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# Fragmented Memories: The Archival Turn in Contemporary Caribbean Literature and Visual Culture

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

FRAGMENTED MEMORIES: THE ARCHIVAL TURN IN CONTEMPORARY  
CARIBBEAN LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

By

Marta Fernández Campa

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2013

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The last few decades have witnessed a critical engagement with colonial and post-colonial archives across the humanities. This engagement in Caribbean studies is characterized by an interrogation of historical records and archives from the colonial period not as sites of historical truth, but rather as means of imperial control. The politics of what is included in institutional or formal archives generally privileges hegemonic positions and narratives, resulting in an erasure of the memory of disenfranchised social groups. For this reason, visual artists and writers across geographic locations have looked to alternative ways of representing past and present events by imagining the events and stories that were once silenced in those archives. This dissertation demonstrates how in contemporary Caribbean artistic expression, visual artists and writers are developing modes of archiving ‘counter-memory’, that is, memory that contradicts or revises official history, offering as a result a critical reflection upon the limitations encountered in colonial and post-colonial archives.

From chapter one, this project starts mapping out the politics of counter-memory embedded in the aesthetic fragmentation of Christopher Cozier’s mixed media *Wait* (1991) and M. NourbeSe Philip’s poetry collection *She Tries her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989). This chapter revises the colonial archival logic by means of conjuring that which has been omitted from a series of archives, bringing

visibility in this way to a series of previously obscured social realities and discursive erasures such as poverty, crime and inequality in *Wait Dorothy Wait*, and imperial and patriarchal domination as enacted through language in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*.

Chapter two continues an exploration of the colonial archival tradition by re-locating the colonial archive and debunking its authority. While Philip's *Zong!* (2008) re-fashions an archival document of the slave trade to unlock its spectral presences and, in so doing, finally encounters a new resting place for them through their symbolic re-location in the sea. *Tropical Night* (2006-present) archives Cozier's visual vocabulary through the re-fashioning of colonial archival materials like maps and flags, placing them alongside popular imagery from Trinidadian culture to create an interrogation of cultural interrelation and influence. The aesthetic fragmentation within both works encourages a speculative reading as their anti-narrative structure challenges conventional narrative practices and calls attention to the multiple possibilities of reading and engaging with such open-ended work rather than the authoritative and didactic tone of the colonial archive.

Chapter three presents two fictional narratives of counter-memory that revise the historiographical Trujillista tradition in the Dominican Republic to provide alternative perspectives to state memory. Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* archive the collective histories of 'El Corte' and the history of the Trujillista repression through a counter-narrative that retells those histories drawing from culturally diverse memory traditions and styles. By excavating and remembering previously suppressed histories these novels create

possibilities for mourning as the working through of memory that makes possible some kind of redress.

For chapter four, I turn to memory as imagination. Dorothea Smartt's poetry in *Ship Shape* and Roshini Kempadoo's installation in *Ghosting* re-construct and imagine the untold histories of the British colonial archive and the Trinidadian plantation archive (1838-1848). The relational call-and-response dynamic in the two parts of *Ship Shape*, and the interactive device that activates the different audio-visual narratives in *Ghosting*, provide a dynamic and critical interrogation of Caribbean history as a constitutive part of British history and social formation.

By looking at different forms of counter-memory across genres and geographies I aim to demonstrate common aesthetic concerns based on the visual and issues of (in)visibility. What connects all these examples of counter-memory is their complex and multifaceted engagement with, and re-figuring of, the archive to open up alternative approaches to historical knowledge. By archiving themselves instances of counter-memory, their critical intervention can challenge and alter ways of knowing the past that are, in turn, revealing of current issues of social inequality. Ultimately, this process provides a potentially shared space for authors and readers/viewers to participate in, and share, the affect that these new aesthetics of archiving can potentially provoke.

A mi abuelo, Feliciano Fernández, quién me enseñó con el mayor cariño el valor de la memoria.



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## Introduction

The archive is first the law of what can be said,  
The systems that govern the appearance of  
statements as unique events.

Michel Foucault.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation examines the different ways in which Caribbean contemporary writers and visual artists are engaging critically with a variety of historical narratives and archival materials in the Caribbean region and diasporic locations like England, United States and Canada. Their work reflects—from an artistic perspective—what Ann Stoler identifies as an “archival turn” in the field of the humanities and the social sciences, characterised by a “move from the archive-as-source to [the] archive-as-subject” (*Along the Archival Grain* 44). In this turn, archives become themselves the subject of critical investigation; they no longer simply function as a source of knowledge. In fact, an examination of their exclusions and silences is central to contemporary studies of the social value of archives, making manifest the epistemological implications of uncritically assuming by default the authority of the documents held within them. Stoler notes how this intellectual shift is motivated by the growing awareness that in some cases archives, particularly colonial ones, offer very limited knowledge (or none at all) about the life experience and perspective of oppressed and colonized social groups (*Along the Archival Grain*; “Colonial Archives”). Aligning with this critical shift, my dissertation follows an approach similar to the one Stoler takes in “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form” where the emphasis is placed on looking to,

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<sup>1</sup>Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*. (1979). (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

archiving as a process rather than to archives as things. It looks to archives as epistemological experiments rather than as sources, to colonial archives as cross-sections of contested knowledge. Most important, it looks to colonial archives as technologies of rule in themselves (Stoler, “Colonial Archives” 83).<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation has a similar focus in the sense that it explores how the imperial project of archiving has generated silences, erased viewpoints and/or disfigured the representation of historical events and subaltern social realities. It also looks at how dynamics of silencing have influenced historiographical and narrative traditions in the Caribbean, Europe and the US. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot distinguishes between two different types of silences; on one hand, there are the “[s]ilences [that] are inherent to history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing. Something is always left out whilst something else is recorded” (27). However, as Trouillot underscores, there is another type of active silencing caused by an “uneven power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives” as is the case in the Western historiographical dismissal of the Haitian Revolution, an example discussed by Trouillot in *Silencing the Past* (27).<sup>3</sup>

In this project, the exploration of historical erasure and silencing takes place from a creative artistic standpoint. The visual art and literature that I discuss focuses on the side of history that is not recorded in written texts and visual documents or which

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<sup>2</sup> In their introduction to *Re-figuring the Archive*, Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid identify very similarly this change in the conceptualization and use of archives: “[w]here previously historians ‘mined’ the archive for ‘nuggets of fact’ in a manner conscious of the record, today scholars pay greater attention to the particular processes by which the record was produced and subsequently shaped [...]” (9). This has become a distinctive characteristic of contemporary historical, cultural and literary scholarship as well as arts research and practice.

<sup>3</sup> In chapter three of *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot traces a long-standing historiographical Western tradition that frames the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) as “unthinkable” (73). Pamphlets and various publications during the revolution evidence the disbelief of contemporaries to conceive a successful slave revolt of such magnitude (73), largely due to the “racist strain inherent in eighteenth-century rationalist thought” and the existing arguments in the inferiority of Africans from 1550s to 1791 (77).

remains marginalized in different post-colonial public sphere(s). In my dissertation, I examine selected literary texts and performance poetry from Caribbean writers M. NourbeSe Philip, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz and Dorothea Smartt alongside artwork by visual artists Christopher Cozier and Roshini Kempadoo. The histories that these authors engage with range from the *Zong* case in 1781 when 142 slaves were thrown overboard a slave ship in order to collect insurance monies, to the originally unmarked burial of an African slave in Sunderland Point in 1736, to ‘El Corte’—the 1937 massacre of Haitians on the Haitian-Dominican border ordered by Rafael Trujillo. Since the knowledge and history of what really happened, together with the perspective(s) of those oppressed, cannot be found in most archives and is in fact obscured in various official narratives, this group of artists develop alternative ways of approaching and re-telling these events. From poetry, fiction, mixed media, drawing and multimedia installation art, the contemporary writers and visual artists included in this dissertation re-figure a series of archival materials and historical narratives. Their work conjures, excavates and imagines the life experiences that have been silenced by, and through, these narratives.

I focus on the *process* of archiving forms of ‘counter-memory’, understanding this term as memory that contradicts, revises, and/or complicates historical and national narratives. George Lipsitz defines counter-memory as “a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal” (213). Drawing from Foucault’s understanding of this term, Lipsitz highlights how counter-memory “looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives” and it “forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past” (213). Similarly, the literary texts and visual artwork discussed here revise and re-figure specific



moments in history, and although some of these moments are distant in time or geographic location, they all embody alternative modes of memory to those available in the historical and national narratives they engage with. At times, these alternative modes of memory are created by means of re-imagining the past, creating what visual artist Roshini Kempadoo describes as “what-if” scenarios (“Evoking a Presence” 78).

For instance, Kempadoo’s multimedia installation *Ghosting* (2004) evokes the life stories of a series of fictionalized characters inspired by research work that the artist undertook in various post-colonial archives in Trinidad corresponding to the period 1838-1938. Through six audio-visual narrative strands *Ghosting* imagines the stories and memories of plantation workers throughout this time period, which were absent in the archives that Kempadoo consulted. In a 2012 interview, Kempadoo explains how “[t]he Caribbean post-colonial archive always has at its heart a colonial narrative – material that is constituted by documents that itemize populations as slaves and indentured workers within a colonial financial system. It is necessary to understand those documents as serving very specific purposes” (“Evoking a Presence” 78). As they engage with a variety of records and narratives, the literary texts and artwork discussed here confront the larger ideological framework that produces those records and narratives.

Michel Foucault’s notion of the archive has been influential to contemporary theorizations of archival practices and archive studies since the publication of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1979. It informs and continues to have an impact in contemporary critical discourse today because it widens traditional understandings of what constitutes an archive by demonstrating how an archival principle functions through different discourses in the public sphere. Foucault defines the archive in its first instance

as a discursive regulatory tool that delineates what can and cannot be contained within its boundaries. In his definition, Foucault identifies the importance of every archive's internal order and outlines how a particular rationale of classification and arrangement, different in every case, governs it:

the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with multiple regularities [...] (129).

“The Archive,” a concept that in its generalized nature and magnitude can acquire an abstract dimension, not only encompasses the physical act of recording and storing visual and written documents, but also extends to discourse formation and thus establishes strong parameters for what, and how, societies remember at both institutional and popular levels. In this project, when I speak of “the archive” I make reference to the set of statements and discursive regulations that mark the boundaries and purposes of a particular archival document. I aim to breach the generalization or abstract figuration of this notion as archives take different forms and can serve very different purposes.<sup>4</sup> When I refer to the types of alternative archives produced by the selected literature and visual art, I attempt to specify how they document expressions of counter-memory that challenge pre-existing archives, and the monologism that characterizes them.

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<sup>4</sup> However, what the term ‘Colonial archive’ generally stands for (the set of documents and records that define or represent in one way or another the colonial, and by extension the imperial project) may be wide reaching and sometimes trespass national boundaries to figure the transnational European colonial project as the colonial archives (archival materials) of other countries like Spain, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands which similarly replicate the measures of colonial rule in the suppression of elements or subaltern histories that contradict their narratives.

There is often a complicit and close relationship between official archives, especially historical ones, and national narratives.<sup>5</sup> As Ann Stoler notes, if it is obvious that “colonial archives are products of state machines, it is less obvious that they are in their own right, technologies that bolstered the production of those states themselves.” (Stoler 69). The dynamics of the ‘Western archive,’ understood as the discursive operations and politics that regulate and dominate hegemonic discourse are rooted in the formation of actual physical archives which consequently follow ordering and re-structuring mechanisms that condition their interpretation, access and circulation.

The scope of counter-memory in this dissertation reflects the interrelationship between individual and collective memory. The literary texts and artwork analyzed here show the inclusive possibilities of some representations of collective counter-memory where individual voices retain their individuality and find a space in a collective body of remembrance that accommodates their relationship to a given history or culture. Within the field of memory studies, “collective memory” as José Colmeiro notes, refers to “an alternative to official national historiographies, potentially giving voice to the subjects traditionally excluded from representation, minority and subaltern groups, on the basis of cultural contingencies such as ethnicity, language, class, gender and sexuality, among others” (20).<sup>6</sup> However, collective forms of memory carry different agendas that are not

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<sup>5</sup> The genealogy of the modern state in European countries like Spain, Portugal, England and The Netherlands is closely entangled with their imperial projects whose success was, and is, greatly due to the influence of archiving and the production of historical knowledge that was used to support its legitimization. (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*). Eurocentric discourses that claimed Western intellectual and technological superiority were expressed in colonial archival documents, many of which were central in perpetuating their own fallacies. This heavily biased production also extended and created multiple omissions, whereby non-European archives became synonymous with illegitimacy and inaccuracy representing a careful epistemic process whose legacy is profoundly experienced to this day.

<sup>6</sup> Although throughout this dissertation I will refer to ‘collective memory’ in the singular form, it is not under the assumption that the term is homogenous and immutable, but rather acknowledging its malleability and flexibility. My use of collective memory emphasizes how it encompasses multiple and

always limited to non-nationalist remembrance. It is important to recognize this so that the term is not associated with marginalized or underrepresented social groups by default. Although collective memory in many cases conveys a *re-vision* of hegemonic history and the incorporation of marginalized memories, in other cases, states and state institutions also use it as a base to construct national histories of belonging and exclusion. Michael Hanchard argues that “[n]ot just individuals and collectivities but states and economies utilize and manipulate representations and perspectives of collective memory and its prospects for purposes other than memory: profit, nationalism, and assimilation” (46). For this reason, in order to specify the nature of the revisionary critiques of history discussed here, I refer to the term “counter-memory” as I contend that it accurately describes the nature of such critiques.

As a reaction and a response to an aesthetic experience, affect can lead to insightful critical investigations since art, as Jill Bennett argues,

by virtue of its affective capacities, is able to exploit forms of embodied perception in order to promote forms of critical inquiry. This conjunction of affect and critical awareness may be understood to constitute the basis of empathy grounded not in affinity (*feeling for* another insofar as we can imagine *being* that other) but on *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible (10).

In this project, affect is potentially achieved by the active practices of reading and viewing that these literary and visual texts demand. This is not to obviate that any act of reading or viewing is in itself always an active practice; however, in the particular cases that I examine here, the visual and formal components of the works seem to emphasize

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complex experiences and as such it is porous, multifaceted and can be mobilized and interpreted differently by different sectors of society. Thus, I make reference to the term with an awareness of the multiplicity of forms that it takes in particular contexts.

multiple avenues and possibilities to engage with the notion of the archive and the experience of memory. A highly visual and fragmented aesthetic connects the visual artwork, literary texts and performance that I focus on for this project. This fragmented aesthetic highlights the silenced and erased experiences in Caribbean histories as well as the entanglement of normative and marginalized forms of memory. The formal and material elements of all these works bring to the forefront those perspectives that have been suppressed and which are largely absent in official and institutional archives. The aesthetic form of the mixed media, poetry, drawings, novels and multimedia installation work that I analyze represents the fragmentation of memory that characterizes Caribbean histories and which Derek Walcott famously described as a defining element of Caribbean art in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992.

Walcott uses the metaphor of a vase shattered into pieces, a highly visual poetic image, to signify the great number of silenced and unrecorded histories of the Antilles that he calls the fragments of memory. For Walcott, “Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent” (“The Antilles” 69). A few years before, in 1988, Kamau Brathwaite spoke similarly of a “sense of fragmentation” and of a subsequent necessary “recovery of the fragments” (*History* 29). However, although this concept of fragmentation is at stake in the work of the writers and artists included in this dissertation, their processes of archiving counter-memory complicate and expand upon this concept. Walcott defines the caring and painful act of reassembling the fragments of memory as potentially capable of “renaming, of finding new metaphors” to articulate experience that departs from the imposed foundations of colonial language and discourse

(70). The aesthetic elements of the literature and artwork included in this dissertation reproduce the fractured and frail nature of memory through a visual emphasis on fragmentation. This visual fragmentation evokes the gaps existing in the narratives embedded in a series of accounts of Caribbean and European history. My dissertation charts how the juxtaposition of official narratives and the experiences written out of history within the space of the literary text and artwork, often in a montage-like manner, encourage a relational reading and viewing of the work. This effect places audiences in a relationship of affect with the historical or personal document previously left outside the archives of official narratives. The relational connections between fragments in each literary text and visual artwork parallels in various ways the dynamics of African, classical and baroque music through the musical structures of call-and-response, counterpoint and the fugue. The dialogical connections between fragments suggest musical patterns. They facilitate circuitous and interconnected avenues for thinking about the past. This circuitousness attests to the ways in which confronting the epistemic violence of the colonial archive requires that we reject a simple and straightforward reading of its content. Therefore, the contrapuntal aesthetic of the work fosters the dialogical connection of discrepant narratives, from hegemonic to subaltern perspectives, in order to generate a critique of one-sided versions of history.

My reference to musical terms like counterpoint, fugue and call-and-response, and the ways in which they figure in the literature and visual art selected in this project, aims to show conceptually the influence of music in both Caribbean literature and visual art from a new perspective. Such influence, especially in poetry, has received significant critical attention. Often, the focus has been on poetic or narrative rhythm and the

musicality of creole languages. In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) and *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues persuasively that the cultural influence of music has generated a transnational cross-cultural network that connects the larger Caribbean, African-American and Black British musical forms both aesthetically and politically through webs of filiation and commodity exchange. Gilroy laments how “the history and significance of these musics are consistently overlooked by black writers” mostly because undertaking such study, Gilroy notes, would “exceed the frameworks of national or ethnocentric analysis with which we have been too easily satisfied” (*The Black Atlantic* 35).<sup>7</sup> Gilroy’s emphasis on the productiveness of a transnational approach to the influence of music in Caribbean artistic production informs my dissertation, as does the idea that “[a]ntiphony (call and response) has come to be seen as a bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression, supplying, along with improvisation, montage, and dramaturgy, the hermeneutic keys to the full medley of black artistic practices” (*The Black Atlantic* 78). I argue that the aesthetic and structural pattern of African-based music(s) can provide one bridging of literature and visual arts.<sup>8</sup> Further, I add that the combination of musicality, sight and the visual element enables both the

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<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that various writers in the Caribbean had previously acknowledged the importance of music in a transnational context, some examples being Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* (1989) and Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* (1990).

<sup>8</sup> Some critics have pointed out significant connections between audio and visual aesthetics as well as between literature, visual art and the act of looking/seeing. For example, Jean Antoine-Dunne underscores “the audio-visual impact of Caribbean image-making” and identifies an audio-visual Caribbean aesthetic in the poetry of Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite where, Antoine-Dunne argues, the use of montage techniques “interrogate and transform the psychic legacy of a colonial past” (126). Mary Lou Emery, on the other hand, focuses on the influence of the visual, acts of looking and seeing and the impact of Caribbean and European visual art in writers like C.L.R. James, Derek Walcott, George Lamming or Jamaica Kincaid, among others. Emery calls attention to how, historically, colonial aesthetics in the Caribbean region have been marked by Eurocentric ideals of beauty and taste that developed with significant force during the eighteenth century, and which can be traced back to the sixteenth century. As Emery points out, eighteenth century theories of aesthetics were based on the presumption that only ‘men of reason’ were intellectually capable of developing this (particular) notion of aesthetic judgment and taste, a category from the Enlightenment from which black people were excluded. The racist ideologies on which colonial oppression seeks legitimization are also deeply rooted in the realm of European art and aesthetic theories.

process of archiving and accessing counter-memories. The specific arrangement and composition of formal elements in the work lends itself to visual and conceptual connections between and among them, which at times follow antiphonal patterns of call and response.

Thinking of musical patterns and musical sensibility as a means to engage with the various forms of counter-memory in the literary and visual texts that I analyze seems also relevant since music was a very important conduit of cultural expression for the African and Amerindian populations across the Americas. Gilroy quotes Glissant to stress its impact on orality and black vernacular expression stating that: “[i]t is nothing new to declare that for us, music, gesture and dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech. This is how we first emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures” (Glissant qtd. in Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 75). In this respect, this dissertation looks at the relationship between musical patterns of call and response, counterpoint and fugue that I contend can be evoked/identified through sight in relation to visual, written and oral narratives of memory.<sup>9</sup> Can they be read as part of a fluid Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora aesthetic? This is mostly a conceptual relationship, but one that nonetheless reflects the flexibility and fluidity of musical forms as vehicles of expression and memory.

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<sup>9</sup> Sight and the ability to ‘see’ (art) critically was widely considered in eighteenth century Western thought a faculty reserved for the European white man, thus establishing “a hierarchy dominated by vision” and influenced by the theories on beauty and the sublime by philosophers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller (Emery 9). Hume’s notion that only a few select white men could achieve a universal principle of aesthetic taste naturally whilst others could only achieve that through observation and imitation also excluded blacks (Emery 9). The Eurocentric denial of the ability to create art forms configured an intellectual and aesthetic tradition that excludes the black subject from the project of modernity based upon an assumed lack of intellectual faculty, upon which the ‘modern’ subject relies. The discourse and practice of colonialism relies strongly upon European artistic and literary canons that were introduced in the Americas as the normative embodiment of high culture.



The term ‘counterpoint’ is generally used to signify a relationship of contrast but this term also describes “[t]he ability, unique to music, to say two things at once comprehensively” (Kennedy and Kennedy).<sup>10</sup> The term derives from the Latin expression “punctus contra punctum” which means ‘point against point’ or ‘note against note’. In music the counterpoint displays arrangements of two or more lines of notes being played (and thus ‘happening’) at the same time. There are two main types of counterpoint: canon counterpoint with a very strict structure (where the notes have to be exactly the same) and imitative counterpoint (a contrapuntal structure where a voice “enters [the composition] with a phrase which is then more or less copied by another” (Kennedy and Kennedy). An even more complex form of contrapuntal composition is the fugue, which combines multiple lines. Here the voices are generally played faster, thus somehow creating a sense of movement through the quick pace and the constant alternation of voices that follow each other in an ongoing flight. Conceptually, these relational dynamics of (strict, imitative) counterpoint or the fugue, as well as the call-and-response pattern, can be used to think about the dialogic implications that predominate in literature and visual art where, for example, a wide range of experiences, viewpoints, and in this case memories, can coalesce and ‘converse’ with each other. This is particularly true of postcolonial art where the attempt at representing the heteroglossia that defines national and transnational communities (despite the rather homogenizing drive that can be found in national discourses) becomes crucial.

Therefore, I read the process of archiving counter-memory or configuring counter-archives in this dissertation through the simultaneity (of narratives) and emphasis

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<sup>10</sup> For a synthesized and concise description of the musical structure of the counterpoint see *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 5th ed.

on dialogic dynamics that the musical term counterpoint and the notion of call-and-response provide. For instance, the way in which words and word clusters seem to “move” in an unruly manner across the pages of NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* due to the visual effect caused by the form of the poems, mirrors the contrapuntal dynamics of the fugue. The aesthetic composition of *Zong!* simultaneously mirrors and counters the violence that marks the *Zong* massacre when 142 slaves drowned as they were thrown overboard a slave ship so that the owners of the ship could receive an insurance settlement for the cargo.

For instance, a call-and-response pattern links the different sections of Dorothea Smartt’s poetry collection *Ship Shape* where the poet re-names an anonymous slave buried in Sunderland Point, Lancaster, England with the name Bilal. Equally, a call-and-response interactive dynamic connects a series of fictionalized narratives set in a Trinidadian plantation in Roshini Kempadoo’s *Ghosting*. By allowing viewers in the installation to activate these oral and visual narratives through the use of the Warai interactive device, *Ghosting* expands viewers’ understanding and experience of historical narratives to include a firsthand encounter with the constructedness of the colonial archive.

The interconnection of textual fragments also affects how we can read Danticat’s and Díaz’s novels. The entanglement between two different narrative lines marked by regular and bold type in *The Farming of Bones* blurs the linearity and oppressive structure imposed by the state control of the Dominican-Haitian border. The complex interaction between personal and collective traumatic memories that are threaded through these lines, stand as testament to the difficulty of fully communicating the trauma caused

by El Corte's massacre along this national border. Similarly, Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* writes a personal and collective history of Trujillo's dictatorship and the Dominican diaspora experience that knows no genre bounds; personal and critical commentary jumps up and down from main text to the numerous footnotes that Díaz includes in his novel.

Edward Said's definition of contrapuntal analysis is also important to this project in that it brings into focus the experiences and memories previously excluded from both a series of records and from a broader notion of the archive understood as functioning in the public sphere. According to Said, a contrapuntal reading entails,

reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England [...] contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can only be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded (66).

The particular context of Said's definition of a contrapuntal analysis deals with the various silences, exclusions and omissions in British imperial fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The context of this type of contrapuntal reading is therefore somewhat different from that which I develop in this dissertation. The contrapuntal reading that I argue can be applied to the literature and visual art discussed here, does not depend as much in reading a particular context with the awareness of what has been forcibly excluded from that context, although that awareness certainly guides the readings. More importantly, I contend that the Caribbean literature and visual art highlight a series of gaps, silences and erasures through the aesthetic configurations of their work. What has been previously excluded from the record and the official narrative

of colonial history or the postcolonial nation, for example, is now brought into focus alongside those official narratives. The sheer variety of voices in the work, the connections between them, and the implications of their dialogism are very much an open invitation for readers and audiences to begin their own personal engagement with the work and the different modes of counter-memory that they bring to the forefront.

This dissertation speaks to an emerging transnational and inter-disciplinary field that is bringing together archival studies, memorialization studies, and mourning, often influenced by trauma studies. The burgeoning state of these critical fields of study attests not only to the current concern with collective global efforts of remembrance in the aftermath of the 2001 September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, but also to a long scholarly tradition that continues to be very much invested in assessing the importance of memorialization, as well as mourning. The question of how to approach, and think about, individual and collective counter-memory remains vital to understandings of power dynamics in the present moment, both in the Caribbean, the diaspora region and worldwide. Paul Ricoeur, drawing from Halbwachs, pinpoints a relation of interdependence between personal and collective memory since to “remember we need others” (*Memory, History* 120).<sup>11</sup> The examples of individual counter-memory in the works that I examine in my dissertation demonstrate how “it is on the basis of a subtle analysis of the individual experience of belonging to a group, and through the instruction received from others, that individual memory takes possession of itself” (Ricoeur, *Memory, History* 120). In other words, the ways in which individuals know, remember and think about the recent and distant past is

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<sup>11</sup> In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur analyses Halbwachs’ argument (developed in “Individual and Collective Memory” a chapter in *The Collective Memory*) about how individual memory is in close relationship with collective memory in the sense that our identity, awareness and relationship to a social group is largely determined by the dynamics established by that group thus conditioning our way of constructing memories (120-124).

conditioned by their own relationship (of belonging) to that group and their own relationship to memory practices within it. Of course, this does not imply that individual memory is simply a reproduction of inherited forms and traditions of memory since individuals often challenge the traditions they are themselves inscribed in, be it at a local, national or transnational level. What is interesting in Ricoeur's statement though, is the emphasis on how the articulation of an individual's memories is, to a great extent, influenced by their relationship to others in what can be deemed a more collective awareness of identity.

In this project, I am particularly interested in the cracks of history where the individual, personal experience of memory intersects with collective counter-memory, especially as it accommodates shared perspectives that state memory traditionally has a tendency to ignore in its own representations of national histories. How are writers and visual artists in the contemporary Caribbean and diasporic locations representing individual and collective experiences of counter-memory that respond and speak to, and from, a collective sense of disavowal? How is their work in dialogue with, challenging, and/or expanding, the long tradition of Caribbean artistic expression that revises or re-imagines history?

In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), Andreas Huyssen describes a contemporary obsession with memory that results in its "hypertrophy" in what seems to be the imposition and victory of memory over history as the outcome of the "debates about memory vs. history" (3). This hypertrophy is symptomatic of the excess and overuse of the term "memory" which, as Huyssen points out, has generated a blurring of its meaning and a general feeling of exhaustion. Another

consequence of the so-called obsession with memory is the collapse of past and present temporalities whereby the past permeates constantly our awareness of the present moment, redefining the implications of “historical memory” which, if previously “used to mark the relationship of a community or a nation to its past” (1), is now characterized by a wider distrust of official histories.

From the late 1980s and increasingly through the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, explorations of memory, and specifically counter-memory, have proliferated both in critical theory and across all forms of artistic expression at a global scale. This, according to Huyssen, has led to an association of history with national pasts whereas memory has become associated with forms of remembering and memorialization that transcend national boundaries, forming an international network (4). This appears especially so since the phenomenon of exclusion and manipulation of memory at national and institutional levels is a worldwide problem. However, I argue that this new situation of “memory without borders” identified by Huyssen needs to also account for the local, national and cultural specificity because, in each context, that specificity is what conditions the form, sensibility and particular issues that characterize our relationship to a given past. The grounding of that knowledge then allows for a larger transnational and international framework. For this reason, in this dissertation, I seek to provide simultaneously a local and global contextualization of the issues at stake in every instance of historical revision enacted through literary texts, performance and visual artwork.

The explosion of critiques to Western historiography from post-structuralist, post-modern, post-colonial and feminist critics that developed internationally from the mid

1980s created a space for alternative approaches to knowing the past, which looked closely at what had been left out of History. Consequently, in the current contemporary moment, where memory studies has generated the feeling that memory is overused, it seems relevant to consider a set of questions in which this dissertation is implicitly and explicitly invested: What does it mean in the twenty-first century, a period in time obsessed with immediate access to knowledge and online archiving to re-think the idea, or rather the experience, of memory? Is it still not relevant to continue exploring an unequal access to forms of remembering the past? And further, is it not productive to do so from a variety of artistic and cultural expressions across different locales in the Caribbean and the diaspora?

All these questions and the multiplicity of issues raised by the process of archiving in this dissertation are both geographically and culturally specific and resonate with global conflicts where the memory of oppressed groups has been erased or marginalized. From the burning of archives and books by the Nazi regime, to Pol Pot's destruction of books and universities as part of his Year Zero project in which he envisioned erasing history altogether, to censorship in Latin American dictatorships like Pinochet's and Videla's or in South Africa's Apartheid, there are countless examples of the repression of popular memories throughout, and in the aftermath of, genocides, wars, revolutions and colonizing projects.

The recent scholarly focus on archives continues to engage with recuperating silenced memories from alternative non-institutional avenues. For example, edited collections like *Refiguring the Archive* (Hamilton [et.al]) examine the different types of archives that can unearth histories previously silenced by Apartheid in South Africa

through exploring the relationship between literature and the archive. Other edited collections like *Archives and the Public Good* (Cox and Wallace) contain case studies “demonstrating how accountability can be served or undermined by recordkeeping practices in many [international] contexts” from the destruction of documents on Nazi war criminals in Canada to the destruction of public records during the last years of Apartheid (3).<sup>12</sup>

An engagement with memory and history defines the origins and developments of Caribbean artistic and cultural production. Many Caribbean writers and scholars have written about the importance of history and memory in the formation of intellectual, anti-colonial, national, queer, feminist, and hybridity discourses. This focus on memory identifies, through different theoretical frameworks, the ways in which historical and collective memory are central to cultural identities in the Caribbean. The width and scope of these theoretical approaches is varied; it stretches from poetic, cultural and philosophical frameworks to political, socio-cultural and spiritual ones. The works of writers like Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé and Jamaica Kincaid among others, and that of scholars and historians like Verene

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<sup>12</sup> This growing and varied field focused on archiving explores the role that archives and archiving itself play as a means to memorialize events, (re)order knowledge, and either bury or unearth histories (Derrida 1996; Merewether 2006; Taylor 2003; Bastian and Alexander 2009; Burton 2005; Enwezor 2008; Stoler 2002, 2009; Hamilton, Harris, Pickover [et al.] 2002, Trouillot 1995; Holly and Smith 2008). Similarly, critical explorations of mourning, trauma and memory also abound in the present moment. Some are edited collections that convey a transnational focus, offering readers a broader perspective on how trauma, memory and/or mourning are addressed, through literature and cultural studies (Eng and Kazangian 2003; Homans 2000), sociology (Alexander [et al.] 2004) and visual arts (Stalzman and Rosenberg 2006; Bennett 2005; Gibbons). Other publications are monographs in the form of critical theory (Butler 2006; 2009; Durrant 2004), literary analysis (Young 2005), historiography (LaCapra 2001, Hartman 2007) and visual arts criticism (Bennett, 2005; Gibbons 2007). In many of these publications, these three concepts: ‘mourning’, ‘trauma’ and ‘memory’ and the complex inter-subjective processes that they signify, are entangled and put in conversation (Bennet 2005; Gibbons 2007; LaCapra 2001).



Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, Michel Rolph-Trouillot, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and David Scott to name but a few, have engaged memory has engaged in a “quarrel with history” and have defined post-colonial engagements with memory over the last half of the twentieth century.

As my dissertation demonstrates, the turn to the archive in literature and visual art as a site of interrogation and re-figurement opens routes to thinking about mourning and redress. There is a group of literary texts that emphasize these routes aesthetically on the page, similarly to the texts that I discuss in this dissertation. For instance, Patrick Chamoiseau’s novel *Texaco* (1992) includes footnotes, like Díaz’s in *Oscar Wao*, that contextualize the ways in which the past affects the present of the plantation space. Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads* (2003) deploys a relational aesthetic that charts interconnected routes of memory throughout time. This novel tells the stories of three different women in ancient Egypt, the Haitian slave plantation and Charles Baudelaire’s Paris; these are contrapuntally connected through an ancestral goddess who inhabits their bodies transmitting memories from each other. As in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, in *The Salt Roads* the alternating juxtapositions of different bold and regular types marks such connections. The interest in the archive extends to literary texts from the Hispanophone Caribbean in novels like *Fe en Disfraz* (2009) where Mayra Santos-Febres problematizes a series of obsessions with the colonial archive.

Caribbean contemporary visual art is equally engaged with the possibilities that the process of archiving offers to re-think the ways in which visual histories have also elicited popular culture and personal memory. In *Compounds* (2009-2010), visual artist Holly Bynoe uses photographs from family archives to construct a collage that shows the

simultaneous permanence and anchorage of personal memories as well as their vulnerability. In the installation *Spoken Softly with Mama* (1998) Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons also makes use of family archive to counter Cuban nationalist narratives where the memories and experiences of Afro-Cuban women have been downplayed. Equally, the use and re-contextualization of public records, a very common practice in contemporary art, defines the artistic practice of artists including Charles Campbell, Jocelyn Gardner, Mariamma Kambon and Leon Ferrari.

However, there is little theory that examines explicitly the relation between acts of mourning and archival practices or dynamics in both Caribbean literature and visual art. Therefore, it becomes particularly relevant to target this gap in the field of Caribbean Studies especially as so much literature and visual art from the region engage with processes of archiving counter-memory and mourning processes in various contexts of Caribbean history. There are few critical studies on the role of archiving counter-memory that encompass an interdisciplinary focus on both literature and visual arts, especially in regards to cultural production in the Caribbean. One example is Donette Francis' *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* (2010), where Francis traces the "silences of sexual violence" in Caribbean women's writing and "asks who and what has been silenced" in order to understand the politics of silencing sexual violence in the postcolonial moment (9). Francis examines novels by Patricia Powell, Edwidge Danticat, Elizabeth Nunez, Angie Cruz and Nelly Rosario, arguing that their "archives of intimacy" record episodes of

violence otherwise suppressed in national narratives thus allowing for a “speculative recovery of missing or hidden histories” (10).<sup>13</sup>

With a focus on the significance of mourning Joyce C. Harte’s *Come Weep with Me* is a pioneering edited collection that explores the role of grieving and engaging critically with the haunting loss and historical amnesia in Caribbean women’s writing. Like *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship*, the essays in Harte’s collection suggest—albeit more implicitly—that we consider their work as archiving very diverse modes of mourning. Finally, another recent publication that targets and connects counter-archival and mourning practices is Vivian Halloran’s *Exhibiting Slavery* (2009) where Halloran reads the Caribbean postmodern historical novel as a mourning museum (155).<sup>14</sup>

In order to begin addressing this need for an interdisciplinary approach incorporating both literature and visual art, I open my dissertation with a discussion of Christopher Cozier’s mixed media *Wait Dorothy Wait* (1991) and M. NourbeSe Philip’s poetry collection *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989). I argue that these works provide a re-examination of how issues of socio-economic, gender and racial discrimination, have been omitted in a series of archives. Moments describing these issues are evoked, invoked, and called to inhabit the space of the arts’ frame and the page. *Wait Dorothy Wait*’s critique of Trinidadian state control over popular culture, and the art market’s rejection of social conceptual art in the 1980s and 1990s, reveals the tensions lying behind their disavowal. Ultimately, Cozier’s critique shows how such rejection is closely connected with, and thus somehow continues, a visual tradition of

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<sup>13</sup> The novels examined in Francis’ *Fictions of Citizenship* are Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda*; Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; Elizabeth Nunez’s *Bruised Hibiscus*; Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*; and Angie Cruz’s *Soledad*.

<sup>14</sup> One of the commonalities that Halloran finds between the Caribbean postmodern historical novel and the mourning museum is how both inform and situate for audiences and readers the cultural value and significance of mourning rituals and practices that honor and remember the dead (155).

representing the Caribbean that privileges local and foreign elite viewpoints whilst ignoring those of the majority of its citizens. With a very similar visual poetics, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* evokes instances of cultural, linguistic and sexual violence, especially during slavery but also in the present moment. Philip's symbolic recreation of how a female voice 'breaks the silence' to articulate the critical genealogy of Caribbean women writers rewrites the trope of Caliban's political agency that abounds in the work of Caribbean male writers, and which largely ignores the contribution of Caribbean women to critical discourses.

Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* guides viewers attention toward the haunting absence of poverty and street crime emphasized by the dichotomy between a pristine tropical landscape and the violent context of street crime in Trinidad in the 1980s and 1990s. Its connection to Black Stalin's calypso of the same name creates a critical space that addresses numerous issues in the Trinidadian public sphere and arts scene at the time. Through a very similar aesthetic fragmentation, Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* excavates the memories of sexual violence and women's political agency in Caribbean history. Similarly to Cozier, for Philip, elements of intertextuality provide the opportunity of formulating a critique that de-masks the absence of women's perspectives in the literature of anti-colonial male writers.

Chapter two continues to examine the work of Cozier and Philip, identifying a similar development in their poetics of counter-memory that moves from a call-and-response fragmented poetics towards a hyper-fragmented aesthetic, mirroring the musical form of the fugue and the disorientation caused by the psychological dissociative state of the same name. Philip's elegy *Zong!* (2008) and Cozier's drawing series *Tropical Night*

(2006-present) construct meta-narratives that (visually and conceptually) stretch even further the boundaries of the British colonial archive and the postcolonial public sphere in Trinidad, emphasizing a new vocabulary of memory struggling to emerge. This vocabulary is marked by an elegiac tone that articulates Philip's mourning for the dead Africans in *Zong* on one hand, and Cozier's lament for the lost promises embodied in Trinidad and Tobago's independence on the other.

My third chapter looks at the alternative testimonial storytelling in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), two historical novels that re-read the history of Hispaniola against the grain of Trujillo's nationalist and anti-Haitian narratives. I argue that *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar* demonstrate how Dominican state memory is constructed around a fabricated myth of racial purity and Hispanic origin that imagines and constructs the Dominican-Haitian border as a site of conflict, eliciting thus the inter-ethnic and multi-linguistic culture that existed across the border prior to the massacre. Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat's and Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz's novels demonstrate the significance of examining trauma through the intersection of individual and collective memory. The characters in both novels are affected by different types of violence, which they experience individually and as part of a collective that is vulnerable to totalitarian abuse and exploitation.

In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle, its narrator protagonist, recounts the events leading up to the 1937 Haitian massacre, the massacre itself, and its aftermath. Amabelle gives her own testimony of the massacre in the name of all the Haitians victims that day. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is also a fictional testimonial narrative. Although

Yunior, its omniscient narrator, is only witness to some of the events that take place in the novel, he reconstructs a variety of histories and stories through the accounts of other sources, as a historiographer would. However, just as Amabelle does, Yunior tells Oscar's story in an attempt to commemorate his life and mourn his loss. Both narrators consciously take the responsibility to tell the stories of those who have died. Their accounts tell more than individual experiences, they tell the (hi)stories of Haitians and Dominicans who directly or indirectly suffered the violence of Trujillo. Individual stories and family histories in these novels speak to the larger group of Dominican and Haitian victims of the Trujillo dictatorship.

In the final chapter, I turn to Dorothea Smartt's poetry collection *Ship Shape* (2008), and Roshini Kempadoo's multimedia installation *Ghosting* (2004) where both artists configure memory work at the crossroads between the archive and the repertoire. *Ship Shape* commemorates the anonymous life of Bilal, the name that Smartt imagines for Samboo, the anonymous slave buried in Sunderland Point, Lancaster. Smartt connects her own voice and personal experience to Bilal's, thus creating a bridge of black diasporic experience that spans the Atlantic and travels through time. In a similar vein, Roshini Kempadoo's screen-based installation *Ghosting* shows the intersection between personal experience and collective memory. *Ghosting* offers access to a series of "stone stories," as the artist describes them; these are oral and visual narratives in the form of still-moving image in which a speculative representation of Trinidad's plantation life after emancipation is intertwined with visual material from (post)colonial and family archives.

I read Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* (2009) and Roshini Kempadoo's *Ghosting* (2004) as performance and multimedia art that shifts reading and viewing paradigms towards a politics of remembrance where Diana Taylor's notion of the repertoire (as embodied, performative memory) and the archive meet in productive ways. This intersection allows, in this case, an interactive space for mourning Bilal and the largely absent voices of plantation workers, especially women, that *Ghosting* identifies and (re)imagines in the Trinidadian plantation (1838-1948). Smartt's performances expose autobiographical sketches interwoven in her portrayal of Bilal, who she also imagines as a poet; this call-and-response pattern beckons an interrogation of how histories of loss can shape creative processes and identities. Similarly, the Warai board in Kempadoo's installation (a traditional African board game) allows audiences to participate in the construction (or silencing) of stories through the use of an electronic device which, upon making a move, triggers fictionalized audio-visual accounts of life in the plantation.

All the works discussed in this dissertation provide individually, but also in combination and in conversation, examples of counter-memory that serve to unveil and confront the implications of nationalist, racist, xenophobic and sexist discourses that permeate different notions of colonial and post-colonial archives. By means of generating repertoires of counter-memory, their critical intervention can challenge and alter ways of knowing the past that are, in turn, revealing of current issues of social inequality. Ultimately, this process provides a potentially shared space for authors and readers/viewers to participate in, and share, the affect that these new forms of archiving can potentially provoke.

**Chapter 1. Archiving Counter-Memory in Christopher Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* and M. NourbeSe Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks***

Is it silence that shapes the words of the “missing” texts,  
or do the words shape the silence?

M. NourbeSe Philip<sup>15</sup>

This chapter examines how Christopher Cozier's mixed media *Wait Dorothy Wait* (1991) and M. NourbeSe Philip's poetry collection *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) engage in a process of archiving counter-memory that reveals the ideological apparatus behind representations of the Caribbean and its population in visual and written discourses such as tropicalization, nationalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. As I foreground in the introduction, I am using the notion of counter-memory as memory that contradicts or revises official history or a particular account of the past. Although *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* belong to different mediums—mixed media and poetry respectively—both display a visual poetics that references, and satirically mocks, modes of cataloguing, labeling and recording past and contemporary history.

Cozier's and Philip's artistic and literary work, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, shows the influence of post-structuralist and postmodern aesthetics in their questioning of written and visual languages, particularly through the use of modernist techniques like montage and collage which Cozier and Philip employ in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. This compositional methodology results in a fragmented visual poetics, which in the 1980s was indicative of postmodernism's

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<sup>15</sup> “Dis Place—The Space Between.” *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989). London: Women's Press, 1993. Print.



predicament as marking a series of social and political crises, questioning the stability of notions like identity, historical progress, and a univocality of meaning. In *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Postmodernity*, Gen Doy notes how critics like David A. Bailey, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer coincide in “an argument for a shift from modernism to postmodernism in black culture in the later 1980s both in Britain and internationally” (2). This shift marks a further politicization of modernist aesthetics, which are used and re-fashioned to challenge the status quo.

Since there are many interpretations of what postmodernism signifies, I will be more specific here; I identify in Cozier’s and Philip’s work the influence of what Hal Foster defines as a “postmodernism of resistance” which “is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition” and in this sense, “it seems to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations” (xiii). The critical and deconstructive element characteristic of postmodernism overlaps with postcolonial efforts of de-centering Western discourses of modernity. In the early 1990s, influential post-colonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak questioned Eurocentric interpretations of history that deny the historical agency of the non-European subject.<sup>16</sup> I argue that despite the undeniable influence of postmodern and postcolonial aesthetics in Cozier and Philip’s work, their artistic sensibility is rooted in Caribbean historical and cultural specificity, and particularly in the contrapuntal call-and-

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<sup>16</sup> Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) shows a preoccupation with incorporating counter-memory into our knowledge of the past, a critical concern that is present in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Said argues in favor of reading Western literature contrapuntally against the grain of imperial history, paying attention to “what was once forcibly excluded” from it (66). Similarly, Bhabha’s post-structuralism inflected definitions of cultural hybridity and liminal identities have shaped much postcolonial theory since the publication of *The Location of Culture* in 1995, as has Spivak’s argument that the subaltern subject remains in a paradoxical situation whereby the articulation of his/her experience is limited by the use of the language that writes him/her as “subaltern” and “other.”

response dynamics of calypso music. As Philip herself states in an interview with Kristen Mahlis,

when people began to read this work [Édouard Glissant's]—many years ago—they said that it was a postmodern work, which I didn't necessarily disagree with. I said, that's fine, but if you don't understand the Caribbean, if you read it solely as a postmodern work, I think you need to understand that the Caribbean was postmodern long before the term was coined: Multiple discourses—fragmentation—we've been doing this ever since; we just haven't applied the name to it (698).

Other critics in the field of visual culture like Nelly Richard (1987), Stuart Hall (1993), Michelle Wallace (2004) and Gen Doy (2000) have also warned against the tendency to equate African Diaspora aesthetics in the Americas with postmodern aesthetics; they warn against the pitfalls of considering Diaspora aesthetics exclusively through a postmodern lens. Alongside such critical positions, this chapter acknowledges the influence of postmodern aesthetics whilst claiming the central role of African-based musical structures in the fragmented aesthetic form that informs many Caribbean literary texts, performance and visual artwork.

Call-and-response patterns are present in African Diaspora aesthetics across the Americas. In the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, musical traditions have carried the memory of collective life from the plantation to the contemporary cityscape or village; from the African-American work songs and celebrations, which form the foundation for blues and jazz, to Caribbean kaiso and its evolution into calypso. Kaiso, the eighteenth century slave work song, and its contemporary counterpart calypso, are based on the African griot tradition where the figure of the griot leads the work song and encourages the rest of the singers to join in a response (kalinda) that follows his call, parallel invitations to respond to a call are also found in terms of percussion rhythm and

musical structure. Although the acute level of improvisation that defined kaiso and earlier forms of calypso has decreased throughout time due to the sophistication of the calypso as well as to the demands of the local and global market, the structure of call-and-response prevails (to differing degrees) both musically and performatively.

This contrapuntal poetics of calypso's call-and-response is evoked through sight and visual juxtaposition in Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* and Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Both works make use of collage and montage, a compositional pair and modernist aesthetic principle that also features in post-modern aesthetics (Ulmer 94).<sup>17</sup> Collage refers to the transfer of elements from "one context to another" whilst "montage" constitutes the "dissemination of these borrowings through the new setting" (Ulmer 95). The various instances of intertextuality in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* are primarily constructed via the collage of a series of elements into the artwork and the literary text (i.e. a fragment of a landscape painting and newspaper cutting in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and the legal, fictional, poetic, and historical texts, among others, in Philip's poetry), which are assembled creating a montage. These processes not only result in the re-contextualization of such elements, allowing readers and viewers to consider them under a new light; they also create the opportunity of questioning the specific discursive frameworks of signification out of which they originated. Consequently, the destabilizing role that collage plays on structures of meaning relies on (and re/produces as a result) a hybridity of form(s):

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<sup>17</sup> Collage, although an ancient technique, was popularized in modernist art through Pablo Picasso and George Braque's cubism. Critics like Ulmer (2002) and Brockelman (2001) have theorized the influence and relevance of collage within postmodern aesthetics as a means to question representational claims within Western art and historiography.

Its [collage's] heterogeneity, [...] imposes itself on the reading as stimulation to produce a signification which could be neither univocal nor stable. Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality [...] Thus the art of collage proves to be one of the most effective strategies in the putting into question of all the illusions of representation (Group *Mu*, 34-35 qtd. in Ulmer 99).<sup>18</sup>

Through this compositional strategy of the collage and montage, Cozier and Philip configure a relational, contrapuntal poetics that highlights patterns of call-and-response, which can in turn offer patterns for reading and viewing what has been previously excluded from a series of narratives. However, it is important to note that this suggested dialogical reading ultimately stresses the speculative nature of the work. Therefore, the temptation to identify a conclusion to the critiques conveyed in Cozier's mixed media and Philip's poetry is complicated by the juxtaposition of fragments in both works, which challenges audiences and readership about how to read the work that stems from seemingly disconnected and discrepant formal elements.

An overview of Cozier's and Philip's intellectual formation illuminates important aspects in their visual poetics. Christopher Cozier studied Fine Arts in the United States where he was taught by artists like Emma Amos, Martha Rosler, and Leon Golub. In an interview that I conducted with Cozier in Trinidad on August 5, 2012, he explained how this exposure to conceptual and socially committed art, influenced his art practice both technically and aesthetically, as he was able to experiment with contemporary expressions of conceptual art in different mediums. In 1986, Cozier graduated in Fine Arts from Maryland Institute, College of Art and initiated postgraduate studies at Rutgers

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<sup>18</sup> Group Mu, eds. *Collages*. Paris: Union Générale, 1978, 13-14.

University where he completed his M.F.A. In 1989 Cozier decided to move back to Trinidad, partly discouraged by the ways in which the artistic stimulation that he enjoyed in New York City was affected by the pressures of cultural representational lenses and labels that paradoxically defined some of the emerging multicultural narratives in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> At his return to Trinidad, Cozier continued to develop artwork from a variety of mediums through which he challenged the nation's status quo (Paul, "The Enigma" 54). In a 2008 lecture at the University of Miami entitled "Topicality, Flexibility, Fluidity," Cozier describes how years before his return to Trinidad the process of real estate development resulted in property speculation in Port of Spain and in the relocation of whole communities, which affected significantly the physical and social map of the island's capital. This moved Cozier to start collecting fragments from bulldozed houses and buildings that he eventually pieced together with different fragments of his own artwork creating very delicate and frail structures that nevertheless remained attached; this assemblage, in Cozier's view came to represent all the different histories and cultures in the Caribbean ("Topicality, Flexibility, Fluidity"). From collecting building fragments, Cozier went onto collecting fragments of newspaper clips and postcards. In the years of 1991-1993, Cozier worked on his series *Wait Dorothy Wait* and developed critical, sharp pieces where he juxtaposed newspaper clippings to fragments from tropical landscape postcards to critique the politics of the postcard in marketing an idealistic tropicalized version of the Caribbean in which the local art market was also complicit, as I demonstrate in my discussion of one of these mixed media later in this chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> After completing his M.F.A., Cozier "was offered a spot in a prestigious program at State University of New York at Stony Brook" but decided to return to Trinidad in 1989" where he continued to work as an artist, critic and educator (Paul, "The Enigma" 53).

The early 1990s in Cozier's oeuvre were very much characterized by installation pieces, video performance and live performance. *The Whip* (1991) was an early performance that examined the socio-cultural value of the rod in relation to a primary school rod made of tamarind wood in order to draw attention to the ways in which the presence and currency of this object perpetuated a colonial mindset through its use in Caribbean schools to punish children (Paul, "The Enigma" 54). For this performance, Cozier would address the audience to explain the appropriate way in which beatings should be executed with the rod and to ironically illustrate how the use of the rod could be likened to the game of cricket. Cozier "commented on the elegance of the gestures, the form and how the style provided entertainment" (Paul, "The Enigma" 54).<sup>20</sup>

The different conceptual explorations of the prerogative and social map of Trinidad's post-independence nation that Cozier had developed in different artwork throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s was central to the configuration of a series of large painting that he has often described as his own cultural autopsy. Art critic Annie Paul highlights how,

[i]n the new nation-states of the Caribbean, it was the job of artists, writers, dancers and singers—the aesthetic corpses of the country—to build culture, literally construct a national culture, [...] Rather than build culture, Cozier has been more interested in dissecting the culture of his nation and laying open to the

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<sup>20</sup> Cozier's performances at this time were influenced conceptually by Peter Minshall's Carnival mas performances, especially through the figure Mancrab which embodied the forces of greed and selfishness in the society. Mancrab was a costume construction of gigantic proportions; it was part of a Carnival dancing mobile performance titled *River* (1983) which toured the streets of Port of Spain accompanied by another gigantic structure: Washerwoman who countered Mancrab as it embodied instead notions of trust. Cozier's Blue Soap Performances of this period like for example *Conversation with a Shirt Jac* (1991), intended to break the boundaries between the private and the public space, a dynamic that Cozier describes in an interview with Claire Tancons as very interesting to him ("No More" 50). For this performance, Cozier invited the audience to a location, there he sat in a chair facing the wall in the small exhibition space with a shirt on a hanger; he would then initiate an improvised "conversation." This navy blue shirt jac metonymically embodies the figure of the third world and revolutionary leader throughout the process of decolonization in Africa and also the Caribbean.

public gaze the sinister scaffolding in which the national rests” (“The Enigma” 56).

Such scrutiny and dissection has been a multiform in Cozier’s art practice: from the ironic and political commentary of the early structures and performances, to video installation pieces like *Blue Soap* where he performatively enacts the psychological pressures of the modern nation’s dictates of “discipline, tolerance and production” (“Topicality, Flexibility, Fluidity”), Cozier’s artwork has engaged in poignant and difficult questions about contemporary life in Trinidad and the Caribbean. Through a series of very large drawings on paper Cozier started to use and investigate a series of visual symbols and objects like the man’s silhouette profile head, the crutch, or the palm tree that are now very distinctive of his art practice and that appear in Cozier’s most recent work such as the ongoing series of mixed media drawings *Tropical Night*, which I discuss in chapter two, and his most recent installation work to date *In Development* (2013). The different conceptual explorations of the prerogative and social map of the post-independence nation that Cozier had developed in different artwork throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s was central to the configuration of the *Cultural Autopsy Series*. *Three Stains of Paper* (1995), a series that is part of the larger *Cultural Autopsy* project, continued to explore critically the disavowal of crime and poverty in touristic and artistic representations of Trinidad that Cozier initiated in *Wait Dorothy Wait* (1991).

Like Cozier, M. NourbeSe Philip studied abroad, completing a Masters degree in political science (1970) and a Bachelors degree in law (1973) at the University of Western Ontario, Canada where she moved in the late 1960s. However, after practicing law for years, in 1983 Philip decided to leave her career in law and write professionally, an activity that she had taken only as a serious hobby until that point. Although Philip is

perhaps most widely known as a poet, she has now written in every literary genre ranging from poetry, essay, fiction and short story to drama. Through these different mediums, Philip explores the role of language in constructing and maintaining Western dominant discourses and simultaneously shows how language can be re-shaped to challenge inherited historical narratives. Philip's early poetry: *Thorns* (1980), *Salmon Courage* (1983) and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) initiates the writer's long engagement with memory and a critical interrogation of how language shapes discourses of race and gender. For example, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) introduces a playful semiotic re-articulation of English in order to deconstruct its authoritative claims through colonial discourse and patriarchal structures. As a result these poetry collections also enact a kind of "cultural autopsy" of colonial discourse and historiography.

Philip's poetry is associated to the late wave of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets who in the 1980s were writing experimental poetry that stretched the boundaries of signification in our perception and use of language. Charles Bernstein describes how in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry "syllogistic logic and naturalistic plot gave way to intuitively felt, aesthetically designed, or programmatically arranged connections among elements of a work" (288). This type of poetics is present in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* whereby its compositional arrangement guides a reading pattern of graphic, semantic and thematic interconnection between the different textual fragments in the poetry. Through (post)modernist techniques like collage and montage, Philip's poetry collection and Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* deploy a relational aesthetics that, consequently, requires that readers and viewers look at, and understand, the work



contrapuntally. In other words, this strategy encourages readers and viewers to make connections between the various elements juxtaposed in the text or the artwork, in order to investigate how they “speak” to, and through, each other.

Additionally, Cozier and Philip belong to the same generation, and were born a few years before Trinidad and Tobago’s declaration of independence from Great Britain in 1962. Christopher Cozier was born in Diego Martin a neighborhood in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1959 and Marlene NourbeSe Philip was born in Woodlands, Tobago in 1947. Both their work shows traces of a critical assessment of the promise that the moment of independence meant for this and previous generations of Trinidadians. *Wait Dorothy Wait* interrogates the ways in which the post-independent nation fails to encourage an autonomous cultural/arts scene and instead limits “culture” to folklore that reinforces nation-building narratives. *She Tries her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* lacks the contextual specificity of *Wait Dorothy Wait* since it situates its poetic narratives primarily in a mythical sense of time. However, Philip’s poetry collection also responds to a sense of historical erasure that defines the colonial archive and which is reproduced in Western historiography of the Caribbean. Most specifically, the different texts included in the collection can be read as an implicit critique to the ways in which female Caribbean subjectivity and historical agency had been largely ignored in much Caribbean literature by male authors.

### **Tearing Apart Pictures of Paradise: Christopher Cozier’s *Wait Dorothy Wait***

In the aftermath of Trinidad and Tobago’s Independence in 1962, the Trinidadian government started to emphasize the importance of culture as a means of fostering

national unity in a highly multicultural society.<sup>21</sup> Political agendas after the declaration of independence and the proclamation of Trinidad and Tobago as a Republic in 1976 were dominated by a sponsorship and patronage of folk culture with the expectation that the arts would bring racial unity and political stability. Although the cultural tradition of Carnival and calypso has provided a platform for social critique that had remained strong since the seventeenth century; this notion of folk culture as unifying element was at times promoted at the expense of social critique and parochial popular perspectives in a gradual increase of state control over the social content in calypso lyrics (Birth 62-81; Rohlehr “The Culture,” “We Getting the Kaiso”).

Initially, the government of Eric Williams, especially in its first decades, generated the promise and hope that socio-economic opportunity would open up to the wider Trinidadian population. However, the prospects of a booming oil economy in the 1970s marked a gradual shift in economic policies leaning towards the neo-liberal measures of the 1980s. The result of these policies accentuated further socio-economic inequality, which was also influenced by a decrease of “governmental economic interventions” (Birth 66). However, what remained a constant in the Trinidadian government was the emphasis on “culture policy.” This dynamic continued after 1981, throughout the 1990s, and persists still today. At times, political demands in Trinidad have interfered in creative art processes, especially in music, plastic arts and visual arts. Calypso music illustrates aptly a combination of both these political and economic pressures on artistic expression. On one hand, calypso has succumbed to the pressure of political parties towards the creation of certain types of calypso hits, especially those

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<sup>21</sup> As Ramcharitar notes, Trinidadian society “consists of roughly equal numbers of citizens of African and Indian descent” with minority groups of Chinese, Middle Eastern and European descent (191).

linked to the Carnival's calypso monarch competitions that could positively favor the current government at a given time. Similarly on another front, as Rohlehr argues in 1998, calypso and soca music started to compete within a global market that imposed a set of commercial expectations:

Over the past six decades, calypsonians have had to produce their songs for that multi-headed monster, the market, while retaining close contact with their communities and struggling to maintain aspects of calypso tradition in a rapidly changing world. Market forces have steadily pushed calypso toward commodification, teaching singers to do for profit what their ancestors did for fun, entertainment, relaxation, edification or self-knowledge (“We Getting the Kaiso” 82).

The field of visual arts in Trinidad has also been affected by the demands of the art market and the privileging of folk culture as representative of national and regional identity. Christopher Cozier's art practice provides a critique of prescriptive ideas of art and culture. In Cozier's view, the “artistic enterprise” of the 1980s and 1990s in Trinidad was “rendering or representing an inventory prescribed as Caribbean or as relevant to the Caribbean. Art was supposed to be painting and its subject was “culture,” the things that defined an “us” as separate from all the “thems” and “usses” out there” (Cozier qtd. in Paul, “Christopher Cozier” 68). Cozier's artwork reflects a position in contemporary Caribbean arts that Krista Thompson describes as seeking to challenge the popular perspective that conceptual art cannot represent the Caribbean as accurately as representational art (“No Abstract Art Here?” 120). In an interview with Annie Paul, Cozier reflects on how the situation in the Trinidadian art scene has positively changed, especially since the 1990s, and describes how “the space has [now] opened up” for artists to explore their creativity confidently: “A conversation is building. In the old days we were just subject to be rendered by someone who came from outside with an alleged

knowledge of real art” (Cozier qtd. in Paul, “Christopher Cozier” 68). *Wait Dorothy Wait* represents Cozier’s positioning in relation to the national and regional art industry at an early stage in his career. However, through this artwork the artist not only formulates a statement about the limited space for critical art in Trinidad at the time, Cozier also reflects on the social responsibility of the arts to address social inequality and violence.

The landscape images included in Cozier’s three-piece mixed media *Wait Dorothy Wait* are very small fragments of tropical postcard scenes originally painted by local Trinidadian artists (see figure 1, following page).<sup>22</sup> In the composition of the artwork, these images are juxtaposed with newspaper cuttings that report murders committed in Port of Spain around 1991, when the series was created. Here, I examine one of these pieces to demonstrate how it highlights the lack of space for social critique in Trinidad’s early 1990s art market and public sphere, whilst archiving an instance of counter-memory through its political critique of different forms of violence: discursive, economic and physical. The image in this mixed media shows a palm tree surrounded by other lush trees and set against the background of a blue sky, which stands in stark contrast with the traumatic murder reported in the newspaper cutting.<sup>23</sup> The cutting reads: “He was shot in the neck as they attempted to steal his car, but was able to outrun the car a short distance. He collapsed and men drove the car over him, brutally killing him” (Thompson, *An Eye* 290).

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<sup>22</sup> The specific mixed media that I examine in this chapter contains a small fragment from a postcard reproduction of an oil painting by a Trinidadian artist. The pictorial style is similar to that of Trinidadian artist David Moore. Moore’s art practice centers on picturesque and pastoral scenes of landscape and social life in Trinidad, capturing the everyday and the quotidian from this lens.

<sup>23</sup> I will only discuss one of the three mixed media pieces and will thus refer to the artwork as *Wait Dorothy Wait*, which is nevertheless the title given to the entire series.



Figure 1. Christopher Cozier. *Wait Dorothy Wait*. 1991. Mixed media. 7 x 7 in. Collection of the late Jeffrey Stanford. Courtesy of the artist.

The shocking incongruence between text and image in the composition of *Wait Dorothy Wait* guides viewers towards an interrogation of the possible links that explain this arrangement. The placement of the murder report below the tropical landscape image—and within the colonial-style golden frame—situates the text as simulated caption to the image. In this sense, the provocative and problematic disconnect between both suggests a major absence: what lies behind the pleasant tropical scene? How is this visual imagery obstructing the reality of death and violence marked by the murder report?

The history and implications of tropicalization in the Caribbean are key in order to appreciate the socio-political critique embedded in *Wait Dorothy Wait*. For this reason,

I will provide here an overview of this mode of representation. The image of a picturesque tropical paradise is very much loaded in the Caribbean context since it is implicated in a tradition of *tropicalization*, which Krista Thompson defines as “the complex visual systems for which the islands were imagined for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations” (*An Eye* 5). Functioning under the rubric of tropicalization, the “Caribbean picturesque” is dominant in eighteenth and nineteenth century visual representations of the region. It conveys a re-interpretation of European notions of the picturesque and relies on creating an image of the region that fashions the islands and their African and Asian inhabitants as accommodating to the needs of the foreign visitor and local elite (Thompson, *An Eye* 17). Cozier’s *Wait Dorothy Wait* points out traces of this visual economy in Trinidad’s 1990s art scene, especially in the way in which the art market rejects any perspective of life in the islands that challenges this tropicalized lens. The divergence between text and image expressed in *Wait Dorothy Wait* is symptomatic of the failure existing in official representations of culture in Trinidad to fully confront social issues.

In the late nineteenth century a visual economy emerges in the Anglophone Caribbean, representing the region as a desirable, customizable and safe place. Behind the construction of this type of visual economy lie economic and ideological motives. The devastating effects of tropical diseases like malaria, yellow fever, and cholera were killing a great number of people within the local white elite. As a result, and despite the readiness of medicines to prevent tropical diseases in the late nineteenth century, the promotion of tourism had to target and dissipate any possible fears from British and North American potential visitors (Thompson, *An Eye* 4). The visual rhetoric of the

picturesque was partly utilized to convince tourists of the existence of an orderly and “disciplined” society of “natives,” thus fostering those expectations internationally (Thompson, *An Eye* 17).<sup>24</sup> The tourism industry in the Caribbean today implicitly perpetuates similar discourses especially with the tailoring of pre-packaged cultural experiences that allow tourists to remain within the premises of all-inclusive hotels and cruises where they can avoid fears rooted in supposed exposure to crime and poverty.

Tourist promotion in the nineteenth century also entailed an ideological control over representations of the population of African and Asian descent or origin. By representing both the landscape and the people as “picturesque,” nineteenth century British and American institutions and companies reenact the *construction* of the Caribbean as a place and space marked by exotic(ized) difference, a discursive practice that dates back to the first representations of the Caribbean by Spanish ‘conquistadores’ and their arrival in the Bahamian island of Guanahani in 1492, which they then renamed San Salvador.<sup>25</sup> From its claimed “discovery,” the West Indies was portrayed by Spain as

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<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the financial impact of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade on the British economy, and the subsequent gradual decrease of forced labor, made the prospects of tourism by the end of the nineteenth century a financially appealing, yet challenging, enterprise. The gradual process of the emancipation of slaves in the Anglophone Caribbean translated into financial losses for the local (and absentee) creole and white economy, especially the plantocracy. Despite the financial compensation received by many of the plantation owners, the prospects of the end of mass production in plantation slavery led colonial authorities and planters to seek other forms of investment. Therefore, tourism campaigns (and multinationals like the United Fruit Company towards the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century) started to develop a profitable economy that continued to exploit the labor conditions of plantation workers and which relied on a picturesque rendering of the Caribbean islands and of their Asian and black population. Although the Emancipation Act was first passed in August 1833, it was not until August 1, 1834 that it was officially acknowledged. However, initially, the Emancipation Act brought a very limited form of freedom. Only slaves under the age of six were freed, whilst the rest of slaves were forced to engage in a (largely unremunerated) six year period of apprenticeship (Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones, 2010 154). Towards the last decades of the nineteenth century, tourism started to be considered an economic alternative. However, promoting tourism in the Caribbean was not only economically profitable to Britain and the United States. It also meant an ideological reinforcement of social and class hierarchies that was emphasized through visual representations of the region.

<sup>25</sup> Various scholars have written about the impact that the narratives of Spanish ‘conquistadores’ have played in the genealogy of a historiographical tradition that frames the American continent as a geo-

the ‘Nuevo Mundo’ (New World), a geographical space signified discursively, through written and visual texts, always already in relation to early modern Europe and the Spanish empire, as will also happen in relation to other colonial powers like Portugal, France, England, the Netherlands and the United States. In other words, narratives of conquest in the early colonial encounter attempt to write the New World into ‘existence’ within the geo-political mapping of the West, forcing a space for signification that has problematically perpetuated an imaginary of the region as space of profit and leisure ready for foreign consumption.

Picturesque visual economies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continued to manipulate sight and reality; whereby lithography, painting and (later) photography would often provide picturesque images of the islands, which in many cases “were only realistic inasmuch as they were consistent with the traveler’s dreams of the tropics” (Thompson, *An Eye* 21). However, I argue that *Wait Dorothy Wait* suggests how these modes of representation follow the visual vocabulary of the “romance,” in the sense that they deploy an idealized depiction of Trinidad specifically, and the Caribbean at large. A picturesque portrayal of the Caribbean continues to omit the viewpoints and life experience of a wide section of the Caribbean population. Therefore, my use of the term “romance” refers to one of its meanings as “a quality or feeling of mystery, excitement,

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political space that can be figuratively and literally re-designed and signified in relation to Europe (Todorov 1992; Sanchez Ferlosio 1994; Wahab 2010; Sheller 2003 and Taylor 2003). The role of language in the naming of the “New World” and the implications that its “newness” represents were originally aimed by European colonizers to mark, ontologically, the starting point of its history. Similarly, although the arrival of Christopher Columbus was traditionally constructed as a “discovery” of new lands, this type of terminology has been widely challenged by Caribbean historians, cultural critics, visual artists, musicians and writers.



and remoteness from everyday life” (Oxford Dictionary of English).<sup>26</sup> I refer here to one of the contemporary meanings of the term “romance” as a quality that estranges and defamiliarizes the quotidian that I identify in *Wait Dorothy Wait*, and which I contend marks a lingering continuity of sentimental idealization in some privileged visual representations of the region. Belinda Edmonson coins the term to signify “the idealized representations of Caribbean society or “Caribbeanness,” both in hegemonic Caribbean-American discourses and, perhaps more important, in *intra*-Caribbean discourses” (2).<sup>27</sup> Cozier’s inclusion of a small postcard fragment in *Wait Dorothy Wait* hints at the historical role and cultural significance of the postcard in the Caribbean as a material object that privileges a foreign and elite representation of the region. Postcards’ abundant tropical landscapes and exoticized and staged images of Caribbean “natives” have a cultural baggage that reinforces the visual economy of tropicalization previously discussed. In *An Eye for the Tropics*, Krista Thompson historicizes in great detail the cultural material value of the postcard as she examines their political and discursive implications within and outside the region. The Caribbean postcard’s imagery starts with early “cultural” scenes of local residents standing still on bicycles holding banana baskets, posing next to donkeys (Thompson, *An Eye* 14, 74, 257 respectively). Later on, throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, postcards of the Caribbean have perpetuated this regional representation through contemporary images of pristine tropical

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<sup>26</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford Reference Online, University of Miami Libraries, Web. 15 Sept. 2012, <<http://http://iiiprxy.library.miami.edu/>>. Most common definitions of “romance” (as a noun) point to the tradition of the sentimental/sentimentalized and idealized love relation or affair and the set of literary and artistic conventions through which such relations are expressed.

<sup>27</sup> Edmonson differentiates both meanings of the term “romance.” On one hand, Edmonson situates romance (without quotations) as the literary genre originated in the Middle Ages where a love story is narrated through allegorical references, heroic and moralizing undertones and which has evolved into contemporary narratives around a story/ies of romantic love. And, on the other hand, “romance” (in quotation marks, a distinction that I adopt here too in order to differentiate both uses) is described as a sentimental and idealized portrayal of reality (2-3).

beaches that promise tourists an escape from modern life, continuing further the representational emphasis on a supposedly pre-modern state of Caribbean islands.

Nineteenth century visual culture in the Caribbean, similarly to British and Creole literary representations of the region throughout this period, shows a fluctuation between both realist and romantic elements. As Tim Watson argues, “realism and romance in the Caribbean context cannot be easily disentangled, just as in the nineteenth century Britain and the West Indies were mutually constitutive rather than discrete entities” (6). Within the visual economy of the lithograph, landscape painting and photography (in the late nineteenth century) this entanglement reveals the ways in which reality was often filtered through the lens of a romantic vocabulary. The characteristic idealization and distortion of reality that defines the contemporary sense of the notion “romance” can be traced to this period in particular. Richard Bridgens’ *West Indian Scenery* (1836) provides a good example of the Caribbean picturesque within the context of nineteenth century Trinidad. It also provides an opportunity to examine the legacy of the picturesque and pastoral visual economies in contemporary Caribbean visual arts.<sup>28</sup> The series depicts, from an ethnographic standpoint, tropical landscapes, social and working life in the plantations, and other urban spaces in Port of Spain, such as the governor’s residency in St Ann’s.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The work of Isaac Mendes Belisario stands as another example of the picturesque in nineteenth century Jamaica. Belisario (1795-1849), as Bridgens, created a series of ethnographic sketches (*Sketches of Character*, 1837-8) accompanied by similar textual descriptions. Belisario’s pictorial style is also very similar to Bridgens’. In fact, their sketches look alike in terms of compositional arrangement, theme and stereotypical representation (Mohammed 2009, 150-154). Similar examples of picturesque style can be found in other parts of the Caribbean, such as Cuba (Victor Patricio de Lanzaluce); Puerto Rico (Francisco Oller) and Dominica (Agustino Brunias) among other locations in the Caribbean.

<sup>29</sup> Bridgens was a civil engineer in Trinidad and was assigned projects like the “new government buildings [in Port of Spain] now called the Red House” (Mohammed 148). He was Superintendent of Public Works in 1844. Bridgens stayed on the island in this capacity for seven years. During this time, he published his series of sketches.

Bridgens' lithographs exemplify the entanglement between realism and romance that Watson refers to. According to Wahab, the series

projected an aesthetically powerful discourse about the continuance of plantation prosperity and the beatitude of slaves in the midst of free coloured agitation, labour shortages, the destabilization caused by amelioration policies and, most importantly, the fears of impending emancipation for which humanitarians in Britain were advocating (90).

The annotations in *West Indian Scenery* exemplify the ideological lens through which the elite classes were viewing and “seeing” African-Trinidadians and Indian indentured workers in the plantation. Text and image work together to reinforce a colonial perspective that renders the ‘apprentice’ a subject of observation. For example, the text that accompanies Bridgens’ lithograph entitled “Carting Canes to the Mill,” albeit from a descriptive narrative style, reveals a romantic interpretation of how slaves experience cane labor processes. The first paragraph provides a detailed description of the workings of a sugar mill, whilst the second and final paragraph interprets the social meaning of this process for plantation workers. Below is a reproduction of this second paragraph and Bridgens’ lithograph (see figure 2, following page). This juxtaposition shows how, through image and text, the hegemonic way of “seeing” the “natives” is constructed around pastoral and romantic notions of labor and self.

The vicinity [sight] of a mill in crop time is generally a very gay scene. The Negroes comfort themselves in the increased labor which is requisite to prevent fermentation in the newly cut cane, by a boisterous mirth that knows no relaxation. Some gifted individual extemporizes a line or two, when he is joined by the whole gang, with a power of lungs that would cause the despair of a chorus at a minor theatre.



Figure 2. Richard Bridgens. “Carting Canes to the Mill.” *West Indian Scenery*, 1836. Lithograph. © British Library Board. Reproduced courtesy of British Library. 789. g.13.Pl.9.

Bridgens’ allusion to singing in the midst of labor, and the description of a chorus suggests the performance of a kaiso in this scene.<sup>30</sup> The individual who, as Bridgens notes, “extemporizes a line or two” can be identified as the “griot,” the leading voice who marks the call-and-response pattern of the kaiso, and who is thus followed unanimously by the rest. As Curwen Best points out, the griot is “the forerunner of the modern-day calypsonian” (17). Bridgens, however, seems unable to decode the content of the kaiso, traditionally highly satirical and critical. Instead, he compares the scene with a performance at a minor theatre, demonstrating the extent to which the cultural

<sup>30</sup> There are various theories regarding the origins of kaiso. Some scholars, like Raphael de Leon, argue that this musical form is primarily influenced by a form of French ballad from medieval France (thirteenth century) that was incorporated in the island when France became involved in Trinidad in the eighteenth century (Curwen Best 16). However, the most popular theory among scholars of calypso locates kaiso as a precedent of calypso rooted in the African musical tradition. Often during their work in the plantation, slaves would sing kaiso, which contained satires ridiculing the slave master (massa).

significance of kaiso remains both masked to the European gaze and necessarily translated into its paradigms.

Both the pastoral aesthetics of the lithograph and the annotation's portrayal of laboring as a "gay scene," where the "negroes" manifest their "boisterous mirth," seem more fitting of a Constable painting like *The Hay Wain* (1821), which also offers an idealized portrayal of haymakers at work in the English countryside of Suffolk. The lithograph's pastoral pictorial style entails a celebration of labor (agricultural labor specifically) that was predominant in European landscape painting in the nineteenth century. The pastoral style, like the picturesque, was a visual style that proved useful in nineteenth century visual representations of the West Indies in order to portray the process of amelioration in rather romanticized terms. However, the gradual improvement of slave laboring conditions prior to the official emancipation of slaves in 1838, continued to cause strife and social unrest in the politics of the plantation throughout the British Caribbean. It generated conflict between the planters and the British government, which aimed to regulate the plantation economy. Planters ignored and sabotaged the 1824 Amelioration Order, and thus, "in the face of opposition and indifference, the amelioration policy had little real success between 1824 and 1831" (Brereton 61).<sup>31</sup> Richard Bridgens' anthropological sketch provides an early example of a romantic lens that illustrates some of the contradictions at stake between the irony embedded in the text and image collaged in Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait*.

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<sup>31</sup> The new Amelioration Order passed in 1831 continued to generate discontent from plantation slave owners in Trinidad who appealed in order to suspend it (Brereton 1981, 74).

The title of Cozier's piece, '*Wait Dorothy Wait*' transmits a central hint to a dialogical interpretation and viewing of the artwork. The title comes from Black Stalin's popular Trinidadian calypso of the same name composed in 1985.<sup>32</sup> By giving the artwork the same title as Black Stalin's theme, Cozier implicitly connects the calypso's context of 1985 and the socio-political moment of 1991, when Cozier created his mixed media series. Furthermore, as I will discuss below, the reference to this calypso contrapuntally connects and illuminates the different narratives in the piece (the landscape painting, the newspaper cutting, and the extravagant golden frame) by reminding viewers of the possibility to confront social realities through the arts, an idea that resonates in Black Stalin's lyrics.

The lyrics in "Wait Dorothy Wait" emphasize the need to confront the socio-economic and political issues of the time period, before engaging in the festivities of Carnival and calypso. Black Stalin tells audiences that, although he has been asked to write a light-hearted calypso: "they say they want something smutty about Jean or Dorothy," his commitment to social critique as a calypsonian weighs heavier still. Initially, Black Stalin admits attempting to write the type of calypso that he was originally asked to compose, but this task proved impossible. The seriousness of the socio-economic situation imposes itself. The calypso's opening shows how the calypsonian is influenced by expectations set through cultural patronage. However, he finally admits the impossibility to ignore the social and economic context of inequality:

So I sit down to write this motto only to please them  
But as I pick up mi pen

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<sup>32</sup> Black Stalin won the Calypso Monarch competition in 1991. He also won this award in 1979, 1985, 1987 and 1995.

And mi piece of paper  
 And I write down those first words  
 This is what I *remember*  
 That oil money come and that oil money go  
 And poor people remain on the pavement and ghetto (emphasis mine)

Black Stalin's use of the words "oil money," and "oil's phonetic resemblance to the word "old," as homonyms, reinforces and rarefies the connection between economic imperialism and the capitalist system of the time (largely based on oil extraction) as exploitative systems that continue to perpetuate class dichotomies. In 1985, when Black Stalin wrote his calypso, the national socio-political situation was such that "new International Monetary Fund policies and the economic recession likely topped the Calypsonian agenda" (Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics* 290). Economic globalization and capital investment were intensified in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1990s, as a central objective of the state was "to become a financial center" (Klak 78). The effects of the emerging globalization are even more evident in the early 1990s when, as economic geographer Barry Riddell points out,

globalization was most intense in Trinidad and Tobago because of agreements with the IMF (in 1989 and 1990) [...] the context within which globalization occurred was a looming debt crisis involving currency devaluation and flotation, the collapse of local firms, conditionalities of the IFIs, a decline in real incomes, a reduction in education and health care, mounting prices, and falling living standards (662).<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, the reference to Black Stalin's calypso in Cozier's artwork six years later in 1991 confirms the predicament embedded in the song; the importance of addressing issues of inequality in the country in order to avoid their worsening.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> IFI's stands for International Financial Institutions.

<sup>34</sup> As previously mentioned, the booming of the oil economy in the 1970s led to its decline in the 1980s; the state had to "redefine its economic path from one of state ownership, political control and alliance with workers to one involving global incorporation, private enterprise, foreign capital and neoliberal economics"

The lyrics go on to remind the audience that Black Stalin won't write a calypso about Dorothy until inequality is addressed and acknowledged. However, in a rhetorical witticism, Black Stalin still manages to write a calypso about Dorothy, one that, nevertheless, critiques the "smutty" theme he has been asked to write about, and consequently writes about something else altogether. Black Stalin's "Wait Dorothy Wait," like Cozier's mixed media, playfully frames and calls attention to the cultural and national narratives that are being privileged in the mid 1980s and early 1990s respectively. Interestingly, they address and explore these narratives through references to what they exclude. In this way, methodologically, they shift focus towards examples that conflict with the *image* of Trinidad as a tropical locale and multi-cultural haven, an image that cultural sponsors of calypso were eager to see represented in the new calypsos of the 1980s and 1990s (Rohlehr, "We Getting the Kaiso" 85).<sup>35</sup>

By alluding to Black Stalin's calypso, Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* invokes the centrality of calypso as embodying a long tradition of satire and socio-political critique that records and critiques the present, often in conversation with the past. Trinidadians often understand calypso as fulfilling the role of a popular newspaper as it collects and

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(Riddell 663). The economic poverty resulting from these neo-liberal measures had an important impact in fostering crime, which was often moved by economic motives. This situation became especially problematic in the next decade; newspapers from 1991 (the time when *Wait Dorothy Wait*'s news cut was recorded) reflect a growing concern with the increase of violence. An article published on December 29th, 1991 in the Sunday Guardian, and significantly entitled "Murders Increased in 1991" announces that "The year 1991 will go down as the Year of the Gruesome murders" with 97 murders, 18 more than the previous year (9). The subheading in the news article points to the issue of unsolved cases related to drugs and drug trafficking. The article states how many of the crimes were "robberies, burglaries, break-ins and kidnappings" and it provides detailed descriptions of some of them which contrasts with the matter of fact tone and brevity of the newspaper cutting used in Cozier's mixed media.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Rohlehr notes that in calypso music, the celebratory song and the social critique are not mutually exclusive or separate facets of a calypsonian career (87). In fact, the critic points out how the social compromise claimed in Black Stalin's "Wait Dorothy Wait" was replaced in his 1991 "celebratory and politically escapist hit "Tonight the Black Man Feeling to Party" ("We Getting the Kaiso We Deserve" 87), a calypso composed and performed in 1991 the same year that Cozier creates *Wait Dorothy Wait*.



examines contemporary memory and provides an oral archive of social life. In Geoffrey Dunn and Michael Horne's documentary film *Calypso Dreams* (2008), Brigo (one of the calypsonians interviewed in the film) describes calypso as a "poor man's newspaper" whilst Black Stalin likens the role of the calypsonian to that of the African storyteller who goes "from village to village spreading the word." Socially committed calypso provides both a personal analysis of the topic or experience recorded in the lyrics and an opportunity for audiences to join in the construction of the calypso via its performative elements, especially with the chorus. Black Stalin's chorus: "Wait, Dorothy, wait, Dorothy wait" playfully invites audiences to join him in his political message. As a kalinda (call-and-response element), "Wait, Dorothy wait, ..." when sung by the audiences, acquires further political significance as the claim to collectively deal with social issues before dancing to the rhythm of a party song is actually shared collectively.

The counterpoint provided by calypso in Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* shifts the focus from the experience of forgetting, embodied in the juxtaposition of tropical image and the news "caption," toward the potentiality of popular culture as a means of generating counter discourses that, on the contrary, remember and address social issues. Black Stalin sings that he must avoid writing "a crowd-pleasing song," to face instead the issues of the day. In a similar way, Cozier rejects the complacent "crowd-pleasing" imagery of the tropical landscape to focus the attention toward other (potentially less pleasing) issues (Thomson, *An Eye For The Tropics* 290). Cozier laments how, in the postcards of tropical landscapes, "no sense of the history or the struggles of those locations were conveyed" (qtd. in Thompson, *An Eye For The Tropics* 291). Cozier's

mixed media can therefore be seen in this context as a personal confrontation with this omission.

Although both Cozier and Black Stalin engage with the socio-political context of Trinidad, they transcend the boundaries of the nation-state and suggest a transnational kinship of collective counter-memory. The prerogative of tropicalization that Cozier tackles in *Wait Dorothy Wait* resonates in many locations across the Caribbean. Additionally, the reference to Black Stalin's calypso makes further evident the international scope of contexts of inequality based on racial, ethnic and cultural hierarchies in places like the United States, South Africa and England in the mid 1980s when the song was written. Black Stalin does not oppose the idea of a party song per se, but identifies the problems that must be confronted before a calypso like that becomes relevant. He sings,

But the Klu Klux Klan in Richmond Alabama  
And in Brixton England  
My people still under pressure  
Any time I see that South Africans are free  
I'm going to finish the whole damn calypso for Dorothy  
In *Masking and Power*, Gerard Aching argues that masking, as a cultural practice

and rhetorical strategy rooted in Carnival, highlights the negotiation of (in)visibility, through the literal or figurative use of the mask, for those (especially the economically poor) who have been negated visibility within the public sphere (2002). In his discussion of masking in Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979), Aching notes that for Aldrick, the main protagonist in the novel, the literal and figurative mask provided by his dragon costume is the vehicle that both hides and paradoxically reveals his identity. Aldrick waits all year round for the moment of Carnival when he designs a costume

through which he negotiates his sense of belonging to the local and national space. By wearing the dragon costume during the Carnival festivities, Aldrick “wanted everybody to see him. When they saw him, they had to be blind not to see” (Lovelace qtd. in Aching 1). Masking, in its performative element, both conceals and reveals an identity. Furthermore, “the mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries” (Bakhtin 40) which in the characters of *The Dragon Can't Dance* is believed or made possible through their participation in the different stages and modes of expression Carnival provides in Port of Spain. However, Lovelace’s novel shows how parallel to those spaces of possibility runs a commodification of Carnival’s culture. Fisheye, who finds a sense of place in the steelband of Calvary Hill, realizes a change when “he saw that thing they called sponsorship coming into steelband” (68). At first he doesn’t notice much but gradually he sees Desperadoes “the baddest band in the island” appear with “new pans and emblem and waving a new flag: Sampoco *Oil Company* Gay Desperadoes” (emphasis mine 68). Philo, a calypsonian character in the novel, also experiences (like Black Stalin) the economic pressures and popular demand to write party calypsos. Masking therefore takes on a special significance as it continues to allow a satiric encoded critique in the face of commercial pressure.

Aching’s definition of the process of demasking (influenced by Bakhtin’s theorization of Carnival) sheds light on Cozier’s *Wait Dorothy Wait*. Aching defines demasking as “the *action* of literally or figuratively removing an ideological mask from oneself or someone else in encounters and confrontations between masked subjects and viewing subjects” (6-7). Acts of ‘demasking’ then require readers and viewers to interrogate what happens at the borders of the narrative or subject matter conveyed in any

work of art. Therefore, demasking does not only posit the question of ‘what are we seeing?’ and ‘how are we seeing it?’ but, most importantly, it interrogates: ‘what are we not able, or willing, to see? and why?’ The context that situates the violence reported in the newspaper, an increase in gang crime and poverty, is powerfully evoked through its absence in the image. Demasking thus forces readers and viewers alike to engage critically and locate our own positioning in relation to the different types of masking (as disguises of reality). To know the discursive role of the Caribbean picturesque, the role of Carnival and calypso as vehicles of different and differing collective memory, to be aware of the Trinidadian arts scene in the 1990s, and the socio-economic context of the country at the time, will determine one’s interpretation and access to *Wait Dorothy Wait*. An awareness, or lack of awareness of these contexts, their implications and interrelations, will influence the way that viewers interact with the work and engage critically with it.

In *Wait Dorothy Wait* a history/story of loss is also mourned under the (compositional) mask, through an alternative archiving of memory. The symbolic loss of a critical space and the promise of a rupture with a tradition of colonial (mis)representation is lamented and mourned in *Wait Dorothy Wait*. The irony in the juxtaposition of these two opposing ‘images’ (the physical image on the postcard and the mental image of violence evoked by the newspaper clipping) makes the viewer feel the *presence* of erased viewpoints, especially when we consider the detailed description of the gruesome violent murder embedded in the newspaper clip, “He was shot in the neck as they attempted to steal his car, but was able to outrun the car a short distance. He collapsed and men drove the car over him, brutally killing him” (Thompson, *An Eye*

290). This leads viewers to recognize that, as we tear away images of paradise, there are other realities lying beneath the surface that demand critical attention.

In *Wait Dorothy Wait*, the estrangement and defamiliarization that the juxtaposition of image and text provokes, in conjunction with the narrative of oral counter-memory evoked by calypso, our gaze to be further directed towards the colonial frame, as a possible *framework* of explication. The golden frame that Cozier uses in *Wait Dorothy Wait* displays a baroque aesthetic, an artistic style prominent during British colonial expansion and settlement in the Anglophone Caribbean.<sup>36</sup> This gesture significantly points to, and frames, the post-independence nation as a space where we can find traces of a legacy of discursive regulation. However, although the symbolic absence of a confrontation of crime and street violence inside the Trinidadian wider arts scene may enact a mourning of the loss of a critical space to address these issues, there is a deeper tension embodied in the absence of the name of the murder victim in the text. This renders him anonymous, a status which subsequently hinders the actual mourning process of this death, an omission and problematic that contributes to the shocking sense of violence that the artwork draws attention to.

### **Searching for a New Language: *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks***

M. NourbeSe Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, like Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait*, is a highly intertextual work. The juxtaposition of a variety of poems and texts throughout the pages of this poetry collection configure a

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<sup>36</sup> Baroque aesthetics originated in Italy in the seventeenth century and then spread to Europe and was transported to the Americas, where new hybrid forms of Baroque art emerged.

heterogeneous collage of sources.<sup>37</sup> Visually, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* presents a seemingly disordered amalgamation of textual fragments from very different registers: legal documents, poetry, prose, fiction, the Bible, dictionary entries, fictional mock-test samples, and so on. The title of the collection: *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, is in itself (as Cozier's mixed media title *Wait Dorothy Wait*) an example of intertextuality.<sup>38</sup> It originates from a line in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that describes the moment when the nymph Io recovers her speech and shape after Jupiter rapes her and turns her into a heifer.<sup>39</sup> The title in Philip's text encapsulates the theme of transformation that runs through the collection, and which parallels the genealogy and articulation of a critical tradition developed by Caribbean women writers. In other words, the act of 'breaking silence' that the title evokes, symbolically alludes to how Caribbean women authors have contributed to a body of literature that creates alternative vocabularies to express their experience in their own terms. Scholars have widely acknowledged and theorized the ways in which Caribbean male writing figured predominantly in publishing and critical studies, whilst the work of women writers remained largely understudied and unpublished, especially until the 1980s and early

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<sup>37</sup> This poetry collection won the international book prize Casa de las Américas in 1988 in its manuscript form, before it was published in 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written in AD 8, records a great number of Greco-Roman myths that are connected to a large extent through the subjects of mutation and change. Ovid's short prologue emphasizes the centrality of transformation in this epic poem, obviously anticipated in its title too: "Changes of shape, new forms" are the theme of this "one continuous poem" (5). In his attempt to narrate history through myth, from the moment of "Creation" (5-9) to "The Apotheosis of Julius Caesar" (630-636), Ovid draws attention toward the repetition of patterns in the cyclical structure that characterizes human history and myth.

<sup>39</sup> One day Jupiter approaches Io, daughter of the river god Inachus, and attempts to rape her, she runs to the forest but Jupiter runs after her and finally rapes her. He then decides to transform her into a heifer and "puts Argus, the son of Arestor, in charge of Io" (36). Io is then subjected to the constant stare of Argus who keeps her captive and "When she opened her / mouth to complain, / her own voice startled her; all that emerged was a hideous / lowing." (37).

1990s.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the focus on male writers such as C.L.R. James, Sam Selvon, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite was in stark contrast with the scarce critical attention that women's writing had received. M. NourbeSe Philip is part of a generation of women writers who approach history and female sexuality from a different perspective, reclaiming women's political agency and active participation in movements of resistance, a perspective that is often absent in the anti-colonial writing of Caribbean male writers.<sup>41</sup> From poetry (*She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* 1989; *Zong!* 2008) and fiction (*Harriet's Daughter* 1988; *Looking for Livingstone* 1991)<sup>42</sup> to essay collections (*A Genealogy of Resistance* 1997), and playwriting (*Coups and Calypsos* 1999), Philip's work writes against historical erasure and the silenced histories of oppressed groups, particularly women.

The nine poems included in "And Over Every Land and Sea,"<sup>43</sup> the opening section to *She Tries*,<sup>44</sup> display small excerpts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* above each

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<sup>40</sup> Caribbean critics have examined the context of Caribbean women's writing in relation to writing by male authors, looking at the implications of an initial marginalization of women's literature in the publishing and editing market and the ways in which, especially from the 1970s Caribbean women writers started to demand more visibility and critical attention. See Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory's *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (1990); Carole Boyce Davis' *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994); Denise deCaires Narain's *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style* (2004); Patricia J. Saunders's *Alien Nation and Repatriation: Translating Identity in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2007).

<sup>41</sup> For example, in *Alien Nation and Repatriation* (2007), Saunders argues that women writers like M. NourbeSe Philip, Erna Brodber, Elizabeth Nunez and Paule Marshall reflect a different relationship to notions like nation building and the experience of migration. Saunders identifies in their work, a gendered experience of migration and exile that does not offer the "pleasures of exile" available to their male counterparts. In this sense, "women writers have consistently sought to critique the need for a language and a more complex notion of form capable of expressing the lived realities of migrant subjects who are women." (Saunders, *Alien Nation* 18).

<sup>42</sup> *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* is commonly listed as fiction. However, on Philip's official website it is referred to as "a narrative in poetry and prose" (<http://www.nourbese.com/Poetry-Home.htm#top>). This example attests to the ways in which Philip's literature, due to its formal hybridity, cannot be easily categorized in conventional literary genres and labels.

<sup>43</sup> The title of this first section in the collection is borrowed from a fragment of *Metamorphoses* that precedes the first poem: "Meanwhile Proserpine's mother Ceres, with panic in her heart vainly sought her daughter over all lands and over all the sea" (2).

poem. These excerpts introduce nymphs and goddesses like Io, Philomela, Ceres and Proserpine that reveal something about their stories in Greek and Roman mythology. The nymph Io and Philomela, princess of Athens, share a similar fate in Greco-Roman mythology; they are both raped, transformed into a heifer and a bird respectively, and both are stripped of the faculty of speech. Philomena's tongue is cut off whilst Io, as previously mentioned, is unable to articulate her voice. Proserpine, the spring goddess, is also raped in *Metamorphoses*. These myths "echo the predicament of the many female slaves raped by their white masters and ... they resonate with the experiences of African slaves in the New World who deprived of their mother tongues had to find a new language to define themselves" (Fugamalli 74). In *She Tries*, Philip creates thus a parallelism between Ovid's text and her own, creating a feminist poetics where the female personae in the poems appear as authors of a new language and alternative modes of kinship. Similarly, if in *Wait Dorothy Wait* the newspaper cutting simulates the role of a caption, Philip's excerpts from *Metamorphoses* function as epigraphs to the poems. These small textual fragments, juxtaposed to the poems, encourage readers to interrogate their influence in how we may read the poetry in relation to the various subtexts and narratives that they bring to the forefront.<sup>45</sup>

Paul Naylor argues that by placing quotations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "above the poems" Philip "is keeping the Western and Caribbean poles of the continuum of expression separate and distinct" (180). However, I argue that, instead of signifying a clear distinction between a Western and a Caribbean paradigm of experience and artistic

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<sup>44</sup> From this point onwards, I will provide this shortened version of the collection's title for the purposes of writing style and sentence length.

<sup>45</sup> Some of these are real texts excerpted from a wide variety of sources; others are fictional texts that emulate the linguistic structures of the former.



expression, this narrative strategy emphasizes further the inter-relation and connection between Philip and Ovid's long poem. As Cozier does with the compositional structure of his mixed media, Philip guides readers in this way toward a relational interpretive act. Myth is thus re-appropriated in order to frame Caribbean history of sexual violence both in its own historical specificity, rooted in slavery and colonialism, but also continued through postcolonial time. Furthermore, the threat and experience of sexual violence is further inscribed within the larger frame of Western history, myth and patriarchy.

Maria Cristina Fugamalli contends that Philip's interest in myth lies in its ability to, "transform a history of dispossession into new possibilities and new departures" (74). The (poetic) language of myth evokes the foundation of tradition, as well as the idea of progress (Fugamalli 74). The notion of progress is nevertheless questioned through myth in Philip's deconstructive task; the emphasis on historical continuities of violence and suppressed memories that counter this notion become a riff throughout the collection. Myth is being used in postcolonial literature as a rhetorical means to explore new and alternative ways of narrating history that complicate modern ideas of progress. Such models de-mask the ways in which Western myth and historiography intersect by revealing how myths, as history, often convey and privilege episodes of creation over their own episodes of erasure. *She Tries* complicates a Eurocentric construction of Caribbean history as a history of Western enterprise and creation, by showing the process of silencing and erasure (linguistic, cultural and historiographical) of Amerindians and African and Asian migrants in the region. The history of the Caribbean, inseparable from the history of European empire(s), reveals the extent to which history relies on myth

formation and how myths embody deep-rooted ways of understanding collective experience.

The first two poems in “And Over Every Land and Sea” describe the search of a daughter for her mother, which counters the intertextual epigraphic reference to *Metamorphoses* where instead Ceres, the Earth Mother, desperately looks for her daughter Proserpine who has been abducted and raped by Pluto, god of the underworld. The mother in Philip’s poems is hyperbolically described as having “skin green like lime, hair indigo-blue / eyes hot like sunshine-time; / grief gone mad with crazy” (2). She acquires mythic-like proportions in her bodily representation, and possesses like her daughter the ability to move easily from place to place. The poem “Adoption Bureau” suggests that this is the search of a daughter for her mother from whom she was once separated. In this poem the daughter searches too for signs of her mother in her own body: “on mine / her skin of lime casts a *glow* / of green, around my head indigo / of *hallo* – tell me, do / I smell like her?” (emphasis mine 3). The use of the words “glow” and “hallo” in these lines highlight the inherently physical and spiritual memory prints and traces of the mother on her daughter’s body. In *She Tries*, female bodies become a site of memory that connect to the experiences of female slaves from the threat and experience of rape to the burden of reproduction.

The parallel searches in Ovid and Philip reveal a closer interconnection and turn of events when readers learn in the third poem entitled “Clues” that the mother is also searching for her daughter as in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Mother(s) and daughter(s) look for each other across geographical and emotional spaces. In this poem the mother first looks for her daughter “where north marry cold” up in “Sateland, England, Canada.” A

voice guides the mother with clues “she still looking for you— / try the Black Bottom— Bathurst above Bloor, Oakwood and Eglinton—even the suburbs them” (4). These places autobiographically refer to Philip’s own experience of migration as Philip lived in Oakwood and Eglinton in Toronto, Canada where she migrated in 1968. The next poem, entitled “The Search,” returns to the daughter looking for her mother, an allusion to Philip’s own mother as she lives in the “cocoa hills of Woodlands, Moriah” (5) in Tobago where Philip was born and grew up. These autobiographical references point to the ways in which personal memories are deeply entangled in an understanding of history as individual experiences central to the formation of larger frameworks of cultural memory. The pressures of a limiting experiencing of mobility are however what link both temporal frames. In “Dis Place—the Space Between” Philip argues how in patriarchal societies the “possibility of the forceful invasion of the space between the legs—rape” is a constant threat that highly conditions and “inflects how the female reads the external language of place, or public space—the outer space” (*A Genealogy* 75). Philip draws a parallelism between this threat and the differences between male and female writing in the Caribbean as she argues the former is not equally affected by constraints of physical mobility and the “dichotomous” experiencing of place as either “safe/unsafe, prohibited/unprohibited” (*A Genealogy* 75).

The poem “The Search” introduces African and Afro-diasporic musical structures of call and response as the vehicle that connects both mother and daughter despite their distance: “is “come child, come,” and “welcome” I looking – / the how in lost between She / and I, call and response in tongue and / word that buck up in strange” (9). The daughter is searching for answers that may explain their separation with a similar

intensity as that with which she is searching for her mother. The rhythmic pattern of the musical call-and-response is also what ultimately defines the archiving logic in *She Tries* as the fragments throughout the pages reveal connections that shed light into each one of them when read in isolation. Call-and-response anticipates the possibility of a re-encounter between daughter and mother in the poems of *And Over Every Land and Sea*, another poem in the collection “Discourse on the Logic of Language” where a child asks her mother to touch her with the tongue of her language to which the mother replies by blowing words into her mouth (30-33).

In “Sightings” readers can anticipate an increasing proximity between daughter and mother in this search, however their future re-encounter continues to be uncertain. The fragment from *Metamorphoses* at the top of the page describes the moment when Ceres identifies Proserpine’s girdle and realizes that her daughter is likely to have been raped by Pluto: “*she had only then learned of her loss ...*” (9). In contrast, “Sightings” demonstrates the haunting presence of the mother’s memory, both the memory of her image and smell produce a “trompe d’oeil” for the female poetic persona, and her mother becomes a three dimensional optical illusion.<sup>46</sup> Her memory is always blurry and multi-sensorial. Memory takes over the senses and smell, sight and hearing all become entangled in an episode of synesthetic experience: “was it a trompe d’oeil— / the voice of her sound, or didn’t I once *see* her song, *hear* her image call / me by name / another sound, a song long past time, / as I cracked from her shell— / the surf of surge / the song of birth” (emphasis mine 9). This poem ‘imagines’ their encounter in a dream-like fashion (Fugamalli 75).

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<sup>46</sup> “Trompe d’oeil” or ‘trompe l’oeil’ is a French term to describe the three dimensional effect caused by a (realist) visual artistic depiction. It is an art technique that can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome.

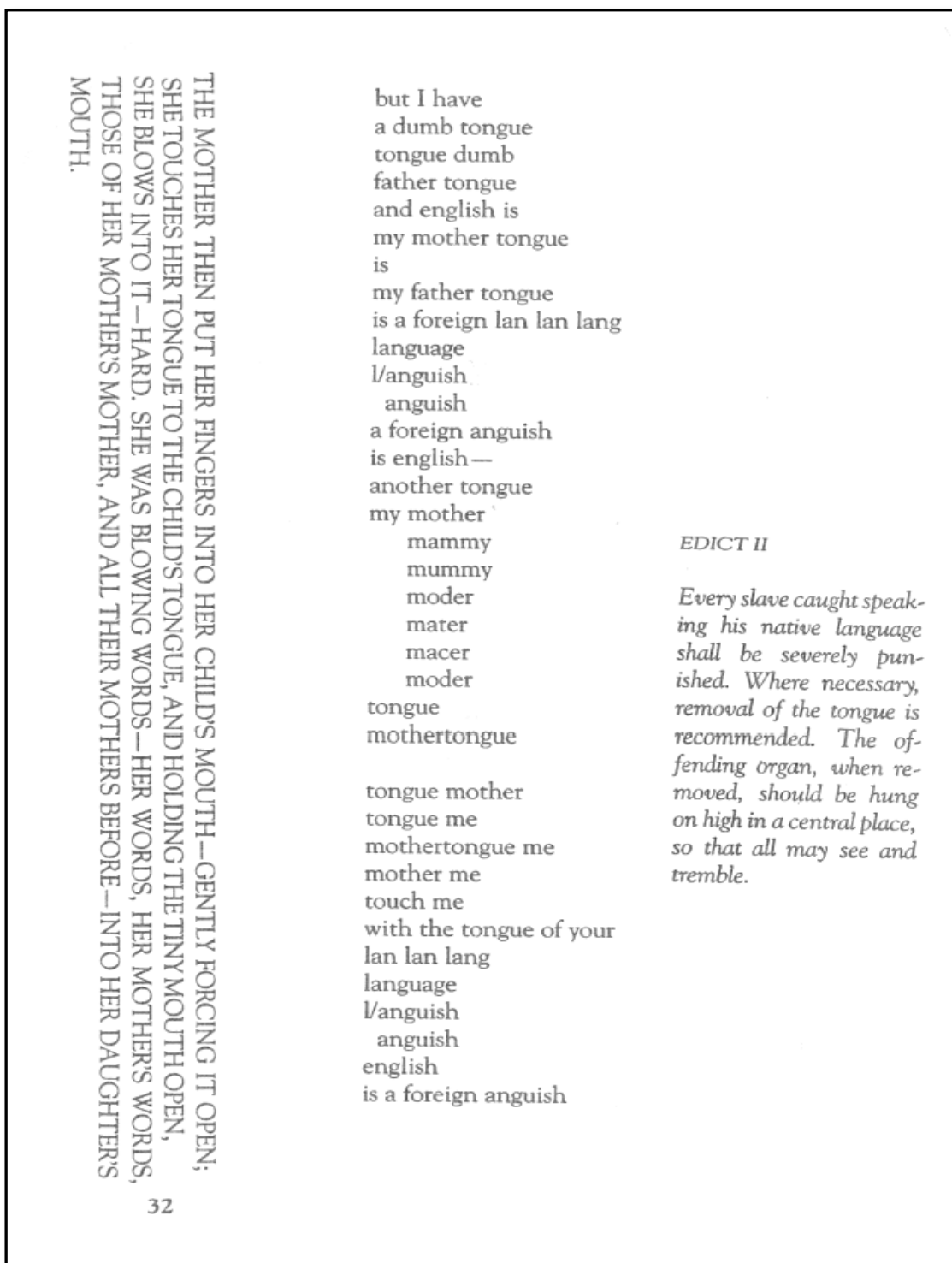


Figure 3. M. NourbeSe Philip. "Discourse on the Logic of Language." *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, 1989. (32). Page reproduction courtesy of the writer.

Visually and methodologically, "Discourse on the Logic of Language" is the poem in the collection that most resembles Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* (see figure 3).

The various formal elements in this poem are closely interconnected and map out a critique of the English language as a source of anxiety, as the father tongue that violates the body through colonial discourse. In two of the four pages of this poem, three different texts *inhabit* the space of the page.<sup>47</sup> They are placed in neatly separated columns and, in this way, emulate visually the columns of the ledger book where the transactions of slaves were documented. This reveals a very conscious playing with form that characterizes all of Philip's poetry, and which is in close conversation with the epistemic violence of the colonial archive and the thousands of documents that erase the humanity and memory of the African population in the Americas.

The regimented feeling evoked in the formal layout of "Discourse on the Logic of Language" makes readers/viewers aware of the constriction of form and language to express the sense of dispossession that the African slave experiences in the New World. The African and Asian Caribbean population created new languages like Patois, or Creole English and through them they configured aesthetic modes that can more aptly convey the complexities of (post)colonial experience. By reproducing formally, and yet confronting contrapuntally, the violence of the archive, Philip's poetry draws attention to how vocabularies of memory in the Caribbean are marked by the difficulty of accessing the past through the perspective of the African or Asian subject. However, the musical call-and-response pattern in Philip's poetic compositions show a circuitous connection to the past that channels memory in "tongues," symbolically allowing disembodied empowered (and spectral) voices to return to, and disrupt, the logic of the archive. As I discuss in chapter two this figure of prosopopeia (a rhetorical device through which a

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<sup>47</sup> This collage of texts suggests to readers that meanings are constructed dialogically by means of (inter) relation: therefore, their content may be opposing, complementing, revising, complicating and/or contextualizing each other.

disembodied voice is expressed) is also used in Philip's elegiac long poem *Zong!* (2008) where spectral voices riff disjointed words throughout the pages. In this poem Philip continues the experimentation with this column-like compositional arrangement engaging more explicitly with the epistemic violence of the archive. However, in *Zong!*, there is a gradual explosion of language whereby columns of words and word clusters progressively expand across the pages finally escaping the physical confines of the colonial archive.

The first and third pages of "Discourse on the Logic of Language" show a textual division in three fragments that posit the question: 'where to start reading?' Paradoxically, inverting the sequence of reading from right to left clarifies the semantic relationship between texts. Readers will encounter two edicts placed in italics at the right margin. They mark the context of physical, linguistic and cultural violence enacted through law in the plantation. On the first page, Edict I dictates the prohibition of any communication between slaves in their 'mother tongues' and the enforcement of multi-linguistic grouping of slaves arguing that "*(if they cannot speak to each other, they cannot form rebellion and revolution*" (30). Edict II, on the third page, describes the gruesome punishment to be carried out if slaves were caught communicating in their native languages. The punishment is also designed to inspire terror. A terror that is significantly based on a graphic image of mutilation, which the very layout of the poem reinforces: "*Where necessary, the removal of the tongue is recommended. The offending organ, when removed should be hung on high in a central place, so that all may see and tremble*" (32).

When read in connection with the edicts placed in the right margin, the capitalized text in the left margin acquires special relevance; the *tongue* is re-signified as a symbol of resistance, the possibility to confront and affront the archive. Throughout the first and third page, a capitalized text placed vertically on the left margin forces us to read differently, not only conceptually but also physically, as readers must turn the book clockwise to read it properly. This capitalized text makes possible a moment of proximity between a mother and child that counters the anxious search in “And Over Every Land and Sea.” This scene of physical communion channels the communication of language, and knowledge through a newfound ‘tongue.’ The vertical text describes in the first page how a mother bird licks her newborn daughter ‘tonguing’ it “CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY” (30). In the third page this text continues to describe an instance that resembles the physical relationship of care amongst birds, which follow the habit of delivering food directly into the mouths of newborn birds (see Figure 3):

THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD’S MOUTH – GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD’S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS INTO IT – HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS – HER WORDS, HER MOTHER’S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER’S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE – INTO HER DAUGHTER’S MOUTH (32).

This fragment reflects the inheritance of words that will shape an emerging (aesthetic) language. It signals the restoration of a previously silenced ‘genealogy of resistance.’ The reference to a child who gains inherited words significantly returns to the subtext of *Metamorphoses* as it parallels the myth of Philomela whose tongue is cut by



Tereus, her sister's husband, after he rapes her. Philomela, unable to speak, decides to weave a tapestry in which she tells her story. She then sends it to Procne, her sister, who after finding out what happened, decides to feed her husband their own son Itys.

Unknowingly, Tereus eats Itys and when he finds out tries to kill both sisters with an axe but is stopped by the gods who transform Procne into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale. In the end, both birds fly away and escape their death. This myth's subtext of kinship frames the moment of mother-daughter communion as an instance that validates the transmission of knowledge through memory across generations. The striking image of an outpouring of ancestral words, from 'mothers' in different timeframes, as conducted via the tongue creates a striking visual image that evokes transference and movement.

This movement connects the past and the present like a thread of memory; it disrupts a sense of mythical time that permeates the poems in "And Over Every Land and Sea" as it unites further the history of sexual abuse and discrimination throughout the period of colonial conquest and slavery, and in the postcolonial moment.

Additionally the episode of the bird mother feeding words to her daughter sets implicitly an intertextual connection with Kamau Brathwaite's "Nam(e)tracks" in *X/Self* (1987) that revises the anti-colonial trope of Prospero in the Caribbean literary canon. In Brathwaite's poem, Prospero insists on Caliban not disrupting the world/word of consciousness ("i") in which colonial identity is privileged. Sycorax, as mother figure to Caliban, intervenes and breaks the word thus bringing in a rupture with colonial language through the birth of what Brathwaite has theorized as "nation language." Caliban in his own words tells: "but / me muh / me muh / mud / me mudda / brek / de word [...] an she te and she tee and she / teach me / dat de world rising in the yeast / wid red wid cloud wid

morning / mist / wid de eye / ron of birds” (89). However, this transition from colonial ‘i’ to critical ‘eye’ always remains the privilege of the son/sun and is thus problematically gendered as male.

As Gordon Rohlehr observes, in the poem “Sycorax directs Caliban’s attention to the rising sun, a symbol of his own sonship/sunship” that “predicts a rebirth and an uprising: a red rising of sons” (284).<sup>48</sup> Although Brathwaite’s rendering of Sycorax presents her as a powerful figure, the political power of the word is only conferred to, and channeled through, a male subjectivity. In this sense, Philip’s ‘bird mother’ re-figures Sycorax’s portrayal as inspirational source by emphasizing her role as author through a powerful graphic image of transmission. The transmission of word and speech has greater implications since, as Philip points out in the Afterword of *She Tries*: “Speech, voice, language and word—all are ways of being in the world” (82).

This text, in the center of the page, illustrates the birth of a new tongue. As Denise deCaires Narain puts it, this poem reflects a “more obviously lyrical poetic voice in which the yearning for a “try” mother tongue is dramatized” (204). The stanzas are organized in a syllogistic form that finally frames English as an imposed language that replaces the multiple African ‘mother tongues.’ However, a new language is in the process of formation, and whilst it originates from English, it remains different. Philip names this new language “a demotic variant of English” (“The Absence” 84). Standard English is then “subverted, turned upside down, inside out, and even sometimes erased” by this language (Philip, “The Absence” 83).

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<sup>48</sup> Rohlehr, Gordon. “Black Sycorax, My Mother.” *The Geography of a Soul: Emerging Perspectives on Kamau Brathwaite*. Ed. Timothy R. Reiss. Trenton (NJ): Africa World Press, 2001. 277-295. Print.

English  
 is my mother tongue.  
 a mother tongue is not  
 not a foreign lan lan lang  
 language  
 l/anguish  
     anguish  
 a foreign anguish.

English is  
 my father tongue.  
 A father tongue is  
 a foreign language,  
 therefore English is  
 a foreign language  
 not a mother tongue.

What is my mother  
 Tongue  
 my mammy tongue  
 my mummy  
 my modder tongue  
 my ma tongue? (30).

As in Brathwaite's "Nam(e)tracks," the rupture of words simulate the birth of this new language, which conceptually signals both Caribbean creole languages and Philip's own experimentation with artistic forms of expression in order to incorporate the (counter)memories of Caribbean women's experience into the page, placing it visually at the center. The final two stanzas in the first page initially seemingly provide a kind of synthesis to the definition of English as a "father" foreign tongue and the absence of a "mother tongue" (30). Seeing as "I have no mother / tongue" and "no tongue to mother" "I must therefore be tongue / dumb." (30). However, the final two lines give way to the cursing of a "damn dumb / tongue" that opens a space for the invocation of the "mothertongue" which takes place in the third page: "mothertongue me / tongue me / touch me / with the tongue of your / lan / lan / lan / language" (30). Although the last line

in the final stanza concludes that “english / is a foreign anguish,” as we know, the unruly capitalized vertical text at the left margin has the final word. The metaphor of the “BLOWING OF WORDS” contains a force that resists the anguish caused by English and brings the promise of new linguistic and artistic possibilities.

According to Denise deCaires Narain, all these textual “juxtapositions foreground the sterile ‘rationality’ and monologism of patriarchal discourse” (206). It is therefore only through the acceptance of plurivocality that meaning can be productively reconstructed in the poems. Philip writes that “[t]he challenge, therefore, facing the African Caribbean writer [...] is to use the language in such a way that the historical realities are not erased or obliterated, so that English is revealed as the tainted tongue it really is. Only in so doing will English be redeemed” (85).

An audio performance of “Discourse on the Logic of Language” available at M. NourbeSe Philip’s website illustrates very accurately the contrapuntal dynamics and reading that suggest Philip’s archival arrangement of textual fragments on the page. In this audio clip, Philip starts reading the text located at the center of the page, which as previously mentioned deconstructs English and refashions its anguish into the articulation of a Creole or demotic English. One minute and fifteen seconds into the performance, a British male voice starts reading Edict I, which dictates the separation of African slaves into different linguistic groups to avoid revolt. At this point both ‘voices’, like in a contrapuntal musical composition, are superposed and can be heard simultaneously. Philip’s voice remains quieter in the background whilst the British voice representing the law remains more audibly present. This continues until Philip’s narration of the center poem takes over. Yet another voice, narrated by Philip, jumps in shortly afterward,

reading the capitalized and vertically placed text on page 30: “WHEN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD THE NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE: SHE BEGAN THEN TO LICK IT ALL OVER [...]” (30) and after that text is read the central poem returns again marking always the central and leading voice that connects the rest of the fragments as it oscillates to the forefront and background of the performance.

After two and a half minutes of the reading the British voice starts to read the text on page 31 which states: “Those parts of the brain chiefly responsible for speech are named after two learned nineteenth century doctors, the eponymous Doctors Wernicke and Broca respectively.” This reading continues to detail Dr. Broca’s racist beliefs though the theories of phrenology (31). A minute later the central poem returns again “but I have / a dumb tongue / tongue dumb / father tongue / and english is my mother tongue ...” (32). The poem continues in this fashion for almost another five minutes until its end. The contrapuntal alternation and superposition of voices in the performance of the poem lifts the voices of the text off the page. It adds another dimension to the experimental arrangement on the page, which now seems flat in comparison unless it is already being read conjecturally. The flatness of the page, already challenged in the written poem by the use of the right and left margins, is thus further unwound through the multi-volume sense of the oral performance.

In “The Absence of Writing or How I Became a Spy” Philip argues “it is impossible for any language that inherently denies the essential humanity of any group or people to be truly capable of giving voice to the i-mages of experiences of that group without tremendous and fundamental changes within that language itself” (82). The anguish and tension represented in the poem, and the paradox of the conclusion of

English as both a mother and father (foreign) tongue are finally resolved, “some sort of balance is achieved despite the anguish of English and despite the fact that English is both a mother tongue and a father tongue” (Philip 89). The poems in *She Tries* “seek to enact a poetics which might transform linguistic structures, particularly those associated with the written text” (deCaires Narain 201). Philip’s understanding of Caribbean demotic language transcends the written or even the spoken language to include other forms of communication such as dance and visual arts. According to Philip,

[t]he power of the artist, poet or writer lies in this ability to create new i-mages that speak to the essential being of the people among whom and for whom the artist creates. If allowed free expression these images succeed in altering the way a society perceives itself, and eventually, its collective consciousness (78).

The notion of the “i-mage” deconstructs the word ‘image’ to privilege the “i” present in Rastafarian philosophy whereby the individual’s perspective is consciously incorporated into collective experience through the creation of “autonomous” i-mage making. The responsibility of the “image-maker” is that of “continually enriching the language by enlarging the source of i-mages – in particular, metaphorical i-mage” (80). Like Cozier, Philip is concerned with creative and visual vocabularies that better express the artist’s subject matter. Through the i-mage, art has the potential to unmask inherited representational modes, thus allowing new modes and vocabularies of experience to emerge. Philip’s use of form strategically calls upon elements outside the text, thus unveiling the context that once produced them.

The textual fragmentation in Philip’s poems, especially in “Discourse on the Logic of Language,” reflects the existing gaps, disconnections and silences that pervade the colonial archive, where the impact and rich history of creole cultural expression

remains largely absent. The fragments in this poem take over the space of the page from left to right margin, which can be read as an attempt to reclaim the space and relationship to place that has been more restricted for Caribbean women writers, as the figure of Caribbean writer and intellectual had more often been represented as male, particularly until the 1970s when the publishing of more women writers started to take place. The corporeality of the archive is therefore re-imagined in non-normative ways as texts are inverted and conventions are challenged. In a journal entry published in the essay “The Habit of: Poetry, Rats and Cats” Philip explains how,

by cramping the space traditionally given the poem itself, by forcing it to share its space with something else—an extended image about women, words, language and silence; with the edicts that established the parameters of silence for the African in the New World, by giving more space to the descriptions of the physiology of speech, the scientific legacy of racism we have inherited and by questioning the tongue as an organ and concept, poetry is put in its place (117).

### **Silence Softly Breaks: The archiving of counter-memory**

The poetics of call-and-response and contrapuntal connections in Cozier’s and Philip’s work requires viewers and readers to break into the semiotic codes of signification and question inherited modes of written and visual vocabularies embedded in modes of representation like tropicalization, or in the linguistic structures established by, and through, colonial discourse. Breaking such codes unveils the extent to which these vocabularies have historically marginalized the experience of many Caribbean citizens and slaves. Via techniques like collage and montage, Cozier and Philip place in juxtaposition textual or visual fragments from colonial, state, and elite forms of memory, with fragments that bring into focus individual and collective experiences that have been previously excluded from the archive and the public sphere. However, this compositional

and aesthetic strategy moves beyond emphasizing binary relationships between privileged and marginalized experience.

The recorded instances of counter-memory in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* do not only create a revisionary counterpoint dynamic in relation to privileged forms of memory, they create too a contrapuntal and polyphonic effect whereby multiple dialogic relations function simultaneously and offer a multidimensional approach to the process of archiving counter-memory. Hence, the archival process that I read in *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* is not just oppositional to colonial/state/elite memory, but entangled with it and complicated by such entanglement. For instance, “Discourse on the Logic of Language” aptly demonstrates how English is re-fashioned through the Caribbean demotic to meta-linguistically reflect its own history of violence in the context of the Americas (a similar concern is expressed about the role of other European languages throughout Philip’s collection). Its imposition initially carried the enforcement of a colonial image-making that negates African culture and signifies it as inferior through discourses like phrenology and colonial law, represented in Wernicke and Broca’s theories and the edicts. However, Philip’s performance of this poem reveals how the centre-page poem interweaves and connects all the fragments around it; the emerging “moder tongue” that the text describes symbolically breaks through the silence and the anguish of imposed languages and their modes of signification. This voice predominates and marks the flow of the composition since it alternately shifts from being in the background to always return as the main voice. The play on words in this central poem ultimately arrives at another instance of call-and-response as the female child’s voice



finally asks “mother me / touch me / with the tongue of your / lan lan lang / language / l/anguish” (32). The fact that the next fragment read by Philip is the capitalized text detailing how a mother blows words into her child’s mouth confirms the echo and response.

If Philip’s poems challenge the authority and expectations marked by the space of the page, Cozier’s mixed media disrupts the reading and viewing conventions marked by the authority of the frame which symbolizes the inclusion and visibility of what is deemed by the arts, culture and tourism industry as valid artistic representations or worthy commodity. Cozier’s ironic use of the miniature colonial style frame in *Wait Dorothy Wait* structures his critique of the rejection of critical visual vocabularies in Trinidad’s art market and public sphere. The satirical and critical nature of calypso is reproduced through the arrangement of referential cues that construct a narrative of protest in this mixed media. The flexible and nuanced vocabulary of calypso, which both encodes and embodies a history of counter-memory in Trinidad, is recycled in *Wait Dorothy Wait*. Cozier’s mixed media masks a mourning of the loss of support to cultural forms like calypso and the commercial pressures that compromise its creative and critical autonomy. Furthermore, the absence of official governmental support or acknowledgement of socially critical art is lamented in *Wait Dorothy Wait*.

*Wait Dorothy Wait* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* extend our understanding of language and propose a more broad approach, as artistic languages (visual and conceptual vocabularies and aesthetic choices) can guide more fluid forms of understanding memory that best represent the syncretism of subaltern knowledge and popular culture in the so-called New World. Their aesthetics replicates the effect of

masking, described by Gerard Aching as a means to claim control over meaning production and to guide, not try to impose, its reception and engagement, whilst facilitating demasking as a decoding of that meaning. In turn this leads to critical assessments of how memory is, or is not, represented and validated in the colonial archive (2002). Masking thus functions in a similar way to Glissant's notion of opacity that resists the imposition of a 'knowing' transparency of the Caribbean that does not consider local/regional knowledge production and social realities.

## Chapter 2 - Polyphonic Archives: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* and Christopher Cozier's *Tropical Night*

Almost two decades after *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) and *Wait Dorothy Wait* (1991), M. NourbeSe Philip published an elegiac long poem titled *Zong!* (2008) just two years after Christopher Cozier had begun his ongoing drawing series *Tropical Night* (2006-present). Interestingly, both works share eclectically what I describe here as a polyphonic aesthetic, an aesthetic that mirrors the pattern of the fugue and African polyphonic structures. Antonio Benítez-Rojo defines the fugue as “a musical form in which the musical voices not only confront each other but also superimpose themselves upon one another, in a parallel fashion, interacting with each other in a perpetual flight” (194).

In “Fugues, Fragments and Fissures: A Work in Progress” M. NourbeSe Philip argues how the term functions as an accurate concept to describe Caribbean societies. According to Philip, its two meanings, fugue as a polyphonic musical composition and as a dissociative psychological state, reflect the syncretic nature of cultures in the Caribbean and the remnants of collective trauma prevalent in its societies respectively. As Philip puts it, the fugue

is a musical composition with polyphonic elements in which ‘themes are developed contrapuntally’. Usually there is a melody or melodic phrase that is repeated in different keys and at different intervals. In this sense of the word, too, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean can also be described as fugal and polyphonic societies, culturally, racially and ethnically. Societies in which the harsh melodies of loss and exile and be/longing for a re/turn are repeated over and over again in different keys and at different intervals. Societies in which these melodies come from different societies and cultures, some of which, like the African and the Asian carry with them polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical traditions. Fugal societies in two senses of the word, both dissociative and polyphonic. (Robert Rudnicki qtd. in Philip 92).

Referring to Robert Rudnicki's use of the notion of the fugue in *Percyscapes: The Fugue State in Twentieth Century Southern Fiction*, Philip explains how the psychology term 'fugue' refers to a dissociative disorder that leads those who have suffered trauma to detach from, and forget, their life prior to the traumatic experience, as a result they adopt a new and different identity as coping mechanism. ("Fugues, Fragments and Fissures" 83). I contend that the organizing structure in Philip's *Zong!* and Cozier's *Tropical Night* shows certain similarities visually and figuratively with the dynamics of the fugue, mostly as a musical concept. Additionally, the fugal aesthetic in *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* reveal too the impact of trauma characterized in the figure as a dissociative state and the necessity of reinvention and change that it carries.

Breaking and trespassing the physical boundaries and limits of the frame and the page, the visual fragmentation and alternating repetition of words in the poems of *Zong!* and the repetition and variation of visual signs in *Tropical Night* parallel the dynamics of the fugue and portray the struggle to articulate a personal language capable of communicating complex, often traumatic, experiences. However, the anxieties and experimentation with narrativity present in *Zong!* and *Tropical Night*, and the attempt to fluidly play with random sequencing of words and images, clashes with the meticulous compositional order that defines the classical fugue. It is important to note that polyphonic patterns are not only representative of the fugue; they appear too in African and African Diasporic musical traditions. In this sense, I argue that if the aesthetic form of Philip's long poem and Cozier's drawing series resembles the sequencing and alternating pattern characteristic of the fugue, the development of both works ultimately reveals a tendency towards more flexible polyphonic structures like those found in the

music of the African diaspora where there is a more ample space for improvisation within polyphonic musical structures.

A wide range of word and word clusters appear in isolation or in seemingly random combinations across the pages of *Zong!*, creating simultaneously multiple blank spaces. The same words keep re-appearing frantically throughout the poem, which commemorates the lives of the 142 Africans who were thrown overboard the slave ship *Zong* in 1781 in order to claim insurance monies. For example, words like “perils,” “order,” “sustenance,” “negroes,” “water,” and “loss” among countless others, populate the pages throughout the book. These words are extracted from *Gregson v. Gilbert*, a court case document regarding the dispute that took place between the ship’s owners and insurers after the massacre. This document never considers the drowning of the Africans aboard the ship as murder; *Gregson v. Gilbert* is instead engaged in the legal battle between parties over a claim of payment (*Gregson v. Gilbert* as reproduced in Phillip, *Zong!* 210-211). However, Philip not only re-appropriates and dismembers the words that appear in *Gregson v. Gilbert*, the poet also creates new words out of combinations of letters and syllables in the original words of this document. Words emerging from this creative process of re-combination also appear and re-appear multiple times through the sections.

Patterns of image repetition and variation produce a similar aesthetic effect in *Tropical Night*. In Cozier’s ongoing project, unframed drawings hang from the gallery/museum wall, placed next to each other forming a rectangular shape. Images of podiums, machine-guns, palm trees, cement walls and empty lots, among others, appear in multiple drawings; sometimes they appear in different positions and contexts. These

repeating images are alternated in the overall composition. Also, very significantly, for each installation Cozier arranges the order of the drawings differently, which makes the artwork itself a conceptual project always in movement and subject to change depending on the historical, intellectual and affective aspects that may be influencing the work at a given time. The visual signs and sketches conveyed in the drawings privilege Cozier's own personal memories and impressions of contemporary life in Port of Spain. However, these memories and impressions are always tied to the past in the sense that they re-examine its influence and impact on the present, especially the unfulfilled promises (for example of political and cultural autonomy) of Trinidad's Independence in the individual and collective psyche.

**M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* "To not tell the story that must be told."**

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1781 the slave ship *Zong* sets sail from the West Coast of Africa to Jamaica with a cargo of 470 slaves.<sup>49</sup> However, the captain of the ship, Luke Collingwood, not being an expert mariner but someone who served as a surgeon on previous slave ships, miscalculates the route and as a result the journey lasts four months instead of six to nine weeks, the usual length of this transatlantic crossing (Philip, *Zong!* 189). The unexpected delay affects provisions of water and, as a result, slaves die of illness and dehydration. Captain Collingwood, who was familiar with the legal workings of the trade, decides that there might be a chance to recuperate the financial loss of cargo by throwing slaves overboard. Collingwood argues that only when the loss of cargo is the result of "natural death" are the owners of the slave ship legally bound to meet the costs

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<sup>49</sup> The ship set sail from the island of São Tomé, located off the coast of Gabon. (*Zong!* 208).

(emphasis mine).<sup>50</sup> He maintains that, on the other hand, if the death of slaves is provoked, the insurers, Messrs Gilbert, could be made financially liable for the loss of cargo. In light of these arguments, he makes the final decision of throwing 142 slaves overboard with the pretext of saving water for the sustenance of the rest of the crew and the remaining slaves.<sup>51</sup> After Collingwood's return to Liverpool, William, James and John Gregson, co-owners of the ship adhering to maritime insurance law, make a claim against the insurers, who in turn refuse payment.<sup>52</sup> This leads to a legal case won by the ship's owners, where the jury verdict finds in favor of financial compensation from Messrs Gilbert, the underwriters. But Messrs Gilbert appeal to the Court of King's Bench, and three justices (Willes, Buller and Lord Mansfield) reach an agreement for a new trial (*Zong!* 189). However, there is no found evidence that indicates that a new trial was ever arranged.

*Gregson v. Gilbert* is the legal report of the judges' decision to reopen the case for a new trial.<sup>53</sup> Its text is reproduced in its entirety at the end of *Zong!* This allows readers to see the role of this document in the writing process of *Zong!* especially as the language used in the poems is extracted from the document. The poetry in *Zong!* mourns the

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<sup>50</sup> I use quotation marks here to question, and draw attention toward, the problematic nature of colonial discourses of slavery whereby the death of an enslaved individual can be termed as natural death unless it is the direct result of murder, which therefore always negates considering a death resulting from the conditions of slave life as murder. This discursive and epistemic violence was greatly possible due to its legitimization by the law.

<sup>51</sup> The account of the number of slaves murdered varies from sources. The legal case *Gregson v. Gilbert* mentions 150 slaves, whilst James Walvin in *Black Ivory* refers to 131 (*Zong!* 208). As Philip points out, "[t]he exact number of African slaves remains a slippery signifier of what was undoubtedly a massacre" (*Zong!* 208).

<sup>52</sup> The Gregsons were an influential family company in Liverpool at the time, they were not only co-owners of the *Zong*, but also formed an insurance firm, Gregson, Case, & Co and were deeply implicated in the flows of capital accumulation and speculation defining the slave trade and the "Atlantic world system" (Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic* 38). As Ian Baucom highlights, they were "not only citizens of this Atlantic metropolis, but its Genoese masters" (38).

<sup>53</sup> The three judges agree in their decision to re-open the case based on the lack of evidence to justify the lengthy delay of the trip. Lord Mansfield decision states that "...the evidence does not support the statement of the loss made in the declaration. There is no evidence of the ship being foul and leaky, and that certainly was not the cause of the delay" (*Zong!* 211).

capture, torture and death of the slaves aboard the ship by re-directing the violence exerted through this specific historical document, a violence which erases the memory and humanity of the 142 Africans who were murdered in that journey, as well as the rest of slaves transported in the belly of the ship. The textual dismemberment in *Zong!* signifies a voiced challenge to the numerous silences found in the British (and by extension European) colonial archive.

The *Zong* case has elicited numerous responses from literature and the visual arts. Perhaps most widely known is J.M.W. Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and the Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (1840) which has captured the imagination of audiences from the nineteenth century to the present day. The painting shows the drowning of Africans by slavers and thus strongly evokes the massacre of the *Zong*. The pathos and dramatic romantic elements of the painting, the way in which "the slaves are to be dissolved in the waters of the ocean, forever inextricably mixed with the element of their destruction" make it a "paradoxical, abstract, difficult" painting (Wood 45). Marcus Wood argues that Turner's painting is a "monument without names, which at least inaugurates the act of mourning" (46). Guyanese-British poet David Dabydeen has also engaged with *Zong* through a response to Turner's painting in his collection of poems titled *Turner* (1995), in which he interrogates the voyeuristic gaze in the representation of death that the painting's aesthetic and formal arrangement may encourage.

Like Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, albeit through fiction, imagines the voices and experiences of the slaves aboard the ship. His 1997 novel *Feeding the Ghosts* imagines a narrative based on the troubling silences of the *Zong*'s archive. The novel tells the story of Mintah, a female slave who manages to return from the ocean and in the end provides



a crucial testimony of the event in the subsequent court case (that was, however, to no avail). D'Aguiar's approach of imagining another fate and possibilities for the anonymous slave contrasts starkly with Philip's *Zong!*, which reflects a conscious choice of moving towards an abstract rendering of the event.

The poetry in *Zong!* confronts both the act of violence embedded in the murder of the slaves and that perpetuated through *Gregson v. Gilbert* by fragmenting and re-appropriating the authority of this archival document. All the graphemes, phonemes, words and word clusters in the poems of *Zong!* originate, in some form or other, from *Gregson v. Gilbert*. At times, words in the poems are exact replicas of words that appear in the document, whilst at other times these words are altered, combined, and/or made into new words, an anagrammatic method that relies on strategies of reordering, splicing or splitting of words to create a new word (or sets of words). The fragmented aesthetics of *Zong!* not only alludes to, and restages, the trauma experienced by the African slaves aboard the *Zong* ship, this aesthetics also represents the general uprootedness experienced by African slaves in the Americas, a subject that Philip explores in *She Tries her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. In Philip's own words, in *Zong!*,

[w]ithin the boundaries established by the poems and their meaning there are silences; within each silence is the poem, which is revealed only when the text is fragmented and mutilated, mirroring the fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetrated on Africans, their customs and ways of life ("Notanda," *Zong!* 195).

The existing gaps between words in the pages of *Zong!*, as well as its overall aesthetics of fragmentation, leave readers wondering about the nature of such gaps.

The relationship between form and content is fundamental to the archive's nature, particularly in the case of the colonial archive. By "form," I refer to a variety of things including language, linguistic, taxonomic and formal conventions, that condition how to

read the archive. A controlled means of archiving information defines the Western archive, revealing a historical preoccupation with form and tradition. For example, one of the most common European colonial documents, the ship's logbook, shows a meticulous attention to detail, recording everything that pertains to the journey. This is in stark contrast with the economy of language in references to the slaves. Africans remain anonymous and itemized as simply cargo and property. Ian Baucom calls attention to this language of commoditization in *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), where he reproduces some entries from the logbook of the *Ranger*, a slave ship from Liverpool heading to Jamaica in 1790 that anchored off the slave port at Anamabo in order to collect slaves. Baucom encourages the reader to pay close attention to the language, "I ask you do not skim, read" in order to fully realize the "horror banalized, horror catalogued" (11) of the following passage,

January 23, 1790: The *Ranger* weighs anchor in the Anamabo roads, and engages in transporting various goods from Fort William to the ship.  
 January 24: The captain sends his sailmaker to repair the sails of the *Gregson*, over which he also has command.  
 January 25: The *Ranger*'s carpenter is engaged in building the "barricadoes" which will serve to pen the slaves in the vessel's hold; more goods loaded from the shore.  
 January 28: The *Ranger* purchases its first slaves: one man and one woman.  
 January 29: The captain sends the *Gregson* upcoast for fresh water.  
 January 31: Christian Freeze, a crewman, is discovered embezzling rum from the *Ranger*'s cargo hold; he insults Mr. Woods (the second mate) and has his rum allowance suspended for eight days.  
 February 4: One slave purchased: a man.  
 February 5: The captain orders the crew to check and clean their guns; purchases one woman.  
 February 7: One woman.  
 February 9: One woman.  
 February 13: Two men. (11-12)

The purchase of Africans appears as a small reference in the account of the preparation for the Middle Passage. On the contrary, the provisioning of the journey and other seemingly minor events, like a heated argument between the second mate and a crewman, are recorded in rather more significant detail. The commodification of the slaves contrasts starkly with instances like the one in the logbook's entry of January 28<sup>th</sup> when the ship is syntactically placed as the subject of the slave's purchase: "The *Ranger* purchases its first slaves: one man, one woman" (11). Colonial records are filled with documents like this in which the humanity and experience of slaves is erased by, and through the use of language. The logbook is one of the many types of colonial documents, alongside plantation production records, court cases, and commission records, to name a few, that exemplify the erasure of the African and Afro-Caribbean subject. It is clear how this erasure complies with the logic of the colonialist mindset, however I argue that it is still very relevant to interrogate the ways in which it exposes the epistemic violence of the archive and sets the foundation for what Spivak describes as a "narrative reality [...] established as the normative one" (25). To a large extent, it is *Zong!*'s fugal compositional arrangement that makes the aforementioned silences speak forming a synesthetic cacophony of images where absences also become palpable and, paradoxically, almost visible through the visual emphasis on mutilated memories as further reminder of absent, un-mourned individuals. The visual fragmentation and arrangement of words, graphemes and phonemes in *Zong!* defy narrativity and thus challenge our own access to the poems.

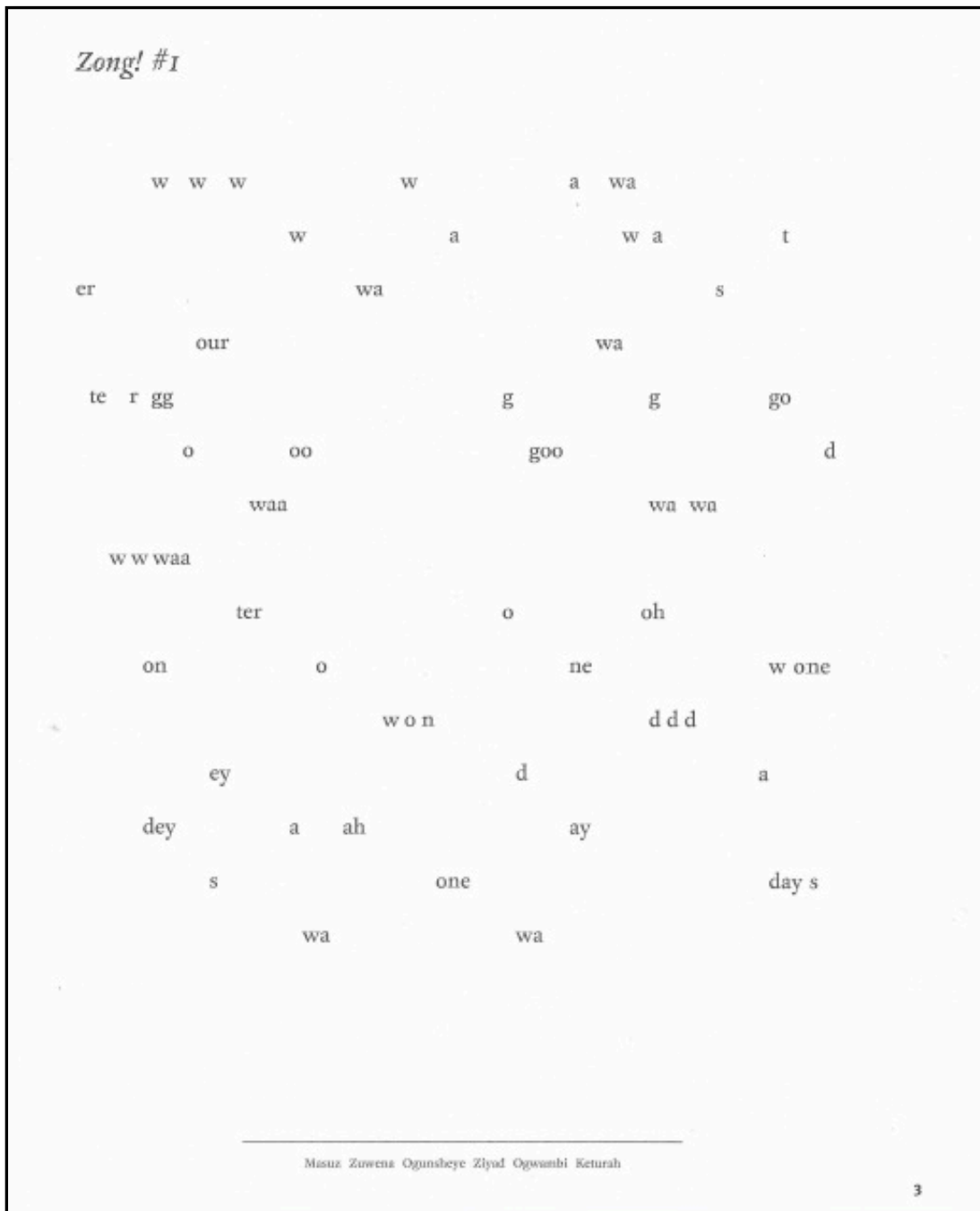


Figure 4. M. NourbeSe Philip. 2008. “Zong! #1” *Zong!* (3). Page reproduction courtesy of the writer.

For example, the first poem “Zong # 1” displays a frantic repetition of the following graphemes and phonemes ‘w’ ‘a’ ‘t’ ‘er,’ spread across the top of the page; through an attempt to visually connect the graphemes the reader can re-construct the word “water” (a

signifier of both death and survival in the history of *Zong!*) but an uneasy feeling of frustration with the text is likely to set in, especially toward the middle of the page where the splitting of words increases and the reconstruction of new words like “good” “won” “one” “dey” and “day” ultimately leaves the reader in suspense about their possible connection.

The onomatopoeic effect in sounding out the poem, and its graphic representation of the historical silencing of the archive, is expressed visually in the wide spaces between letters and words, as in the hole that appears in the middle of the page. This image of gaps and silences anticipates the communicative role of affect and feeling in an engagement with *Zong!* The second part of the poem, at the turn of the page, shows the mathematical infinity symbol forming the word water, thus visually marking the sea as the ultimate site of memory and remembrance, which in Caribbean literature and visual arts has been a frequent trope for revising history and claiming counter-histories. The trope of the sea has perhaps most famously been constructed as a metaphor and site of memory by Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History” (365-367). In Walcott’s poem, what seem to be the voices of British men enquire: “Where are your monuments, your battles, and martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory? [...]” to which a Caribbean voice replies, “Sirs, / in that gray vault. The Sea. The Sea / has lock them up. The Sea is History” (365).<sup>54</sup> The sea and the Middle Passage continue to be represented as a critically productive site of memory in Caribbean literature and visual arts today.

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<sup>54</sup> The sea has metaphorically worked as the space where the colonial construction of history locks up counter-memory. It functions as a reminder of an archival vault but is significantly often re-constructed by Caribbean artists as a productive source of inspiration and a means to articulate an experience of resistance and counter-memory. From Derek Walcott’s musings on the sea as history, to Kamau Brathwaite’s tidalectic poetics in *Ancestors* (where undercurrent roots/routes channel ancestral counter-memory) to the transatlantic journey of Grace Nichol’s *Caribwoman* (a mythic Caribbean character that connects through underwater travel different Amerindian, African and Western traditions of remembrance), Caribbean poetry

One of the main entries into the core of “*Zong!* #1” is through the feeling and sensation of being at a loss, which readers themselves are very likely to experience when approaching *Zong!* The fugal and fragmented aesthetics of Philip’s elegy enacts a process of mourning through which the loss of the enslaved and murdered Africans is grieved. Through the visual fragmentation of the text and the dismemberment of the document *Gregson v. Gilbert*, Philip marks the loss through an elegiac song of sorrow, a lament for the dead. This act of mourning extends to readers, allowing them to join in this process as *Zong!*’s relational aesthetics seeks an active critical engagement from its readership. The seeming disconnection between letters, words, and word clusters both carefully arranged and scattered across the pages of *Zong!* is visually marked by large and small spaces between them, emphasizing their spatial presence. Our awareness of the Zong case, its facts and its history, as well as the larger frame of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, facilitates the potential connections between words or combinations of words. The drowning of the slaves aboard the *Zong*, their simultaneous presence and absence in the resulting court case, the obstructions to their mourning are all visually and audibly perceptible through the compositional structure of the poem and its polyphonic effect. The semantic associations or connections enabled by the efforts of the eye moving from right to left and all over the page often provokes frustration since, at times, they *do not make* sense. Philip explains how “[t]he resulting abbreviated, disjunctive, almost non-sensical style of the poems demands a corresponding effort from the reader to “make sense” of an event that eludes understanding, perhaps permanently” (“Notanda,” *Zong!*

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has generated productive memory-work around the trope of the sea. The water-infinity symbol in the opening pages of *Zong!* highlights the inclusion of the text within this larger tradition of memory-work in Caribbean arts. Equally, as a means of “closing” this first poem, the infinity symbol suggests the ways in which memory-work is necessarily a collective and on-going process.

<<http://catalog.library.miami.edu/search~S111?awalcott%2C+derek/awalcott+derek/1%2C1%2C56%2CB/f+rameset&FF=awalcott+derek&37%2C%2C56>>.

198). Indeed, often there is no sense, or at least not a clear narrative, that comes out of that relational way of reading; words seem to populate the page in an unruly manner, which Philip likens to the “religious practice of speaking in tongues” (“Notanda,” *Zong!* 197).

Other times, the significance of certain words (or combination of words), especially when read against *Gregson v. Gilbert*, gains a specific relevance and are evocative of many different voices including that of all those who travelled in the *Zong* or those involved in the court case. Knowing the story allows one to appreciate the extent to which the reader’s sense of confusion is closely related to the impossibility of ever narrating this event coherently. In “Notanda” Philip explains how the story of the *Zong* can never be narrated and made fully coherent as it has already been defiled by the archive. However, although Philip speaks of an anti-narrative drive that guides the writing of *Zong!* (189-207), I argue that there *is* a narrative in *Zong!* and even when it is un-telling the previous narrative about the massacre represented in *Gregson v. Gilbert*, it communicates something to both readers and listeners of *Zong!* (the poems have also been performed by Philip on various occasions).<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly, Philip’s narrative is radically unconventional; by creating a new form and language to simultaneously transmit the violence of the trade in humans, the archive as tomb, the mourning and the ancestors’ voices in “tongues,” *Zong!* opens a new archive of affect.

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<sup>55</sup> In her reading of the poems, Philip reproduces the silences embodied in the gaps between words on the page. The result is a striking rhythm both tense and soothing (especially when we notice the softly spoken reading of the words) and tense and dissonant as the words and word strands often evoke images of “frenzy,” death and confusion into the silent room/conference/hall space. The dichotomy between this resulting space of intimacy and spirituality, almost reminiscent of the respect paid at a wake seems a provocative element of the performance. For an online clip where Philip reads from *Zong!* see: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=my4eE4denus>>.

The various feelings of confusion, frustration and/or loss that readers may experience as a result of the fragmentation that the text displays can potentially transform into something else and become part of the interpersonal process of cultural mourning that the author and her readership could then share. These feelings can potentially connect readers through affect, since despite the sensation of confusion (emphasized aesthetically) in the elegiac poem, there is a careful structure in the text and a reflective critical engagement that emerges solidly from *Zong!*, one that questions what it means to re-member history by dismembering its fantasies and fictions but also one that searches for aesthetic choices that empathically and ethically explore the fraught nature of memory in remembering the past of slavery that is especially evident from the archival document.

Reading *Zong!* requires that we think and read history against the grain of the archive; since the historical gaps and silences produced by and through colonial documentation make impossible a recollection of the past. And although no account of the past is freed from ideology, in the case of the colonial archive this issue is doubly poignant and problematic as the archive itself is dominated by, and implicated in, countless acts of violence and subjection. Recent scholarship focuses on the limitations that colonial archives pose to historical knowledge as well as the opportunities that they provide for deducing alternative versions of history (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011; Stoler 2009, Baucom 2005; Taylor 2003; Hamilton, Harris, Pickover [et al.] 2002). Ann Stoler defines this critical intervention as a “commitment to the notion of reading archives “against the grain” of imperial history, empire builders and the priorities and perceptions of those who wrote them” (47). *Zong!* demands just such commitment.



In order to engage with the text readers must learn to read differently: listening and paying attention to the different voices that are entangled in this story/history, thinking through the implications of not having a conventional language that can coherently articulate that loss, largely because European languages of conquest have previously been one of the very tools of erasure of African subjectivity in the Americas and beyond. Myriam Moïse highlights the role of readership in *Zong!* and argues that Philip's poem "challenges the reader to reconsider the established order, to see beyond imposed limits, as she deliberately seeks to reconstruct history, to voice the unspeakable and to extend the limits of memory" (23). This reconstruction of history consequently entails an emotional immersion in the text, which is facilitated by its fugal aesthetics.

In *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* Philip's poetry embarks on a deep exploration of reading by questioning assumed and inherited models of understanding the relationship between language and experience. For example, as I demonstrate in chapter one, Phillip's poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language" pushes the boundaries of reading, both literally and symbolically, to the point that one has to physically move the position of the book in order to read the capitalized text at the margin of the vertically printed page. Its contrapuntal aesthetics is guided by fragments within the same and different poems, whose meaning is often intimately bound to each other, creating an interwoven web of significance through an act of re-membering Caribbean female subjectivity. This challenge to pre-established ways of seeing and reading is stretched to its boundaries in *Zong!* where visual fragmentation is significantly more acute. Consequently, in the case of *Zong!* the vast array of contrapuntal connections that constitute the musical form of the fugue, continue to challenge how we construct

and re-construct meaning, as I will address more specifically towards the end of this section.

From the first page of *Zong!* readers face the issue of how to read the poems. The seemingly erratic dis/order of letters and words across the pages confuses the eye. Consequently, a likely initial reaction will be to search for answers and reading cues through the following pages. However, the visual fragmentation of the text extends throughout the poems and grows in crescendo through the other five sections of *Zong!* Finally, the full reproduction of the two-page document *Gregson v. Gilbert* placed at the end of the book provides a contextualization that clarifies some of the reasons behind the fragmentation of this elegy. The document itself reproduces through language and discourse both the physical and epistemic violence of the slave trade and the Imperial project; the murder of the drowned slaves, their death, is never considered, addressed or judged in this document. Instead, the emphasis revolves around commodity, and so does its language. Ian Baucom writes about the *Zong* case in *Specters of the Atlantic*, where he explores in depth the type of discursive violence perpetuated through archival records.

Baucom stresses how,

[i]ndeed what we know of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is that among the other violences it inflicted on millions of human beings was the violence of becoming a “type”: a type of person, or, terribly, not even that, a type of nonperson, a type of property, a type of commodity, a type of money (11).

It is thus significantly through language (a visual, fragmentary, and polyphonic language) that *Zong!* attacks the document in an act of re-vision. The use of the term here is borrowed from American poet Adrienne Rich, for whom re-vision entails “the act of

looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (983).<sup>56</sup>

*Gregson v. Gilbert* is paradoxically at the very center of Philip’s *Zong!* and yet the document is also dis-membered and attacked. Its reproduction is placed at the very end of the book, following a glossary to the poems, and a section titled “*Notanda*” where Philip, as a mode of afterword, discusses her creative process in regards to *Zong!* This physical ordering of text marks symbolically a new archival gesture where the logic of the colonial archive is delegitimized. The authority of the archive is (thus) displaced and challenged in multifarious ways throughout the poems.

The language of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, being that of the law, is therefore bereft of any feeling. In an interview with Patricia Saunders, Philip explains her own relationship with the text whereby writing the poems allows her to,

take those hard facts, this desiccated fact situation of *Gregson v. Gilbert* – and you reintroduce those emotions and feelings that were removed [in/by the document] If you have something that is dried, when you put it in water, the water restores the dried fibers – and if you think about this, this two-page account of *Gregson v. Gilbert* that I found, squeezed out the lives that were at the heart of this case (“Defending the Dead” 66).

By allowing readers access to *Gregson v. Gilbert* Philip’s *Zong!* provides the possibility of what Jacques Derrida describes as “localizing the dead,” as the text

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<sup>56</sup> Adrienne Rich provides this definition of re-vision in her seminal critical essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision” written in 1971. In this essay, Rich uses the concept of “re-vision” to explain the necessity for women writers, and specifically poets, to liberate themselves from the influence of a male literary tradition and the legacy of patriarchy in an attempt to re-vise their own creative processes, since as she argues “the drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (983). Although the context in which Rich wrote this essay (the 1970s feminist critique of the literary canon), differs from the historical context in which *Zong!* is situated, Rich’s concept of “re-vision” is still nevertheless helpful to illustrate the ways in which a re-vision of a past discourse/text entails an active process of critique which unveils discursively what has been silenced and repressed.

functions as a tomb to the memory and humanity of the Africans killed onboard the ship and by drowning. According to Derrida,

mourning always consists in attempting to ontologize the remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead [...] One has to know. *One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* [Il faut le savoir]. Now, to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its safe place. In a safe place. Hamlet does not ask merely to whom the skull belonged (“Whose was it?” the question that Valéry quotes). He demands to know to whom the grave belongs (“Whose grave’s this, sir?”). Nothing could be worse for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where (*Specters* 9).

Therefore, if the knowledge of who it is that we mourn, and where their remains lay, is central to every process of mourning, it acquires even deeper implications in those cases when the dead is made (and remains) anonymous and when, as in the case of *Zong!*, his/her death has not been *fully* acknowledged, localized, and thus grieved, especially in cases of a violent death and the absence of burial. Literature and visual arts become a vehicle for this acknowledgement and therefore of the process of “localizing of the dead.” Including *Gregson v. Gilbert* in *Zong!* marks the text itself as the place where the memory of the dead slaves is locked and buried. Since the erasure of the slaves’ subjectivity perpetrated by the legal document is obviously not a symbolic burial that acknowledges the death of the slaves or enables any kind of mourning, the elegy excavates the bones of the dead and provides a new resting place for them. The division of the poem into different sections emphasizes the different stages and rituals that generally define a process of mourning, from the wake to the act of burial (which takes place in the final section).

As I will examine later, the last section of the elegy, significantly entitled “*Ebora*” – a Yoruba word meaning “underwater spirits” (*Zong!* 184), indicates that to find a

resting place for the bones, the text itself needs to mutate and physically fade. The text in this section displays faded ink and, in places, certain words are written over others making it impossible to read them and creating an impression of erasure which altogether simulates a gradual silencing of the voices. This final moment embodies the climax of the process of “destruction” and “erasure” of *Gregson v. Gilbert* that Philip initiates with *Zong!* and which ultimately debunks its authority. The fragmented re-contextualization of the original document ultimately constitutes an erasure of the document *Gregson v. Gilbert* itself and the authority it represents. A central part of the mourning process in *Zong!* is enacted through the action of dismembering and mutating this archival document (*Gregson v. Gilbert*) to therefore unlock its silence, and at the same time open spaces to hear or imagine other voices.

The opening sentences of this case report demonstrate the ways in which the language and discourse of the British Empire functions as a tool of erasure for the slaves drowned on Collingwood’s orders. Some of the words stressed in this following fragment from the document (emphasis mine) are words that are particularly recurrent throughout the elegy. The meaning of words like “recover,” “value,” “reason” or “preservation,” albeit seemingly used transparently, envelop concrete meanings that underline the pervasive naturalization of their perceived currency and use within slave trade law and imperial discourse.

This was an action on a policy of insurance, to *recover* the *value* of certain *slaves* thrown overboard for *want of water*. The declaration stated, that by the *perils of the seas*, and contrary currents and other misfortunes, the ship was rendered *foul and leaky*, and was retarded in her voyage; and, by *reason* thereof, so much of the water on board the said ship, for her said voyage, was spent on board the said ship: that before her arrival at Jamaica, to wit, on, &c. a *sufficient* quantity of water did not remain on board the said ship for *preserving* the lives of the *master and mariners* belonging to the said ship, and of the negro slaves on board, for the

residue of the said voyage; by *reason* whereof, during the said voyage, and before the arrival of the said ship at Jamaica - sixty *negroes* died for want of water for *sustenance*; and forty others, for want of water for sustenance, and through thirst and *frenzy* thereby occasioned, *threw themselves* into the sea and *were drowned*; and the master and mariners, for the *preservation* of their own lives, and the lives of the rest of the negroes, which for want of water they could otherwise not preserve, were obliged to throw overboard 150 other negroes (Gregson v. Gilbert, *Zong!* emphases mine 210).

Language here, as in most documents from the slave trade, naturalizes the contextualization of *value* as that of goods and not humans. The “value” of the slaves firmly remains monetary throughout the entire text. Similarly, the *perils of the sea* are (according to the account of the claim) the ones caused by natural adversities to the ensured property and never to the unnamed Africans enclosed by the hundreds in the belly of the ship or those who see themselves being thrown to the sea or who supposedly “threw themselves” overboard “voluntarily,” as the report suggests (emphasis mine 210). This is never a question of murder, for if the issue may have ever appeared during the initial court case or subsequent appeals to overrule the sentence, the lawyers representing the “contra” in the assessment of the case stresses the irrelevance of this consideration: “It has been decided, whether wisely or unwisely, is not now the *question*, that a portion of our *fellow-creatures* may become the *subject of property*. This, therefore, was a throwing overboard of *goods*, and of part to *save* the residue. The question is, first, whether any *necessity* existed for *that fact*” (emphasis mine 211). Reading this document allows readers who may (to differing degrees) be familiar with the physical and discursive violence of the slave trade to encounter the type of language that legitimized and represented that violence and to experience it themselves; a violence that is felt through the use of words like “save,” “necessity” and “fact.” The murder of the slaves is reduced to “that fact,” and is thus written out from the account and expressed as nothing

other than a “necessity” to “save the residue” (211). The word “reason,” which is mentioned twice in the above passage, and several times in the entire document, is particularly haunting as it embodies the rationalization of massacre and the African genocides carried out throughout the period of slavery in the Americas. Therefore, *Zong!* questions and dismantles imperial reasoning, and allows space to experience the haunting and restless memories of specters.

*Gregson vs. Gilbert*, the judges’ report over the *Zong* case, is not the only written document related to the event. The rest of the documentation related to the *Zong* reveals the transcendence of record keeping and documentation in the success of the imperial project. British abolitionist Granville Sharpe compiled archival material related to the *Zong* case; 133 pages of documents of which one of them (located in the middle of the record) is completely blank which, as Erin M. Fehskens observes, is symbolic of the absences and silences typical of much colonial archival documentation (“Accounts Unpaid” 2012). Philip and scholar Ian Baucom who, from poetry and prose respectively, write about the silences and blank spaces that the colonial archive and the imperial project produced in Western historical knowledge have not overlooked this fact. Sharp compiled and used these archival documents politically as a means to exemplify publicly the horror of the slave trade, and generate consciousness against its social and moral damage. On May 23, 1783 Sharp wrote a letter to William Baker where he expressed his “hope to obtain evidence to commence a critical prosecution ... for murder...” against Luke Collingwood. Sharpe’s statement demonstrates his awareness of the pivotal role of written evidence and documentation in all financial and legal actions associated with the trade, which is evident too in his own “fastidious [and detailed] note keeping,” for which

he was famous (Fehskens 414). This reliance on the archive attests to the authorizing power that has historically been conferred to record keeping, cataloguing, and the storage of information both in legitimizing and perpetuating the slave trade, as well as in the efforts to regulate and put an end to it.

### **Mourning and Place: the colonial archival document as tomb**

The structure of *Zong!* and its division into six distinct sections mimics the formal structure of the colonial archive, whilst it parallels different stages and rituals in a process of mourning. This demonstrates the complex ways in which mourning and the archiving of counter-memory are bound up and entangled in *Zong!*'s memory work. Paradoxically, by using the archival document, the very tool that negates a mourning of the dead Philip facilitates the expression of grief and a subsequent critical engagement with alternative forms of remembrance. The textual heterogeneity embedded in *Zong!* and its experimental use of form are largely facilitated by its genre, the elegy. William Watkin notes that although the elegy is one of the easiest poetic genres to identify, its formal structure varies considerably in each case, leading to the existing lack of consensus, and active debate, on a firm definition of the term and its structure (53). This allows greater freedom to give *form* to grief, which is always a very personal experience (even when its purpose is both individual and collective). However, one thing is clear, “[e]legies do not exist as a form of expression, but as an activity, an intervention and a lasting ritual. Elegy has to do something, this much is agreed upon, but as to what it is, this is very much under dispute” (*On Mourning* 53).

In the case of *Zong!* elegy enables an interpersonal *process* of mourning in which the author and her readership participate and *act*. This mourning process starts with the



identification of the bones and in the opening section, significantly entitled “*Os*” (the Latin word for bones), these are found in the columns of the logbook and the account ledger which are visually simulated in the formal structure of the poems. Realizing that *Gregson v. Gilbert* is one place where the slaves are also *buried*, where their memories are silenced, Philip decides to use its content as a starting point for *Zong!* The first section, “*Os*,” questions the use and meaning of words in the legal document. Most of the poems in this section introduce combinations of words dominated by definite articles like “the” or “this,” introducing an expository and nominal dynamic in the writing.

*Zong! # 2*

	the throw in circumstance
the weight in want	
	in sustenance
for underwriters	
	the loss
the order in destroy	
	the that fact
	the it was
	the were
negroes	
	the after rains (5)

Having read the document before reading the poems conditions our level of engagement and “understanding” of the poems. The reference to “want of water” appears in the text as the main reason for the throwing of slaves overboard and thus carries a *weight* that is felt throughout the pages of *Zong!* However, the “weight in want” recorded in the document is not the same kind of weight expressed in the poem. The case summary

of *Gregson v. Gilbert* states that “several of the slaves died for want of water” (210). In this document, the sustenance of slaves is always measured against the loss of their economic value. The sustenance of their life is never given any other value. Although this is an obvious reality of the slave trade and the institution of slavery, it is nevertheless important to highlight the violence and historical impact of this action; the construction of human beings as commodities is largely effected and legitimized by and through language and, of course, the law. As Philip herself argues,

[t]he language in which those events took place promulgated the non-being of African peoples, and I distrust its order, which hides a disorder; its logic hiding the illogic and its rationality, which is simultaneously irrational. However, if language is to do what it must do, which is to communicate these qualities – order, logic, rationality – the rules of grammar must be present. And, as it is with language, so too with the law. Exceptions to these requirements exist in religious or spiritual communication with nonhuman forces such as gods, or supra-human beings, in puns, parables, and, of course, poetry (“Notanda,” *Zong!* 197).

The order and logic of colonial language is therefore violated in *Zong!* The boundaries of linguistic coherence are stretched and language is thus deformed. This results in a visual vocabulary and language that reproduces and makes perceptible the experience of extreme violence that defines the *Zong!* massacre. This takes place gradually throughout the poems; it is a process which follows a certain logic that speaks back to that of the colonial archival machinery by which the African slave is made non-being. “*Os*” and “*Dicta*,” the first two sections of *Zong!* are visually dominated by the rigid structure of colonial forms of cataloguing. Most significantly in the opening section entitled “*Os*” (“bones”), the naming of the slaves, which Derrida argues is essential to the process of mourning and to localizing the dead, appears at the bottom of the page where Philip creates Yoruban names for the dead. Names like “Msuz Zuwena Ogunysheye Ziyad

Ogwambi Zeturah” can be seen at the bottom of the pages in this section (3). These names are also separated from the above poems by a horizontal line that emphasizes further their position at the margins, keeping them figuratively separated from the rest of the poem. In the next section, “*Dicta*,” the names disappear but the separating lines remain, underscoring in this sense the ways in which the law and the Archive has forced them out of the page and, therefore, out of memory.

As Fehskens argues, “the account ledger visually and ideologically ghosts the pages of “*Os*” and “*Dicta*” (411). Many of the poems in these two initial sections visually reproduce the columns of the account ledger and logbook. This is particularly the case for “*Zong!* #3” (6), “*Zong!* #4” (7), “*Zong!* #9” (17), “*Zong!* #11” (20), “*Zong!* #12” (21) and “*Zong!* #18” (31-32), where two or more columns of words function as reminders of the formal structure of the logbook and ledger. Fehskens notes how, “the ghost of the logbook haunts the cataloguing mode in *Zong!*, dramatizing the irreconcilable tension between violent exchangeability and zealous accumulation” (412). *Zong!* problematizes how the African slave is made specter by and through the colonial record. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes the nature of the specter at the interstices of the being and non-being; absence and presence; knowledge and ignorance.

Derrida’s abstract definition of the specter, although directed at an evaluation of the legacy of Marxism, can be useful in examining the paradoxical situation of the slave and their simultaneous absence and presence in the historical record and our knowledge of the past. The specter,

is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to

knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is – or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something between something and someone, anyone of anything [...] (*Specters* 5).

Similarly, our knowledge of the history of slavery through the archive is highly mediated by colonial documents that truncate the possibility of ever knowing completely the history they record, for knowledge is often contaminated by various agendas in many of these documents. Additionally, the combined presence and absence of the slave in the archival record contributes to its appearance through documents as a spectral figure written out of history by a language that denies his and her humanity and who is paradoxically both at the center of the project of modernity and yet erased from its narrative as a forced agent. The objectification of the African slave and the imposed identity as commodity makes the slave discursively unreal, a type of violence that can be partially redressed through a new critical (visual) vocabulary of memory. All that is left from *Gregson v. Gilbert* is an immense sense of loss. However, if the poems originally seem to be the visual remnants of the “frenzy” suffered by the drowned and drowning slaves, the development of *Zong!* proves the productiveness of working through trauma, pain and omission (*Gilbert v. Gregson*). Philip’s elegy transmits that the memories of the dead can never be brought to life, even if these were imagined and narrated within a coherent poetic narrative, but the specters, however, can be invoked and recalled, and their loss can be marked and localized in ways that generate an awareness of how counter-memory connects the present and the past.

As previously examined, “*Os*” and “*Dicta*” simulate the form of the book log and ledger accounts. However, they also represent one of the initial stages in the mourning process; a sense of denial toward accepting the loss, and an attempt at making sense of it.

However, this is complicated as often the voices seem to obscure or blur whose loss is being grieved. In this section voices reproduce the cold and dry language of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, and words focus on loss of property whilst other voices contrapuntally mark the loss of individuals, rousing readers to “defend the dead” (“*Zong!* # 15). This contrast between voices lamenting the death of the slaves as property on the one hand, and as individuals on the other, is most striking in poems “*Zong!* #14” and “*Zong!* #15.”

In “*Zong!* #14” the compositional arrangement of words on the page continues to be a reminder of the columns in the account ledger:

the truth was		
	the ship sailed	
	the rains came	
	the loss arose	
		the truth is
the ship sailed		
the rains came		
the loss arose		
		the negroes is
the truth was (24)		

The word clusters on the two “columns” or blocks (starting from the left) establish the order and consequence of facts as they appear in *Gregson v. Gilbert*. These facts are enumerated in a way that implies their “logical” sequence. However, reading the two sets of word clusters in the block at the right hand side evokes a different voice that, if read or heard like that, voices how “the truth is [...] the negroes is” stressing without any other addition the existence and acknowledgement of the slaves, albeit still with the language

of the document since the dead Africans are not identified other than as “negroes” (24). In stark contrast, the voices that enter the poem in “*Zong!* #15” seem to carry a message and work as counterpoint to the facts in “*Zong!* #14,”

defend the dead  
 weight of circumstance  
 ground  
 to usual &  
 etc  
 where the ratio of just  
 in less than  
 is necessary  
 to murder  
 the subject in property  
 the save in underwriter  
 where etc tunes justice  
 and the ratio of murder  
 is  
 the usual in occurred  
 the just in ration  
 the suffer in loss defend the dead  
 the weight  
 in  
 circumstance  
 ached in necessary  
 the ration in just  
 age the act in the *ave* to justice (25).

The imperative voicing of “defend the dead” opens this song where the “weight” is clearly identified as the loaded language of the law and the colonial archive that stipulates a priori what is both included and excluded from its boundaries (25). There are

clear allusions to *Gregson v. Gilbert*; the text itself is the place where “etc tunes justice” alluding thus and ridiculing the times when the expression appears in the document, metaphorically functioning as simile of the “justice” that the document comes to represent (25). Similarly, “the usual in occurred” voices the banality with which Africans were murdered during slavery. This “suffer in loss” is clearly caused by the use of language in the poem and the project of objectification of human lives when language murders “the subject in property” (25). Since the gravity of the massacre continues to be unaccounted, therefore “the weight / in / circumstance” continues to be unresolved in the present moment (25).

In “Sal” the salt alludes to sea water but also to the tears of the “oba” a Yoruba word meaning “ruler” and “king” which often appears in this and in subsequent sections. The only words on page 59 are “water parts / the *oba* sobs”. This section also introduces a wider variety of words and in different languages, from Latin, Yoruba, English, French, Dutch and Spanish. All the languages of Imperial history are entangled in this song. But the sobs of the “oba” are recurrent and often they can be heard over the voices “spoken” in all those other languages. Now the words seem to float on the page and the poems/songs are not divided in number with the symbol “#” but form instead an organic whole where the “ifa” is invoked, perhaps by the “oba” in an attempt to contact African gods. The “ifa” is the Yoruba word for “divination” (184) and its use thus opens the channels of communication with the spirits of those on the other world. This communication parallels and simulates African and African Caribbean religious practices as mediated and expressed by “speaking in tongues” through a language of the spiritual and extra-sensorial.

Many of the word clusters in “*Sal*” playfully combine the Latin word “salve” and “save” in relation to the bones; “save us *os* / slave” and “salve / & save our bones” (64). To save the bones and the souls one has to salute and acknowledge them. The sensation of movement and visual rhythm provided by the compositional arrangement and expansion of words in “*Sal*” continues in the following section “*Ventus*,” where words form similar and varying shapes constantly shifting page after page. These shapes are highly reminiscent of maps, especially maps of Great Britain and the American continent. This can be clearly appreciated on pages 98 and 82 respectively. The visual allusion of maps, especially those of Great Britain and the Americas, situates us at the crossing of the Middle Passage representing the moment of uprootedness from the original African culture. The fragmentation of words increasingly separates word clusters which often appear divided in different lines. It also displays more isolated words that stand on their own. On page 98 of *Zong!* a visual reproduction of the map of Great Britain made out of isolated words and word clusters illustrates this, as on the center of the page one can significantly read the word “mourns” (see Figure 5, following page).

Reading *Zong!* defies an accessible interpretation of the text, precisely because as Philip notes, the poems form an anti-narrative where language challenges our reading paradigms and access to histories. The poems in *Zong!* are often plagued with uncertainty and confusion, meaning is relational, oblique and often absent. Therefore these poems create a crossroads between knowing and (un)knowing.

*Zong!* places mourning at the centre of its anti-narrative. And, as Philip observes, story must be mourned and told, yet there is no telling it (*Zong!* 189-191). For how can we ever know what happened aboard the *Zong* when the only account is a two page legal



report of a court case where the massacre of slaves is phrased as a contention between parties in regards to an economic dispute?

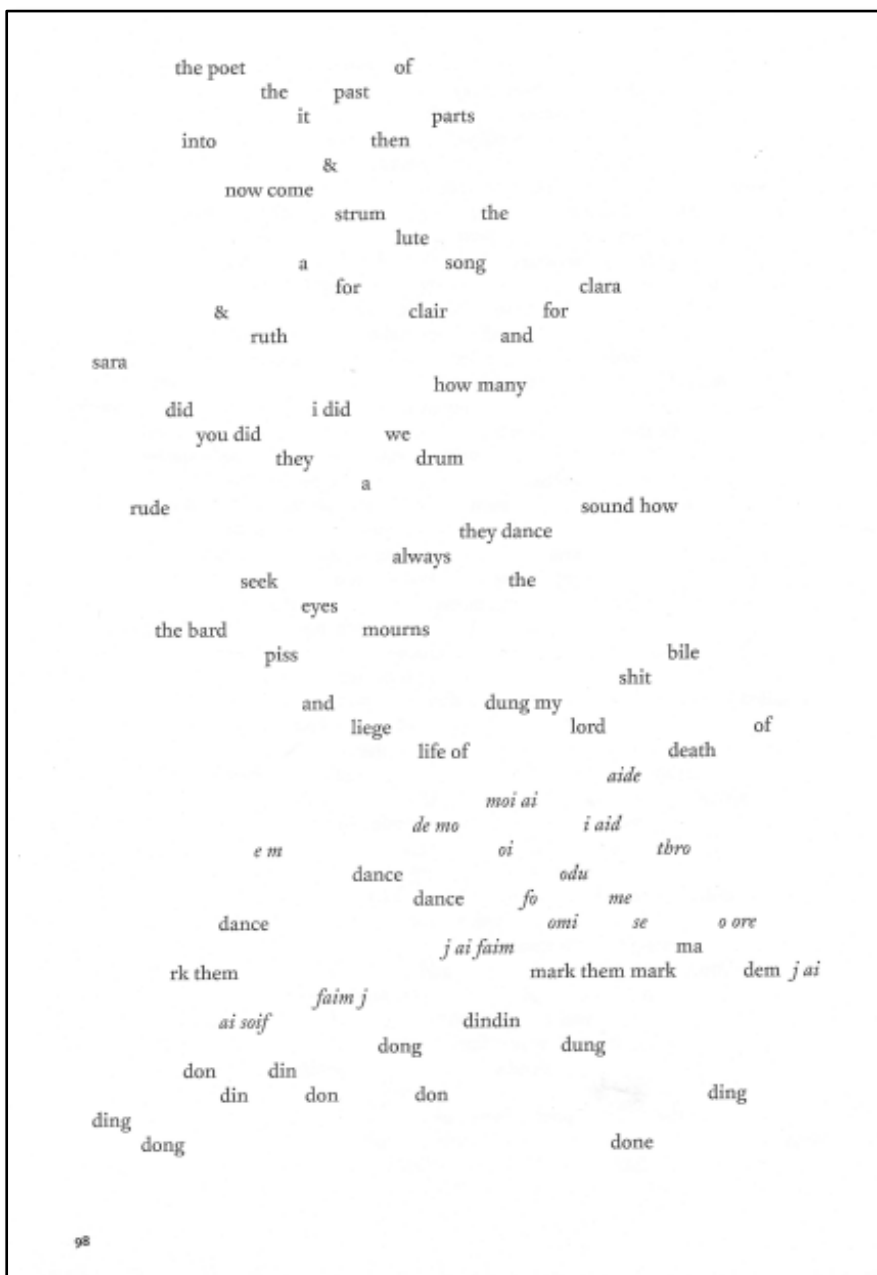


Figure 5. M. NourbeSe Philip. 2008. “*Ventus*.” *Zong!* (98). Courtesy of the writer.

*Zong!*'s concluding section, poignantly entitled “*Ebora*” which means “underwater spirits in the Yoruba language (“Glossary” 184), shows the complete disintegration of *Gregson v. Gilbert* symbolically and literally erased as most words in



***Tropical Night: fugal narratives and fluid visual vocabularies***

In *Caribbean Art* Veerle Poupeye underscores how a younger generation of artists in the Caribbean “represents a challenge to what had become official post-colonial and revolutionary culture” (183). Here, Poupeye agrees with Cozier’s “polemical statement” that “the main difference between Trinidadian art in the sixties and seventies and his generation is the shift from ‘representing culture’ to ‘creating culture’” (183). Although Poupeye describes Cozier’s statement as an underestimation of the role that the previous generation of artists has played in defining a post-colonial culture, the art historian and curator points out the fact that many established artists from that older generation operate within “formulaic” representational demands of art markets within countries like Jamaica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico (183).<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Philip Sander describes how in the Trinidadian art market “[c]ommercial galleries deal almost exclusively in landscapes, still lifes, and genre paintings, and local collectors have sometimes been openly hostile to work that breaks those conventions” (“Galvanize” 2007). Cozier’s art practice confronts the creative limitations and restrictive artistic vision that the work of those galleries represents. Therefore, the lack of an officially supported platform where speculative visual vocabularies can coexist becomes an important context in order to understand the role of language, narrativity and archiving in Cozier’s series.

In *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean*, Leon Wainwright draws attention to the role that curatorial initiatives like *Galvanize* have played in destabilizing and critiquing a national oversight of independent art practice (157). *Galvanize* was a

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<sup>57</sup> Ironically, in Poupeye’s *Caribbean Art*, one of the pioneering publications covering art from the region (published in 1998), the name of Christopher Cozier is only mentioned in relation to his critical statement, without further reference to Cozier’s own critical contribution to the larger contemporary Caribbean arts field, especially from the early 1990s onwards. Annie Paul marks this omission in her article “The Enigma of Survival” where she locates Cozier’s arts practice and that of other Caribbean artists like Irénée Shaw and Steve Ouditt as “alterNATIVES” within the Trinidadian nation space.

collective and collaborative arts program created by a group of artists in Port of Spain, which extended over a six week period in September 2006, coinciding with the government sponsored Carifesta IX.<sup>58</sup> However, as Wainwright notes, *Galvanize* was completely independent from the festival. In fact, it originated from a very different principle. A large group of critics, visual artists and art practitioners including Christopher Cozier, Nicholas Laughlin, Steve Ouditt and Peter Doig (all members of *Galvanize*'s advisory board) engaged in critical conversations and generated twenty art projects and events, some of which were exhibited at the Caribbean Contemporary Arts (CCA), around the premise "visibly absent." This motto, displayed in Bruce Cayone's *Galvanize* posters, summarizes the project's ontological principle.<sup>59</sup>

Christopher Cozier's series of drawings *Tropical Night* in many ways problematizes this sense of invisibility as it claims personal renderings of collectively shared visual markers that lie outside of the language of nation building. Conceived as an ongoing art project, the series started to take form in 2006. Although the conceptual idea for the series originated in 2003 after some drawings from Cozier's travel journal were exhibited at Madrid's Marlborough gallery as part of the group exhibition *Diciendo lo*

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<sup>58</sup> The concept for *Galvanize* started to take form in April 2006 (a few months before its six-week program), and in a meeting in June, the members of its advisory team (Mario Lewis, Charlotte Elias, Christopher Cozier, Steve Ouditt, Peter Doig and Nicholas Laughlin) met to discuss the project's vision and its inclusion of other art forms like literature, graphic design, music, performance and architecture. *Galvanize* then partnered with the Caribbean Contemporary Arts (Sanders, "Galvanize: Talking It Through," 2007).

<sup>59</sup> The project made an influential statement about the invisibility experienced by many artists who, despite "impressive lists of credentials and shows on their CVs might nonetheless never catch the attention of the cultural authorities, never merit a mention in the press" (Sander 2007). The success of *Galvanize* relies in its collective effort, resourceful mobilization of the media and Internet, and a vibrant alternative arts scene with a clear vision of the critical possibilities of the arts, often exhibiting the work of artists in unfamiliar spaces like a fabric shop or a small backyard, and thus questioning the place/space of art in society. As Sander points out, such success made a stark contrast with Carifesta; although lacking the financial support of the latter, *Galvanize* was still able to attract a great number of visitors and garner positive press coverage that sometimes drew comparisons between the two in favor of the alternative show.

*que me pasa por la Mente*, curated by Kevin Power.<sup>60</sup> Cozier then saw the currency of his drawings in exploring a personal and visual vocabulary based on a series of visual signs which are recurrent in his art practice and central to his own relationship to place and space, particularly Port of Spain, but also other locations in the Caribbean and the global South. In 2005, inspired by the investigative dynamics of his journal's drawings, Cozier created *Tropical Night*, a series of drawings where he explores Trinidadian and Caribbean contemporary experience.

*Tropical Night* consists of a series of 9 x 7 inch individual drawings on thick paper that are pinned together onto the gallery space's wall forming the shape of a large canvas. A large wooden 'pira'—a bench of Indian origin—stands in the gallery as part of the installation, and at times, as it was the case for the first installation of the series at the Jaffe Friede Gallery (2007) smaller piras are located across the installation space. The large pira is always placed in front of the drawings, inviting viewers to sit and look at the composition, challenging us to draw thoughts from the big mosaic of memories, impressions and icons formed by these drawings. In 2007 *Tropical Night* was displayed at *Infinite Island*, a Caribbean arts group exhibition curated by Tumelo Musaka at the Brooklyn Museum (August 2007 to January 2008). *Infinite Island* showed eighty works by forty-five established and emerging artists from the Caribbean in an attempt to illustrate the multifaceted art produced in the region during the six years prior to the exhibit. Cozier's drawings were afterwards displayed at Dartmouth College where Cozier was artist in residence. On this occasion the number of drawings in *Tropical Night* changed from the 136 in the Brooklyn museum to 120. In *Afro Modern*, the next group

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<sup>60</sup> The exhibition ran from June 26 – September 6, 2003. It also showed the work of Curro González, Fernando Bryce, Pedro Álvarez and Marcelo Schuster. The English translation of the exhibition title is Saying What Goes Through My Mind.

exhibition that displayed *Tropical Night*, there were 189 drawings (Tate Liverpool January-April 2010; Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, July-October 2010), a number that increased to 210 in *Vous Êtes Ici* an exhibition in Martinique (Fondation Clément, October-December 2010). The growth of the series through the incorporation of new images and visual signs, as well as new orderings of the sequences into Cozier's 'visual vocabulary' reflects the investigative approach of the work and the focus on constructing a critical conversation (Laughlin, "Working Notes" 8). The concern with narrativity embedded in the artwork attests to its dialogical nature. Although the material used for the drawings is basic: thick paper of nine by seven inches, the visual vocabulary that the drawings create when they are placed together reveals a complex web of interrelated elements: narrative threads and sequences, histories and stories seem to 'converse' with each other across the compositional framework.



Figure 7. Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night* (2006-present). *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*. Tate Liverpool, (2010). Dimensions variable. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

The drawings often include writing: thoughts that Cozier jots down as observations of the particular issue, or issues, that the artist is thinking through. Therefore, image and text continue to be very much connected here as in *Wait Dorothy Wait*. However, viewers' access to the text in *Tropical Night* is not as available as it is in *Wait Dorothy Wait* where the newspaper cutting is completely legible. In some of the individual drawings of the series it is the act of writing itself, rather than the legibility of the text that acquires particular relevance emphasizing, in this way, the investment in showcasing a critical thought process.

In a conversation with Nicholas Laughlin, Cozier describes how for him drawing is akin to a "thought process" of which writing becomes an integral part ("Notebook" 21). The inclusion of writing draws attention toward the notion of narrativity, important to the conceptual nature of the artwork. At times, the writing in *Tropical Night's* drawings is undecipherable as it is superposed to the visual image, consequently blurring the text. For example, "Little Gestures with Notes," a drawing from the first series exhibited at Dartmouth College (see figure 8, next page), shows a 'pira'. Superposed to this image is a written text that occupies the entire page. The strong brown color of the 'pira' and the softer sepia brown in the background hinder any potential unraveling of the text, at least in its entirety. Equally, sections of writing in this drawing are placed upside down curtailing viewers' possibilities of reading the whole text; what remains accessible instead are words and sentences that may stand out to the viewers' gaze as they look in closer and as their eye moves across the paper.



Figure 8. Christopher Cozier. "Little Gesture with Notes." *Tropical Night*, (2006-present). Drawing and painting on paper. 9 x 7 in. Courtesy of the artist.

The resulting sense of indeterminacy produced by the visual obstructions to the text or the sense of suspense created by the seemingly unfinished paint strokes, embody conceptual art's rejection of the (high) modernist theoretic principle which argues that art must transparently speak for itself (Harrison 41).<sup>61</sup> The aesthetics of *Tropical Night* shows a rejection of transparency whilst fostering an open hermeneutical approach to the artwork.

<sup>61</sup> See Harrison, Charles. *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.



The overwhelming visual excess of writing in “Little Gesture with Notes,” a drawing that is part of the first series (see figure 8), simultaneously reveals and conceals what the visual sign of the ‘pira’ evokes and means to the artist. One of the final sentences inscribed in the drawing reads: “[s]o I must continue to have faith in myself and in this *process* and not allow the engine of devaluation and belittlement to overwhelm or taint the effort and the focus I have been putting into these gestures each and every day, building and shaping these little stories and notations along the way.” This confessional remark highlights a strong sense of how Trinidadian official public discourse and the cultural and arts industry can be understood as being driven by an archival drive where alternative experiences of history, culture and place remain unintelligible. Annie Paul uses the term “alterNATIVE” to refer to Christopher Cozier, Irénée Shaw and Steve Ouditt’s art practice, all Trinidadian artists who the critic views as having no interest in reproducing “nation culture” but who, on the other hand, choose to explore their own personal relationship to the notion and experience of self, culture, place and history. Furthermore, their art claims a critical space that legitimizes artists’ own experiences and understanding of these terms even when they are in dissonance with their official configurations in public discourses.

Cozier’s “Little Gesture with Notes” confronts viewers with the problematic of narrativity. How can we communicate a personal account of memory that necessarily relies on the configuration of an individual visual vocabulary under the pressure of national narratives? As in Philip’s *Zong!*, the pressure of coherently and transparently conveying a personal, yet collective narrative of counter-memory is communicated visually through the difficulty of reading and decoding the visual work. Cozier affirms

how with *Tropical Night*, “I’m trying to get rid of the rhetorical, get rid of all the familiar symbolism, and see if I can arrive at new signs, new symbols. I’m basically extending and expanding the vocabulary” (Laughlin, “Notebook” 21). Cozier’s conceptual vocabulary relies on exploring issues by introducing in various guises familiar objects and visual signs, finding new ways of articulating or rather investigating people’s relationships with them and their culture. The excess and restricted legibility of “Little Gestures with Notes” ultimately emphasizes the centrality of the object. The pira stands out in the drawing, almost demanding that viewers also consider this object on its own.

The cultural and material history of this object is linked to a type of labor and artisanship that contrasts with the capitalist spirit of entrepreneurship in the contemporary post-independence nation. The pira alludes to the work of the market seller, barber, carpenter or other artisans who use the pira to work on various traditional arts and trades.<sup>62</sup> A recurrent icon in Cozier’s oeuvre, the pira also appears in *In Development* (2013), the artist’s most recent installation to date. In “Red White & Blue,” one of the large drawings that form part of this installation, viewers can see a small pira next to a written note that reads “small time.” Above the pira Cozier places a breeze brick pattern, a distinctive symbol that often decorates the top of concrete middle-class house fences in Port of Spain, next to a note that counters the pira’s by stating “big time.” The contrasting notions of “big” and “small time” allude to what the pira and breeze brick may connote from a national bourgeois perspective that is likely to privilege materiality and signs of economic success, marked as “big time,” over more traditional artisanship and labor.

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<sup>62</sup> The *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago* describes some other uses of the ‘pira’ (also known as ‘pirha’, ‘peerha’ or ‘pirah’). For instance, in Hindu weddings the groom “perches on the pirah” during the ceremony (699).

However, the representation of the pira in Cozier's oeuvre embodies a *gesture* towards a long-standing tradition of Caribbean artistic expression and labor.



Figure 9. Christopher Cozier. "A Little End (Little Gestures)" *Tropical Night*, (2006-present). Drawing and painting on paper. 9 x 7 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Cozier's recurrent use of the pira can be thought of as archiving the previously discussed tradition of labor; traditions which can be seen to be under unprecedented pressure in the contemporary moment. I argue that Cozier's critique reflects the irony of

reading the pira as “small time,” or as embodying a lifestyle and work marginal to the ‘modern’ nation, since this perspective overlooks the multiple ways in which the economic and social “progress” or “development” of the nation relies in the work of more traditional trades and labor. The superposition of an imperial map onto the pira in “A Little End (Little Gestures)” one of the original pira drawings that appeared in *Tropical Night* (see figure 9, previous page), demonstrates a revealing visual parallelism. The map exemplifies a quintessential record within imperial and colonial archives. Maps in European imperial history designed and labeled colonized regions as pre-modern, primitive and underdeveloped (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 223). However, the map that appears in “A Little End” includes Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania but not the American continent<sup>63</sup>. All the other visual signs of supposed development that appear in *Tropical Night*, such as the podiums, the national flags or the white bread loaf (as symbol of a productive nation) form part of elitist and nationalistic efforts to re-signify the Caribbean nation as a competitive power within that map. The see-through map in “A Little End” allows the viewer to engage with an often-overlooked labor tool (the pira), conceptually pointing to global labor. This, in dialogue with an inaccurate and incomplete global map, highlights the fragmented and complex nature of contemporary relationships between labor capital and geography. Cozier expands upon this interaction further in “Cross Currents,” part of the first installation of *Tropical Night* (2007), where the artist places numerous little flag-shaped pieces with of white paper atop small blocks of wood, with half pointing North and the other half South. Those pointing North contain woodcut image reproductions of a runaway slave whilst those pointing South display a man

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<sup>63</sup> “A Little End” is a shortened version of the drawings full title: “A Little End (Little Gestures).”

dressed in a business suit and holding a briefcase hurriedly moving in the opposite direction.

As with *Zong!*'s fragmented word sequences, the arrangement of drawings in *Tropical Night* is marked by a repetition impulse; visual signs keep re-appearing in similar, and also different contexts evoking the instability and mobility of a visual vocabulary in the process of emerging; as Laughlin accurately describes it, *Tropical Night* shows "a vocabulary struggling to emerge" ("Little Gestures"). The wavering between repetition and variation of visual signs creates a rhythm that reinforces a unique and experimental sense of narrative that, like Philip's, resists linearity and an assumed transparent readability that was once assumed of the colonial archive in their supposedly 'true' epistemic statements.

In many of these drawings, images of 'piras,' palm leaves, fences, brick walls and silhouettes of female dancehall dancers, among others, keep reappearing in similar and different contexts. The drawings form grids, which overall create the rectangular shape of a canvas. In front of the drawings, Cozier always places a wooden bench, which encourages a careful observation of the work and reinforces a sense of dialogue and intimacy between the artwork and the viewer. In this sense, the repetition of visual symbols in *Tropical Night* reveals an archival tendency to construct narratives as a means to make sense of experience. However, the very indeterminacy and speculativeness of the drawings uncovers distrust for the constraints imposed by narrativity and the expectations that it anticipates. Cozier writes in relation to *Tropical Night*: "I am very weary of narrative, as it often feels like an imposition on experience; a rationalization that inhibits as much as it offers consolation or promises order or meaning ... Each image declares

new paths and either lays to rest overly familiar concerns or allows them new readings in the shifting associative structure” (*Tropical Night* blog).<sup>64</sup> Paradoxically, the multiple sequences that form *Tropical Night* and the additions that have been made to the artwork, show a commitment to narrative and continuity despite, and perhaps because of, the fact that more drawings are added every exhibit thus changing the overall aspect and order of this archive.



Figure 10. Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night* (2006-present). Dartmouth College, (2007). Mixed media on paper. Each drawing 9 x 7 in. each. Courtesy of the artist.

In the series of drawings exhibited at Dartmouth College human figures predominate; they often appear fragmented in limbs, silhouettes of a black male torso, or

<sup>64</sup> Cozier’s “Tropical Night: Random Notes 06” (Friday, May 4, 2007) in Christopher Cozier and Nicholas Laughlin. *Tropical Night* Blog. <[www.tropicalnight.blogspot.com](http://www.tropicalnight.blogspot.com)>

just a head. The juxtaposition of objects above male heads underlines a sense of oppressive heaviness; piras, inverted podiums, or the Trinidadian parliament building known as the Red House suggest in these positions impediments to selfhood (see figure 10, previous page). These objects mark visually an imposed sense of nationhood and belonging. The podium, a very recurrent visual sign in the series, embodies a critique and obsession with competition and ideas of socio-economic progress that are also accentuated by other visual signs like the wall's 'breeze brick,' and the bread on wheels which evokes perceived symbols of prosperity and modernity.

*Tropical Night's* visual vocabulary is therefore characterized by ambivalence and polysemy; its conceptual project is changing and fluid. The series reflects an obsession with documenting such sense. As in *Zong!* the inclusion of archival material in *Tropical Night*, (for instance, visual records in the form of maps and imperial stamps) documents the multiplicity of ways in which ideas of progress and modernity propelled through colonial history perpetuate today. Their influence through education, economic policies and the official cultural industry in Trinidad is problematized in a variety of drawings. For example, in a sequence from *Tropical Night's* second exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, the image of an eighteenth century map is superposed to a series of images: a gigantic piece of cake, a boat's sail, an old blackboard, among others. This map displays Africa, Europe, Asia and Oceania with the absence of Latin America and the Caribbean. Their disappearance from the map signals a historical tension whereby the Caribbean is ironically excluded from the project of modernity despite the fact that its exploitation was central to its emergence.



Figure 11. Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night* grid. *Infinite Island*, Brooklyn Museum (2007). Mixed media on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Row 1. Left to right: lucky seven, Cyclops—smiling eye devouring; the castaway; 4-p stains, marking all four corners; way out.

Row 2. Left to right: still carrying load; feathered bat descending; hop, skip, jump; a little end (little gestures); never, never, take the biggest slice.

Row 3. Left to right: carrying a slice; party time—in the dance; mongrel pissing on tree; fly of the hummingbirds; after three leaps of a small mound.

Row 4. Left to right: eating within the enclosure- Haiti; all star; open drawer's-state as cash register; d'vale wall; further explanations while submerged.

The sometimes gritty imagery of the drawings: men seemingly trapped in fenced enclosures, nightmares or memories, half submerged in water, or pressed down by images of cake slices or Oxford sets of mathematical instruments, or inverted podiums



contrast with the tropicalized and colorfully bright tradition of painting that predominates in most art galleries of Port of Spain, as Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait* problematizes. However, if many of these visual signs become unfamiliar in the context of traditional visual representations of the Caribbean, through folkloric or tropicalized lenses, many of the cultural, material and physical references to the urban landscape are recognizable for Trinidadians, as well as people from other Caribbean locations with a similar history and culture. *Tropical Night* configures a counter-archive of individual and cultural memory that responds to a lack of alternative visual vocabularies in the official discourse of the nation state, as in the national and regional commercial art market. This was especially the case in the Anglophone Caribbean during the 1980s (Poupeye 1998; Sander 2007, Wainwright 2011). However, Cozier's work has since then carried on exploring the continuities of such legacy. Within these contexts, the codes to communicate Caribbean experience have often been prefigured, and largely limited to stereotypes of what folklore culture means and how it represents the nation to both local and foreign audiences.

The fugal aesthetic of *Tropical Night* and *Zong!* reveals the impact of memory, especially traumatic memory, on the individual and collective unconscious. As previously examined, the iconography of *Tropical Night* is dominated by images like the bench, the map, the podium or the palm tree, which keep appearing in the composition. Images as varied as colonial maps, blackboards, palm trees, sound system speakers, machine guns, erect and inverted podiums, among others, map out the composition. When viewed together, these images evoke different musical notes or keys being played at different times, a visual effect produced by the changing chromatic tonality of the drawings' background which varies from light yellow and sepia to light and dark brown. Similarly,

this kaleidoscopic effect, together with the repetition of images and their variation of contexts where those visual signs appear create a strong sense of rhythm (see figure 12).



Figure 12. Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night* (2006-present), Liverpool Tate, 2010. Dimensions variable. Reproduction courtesy of the artist.

The fugue in *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* creates a logic of assembling and archiving fragments of memory and little gestures that underscores an apparent sense of disorder and chaos through its acute level of visual fragmentation. This visual ordering of words and images questions the possibility of narrating histories of oppression cohesively or assertively. It also reflects visually and conceptually the haunting effects of loss, censorship, unaccountability and the burden of representation that exists in the Caribbean.

In *Tropical Night* repeating images contrast with one another thematically and chromatically; this can potentially create the impression that they ‘move’ figuratively across the extension of the piece, fostering a sense of rhythm and dynamism. In this

sense, the viewer's eye/I is likely to follow these images through the visual narrative that Cozier configures in the various exhibitions of the artwork. By evoking a sense of musicality, through contrapuntal associations, movement and (poly)rhythm, *Tropical Night* generates an instance of synesthesia, that is, when something is experienced from various senses simultaneously. Therefore, in this case, seeing something produces visually the impression of listening to it too, therefore stimulating music through sight. This effect is also applicable to *Zong!* where the exploded fragmentation of words across the page and its constant shifting and transformation follow a fugal pattern akin to a musical composition. This synesthetic effect in *Tropical Night* and *Zong!* ultimately configures a creolization of the archive insofar as it combines visual, oral and aural elements to document instances of counter-memory that best accommodate the multi-vocal nature of collective memory and the public sphere.

At times images in *Tropical Night* appear in freer contexts such as those expressed by Carnival, dance or music. Similarly, the fragmentation in *Zong!* follows a gradual process of transformation that visually breaks the regimented structures and policing of the archive. Words break progressively freer through the pages. The drawings in *Tropical Night* speak of the predicament of living and working in the Caribbean but also aim to reach other geographies. Annie Paul defines Cozier's work as "extremely local" and yet translatable in other contexts with similar backgrounds ("The Enigma of Survival" 7). Nicholas Laughlin, in a conversation with Cozier asks him whether he feels the burden of "being from a small, peripheral place where individual sensibility is trapped on all sides: by ideologies, by national "culture" narratives, by stereotypes – by that whole tangle of expectations about what it means to be an artist from the Caribbean"

(“Little Gestures” 10). Cozier’s response illustrates the importance of location and locality in his artwork and philosophy, “[b]ut the subject matter of the drawings is unavoidably ‘from and in the Caribbean’ – it’s the sometimes mundane, sometimes crazy everyday of an individual living in Port of Spain and immersed in all the elements of life in the twenty-first-century urban Caribbean” (“Little Gestures” 10). In Cozier’s art practice the tackling of local concerns conveys a transnational readability through affect and the ability to communicate how he experiences global and local issues daily from Trinidad and the various international locations where his work is often exhibited.

*Tropical Night* avoids an authoritative critical voice and rejects the configuration of a markedly delineated or overly defined narrative. Instead, as Philip’s *Zong!*, *Tropical Night* is highly dialogical and opens up a critical space where audiences can participate in the speculative nature of the drawings and their infinite possible combinations, as their order in the grids of the museum’s wall changes at every new exhibition. Similarly, since the drawings are placed in the rectangular shape of a canvas and are attached to the wall through pushpins, they somehow mirror a photographic darkroom, where the image of the photo shoots is yet to be fully revealed. This analogy underscores the extent to which *Tropical Night* is a work in progress and an ongoing development. Similarly, this compositional arrangement grants access to all different drawings at once. In this way, viewers too can construct their own narratives as their eye moves across the composition, which makes viewers participants in the narrative of the series. The visualization of the whole series of drawings in *Tropical Night* and its fugal aesthetics demonstrate a constant shifting of narrative that privileges heteroglossia, in the coexistence of multiple viewpoints. The meaning of the series’ visual vocabulary remains unfixed as it is

constantly ‘moving’ in dialogical formations. According to Grant H. Kester, dialogical art facilitates a “space in which certain questions can be asked, certain critical analyses articulated, that would not be accepted or tolerated elsewhere” (68).<sup>65</sup> *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* are examples of dialogical visual art and literature where the boundaries between literary and visual narrativity blur and where a synaesthetic form of heteroglossia counters the limitations of the colonial and post-colonial archive.



Figure 13. Christopher Cozier. Journal pages. Courtesy of the artist.

The drawings of *Tropical Night* reflect what Nicholas Laughlin defines as Cozier’s form of “taking note” of one’s surrounding reality and present moment (“Notebook” 21). This dynamics of personal archiving is strongly evoked by the use of

<sup>65</sup> Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. University of California Press, 2004.

office supply materials in the display of the artwork. In every exhibition, the drawings are pinned onto a wall in the museum using pushpins whereby paper clips are hung from the wall whilst holding the paper. Above is a photograph from Cozier's own journal where the artist works through the conceptualization of the drawings (see figure 13).

The wide range of memories and histories documented and archived in the series emerges from Cozier's sense that historically, in Trinidad, there has not been enough institutional support to give a platform to alternative ways of expressing one's relationship to place, its past and present history outside official national frameworks. *Tropical Night* claims a personal and individual perspective of Caribbean history and the contemporary moment, which has been largely dismissed, or rather prescribed, in the context of Trinidad's cultural industry.

There is a strong sense of mourning evoked in *Tropical Night* that is closely connected to the loss of a creative autonomy of image making or "i-maging" to use Philip's term ("Afterword" *She Tries Her Tongue*). However, unlike *Zong!* where the object being mourned are individuals situated historically, *Tropical Night* engages in a mourning of culture, always already an abstract notion. As Seth Moglen notes, Freud argues that a more social type of mourning or melancholia associated to abstract notions can elicit similar psychic responses than the mourning of lost ones (14). However, here I depart from Freud's mourning theory in favor of Peter Homans' concept of "symbolic loss" that,

refers to the loss of an attachment to a political ideology or religious creed, or to some aspect or fragment of one, and to the inner work of coming to terms with this kind of loss. In this sense it resembles mourning. However, in the case of symbolic loss the object that is lost is, ordinarily, socio-historical, cognitive and collective. The lost object is a symbol, or rather a set of symbols (20).

Cozier's drawings in *Tropical Night* express the symbolic loss of more flexible understandings of culture; ones that do not rest on expectations of nation building or representational demands. *Tropical Night* problematizes Cozier's notion of "cultural autopsy" which the artist mentions with frequency in regards to his work (Paul, "The Enigma" 56). The idea of cultural autopsy refers, as the name itself suggests, to the dissection of a still and fixed form of culture; it alludes to the death of culture as understood, and imposed from above. Paul observes that "[r]ather than build culture, Cozier has been more interested in dissecting the culture of his nation and laying open to the public gaze the sinister scaffolding on which the national rests" ("The Enigma" 56). I add that the term "cultural autopsy" in *Tropical Night* highlights as well the lost opportunity of creating a truly democratic and inclusive public sphere as envisioned by the moment of Independence.

Some drawings in *Tropical Night* make explicit references to more contemporary processes of documenting history, especially through vehicles like the media, a practice that Cozier problematizes in *Wait Dorothy Wait* as seen in chapter one. The drawing "Floating Afro-Ophelia" alludes to the death of Beverly Jones, a young female member of the radical group National Union of Freedom Fighters, which was actively fighting towards the improvement of socio-economic conditions and the end of class privilege in the 1970's Black Power revolution (see figure 14, following page). An image of Jones lying on the ground was published in the Trinidadian newspaper *Express*. Cozier, who was deeply affected by the image, explains how for him,

There was a temptation to go into the public archives to find that front-page image of the young woman shot on the forest floor but its reshaping and fluidity in memory seemed to be more capable in some way of saying something as well. It could become a way of owning that memory [...]

The drawing echoes Millais' pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia*, which appeared in the Nelson Reader and which was, according to Cozier, "a book through which formal English was conveyed to me as a child" ("One Narrative Thread," *Tropical Night* weblog).



Figure 14. Christopher Cozier. "Floating Afro-Ophelia" *Tropical Night* (2006-present). 9 x 7 in. Courtesy of the artist.

"Floating Afro-Ophelia" enacts a remembrance of Beverly Jones by ironically problematizing the aestheticizing of her death in the newspaper's front page by recreating this scene through one of the pre-Raphaelites' signature paintings. Moreover, "Afro-Ophelia" counters the archival neglect to document the active participation of many



women in the movement (Pasley 1), whilst it grieves another loss embodied in the government's repression of the revolution. Victoria Pasley points out how,

[t]he Black Power Revolution in Trinidad in 1970 presented a serious challenge to the dominant cultural ideology based mainly on a European model, which had, to a large extent, been left intact from the colonial era. [...] Despite the government's achievement of providing increased access to education, it had not fulfilled many of the other promises of independence. Institutionalized racism remained (2).<sup>66</sup>

Further, the carefully staged and aestheticized memory of the dead body on the ground, as represented in Cozier's drawing, points toward the contentious inclusion and acceptance of women in revolutionary projects where their readability and inclusion is as contested and as predetermined as it is within the national community, where the burden of gender roles, sexism, reproduction, and so on demarcate more constrictive avenues of citizenry. The visual analogy between the blending of green and brown murky colors that represent the savannah's foliage and the design of military camouflaged outfit seems to suggest, again, the ways in which the military outfit renders women outside its project. This analogy thus interrogates the roles imposed on women in these highly gendered spaces.

In my reading of Christopher Cozier's mixed media *Wait Dorothy Wait* (1991) and series of drawings *Tropical Night* (2006-present), I demonstrate how Cozier elaborates a simultaneously highly personal and collective visual vocabulary of experience. Cozier maps out his own relationship to places, especially Port of Spain but also the larger Caribbean region and multiple international locations by creating a mosaic of visual signs that form part of his social and cultural context. Many of the drawings in Cozier's series *Tropical Night* show visual signs that are very familiar to Caribbean

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<sup>66</sup> Also see Khafra Kambon, "Black Power in Trinidad and Tobago February 26-April 21, 1970." In *The Black Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*.

residents; one of the best examples is the “breeze” brick wall, a recurrent motif in Cozier’s oeuvre. In the specific context of Trinidad and Tobago the brick can be identified, as Nicholas Laughlin argues, as a 1970s post-independence marker of economic status and promises of development as it decorates the front walls of many middle class residences (“Work in Process”).<sup>67</sup>

### **Working through the Weight of the Narrative: *Zong!* and *Tropical Night***

In this chapter, I have read *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* as examples of alternative archival practice that (re)incorporates a series of counter-memories into our historical knowledge of the past and present moment. Whilst the historical context of Philip’s *Zong!* is circumscribed to a single and specific historical moment, Cozier’s *Tropical Night* reveals a relationship to forms of archiving that draws inspiration from a variety of historical moments and predicaments. Cozier’s series of drawings constructs a repertoire that records popular culture and memory and in so doing forms a type of (counter) archive in relation to official national discourses, the media, and representational art in Trinidad and Tobago. Although both *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* vary in their level of historical specificity and historical frame of reference, they nevertheless reflect very similarly a concern with finding a language and vocabulary that most accurately conveys the complex and multiple memories and histories that they deal with. Despite being primarily situated in different temporal frames, both Philip and Cozier’s works establish a productive and ongoing connection between the past and the present. Both in *Zong!* and *Tropical Night*, (counter)archiving allows a process of mourning by claiming a space to identify and express the grief over a series of crimes and losses to then construct not necessarily a prescriptive alternative but an opportunity for envisioning and legitimizing

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<sup>67</sup> “Work in Process,” appears in the art catalog *Christopher Cozier: In Development* and is not paginated.

an understanding of counter-memory, as an ongoing, collective task. The elegiac nature of Philip's text, and its conscious creation as memorial to the African slaves murdered on the *Zong*, makes it a more transparent work of mourning, at least initially, than *Tropical Night*, which does not deal with mourning as clearly or explicitly. Equally, the revisionary practice in both *Zong!* and *Tropical Night* addresses the colonial archive more specifically in the former, which is written against the backdrop of an actual colonial document, whereas *Tropical Night*, on the other hand, reflects the remnants of colonial narrative and discursive practices in the narration and imagining of the nation.

The post-independence decades in Caribbean nations like Trinidad, especially the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the postcolonial moment in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, show a certain legacy and continuity from the colonial period. The postcolonial nation inherits the paradigm of the archive in that the national (as the colonial) project sees itself as depending on a stable representation of itself that often privileges prefigured understandings of "culture" over other personal and political visions. Cozier's *Tropical Night* problematizes the multiple ways in which, as Hershini B. Young argues, "Instead of the moment of nationalism rupturing the foundational mythology of empire, the postcolonial nation and postcolonial identities are haunted by the universalizing claims of modernity and progress" (15).

Mourning and symbolic loss mark processes by which loss is fully acknowledged as unrecoverable but from which something can potentially be reconstructed. Mourning, by incorporating the *name* into the *memory*, calls attention towards what has been erased, in an attempt to work through trauma. As Jacques Derrida suggests, mourning also entails an identification of the "bodily remains" of the dead (9). Derrida argues the importance

of “localizing the dead,” knowing who is buried and where, something necessary in order “to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its place. In a safe place” (9).

There is a crossroads between constriction and liberation from language in both *Zong!* and *Tropical Night*. The fluidity and flexibility of their signs and visual language are latent in drawings like “Castaway” where the image of a black man half submerged in the sea evokes the history of the Middle Passage whilst suggesting an idea of movement and agency, as Cozier himself argues in an analysis of the series in his collaborative blog with Nicholas Laughlin. In the drawing, the man carries a big flag on his back upon which the image of a map is juxtaposed (see figure 15 below).

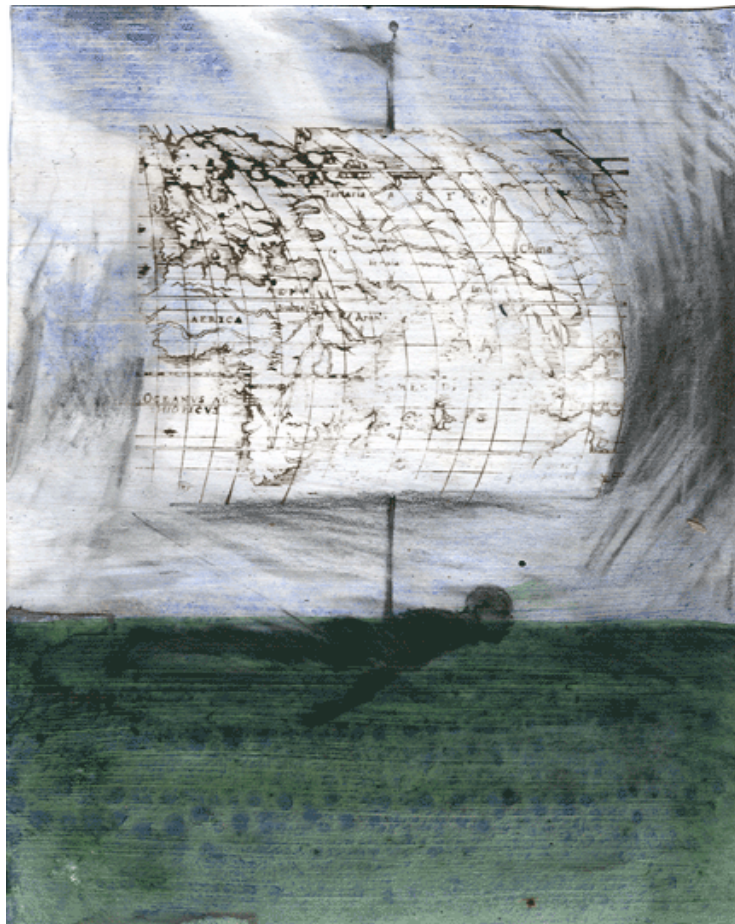


Figure 15. Christopher Cozier. “Castaway.” *Tropical Night* (2006-present).  
Drawing and painting on paper. 9 x 7 in. Courtesy of the artist.

This contrast of hermeneutic possibilities and invocation of different realities provide a useful site to reflect upon the relevance of continuously challenging inherited modes of expression. The clips with which the papers are hung on the wall remind the viewer of an archival process that both Laughlin and Cozier interpret as a ‘note-taking.’ In this sense, note-taking counters the authority of colonial archiving in constructing didactic knowledge.

The obsessive reappearance of images in both *Tropical Night* and *Zong!* is not only indicative of traumatic memory. By appearing in different contexts, the images in the drawings and the poem become visual signs that, sometimes superposed upon each other or on human limbs, as in the case of *Tropical Night*, or placed in combinations that suggest a pressure on the human psyche and the body as in *Zong!*, paradoxically create a mobile and fluid visual vocabulary. Such vocabulary, in turn, challenges the limitations of viewing and reading lenses that we use to think about, and think through, the construct and realities embedded in notions like that of ‘the Caribbean’.

### **Chapter 3. Alternative Visions of Counter-Memory in Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

I will now turn to Paul Ricoeur's understanding of memory before examining the role of counter-memory and mourning in the novels *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz respectively. According to Ricoeur, "memory is not in the first instance an action, but a kind of knowledge [of the past] like perception, imagination and understanding" ("Memory and Forgetting" 5). This "relation of knowledge" is only one of two relations to the past that characterize memory (Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting" 5). The other is a "relation of action" whereby individuals or social groups exercise memory through acts of recollection and remembering.

Both relations to memory are often interdependent and present in processes of remembrance, particularly in those cases when an individual or group engage in an active recollection of the past life of a lost person or the loss of an abstract notion that is being remembered and/or mourned. In this regard, Ricoeur identifies a connection between Freud's notion of remembering as a "working through" of the past, and mourning as a similar type of "working through." The philosopher refers to Freud's 1914 short essay "Remembering, Repetition, and Working Through" where Freud states that—based on psychoanalysis—the repetition of symptoms in a patient becomes an obstacle to remembering and overcoming an [traumatic] experience. According to Freud, the action of "working through" is a necessary step in order to gain reconciliation with the past. This entails an effort and active practice of remembering, trying to tackle that past in an attempt to overcome its resistance and repression (Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting" 6).

Ricoeur sees a parallelism between Freud's idea of "the work of memory" in this essay and his later theorization of "the work of mourning" in his seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia," written in 1917 (7). Mourning, affirms Ricoeur, "is a reconciliation. With what? With the loss of some objects of love; objects of love may be persons of course, but also, as Freud says, abstractions like a fatherland, freedom—ideals of all kinds" ("Memory and Forgetting" 7). If the work of memory is always against repetition in Freud, the work of mourning is set against the backdrop of melancholia: that is, the narcissistic identification with the lost object and its interiorization in a way that perpetuates the pleasure principle, thus avoiding the reality of death. Although Freud's oppositions (memory vs. repetition; mourning vs. melancholia) offer a rigid framework, and his theorization of melancholia often overlooks the specificity and circumstances of the object of love that is mourned, the emphasis on memory and mourning as an active working through, which Ricoeur identifies as connected, is useful to analyze the role of memory and mourning in the two novels that I discuss in this chapter.

Testimonial narration and storytelling facilitate the working through of traumatic memory and mourning in *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Amabelle, the narrator protagonist in *The Farming of Bones* and Yuniior, the semi-omniscient narrator in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, reconstruct the stories of their lost loved ones against the odds of historical erasure. However, it is not just the action of testimony and storytelling that provides a certain sense of healing, or at least of its promise. It is rather *how* - through which methods, narrative strategies and techniques - these novels manage to archive the personal (and collective) trauma that potentially allows both narrators and readers to appreciate its value as alternative forms of memory.

As novels that grapple with the issue of how to narrate trauma and the death of others ethically, Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* investigate different avenues in order to remember and commemorate the dead. Through the use of different print types, footnotes, Caribbean folklore, science fiction and comic references to pop culture and intertextual literary elements, these novels elaborate a collective counter-memory to Dominican and Haitian official histories that suggest alternative ways of telling and understanding the past.<sup>68</sup> *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* revise and question official history. This is an aspect of testimony that Yúdice likens to postmodernity, since both call into question the ways in which the construction of master narratives “function to legitimize “political or historical teleologies ... or the great ‘actors’ and ‘subjects’ of history – the nation-state, the proletariat, the party, the West, etc” (Jameson qtd. in Yúdice, “Testimonio and Postmodernism” 16).

Both novels address the challenge that their narrators take on, to respectfully bear witness to the circumstances surrounding someone's death, particularly in the event of a violent death caused by murders that were never prosecuted. In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle recounts the 1937 Haitian massacre known as ‘El Corte,’ of which she herself is a survivor. One day in the Dominican village of Alegría news arrives confirming the beginning of the slaughter against Haitians living in the areas of the Dominican-Haitian border; Amabelle and her lover Sebastien decide to meet that evening and escape to Haiti

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<sup>68</sup> Although I will refer throughout this chapter to ‘collective memory’ in the singular form, it is not under the assumption that the term is homogenous and immutable, but rather acknowledging its malleability and flexibility. My use of collective memory emphasizes how it encompasses multiple and complex experiences and as such it is porous, multifaceted and can be mobilized and interpreted differently by different sectors of society. Thus, I make reference to the term with an awareness of the multiplicity of forms that it takes in particular contexts.



together. However, they never reunite and although Amabelle manages to cross the Massacre River and arrive safely to a Haitian village, she never again sees Sebastien, nor does she ever find out what happens to him during the massacre. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is also a historical fictional account with testimonial components. The narrative centers on the life of Oscar De León and his family. Disrupting the chronological time in the account of Oscar's life are alternating past episodes of his family history intertwined with the history of Trujillo's era. The story moves back and forth between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic across generations, a fluctuating movement across time and space that finally confirms the cyclical structure of history when Oscar ends up killed in a Dominican cane field, a site and scene that links the present with the Dominican past of military torture. As a semi-omniscient narrator, Yunior is only witness to some of the events that take place in the novel; he reconstructs a variety of histories and stories through the accounts of other sources as a historiographer would. Towards the end of the novel, Yunior reveals how he was compelled to tell Oscar's story after being haunted by his ghostly memory in dreams.

### **Collective Memory in the History and Historiography of the “Trujillato”**

In order to examine how a transnational counter-memory figures in *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a review of Dominican state memory, Dominican-Haitian relations and Trujillo's repression becomes necessary. On September 28, 1937, Trujillo initiated a brutal massacre against Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans living and working in rural areas along the Haitian-Dominican border and adjacent villages. The first killings took place south of Dajabón, and a few days later, on the night of October 2, Trujillo delivered an incendiary speech in Dajabón where he

“gave “orders” to the solution of the Haitian problem” (Wucker, “Race and Massacre” 62) thus encouraging the massacre further. Popularly known as ‘El Corte’ (Spanish for “the cutting”), ‘Kout Kouto’ (“the stabbing” in Haitian Creole) and Parsley Massacre (‘Perejil’ or ‘Pessi’ in Spanish and Haitian Creole, respectively), the killings ‘officially’ lasted two weeks although there is evidence that attacks continued periodically until January of 1938. There is no official death toll upon which historians agree; the number of deaths is believed to range anywhere from 12,000 to 35,000. As historians state, this was not a spontaneous action but rather a carefully designed operation ordered by Trujillo as a means to reduce the number of Haitian workers within Dominican soil; part of his plan to Dominicanize and ‘whiten’ the nation (Derby 2009; Vega 1998; Turits 2002; Wucker “Race and Massacre,” *Why The Cocks Fight*). Trujillo’s dictatorship lasted 31 years (1930-1961) and was characterized by a fascist ideology influenced by Adolf Hitler’s racial theories (Wucker, “Race and Massacre” 61). During this period thousands of Dominicans were also killed in the Dominican Republic; those who opposed the regime would often “disappear” and in many cases their bodies were never found. Illegal arrests, torture and murders were regular occurrences throughout Trujillo’s dictatorship and the regime’s traumatic effects still linger in Dominican society, as do the legacies of anti-Haitian discourses.

The collective official memory of Trujillo’s repression is of course heterogeneous, but it has been largely influenced (especially until the 1980s) by the discourse of political figures like Joaquín Balaguer who, during the dictatorship and decades after, still continued to publicly exonerate Trujillo’s policies of repression. Balaguer was himself deeply implicated in Trujillo’s regime as one of its main

ideologues, and was the undersecretary of Foreign Relations during the Parsley massacre. Michelle Wucker describes Balaguer as “one of [the massacre’s] greatest defenders” (“Race and Massacre” 61). He was also an important instigator. However, despite his involvement and role in both this and other aspects of Trujillo’s fascist regime he continued to be very much present in Dominican politics after Trujillo’s assassination in 1961. As a political figure, Balaguer has been very influential in Dominican society. He has been president of the country three times (1960-1962, 1966-1978, and 1986-1996) in what have been, at best, questionably democratic elections.

According to Balaguer, the 1937 massacre was essential to what the government considered a necessary process of hispanization along the Dominican border: “Para impedir [...] que el país perdiera sus características de pueblo nítidamente hispano, lo que se necesitaba era poner en práctica una política de *dominicanización* de la frontera y despertar al mismo tiempo en el pueblo el pensamiento de sus grandezas tradicionales” (Strongman 22).<sup>69</sup> Roberto Strongman quotes Balaguer’s famous publication *La Isla al Revés: Haití y el Destino Dominicano* (1983), as one of the best-known examples of anti-Haitian propaganda.<sup>70</sup> Equally, as Roberto Strongman points out, the influence of various Trujillista texts like Carlos Cornielle’s *Proceso Histórico Dominico-Haitiano* (1983), have characterized Dominican historical perspectives for decades. Strongman calls attention to how such discourses continued to be publicly legitimized well into the twentieth century:

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<sup>69</sup> Translation: “In order to avoid the nation’s loss of its typically Spanish characteristics, it was necessary to implement a policy of Dominicanization along the border that would simultaneously awaken the awareness of the nation’s traditional greatness.”

<sup>70</sup> Balaguer’s book has been re-printed eight times in Santo Domingo, a fact that attests “to the public demand in the Dominican Republic for these ideas, which exhibit a virulent racism” (Strongman 32).

Proving that the legacy of the Anti-Haitian Trujillista discourse survives years after the dictatorship, in a 1981 speech at the National Library, Carlos Cornielle, a prominent Dominican journalist, diplomat and university professor spoke of the settlement of Haitians in the Dominican Republic as a serious national problem: “no basta limitar el numero de picadores de caña, porque la mayoría de ellos se quedan viviendo en tierra dominicana”<sup>71</sup> (Cornielle qtd. in Strongman 25).<sup>72</sup>

However, as I noted earlier, despite the influence of this type of racist and xenophobic discourse within the corpus of Dominican collective memory, significant forms of counter-memory have emerged. Especially since the 1980s, renowned Dominican historiographers like Juan Bosch, Bernardo Vega and Roberto *Cassá* have started to excavate the history and stories of Trujillo’s oppression that had been silenced in previous decades. Their historiographical approach registers the experiences of those who were particularly affected and disenfranchised by the regime. With a similar purpose, historical studies of Dominican-Haitian relations and particularly the episode of the 1937 Parsley Massacre have flourished since the 1990s, expanding this revisionary tradition of historiography. Since the 1990s the research of an international group of historians and critics like Eric Roorda, Richard Turits, Michelle Wucker, Edward Paulino, Eduardo Matibag, Ernesto Sagas and Sibylle Fisher have written serious

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<sup>71</sup> Cornielle’s comment translates as: “it is not enough to reduce the number of cane cutters [in the Dominican Republic] because most of them settle on Dominican land.” Implicit in this statement is the belief that Haitian settlement and cultural integration is a problem in and of itself for Cornielle.

<sup>72</sup> One of the most successful projects of Trujillo’s dictatorship, which has outlived his regime and continued to impact Dominican official discourses and popular views, is the legacy of anti-Haitian thinking and attitudes (Strongman 2006; Paulino 2006). These have sometimes even been assumed and reproduced by those critical of the Trujillista system, a fact that corroborates the powerful effects of its ideological apparatus. This is the case, for instance, of Freddy Preston Castillo’s *El Masacre Se Pasa a Pie* (1973), a Dominican historical novel that despite its acute critique of the Parsley massacre, describes the portrayal of Haitians in the novel uncritically and refers to “La Langosta negra [que] arrasaba en la noche los plantíos de yuca y de maiz.” alluding to the criminal activities on the border as an intrinsically Haitian phenomenon (Prestol Castillo qtd. in Strongman 30). The popularization of these types of ideas and the demonization of Haitians has a long history. Edward Paulino identifies a direct correlation between the legacy of that thinking and the (periodically) existing conflict in the border region where migrant Haitian workers are often still perceived as criminals, whilst their human rights and workers rights are often violated (2006). Dominicans of Haitian descent are also systematically denied citizenship and thus live in a perennial state of vulnerability to deportation.

historical revisions that, like *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, counter a tradition of Dominican nationalist narratives, official archiving, and historiography, that is marked by historical gaps, silences and erasures. Therefore, Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, through historical fiction, add their voices to this body of work. As Amy Novack affirms in regards to the Parsley massacre, “The event slipped from history, unspoken by the governments on both sides of the Massacre River” (97). Through fiction Danticat and Díaz offer a kind of redress to the anonymous memory of Trujillo’s victims, and to a larger transnational social body willing to remember and revise the past.

### **Documentation: fictions of history and the configuration of collective memory**

General Trujillo and the Dominican elite viewed the intercultural and interethnic communities established along the Dominican border with Haiti as a threat to their national project of modernity and modernization. Their ideology of ethnic superiority was fueled by an anti-Haitian discourse that goes back to the nineteenth century: “Since the 1800s [...] elites had demonized popular Haitian culture, and Vodou in particular, as a threat to Dominican nationality. Haitian influence was perceived as an obstacle to the elite’s aims to render the country “modern” and “civilized” (Turits 599). Turits situates the creation and control of a border between both nations as a measure common to “modern states” in order to “regulate the flow of goods and people across it” (600). Anti-Haitian discourses fostered in the Dominican Republic during Trujillo’s regime perpetuate the notion of “purity of blood” introduced by Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century; a concept which was originally used in the Iberian peninsula at the time as a means to establish religious hierarchies between Catholicism and Judaism but

which, in the Americas, and especially from the nineteenth century, “was no longer measured in terms of religion but of the color of people’s skin [...]” (Mignolo 31). In *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Sibylle Fischer discusses the nature of a particular tradition of collective memory in the Dominican Republic that goes back to the eighteenth century. This tradition conveys anti-Haitian sentiments and imagines Haiti as an antithesis to progress and modernity. Also embedded in this discourse is a nostalgic fixation with Spanish colonial rule as a period of progress. The ancestors are imagined within this discourse as Spaniards and ‘Indians,’ not Africans, despite the fact that Dominican society is largely mulatto (Fischer 151). Much of eighteenth century literature on the issue creates an improbable social, racial and ethnic categorization through the use of fantasy; fantastic and hyperbolic elements that result in a problematic “suppression of the memory of slavery and anti-slavery [that] gets off the ground only by means of a wholesale invention of a rather implausible past” (Fischer 152). The rhetoric of the Anti-Haitian discourse expressed openly in the Dominican Republic, especially after ‘El Corte,’ needs to be identified as part of this tradition and be understood as one of its continuities.

Michelle Wucker (1999), Richard Lee Turits (2002), Eugenio Matibag (2003) and Edward Paulino (2006) underscore how initially the Haitian-Dominican borderland was not marked by the acute division and strife between Dominicans and Haitians, which Trujillo and the white Dominican elite claimed. According to this group of historians, the Dominican border had been a bilingual and bicultural space where many Dominican-Haitian families had formed and coexisted for centuries. However, both Trujillo and Balaguer made public statements about the fact that Dominican landowners on the border

expressed their complaints about numerous criminal activities supposedly carried out by Haitians. Such statements would serve to implicitly legitimize the existence of conflict in the region for which Haitians were made accountable.

The first murders of the Perejil Massacre took place on September 28, 1937 and a few days later, on October 2, Trujillo gave a famous speech in Dajabón where he made direct allusions to the killings. Although most speeches delivered by the “Generalísimo” were transcribed and recorded in archives, there is no official record of this historic speech which would have otherwise proved officially Trujillo’s orchestration of the slaughter, a responsibility that he always denied to the international community and Haiti. The unabashedly encouragement of violence evidence of the massacre’s authorship remained in the collective memory of those presents.<sup>73</sup>

It is rather after the massacre however when those divisive sentiments and tensions emerged fully. Although social hierarchies existed prior to the massacre, these were manifested at different levels and did not affect Dominican and Haitian relations exclusively but rather determined social dichotomies, especially noticeable across class. Turits makes an important emphasis upon the heterogeneous and complex social and ethnic dynamics in the Dominican-Haitian border that is worth quoting here at length:

Yet to tell the history of the Haitian massacre through the lens of post-1937 Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic, indeed to tell it as a history of Dominicans versus Haitians, of one ethnic group or nation versus another, is misleading and may unwittingly reinscribe and essentialize what are, in fact, historically varying and contingent ways of imagining the Dominican nation. The story of the Haitian massacre is also one of Dominicans versus Dominicans, of Dominican elites versus Dominican peasants, of the national state against Dominicans in the frontier, of centralizing forces in opposition to local interests, and, following the massacre, of newly hegemonic anti-Haitian discourses of the nation vying with more culturally pluralist discourses and memories from

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<sup>73</sup> See Turits, “A World Destroyed” 613 (2002).

the past. It is also a story of how multiethnic communities and shifting, complex, or ambiguous national identities come to be perceived as a problem for the state (593).

According to Turits, viewing the massacre *exclusively* as a conflict between Dominicans and Haitians, originating in anti-Haitian feelings, is a reductionist approach to the massacre and the socio-historical context existing along the Haitian-Dominican border. Looking at the multiple historical and political factors involved in the 1937 Haitian genocide facilitates an understanding of the role of collective memory in shaping and re-writing history. The killings of October 1937 were a reenactment of another massacre carried out in the Massacre River in 1728 when thirty French buccaneers were defeated and killed by Spanish troops; a historical moment that named the river thus. This organized attempt at history repeating aims to re-signify the Dominican nation as rooted in a tradition of Spanish conquest and heritage that imposes itself against all that is labeled ‘foreign,’ that is, ‘African’. This is one example of Trujillo’s various political and military actions to shape collective and national(istic) consciousness and to impose his own vision of history and historical memory. His grandiose gestures need to be understood as constitutive of a national discourse that makes use of collective memory to shape and alter history.

Turits points out an “alternative history,” embedded in the oral testimonies from the late 1980s by elderly Haitians and Dominicans that brings forward a more complex pre- and post-massacre context (594). These testimonials contradict the notion of a homogenous Dominican national identity around the border before 1937 functioning as antithetical, and in opposition, to Haitianness and Haitian culture (593). As Turits argues, “[t]he massacre’s diplomatic resolution allowed Trujillo to begin rewriting the slaughter



as a nationalist defense against the putative “pacific invasion” of Haitians” (623). Furthermore, all these measures, due to their instrumental nature and implication in ‘exculpatory’ political agendas, exert a double violence on the relatives of those who lost their lives during the massacre and their memory, since they perpetuate the dehumanizing of Haitian and Haitian-Dominican individuals enacted by the killings. Rather than contributing to social dialogue and the overcoming of trauma, these measures of expiation are inscribed further in a hierarchy of grief. The physical, psychic and ideological violence of the massacre is thus reinforced by the lack of acknowledgement and public expression of grief and mourning. The archiving of a limited number of stories and the financial compensation to victims of ‘El Corte’ and family members ultimately fails to commemorate the victims or provide redress. Judith Butler theorizes a hierarchy of grief in which some losses can be publicly grieved whilst others cannot. Butler thus proposes that we “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others” (*Precarious Life* 30).

### ***The Farming of Bones: Narrating memory with no audience***

Amabelle Désir, the narrator of *The Farming of Bones*, is one of the survivors of ‘El Corte’. In the wake of the massacre, thousands of Haitians tried to cross the border and escape to Haiti. Many of them were killed as they were crossing the Massacre River. Amabelle’s testimony exposes her own need to tell the horrific experiences she witnessed during her escape to Haiti. As in Philip’s *Zong!*, the process of mourning in *The Farming of Bones* takes the silenced memory of the dead back to one of the murder scenes of the massacre and the site of unmarked “burial” which in *Zong!* is the Atlantic ocean, and in

Danticat's novel is the river. *The Farming of Bones* begins and ends its narrative invoking the Massacre River and the spirits that haunt its history. The opening of Amabelle's testimony implicitly reveals the fraught institutional response to the experiences of the victims and survivors as the narrator seems to be addressing and telling the story to the Mother of the Rivers: "In confidence to you, Metrès Dlo, Mother of the Rivers".<sup>74</sup> This appeal to Metrès Dlo situates Amabelle's account outside the confines of official memory and anticipates the failure of both Dominican and Haitian state institutions to effectively record, document and publicly mourn the lives of those Haitians and Dominicans killed in the massacre.

Relying on and confiding the story to Metrès Dlo, also reveals Amabelle's desire to take the stories back to the river, which is thus transformed from a site of violence and oblivion, into a site of memory and, to a certain extent, of healing through the work of mourning. Metrès Dlo is thus implicitly presented as witness to the massacre and explicitly addressed as confidant of the story. Since Amabelle is conscious that her testimony will never bring about an official acknowledgement or accountability of the massacre, her testimony is rather communicated to the Mother of the Rivers as a means to commemorate the lives of the thousands of Haitians brutally killed, and made anonymous by the denial of a proper burial as most of the dead were buried in mass graves. Significantly, as Renée Larrier indicates, "Mèt Dlo is a Vodou figure from whom one seeks protection and it is to his female counterpart that Amabelle dedicates her narrative" (Larrier qtd. in Hewett 128). This symbolic act therefore suggests the invocation of

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<sup>74</sup> This page is not numbered.

protection from historical erasure; Metrès Dlo becomes not only witness, and confidant but also guardian of memory.<sup>75</sup>

Amabelle's testimony enables access to the interior lives of the massacre's victims as well as hers, allowing readers to know about their lives intimately, their relationships, dreams, fears and hopes. In this way, *The Farming of Bones* offers multiple angles to life in the Dominican border and to the history of the massacre. Consequently, Haitians and Dominican-Haitians subjected to 'El Corte' appear as more than victims rendered anonymous by historical erasure. The stories in these novels deal with life as they engage death. In this regard, *The Farming of Bones* has a similar structure to previous Haitian historical novels about the massacre like Jacques Stephen Alexis' *General Sun, My Brother* (1955) and René Philoctète's *Massacre River* (1989). All three novels emphasize social and working life at the border prior to the massacre and their portrayal complicates and contradicts claims of border conflict alleged by members of the Dominican military elite.<sup>76</sup> The sections that describe the characters' lives before the slaughter are also prominently featured in terms of narrative length and development. In *General Sun, My Brother*, Alexis spends a great deal of the narrative describing Hilarion

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<sup>75</sup> Metrès Dlo shares similarities with other religious and folkloric figures across different places in the Caribbean. For example, Trinidad and Tobago's Mama Dlo or also known as Mama Dglo, a name that originates from "maman de l'eau" meaning mother of the water in French. Portrayed in folklore as a monstrous figure whose lower half of the body takes the form of an anaconda (although other times she takes the form of a beautiful woman) she is believed to punish those who attack the forest or the river by forcing them to marry her for the rest of their life (Pitts, Espinet and Collado, "Trinidad Folklore" 346).

<sup>76</sup> The original title of *General Sun, My Brother* is *Compère Général Soleil*. Philoctète's *Massacre River* was originally published in Haiti as *Le Peuple des Terres Mêlées*, which as its translator Linda Coverdale explains translates literally as *The People of the Mixed Lands* (219). In "A Note on the Translation" Coverdale admits that the English title does not work because it does not match "the hopeful and even healing title the author chose" (*Massacre River* 219). However, Coverdale explains how "[t]o a French reader Terres Mêlées inevitably echoes the words sang-mêle, "mixed blood," so that the French title means in a way, "the mixed blood people of the mixed lands, which is the whole subject of the novel" (219), a linguistic cue that may therefore be lost to English-speaking readers in a literal translation of the original title.

Hilarius's politicization whilst he spends time in jail and becomes involved with the communist party. These parts of the novel set in Léogâne and Port au Prince outnumber the later section of the novel that relates the massacre. Similarly, the story in *Massacre River* has the slaughter both at a suppressed center and as background to flashbacks of a love story between Dominican Pedro Brito and his Haitian partner Adèle who, like Danticat's Amabelle and Sebastien, are set apart by the ruthless killings.<sup>77</sup>

A little less than half the narrative of *The Farming of Bones* describes life in the village of Alegria before the slaughter. The first half of the narrative offers insight into the shared history and culture that connects Dominicans and Haitians; this is juxtaposed to the menacing and increased difference imposed from the elite. However, an important element that differentiates *The Farming of Bones* from Alexis' and Philoctète's novels is the substitution of the third person omniscient narrator for a first person testimonial narrative. Danticat explains in an interview with Myriam J. A. Chancy that her interest in the form of testimony lies in its potential to makes us "understand larger events by reading one narrative" (29). Interestingly, this one testimonial narrative in Danticat's novel is made up of various alternating narratives and memory threads. The personal and the political (or the collective) are always bound up in the work of memory.

From the beginning of *The Farming of Bones* we learn how Amabelle's life is deeply marked by the struggle of dealing with post-traumatic memories that haunt her

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<sup>77</sup> The centrality of the love story in *The Farming of Bones* constitutes another intertextual link with Alexis' and Philoctète's novels, which explore the amorous relationships of Hilarion and Claire-Hereuse, and Pedro and Adèle. The similarities between Adèle and Amabelle's names seems to emphasize this intertextual connection, although if Pedro and Adèle can be representative of the inter-ethnic marriages that are prominent in the social fabric of the Dominican-Haitian border, Danticat's narrative, on the other hand, shows another perspective to the experience of migration and settlement as both Sebastien and Amabelle are born in Haiti and settle in the village of Alegria later in life.

regularly. A recurrent image comes to her in dreams: at an early age Amabelle witnesses her parents drowning whilst attempting to cross the Massacre River. As many Haitians who live near the border often do, one day, Amabelle and her parents cross the river to visit the market in *Dajabón*, one of the nearest Dominican cities on the other side of the border.<sup>78</sup> On their return home, Amabelle's parents, seeing the worsening of the current, hurriedly decide to cross the river, but as she recalls, "[t]he water reaches up to Papa's waist as soon as he steps in. Once he is in the river, he flinches, realizing that he has made a grave mistake" (51). After her parents drown, Javier Pico, a Spanish-Dominican landowner from Alegria finds Amabelle and adopts her into his family. In time Amabelle starts to work as a domestic worker in the household. Although she has grown up with them, there are clear socio-economic boundaries as well as racial and ethnic hierarchies meaning that Amabelle is never considered an equal member of the family.

Black Haitian, Dominican-Haitian and Dominican domestic workers, and to an extent all society, interiorize and normalize hierarchies of class status marked by skin color. The moment when Señora Valencia, Señor Pico's daughter, gives birth to twins is significant in revealing how the construct of racial difference has a complex social impact in the Dominican borderland. When Amabelle, who acts as midwife in the birthing of the twins, hands the second baby to Señora Valencia, the latter notices the darker complexion of the baby girl whose "skin was a deep bronze, between the colors of tan Brazil nut shells and black salsify" (11). Señora Valencia remarks,

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<sup>78</sup> As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains in his documentary *Haiti & The Dominican Republic: An Island Divided* part of the series *Black in Latin America*, hundreds of Haitians cross the Massacre River on market day to buy and sell products at the market in Dajabón. Edward Paulino points out that in various Dominican towns along the border Dominicans and Haitians trade freely in street markets that take place twice a week (266).

“They differ in appearance.” She wanted another opinion.  
 “Your son favors your cherimoya milk color.” I said.  
 “And my daughter’s favors you,” she said. “My daughter is a chameleon.  
 She’s taken your color from the mere sight of your face.”  
 Her fingers still trembling, she made the sign of the holy cross from her  
 forehead down to the sweaty cave between her swollen breasts [...] (11).

Señora Valencia’s remark, suggesting that her daughter’s darker complexion may be the result of close contact with Amabelle, reveals the pervasive ways in which blackness is considered as threatening to the supposed Hispanic lineage and claimed heritage. As April Shemak argues, there is an obvious symbolic parallelism between Rosalinda (the darker twin) and Rafi (the one of lighter complexion) and the “twin” republics of Hispaniola: Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which despite sharing a history of European conquest, enslavement, and colonialism, had different relationships to their African heritage at an official level (“Re-Membering Hispaniola” 92).<sup>79</sup> The twins make an allusion to the Marasa, the Haitian Iwa of twin identity, a recurrent trope in Danticat’s fiction; in this case the trope denotes the common history that unites both sides of the island.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, Rosalinda, the darker daughter, survives childbirth whereas Rafi, named after Trujillo, dies shortly after being born. This death counters metaphorically the imminent events of the massacre where skin color, as well as language, meant the difference between life and death as people were asked to say the word ‘perejil’ to prove their ability or impediment to trill the Spanish ‘r,’ and thus ‘check’ if they were Haitian before they were killed. This episode of birth and death,

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<sup>79</sup> As previously mentioned in the chapter, the Dominican Republic’s negation of blackness through the racial category of the “Indio” and its general disavowal of African-Caribbean culture in favor of a stubborn emphasis on Hispanic national and cultural traits was prevalent through much of its history.

<sup>80</sup> For an exploration of the role of voodoo in *The Farming of Bones* see Donna Weir-Soley’s “Voodoo Symbolism in the Farming of Bones.” *Obsidian*. 6/7.2 (2005): 167-184. Web. 20. Mar. 2013. Proquest.

early in the novel, shows the pervasiveness of a Dominican state and elite discourse that associates blackness as a contaminating, contagious threat to national identity.

April Shemak identifies Amabelle's lack of awareness of this type of discourse as something that conflicts with George Yúdice's definition of 'testimonio,' which "assumes that the speaker is already a fully conscious subject," ("Re-Membering Hispaniola" 87). Shemak points out how "Amabelle, at first, does not offer a counter-discourse to Dominican nationalism" ("Re-Membering Hispaniola" 87). In this regard, Shemak's reading does not take into consideration Amabelle's own emphasis on the gradual realization of the implications and pervasiveness of such discourse. This is made available through her narration of the events and such emphasis allows readers to appreciate the initial complications to Amabelle's own awareness of the situation as she was initially fully immersed in the familiar space of the Valencia household that later, when the slaughter begins, becomes a dangerous and even deadly space.

Shemak reads the fragmented testimonial narrative in the novel as a critique to the ways in which, despite the revolutionary nature of 'testimonio,' this genre fails to contain and communicate the experience of the massacre: "because testimonials in the novel are often fragmented and at times silenced, the novel critiques the revolutionary potential of testimonio" ("Re-Membering Hispaniola" 87). However, I argue that *The Farming of Bones* enacts a critique directed rather at the Dominican and Haitian state for their failure to document the massacre in its aftermath. This is epitomized in the episode (which I analyze later in this chapter) where the justice of the peace in Haiti attempts to collect the testimonials of the victims, a process that ultimately reveals the inaccuracy of its approach. In fact the form of 'testimonio,' in its tense relationship with national forms of

memory or memorialization, offers instead an accurate means to express the memory of an experience that, due to its traumatic nature (and the subsequent traumatic effects of the institutional silence), will always remain fragmented and broken.

According to Yúdice, ‘testimonio’ emphasizes “popular, oral discourse [in which] the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exercising and setting aright official history” (“Testimonio and Postmodernism” 44). Amabelle’s ‘testimonio’ becomes a conscious exercise of revising and rewriting history. The narrator’s fragmented narrative, marked by an alternate intersection of memories in bold and regular type, forms part of an ethical account that on one hand reflects the irrecoverable loss and pain caused by the massacre and, on other hand, emphasizes the individuality of Amabelle’s own process of remembrance. In regards to the sections in bold type that refer to more personal memories, Danticat explains, “I decided to write those little sections where it’s just her thoughts, her remembering, her memory. Because it would just contrast the silence forced on people who work for others” (“Recovering History” 29). In this sense, the experience of silence and invisibility (yet complete availability) expected of Amabelle as a servant in the house is echoed in the shameful institutional silence following the massacre.

The sections of *The Farming of Bones* that narrate ‘El Corte’ and its aftermath demonstrate the problems that victims encounter not only in having their testimonies officially acknowledged but also (when this is done through the formal existing means) the issue and failure of recording those testimonies ethically as a potential means to gain redress, and as a way of honoring and mourning the dead through that act of



remembering and “setting aright official history” (Yúdice, “Testimonio and Postmodernism” 44). The night before the massacre, Sebastien, Amabelle’s lover, convinces her to return to Haiti together, leave behind the hardship of life on the sugar plantation and start life fresh in their home country. However, the killings begin and Amabelle has to escape from Alegria immediately. On her journey she meets Sebastien’s friend Yves, and together they cross Massacre River, finally reaching the Haitian side of the border. In her flight from the Dominican Republic, Amabelle, after surviving the killings and crossing Massacre River, wakes up in “a large room with wooden walls and a tin roof like the face of a dirty mirror” (207). She and others gather in this refuge, where a priest and nuns are assisting survivors, many of whom are seriously injured. In the face of recent trauma, Amabelle notes their “hunger” to tell their stories: “Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, far greater than their desire of being heard was the hunger to tell. One could hear it in the fervor of their declarations, the obscenities shouted when something could not be remembered fast enough” (209). The frustration in this particular episode is with language and memory not being ready with immediacy to aid the narration.

*The Farming of Bones* sheds light on a series of post-traumatic effects, as Amy Novack accurately examines in her article “A Marred Testament”. Here Novack discusses how the struggle reflected in Amabelle’s fragmented narrative is not only with the impossibility of narrating violence and trauma in a linear, accessible and fully comprehensible manner (for in the case of traumatic experience this is always something already problematic) but also the struggle with the Dominican and Haitian states reaction after ‘El Corte’ and the lack of accountability that presided over subsequent diplomatic

efforts. The official archiving of testimonials of the massacre reveals its own utilitarian nature. Both governments decide upon this action in order to mollify international disquiet over the lack of accountability given the vast number of deaths and the trauma occasioned. The many institutional limits to the viability of archiving the stories, and the unclear goal that this very process would have, highlight its failure as a means to look critically at what happened, pinpoint the historical actors involved, and examine the repercussions both on isolated individuals as well as families on both sides of the border. The archiving of oral histories took place hurriedly and only for a very short period of time.

Other formal state responses taken were equally insufficient in providing redress. Despite never explicitly admitting to ordering the massacre, Trujillo did sign an agreement in Washington, D.C. on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1938 in which the Dominican Republic commits to offer financial indemnification to victims of the massacre and their families. Trujillo offered “\$75,000 (of which only \$52,500 were ever paid) in exchange for an end to international arbitration” (Turits 636).

Soon after settling with Yves in her mother’s house in Haiti, Amabelle tries to meet with a justice of the peace in order to seek information that may help her find Sebastien. She also hopes to have the chance to tell the stories of other characters like Odette who died trying to cross the river. Yves and Amabelle spend hours with a thousand other Haitians lined up outside the official building waiting to be heard. This episode in the novel is key to appreciate the extent to which the victims of the massacre not only long to tell their own story (and that of their beloved) but also to see as many stories as possible recorded as proof of the horror that took place. As Amabelle observes

during their wait; “I thought of many ways to shorten my tale. Perhaps Yves and I would go in together and make both our stories one. That way we would give someone else the chance to be heard” (232).

The hearings would often last whole days; yet there was not enough time to record the stories of the thousands of people waiting outside. On the first day that Amabelle and Yves line up for a hearing, Yves sees the last woman to have a meeting with the justice of the peace. He asks: “What did they do for you there? [...] Did they give you money?” to which the woman replies “No, he did not give me money”. [...] “You see the book he had with him?” [...] “He writes your name in the book and he says he will take your story to President Sténio Vincent so you can get your money.” [...] “Then he lets you talk and lets you cry and he asks you if you have papers to show that all those people died” (233-234). The official demand for evidence to demonstrate the deaths is highly unrealistic, especially considering that many of the deceased were buried in mass graves by the Dominican army and civilians trained by the government to assist in the massacre. It also reproduces the anxiety of disavowal that diplomatic action taken embodies. The unfeasibility of this demand also touches on an issue central to the precarious situation of Dominican-Haitians living and working along the border at the time of the massacre and afterwards. In the late 1930s the Haitians and ‘Haitiano-Dominicanos’ living in the region lacked Dominican nationality, an issue that continues today when, despite having lived in the Dominican Republic all their lives, many Dominican-Haitians face enormous difficulties in obtaining a ‘cédula,’ the equivalent of a

documentation card proving one's national identity.<sup>81</sup> The legitimization of experience through state devised versions of historical proof and documented experience confirms the fragile and incomplete nature of official memory.

For fifteen days, Amabelle and Yves line up to see the justice of the peace. On the sixteenth day he comes out at dusk and addresses the crowd to announce that no more money will be handed out since “[a]ll the money had already been distributed” (235). This news causes much disappointment and an assertive reaction from the people waiting; “There were moans and screams of protests, convulsions and fainting as rocks began to fly. [...] The group charged the station looking for someone to write their names in a book, and take their story to President Vincent. They wanted a civilian face to concede that what they had witnessed and lived through did truly happen” (235-236). This moment manifests the conflicting interests between the state and civilians, as the latter are fundamentally eager to have their stories and experiences acknowledged somewhere official so that they do not become further suppressed or silenced. The fact that the recording of testimonials stops after the money allocated for reparations runs out attests to the instrumentality of the recorded declarations as it signifies them mainly as proof that the speaker witnessed the events for the purposes of receiving financial compensation.

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<sup>81</sup> *In Asylum Speakers: Caribbean Refugees and Testimonial Discourse*, April Shemak elaborates a detailed and insightful analysis of the precarious situation of Haitian migrants and Haitian and Haitian-Dominican cane cutters in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. In regards to the denial of citizenship status to long time migrants, Shemak poignantly highlights the paradox that, although “[t]he labor of Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican Republic has shored up the Dominican economy for nearly a century, and yet they face ongoing restrictions by the Dominican government that impair their abilities for movement or transcultural transformation” (133).

The oral accounts that *The Farming of Bones* describes were written down and some have been compiled in a publication archived in the Archivo General de la Nación, the Dominican National Archives located in Santo Domingo.<sup>82</sup> The economy of these testimonies is striking. The brief accounts are included in distinct organized boxes which from left to right feature place of declaration, date of testimony, name of witness, place of the event, date, people affected, nationality, nature of the event, and a final section for observations. In many cases the records display gaps left blank on some of these categories/boxes, representing the many silences that the process of documentation produced. For example, the nationality box is often left blank, suggesting that the speakers either refused to answer the question and/or were Dominicans of Haitian heritage that would not be recognized as Haitians in Haiti nor would they be granted Dominican citizenship in the D.R. This blank space therefore embodies larger and more systemic absences and divisions within society. The regulation of the Dominican-Haitian border as separating politically different cultures and ethnic groups is equally problematic as it fails to correspond to the layered, socio-cultural dynamics of the border region.

Amabelle is soon aware of the inefficacy of official forms of memory. Her distrust and discontent with the state's recording of testimonials leads her toward alternative ways of archiving and communicating the memory and experience of 'El Corte'. Ultimately, her own 'testimonio' presupposes an audience that, thanks to her narration, will know how the killings were perpetrated and will receive an education and awareness about the conditions, circumstances and discourse(s) surrounding it. For

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<sup>82</sup> Most of the testimonies were recorded in the Haitian town of Ouanaminthe. They were compiled by various 'jueces de paz' (justices of the peace). J. M. Troncoso arranged and compiles these documents for the Dominican public. (*Documentos* 60, 61). See Cuello, José Israel. *Documentos del Conflicto Dominico-Haitiano de 1937*. Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Editora Taller, 1985. Print.

readers it never becomes fully clear who the audience of the story is, or whether the story we witness has been written down or is being told orally. Shreerexha Subramanian stresses the way in which Amabelle's storytelling guides her mourning process: "[w]hat drives the narrative forward and keeps Amabelle moving is her link with the dead: her parents, Antoine Désir and Irelle Pradelle, and her love Sebastien Onius. In this imagined community, the massacre's survivor finds her humanity, her connection to a fleshy past and her desire to write the rest. Remembering is a political exercise, and not letting go of the dead is an act of love" (151).

The sequential and fragmentary narrative structure in *The Farming of Bones* illustrates the interconnectedness between personal memory and collective counter-memory. It also manifests the effects that experiencing a traumatic event exerts on the psyche, especially through the repetition of the dreams and memories that haunt Amabelle; these are conveyed in the sections in bold type. Their intersection in the narrative with regular type mirrors the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. Memories keep returning and interrupting the chronological narrative. In this sense, the narrative structure in *The Farming of Bones* reproduces visually the effects of trauma which, as Cathy Caruth observes, describe "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). However, if in Freud's psychoanalytic theory the repetition of memory is to be avoided through therapy since repetition is the manifestation of trauma and the obstacle to a healthy remembering, what about those cases when the repetition of memories and dreams facilitate a therapeutic exercise in itself?

Amabelle consciously conjures the memory of her dead parents in moments when she “couldn’t bring [herself] to go out and discover an unpleasant truth. (When you have so few remembrances, you cling to them tightly and repeat them over and over in your mind so time will not erase them)” (45). I contend that Danticat places this reflection in parenthesis to draw attention to its resonance with the difficult process of memorializing the victims of ‘El Corte’ which is problematized in the second half of the novel. The problem of remembering in the face of national, and in this case also transnational, amnesia renders Freud’s issue of the work of memory more complicated. For what about those situations when a traumatic experience is perpetuated through its ongoing suppression and erasure? In cases of traumatic experience and further cultural amnesia (as in ‘El Corte’) the repetition of memories can signal more than just the experience of trauma. Repetition can also become both an unconscious wish and a chosen act of remembering and remembrance of the dead. Amabelle dreams with the possibility of telling their story: “I dream all the time of returning to give my testimony to the river, the waterfall, the justice of the peace, even to the Generalissimo himself” (264). It manifests one of the many forms that grieving and mourning can take. Consequently, as Ricoeur noted in Freud’s theory, although the work of memory is intertwined with the work of mourning, both types of working through re-signify repetition as a demand to bear witness to counter-memory.

*The Farming of Bones* purports such demand in its aesthetic form. In the first half, the recurrent traumatic dreams of Amabelle are intertwined with the main narrative line. They disrupt the narrative and stress the individual past of the character-narrator. In the second part of the novel the narrative in print focuses on the effects of trauma, individual

and collective, and emphasizes the importance of narrating traumatic experience. As the novel advances, it becomes clear that the relationship between both narrative lines is more complex and interdependent than it first seems. Halfway through the novel, the sections in bold start to archive other moments of remembrance, which are thus incorporated in this special and very personal way of narrating and marking memory. Gradually, the remembrance of the massacre's victims is also included in these sequences. Amabelle describes a waterfall and a cave where Sebastien takes her one day. For Amabelle, this place represents a haven of memory. She remembers how Sebastien used to say: "the waterfall [...] holds on to some memory of the sun that it will not surrender. On the inside of the cave there is always light, day and night" (100). Amabelle extends her wish to symbolically connect the memory of her parents to this site of memory. She wishes to mark safely not only the grave of her parents but Joël and Raphael's: "I have always wished for this same kind of light on the grave of my parents, but now I wish it also for both Joël and Rafael" (101).<sup>83</sup>

Memory in the novel appears in its relation to knowledge and action that Ricoeur describes. It aids Haitian and Haitian-Dominican residents to form a different sense of belonging to the land that is not marked, or not exclusively, by national identity. Forms of lived memory in the Dominican and Haitian villages are mostly inter-personal and are configured through networks of affiliation and kinship. In her descriptions of life in Alegria, Amabelle highlights the kinship existing among Haitians. She describes how people would spend afternoons sharing with each other memories about their past life in

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<sup>83</sup> Joël, a Haitian cane worker and good friend of Amabelle and Sebastien, is run over by a car one evening. Pico, Señora Valencia's husband and one of the Dominican army officials speeds on his way home to meet his newborn twins and as a consequence he kills Joël. It is never clear whether Pico ever sees Joël on the road but what remains clear is that for Pico, Joël's death is not worth grieving.



the same part of Haiti before settling in the Dominican Republic and how when anyone returned to Haiti they would carry other people's belongings with them as a means to connect those people to their place and vice versa: "This was how people left imprints of themselves in each other's memory so that if you left first and went back to the common village, you could carry, if not a letter, a piece of treasured clothing, some message to their loved ones that their place was still among the living" (73). Thus memory and remembering provide a sense of common cultural identity to Haitians in Alegria and surrounding villages. In church, Father Roumain mentions "common ties: language, foods, history, Carnival, songs, tales, and prayers. His creed was one of memory, how remembering – though sometimes painful – can make you strong" (73). Place and home are never static notions but rather fluid concepts that define identity and relationships beyond the geographic limits of the national space.

Memory is maintained trans-generationally. Amabelle's reflection in one of the final bold print sections affirms the significance of remembering as a means to connect with the dead:

I once heard an elder say that the dead who have no use for their words leave them as part of their children's inheritance [...] The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is find a place to lay it down and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor forever buried beneath the sod. I just need to lay it down sometimes. Even in the rare silence of the night (266).

To a large extent the dead live on through the memories that are left behind. The visual image and metaphor of the "nest" imagines a new and "safe" burial for the dead, one that is free from forgetting and oblivion. The need to communicate the suffering and the witnessing of the slaughter both requires and transcends the existence of an audience.

The imagery of the nest also suggests the possibility of future returns to this resting place where more memories can be incorporated. It is as much an ethical act as a therapeutic one in the sense that telling it, narrating it, can never depend exclusively on whether and whom it will be listened to by. The account in itself is what exists independently of any audience. And yet, sharing it with others, communicating the experience, helps the narrator and restores humanity to the oppressed/dead. The image of Amabelle wanting to repeat this action, the symbolic act of archiving the memories in the land shows a ritualistic memory process in which the repetition of symbolic actions allows a politics of memory and a working through. In her latest collection of essays *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2011), Danticat provides her interpretation of the role of memory in Haitian culture:

Grappling with memory is, I believe, one of the many complicated Haitian obsessions. We have, it seems, a collective agreement to remember our triumphs and gloss over our failures. Thus, we speak of the Haitian revolution as though it happened just yesterday but we rarely speak of the slavery that prompted it [...] we cultivate communal and historical amnesia, continually repeating cycles that we never see coming until we are reliving similar horrors (63-64).

In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat aims to symbolically excavate the unmarked bones of the victims of the massacre through historical fiction. By contextualizing and historicizing the story, Danticat engages in an archeological task of memory that brings the reader closer to the scale of the event and the traumatic effects it is likely to have on the people who witnessed it and survived. This traumatic experience is complicated and accentuated by the difficulties in finding a legitimized public space where an acknowledgement of the experience and its suffering can take place. Thus telling this history, and especially since it has received little attention in historiography until fairly

recently, becomes a responsibility due to all the people who lost their lives in 1937. As in M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, the politics of memory embodied in *The Farming of Bones* is very much motivated by the need to localize the dead, thus supporting Derrida's argument that localizing the place where the dead lay is a decisive and necessary task in the initial process of mourning (1994). This premise is particularly relevant in historical cases where the bodies of the dead have never been found or when no proper burial has been facilitated. This situation, as many cases worldwide illustrate, bears a great impact on the process of collective memory. From the *Zong*, to the mass graves of the Argentinean and Chilean dictatorships in Latin America, to the civil wars and dictatorship in places as far away from each other as Spain, Bosnia and Liberia, cases of unlocalized mass grouping of bodily remains abound. Although it is extremely important to acknowledge the historical specificity in all these conflicts, as *The Farming of Bones* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* do, it is also productive to gain awareness of the ways in which they exist globally and function similarly in reproducing a model of local-global (epistemic) violence where the lives and deaths of members of society are given differing values based upon constructed notions of separation.

In many instances, excavating these memories shows an important division in public opinion due to conflicting interests in regards to the remembering and forgetting of the past. As in these other historical contexts, the lack of a physical marking of the deaths in the 1937 massacre reflects a forced burial of their memory, blocking collectively their grieving at local, national and transnational scales. For localizing the dead ultimately means acknowledging not just their death, and their specific context, but furthermore it also means acknowledging their lives and humanity.

As I mention at the beginning of this section, the novel's opening points to how Amabelle's testimony mourns the unaccounted loss of the victims of the massacre. Similarly, the ending of the novel marks again the river as a site of memory, underscoring the cyclical and performative structure of remembrance. In the final scene, Amabelle returns to the river after her exile in Haiti. This visit takes place years after the massacre but importantly occurs on an October evening, thus marking the anniversary of the massacre. Amabelle again confides, this time not to Metrès Dlo, as in the opening on the novel, but to the reader, her inconsolable need to restage the moment:

I thought that if I relived the moment often enough, the answer would become clear, that they had wanted either for us to die together or for me to go on living, even if by myself. I also thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And also, perhaps, neither will I (309).

The impossibility for Amabelle of making sense of her traumatic experience and the emphasis on repetition as a manifestation of trauma, contrast with the realization that the Parsley massacre will remain unmarked unless people undertake conscious attempts at remembrance. In this passage, memory is implicitly identified as a cultural expression able to provide redress through performative acts of mourning.

### **The (Hi)Story of Oscar Wao: “who is more sci-fi than us?”**

As in *The Farming of Bones*, Junot Díaz's novel also introduces the reader to alternative forms of narrating (and reflecting upon) history. This is achieved, to a large extent, through formal arrangements that invite aesthetic and interpretive considerations. The existence of different texts, subtexts and countertexts faces the reader in a similar manner to Danticat's novel, alongside the issue of historical and narrative hermeneutics.

It propels an awareness of and reflection on the ways in which historical narratives organize power and knowledge. I argue that, in the particular case of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, ‘footnotes’ constitute an important element by which all these issues take form. The role of footnotes in this novel is multifaceted and reveals contrapuntal connections between Oscar’s life in Patterson, New Jersey, the story of his family, and the history of the Dominican Republic. Footnotes appear in the narrative from the very beginning, providing a historical framework of the nation, especially during the “Trujillato” (Trujillo’s era), whilst showing the ways in which that past continues to affect Dominicans on the island and abroad, among diasporic communities in places like Patterson. Stylistically and thematically, footnotes in Díaz’s novel disrupt generic conventions and expectations through their conversational tone on one hand, and through the anomaly of their inclusion within fiction on the other. This calls further attention to the relationship between form and content in historically-based narratives.

Dominick LaCapra notes how footnotes are considered as the part of a text that serves to authenticate and validate historiography or other types of historical texts (5-6). But LaCapra also identifies an occasional parodic use of the footnote in fiction and history that is corroborated in *Oscar Wao*:<sup>84</sup>

Of course, notes may be used in both history and fiction in a manner that questions or even parodies a documentary or self-sufficient research paradigm, and there may be substantive notes that function not merely as references but as elaborations of points or even as significant qualifications of assertions or arguments in the principal text, at times to the point of establishing a critically dialogic relation between text and note or even something approximating a countertext in the notes (6-7).

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<sup>84</sup> From this point onwards I will use this abbreviation of Díaz’s novel.

This visibly emphatic role of the footnote in *Oscar Wao* highlights the need for references at the margins in order to access the story and history of Oscar whilst parodying the authority of this “documentary or self-sufficient research paradigm” that traditionally in Western historiography of the Caribbean, and particularly within Dominican official history, contains multiples gaps, cracks and silences. Footnotes highlight a meta-discursive reflection that, at different levels, confronts the reader with the issue of how to read history, and especially how to read history against the grain of state-based ‘official’ historiography. *Oscar Wao* confronts the limitations in communicating a history that has repressed the memory of a great collective body for decades. It investigates questions that address and imagine other types and forms of representing collective memory by asking: What is the role of the fantastic and the imagination in filling those gaps and making readers feel their haunting presence in the present? What is the interrelation between popular culture and a critical interpretation of official history? And what does the coexistence of personal anecdotes and history in the footnotes reveal about Díaz’s alternative vision of history?

According to Monica Hanna “Yunior [the semi-omniscient narrator in *Oscar Wao*] develops a model that is meant to act as a direct *counterpoint* to the national history presented by the [Trujillo] regime” (emphasis mine 504). Text and footnote therefore mark a “critically dialogic” relationship as LaCapra puts it. Yunior refers to the daunting responsibility of faithfully conveying Oscar’s life story, his family’s biographies, and the history of the Dominican Republic. Through the footnotes, history is introduced in the story in an unabashedly critical tone. The first footnote in the novel sets this tone by explicitly pointing out the absence of Dominican and Caribbean history in educational

curricula, alluding not exclusively (although principally) to the educational system in the United States and the Dominican Republic, but to Western education in general.

For those of you who missed the mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: Trujillo, one of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality. A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulatto who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes and had a fondness for Napoleon era-haberdashery, Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, the Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social and economic life through a potent and familiar history of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master (2).

In a few sentences, Díaz is able to synthesize the dictatorship (which is explored in detail throughout the novel) and establish connections between the dynamics of the plantocracy (the colonial power structure of the plantation) and the dictatorship. The use of language clearly avoids an objective scientific tone and remains unapologetically subjective. However, it crudely states irrefutable and objective facts about Trujillo since 'El Chivo' (as he was also known) did in fact suppress and reject his African ancestry by bleaching his skin. Additionally, he displayed multiple and lasting signs of grandiosity, visibly reflected in the change of street names and various landmarks across the country. Moreover Trujillo was responsible for the deaths and massacre of a large number of both ethnic Dominicans and Haitians. *Oscar Wao* resorts to humor and satire to critique and ridicule the "scientific" tone and supposedly scientific claims of the Western historiographical tradition where form and conventions have regulated what is included and excluded from its validating narratives. This critique is largely enacted through the footnotes in the novel. Through an unabashedly subjective tone, Díaz's narrative confronts the reader with the legitimacy traditionally rendered to Western historiography.

In his introductory portrayal of Trujillo, Yunior uses references to fantastic fiction and popular culture in order to provide a framework that properly contextualizes the magnitude of power acquired, and abused, by Trujillo.

At a first glance, he was just your prototypical Latin American caudillo, but his power was terminal in ways that few historians or writers have truly captured, or I would argue, imagined. He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkside, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up. Famous for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS in the Dominican Republic to honor himself (Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo, and Santo Domingo de Guzman, the first and oldest city in the New World became Ciudad Trujillo) (2).

Here, Yunior comments on the difficulty of looking at history, and specifically at the figure of Trujillo, exclusively through a conventional and realist lens. Since Trujillo's actions often entail a magnification of his character to almost epic dimensions the fantastic and sci-fi become more accurate genres to convey his despotism. Trujillo's own self-fashioning as *the* historical figure in his definition of the nation is already embedded in a discourse of the fantastic and the hyperbolic. By appealing to the fantastic, *Oscar Wao* makes emphasis on the extent to which history in the Caribbean is not only based upon discursive violence that imagines the colony and later re-imagines the nation prescriptively; the fantastic is also able to convey something that a realist and 'matter of fact' account could not. Especially significant is the stress on the role of the imagination in capturing the personality of Trujillo and the impact of his rule. The epistemic violence of Trujillo's re-imagination of the landscape and history of the Dominican Republic is counteracted by Díaz's portrayal of 'El Chivo,' who is hyperbolized to grotesque dimensions. *Oscar Wao's* portrayal of Trujillo evokes Mario Vargas Llosa's portrayal of



‘El Chivo’ in *The Feast of the Goat* since it emphasizes the grotesque and ridiculous aspects of Trujillo as historical character.<sup>85</sup>

Through similes Yuniors compares Trujillo to other “dark figures” such as Sauron (from *The Lord of the Rings*); Arawn (evil character in the series *The Chronicles of Prydain* by Lloyd Alexander);<sup>86</sup> and the Darkside (from the film series *Star Wars*). Although from seemingly discrepant cultural traditions and times, these references relate to Trujillo and the historical period in which he ruled. Common to all those characters, and Trujillo, is their implication in despotic forms of government, the drive toward creating an Empire or Empire-like state, and its safeguard through the physical and discursive violence they entail. These connections confirm the relevance of looking at various ‘imperial designs’ simultaneously in order to identify parallelism between local histories and global designs (Mignolo 2000). All these references to discrepant imperial designs draw attention to an imaginary giving shape to collective memory.

In *Oscar Wao* Yuniors depicts Oscar as a “ghetto nerd” with difficulties in socializing, finding a girlfriend, and adapting to Dominican and American standards of high school and life in general. Oscar is depicted as a fat Dominican boy from Patterson possessing “[n]one of the High Powers of your typical Dominican male, couldn’t have pulled a girl even if his life depended on it. Couldn’t play sports for shit, or dominoes, was beyond uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most of all: no looks” (19-20). Oscar is regarded as

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<sup>85</sup> Oscar Wao makes an explicit reference to Vargas Llosa when Yuniors emphasizes the popularity of Trujillo’s fixation with a young Dominican woman, which “was so common that Mario Vargas Llosa didn’t have to do as much as open his mouth to sift it out of the air” (244).

<sup>86</sup> Arawn is a character inspired by a figure from a Welsh mythology; he is the king of the otherworld and has inspired the character in Alexander’s book series.

an outsider within his own community in Patterson, New Jersey, mostly formed of Caribbean and Latin American immigrants. He is also described as being at odds with the wider US society, where his precarious readability as a Dominican male renders him culturally untranslatable. However, as Yuniors show us, Oscar creates his own world based on sci-fi books and comics; he draws his philosophy and way of seeing the world from its diverse stories.

The footnotes, once again, provide an insightful perspective on the role of the genres. In the sixth footnote Yuniors writes, “[w]here this outsized love of genres jumped off from no one quite seems to know. It might have been a consequence of being Antillean (who more sci-fi than us?) or of living in the DR for the first couple of years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey – a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Third to First) but centuries (from almost no TV or electricity to plenty of both). [...] Who can say?” (21-22). The fictional fantastic characters Oscar identifies with are themselves working against imposed constructs and prescribed forms of belonging to the nation. In counterpoint to Oscar, Yuniors reveals himself (and overemphasizes) his Dominican-infused masculinity, outgoing nature, and ability to fit into the US context of Patterson and Washington Heights.

The narrator in *Oscar Wao* uses Oscar’s knowledge and passion for comics and sci-fi to tell his story whilst simultaneously writing Caribbean history through incorporating in his version a personal and collective experience of the memories that are often dismissed and suppressed by national narratives and the formal historical archive. From the Dominican Fuku, “the Doom of the New World,” (1) to the Zafa (its *counter-spell*) embodied in Yuniors’s narrative, through intertextual references to comics, magical

realism and science fiction, Yunior's careful attention to form and content, and how heterogeneous stories/histories can be integrated into a larger narrative, becomes part of *Oscar Wao's* critique to official historical accounts in the Dominican Republic, other parts of the Caribbean, and globally (1). Together this gives voice to the perspective of those with little or no access to representation in official narratives and archives.

Yunior advocates and experiments with alternative ways of writing history not as representative of national history, but as an account mindful of the memories that remain at the margins of national narratives. Monica Hanna reads Yunior's historiographical task through Walcott's metaphor of fragmentation, "Yunior often explicitly rejects the possibility of recovering an original, whole story because so much of the history he wishes to recover has been violently suppressed and shrouded in silence. The sources to which he has recourse are fragmentary at best, and he asserts the need of his art and creativity to cohere those shards and give a new shape to the vase of Dominican diasporic art and history" (498). While reassembling the fragments of memory to form a whole is not entirely possible, compiling and archiving these fragments reconstructs a new narrative and creates a new shape that is malleable, flexible and offers more than one route to the past. Just as the cracks in Walcott's reassembled vase, the spaces in these reconstructed histories draw our attention to what has been historically silenced by the archive.

Conversely, Elena Machado Sáez rightly cautions against considering Yunior a trustworthy narrator since he imposes his own rigid understandings of gender, sexuality and masculinity upon his reading of Oscar's queer identity. Our encounter with Oscar is mostly mediated through Yunior's eyes – apart from the chapter in the book narrated by

Lola, Oscar's sister. Our awareness that Yunior is moved to tell Oscar's story to honor his death (which is clear toward the end of the novel), and the fact he uses the language and fantastic culture of "the Genres" (20) through which Oscar sees life, may undermine and distract readers from the fact that this is also very much Yunior's story, as Machado Sáez points out (524).<sup>87</sup> Therefore projections of how Yunior sees and experiences his Dominicanness and diasporic experience blur and interfere with Oscar's portrait. For example, "Yunior's mission to identify him [Oscar] as a representative subject who can embody the Dominican diaspora leads him ultimately to silence Oscar's points of queer Otherness—his virginity and sentimentality" (Machado Sáez 524). However, although "[b]y pulling back the veil of the omniscient voice and revealing Yunior as the narrator, Díaz underscores the dangers involved in accepting the authenticity of any historical narrative" (Machado Sáez 527). Likening the process of storytelling in the novel to that of dictatorship may overlook the extent to which Yunior's historiographical labor is far from monological in that it draws from many sources as Monica Hanna argues ("Reassembling the Fragments" 2012).

Machado Sáez reads *Oscar Wao*'s portrayal of the diasporic space as revising "celebratory theorizations of diaspora that frame the concepts of diaspora and nation in opposition to one another" (524). Instead, *Oscar Wao* incorporates a more nuanced and

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<sup>87</sup> Although Yunior describes himself as someone culturally removed from this type of popular culture, he chooses this eclectic poetics from which he also admits learning something as a dominant element in his writing (*Oscar Wao* 331). He chooses this framework in order to explain Caribbean history and culture. Similar to Amabelle, who feels the responsibility of telling Sebastien's story and that of the Haitian victims of the massacre, Yunior is finally compelled to narrate Oscar's life leading to this death in the Dominican plantation. However, there are some differences between Amabelle and Yunior's approach to bearing witness; Amabelle's acute need to tell Sebastien's loss and the events silenced by the state is never portrayed as a selfish act. Even though she admits to laying down the stories in the river as an act that is therapeutic to her, it is clear that remembering becomes urgent and central to survival as an ethical collective need. For Yunior, however, this process is different; he is primarily moved to write the story because he regularly sees Oscar in dreams and these confront him with the past. Therefore the final decision to write Oscar is moved not only by love and friendship, but also by guilt.

complex reflection of how Yuniór feels pressured to identify himself or Oscar as authentic diasporic characters (524). For instance, Yuniór's account of Oscar's experiences of bullying at Rutgers University, where both characters become roommates, ultimately reflects his own anxiety and fears at being targeted as an outcast:

You think people hate a fat person? Try a fat person who's trying to get thin. Brought out the motherfucking Balrog in niggers. Sweetest girls you'd ever see would say the vilest things to him on the street, old ladies would jabber, You're disgusting, *disgusting*, [...] It was straight up nuts.

OK, people suck, but what were his options? O had to do *something*. Twenty-four/seven at a computer, writing sci-fi monsterpieces, darting out the Student Center every now and then to play video games, talking about girls but never actually touching one—what kind of life was that? For fuck's sake, we were at Rutgers—Rutgers was just girls everywhere... (177).

Yuniór's anxiety—most poignantly expressed in the lines “what were his options?” and “what kind of life was that?”—show his inability to imagine an alternative to the cultural constructs and social conventions available to him. Díaz demonstrates through Yuniór's portrayal of Oscar, and the account of their relationship, how the cultural constructs that dictate what is deemed appropriately ‘Dominican’ or ‘Dominican American’ in the U.S., especially in regard to gender roles and stereotypes, often obstruct the personal and collective plurality and diversity associated with the potentiality of the diaspora collective.

In the best contrapuntal and eclectic fashion Díaz frames his novel by opening with two discrepant epigraphic references that nevertheless converge. One is a line from the *Fantastic Four*: “Of what import are brief, nameless lives ... to Galactus?” followed by an extract from Derek Walcott's poem “Schooner Flight” the last line of which posits the problem “either I'm a nobody, or I'm a nation.” This link of Caribbean art and sci-fi

implicitly articulates the question: what belonging can be imagined beyond the dichotomy of the marginalized, outcast figure or the clearly defined identity within a community like that of the nation or the diaspora? In *Oscar Wao* the relationship between text and context, the body of the narrative and the footnotes, is based upon a relationship of inter-dependency that questions these types of dichotomies.

I contend that the unruly nature of the footnotes in *Oscar Wao* defies genre conventions and boundaries that symbolically stand for the physical and ideological borders imposed by nations: be it geo-political borders like the one that separates the Dominican Republic and Haiti or those that impose binary understandings of national and diaspora identity. In history books footnotes are understood to mark the scientific claim of the research and will never include personal elements. However, in *Oscar Wao*, the personal and the political intertwine and alternate jumping on and off from footnotes to the main text and vice versa.

*Oscar Wao* provides a small window into Oscar's life, from his romantic infatuation with girls, to his writing aspirations and curiosity about his Dominican "homeland." The numerous flashbacks and geographic shifts between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic connect the different plot lines in the distant and more recent past events in the novel, often shedding light on the de León's family history. For example, through these narrative shifts readers learn of Beli's cancer (Oscar and Lola's mother), and her complicated and arduous relationship with her daughter Lola in Patterson. They also have access to her even earlier traumatic past and the complicated ways in which shame and silence have marked her past and reverberate throughout Beli's later life to affect her relationship with Lola. Like Oscar, Beli was also ostracized at school in Santo

Domingo for her looks (in Beli's case her dark complexion). Beli suffers racism at school in the Dominican Republic despite, or perhaps due to, being at "El Redentor, one of the best schools in Baní" where she is never accepted socially by classmates and teachers alike (82). However, when her body develops, she starts to attract the attention of boys and men who had previously rejected her. Beli becomes aware of her sexuality, and of "the undeniable concreteness of her desirability which was, in its own way, Power" (94). As in *The Farming of Bones*, the imprint of trauma is marked upon the body and the psyche, creating a scar that grows through its individual and collective silencing. When Beli gets pregnant by a gangster married to Trujillo's sister, police officer's appear to take Beli to a plantation and give her a strong beating in order to provoke an abortion. At that moment, she sees a man who "didn't have a face" (141). Similarly, the man that beats Oscar to death at the end of the story lacks a face, hinting again at the ambiguous nature of culpability for violent acts on Hispaniola. Both scenes therefore foreground the historical continuities of violence in the Dominican Republic. In *The Farming of Bones* the plantation (represented as the Dominican border and the Massacre River) becomes a site of memory where violence is enacted cyclically as in *Oscar Wao* where the plantation is also portrayed as a site conducting a memory of oppression and violence. The participation or the shared vision of "No Face Man" in both episodes of the novel function clearly as an allegory of the lack of accountability for those crimes that are committed by "faceless" men within a regime like Trujillo's.

**"On a Super Final Note": Dreaming for the archives to be passed on**

Drawing from comics, science fiction, popular culture, Caribbean history and poetics, *Oscar Wao* constitutes a hybrid text where all these different and discrepant

references and experiences coalesce forming an inter-cultural and intertextual narrative. Through all this amalgamation of genres and discourses Díaz examines different forms of hybridity closely as a means to counter the homogenizing violence of national narratives. The substantial hybridity of genres in the narrative defies, as Monica Hanna argues, a monologic and homogenous model for the nation and for narrating what the Caribbean region and the Caribbean nation looks like or can be (“Reassembling the Fragments” 2012). The haunting of history’s nature in the form of traumatic memory/ies continues to reverberate throughout countless societies today and the act of rewriting or re-embodiment these accounts is therefore a central aspect of both *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao*. As Junot Díaz himself explains in an interview with Cuban writer Achy Obejas, the focus and role of history in the novel responds to what Díaz identifies as an underlying tension in the Dominican collective unconscious whereby trauma is still largely unaddressed.

Although I didn’t live through the Trujillo dictatorship, the trauma of that dictatorship survived Mr. Trujillo. I arrived as a little boy to the United States, and really I had no interest in politics or the dictatorship, I didn’t want to know anything about it. All that mattered to me was playing ball and books. But being Dominican, from that generation, means that that history, more or less forgotten, remains alive. It’s in the air, it’s alive under all those silences. You don’t need to mention the name of Trujillo, he’s still present at the table [...] If you’re not too thick, you realize that underneath everything there is a very powerful history that still has an impact, as though it’s in our blood. So it wasn’t a big thing to avoid it, to decide I’m not going to write about Trujillo. I think it’s part of Dominican culture, avoiding trauma. Every culture has a great talent for that, avoiding what’s alive inside of those silences in the culture (44-45).

Trauma and transgenerational trauma lie at the heart of *Oscar Wao*. The novel shows how the silencing of traumatic experiences has impeded their being overcome.

This problematic of collective, and national(istic), nature is explored in the text through



its focus on the familial relations and interactions in de Leon's family. The relationship between this micro-focus and a macro-context is hinted at by paralleling the effects of trauma on the individual who silences it and a society that, as Díaz notes, suffers historical amnesia as a result of repressing a collective memory that reflects the experience of the Dominicans who suffered at the hands, words or (in)actions of the regime. Beli, Oscar's mother, never tells Oscar or Lola their grandparents' story and how they were incarcerated under the charge of "[s]lander and gross calumny against the Person of the President" (233). She also keeps from them all hardships experienced by her as a child and young woman in the Dominican Republic. It is through the voice of the 'abuela Inca' (Beli's godmother) however that we learn about Oscar's grandparents, their intellectual and political rejection of the regime, and the fatal consequences that it had. Yunior notes how knowing this story changes Oscar and Lola's vision of their mother, allowing them to better understand her own relationship with them.

By addressing history from different angles and establishing connections between various patterns of physical and epistemic violence in the history of the Dominican nation, Díaz provides in his novel a critical space of analysis of a history in which the memory of many Dominicans and Haitians remains disembodied; their voices silenced and erased. History, as it appears not only in *Oscar Wao's* footnotes but in the overall novel, is also represented as a process rather than a final product. Yunior's aim in telling Oscar's story is that of honoring his memory but also telling his family's story and the history of the Dominicans who suffered the repression of Trujillo's regime.

In the penultimate and untitled section of the novel, Yunior imagines the moment in which Isi, Lola's daughter, arrives at his house and Yunior passes her uncle's story

onto her: “This is what, on my best days I hope. What I dream” (331). In this “dream,” Yunior leads Isi to the basement of his house where he archives Oscar’s documents. “I’ll take her down to my basement and open the four refrigerators where I store her tio’s books, his games, his manuscript, his comic books, his papers [...]” (330). Written documentation, with fantastic elements in this case, becomes an important resource in reconstructing Oscar’s story, and in turn Dominican and US (diaspora) history. Yet this is not the only form of accessing the past as Yunior also states how he wants to talk to her and tell her himself what he witnessed of Oscar’s life and what he was told about, alluding to the importance and value of oral histories and how, in combination, this range of archiving can educate and inform to lead to a productive new future. Yunior ultimately dreams with a trans-generational turn; the possibility that Isi would one day offer her own input in the configuration and re-construction of Oscar’s story: “And maybe, just maybe, if she’s as smart and as brave as I’m expecting her to be, she’ll take all we’ve done and all we’ve learned and add her own insights and she’ll put an end to it” (330-331).

As in *The Farming of Bones*, *Oscar Wao* opens up a space where the voice of individuals can contribute to the transgenerational communication of family history and the history of Hispaniola. The use of ‘testimonio’ in both narratives is key in facilitating this practice. As narrators, Amabelle and Yunior reveal the different ways in which their witnessing of the 1937 Haitian massacre and Oscar’s life respectively, necessarily encompasses their own personal and emotional involvement. The incorporation of the voices of Amabelle and Yunior, and by extension the experience of Haitian and Dominican victims of the Trujillo dictatorship, questions a teleological model of history.

The critical and unapologetic tone in the footnotes questions the authority of Western representations of Caribbean history: its facts, events and discourse. Monica Hanna reads Yunió's narration in *Oscar Wao* as ultimately able to detach itself from the constraints of Caribbean historiography. Thus, "the pressure of historical authority and truth claims, are enslaved by the focus on the history that has been silenced" (Hanna 500). Yunió is able to explore these silences through fantasy and the imagination. By exploring a life experience, memory, and perspective that does not belong to him and that is outside his own subjectivity, Yunió develops a politics of affect that is intimately linked to the act of storytelling. However, this is not without problems. While remembering and writing Oscar's story constitutes Yunió's mourning and his own particular tribute to the "nerd," it also exposes the ways in which Yunió is unable to fully come to terms with his difference.

### **Sites of Counter-memory in *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao***

In Danticat and Díaz's novels, places and landscapes mark personal and collective memory in important ways. In both texts the plantation is experienced as a space where embodied memory remains a *site of memory*, where violence keeps being reenacted, marking historical continuities with the past. However, the plantation also functions as a space where survival signals another type of continuity, enabled by the permanence of ancestral memory and its inter-generational inheritance. This is clearly seen in Amabelle's act of mourning by taking her story back to the river and confiding it to Metrés Dlo. The return, physical and spiritual, to spaces marked by trauma and loss in both novels reveals a cultural and psychological need to confront the past in order to find redress. It also illustrates how such return can become potentially productive of a more

complex and nuanced understanding of national histories. Re-turning to the Dominican nation and crossing the transnational bridge in *Oscar Wao* emphasizes the similarities and differences between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Seeing one place from the soil of the other enables Oscar to know and see these places differently and from more angles, as well as to connect the nature of personal relations in his family with Dominican history.

Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* relates to the forms of memory encountered in *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao*. Generally translated from the French as "sites of memory" or "locations of memory" (Schwartz, "Memory, Temporality, Modernity" 50), '*lieux de mémoire*' are constituted by performative acts of marking the past in the present; marking real and lived memory that would otherwise become lost and die "at the outset of modernity" (52). According to Nora,

*lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally. The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de mémoire* – that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away (12).

Therefore, as Nora argues, *lieux de mémoire* exists in an attempt to highlight "moments of history torn away from the movement of history" (12). *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* convey multiple sites of memory for those individuals and collectives that are disenfranchised and deprived of remembrance; whose experiences and versions of history have been for decades silenced through censorship and/or the unwillingness to confront a past that contradicts the official interpretation of history and

of the Dominican or Haitian 'nation'. As 'sites of memory' themselves, these novels bring memory in closer, and in conversation with history, and critically examine the unequal historical representation of black Dominicans and Haitians.

Nora identifies a profound dichotomy and opposition between the nature of memory and history as they are understood today. However, this model proves flawed in truly examining the interrelation between history and memory and the understandings of what constitutes one and the other. For Nora, 'memory' is tied to more archaic and traditional modes of remembering (and forgetting) whilst 'history' is placed at the center of modernity, as one of its byproducts as well as being characterized by a critical analysis of the past (8-9). Nora's binary differentiation between memory and history, whereby the former is inscribed and manifested spontaneously and more so in rural, traditional environments, whilst the latter becomes identified with how modern society organizes the past, overlooks the complex ways in which radical and critical expressions of memory revise history and claim alternative and more democratic ways of narrating history through specific memories.

Collective memory, as these novels suggest, can also be a plural exercise of remembering that critically incorporates or rather confronts the individual and collective stories and experiences within historical events with the official historical narrative of that event. The forms of remembrance and memory-works, even in agrarian societies like the villages along the Dominican-Haitian border, are not exclusively confined to either "traditional" or "modern" forms of memory. For example, after the massacre Amabelle tries to leave her own testimony (without success) within the oral records that the Dominican church starts to collect. In this case, the emphasis is placed not on the

incompatibility of official archiving, but with the cultural memory of peasants, domestic workers and other members of the Haitian-Dominican community. The novel stresses rather the inefficacy and inability of such institutional archiving to allow members of the community affected to leave their memories in those records, providing firsthand accounts and thus contributing to the process of historiography of the massacre.

Therefore, the binary distinction between traditional and modern forms of remembering, represented in the categories of ‘memory’ and ‘history’ respectively, already reproduces the categorization between the traditional and the modern originated in the project of modernity; a distinction that Díaz and Danticat’s novels deconstruct through their configuration of counter-memory and counter-archives.

### **Un-silencing the Past of Plural Counter-Memories**

The narratives in *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* stretch the boundaries of what is traditionally recognized and validated as historiographical discourse since they claim the centrality of oral and written ‘testimonios’ by individuals who witnessed and experienced episodes in the history of Hispaniola, specifically between 1930 and 1961, during the presidency of Trujillo. Both novels stand against the enforcement of a prefigured cultural and national identity. Amabelle, Sebastien, Yves and the other Haitian characters in *The Farming of Bones* are rendered by the Dominican state as people with an indeterminate and undefined relation to the nation; their presence in the Dominican Republic thus challenges state definitions of national identity, which before and after 1937 are highly determined by a subscription to Spanish coloniality. Similarly, Oscar, and characters like Lola and Yuniór struggle in different contexts where their difference is marked as alien and irreconcilable with the social norm. For instance, Oscar’s

masculinity exists at the margins of ‘Dominicanness,’ whilst Yuniór, who on the other hand portrays himself through a hyper-masculinized language, feels estranged from his recent love for writing, intellectuality and identity as an ‘artist,’ that he locates outside the socio-cultural registers with whom he identifies himself before meeting Oscar. Lola’s questioning of traditional gender roles and fixed notions of masculinity and femininity associated also with ‘Dominicanness’ extends this sense of a collective resistance to cultural homogeneity and its association with national (and diasporic) belonging.

Chicano feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa offers a definition of “border culture” that resonates with the situation on the Haitian-Dominican border and the entangled relationship between national and diasporic identity in *Oscar Wao*. Similarly to Danticat and Díaz’s novels, *Borderlands* is a very hybrid text combining poetry, prose, and folk legend. It is widely read as ‘testimonio’ and autobiographical mix of genres, clearly part of Anzaldúa’s purpose of giving tangible form to the argument of breaking down regimented intellectual definitions of cultural expression. April Shemak locates an ambivalence in Anzaldúa’s border theory as the border becomes both a productive zone of cultural exchange and a marker of inequality and exploitation of labor (“Remembering Hispaniola” 85-86; *Asylum Speakers* 157-158) as is latent in *The Farming of Bones*. The non-linear narrative structure of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands – La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) resembles the narrative structure in *The Farming of Bones* and the genre hybridity that permeates *Oscar Wao*. However, what really connects these three texts most productively is their shared focus on a wider understanding of history that renders it accessible from a plurality of forms and discourses. Oral traditions and forms of memory;

popular ceremonies, folk tales, intertextual references and testimony are introduced as legitimate means to know history, providing a reading against the grain.

The multiple physical and figurative borders and boundaries crossed in Danticat's and Díaz's novels conceptually resist the demands of homogenizing national discourses. From the non-linear narrative structure in both novels, which challenges a linear and 'straightforward' way of narrating history, to the dialogics marked by a 'poetics of counterpoint' embedded in Danticat's double narrative and Díaz's use of the footnotes, *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* generate awareness of the restraints to individual and collective heterogeneity embedded in nationalist discourses like Trujillo's. In reading Danticat and Díaz's novels it is also important to consider the question of the responsibility of knowing this part of Dominican and Haitian history. The issue of audience and reception is of key importance. As immigrant writers, Danticat and Díaz are cognizant of the role of historical awareness not just for Dominicans and Haitians in their homelands, but also abroad. They have both stated in interviews their desire to reach diverse audiences and take on issues that affect deeply the Dominican and Haitian communities. Equally the fact that both novels are often assigned in high school, college, and university courses in the United States, and are widely read, especially in the United States where both writers currently reside, attests to the kind of critical conversations that both are engaged in fostering. Their novels are thus engaged with collective memory in the broadest sense, since they deal with issues and forms of collective counter-memory but also aim to include those generations who may have not experienced the Trujillo or Vincent dictatorships in the on-going process of remembering and remembrance.



Both the purpose and impact of *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* demonstrate how “what we refer to as collective memory, many times is a present collective consciousness of the past, rather than the personally lived experiences” (Colmeiro 21). As Danticat puts it in her collection of autobiographical essays, *Create Dangerously* (2010), “even if history is most often recounted by victors, it’s not always easy to tell who the rightful narrators should be, unless we keep redefining with each page what it means to conquer and be conquered” (102). To a large extent, *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* explore and re-define not only “what it means to conquer and be conquered” but also, by extension, they look at what it means to narrate history from the perspective of those who “conquer” and are “conquered” (Danticat, *Create* 102).

As in the case of Cozier’s artwork and Philip’s poetry, Danticat’s and Diaz’s novels also use the counterpoint to draw attention to the complexity and interconnectedness between individual and collective popular memories, and the disconnect between official history and the silences and gaps existing in-between. In *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao*, reading contrapuntally allows readers to appreciate this interplay. For example, in *The Farming of Bones* there are two different types of narratives. On one hand, we encounter Amabelle’s personal and family memories, with which her love story with Sebastien is interwoven, and on the other hand there is the account of life in the village of Alegria and the massacre. These narratives are differentiated; the first is printed in bold whilst the latter is not. This visual effect highlights two distinct voices that, albeit different, connect with each other in ways that reveal commonalities in the experience of personal and individual trauma and the trauma

of the massacre which, although experienced individually and firsthand by Amabelle, is also experienced and shared by an extended and larger community.

Amy Novak, in her article “A Marred Testament: Cultural Trauma and Narrative in Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*,” locates a “point/counterpoint” dynamics between these two narrative lines in the novel. These dynamics not only highlight a “model of historiography that embraces rather than denies the ambiguity and spectral nature of traumatic memory” as Novak argues, but it also facilitates an examination of the personal and individual memory alongside the collective (95). Danticat puts forward a historiographical ethos that generates a critical conversation between different modes of understanding history: from the perspective of those whose experience has been dismissed in the historiography of the massacre, and in relation to other historical moments and state (and state oriented) historiography. Díaz’s *Oscar Wao* also deploys a counterpoint dynamics through the use of the footnotes in the novel. The incorporation of the footnotes not only pushes generic boundaries, questioning the fictional and creative elements within historiography, and the influence of history (especially) in Caribbean creative writing, it also aids readers to make connections between seemingly discrepant experiences in history and across geographies, in Patterson (New Jersey) and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic).

Danticat’s and Díaz’s novels not only revise history; they revise too our way of reading and approaching history and its effects on later generations. They look at what remains in the untold and silenced memories. Those memories linger and show their resonance and echo in the biography of places and the people who inhabit and build communities in them. Both novels prove that there is no possible telling of Oscar and

Amabelle's life without telling the history of Dominicans and Haitians who experienced Trujillo's oppression—and vice versa. Through a blend of realism and fantastic fiction in the case of Díaz, and through realism in Danticat's writing, these authors imagine the forgotten and silenced past whilst examining how it impacts individuals and collectives inter-generationally. *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* posit the question of what can be built of that which remains, of the fragmented and often unknown or unrecorded memories? And, what does knowing this history, even when it is through the fictionalization of stories within it, mean today?

#### **Chapter 4. The Archive and the Repertoire in Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* and Roshini Kempadoo's *Ghosting*.**

The turn to the archive as a locus of critical investigation in contemporary Caribbean and black British (performance) poetry, photography and installation art makes manifest the ongoing necessity to situate history, and its knowledge, in conversation with the present moment. As I demonstrate in previous chapters, contemporary artistic expression across the Caribbean region and the diaspora is deeply engaged in interrogating the productiveness of thinking about, and thinking through, the politics of archives. The echoes of voices absent from archives in the Caribbean or Britain, and largely under-discussed in the public sphere, resonate with special intensity when read against contemporary episodes of disavowal. In this chapter, I read Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* and Roshini Kempadoo's *Ghosting* as performance and multimedia art that shifts reading and viewing paradigms towards a politics of memory where the repertoire and the archive meet in productive ways to imagine experiences previously silenced in a series of archival documents.

The modality of counter-memory at stake in *Ship Shape* and *Ghosting* presents itself as imagination. The act of reconstructing and (re)imagining the past in these works emerges out of the absence of a first-hand experienced account or record; memory is imagined and evoked with the acknowledgement that although the archives of slavery (in the case of *Ship Shape*) and post-emancipation archives do not hold the stories that are otherwise imagined, these erased experiences shape the history of locations like Lancaster's Sunderland Point and the Trinidadian Stollmeyer plantation in Santa Cruz.

Diana Taylor defines the repertoire as an assemblage of mediums (written, visual and oral) that document the memory of an experience in performative ways, thus emphasizing the connection between the past and the present moment in processes of memorialization. *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape* are both examples of an entanglement between the written archival document, the visual and the performative. Kempadoo's installation uses original archival material, still moving images, oral narratives and interactive activation. Similarly, Smartt's poetry has a performative element as it is conceived also as performance poetry. The blend and elasticity of forms embedded in both works reflects the dynamism of the repertoire, which together with their inclusion of archival material (and its revision), configures an alternative archiving of history.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, examples of counter-memory archives in *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape* rely heavily on transmission and the presence of an audience. Their impact and readability changes considerably when they are either read to oneself, seen in performance—as in the case of *Ship Shape*—or simply viewed or played in the case of *Ghosting*. As Taylor notes, the repertoire creates the possibility for audiences to participate in the “production and reproduction of knowledge;” facilitating thus a zone of contact between artists, art, medium, knowledge, and audiences (20). I identify *Ship Shape* and *Ghosting* as instances where disembodied memory is given a space to manifest itself under a new light. As a

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor locates the notion of the ‘repertoire’ within the performative and performance studies. However, her insistence on separating the repertoire from the narrative element (as a form of transmitting knowledge specific of Western knowledge) seems limiting and ready to impose a dichotomy between the repertoire and the archive that contradicts her argument about how “they usually work in tandem” (21). Taylor instead connects to the notion of the ‘scenario,’ where the repetition of embodied memory allows spectators to view and witness the cultural significance of events and its memory through the performance. For example, in an examination of a performance organized by the Argentinean group H.I.J.O.S. (children of the “disappeared” during Videla’s dictatorship, 1976-1981), Taylor notes how through their “escraches” public performance protests a younger generation “not only make visible the crimes committed by the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, but also make visible the lasting trauma suffered by families of the disappeared and the country as a whole.” (165).

result, the voices from Trinidad's post-emancipation plantation in *Ghosting*, as the voice of a slave buried in Sunderland Point in *Ship Shape*, re-gain a certain 'corporeality' through the textuality and performativity of both works.

Smartt's performance poetry and Kempadoo's multi-media practice not only look at history against the grain of the colonial archive, both works implicitly defy conservative nationalist discourses in Britain which, to varying degrees, especially from the 1960s to the 1990s, have had an impact in the public sphere through contested notions of citizenship and belonging marked by what Paul Gilroy described in 1987 as a "new racism [that] is primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. It specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community ..." (*There Ain't No Black* 45). As in other European nations like Spain, where colonial history is rarely examined critically when it affects national image,<sup>89</sup> historical official narratives in Britain have placed an emphasis on the successes of abolitionist history and emancipation over a more critical investigation of the history of slavery and colonialism.<sup>90</sup> For this reason, the focus on historical excavation and re-construction at stake in *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape* takes on a special significance as it allows the possibility for audiences to appreciate the complex ways in which the Anglophone Caribbean and Britain's history are interconnected. *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape* demonstrate the implications of a new sense of "diaspora" that Jerry Philogene defines not through its conventional meaning as the

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<sup>89</sup> Historical amnesia in Spain in terms of its involvement in the slave trade and colonial oppression exceeds that of the UK, where debates around the issue at academic, public sphere and community-based levels are far more common.

<sup>90</sup> In an article published in the Guardian, Catherine Hall reflects on Britain's debt to slavery calling for an acknowledgement of "the ways in which the fruits of slavery are part of our collective memory." ("Britain's Massive Debt to Slavery." Web. 26 Feb. 2013). Hall has worked on a research project affiliated with University College London's History department that traces the extent to which the economic benefits of the slave trade has benefitted the UK economically.

< <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/feb/27/britain-debt-slavery-made-public>>.

“dispersal and scattering” of peoples, but rather as a “diaspora that speaks of struggle, survival, and the re-creation of a people” (“Visual Narratives” 85). Diaspora, in this sense entails “the intellectual and cultural connections to the homeland, as well as the numerous artistic, physical and spiritual ways in which homelands are created” (Philogene, “Visual Narratives” 85).<sup>91</sup> This sense of diaspora, conveyed in *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape*, bridges the history of both Britain and the Caribbean’s geographies and, I argue, makes the experience of historical erasure or amnesia not just a matter relevant to the diasporic subject, but to any visitor and reader as an important part of world history.

Kempadoo’s and Smartt’s families migrated to Britain from Guyana and Barbados respectively as part of the *Windrush* generation that arrived in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s seeking economic opportunities in the British metropolis. The need for extra workforce after the economic impact of World War II led British authorities to promote migration from its Commonwealth colonies. However, the opposition to migration and diaspora formation by nationalist and fascist groups started to radicalize in the 1960s. These attitudes were epitomized in Enoch Powell’s infamous speech “Rivers of Blood” in 1968, in which Powell explicitly encouraged the use of violence against all citizens (particularly first or second generation immigrants) whom he considered to be a threat to his particular sense of British identity (Philips and Philips, *Windrush*, 249-52).<sup>92</sup>

Despite the intercultural dynamics in many neighborhoods of the city, conservative

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<sup>91</sup> Philogene’s article “Visual Narratives of Cultural Memory and Diasporic Identities: Two Contemporary Haitian-American Artists” examines the ways in which cultural memory shapes diasporic identity (and vice versa) in the artwork of Haitian-American visual artists Rejin Leys and Vladimir Cybil. As Philogene demonstrates, the iconography and visual vocabularies in the work of both artists not only points to the precariousness involved in contemporary experiences of migration that many Haitian immigrants have to face, but this iconography also suggests connections and frames this experience within the larger history of African forced migration in the Caribbean region. (*Small Axe*. 26. (2006): 84-99. Web. 26. Feb. 2013).

<sup>92</sup> For an informative review of the role of Powell’s discourse in British nationalist politics of the 1970s see Mike Philips and Trevor Philip’s “Powellism and the Politics of the Seventies” in *Windrush The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain*.

attitudes influenced by these nationalist discourses mobilized violent action. Cases of arson in the 1970s, especially those in neighborhoods like Notting Hill and Lewisham, where the fascist National Front group visibly threatened multiracial communities, were followed by the eruption of major riots in cities like London and Birmingham in the 1980s.<sup>93</sup>

With the purpose of contextualizing the history of intellectual and artistic contributions of black artists in Britain, I will provide an overview of three different (yet sometimes overlapping) moments in the genealogy of the diaspora arts in Britain that Stuart Hall foregrounds in his essay “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-War History”.<sup>94</sup> The first moment is defined by the work of artists who migrated to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. One of its main pioneers was Jamaican sculptor Ronald Moody whose wooden sculptures of black male and female bodies provides a counterpoint to the Cubist and European modernist appropriations of African art. Some Caribbean artists who belonged to this movement were Frank Bowling, Donald Locke and Aubrey Williams, who formed part of the larger Caribbean Arts Movement of the 1960s that brought together a number of visual artists and writers.<sup>95</sup> According to Hall,

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<sup>93</sup> The Brixton Riots, for instance, were largely the result of institutional racism and police harassment of black youth. Margaret Thatcher’s implementation of the “sus” law allowed policemen to stop and search any person suspected of the intent to commit a crime, which gave leeway to a panoptical policing of urban space in these neighborhoods. (Other riots were: Notting Hill, London 1975, 1976; Handsworth Riots, Birmingham 1981; Tottenham, London 1985). See John MacLeod’s “Babylon’s Burning” in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (2004) for a contextualization of these issues and its role in space politics in the dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson and the fiction of Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie.

<sup>94</sup> Stuart Hall contextualizes his use of the term “black” as rooted in the context of the 1970s when it “encompassed all the minority migrant communities without the careful discrimination of ethnic, racial, regional, national and religious distinctions which has since emerged. It is used here not as the sign of an ineradicable genetic imprint but as a signifier of difference: a difference which, being historical, is therefore always changing, always located, always articulated with other signifying elements: but which, nevertheless, continues – persistently – to register its disturbing effects” (2).

<sup>95</sup> Other diaspora black artists part of the movement were Rasheed Araeen (Karachi); Iqbal Geoffrey (Pakistan); Avinash Chandra (India); Uzo Egonu (Nigeria); Li Yuan Chia (China) and David Medalla (Philippines) among others. This generation arrived in England a few years before and after WWII and was



one of the differences between this and the next generation of artists lies in their relation to the British metropolis, Western art and representation. Diaspora artists in the 1950s and 1960s were excited by the anti-colonial spirit and the possibility to participate in modern art from the metropolis since,

they came to Britain feeling that they naturally belonged to the modern movement and, in a way, it belonged to them. The promise of decolonization fired their ambition, their sense of themselves as already ‘modern persons’. It liberated them from any lingering sense of inferiority (Hall, “Black Diaspora” 5).

This moment in diaspora arts also extends to literature. The arrival in London of writers like Edgar Mittelholzer (Guyana), George Lamming (Barbados), Vic Reid (Jamaica), Andrew Salkey (Jamaica), Sam Selvon (Trinidad), and V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad) among others, changed the literary scene of the metropolis, especially as in the coming decades these writers started to be read as the forerunners of post-colonial literature. Their writing in London, where publication opportunities were better than in the Caribbean, fostered a literary renaissance and the advent of what became known as the ‘the West Indian novel’. Equally, the BBC radio program *Caribbean Voices* (produced by Henry Swanzy since 1946) provided an important launching platform for writers in London, connecting them with a Caribbean audience at ‘home,’ as the program offered literature readings, workshops and advice to writers in the region, where it was broadcast. It is important to note, however that the literary work of Caribbean, African and Asian women writers of this generation has been previously rather overlooked in studies of Caribbean and diaspora literature in Britain. Writers like Una Marson

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influenced by modernist aesthetics. As Hall points out, Rasheed Araeen became also very much involved in supporting black diaspora arts. In 1989 he curated *The Other Story*, a seminal retrospective exhibition that grouped the work of many of the diaspora artists previously mentioned. Araeen was also founding editor of the influential cultural studies and arts journal *Third Text* (Hall, “Black Diaspora” 4).

(Jamaica) and Claudia Jones (Trinidad) in the 1940s and 1950s, and others like Beryl Gilroy (Guyana) and Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) in the 1970s are rarely considered in critical examinations of the diasporic arts and intellectual scene, even when their explorations of diaspora experience and life in the metropolis shows interesting similarities and counterpoints to the experiences of male intellectuals.<sup>96</sup> For instance, although the role of Henry Swanzy has always been praised for his promotion of Caribbean literature in the postwar decades, fewer people know that Una Marson was the original producer of *Caribbean Voices* from 1941-1946 and from whom Swanzy took over.<sup>97</sup>

The two other moments that Hall locates in the visual arts diaspora scene are marked by the socio-political climate of the 1980s and the 1990s. The eighties were dominated by a reaction against racial discrimination and an exploration of visual vocabularies deconstructing the restrictive notion of Britishness from which many black artists felt excluded. Artworks like Eddie Chamber's *Destruction of the NF* (1979-80) encapsulated this feeling.<sup>98</sup> Hall notes, thinking specifically about Chambers' piece, how this anger "literally scars, fractures, invades, scribbles and squiggles [...] the surfaces of works" (17). For *Destruction of the NF*, Chambers creates four posters with swastikas

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<sup>96</sup> However, it is equally important to acknowledge the work of scholars like Alison Donnell, Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory who have been crucial in recuperating and claiming the role of Caribbean women writers both in the region and the diaspora. See Boyce Davies and Savory's *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (1990); Myriam A. J. Chancy's *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (1997); Donnell's *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature: Cultural Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (2005) and Meredith Gadsby's *Sucking Salt: Women Writers, Migration and Survival* (2006). Donnell has recently compiled and edited a collection of Una Marson's poetry (*Una Marson: Selected Poems*. Peepal Tree Press, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> The original program that Marson transformed into *Caribbean Voices* was called *Calling the West Indies* (1939), a radio program part of BBC World Services that was designed to connect West Indian soldiers who enrolled in the British Army with their families back home while serving during WWII. In *Calling the West Indies* soldiers would read letters addressed to relatives. In 1941, Marson changed the format of the program to accommodate a literary focus.

<sup>98</sup> NF stands for National Front.

patterned into the design of the Union Jack flag all placed upon a black background. They capture four different stages of fracture leading to the final stage when the flag is fully shattered and destroyed.<sup>99</sup> Hall explains how the politicized art of this group of artists including Eddie Chambers, Marlene Smith, Keith Piper and Donald Rodney was distinguished by the use of,

a highly graphic, iconographic art of line and montage, cut-out and collage, image and slogan; the ‘message’ often appearing too pressing, too immediate, too literal, to brook formal delay and, instead, breaking insistently into ‘writing’. The black body, stretched, threatened, distorted, degraded, imprisoned, beaten, and resisting, became an iconic recurring motif (17).

These methodologies, which were very common in conceptual modern art at this time, came to define a “‘Black’ aesthetic” (Hall 17). In its political intervention this aesthetic resembles the visual language and strategy of Cozier’s *Wait Dorothy Wait* in that it deconstructs and challenges prescribed and imposed notions of citizenship, national belonging and historical representations of the black body. Out of this moment and energy emerged the Black Arts Movement, influenced by its analogous counterpart in the US. This movement continued throughout the 1990s and artists like Roshini Kempadoo, Sonia Boyce, Ingrid Pollard, Sunil Gupta, David A. Bailey joined in and, with Keith Piper, went on to explore issues of identity politics with a focus on “identity and the body,” that Hall identifies as a main concern of these artists, and which started being explored through multiple mediums (19). Many turned to photography and staged constructions of the black body. Piper, whose art practice shows great affinities with Kempadoo’s, was very much interested in exploring the individual and psychological effects of racism and stereotypical, criminalized representations of black young men in

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<sup>99</sup> Other black British artists and artworks that Stuart Hall points out as using this radical aesthetic are Keith Piper’s *Reactionary Suicide: Black Boys Keep Swinging (Another Nigger Died Today)* (1982) and Donald Rodney’s *The Lexicon Of Liberation* (1984) (Hall 17).

the media. The incorporation of text was often meant to provoke a reaction and a contrast with the work to foster critical dialogue.<sup>100</sup> The 1990s therefore marked a moment where the notion of ‘black British’ identity started to be coined, claimed and given multiple shapes by black visual artists as well as writers. Poets like Benjamin Zephaniah, Fred D’Aguiar, and more recently Dorothea Smartt, Sheree Mack or Jacob Sam-La Rose have also engaged and positioned themselves from their own personal perspectives of what it meant to articulate a black British identity and aesthetics.

### **Caribbean photography: the ethnographic gaze and the family archive**

Contemporary Caribbean photography, both in the region and the diaspora, is deeply engaged in contesting the legacy of a photographic tradition characterized by elite photographers who have historically framed the representation of the African, Chinese and Indian person through a particular, often ethnographic, lens. As discussed in chapter one, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century depictions of the region and its population follow aesthetic conventions that represent the Caribbean “native” as picturesque and exotic (Thompson, *An Eye*). In similar terms, Derrick Price situates the role of early British photography in the colonies as an important tool that “helped to construct an archive of the achievements of the Victorian colonial and imperial project” (“Surveyors and Surveyed” 86). Both landscape and ethnographic photographs, in this sense, became part of a,

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<sup>100</sup> See *Keith Piper: Relocating the Remains* for a comprehensive and insightful exploration of Keith Piper’s work written by Kobena Mercer (Iniva), 1997. Roshini Kempadoo, like Piper has specialized her practice in digital media. Piper explores the re-figuration of archival documents in the electronic setting where images of the black body that mark the violence of the colonial archive are juxtaposed on the TV or computer screen.

Victorian fervour for classification [that] extended to whole peoples, who were categorised and ranked according to ‘anthropological type’. [...] Those who were subjected to the colonizer’s gaze were often seen as merely representative of racial or social groups, and were usually posed so as to embody particular kinds of dress, social roles and material cultures. (Price, “Surveyors and Surveyed” 82-83).

Melanie Archer and Mariel Brown’s *Pictures from Paradise: A Survey of Contemporary Caribbean Photography* collects the work of Caribbean artists like Jamaican Renée Cox who both mirrors and inverts this kind of staging through the tableaux vivant. In *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004), a series dedicated to Nanny, the eighteenth century maroon leader and Jamaican national hero, Cox portrays herself dressed up as Nanny enacting a variety of scenarios (Nanny holding a big basket of bananas on “Banana Road” or defiantly holding her machete in “Lolivya” and “Nanny Warrior”). In all these photographs, despite their staged nature, Nanny’s pose reflects an awareness and participation in the production of this visual documentation of herself as historical actor and agent. As in Roshini Kempadoo’s *Ghosting*, which also appears in *Pictures from Paradise*, the enactments of Nanny follow the postcolonial aesthetic gesture of making the past and the present intersect and blur; this is achieved through the photographic lens’ emphasis on the constructedness of the image. Some of Cox’ tableaux vivants like “Mother of Us All” appear separately reproduced in black and white and in color. As a result, this variation of the same image marks an almost indistinguishable temporality, since aesthetically the past and the present become seemingly interchangeable. The black and white version of “Mother of Us All” shows Cox herself sitting on the porch of a wooden house in the countryside. Five small children surround her, and like her, they look right into the camera. The fact that she is wearing a white skirt and a headscarf similar to the one that Cox wears in the Nanny series provides the

visual connection with Nanny. Seeing the color version, on the other hand, erases the 'pastness' represented in the black and white image.

Another distinctive element of contemporary photography, especially documentary photography, by Caribbean and black British artists is the incorporation of photographic material from artists' family archives into the artwork, illustrating a focus on family portraiture as a means to document black and Caribbean history. For instance, Mariamma Kambon's *Black Power's Inheritance* documents the life of both an older and younger generation descendant of the 1970s Black power movement in Trinidad and the US. It gathers photographic portraits that Kambon takes in domestic and private spaces, capturing quotidian moments or personal relations. This emphasis on the documentation of family inheritance provides an insight into how a sense of history and political awareness, as well as its (re)interpretation, is largely transmitted trans-generationally through family relationships.

Photographs from family and formal archives are used in digital photography, utilizing techniques that provide a new shape and re-contextualization to the images. This approach characterizes the work of Vincentian artist Holly Bynoe. For instance, *Compound* consists of digital collages where Bynoe includes photographs from her own family archive, media and historical records. Through this arrangement, the series explores the role of memory (both in the context of family history and Caribbean history) as a means to interrogate and shape identity. One of its digital collages, titled "On Deck," includes a 1940s scanned photograph of two sailors (family relatives of the artist) who travel sailing the Caribbean together (see figure 16, following page). For this, and the other collages of the series, Bynoe displaces the pixels digitally in order to create a visual

effect of fragmentation. As a result, the composition also acquires a scratched appearance, suggesting the erosion that time plays on personal and collective memory. Something else that emphasizes this is the black abstract effect that obstructs the vision of half their faces; this stain symbolizes death and connects the distant memory of family to a process of remembrance. In this process, to actively remember and memorialize the dead engage in an act of mourning in which remembering and honoring the lives of lost ones generates a reflection on the paradoxical vulnerability and persistence of memory. The compositional arrangement of Bynoe's digital collages is very similar to Kempadoo's photomontages whereby formally, the juxtaposition of images from different official/formal, family and authored photographs contrapuntally link the contexts evoked in all images.



Figure 16. Holly Bynoe. "On Deck." *Compounds*. 2009. Digital collage. 30 x 40 in. Courtesy of the artist.

The stark division of archival visual documents in “On Deck” underscores this. The differentiated image on the left corresponds to a media photograph of the ship SS *Antilles* which sailed with a European tourist float and famously burned and drowned with no casualties off the coast of Mustique in 1971. The superposition of Bynoe’s family archive photograph on the left ‘square’ of the composition interconnects different experiences of migration.

The cultural significance of the family album has generated critical attention in the last decades. In Britain, publications like Charlie Phillips and Mike Phillip’s *Notting Hill in the Sixties* (1991), Paul Gilroy’s *Black Britain: A Photographic History* (2008) or more recently Tina M. Campt’s *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (2012) confirm the crucial role that documentary photography and the family archive have played. This focus has been important not only in documenting the process of migration and diaspora communities in Britain and other parts of Europe, but also in shaping alternative images and portrayals that countered some of the stereotypical representations of black Britons in the sensationalist British media, particularly newspapers like *The Sun*.<sup>101</sup> Another important project that makes visible the role of documentary and family photography in diasporic Britain is Autograph ABP (Association of Black Photographers), where Kempadoo’s work is also being archived. Autograph, founded in 1983, is located in the arts space Rivington Place, London, jointly

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<sup>101</sup> For an informative documentary on the history of West Indian migration and diasporic life in Britain see *Windrush* Dir. David Upshal. BBC2, 1998. VHS. This documentary describes West Indian migration and life in Britain—especially London—ranging from the arrival of the boat *Empire Windrush* in 1948 (which transported 493 West Indian migrants to England) to the year 1998 when the video was created to commemorate the 50th anniversary of that arrival. This documentary also collects testimonies of first and second-generation migrants, of poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson and scholars and sociologists like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. It offers a particularly good insight into the complicit role of the sensationalist press in archiving and giving popular reach to pervasive and racialized representations of black British citizens.



with Iniva (the Institute of International Visual Arts); it hosts exhibitions, conferences and an archive that collects, curates and facilitates research of culturally diverse photography in Britain. A description of this archive on Rivington Place’s website states how the archive “will highlight a missing chapter in the UK’s cultural history”.<sup>102</sup> This notion of filling in the gaps of British history by incorporating and giving reach to these visual archives of diaspora experience and life in the UK is central to both Kempadoo’s and Smartt’s work.

***Ghosting: bringing to life the ghosts of memory***

Roshini Kempadoo’s artistic practice derives from a tradition of documentary photography. Her career originated and developed with Format Photographic Agency, Britain’s pioneer agency concentrating on the visual documentation of women’s work, which was created exclusively by women photographers.<sup>103</sup> Early artwork in Kempadoo’s career shows the influence of social documentary photography and portraiture and aims to interrogate and push its boundaries. For example, the photomontage ‘Who do they expect me to be today?’ part of the series *Identity in Production* (1990), combines visual techniques associated with social photography to suggest a contemporary reflection on cultural identity politics at the beginning of the 1990s (see figure 17).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See < <http://www.rivingtonplace.org/Photographic-archive> >.

<sup>103</sup> The agency was created in 1983 and it documented visually the work and history of women in Britain and other locations concentrating on subjects and issues that were underrepresented in the larger field of documentary photography and the public sphere. The agency provided photographic material for magazines, journals and other publications. In 2003 (the year that marked the 20 year anniversary of the agency and unfortunately also its closing) The National Gallery in London displayed a retrospective group exhibition titled *Format Photography Agency: 1983-2003*, which displayed the work of its former members and mapped out the trajectory of the agency. Along with other members of Format—including Pam Isherwood, Anita Corbin, Raissa Page and Roshini Kempadoo—a total of 20 photographers’ work was included in this exhibition.

<sup>104</sup> *Identity in Production* consists of six photographs and text lines that center on the issue of personal and cultural identity and the social spaces that either constrict or foster those identities.

This photograph displays three different portraits of Kempadoo juxtaposed very close to each other in a dark background that only lets viewers see the artist's face. The portrait on the far left shows Kempadoo wearing large silver hoop earrings and her hair wrapped in a scarf. In the following center image the artist stands with her eyes closed whilst the image on the right shows her gazing into a distant point on her left wearing an Indian-style headscarf. This self-portrait construction, especially when considered in combination with the series' title, suggests the limitations created by notions of identity when they are socially imposed on individuals under fixed preconceptions or set expectations of a given cultural identity. "Who do they expect me to be today?" underscores Jaqueline Francis' argument about the pitfalls of multiculturalism:

[o]ur poorly conceived multicultural policies merely encourage us to look for the recognizable markers of minority difference, to parrot the rhetoric that advances essentialist ideas about nonwhite subjects, and to create demand for the ethnic and racial particularity that is valued as authentic, natural and real. (188).



Figure 17. Roshini Kempadoo. "Who do they expect me to be today?" *Identity in Production* (1990). Courtesy of the artist and Autograph ABP.

The inclusion of the text “Who do they expect me to be today?” implies the shifting social demands of contemporary cultural narratives whereby a person is expected to represent a single, specific identity at a given moment regardless of one’s complex cultural diversity. For the artist, as the photomontage suggests, the influence of her own African, Indo-Caribbean and British cultural codes and identities revises essentialist and prefigured/regulated notions of identity.

Kempadoo’s art practice often reflects an autobiographical focus; as a Caribbean-British woman of Indian ancestry she explores Caribbean and European history through her own perspective and personal history of migration. She was born in England but lived in the Caribbean from ages eleven to eighteen “growing up in Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana” (Kempadoo, “An Interview” 7). In 1977, partly due to the political agitation and instability in Guyana, Kempadoo returned to England in order to undertake her university degree and finally settled there. However, she travels often to the Caribbean, where part of her family lives, and is very much connected to the region. In an interview with Nalini Mohabir, Kempadoo describes herself as a “Caribbean diasporic person” and explains how “[a]lthough I can talk about myself as coming from the Caribbean, I cannot categorically speak from the position of the Caribbean. I’ve traversed oceans too many times and also identify as being British” (7).

Similarly to Cozier’s, Kempadoo’s artwork is not invested in a prefigured representation of ‘Caribbeanness’ but engages instead in a fluid and personal notion of Caribbean identities and histories. In the article “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” Stuart Hall discusses two different, yet interconnected understandings of cultural identity. On one hand, we can think of it in terms of those “shared cultural codes

which provide us, as “one people,” with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference, and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 211).<sup>105</sup> However, Hall also points out another way of considering cultural identity as a more complex phenomenon in constant flux: one that contains the aforementioned sense of oneness and collective experience, but which can still account for the specific situation of individuals in relation to all the social and political elements that shape cultural identities. In this sense, cultural identity involves

a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essential past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 212).

This idea of cultural identity as “becoming” is echoed in Kempadoo’s above-mentioned series title (*Identity in Production*). However, the title can be read ambivalently and satirically as an allusion to both the sense of imposed cultural labels previously discussed or as an affirmation that Both Kempadoo’s and Cozier’s art practice engage with this notion of identity as investigative and open-ended.

Closely connected to *Autograph*, Kempadoo’s participation in British independent and critical photographic practice aims to create a space for artists of minority cultural groups. In a lecture titled “State of Play: Photography, Multimedia and Memory” delivered at the Glasgow School of Art on February 5, 2010, Kempadoo defines both her own practice and *Autograph*’s mission as being “concerned with questioning [traditional photographic] conventions, practices and approaches and a critical enquiry of both

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<sup>105</sup> Hall also notes how the unifying implications of this notion for a Caribbean cultural or national identity were central to anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial articulations of identity (211).

photographs and photographic practices, questioning the societal and cultural space it works within”.<sup>106</sup> In this same lecture, Kempadoo describes Autograph as a collective project lobbying “to bring visibility” to this body of culturally diverse photography. The interest in creating critical spaces for independent artwork and bringing visibility within the larger artistic and cultural public sphere is clearly shared by both Christopher Cozier and Roshini Kempadoo. Although Autograph has received some institutional support in contrast with Alice Yard, which on the other hand relies largely on more local and grassroots support, both Alice Yard and Autograph liken each other in their commitment to foster creativity and critical independent art projects. Both artists are also very much involved in intellectual debates of Caribbean art and culture, Cozier as an art writer and curator and Kempadoo as a university professor and art critic.<sup>107</sup>

From its beginnings, Kempadoo’s photography and digital media work has shown a critical preoccupation with silenced memories, the construction of historical narratives, the fetishization of the black body (particularly the female body), migration, and the ways in which memories inhabit locations through people’s relationships to place and identity.<sup>108</sup> Liz Wells locates Kempadoo’s artwork within a new approach to landscape

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<sup>106</sup> A Video file of this lecture is available via the University of Glasgow’s channel at Vimeo. See link: <http://vimeo.com/62421134>. Web. 4 March, 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Dr. Kempadoo is currently a professor at the University of East London where she lectures in Visual arts and culture. Kempadoo’s doctoral dissertation titled *Creole in the Archive: Imagery, Presence and Location of the Plantation Worker of two Plantations, nearby Villages and Towns in Trinidad (1838-1938)*. Here, Kempadoo explores theoretically and artistically through her artwork (including *Ghosting*) the stories, silences, erasures and archival principles that characterize the colonial Trinidad’s archive from the period 1838-1938.

<sup>108</sup> Kempadoo’s work mostly concentrates on, but is by no means restricted to, historical narratives in Britain and the Caribbean. In some instances, her artwork explores colonial and neo-colonial relations that European countries like Spain or England establish with previously colonized regions like the Caribbean and countries like Brazil or India, as is the case in the series *ECU: European Currency Unfolds* (1992). These photomontage pieces show archive photographs and photographs taken by Kempadoo in those locations superposed to European money notes of various European nations. This superposition often includes short textual fragments (generally a sentence or two long) that imply and encourage a critical stance in regards to the composition. Other works by Kempadoo, like her installation *Arrival* (2011),

photography as a way to call attention to the way in which constructions of spaces within different rural and urban landscapes often condition people's relationship and accessibility to those spaces (*Land Matters* 203-208). Wells identifies a tendency within the artwork of British women artists including Kempadoo who, in the 1980s and 1990s, started to "focus on the inter-relation of women and place, rather than, for instance, on land as vista more-or-less devoid of indications of human habitation" (*Land Matters* 186). In *Ghosting's* still image sequences, Kempadoo includes her own photographs of the Stollmeyer's derelict looking plantation closely followed by images from the Trinidad plantation's visual archive, all with the accompaniment of different fictionalized oral accounts that imagine ordinary people's lives in and around the plantation.

*Ghosting* was specifically created as a means to confront the lack of "historical material associated with the plantation" (*Feminist Review* 2004, 125).<sup>109</sup> In her quest to examine this period in the history of Trinidad, Kempadoo uses material from interviews with plantation workers, old archive photographs, and her own photographs of the landscape, documents and maps of the region. However, the existing gaps in the post-emancipation history of the plantation, namely those concerning the lives of ex-slaves and indentured workers, necessarily require a different avenue for approaching their silenced stories and histories. Turning to an imaginative recreation of the past highlights how "[h]istory, after all tends to be written by winners" and often the experience or

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explore the theme of migration by looking at the journey of North African migrants who travel to Spain in 'cayucos.'

<sup>109</sup> This installation was commissioned by the City Art Gallery and the Peepul Centre in Leicester, UK (2004). It was part of the retrospective exhibition *Roshini Kempadoo: 1990-2004*, produced by OVA: The Organization for Visual Arts, London. The installation was first exhibited at The City Center from 27 February – 3 April, 2004. Later, it toured with OVA after opening at the Pitzhanger Gallery in London on 15 July, 2004.

perspective of those who have suffered oppression and uneven access to historical narratives is marginalized (Jones 330).

The combination of still moving images, oral Creole narratives and interactivity in *Ghosting* enables the viewer to access the artwork from a variety of perspectives. In this installation, visiting viewers can listen to one oral narrative or another depending on their level of engagement. They have the chance to ‘play’ with a handmade wooden console that simulates a Sudanese board game named Warai.<sup>110</sup> As “one of the oldest strategy games exploring notions of cause and effect”, the Warai’s shape and functionality is significantly chosen by Kempadoo as the means through which viewers can access these creolized stories (Kempadoo, “Digital Media” 289). Five large river pebbles can be placed into the five pits of this wooden board, and depending on how these stones are moved across the board, viewers would see a sequence projected onto a single screen and would witness a series of images accompanied by an audio of a series of creolized narratives. Viewers can therefore combine the order of these narratives and, by doing so, create a longer one; additionally, they can repeat or change to a different narrative by moving the pebble to another pit on the board, thus choosing and influencing the length of their interaction. As the artist points out in Sunil Gupta’s documentary film *Roshini Kempadoo: Works 1990-2004*, the Warai tradition travelled with slaves to the Caribbean, which consequently makes it an important vehicle of cultural memory: it represents what has been both preserved and altered as the game has undergone transformations

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<sup>110</sup> The Warai board game originates in Sudan; its meaning in the Ijo language is “houses” and “[t]here are some three hundred ways in which this game is named internationally.” (Kempadoo 2009, 289). This game, as Kempadoo explains in “Roshini Kempadoo: Works 1990- 2004” is still played in Barbados and Antigua.

throughout time and also retains an ancestral connection to Africa, as the original homeland.

*Ghosting* introduces viewers to six story strands, all of which are fictionalized accounts inspired by archival written records and visual documents. The historical period of these narratives ranges from 1838 to 1948, covering the period of emancipation and the first half of the twentieth century at the Stollmeyer Cocoa Plantation, located in the Santa Cruz Valley on the northwest coast of Trinidad. The stories were written by Trinidadian dub poet Marc Mathews and were read by two young Trinidadians based in the UK, making *Ghosting* not only a multimedia piece but also, to some degree, a collaborative project. The four oral narratives in *Ghosting* are fictionalized accounts based on a plantation owner's will from 1792 that Mathews and Kempadoo came across during their research at Trinidad's University of the West Indies' library and private collections.<sup>111</sup> This historical source served as inspiration to then create the oral and visual narratives in *Ghosting*.

In one of the narratives a female character named Aunt Ruth recounts stories about a slave girl, Elsie. This is a narrative that reveals the traumatic legacy of the plantation system. In a second strand, a voice reads the will of Sampson de Boissiere, a French plantation owner. This strand continues to explore the plantation system through issues of property, land and rights which have affected Caribbean subjects for hundreds of years, and which continued to be present in the period covered by *Ghosting* (1838-1948) as well as in the contemporary moment. A third narrative strand in *Ghosting* tells

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<sup>111</sup> Kempadoo and Mathews consulted the private collection of historian Mrs. Olga Mavrogordato. Mrs. Mavrogordato was an archivist and editor working with The Pariah Publishing Co. Ltd., one of the main publishing houses in Trinidad that specializes in books and materials about the history of Trinidad and Tobago. <<http://pariapublishing.com/publisher.htm>>



the narrative of Jonas Mohammed Bath, in which viewers learn of his wish to travel “back” to Africa. This is done through a dialogue between Jonas Mohammed Bath, Jean Baptiste Philippe and Ram in which they express their differing viewpoints on the situation of ex-slaves wishing to return to Africa, and the political situation for the Afro-Caribbean and Indian indentured population after emancipation. In the fourth account Elsie and Ram engage in a conversation that reveals the significance of land ownership, whilst in a fifth strand Victoria May’s monologue demonstrates “the entrepreneurial spirit and independence of Afro-Caribbean women” (Petty 8). In the final narrative, Marie Louise remembers the day when Jean Baptiste’s medical practice was closed down because he is Afro-Caribbean.



Figure. 18. Roshini Kempadoo and the Warai board. *Ghosting*, 2004. Multimedia installation shot. Courtesy of Iniva.



Figure. 19. *Ghosting*, 2004. Installation shot. Courtesy of Iniva.

Since the interactive Warai board activates the strands, depending on how the stones are moved in the pits, viewers have access to some stories or others, thus making them participants in the sequencing, length and relatedness of the stories. Despite the order in which the strands may be played, the narratives in *Ghosting* are all intimately connected; therefore listening to all the strands allows viewers to see those links regardless of their sequencing. In a public lecture on *Ghosting*, Sheila Petty comments on the common plot and thematic threads that link the different strands,<sup>112</sup>

For example, through the content of his will, de Boissiere grants Elsie her freedom, and acknowledges her daughters Marie Louise and Victoria May as his own, revealing the familial connection between the women. In the debate with Jonas and Jean Baptiste Phillippe, Ram discloses his reliance on Elsie as a confidante, a relationship that is further developed in the

<sup>112</sup> The title of Petty's presentation is "CyberRace Constructs: Transnational Identities in Roshini Kempadoo's *Ghosting*" and was delivered at Refresh: The First International Conference on the Histories of Art, Science and Technology, September 28-October 1, 2005.

strand where they pool their resources to purchase land from Marie Louise and thus affirm that they are lovers working to a common goal. Marie Louise notes Aunt Ruth's status as a healer in the preface to her recollection of Jean Baptiste's travails as well as acknowledging him as her husband (9).

Endowing the installation with this highly interactive dynamic opens up a wider space for exploring the constructedness involved in historical narratives. The fact that visitors play a role in selecting, and hence displaying, these sequences can potentially make viewers aware of their own participation in those narratives; it allows them to become engaged in the artwork not as something alien to them, but rather as a critical space where they can realize their own relationship to history in general, and more specifically British and Caribbean history. Art historian Gen Doy views Kempadoo's recurrent emphasis on interactivity as a way to have viewers face the question of what it means to participate in the meaning of the artwork as opposed to remaining passive recipients of a given narrative: "[t]he spectator/user is not presented with meaning as a ready-made object of consumption, but with images and texts which have to be negotiated and worked with in an interactive way" (87). The possibility to 'play' with these stories in *Ghosting* highlights the extent to which, as individuals, most people find themselves outside the institutional mechanisms that organize and write history.

Kempadoo explains how "[t]hrough its conceptual staging, in engagement with the viewer [*Ghosting*] animates traces of the imperial project in our contemporary multicultural experience of both Britain and the Caribbean" (Kempadoo, "Ghosting" 125). Further, Kempadoo also views a connection between the colonial past and the contemporary moment through critical interrogations of inherited traditional 'ways of seeing':

[w]hat was key to the emergence of independent practice was its association with both an artistic intervention and an aesthetic that challenged the conventions of photography – particularly social documentary practices – and explored the extent to which such practices provided the basis for a level of advocacy and critique that challenge the cultural climate of the 1990s politically and socially (“Ghosting” 285).

In her essay “Interpolating Screen Bytes: Critical Commentary in Multimedia Works,” Kempadoo discusses *Ghosting* alongside other multi-media and interactive artwork by black American and British artists. Kempadoo describes the visual arrangement and rationale behind the artwork and explains the significance of creating sequences that represent how the past inhabits the present through representations of landscape.



Figure 20. Roshini Kempadoo. Ghosting (01). *Ghosting*, 2004. Still. Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of the artist.

The first image that viewers can see in one of *Ghosting*'s still image sequences of is “Ghosting (01)” (see figure 20), which consists of two layered photographs of the plantation owner’s house taken by Kempadoo during one of her research visits to the plantation. This digital compositional arrangement instantly provokes a sensation of abandonment and highlights the passing of time; an oblique angle shows the corner of a

window out of which one can see the foundations of the plantation house looking withered and weathered.

Close to the window, approximately two meters from it, lay various pieces of rubble that emphasize aesthetically this sense of time past and decay. Farther into the distance, the combination of darkness and light filtered through the cracks of disheveled foundations creates a nostalgic and dreamy effect that blurs the boundaries between inside and outside spaces. The layering of both photographs creates the illusion that viewers are looking out from inside a room in the ruined remains of the plantation house. However, this feeling is also reversed, since the placement of the window frame from which the gaze is directed suggests a reflective act of looking back, not only in time but also out to space. Both place and temporality are therefore fluid in this sequence; the ruins in the first photograph emphasize the ghostly presence of the past in the present landscape.

The following still image in this sequence makes manifest the haunting presence of the past through the layering of an archival photograph superposed to the original building's image. This is an old photograph of plantation workers toiling in the cocoa field ("Ghosting (02)," see figure 21). Whilst the viewer is witnessing the transition from one still image to another, he/she is also hearing the voice of Aunt Ruth narrating the following in Trinidadian Creole over "a musical rhythm" (60):

The window is the eyes of the soul  
and see the little face of we Elsie pon the inside, scrubbing the soul-eye  
on the plantation house,  
watching through single, glass frames of time,  
watching we pon the other side ...  
(text by Marc Mathews; Kempadoo "Interpolating Screen Bytes," 60).



Figure 21. Roshini Kempadoo. *Ghosting (02) Ghosting*. 2004. Still. Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of the artist.

Aunt Ruth's narrative remembers Elsie when she was a house slave. She describes Elsie looking through the window of the plantation house and seeing slaves work in the cocoa field on the other side. However, Elsie's memory, as filtered through Aunt Ruth's account, contrasts with an archival photograph that frames the image of field workers within an official recorded history of the Caribbean that rarely elicits the lived experience and memories of subaltern subjects. The window's frame from which viewers can imagine Elsie looking out, in combination with Aunt Ruth's narrative, counters the photographic framing of this visual document. The photograph of the workers comes to represent the colonial gaze embedded in the nineteenth century photographic tradition. As Krista Thompson (*An Eye*), Melanie Archer and Mariel Brown (*Pictures*) point out, nineteenth century photography in the region represents the Caribbean "native" subject as productive member of an industrious plantation space. Archer and Brown note how,

[m]any of these early photographs displayed women going to market with the requisite donkey to sell their wares, or male and female laborers in cane fields. While these activities were indeed part of daily lives in the Caribbean, the realities of harsh treatment and poverty that were inherent

in the laborer's lives were instead substituted by the unreality of happy natives unthinkingly going about their natural endeavors (5).

Despite the fact that the photographic framing in those kinds of photographs was fashioned to represent content and obedient subjects, the expressions and body language of the laborers often challenge such romanticized portrayals.<sup>113</sup> In the still "Ghosting 02" (see figure 21) viewers can see the face of a worker who seems to stare right into the camera. Although it is difficult to discern his facial expression in the old photograph, there is a sense of contestation and disruption of photographic aesthetic conventions as his act of looking back disrupts the authority of the colonial gaze.

As Sheila Petty notes, Aunt Ruth's account of Elsie reflects Elsie's sense of guilt for her privileged social status as a house slave and her awareness of the social conditions endured by the slaves who worked in the fields (11). The fact that Elsie's memory corresponds to the period of slavery, whilst the photograph documents plantation field work after emancipation, link both periods further and reveal a blurry line of differentiation in the visual record of the archive where movements of political struggle and resistance often remain absent. Additionally, the intersection of multiple viewpoints (Aunt Ruth and Elsie's, the colonial photographic lens, and the exhibition visitors') is further highlighted by the visual presence of the window frame, which accentuates our role in the process of revising history through the inclusion of fictionalized accounts of

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<sup>113</sup> This is the case in some ethnographic photographs by Sir Harry Johnston. In an introduction to *Photos and Phantasms*, an exhibition of Johnston's photographic work, Petrine Archer-Straw credits Johnston's contribution to countering visual stereotypes of Caribbean people. According to Archer-Straw "His scenes, of markets, farmers and workers in rural settings depict a vivid and accurate record of a lifestyle that has changed considerably in this century" (9). However, some of the photographs like "Haitian Woman with Children, Haiti cat.25" or "A Woman Selling Jack Fruit, Trinidad. cat, 68." embody instances of staged documentary life where the subjects being photographed transmit a feeling of distrust and a intimidation respectively.

memory. According to Kempadoo, what *Ghosting*'s intervention entails is not an accurate or exact representation of the past, which is proved futile by the limitations of the archival tradition in Caribbean history; *Ghosting*'s aim is rather a speculative interrogation of the past and an evocative sense of both its vulnerability and permanence ("Interpolating" 74).

If, as Diana Taylor notes, the repertoire and the archive often work in tandem, the repertoire (the oral and visual account, the interactive performativity and music) in Kempadoo's installation carries the potential of *ghosting* the archive. This is done paradoxically by bringing it to life in dynamic ways. The *ghosting* of the archive confronts viewers with its limitations and possibilities. The different colonial and family visual documents that are projected onto landscape images turn the plantation space into a site of memory where subaltern Creole voices resonate, counterpoint, and expand the archival trace. Taylor formulates an important question in regards to the productiveness of bringing the archive and the repertoire closer:

What is at risk politically in thinking about embodied knowledge and performance as ephemeral as that which disappears? Whose memories "disappear" if only archival knowledge is valorized and granted permanence? Should we simply expand our notion of the archive to house the mnemonic and gestural practices and specialized knowledge transmitted live? Or get beyond the confines of the archive? [...] there is an advantage to thinking about a repertoire performed through dance, theatre, song, ritual, witnessing, healing practices, memory paths, and the many other forms of repeatable behaviors as something that cannot be housed or contained in the archive (37).

In *Ghosting*, re-locating archival material outside the physical space of the archive to the physical landscape of memory (marked by the photographic images of the plantation house, the beach and the cocoa plantation) supposes a revision of official history that is confronted by the simultaneous presence and absence of collective counter-



memory. The oral presence of Aunt Ruth, Elsie, Jean Baptiste, Sampson, Jonas Mohammed, Ram, Marie Louise and Victoria May becomes a ghostly one not so much due to their fictionalized nature but rather through the archival absence of their voices, which their own oral accounts counter. This absence is even greater in the case of female plantation workers. Both Jonas Mohammed and Jean Baptiste Sampson were actual people who lived and worked on the plantation and whose stories inspired the construction of the oral narratives of *Ghosting*. However, in her research of the Trinidad colonial archive Kempadoo struggled to find references to the lives of women. In an interview that I conducted with the artist in 2011, Kempadoo explains how

Women's stories are central in *Ghosting*. This was made in an effort to counter the fact that there is simply less visibility for women workers of this period of history. This is what triggered the creation of the work; the aim was to recognize that the actual heroes, hard workers and contributions were made by women. I talked to persons from villages and towns close by, and interviewed women who had lived in or near the plantation for years [...] I discovered things like the plantation still owns much of the land where the people are living and leasing parcels to residents, in effect the land remaining part of the plantation. These are colonial legacies that we still have as part of the landscape ("Evoking a Presence" 81).

The significance of the physical landscape and the interior domestic spaces of the plantation house in *Ghosting*—especially through the melancholic use of lighting and the emphasis on the abandoned state of the house—emphasize the impact of unresolved traces of the past. The rustiness of a tin roof, the weeds growing through the tiles of the floor, and the derelict state of the building in the previously discussed still image, are all visual and conceptual markers of those traces. For example, one of the stills in *Ghosting* ("Ghosting (23)," see figure 22), shows an archival photograph that captures four men walking towards the camera point outside a large building in the plantation. The men's

attire, especially those dressed in white suits and hats, suggests an elite status as it resembles a fashion style typically associated with plantation owners.



Figure 22. Roshini Kempadoo. Ghosting (23), *Ghosting*, 2004. Digital photography. Still. Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of the artist.

The camera angle, depth of field and resulting perspective in this photograph confers a special protagonism to the male figures. The use of perspective directs the viewer's gaze towards the center of the image where the men stand, privileging thus their presence in the compositional structure. This photographic convention is reminiscent of late nineteenth and early twentieth century visual representations of the plantation where its grounds are represented as picturesque and prosperous sites.<sup>114</sup> As Mimi Sheller observes, with the advent of photography “the Caribbean became not only “paintable” but also “Kodakable” that established a tradition of photography with very specific

<sup>114</sup> As previously discussed in chapter one, in *An Eye for the Tropics*, Krista A. Thompson examines the complicit interrelation between picturesque photography and tourism promotion in the Caribbean, especially from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century. Although this examination focuses mostly on the role of this style of photography in promoting a specific view and viewpoint of the region for touristic purposes, Thompson also notes the influence of this visual economy in documenting the social and economic structure of the post-emancipation plantation (*An Eye* 39).

technical conventions and representational aims (*Consuming* 66). In her lecture “State of Play,” Kempadoo discusses a scanned image of a Kodak pamphlet that she found in a Port of Spain’s archive. Historically located in the 1930s -1940s, this pamphlet, as Kempadoo argues, becomes symbolic of the constructedness involved in photographic practice despite its traditional associations with realism and objective representation.<sup>115</sup> However, the digital superposition and texturizing of the landscape photograph on the surface of a rusted tin roof (see figure 22), disturbs the neat and tidy representation of the plantation space embodied in the old photograph. This re-location and projection of the archival record onto a different new site in the present space of the plantation continues to evoke the ways in which the past inhabits the actual present.

The opulence of the plantation building contrasts starkly with the corrugated roof, which belongs to Mrs. Caesar’s house, an Indo-Trinidadian woman who Kempadoo interviewed during her research and who used to work on the Stollmeyer plantation. Significantly too, “Ghosting (23)” is one of the still images that viewers see as they listen to the Ram, Jean and Jonas’s narrative where they debate the late 1930s socio-economic and political situation of African and Indian post-independence workers. This fictionalized dialog archives stories of workers’ participation in Trinidad’s society at a time when political activism and organization was gaining strength among the working and middle class, and when the white creole elite started to be “seriously challenged” (Brereton 116).

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<sup>115</sup> The pamphlet’s slogan: “Keep the Story” embodies the ways in which photography is always in itself conceived as a medium that records (and to a certain extent thus ‘archives’) an event, preserving thus its memory through the visual image. The back of the pamphlet displays a sign that reads “REMEMBER!” and is followed by a list of codes and conventions on how to execute and think about your photographs.



Figure 23. Roshini Kempadoo. Ghosting (12). *Ghosting*. 2004. Digital photography. Still. Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of the artist.

As previously discussed, through layering techniques, the sequences of still-moving images project visual documents from various archives onto the physical landscape illustrating further the fragmented and unequal experiences of the plantation across divisions of class, gender, ethnicity and race. Past and present physical spaces in the form of rooms, houses or natural landscapes become ghostly, firstly as reminders of past times conveyed in the black and white photographs, and then as reminders of the passing of time through the images of physical deterioration in the buildings that Kempadoo captures in her photographs. One of the stills in the installation (“Ghosting (12)” see figure 23 above) strikingly educes a sense of abandonment and loss through the image of an outdoor black and white tiled floor.

Weeds come out through the cracks of some of the tiles’ junctures, which, in combination to the soil stains on their surface, highlights a perception of disrepair and neglect. Projected onto four tiles is a photograph of a black Trinidadian family posing for

a group picture. The elegant attire of the family contrasts with the sense of loss and disavowal embodied in Kempadoo's landscape shot. Further, this contrasting juxtaposition invites an interrogation of their connection, animating an inquiry into the relationship of this family to the plantation house or the plantation space overall. In "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument" Okwui Enwezor notes how contemporary artists "interrogate the self-evidentiary claims of the archive by reading it against the grain" (18). Enwezor also identifies two main trends in their engagement with the authority of archives. One type of approach is embodied in investigations of the structural and organizing principles around the use of the archival document, alternatively, artists' use of the archival document "may result in the creation of another archival structure as means of establishing an archeological relationship to history, evidence, information and data that will give rise to its own interpretive categories" (18). Both approaches coalesce in uses of archival documents in Caribbean visual arts, especially since the (a priori) principles of the colonial archives were so intimately intertwined with hegemonic discourse that kept 'outside', as a result, the life stories and histories of non-elite Caribbean subjects.

Similarly, the following still image "Ghosting (03)" (see figure 24), recreates an intimate space that evokes the passing of time. The positioning of the sunlight and the formation of shade on the surface of a wooden carved table somewhat resembles the shape of a coffin, which can function as a poignant reminder of the mourning of the largely unrecorded life experiences of plantation workers.



Figure 24. Roshini Kempadoo. Ghosting (03). *Ghosting*. Digital photography. Still. 2004. Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of the artist.

*Ghosting*'s embodiment of the intersection between time and space in new material and conceptual spaces, locates individual voices and the ways in which visibility around the plantation has historically ignored and erased the subjectivity of laborers, especially that of female workers. *Ghosting* negotiates a particular positioning toward the archive that extends contemporary use (and therefore an understanding of the role) of archival material and archival research within Caribbean artistic expression. Kempadoo's installation stretches the boundaries of what constitutes an archive and what the role of the archive is, in relation to notions of "truth," and representational claims conveyed in the visual and written texts documenting life in the plantation. The finding of "truth" in the historical document of the colonial project is always a highly problematic and contested practice due to the imposed ideological representation of the indigenous inhabitants, the African slaves and the Asian indentured workers. *Ghosting* provides an alternative way of looking at the gaps, erasures and silences in those documents; looking at them not as configuring a space of absence, but rather as a productive site for

exploration and interrogation. My understanding of the relationship between memory and history follows Joan Gibbons' argument that "[h]istory and memory are in supplementary relation to one another, with history functioning as a (perhaps a more regulatory form) of memory that interprets and authenticates the testimonies of primary witnesses and sources" (54). By incorporating fictionalized oral narratives of plantation workers, Kempadoo opens up a critical space for representing a counter-history of the plantation, which unlike official colonial history is not based upon modernity's teleological promise of progress and linearity, but rather upon the validation of alternative sources for the revision of history and (mis)representation.

### **Dorothea Smartt Ship-Shaping History**

The *Lonsdale Magazine* of 1822 records a brief reference to an African slave popularly known as 'Sambo'<sup>116</sup> who arrives in a ship from the West Indies to Lancaster's seaport around 1736. The magazine article speculates about the death of this slave who dies of illness in the loft of a local brewhouse where he finds shelter after he is supposedly "deserted by the master" who is also the ship's captain (*Ship Shape* 16). It is through this reference that this slave, whose actual name remains unknown, officially appears in the recorded history of the slave trade and, as Dorothea Smartt notes, he is thus "woven into the folklore of Sunderland Point" (16). The article succinctly states that the ship's sailors buried Sambo at Sunderland Point "whither they conveyed his remains without coffin or bier" (16). In her poetry collection *Ship Shape* (2009), the British poet of Barbadian ancestry, Dorothea Smartt addresses the episodes of erasure that accompany

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<sup>116</sup> 'Sambo' is a word historically used to refer to a black person; a common name given to slaves in the Americas. The word originates from the Foulah meaning "uncle" and in the Hausa language where it means "son" (*Ship Shape* 15)

the representation of slaves in the imperial and colonial archive. *Ship Shape* offers a fictionalized portrayal of this unknown slave who Smartt re-names Bilal.

By examining an excerpt of the only known text that makes reference to ‘Sambo’, readers can appreciate how certain documented references, especially those regarding slaves, can filter and obstruct our knowledge of the past, making it increasingly difficult to ever really know it. The sketch of Samboo provided by *The Lonsdale Magazine* demonstrates this as it speculates upon the reasons for his death,<sup>117</sup>

After she [the ship] had discharged her cargo, he was placed at the inn ... supposing himself to be deserted by his master, without being able, probably from his ignorance of the language, to ascertain the cause, he fell into a complete state of stupefaction, even to such a degree that he secreted himself in the loft on the brewhouses and stretching himself out at full length on the bare boards refused all sustenance. He continued on in this state for a few days, when death terminated the sufferings of poor Samboo. As soon as Samboo’s exit was known to the sailors ... they excavated him a grave ... behind the village, within twenty yards of the sea shore, whither they conveyed the remains without either coffin or bier, being covered only with the clothes in which he died (*The Lonsdale Magazine* 1822).

Did Samboo feel “deserted” by his master? Does this assumption not imply that his happiness depended on his master’s care and approval whereby Samboo would be fulfilling the role of the faithful and noble savage? This reference taints the anonymous memory of this slave, reducing it to a series of obscure facts and speculations. Like the erasure of the African slaves in *Gregson v. Gilbert*, or the schematic recorded testimonial taken from victims of the Parsley massacre, this document embodies the liminal space that black memory occupies historically in the colonial and post-colonial archive.

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<sup>117</sup> Smartt uses the name ‘Samboo’ referring to the contemporary pronunciation and usage of the word (*Ship Shape* 15)



Many of the poems in *Ship Shape* are voiced by Bilal, the name that Smartt gives to Samboo. However, the collection contains a myriad of other voices that run through the poems. The poetic personae vary from the wife of the ship's captain, to the sailors, to Smartt herself, making those poems explicitly autobiographical. Such multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives confronts the "unidirectionality of communication and meaning making" that typically characterizes the colonial archive (Taylor 8). Similarly, the form of the poems is highly heterogeneous in that it incorporates the inclusion of dictionary entries (15), poems made up of word definitions (21), inclusion of epigraphs – as examples of intertextuality– (23, 26, 37, 38, 48), and the interweaving of song and poetry (86). The contrapuntal connections between some of the poems in "Samboo's Grave ~ Bilal's Grave" and "Just a Part," the two distinct sections in the collection, also corroborate the nature of *Ship Shape* as poetic repertoire where readers and audiences can participate in the process of establishing meaning by making linkages between the life of Bilal and the silenced memory of slavery in Dorothea's own upbringing and wider British society. The underlying interconnection between poems in both sections invites readers to consider how the past permeates the present in the city of Lancaster, which through the economic gains derived from hosting "the fourth largest slave port in Britain" became one of the richest places in Europe in the eighteenth century (*Ship Shape* 16). This consideration leads to questions such as what are the existing continuities in terms of contemporary social inequality derived from slavery and the archive's role in silencing the past? What are the opportunities made available through mourning the memory of Bilal and the multiple losses that his silenced story represents and perpetuates?

What really characterizes *Ship Shape* as repertoire is the fact that it is performance poetry, poetry also written to be performed; therefore “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by being there, being part of the transmission” (Taylor 20). The first poem in Smartt’s poetry collection, “Ruby Lips,” precedes the aforementioned first section “Sambo’s Grave ~ Bilal’s Grave” and frames *Ship Shape* as a text at the crossroad between the archive and the repertoire. The scar of the colonial archive and historiography as tools of African cultural erasure and denial of counter-history is palpable from the opening stanza:

*Dead men tell no tales,  
but dead white men document plenty,  
great tomes that weigh  
over our living, African diasporic selves,  
our living Black Mother; (11).*

Smartt’s poem highlights how the process of documenting the imperial enterprise is in itself a project of death and manipulation of history that is yet to be fully confronted; in many cases the *tales* still need to be challenged and unveiled as highly mediated constructions of the past instead of historical truth. *Ship Shape* interrogates the consequences of an imperial and colonial tradition of documentation and historiography today. How can we (re)think the impact of such a legacy in societies across the Black Atlantic? The colonial archival tradition of denial however is confronted in much Caribbean poetry by the wisdom of the “Black Mother” as a mythical figure of remembrance. This figure appears engaged in forms of counter-memory in works such as M. NourbeSe Philip’s *She Tries Her Tongue*, Kamau Brathwaite’s *Ancestors*, and Grace Nichol’s *Startling the Flying Fish* among others. However, it is also the knowing legacy of Smartt’s own mother, Ruby, that Smartt admittedly uses to dismantle the myths and

tales of the archive. Smartt affirms that this process of vilifying the archive is carried on through oral history and non-written forms of knowledge that include feelings, thoughts, dreams and spoken word:

So listen beyond the shallows,  
there is wisdom to be learned through  
fleeting words, instinctive feelings, thoughts  
and inspired dreams, Olokum stirring,  
sending dark bubbles from her depths  
that are no more than air on the breeze;

those erudite manuscripts  
that aid and abet,  
corroborate and validate each other,  
I will vilify with my mother's  
knowing  
sayings (11).

Significantly, the Yoruban Orisha deity Olokum, who dwells at the bottom of the sea and is able to transform into anything (here appearing as goddess instead of its usual androgynous form of half man - half fish), aids Smartt in the task of excavating an alternative history of the Black Atlantic. *Ship Shape* revises and transforms, or rather productively debunks, a legacy of silence for a tradition of counter-memory in which Smartt's poetry collection participates. As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, Smartt's configuration of a counter-memory that writes back to the Archive is performed, to a great extent, through the gradual process of naming the slave buried in Sunderland point as Bilal. Naming the dead, a central and initiating stage of mourning, brings Bilal back to the present, allowing him to 'speak back' through poetry.

Dorothea Smartt was "commissioned by Lancaster Litfest in 2003, to write a contemporary elegy for Sambo of Sambo's Grave" (Smartt, *Ship Shape* 15). After carrying out extensive research on the story of Sambo and the history of the slave trade

in Lancaster, Smartt wrote a series of poems, which appeared in various journals and were afterwards collected and expanded in *Ship Shape*, published in 2008.<sup>118</sup> *Ship Shape* rescues and imagines the memory of Samboo, the name given to this West African slave who travelled with his master, the captain of a ship, from the Caribbean to Sunderland Point in 1736. He died shortly after his arrival in England, the exact cause of his death remains unknown, although he probably died of sickness, very likely of pneumonia. Sixty years after his death, in 1796, Reverend James Watson wrote an epitaph on his grave. The opening reads: “Here lies Poor Samboo, a faithful Negro who attending his Master from the West Indies died on his arrival at Sunderland.” Both the reference in *The Lonsdale Magazine* and Watson’s epitaph refer to the slave as ‘poor Samboo,’ without mention of his actual name. The absence of the slave’s name is not atypical since, as examined in chapter two, giving slaves new names and/or eliding their names in documents, is a distinctive characteristic of many colonial records pertaining to the slave trade, a situation that is also paradoxically latent in some anti-slavery oriented literature.

### **Samboo - and representation - in the archive**

Like Philip’s *Zong!*, *Ship Shape* includes an actual excerpt of an archival document that illustrates the inscription of the African slave in constructions of imperial history where he/she is estranged and reduced to a disembodied category, a generic type, discursively formed by the use of names like ‘Sambo.’ In “Venus in Two Acts” Saidiya Hartman discusses the common practice during slavery of using generic names for slaves

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<sup>118</sup> Some of the poems included in *Ship Shape* were published in a series of journals: *Moving Worlds*; *SABLE LitMag* and *JALA: Journal of the African Literature Association*.

as a means to erase their identity further. Hartman explains how the name Venus has been used interchangeably to refer to female slaves in the archive:

variously named Harriot, Phibba, Sara, Joanna, Rachel, Linda, and Sally, she is found everywhere in the Atlantic world. The barracoon, the hollow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon's laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the kitchen, the master's bedroom—turn out to be exactly the same place and in all of them she is called Venus (3).

The violence of language is thus placed at the center of the archive. In the section “A Few Words on Sambo’s Grave,” Smartt includes dictionary entries which describe the word ‘sambo’, ranging from the nineteenth century to the present. The *Webster Dictionary* from 1913 defines the word as “[a] colloquial or humorous appellation for a negro...” and the *Online Etymology Dictionary* describes it as the “stereotypical word for a male black person (now only derogatory) [...] used without conscious racism and contempt until circa World War II when the word fell from polite usage...” (*Ship Shape* 15). This exculpatory remark fails to acknowledge the violence exerted by the word ‘sambo,’ also in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a generic word used to substitute the names of African slaves. This absence of the slaves’ African names in slave trade and other colonial documents reproduces a type of violence and anxiety that is still in need of redress. In *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body*, Hershini Young theorizes a redefinition of the black body “as a *collective*, remembering body” and as “one that bears the brunt of history, a body in need of redress” (2). The practice of imposing names on African slaves extended to the Spanish, French, and British Caribbean and North America. Although among themselves slaves generally continued to address each other by their African names, they would be given a new name by slave traders upon boarding the slave ships and again as they were being sold off to

their masters in the Caribbean (Patterson, “Slavery” 57).<sup>119</sup> In Caribbean literature, this process of *critical grieving* in search of redress has relied, and continues to rely significantly, as the work of Philip and Smartt demonstrate, on the *naming* of the African and Afro-Caribbean slave.

The sentimental (written and visual) language of abolitionist discourse often figures the African slave as victim through very limiting and diminishing portrayals like those of the noble savage and faithful servant. Smartt draws attention to how previous discourses of Sambo’s remembrance in Lancaster are tinted by this inherited sentimental language through which the myth of this slave has been formed throughout time. Sambo is “cut off and submerged / under waning facts, / buried in Sunderland Point / muddied with trade and profits / human sales [...]” (*Ship Shape* 17). The final stanza of this poem reproduces, and thus problematizes, the few known facts about Sambo and the sentimental account that simultaneously inscribes and buries him into the history of Lancaster and the slave trade. He is “[a]bandoned by his master” and “Sambo, stupefied, dies” as implied in the melancholic and nostalgic version of the account recorded in *The Lonsdale Magazine*.

To name again the human being who has been stripped of her/his original name, who has been constructed linguistically, politically and legally as a commodity, is not only to claim and restore their humanity, it also situates their identity as historical agents beyond the discursive confines of Western historiography. The Western world carries a tendency to inscribe the African slave and the black subject prominently as powerless victims of oppression which undermines the multiple forms of political and cultural

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<sup>119</sup> See Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982) for a comprehensive study of the practices of naming slaves in the Americas.

resistance in which African and Caribbean people have participated in hemispheric history as actors of social change. There are countless examples of this, for instance in the numerous successful slave rebellions across the Caribbean in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly the Haitian revolution and the subsequent establishment of the first Black Republic in Saint Domingue (1791-1804). However, such resistance has been consistently misrepresented and underrepresented within colonial and postcolonial archives up to this day.

Black resistance in the Americas and Africa, as Paul Gilroy notes, is a diasporic and global experience defining the Black Atlantic as a physical and symbolic community “continuously crisscrossed by movements of black people - not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy and citizenship” (*The Black Atlantic* 16). Smartt and Philip’s stress on imagining an African name for the slave functions in this sense as a means to make tangible the agency, political existence and cultural identity that the slave is deprived of on one hand, but which to some extent is also attained through cultural, artistic expression and political action. Equally, the Caribbean literary practice of imagining a new African name for the slave further solidifies their identity as African or Afro-Caribbean subjects who, albeit experiencing exceedingly restricted forms of agency, still worked individually and collectively against subjection, often obliquely.

In *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archeology of Black Women’s Lives*, Jenny Sharpe cautiously reminds readers of the ways in which the notion of agency is of course contested within the context of slavery and must be specified and historicized to avoid misconceptions. Sharpe notes that “[t]he language of freedom is so bound up in large

narratives of emancipation like feminism, Marxism and nationalism that is often for us difficult to think outside their terms of “self-determination,” “self-making” and “consciousness,” therefore imagining forms of agency that take place outside this vocabulary becomes a challenge, albeit a necessary one (xxv). Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Mimi Sheller in *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* make this emphasis too. Hartman theorizes the nuances of a “coerced agency” present in African American forms of subjection and cultural practices, whilst Sheller underscores how agency, and particularly female erotic agency, is enacted through performative forms of counter-memory (213), and how it is often communicated in coded ways (212-214).

One of the main avenues to agency in *Ship Shape* is naming. The act of naming is critical to the ship-shaping of history and counters the processes of categorization validated by the archive and generated through different forms of colonial documentation. The poem entitled “99 names of the Sambo” demonstrates the pervasiveness of language in its creation of labels and categories. The poem has a cyclical structure since it starts with Bilal being written in bold type (and ends in the same way) thus privileging his new fictionalized identity. The group of nouns listed in the poem range from “ibn / beloved / son / brother / husband / father / kin / elder / ancestor” to “sold / livestock / cargo / chattel / property [...]” (*Ship Shape* 29). Some of the nouns and adjectives listed appear in more popular and alternative historical accounts. They allow us to imagine Bilal outside the confines of the colonial archive as a “warrior / bussa / cudjoe / leader / Toussaint / revolutionary / guerilla / Cimarron / subversive /



cuffy / duppy conqueror” (31). However, the next column creates a counterpoint that denies this possibility and determines the various categories that are imposed on Bilal today: “outsider / illegal / other / criminal / refugee / foreigner / exile / uprooted / immigrant / sojourner / hyphenated” (31).

The enumeration of names in column-like form shows aesthetic similarities with the first poems in sections “*Os*” and “*Dicta*” from Philip’s *Zong!* where, as I examine in chapter two, the visual image recalls the categorizing and labeling nature of the colonial record. The image itself communicates the physical constriction and tomb-like space of the archive. Samboo is renamed as Bilal. Smartt imagines for “Samboo” a Muslim name and an alternative persona and identity than the one registered in the official record of history. In the last stanza of the poem “My Calling,” Bilal explains how he keeps his name secret and thus safe (to some extent) from alienation: “My true-true / name / is a secret / I keep from / those / that would de- / file me” (35). Here the play on words establishes a clear connection between a tradition of European documentation and erasure. The action of filing colonial documents in the archive, and the subsequent defiling of one’s identity as a result, is made clear by Smartt’s pun.

This poem also imagines an alternative to the imperial epistemic violence of erasing names and imposing alien ones. Bilal articulates a conscious refusal to being categorized as property, which is deeply rooted in his decision to resist giving up his real name. Furthermore, Smartt imagines too an alternative to the historical narrative that is known to us through archival material and thus the imposition of names to African slaves and the pervasive practice of choosing names that would debase them further, is

challenged. In this version of history, Bilal also exerts a form of power by refusing to share his real name with his oppressors.

In the rest of the poem, Bilal asserts:

I tell them  
 my name is  
 Bil'...  
*Bill*, they reply  
*Right you are,*  
*Young Samboo,*  
*Bill it is.*  
 Dey laugh at  
 Me. And I  
 keep the source  
 of m'smile  
 hidden as I  
 whisper to  
 m'self – yes,  
 yes I is my father, the muezzin, son; I is  
 Bilal (35).

Bilal stops half way through uttering his name and “Dey” (the slave traders, colonial masters or ship’s crew) scornfully joke about the associations of the name Bil, its homonym “bill,” and the word’s monetary associations with the trade (bill as means of financial transaction and as a proposed law), which inscribe Bilal’s position as commodity and property in the marketplace. However, in the poem, Bilal shifts the focus on their laughter towards his own secretive smile. The final example of double meaning is fashioned by him, who affirms “yes I is my / father, the muezzin, son” I is / Bilal.” (35). Bilal is both author and “father” of this secretly kept name and sense of identity as he recreates it, thus endowing it with a deeper meaning to him. He may also be the son of a muezzin, but ultimately it is his own name which grants him this important status, reinforced by the cultural and religious significance of his name, since Bilal al-Habashi or rsummoning Muslims to prayer five times a day). Bilal al-Habashi was an Ethiopian

slave once liberated by the prophet Mohammed who then converted to Islam and became an important muezzin and companion of the prophet. Bilal's awareness of the connection that his name and life story creates with the figure of Bilal al-Habashi, and his determination to guard its significance from cultural erasure, marks a restricted act of agency whereby keeping one's name anonymous becomes a weapon for the construction of an alternative identity.

The preoccupation with the role of documentation within colonial archives continues in another poem entitled "because I'm nothing you can name" where Bilal denounces "I'm nothing, to be made some thing / useful for you to examine, file, classify. / You assume I am yours for the taking, / presume I was just waiting for you / to make me mean something" (*Ship Shape* 48). Dorothea Smartt attempts to undo the de-filing of Sambo by offering Bilal a voice which, albeit a fictional one, nevertheless incorporates the body and the embodied memory into the narrative.

As I mentioned in chapter two, language and naming is a fundamental part of mourning according to Derrida, who argues that naming the dead allows for the process of mourning to be initiated. Naming thus becomes an invocation of the spirit of the dead and is also one of the elements that define the specter, together with the localizing of the dead object's remains, both physically and metaphorically. Both in Kempadoo's *Ghosting* and in Smartt's *Ship Shape*, localizing the place of the slave and the plantation worker is to localize their place not only in the recorded history but moreover to identify their place in current moments and opportunities of memorialization in Britain and beyond.

In the section “samboo’s elegy: no rhyme or reason” Smartt expresses the pain and frustration of not knowing the full story of the slave:

Lying at the site of Samboo’s grave, / waiting for full earth to speak to me,  
/ waiting for buried bones to whisper / as a flow of fears floods through  
me. / I’m held here at Lune River’s estuary, / caught in fear, not daring to  
go down / *again* into the ship’s deep belly – [...] (emphasis mine 23).

The torture and murder committed in the belly of the slave ship is a painful route to remembering history. However, the haunting memory of this experience becomes central to the creative impulse and force present in the rest of the poems. The emphasis on a return to the “ship’s deep belly” alludes to the impact of traumatic, and collective, black memory which is communicated trans-generationally through the experience of what Young describes as “the underrecognized injury of the black body” (2). Consequently, traveling figuratively to the belly of the ship is key to the voicing of Bilal. The journey of remembrance starts by localizing the place where the dead is buried, literally and figuratively in the collective memory of Lancaster’s history and in their connection with the economic profit from the slave trade. This return also suggests an ongoing artistic commitment to mourning since this poem opens with an epigraph from Maryse Condé’s *Segu* that confirms a Caribbean creative preoccupation with remembrance and includes *Ship Shape* within this tradition. The epigraph reads “If I don’t sing you / who are you? / Does not the word make the man?”. These lines acquire particular relevance as Smartt expresses her difficulty in finding words to articulate the traumatic experience undergone by Bilal.

The second part of *Ship Shape* engages with contemporary Britain and introduces Smartt’s own subjective position into the archive, thus establishing a connection between

Bilal's and her own life memories. Both parts connect contrapuntally revealing a connection between two different types of uprootedness as part of the African diaspora. The second section, significantly entitled "just a part," functions as a counterpoint to the first. The memory of home and the confrontation with socio-political spaces in which individuals are confronted with imposed 'categories' is suggested and problematized in both sections and superposed with the experience of family, kin and community. Thus historical continuities of displacement, racism and economic disparity between the eighteenth century and today are laid bare in the connection between both sections.

In the poem "just a part: a distant lot" Smartt describes her own family as part of the diasporic network that defines Caribbean history: "My family are a distant lot / scattered around migratory paths: from Barbados / landing up in London, Birmingham, New York, / Panama City, Nassau, Miami, Havana" (74). As a consequence of a longing to connect with her "distant" relatives, Smartt records their names; "people whose names I write down / to remember, interrogate my mother / to make connections on paper – my family extending across the page - / great uncles and aunts on their travels" (74). In this way, Smartt underscores another means of archiving family history and memory. In this sense, by writing *Ship Shape* as a memorial to Bilal, Smartt includes him as close kin. The importance of names in marking places (which duplicate in both England and Barbados) also appears when "Cousin Sherry and I, excavating names, / make mention of a place / with the same address in Bridgeton" (74).

The differences and similarities that young Smartt appreciates between herself and her relatives are something that she tries to understand and incorporate into her identity and life experience:

My family and I are just apart.  
 And this distant lot are just  
 a part I could not see, do not live around.  
 And I wonder if the family I'm born to  
 is the family that will make me whole (75).

This poem's title "just a part" is also the title of this second section in the collection, where it is used in combination to create the line "My family and I are just apart" as the titles playfully connect the experience of being "apart" as just "a part" of Caribbean and British history in which Bilal's memory and experience is integrated.

The two distinct sections in *Ship Shape* are dialogically connected through the dynamics of 'call and response.' In the first section Bilal's poems describe his family and his longing to return to Africa. Bilal's memories are echoed through Smartt's childhood memories where the poet re-members moments of her young life, family and the experience of distance, migration and life in Britain, in the second section of *Ship Shape*. The plurivocality of the poems and their formal arrangement in the configuration of interrelated "snap shots" fittingly reflect the limitations of the archive in the generally homogenous footnoting of African and Indo-Caribbean experience and culture that abounds in historical records. The fragments in *Ship Shape*, on the other hand, configure a narrative which, although marked by silences, narrates a counter-history that dismantles univocal discourse. Allan Rice argues that the task of "memory work," enacted by literary pieces like *Ship Shape*, is

best undertaken through interdisciplinary case studies that move beyond the mere documentary and historical, and into the performative and contemporary realm where the full implications of Lancaster's involvement in the slave trade can be teased out in counter distinction to the way the traditional historical record obscures the city's involvement (34).

Further, this dynamic approach to remembering and historical memory is effectively carried out in *Ship Shape* both through the imagination of Bilal as someone other than an unknown and unceremoniously buried slave, and by connecting sections relating to histories of migration that contextualize Bilal's journey and contemporary journeys of the African diaspora. Smartt uses this same poetic strategy of contrapuntal interweaving in her earlier poetry collection *Connecting Medium* where the subsequent poems "generations dreaming I" and "generations dreaming II" speak, respectively, of her parents' generation's experience of migration, and her own experience of growing up in Britain as the daughter of immigrants. In "generations dreaming I" Smartt describes the Windrush generation as "dreaming to change the pattern, / undo the seams, re-style / the suits you wore / as you stepped off the boat, / Windrush style." (12). The pattern here to is that of the call-and-response. In "generations dreaming II" Smartt describes her re-styling and the re-fashioning of Caribbean culture in the 'Motherland': 'With a stance, with words / that roll from me, telling / of West Indies trade, / England's sugar, and bitter cane; / trading culcha, trading food; / trading sounds and nuff expressions.'" (14). This stanza in the poem conveys how intercultural identity in multicultural Britain necessarily becomes available through a negotiation of history. The (re)telling of British and Caribbean history and excavation of darker stories of trade over national celebrations of Empire creates new spaces and paves the way for critical understandings of history. Progressively too, the verses advance towards other types of trade based on Caribbean "culcha" where "sounds and nuff expressions" (Smartt, *Connecting Medium* 14).

### **Transatlantic Flows of Memory in *Ghosting* and *Ship Shape***

Like Cozier, Philip, Danticat and Díaz, Smartt and Kempadoo are creating new critical approaches to the empty spaces in different archives and models of state memory. Smartt's *Ship Shape* and Kempadoo's *Ghosting* prove that if archival documents can be re-positioned and reinterpreted, so too can embodied memory be (re)conveyed in the repertoire. This crossroads between the archives' textuality, visuality and performativity highlights the usefulness of understanding memory as multi-discursive, multi-generic and interdisciplinary. As in the work of the other artists discussed in this dissertation, Roshini Kempadoo and Dorothea Smartt's work conveys a strong visual and oral/aural component that facilitates a critical dialogue based on the *intersection* of different narratives. Such intersections generate a space of inquiry where the reader/viewer is able to question issues of readability, as well as their own interpretive role and responsibility in witnessing the stories and histories that are narrated.

The performative element, central to Smartt's memory work, as in Kempadoo's *Ghosting*, turns Lancaster, London, and the plantation spaces into sites of memory where the historical continuities from the colonial structures of inequality and oppression haunt/ghost the present. The ephemeral nature of the repertoire, in its performative condition, makes manifest the uniqueness of every enactment of memory work. Every new time that poems from *Ship Shape* are performed by Dorothea Smartt, and every time that a viewer interacts with *Ghosting*, the moment of remembrance resonates differently in connection with the changing present and in combination with the varying selection of poems and/or the varying possibility of narratives offered by the interactive board in



*Ghosting*. The assumed stasis usually conferred to archival documents as finished repositories of the past, is deconstructed via the repertoire.

Through these repertoires of counter-memory, Smartt and Kempadoo engage in a process of mourning. By incorporating the *name* into the *memory*, calling attention towards what has been erased, they mourn that loss in an attempt to work through a legacy of dispossession and also claim the legacy of the largely unrecorded resistance. One of the most critically productive aspects of the 'repertoire' is that it juxtaposes discrepant experiences and relies on audiences and readers to decode their inter-connection. Kempadoo and Smartt's dissection and re-composition of archival material on one hand critiques the ways in which colonial documentation attempted to erase the memory of enslaved and colonized people. However, their work configures an alternative archiving of memory (in which fictionalized narratives are embedded) that allows a critical reflection and knowledge of the past. Remembering, as Dorothea Smartt and Roshini Kempadoo suggest in their work, is an act of revising forgotten and marginalized memories and placing them in contrast and conversation with official accounts of history where those memories were not present. It seems thus that remembering functions also as a sort of *shipshaping* that aims to set the record straight.

In Dorothea Smartt and Roshini Kempadoo's work, the past and the present merge. The juxtaposition of narrative voices from the past (the eighteenth, nineteenth, early and mid-twentieth century) and the present creates a space where the reader and viewer become more aware of the spectral, yet embodied and lived, presence of memory, and how the past still resonates today in everyday life in Trinidad and England. From the foundations of archival material, both Kempadoo and Smartt re-imagine and re-create

possible past scenarios that link the past and the present; make historical erasure tangible; and bring historical continuities based on social inequality to the forefront. This interconnection of temporality and space emerges too, thanks to patterns of call-and-response, central to African and African-based music and musicality embedded in their poetry and multimedia artwork respectively.

The title of Smartt's book *Ship Shape* takes on multiple meanings, calling attention to a different kind of ordering through narrativity found in both *Ship Shape* and *Ghosting*. The expression refers to keeping things in order and trimmed. On one hand, the title suggests the impact of Western colonial ideology and its establishment of an "order of things," embedded in what Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies as the "new symbolic order" by which European powers established "the invention of the Americas" in relation to "the invention of Europe" (74-75). Equally, *Ship Shape*, written as two words on Smartt's book's cover, also points to the shape of the slave ship as a visual signifier of both death and struggle. However, the title *Ship Shape* also signals Smartt and Kempadoo's intention to shape history through a work of mourning in which readers and viewers become further aware of what has been silenced and excluded in official records.

## Conclusion: Alternative Archives of Affect as an Ongoing Project

History and elegy are akin. The word “history” comes from an ancient Greek verb ἵστωρῖα meaning “to ask.” One who asks about things – about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell – is an historian.

- Anne Carson, *Nox* (2010)<sup>120</sup>

Marked opportunities for remembering histories of violence at an institutional level can reproduce forms of violence themselves; this is especially so in those cases when the image of the state could potentially be compromised in these acts of remembering. The commemoration in Spain of the quinentennial anniversary of the “discovery” of the Americas proved to be just such an event, dominated by triumphalist nationalistic narratives.<sup>121</sup> The Exposición Universal de Sevilla in 1992 exemplified this occurrence<sup>122</sup> and took the opportunity to revise and/or reinforce a certain history, not only of European arrival in the Americas, but also the subsequent genocide of indigenous groups, enslaved Africans and colonial conquest. This international conference, rather than openly fostering a dialogue of these events, was rather an attempt to re-define this history as an ‘encuentro,’ that is, an encounter. The Spanish writer Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio critiques this semiotic turn suggesting that the supposed encounter be considered instead an “encontronazo” (a collision): “[I]ejos de haber encuentro alguno, lo que hubo

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<sup>120</sup> Carson, Anne and Gaius Valerius Catullus. *Nox*. New York: New Directions, 2010. Print.

<sup>121</sup> Another recent example includes the 2007 International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In “Remembering 1807: Histories of the Slave Trade, Slavery and Abolition” Catherine Hall enquires about the commemorations in Britain of the 200 year anniversary of abolition by posing an interesting and productive question: “... how and what is to be remembered – that is the issue. Is it the horrors of the middle passage and of the plantation and the collective responsibility that Britons bear for this- or is it the pride in abolition? How might these different memories be put together so as to find a way of understanding the complexity of that shared history across Britain, West Africa and the Caribbean” (1). Similar questions are extremely relevant in the context of Spain’s “historical memory” of its involvement and responsibility in slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean and Latin America.

<sup>122</sup> This International Exhibition, also known as ‘Seville Expo ’92,’ took place at the Isla de la Cartuja, Seville, Spain over seven months (April 20th – October 12, 1992). It consisted of pavilions representing over 100 nations. Its theme unabashedly commemorated the “Age of Discovery.”

fue un encontronazo, un choque brutal y destructor, un verdadero allanamiento...”  
(47).<sup>123</sup>

The reformulation of the previous narrative of discovery as a narrative of encounter between different social groups perpetuates the original instance of epistemic violence. Trouillot observes that “[t]o call “discovery” the first invasions of inhabited lands by Europeans is an exercise in Eurocentric power that already frames future narratives of the event so described” (114). In the 1990s a group of historians and activists, including Trouillot, denounced the implications of emerging narratives of “encounter” that characterized many of the quincentennial celebrations because they prove to be “one more testimony [... in which] “[e]ncounter” sweetens the horror, polishes the rough edges that do not fit neatly either side of the controversy. Everyone *seems* to gain” (emphasis mine. Trouillot 115). Like Sánchez Ferlosio, Trouillot suggests a different framing of this history of the Americas by declaring, “I prefer to say that Columbus “stumbled on the Bahamas,” or “discovered the Antilles,” and I prefer “conquest” over “discovery” to describe what happened after the landing” (115).

An irony that marked Seville Expo '92, alongside how it uncritically perpetuated a problematic tradition of International Exhibitions in Europe (and European organized international events), was the commoditization of the celebrations. In the style of what Sánchez Ferlosio deems a great Sevillian Disneyland (13, 51, 248),<sup>124</sup> Expo '92 became a moment when one was informed by advertisements that paying 4,000 pesetas allowed access to a cultural experience where visitors could,

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<sup>123</sup> Translation: Far from an encounter, what took place was a collision, a brutal and destructive clash, and a truly forceful entry.

<sup>124</sup> “la gran Disneyland sevillana” in the original text (13, 51, 248).

have dinner in a galleon, [join] Palenques dances, visit the Mohican tombs, eat pizzas and couscous, [visit] the Mayan time tunnel, the burial of the Lord of Sipán [...] Dive into the world of 1492! A spectacle full of magic, with actors, machines, projections and special effects [...] to immerse ourselves in the era of the Discovery [...] Have fun, relax and enjoy! (Bayer *Página/12*).

This bizarre collection of ‘historical’ experiences may be publicized as just a ‘fun’ and ‘relaxing’ experience; however, a more critical analysis might view such an interpretation of colonial history as illustrative of a continuation of historical silencing, adding to and popularizing a highly skewed version of the historical archive.

There were, however, responses and protests toward the official and commercial commemorations by activists, indigenous groups and artists who targeted some otherwise unaddressed issues. Activists complaints managed to cancel the tour of the Spanish replica caravels (part of the Ruta Quetzal), a massive ‘educational’ program sponsored by the Spanish king Juan Carlos I. For this tour, 439 young students from 35 countries would have traveled from Spain to Latin America in caravels reproducing Columbus’ journey. Similar protests in the USA saw Colorado Native American activist Russell Means succeed “in getting Italian-Americans in Denver to cancel their Columbus Day parade” (Fusco 144). Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña created a cage performance entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* which was meant, “as part of a counter-quincentenary project,” to provide an opportunity to re-think alternatives to memorialization processes (Fusco 144). By enclosing themselves in a golden cage disguised as two “undiscovered Amerindians” of a fictional tribe (144), Fusco and Gomez Peña located their performance alongside the “many examples of how popular opposition has for centuries been expressed through the use of satiric spectacle” (Fusco 145). Fusco explains:

[w]e performed our “traditional tasks,” which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer. A donation box in front of the cage indicated that for a small fee, I would dance (to rap music), Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language) and we would pose for polaroids with visitors [...] A chronology with the highlights from the history of exhibiting Non-Western peoples was on a didactic panel, and a simulated Encyclopedia Britannica entry with a fake map of the Gulf of Mexico showing our island [Guatinau] was on another” (145).

Fusco and Gomez Peña toured many locations across the US and Europe and would set up their performance in public spaces, sometimes next to museum doors, challenging spectators’ reactions. Both artists were shocked to find that the public would often fail to identify the satiric content of the performance and would instead believe their fictional identities to be real (Fusco 143). Additionally, they faced misunderstanding and critiques from intellectuals and artists who argued that their performance risked misrepresenting indigenous communities and misinforming the public about who they really were (143).<sup>125</sup>

These moments re-inscribe some of the problems in the larger public sphere that define the colonial archive. By failing to account for the impact of both the history and historiography, in which subaltern experience and the figure of the imperial and colonial “other” has been simultaneously written in and written out of history, public occasions for revisionism have more often than not become moments of discourse that echoes (and

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<sup>125</sup> In “Still in the Cage: Thoughts on “Two Undiscovered Indians,” 20 Years Later,” an article published in Blouin Artinfo, Coco Fusco reflects upon the twentieth anniversary of the performance. The article provides an insight into the implications of the two-year tour of the performance not only for audiences and the art world but also for the artists themselves. Towards the conclusion of the article Fusco reflects, “[t]wenty years later, I still think about an unanswered question that led me into the cage. Is there anyone who really believes that we could be “post-racial” in a culture that fetishizes black athletes, equates black style with rebelliousness, pillages indigenous belief systems for pithy profundities to satisfy the spiritual cravings of secular materialists, and then depends on cheap immigrant labor, redlining, and mass incarceration to safeguard class hierarchies that are obviously racialized? It was the unspeakably grotesque irony of our imagining America as a multicultural paradise that inspired me to push the performance to its limits and to refuse to break character so as to assure the audience that we were not real, let them breathe a sigh of relief, and wander home.” <[www.artinfo.com](http://www.artinfo.com)>.

somehow thus repeats) itself under new forms. The re-figuration of the genocide in the Americas as “encounter,” and the various responses to Fusco and Gomez Peña’s performance, reflect an underlying issue that runs throughout this project. It is no surprise that official historical narratives are deeply invested in representing a favorable sense of national identity; this is something that Benedict Anderson and others have famously argued, and generally commemorations form part of that project.<sup>126</sup> For this reason, what does not fit into the frame of official memory tends to be ignored or excluded due to the fear of *encountering* or confronting the implications that such an acknowledgement and/or revision may bring about, such as the thorny issue of reparations which, for similar reasons, rarely receives attention from governments and institutions. Although these are widely acknowledged realities, what is perhaps less often considered is the question of what it means to make more space for individual forms of counter-memory that challenge the conventions and expectations of the archive as well as assumed understandings of memory. This has been a question central to my dissertation; the literary texts and artwork examined in this dissertation provide answers that corroborate the multifaceted aesthetic vocabulary to express the *experience* of counter-memory.

In all the written, visual and performative expressions included in this dissertation this experience of counter-memory brings forward the question of audience. Who is listening or willing to listen and bear witness to these memories? And how can those engagements become an extension of the politics of memory and affect? Ultimately the project of archiving counter-memory is moved by the experience or sense of disavowal

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<sup>126</sup> See Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Michel Certeau’s *The Writing of History* (1988). For a nuanced reflection on the configuration of ‘empire’ thinking that presents interesting connections between old and new possible conceptions of ‘empires’ see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000).

and amnesia and therefore the emphasis that the works discussed in this project place is on audience interaction, which implicitly or explicitly becomes part of their archival project, part of its logic. For, what happens if we fail to read Yuniors' footnotes in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*? Or if we do not move and play with (all) the pebbles in the interactive Warai board of *Ghosting*? Equally, how does our experience of *Tropical Night* change when we stop to really zoom in and examine the drawings and their "little gestures" rather than looking at the larger frame from afar? In similar ways, *Zong!* also asks that we think about both the impossibility and possibilities of reading its anti-narrative, for there are certainly many ways to approach this text that break reading conventions and in the end break against the heavy archival draw. Listening to the fictionalized accounts of Bilal in *Ship Shape* and the victims of 'El Corte' in *The Farming of Bones*, the reader become aware of the multitude of similar accounts that remain buried in history. Both these archives require careful attention to be paid to the personal voices, the intimate experiences of family, love and community that were stripped from memory.

Toni Morrison's notion of 're-memory' encapsulates this issue and resonates in different forms in the archives of counter-memory discussed here.<sup>127</sup> Re-memory, according to Morrison, entails the permanence of memories in their location and through their visual and bodily imprint on the psyche.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> In musical terms we could argue that it resonates in different keys.

<sup>128</sup> African-American Toni Morrison introduces this concept throughout her novel *Beloved* (1987). "Re-memory" appears as the action of revisiting or remembering a memory. In the novel, Sethe engages in various acts of re-remembering the past. A significant passage in the novel when the term is used describes a conversation between Sethe and her young daughter Denver. Sethe explains to her daughter how "re-memories" as acts of remembering exist almost independently from individual re-collection, they will always be tied to the place and moment in history when they happened (*Beloved* 46-47).



This experience also has an intricate relationship with mourning. Ed Fluker observes how,

[g]rieving requires “re-memory,” to use Toni Morrison’s language. It is a return not merely to intellectual excavation of historical data, but is associated with deep emotional energy and is spiritual and emphatic. To participate in grief offers entrée into worlds of meaning, into forgotten and dis-membered bodies of experience that lie hidden and invisible to consciousness. [...] “Re-memory,” in Morrison, functions to re-collect, re-assemble and re-configure individual *and* collective consciousness into a meaningful and sequential whole through the process of narrativization (emphasis mine 17).

In a similar way, the politics of counter-memory described throughout these four chapters not only excavates and unearths the experiences and voices that have been excluded from a series of narratives, but, as I point out throughout this dissertation, through these processes of counter-archiving M. NourbeSe Philip, Christopher Cozier, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, Roshini Kempadoo and Dorothea Smartt also mark and grieve multiple losses through different works of mourning. Their artwork, fiction, poetry and performance engage too in rituals of mourning by providing both sites of investigation regarding how archives have functioned historically, whilst allowing for a space of remembering and honoring the dead to be opened up.

The work of mourning in M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* and Dorothea Smartt’s *Ship Shape* bring the archival document back to the focus of attention; they counter and confront the colonial archive with the feelings that were once removed from, what Philip describes as, “the hard facts” of history (“Defending the Dead” 66). Mourning the anonymous slaves rendered ghostly figures through their simultaneous presence and absence in the colonial archival record challenges Freud’s early theorization of mourning

in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917).<sup>129</sup> Recent postcolonial approaches to Freud’s theory have questioned its validity especially because,

[t]his sense of what constitutes a healthy or reasonable period of mourning radically alters as we move towards the idea of collective mourning. At the level of the individual, the melancholic’s refusal to recognize an end to the time of mourning seems to preclude the possibility of the future. For the collective, the commitment never to forget seems precisely to be a way of looking at the future, a way of ensuring that history does not repeat itself (Durrant 9).

Further, in the particular case of slavery, remembering becomes truncated as the relationship to the unknown and fragmented past is mediated through the archive, the very tool that erases and in this sense also imposes a certain death to Africans in the New World. *Zong!’s* approach problematizes the project of re-membering as a reassembling of the fragments for the actual memories are, at best, precariously ‘known’ through slave narratives, and forever lost by the law of the archive.<sup>130</sup> Instead, *Zong!* investigates the possibilities of affect, provided by the very witnessing of erasure that dominates the pages of the book. Philip’s “anti-narrative” in *Zong!* may not convey a conventional narrative but through the un-telling of the court case, the poem provides an emotional entry to the problems of memorializing. Analogously, the seemingly disconnected textual

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<sup>129</sup> Freud identifies a very dichotomous and oppositional relationship between a healthy mourning (as “the withdrawal of libido from the lost object” Durrant 9) and melancholia as the narcissistic identification with the lost object and the impossibility of letting go, that is an unhealthy mourning that “seems to have no end to other than the perpetuation of processes of remembering itself” (Durrant 9). Sam Durrant’s *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2008), where he explores mourning in fiction by Toni Morrison, J.M. Coetzee and Wilson Harris, provides an interesting critique of Freud’s ideas. Another example of a similar approach is *Come Weep with Me: Loss and Mourning in the Writing of Caribbean Women Writers*, a collection of essays edited by Joyce C. Harte that includes analysis of mourning in writers like Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand and Michelle Cliff, among others.

<sup>130</sup> As Marcus Wood argues in *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (2000), “there cannot be archeology of memory that corresponds to an emotional identification with a lost reality” (7). The fact that “[o]ur cultures will never know what ‘really happened’ to the people who endured slavery” is explored in *Blind Memory* where Wood examines critically visual representations of slavery to demonstrate how “[t]he attempts of Western painters, sculptors, engravers, and lithographers to provide European culture with a record of slave experience is consequently a history fraught with irony, paradox, voyeurism and erasure” (8).

fragments in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* visually communicate and grieve the loss of African tongues and cultures through the law of the imperial and colonial project.

Mourning in *Zong!* becomes a journey and a process that results in the configuration of the elegy. Smartt's *Ship Shape*, like Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* takes another approach to these issues by re-thinking the past (and its relationship to the present) through fictionalizing an irrecoverable history. For Smartt, this imagination aims to contrapuntally connect the past and the present as the final section in the collection: "is just a part" links Smartt's own life experience in Britain to how a knowledge and awareness of the history of slavery as an important part of British history can impact and inform a sense of belonging. What enables the rituals of mourning embodied in Philip's un-telling (or telling differently) of the *Zong* case, and in Smartt's naming and de-ghosting of Bilal, is a memorialization of the dead that acknowledges the fraught and interpersonal nature of memory.

Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* deal with a possibility of mourning that is made available through storytelling: narrating and telling the past provides some form of redress even though these memories will always be fragmented, as in the case of Amabelle's recollections of the massacre, or incomplete and re-fashioned, as in Yunior's semi-testimonial account of Oscar. The act of telling them through a personalized 'testimonio' (vs. an institutionally manipulated testimony) and through a multi-genre narrative respectively, counters and confronts the disavowal and unaccountability that surrounds the deaths of Sebastien, Odette, Joël, Oscar's grandfather and Oscar himself in the two novels. Danticat and Díaz

show how, as Judith Butler points out, “the deliberate act of violence against a collectivity, humans who have been rendered anonymous for violence and whose death recapitulates an anonymity for memory” problematizes a ‘working through’ of that violence (“After Loss” 468). But, as Butler also suggests, a ‘new thought’ emerges from the experience of loss. *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao* convey this productive way of thinking about loss and its implications; these novels suggest a transformative element to communities in which mourning can help consider and address unequal access to official and institutional forms of memory.

Advocating for a burgeoning critical approach to grief and mourning, Judith Butler argues in favor of thinking “about loss as constituting social, political, and aesthetic relations, thereby overcoming the conventional understanding that “loss” belongs to a purely psychological or psychoanalytic discourse” (“After Loss” 467).

Addressing the political aspects of mourning, Butler emphasizes how,

[m]any people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility (Butler *Precarious* 22).

This understanding of ‘mourning,’ as a practice that reveals our dependency and responsibility to others, and thus facilitates an ethical “sense of political community,” is at stake in the works analyzed in this dissertation.

In the case of Christopher Cozier’s *Wait Dorothy Wait* and *Tropical Night* there is a tension that blurs the boundaries between loss and absence. The expression of grief over the gradual loss of a critical space that is at stake in *Wait Dorothy Wait* does not altogether confirm that such spaces were previously autonomously, and consistently,

available. The history of Carnival in Trinidad, from its origins until today, has shown fluctuations in its relationship of support and subversion with the state however popular music like calypso and soca enjoy a better, yet still complicated, support and promotion from the cultural industries in Trinidad. Critical and particularly conceptual visual art has generally lacked that support, as Cozier's art practice laments. The issues conveyed in Cozier's mixed media, and his ongoing drawing series, make manifest the impact of a sense of loss or absence of "cultural rights" or "cultural citizenship," a core aspect of what George Yúdice defines as the freedom to "identify with the cultural communities of one's choice" (*The Expediency of Culture* 21).<sup>131</sup>

The process of note taking as "taking note" of the places we inhabit that Nicholas Laughlin finds in *Tropical Night*, claims the relevance of local and personal mappings of the nation and the region ("Notebook" 26).<sup>132</sup> In Cozier's art these are expressions that sometimes struggle against the burden of representation imposed either by nation-building projects, liberal multiculturalist approaches to "Third World art" and/or the prefigured iconography of what is deemed as "Caribbean" or "Trinidadian." As a

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<sup>131</sup> In *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice discusses the various ways in which, albeit differently, civil society and institutions are mobilizing culture as a powerful resource. Yúdice notes how, as "powerful institutions like the European Union, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (I A D B), and the major international foundations begin to understand culture as a crucial sphere for investment, it is increasingly treated like any other resource" (13). However, these projects can pose contradictory situations in that on one hand they can offer opportunities for independently designed art projects or international exposure, and at the same time their support originates from a capitalist cultural economy entangled in the idea of development that those projects may counter or be at odds with. For example, the Caribbean visual arts exhibition *Wrestling with the Image*, co-curated by Christopher Cozier and art historian Tatiana Flores was sponsored by the World Bank's About Change program and was exhibited in the Art Museum of the America, Washington D.C. in 2011. The exhibition provided an important opportunity of exposure for many young artists in the Anglophone Caribbean, some of whom would otherwise receive scarce support from the cultural industry in their countries.

See Jerry Philogene's "Belonging to In Between" a review of *Wrestling with the Image* in *Caribbean Review of Books*. < <http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/25-january-2011/belonging-to-in-between/>>. I have published a review entitled "Caribbean Art in Dialogue: Connecting Narratives in *Wrestling with the Image*" published in *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* <<http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol9/iss1/12/>>.

<sup>132</sup> See Nicholas Laughlin's "Notebook" for an insightful review of Cozier's *Tropical Night*. (Laughlin, Nicholas. "Notebook." *The Caribbean Review of Books*. 9. (2006): 21-26. Print.

recurrent trope in Cozier's art practice, the unfulfilled promise of post-Independence in Trinidad and Tobago appears especially signaled in his latest art show *In Development* (2013). This show revolves predominantly around the visual sign of the concrete "breeze block" and what it represents as a symbol of "development" and "progress" in Trinidad's urban landscape of the 1970s, where it started to map and mark middle class property at a time when the housing market was booming. This visual sign, also very present in the *Tropical Night* drawings, signals simultaneously opposite stages of promise. As a symbol of the hopeful building projects of the middle class in the 1970s these blocks captured, for Cozier, a period of hope and promise that Independence brought with it. As a continuing feature in many houses throughout Trinidad today, these blocks also mark the unfulfilled nature of development in Trinidad, especially poignant as this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence. Therefore, Cozier's *Wait Dorothy Wait*, *Tropical Night* and *In Development* lament a lost or unfulfilled promise that came with Independence. Implicitly, these artworks also interrogate the compromises of privileging an economy that mobilizes a particular model of culture (mostly for marketing purposes) and how tackling criminality only through police interventionism washes over the potential impact on civil liberties and how societies' can have an active role in development through art and cultural production.

Finally, the interactive engagement in Cozier's art, which in *In Development* takes the form of a blog where audiences respond to the "breeze block" through a downloadable template, resonates in Roshini Kempadoo's *Ghosting*.<sup>133</sup> By moving the

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<sup>133</sup> In this blog, Cozier archives the responses that are sent to the blog's email: [dpatterns2013@gmail.com](mailto:dpatterns2013@gmail.com). Many of them so far have been from other artists in the Caribbean region and diaspora including Ebony Patterson, DJ Afifa, Rodell Warner, Michelle Isava, Holly Bynoe, Nadia Huggins and Sheena Rose. The responses ranged from graphic design, to textile patterns, photography, drawing, mixed media, video and

stones in the Warai board, viewers in *Ghosting*'s installation space participate in the process of narration and the sequencing of fictionalized histories of life in Trinidad's post-emancipation plantation (1838-1948). The immediate potential of this interactive place, and the personal "construction" of narratives that is available to the viewer, opens a space of engagement, interest and authorship. This can also initiate a reflection about the viewer's own power or powerless participation in the configuration of national narratives and prerogatives in Britain. The narratives in Kempadoo's installation are *ghosting* the archive by responding to its silences.

The varied artistic expressions that I discuss in this dissertation ultimately challenge readers and viewers to consider non-linear, circuitous paths to engaging with traumatic episodes in both distant and recent episodes of Caribbean history. Such challenges epitomize a postcolonial sense of plurivocality and heterogeneity that can confront the authoritative nature of colonial, national or state archives, and the fact that what is written and included within them becomes validated as historical truth and knowledge. The archiving of counter-memory moves beyond the postcolonial emphasis on rewriting history (where the reader or viewer gains access to a wider variety of perspectives and experiences of memory) by emphasizing artists' investment in interrogating and actively challenging our viewing and reading of history. Mourning is also figured in many of these texts. Not only does it signal a process of critical engagement, seeking to know more about particular history/ies, and stimulating dialog around silenced or marginalized historical events or individuals but, moreover, is embodied in the response of affect that, as I mention in the introduction, lies in the

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gif. Art schools in the Caribbean and other places have sent responses to Cozier's invitation to participate in the cultural and personal exploration of this motif. See "Christopher Cozier in Development: A Collaborative Project. 2013-Ongoing" <<http://dpatterns2013.wordpress.com/category/dpatterns/>>.

acknowledgement of the irreducibility of one's personal experience. Overall, in so doing, mourning generates conversations on multiple scales within the local and global communities of readers and viewers.



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