

**LIBERATION TEXTUALITIES:  
DECOLONIALITY, FEMINISM, AND  
AESTHETICS IN ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN  
AND INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICAN  
RESISTANCE LITERATURE**

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## ABSTRACT

*Liberation Textualities* recognizes the connections between personal, emotional, and spiritual writing by Anglophone Caribbean and Indigenous North American women and an expanded framework of resistance literature. I argue that resistance itself is in fact a broad tradition within which many texts, representations, and ideas intersect. While this project is sensitive to the profound historical, socioeconomic, and cultural differences that shape the realities of various communities in the Americas, it also recognizes a shared decolonizing impulse and a common interest in interior and domestic life, nurtured by similar gendered and racialized experiences in settler, colonial, and neocolonial societies. This dissertation argues that decolonial, feminist, and aesthetic practices, while still overlooked in most canons of resistance literature, provide the grounds upon which to revitalize and expand our understanding of what constitutes resistance and offer representation to the extensive range of unexpected and unsung resistant textualities.

The study focuses on novels by Merle Collins and Lee Maracle, poems by Chrystos and Mahadai Das, and plays by M. NourbeSe Philip and Yvette Nolan. *The Colour of Forgetting* (1996) is read alongside *Celia's Song* (2014) through the lens of spiritual resistance and marvellous realism. *Not Vanishing* (1988) and *A Leaf in His Hear* (2010) are analyzed for their representations of the body as a site of resistance. Lastly, *Coups and Calypsos* (2001) and *Annie Mae's Movement* (1998) are examined for their focus on personal relationships and the dynamic interplay of resistance between individuals. This study looks at how different literary forms shift polemic and dominant understandings of resistance theory, whilst underscoring literary diversity as a principle value of resistance literature. The theoretical structure of the dissertation engages

with foundational thinkers in resistance literature theory—Barbara Harlow, Frantz Fanon, and Selwyn Cudjoe—but complicates, updates, and deconstructs their contributions through multiple resistance theorists, including Emma LaRocque, Leanne Simpson, and Carole Boyce Davies. These women have challenged patriarchal nationalism within Caribbean and Indigenous North American political movements and societies, but their philosophical work extends to how literary critics engage with the idea of resistance and assign value to a text.

These women, this dissertation asserts, redraw the boundaries of political and aesthetic engagement in literary studies, offering an important and revolutionary new path toward a comprehensive and pluriversal resistance literature that transcends a single movement, moment, or place.

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And to my students: you have inspired me, sharpened my mind, and given me so much hope that literature truly can have an impact in this world.

I was so fortunate to be reared by a powerful and beautiful mother who told me, before she left this world: go to grad school, focus on writing. She is always in my heart, and in my head, her wisdom, her humour, and her pain pushing me to write, to listen, to act, and to seek justice. I cannot express how much I owe to my aunt Sharon, my guardian angel and role model for teaching practice, who helped me survive the loss of my mother, and who urged me to be persistent about my education and instilled in me the necessity of treating people with an abundance of kindness. I need to thank Alan for supporting me at the beginning of this journey and reminding me that I could do this. This work is a testament to the forces of love in my life, to those who have been with me for a season, a reason, or a lifetime.

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## PREFACE

A close friend from Trinidad once asked me why my scholarship is focused on the Caribbean and Indigenous North America. Understandably, she wonders why her white Canadian friend thinks he should study the literary works of cultures he is not a part of, and to which in fact he has a direct and indirect colonial relationship. Am I just another white person taking up or appropriating the space of people of colour? This is not a question I take lightly. Perhaps I even avoided having any discussion about it with my friends when I began my journey at grad school because I really had no satisfactory answer.

But I have come to see the work that I do as having personal, ethical, and political significance. I think it is appropriate to share these thoughts at the outset of my dissertation, both to frame it through my own social location but also so that I may focus on the important texts in my study and not allow my own whiteness to glare over the voices and thoughts in the study.

First, the personal. Though my mother and I are both Anglo-Canadians, she spent a great deal of her life living and teaching in the Caribbean. She has been to Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, Bequia, Curaçao, Dominica, Montserrat, and Trinidad as a schoolteacher, tourist, migrant, and calypso devotee since 1962. To use a Trinidadian phrase, her blood “took” the Caribbean. She spent most of her life working to be able to live in the Caribbean and fled from Canada any chance she could. Growing up, I attended Caribana (when it was on University) many times, helped her teach students at the Toronto Island science school to cut up sugar cane, and travelled to numerous Caribbean countries with her. It was as if she wanted me to know as much about the region as possible. Of course, we were typical tourists and we are also not, given

her relationships with the people and places we went. In Antigua, she introduced me to Miss Winter, who had been her landlady when she was a teacher twenty years earlier. The frail elder perked up greatly when she saw my mother and I will never forget the soft tap of her fingers on the bed, indicating my mother should sit next to her. In 2009, my mother passed away suddenly in Barbados, having settled there in her retirement. I scattered her remains in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Worthing, Christ Church, and that place feels, however incongruously, like home. I do not mean this in the colonial sense; it is not a space that I seek to take from another to claim for myself, or to supplant my own colonial status in Canada or even in relation to Barbados or the Caribbean as a region. Rather, it is a place that has spiritual and social connection for me; it is a real link that I cannot deny. I have spent every year since her death trying to figure out how to get to that place, to the community that her death introduced me to, to the voices, wisdom, smells, the moisture, the sounds of that place because, in my mind, she inhabits that space, and I miss her every day, every moment. I envision her standing, impish, under the almond tree on the beach where she plunged into the sea to take her last breaths. Before she passed, she urged me to go to graduate school and seek a degree in English, which she knew was my passion and could form my life's work.

I tell this story not to suggest that I need to "see myself" in a place in order for it to be important, but simply as the reason that when I applied for doctoral studies I knew that I wanted to study Caribbean literature. At the time it was not something I could explain because the connection was so personal, and also framed by the problematic relations of North American tourism and exploitation in the Caribbean. I knew something but not a great deal about life in the places my mother and I had visited; I knew more about experiences West Indians had in Canada as migrant labour and targets of police violence, but white privilege allowed me to choose

whether this affected me or not. Of course, it affected me greatly on an emotional and intellectual level and in many ways helped shape my own critique of Canada and other white settler colonies for their perpetuation of white supremacy and racist domination. It is here, perhaps, that my connection with Indigenous peoples in North America emerges. I have always believed that justice in Canada and the U.S., as well as other white settler colonies, can only take place when a fundamental reshaping of colonial relations takes place. That means indigenous sovereignty, but also significant changes in the legacies of European culture—including patriarchy and capitalism—within the social matrix of whatever national or political structure emerges from that transformation. Social transformation, to me, will have happened when these lands are returned to those from whom Europeans stole them and negotiated treaties are truly honoured. Indigenous presence, then, is central to my understanding of my birth “home” and the racialized relations which structure my social location.

As an MA student (and undergrad), I was drawn to postcolonial theory because it reflected my politics so profoundly. I have since come to understand the problematics of the theory—its insistence on “post” when colonial relations remain in place; its historicization of indigenous peoples only in relation to contact with Europe; its entrenchment in the jargon of poststructuralism and academic elitism—yet I firmly believe in acknowledging, confronting, and eradicating the structured inequalities that have resulted from European colonization. The politics of postcolonialism, particularly the ways in which it links colonization with patriarchy and mercantilism/capitalism, are important to my own understanding of the pathways to liberation, as well as how I think we ought to diagnose the causes of contemporary oppression. While the theory was important, it was in the fiction, poetry, and drama of peoples of colour—African, Caribbean, Latin American, South and East Asian, Indigenous North American and

Australian, Maori—that these politics were consistently explored, expressed, aestheticized, theorized, and depicted. And these were the literatures I became determined to study and place at the centre of my own literary theory.

White colleagues often talk about how they try to see their own experience in a text by a person of colour; they seek out kind depictions of white friends in novels, a domineering mother figure “just like mine” haunting the speaker of a poem, an assured embrace of interracial tolerance in a play set in Toronto the Great. The white search for unproblematized multiculturalism and a relatable self in texts by people of colour is at the heart of why I must take the question of why I study texts outside my own background very seriously. I do not wish to fall into this trap or erode the value of the texts I study. I do not look for myself in the texts I study, or for an easy pass into the world of a “other” that is ultimately relatable, to humanistically reassure myself that I and other white people do not *really* benefit from inequalities. I look to be challenged, transformed, discomfited, thrilled not by self-satisfaction that my whiteness is not that bad after all, but by seeing whiteness and patriarchy and economic injustice torn asunder, grabbed by both hands, forced up and out of the social matrix. Literature by people of colour does this consistently, and that is why I study it and want to teach it.

Teaching is also a practice that is inherently unequal, but which, at the postsecondary level, offers an opportunity to transgress those inequalities and bring democracy into the classroom. I would not see teaching a Caribbean or Indigenous North American text as an instance of instructing people about a—or, worse, their own—culture, but rather using a text to explore ideas, concepts, literary techniques, *and* culture. The teaching model I strive for is not a knowledge-learning dyad, but rather a circulation of discussion and debate that is limited by the

cultural information and perspectives of the participants. Any expertise I have is about literary practices and that knowledge too can be questioned by students.

Despite my own hesitance to appropriate these literatures—and I am not convinced that literary study constitutes appropriation, but rather I am mindful of the care a white person must take in the transformation from student to teacher and/or theorist of these texts—I saw opportunities to shape and extend my political analysis with these works. This did not happen, for me, in works by white gay men, or postmodernists, or other, more “appropriate” literatures the white student is often expected to undertake.

This is not to say that there is nothing for me to say about white texts. There are numerous white Caribbean authors whose works raise complex and interesting arguments about hybridity and creolization. White South African authors offer searing critiques of apartheid and racial relations in ways that white Canadian authors, for example, rarely do. Race is often an absent presence in white people’s texts and this would be a worthy area of study.

However, this brings me to the ethical reason I study the literatures that I do. In my (all-white) doctoral cohort, there is one other student who touches on literatures by people of colour. In my department, there is a handful (no more than 10%) of courses offered on literature by people of colour. In many cases, an entire region is grouped in to one year-long course (i.e. African Literature) that is supposed to encompass regional, generic, political, and perspectival diversity. By contrast, British literature is divided into several epochs (Renaissance, Modernist, Medieval, Romantic, Restoration, Postmodern etc.), and even Canadian and American literature has at minimum three distinct courses that are divided by historical period or genre (and is, by far, dominated by the settler literatures with tokenistic inclusions of “minority” texts here and there). Needless to say, writing by people of colour is marginalized; graduate students are not

encouraged to study it or theorize it because, as undergrads, it is not an area of any substantial focus at the departmental level. When literature by people of colour appears outside of those designated areas, I can say that it is often lumped into one category—“postcolonial,” which, outside postcolonial studies, stands in for anti-racist sentiment or non-white cultural expression—or it is deemed more auto- or ethnography than “literature.” This has created a dearth in graduate work on these literatures, at least at my institution. I therefore see it as my responsibility to use the privileged position I have as a grad student and potential faculty member to focus on these underrepresented works. I personally see it as capitulating to white dominance to contribute yet another study on white works when my own interests lie in an area most white students avoid or oversimplify.

I anticipate that my career will traverse literary genres, regions, and authors; however, my scholarly mission is to promote literature by people of colour from a wide range of backgrounds and subjectivities. I undertake this not as a gesture of inclusiveness, but as an attempt to transform the focus of English literary study and privilege the important work by authors of colour. I will continually interrogate my own whiteness in relation to my work and acknowledge that I occupy a privileged position in a field where knowledge and expertise are often deployed unproblematically; indeed, “knowledge” and “expertise” are much more complicated for a white person teaching works by people of colour. Were I to ignore these structural issues, the quality of and interest in my work would suffer. But to retreat into an enclave of white literature to avoid the challenging territory of cross-cultural reading and teaching would be a crime against every principle I hold dear.

## INTRODUCTION

My approach to this work is not rooted solely in the intellectual; it is rooted in my spiritual and emotional life, as well as my body.

Leanne Simpson

*Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (19)

I was going to write about the revolution; instead this book is full of loneliness.

—Dionne Brand

*In Another Place, Not Here* (220)

*Liberation Textualities* seeks to revitalize resistance in literary study by validating its potential for critical, political, and aesthetic wonder. Acknowledging and restoring resistance literature as a distinct field offers important analytical pathways for students, scholars, and publishers who still believe that literature intervenes in the world as a unique form of critique that furthers social justice in many areas, promotes self-reflexivity, and develops empathy for others. This dissertation seeks to revive, reconceptualize, and interrogate the concept of resistance literature through various lenses intended to broaden its scope, while simultaneously demonstrating its significance to a range of literary inquiries.

Resistance is a ubiquitous term in critical theory and popular media discourse, with at least 3,600 article titles in the MLA database using the word (as of this writing), and with a

complicated history of usage. As Shalini Puri has discussed in *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (2004), the concept of resistance was once associated with covert, “symbolic or disguised” political activity, thus rendering it less politically palatable than her alternative: “overt opposition” (108). Conversely, Barbara Harlow has linked literature and resistance through avowed polemic discourse intended to show the artistic power of the politicized text, in open defiance of formalism. The popular use of resistance to mean polemics has come back into fashion through its association with political movements, particularly in North America. Though my project makes a specific effort to emphasize events, figures, theorists, and creative authors outside of the imperial mainstream, the return of resistance to the popular imagination cannot be cleaved from the ascendance of Donald Trump in the U.S., and before that the Brexit vote in the U.K. But it is also a result of Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Occupy Wall Street, and the Women’s Marches; the echoes from within and against the empires of settler colonialism work in tandem with strugglers around the world to resist coloniality, to finish the work of national movements and treaty negotiators, and to bring about a liberation that addresses the real concerns faced by people in daily life, rather than the goals of a rigid ideological framework. The sharing of similar ideals, but without the demand for uniformity of method, enables a vision of global resistance with many nuances, tactics, beliefs, participants, and theorists; it reminds us that traditional activism is not the only source of contemporary or historical resistance.

Resistance occurs in the dark corners of homes, in simple acts that introduce equity to a romantic relationship, in holding on to a spiritual practice that sees the afterlife as something beyond Christian dogma. Resistance, as the epigraph from Simpson states above, is in our spirits, our emotions, and our bodies as much as it is in our protests, our legal battles, and our policy victories. My dissertation follows Simpson’s words very closely, with each chapter addressing

literary representations of these three realms and looking at how they connect literature with resistance theory. Resistance theory itself is problematized here, meaning that resistance is considered to be multiple forms of struggle at once: individual, collective, intellectual, physical, and emotional. I have chosen three critical lenses, both products of political critique and areas of contested thought in literary studies, through which to reconsider resistance and open up its array of possibilities.

## **Critical Lenses**

Decolonialism is the first lens and was selected for two main reasons: its assertion that racialization and gender equally inform all colonial systems (which decolonial theorists break into three comprehensive categories—knowledge, education, and economic) and its ability to seek out and coalesce with indigenous critiques in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Postcolonial literary criticism, as I explore in Chapter 1, is often rebuked for centralizing empire or ignoring the presence of peoples in a land prior to the arrival of European invaders. Drawing upon the connections between the colonial matrix of power and the leaders of many national liberation movements, Walter D. Mignolo famously articulates that neither capitalism nor socialism shall liberate the world; it is decolonization that will do that (“Further Thoughts” 29). Resistance is therefore deconstructed in a way that allows for “pluriversal” decolonizations that are not identical across cultural or geographic boundaries, but which may have shared or related strategies and goals. Decolonization is also, crucially, not simply the notion of kicking a colonizer out of one’s territory, but rather doing intricate and painful cultural and social work to recover, reinvigorate, and restructure relations between people in the wake of this insidious

power matrix. To use the terms of critical indigenous theory, this is not simply about reconciliation but about resurgence and a return to more holistic and interconnected life ways.

The second lens through which this dissertation considers its primary texts is feminism. While certainly not “new,” even in its antiracist or deconstructive wave, feminism remains a foremost arena for the critique of most theoretical frameworks, literary or otherwise, and still remains marginalized in discussions of decolonization. As Helen Scott argues in *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* (2006), “women’s issues” have been relegated to a realm unrelated to the collective public interest or silenced altogether. The continued struggle against domestic violence and heterosexism in communities affected by colonialism speaks to the ongoing impact of colonial gender hierarchies and the need for a feminist response. Feminism is used here in its least narrow definition, in ways adopted by scholars like Kim Anderson, Paula Gunn Allen, Carole Boyce Davies, and other women of colour to centralize race and colonialism in the challenge to patriarchy, which mirrors decolonial theory’s attention to gender.

Finally, I use aesthetics as another lens for textual analysis. Refusing the formalist iterations of aesthetics, and further rejecting the return of “taste” and canonicity in the emergence of what I have called elsewhere the “new” world literature school,<sup>1</sup> aesthetics is used here primarily as Bill Ashcroft and Shira Wolosky have redefined it: as a means through which feminist and cultural meanings cross from literary texts to readers, and the visceral, emotional, textural, and sensual process that occurs within that connection, which cannot be read without political, historical, and social contexts. Aesthetics are infused into the literary choices of the

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<sup>1</sup> In an unpublished article, “Questioning Orders Old and New: Reading *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as Critical World Literature.”

authors, the representational elements that appear on the page (and the stage), and in the way readers can be affected by a text.

The purpose of using these three particular aspects of literary study and connecting them to a more antistructural reading of resistance literature is to connect resistance to a more fluid, more personal, and more typical range of acts of resistance. I look beyond moments of national independence, mass demonstrations, or direct militant action—all examined in Harlow’s original text, and which do arguably add vigour and excitement to what she perceived as a stale house of literary inquiry—in order to open up the concept of resistance and see how some literature is often dismissed as too personal, too interiorized, too gender-focused to achieve any kind of anticolonial or political effect. I should state quite clearly that my intention is not to demolish Harlow’s book or set her up as a straw to knock down; her text was seminal in pushing back against the formalist establishments that condemned overtly political literature as not literary.<sup>2</sup> However, the decades of theory and social justice practice since the foundational theorists of resistance literature—who I discuss in Chapter 1 and argue are primarily Frantz Fanon, Sewlyn Cudjoe, and Harlow—must be addressed and a new formulation drawn up that allows for developments in the future that are less tied to specific moments in history or certain political methods.

My argument is that resistance literature is an important framework for the contextual analysis and close reading of texts. Rather than the awkward and somewhat misleading “postcolonial literature,” which is often a euphemism for literature that deals with race or works

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed similar voices are rearing their heads in scholarship by Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, and Nicholas Harrison, who advertently or not, have suggested that postcolonial theory has delegitimized literary scholarship by either imposing “too political” a reading or encouraging the study of texts for social rather than artistic reasons.

written by people of colour, particularly from the “Third World” but also by white settlers in Canada, Australia or South Africa, *resistance* literature focuses on decolonization and uses phrasing that is more stimulating and socially relevant. Therefore, resistance literature must become more than a terminological change (or a return to narrow categorization that refers to one type of historical event or occurrence). Rather, it must become a living theory that allows for multiple approaches to how a text operates at artistic and political levels. Resistance literature must be able to move across and through various cultural and geographic contexts, without attempting to distance those texts from the events and identities that inform their symbols and signifiers. Resistance, then, can be seen using Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s recent theory of globalectics, wherein the globe serves as a metaphor for literary relations: “On its surface, there is no one centre; any point is equally a centre. As for the internal centre of the globe, all points on the surface are equidistant to it—like the spokes of a bicycle wheel that meet at the hub” (8). In my analogy, the hub is a comprehensive theory of resistance, with as many possible resistances branching out equidistantly as there are literary texts that challenge personal, social, cultural, political, and economic realities. The spokes, taken as a whole, represent acts of decolonization, large and small. Resistance is thus manifold.

## **Choices and Methods**

Given the limitations of any literary project, even a dissertation, selections must be made that by their nature create exclusions, are based on a degree of arbitrariness, and present dilemmas of representation, genre, and geography. As the title of the project indicates, I have chosen to focus in this study on two distinct and important groups out of which my primary texts

emerge: Anglophone Caribbean and Indigenous North American literatures. Perhaps the most superficial reasons for selecting these two regions is personal interest in their literatures and the fact that they have rarely been put in conversation.<sup>3</sup> But, more importantly, Caribbean and Indigenous American literary texts address the various questions my project poses: what is resistance? How can it be modified to reflect the widest diversity of struggles in public and daily life? How can it be used to revive interest in literary study and push back against returns to formalist decontextualizations or so-called “distant reading”? These texts are sites of complex resistances based on their histories of precoloniality, invasion, occupation, and decolonization. Questions of indigeneity, sovereignty, linguistic hybridity, spiritual creolization, oral and scribal cultural practice, vestiges of colonial patriarchy—these are all themes in the literary expressions of both peoples and bring up the complications involved in theorizing resistance. But even more relevant to my project are the texts’ engagement with decolonial concerns, women’s perspectives and challenges to gendered hierarchies, and aesthetic interaction. They play with form in the sense of drawing from multiple cultural sources, demonstrating that poetry and drama are not European forms, and that fiction is no longer one.

This study defines Caribbean and Indigenous North American literature as those texts produced by authors who identify with those regions either by birth or by culture, regardless of their current residence—be it in diaspora/within the artificial boundaries of the settler state, “back home,” urban or on-reserve, or any combination of those things. In some sense, then, there is an identitarian underpinning to my classifications of literatures, but I use those classifications

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<sup>3</sup> Jodi A. Byrd’s *Transit of Empire* (2011) is a significant exception, though her book more precisely puts critical indigenous theory in conversation with Caribbean literary texts as means of internationalizing the relevance of that theory.

in their regional sense and do not interrogate the authors' claims to their identities. I do so in honour of the work antiracist scholars and activists have done to confront essentialism but without losing the importance of identity in determining social location. Standpoint epistemology, as feminist discourse calls it, shapes our experiences of the world, even if we are able to find shared connections and commonalities across the boundaries of skin colour, gender identification, language, or geography. National, regional, racial, or other identities are still formed by structural privilege and oppression and those barriers cannot be simply willed away by refusing to "see" them—even if a genderless and raceless world is a noble and, perhaps one day, attainable goal. Therefore, my "definition" balances both arguments in the most inclusive way possible.

The textual choices I have made have involved two related sets of criteria: first, they engage with resistance in a complicated or unusual way; two, they address the three thematic concerns I set up at the outset—spirituality, the body, and personal relationships. In each case, the author can be considered both a traditional and innovative resistance writer, since she addresses both "public" and "private" realms in her various texts. Moreover, the authors have both polemic and opaque works in their respective oeuvres, a contrast I consider in my textual analysis.

For the Caribbean, I have selected texts that are primarily set in the region but often deal with social, familial, and political structures that extended beyond the Caribbean itself. That I have done so raises the vexed question of whether literature is "Caribbean" or, for example, "Canadian," given the diasporic positionality of its author. I believe literature written in diaspora can belong to multiple national formations and that these complexities serve to remind us that though national formations are fraught, one cannot theorize a resistance literature without some

attention to the pesky borders erected by states in spite of claims to a globalized world. Mahadai Das, for instance, is associated with Guyana and its political movements in spite of being educated in the United States, whereas M. NourbeSe Philip is an active figure in Canadian political and literary circles despite her strong ties and textual affiliation with Trinidad and Tobago. For the Indigenous North American texts, I similarly disregard questions of the author's current residence in favour of representational and perspectival criteria. The texts are set within indigenous cultural and social spaces, for the most part, but those spaces are more loosely demarcated given that they occur in colonially-defined and colonially-occupied territories. Maracle's novel takes place almost entirely in Stó:lō country, but also with key scenes in Vancouver; Chrystos's poetry almost exclusively addresses life in San Francisco, or otherwise away from Menonimee country, her "home" territory. These boundaries are deliberately constructed on a continent that is essentially stolen and still occupied by a colonizer, so to use colonial geography risks ignoring the realities of indigenous life in the Americas. And not all texts adhere to strict identity barriers: Nolan's play is about a Mi'kmaq woman and Afro-Grenadian Collins's main character is a Kalinago woman. These crossings enrich the works in many ways, and open up the possibilities for analysis raised by the construction involved in representations of others, particularly when the author herself is from an oppressed group.

The reason I have selected only women's texts is because women's voices are integral to any refashioned resistance literature. Women's exclusions from postcolonial state formations, the derision with which their texts are compared to the "national interest," and, again, the ways in which their texts coincide with my critical inquiry make women's texts an important jumping off point for my reformulation of resistance. As my intention is to lay the groundwork for future scholarship on resistance, I believe it is important to act in a way that encourages equity—to

produce an all-women's study that is not only about "women's issues" but rather the broader concept of resistance, and challenges previous studies, such as Cudjoe's, which examines resistance yet only includes works written by men. The women in this study share a common interest in decolonization, but also a unique focus on various aspects of it. They engage in traditional political representations, but also deeply personal ones. They challenge the presumptive male figure as national allegory, such as in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) or Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985). Those two novels, both important to literary study and resistance literature, also have the effect of reaffirming the nationalist image of the liberator as a man, with women enacting a supportive role. The texts here question those dynamics not simply by reversing the roles, but resituating the location and terms of resistance itself.

The performance of resistance is informed by the local contexts out of which the texts are written. Indigenous resurgence and arrivant decolonization, gender and sexual freedom, and engaging literature as a means of developing a pathos for resistance are explored by writers with connections to millennia-old cultural traditions under constant threat by imperial forces. The texts studied here explore cosmologies and social practices that serve human enrichment rather than profit and constraint, and oppose hundreds of years of atrocity and unacknowledged debts of land and labour. They also draw upon long-standing knowledge and experience with what is now called multiculturalism in a way that subverts nationalism, patriarchy, and universality. Resistance is thus reformulated through these texts with a sense of history, pluriversality, and tenacity.

This study analyzes all three of the major literary forms, which is both a traditionalist move and not. The initial impulse for this triple focus was to challenge recent trends in

contemporary literary fields that favour prose fiction; and also to honour the traditions out of which resistance literature theory has grown, with Harlow in particular emphasizing the role of poetry in furthering social movements. Moreover, drama and poetry are forms which challenge European domination of literature as whole. Considering ancient and classical oral, performative, and verse literature from Mali, India, Syria, the Mayan empire, and Afghanistan, I strive to ensure that my literary scholarship includes all three forms—and, in future, experimental or hybrid genres—in order to acknowledge the world history of literature that refutes a Eurocentric bias and gestures toward a reconfigured understanding of global literature.

However, whilst inclusion is behind the move to study the three literary forms, exclusions have been made which must be acknowledged. Pauline Melville, notable for her identification as an Indigenous Caribbean author, is perhaps the most remarkably absent voice in this project. Given its comparison between arrivant and indigenous authors, with themes of indigeneity and the national and regional erasure of aboriginality in the Caribbean, her omission may be read as a grave one indeed. In practical terms, I felt that Collins's novel shared more thematic concerns with Maracle's and that the two novels' turn away from diasporic setting suited a comparative analysis. Certainly, Melville engages in marvellous realism, particularly in her collection *The Migration of Ghosts* (1998), but the particular practices of both Collins and Maracle open up the notion of spirituality in resistance literature in ways that I felt were important for my own reading of the concept in conversation with resistance. There are countless others who could easily have been added to this study; indeed, that is in some ways the point of it. I prioritized texts based on the lack of critical attention to them, their political complexity, and their direct challenge to traditional resistance themes. Despite these acts of omission, my intention is to create new pathways along which to explore resistance literature: the short story as a resistant

form, sexuality as a plane of resistance, cross-cultural representation as an act of resistance. Each of these lines of inquiry can draw a wider variety of artists and texts into what I see as a crucial field in the study of literature.

## **The Discussion Ahead**

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical overview and explores the historical frameworks of resistance. The chapter identifies the conflagration of theorists, current and past, who make up the posts of resistance literature theory and places them in conversation in order to forge a new formulation. In the chapter, I seek to define the terms I apply in later chapters—such as liberation, de/coloniality, feminism, aesthetics, and resistance—through the work of postcolonial, indigenous, arrivant, and feminist scholars and how they inform understandings of resistance in a literary context. The chapter looks in particular at indigenous critical theory and Caribbean feminism, but connects them to a broader network of resistance theorists who inform the scholarship in these pages. The regional focus, then, of the close readings, is placed in a global context.

Chapter 2 begins the work of textual analysis. Using questions of spirituality and metaphysics as a point of inquiry into marvellous realism in novels by Lee Maracle (Stó:lō) and Merle Collins (Grenada), I examine narratives that attempt to express cosmologies and world views that are often set aside in political debates. I examine prose depictions of the supernatural and how they help complicate the polemic realism that traditional resistance theory demands from literary texts. Magic realist theory is used alongside my three lenses to chart a more

expansive resistance terrain that is distinctly literary and featured in narratives that are figurative, spiritual, and grounded in indigenous resurgence.

Chapter 3 examines poetry that uses the body to re-centre the practice of resistance. The body becomes the signifying and symbolic terrain upon which the personal, the erotic, the sartorial, and the painful are rendered as sites of struggle. The chapter engages poets Chrystos (Menomonee) and Das (Guyana), who have both been polemical *and* figurative in their work, but whose blend of resistance is oriented toward personal liberation from coloniality in all its forms. Politics and the personal are blended, but also grate up against one another in a way that insists upon poetry's critical function in rethinking ideology and social justice.

Chapter 4 looks at drama by M. NourbeSe Philip (Tobago) and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin). This chapter brings together plays that are based in historical moments of uprising and political disappointment alongside romantic entanglements in order to show that two are inextricable. In this chapter, the personal is *constituted* by the political and vice versa. Emotion and affect are at the core of drama and theatre analysis, and my work with the texts shows how the stagescape uses realism to reshape notions of resistance and therefore renders plays that focus on personal relationships, as a great many of them do, as potential resistance texts.

I hope that my literary criticism contributes to a reinforcement of the value of close reading, historical context, politicized literary theory, and affirms the many possibilities of studying what is now commonly called global anglophone literature as resistance literature. It would be presumptuous to suggest that a single dissertation project can usher in a renewed field of study. However, my sense of urgency arises from a pendulous swing I have noted with the rise of a "world" literature that directly remarginalizes coloniality and contemporary non-European texts in favour of a revived aesthetic formalism. I therefore put this study and these words

forward as a concomitant endorsement of political, historical, decolonial, feminist, and aesthetic close readings.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Including the Kitchen Sink: Theorizing Resistance Literature through Liberation Textualities**

I think that our notions of what counts as radical have changed over time. Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now part of radical social justice struggles. That wasn't the case before.

And I think that now we're thinking deeply about the connection between interior life and what happens in the social world.

—Angela Davis<sup>4</sup>

From its codification in the 1980s, resistance literature as a category has typically held narrow historical and ideological requirements. As its early theorists attempted to underscore the value of reading literature politically, resistance literature became associated with specific nationalist movements and moments that allowed it to be dismissed as reductive based on its reverence for overt polemics and unproblematized patriarchal emphasis. Meanwhile, literary

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Sarah van Gelder, "The Radical Work of Healing: Fania and Angela Davis on a New Kind of Civil Rights Activism," *Yes! Magazine*, 18 February 2016, n.p., <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/life-after-oil/the-radical-work-of-healing-fania-and-angela-davis-on-a-new-kind-of-civil-rights-activism-20160218>. Accessed 28 February 2016.

study still lacks a critical approach to address the advances in theories of anti-oppression and equity that embrace intersectionality. Postcolonialism and gender studies are still considered largely separate lenses for literary criticism, with postcolonial essentially standing in for critical race theory. And yet the term *resistance* maintains a broad appeal because of its versatility, its applicability to multiple instances of social and political struggle. Resistance literature, then, in spite of its earlier associations, offers the potential for an engagement with texts that can adapt to shifting sites of oppression and liberation. To undertake that engagement, though, we must reconstruct a theory of resistance literature that addresses its inadequacies and opens up its potential scope.

Black feminist scholars were among the first to question the fractured approach to resistance by proposing the intersectionality of oppression—what legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw calls “the need to account for multiple [structural] grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (1245)—to interrogate binary thinking and urge an interlocking view of hegemony. Recent work by indigenous literary critics, especially Emma LaRocque (Métis) in *When the Other is Me* (2010), problematizes the traditional definition of resistance and seeks out new ways to reformulate it. As questions of social justice, freedom, and equity become more complicated, so too should theories of resistance. Indeed critique and debate enhances social movements and better energizes struggle, and literary texts are intrinsically capable of that diagnostic function. Resistance literature, therefore, must shift from a reductive expression of a particular movement’s goal or will, toward a textual intervention that signifies multiple perspectives on, sites of, and possibilities for liberation in the minds of readers.

LaRocque’s scrutiny of resistance and literature provides a direct antecedent to my work here, in that we offer potential entry points to recuperate the term from its reductive

interpretations and address the various challenges put forth about its critical efficacy. LaRocque specifically subverts the boundaries of what is considered traditional resistance literature by introducing a North American indigenous context, challenging its regional limitation to the “Third World,” its presumption of postcoloniality, and its grounding in Western literary forms (19-23). My purpose here is to intersect a critique of prevailing resistance literature theory with parts of hers, in order to unpack what is meant by resistance literature and allow for a greater possible corpus of literary texts in relation to struggles for social, economic, cultural, and political liberation.

I seek to reread, rewrite, and revive resistance literature through the work of decolonial, feminist,<sup>5</sup> and aesthetics thinkers to produce an effect I am calling *liberation textualities*, which revises a term first used by Carole Boyce Davies in *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* (1994) that continues to be relevant today: uprising textualities. Liberation textualities, as I define them, expand and reformulate resistance literature theory to align it better with the personal relationships and social struggles represented in African, Asian, Caribbean, and non-settler North American and South Pacific literatures. Liberation textualities push past the notion that

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<sup>5</sup> I have debated whether to use the term womanism or feminism here, since much scholarship by women of colour has identified the mainstream totalizing of feminism as inapplicable to women who experience racialization or colonization. African/Black/Afrikan women have asserted womanism as a better descriptor for their woman-centred praxis. I use feminism here because womanism is currently theorized as an Afrocentric concept and, although I align myself with non-traditional theorists and scholarly frames, I would await leadership from womanists to extend the framework to non-African/Afro-diasporic texts. I also believe that feminism has shifted its thinking away from Eurocentrism and can be claimed by multiple standpoints; and, it must be recognized, intersectionality is largely grounded in feminist (of colour) epistemologies. I should also note that I use feminist and woman not as biological categories, but as the result of a social constructionist interpretation of gender. See Dorothy Randall Tsuruta.

resistance literature speaks only to a particular nationalist struggle against European-based colonialism and toward the idea of resistance to ongoing coloniality within traditionally underappreciated spheres, such as domestic relationships or spiritual practices. Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1987) is the book that is most often cited as the founding of the term, and Harlow deserves credit for offering a concrete and precise notion of how the two realms of literature and resistance are (or ought to be) related.<sup>6</sup> However, her insistence on linking literature to a specific set of nationalist conditions and failing to account for the burgeoning of intersectionality (already underway by the time of her book's publication) led resistance literature down a path to marginalization. My recuperation of the term as a broad field is driven by the three principal theoretical modes named above that challenge nationalist, patriarchal, and polemic reductions of literature. The terminology plays on Davies's alternative to "post-colonial" literature but replaces "uprising" with *liberation*. Though uprising is apt and key to notions of resistance, my turn toward its lesser-recognized aspects entreats the use of a less strategically-specific term; I therefore use *liberation* because of its more comprehensive and deliberately elusive impulses, its relevance to personal and public resistances, and its ability to connect traditional political struggles to marginalized and underscrutinized arenas like the home, the body, the mind, and the spirit.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said's theory of liberation focuses on a "noticeable pull away from separatist nationalism toward a more integrative view of human community and human liberation" without denying the "historical fact that nationalism—restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices—as a

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<sup>6</sup> While Harlow in many ways offered a seminal and direct analysis of resistance literature, as I will discuss below, Fanon and Cudjoe are significant precursors to her study.

mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination everywhere in the non-European world” (216; 218). Liberation, as a desired outcome of resistance, moves beyond a fixed historical or political moment that centralizes European colonialism, and which resonates with a wider array of people struggling to assert their humanity. Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe) argues that “western theories of liberation have for the most part failed to recognize the broader contextualizations of resistance within Indigenous thought...” (31). Thus, liberation—which Simpson concedes is “always valuable”—must be decolonized. Resistance literature, in turn, must be enhanced in order to recognize both the “diversity of thought within [indigenous] cosmologies, those ancient ways that are inherently counter to the influences of colonial hegemony” (31) and the various levels at which struggle occurs in contexts across the globe.

Simpson does not look uncritically at a precolonial past, but instead envisions the future through a trajectory that extends beyond the customary epochs of invasion, occupation, and national struggle. This expansive perspective, which informs her book-length argument for indigenous resurgence, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* (2011), which I discuss throughout this dissertation, provides a model for how to expand the notion of resistance in specific ways that inform the consideration of resistance literature here. To make this transformation in the context of literary study means applying the principle modes of liberation textualities in a way that continues the work of indigenous and world majority feminist critics who have already begun to deconstruct resistance and resistance literature.

As one envisions struggle, it is sometimes difficult to imagine the literary role. Jasbir Jain suggests that an important aspect of resistance literature is analytical: “the need to question, to evolve, to review, and the refusal to be limited by an ideology...” (177). Positioning literature at

a critical distance from social movements offers a methodological opportunity to expand resistance literature into a multifaceted field wherein “individual[s are] located in a contingent world, one which is sensitive to emotional responses and conflicts lest literary art become propaganda and an unfeeling, unthinking medium” (Jain 177). Liberation must be applied against and among these binaries, moving beyond the formation of a quasi-independent, patriarchal capitalist or communist state; and theories of resistance literature must consider texts that breach standardized forms and content in literature. Situating literature in this way opens up the possibility for personal, social, and spiritual explorations of resistance.

Early studies of resistance literature, such as Harlow’s, or Selwyn Cudjoe’s *Caribbean Literature and Resistance* (1980), posit a direct and obligatory connection between texts and specific struggles in order to be considered “resistance literature.” Jain argues that we must in some way sever, or at least problematize, this political expectation, which honours both the notion of liberation and the creative instincts of literature. It is here that aesthetics, once the bastion of depoliticized formalists, can be surprisingly helpful. To examine *how* a text provokes a reader, what ideas it triggers, what emotions it arouses, how it achieves its argument or message, necessarily confounds the polemic, which, in the quote above, Jain equates with indifference to the emotional and intellectual life of its reader. Aesthetic analysis emphasizes the literary aspect of resistance literature, looking at how a text activates a reader’s empathy, wonder, or outrage. Decoloniality and feminism make resistance relevant beyond the bifurcated pillars of race and gender and extend it to various marginalized places, situations, people, and perspectives, and aesthetics positions that resistance within the literary field.

Resistance literature must be kaleidoscopic, simultaneously ambiguous and oppositional, always traversing social locations and political boundaries, ever mediated by writer, publisher,

and reader. Notions of resistance must therefore account for the colonial matrix of power—which Ramón Grosfoguel identifies as “an entanglement...of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic, and racial forms of domination and exploitation” (217).

Colonialism and the doctrines of so-called liberal democracy grant symbolic acknowledgement of indigenous and other human rights, yet the talons of Eurocentric exploitation-based economic and binary gender systems maintain a power imbalance globally that values whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity, class arrogance, and physical conformity. There is, therefore, an important social and cultural need to use decolonial, feminist, and aesthetic theory to reroute dominant definitions of resistance literature, one that builds upon the history of woman-centred, indigenous, anti-colonial, anti-racist, intersectional, and multicultural literary criticism and casts resistance literature as responsive to these many positionalities.

### **Foundational Resistance Literature Thinkers**

In order to develop these new formulations of resistance literature it is important to revisit its founders. As noted above, Harlow challenges the entrenchment of apolitical formalism in literary study, whilst constructing resistance literature as a cultural element of anticolonialism. Harlow argues that resistance literature comes from within specific movements (or similar movements in particular regions—she identifies the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa) in a way that suggests mimesis, or what Colin Clark has called “the more conventional notion of literary political engagement through *direct* representation” (51), though Harlow does not depend on it. She also emphasizes authorial politics or involvement in struggle (xvi). In the cleavage between aesthetic value and political analysis, Harlow’s efforts to chart the stakes of resistance literature as a largely metatextual affair (the text’s value to a movement; its author’s political

commitment and authenticity) suggests a more traditional practice in which, as Jacques Rancière has noted, the “political dimension of literature [is] explained through social science and political interpretation” (168), and which involves the social location and political viewpoints of the author, coupled with the revolutionary utility of the text. This association encounters some difficulty not simply because she yokes textuality to national struggle, but for how she dichotomizes “political literature” in relation to the “personal.”

In her chapter “The Theoretical-Historical Context,” Harlow concludes that literature has a critical effect on political struggle. She lauds the “dynamic of debate in which the cultural politics of resistance...challenge both the monolithic historiographical practices of domination and the unidimensional responses of dogma to them” (30). In a sense, for Harlow, literature itself opens up the colonial and anticolonial battlefield(s) to more pluriversal questions that haunt its dialectics. As Rancière suggests, the “politics of literature ... means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing, and saying that frames a polemical common world” (152), but one in which challenges “high genres devoted to the imitation of noble actions and characters” versus “low genres devoted to common people and base subject matters” (156). Harlow certainly sides with “common people” and contests the notion of “low genre,” but by eschewing a notion of the “personal” as bourgeois concerns of the “high” genres, she in effect turns politicized literature into its own version of “noble actions and characters” engaged in the practice of national revolution and denigrates the more personal narratives of struggle as irrelevant to resistance. In spite of the complexity and interiority of literary interventions that focalize on domesticity or social settings, Harlow decries a Western emphasis on the personal as a practice of depoliticizing literature (30), thus disregarding the personal affectivity of the text.

Harlow's critique remains valuable in challenging Eurocentric canons, but runs the risk of creating a new limitation on the corpus of resistance literature by adhering to national struggles as its nucleus. On the one hand, the turn away from social and personal narratives implies that there is no personal stake, or subjectivity, involved in political transformation; on the other, it excludes a great deal of literature that does not (or should not) conform to an easy "political" categorization. For example, LaRocque specifically extends Harlow's definition of resistance to include "strategic contestation," which better reflects the nuances of indigenous North American traditions (24). LaRocque notes that "[w]ith respect to producing literature along with armed resistance, no one Native nation or peoples has produced literature from an 'organized resistance movement' within a 'specific historical context,' as defined by Harlow" (23). At the heart of this problem is the notion, first argued by Frederic Jameson and famously contested by Aijaz Ahmed, that literature by people of colour is always allegorical, semi-autobiographical, or otherwise tethered to colonial history and, by implication, possesses questionable literariness. Harlow's insistence on organized politics over subjectivity, unfortunately, encourages these maneuvers, with all of their assumptions and exclusions. Resistance literature as a concept must therefore shift away from canons or criteria and embrace a myriad of representations, no matter their potential opacity or individual narrative foci.<sup>7</sup>

Harlow's theory is most effective at confronting what Ahmed calls "the sheer weight of reactionary positions in the Anglo-American literary [establishment]" (64). She is correct to argue that resistance literature is bound up with "the struggle over the historical and cultural record" (7); however, the value attached to this literature ought not to veer toward the

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<sup>7</sup> See Clark for an effective comparative discussion of Edouard Glissant's theory of opacity in relation to resistance literature in Algeria.

propagandistic, but rather embrace a creative restlessness. In many ways, resistance literature has functioned canonically (or perhaps counter-canonically): only texts with explicit politics are admitted. This has proved troublesome, not only because of a narrow definition of resistance, but because literary study is strongest when exploring complexity. If resistance is defined as a reflection of national struggle that furthers a programmatic independence, then the messy, uncomfortable, and irrepressible nature of both politics and literature are virtually excluded. Resistance can and should therefore act as a wide-ranging literary field, within which various intersecting approaches (decolonial, feminist, materialist, queer, etc.) are used to enhance, unpack, and explore textual resistance.

Harlow's work is nevertheless important. Setting aside her mimetic linkages between writing and national liberation, she offers a crucial vision of the mutual critique at the centre of the relationship between literature and resistance. Her insistence on a literary role in social movements and on the acknowledgement of overtly political Third World texts as literature worthy of formal study breaks important ground in political and aesthetic theory. She notes that "literature and literary studies themselves, as a part of the academic enterprise, are being contested by the cultural and ideological expressions of resistance, armed struggle, liberation and social revolutions in those geopolitical regions referred to as the 'Third world'" (14). Literary establishments are challenged by the multiple textualities that coalesce and depart from one another in opposition to various systems of domination around the world, including aesthetic rigidity, forming a nuanced resistance that moves beyond the pillars Harlow has identified.

Harlow hints at a differently conceptualized resistance in her discussion of the contradictions, debates, and even controversies within movements (29).<sup>8</sup> Many of these divisions<sup>9</sup> result from the agitation of those outside the dominant dichotomies of nation and colonizer, those whose lives are deeply affected by intersecting oppression but whose narratives are silenced or underrepresented: women, queers/two-spirits, people living in poverty, the working poor, culturally or racially mixed people, people with differing abilities, and indigenous peoples. The literary expressions of these folks, if indeed they make it into the publishing industrial complex at all, are reflexive of their often problematic relations with traditional national struggles or independence movements. If, as Harlow argues, resistance literature is “immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production” (28-29), then it must be shaped and reshaped to recognize those agitators who resist that dominance through unique representations. This not only strengthens the resistance itself, but honours literary range as well.

Twenty-four years before Harlow, Frantz Fanon’s vision of national culture also honours a place for the literary in decolonization and for that reason his work is equally significant to the framework of my study. Generally, his emphasis on the psychology of colonization and its resisters (grounded of course in his medical training) has been most applicable to literature. For

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, Harlow returned to her formulation of resistance literature in a recent article, “Resistance Literature Revisited” (2012). Unfortunately, she spends little time evaluating terms like “resistance” and “literature”. She makes no mention of contemporary social movements that have transformed anti-colonial struggle since her initial writing, such as feminism, indigenous sovereignty, or sexual liberation, or even the anti-globalization, anti-capitalist movements that have crystallized since the turn of the century.

<sup>9</sup> Aside from those sewn by *agents provocateur*, which ought not to be unheeded and will be scrutinized in my discussion of Yvette Nolan’s *Annie Mae’s Movement* in Chapter 4.

that reason, literary critics tend to focus on *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and its psychoanalytic application to the emotional trajectories of characters in postcolonial fiction. However, in “On National Culture” from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963),<sup>10</sup> Fanon is deeply concerned with the literary, with the individual in the context of struggle, and with ensuring linkages between broader movements and “every stage of the whole of society” for which freedom is sought (Fanon 196).

Fanon’s insistence that writers must participate in struggle as they write about it, supported by Harlow, is complicated by his concern that “the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities” (181). The “realities” are indeed the lived experiences of a people, and those people may be marginalized from the centre(s) of struggle, particularly as they were defined in the nationalist period in which Fanon himself is writing. David Scott makes the important point that *Wretched* “captures the spirit of militant insurgency that characterized the refusal of colonial subordination and tutelage and the unequivocal demand for absolute sovereignty that marked the Bandung years” (198).<sup>11</sup> But Scott also identifies the primary trouble with Fanon’s formulation:

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<sup>10</sup> I use Constance Farrington’s 1963 translation of Fanon from the 2001 Penguin edition. While Richard Philcox’s 2004 translation provided some linguistic updates, Farrington remains a sounder, more lyrical translation. See Konate.

<sup>11</sup> The Bandung Conference—organized by Indonesia (where it was held), Burma, Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan—took place in 1955, with the participation of 29 countries from Africa and Asia. According to Walter Mignolo, the “main goal of the conference was to find a common ground and vision for the future that was neither capitalism nor communism. That way was decolonization” (“Geopolitics” 273). A second conference of non-aligned countries followed in Belgrade in 1961 that included Latin America. This era, in which what was once considered the “Third World” came together to consider the future and where the roots of decoloniality were planted, is referred to colloquially as Bandung.

“Who exactly are these ‘natives’...? My worry is that the Fanonian story underwrites too much—or gives too much space to—the normalized centrality of a specific identity, even though an identity argued to have suffered particular injuries under colonial domination” (204). Here Scott identifies a recurring problem with the reading of early resistance theorizing: the tendency to reduce it to its immediate context. By asking writers to seek out the “truths” and “realities” of a nation, Fanon signals the need for a deconstructed “native” identity, one that shifts over time and questions any normalized centrality. Scott is right to call out the essentialism that has been applied to Fanon, but Fanon’s nascent call for literature to reflect the diversity of the people is significant.

“On National Culture” expresses a surprisingly critical role for literature considering how strongly his work is associated with national struggles that are considered overly totalizing in their construction of the “native subject. Fanon’s definition of culture denotes “the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns...the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external tensions exerted over society as a whole and *at every level* of that society” (196, emphasis added). Fanon calls for a refreshingly nuanced and diverse literary representation that poses a direct challenge to the ideologically rigid impulses of the traditional revolutionary. His concern is with the various realities of a people; and though it would border on revisionism to suggest that he articulated a feminist standpoint, this definition can certainly be read as a reminder to look beyond essentializing binaries in our complications of resistance literature.

I see in Fanon’s theory a particularly critical role—one which Harlow is ambiguous toward—for literature that allows it to be framed not as a propagandistic arm of any movement

(though it must be mindful of re-establishing coloniality), but an aestheticization which performs critically.

Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence *as a nation*. It is a literature of combat because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space. (193, emphasis added)

Note Fanon's use of "taking up" (*reprise* in the French) and "clarification," which are both reflexive and critical stances; and his view of the literature as an "awakener" (*en réveilleur du peuple*) whose focus is on the colonized as much as the colonizer, gesturing toward an aesthetic response. Here literature is directed to *du peuple*, who are legion in their social locations, interests, and experiences. The future's "boundless horizons" (*d'illimitées perspectives*, which evokes multiplicity) can only be achieved when form and contour are given to national consciousness, which Fanon distinguishes from nationalism, thus giving it a more pluriversal flavour.

Fanon invites resistance literature to move beyond what many have identified as the Manichean binary and toward an aesthetics that reflects and refracts the perspectives of the people at all levels, and in which other resistances, such as feminism, can have a central role. Stories are the result of a "new rhythm of life" that invigorates "forgotten muscular tensions, and develops the imagination" (Fanon 194). Thus, although his literary stages reflect the importance

of textuality to understanding resistance literature, Fanon is also concerned with the aesthetics of “awakening” that is invoked by storytellers in a resistant context.

Fanon’s theory, like Harlow’s, allows for a transformation of his own formula even though it falls short of identifying what that needed change might be. Whereas Harlow sees the focus on interpersonal life as the dominion of a Eurocentric and formalist literary status quo, Fanon excoriates a fragmented, symbolic, and ultimately “sterile” rendering of indigenous culture, a sort of precolonial draping, a “banal search for exoticism” (178) that “reveals the need that man has to liberate himself from a [contemporary] part of his being which already contained seeds of decay” (177). Only the combative text, the openly oppositional, would suffice to cast off the chains of cultural imperialism. And yet uncovering meaning from a pattern of seemingly fragmented, symbolic, or mundane representations is the aim of literary study, an aim which draws us further into the politics of daily life, into the invigorated and imaginary new rhythms of a people. As Fanon himself concedes, “the first duty of the native poet is to see clearly the people he has chosen as the subject of his work of art” (182). The art of seeing clearly is to return to the “banal” and seek within it the spark of revolution, to use literature not to replace the struggle or to engage in exoticism, but rather to see that manifold ways in which the struggle is undertaken through journeys of personal decolonization.

Like Fanon, Selwyn Cudjoe sets up a progression from restless literature to the literary expressions of open conflict, but Cudjoe identifies both as resistance literature. He notes that “when an artist is working under revolutionary conditions, the theoretical perspective of resistance as an aesthetic gives way to the concrete perspective of resistance, calling for a different collaboration between content and form—the content virtually fashions its own form which is shaped by the new dialectic created by the revolutionary conditions” (58-59).

Resistance literature, then, can be pre-revolutionary and revolutionary, and is shaped by the context in which it is produced. Cudjoe's important claim that "literary sensitivity and the literary aesthetic emanate from the socioeconomic and historical conditions of the life of a people..." (57) supports the idea that resistance literature is possible even without the existence of an active revolution, and links resistance literature to "any act or complex of acts designed to rid a people of its oppressors" (56, emphasis added). Questions of personal decolonization are highly relevant to an analysis that understands the contours of resistance under various colonial conditions. As Glen Sean Coulthard reminds us in *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), Fanon's concept of psycho-affective colonization means that "the longevity of a colonial social formation depends, to a significant degree, on its capacity to transform the colonized population into *subjects* of imperial rule" (31, emphasis in original). Traditional resistance theory places aesthetics to a large extent outside the armed struggle and suspects an inherent confusion or apoliticality, when in fact the sensory and emotional reactions to textualities are part and parcel of a larger concept of personal, psycho-affective resistance, one that challenges hegemony in multiple, and sometimes subtle, ways.

Cudjoe's argument that resistance underpins all literary output in the Caribbean provides an important but overlooked alternative to Harlow's construction of resistance literature. Insisting that "resistance served as a fundamental aesthetic-political quality in the structuring of Caribbean literature" because "the synthesis of culture, socioeconomics, and politics provides the necessary milieu through which, and out of which, an aesthetic-political interpretation of the literature can be made" (56), Cudjoe extends the resistance moniker to a more widespread corpus of texts. To his synthesis, I would add the social (the interpersonal, the domestic, the interior) as another context that is important to the literature and its criticism. Resistance is embedded in a

far greater number of texts than those with expressly nationalist themes. Resistance becomes an issue that can be unpacked by literature in various stages of opposition, and connects the aesthetics of the personal to the politics of decolonization.

Cudjoe brings an aesthetic sensibility to his resistance theory, grounding literature in artistic practice and recognizing its creative possibilities. He rightly cautions against the extremes of “sociologism (content at expense of form) and formalism (form at expense of content)” in literary theory (65). It cannot be argued, in fairness, that Harlow totally embraces sociologism (her study is organized around genre and form); however, her conflation of Eurocentric formalism with inquiries about personal or individual struggles causes a somewhat unsound rejection of the aesthetic. Indeed, Harlow casts literature and literary studies as inherently formalist, in contrast to “the ‘here-and-now of historical reality and its conditions of possibility [that] underwrite the project of resistance literature” (16). Harlow is not wrong to condemn literary critics who reject “political literature” as inartistic or unworthy of study (particularly when emanating from regions outside of Europe), but she does not explore an alternative aesthetics or recognize its significance to literature in the way Cudjoe does. Cudjoe conjoins the concepts—aesthetic-political—in a way that reframes literary study to include both elements, thus opening up greater possibilities for what is considered resistance literature.

A decolonial aesthetics—imaginings, techniques, and literary elements that turn away from Eurocentric systems, including neocoloniality—can be borne out of Cudjoe’s consideration of the multiplicities inherent in a literary work. Novelists, Cudjoe offers, apprehend the “conflicts and contradictions in a colonial society” (67). Cudjoe sees within the novel the “dichotomized” influences with which a society struggles and in the author a “spiritual alienation” from the opposing pressures in political conflict. Alienated narrators cast resistance

literature in a critical role vis-à-vis revolutionary activity by acknowledging the often outsider status that liberation textualities often inhabit. Cudjoe's assertion that "[e]ach work of art, and therefore each piece of literature, must not only propose a concrete form of liberation, from these alien and destructive forms of oppression...but must also produce a symbiotic and synthetic unity between man's essence and his existence" (69-70) can be modified not only to degender his concept of humankind, but to argue that resistance literature must not simply reinforce the dogmas of a particular struggle, but must also speak to the various ways in which colonized peoples are alienated—be they cultural, spiritual, domestic, personal, or otherwise. Confronting and representing this alienation reignites a project of liberation begun decades before, in the social movements of indigenous rights and the national struggles of decolonization, but which failed to dismantle the gender, religious, and economic structures of the colonial matrix of power.

The practice of resistance is complex, and the literature produced in and around it does not conform to traditional notions. Cudjoe and Fanon subscribe to a temporal "stages" framework for resistance literature, though it varies between them. Throughout the Americas, resistance has followed a sporadic path. Movements have emerged to fight oppression based on identity (black liberation, indigenous sovereignty, reproductive rights), class (anti-poverty, police violence, psychiatric survivors), and in solidarity across colonial borders and boundaries; but they have also taken place in living rooms, in the formation of community breakfast programs, "bad john" reporting networks, gender play at carnivals, poster campaigns against rapists and dirty cops, free schools, self-defence classes, mas costuming, storytelling festivals, social media critiques, calypso writing, community radio broadcasts, and memes. Literature traverses this ground between public protest and social uprising. To consider these resistances, it is necessary

to look at common colonialities, struggles, and social formations, while recognizing cultural and political differences that need not be subsumed into a totalizing entity to enact decoloniality.

Literature can express resistance outside of a progression of revolutionary activity; it is informed by radical ideas, social issues, and political pressures, but it need not directly correspond to the gathering of revolutionary forces. Resistance literature may be an alienated voice in the hinterland of oppression or strident among the chorus of firebrands raising their voices in organized struggle; resistance as a concept must shift and alter, echoing in the streets as well as in kitchens and bedrooms. Resistance may reflect the dynamics of building a nation or tearing down an illegitimate one, but is also inflected with the relations among people trying to forge their own freedoms, to engage in liberation textualities within a larger nexus of social transformation.

While some might argue that resistance literature is a concept of a bygone decade that no longer has any cache in literary study, *resistance* remains a central term in the popular and scholarly lexicon, and reviving its association with literature through the benefit of recent critical work by decolonial, feminist, and aesthetics scholars fortifies it as a legitimate field of literary study while emphasizing its relevance to scholars of postcolonialism, indigeneity, and gender studies. Whereas postcolonial literary theory attends more broadly to cultural expression in the context of colonialism and empire (with the potential for *overemphasizing* them), resistance literature focuses more determinedly on the subversion of those structures. Though it developed in a somewhat sweeping manner, intended to reflect and coalesce the “militant movements for national liberation and independence” in North Africa, West Asia, and South America (LaRocque 19; Harlow), Jain argues that resistance literature came to be seen as a “focus on oppositional relationships between the imperial and the colonial,” which “limits both literature

and its interpretation” by ignoring “the dissidence, non-conformity and resistance within societies and leads to the framing of national discourses within narrow concerns” (174). Jain’s demand that “[r]esistance discourse needs to be freed from the confines of postcoloniality and placed within the aesthetics of literature” reflects the aversion many critics and artists have to the overly deterministic theorizing of resistance literature (172), which situated acts of resistance strictly within the framework of organized movements.

Resistance literature is therefore shaped to some extent by colonial borders and national independence, though it can be theorized in a transnational or comparative way; that is, it takes up historically and geographically specific struggles—Algerian independence, or Laguna Pueblo sovereignty—and but can draw them into a matrix of global anticolonialism without collapsing their specificities. Harlow maintains that resistance “engages the traditional past as well as the recent circumstances of western hegemony in order to determine future coordinates of social and political formation and strategic alliances” (20). The global and national character of this resistance focuses on particular methodologies—armed struggle, mass demonstrations—that overshadow others, such as the emotional investment in revolutionary practice. How resistance manifests in daily life, how it raises thorny and uncomfortable realities, how it is an uneasy practice, connects resistance to literature’s ability to explore issues with complexity and nuance. Thus, resistance literature ought to be comprised of not only those texts that depict revolutionary activity, but also works that shift the terrain of struggle to more complicated realms.

The early criticism of resistance literature, that it is too rigid, either in its reductive polemics or in its insistence on overt politics, supports the need for a multifaceted approach. Stephen Slemon, for instance, characterizes resistance literature as too reliant on “a form of contractual understanding between text and reader, one which is embedded in an experiential

dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in the culture” (36). When literature is seen to be supporting the goals of a particular movement or organization, the nuances of that movement are marginalized and its ideas (to say nothing of its history) become essentialized. Though the idea of revolution seems clear because of its urgency and its profound implications, histories of struggle have demonstrated that the complexities of life under those conditions are not comfortably represented. One need think only of the internecine battles in the American Indian Movement (AIM) or the exertions of power by Forbes Burnham in Guyana to see the complications that occur within political movements.<sup>12</sup> Resistance literature becomes limited when, according to Slemon, it is “seen as that category of literary writing which emerges as an integral part of an *organized* struggle or resistance for national liberation” (36, emphasis added).

On the other hand, Eurocentric approaches to literary study have often feared and derided the overt politics that have accompanied the study of world majority literatures (see Casanova); in fact, upholding a literary-political divide in favour of a neo-formalism has been a chief tactic in the effort to suppress the influence of postcolonial theory in literary study (see Helgesson). This trend back to formalist and Eurocentric domination necessitates a recuperation of literature as political *and* artistic expression, in which critics extend resistance literature beyond the

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<sup>12</sup> AIM, which sought to assert indigenous land rights in the U.S., not only fought the FBI but also a local Oglala Sioux police force on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, and allegations of internal sexism were writ large in the famous murder of AIM activist Anna Mae Aquash, whose death remained unsolved for many years and was found to be a result of FBI rumour-mongering that led to her execution by the AIM leadership (see Pettit). Forbes Burnham was Prime Minister of Guyana 1964-1980, and President from 1980-85. His successful bid for Guyanese independence was dampened by his questionable use of political tactics, including ordering the deaths of political opponents (see Macpherson). These movements are discussed in relation to texts in Chapter 3 & Chapter 4.

traditional realms of pitched battles for independence and toward what Davies calls the “creative movement upward and outward from constricted and submerged spaces” (108) occupied largely by women’s writing in neo/colonial contexts. A liberation textualities approach recognizes the importance of national and political struggle to the lives of many, but allows literary critics to contemplate aesthetic aspects of a text and scrutinize “personal” realms that are largely thought of as depoliticized, domesticated, and too ambiguous to serve any broader transformational process.

The division between social relationships and political struggle stems, in part, from opposition to the application of individualism to literature. “Whereas the social and the personal have tended to displace the political in western literary and cultural studies, the emphasis in the literature of resistance is on the political as the power to change the world. The theory of resistance literature is in its politics” (Harlow 30). Harlow’s assertions express an emphasis on collectivity over individuality, which can be linked to an anti-capitalist desire in her political argument. Yet textuality is principally about social situations and figures—even if they are read allegorically. Moreover, feminist praxis, both creative and philosophical, strengthens the connections between personal subjectivity and political action. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), bell hooks discusses the conceptual binary between resistance and subjectivity, but then urges readers to consider subjectivity as resistance:

Resistance is that struggle we can most easily grasp. Even the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against. There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short-lived.... It is different, then, to talk about becoming subjects. That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one’s own life, as one

develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and *resists* from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined. (15, emphasis added)

hooks deftly conflates the individual and the structural—echoing the feminist slogan “the personal is political”—in ways that enhance Harlow’s demand for literary politics. A paradigm shift must carefully maneuver through legacies of formalist literary criticism and polemic resistance theory, and must bring together these disparate realms. Theories of literary resistance must also therefore recognize the inherent significance of personal concerns, in addition to public ones, in order to apprehend the full relevance of literature to practices of social justice and liberation.

Later criticism of resistance and literature has examined the question of what resistance literature is categorically. Nagesh Rao, for example, situates resistance literature within the umbrella of postcolonial literary theory and refers to two main strands of thought: “literature as resistance” and “literature of resistance” (n.p.). He articulates this distinction by claiming that literature as resistance means “postcolonial literary texts [that] are resistant to the extent that they succeed in subverting the normative codes of European canonical traditions,” whereas literature of resistance refers to “the manner in which social and political resistance in the real world comes to be represented by the literary text, and consequently, to relocate the text within its historical and ideological context” (n.p.). One type looks at its metatextual effects, the other at its internal representations. And while both strands might appear to be framed by a traditional idea of resistance—that being a confrontation with Europe and a presumed “social and political resistance in the real world” that implies collective action or public protest—Rao’s formula in fact allows for a deconstruction of resistance literature. His inclusion of “social” alongside

political in the realm of resistance is a reminder that attention to both realms—I read social in its personal dimensions here—is necessary in any analysis of resistance. And his use of the term “subverting” suggests a critique of centralizing Europe. By problematizing and attempting to examine the effects of literature of resistance (and vice versa), Rao offers a tentative analysis of the new horizons of resistance literature theory, namely the breaking down of a binary between the social and the political, and a focus on non-European literary expressions that challenge coloniality.

Spiritual, personal, or domestic acts of resistance, often featured in literary texts, transform the political arena by indicating widespread, interlocking oppositional practices working in tandem, from the guerilla army to the village seer to the questioning child. Grosfoguel argues for a “pluriversal” (as opposed to universal imperialist) understanding of the world where diverse “epistemic/ethical/political projects” coalesce toward decolonization (212). Indeed, notions of a unified (some would say monolithic) subaltern voice are not only mired in Eurocentric conceptions of the universalized “Native informant” but are unable to challenge the various facets of the larger colonial power matrix. Systems of inequality are of course not only powerful, they involve many aspects of our identity, situating human beings on a continuum of oppression and privilege out of which there is no easy path.

Resistance literature can attend to that complexity. Novels, for example, are often polyvocal, drawing together multiple perspectives through narration, dialogue, characterization, and plot. More challenging prose texts play with notions of the real by constructing spiritual, magical, or otherwise metaphysical narratives. Michael D. Wilson suggests that many indigenous novels are “derived from concepts of orality, such as the use of multiple narrators that suggest subjectivity in both points of view and in the grain or nuance of the spoken voice,” which offer

“alternative, even resistant forms of narrative against generic expectations” (xiii). Thus, the polyvocality of a novel contributes to a resistance more responsive to various positionalities.

Conversely, the linguistic and figurative innovations in literature can challenge monolithic depictions of resistance. Discussing compositional resistance, when poets flout traditional rules of poetics, Dean Rader declares that “breaking out of the identity markers of poetic form also means liberation from larger notions of identity limitations that attempt to circumscribe and circumvent Native independence. Resistance to generic assimilation is neither futile nor fanciful; it is a means and a mode of sovereignty” (128). By focusing on what literary critics might consider the banalities of everyday life, and political materialists view as personal relations outside the collective demands of a social movement, literary invention challenges domination in both resistance and literary theory.

### **Theorizing Liberation Textualities: Feminism, Aesthetics, and Decoloniality**

The lack of gender analysis is a central omission in resistance literature theory. Cudjoe’s book, though exceptional in formulating a literary approach to resistance theory, studies predominantly nationalist novels that contain scenes of overt political action; and while the texts he focuses on are linguistically diverse, they are exclusively male. Feminist theory by women of colour has long advocated for an intersectional resistance that addresses the colonial matrix of power, and many feminists have linked the individual to collective interests. Yet, in *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* (2006) Helen Scott is mindful that “critics have...variously characteriz[ed] women’s texts, in contradistinction to the extant canon, as more concerned with issues of personal relationships, gender, and sexuality; less engaged with imperialism, class,

economics, and collective struggle; and radical more for...innovation than...political content”

(5). Rather than simply include certain women’s texts in a narrowly-defined canon, though Scott argues for this rather effectively, resistance must be expanded to recognize that personal relationships, gender, and sexuality are inherent to imperialism, class, and collective struggle. Textuality dissolves that boundary by allowing for critical attention to countless representations of resistance, especially those deemed personal or individual or, at worst, “women’s concerns” that are thought to have no bearing on political, economic, or cultural revolutions.

When theorizing the literary role in liberation, one must be mindful of the asymmetry of colonization around the world—for example, how the settler colonial realities of North America compare and contrast with the variously independent and settler Caribbean states. Liberation must be conceptualized in a nuanced way, accounting for various geographic and identitarian contexts. Returning to Said is useful here. Like Cudjoe and Harlow, Said sees “the literature of resistance [as] written in the thick of battle, [where] there is an understandable tendency to concentrate on its combative, often strident assertiveness” (274). Given global realities of settler and neo-colonialism, alongside capitalist and patriarchal state formations, a new notion of “battle” is needed beyond a moment of singular political independence from a colonial power, an independence which in many instances has been stifled. Liberation must therefore be conceived variously, as emancipatory and unbound by doctrine; it must shift according to the vagaries of domination and sparkle with the infinite perspectives of oppressed individuals. This multiplicity includes varied artistic expressions of freedom and discontent.

Texts that imagine, ponder, articulate, and recreate facets of personal life constitute what is thought of as the broader political picture. Movements exist through personal struggles and hegemonic structures that inform one another in a dialectic way, represented by a resistance

literature that apprehends these subtle interactions. Waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy (Ojibway Anishinaabe) argues that “[d]ecolonization, generally, may be understood as a process and event that includes both resistance against colonization and the reclamation of Indigenous life ways” (185). Tracing her own decolonized consciousness and poetic expression, Sy calls for critical engagement with the “poetics of personal decolonization” which traverse a collective process of “resistance, reclamation, [and] regeneration” that “re-envision[s] what [spatial] or social relationships might look like and what such praxis or practice might produce” (195). Reclaiming decolonization from its nationalist limits requires transformative narratives and textualities that are not only able to comprehend the raising of consciousness, but are crucially linked to literature and gender as spaces of decolonial practice.

Theorizing resistance literature through feminism, aesthetics, and personal decolonization involves three important moves: a turn away from the Eurocentric spiritual and economic structures that remain dominant, even in neocolonial states; a feminist remapping of gender and sexuality systems, left unchanged by many liberation struggles, that links personal, everyday struggles to broader decolonizing impulses; and a commitment to literature as a constructed art form that uses multiple techniques and elements to represent and incite resistance. This reconstituted resistance extends the scope of what is resistance literature to include the liberation textualities that have been traditionally set aside.

Decoloniality and feminism are crucial to ensuring that resistance literature addresses the marginalization of nontraditional resistances enforced by the field's early attachment to the polemics of national movements, and my inclusion of aesthetics as the third means of transforming resistance literature is in response to a complaint that has long been laid at the feet of postcolonial literary analysis but which is often dismissed as the imperialist discourse of

Eurocentric literary scholars. Pascale Casanova, for instance, claims that “[p]ost-colonialism posits a direct link between literature and history, one that is exclusively political. From this, it moves to an *external* criticism that runs the risk of reducing the literary to the political, imposing a series of annexations or short-circuits, and often passing in silence over the actual aesthetic, formal or stylistic characteristics that actually ‘make’ literature” (71, emphasis in original). And whilst Casanova’s Europeanist bias has been well documented (see Hafez), she raises a thorny issue that is an essential question for me: ensuring that the literary aspect of resistance literature receives appropriate attention in the theory of liberation textualities. According to Bill Ashcroft, “[w]e move away from aesthetics as a cultural ideology by describing it as the qualitative effect of the stimuli on the senses ... a transcultural aesthetics [that] becomes a confluence of reception *and* production” (5). The text’s impact is connected to its literary elements. Aesthetics is therefore seen to have social implication—in Ashcroft’s case, bridging identity divides by reading outside of one’s cultural boundaries—shaped by its acts of construction. Aesthetics never exists in a formal vacuum, but rather as a sensory representation bound up with a local and global context. My use of aesthetics is similar to Ashcroft’s in that I connect it to a pathos of resistance, a deliberate use of literary strategy to engage readers with social and political questions in an affective way.

By placing aesthetics into conversation with decoloniality and feminism, I aim to soften the boundaries between the literary and the social, political, economic, and cultural context out of which it emerges. Aesthetics, until recently, was associated with what Ashcroft identifies as the hegemonic establishment of “beauty” as a Eurocentric, imperial “universal subject...that has haunted the reception of colonial creative production for at least a century-and-a-half. The combination of knowledge, judgement, and taste, contemporaneous with the rise of capitalism,

provides a hegemonic order to which all consent” (2). Aesthetics are thus traditionally steeped in the colonial matrix of power, reflecting and buttressing its cultural yoke. Ashcroft calls for aesthetics to be seen as “material resonance”—a politicized affect, which Ashcroft grounds in cross-cultural encounter, “a constant invitation to openness, to anticipation, to an expectation of the wonder of the world available through the eyes of the other” (11)—rather than a (falsely universalized) response by audiences to artistic magnificence. Literary elements and techniques, then, would be considered in their ability to raise critical consciousness through the emotional or visceral reactions of readers.

In a resistance literature context, aesthetics are affective and effective, subverting dominant structures and hegemonic orthodoxies by making connections to readers on an emotional, spiritual, and personal level. Resistance may seem anathema to aesthetics, but resistance literature can draw the two spheres together in a textual *mélange*. Whilst political literary critics, as Ashcroft indicates, tend to relegate aesthetics to the apolitical realm of Eurocentric formalism, aesthetic critics, like Casanova, are inclined to revile political literary content to the point of overemphasis. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), makes the point that form and politics are not only inextricable, but a desirable site of affect:

Indeed, literature might be the best complement to ideological transformation....

The successful reader learns to identify implicitly with the value system figured forth by literature through learning to manipulate the figures, rather than through (or in addition to) working out the argument explicitly and literally, with a view to reasonable consent. Literature buys your assent in an almost clandestine way and therefore is an excellent instrument for slow transformation of the mind. (38)

Spivak alludes in this passage to the aesthetic function of a text, one that uses literary technique to connect with a reader, who becomes co-creator in the construction of an imaginative world in her mind as she reads. Liberation textuality aesthetics, similarly, produce resonance across and off the page.

Literary representations of personal decolonization become aesthetic achievements by using artistic means to move readers in a way that relate to larger social and political forces. Shira Wolosky argues that aesthetics is not “a separate and self-defined sphere. The text instead emerges as an intersecting site of multiple domains and discourses” (572). Aesthetics is a crucial aspect of literary study: how authors creatively affect not just cultural assumptions and understanding, but political beliefs and their relationship to social realities. In a way, then, aesthetics becomes the link between notions of resistance and literature.

In her discussion of feminist poetics, Wolosky defines aesthetics as a “domain of mutual interrelationship among the variable functions that go into [artistic] constitution and experience,” which includes “the multiple terms of speaker and audience, contact and context in many aspects and dimensions” (571). Her main argument is that textuality cannot be disconnected from the political milieu (or, in her study, gender) and that by introducing a text’s context, aesthetics are historicized *a priori*. Indeed, these connections and mutualities are always present in literature to some degree. That this argument supports a feminist poetics is no coincidence: feminism has been the site of intersectional analysis, and feminist literary criticism has been significant in the development of what is now called gender studies. Gender studies and literary aesthetics have both been considered to inhabit personal or private spheres. Decolonization in the global south, which is usually implicated in public or collective action, is often placed apart from both feminism and aesthetics. Interrogating this dichotomy, Wolosky notes that “[i]n literature, the

traditional boundaries of gender are exposed and crossed, not least the boundary of public and private realms. Literature, including poetry, has in fact been one of the central fora in which women have participated in public discourses as well as reflecting on them” (574). Resistance literature has typically reinforced a patriarchal vision of unified opposition to colonial domination. Women’s texts, as noted in H. Scott above, are set apart from national interests and revolutionary discourse because of their perceived focus on personal matters. Transforming resistance to include the aesthetics of personal decolonization subverts these borders by placing feminist writing within public/collective/mutually reinforcing liberation struggles and extending the notion of decoloniality in ways that confront the nationalist, economic, and patriarchal limits of neocolonialism.

Decoloniality, which emerges as distinct from but alongside postcolonial theory, provides an epistemological frame for personal decolonization, intersectional feminism, and aesthetic consciousness central to a redefined resistance literature. Decolonial theory substantially questions concepts like independence, nationalism, and even liberation by pushing analysis beyond the limits of a colonial power matrix, which remains tethered to economic and gender hegemonies. What Alejandro Vallega has called the “radical exteriority” of decoloniality (x), or its insistence upon delinking from the Eurocentrism of epistemic traditions, allows for an exploration of resistance outside the old colonial contest in which national struggles have been mired. Decoloniality rejects any project that retains associations with colonial “modernity”—such as exploitative labour systems, skin colour hierarchies, Christian dominance (Grosfoguel 216)—thus exposing the unfinished work of national liberation struggles and pointing directly to the “personal” location of contemporary coloniality.

The practice of “nationalizing” resistance literatures is deeply gendered, and the reason that uprising and liberation textualities and, indeed, decoloniality are firmly connected to feminism is because the elision of women and other “deviants” from the sex-gender system of Euro-Christian patriarchy remains the primary legacy of European colonization. Bonita Lawrence and Kim Anderson, in an introduction to a special issue of *Atlantis* on “Indigenous Women: The State of Our Nations,” argue that “colonial governments have historically refused to negotiate with Indigenous women, accepting only male representatives when discussing terms of relationship. They then actively disempowered women by attacking the clan systems and other forms of female representation ...” (1). Colonization is bound up with how patriarchy governs the “postcolonial” relations that emerge in different parts of the world as a part of independence, sovereignty, or, as with Canada, protectorate neocolonialism.

The cooptation of the nationalist resistance narrative by androcentric forces resulted in a bifurcation of “community” issues from “sovereignty” issues along gendered lines, thus suggesting women’s concerns are not part of the struggle for decolonization or, worse, that they are opposed to the national interests of sovereignty or independence (Anderson and Lawrence 1). This harkens back to Davies’s assertion that “[t]he women who are absent or have disappeared from the formulations of post-coloniality are ... oriented toward articulating presences and histories across a variety of boundaries imposed by colonizers, but also by the men, the elders, and other authorized figures in their various societies” (88). Anderson and Lawrence’s claims further anticipate Simpson’s call for a “decolonization of our conceptualization of gender as a starting point” that places “the sovereignty of Indigenous women at the core of our movement ...” (Simpson 60). Resistance, and its political manifestations, are highly gendered, and current resurgent indigenous and feminist impulses are calling for a rethinking of any political agenda

that reinforces colonial heteropatriarchy. Resistance literature, too, must move beyond these simplified dichotomies, and their gendered bifurcations; and assertions of liberation textualities make these shifts in the context of literary analysis.

Resistance literature terminologically foregrounds both political struggle and aesthetics, connecting the two spheres. Liberation textualities complicate and widen the composition of both spheres, embracing multiple (and simultaneous, transhistorical) foci—poetry, drama, prose fiction; oral, scribal, visual textuality; gender, race, class, ability, sexuality; Africa, America, Asia, Europe; arrivant,<sup>13</sup> settler, immigrant, indigenous—without surrendering the idea of politics, and avoiding phrasing that distorts settler and neocolonial structures (“post”). As LaRocque notes, “Native Canadians hardly enjoy ‘postcoloniality’” (23), yet remain a significant group of artists within the broader Americas that would normally fall under a postcolonial rubric. Resistance literature as a frame, a field, or a basis of inquiry opens up possibilities for artistic expression and social justice, and should be used in ways that refract reductive notions of both.

## **Reconfiguring Resistance**

Like many theorists in postcolonial or anticolonial studies, LaRocque uses Harlow’s study as a benchmark of resistance literature theory, but questions its applicability to North American Indigenous literature and/or struggle. Arguably, Harlow’s primary focus is on the

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<sup>13</sup> Jodi A. Byrd groups the populace of North America into three general categories: indigenous peoples, settlers, and arrivants. She uses “arrivants” to “signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism” (Byrd xix)—so those descended from African slaves and Asian indentured labourers.

settler colonization of Palestine (the source of her own theory is Ghassan Kanafani's *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine 1948-1966*), which in some sense might make it more amiable to another region where an indigenous population must contend with an uninterrupted colonial state; however, it is how Harlow characterizes resistance—its militant flavour, its nationalism under a singular flag of identity—that troubles LaRocque the most. She contrasts the multiplicity of indigenous “contestatory practices right from the initial contact with Europeans to the present” with the “tradition of liberationist Third World thinkers and writers” and the “explosive” writers of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the U.S (23). LaRocque emphasizes this distinction not, I believe, because she sees indigenous struggles as any less urgent or insistent, but rather because “Natives are still expressing the presentness of their colonization” (22). Indigenous texts can and often do propose radical ideas and possibilities for decolonization, but they are often read as “symbolic,” and any emphasis on the spiritual and the metaphysical is decoded as too subtle or allegorical for a literature whose theory is “in its politics” (Harlow 30). For LaRocque, then, much of the problem with literary resistance theory lies in its ideological restrictions.

To formulate a globally-applicable notion of resistance literature without having to conflate the individual uniqueness of the resistances out of which it is theorized or, worse, the cultural context of the people in struggle means to deconstruct resistance in a way that does not neutralize it as a historicized concept. LaRocque notes that indigenous resistance traditions are “ever developing” and asserts that “Native writers record historical and personal incursions, social upheavals, a range of emotions, and unique individual and cultural backgrounds, and struggle for hope and determination” (18). Here she establishes resistance as relevant to struggles on many levels: “whether it is lands, reserves, homesteads, homes, parents, children, or women

personally invaded, or whether it is languages, ceremonies, epistemologies, or faiths suppressed, there is a striking unity of occurrence” in the tradition (18). This complicates our sense of resistance literature that is yoked to, for instance, an armed struggle or even a particular movement organization. But rather than suggesting that these narrative foci preclude indigenous writing from being considered resistant, I would argue that the aspects of life that LaRocque lists are pertinent to liberation in many localities—more so, perhaps, than strictly revolutionary ones. These various and often personalized views of struggle improve resistance theory and allow it to move across geographical space and be applied to multiple contexts without trying to subsume a diversity of struggles into a totalizing or uniform set of social, cultural, or political conditions.

Resistance literature is ultimately a form of representation, one whose material referents are “actually the stage on which the social contradictions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and language are played out” (Rao). Literature, even in the form of realist texts that attempt to closely mimic existence, does not foreclose social realities, historical records, cultural practices, or political economies beyond the confines of the text. The text is a place to “recount cultural fragmentation in the form of community and personal crisis” without providing the *definitive* voice of a people, if there is such a thing (LaRocque 26). Herein is the work of liberation textualities: to take the tools of artistic creation and offer a crucial element to the practice of liberation—be it enhancing the quieted voices of queers through an evocative emotion or image, or subverting government demands by depicting a public gathering of unruly townfolk. Liberation textualities draw together the marginal and the prevalent to contest the dominant, it “gives something actual” to the theories of liberation through representation that is not necessarily exhaustive but is founded on the pretense of resistance as questioning and contestatory (LaRocque 32).

Resistance is not always obvious, and yet the dynamics of struggle do not routinely account for subtleties or ambiguity. Revolutionary discourse and praxis are often considered uncomplicated, such as at “the extreme or critical stages of national liberation” when politics and literature become indistinguishable (Cudjoe 68). Literature is, however, a site in which ambiguities and contradictions can be made evident through critical attention. I return to LaRocque’s argument, quoted at the outset, that “resistance may not always be readily apparent to the unstudied,” meaning those unfamiliar with indigenous histories and customs, but that in fact:

In this overarching history of colonization, Native peoples have developed a collective sense of relationship to the land and to each other, in the common cause of decolonization. In this sense, *every politically aware* Native teacher, scholar, writer, artist, filmmaker, poet, or activist is ultimately a producer of resistance material. (23, emphasis added)

LaRocque deftly expands resistance in one theoretical stroke, but not unproblematically or without important notation. Social awareness, though it hints at authorial intention, is instead precisely the linkage to historical and political context that Harlow longs for in resistance texts. Wilson concurs that resistance texts “not only expose the narrative alibis for colonial power, they also reflect the complex, internal tensions within postcolonial societies through the use of innovative narrative structures” (xvi). Politically aware literature need not be polemic, bombastic, or even overt; but it must find a way to turn away from gendered, racialized, and economic dominations, to use aesthetics as political practice—liberation textualities—to problematize, invoke, and reconsider.

Resistance literature is about giving voice to multiple aspects of struggle. “Voice,” LaRocque notes, “is not primarily about oneself or even of ‘one’s people’ (a favourite colonial expression)—it is more a recognition of the relationship between power and knowledge, which then reveals positionality” (29). Power and knowledge, in the context of resistance literature, are usually associated with marginality. Revolutionary cries must be enmeshed with the alienated voices outside the binaries of political conflict—or heretofore unaccounted for in the nexus of anticolonialism. Liberation textualities connect the dominant forces locked in battle to the struggles of those positioned on the margins: those whose colour, gender, sexuality, spirituality, or other identity, practice, or way of being is held in the periphery of social transformation. Decolonial literature intervenes in the “closed dialogue between [postcolonial political elites] and the colonizing ‘West’” (Newton 110) from the standpoint of those voices elided from the white settler colony and the neocolonial state, breaking silences, giving further shape to decolonization, and exposing the limitations of national struggle. These voices, though at times highly personal and aesthetically complex, are anathema to what M. Jacqui Alexander calls the “early politics of compromise and erasure, the [colonial] state’s desire to neutralize political struggle through its control over the instruments of cooptation and coercion, which foreshadow the more contemporary politics of recolonization” (66). Alexander grounds this recolonization in what she characterizes as a pact of heteropatriarchy whose imperial notions of gender and sexuality form the basis of contemporary decolonial struggles.

To correct the notion that personal decolonization is, in fact, marginalia, theories must be drawn upon which untie the bonds of the canon of resistance literature. Textuality, as a component of decolonization, allows for the exploration of political complications and identity

ambiguities in ways that sociological or historical studies do not by virtue of the creative element. As cheyanne turions has argued,

The space of art is a space of possibility where ideas need not be grounded in the facts of the way the world is, where ideas can be proposed aside from feasibility concerns and outside of regular social protocols. It allows for propositions to be made that resist articulation elsewhere, such as in the realm of politics proper.

(n.p.)

Certainly, there are social and political consequences to imaginative literature, but, as textualities, literary forms afford a more disruptive opportunity; texts play with the conditions of their context and, for this reason, textuality is crucial to resistance literature.

Uprisings can equally occur in domestic and public spheres, and at their intersection; they are not necessarily confined to space and time, can cross nationalized and historicized boundaries, and can take multiple forms, including the literary. Davies identifies “the meaning implicit in ‘uprising’ to reformulate a host of textualities which seek to destabilize the established knowledge/authoritarian bases. It is a new resistance to imperialism which eschews colonial borders, systems, separations, ideologies, [and] structures of domination” (108). Here lie the unfettered possibilities—or propositions, in turions’s words—of uprising that are situated apart from the resistance canon, within and across the personal decolonizations apprehended and refracted by liberation textualities. Moving from uprising to liberation emphasizes the polyvocal and restless, resisting confines and silences of patriarchal neocolonialists who try to fix resistance into the fight for a national state whose pillars are capitalist patriarchy. The multiple layers of this liberation, its many fronts and locales, move away from the strict requirements of

the armed struggle and into the prism of intersectionality, where social justice is an ongoing practice that is habitually reconfigured, remapped, and rethought.

The attachment of liberation to textualities signifies the interactive space of resistance literature. Textualities are in many ways infinite, engaging diverse forms within and outside the realm of traditional literary or cultural studies. Liberation textualities encourage multiplicity and integration in literary thinking. According to Cudjoe, literature “expresses the content of the age[,] which has affected the form” (59). For instance, novels remain a central form of what is considered politicized literature, whereas poetry is often cast as too opaque and contradictory for resistance struggle (Harlow 78). On the other hand, poets whose work reflects lived realities a little too mimetically are considered poor at their craft (Patke 14). Seeing works as liberation textualities focuses on the intersection of these poles and considers literature as “promising re- /articulations” (Davies 81) that attempt to shatter the boundaries established by traditional literary and political theory. Resistance literature from its inception has embraced formal diversity: Harlow’s study analyzed poetry and prose (including the memoir), Cudjoe included the political pamphlet, and LaRocque extends the definition to include “legends, children’s stories, ethnographies, arts and crafts manuals” (26). One form that has received relatively less attention in literary resistance studies is drama, though the legacy of theatrical resistance theory dates back at least to Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979; rev. ed. 2000), and drama represents a key site of personal decolonization, drawing as it does upon indigenous oral traditions, aesthetic innovations, and domestic narratives of resistance. Liberation textualities, then, support a literary resistance project by providing a solid political and aesthetic framework for dislodging the essentializing function of resistance literature.

Such a conceptualization works both ways, calling on readers and critics to look for resistance beyond traditional representations of struggle. While one must be cautious that liberation textualities “resist theorizing and cannot be really ‘read’ or defined in totality” (Davies 109), it is crucial to include radical subjectivities and personal uprising within the frame of resistance literature. Simpson argues that indigenous “[s]torytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning, and creating a just reality [...] a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice” (33). Here the affective and the creative are honoured, and liberation can be seen from a critical standpoint, beyond the binaries of national struggle, and can be sought in unexpected textualities, in instances of “literary opacity” that can give way to powerful political insights.

Complications and ambiguity drive the literary impulse and the absence of the feminine or the feminized in resistance discourse is redressed by seeking out uprising or liberation textualities in order to recover their “power of imagination, of image, which is the fundamental power of literature” (Allen 268). Aesthetics is about the ability to affect, to challenge and arouse the senses alongside the intellect; and indigenous, decolonial literary praxis is about “critically re-evaluating, reconstructing, and redeploying Indigenous cultural forms in ways that seek to prefigure, alongside those similar ethical commitments, radical alternatives to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination ... ” (Coulthard 49). Resistance shifts, then, toward an emotional and practical decolonization, one which must centralize gender as a pillar of coloniality and decoloniality.

Though contemporary moves to incorporate gender and sexuality into the terms of struggle have occurred, no great paradigm shift has taken place that supersedes the feminist

necessity of liberation textualities. Postcolonialism remains a powerful arena in scholarly study, and an attractive pathway to studying the still-underestimated works by world majority people in literary study; but Davies's critique that it represents a "misnaming of current realities, it is too premature a formulation, it erroneously contains decolonizing discourses, it re-males and re-centres resistant discourses by women and attempts to submerge a host of uprising textualities" (81) is borne out in the tradition of resistance literature that has disproportionately favoured patriarchal nationalist struggles.

As with Cudjoe, Fanon, and Harlow, Simpson insists that "[t]he starting point within Indigenous theoretical frameworks ... is different than from within western theories: the spiritual world is alive and influencing; colonialism is contested; and storytelling, or 'narrative imagination,' is a tool to vision other existences outside of the current ones by critiquing and analyzing the current state of affairs, but also by dreaming and visioning other realities" (40). What those visions look like is where Davies and LaRocque make important contributions: resistance literature must look past its dominant representations and see power in the ordinary, in the figurative. In her introduction to the Caribbean women's poetry anthology *Creation Fire*, Ramabai Espinet invokes the image of "a woman...sitting in a room alone, writing.... The woman writes fiercely, compulsively, for many hours even though she is exhausted and sleepy and even though she has no immediate plan for her writing. She writes because she must.... [Women] write because the time has come when they must invent their new world" (xiii). These women draw upon a host of uprisings that occur well beyond the realm of political conflict in the legislatures or even the marches and occupations, though they are certainly related. These women expand the vision of resistance to embrace a longer view of the colonial matrix of power, to expose the claws of coloniality and its insipid race, gender, economic, knowledge, and

governance systems, and to narrativize, perform, and sound off on the nature of revolution; they occupy various echelons or locations, are diasporic and indigenous, and engage in political, social, sexual, and spiritual relations that transcend and transform gender.

The point of reconfiguring resistance literature is to open it up, to push it toward Fanon's boundless horizons, and not simply to let that woman out of her room, but to consider the contested spaces in that room and see their resistances, their grapples with history, with kin, with erasure, and with expression. Caught between a nationalist politics that privileged heterosexual masculinity and global financial institutions that coerced decolonizing nation-states—once thought of as “the restoration of the nation to its imagined precolonial autonomy and the securing of its identity from exogamous forces” (Gikandi 637)—into turning on their own citizens through structural adjustment and economic restructuring, feminism has been marginalized and the decolonial aesthetics of feminist literature have been subsumed by two dichotomous contests: first, an imperial one that overlooks major branches of the colonial power matrix such as gender, spirituality, and sexuality; and second, the literary battle between formal aesthetics and political-historical analysis. In “The Old Aestheticism and the New” (2005), Nicholas Shrimpton decries, that “cultural materialist, gender-based, and deconstructive criticisms” have little place in studies of aesthetics because

Critics can and should pay attention to the socially, morally and intellectually referential qualities of literary or painterly texts—so long as they retain their sense of priority. These are real but *merely secondary characteristics* of the distinctive mode of the discourse which they have chosen to consider. (7; 15, emphasis added)

Textuality, as I have argued, shatters any sense of primary and secondary artistic characteristics and instead sees multiple facets of a representation as crucial to its composition and analysis; but, the revival of the old aestheticism, under a guise of newness, consciously decontextualizes literature in a way that undermines and reverses the pressures put on literary studies (and the academy) to embrace the shifting grounds of literary expression. Resistance is the ground which I have chosen to trace, not because it is so obviously anathema to the aestheticists (neo or otherwise) but because resistance literature is a field that insists upon political and aesthetic dialectics. To ignore, or to try to stifle, the legacy of postcolonial feminism or the current impulses of decoloniality is to force literature back into a largely inaccessible and irrelevant realm.

### **Conclusions: Personalizing Intersectionality, Textualizing Liberation**

Resistance literature has suffered from the limitations of its early theorizing, succumbing to the accusation that its polemics detract from its artistic value while texts that do not explicitly fit the narrow formula are dismissed as apolitical. Intersectionality, which began as a demand that marginalized standpoints and social locations be accounted for in the basis for struggle, provides a jumping point from which to critique these formations, a challenge which emerges in early work by feminists of colour, postcolonial literary theorists, and most recently indigenous critical theory. Using the tripartite (and interwoven) approach of decolonial feminist aesthetics, the personal lives and struggles depicted in texts excluded by the polemicist model of resistance literature are recuperated and the notion of what constitutes this literature is rightfully expanded. Traditional literary criticism bemoans the extension outward to the political;

traditional resistance theory questions looking inward to the personal, the individual. Yet attention to the personal struggles of the people, of examining the facets of identity and experience which shape and have shaped political, spiritual, and economic structures but which may seem unromantic or lack the epic qualities needed to further a movement, is essential to the work of decolonization. Looking beyond reductive readings of—or, rather, about the presumed politics of—literary representations pushes us closer to the unrealized and elusive liberation at the centre of all struggles.

Resistance literature must focus on inclusion, away from the political/artistic divides that still dominate literary criticism and toward a pluriversal notion of the revolutionary by recognizing the intersection of aesthetic and personal realities—experiences that are shaped by gender, spirituality, sexuality, class, and kinship—with political narratives and the practices of social justice. Resisting settler colonialisms, with their religious, economic, and gender entrenchments, feminist authors in the Caribbean and North America use various textualities to re-examine and reassert the terms of struggle from an aesthetic and decolonial standpoint, textualizing liberation from a binary world view that casts resistance as a politics of erasure, and recasting it through the propositional wonder that is literary expression.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Marvellous Counteractions: Spiritual Resurgence in Lee Maracle's *Celia's Song* and Merle Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting***

For most native women, spirituality is at the heart of survival, resistance, and renewal.

—Kim Anderson,

*A Recognition of Being* (133)

Liberation textualities shift our thinking of what constitutes resistance literature by incorporating multiple strategies for and concerns about social transformation that have gained attention in the wake of nationalist struggles through decolonial, feminist, and aesthetic assertions. Works that turn to relations within families, in personal spaces, and beyond the realist mode dissolve the boundaries of the “political” sphere and implicate many sites of resistance in the struggle for liberation. Liberation textualities are concerned not only with what happens in the streets, in the public domain, in the legislatures, or on the town squares. Literature attaches politics to the home, the longhouse, the mountains, the cemeteries, the afterlives, the inner lives, and the unexpected and under-explained irruptions of the supernatural into everyday life. Helen Scott argues in *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* (2006) that women’s resistance literature is considered “radical more for its formal innovation than its political content” (5). Yet those formal innovations are not only radical challenges to the literary status quo, but also an

extension of a political framework that subverts the isolation of those relegated to the margins of national political battles and demonstrates the interlocking nature of structural and collective inequalities.

This chapter argues that Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) *Celia's Song* (2014) and Merle Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995)<sup>14</sup> use marvellous realism to consider the spiritual aspects and implications of social transformation and to interrogate the realism of traditional resistance literature, thus acting as liberation textualities. The characters and settings of both novels are recognizable, but both texts accept the ethical and influential presence of the supernatural in order to connect inequities to coloniality and to aestheticize liberation that is grounded in spiritual and social struggle.<sup>15</sup> In *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (2004), Shalini Puri notes that “the global market's hyper-canonization of marvelous and magic realism as ideal forms of postcolonial writing” has rendered it suspect by scholars (140). Marvellous realism, goes the argument, focuses on duality, liminal connections between the real and the fantastic, and ideally lends itself to postcolonial contexts of hybridity, cross-culturalism, and reconciliation (Slemon, “Magic Realism”; Quayson). These are important debates, but my intention is to examine how the aesthetic mode of marvellous realism, in conversation with decoloniality and feminism, can challenge the realism associated with polemic writing, explore human existence beyond the

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<sup>14</sup> Hereafter, and for expediency, I shall refer to the two primary texts of this chapter—*Celia's Song* and *The Colour of Forgetting*—as *Song* and *Colour*, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> I use the term “marvellous realism,” first articulated by Cuban essayist Alejo Carpentier in “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” for its lyricism and Caribbean cultural significance, and for its signification of the literary imagination and association with a sense of wonder. When referring to other theorists' discussions of “magic realism,” I will use whichever terminology they use. But for the purposes of this chapter, “magic” and “marvellous” are virtually interchangeable and the choice to use “marvellous” is aesthetic on my part.

religious and rationalized colonial structuring of the world, and foreground the contiguous relations between tactile and spiritual phenomena.

In *Colour* and *Song*, marvellous realism produces liberation textualities by depicting spiritual elements that irrupt into the settler colonial spheres, have deep ties to domestic spaces, and which produce narrative and sensory representations of resistance in affective and unusual ways. For example, *Colour* posits that the churning of the seas below Leaper's Hill—where the indigenous Kalinago population is rumoured to have jumped to its near-extinction in order to outwit the invading French army (Newton 13)—is not the convergence of the powerful currents of the Atlantic and the Caribbean sea, but rather the unquiet spirits who see a continued colonial stronghold strangling their lands (Collins 4). The reader is encouraged to accept this reality through the perceptions of the narrator and focalizer Carib, who recognizes the true nature of the activity and thus confounds a hegemonic reading of the novel's natural setting. Similarly, *Song's* narrator describes animated ancestral bones: “The bones in the broken longhouse giggle; their neglect will be avenged. Deep inside the mountain, another set of bones rattles. They want to know what the hell is going on. [ ... ] They wriggle and fight to get to the surface, but it is a slow and difficult process, this business of climbing through layers of rock and dirt” (Maracle 27). The bones, like the stirring of the sea in *Colour*, acknowledge a resurgent spiritual presence that expresses indigenous restlessness and disappointment with current social structures and systems not simply by “standing in” for a vanquished vulture, but by attaching decoloniality to a reframed and revisioned physical reality, by stretching the boundaries of political opposition into the spirit world. The magic is “irreducible,” as Wendy B. Faris has argued it should be (167); the spiritual realm is situated in profound opposition to the worldly structures of colonial and

patriarchal practices, suggesting that they are harmful to existence itself and asserting the necessity of personal, spiritual, and community struggle.

Both novels are about the power of storytelling, of history, and cultural knowledge in bringing about liberation, but also about how neocolonial modernity can be confronted by spiritual beliefs that are reflected in supernatural occurrences rendered tactile by the texts' narrators. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011) Leanne Simpson (Nishnaabeg) situates this balance of spirit and corporeality in a confrontation between coloniality and indigenous cosmology:

In western science, emergence theory is based on the idea that events are not created on a single structure or rule, but that each component and its surroundings (or relationships) creates a complex chain of processes leading to some order. In Nishnaabeg thought these processes are also mediated through the implicate order or the spirit world, and that 'complex' chain of reactions is necessarily non-linear. (*Dancing* 90-91)

“Emergence” and “implicate” are brought into contest in marvellous realism, mirroring and complicating the cultural, political, and aesthetic elements of liberation textualities. *Song* depicts the cultural awakening of a Stó:lō<sup>16</sup> seer-woman whose visions of an ancient longhouse and a double-headed serpent that is angry with the people for accepting the ways of the invaders give her clarity to participate in a ceremony that confronts violence against women in her community.

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<sup>16</sup> I do not attempt to conflate Stó:lō and Nishnaabeg communities or cosmologies here; but rather, see Simpson's text as expressing a theoretical framework that helps readers better understand the literary work that the novels by Maracle and Collins do. I respect that the indigenous critical theory I am using emerges from specific cultural contexts, but my intent is to regard it as philosophical discourse that is applicable beyond national or cultural boundaries.

The novel uses various narratological strategies to challenge the gendered consequences of colonization for the novel's rural indigenous community, and draws upon cultural beliefs about the interconnectedness of land, people, spirits, and animals to demonstrate possibilities for healing. *Colour* traces the history of a culturally creolized family (descended from African and European blood, mixed with South Asian in the latter generations) that is torn apart by colonial, economic, and patriarchal forces alongside a supernatural narrative that signifies a persistent indigenous presence on its fictional, diasporic Caribbean island. The text uses hetero- and autodiegetic narration to focalize women's voices and struggles, while demonstrating the spiritual aspects of liberation through marvellous realist literary techniques. Both novels use indigenous figures to challenge the colonial matrix of power in and around communities of women who are connected in various ways to a larger spiritual reality: visionaries, healers, historians, warriors, and indeed victims. Together, these novels connect decolonial perspectives and feminism to a transformative resistance that extends beyond the limits of nationalism, realism, and traditional forms of protest.

### **Marvellous Realism: Refracting the Realist Polemic**

Marvellous realism is often associated with postmodernism in the sense of disturbance and disruption, and romanticising its form can easily attract the relativist trap—misanthropic, purposeless, and apolitical—that haunts postmodern theory. Faris's seminal essay, "Scheherazade's Children: Magic Realism and Postmodern Fiction," which grounds magic realism in postmodern critique, remains foundational in determining the primary elements of marvellous realism as literary technique and/or genre and is often cited by postcolonial critics.

Faris's assertion that "in magic realist fictions, we witness an idiosyncratic recreation of historical events, but events grounded firmly in historical realities," that magic realism tends to "reveal [its] motivations" and thus remains open to interpretation, and, most pointedly, that magic realist texts "use their magic against the social order" suggest that the resistant disruptions that inhere in magic realism are purposeful and political (169-70, 171, 179). Resistant narratives do not simply create a fantastical world of escape and exoticism, but rather pose alternative visions of the "real," subverting what is hegemonically accepted as existence, spirituality, physical and metaphysical. Spiritual presences and marvellous narratives become liberation textualities when they intervene in dominant structures that marginalize indigenous and/or feminist standpoints.

A key component of marvellous realism as liberation textuality emerges in Faris's assertion that "[i]n magic realist narrative, ancient systems of belief and local lore often underlie the text" (182). Marvellous realism is, of course, constructed in the imaginary mode, but still offers representations of a world beyond the colonially-constructed, Eurocentric rationalism and Christian religion by drawing upon those traditions that were marginalized under imperial domination and bringing them into a contemporary "realist" setting that still twists upon colonial inequalities.<sup>17</sup> As Christopher Warnes notes, "the meanings that [magic realism] is assumed to

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<sup>17</sup> *Beyond* is a key word in this sentence. Christianity has been blended with African and Asian spiritual practice in the Caribbean. The presence of Spiritual Baptists, with linkages to Orisha traditions, in Trinidad and Grenada are important spheres of religious/spiritual liminality and hybridity. Stó:lō traditions are more starkly oppositional to Christian invasion—a difference that underpins the varying social positionalities of diasporic Caribbean peoples and Indigenous North Americans. African and Asian presences in the Caribbean were interwoven with Christian settlement and colonization, even if they would later resist, overthrow, and become politically independent from them. Cf. Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*.

signify [are] clustered around notions of narrative and representation, culture, history, identity, what is natural and supernatural” (1-2). And yet he is mindful that “magical realist novels are deliberate, carefully contrived and manipulated works of art rather than unmediated conduits of cultural values and perspectives” (Warnes 11). In the context of indigenous and arrivant literary texts, one must be cautious of suggesting too easy a correlation between marvellous realism and spiritual practices of a certain community. Novels are art, not anthropology; they offer creative propositions and draw upon cultural resonances, but are not simply rote renderings of history or autobiography. Thus, marvellous realism as liberation textualities can intervene in colonial and patriarchal ideologies and discourses, but in ways that *imagine* resurgence and liberation. *Song* certainly draws upon the ancient teachings of Stó:lō cosmology, but conjures them in a specific way to make claims about violence against women and cultural genocide, by settler and indigenous men in collaboration. *Colour* complicates the romanticization of the arrivant state that emerged from nationalist struggle with a colonial matrix largely still gripping the people by symbolically invoking absent and erased indigenous presences. Both novels aesthetically shift “reality” in order that readers consider the wider implications of decolonial and feminist challenges to hegemonic social orders.

Discussing the linkages between South African anti-apartheid movements and literary realism, Paulina Grzęda argues that:

[U]nder such circumstances, [literature] became primarily a manifestation of one’s ideological affiliations and thus a profoundly political act. The agenda of protest writing required explicit and straightforward engagement with the contemporary milieu.... Neo-realist strategies of representing contemporaneity were offered as an ethical alternative [to formalist and surrealist literature]. (155)

Again, the dichotomy of aesthetics and politics confounds a far-reaching notion of resistance. And while Susan Z. Andrade suggests that “the literary critical pendulum has swung violently” away from a reflective representation that “was ... bound up with rationality and freedom struggles” (183), that shift does not necessarily correlate to materialist theorists of resistance literature. Liberation textualities change the “agenda of protest writing” to include lesser-considered arenas of the contemporary milieu, and marvellous realism intervenes in a profound way by emphasizing alternative spiritual and religious propositions.

Anglophone Caribbean literature is known for using African, Asian, European, and, to a much lesser extent, Indigenous American spiritual traditions; and Indigenous North American literature has incorporated mythic and anthropomorphic elements into narrative structures.<sup>18</sup> Use of these pre- and anticolonial traditions aligns literary texts with what historian Nathaniel Samuel Murrell calls the religious “confrontation with the colonial Christian cultural hegemony, race differentiation, economic deprivation, oppression, and persecution” (204). Though Murrell’s study is focused on Afro-Caribbean traditions, his positioning of Orisha in opposition to coloniality could equally apply to the Stó:lō spiritual belief system that has grappled with Anglo-Canadian religious hegemony and institutionalized racism. Traditionally, these texts would only be considered resistance literature if their spiritual elements are explicitly associated with the political arena, or, put another way, if a text’s marvel is subordinate to its realism. Barbara Harlow, for instance, sees resistance narratives (meaning prose fiction) as a means to “display

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<sup>18</sup> Notable examples of Caribbean fiction that incorporate marvellous or magic realist elements are: Marcia Douglas, *Madam Fate* (1999), Wilson Harris, *Jonestown* (1996), and Erna Brodber, *Myal* (1988). For Indigenous North American instances, consider Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977), Gerald Vizenor, *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1978; rev. ed. 1990), Jeanette Armstrong, *Whispering in Shadows* (2000), and Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (2008).

the historical and social context” through “analysis and documentation” (85), which she contrasts with the more symbolic nature of poetry. In her theoretical formulation of resistance, Harlow allows for the use of fable, but subordinates it to the concerns of the “real world”: she opens her study with the story of how the tortoise came to have a broken shell from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1953), a sequence that only “takes on a political significance” when it becomes “an allegory for an African strategy for independence” (xv). Yet Susan L. Dunston argues that even the physical, “knowable” world is made up of “dynamic relationships or configurations that enable and demonstrate continuity, contiguity, and mutually creative effects” (138). Dunston reveals that even the great magisterium of reality—quantum physics—must contend with the spiritual, with precolonial and decolonial belief systems that emerge from “convergences and configurations along space-time” (141). Liberation textualities neither dismiss the political implications of the fable nor reduce them to the simplified role of allegory; rather, liberation textualities strive for a transformative world view, where dynamic cultural principles—such as anthropomorphic narratives from the animal sphere or magical interpretations of phenomenological occurrences—challenge a flattened or rationalized vision of the physical and the spiritual by suggesting the world is not simply about the real/political and the marvellous/symbolic, but that in fact the real is marvellous and vice versa.

Critical attention to *The Colour of Forgetting*, Merle Collins’s second novel, exists in the shadow of her earlier, more widely-read text *Angel* (1987; revised edition 2011). *Angel* directly engages with questions of revolution and culture by juxtaposing Grenadian proverbs with the multigenerational story of women involved in the movement(s) leading up to the political struggles of 1979-83. *Angel* contemplates the background and aftermath of the U.S. invasion and crushing of the New Jewel Movement (NJM), which had sought to transform the post-

independence colonialist economic and land configurations of the island. Other than the fact that *Colour* is now out of print, the novel is distinct from *Angel* in two specific ways: whereas *Angel* is a more traditional resistance novel, centrally concerned with “articulat[ing] the growth to political consciousness of its female protagonist, Angel, and simultaneously trac[ing] the evolution of radical nationalist politics in the small island state” (Cooper 176), *Colour* explores domestic and spiritual responses to the social milieu of a fictionalized representation of Grenada; secondly, *Colour*’s narrative is framed by indigenous presence. The focal character Carib is central rather than ornamental in the text, impelling an indigenous resurgence that, in Glen Sean Coulthard’s words, “draws critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present” (157). Given its Caribbean setting, *Colour*’s emphasis on indigenous presence provides an enhanced critique of nationalist independence movements and, more significantly, presents a site upon which to discuss expanded notions of resistance, particularly in relation to spirituality and domestic concerns. Maracle’s novel confronts similar issues whilst using marvellous realism as liberation textualities on analogous but distinct fronts: against white settler colonialism and patriarchal neocoloniality within an indigenous community.

Where Collins must struggle against the notion that indigenous peoples no longer exist (or have had no historical impact) in any significant form in the Caribbean, Maracle creates a cultural battle to reinstate indigenous sovereignty in spiritual matters. Therefore, I shall not be comparing how effectively or realistically Collins has represented indigenous peoples in comparison to Maracle (there can hardly be an effective use for such a comparison), but rather how both authors must resist the coloniality of power in two different contexts that produce related results: whether the population is reduced to one (ambiguously) indigenous person in an

arrivant society or is a predominantly indigenous community in a settler colony, the hegemony of Euro-imperial ideas, religions, gender systems, and economic practices must still be dislodged. Like *Colour*, *Celia's Song* represents the key battlefields in this struggle as domestic and spiritual spaces, and, also like Collins's text, Maracle's narrative encourages a decolonial feminist aesthetic reading that allows us to reframe resistance literature as liberation textualities.

*Song* continues a story introduced in Maracle's earlier *Ravensong* (1993), and has received acclaim from popular literary reviews. *The Winnipeg Review*, for example, described the novel's magical and mythological elements as "an extended meditation on the nature of knowledge and truth" (Martin n.p.); and *Anishnabek News*, exploring the productive value of the text, declares that *Song* "makes you think of the power of ceremony and how it can get you through the toughest of times" (McFarlane n.p.). Where *Ravensong* concentrated in many ways on the conflicts and contrast between the Stó:lō community and "white town," the metaphor for colonial Canada, *Song* is located more definitively among the Stó:lō themselves, and is concerned chiefly with spiritual recovery that turns away from imperial logics and the tensions between indigenous and settler realities. To draw upon Coulthard again, this "turning away" reflects a decolonial affirmation of "traditional practices" that "re-establishes [indigenous peoples] as historical protagonists in the present" (154). Which is not to say that coloniality is absent or unacknowledged in *Song*, but rather that it is deliberately marginalized so as to focus on pathways to healing through resurgence; that is, to return to Coulthard's definition of decoloniality, the novel mobilizes historical knowledge to reconfigure current relations (157).

Diana Brydon argues that

by beginning with her own culture's understanding of time, rather than accepting the linear, Eurocentric view, Maracle can show how the past lives on in the

present through ancestral voices, visions, and dreams and mythic incarnations.

This is an approach to decolonization that refuses to situate the decolonizing project within a linear view of history. It must involve the ancestors if it is to succeed. (n.p.)

*Song* can therefore be seen as subverting colonial notions of time and space, while accepting that coloniality has attempted to relegate traditional spiritual practices to “the past” in the course of the “civilizing” mission.

### **Decoloniality: From Spectral Presence to Spiritual Resurgence**

Decoloniality in liberation textualities decentres Eurocentric epistemologies, presences, and systems without denying the persistence of coloniality in the settings created by the texts. Decolonial resistance literature shifts the focus from imperial institutions, beliefs, and life ways toward those which are predominantly indigenous or arrivant. Both regions studied in my project are enmeshed with settler colonialism. While the Caribbean is arguably more complicated, given that arrivants and not settlers now control governing structures, the predominant national structures and institutions of the Anglophone Caribbean and North America are based on settler colonialities. Decolonial resistance literature acknowledges and explores these complexities, whilst subverting the coloniality of power in its traditional, settler, and neocolonial formations. According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres,

The decolonial turn ... refers to the decisive recognition and propagations of decolonization as an ethical, political, and epistemic project [begun] in the twentieth century. This project reflects changes in historical consciousness,

agency, and knowledge, and it also involves a method or series of methods that facilitate the task of decolonization at the material and epistemic levels. (114)

Decolonial resistance literature is therefore not simply about the national struggle against European invaders, but about challenging the legacy and entrenchment of coloniality in societies that are considered to be independent, self-determining, and proposing indigenous sovereignty out of current settler formations. The novels studied here challenge that coloniality by focusing on indigenous cosmology and spirituality, domestic and familial social concerns, and aesthetic reimaginings of realism.

*Colour* reroutes what Melanie J. Newton condemns as “a closed dialogue between the [creole] Caribbean and the colonizing ‘West,’” wherein a “specifically ‘Anglophone Caribbean indigenism’ has severed the assumed link between aboriginality and indigeneity” resulting in the erasure of indigenous peoples from the Caribbean imagined community (“Returns” 110; 118). In her analysis of Wilson Harris’s *Jonestown* (1996), Jodi A. Byrd concurs that, while certain Anglophone novels may texturize their environments with indigenous peoples, often they are “not ... fully realized,” they are rendered a “presence [that] has no agency of its own, in its own right ... forever frozen on the precipice of conquest ...” (88).

Far from reflecting a marginalized absence, Carib is a focal and insistent figure on the landscape and the narrative of the novel; she acts as an abstraction of the novel’s ideological critique of neocoloniality while connecting its marvellous elements to its realist representations. In her analysis of the novel, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey suggests that because of the fact that Carib is the end of a line of women who share the same name “it becomes clear that the Amerindian presence is not part of the nation’s future” (265), thus reinforcing the notion of indigenous extinction and fixture within a discourse of conquest. While the narrator states that “it

seemed now that the line was finished, because Carib was fifty-ish and she had no children” (Collins 12), as a figure, Carib is not extinguished—she outlives many of her contemporaries—and is also central to the novel’s ethos. In the final words of the text, when she admonishes arrivants and tourists alike that “is all right, you know. Is all right as long as *we see and we know and we remember*” (213, emphasis added), the novel signifies a somewhat archetypical indigenous caution (if the “we” refers to the indigenous presences).

Carib is also depicted as an active presence in modern Paz, including her spiritual guidance to the boy Thunder and her political critique of the socialist regime that continues colonial economic practice. She furthermore asserts herself in the landscape and contemporary life of the island throughout the story; other characters remark that her perceived madness is an underestimation of her abilities (82); she outlives many of her contemporaries; and her knowledge is connected to the fate of the arrivant population, which her presence at the end of the novel seems to surpass.

In his essay “Wistful Envy,” Gerald Vizenor contemplates indigenous literature in the context of “survivance.” Vizenor juxtaposes survivance with “absence” and “victimry” discourses that he believes have dominated the metanarrative(s) of indigenous peoples in the Americas, while acknowledge that indigenous cultural identity relies largely on reconstruction, ambiguity, and storytelling (62-63):

Native names are inscrutable constructions; the ironic suit of discoveries, histories, memories, and many clusters of stories. Native identities and the sense of self are the tricky traces of solace and heard stories; the tease of creations, an innermost brush with natural reason, precarious visions, and unbounded

narcissism. [...] Native memories are intimate, the traces of wind over water, the rush of leaves, and the tease of seasons.... (69)

Carib offers a challenge the discourses of “discovery, dominance, and victimry” (Vizenor 65); she provides an active presence that counters the colonial narrative even while it acknowledges the marginality of indigenous voices in the Caribbean. *Colour* posits that indigenous presence is significant to the domestic, political, and spiritual life of the island by featuring Carib across and through the novel. Carib’s prophetic and analytic presence is a frame narrative: she opens and closes the novel before we meet the mixed-blood settler-arrivant Malheureuse family members and their land-based plot. At the outset, Carib envisions the last stand of the Kalinago: “Look at them. Running and jumping, Jumping and screaming. You hear the voices coming up from the bush? Forgotten and consoled. Forgotten and drowned. And the blue crying red in between” (3). The narrator confirms the historical facts—“The Amerindian people, who, *long ago*, had *escaped* their French pursuers by jumping off the cliff into the sea. Since then, legend had it, the sea in that part of the island was particularly angry sometimes, churned up with *remembering*” (4, emphasis added)—that underlie Carib’s vision, wherein most (arrivant) inhabitants of the novel’s loosely-fictionalized version of Grenada, called Paz, consider “the leap” an event that wiped out the indigenous population; however, Carib envisions instead a filmic loop, a recurrence that keeps the Kalinago alive. History is rendered in the present tense. The narrator reinforces this present presence: “People had grown up with Carib’s voice and its endless effort to kick-start their memory” (5). The use of fragmented sentences in Carib’s expression of her vision arrests the relegation of the Kalinago spirits to the past for the reader, and reflects the cyclical nature of what Carib sees. Her address to others, seeking confirmation, confronts the gap between the indigenous presence and its presumed absence. As the subsequent narration attempts

to unpack the meaning of Carib's cry, it underscores the collision of the past and the present: "Less understandable was Carib's comment about 'forgotten and consoled.' But she may be have been thinking of her own lonesome shout to her spirit friends as a consolation of sorts" (5). Thus, Carib is considered a seer in whom the active presence of indigenous spirits seek consolation and confidence, while haunting her and the island with the recurring moment of alleged "extinction." The narrative is set up in opposition to the erasure of indigenous presences, which are instead rendered a part of the land spiritually and possibly through Carib's identity.

Carib's linkages to the indigenous spirits render her own identity somewhat irrelevant. While the narrator explains that Carib "may or may not have been a descendant by blood" (4) and, later, refers to the "possibl[e] ... colour of her face" (135)—claims that work both ways, thus raising the equal possibility of her racialized estrangement from the arrivant population—she is still the means through which indigenous peoples are present in the contemporary setting. If Carib is a descendant, then her body as well as her mind enact survivance against erasure; if she is not, then she represents a transformed arrivant consciousness that is governed by confronting metanarratives of extinction and the resultant colonialist politics that are enabled by arrivant "indigeneity."<sup>19</sup> Like many characters in Collins's writing, Carib's name acts as allegory and signification. Carib's professed indigeneity extends beyond her name. Marina Warner suggests that historically, indigenous women have been represented in a liminal space: "[w]omen, through their bodies, become the hyphen between the forest and the *morne* and the habitation/house/plantation, either by force or by choice" (105). Carib's liminality elides the

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<sup>19</sup> I refer here to Shona N. Jackson's theory that creole (arivant) populations in the Caribbean indigenize themselves through a nationalist consciousness that insists creolization was built on the backs of Afro and Indo Caribbean labour (47), and which consequently erases indigenous presences, thus enabling Caribbean arrivants or even settlers to occupy indigenous lands and spaces without acknowledging indigenous sovereignty.

European, opposing a colonial narrative of erasure, in favour of indigenous and arrivant ambiguity. She is a reminder of the precolonial and a symbol of the decolonial. Her connection, if not kinship, with indigenous presence is persistent and metaphysical; it defies the boundaries set out by nationalist independence movements and realist resistance literature.

Carib's spiritual prowess is acknowledged when two members of the Malheureuse family become concerned over the youngest son in their line, Thunder, called so because of his deep fear of storms.

[Willive] was becoming increasingly worried about her son, was beginning to think that it wasn't just a child's understandable fear of a sudden inexplicable noise and was considering taking him to the Shango people, to see if they could do anything for him, perhaps remove from him whatever spirit it was that might be haunting him. Or even ask the priest to pray for him, and leave a lighted candle on the altar. It was [his great Aunt] Mamag who said, "I believe I have an idea what do the boy [sic]. Bring him and see Carib. (11)

Carib is therefore set apart from the dominant arrivant and settler religions—Shango is itself "a mixture of African culture and spirituality in which many strands of traditions synchronize" including "Kongo-Yoruba...Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism as well as a variety of elements from Catholicism, Spiritual Baptist practices, Rastafari, and Hindu and Islamic cultural traditions" that, like national independence, both confronts and incorporates coloniality while lacking an indigenous element (Murrell 210)—and she is seen as key to the spiritual health and healing of a future generation. Mamag observes that Thunder's fear is linked to the bloody (and bloodied) confrontation between settler and arrivant blood that runs through Thunder's veins, "That is the connection. And that is where your story and the Malheureuse story cross. Is that he

remembering. [...] One kill the other and so now Thunder have murderer and victim in his head” (Collins 94). Carib’s diagnosis—that “the thunder he was hearing was the thunder inside him. Wasn’t his alone, but the spirits letting him hear it and it would only stop when he found a way of understanding the spirits that lived inside him” (14)—confirms that Thunder’s crisis is both existential and supernatural, and demonstrates her knowledge of the spiritual (and spirit-filled) landscape and historical contexts through which Thunder must seek decoloniality, within a survivance that looks askance at both arrivant and settler domination.

Thunder’s own trajectory, under the guidance of Carib and the elder women of his family, follows a pathway that evokes indigenous resurgence. Near the conclusion of the novel, Carib traverses Paz in a sequence that confirms her connection to the land and her disconnection from the fractured national political scene that has erupted into violence (the text’s gesture toward the Grenadian revolution and the participatory democracy espoused by the New Jewel Movement).<sup>20</sup> Carib encounters Thunder, who seeks communion in the land:

Is in the bush there, yes. In the bush up there Thunder go and stay after trouble take place in the market. Leave his mother house and walk up in the woods to listen. And listen. Sh-h-h! In the bush. Too much noise in the world. Thunder. Sometimes the children who should know most end up acting like they know nothing at all. But he will be all right, you know. He can’t help it. Is his nation. It is written. Blue crying red. From there to here. England, they say for education.

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<sup>20</sup> Collins’s chapter “Blood in the South” (161-69) recreates the conditions of the Grenadian revolution and, in particular, the NJM’s direct democracy in which villages sent representative to town and village squares in order to debate issues of public concern. *Colour*’s narrator states that “No village wanted to have just one representative in Paz City. Everybody wanted to be there” (165). See Phillip.

And bush. Walk good. He know the hill. Come back to walk back. Walk back.  
(185)

Sudden noises of the “bush” are reflected in the staccato musicality of the text. Carib’s intradiegetic narration evokes the sounds of “bush” in its tonality, both calming in the slowed-down repetition of “listen,” and the rustling of “sh-h-h!” which is juxtaposed with the “noise in the world.” Listen-silence-noise. Carib contrasts the land with people who have inherited coloniality from conquerors and then extols the instructive spiritual purposes of bush in contrast to the venerated foreign education in England. Carib emphasizes movement and contrast, a shifting away from dominant values. Jacob, a young character in Maracle’s novel, undertakes a similar process in order to contemplate the conditions of his village and revitalize his own spirituality in order to confront misogyny from a decolonial perspective. The promise in Carib’s assurances that Thunder “will be all right” and “walk good” reinforce the importance of this moment to a hopeful resurgence for Thunder and, indeed, for the broader community.

A key sequence, in which Carib’s relationship to Paz signifies the importance of indigenous presences to understanding place and history in the Caribbean, is situated in the novel’s final pages. After the narration has concluded its time with the Malheureuse clan, Carib undertakes a sea voyage from Paz to nearby Eden (the novel’s fictionalized Carriacou) when the ship is gripped by an unseen force, which Carib identifies as an active underwater volcano called “Kick-em-Ginny.” The narrator casts the volcano as a metaphor for a marginalized spectre struggling to be felt in the present, as Kick-em-Ginny erupts *and* irrupts into the lives of arrivants and tourists aboard the boat, and the unseen force manifests in a young passenger as a “spirit she cannot control” (205). Casting the volcano as a metaphysical force, *Colour* is able to visually associate land with history and memory, but also with a resistant and insistent ancient presence.

Carib's wisdom about the volcano contrasts the skepticism of the island's youth, the ignorance of tourists, and the cynicism of arrivants like the ferry's skipper. Carib is not only knowledgeable, but an integral presence within a nation struggling with forgetting, and where forgetting is deadly: the failure to remember where the volcano traditionally affects boats results in the drowning of an infant. Carib's incanted response—"The sea is quiet. Blue but almost green. So blue you can't look down and see anything below its surface. Nothing but the blue-green and the sun glinting golden silver back into your eyes" (209)—suggests that there are multiple layers to this failure to see what lies beneath. On the one hand, Carib is analyzing a traditional inability to "see" the truths of life in the Caribbean by foreign tourists from colonialist metropolises—blinded by sandy beaches and glittering seascapes—but, on the other, also suggesting that arrivants must confront the indigeneity that haunts and surrounds them. Carole Boyce Davies, in *Caribbean Spaces: Escape from Twilight Zones* (2013), discusses "Kick 'em Jenny," Ginny's referent signified, as a new island between Grenada and Carriacou produced by volcanic action, signifying birth and creation (33). This volcano, then, evokes rebirth, resurgence—it has always been present, beneath the surface of the sea, and is linked to Carib in the closing arguments of the text. This episode therefore situates Carib's purpose in the life of Paz, one that continues in spite of her "barrenness" and which contradicts the notion that the work of her line is done.

Carib represents an intervention in modernity that critiques colonial economic as well as spiritual practices, an intervention that is bound up with spectral presences in and around the land. One of Carib's acts that disrupts the daily life of Paz involves halting traffic at the Unity Tunnel, which the narrator informs us has been standing "since the end of the nineteenth century" (7). In addition to its association with European "high imperialism" and the development of modern-day racist biological theories, the (long) nineteenth century in the

Anglophone Caribbean is a period when the promise of the abolition of slavery is stifled by the introduction of apprenticeship and indentureship, and also when the plantocracy exerts pressure on governors to ensure maximum labour exploitation in the development of a colonial-capitalist economic framework throughout the region (Elizabeth Cooper 386; 391). Carib’s halting of traffic thus draws attention to the relations between colonialism and capitalism that dominate Paz, even as it struggles to establish a quasi-socialist government (Collins 163), but also evokes another figure that “haunts” the landscape of Paz: the “lajabless, the woman with one good foot and one cow foot who carried away men whose eyes were too big in their head” and the “loupgarou, who sucked your blood in the night” (8). Carib’s placement in the flow of traffic—another advent of industrialization—is therefore a supernatural irruption and her obstruction signifies both an indigenous survivance coupled with arrivant spiritual resistance that is linked to the failure of Christianity: “lifting her hands up in the darkness, she cried, ‘Let there be light! And light there was none. Unity is strength! But strength there is none. And you know, all-you, of the blue crying red in between’” (7). Carib decries the failure of biblical myth and political slogan in the face of the incanted prophecy, which reaches back to the “defeat” of the Kalinago, and forges a resurgent spirit in the contemporary social climate, placing indigenous presence at the heart of liberation.

In a similar spirit of the long view and resurgence, Maracle’s *Song* seeks to weave together the past, the present, the physical world, and the supernatural. Early on, the narrative brings the reader to the double-headed snake: “*The humans broke their contract with the serpent when they stopped feasting and singing for him. This breach granted permission to the serpent to slide from the house front and return to the sea, but both heads did not want to leave—just one did, the restless head, the one that preferred shadowland*” (Maracle 2-3, italics in original). The

tussle between these snake heads, and the force of Restless, situates the social struggles of the community in an ancient battle reaching back to before the arrival of the “newcomers,” whose oppressive practices—such as a prohibition on singing (2)—seize upon the original peoples’ doubts. Such is the complex decoloniality of this novel; it seeks answers beyond reconciliation with the settlers; it looks to the ways in which the minds and hearts of the people have been colonized and grown self-hating: “What matters is that the snake had the right to be upset. The singing had stopped for the house protector before the inhabitants had died” (2). This abandonment of cultural practice, both by force and hegemony, (and not simply as a result of neutral but deadly pathogens) is what has divided the core of the people in this novel, and is the pathway that the text insists must be followed in order to liberation to occur.

Restless and Loyal, as the two serpent heads are known, do not reinforce traditional binaries of good and evil. They are complex in their rendering and both have devastating and resistant effects on the living. “Why are there no trees but for a thin patch next to the men? Loyal has no interest in doing them harm, but Restless is excited. He surmises that these men have murdered the trees; this means they lack conscience, and so they are full of the kind of spirit food Restless craves” (33). Loyal is therefore somewhat complicit in the environmental devastation of colonial and capitalist forces; whereas Restless can be read as a more militant, heroic figure that will avenge colonial injustice. However, Restless is also destructive: “Restless thinks he recognizes the mind-changer they are drinking. He lies in wait, and then enters through the gaping mouth of one of them. The next night the man kills one of the women, chops her to bits, and feeds her to the pigs. Loyal is stunned at what Restless has done, but Restless sleeps a deep and satisfying sleep that night” (41). While the pig reference in this passage signifies serial killer Robert Pickton, a well-known Canadian murderer of Aboriginal women, the snake has actively

sought out “the original people” in the multicultural milieu, thus suggesting that coloniality lives in and around indigenous peoples and settlers in a comprehensively toxic way (41). Restless also plays an active role in the behaviour of the novel’s main antagonist, Amos: “the serpent had got inside him, swallowed his warped conscience, wrapped its wicked breath of horrific permission around it, spat it out, and sent it back toward Amos’s open mouth as Amos fought hard to scream out loud. [ ... ] It roots itself in the wall of his stomach, a toxic ulcer” (40). The serpent heads are therefore not simplistic metaphors, nor are they easily characterized. They represent a complex, horrible, and significant view of the supernatural and the real that can get lost in the binary thinking that sometimes dominates traditional resistance theory.

In a critique similar to *Colour, Song* represents colonial law as troubling and useless for the people’s freedom. Faced with Amos’s brutal torture of Stella and her child, Momma decides “we should kill the man who did this” (149) rather than rely on the colonial state. The narration emphasizes Momma’s belief in traditional forms of justice that are unknown or suppressed in the colonial context:

Momma stares at the mountains and, as she does, she flips through page after page of memory searching for a word in her language to describe this man’s behaviour. If she could say it in her language, the word for it would lead her to name the kind of death she should make sure he gets. She would know how to kill him.

[...]

White people’s laws are crazy; they starve the innocent and feed the guilty. She knows the law functions to help you know what to do in a crisis, so she doesn’t hold it against them. She just wants to know the law of her

grandmothers, the law that will tell her what to do. She has never tried to cross the two languages before. They don't fit. (149)

Celia's mother struggles with the spiritual and juridical legacy of her people in order to enact justice that aligns with a world that exists beyond the physical plane. The fact that Amos's actual death toward the end of the novel occurs not by anyone's direct hand, but by a spiritual frenzy evoked by Jacob and the family women dancing with Amos in the longhouse moves this contemplation beyond simplistic notions of the death penalty or revenge killing, forms of retribution that are mired in the colonial matrix and racialized power imbalances.<sup>21</sup>

Momma's search for a cultural means by which to exact what may read as an extreme form of "justice," or merely an act of vengeance, can therefore be seen as a decolonial act that paradigmatically shifts social transformation and consequences outside of the colonial matrix; she seeks answers through the naming of Amos's acts—not in the various colonial, capitalist, and patriarchy means through which a Canadian court might seek to criminalize him (such as the notion of rape as a crime against the state, of which women are the property)—and the appropriate punishment through a decolonial gaze that is set apart from white settler society, drawing beliefs and cosmologies long thought "extinct" into the material present.

### **Feminism: Conjuring Women, Dissipating Gender**

One of the key features of decoloniality is its insistence that gender is not only one aspect of the coloniality of power, but a pillar of its maintenance. As transnational feminist theorists have indicated, feminism has a fraught existence outside of Europe and settler North America

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<sup>21</sup> See Adams.

(Mohanty and Alexander; Patricia Hill Collins; Tsuruta). The domination of feminism by liberal white heteronormative voices and interests and their reluctance to acknowledge coloniality, have led to calls to undo the universalizing hegemony of feminism in relation to women of colour in diverse global contexts (Tsuruta 3). Yet gender remains a pillar of coloniality and an area that requires more political attention in a resistance context. Feminist or woman-centred scholars and activists have contemplated the intersectional issues that link gender and race under colonialism and done important work to see how caste/class, ability, and sexuality are equally fundamental to discussions of social justice and liberation. As Cheryl Johnson-Odim's essay "Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism" argues,

Feminism ... must be a comprehensive and inclusive ideology and movement that incorporates yet transcends gender-specificity. We must create a feminist movement which struggles against those things which can clearly be shown to oppress women, whether based on race, sex, or class, or resulting from imperialism. Such a definition of feminism will allow us to isolate the gender-specific element in women's oppression while simultaneously relating it to broader issues, to the totality of what oppresses us as women. (321-22)

In other words, since feminism is about liberating women from oppression, patriarchal domination must be situated within the interlocking forces of coloniality that affect women's lives. The texts under consideration here take just such an intersecting view of gender relations, and in ways that complicate liberal or mainstream feminist views of indigenous or arrivant societies.

Women characters in the novels occupy mostly domestic arenas, but their location is linked to broader social, political, economic, and spiritual contexts that challenge a reductive

reading of them as simply victims of patriarchy. They further each text's vision of women's varying resistances, and embody a feminist stance that is transformational and unconventional.

Kim Anderson is mindful that

[b]y virtue of their position as mothers of the nations, Indigenous women in many pre-contact cultures had the authority to call up or halt a war, allocate the wealth of the community, and determine membership .... With this in mind, we have to ask what kind of decision-making power our contemporary mothers of the nation truly carry. We have to ask whether Indigenous male leaders are not only open to listening to but also taking direction from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and their affiliate organizations. (86)

Anderson locates this diminished role for indigenous women to the “deplorable conditions” of “colonization and its handmaiden, patriarchy” (83). Traditional familial roles have been hard-fought against by first- and second-wave feminists for their restrictions on women's autonomy and for constricting their participation in public life, and indigenous theory seeks not to situate women back in the “home,” but rather to complicate reductive understandings of motherhood, womanhood, gender, and sexuality. Anderson therefore argues for a resistant womanhood, one that is played out in both *Song* and *Colour*, where women are central to *both* maternal and political praxis, and where community and kinship alleviate the restrictions of modern motherhood. The domestic experiences of women—including those who embrace, transform, reject, or resign themselves to the roles associated with domesticity—are used as tropes, themes, and settings that are important to notions of social justice which recognize women's multiplicities, and which are aestheticized and contemplated in the novels considered here.

The transformative nature of what could be construed as “traditional” roles for women in the Indigenous North American or Anglophone Caribbean context is situated in the spiritual elements of women’s positions that are emphasized by both novels. The texts are examples of what Carole Boyce Davies aptly calls uprising textualities, in that they “participate in a growing collage ... [that is] oriented to articulating presences and histories across a variety of boundaries imposed by colonizers, but also by the men, the elders and other authorized figures in their various societies” (88). Prominent characters in both novels are mothers who assume resistant roles in relation to the family, the community, the broader culture, and the forces of imperialism; they are also associated with a broader spirituality that is bound up with questions of liberation. Women are cast as seers, prophets, proponents, healers, and experts in supernatural phenomena. These representations not only challenge the hegemonic image of helpless women oppressed by savage men, they also engage worldly and otherworldly questions about existence, social transformation, and the origins of malevolence—in both colonial and neocolonial form.

In *Colour*, it is clear that patriarchal Christian orthodoxy is cast as incompatible with land rights and gender justice. The struggle of the women in the Malheureuse family is tied to land, and its expropriation by arrivant patriarchy using colonial logics (even under the guise of socialism), and it is clear that though Carib is identified as a spiritual heart of the text, the Malheureuse women also have marvellous connections. Cassandra, Thunder’s grandmother, in whom the spirits of history live, represents a blood joining of the racialized conflict in Paz— “[m]ixture in the blood of the story” (17). She is descended from John-Bull, the slave killed by Oldman Malheureuse in the streets of Paz City. Cassandra, as carrier of this family knowledge, is situated as storyteller, and aligned with preternatural forces: “And everybody that Cassandra talk to serious later on in her life, she tell them the story. And if you listening careful, careful, you

will hear that kind of story howling in the wind in villages all over Paz. Is why sometimes the wind would find a hold in an old, old tree and stay there whistling and whistling” (36).

Cassandra, along with Mamag and Willive, are aligned with spiritual occurrences and their faith in Carib’s abilities as a healer and seer. Thus, the relationship of the arrivant women is intertwined with Carib’s indigenous presence, and their maternal relationship to Thunder is cast as significant to the future of an island beset by Christian patriarchal law, even in the wake of independence.

The embedded story’s central conflict around land and its dispossession from those who do not conform to colonial marriage laws is a direct critique of neocolonial logics, and one in which the spirits of the landscape contradict Christian doctrine. As the foreign-educated cousin Dolphus embraces the notion that anyone born out of wedlock has no entitlement to the family’s land, his return to the land itself with family patriarch Son-Son is marked as coloniality by the narration, with Cassandra standing-in for the indigenous presence:

Afterwards, walking back in her mind over the unfolding of the day, *Cassandra feel* she could remember that she know something was wrong the moment she see Uncle Son-Son through the window with *the stranger*.

It must have been the way they stand up down by the mango tree looking around and shaking their heads and talking, Uncle Son-Son lifting his hand and *measuring the land* with his finger, pointing right around. The stranger, arms akimbo on the sides of his *grey flannel jacket*, turning right around, *planting his feet* and looking and nodding. (39, emphasis added)

Son-Son and Dolphus, whose scheme to own the land is in keeping with what Eric Cheyfitz has identified as the colonial “dream of property-holding individualism” (63), are reconfigured as

invader and informant, thus evoking a neocoloniality grounded in the European arrival. Dolphus is dressed in the foreign fabric of the colonizer and both are alienated from the land they are observing by their association with conquest. Cassandra's critical gaze enacts an indigenous standpoint, conjuring a presence and perspective elided in contemporary extinction narratives. Her instinct gestures to the larger marvellous realism of the novel that casts doubt on colonial and patriarchal logics, both settler and arrivant, through women's preternatural senses.

Challenging a colonial law that furthers conquest, genocide, and extinction by acting to actually make people disappear—"Ti-Moun [Willive's father] just didn't understand that the law had decided he didn't exist" (Collins 51)—spirits refuse to vanish and instead emerge in connection with the women fighting patriarchal land expropriation. Having sold her portion of the land before Dolphus and Son-Son could misappropriate it, Mamag remains a chief thorn in Son-Son's side, and humiliates him during a public confrontation, by reminding him of the irony of his colonialist allegiance, given that he and all the mixed-blood Malheureuse people are "outside" to their white planter ancestor: "'You that so afraid bastard blood, she ask her brother, 'how you managing walking around every day with Malheureuse own in you veins? [...] If you is prince then you is pauper too'" (50). Thunder acknowledges that after Mamag has passed, she "wasn't really gone" because "Mamag's voice spoke through the howls in the night, or through the crickets singing in the darkness" (99). Mamag remains aligned in the landscape, defying death and extinction, alongside the Kalinago who churn up the ocean and cry in Carib's ear. Moreover, spirits appear in the old sugar mill "[a]s if the old copper vats that used to hold the cane juice in the old days were being tossed about by angry hands" (158). Readers are reminded of the vestiges of slavery, but also of Willive's work separating mace in the Nutmeg Pool. Willive, who as a child looks as though she held memories beyond her years (82), struggles with

her degraded inheritance, and tries in the novel to reclaim the family plot whilst pushing back against a government program that would see her permanently dispossessed. The narrative illustrates the decolonial grounding of both capitalism and socialism in world systems of coloniality, and which posits only decolonization as the path forward (Grosfoguel 219; Mignolo, “Geopolitics” 274). Thus, a line is drawn connecting land struggles from the indigenous Kalinago to the arrivant Malheureuse descendants and emphasising women’s roles in unsettling this conquest. By setting up the central conflict in the novel as a land dispute, framed by the narrative of an indigenous presence, and connecting that land to profligate spirits, *Colour* embraces feminist and decolonial textualities that engage marvellous realism in a broader sense of liberation.

Land struggle is implicit to *Song*, but so too is women’s centrality in turning away from, or looking beyond, colonial systems and their attendant patriarchy, which has in the case of Maracle’s novel, poisoned the community with a particular kind of violence against indigenous women. A conversation between Celia and her mother demonstrates the role that women play in social justice, which the narrative links to the land and its attendant spirits:

“Either I don’t know what I believe I knew, or we need a new word, a new law, a new response,” Momma says.

“Well, if a man batters or rapes some woman, he destroys her life and so he is destroyed by those who cherish her. If a man tortures some child, he should face torture.”

[...] She accepts Celia’s words.

This discussion compounds an earlier scene, when Celia’s sister Stacey searches for answers to the dilemma posed by Amos’s aggression against Stella and her daughter. “There is an old cedar

[by the river] that has escaped logging. It is big and round, and Stacey has taken to talking to it. Jacob stops the car and Stacey gets out. She lays a pinch of tobacco down, mumbling, ‘We could use some help’ to the cedar” (138). The crisis in the community cannot be solved by colonial laws, which have alienated the people from their spiritual practices. The women in Celia’s family demonstrate to Jacob that they must look elsewhere for guidance and justice, and in effect become the jurists that are needed to resolve the struggle. Their course of action purposefully confounds the “white town” legal system, while bringing about spiritual, social, and ethical resurgence among the indigenous characters. Where *Colour* identifies the problems of land dispossession and patriarchy in colonial legality, *Song* offers an alternative to settler colonial laws in domestic and spiritual realms, grounded in the resurgent and reconstructed decolonial knowledges of women in the community.

The feminist praxis of the novel, however, is not just about women appropriating male power; it reflects and engages with the more contemporary question of gender relations that underscores current feminist thought and decolonial indigenous practice. Women’s roles are certainly accentuated in the text, but so is that of Jacob, a representative of the future generation and a figure through which the novel considers the inheritance of knowledge, action, and spirituality. Jacob is seen as someone who is caught in the battle between Loyal and Restless, whom Restless tries to “lure” and “seduce” into becoming another Amos (123). Jacob resists this patriarchal path, pursues a spiritual journey grounded in the women’s leadership, and even participates in the enticement of Amos back to the village and to his death in the long house. Upon meeting Amos, Jacob “saunters over,” “gives Amos that smile again,” discusses what clothes make a man “sexy”; the narrator then states that “Jacob has him,” and Jacob himself proclaims, “He’s ours” after Celia and he have courted Amos in a bar (247-48). While Jacob is

ostensibly offering friendship more than a “honey trap,” the language of narration challenges colonial gender dichotomies and signifies Jacob as a (somewhat muted) two-spirited figure in order to serve the greater purpose of justice in the novel’s plot.

Unlike his cousin Jimmy, Celia’s son who has committed suicide, Jacob does not participate in any heterosexual relationship or procreate, and he resists the aggressive masculinity embodied by Amos. In this way, Jacob represents a new paradigm of gender that is embedded in both indigenous resurgence and liberation textualities. *Song* attempts not simply to replace patriarchal domination with matriarchal domination, but rather questions the notion of gendered domination going forward. Women undertake gendered roles, to be sure, and, while the portrayal of Jacob does not go as far as the “intentional erasure of heteronormative construction of the erotic as a way to create imaginative space for other gendered and relational possibilities” (Sy 191), he does reflect Anderson’s argument that “Indigenous feminism is about creating a new world out of the best of the old. Indigenous feminism is about honouring creation in all its forms, while also fostering the kind of critical thinking that will allow us to stay true to our traditional reverence for life” (“Affirmations” 89). The novel stands apart from simplistic representations by showing the mingling of genders in Celia’s family and emphasizing a gender diversity, accentuated by Jacob (and the lesbian couple Rena and Judy), that does not destroy traditional gendered roles as they exist within the Stó:lō culture of the text, but rather destroys the colonial patriarchal binary by moving beyond the heteronormative to include multiple possibilities. In this way, the novel embraces a decolonial feminism that rejects a patriarchal nationalism in favour of a gender-fluid resurgence.

The feminism of *Song* is about decentring colonial gender boundaries as much as it is about depicting women’s role in atypical resistance struggles. Where a patriarchal nationalism

sees the colonial contest as a matter for men, within a masculine-dominated battle that does not challenge colonialism's gendered hierarchies, *Song* reroutes the struggle to the traditional arenas of women—the domestic, the spiritual—and brings men and boys into those arenas. Celia's stepfather (and uncle) Ned advises Steve, a love interest of Stacey from white town, ““This clutch of women is full of every possible medicine; if you know your light isn't always shining, you just learn to move along with the rhythm they set in motion and wait for the story to unfold...”” (203). Ned expresses the alternative set of relations of the novel's liberation textualities, which posits women as healers and leaders in a realm outside of traditional spheres of uprising. Through the lens of marvellous realism, the significance of women's spiritual knowledge and acumen in the text cannot be overstated. The narrator announces Celia's power early on: “I know she is a seer. Few people actually believe in seers, but I am mink—the shape-shifter, the people's primary witness. I know things others don't” (5). Like Carib, Celia is infused with a greater spiritual significance in the people's struggle for liberation. Her visions are full of the Nuu'chalnuth history that sets the plot in motion and frames the colonization of the Stó:lō community.

Also like Carib, Celia is (now) childless and associated with madness: ““I'm delusional,” she complains out loud. The delusions convinced her family and her fellow villagers that she was half-crazed; even in her own mind they mark her as odd” (11). Celia is an outsider who must bridge the “real world” of oppression and spiritual vacuum with the visionary world of Restless and Loyal and the longhouse and the ancestors. “*Celia is on her way,*” the narrator explains of Celia's visions. “*She doesn't know she has shifted direction, but there it is, she is on her way home to the old ways*” (64, emphasis in original). Celia, marked by colonial patriarchy's misunderstanding of women and spirituality—a husbandless woman to whom “[h]unger and

poverty are not strangers,” who, “[s]ince her son’s death,” can only take pleasure in “seeing chaos,” (8-9), an odd woman with “delusions”—emerges through the narrative arc as both an unlikely “commander” (140) and, ultimately, takes her place among the grandmothers and elders of the village (267). Her grim conclusion that Amos’s death has “been good for the village” signifies a resurgence of a transformed resistance, one that is atypical; it underscores the significance of spiritual practice and centralizes the eradication of patriarchal oppression as key to liberation.

The efficacy of the women’s (and Jacob’s) conjuration that may or may not have killed Amos is reinforced by the response of the settler colonial legal apparatus. “Witchcraft, mumbo jumbo, voodoo, cultism were being whispered throughout the town. White town was terrified at the power that house seemed to have” (258). The police know that Amos and his friend have died and that the longhouse is involved, that “[t]his was murder” (257), but of course they come for the men in the village and cannot make a charge stick because the act is beyond the corporeal beliefs of the settler colony: “the town came alive with the fear of sorcery and witchcraft. No one said it, but it could be heard in the hushed terror of the tone used when they said ‘criminal negligence causing death.’ This dancing and singing stuff was a way to kill people. ‘Bad medicine’ was being whispered everywhere throughout the village and the town” (259). The police fail to associate any of this with the women at its centre, even though there is the gesture toward the femininity of “singing and dancing,” derided as both colloquial “native” practice and womanly behaviour unsuitable to the colonial male. The longhouse ceremony is therefore doubly resistant, undermining colonial patriarchy and reinscribing their place among the village’s agents of liberation, with the intonations of witchcraft and sorcery exerting narrational and social power

in the novel. In both texts, then, spirits wield the power of social transformation in ways that that neo/colonial apparatuses fail to see but which are active in the present and not relics of the past.

### **Aesthetics: Images and Incantations**

Rather than acting in propagandistic or utilitarian ways, literature explores the difficult and uneasy atmosphere of political struggle, reimagining and representing its complexity, its horror, and its beauty. Literary texts are affective because they are infused with the realities of cultural, social, domestic, spiritual, and political life, but they are also woven with the constructed image, the marginalized voice, and the startling tone; simultaneously recognizable and strange. As Shira Wolosky has argued, “[i]nstead ... of defining aesthetics in exclusionary terms—whether these be historicist or formalist—we can think of aesthetics as a domain of mutual interrelationship among the variable functions that go into its constitution and experience ... as the *inclusion* of the multiple terms of speaker and audience, contact and context in their many aspects and dimensions” (571). In the case of resistance novels, examining their narrative textuality includes social and political dimensions but this need not supersede aesthetics. Part of the fallacy of relegating “women’s” texts to the bastion of formal innovation, identified by Scott, is the implication that form has no political relevance or is not infused with “multiple domains” (Wolosky 572).

This cleavage of aesthetics and politics results largely from the historical formulation of art as divorced from (or even antithetical to) ethics or social struggle. Aestheticists like Nicolas Shrimpton insist that we esteem “beauty”—the subjectivity of which is erased in the discourse—without articulating why art in and of itself is important or valuable.

A work of art which is offered or received as ‘art’ has...an obligation to be beautiful (or sublime or grotesque, all these terms involving a notion of pleasure). It has no obligation to be either true or morally good, those being the distinctive concerns of logic and ethics .... Works of art ... can perfectly well incorporate moral or political or religious or social issues: writers and painters make patterns out of ideas as well as out of syllables and brush strokes. But they don’t have to, and even when they do the pattern is more important than the ideas as such. (13)

How then do we define a work as beautiful? What makes the pattern “important?” Its value, I would argue, is in its ability to affect, to conjure emotion and experience and ideas in a way that moves readers in some way. And while that arousal comes from the context of the reader, to some degree, the textuality of a piece is the primary site of invocation and analysis. Rather than existing as an abstraction, “beauty” lies in the rendering of perceptible (or at least decipherable) emotivity that connects in some way to a reader’s understanding of social, cultural, spiritual, or political life. Context, as it were, pervades the text. My concept of liberation textualities reflects this infusion perhaps more pointedly. By focusing simultaneously on the “mundane” and the supernatural, resistance literature featuring domestic as well as spiritual themes directly challenges formalist aesthetics. Domestic narratives are elevated to national, global, or otherwise public concerns; and spirituality—rather than being seen as inaccessible and mysteriously omniscient—is connected with the social struggles of the people, both in their homes and the streets. Thus, not only are “ideas” always and already present in the text, but the very significance of the piece is the bringing together of the “moral” with the textual in order to create the “beautiful.”

*Colour*'s incantatory, almost fragmented, portrait of spiritual presences, indigenous survivance, social and political confrontation is rendered in the haunting invocation and repetition of words that reveal the deep stakes of the story: blood, law, confusion, and spirit; these words permeate the text, as does the prophetic incantation: "Blood in the north, blood to come in the south, and the blue crying red in between" (1). "Blood" marks the history and the present of the novel, and is soaked into the very waters that surround the island. Blood also courses through the Malheureuse family from European and African progenitors; and indigenous blood may or may not flow through Carib's veins. Blood evokes ancestry and violence, and is linked to essentialized ideas about race. But it is also a marker of violence and Collins's constant use of blood as a key word serves as a reminder that erasure of indigenous peoples resulted in bloodletting which still mars the land, and which is signified by the spirits that inhabit Paz and refuse to be erased. Blood refers to women's Biblical-decreed oppression, and forces the blue of the sea—the source of the European invader, the enslaved African, and the indentured Asian—to change colour through the eyes of indigenous peoples.

"Law" is associated with coloniality and patriarchy through its mobilization against the unmarried women of the Malheureuse family; law itself is an institutional discourse that is associated with rulers, with order, and with a hegemonic system that disavows resurgence, revolution, and liberation. Law in this text stands in contrast to the spirit of the women it oppresses, and its existential violence against those born out of wedlock that defies blood ties it chooses not to recognize. The law in Paz, like much of the Caribbean, is colonial in origin but administered by a postcolonial figure. "Law is law" are the words that open a key chapter depicting the confrontation between Mamag and Son-Son (49), a gendered fight about the nature of re-colonization in Paz. Law also stands in for the rational and the corporeal—even though it

behaves in irrational ways, refusing to acknowledge the flesh and blood of a human being because of social circumstances—whilst attempting to be definitive and universal as the landscape and its spirits remain pluriversal and troublesome. Law is flawed and failed in the narrative, and secondary to the needs and desires of the people; the law inflicts death instead of peace, as when Ti-Moun is beaten and later dies because he refuses to vacate the expropriated land (58; 72). Law is used in the novel as a counterpoint to blood, as a realist trope in contest with the magic associated with blood.

“Confusion” troubles the conflicts of blood and law, the walls of physicality that separate the magic from the real, the arrivant from the indigenous, and the men from the women. Confusion and ambiguity are particularly associated with land in the novel—land confusion is the predominant term repeated again and against by the wiser characters. Carib observes: “When people having confusion over boundary in land, once one could remember where mortelle plant as a boundary, no need to shout. Confusion done. Mortelle root never die” (180). Paz’s flora provides a solution to conflict that the law cannot; the law relies on erasure, on death, on vanishing to assert its reconfigured coloniality. Confusion is both injustice, in the case of the Malheureuse land dispute, and complication, in the case of genealogy, and questioning, in the case for what is real and what is spirit. The novel emphasizes the linkages between confusion and domination, as it is only the figures of patriarchy and coloniality, such as Son-Son, who are “confused,” whereas Carib, Mamag, Cassandra, and Willive exude clarity and wisdom, while the narrators startle readers with visions of stories travelling in the wind, or a sea churning in rage, or a hopeless infant death on a short ferry ride over an underwater volcano. Confusion in the novel serves to undermine the clarity of social struggle, complicating it with symbolic and supernatural occurrences which double down on decoloniality but offer few simple pathways to liberation.

Lastly, “spirit” is repeated to connect historical injustices to present-day ones, and to signify a metaphysical world beyond that of the European inheritance. Mamag’s spirit remains in the land, it does not ascend to heaven or fall into hell, and it is recognizable to Thunder (99). The spirits of the Kalinago alternately speak gently to Carib (5) or scream into her head (177). Spirits inhabit weather patterns and storms (186)—speaking to Thunder across the trajectory of his family from its origins—and express vexation with political developments (191; 212). Spirits transform the neocoloniality of arrivant society into one better attuned with indigenous American survivance, in a spiritual formation that extends beyond the physical realm and yet arises into modern day Paz through the seemingly immortal Carib and the frenzy of spectres that she channels into the minds of the people. Spirits call the people’s attention to the sugar mill (a signifier of slavery) and to the Leaper’s hill (a signifier of genocide). Spirits conjoin indigenous and arrivant histories and struggles in an attempt to guide Paz toward a more comprehensive liberation.

*Colour*’s incantatory rhythm contributes to the ethereal tone of the novel. Susan Meltzer calls the narration and dialogue of the novel “a Creole-like grapholect ... that seeks to mimic the sound of island speech” (88); repetition and the use of arrivant linguistics evokes a ceremonial intonation, which emphasizes the spiritual aspects of the story and underscores its marvellous elements. The narration uses myth and folklore, such as the anthropomorphic political commentary of Monkey and Crapaud (18), to invigorate the landscape and give the reader a deeper sense of the issues at stake in the story. Storytelling is emphasised by the characters and reflected in the lyrical speech of the narrators. Carib advises on the importance of telling Thunder “everything you know” to cure his fear of the storm inside of him (14); Mamag undermines the deception that Son-Son uses to justify his theft of the land from the family by

reminding him that he “can’t talk that nonsense to people right inside the family ... ” (50). The shifts in narrative voice are both distinct and at times unidentifiable. Some voices are written in foreign English—“Carib walked back towards the cemetery, talking conversationally” (1)—and at others in an arrivant voice—“One child they have, Jim-Bull and his wife, and to tell you the truth, they didn’t want more. [...] And from the time he born their little boy looking like he was here before. Look at that face, people saying. That not no little child all-you have there, nuh. Is a old, old man” (21). The novel never identifies whether the narration is an extradiegetic omniscient, or is Carib, Mamag, or Willive; at various points, it could be any of these. The text does not limit itself to the political machinations of a single struggle, but instead builds a spiritual architecture around its characters, its plot, and its social milieu in order to draw political struggle into a larger spiritual contemplation. Using various styles and voices, with an emphasis on storytelling, the narrative shifts the standpoint from the actions of the principal government, national, or revolutionary players toward the everyday struggles of the people and situates those struggles within a world with a pervasive spiritual presence.

Alongside the eerie tone of the novel is its affective mood. Within a revolutionary context, emotion is typically an unacknowledged motivator for social transformation that must be suppressed in order to forge ahead with direct actions and militant practices. Emotion is, of course, highly gendered; it is associated with femininity and therefore undesirable in a patriarchal framework that sees revolutionaries as soldiers. As Naimo Greyser has argued, “[f]emininity continues to be associated with emotion in the public sphere and, partly as a result, is often called a number of too-familiar names: angry, hating, irrational, and hysterical” (90). This othering of emotion is a plight shared with the magical and spiritual: that which cannot be contained by the rational, “realist” world and is therefore out of place on the masculinist

vanguard of liberation. In an indigenous context, Leanne Simpson refers to “heart knowledge,” which “represents our emotional intelligence, and intelligence that traditionally was balanced with physical, intellectual, and spiritual intelligence to create a fully embodied way of being in the world” (94). *Colour* shapes the patriarchal neocoloniality of the Malheureuse land struggle in a profound sadness by showing how Uncle Son-Son—who used to tell his “illegal” nephews ’nancy stories and hold their hands on the way to school—sees to it that one of them, Thunder’s grandfather Ti-Moun, is left “bleeding and unconscious” after he defies Son-Son’s order to leave the land (Collins 58). As the reader realizes that a beloved uncle has turned would-be murderer over land, the spiritual framework of the novel cries out from the page. Son-Son’s evil—which verges on madness, when confronted by Mamag, he is “so vex he dancing like a person in a tac-tac nest” (50)—Ti-Moun’s defeat, and Thunder’s pervasive association with fear, when contrasted with the spiritual, rhetorical, and political prowess of Carib, Mamag, and Willive, challenge dominant gendered norms about emotion whilst encouraging the reader to react emotionally to the details of the plot, to be reminded that injustice is affective. As Dian Million has argued, in the context of the emotional content of structural oppression, “colonialism is *felt* by those whose experience it is” (58, emphasis in original).

*Colour* links this counter-hegemonic emotional representation to spirituality by depicting spirits and marvellous elements of the novel as engaged with its more compelling moments. The attack on Ti-Moun is described thus:

Monkey began to chatter when the first planass landed. Crapaud’s eyes disappeared into the water when the blood began to flow. The breeze, rustling through the cocoa and nutmeg trees, sounded like rain. Crapaud heard what seemed to be running footsteps, but there was no pack of dogs and runaway

dashing into the mountains. The mountain whispered its magic to itself. And Ajakbe's mother wailed in the wind. (Collins 58)

Here the narrative's magic speaks directly to the reader, providing a chorus for emotional response, but also connecting a physical struggle to a spiritual world. The anthropomorphic presences and the fearsome lajabless, Ajakbe's mother (65), bear witness, cry out, signify history—chasing dogs is a frequent motif in slave rebellion and marronage—and recalibrate the depiction of a violent assault within a broader plane. By juxtaposing Ti-Moun's childhood analepsis with the spiritual response to the attack on him, readers are allied emotionally with marvellous elements that might otherwise estrange them.

In *Song*, the narrative emphasis on spirituality that counteracts the division and disconnection of the colonial matrix of power is reflected in the novel's linguistic evocation of images that shift the reader beyond the "known" world of settler colonial Canada. The repetitive use of "loyal" and "restless" as the names of the two snake heads evokes the complicated nature of indigenous resurgence, while the narrator's recurring use of "bones" and the power of "story" helps signify various aspects of liberation practice that are not traditionally acknowledged. The word "loyal" has the paradoxical signification of both allegiance to a colonial power and a deeper connection to one's indigenous ancestral cosmology. Loyal, as a character, is both a complicit observer of the destructive nature of Restless, but also remains faithful to the old ways, and to once again becoming the "protector" of the people (Maracle 234). Here loyal as a term comes to represent affiliation with indigenous traditions, a trace that links the "forgotten" past with the active present. Rather than signalling an association with the invader's Crown, loyalty to ancient practices and beliefs is heralded by the repetitive use of Loyal throughout the text, in effect reclaiming it for what Simpson describes as "the best practices of our traditional cultures,

knowledge systems and life ways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context within which they were originally generated” (18). Thus, like *Colour*, the text offers up the notion of resurgence as a dormant spirituality that was never fully erased or eradicated by coloniality. Loyalty comes to mean knowledge that may be buried but is, in fact, restless in its push back into the contemporary period.

Restless, too, is a complication that the novel deftly applies to a transformed resistance practice. Liberation can be associated with the people’s restlessness, a first step in Coulthard’s radical transformation of the coloniality of power (157). Restlessness is also key to Frantz Fanon’s progression of literary resistance: “[i]n the second phase [of three], the native is disturbed” (179). It is a liminal state, one in which the yoke remains but it is fraying. Colonial settlement itself is challenged by the idea of restlessness, the inability to fully neutralize the people or eradicate them from the land. In *Song*, Restless is also the force of aggression and horror that infuses the Stó:lō community with violence against women and children. Restless inheres in alcohol, rage, beatings, and environmental destruction. His anger at the effects of colonialism has turned him monstrous, working his misery upon the people of the village and not the white settler apparatus that has dislocated them from their spiritual beliefs in the first place. Restlessness also signifies a sense of being trapped; restlessness is not freedom, but the ache for it, a pain that is often misdirected and misguided. *Song* offers readers the powerful nature of restlessness, while also encapsulating its dangers, and contextualizing the sources of pain from which restlessness emanates. In this way, restless figures are neither condemned nor reified; they exist within the complications of a colonized world and represent a nascent resurgent indigenous spirituality.

Repeated references to bones, of both the living and the dead, challenge dominant notions about the finality of death and what constitutes the afterlife. Agitated bones of the ancestors haunt the narrative and Celia at the beginning of the novel; but they are also represented in a long-standing struggle for cultural and spiritual connection. “The old bones rattle louder as they get closer to the new bones. They sing and pray, pushing for the surface as they grow more concerned about the influence of the enraged younger bones. The old bones have no idea how to fix what has happened, but they are certain they have the song to fix it” (Maracle 84). Bones hold cultural memory and are faced with the anger of the more recent dead, who have suffered more acutely under the yoke of coloniality. Rather than signifying an end to life, they, like Carib, are aligned with the resurgent notion of survivance; they harken back to precolonial times but exist in the present, traversing time and location. Bones are referred to in this novel as a demonstration of magic’s emotional and ethical presence in the “real” world.

The narrative voice in *Song* breaches the marvellous and realist realms with ease, conflating them in spatial vision of the novel. Mink, the alternately omniscient and self-referential narrator, establishes a fetid setting before easily drawing the reader into the novel’s marvellous world:

No one comes here anymore, just me. I can’t seem to resist returning to the place where everyone died. [...] The bones lie naked underneath the rotted weavings. Under these the dead rot; even after all this time, the smell of them comingles with the mouldering blankets and mats. The scent is horrific; mould, flesh, and goat fibre rot fill the house. The bones of the dead loathe their own stench. (1-2)

The narrative voice contemplates the state of death in vivid terms, but just as easily reminds us that death does not mean dead in the colonial sense; Mink not only constructs the setting for the

reader, but guides Celia's visions toward the historical disjuncture that is at the root cause of the oppression within her community. Narrative authority transforms arbitrarily demarcated realms, the living and the dead, into a communal history, contextualizing the events of the plot in a larger framework of knowledge that contests a void enforced by coloniality: the history of the longhouse, the restlessness of the bones, Celia's turn away from her seer abilities—each of these are rendered part of a landscape that is populated by spirits, ancestors, gods, and other unseen forces that form the spiritual survivance at the heart of the novel. The narration that precedes Jacob's own resurgence contrasts with the rotting imagery of the novel's opening: "The pale blue under gold fires the sky. The sun rises to a bright gold, no red, no orange, no other colour to taint its gold. The purity of its light bathes the mountains. Jacob breathes in the sight of the sun fighting with the overwhelming dark of night" (177). The bridging of these two spheres is key to the narrative work of the text to aestheticize the dreadfulness of coloniality within the cosmic elegance of the novel's spiritual landscape.

*Song's* depiction of the violence experienced by indigenous women in North America is at the heart of its emotional resonance for readers. Celia and her kin coalesce around the appalling experience of Stella and her young daughter Shelley, in both white town and at the hands of Amos in the Stó:lō village, which speaks graphically to the facts behind national calls for attention to missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada, to the overlooked lives that are the cost of coloniality, and to the machinations of neocoloniality. By seeing Stella's dream of "soft lace curtains, of white countertops, of pretty blankets, of dresses" of "a softer life" turned into degradation, sex work, physical and psychological pain, abuse, and addiction, the notion that the economic uplift associated with marrying a white man is violently contradicted: "There was no softness. She looked everywhere for it. It slipped through her fingers the moment she turned

around. She convinced herself she would have hardness then, raw hardness, brutal hardness, and she hunted it down” (209). The struggles of indigenous women are wrought painfully through the narrative, particularly as Jacob bears unwilling witness to the attacks upon Shelley:

The sound of a little girl whimpering and begging nips at Jacob’s ear and freezes his feet. A man’s voice punctuates the pauses between her whimpers and the pleading phrases.

“No. Please. No.”

The interplay of snarling and wicked laughter behind the pleas and whimpers weakens Jacobs’s legs. (113)

*Song* examines the oppression of indigenous women through the various colonial and patriarchal contexts discussed here, and aestheticizes the brutality they face in the absence of spiritual and domestic liberation. Simpson links the cycle of oppression to a failure to see the variety of resistances that are required and undertaken by indigenous peoples:

Shame traps us individually and collectively into the victimry of colonial assault, and travels through the generations, accumulating and manifesting itself in new and more insidious ways in each re-generation. The cycles of shame we are cognitively locked into is in part perpetuated and maintained by western theoretical constructions of ‘resistance,’ ‘mobilization’ and ‘social movements,’ by defining what is and is not considered. (15)

The interaction between coloniality, shame, and violence within the village is confronted by *Song*’s transformative view of what constitutes resistance. The novel shows a community, led by the vision and visions of women, tapping into a resurgent energy that exists within the home, and through a magic realism that contests an easy reading of liberation practice. Moving deftly into

the pain and loss experience by its characters, and through a narration that accepts and emphasizes the spiritual world's role in decoloniality, this text shifts dominant paradigms about nation and political change that are governed by colonial and patriarchal ideas.

## Conclusion

*The Colour of Forgetting* transforms traditional notions of resistance literature through the lenses of decoloniality, feminism, and aesthetics by aligning with Simpson's expression of indigenous theoretical frameworks: "the spiritual world is alive and influencing; colonialism is contested; and storytelling, or 'narrative imagination,' is a tool to vision other existences outside of the current ones by critiquing and analyzing the current state of affairs, but also by dreaming and visioning other realities" (40). The novel achieves this not simply by featuring a (potentially) indigenous survivant character, but in using marvellous realism to reassemble the neocolonial world in which the text is set and gesturing toward a resurgent, complex, and interconnected indigenous standpoint that is often absent from Caribbean literary texts and the dominant discourse of indigeneity that pervades both capitalist and socialist arrivant political institutions. *Colour* engages with both historical and contemporary inequalities, critiques outdated and incomplete nationalist tactics, and connects anticolonial struggle to decoloniality and indigenous critical praxis that underscores the continuing domination of, in particular, gendered hierarchies.

*Celia's Song* redirects traditional notions of indigenous sovereignty and reconciliation to a decolonial feminist aesthetics that is in keeping with Coulthard's assertion that patriarchal "violence must be stopped in its overt forms, but we must also stop practicing it in its more subtle expressions—in our daily relationships and practices in the home, workplaces, and

offices, governance institutions, and, crucially, in our practices of *cultural resurgence*” (178, emphasis in original). *Song* offers a pathway to liberation even more so than *Colour*, which looks more critically at the misunderstood systems of oppression which hinder liberation struggle. *Song*, by contrast, examines the nature of liberation itself through the lens of spirituality. The novel draws upon indigenous belief and cosmologies in order to confront contemporary inequalities in an exquisite rendering of marvellous realism: one that unsettles the certainty of political practices and embraces spiritual ambiguity, the centrality of gender, and the legitimacy of literature in anticolonial struggle.

Taken together, both of these novels interject in the field of resistance literature in important ways. These texts remap the legal, cultural, and political frameworks of the neocolonial spaces that make up their settings by focusing on that which is typically ignored or denigrated: domestic and spiritual realms; they enact a transformative marvellous realism that goes beyond spectacle or estrangement to posit a spiritual influence in the lives of their characters and the worlds of their readers; and they resituate the terms of resistance struggle by emphasizing a turn away from the coloniality of nationalism and patriarchy, away from ideas of freedom that around bound up with European rationality, and away from any practice of independence that is not bound up with decolonization. Where *Colour* turns to the traces of indigenous presence that undermine the coloniality of arrivant settler society, *Song* reinvigorates the spiritual memory of indigenous peoples to confront the violence of coloniality under white settler colonialism. Together, these works reconstruct the narrative of resistance in a way that moves through and beyond early theoretical configurations that limited practices of resistance to Eurocentrically-defined social movements.

As with most studies of fiction, this chapter has focused a great deal on character, narrative, and theme in its exploration of novels as liberation textualities. In the following chapter, I turn to poetry and poetics, a much more fragmented, symbolic, and figurative form, and also one associated with liberation struggle largely in its most didactic and polemic manifestations. And yet, poetry is also most apt for any scholarly inquiry that attempts to destabilize established paradigms. The novels in this chapter are both conventional and not, given their structures, their foci, and their efficacy in transforming ideas of resistance literature; the poetry of the following chapters has been traditionally welcomed by resistance movements, but also performs an unusual function by contesting the very political notions of those who would most readily accept and embrace them. Due perhaps to their magic and domestic emphasis, *Song* and *Colour* have not yet enjoyed widespread acceptance as “political” novels. Hopefully, my examination of them will help demonstrate their significance to all of us struggling against coloniality, on whatever level we can and are able to do so.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Resituating Resistance: The Body Poetics of Mahadai Das and Chrystos**

[I]n the body's innate propensity, through its autonomous forms of being, to reinstate ways of knowing and to escape cognitive forms of control, it is perhaps closer to the literary than [it is to] most other disciplines. In confronting us with the legible materiality of the body, literature often provides powerful forms of resistance to socially instituted perceptions and demands.

—David Hillman and Ulrika Maude,

*Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* (4)

Moving from marvel and spirituality to the landscape of the body as a site of liberation textualities, the following chapter explores the difficult dialogue between poetry and resistance. On the one hand, poets express pride in the form's rhetorical abilities, its impulses to subvert, unsettle, and deconstruct dominant discourses; on the other, traditional resistance theorists tend to elide emphasis on symbol, figurative language, personal concerns, and interiority, suggesting that such things dampen an explicitly oppositional message. The focus on atmosphere, emotion, diction, grammatology, and texture are often too subtle for the polemics of resistance literature, of efforts to shore up those who are "adherents and partisans of given organizations with national identities" (Harlow 46). The distillation of meaning complicates ideas, morality, and arguments;

poems provide critique as much as bluster, and disrupt an easy pathway to revolutionary victory. As with other chapters, my goal is not to reify the “cult of *bienséance* ... or academic objectivity traditionally cultivated in western literary or academic establishments” (Harlow 54), but rather to extend the boundaries of resistance literature to include those complex and ambiguous renderings, and broaden the scope of liberation practice to encompass the lived experiences of all those who fight structures of oppression on a daily basis.

Chrystos (Menomenee) and Mahadai Das (Guyana) share a reputation for sometimes nakedly political poetry, but also for reflection on social justice practice that is transgressive and defiant. In a review of Chrystos’s *oeuvre*, Victoria Brehm argues that the poet is “often anthologized piecemeal: as an American Indian protest poet, as a Lesbian, as an apologist for the underclass and discriminated against of any race other than white, as an environmentalist” (73). Donelle N. Dreese, in “Reterritorializations of Self and Place in the Poetry of Chrystos,” claims that “Chrystos deliberately establishes a threatening relationship with particular members of her audience and characters in her poems knowing that survival on her battlefield entails destroying that which has armed oppression” (42). In an article in *Anthurium*, Joy Mahabir argues that Das’s poetry “emphasizes those capitalist relations that exploit women’s labour” (11). According to Denise De Caires Narain Gurnah, in the introduction to the collected works of Das, *A Leaf in His Ear*, Das’s poetry “charts from nationalism to disillusionment” and “assume[s] an active visionary role for the poet as well as a clear sense of the constituency being addressed[:] ... Guyana’s land and people following independence from colonial rule” (12; 13). Both poets have produced work that not only challenges dominant structures, but looks askance at those who claim to fight for freedom, and conjures disappointment in those who use revolutionary methods to reinscribe old foes: coloniality and patriarchy; and they do so through poetry, that “most

rebellious and unconventional of forms, constantly seeking new breakwaters and unearthing strange harmonies” (Espinet xxi), that figurative, symbolic, affective, aesthetic mode that confounds easy interpretation.

In this chapter, I examine works in two collections, Das’s *A Leaf in His Ear* and Chrystos’s *Not Vanishing*,<sup>22</sup> through the representation of the body in both texts. Numerous studies have been produced which discuss the body in literature and literary theory, including an increased interest in the subject with regard to Caribbean literature, such as Rosamond S. King’s *Island Bodies* (2014) and Tanya L. Shields’s *Bodies and Bones* (2014). This chapter does not purport to intervene profoundly in that field; however, the bodies in the collections I examine are sites upon which resistance struggle is decolonized, feminized, and aestheticized. For example, Dreese’s discussion of Chrystos divides the poems in *Not Vanishing* into a “stark contrast between the love poems ... and the poems of resistance” (45), thus reproducing a somewhat false dichotomy that sidelines sexual arenas in liberation struggle. The body provides an opportunity to see the liberating potential in these unsung resistance texts, to appreciate the way these poets defy easy boundaries of personal and political, and underscore the importance of critique in enacting resistance. Both authors lay their poetic concerns over bodies in a palimpsestic way, where the body is haunted by politics and vice versa. Pain, anger, and disappointment are overriding themes linked to the bodies in these texts, but so too are beauty and hope. Together, poems in these collections confound the polemic of traditional resistance literature in order to demonstrate that social transformation has many spheres, and, in particular, that the (feminine, queer, sickly, dying, or energized) body can act as metaphor, as territory, as ideology, and voice to express liberation textualities.

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<sup>22</sup> All poems examined will be from these two collections, unless otherwise noted.

Bodies are sites of multiplicity, often central to oppression and exploitation, in addition to being loci of pleasure and freedom. They are significant places of politics and feeling, and thus lend themselves well to the contours of critique that inhere in liberation textualities. The authors considered here represent bodies as complex figurations, sometimes chained and restrained, other times inconvenient and bothersome, and at yet other times formidable and beautiful. As symbols, reminders, textures, and settings, bodies are crucial to the transformed resistance theory that liberation textualities establishes. King reminds readers at the outset of her book that

The Caribbean body has consistently been exploited for its labour, in previous centuries through slavery and indentureship, and more recently through cheap labour for multinational corporations ... [and] sexual labour [and] sexual tourism. But Caribbean people have persistently used their own bodies for pleasure as well as work. (1)

Indigenous bodies are often signified through their absence, or, when present, through their associations with “savage” practices and the natural world, within a static and reductive “past” left behind by modernity and urbanization.

Caribbean and Indigenous North American bodies are central to public protest, where activists place their bodies in front of colonial encroachments or signal their desire to cast the colonizer out with public demonstrations and interventions, such as the Trinidadian black power marches or the Mohawk land rights intervention at Kanesatake/Oka. Leanne Simpson (Nishnaabeg), in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, speaks of “heart knowledge,” linking intellectual and “emotional intelligence, an intelligence that traditionally was balanced with physical, intellectual and spiritual intelligence to create a fully embodied way of being in the world” (94). The body is vital to this concept, which Simpson maintains is fundamental to

indigenous resurgence and other forms of decolonial liberation. Bodies are therefore implicated in traditional resistance theory, linked to nationalist struggle and liberation textualities, and connected to spiritual, personal, and domestic decolonization.

Poetry is an important medium through which to join the body with liberation textualities, with poetry's shifting and uneasy distillations of ideas that make polemic resistance theorists uneasy. Poetry can certainly be strident, but also relies on figurative language, opaque symbols, fluid and uncertain voices, and unrestricted musicality that confound easy dichotomies or binaries about protest, struggle, or liberation. Poetry is better suited to refraction than to conflation and thus challenges the dominant paradigm of what is considered resistance. Terry Eagleton argues in *How to Read a Poem* (2007) that "[p]oems are moral statements ... not because they launch stringent judgements according to some code, but because they deal in human values, meanings and purposes" (29). This morality, in poetry, is bound up with its restless form, in which the author is structurally expected to play with and defy (in the case of free verse at least) the constructions of the prose line (Eagleton 25). Poetry therefore coalesces with Shield's contention that "bodies and bones [are] vivid reminder[s] of the ways in which Caribbean bodies matter; how the tensions that arise in and between those gendered, classed, coloured, and sexualized bodies alter, sometimes disappear, and often are reshuffled, lost, and reclaimed" (2). As Dean Rader notes in *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (2011), "poetic form also means liberation from larger notions of identity limitations that attempt to circumvent Native independence. Resistance to generic assimilation is neither futile nor fanciful; it is a means and mode of sovereignty" (127-28). These boundary-resisting configurations that link poetry to the body and resistance theory

are well-suited to an analysis that situates poets and poetry as sites of dissent in the representation of liberation struggle.

Biographical details about both poets can additionally offer some insight into their poems' role as dissenting resistance pieces. Das's critics often point to her involvement in and subsequent exile from the Guyana National Service (GNS) under the leadership of Forbes Burnham (Alves 211; Gurnah "Introduction" 12) as the source of the shift to disillusionment in her poetry. Chrystos's own voice is more readily available through the multiple interviews and public appearances in which she speaks directly to her participation in social struggle, the forging of political movements, and her assertions about the political value of art (Bealy), but she is also sharp in her critiques of those movements:

I feel I have failed utterly to affect social change, because there is still war, still rape, still prisons, still starvation, still clear cuts, still sexual abuse of children, still torture, still rampant injustice of all kinds. The world hasn't changed nearly enough to suit me, the Empress, as I joke. When I was young, I believed we (and there was a nation of us, then) would change the world. I didn't notice that many of us were there to get laid, dominate instead of cooperate, get back at indifferent parents, use drugs, etc. (qtd. in Richards n.p)

Situating Chrystos and Das in a liminal space of opposition to coloniality but critical of the forces that mobilized to confront oppression in their respective social contexts gives us some insight into the politics of their aesthetics, but the stronger evidence lies on their pages, in their constructions of textualities, in the bodies of and in their poetry.

Even in their most nakedly political poetry, both poets spatialize resistance through the body. Das's poems from *I Want to be a Poetess of My People* (1976, rev. ed. 1977), from which

the poems in the first section of *Leaf* are taken, are mired in nationalist spirit, to the point of being “embarrassing” to some contemporary critics (Capildeo n.p.), and establish her as a partisan poet whose speaker’s voice is linked not only to the 1966 movement for independence from Britain led by Burnham but also to those later outraged by his questionable political maneuvers in the late 1970s (Macpherson 488). Das’s anticolonial and anti-neocolonial politics are reflected in the form and content of many poems in that first published collection; but it is evident that even in her most strident and patriotic voice, the collective freedom envisioned by the speaker runs through that most derided realm, the personal, of which the body provides a constant symbolic representation.

In “Militant,” the body is implicated in the speaker’s political awakening, commitment to the struggle, and the very actions she will undertake in the name of the revolution. In the first stanza, the speaker evokes the physical act of marching and links it to a conjoining of body and spirit: “I want my blood to churn/ Change! Change! Change! / March!” (39). The image, which is presented just below the lines, “I want to march in my revolution / I want to march with my brothers and sisters / Revolution firing my song of freedom” shows the body’s participation and response to struggle. “Militant” is written in the voice of a radical, brimming with passion and conviction and whose body—blood, hands, feet—is happily enlisted in the revolution. Political awakening is a corporeal act, vocal and visceral. Even though the assertive tone and steady chanting beats of the poem are in keeping with traditional resistance poetry, Das’s insertion of the bodily presence through “Militant” reminds readers of the human being within the movement. The last two stanzas of the poem reinforce this belonging through the use of the body to both represent land and act as a site of refusal, resistance, and rebirth. “In our veins run atoms of gall, / Atoms of gall, / Cane-sugar’s ever-running historic stream” (40). The excreting pustule

is evoked as coursing beneath the surface, a manifestation of the brutality of the plantation at the ready to coalesce and push forward into the narrative of struggle. As the poem progresses, the speaker's "I" overtakes the collectivized "We are the army / We are the people / We are Guyana marching for change" and asserts an individual identity within that greater revolutionary body.

Das achieves this identity formation through the speaker's identification with various non-traditional "militant" roles: singer and writer. Whilst the first stanza uses recognizable imagery such as marching, "the people," and an "army," the next two focus on song and the written word. "Singer I am" has replaced "Militant I am." Not that militant and singer are mutually exclusive by any means, but rather the speaker defines for herself a role that is unusual among modern social movement figures. The body produces song and the choral repetition of many lines in the poem reflects its song-like quality. Song is, like political awakening, connected to the body in the lines "I want the notes to climb Pakaraima's peaks, / Spread like her stars o'er Kimbia's peaks, / Grow, like seeds, in our people's hearts," evoking powerful images of land, reflecting Shields's contention that "[t]he ways in which bodies belong to land, to communities, and to nations manifest in many respects, but the core idea is one of connection" (Shields 7). When the speaker longs to "clench the stain of my earth in my palms," she affirms the body's assertion of a land-based resistance: "My earth, / My land, / My country" (Das 40). The vocal sounds and tactile sensation coupled with the emotional responses to both are connected to symbols of territorial anticolonialism alongside a renewed and refreshed enthusiasm for social transformation.

The roles that Das's awakening speaker seeks within the revolution are atypical and associated with the body, either through implication or an explicit connection by the speaker. Song, produced by the orality of the body and received by its auditory receptors, leads to affect,

which reinforces the link between politics and blood, between the mind and the flesh. In the third stanza, which opens with “Writer I am,” the speaker declares “I want my words scorching pages / Burning tongues.” This association between the content of her writing and its physical communication or reception further reinforces the body’s role in this speaker’s radical consciousness. The fourth stanza, beginning with “Dancer I am” makes the most explicit representations of the body in relation to resistance. Dancing becomes an explicit act of defiance that must move through “patterns of pain / Beaded to rooted, furrowed brows / of our sons of the land” (40). Resistance, oppression, and the emotional costs of both are thus embedded in the dancing militant Das’s speaker longs to become. Far from exposing an embarrassing nationalism in Das’s work, “Militant” demonstrates the emotional and physical engagement involved in resistance. The poet uses the body to show the depth of resistance that is at once polemic in a traditional manner but also sets itself apart as it moves through and away from its own standardized revolutionary jargon.

Chrystos achieves a similar reconfiguration of traditional resistance in “Savage Eloquence,” her dramatic monologue to indigenous land stragglers. The Big Mountain addressed by the speaker has multiple implied meanings. Historically, Big Mountain refers to a community of Hopi and Navajo peoples displaced by the U.S. settler government in 1974 in order to access their coal-rich lands (Katenay). Straddling the colonial borders of Arizona, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico, some 300 remaining families are defending their sacred Four Mountain region from encroachments by colonial and capitalist forces, including the Peabody mining company (Parker; Maryboy and Begay 265-66). Using the identified “you” (Big Mountain—the struggle itself and its stragglers), “us/our/we” (indigenous peoples generally) and “them/they/ their” (colonizers), the speaker establishes a well-worn resistance field in the context of colonialism:



capitalist ideals of rugged individualism and opposed to the principles of collectivity and social justice as implicated in indigenous epistemology. The movement, pleasure, health, and very being of indigenous peoples inheres in the body: “We know you fences death laws death hunger death / This is our skin / you take from us” (41). Flesh is the site of the death ordered by forces of coloniality and the speaker uses it as an image of decimation, significant for its connotation of racialization, disease pathogens, sexualized violence; colonialism is rendered a life-taking force.

Contemporary coloniality is manifest through the body as well. Bodies are arrested—“no sun dance”—and confined—“walls more walls jails more jails”—and violated—“take our hands hacked from us in death” (40). The speaker evokes the general cultural war of colonization that restricted indigenous ceremony, the coloniality in the structuring of prison industrial complex—what Angela Davis has referred to as the “sedemented slavery” in the prison (Davis and Mendieta 171)—and the specific defilement of American Indian Movement activist Anna Mae Aquash’s body by the FBI after she was found dead in the Badlands of Oglala Sioux territory in 1976.<sup>23</sup> Using this striking imagery, so referential to anticolonial struggles of the latter 20th century and beyond, the poet uses the body as a way to remind readers of the continued coloniality that marks the experience in settler-colonized North America, whilst offering an important site through which indigenous peoples can resurge and achieve liberation.

These two examples indicate that even in the midst of nationalist or political allegory, the body is fundamental. Both poets apprehend the hope and dedication at the surface of resistance

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<sup>23</sup> After her body was found, Aquash’s hands were cut off by the FBI and sent to a lab in D.C. for fingerprinting. AIM activists maintain this was a deliberate act of malice, given that the agent who ordered the indignity had had several contacts with her and could have visually confirmed her identity. Details of this case, which will be explored in greater detail in my subsequent chapter, can be found in Brand. Updates in the criminal case are discussed in Konigsberg.

theory and liberation struggle, but, by implicating the body, Chrystos and Das prepare the reader for what follows: the messy, complex, and contradictory challenge of wrestling with issues like coloniality, gender, and the role of art in material liberation. The poets thus situate themselves in the practice of liberation textualities I have described earlier: seeking out decolonial feminist aesthetics that further the ideals of resistance, while interrogating and confronting its practical and historical shortcomings.

### **Decolonial Bodies: Pain, Meaning, and Creation**

Decoloniality requires that we rethink traditions of resistance. The term “coloniality,” as Ramón Grosfoguel argues brilliantly, “allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system” (219). He makes the important distinction between *colonialism*—the physical/political domination of a foreign territory—and *coloniality*, in which there may or may not be a colonial administration but in which the values, epistemologies, traditions, and structures of colonialism remain at play (219). This certainly describes many nation states in the Caribbean, when we consider the ways in which independence is shaped by Christian-patriarchal tenets and how the region’s global power is located within a racialized hierarchy. In North America, the situation remains (settler) colonial but the concept of coloniality helps us to understand the decolonial struggle to disentangle the colonial matrix of power, present as both colonialism and coloniality, from indigenous societies/national groupings/communities.

Waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy, in her essay "Through Iskigamizigan (The Sugar Bush): A Poetics of Decolonization," reminds us that "personal decolonization [is] a necessary process in liberation *from* colonization as well as liberation *toward* a new reality ..." (185). The colonial matrix is recognized, challenged, and ultimately reconfigured within a new paradigm. To represent the body decolonially means to examine how bodies are situated within the matrix, to reconstruct and deconstruct those bodies that are not "European / capitalist / military / Christian / patriarchal / white / heterosexual / male" (Grosfoguel 216), whilst using the notion of matrix to problematize leakages within its various identity markers. Poets often embrace the Janus-headed view of dismantling and recreating in terms that radically transform mechanisms of domination, but also trace the uneasy pathways of a matrilineal pattern that confounds old and easy Manichaean binaries.

In her narrative poem "Ya Don Wanna Eat Pussy" (1988), Chrystos uses images of the body to deliberately foreground the complicated relations that exist under settler colonialism. The poet intersects various marginalized figures that reproduce colonial thinking in a domestic setting. Like Das, Chrystos connects emotional responses to the body as a site of oppression and resistance. In choosing to expose the contradictory effects of patriarchy, heterosexism, and racism, Chrystos deliberately engages with the decolonial and its interrogation of *coloniality*. Moreover, the poem offers a shifting notion of solidarity that must often cross the barriers of gender and culture in a frenetic and difficult way. The italicized, all-caps rendering of a title that acts as vulgar joke instantly problematizes the resistance logic in the poem:

*YA DON WANNA EAT PUSSY*

that Chippewa said to that gay white man who never has

*Ya don wanna eat pussy after eatin hot peppers* he laughed (36)

The line is revealed to be both homophobic and sexist, mocking the bodily pleasure of women—it is directed at “Two Native women chopping onions & pickles / to make tuna fish sandwiches / for these six men ...”—and undercutting a sexual act that is often associated with sexual equality and women’s erotic self-determination (a counterpoint to the expectation of fellatio by most heterosexual men). What complicates this act of aggression is its utterance by a Chippewa man, disrupting any presumption of racialized or cultural solidarity between him and the two women. The speaker is silenced by this misogynist moment between the men of different colours: “I stared in the white sink memorizing rust stains / He nodded in the general direction of the windows behind us.” The lacuna that follows “I stared” demonstrates the impact of the joke on the speaker; the description of the sink connects the comment to whiteness and decay, signifiers that traverse colonial relations with indigenous cultures. The white gay man is situated in a contradictory space—he shares a marginalized sexual status with the women, and his own initial silence indicates a reluctance to join in the jocularity, but he is distanced from their racialized, gender, and, as the poem emphasizes, sexual experiences. The poet thus demonstrates how the body acts as a symbolic site through to represent the disconnections exposed by the coloniality of heteropatriarchy even within and across indigenous communities. Men can bond across racialized boundaries over their disgust at women’s bodies, which shows the entrenchment of patriarchy as a pillar of the coloniality that subsists beyond the confines of colonialism

The community and cultural disconnect with which the poem begins also disrupts an easy notion of solidarity. The Native women enact quiet domestic roles, their bodies having been rejected as sexual objects; they are instead rendered as cooks and nourishers, using their hands to provide for men who show no indication of reciprocating those comforts in or out of the

bedroom (not that either woman would be interested, as the line “Close to my tribe he’d probably guessed we’re lesbians” indicates). The indigenous characters in the poem have familiarity but not solidarity, a colonial condition addressed when the speaker explains “Ya don wanna take offense at an Indian man’s joke / no matter how crude / in front of a white man.” Adopting the diction of the Chippewa man underscores their shared “tribal” community even while the speaker cannot abide the sexism of his bawdy humour. Yet the women do not simply accept the man’s coarseness either, as the exchange leading up to her explanation indicates:

He said *Ya didn hear that did ya Good*

She answered *I chose to ignore it*

I muttered *So did I*

A quiet resistance pervades the women’s actions, suggesting the depths to which this invocation of bodily assault affects them. They register an objection, but the aura of heterosexism and violence, indicated by the man’s potential “guess” about their sexuality compels them to “keep on doin what we had been doin” both then and when the gay white man calls the Chippewa a drunk: “we both stared at a different floor / in a different silence just as sharp / & hot.” The threat of harm, instigated by the opening lines of the poem and fueled by coloniality, creates a pervasive environment around the women that requires strategic resistance. Pain is seen not only in the joke itself, but in the “sharp & hot” silence, the subtlety of the women’s objections. This resistance is decolonial because it must be panoptic, it must confront the white settler and the indigenous brother, both of whom at best stand by whilst violence against indigenous/lesbian women is celebrated and at worst perpetuate it themselves.

Discomfort is the prevailing feeling evoked by the poem. From the rough texture of the phrase “ya don wanna eat pussy” to the awkward relations among the characters in the poem, the reader is made deeply uneasy. Relations in the poem are fraught and difficult, with shifting allegiances and scattered expressions of oppression. The only grounded figures are the two women, but their resistance is restrained and their pain is writ large in the images and feelings throughout the poem. The minefield of coloniality bursts in various moments throughout the poem with the women destabilized in spite of their potential solidarity: “That Chippewa said *Not too much [tuna] for me Don eat fish* / probably another joke we ignored.” Buffeted on all sides, the women absorb emotional and physical impacts, foregrounding the sensory ways that coloniality plays out. Given the poem’s typography—dialogue offered in italics, stressing its power; lacunae offering silence both contemplative and fearful; the identification of nameless characters by their racialized markers, sexual orientation, or national affiliation only; the appearance of the turtle at the end of the poem, which is present for the most personal poems in the collection<sup>24</sup>—one can see how the fraught territory of the poem’s subject matter is supported by its form. Bodies are both targets of ridicule and sources of comfort in “Ya Don Wanna Eat Pussy.” The female erotic is denigrated by sexist humour, while the motions of the women present are rendered routine—“chopping onions & pickles”; “doin what we had been doin”; “stared at a different floor”—and stymied, set in a stance that is some ways contrary to

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<sup>24</sup> These include the Preface, “My Baby Brother,” For Sharol Groves,” “Foolish,” Meditation for Gloria Anzaldúa,” “Coming Home,” “Bones,” “For Chrystal Rebecca,” and “Herbert Joseph Jeans,” “Three,” and the Acknowledgements. These sections and poems are, arguably, the closest autobiographically to the author and/or are addressed directly to people in her life. There are a couple of poems, such as “Foolish,” that confound a definitive reading of the turtle in this way, but there is at least some connection between almost all these poems and the poet’s life off the page.

sensuality. The challenge of disengaging from coloniality shrouds this poem, speaking to a more complex resistance strategy that pays greater attention to all elements of the matrix, to economics, gender, sexuality, and race, rather than relying on nationalistic impulses that seek to end colonialism while maintaining coloniality.

Another important aspect of decoloniality is its productive assertion of indigenous resurgence and arrivant<sup>25</sup> liberation. Where “Ya Don Wanna Eat Pussy” explores the wretchedness enacted by coloniality, Das’s “While the Sun is Trapped” (1982) reconfigures the aubade form to encourage readers to challenge coloniality from new and marginalized perspectives, which recast Caribbean liberation as a dawn that follows a doubly oppressive night. Using the body as a forceful image and example, “Trapped” strikes an unlikely note of hope in the wake of horror and disappointment that characterized the era after the British gave political control of Guyana to the People’s National Congress. The period, according to historian Anne S. Macpherson in her essay “Toward Decolonization,” was one of dictatorship:

In Guyana, Britain’s favoured moderate, Forbes Burnham, turned authoritarian immediately after the country achieved independence in 1966. Consolidating control via fraudulent elections, police and military power, and a self-serving nationalization of the economy in the name of socialism, Burnham furthered racial division, deepened poverty, and provoked massive emigration. (488)

Das’s speaker confronts this backdrop with a tone of quiet optimism in the first three lines of this dramatic poem: “While the sun is trapped / in clouds of heaven, tiny guerilla lights / border the moon” (52). The poem narrates a dialectic conflict, in which bodies are bent and torn asunder by

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<sup>25</sup> The term, as used in previous chapters, is from Byrd, and refers to those descended from peoples whose presence in the Americas is as a result of forced migration: primarily African slaves and Asian indentured labourers.

the ravages of a gleeful “tyrant” whilst the “the day to come crouches,” and “waits armed in the shadows.” The ambiguity in identifying the “they” whose “fangs drip,” who “hold to prey the man / and his starving child” with “paunches and contented belches” allows for a decolonial reading in that both European colonialism and arrivant coloniality are signified by these oppressive images. As the poem moves towards its hopeful “golden day,” all engorged tyrants are left behind.

Just as “Ya Don Wanna” focuses on the physical manifestations of oppression, particularly against women, “While the Sun” uses the body to look at colonial effects. “Hardship bends the back of the wind. / Loneliness carves a philosophical man / celebrating his despair.” In these early lines, the speaker uses bodies to show the physical and epistemological impacts of coloniality. Bent backs, long associated with manual labour and slavery, situate for the reader the context created by the lack of sun.<sup>26</sup> Natural elements are strong in this poem, with lines ending in “moon,” “wind,” “man,” and “air,” but so too is the body. Preying upon a “man / and his starving child,” forces of domination

bare their teeth and prepare for the slaughter.

While their fangs drip

with the blood of priests and the aborted

day,

The starving body signifies the repressed people, while aggressors bare and use their fangs to disembowel. The reference to priests complicates an easy attempt to name the oppressors here,

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<sup>26</sup> The use of darkness here may go beyond the typical and racially-implicated light versus dark. The sun can also represent the global south in contest against a “sunless” or “cold” north, a trope taken up by other Caribbean poets, such as Una Marson in “Frozen” and Lorna Goodison in “Lush.” Within a framework of decolonial thinking, the coldness could be a direct reference to Europe or the European origins of coloniality.

since priests have acted as forces of colonial genocide and cultural imperialism, but also in such contexts as Latin American liberation theology, where priests oppose tyranny and international exploitation (see Tombs). Nevertheless, the poet uses the body to show the reader graphically the implications of coloniality.

The poet also uses the body to signify the privilege that accompanies hegemonic rule. In contrast to the starving child and the bloodied priests,

the lords  
of the fallen leaves lie yellow  
in their coming and moist rot, while  
those with paunches and contented belches polish  
their cars,

This section, more than any other, attempts to represent the collusion of the various forces of coloniality. The “lords” who forged a colonizing regime stand by and encourage conspicuously-consumptive heirs, whose satiated and engorged bodies reflect their avarice and exploitation, carry on the legacy of coloniality represented by the ongoing night. The hardships of the people are juxtaposed with bodies that live in comfort and have time to leisurely wash their symbols of wealth. Bodies are thus sites of the social inequalities as they manifest in both privileged and oppressed peoples.

In addition to colonizers and neocoloniality, the speaker also gestures toward indigenous resurgence when she reveals the oppositional bodies lying in wait to bring about the “dawn.” The guerilla lights of the opening line become embodied in a crouching figure “holding / his long spear in the night.” Just as Narain uncovers indigenous references in Das’s use of the bone flute in “Bones” (discussed below), this somewhat cruder symbol can nevertheless be connected to

indigenous resurgence as much as to arrivant revolution. Rather than existing metaphorically, as the indigenous figure so often does in arrivant Caribbean literature, the tiny guerilla lights form into a poised resurgent body, wielding a symbol of indigenous presence but also an ancient symbol of war that resonates in European antiquity and African history.

Das transforms the aubade form, abandoning its traditional use as a night of passion followed by a dawn in which a lover departs into an extended metaphor for anticoloniality and indigenous resurgence. The guerilla lights, the crouching day to come, the vengeance of heaven, all persist throughout the vagaries of the night. In the final lines—“The sun comes up in a coup / for the golden day”—the poet gives revolutionary rise to a resurgent force that she has used specific imagery to connect to a persistent presence. The arrival of the sun is the emergence of a dormant but surviving light-day-heaven that remains, even if on the margins, to unseat the tyrannical rulers of the night. This metaphor, of course, is neither limited to nor explicitly about indigeneity or indigenous presence, but rather acts as a demonstration of the body that resists colonial narratives of erasure, which acknowledges the complex and ongoing oppression of settler coloniality—reflected in the sixteen lines devoted to describing these horrors, versus the nine that describe its resurgence/resistance/revolution—and uses the dramatic and dialectic alternating of perspectives in the poem to echo the colonial contest, ending on a resurgent and liberatory future.

The decolonial work of these two poems shifts the gaze away from reductive nationalist polemics or glorifications of independence toward a complex vision that confronts coloniality through an alternative perspective that recognizes complexity. Using the arenas of sexual diversity and self-determination, economic inequality, and shifting sense of solidarity, “You Don Wanna Eat Pussy” and “While the Sun is Trapped” complicate questions of colonialism and

coloniality whilst foregrounding the body as a site of oppression and privilege. This contributes to an overall reworking of resistance literature by exploring ambiguous and fraught areas that intersect with calls for liberation and revolution, areas that are greatly served by a turn toward decolonial thinking.

### **Traces of Erotic Beauty: Feminist Liberation Poetics**

In the poems “Bones” (1988) and “I Could Carve” (1988), Das and Chrystos engage with questions of beauty and erotics, respectively, and connect them to a politics of liberation. Feminist perspectives challenge traditional resistance theory by focusing on cultures of patriarchy that exist both within the colonial matrix and the indigenous or arrivant communities oppressed by it. By situating feminine beauty standards and lesbian sexuality in an anticolonial context, each poet challenges a narrative that reduces struggle to nationalism. The speaker in Das’s poem uses the trope of “skeletons in the closet” to explore a feminist resurgence that is embedded in the body and its sartorial decorations, while Chrystos’s speaker also navigates a liberatory terrain through the tactile and sensuous revolutionary potential of the body through same-sex desire. As Shields points out, feminist engagement is “not merely the recognition of ‘the feminine,’ or the betterment of women, or attending to the representation of them; rather, feminism is a refashioning of the role gender plays in all our lives, in our worldviews, in our political presents and presence. It is about constructing a world across, between, among, and in spite of colonial legacies and histories” (13). Both poets present the body as a site of oppression and liberation, using poetic textualities to add contour to notions of struggle and strategies to disentangle from the colonial matrix. These poems insist upon the disruption of, in the words of

Sy, “a colonial heterosexual, gender-rigid view of the world” (190) and, as Carole Boyce Davies argues in *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* (1994), the speakers “articulate temporalities and locations outside the paradigms set by men, white society, and...literary establishments” (Davies 112). Together, these texts reconsider the terrain of resistance through gendered bodies and feminist politics.

First published in Das’s collection of the same name, “Bones” affirms not only the various ways in which women’s bodies are constricted, but also suggests pathways to their escape from the patriarchal spaces represented by the speaker’s “closet.” Closets are spaces that contain the implements of gender performance; they act as metaphors for sexual repression and secrecy; and they are claustrophobic crucibles in which discarded items lie dormant and forgotten. Beginning with the word “grotesque,” Das’s speaker immediately associates her skeletal “jewels” with the construction of femininity: “prom dresses” and “red pumps” (66). But they are also petrified, their flesh having fallen away, and unburied. These bones defy a complete erasure; they represent gendered hardship and silencing, but their defeat is incomplete. “After all,” the speaker reminds us, “it’s not that they dwindled / into dust altogether.” By connecting gendered images to the metaphor of the closet, Das presents patriarchy as powerful, deadly, connected to femininity, but not omnipotent. The trapped figures, who hold the potential to develop into noisy “golden seedlings” (67), continue to challenge the instruments of imperialism, through signifiers of glamour—prom dresses, pumps, petticoats—that are associated with social gathering, frolic, and budding sexuality, but are also markers of coloniality: the prom and the petticoat are key symbols of feminine life in U.S. popular culture and British literature, hegemonies which have dominated Caribbean cultural life and are associated with a vapid and pervasive whiteness. Pumps are an uncomfortable reminder that Western femininity is predicated

on fragility. Bodies in this poem are thus dislocated and resistant to these sartorial adornments as they are encased and reduced to “bony blades.”

In fact, the bones grow agitated and animated as the poem proceeds, showing the body as epicentre of resistant uprising. Proceeding to elaborate on the agitation from within the closet, the speaker affirms that their history will not be silenced (“They could tell a tale. / They want a say, without doubt”), is significant (“Someone should examine their story”), and that they desire liberation (“They have no wish to stay in the attic. / They want to be part of the world”). Das’s reference to the attic, an archetype made infamous by Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and famously challenged by Jean Rhys (Dominica) in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), genders and racializes the struggle of the bones. As Denise deCaires Narain has noted in *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry: Making Style*, the attic of this poem evokes the “doomed place[s]” in those novels (178); however, the rejection of the attic in favour of the world—itsself perhaps a gesture to Rabindranath Tagore’s woman-centred novel *The Home and the World* (1916)—suggests more than a “juxtaposition of images from different mythologies” (Narain 178). Instead, this couplet seeks to associate the poem’s narrative drive with women’s liberation from coloniality and a resurgence (“they are hungry for wind to sing / through their [reanimated] tissue, so hungry” [66]) into political life.

The trajectory of the bones in the poem is a liberation not only from the constrictions of the closet, but from a cold place to one of warmth and growth. Signifying both a north-south global dialectic represented by winter and spring, and a conscious emergence from a starved place of death into a realm of love and rebirth, the speaker places her liberation narrative in the body and its relationship to the earth. Bones decompose but are resurrected in the harvest. “These bones could make more than music,” the speaker informs the reader. The transformation

becomes more solidified as the bones become implicated in an awakening likened to seasons and planetary renewal, a metaphor for feminist resistance evidenced by the gendered nature of the bones' previous confinement. Avles's review of *A Leaf in His Ear* argues that "Das's vision for the liberated country and people is mark[ed] by inclusivity of race and gender. It is contrary to politics as practiced at the time (and continues in some circles) that tended to divide political parties along racial lines and relegate women to second-class citizens" (212). The body acts simultaneously as a source of memory, lingering in the speaker's closet, and of liberation, singing and speaking into the wind and the heavens. The poet represents this freedom by breaking down the stanzaic form of the poem in its last lines, when the bones' voices take "to air,

full shape climbing,

rising

helium balloon      forever      (67)

Sound extends where the bones cannot, breaking free from traditional sites of burial and constraint in order to soar within the open sky. The resistance is bodily but complete, forever, in contrast to the patriarchy that has tried to conquer the bones in the first place.

The erasure and resurgence in Das's use of the bones is not accidentally a symbol of indigenous presence. Narain associates the "white flutes" with indigenous ceremonial instruments (177), linking them to Wilson Harris's discussion of indigenous "cannibalism" in his essay "The Schizophrenic Sea" (1983). Harris notes that the accusation of cannibalism is a disreputable "ferocity projected onto the Caribs ... by the Spanish conquistadors" but, nevertheless, the use of an opponent's bones as flutes was "a confessional organ involved in, yet subtly repudiating, the evil bias on conquest that afflicted humanity" (106). In this way, the

speaker evokes yet another marginal player in Guyana's political life—the indigene—and connects that figure to the articulations that form the poem's main concerns; through the flutes, which are hinted at throughout the poem—from their “strange noise” to the description of them as a “fire-tried instrument” (66) to the “note” they send out as “a golden apple / from the Mexican border” (67)—the oppressed and freedom-seeking voice cries out, sings across borders and into the sky. The core of the body in the poem is thus linked to indigenous cultural practice. As the call of the bones rings out disrupting colonial order and logic, so too is the poetic structure unsettled. The words spread out like wings, challenging the order of things, with “rising” prominent at their centre.

“Bones” represents a feminist confrontation with local and global coloniality. The poet thus uses the (feminine) body to decry spuriousness that coincides with what Michelle V. Rowley has identified in *Feminist Advocacy and Gender Equity in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2011) as “the persistent political unwillingness of state-managers to aggressively pursue an agenda of equity for marginalized citizens of the region” (1) in which feminist resistance “has for the past three decades been in a stranglehold of a Westminster system of government, characterized as it is by authoritarian and masculinized forms of ‘maximum’ leadership” (8). Lip service is offered to women as “mothers” of the nation, but they are silenced as patriarchal coloniality persists in the independence period. Das uses figurative language, alongside archetypal and marginalized imagery, to demonstrate the political and cultural elision of women's voices in social transformation. Her speaker contests attempts to bury women's presences, a reflection of the colonial and arrivant politics of Das's social milieu. The poem pushes back at the use of gendered systems that demand women's silence and absence. Focusing

on the ways in which women's bodies are sites of subjugation and resistance, Das's liberation textualities construct a profound sense of resurgence and renewal.

Where Das focuses on critiquing and challenging structures of domination directly, Chrystos seeks a productive expression of revolutionary thought in the submerged spaces of marginality. In "I Could Carve," Chrystos wastes little time on the oppressor and instead sustains a body-based radical space that grounds resistance in sexuality, indigeneity, and desire. The poet forsakes traditional punctuation, instead letting enjambment and lacunae organize the words in a seemingly continuous flow that emphasizes sensuality and erotics. As in Das, women's bodies are the subjects—and objects—of the poem. Chrystos stresses safety, nourishment, nature, pleasure, connectedness, and solidarity within woman-centred sexual encounter. A resistant space is created outside of movement politics, in an intimate relationship where "[n]o more bones cocks / horses drag [the speaker] in terror" (93)—the poem's sole reference to the oppressor. Beyond the predominance of the aroused and loving body, the space created by the poet is one that is embedded in the natural world—stones, the moon, driftwood, salt water, the sun, feathers, smoke, fire, dust, granite: these elements play in and around the lovers in this lyric poem.<sup>27</sup> The poem therefore traverses a similar terrain to "Bones," but envisions liberation within a connection between two bodies.

The speaker opens by signifying a conventional love practice—inscribing names into enduring surfaces—and juxtaposes that with a contrasting fleshly and sensory imprint. The

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<sup>27</sup> The dedication to BJ Collins, of whom Chrystos offers the following description in the Acknowledgements: "& so I come to you, BJ Collins, who has managed to love me for the last three years, sometimes by the skin of both our teeth" (104), heightens the romantic textuality of the poem, but also links it to the broader social context of semi-autobiography that Chrystos injects into her poetry. The romance and pastoral imagery cannot be formalistically divorced from the poet's own struggles against homo/lesbophobia and racism.

double reference to the moon, followed by an emphasis on “mouth & fingers” and the rejection of “cocks,” associates the love with women, as does the provocative “in” centred on its own line, a typographic choice that repeats three times in the poem, which not only signifies penetration, but also domestic spaces. Within the poem, “in” performs a centripetal movement that adds new territory to resistance struggle; it adds sexuality and erotic life to the terms of liberation by connecting public proclamations of love with a forbidden (or marginalized) sexuality: “Suns in our bellies as we dream of sleeping beside each other” proclaims the speaker. Struggle is therefore not only about national disentanglement, but about erotic freedom. In the home, in the bedroom, in the body; politics are literally and figuratively moved inside. Where Das’s poem pushes the domestic and the feminine into the realm of politics, Chrystos’s speaker politicizes the domestic and the womanly.

Physical desire is at the core of the speaker’s words, but it is not only a sexual desire; liberation, the desire for freedom, undergirds the poem. Indeed the beginnings foreground the personal and elide the overt politics of a traditional resistance poem:

I could weave  
your name through every muscle of my body black with longing to be  
in  
you    Have your mouth & fingers take me farther than the moon

Yet, there is a sense that this desire, in fact the relationship itself, has emerged out of thwarted past. “No more bones cocks,” “buckets of salt water to douse forgotten flames,” and “[s]uns in our bellies as we dream of sleeping beside each other” all speak to a separation between these lovers that has been overcome. This can be read literally and simply mean that the speaker and the addressee were in prior relationships that kept them apart; or we can explore the figurative

possibility that heterosexism's prohibitions and boundaries have been overcome. Reading the space of this poem as resistant need not involve direct and overt references to struggle. Its creation of a woman-centred erotic space is an act of political resistance. Dreese has suggested that "the erotic poetry in [*Not Vanishing*] employs language that is highly sensual and imagistic with a centred, symmetrical presentation on the page suggesting a sense of order not always discernible in the other poems," which "provide[s] a site of refuge, a safe community, *on* [Chrystos's] battlefield where she can exist within an atmosphere that is loving and pleasurable" (45, emphasis added). The poem is indeed centred on the page, organized in the pattern of a shapely body, its uneven pace and intermittent lacunae are suggestive of an emotional and physical struggle. What is key about Dreese's statement is not the division between the types of poems in *Not Vanishing*—which I have critiqued above as a false dichotomy—but rather her assertion of a single battlefield that represents a multifaceted terrain of resistance—overt, figurative, erotic, polemic. Despite the intimacy of the poem, "I Could Carve" still takes a place on the field of resistance by challenging hegemonies and enacting a transformative sexuality.

The racial politics of the poem are subtle; the poet works colour into her phrasing and diction to question presumptions of whiteness about the two lovers.<sup>28</sup> In addition to "black with longing," which immediately disrupts the colonial association between blackness and evil, the speaker uses blackness and darkness to soften, to offer a liberatory vision of erotics between women of colour. Black becomes the adjective for silk, a sexy and luxurious fabric; the women's thighs are smoky, not only from being at a fireside referred to earlier in the poem, but as a

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<sup>28</sup> A possible counterargument is that BJ Collins herself is potentially a white woman; but my contention is that the poem defies easy racialization of its two main characters, and suggests that the safe space of their lovemaking occurs within an absence (or at least critique) of whiteness.

signifier that defies presumptions of whiteness. The sensual and passionate environment between the women is rich with darkness, on skin and in imagery. Far from the notions of the civilizing mission, this darkness is associated with an affectionate desire that is in fact slowed down, savoured, by the speaker. Breaks in the text arrest the feverish pace observed in the opening lines, disrupting representations of a “hypersexual savage” without denying the erotic potential between the two women. The poem reroutes dominant sexual, gendered, and racialized knowledges to emphasize the sexual lives of indigenous women and women of colour that are politicized by the context of coloniality, but can resist without constant reference to dominating structures. The subtle but insistent method the poet uses for this emphasis articulates a feminism consistent with liberation textualities, one that defies coloniality by marginalizing it.

### **Unsettled and Indefatigable Bodies: Resurgent Aesthetics**

Chrystos and Das use the imagery and symbolism of the body in their poetry to recast political struggle beyond its typical and dominant signifiers of inspirational public protest or the swift justice of uprising. “Resurrection” (1988) and “I Walk in the Body of My People” are both steeped in pain, memory, persistence, and devastation wrought through the body. History coats the bodies in these highly allegorical poems, but readers see it either through limbs that bear the weight of colonization, or a “thin...weak...exhausted” body that refuses to be consigned to oblivion (Das 71). Both poets challenge an exultant ideological reading by deeply personalizing the struggles within the lines of their poems, contributing to what Bill Ashcroft has called a “non-cognitive reception” that “exists beyond meaning and judgement, a reception that exists outside any question of taste or commodification” (3). He terms this reception an “aesthetic

engagement” in which readers are affected through a “constant dialogue...between producer and consumer in which the affective and sensual engagement of artist and viewer are mutually developed” (8). By evoking a typical textural interaction—physical, emotional, and intellectual stimulation—and connecting it to decolonial contemplations, an aesthetics of resistance is produced which expands upon earlier formations and seeks out a more inclusive and meditative inquiry into the representation of social justice.

Resistance aesthetics are traditionally defined according to their more obvious political elements and the means through which they support a particular social or liberation movement. Barbara Harlow’s concept of resistance poetry insists that “poems of resistance, produced by, as well as being productive of, resistance movements throughout the Third World, participate in a radical critique of...patterns...of western ideological domination which are currently disseminated, whether through the conventions of literary genre and protocol or by means of the structures of educational institutions, on an international scale” (36-37). Here she deliberately grounds her theory, and the radical critique of the poets, in a specific set of anti-colonial struggles. The aesthetics of traditional resistance literature are often limited to a polemic stance, to a social purpose wherein it is apparent what the “value” of the poem is to ongoing struggles either in the author’s immediate cultural or geographic context or globally.

Resistance poetry, within such a model, thus moves away from what Colin Clark, in his engagement with Edouard Glissant’s concept, identifies as the “political valency of [literary] opacity” (51). Clark argues at the outset of his article, “Resistant Literatures; Literatures of Resistance?”, that “[o]pacity in literature is not something we might first associate with political engagement. A clear medium seems to suit a clear political message” (50). Clark’s theory contradicts Harlow’s claim that obscure poetry is a part of “the conventional and canonical

criteria of poetic inspiration and composition applied by the Western critics and practitioners of poetry” (Harlow 35). But poetry—political, resistant, liberatory, feminist, decolonial—need not shy away from indigenous, diasporic, or arrivant artistic methods of ambiguity, indiscernibility, or inscrutability that may coincide with Eurocentric critical legacies. As Rader suggests, indigenous poetry “pulls from many domains, merging strains from oral, historical, tribal, and written sources” (129). Complexity exists in all social matters, and is reflected in a multitude of poems. Harlow’s argument is sound in relation to her goal: that polemic literature once thought of as inartistic ought to be considered serious literature. However, as “resistance literature” has now come to mean solely those texts which express a clear and defined politics, the aesthetic must be reapplied in a way that honours a diversity of resistances. Poets, and particularly Das and Chrystos, move sites of struggle, but also offer up new rhythms, sounds, and images to reroute the political interests and the terms of liberation.

In “Resurrection,” Das uses the body as a metaphor for struggle. Not as an allegory for national struggle, not something that can be easily reduced to the vagaries of this or that political movement, but rather in an opaque way that can apply to the multiple and various struggles faced in daily life, personal and political, in a way that resonates with readers. The opening stanza presents a body that is both “triumphant” in resurrection, but also “thin,” “weak,” “exhausted” and unable to “claim glory for [its] victories” (71). From the outset, a complex tension between revival and mortality contests easy triumphalism, glory, and victory. This narrative poem, told in the first person, questions a simple liberation that is often found in traditional resistance texts.

On the other hand, the speaker’s troubles are not hers alone: “I ponder my history, / I see it in sullenness of roofs, / the droop of the willowtree.” A historical and geographic context is offered which allows for more than one reading of this body’s marvellous and horrifying

journey. References to Columbus and Jesus in different stanzas gesture toward the colonial context of the narrative (indeed, the poem plays directly with aspects of Christianity, such as forgiveness, the forsaken, divine knowledge, sacrifice, and charity by dampening its resurrection with atrocious representations of memory and history). Meanwhile, the highly figurative use of such things as undertakers who “pinion [the speaker’s] dreams” and “rejoice” in her death, while worms and maggots “dare...impunities” on her rotting body give rise to any number of resistant readings (72-73). The body in this poem is a source of weakness and strength, at once a burden and a “conqueror” of death that can brazenly “engineer the morning” (73). The poem’s aesthetics, then, are about emotion (betrayal, malice, indignity) and texture (rotting, encasement, pollution) but also convey a hopeful and clear resurrection, a survivance tempered by ignominy, by appealing to readers through the senses.

As with “While the Sun is Trapped,” Das uses the dawn as a symbol of hope and renewal, but this time it is a scarred optimism. Damaged by the indignities of the grave, but persistent in rising “from this tomb,” the speaker plays

an elegiac flute in silver hours  
of a misty morning, calling birds with songs,  
early grasshoppers, awakening the population  
at your farm

I draw the sun out of his milky horizon  
with invisible strings, as if I were a puppeteer,  
and with my skill, I engineer the morning. (73)

A more complex uprising is depicted here than in the previous poem. The speaker is marked by the horror experienced in “death” and still laments her losses, despite “hav[ing] reason / to blow trumpets.” Therefore, the freedom experienced by the last stanza is tempered and uneasy. She emerges and regains her powers, but not without the wounds of battle. Memories of defilement plague her, leaving the future hopeful but uncertain. By constructing this semi-triumphant journey, the poet contradicts a polemic reading of social transformation and uses the body to make space for uncomfortable truths and painful histories. By offering a body that is so thoroughly ravaged, Das deftly contemplates many questions that face decolonization movements and those within them: survivance and resurgence, sectarian and interpersonal betrayal, unfinished independence, and lost or reconstructed identity.

The speaker is represented as powerful, but her alienation is clear. Faith, belief, and understanding are complicated for her:

The moon’s fullness, its perfection, the deep  
significances of its circles, elude me.

It is too round. My beliefs stick faster  
with professors of worlds, penny-like and flat.

A highly figurative passage that exudes an alienated self that struggles to see what most others seem to (the perfection of the moon), whilst gravitating toward a more obscure affinity, such as writers or philosophers (professors of worlds) whose views are not so apparent. The speaker herself is therefore opaque, and dwells in opacity—at one point, in “earth’s opaque jar” (72)—as “neither helmsman nor sailor” (71), eschewing a navigational role in favour of a pensive one that includes “dwell[ing] upon [her] entombment.” There is political allegory in here, certainly, but also a figure that cannot be resistant without pain. Liberation can bring joy but not exultation

given the histories and atrocities against which people struggle. Violence, betrayal, and mockery—“In my burial robes, they adorned me / with jewels from junk-shop disposals / and backyard sales (72)—are enacted on the body, conjoining politics with the social realm, with family and friends and lovers and other spaces within which people must be resistant.

The speaker offers the experience of entombment as an acknowledgement of the obstinacy of domination. The two-line stanza “I dwell upon my undertakers’ faces / their elevated hopes that I may rest in peace” sets up a political and emotional reading before the reader is lead through a litany of ritual ill intentions, foul sensations, and improper violations by people and creatures that have reduced the speaker to a “bloodless whiteness” (71). The unbearable details, such as maggots replacing a lover’s mouth by suckling at the childless woman’s decaying breasts, among other places she “guarded with passion and suffering” (72), reminds readers that the “return from the abyss” is no easy achievement and that its memory haunts her. A divine and grim knowledge—“I understand the libations / at the feet of the gods” (73)—reflects in the inflictions of history on freedom struggle. The pathways offered by “Resurrection” are uneasy and precarious, muted and filled with demonic visions. Yet the speaker arises triumphant, so the poem is not without hope, but the journey is highly affective and therefore emphasizes an aesthetics that is not always about beauty but is nevertheless grounded in a sensual confluence between reader and poet.

Chrystos, too, infuses the body of her speaker with the pain and memory of history in a way that her readers can sense almost physically. The suffering inflicted by coloniality manifests as bodily pain and deterioration in “I Walk in the History of My People.” Taking the symbols of aging, injury, and rheumatic disease, the poet presents the body as infused with histories of oppression and acts of resistance. Opening with “There are women locked in my joints / for

refusing to speak to the police,” the poem proceeds with an incantatory rhythm that repeats “My” and “In my,” traversing the body’s surface and internal ligaments to indicate where historical injustices are lodged. The speaker wields the body’s vulnerabilities bluntly, operating in an almost didactic fashion: the reader is guided through the ways in which coloniality engulfs a people and damages a body in an instructive way. Contemporary struggles against police violence, hunting rights, prison abolition are woven into the “long war” of land expropriation and cultural genocide in which “the pus of the past oozes from every pore” (7). Less opaque than Das’s poem, Chrystos gives tactile form to the history of colonization in the Americas.

Though its polemics are arguably in line with a traditional resistance poem, its emphasis on the body adds a dimension to the levels of struggle consistent with liberation textualities. “My tendons stretched brittle with anger / do not look like white roots of peace.” These two lines are clearly about racism, but wrought through a distinctly personal pain. The site of struggle is resituated and therefore the impact of the metaphor rethinks resistance. Appealing to a reader’s sense of pain elicits an outrage that goes beyond political or intellectual association. The speaker lays out a framework for the impacts of oppression that validates other indigenous trauma narratives while simultaneously rendering a potentially “othered” experience in relatable terms. Scarred knees, pinned bones, and infected limbs are pluriversal symbols that Chrystos imparts with “children torn from their families,” “prisoners,” and a “300 year” campaign wherein “Our sacred beliefs have been made into pencils / names of cities gas stations.” Her use of “wounded knee” is particularly effective in this instance. The speaker’s repeated use of “wounded knee” refer to what appear to be ordinary struggles associated with arthritis or other damage, but instead evokes a central (and recurrent) conflict between indigenous peoples and settlers in the colonial expansion of the United States: the 1898 Wounded Knee Massacre of Lakota by the

U.S. army, and the Wounded Knee Uprising undertaken by the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1973. The phrase therefore signifies both colonial history and instances of resistance, which the poet engages by the poem's final lines:

My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly

Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it

My knee is wounded

see

How I Am Still Walking

Like in "Resurrection," this speaker suffers the vagaries of history but still gets through. The speaker is resurgent, still walking despite unbearable pain and swallowing hundreds of years of aggression into her very limbs. The final line is significantly not a question, but an instruction to see, another bodily function associated with political consciousness. Resistance is once again complicated even within a didactic poem because Chrystos grounds her speaker's experiences in the personal space of the body, and renders a potential liberation that is not easily achieved.

By using the body as its central metaphor, Chrystos's poem can be aligned with what Simpson calls "heart knowledge," which I have explored above and which represents a balance of various life forces in the experience of resurgence and liberation (Simpson 94). For instance, the poet's use of "marrow," a supportive and productive component of every human's bones, explores the life ways affected by colonization but also emphasizes cultural and physical health as an important strain of resistance:

In my marrow women who walk 5 miles every day for water

In my marrow the swollen hands of my people who are not allowed

to hunt

to move

to be

Displacement forces tired women to seek nourishment at far distances; it also robs indigenous peoples of their traditional ways. The body is represented here at various levels: implicated in land appropriation and survival practices (imposed and cultural), and in the manifestation of the associated pain in the speaker's swollen hands. Memory has infused the body through these facts of history. Repetition here emphasizes the deep entrenchment of these affronts, and also the multiple levels at which colonization operates. The swollen indigenous hands do not sprout from a "lazy" disposition or alcohol use, but from a dislocation from traditional roles that impacts indigenous bodies. The speaker then uses that same body to appeal to readers of all kinds, to connect and demonstrate the visceral impacts of this history.

### **Conclusion: Embodied Sites of Resistance**

With the figurative use of the body in the poetry collections discussed here—as metaphor, symbol, and signifier—Das and Chrystos conjoin women's bodies to historical and cultural resistances in a way that confounds any attempt to relegate issues of gender, identity, or sexuality to a personal and apolitical realm. Merging the political complications of issues such as national independence and sexism with physical explorations of how history and uprising score the body and hinder its participation in an easy decolonization serves an important purpose: not only questioning dominant theories of what constitutes resistance, but offering new possibilities for the application of resistance theory to literature in realms once considered tangential, overly personal, or insignificant.

The power of aesthetics, or the appeal to connectivity and emotion, so central to the affect generated by poetry, is emphasized along in this new pathway. The poems startle with their horror, their sadness, their violences, rather than the stridency of their calls to arms. They are no less militant or brave in their challenge to coloniality, but they are far more comprehensive in their considerations and unexpected in their offerings. To unearth a resistant meaning within these lines is not to impose a mismatched national framework, but serves rather to tease out an important and often overlooked (or disparaged) strategy of literary inquiry—the political reading—and render it more relevant, more complex, and more important than ever before.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Rehumanizing Struggle: Domestic Resistance Drama**

When two individuals from different backgrounds love each other, cultural conflicts between them have greater poignancy. After all, they have already crossed the great cultural divide that separates so many of us, to see themselves in the Other. They have moved from the public representation of each Other to a more private understanding. But that which is public does impinge on the private: the private relationship of this couple, Elvira and Rohan, becomes the public arena in which the historical drama inherent in the brutal legacies of colonialism and racism in the Caribbean play themselves out.

—M. NourbeSe Philip,

“Such Stuff,” Introduction to *Coups and Calypsos* (11)

ANNA. What are we in it for? It takes so much, it devours you, this thing. You lose all sense of who you are except in context of the Movement. It's like the Movement becomes the solution for every problem—you're a drunk—AIM doesn't condone drinking—bingo you're not a drunk—you beat your woman—that's not proper for an AIMster, bingo problem gone—your welfare runs out early and you can't afford to eat—hunger is noble in service of the Movement—

someone will order food in—takeout!—though your kids might be hungry at home. It's like the Movement has become everything—home, family, social life. We have to renounce everything. It's insatiable.

—*Annie Mae's Movement* (24)

Resistance is not always about soldiers, or warriors, or police batons, or spies with guns. Struggle can tug at the heart. The plays considered here foreground the entanglements of loss, resentment, and heartbreak with consciousness, upheaval, and revolution. Pushing historical and political conflicts into the background, *Coups and Calypsos* (2001) by M. NourbeSe Philip (Tobago/Canada) and *Annie Mae's Movement* (1998) by Yvette Nolan (Algonquin)<sup>29</sup> emphasize that the home is a site of resistance, and that larger liberation struggles have direct ties to the tension in domestic and personal relationships. The plays examine the impacts of history and the cost of political organizing through the lens of the “domestic drama.” They do so not just to symbolize the movements depicted, but rather to centralize the terrains of struggle that are often marginalized, elided, and dismissed in both resistance literature theory and the broader study of “political” literature.

Both plays focus upon the sexual and romantic dynamics that play out between the characters and the vagaries of love are used to evoke, reflect, and transform resistance through an aesthetics of decolonial feminism. *Coups* and *Movement* offer deeply personal and affective

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<sup>29</sup> I use the dates from the published texts upon which I base the analysis here. Both plays had performances and workshops from 1997-99; *Annie Mae's Movement* was performed again in Toronto in 2006. Hereafter, the plays shall be referred to as *Coups* and *Movement*.

ways of exploring political issues, obliging audiences to concentrate on the relationships in front of them. Traditional social movements are surrounding presences in these dramas (Nolan's play is set inside a political struggle; Philip's play traps the characters in the midst of a minor rebellion), but what takes place in the streets is connected and contrasted with what happens "in de bedroom," as Mrs. Samuels suggests in *Coups* (100). Drama's very form, enclosed within the theatre itself and with a natural inclination toward domestic spaces and dialogic action, emphasizes this peripheral aspect of struggle: the personal not simply in relation to broader political concerns, but as enactment of politics within a personal setting. The proximity of the audience to the home life depicted challenges the estranged discourse of propaganda whilst emphasizing the complications and messiness of personal relationships and politics; which is to say that the movements and their ideas are unpacked, critiqued, and acknowledged through the use of interpersonal dynamics. Petty acts are bound up with the courageous in ways that help viewers and readers rethink practices of resistance because the dramas hold their audiences in very intimate spaces constructed for the stage.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In some ways this chapter goes against the tide of most drama and theatre criticism by focusing a great deal on Nolan's and Philip's play scripts rather than the performances that have occurred. Theatre studies is inarguably about both drama (script) and performance; however, I focus my inquiry here on the potential for readers of plays to imagine, reconsider, recognize, and empathize with resistance in a text. I do this not to suggest that performance is irrelevant to literature—it is a key element of oral, poetic, and dramatic literature. Rather, to argue that the script is in fact the guiding force behind how resistance manifests in these plays. Decoloniality, feminism, and aesthetics emanate from the script and the choices made by the authors to construct setting, dialogue, and imagery before the first set is built or actor is cast. For my purposes here, the work put into the scripts by the authors is of supreme importance to the ways in which theatre can intervene in resistance struggle. It is the blueprint that can often be overlooked if we focus too hard on a single performance. I therefore give sovereignty to the script; however, I do not see the stage script as an isolated and totalizing document to be studied like a manuscript, a novel, or a poem. It is

The notion that personal issues—particularly romantic ones—are integral to social and political relations is not a new idea. Indigenous and arrivant feminists have urged women’s rights advocates to think intersectionally for decades, unpacking and reconstituting the second-wave feminist slogan “the personal is political” (Alexander; Anderson, “Affirmations”; Carastathis; Christian; Crenshaw; Davies, “From Post-Coloniality”; hooks; Johnson-Odim; Noble; Simpson). However, recuperating *the personal* is part of an overall expansion of resistance literature theory that does not turn away from political aspects of a text, but rather better aligns political action with the lives of those affected by it.

Two theorists who have guided my overall thinking on resistance underscore how explorations of personal relationships are significant to social justice: Leanne Simpson (Mississauga Nishnaabeg) and Carole Boyce Davies (Trinidad/U.S.). Within the context of a decolonizing feminism, both authors emphasize a need to consider personal lives in the articulation of political resistance. Taken alongside one another, their calls for a transformative understanding of struggle support my contention that personal dynamics within these dramas reconfigure the limits of “resistance theatre” by constructing an affective social site wherein the grand narratives of political contest are staged in domestic settings. Personal spaces are crucial to Davies’s and Simpson’s insistence that Afro-Caribbean women’s writing and Indigenous cosmology, respectively, are not reduced to the Manichean dynamics of colonizer-nationalist confrontation. The polemic essentializing of writing—reducing it to one purpose or argument, a monolithic critique of empire, or mere public relations for a social movement—erases what

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intrinsically linked the *possibility* of performance, cultural signification, popular mobilization, and multiple interpretations. Texts are treated here as living documents that provide specific—and crucial—ideas for the transformation of resistance, but which do so in the expectation that the ideas will live through performance in various transformations, interpellations, and significations.

Davies refers to as “the creative movement upward and outward from constricted and submerged spaces” (108). By emphasizing the personal in their work, Simpson and Davies challenge the dichotomy between political service and domestic troubles in two main ways: first, by examining the inadequacy of existing or dominant theories of struggle; and second, by asserting the importance of undervalued realms to the overall lives that form the basis of struggle in the first place. This more holistic approach to resistance creates a pathway for new and ever-changing notions of resistance literature, to which I contribute the idea of liberation textualities, grounded in decolonial (rather than postcolonial or nationalist), feminist (rather than patriarchal) and aesthetic (rather than polemic) approaches.

In “From Post-Coloniality to Uprising Textualities” (1994), Davies not only confronts the dominating discourse of postcolonial literary study, she articulates a feminist praxis that shifts away from what, in “From Masquerade to *Maskerade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project” (2015), she later calls the “‘privileged example’ of Caribbean resistance,” namely large-scale rebellion (“Masquerade” 214). In “Uprising Textualities,” Davies maps out a methodology through which to decolonize postcolonial literary theory from its totalizing early narratives that prefigures and mirrors my own engagement with resistance literature theory. Her systematic critique of post-colonialism—then largely dominated by terminology from Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989; revised 2002), which simultaneously suggests colonization ended with formal independence and that Third World literary study begins with the moment Europeans arrived on the shore—is based in questions of how gender and empire interact, thus laying the groundwork for an intersectional analysis still relevant more than twenty years later. Davies notes that women’s voices are crucial to anti-imperial literary analysis and theory, that “Third

World/Black/women of colour feminisms move the imagination away from dominating authorities and do not constantly accept their existence as a fact of life” (“Uprising” 87). Central to that movement away, is an “elsewhere” that describes the personal, domestic, and romantic struggles that emerge from writing out of women’s experiences and offers a new perspective on how resistance is enacted in the lives of those on the margins (“Uprising” 88; 112). Thus, in order to honour the creative and scholarly work of women directly impacted by the cultural forces of imperialism, nationalism, and resistance, one must look beyond traditional examples and dominant theorists, an assertion that can be extended with great efficacy to the study of resistance drama through the lens of personal relations.

In the more recent essay, Davies articulates this expansive view as a move toward the ways in which people “conducted their lives and their daily departures and returns” (“Masquerade” 214). While one must be cautious about ascribing too mimetic a role to literary texts, Davies’s emphasis on giving expression to largely silenced voices is important to how the personal is effective (and affective) in resistance literature. How does literature represent these interlocking experiences? How does politics play out in everyday life? Participation in meetings and marches are accompanied by daily chores and emotional trials. Political movements are frayed by personality conflicts and romantic entanglements. In “Masquerade,” Davies thus establishes the artificiality of two partitioned realms: political struggle and daily life. Her argument that Sylvia Wynter’s play *Maskerade* (1973) links these two spheres is deeply significant to my own consideration of Philip’s and Nolan’s plays as liberation textualities that, in their exploration of largely ignored or underscrutinized aspects of social justice, shift the boundaries of resistance literature toward a more comprehensive vision of who resists and how resistance operates.

The importance of examining these questions is not limited to the question of inclusion—though that is important and often undervalued—but rather speaks to the very purpose and relevance of the idea of resistance itself. Davies asserts that “ideas on the nature of the human condition as it pertains to the Caribbean/black/working poor subject” (“Masquerade” 216) constitute a *rehumanizing* project, one that re/constructs the emotional, cultural, political, and social lives of marginalized peoples but does not obscure the context of “histories of servitude and colonialism, decolonization struggles, and strategies of cultural resistance” (207).

Rehumanizing is also a radical literary move, where figures are explored through multiple aspects of their humanity, including romantic, social, and emotional relations. These explorations offer solid insights in how to restyle resistance into liberation textualities, to open up the concept to the vast and interrelated possibilities offered by texts written by world majority peoples.

Domestic dramas, then, such as *Coups* and *Movement* become a part of resistance because the admittedly familiar dramatic trope of personal relations reflects and engages with the domestic struggles that inform the political and other “grand” engagements with social transformation that comprise their backdrops. The loves, losses, abuses, and elations that these plays contend with are not limited to a depoliticized sphere, nor are they propagandistic depictions of the unblemished movement(s) of the days of their settings. They are affective and contemplative constructions of social relations that offer a greater understanding of the politics that surround them whilst resisting easy categorization, such as the (in)famous national allegory, by presenting layered and rehumanized representations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The slippage from *rehumanized* to universalized can be a dangerous one. Barbara Harlow quotes Frederic Jameson’s idea of “strategies of containment” (qtd. in Harlow 17) and includes in those strategies the “demand on the part of critics and readers, against historical necessity, [that literature] appeal to universality, posterity, and the human condition” (17). My argument is that regardless of the demands of literary establishments, academic or

Representations of the personal are thus shifted away from a flattened universal (Eurocentric) figure in favour of a pluriversal subject, a contributor to a larger corpus of textualities that problematize and ponder the questions of liberation from multiple vantage points. Simpson's assertion that indigenous life ways and world views must be central to decolonization elucidates this shift in practice. Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011) is grounded in Nishnaabeg philosophy, cosmology, and politics, but its argument is relevant to the broader issue of resistance theory and by extension resistance literature. Like Davies, Simpson challenges hegemonic paradigms by arguing that "western-based social movement theory has failed to recognize the broader contextualizations of resistance within Indigenous thought" (31) because it largely ignores the traditionally holistic approach of the Nishnaabeg, which "has to be learned in the context of our own personal lives, in an emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual way" (41). She goes on to emphasize that "Indigenous thought can only be learned through the personal; this is because our greatest influence is on ourselves, and because living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial metanarrative in and of itself" (41). The personal is thus cast not only in opposition to coloniality in concrete terms, but also as a significant site of indigenous resurgence, of the assertion that indigenous lives matter, and in the focus of the stories that contribute to that resurgence.

Whereas the articles by Davies make explicit connections between life ways and literary criticism, Simpson's book moves through various aspects of Nishnaabeg thought with an approach that allows us to situate literature within a broader framework of storytelling as

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otherwise, authors such as Philip and Nolan, and critics such as Davies and Simpson, are demanding that their texts and their arguments be seen outside a counter-discourse that is equally totalizing, that textual analysis must always defy a narrow definition of resistance (often frozen in a particular historical and patriarchal moment). The paradigm must shift to acknowledge the diversity of these literary texts.

representation. According to Simpson, herself a creative writer, “[s]torytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, [and] critiquing the social space around us, and, ultimately, challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives” (34). Stories are therefore crucial to social interaction and vice versa. Simpson reconfigures the political and the literary through the social, establishing a transformative sense of each. The personal is politicized, the literary is personalized, and politics is rendered literary. Together, these elements inform new perspective we can apply to drama that tells unconventional resistance stories.

The two plays under consideration here mobilize the personal in ways that support Simpson’s philosophy and, even though both originate from outside of the Nishnaabeg community, are illuminated by her ideas. *Coups* depicts horizontal racialized antagonisms and colonial legacies through the breakdown of a mixed marriage; and *Movement* questions the value of political organization by emphasizing the personal relationships of a famous activist figure whose life ended in a brutal and mysterious murder. The larger historical questions about Indian<sup>32</sup> and African inequalities in the Caribbean, or the efficacy of organizations like the Jamaat al Muslimeen (JAM) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) are depicted through the lens of personal relationships. Social spaces—typically considered in literature to be “women’s” concerns, such as marriage, sexual relationships, and children—are centred on the stage, with the epic political struggle acting as background.<sup>33</sup> Nolan and Philip insist on social perspectives in a

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<sup>32</sup> The different uses of the term Indian may be confusing here. Relative to Africans, Indo-Caribbean people are a South Asian presence in the Caribbean; however, I favour the local terminologies “Indian” and “African.” In the context of AIM, Indian is reclaimed by the Indigenous North American peoples themselves and I use it only where it is asserted in the original text or when articulating the full name of the organization.

<sup>33</sup> Given the significance of political movements to the cultural resistances in North America during the 1960s and 70s, including the American Indian Movement, the Black Panthers, the Black Liberation Army, Students for a

way that problematizes single-issue ideologies (i.e. race or class). The personal relations of the players are writ large on the stage, where audiences can consider historical or political contexts only through the emotional lives of the characters before them. Viewers and readers cannot think about the Muslimeen coup in Trinidad without Rohan and Elvira's marital history; nor can they evaluate Douglas Durham's role as an *agent provocateur* without considering him in relation to the extramarital affair between Anna Mae and Dennis Banks, and its fall-out. This deliberate construction demonstrates the interconnection between personal and political struggles.

Rather than reinforcing delineation between the (gendered) realms of political action and romantic interactions, these plays show them as constituting one another; the dynamics that play out between the characters are entwined with the work of the struggle and on the ground. AIM is hampered by sexism, and so too is Anna Mae's love life. The Muslimeen insurrection occurs out of a historical, economic, and political context marked by racialized complexity that entangles Rohan and Elvira. Drama scholars Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins argue that plays which challenge dominant historical narratives are bound up with individual stories, and in particular the voices of women:

The well-worn feminist slogan that 'the personal is political' is particularly relevant here, since gender-related oppression, although often experienced in domestic spaces, is deeply inflected by the structural hierarchies of imperialism. A focus on women's experiences illustrates a different historical trajectory, and, in performance contexts, allows the presentation of an embodied subjectivity and

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Democratic Society, and the Weather Underground, I see the representation of political movement leaders in texts like *Annie Mae's Movement*, Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* (2011), Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1997), or Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977) as an extension of the sometimes flawed and humanized depictions of the gods in classical epics. Thus the use of "epic battles" is deliberate.

the demarcation of a place/space, from which women can speak. The injection of their histories into the larger discourse of the past broadens the ambit of history to dismantle further the authoritarian and imperialist claims of a univocal historical record. (126)

These assertions help to demonstrate how the personal augments resistance to colonial histories and reclaims marginalized perspectives within a larger cultural milieu. Of particular interest to me is the notion of a univocal historical record. Resistance literature theory is traditionally constructed with an emphasis on the personal allegorizing history. Gilbert and Tompkins create a dialectic wherein the personal and the historical contest and influence one another. Liberation textualities go further, to break apart that binary and proffer a politics that is comprised of social relations. Not only is a larger discourse extended, it is transformed altogether; the dominant trajectory becomes a dialectic that is not about inclusion or exclusion, but through which the political is reconstituted through the personal in a polyvocal and pluriversal combination that decentres traditional political action as the ultimate representation of resistance.

While Gilbert and Tompkins are correct to argue that “the history of a people [can be] explored through the stories of individual women” and that those individual stories “construct a theatrical event that attempts to dilute and disperse the power of a unitary system of historical knowledge” (123; 124), this focus on individuals and their personal relationships is not only about contradicting imperial hegemony; it applies in a panoptical way, illuminating the mutually reinforcing dialectic of personal and political narratives that intersect in the daily lives of most people. The decolonial, feminist, and aesthetic assertions in *Coups* and *Movement* are embodied through personal relations enacted on, to use Gilbert and Tompkins’s phrasing, the *stagescape*: by exploring relationships that are principally or even exclusively between racialized “subjects,”

the colonial presence is diminished; by foregrounding intimate spaces and relations, the audience is drawn emotionally and viscerally into the story; and, of course, while personal relations have always been central to feminism, these plays insist that it is not enough to see the characters allegorically, but rather they argue that the political history of a people or even a movement *is* personal, that what is considered a political force like gender is social, it manifests between people, particularly in romantic situations and emotional conflicts.

However, when emphasising the personal, one must be cautious about using individual figures as allegories for broader social contexts because those personified figures can inhibit the analytical lens by virtue of the limits of the characters' identities and lead to the erasure of crucial voices. *Coups*, for instance, foregrounds the personal relationship of its two main characters and backgrounds the public uprising in a way that also foregrounds specific class (upper middle), sexual (heterosexual), religious (Christian/Hindu), and historical (arrivant) positionalities. Therefore, one must be cautious not to overemphasize one personal perspective over others, or to insist that any one cultural representation is a definitive lens through which to analyze larger historical or political forces. Rather, a focus on personal relations provides specific insights and grounds for critique that help to reconsider social transformation through individual dynamics in conversation with an array of representations that address similar or the same events, issues, ideas, and problems. The goal is not to enforce uniformity, but to create pathways to pluriversality.

The revolutionary context in *Coups* is subordinate to the personal dynamics between the two main characters, and subject to the dismissive commentary of the third. The radio broadcasts which keep the characters and the audience aware of what is going on are subject to Elvira's determination to leave the country and her longing for the airport to reopen. When the coup is

discussed with Mrs. Samuels, Rohan's local neighbour, who *Toronto Star* reviewer Vit Wagner calls the "chorus of common sense" in the play (n.p.), she refers to the Muslimeen as "dese jokers" (Philip 39) and compares their vague motivations and questionable tactics unfavourably against the decisive marches of the Black Power struggles in the 1970s. What is thought of as a resistance struggle is therefore never depicted directly, and even when it enters the stage it is quickly pushed into the background in favour of the crumbling love between Elvira and Rohan. Does Philip include the coup merely as a plot device to strand Elvira with her estranged husband and confront the demons of their marriage? Does the action's remoteness from the characters and elusiveness from the audience suggest a lack of connection to the people? Do Mrs. Samuels's continued disapproving comparisons between Ali Khalid (a stand-in for Imam Yasin Abu Kahr, leader of the JAM) and 70s labour leader Tubal Uriah Butler reinforce the lasting Trinbagonian<sup>34</sup> antipathy toward the 1990 event, despite its grounding in real economic and social discontent with the government of the day (Martinez)? *Coups* does no ideological service to the JAM or its activities and instead offers a politically cynical and socially desolate exploration of what its characters face within the confines of the beach house and in the surrounding society. Just as the JAM would surrender to the government after three days, the country in no better shape than the day before the coup, Elvira and Rohan are unable to cast off the racialized shackles put upon them by their families, and by white colonizers before them. The resistance of *Coups* is therefore messy and intangible; there is no dogma to be embraced, and while consciousness may be raised about the coloniality of racialized antagonisms within Trinidad and Tobago, Philip offers no easy

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<sup>34</sup> While Trinidadian and Tobagonian are official demonyms for people from Trinidad and Tobago, the local term "Trinbagonian" is used here to reflect the unified polity of the two islands. "Trini" is another local term, but favours Trinidad over Tobago in its denotation.

methods for dislodging them. In this way, the ambiguities of life's challenges are wrought as resistance in an unusual fashion, without the safety of victory and through which liberation does not come easily.

*Movement* takes its audience right into the heart of AIM,<sup>35</sup> with some scenes taking place in recognizable spaces of AIM activity or repression (Pine Ridge Reservation, U.S. courthouses, FBI interrogation rooms), but in a way that is no less uneasy and no less focused on how personal relationships construct political struggles. Nolan includes many details from the historical record relating to Anna Mae Aquash and AIM, but the play uses Anna's romantic entanglements as the lens through which her character arc is witnessed. Though the play is framed by her death, her journey from a Boston schoolhouse to the badlands of South Dakota where her body was found is staged through a series of interactions with her ex-husband, her pupil, her second husband, her lover, and her children. Even her political rivalries and conflicts are wrapped up in her relationship with AIM leader Dennis Banks. The political action is inextricable from the personal complications that inform the relationships in the play, and Nolan makes the controversial assertion that Dennis's romantic ambiguity toward Anna leads to her alienation within AIM and, ultimately, her murder. Far from diminishing the "warrior" moniker that writers, comrades, and filmmakers have posthumously adorned Aquash with, the play offers the audience a sense of resistance that is defined by the undervalued aspects of womanhood that are ever-present in social movements but often considered to be of little importance to liberation struggle. Anna is a character that inhabits both traditional and liberated women's roles in a way that not only forges a unique representation of the revolutionary figure, but also underscores the

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<sup>35</sup> Grammatically, this should (rather awkwardly) read "the AIM"; however, in the interests of lyricality, I align myself with scholars and AIM members who drop the definite article in both prose and colloquial speech.

variety of positionalities that indigenous women occupy outside of the colonial matrix of power. Resistance is thus not only personalized in a very direct way, but the difficult questions about hypocrisy, patriarchy, and efficacy are unearthed by the play's focus and juxtapositions staged by the playwright.

### **Decolonial Maneuvers**

Decoloniality decentres colonizing structures without presuming they have miraculously vanished. These plays do not deny the impacts of coloniality on the lives of their characters—land appropriation, cultural imperialism, alcohol use, and patriarchal family structures all inform *Movement*; while racism, cultural erasure, and forced migration haunt *Coups*—but they focus, for their audiences and their readers, not on the clash between colonizer and colonized, but on the impact for arrivant and indigenous peoples, on how these forces play out in their daily lives and loves. Placing marginalized figures at the centre of the stage is a subtle but important move by both playwrights.

In a chilling reflection of how coloniality can emerge even beyond colonialism, the truth about Aquash's death involves the indirect collaboration of government and movement forces. Activists believed for years that Aquash was murdered by FBI agents as a part of their terror campaign to neutralize AIM. Aquash embodied for many the epic conflict between the forces of indigenous resistance and settler colonial oppression; however, as time moved on, it became clear that the truth was much more complicated and ghastly: having been “bad-jacketed” by the government (who would spontaneously release Aquash from custody in order to give her comrades the impression she had cooperated or was cooperating with them), Aquash was

executed by AIM members (Koningberg MM34). *Movement* confronts this reality: a single male actor plays the roles of Lawrence (her pupil), Dennis (her lover), and FBI Guy (her antagonist), all of whom manifest in the Rugaru (also played by the same actor) to rape and murder Anna in the play's final scene. The play therefore conjectures that Anna's personal relationships collide with the coloniality of the state in a misogynist combination that ended her life. Alexander Pettit calls this the "shared-guilt theory," in which "a composite theory of guilt emerged, according to which a paranoiac AIM leadership had ordered Aquash's death after having been duped by the FBI's strategy" (44; 32). Nolan weaves these forces into the monstrous Rugaru, a figure that literally haunts the play, emerging from the shadows of the set in several scenes to clutch at Anna. Daniel David Moses (Lenape) comments that "the creature seems almost the embodiment of *western* culture's misogyny that Aquash faced coming from both the American government institutions and the warriors of AIM" (258-59, emphasis added). Coloniality is embodied in the Rugaru; and while indigenous and settler men contribute to its power, it is a colonizing patriarchy that is its basis. The stage directions make the culprits in the Rugaru's makeup explicit:

*The man has entered and is watching her, smelling her. He is man, with elements of LAWRENCE, DENNIS, FBI GUY, but he moves like an animal. She becomes aware of him.*

*As he approaches her, her "don'ts" become more agitated, pleading, angry, anguished. As he rapes her, she stops begging ....* (53)

The audience witnesses a clear critique of AIM that refuses any attempt to absolve the settler state, but which does not flinch from depicting what indigenous men have done in collusion with

that colonial patriarchy. The use of the Rugaru symbolically underscores this shared sense of culpability: Delani Valin's discussion of the Rugaru figure reveals that it has both French and Indigenous North American roots, related etymologically to the werewolf—called the *loupgarou*, a figure which has spread across the Americas along the trajectory of French settlers, including the Caribbean as I have discussed in Chapter 2—and the Ojibwe wendigo (355, 357). This hybrid figure is therefore an important signifier for the play's decolonial work, the way it represents the various forces at play in Anna's life and death.

The fact that one man plays both indigenous (Lawrence, Dennis, and Nogeeshik) and white settler parts (Law, Doug, and FBI Guy) reinforces a concept of comprehensive coloniality; patriarchy is spread across these figures, and the actor must find a way to make a startling transition from Dennis to FBI Guy between the scene at the AIM National Convention and the first interrogation scene.<sup>36</sup> Nolan uses the material facts of the Aquash story to design a series of moments that function as a reminder that old binaries of empire and nation are complicated by the psychological and cultural invasion of coloniality beyond the bounds of settler societies.

The effect of this emphasis is not to absolve colonial North America of its role in oppression, but rather to offer a more holistic assessment of the work ahead in decolonizing. The argument that AIM suffered from a colonizing sexism that disrupted its efforts at indigenous resurgence, while not uncontroversial, is precisely what Simpson argues about the contours of decolonizing practice. The loss of selfhood, resulting from acts of cultural and physical genocide, leads to what Simpson calls "cognitive imperialism" (32), a sense of worthlessness into which

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<sup>36</sup> The scene where Doug is outed as an informer names Doug also as FBI Guy, which gives the audience a sense of the slippages between the two roles. However, even that scene, in which the actor must transform himself from an indigenous imposter into a white infiltrator provides a striking and contradictory visual if the actor is indigenous.

neocolonial, and especially patriarchal, aggressions can creep. Nolan's play challenges this uncomfortable reality in a way that is driven by decolonial sensibilities. By framing the play through a protagonist whose physical death is subverted in the opening stage directions, Nolan demands that the audience revive their consideration of the issues raised by Aquash's murder, and by reframing Aquash's final years through the lens of her personal relationships, Nolan deploys vision, imagination, and critique in such a way that the daily manifestations of coloniality are confronted and unpacked.

Nolan's opening scene, "Beginning," presents the stakes of her argument to the audience not only through the startling presentation of the protagonist already dead, but using the set and a dramatic awakening and soliloquy to introduce the story through a prism of indigenous resurgence and inquiry:

*Lights up to reveal ANNA MAE, curled in a foetal position CS. The red silk/red road flows downstage, the good red road. ANNA awakens, begins to crawl, then to walk the road. (3)*

Nolan uses the awful facts reported in the press about how Aquash was found—by a rancher who describes the “badly decomposed corpse, in jeans and a maroon ski jacket, lay[ing] with knees pushed up toward chest” (Konigsberg MM34)—and immediately allows Anna to rise, to break away from the wretched figure that has been associated with her death. Nolan's red road is not simply about blood,<sup>37</sup> but a signifying pathway along which the audience revisits her story and re-examines the issues it raises.

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<sup>37</sup> Red recurs throughout the play; this can, of course, signify blood—such as when Anna spills ketchup on her wrists to simulate suicide in an angry moment (Nolan 10)—but also anger, or the historical denotation of indigenous protest movements with “Red Power,” or the racialized designation of indigenous peoples as “red” based upon a crude approximation of their skin colour.

Nolan's own Toronto 2001 production stages the play in such a way that the audience has "roadside" seats to Anna's journey. Reviewer Christopher Hoile describes the set:

The performance space at the Native Canadian Centre has been divided into a kind of irregular cross with the audience sitting in four groups at each angle as if perched on cliffs over a canyon. Designer Christine Plunkett has, in fact, designed the space to resemble a river, with action beginning at the entrance to the theatre and gradually moving to the mountain on the platform opposite, where Anna Mae meets her death. (n.p.)

The audience physically sees the many sides of the story, whilst being seated in a recreation of the mountainous badlands where Aquash was found. Nolan cannot change the outcome of Aquash's story, but she can breathe new life into Anna, infusing in her a sense of teaching, about history, about relationships, about resistance. According to Simpson, indigenous knowledge must be "learned in the context of our own personal lives, in an emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual way" (41). Nolan's Anna appears to the audience in these very ways, apart from her reputation as a political fighter, situated amid the faults and problems within the movement she joined, or to cover them up in order to protect the important goals of that movement.

Anna is reconstructed through a sense of resurgence that must confront an uncomfortable past. Her opening soliloquy draws together the various forces that make up the coloniality she faces throughout the play. Evoking the concept of disappearance—a theme that haunts indigenous peoples past and present, as the title of Chrystos's *Not Vanishing* (1988) makes so clear—she declares its continental ubiquity, and then links the refusal of vanishing to the personal relationships she forged in her life, thus an expansive decolonial viewpoint is set up at the play's outset:

ANNA. Our leaders—the leaders of the American Indian Movement—said that we should learn to fight.... Well, they didn't mean me, did they? They meant the men, the warriors, the dog soldiers. Not you, girl, fighting's not for you....

I guess I got it from my mother, she used to fight the Indian Agent.... I couldn't have been more than four, but I remember she sent him packing.... (3-4)

The failure of the AIM leaders is contrasted with the effectiveness of her mother. Political solidarity is diminished by deeper bonds. Not only does this opening statement emphasize the significance of personal relationships in the pursuit of social justice, it also situates the story of the play within a predominantly indigenous-centred drama. The disparity of European colonization and U.S. oppression is a given, but not a central conflict in the scenes to come. In discussing her reluctance to join the movement with her husband, Nogeeshik, she portends that “we will be fighting ourselves, Indian against Indian” (13) or her later, stronger assertion that white folks “don't have to do anything, they just stand back and watch us destroy ourselves” (39). Her hesitation lies in the complex nature of patriarchy's hold on the organization she wants to support. Anna's indexical reference to the “AIM boys” (11) illustrates the male domination of the organization, raising questions about its commitment to women's liberation. Typical political narrative is problematized, and emphasis is placed on the complexities of the indigenous social environment (rather than the binary of indigenous-white relations) that, ultimately, has more relevance to those affected by coloniality.

*Coups* is noteworthy for both its focus on a personal domestic relationship and the absence of white people from its representational centre.<sup>38</sup> From the list of characters at the outset, it is clear that this drama decolonially eschews whiteness in favour of a difficult conversation between its two focal characters—“Elvira Jackson, an African Caribbean woman from Trinidad” and “Rohan Shankar, a South Asian Caribbean man from Trinidad”—and their choral interloper, Mrs. Samuels, “an African Caribbean woman from Tobago” (Philip 15). As Nolan does in *Movements* (though perhaps less so, as Nolan’s dramatic conflict includes the active and aggressive role of the repressive and judicial arms of the state in Aquash’s story), Philip focuses her audience on a tension between characters that is inflected with coloniality and its matrix of power, but which play out predominantly within spaces of and for people of colour. Shifting the ground in this way allows Philip’s characters to have frank dialogue on painful realities without the need to coalesce in the presence of the oppressor. For example, in the following exchange whiteness is set aside in favour of an exploration of racialized conflicts between black and brown Trinbagonians:

ELVIRA. You feel you don’t belong here anymore.

ROHAN. I never belonged here, Elvira.

*(Pause.)*

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<sup>38</sup> As I will discuss below, it is also noteworthy for the absence of indigenous peoples. Despite the play’s heightened awareness of racialized history and colonial relations, and Philip’s sharp exploration of the rootlessness of her characters, neither of whom feels they “belong” in the land of their birth, the play does not refer even superficially to the indigenous peoples that predate the arrival of Europeans, African, and Asians, and whose presence is often overlooked in discussions about Trinidad and Tobago. See Tracy Assing and Sophie Meyer’s *The Amerindians* (2010), a short film about the social and political challenges facing the contemporary Santa Rosa Carib community in Trinidad, for one example.

Neither did you, for that matter. The fundamental difference being that we Indians always felt that we didn't belong, whereas you Blacks believed you did— No, you believed you owned here. And guess what, Elvira, that was as much a myth as those Indians who felt they didn't belong.

*(Pause.)*

You didn't even own the land, Elvira, so how could you belong? And it wasn't us, coolies, that owned it either—contrary to the common belief that “coolie own everyting.” No, Elvira, it was the French Creole—the *French Creole!* And here you are talking about belonging. The situation was always clearer for us Indians—we never had the luxury you people had.

ELVIRA. Luxury!

ROHAN. Once we got here, we were coolies, and coolies we remained. Until we left or died—those who were lucky enough.

ELVIRA. And weren't we niggers once we got here? At least you had your Hindi and your Gujerati! [*sic*] Do you hear anyone speaking Yoruba or Ga in Trinidad, Rohan? And *your* people are still practicing their religion today. You forget the government used to lock up the Shouter Baptists like Granny, because their worship—their *Christian* worship, mind you, was too African! Anybody Indian ever got put in jail, Rohan, because they practiced their religion? (60-61)

These horizontal inequalities and resentments are of course a product of the colonial history in which Europeans attempted to dislodge African identity and language during the slave trade, offered slightly adjusted (though no less severe) conditions to indentured South Asian labourers, and fomented a post-plantation environment in which tensions and anger were focused not on

Europeans (or French Creole, as Rohan identifies them, which Trinbagonians use to refer to Euro-Caribbean people generally) but on whatever arrivant group was perceived to have a slight advantage either under colonial rule or after (see Puri 171-88). Legacies of coloniality are present but remain in the background; colonialism has ruptured their connections to the present and anguished their attempts to create a new diasporic identity as secondary settlers in a land stolen from others. And though Philip remains silent on those aboriginal others, she does construct a space on the stage in which brown and black characters can express their vulnerabilities, expose their fears, and express their outrage, with whites only as potential witnesses in the audience and not as an imposing presence on the stage.

Resistance drama that stakes out a decolonial position presents a forum in which to rethink old binaries through the muffled voices of those excluded from the typical stages of political battle. Elvira and Rohan debate the sense of dislocation that is the legacy of coloniality, but their marital breakdown is the design through which Philip has organized these material histories, including racial and cultural divides, the much-disputed Muslimeen coup, and migration to the UK and other white-dominated places. Focus on the Indian-African marriage assists the play's function as a discussion among people of colour. The *Guardian* review of Talawa Theatre Company's 1999 production of *Coups* elucidates the necessity for downplaying whiteness in the context of contemporary Caribbean coloniality. Its title, "Are West Indians Racist Too?" (Gardner G26), suggests that the reviewer (or the paper's editor) cannot apprehend the subtleties of race in Trinidad and Tobago. Lyn Gardner goes on to say that "Philip's play crams rather too much in for its own thematic good, but it is a compelling history lesson that taught me plenty I did not know about the racial and religious make-up of this part of the world,

and that clearly struck a chord with a local, vocal audience at the Oval House<sup>39</sup> in Kennington” (G26). While that didactic outcome is satisfactory for the reviewer and perhaps her white readers, the intersections of race, gender, love, regret, desire, culture, and politics that Philip tackles are facets of Caribbean life that require care and nuance, and indeed a synchronization of many themes into a short domestic drama. By ignoring indigenous presences, Philip does not quite get there but she does establish a space for meaningful dialogue about persistent colonialities in the region.

Davies dedicates a good portion of her “Uprising Textualities” article to the question of “unbelongingness,” a sense of which looms over Elvira and Rohan in spite of their being Trinidadians. What is remarkable about Philip’s work in the context of scholarship and literature on diaspora and exile is that the play is set in the “homeland.” The unbelongingness is not just the impenetrable and unforgiving metropole (though both characters live primarily in London, hold UK passports, and reveal disaffecting incidents of British racism), but rather the dislocation and angst they feel *in* Trinidad and Tobago, exacerbated by the eruption of a coup which they do not understand or even sympathize with. Part of this relates to Davies’s formulation. She remarks

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<sup>39</sup> “Local” can of course mean many things. Located in the predominantly Caribbean district of Brixton, the Oval House’s website boasts that it is:

A hotbed of artistic activism in the five decades since we began, Ovalhouse has seen the social and artistic ideals it has aspired to become widely accepted as the model for a better society. We have sheltered social and political movements staffed by the stage and screen stars of the future, pursued an unerring agenda for positive artistic, political and social change and, once, stabled a donkey in the Theatre Upstairs. Ovalhouse stands on a proud history and continues to be a vital home for boundary-pushing art and artists with an eye on the future” (n.p.).

This gives an indication of what the local, vocal audience might be like and suggests that there was not “too much” in the play for them.

that one of the ironies of the migration narrative is its dissociative effect on characters; they are portrayed and think of themselves as completely displaced. This results in a “flat, stereotypical, and over-romanticized ‘home’” that is confounded by the moment when “the reality and dream converge in a nightmarish sequence” and the harsh realities of “neglect, and poverty and people hostile to ‘foreigners’” swiftly demystify that home (102). Elvira and Rohan experience nothing as acute as what Davies describes, but their sense of unease is palpable. Elvira describes an almost comic scene at the Tobago airport when she is caught by the beginning of the coup in Trinidad, which cancels all flights. She is desperate to leave, waving her UK passport in anyone’s face and hurling threats and insults to no avail.

ROHAN. I’m surprised they didn’t have you arrested.

ELVIRA. They called the soldiers for me—had me escorted out of the waiting room. In my own country—soldiers manhandling me—

ROHAN. You can’t have it both ways, Elvira, you did say you were a tourist.

ELVIRA. I didn’t have it any way, Rohan. I don’t get the advantages of being a tourist, and when I object to being treated unfairly I get treated like a common criminal. (23)

Of course, economic status intersects with much of this “mistreatment”; Elvira is a doctor and is trying to return to her post at a British hospital. Her imperious treatment of the airport staff in a time of crisis that is personally inconvenient registers both tourist and class arrogance, but Philip reminds her audience that these exercises of privilege occur along the spectrum of unbelongingness that is the legacy of coloniality. Elvira may demand respect, even excessively so, but it leads to no avail. Even the UK passport cannot override the racialized and gendered signifiers that she bears on her person, and which overshadow the passport and its privileges.

Though *Coups* lacks the severity that Davies points to—or the psychological starkness of, for instance, Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939)—the play seeks to demonstrate that the difficulties of arrivant Caribbean life are not erased by emigration or a turn toward the old colonial powers. Philip insists that Trinbagonians must confront their personal histories and explore the question of how and why coloniality persists even in an era of national independence.

However, it cannot be overlooked that *Coups* also absents indigenous peoples from its stage. Even as Rohan and Elvira discuss this sense of unbelongingness, no dialogue indicates that such a sense may be problematized by an indigenous presence or that the independent Caribbean state is still a settler one. In her introduction to *Transit of Empire*, Jodi A. Byrd (Chickasaw) argues effectively that the standpoint of anticolonial criticism is better served by accounting for “the complex dynamics of colonial discourses that exist horizontally among histories of oppression and inform continued complicities as historical narratives vie for ascendancy as the primary or originary oppression within lands shaped by competing histories of slavery, colonialism, arrival, and indigeneity” (xxxv). In other words, Caribbean narratives often overlook and erase the indigenous presences in the Caribbean that predated the arrival of Europeans, Africans, and Asians precisely because indigenous presences problematize the belongingness of all settler and arrivant peoples. Where other Caribbean authors in my study have acknowledged or explored that fact and its potential representative value, Philip remains relatively silent. Yet the personal sense of rootlessness that both Elvira and Rohan experience can be accounted for by broadening Davies’s analysis of unbelongingness with Byrd’s sense that “indigenous critical theory ... provide[s] a diagnostic way of reading and interpreting the colonial logics that underpin cultural, intellectual, and political discourses” by “ask[ing] that

settler, native, and arrivant each acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure” (Byrd xxx). The neocoloniality of the contemporary Caribbean (and indeed the Americas), against which decolonial thought mobilizes, and which penetrates the lives of those who populate the region, is better understood by this historical perspective. The communities of people represented by Elvira and Rohan, locked though they are in the cultural bifurcations which mark racialized identity for Trinbagonians, might find a sense of solace and solidarity in an expanded notion of social location in the Caribbean that includes the indigenous presence.

The comment by Rohan that “nobody belongs” is better illuminated by the group he fails to acknowledge, the indigenous, the Arawak and Carib, but his dis-ease with current social relations is an important part of a broader critique. While colonizing Europeans forged and exploited the racialized antagonisms between arrivant communities, the sense of rootlessness is an apex of indigenous dispossession, forced migration, and cultural imperialism. The first two are facts of history which incriminate colonizers and plantocrats, the third implicates all dominant structures that erase indigenous presences, foment colour and culture prejudice, use Christianity to enforce misogyny and heterosexism, and subscribe to Eurocentric economic models that benefit most globally imperial powers and few Trinbagonians. *Coups* perhaps takes a less comprehensive view of the factors that contribute to the frustrations its characters face than might be ideal, but the play articulates the experience that, in spite of grand narratives to the contrary on behalf of the political class, in everyday life, coloniality remains in place:

ROHAN. That’s what I mean by the choice between massa and massa.

*(Pause.)*

[Prime Minister Eric Williams] was telling us “Massa day done,” but he and his cronies were busily setting up another class of massas—Black ones. (65)

This statement illustrates the common disconnect between polemics and social realities. Rohan’s claim belies the reductive assumption that coloniality was eradicated with independence and offers readers/viewers a glimpse into the domestic impact of political practices.

Philip herself gives a potential insight into the complexity of Caribbean decoloniality in her essay, “Fugues, Fragments, and Fissures: A Work in Progress” (2007). She uses the fugue state as analogue for various social and structural problems:

What I find incomprehensible in Trinbagonian society becomes comprehensible when I apply the concept of the fugue state to it—a state that allows groups and individuals to function as if ‘normal’ but whose behaviour is dissociative.

Beginning with the political shenanigans which manifest as general corruption and contempt for the populace, whatever the party in power, the apparently utter contempt for life in Trinidad and Tobago and the loosening of the bounds that once held families and society. (83-84)

She situates her skepticism in the dislocation and trauma of forced migration and slavery in order to account for “the atomization of society, the breakdown of communities, the dissipation of family ties, the hiving off of generations, the emphasis on youth culture at the expense of the wisdom of elders” (85). Philip casts the coloniality of contemporary Trinidad and Tobago in distinctly social terms, in domestic and familial settings. The historical atrocity of slavery comingles with social disintegration in order to continue the colonial matrix of power.

Unable or unwilling to confront and cast out the ghosts of slavery (Philip points to a celebratory magazine article about an Antiguan plantation house turned into luxury living and

unironically called Body Pond Estate), the architecture of colonial rule remains, an architecture which includes the unacknowledged but continued dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants. In order to reckon with this past, to heal in a way that Rohan and Elvira cannot by the end of the play, coloniality must be confronted, interrupted, and ultimately eradicated in its multiple manifestations. The cynical and dissatisfying conclusion to the marriage narrative, alongside the dismissive and ambiguous attitude of Mrs. Samuels to the Muslimeen coup, dovetail to dislodge a romantic notion of independence and lays the textual groundwork for readers and viewers to further consider how resistance is played out between individuals toward a liberatory condition; in a similar way, *Movements* revisits the idealism of AIM and its struggle in order to unpack the personal dynamics of its lethal neocolonial mistakes so that readers and audiences can make more hopeful, decolonial choices for the future.

### **Feminist Nuances**

Just as *Movements* is perhaps more obviously decolonial to an audience than *Coups*, Nolan's feminist maneuvers are clearer and more palatable than Philip's. Not only is Nolan recuperating a woman-centred story by "denaturalizing" the male-dominated history of AIM and indigenous protest generally (Gilbert and Tompkins 120), she offers Anna as an emblem of radical womanhood that is equally committed to political and personal struggle. Pettit agrees that *Movement* "expose[s] conflicts and contradictions within AIM in order to posit a top-down misogyny at odds with the organizations mission as an agent of change" (29). Anna symbolizes the failure of AIM and indigenous male political leadership to confront misogyny and the patriarchal pillar of coloniality, such as when she confronts her student-turned-inquisitor

Lawrence: “Is the revolution what your Rugaru foretold? That our men would be interrogating our women on their knees?” (51). This dialogue emphasizes the irony and absurdity of a misogynist social movement, further alienating it from indigenous resurgence and liberation. Anna signifies a resistant feminist figure whose personal and social resistance is central to her decolonization. Andrea Smith argues that colonial violence is perpetuated in the domestic sphere and that “[n]o amount of reparations will be successful if we do not address the oppressive behaviours we have internalized” (103). Calls for an end to indigenous oppression are not enough if, behind the scenes, colonial gender hierarchies are enacted within the movement.

Staging Anna’s activist work primarily through her romantic relationships, particularly to Dennis, emphasizes the significance of the personal in shaping a political reality. As with most plays, the information readers are given about Anna and Dennis is spare, as is the description of their interactions. In “Anna Meets Dennis,” a seemingly shy, bright, and mildly star-struck Anna meets the confident, responsible, burdened, and casually sexist Dennis. Depending on how the actors play it, Anna may bristle at being called the “little warrior woman,” or his complaint about people “with a bunch of ideas for improvements,” and react accordingly to his condescending suggestion that fundraising is something “useful the women can actually do”; and her reply to “My name is Dennis” with “Oh, I know who you are, of course” can have several possible emphases (15-17). Nolan has set up the meeting between Anna and Dennis to be one of mixed emotions and consequences. Dennis is at once a man burdened with a great struggle and a difficult group of lieutenants; but he is also patronizing and dismissive, particularly towards women, and women with ideas for the future. Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe), writing of the Wounded Knee uprising in his memoir *Interior Landscapes* (2009), refers to Banks as a “media man” and derisively recalls that while indigenous activists and settler representatives were

negotiating a treaty agreement, “Dennis Banks was riding a horse, posing for photographers at Wounded Knee” (239). Banks is cast by Vizenor as a man of style unable or unwilling to engage in the mucky work of social transformation. In *Movement*, Dennis remarks that he is “more of a practical, political Indian. All of this ooga booga shit—you take something practical like a traditional, a ritual, and you fill it up with meaning because it satisfies something in you, you give it more meaning than it has” (30). The play has him admit the artifice of the very behaviour observed by Vizenor.

At their first meeting, Anna makes her case for “long-term” thinking, whilst Dennis is incredulous and uncompromising, stuck in the now and signifying a stifled sense of vision. Anna is his foil, full of enthusiasm, wisdom, and modesty—twice, he asks her if she has ideas, and she replies with “A few.” Nolan’s dialogue not only represents what Aquash was up against, but also allows for a nuanced performance of gender relations. Anna can be fawning and wary, diminutive and sardonic; Dennis can be playful and troubled, ironic and sinister. These subtleties reflect the complexity of “a more critical analysis of Native activist responses to feminism and sexism in Native communities” (Smith 95). Anna struggles with an attraction to Dennis, a commitment to the movement, and neocolonial patriarchy; Nolan brings these struggles downstage and readers must consider the various personal pressures of involvement in resistance.

Motherhood is a recurring theme in the play, and its pressures are exerted alongside and through Anna’s relationship with Dennis. Nolan’s use of motherhood acts to humanize Anna, and also to expose the gendered inequalities embodied in Dennis and the other men with whom the play conflates him.

ANNA. That's what frightens me. That I willingly leave my girls, willingly give up my children. I tried to keep us together in the beginning. I did. I kept the girls with me when I first came to the States, but what kind of life is that for kids, dragging them everywhere. [sic] Kids need stability, routine. *(pause)* You got kids?

DENNIS. Fifteen.

ANNA. Fifteen?

DENNIS. That I know of.

ANNA. Fifteen? You trying to populate the movement by yourself?

*DENNIS shrugs.* (25)

Anna struggles with the choices she has made, carefully and remorsefully considering what is best for her family given her involvement in AIM. She accepts and confronts the burdens of motherhood; Dennis, on the contrary, seems either unconcerned or hardened to the fact. When Anna says "it doesn't seem to phase you" [sic] and describes her own painful parting from her daughter, Dennis replies: "My kids don't even really know who I am" (25-26). The scene culminates with this exchange:

DENNIS. This is what we do. We are warriors. We leave the kid raising to others.

ANNA. But raising kids is important.

DENNIS. I'm not saying it isn't. But you are doing other things for your kids, for all Indian kids. You are out there fighting to change the world for your kids. You are a warrior, Anna Mae, and it has a cost.

ANNA. I'm a better warrior than I am a mother, that's for sure. (26)

This leads to a moment of Dennis acknowledging Anna's importance to him, and to the organization, to his calling her "powerful" and "brave-hearted." His small caveat—"I would be afraid of you if I didn't trust you so much"—gestures toward the reasoning behind Anna's tragic end. The lines are drawn in this scene between the political warrior and the domestic parent, with each character coping with the dichotomy in different, gendered ways.

Kim Anderson (Métis) points to motherhood as a fraught but integral aspect of indigenous womanhood:

Empowered motherhood was not only a practice but also an ideology that allowed women to assert their authority at various political levels. In a number of indigenous societies, it was older women who made decisions that set the direction for all the people, which they did as clan mothers, through women's councils, and as head women of their own extended families. (83-84)

This role *combines* rather than bifurcates motherhood and political activism/leadership. The fact that Dennis's wife, Kamook, and his children, are in the periphery of AIM, whilst Anna's children are back with their father in Nova Scotia, represents a colonized state of being that plays out between them in the scene. Anna is a far cry from the role Anderson describes, and Dennis justifies it by ignoring Anna's difficulty with this cleavage in her life. Anna longs to subvert the dichotomy imposed by colonial patriarchy, one that mirrors who is "resistant" and who is not, and this disagreement ushers in a turn in her relationship to Dennis. In their next scene together, he has decided to send her to the Los Angeles office, an assignment that disappoints Anna and which is tied to Dennis's assertion that women are only good for fundraising. The relationship between Dennis and Anna comes to represent the destructive impact of colonial patriarchy on indigenous womanhood, embodied in Anna's attempt to reconcile her positions but also in the

deadly path she is set on by this and other misogynies<sup>40</sup> rearing their heads within AIM and across indigenous and settler communities in North America.

*Coups* is also concerned with the neocolonial effects of patriarchy, but Philip stages its feminism in a way that is less direct than Nolan. Elvira's self-determination rests on a racialized connection she seeks that refutes the presumption of intercultural creolization in the Caribbean; she bucks the idea of solidarity across Indian and African communities and, in some ways, appears to surrender to the prejudices of her and Rohan's parents' generation. Moreover, Rohan is cast as someone who glosses over racialized divisions in Trinidad and Tobago (preferring the British context, where they are both "wog" [109]) and treats his wife more as an exotic prop, and uses her as a cover for academic rebellion against his family. Osita Okagbue's psychoanalytic inquiry in *Culture and Identity in African and Caribbean Theatre* (2009) suggests that the diasporic positionality of (most) Caribbean peoples results in a "preponderance of the theme of individual search for an understanding of the self and their position in society" in the region's drama (26). Moreover,

[Afro-]Caribbean writers are neither in search of heroes, nor are they interested in presenting history as immutably flowing into and informing the present. Their focus is more on the African-Caribbean person now; they are interested in his or her life, values, and world, but above all, they are interested in his or her alienation in the present. Although fully aware of the historical dimension of the

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<sup>40</sup> Both internalized and standard misogynies, as it turns out; the Konigsberg article reveals that a number of women—referred to as the Pie Patrol—were involved in the setup of Aquash's murder. However, the article posits that the act itself could only have been carried out at the request of male leadership, given that those convicted of the crime had little or no relationship to Aquash prior to her death.

Caribbean psychic dilemma, the majority of the playwrights avoid specific historicity. (Okagbue 27-28)

Philip's humanization project, then, is to confront the creolizing intersections of Trinbagonian society, and to embrace and yet leave unresolved the historical conflicts between African and Indian in the Caribbean. At the play's final curtain, Elvira exits the stage, risking death; the radio announcements that puncture the action on stage repeat that the police will "shoot on sight" anyone breaking the curfew. Elvira is scrambling to escape the fugue state, the disjuncture among her "people," in search of the elusive *belonging*. Belonging. The word repeats throughout the dialogue like an incantation. Elvira's departure represents a feminist link to a ruptured blackness, to "know the darkness" and "love the darkness" (Philip 137).

The relationship between the leads is complex and painful. Rohan's hunger for what amounts to a constructed version of Elvira is matched only by his longing for unity among all Trinbagonians. Elvira's struggle for colour pride is obscured by her articulated disdain for Trinidad and Tobago, her longing to escape it, even at one point crying "Why doesn't America invade and put an end to all this?" (86). A feminist analysis emerges through the very unpacking of these complications, through Philip's creation of an antiheroine whose seemingly calm and progressive male counterpart is revealed to harbour race and gender colonialities just beneath the slick veneer of his academic discourse.

Philip reinforces her critique of patronizing coloniality with the introduction of Mrs. Samuels, an actantial presence<sup>41</sup> who uses the Trinbagonian demotic that provides an aural/oral

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<sup>41</sup> Knowles defines an actant as characters and other elements in the play who are "forces tht are brought to bear on the action and on one another.... Actantial functions, when they are performed by characters...operate on the level of plot rather than of characters and motivation because any one actant can simultaneously or sequentially bring different forces into the play" (149).

contrast to the diasporic diction of Elvira and Rohan, and who disrupts the comforting and at times colonial logics that the other characters try to rest upon. Mrs. Samuels confronts Rohan's superficial ideology with an epistemology grounded in history, memory, and experiential knowledge. For instance, the dialogue between Rohan and Mrs. Samuels exposes his attitude toward her to be simultaneously venerating and patronizing:

ROHAN. What you saw back then, Mrs. Samuels is really important. If I interviewed you, what I would do is—

MRS. SAMUELS. Is not just what me *seeing*, Mr. Rohan, is what happening back den. All like you and Miss Elvira so could never get together. No sir! Somebody woulda dead already. (37)

Mrs. Samuels cuts into Rohan's glorification of the past with the harsh reality. Her voice in the play is a constant reminder of the hardships that mark Trinbagonian history. Even though Rohan and Elvira have lived through some of this experience, it is Mrs. Samuels who makes them confront it in blunt and localized terms. At another point, Elvira and Mrs. Samuels team up against Rohan to expose the limits of his expertise:

MRS. SAMUELS. [...] You have a chapter bout dat in your book? What it call again? You did tell me but me forget.

*They both answer.*

ELVIRA. *The Tropical and the Sublime.*

ROHAN. *The Sublime and the Tropical.*

MRS. SAMUELS. It sounding real important. I understand de Tropical part of it, but what is dis ting you calling Sublime?

ELVIRA. That's where Rohan gets to show that we Black people are no different from white people. Like them we have our beauty, our awe-inspiring nature—just look at the blues out there in the Caribbean Sea, Mrs. Samuels. How many can you count? And, like, the whites, we also have our terror. Which is just another name for the sublime—

MRS. SAMUELS. Huh! De only terror me knowing in dese islands is what people doing to each other. Especially politicians. White politician. Black politician. Indian politician. Is all de same. (41-42)

In this exchange, Rohan is slightly mocked by Elvira, but it is Mrs. Samuels who once again reframes the abstract claims of Rohan's work with concrete knowledge. Her use of local demotic dislodges both Rohan and Elvira's authority whilst giving a sub- and counter text to their assertions. Mrs. Samuels defies the traditional use of this type of character in a resistance context. She is not just a wise peasant reminding these upper middle-class expats about the struggle of the worker; nor is she the naïve housewife who cares nothing about the community and country around her. Mrs. Samuels is a skeptical historian and social analyst; she faces her own plight against labour exploitation and poverty, but she is neither uninvolved in political struggle nor particularly enchanted by it. Philip enriches the conflict between Rohan and Elvira by introducing a voice whose Tobago—in spite of her early claims that “Is God own land dis” (31)—is not that of the tourist brochures, or the government proclamations of racial harmony codified in Prime Minister Williams's 1965 slogan that “all ah we is one” (Palmer 255-56). Mrs. Samuels deflates Rohan's idealism, and softens Elvira's racialized longings.

The development of Elvira's character in the play signifies the unfinished work of cross-cultural solidarity within the Caribbean and its diaspora, but also emphasizes the gendered path

toward reconciliation. After Mrs. Samuels and Rohan separately confront Elvira about the real reason for her stay in Tobago, there is a marked escalation in Elvira's resistance to Rohan's overtures and desire for rapprochement. Her early dialogue indicates through many of their exchanges that she doesn't agree with Rohan's argument equating African and Indian "rootlessness," and thus flattening the distinctive fissures—to use Philip's phrasing—caused by slavery and indentureship. But once she can speak openly about her affair with the black fisherman, her defiance cuts into Rohan's pleas to take politics out of their relationship.

ROHAN. The only African and Indian I care about—no—to use your language, the only nigger and coolie I care about is you and me. We—you and I—have a relationship and you care more about the crap that's being broadcast on that radio than about us. I don't give a fuck about racial violence. I care about us. Me, Rohan, and you Elvira. And I don't see you as Black—you are Elvira.

ELVIRA. That's your mistake. Not seeing me as Black. And no amount of your love will change the fact that I am. (132-33)

At the scene's crescendo, Rohan "*blocks her exit*," stating that "You can't let this madness get to you, Elvira. I won't let you go—," to which she responds "*You won't let me go?*" (134). For Rohan, the sum of their relationship is a personal defiance of racial codes. Rohan's repeated return to how racism plays out in an English setting signifies the notion that British white supremacy pushes people of colour closer together, neutralizing the antagonisms harboured from the Trinbagonian context. Elvira's challenge to these claims questions that reasoning and suggests that it participates in the master narrative of neocolonial multiculturalism, the "I don't see race" defence that leaves structural inequalities and historical forces of privilege and oppression aside in the quest for a false racial uplift.

Davies reminds us that

Black women's experience in England has its genesis in British colonialism (their migrations for exploitation) and the disruptions which followed their earlier involvement in the forced migrations, indenturing and enslavement of African and Asian peoples. The subsequent migrations to England for economic, political, and other well-documented reasons are all by-products of this earlier series of displacements. (97-98)

The audience of *Coups* is placed head-long into thorny debates about race and gender that could rarely take place in the cities where the play was initially performed (Toronto and London) because the predominance of whiteness too often shifts the discussion toward a binary that tries to glaze over conflicts among people of colour. Rohan's life experience bears a similar historical trajectory to Elvira's, but they are not the same. In Elvira's response above to Rohan's attempt to detain her, the emphasis on *you*—a direction to the actor perhaps—rather than the more outrageous *let*, is telling: Elvira focuses on *his* complicity, *his* patriarchal insistence that mars *his* claim to racial enlightenment. Their relationship and its political context weave in and out of the slippery bond between them. Both Elvira and Rohan admit their love for one another, but it is not enough to transform history. Their love is beset by race and by gender; however, not in abstraction, but in the battle of wits and physicality that Philip has staged. That they struggle and fail, that Elvira cannot resist the call to explore her roots, to see how “black skin comes alive in the sun” (129) reminds the audience how relationships make politics, how resistance is uncomfortable, and how gender and race intersect within heterosexuality.

Both plays offer audiences a sense of the insidiousness of patriarchal hegemony, of how struggles for liberation are incomplete where historical factors are ignored or set aside in the

interest of an immediate “good,” and how those elisions play out primarily in romantic or personal relationships. The best articulations of social justice are often present in front of cameras or at marches. But in the morass of personal dynamics, where love and sex and passion collide with political organizing, resistance takes on a more complex hue. Nolan and Philip make their readers and audiences uncomfortable, whether by creating characters—historical and fictional—who do not comply with easy categories of good and evil, or by treating political heroes—historical and fictional—with ambivalence and ambiguity. They offer to the field of resistance literature thoughtful and complex assessments of its most sacred spaces: the activist circle, the brave mixed marriage. In order to accomplish this, these texts stage resonant and affective dramas that rely on important but often overlooked aspects of liberation.

### **Aesthetic Engagement**

In “Towards a Postcolonial Aesthetics” (2015), Bill Ashcroft argues strongly that aesthetics in a postcolonial context is about engagement rather than judgement (or taste). Once considered to be an assessment of beauty, genius, or “universal appeal,” aesthetic theory has, as Terry Eagleton and Shira Wolosky, among others, have discussed, been mired in the totalizing ideologies of colonial Europe. To think of aesthetics as an engagement between cultural producers and their audiences recuperates aesthetics from its imperial past and better aligns it with Simpson’s insistence that practices of social justice must have resonance. More specifically, to view aesthetics as engagement aligns with her view that indigenous or other decolonial resistance is not tied solely or even primarily to social movements. Just as texts cannot be isolated from their reception, resistance cannot be severed from the vast potentiality of its

manifestations, of which literature is an important site for resonance and engagement. Therefore, aesthetics as engagement subverts the art/politics dichotomy and provides an connective path for resistance literature to be seen outside of its dominant tropes.

If we think of decolonial feminism as the “what” of liberation textualities, then aesthetics is the “how.” A text’s productive capacity and ability to affect a reader/viewer is its aesthetics. As with poetry and fiction, drama aesthetics are manifest in emotional, imagistic, and linguistic elements used by an author to create an effect on an audience. And while drama, particularly realist drama, may not always use the figurative and encoded methods of poetry, or offer the narrative elaborations or psychoanalysis of fiction, drama encloses its action within a demarcated space that must draw an audience in and keep them engaged. Theatre productions rely upon aesthetics as audience engagement in order to convey the play’s messages, themes, contemplations, or other representational goals in a way that impacts and resonates.

Drama scripts engage readers differently from novels, in that drama always gestures to the performative. With poetry, readers and critics attempt to decode signifiers and symbols, to unpack; with fiction, the story and character development are supreme, with ample evidence provided by the novel’s narrative. In drama, the script is written with intention that it be taken up by directors, actors, dramaturges, and designers; the very essence of drama is its possibilities for interpretation. As theatre scholar Ric Knowles contends, “[s]cript analysis, whether in the service of staging or studying a work, and whether it is undertaken by directors, designers, actors, literary critics, or theatre historians, is fundamentally dramaturgical” (127). Therefore, readers of plays are encouraged to envision not a room, but a stage (see Hayman). Since drama is conceived of as what Jo-Ann Episkew (Métis) calls an “inherently communal” and “transformative” healing practice that can be “utilize[d] to examine and address the unresolved grief and trauma

present in our [indigenous] communities” (147, 148), the reader of drama connects not only to the characters, action, or conflicts in the script, but to the possibilities it arouses for social and political critique, for generating signifying practices by conceptualizing the set, and for emotional and intellectual resonance. Even the person alone reading a script written by one other person (a solitude considered anathema to the collective and participatory nature of theatre) demands a specifically theatrical imaginative engagement. Drama is unique in giving readers a structure with minimal cues that must be reconstructed into a performative space.

In the context of resistance, community theatre is often held up as the greatest example of politics and drama intersecting. Episkenew argues that “Indigenous community theatre is more likely to be found in healing and educational venues rather than purely aesthetic ones” (149).<sup>42</sup> She draws a distinction between community and “professional” theatre that reinforces a practical versus leisurely divide. As I (and others, particularly Emma LaRocque) have asserted, these divisions, on the one hand, fix resistance literature in a particular historical and political moment that does not resonate with the greater practice of cultural production; and, on the other hand, allows Eurocentric and formalist literary critics to maintain an imperial hold on aesthetics. If we

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<sup>42</sup> A wide-ranging discussion of various theatrical forms and their cultural bases is beyond the scope of this chapter, but still noteworthy in any discussion of form or aesthetics. Comprehensive debates have occurred elsewhere about the European domination of theatre versus the indigenous/arrivant oral and performative forms that expand the concept itself. Christopher R. Balme’s discussion of global theatre as *syncretic* is most informative, particularly in embracing those writers who use what some consider a “European” form but which is transformed, subverted, and reconstructed in Asian, Caribbean, African, and Indigenous North American/South Pacific contexts. As Monique Mojica argues in “EHTNOSTRESS: Women’s Voices in Native American Theatre,” the dichotomy between European and Indigenous form is ultimately a false one that tends to suppress indigenous artists who draw influence from multiple places and ought not to be imprisoned in the authorial trap of “authentic” native informants (11-12).

consider aesthetics—resistance aesthetics, liberation textualities—to be about the ways in which an author’s use of literary elements arouses a reader’s or viewer’s responses, what materials (signifiers and symbols) they design into a text to achieve a particular function (political awareness, emotional catharsis, cultural resurgence etc.),<sup>43</sup> then aesthetics is democratized; healing and education become equally aesthetic practices, alongside pleasure and intrigue. As *Coups* and *Movement* demonstrate, aesthetic engagement does not always mean joy, but it is no less affective.

The personal emphasis of both plays is the central means through which the audience becomes engaged with both plays. The emotional stakes for the characters are enmeshed with political ones and the familiar tropes of a marriage breakdown or a strained romantic triangle draw an audience into the world of struggle through a practice of affect. In *Movement*, the use of only two actors emphasizes the play’s interest in personal relations over a collective and multifaceted movement. Each scene, even one called “Anna Amongst the Women,” is part of what Moses calls a “montage of two-hander, he-and-she scenes” (258), which draws the audience’s gaze onto Anna’s emotional, sexual, and ethical conflicts with various men. This move contextualizes an overarching view of AIM itself, but it also demonstrates that these two-party themes and perspectives are important to resistance practice and resistance literature.

Scholarly work on the play, including my own analysis above, considers *Movement* to be largely about holding AIM to account for its patriarchal inner circle. According to Michelle LaFlamme (Métis/Creek/Afro-American), “the play is emancipatory for women because it documents the culturally specific contours of patriarchal oppression within the American Indian

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<sup>43</sup> I adapt here Knowles’s discussion of how a script is put together and extend it to the practice of literary writing in general (144).

Movement and, by extension, other Aboriginal community contexts” (110; see also: Pettit; Hargreaves). But the play is also about the interpersonal bonds and complications that occur within the context of struggle, and, by extension, how struggles are shaped by those dynamics. In this way, Nolan has insisted that audiences not just re-evaluate AIM (an aspect of the Aquash case which Allison Hargreaves has argued makes it relatively palatable to non-indigenous audiences [153]), but also drawn important comparisons and contrasts between Anna’s various relationships and those that exist in many (if not all) communities that make up the play’s potential viewership.

The men in the play are not only historical figures from Aquash’s story; they represent various emotional struggles and crises faced by participants in resistance struggle. Dennis’s ambiguous attitude toward Anna, his fragile mistrust of her, his flawed and shameful allegiance to Doug that contrasts with Anna’s political prowess; Lawrence’s optimism and arrogance—all of these emotions pour into the murderous Rugaru, embodied by the single actor. When Anna and Lawrence debate political strategy, he remarks that her faith in the law exposes her allegiance to “white ways” (8). Later, the audience experiences pay-off when she derides his patriarchal interrogation techniques (51). Nolan elevates the emotional resonance of these relationships by drawing the audience through everyday situations—a teacher and student discussing philosophy; two lovers meeting for the first time; a husband unable to continue an affair because he has told his wife about it—in the build up to extraordinary ones—interrogation; rape and murder. Anna’s relationships are shown in their full, flawed, and fraught nature, in ways that demonstrate the perils of love and friendship. What is perhaps most tragic about Anna, in the theatrical sense, is her belief in the men who struggle alongside her. The betrayals she experiences from the Everyman opposite her on the stage are crystallized just before she faces

the Rugaru. Colonial and colonized men drown her words and defile her body before the audience's eyes, signifying the pain and horror of domestic violence, of not only a political neutralization but the extinguishing of a woman's spirit by a man she loved. This set-up gives new meaning to those familiar with Aquash's death, and it generally conveys a cautionary image about the personal stakes of patriarchy.

Philip's play also foregrounds the social relationship of its characters—their marriage—even though the context includes traditional political elements like the 1990 coup and Rohan's participation in British anti-racist demonstrations. On the surface, the climactic arcs of the story—the miscarriage that lead to the marriage breakup, and Elvira's recent Tobago-based affair—have very little to do with its immediate political context. Of course, Philip never lets history, race, or politics stray far from the action, but she positions her audience in the midst of a crumbling marriage buffeted by these forces and into which the audience is drawn. Even as Rohan and Elvira fight about the racialized inequalities that informed their upbringings and their lives abroad, *Coups* features affectionate moments that defy these cleavages, such as when Rohan and Elvira share a mango he has brought back for her from the market and which reminds him of their initial courting. As the mango passes between them, with stage directions repeating the word “suck” to each actor (54-55), or when Rohan gently kisses Elvira's “butterfly fingers” and she repeatedly takes her hands “away” (51-52), the audience is made aware of a future the play's own narrative does not yet allow. These moments destabilize the differences the characters articulate and represent to an audience: if their estrangement from one another can be read alongside their racialized divisions, then their moments of tenderness subvert the conclusion that the interests of Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonians can never coalesce. Personal connections defy—but do not overcome, which is an important distinction for the play—identity-based

divides in a way that is converse to the process in *Movement*: the gender dynamics that play out within Anna's personal relationships reflect a widespread colonial patriarchy that troubles the audience's impressions of AIM; in *Coups*, the marital relations reflect the contradictory nature of the independence era in the anglophone Caribbean but also show the audience how individuals grapple with those forces from a place of positive change. Of course, the butterfly fingers betray Elvira's secret and their lovemaking cannot restore their love; Philip offers no easy solutions to these challenges, but she persuades her audience to face those rough roads through a predominant dramatic trope: star-crossed lovers.

Both playwrights make use of setting to inflect the sensibilities of each play's main argument. In *Movement*, Nolan uses nontraditional places to reorient the audience's approach to the documented history she has fictionalized. The use of workplace and domestic settings gives both a transformative and intimate perspective on the politics that surround the play. These recurring sets countermand the dominant imaginary of AIM—associated with outdoor standoffs, mountain ranges, and street demonstrations. Resituating the action subverts the traditional resistance symbols and focuses on activities that are identifiable and relatable. Anna's encounters are humanized by placing them in offices, bedrooms, and classrooms; even the scenes that are set in more recognizably "political" spaces, such as the AIM convention, are cleaved into an intimate two-shot. These choices complicate these figures and emphasize their emotional and personal concerns. Even the site of Anna's murder is reconfigured as a place of resurrection in the opening scene, and a nucleus of indigenous women's resurgence in the final speech, when Anna names the woman forebears and descendants that persist in spite of her own passing. These stagescapes are unexpected and encourage the audience to rethink its beliefs about resistance struggle.

Where *Movement* is designed largely against the grain of AIM and other activist representations, *Coups* deploys traditional symbols of the Caribbean to draw the audience into its particular regional context but then complicates this environment by troubling its relationship to the characters (and theirs to it). The set directions are almost rote symbols of the Caribbean to both locals, tourists, or the casual viewer of getaway commercials: sea-side village, beach house, luggage, rocking chairs (15). The coup backdrop arguably evokes an imperialist discourse of Third World chaos and political instability. Self-reflexively, Philip has Rohan articulate this very idea: “What a way to sit out a coup! Pan-fried snapper on a bed of freshly cooked Basmati rice alongside dhal, fried plantains and served with a chilled German Riesling. I’m surprised this sort of thing hasn’t been marketed yet—‘Come and see Beirut burn while you savour succulent lamb kebabs and fragrant couscous’” (64). Philip’s contradictory use of the coup is rendered ironic with this dialogue, since a potential imperialist reading is pointed out whilst the play itself presents a flattened and unproblematized version of the events of 1990. The multiple meanings evoked by Philip’s choices undergird the play’s notion of belonging and its reliance on ambiguities and contradictions.

Philip’s use of calypso further reinforces this atmosphere; it creates an auditory rendering of Caribbean space. As Philip notes in her essay quoted above on the subject, calypso has a historical role of political intervention, but also in many ways has come to be dominated by commercial interests:

Calypso does remember, but calypso does forget too.... Many of these [contemporary] calypsos are nothing but a set of instructions, which the audience is expected to follow. Often they are primarily sexual in content but no longer indulging in the clever word play and double entendre of earlier calypsos.... As

the carnival bands have become little more than bikinis and beads, so too have the calypsos that are given prominence become little more than empty refrains exhorting the crowds to move left or right, or take something and wave. (85)

The history of the calypsos is complex, grappling with popular demands that seem at odds: on the one hand, love- and sex-based lyrics and, on the other, widespread political and economic dissatisfaction with an inequitable society.

While Philip's assessment of calypso is a fair point, her oversimplification is disproved by the philosophy expressed by *Coups*. These two pillars of calypsonian content are not always incompatible, and can be drawn into one another. Initially, audiences may agree with Elvira that the radio station is "crazy" to play calypso music in a political crisis, but Rohan reminds her that coups and calypsos are almost always implicated in one another (58-59); Elvira herself remarks that the words of a calypso from Afro-Guyanese pop artist Eddy Grant awaken her renewed sense of African pride and longing for blackness (127).<sup>44</sup> The play's use of calypso, then, signifies the tensions that intersect at its centre: between Rohan and Elvira, African and Indian, love and politics, culture and commerciality. In the use of both of these devices—setting and sound—*Coups* is grounded in a Caribbean sensibility whilst problematizing most approaches to the symbols and signifiers offered. Foreign viewers cannot excise the beauty from the politics, nor avoid the romantic irony that is constituted by historical forces; local and diasporic viewers see a familiar performance of identity, but one that uses the many possibilities of representation to thwart the notion of "positive" or "negative" images.

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<sup>44</sup> Grant's own career is an interesting juxtaposition to Philip's comments on calypso. His popularity and financial success (due in large part to "Electric Avenue" and the theme from *Romancing the Stone* [see Thompson 111-14]) in the UK and the US arguably depart from his calypsonian roots; and yet those roots remain the basis of his power to connect with Elvira and inspire her own cultural resurgence.

## Conclusion

Nolan and Philip make a subtle but profound shift in the territory of resistance literature by emphasizing the personal lives of their characters. This emphasis not only challenges the polemic insistence of early resistance literature theory, but recovers the romantic, domestic, and emotional arenas of literature from a depoliticized formalism that attempts to suppress as insipid the artful impulses of political writing. These plays not only raise questions about the political movements and struggles that surround them—AIM, indigenous rights, the 1990 Muslimeen coup, or the Black Power marches of the 1970s—but demand that viewers see these historical and political themes through a very personal lens. And they do so without sentimentality or attempting to gloss over the unpleasant and disagreeable aspects of most relationships. Patriarchal coloniality is both embedded in the inequalities and prejudices that linger between the couples in these dramas, and challenged by the resistances that irrupt in the course of the narrative.

Sometimes what seem like small acts, like pulling a hand away or holding a gaze, signify powerful defiance or hopeless resignation. On the stage, these acts are given prominence. The representational power of theatre lies in the ability to foreground and complicate human interactions through the choices by a director or an actor; and to do the same for seemingly innocuous objects like a radio or a bottle of ketchup (Knowles 45). Theatre is dominated by personal conflicts and tensions, relying most often on characters, dialogue, and actors to propel its action, its effects, and its resonance with audiences. And while it is often deployed to challenge injustice and can be smothered in polemic sloganeering and unwieldy significations,

drama can also bring forth soft textures and subtle gestures that excite or inspire audiences just as much or more so. When Elvira defies the curfew and her husband's pleas to venture into a metaphorical and literal darkness, she makes a choice that the audience has seen is both brave and painful. Philip has made our hearts sink at the lack of solidarity in this conclusion, but she has shown us why Elvira must take this journey, no matter how uncomfortable it makes an audience. Anna's disappointment at being rebuffed by Dennis is coupled with his insistence that she know her place and go where he tells her, and the audience feels her anguish and solitude as the slow unravelling of the love knot between them leads us inexorably toward the awful conclusion of the play and Aquash's life. *Coups and Calypsos* and *Annie Mae's Movement* do not dull their thorns, but instead confront and expose the difficult and contradictory elements of love and resistance, drawing them next to each other and offering a deep rethink of how activist practice and personal dynamics inform and constitute one another. This emphasis and perspective make them important examples of resistance literature as liberation textualities, within a reformulated discourse that honours literary and social justice traditions but with an eye toward the shifting terms under which oppression can be brought down.

## CONCLUSION

The information people exchange on the daily bus-ride to work, queues outside ration-shops or rum shops where discontent may surface, the resources of respectability through which a group of village women may mount a campaign against the drunkenness of their husbands, the informally institutionalized networks of day care, the struggles for clean water and access to medical care, the practice of second jobs after work, the thousand small generousities and gestures of community made by people divided by caste, class, sexuality: these instances of the everyday rarely enter into the pages of cultural theory.

—Shalini Puri

*The Caribbean Postcolonial* (113)

I hope that in some small way, *Liberation Textualities* has contributed to emphasizing these “instances of the everyday” and their importance to studies of resistance, particularly literature. Literature’s unique exploration of emotional, social, spiritual, and political struggle lends itself so agreeably to a notion of resistance that is pluriversal, fluid, and resonant beyond any attempt to reduce it to a single thing or moment in time. Having bridged traditional resistance theory with a wider range of critical impulses that seek to liberate in a sustained way, a way that confronts the cunning forces that have stifled decolonization or entrenched settler occupation, I situate this project across the (artificial) barriers between artistic and political

analysis. The drive to examine these everyday instances comes from my own commitment to redrawing the margins in literary study, but also from a sense that the sharp, at times even individualistic, focus of literature broadens our sense of the struggles occurring on those margins.

This dissertation has sought to bring forward the implied vision of social justice that underpins most resistance struggle. Spiritual and cultural diversity, a self-determining body, and relationships defined by equity and respect for difference—these are among the desires for which we fight, the future we seek, the present we must insist upon. The novels, poems, and plays analyzed here bring together the epic forces of history—the battles between freedom fighters and embedded occupiers—with romantic heartache, weary joints, family conflicts, and spectral visions. The texts studied have demonstrated the power and complexity of women’s literary expressions, their political critiques, and their concern with a thorough liberation that stands against any figure or structure, friend or foe, who allows colonial relations to continue. Engagement with these catalysts has established a new definition of resistance literature, one that refuses temporal, geographic, or ideological boundaries.

In spite of these deconstructive impulses, this project has still left many stones unturned. Literature from various cultural, linguistic, formal, and generic traditions ought to be brought to this conversation. Afrofuturism, to name but one example, has emerged as a popular and challenging genre with a vision of literary textuality that greatly expands the terrain of resistance literature, confounding long-standing categorizations of “refined” versus “popular” culture and infusing speculative and science fiction studies with an anti-imperialist vitality. In a similar vein, applying post-apocalyptic theory to Indigenous North American narratives after smallpox and settler invasion points toward another new horizon in literary study.

Resistance should indeed be considered a boundless concept, but it must not be diluted to a point where it is no longer resistance. Resistance literature, as I hope I have shown, can manifest in multiple ways, but it does not lose its political heart, no matter how minute or opaque its representational reach. Resistance still stands against coloniality, exploitation, and oppression; it owes its persistence to those very national struggles against colonialism from which I have so determinedly distanced it.

But resistance is a big house, with room for literatures epic and interior, polemic and figurative, personal and allegorical. I hope that these few bricks have at least started a new and important addition.

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