas that shape Caribbean postcolonial reality in the present,” and thus exposes “the colonial violence preserved in

standard science fiction tropes” (277). *The New Moon’s Arms* stages a similar confrontation by presenting a Caribbean woman who deploys animalizing and dehumanizing frameworks while working to ‘civilize’ a child she believes is her Other.

Through Calamity’s attempts to humanize Agway “enough to enter the real world” (281), *The New Moon’s Arms* exposes contemporary anxieties about Caribbean underdevelopment, anxieties that circulate in proprietary notions of family in general, and Black motherhood in particular. Echoing colonial and neocolonial narratives about the Caribbean as regressive and resistant to modernization, Calamity thinks of Agway as needing to be humanized “before it’s too late for [him] to learn” (84). Her attempts to mother Agway into humanity show the colonial violence preserved in notions of ‘good mothering.’ For example, while her grandson, Stanley, learns to speak a few phrases in Agway’s language (216), Calamity never does. Her inability, or unwillingness, to communicate with Agway on his terms is a major source of frustration for Ifeoma:

‘If you looking out for Agway so good, why you not finding out what language he speaks?... Why you not trying to learn what Agway saying?... Like you frighten?’

‘Your rass. Frighten of what? What a three-year-old boy could say to frighten me?’

‘He could tell you something about himself and where he came from. He could tell you what really happen to him. He could tell you his *name*, Mummy.’

I was breathing in little gasps. ‘He *have* a name! I give him a perfectly good name!’ (287-8)<sup>15</sup>

‘Gifting’ Agway his name resonates with colonial histories of “[n]aming the other,” which “involves asserting power, dominance, and ontological superiority” (Sorensen 27). Calamity’s ‘care’ for Agway asserts her power and possessiveness. Like the loans the FFWD offers Cayaba, her motherly aid is always on the edge of becoming compromising and exploitative. Or, as Ifeoma argues at the novel’s conclusion, “Every good deed you do have a price attached” (288).

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<sup>15</sup> Calamity’s unwillingness to learn from him stands in contrast to the dada hair woman who learns the languages of those with whom she crosses the Middle Passage: “They were Igbos and Ewes and Aradas in that place. Different languages, different ways, but they had been learning each other’s speech in the long dark misery of their days” (256).

Calamity is deeply invested in normative ways of being female, mothering, and forming family; through this flawed character, Hopkinson casts doubt on normativity's possibilities for Black subjects. Hector Goonan, a marine biologist from UWI Calamity develops a crush on, challenges her heteronormative presumptions after she makes homophobic comments about Michael and his partner. When Goonan discloses his bisexuality to Calamity and calls out the violence her expectations of male heterosexuality afford, "this thing is not a joke in the Caribbean. I learned the hard way to keep my distance from people who have a problem with my being bisexual" (253), her Calamity's response, "You're sick!... Can't even make up your mind. Going back and forth from women to men, spreading diseases" (254), attempts to pathologize Goonan's sexuality, but only exposes her violent notions of normativity: "Faggot!" I cried. He kept on walking. I followed. "Anti-man! Dirty, stinking, lying *ben!*.... Everywhere I turn, another one of those nasty men, thieving away any joy from my life" (254).

Calamity's attack on Goonan makes it tempting to dismiss this character as little more than a bigot, but I think her insistence on normativity is more productively understood as a powerful reaction against slavery's disruption of family and gender roles, when "captive persons were *forced* into patterns of *dispersal*... into the *horizontal* relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names, and properties by the legal arrangements of enslavement" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby" 75). Anatol provides a valuable summary of Spillers' arguments in "Mamma's Baby" with regard to *The New Moon's Arms*: "Spillers proposes the need to consider African American families in terms of horizontal rather than vertical kinship ties. These ties de-privilege patrimony and the hegemonic fixation on the connections between men and their birth children (particularly sons) and focus instead on 'parents' who are uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, and neighbors" (209). Hopkinson's novel contrasts chosen families, associated with the selkies, over 'traditional,' vertical models of biological motherhood, associated with Calamity (Anatol 211). She rejects the extended,

queer kinship Cayaba's selkies embrace. For example, despite her barrenness, the dada hair woman becomes a mother by adopting the orphaned son of one of her shipmates after they transform into seals (318). Their relationship affirms non-biological family structures as necessary after Afro-diasporic loss.

Writing about the impossibility of discussing Black women's sexuality within the existing feminist frameworks of the late 1980s, Spillers acknowledges that "when current critical discourses appear to compel us more and more decidedly toward gender 'undecidability,' it would appear reactionary, if not dumb, to insist on the integrity of female/male gender" ("Mama's Baby" 66). She also proposes such a return may be necessary to understand Afro-diasporic identities in slavery's aftermath: "undressing these confluences of meaning, as they appear under the rule of dominance, would restore, as figurative possibility, not only Power to the Female (for Maternity), but also Power to the Male (for Paternity). We would gain... the *potential* for gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including human biology in its intersection with the project of culture" ("Mama's Baby" 66). In the light of neoliberalism's abrogation of former colonies' economic futures, Scott similarly reasons "we now have to re-examine our assumptions about the radical/conservative distinction that has so shaped and guided our modern/modernist ways of thinking...that distinction hangs on to our buying an Enlightenment story about progress, reason, and emancipation" (*Refashioning* 19). Calamity, a most unreliable narrator, buys in to precisely these notions of progress, reason, and individual emancipation, all of which are upended by her magical menopause.

The body, then, is a site where Hopkinson's "A Habit of Waste" and *The New Moon's Arms* differ significantly. If Cynthia's body switch "profoundly decenters the body as [a] vector of identity by rendering it superficial to a person's core being" (Faucheux 574), then Calamity's menopause firmly re-centres the body—specifically the ageing female body—as integral to identity and 'being.'

Arguing against neocritical thought's anti-essentialist tendencies, Nelson offers the reminder that "[b]odies carry different social weights that unevenly mediate access to...freely constructed identity.... discourse[s] of disembodiment, which fit an unrelentingly progressive and libertarian vision of the future, [and] became an important inspiration for theories of identity in the digital age" (3). Hopkinson pushes back against neocritical celebrations of body-less futures by presenting Calamity's aging body as a source of magic and power. While the character's doctor presents menopause as a disenchanting and even pathological state—"some people get actual headaches. And maybe bouts of rapid heartbeat. And flatulence. You might notice you're getting some hairs on your chin, but the hair will be thinner on your head and...everywhere else. Weight gain, loss of libido, dry vagina" (125-6)—menopause also renews Calamity's magic abilities, what she later calls her 'power surges' (175).

I read menopause in *The New Moon's Arms* as a wonderfully evocative metaphor for Scott's after postcoloniality. Menopause throws Calamity's normativity into chaos, but not just because of her hot flash's anachronistic manifestations: to be a sexual—and sexualized—but non-reproductive woman is a fundamentally queer state in *The New Moon's Arms*. As the fertile possibilities of postcolonial nationalism prove no longer viable, Calamity has to reconfigure normativity outside of reproductive—and possessive—narratives of motherhood, narratives that are indelibly marked by Black women's enslavement. Reflecting on SF's troubled history with representing gender, Dubey writes that while some authors slot female characters into the scientific and rational roles typically reserved for male characters, others affirm the "supposedly unscientific faculties, such as empathy or intuition, as the distinctive property of women" (32). Both approaches, she argues, reaffirm gendered binaries that distinguish between science, rationality, and technology as masculine while feminizing nature, affect, and magic. In *The New Moon's Arms*, Hopkinson does not "reclaim science for women" (Dubey 32) or "[extend] definitions of science so as to include bodies of knowledge

such as herbal medicine, midwifery, or magic” (Dubay 32) so much as she unabashedly associates magic with feminine power. Through Calamity’s flawed insistence on traditional femininity, Hopkinson actually refutes *anti-essentialist* arguments: this character’s menopause and the dada hair woman’s blood magic assign power to the normative embodied states—aging and menstruation—used to denigrate female life.

By valorizing Afro-diasporic subjects’ animalization and women’s ageing, *The New Moon’s Arms* condemns normative—and deeply possessive—notions of motherhood, those parsed in Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” “[U]nder conditions of captivity,” she writes, “the offspring of the female does not ‘belong’ to the Mother, nor is s/he ‘related’ to the ‘owner,’ though the latter ‘possesses’ it” (Spillers 74). While the possession of people is the most obvious element of race-based slavery, Spillers adds that “to overlap *kinlessness* on the requirement of property might enlarge our view of the conditions of enslavement” (“Mama’s Baby” 74).<sup>16</sup> Calamity is an interesting inheritor of this legacy of enforced kinship as she both insists upon and resents her kinlessness. Calamity is initially told she cannot foster Agway in part because of her age, her finances, her home’s distance from the main island, but mostly because of her relational status: “they like families that come with a mummy and a daddy and two well behaved children, preferably one boy and one girl” (119). Evelyn uses this normative logic to discourage Calamity’s foster application: “Children’s Services prefers them to go to whole families” (118). Calamity’s response, “I’m not broken” (119), highlights the relational prerequisites that define normative mothering. When a nurse asks if she is Agway’s mother, Calamity’s response, “‘No.’ He didn’t belong to me. *Yes*, said my heart. *Mine*” (80), espouses her possessive understanding of motherhood. When no one else can feed him, this

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<sup>16</sup> In the same passage, Spillers elaborates that “[t]he offspring of the enslaved, ‘being unrelated both to their begetters and to their owners...’, find themselves in the situation of being orphans” (Meillassoux qtd. in “Mama’s Baby” 74). *The New Moon’s Arms* shows how these disturbances to mothering persist under the ‘freedom’ of life in neo-colonial states. The novel begins with Calamity’s father’s funeral, and she identifies herself as “fully an orphan” (7). Agway too is assumed orphaned and belongs to the state to which he is not related but which assumes responsibility for his care.

possessiveness resurfaces: “I will do it.’ *Mine*” (82).<sup>17</sup> Agway not only gives Calamity a second chance at motherhood, then, but an *independent* even *kinless* motherhood. As she reflects internally on introducing the foundling to Michael, “*I don’t need you... I got a baby without you this time*” (207).

Quoting from Claude Meillassoux’s studies of female slavery, Spillers writes that “slavery creates an economic and social agent whose virtue lies in being outside the kinship system’.... the idea becomes useful as a point of contemplation when we try to sharpen our own sense of the African female’s reproductive uses within the diasporic enterprise of enslavement and the genetic reproduction of the enslaved” (“Mama’s Baby” 74). By insisting on her kinlessness, Calamity idealizes ‘normative’ motherhood, that which was denied to Black diasporic women, an idealization that accounts for her suspicion that her father must have murdered her mother: “this assumption is tied to traditional notions of motherhood—a ‘good’ mother would never abandon her children, and would sacrifice her life before willingly separating from them” (Anatol 212). Calamity cannot fathom choosing not to mother, or, in Afro-pessimist terms, she cannot refuse normative notions of possessive and individual motherhood that have been historically denied to Afro-diasporic women.

Reproduction without men or birth is an often-lauded premise of gynocentric futurity, but Hopkinson does not affirm Calamity’s desire for independent motherhood. Instead, Ifeoma chides Calamity’s assertions of strong Black womanhood as an independent state, an attitude that distanced both women from Michael: “if you couldn’t have him all to yourself, you didn’t want nobody else to have him neither,” Ifeoma observes, “Wouldn’t even let his own daughter get to know him” (287). Calamity’s homophobic justification for keeping father and daughter apart, “I did that to protect you,” attempts to reframe possessiveness as protectiveness, but Ifeoma dismisses this notion of ‘protection’ as fundamentally isolating and possessive: “The same way you protecting Agway? By shutting him away from everyone?” (287). Calamity’s possessiveness reads as a reaction against

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<sup>17</sup> Like Carla’s need to care for Jamal in *What We All Long For*, then, Calamity’s possessiveness stems both from lingering guilt over her mother’s disappearance, “*My fault. Mine*” (73), as well as her failure to secure Michael’s love.

slavery's corruption of motherhood, where "'kinship' loses meaning, since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by...property relations" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby" 74). This notion of autonomous freedom is upended by Calamity's inescapable debts to others. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman argues that while the nonevent of emancipation appeared to have 'freed' enslaved African Americans, their subjection was replaced by—and replicated under—liberal notions of possessive individualism:

If the control of blacks was formerly effected by absolute rights of property in the black body, dishonor, and the quotidian routine of violence, these techniques were supplanted by the liberty of contract that spawned debt-peonage, the bestowal of right that engendered indebtedness and obligation and licensed naked forms of domination and coercion, and the cultivation of a work ethic that promoted self-discipline and induced internal forms of policing. (120)

This internalized control and soft domination echo throughout Calamity's struggle to get and keep Agway. Evelyn eventually decides Calamity can foster Agway, but only because she has all the right possessions—the children's books, toys, school supplies that materialized through her hot flashes (163)—to be a 'good' mother. These possessions, in turn, both afford—and limit—Calamity's individual freedom and her ability to mother Agway. She finds herself multiply indebted to Evelyn firstly for allowing her to foster Agway, and secondly for fixing her car: "You're going to need a functioning car now that you have a child to look after.... If you can't pay for it now, I'll tell Martin to run you a tab," adding that "[t]here's a stipend that comes with being a foster parent, you know?" (165).<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting on debt's governmentality, Meissner notes that "the condition of debt... suspends the state of freedom that is, at the same time, imperative for economic agency within neoliberalism.

Debtors' subjectivity is therefore torn between formal freedom...and their actual state of

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<sup>18</sup> Calamity's car, an Austin Mini named 'Victoria' warrants its own analysis via Gilroy's discussion of Afro-diasporic car culture in *Darker than Blue*. For here, though, suffice to say that this overt symbol of British colonialism keeps Calamity in debt: "A crack in the front windshield had walked its way from the bottom to the top of the glass. I wasn't even going to ask the mechanic how much it would cost to replace the windshield. I still hadn't finished paying him for when he'd fixed my breaks last year" (22). Calamity's car, ostensibly a tool of both physical and social mobility, constantly gets her stuck in more and more debt.



dependency on the creditor” (151). Calamity gets to foster Agway, but this apparent agency comes with a price: Evelyn insists she be able to study the child further to assess whether he is in fact a mermaid. Calamity questions Evelyn’s intrusions, “So, this is how I’m to repay you? By letting you treat him like a research subject?” (179), but her indebtedness prevents her from refusing these intrusions: “[Evelyn] had the power to take Agway” (179).

Later in the novel, scandal erupts when an agreement detailing the Johnson government’s move towards national austerity in adherence to the FFWD’s demands—an agreement drafted by Evelyn’s husband, minister of economics—leaks to Sookdeo-Grant’s campaign: “*Under the terms of the agreement, China and a group of other creditor banks are slated to help Cayaba to repay past-due interest exceeding \$750 million on loans from the FFWD*” (273). This sub-plot trans-nationalizes Hartman’s ‘burdened individuality’: Cayaba is “freed of slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated” (*Scenes* 117) through these loans and international ‘aid’. Hartman’s analysis focuses on how this process unfolded during the Reconstruction; *The New Moon’s Arms* shows transnational debts as repeating these colonial processes for domination, curtailing Cayaba’s futures. The Johnson government’s agreements with Gilmor Saline, the FFWD, and an increasingly transnational cohort of creditors compromise the nation’s sovereignty, demonstrating that “extant and emergent forms of domination intensified and exacerbated the responsibilities and the afflictions of the newly emancipated” (Hartman, *Scenes* 117), or, in Cayaba’s case, decolonized Caribbean nation-state.

When her husband comes under scrutiny for drafting this austerity plan, Evelyn distances herself from Calamity and stops exploring Agway’s origins: “Samuel’s coming under fire for signing that agreement with the FFWD. I can’t be associated with anything or anyone *irregular*” (279; emphasis added). In one final act of ‘care,’ Evelyn forcibly normalizes this ‘irregular’ child by surgically removing the scales between his legs. Calamity reflects: “[k]ept asking myself if I should

had let Evelyn order the surgery, superficial though it was” (282), but Evelyn performs this surgery against her and Agway’s will. Again, Calamity’s debt to Evelyn threatens her ability to mother Agway. Calamity concludes she “couldn’t have stopped [Evelyn]” because she “wasn’t Agway’s legal guardian yet” (282).

Calamity cannot mother outside of her relationships with others. While she struggles against her interdependencies, the novel’s selkies seem to embrace them. Dubey contends that Afrofuturist authors “tend to blur the boundaries between human and animal in order to explore and affirm women’s difference from masculinist notions of science and culture defined in opposition to nonhuman nature” (33). Hopkinson’s selkies blur these animal-human boundaries, leading Anatol to read them as engaged in “a complicated interrogation of the processes of globalization,” which focuses “on the potential of *women* to create, redefine, and refine a version of Black Atlantic subjectivity” (203). I take a slightly different approach to these hybrid figures: while Calamity’s notions of motherhood are warped by colonial history’s mitigated freedoms, the island’s selkies present an alternative that allows for “an appraisal of identity that does not simply look to what is seemingly new about the self in the ‘virtual age’ but looks backward *and* forward in seeking to provide insights about identity, one that asks what was *and* what if” (Nelson 3-4). In effect, the novel’s selkies are an example of what diasporic Black subjectivity *could have been* if configured outside of slavery and emancipation.

Cayaba’s tourist billboards depict the island’s seals as living in monogamous, heteronormative families, “two adults and a child—as though seals hooked up in nuclear family units” (211).<sup>19</sup> When Calamity returns Agway to his people at the novel’s conclusion, though, the

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<sup>19</sup> These same ads derogate blackness: “At each corner of the image was a mermaid, exotically brown but not too dark. No obvious negroes in Cayaba Tourist Board publicity, unless they were dressed as smiling servers. The fish women sported the kind of long, flowing hair that most black women had to buy in a bottle of straightening solution. They had shells covering their teacup breasts. I would love to see the shell big enough to cover one of my bobbies” (222). The island’s “Tourist Entrapment Zone” is “lined with expensive ‘boo-teeks’ selling all kinds of nonsense: lamps made of old

island's selkies have much more expansive kinship structures. After she rows him out into the ocean and uses her finding powers to locate his people, Agway refers to one of the male selkies as 'Nna,' which Calamity assumes this means father. Agway then points to "another man and then a third, [calling] them both 'Nna.' So, it meant something like 'uncle,' then? No matter. Family" (298). Here, Hopkinson presents a breakdown of possessive individualism at the level of the name: "The loss of the indigenous name/land," Spillers writes, "provides a metaphor of displacement for other human and cultural features and relations, including the displacement of the genitalia, the female's and the male's desire that engenders future. The fact that the enslaved person's access to the issue of his/her own body is not entirely clear...throws in crisis all aspects of the blood relations, as captors apparently felt no obligation to acknowledge them" ("Mama's Baby" 73). Rather than reiterating slavery's de-individuation of Black subjects, Hopkinson's selkies embrace this refusal by establishing extended kinship beyond individuating gender roles. Gender's breakdown is extended to Calamity when Agway refers to her as "nne" as well: "So I was his uncle, too?" (304).<sup>21</sup> The novel's selkies find freedom and kinship through these displacements.

The novel's selkies defamiliarize normativity, and the most significant difference Hopkinson presents between Cayaba's mythic and 'real' people concerns their relative understanding of possessions. In a telling scene before he is reunited with his people, Agway presents Calamity with pebbles from her yard: "I couldn't find out what the blazes he wanted me to do with them. When I'd thanked him for one, he'd just looked disappointed. When I'd tried putting one in my purse, he'd burst into tears" (191). When Agway makes the same gesture to Stanley, Calamity's grandson, he

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rum bottles covered in glued on shells (the shells imported in bulk from China); neon bikinis no bigger than a farthing; a zillion zillion t-shirts, coasters, baseball caps, mugs, and canvas shopping bags, all imprinted with images of monk seals and mermaids and the Cayaba Tourist Board logo ("Cayaba; Our Doors Are Open")" (222). This openness, a testament to both transnational mobility and the nation's lax economic protections, homogenizes Cayaba with all other tropical locales: "I tried to ignore the tourists clogging the sidewalks, the bright sarongs and Hawaiian shirts embossed with those fucking mermaids, the reggae music already blaring at 8:45 in the blessed morning... Why we had to import reggae? What the blast was wrong with tumpa?" (222)

<sup>21</sup> In this scene, Hopkinson reveals that Agway's given name is "Chichi" (299), an ironic naming: 'chichiman' is a derogatory term for queer men throughout the Caribbean.

does not treat the pebble game as a way to teach Agway manners or assign objects value and instead tosses the gifted pebbles away: “‘No!’ I shouted, too late. But Agway shouted with laughter and clapped his hands” (191). To Calamity’s surprise, this refusal of that which is offered, this throwing away of a ‘gift,’ becomes the basis of Agway and Stanley’s friendship: “Children... For the first little while they not exactly human” (192), she reflects. Here, to become ‘human’ requires a possessive worldview and concern with equal exchanges.

While this game of throwing gifts away goes on between the children, Ifeoma and Calamity rehash old hurts from Ifeoma’s childhood that also concern gifts and notions of individual value:

‘You said you were going to get me Pretty Changes Barbie.’

‘And you wanted your hair straightened to match hers, and you asked me how to make your skin ‘nice and light’ like hers. You wanted me to buy you self-hatred.’

‘Okay, you’re right. Maybe I should let Stanley do something that would help him to love his blackness. Like...’ She looked mock-thoughtful, then snapped her fingers. “I know! Locksing his hair!” (190-1)

Ifeoma’s lasting sense of being uncared for because of this lacking gift makes Calamity realize her shame at being an unmarried teenaged mother, “*Sometimes I would pretend I wasn’t Ifeoma’s mother*” (244), another instance in *The New Moon’s Arms* where Calamity presents herself as kinless while simultaneously defending and denigrating blackness.

In comparison to Agway’s thrill at having a ‘gift’ tossed away, Calamity’s lasting homophobia results from her possessiveness over Michael. Ifeoma suggests Calamity gave herself “as a gift to your best friend one day, and...still can’t forgive him for saying ‘no thank you’” (286). In her analysis of the Freedman’s Bureau’s guides for newly freed African Americans, Hartman observes that these documents often begin with “[b]eneficient gestures... and also establish the obligation and indebtedness of the freed” (*Scenes* 130). Calamity’s care for Michael as a teenager, her care for Ifeoma as a child, and her care for Agway similarly accumulate unpayable debts, “the centre of a moral economy of submission and servitude” (Hartman, *Scenes* 131). Unlike Calamity, Agway

delights in eschewing possessiveness: he presents an Afropessimistic alternative to possessive individualism, refusing to generate obligatory relationships of submission or servitude through care for others.

By the novel's conclusion, each of Calamity's attempts to help Agway to 'fit in' to the human world prove more damaging than progressive. Agway's natural hair is the focus of much of Calamity's ire because she reads it as evidence of his parents' neglect: "Fine if his parents wanted to be Rastas and smoke ganja and make their hair grow wild as any rats' nest, but it wasn't right to drag a child into it" (84). Her fixation on his dreadlocks also expose Calamity's concern with respectability and her fears about his non-belonging: "He best had learn to stand a proper haircut before he was old enough for school. Children were pack animals; let any one of them act different from the group and the rest would bring him down" (191). The novel's conclusion, however, reveals that these dreadlocks connect Agway both culturally *and* physically to his people. For a school science project, Stanley works with Goonan—an extended relationship Ifeoma fosters through her father's connection to the island's small queer community—to make a drone with a night-vision-camera. His photos first confirm the selkies existence, "On the tv screen was a blurry, green-tinged photograph of two naked brown women floating in the sea. One had a baby lolling on her breast. The other one was doing a frog swim. Her long, ratty hair rayed out from the top of her head," and second show that the selkies' dreaded hair is more than aesthetic: "A second baby floated in the water, clinging to her hair" (289). The mer-babies cling to their parents' dreadlocks to keep them from separating at sea. Her acts of civilizing care and attempts to help Agway fit in are shown to violate him: "He'd given me such a fight when I tried to chop off that rats' nest! Eventually I had just done it in his sleep. He'd been furious when he woke up" (282).

Agway's conscription into humanity exposes Calamity's assumptions about normativity, her internalized racism, and the binary distinctions she draws between animal and human, male and

female, culture and nature, hetero- and homosexuality. Like his hair, the scales Evelyn removes from between his legs, a surgery she described as “what’s best for Agway” (280), bind the selkies’ knees together while swimming: “Christ. That’s what the patches were for. To streamline the legs so they could swim better. And I had let Evelyn take Agway’s away. I had fucked everything up so badly, I didn’t know how to unfuck it” (302). Calamity returns Agway to his mother, but this scene highlights how her intervening acts of care—from cutting the child’s hair to letting Evelyn remove his scales—have damaged him: “I felt heartsick at what I’d put her through.... she kept inspecting his shorn hair, touching his arms, patting his face, stroking his back. Every touch said love, love, and Agway echoed it back to her. He curled his fist tightly in her hair” (299). It is unclear whether Agway will be able to swim without his scales; his biological mother almost drowns Calamity when she discovers they were removed. Calamity’s response, “He couldn’t manage on land with those things, waddling around like that” (303), underscore that each of her compromising acts of care were undertaken to prepare Agway for a future on land that does not come. Like the FFWD’s austerity measures, ostensibly undertaken to foster Cayaba’s prosperity, these acts damage Agway by preparing him for a future that will not come.

This is the novel’s overarching Afro-pessimistic critique: throughout *The New Moon’s Arms*, becoming human means refusing kinship while accepting violence against Black bodies. The story that circulates publicly about Agway’s discovery is that the child was likely locked away and neglected by abusive parents (79). More broadly, Hopkinson presents Calamity’s protective care as reactionary against the violence she anticipates against Black children. She is terrified for Agway’s safety around Michael’s partner Orso, who she implies is a child predator based on nothing but his homosexuality: “Damned child had no native caution when it came to other people. Don’t know what his parents had been teaching him” (233), Calamity thinks when Agway embraces Orso on their first meeting. For Agway to become ‘human,’ then, means learning to expect and anticipate

predatory violence against his Black body, to distrust extended kinship structures, and to transition from being Calamity's possession into a similarly possessive individual.

Like Agway's unlearned native language, the mermaids' world beyond the waves is never explored within *The New Moon's Arms*. It remains a private if ecologically-threatened space of being otherwise. A few weeks after returning Agway to his people, Calamity discovers her house has been broken into: left behind are the remnants of Agway's post-surgery wrappings and five pounds of raw shrimp, his favorite food (322-3). Missing is the seal skin she and Ifeoma found in the cashew grove, a disappearance that suggests either Calamity's mother has returned to reclaim her skin or that the selkies have severed this final point of connection between Calamity and their people. The ambiguity here is intentional. Of *Midnight Robber*, Dubey writes that "[q]ualifying the idealist dream of empathetic communion and reciprocal recognition between different species, Hopkinson's novel ends with a disenchanting separation of the species" (47). *The New Moon's Arms* comes to a similar conclusion: regardless of Calamity's desires—or Hopkinson's—emancipatory futures are not possible above the waves insofar as Cayaba is alienated from such futures by its environmental, capitalist, and political deficits. This cuts Calamity and the 'real' world of Cayaba off from the fabulist, communal, non-possessive lives of the novel's selkie people.

#### AGAINST CONCLUSIONS

In *Genres of the Credit Economy*, Poovey observes that literature has historically to teach readers how to understand value: "at the end of the seventeenth century, one of the functions performed by imaginative writing in general was to mediate value—that is, to help people understand the new credit economy and the market model of value that it promoted" (1-2). For this emerging credit economy to function, it was integral for reader-consumers to distinguish between fact and fiction: "the distinction between fact and fiction, which occupies such an important place in our modern understanding of knowledge, was modeled on a similar distinction forged in relation to monetary

instruments: that between valid and invalid monetary tokens” (80). The fact/fiction continuum Poovey describes—and the value it ascribes—continues to inflect what genres are validated and which do not, distinctions that have everything to do with learning how to read and judge individual character:

the evaluation of character—the skill ideally inculcated by [imaginative] reading—constituted an integral aspect of this genre’s claim to be able to mediate the credit economy. Evaluating character, in other words, was what everyone who accepted a token of credit was required to do; and the skills necessary to evaluate character were what forms of imaginative writing like the novel claimed uniquely to teach. (85)

In an era of neoliberal economics, Caribbean Canadian literature is teaching its readers to evaluate fact/fiction, but not via characters so much as by time and its operative chronotopes. Calamity is an untrustworthy character, but that does not matter so much as her faulty investments in a future and notions of normativity that are not only unavailable to her, but imbued with anti-Black violence.

Across the texts studied in this thesis, debt’s temporal and moral engines have broken down: Brand, Chariandy, Espinet, and Hopkinson all write about futures that refuse to proceed from the colonial past. Outside these texts, neoliberal economic policies and boundary-negating trade agreements impair postcolonial nation-states’ fledgling economies and culminate in further diasporic displacements. As colonial history’s financial and moral obligations go deeper and deeper into default, works of Caribbean Canadian literature represent temporal progress as held back, repeating, and regressing. These works operate under radically different chronotopes than Victorian novels about debtors’ prisons or Early Modern pacts with Mephistopheles at least in part because they hinge on debts that cannot—and will not—be paid back. These narratives are not eschatological and thus not concerned with the moral success and self-improvement that is metaphorically proven by paying off one’s debts.

Instead, unpayable debts in works by Chariandy, Espinet, Brand, and Hopkinson counter the logic of accumulative progress and linear time. Given their critiques of capitalism’s progressive logic,



it seems entirely appropriate that their works' narrative-plotting proves wildly unpredictable: seemingly chronological narratives loop back on themselves at the last moment, as seen in *At the Full and Change of the Moon's* concluding return to pre-Independence Trinidad as well as Mona's backward-browsing future as a documentarian in *The Swinging Bridge*; multiple narrators tell their narratives front to back and back to front while jumping from 1980s Scarborough to 1960s Toronto to 1940s Trinidad in Chariandy's *Soucouyant*; Brand's *Inventory*, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, and *What we All Long For* have no definitive end, leaving their characters and readers alike *in medias res*. Collectively, these plots repeat, stop short, and curve back on themselves. All contend that, in the colonial aftermath, progress does not operate according to a linear temporal logic—the operational logic of *payable* debts and obligations. Instead, colonial history's unpayable debts derail linear time and linear narrative plotting alike.

Hopkinson reinforces this critique of linear, progressive time through *The New Moon's Arms's* narrative plotting: despite all the diegetic leadup to the election, the narrative never actually arrives at the election date. This novel begins—and takes its title—from the moon cycle, “The sickle moon looked fresh and clean, wearing one coy wisp of cloud” (314), and ends in the exact same place, suggesting time itself stands still in this text. Likewise, the novel's central mystery—what happened to Calamity's mother?—is never resolved. This is a novel about the refusal to progress according to the laws of realist time or capitalist accumulation. In his study of 1960s, 70s, and 80s Black Power SF, Mark Bould observes that many of these works' authors—despite their deeply anti-racist politics—proved unable to imagine futures that were free of white supremacist power: “imaginative constraints are common in black power sf, which cannot picture the future for which it yearns” (221). By contrast, Hopkinson's *The New Moon's Arms* refuses to imagine any future at all: through the novel's fantastical and realist elements alike, Hopkinson shows that time has stalled, repeats

itself, and refuses to progress in the Caribbean's colonial aftermath. Progress and time do not go hand in hand in a neoliberal world order.

Through its fabulist and mundane elements alike, *The New Moon's Arms* insists on the past's material and figurative presence in the present but offers no simple solution to—or didactic lessons from—these entanglements. The novel's "melding of the familiar and the strange is not only the essence of the marvelous, but the very grounds of the uncanny, which returns us to what we know in a way that we had not known and experienced before" (Spillers, "Imaginative Encounters" 4). The juxtaposition Cayaba's very real financial debts with the novel's fabulist mermaids and Calamity's magical hot flashes provide new ways of knowing modernism's progress, mothering, and the (ageing female) body. More concretely, the novel's magical intrusions into the realist world relativize progressive notions of time: instead of depicting any future—utopian, dystopian, or otherwise—*The New Moon's Arms* construes the past as constricting time's passage, forestalling Calamity's individual—and Cayaba's national—progress. As anti-modern figures, its selkies call evolutionary and revolutionary progress narratives alike into question by exploring what family *could* have looked like outside of colonization, slavery, and emancipation's mitigated freedoms. Rather than teaching her readers to distinguish between fact and fiction, realism and speculation, then, Hopkinson challenges them to attend to the fictions that operate in neoliberal economic systems and the violent notions of normativity they depend upon.

## UNCONSOLIDATED DEBTS

This dissertation began with two overarching questions: what is owed in the colonial aftermath and wither emancipation since the transnational turn? In response, I have presented an anti-colonial critique of Canadian diaspora studies and the post- and transnational discourses the field draws on by paying close attention to how cultural studies positions postcolonial and transnational critique relative to one another. Canadian literature scholars are struggling to discuss “the poignant proximity of the incomplete project of decolonization to the dispossessed subjects of globalization” (Bhabha, “Framing Fanon” xxvii-xxviii) at least in part because of disciplinary divisions that parse racialized diasporic citizens from the nation. Canada’s colonial, postcolonial, and transnational moments are not discrete or separate moments. Caribbean Canadian literature’s discourses of debt—particularly confluences of moral and material obligation and their resulting temporal entanglements—show how these divisions manifest in literary studies’ contributions to memory studies, its ongoing debates over the colonial politics of recognition, and its disciplinary uncertainties over futurity within a neoliberal world system.

Discussing Canadian literary studies’ turn away from the language and theory of postcolonial critique, Lily Cho suggests this reorientation results from our collective “loss of a historical horizon [on] which the promise [of] ‘big and beautiful things,’” the anti-colonial movement’s emancipatory potential, “was an unfulfilled rather than a failed promise” (“Dreaming” 185). Abroad, this failure can be seen in the foundering of the national economies of former colonies that achieved independence by the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At home, this failure is evident in the fact that Canada has never been *post*-colonial for Indigenous peoples. Throughout this thesis, I argue that anti-colonial critiques’ ‘big and beautiful things’ have also gone from being imagined as national projects to individual ones within diaspora studies. This shift places ever more stress on

autonomous, ostensibly free and independent subjects to personally balance colonialism's lasting inequalities.

Amid these disciplinary shifts, I remain wary of what Paul Jay terms the 'transnational turn' in literary analysis. Critical narratives that cleave the colonial, the postcolonial, and the global apart from one another and present each as a discrete phase in a historical progression reproduce Canada's settler-colonial desires; declarations of newness and clear categorical breaks—as well as clean historical slates—afford the ongoing erasure and displacement of Indigeneity for the sake of land and gloss Canada's foundational anti-Blackness. Such clear temporal distinctions are also at odds with *the* observation that sparked this thesis: in many Caribbean Canadian texts, colonial history refuses to remain in the past; instead, colonial pasts insistently enter and interrupt the present through the language of debt and obligation. In this literary archive, colonialism, postcolonialism, and transnationalism appear as concurrent ideological trajectories, not teleologic temporal categories. The authors and texts studied here dismiss any suggestion that diaspora or the passage of time has somehow amortized colonialism's outstanding debts. Instead, these debts have gone global.

I sense that no one reading this conclusion has much faith in rigid temporal or national divisions. It would be difficult to argue that there was a moment in Canada's history that was strictly colonial, followed by one that was distinctly postcolonial, and that the nation is now exclusively global or transnational. We know the problematically temporalizing 'post' in postcolonial does not account for the ongoing occupation of Indigenous land, just as we know Canada's colonization was a transnational project fueled by finance capital and enacted by corporate agents. In short, we use terms like 'postcolonial' and 'transnational' to organize our teaching and research while tangentially aware of their faults and limitations. However, existing readings of Caribbean Canadian literature have become a critical epicentre wherein scholarship is stiffening temporal distinctions between 'the colonial,' 'the postcolonial,' and 'the transnational' as well as communal distinctions between 'the

diasporic' and 'the national' without necessarily meaning to. Over the span of this thesis, I have worked to show how this stiffening takes place in contemporary discussions of diasporic memory, resistant theories of post-national recognition, and seemingly anti-essentialist speculations about a post-national, post-racial, and post-embodied future.

Mrs. Christopher's ledgers in *Soucouyant* were the first evocation of debt that inspired this research, but are not the only such debt records in Caribbean Canadian literature. Chariandy's and Espinet's representations of diasporic bookkeeping do not privilege embodied memory over archival history in the same way diasporic critique arguably does; rather, Mrs. Christopher's ledgers and Grandma Lily's shop books show that textual archives are never the sole purview of the nation-state. Adele's dementia likewise shows the enormous pressure 'diasporic memory' places on diasporic *bodies* to not only remember but remember correctively. For all their similarities, these novels fundamentally disagree about who is obliged to remember what in the colonial aftermath. Espinet focuses on the debts diasporic communities bear to their own histories: whatever memories are lost or recovered in this novel, they delimit the Indo-Trinidadian community's self-identification after diaspora. Chariandy's *Soucouyant* makes a more expansive claim: Canada bears obligations to not only the histories it recognizes as its own but also those whose belonging is tentative, even precluded, by the nation. Debt and obligation become conditions of Canadian identity in *Soucouyant*.

Dionne Brand's works explore the subtle and interconnected economies of regard, validation, and domination that determine who is recognized and who is not in the colonial aftermath. Her works repeatedly ask what Canada owes its racialized immigrants; in response, I ask whether Afro-diasporic subjects can owe the Indigenous communities whose dispossession underwrites all subjects' presence in this geopolitical territory. Brand's border-crossing characters demonstrate the limits of national identifications; literary scholarship largely celebrates these characters as offering a hopeful—or more importantly, an ethical—rejoinder to the compromises of

the citizen-subject. But what exactly are the ethics of reterritorializing land in Canada when that land is simultaneously national space and Indigenous territory? My extended reading of recognition in Brand's works highlights the danger, from an anti-colonial perspective, of giving up on land as an ethical stance or as the basis of a resistant post-national community; it also underscores the necessity of giving up on land from an Afro-diasporic perspective. Stepping away from Brand, this disciplinary claim this study offers is this: while ostensibly resisting possessive individualism and all its inherent limits, Canadian diaspora studies is reinforcing possessive individualism's driving desire: freedom from obligations to others. This notion of emancipation poses a problem for both post-nationalism's autonomous communities and anti-national resistance in settler-colonial sites.

On the more fantastical end of the literary spectrum, Nalo Hopkinson's *The New Moon's Arms* juxtaposes selkie folklore and the magical menopause of Calamity Lambkin with its realist setting, a Caribbean island facing an impending debt crisis and national austerity. Through Calamity's ambivalent relationship with kin and kinship, Hopkinson offers an Afro-pessimistic response to Afro-futurity—and its emancipatory limits—for the formerly colonized Caribbean. As it upends generic and gendered expectations, *The New Moon's Arms* refuses to offer readers a hopeful or emancipatory future. This speculative work instead shows how deeply imbricated 'normative' notions of reproductive futurity are in anti-Black violence.

The thing that surprised me—the recurring problem I had not anticipated when beginning this project, that is—concerns diaspora studies' emphasis on the autonomous individual. Its discussions of everything from embodied memory, to post-national recognition, to resistant theories of citizenship, and even its desired futures collectively ally the field with liberal humanism's independent, possessive subject. Diaspora studies, in short, has an autonomy problem. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman argues that emancipated African Americans took up the language of humanism to seize “upon that which had been used against and denied them” (5). This same

embrace of that which has been denied can be traced not only through the anti-colonial independence movements of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s and postcolonial fights for national sovereignty, but diaspora studies discourses of post-national resistance as well. As Hartman adds, the inclusion of the formerly enslaved in liberal humanism's categories did not culminate in African Americans' freedom. Instead, 'inclusion' created new conditions for subjection and white supremacy: "suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one's suffering but rather of intensifying it... the recognition of humanity and individuality acted to tether, bind, and oppress" (5). Like Hartman's tentatively free African Americans, anticolonial independence movements tether, bind, and oppress former colonies; this we know. My argument is that diasporic, trans-, and post-national resistance that hinges on individual independence and autonomy partake of the same oppressive processes. Hartman writes of the postbellum United States that "[f]rom this vantage point, emancipation appears less a grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjugation" (6). Assertions of diasporic independence are proving just as illusory in the neoliberal present.

At *this* historical moment, *this* neoliberal point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjugation, anticolonial critique's target has necessarily shifted and must tackle the very grounds on which colonial power compels servitude and racial subjugation in the present neoliberal world system. Enlightenment-cum-liberal notions of *in*dependence, dependence, and *inter*dependence were this thesis's target. More hopefully, I want to suggest that the *inter*dependencies of debt and obligation need not be abject or subjugating states in diaspora studies. Rather than *resisting* the nation-state, *resisting* global capital, *resisting* categories imposed from without, I want this field, my field, to engage more with discourses of *refusal*. Integral to Afro-pessimist critique, refusal may help Canadian diaspora studies get away from merely troubling the nation-state from within and

move towards arguments that dismantle the specific threats national community poses Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Refusal means not resisting debts imposed from without, but refusing to think of indebtedness as an abject or degrading state. Refusal means not following a neo-Marxist line of thought wherein debt's governmentality can only be upended by restoring everyman's credit through Jubilee, but embracing what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney label 'bad debt':

They say we have too much debt. We need better credit, more credit, less spending. They offer us credit repair, credit counseling, micro-credit, personal financial planning. They promise to match credit and debt again, debt and credit. But our debts stay bad. We keep buying another song, another round. It is not credit we seek nor even debt but bad debt which is to say real debt, the debt that cannot be repaid, the debt at a distance, the debt without creditor, the black debt, the queer debt, the criminal debt. Excessive debt, incalculable debt, debt for no reason, debt broken from credit, debt as its own principle. (61)

Bad debts are the basis of relationships. Bad debts cannot be settled because they are, by their very nature, unseizable. In their unseizability, bad debts connect past, present, and future, racialized diasporic subjects, a white Canadian majority, and Indigenous peoples to one another. Colonial history, under this reasoning, is a bad debt. It cannot be consolidated or settled. The problem, then, is not settling the nation's debts, but living ethically amid its bad debts, debts every person who occupies Indigenous land are party to, bad debts that hold up debtlessness as a state of emancipation.

I see three new projects emerging from these indebted futures. First, I want to theorize the difference between *resistance* and *refusal* as they pertain to recognition in Canada and diasporic literature. Embracing 'bad debt' requires Canadian literary criticism to seriously rethink the value it attaches to notions of autonomous, independent subjectivity. *Interdependence* and obligations to others are threatening only insofar as they impinge on the freedoms of the autonomous individual. As Kelly Oliver argues, it is "not the facts of dependency" (86-7) so much as the "illusion of



autonomy” (68) that proves dangerous in contemporary cultural studies. This illusion is particularly misleading in simultaneously colonial, postcolonial, and transnational sites like Canada, where claims to autonomy and the desire to escape *interdependency* go hand in hand with settler-colonial power. Literary scholarship has thought seriously about how settler-colonial states deploy their *postcolonial* labels; now, we need to think as seriously about how settler-colonial states broker their *post-* and *transnational* labels as well.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler proposes bodily vulnerability be reclaimed as a site of commonality and a reminder of mutual connection across lines of difference. In my triptic of chapters on Brand, I alternatively propose that land—not as nation-state but traditional territory—may be able to affirm all subjects’ *interdependence* in ways the body cannot, *if*, that is, diasporic critique can conceive of land not as the manifestation of the Canadian nation, but as the basis of mutual obligations and common indebtedness. This deontological principle—land as debt—is the basis of treaty citizenship, a theory of recognition that assumes *interdependence* and mutual obligation are inescapable conditions of subjectivity. By contrast, diaspora studies’ fractal citizenships tend to present mutual *interdependence* as an abject and unwanted state.

The second of these three avenues for future research returns to new economic criticism: this project has focused on how economic concepts circulate in literary texts, the first half of Poovey’s definition of new economic critique. It has not addressed how Caribbean Canadian literature itself circulates as a cultural commodity: who pays for Caribbean Canadian literature? How do *these* works come to market and what economic factors both afford and delimit this literary archive? Answering these questions requires a scholarly grounding in book history and literary markets. The past eight years have seen significant academic examinations of Canada’s literary prize culture, governmental funding programs, and Canadian literature’s circulation on international markets; amid these studies of the nation’s literary economies, though, the relationship between the

production of Canadian literature and postsecondary institutions remains opaque.

Every Caribbean Canadian author I address in this dissertation has supported their literary careers as employees of postsecondary institutions.<sup>1</sup> More generally, many of Canadian literature's most well taught authors (Thomas King, Larissa Lai, Aritha van Herk, Christian Bök, Wayne Compton, Shyam Selvadurai, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, George Bowering, Ann-Marie McDonald, Joseph Boyden, Roy Miki, Daniel Heath Justice, and Vivek Sharaya to name only a very few) work as instructors at post-secondary institutions. I want to examine what this confluence of literary production and post-secondary education reveals about Canada's lingering settler-colonial anxieties and transcultural desires: what is the university's role in fostering "Canadian" literature? What does it mean that some of the sharpest critiques of the Canadian nation emerge from authors whose livelihood relies on nationally-funded institutions?

Canada's academic and literary communities are intimately twined. A study that focuses on this closeness could anchor existing debates over Canadian cultural production, precarious nationalism, and unsettled identity. An *independence*-oriented analysis of could only decry this close relationship between literary production and postsecondary institutions as compromising or negating the critiques of nationalism these authors put forward; an *interdependence*-oriented analysis can more valuably consider what this confluence demonstrates about how writers—and national literatures—support themselves amid neoliberal economies.

The last project I have thought about while drafting this thesis expands from questions of debt to complicity. Accusations of complicity are increasingly used to dismiss the anti-colonial critiques of settler-colonial authors, to anesthetize tar sands and pipeline protests, and to repudiate dismissals of texts and authors in an era of literary scandals. This emphasis on complicity speaks to critique's lasting analytical purchase. Because it is viewed as depoliticizing, though, complicity is a

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<sup>1</sup> Ramabai Espinet is employed by Seneca College, David Chariandy by Simon Fraser University, Dionne Brand by the University of Guelph, and Nalo Hopkinson by the University of California at Riverside.

strong conceptual starting point from which to re-examine autonomy and ambivalence in an economically, environmentally, and culturally *interdependent* world. Sara Ahmed's work on happiness and Sianne Ngai's studies of aesthetic categories show how familiar affective concepts inflect the production, circulation, and consumption of culture. I envision a similar study of complicity in Canadian literature: what does poetry by Vivek Shraya and Rita Wong demonstrate about racialized Canadians' complicity with Indigenous displacement? What can responses to Joseph Boyden's and Margaret Atwood's support for Steven Galloway tell literary scholars about how we read texts through their authors' complicity, and read authors' complicity through their texts?

All these questions, all these future projects, begin in debt. Debt has made my studies possible, and not just financial debts, but profound debts to communities and authors I cannot pay back. Debt is the condition of literary production, of literary study, of literary analysis at this historical moment. I am not, it seems, getting out of debt any time soon, but will remain with this problematic into the scholarly future.

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