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BASTARDLY DUPPIES & DASTARDLY DYKES: QUEER SEXUALITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN MICHELLE CLIFF'S *ABENG* AND SHANI MOOTOO'S *CEREUS BLOOMS AT NIGHT*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the ways in which the "duppy," or malevolent spirit, circulates the fictive landscape of the queer novels of Michelle Cliff and Shani Mootoo. I explore the ways in which the unhappy ghost is a figure which comments on the sexual pathology of postcolonial queerness in the Caribbean. I focus on the characters of Clare in "Abeng" and Mala in "Cereus Blooms at Night" in a bid to elucidate the ways that Caribbean lesbianism invokes, on the one hand, what M. Jacqui Alexander calls "erotic autonomy as a form of decolonization politics" in the material eroticism of women characters. On the other hand, and at the same time, however, these practices resurrect spectres of dissent that index queerphobia in the Caribbean that is a direct result of exploitative economic strangulation, past and present.

Introduction: The Black Magic of Blackness

Black diasporic literature of the Caribbean has, for many decades, grappled with the catastrophic effects wrought by the middle passage on peoples of West and Southern African descent who settled there and throughout the Americas. Myriad studies have been generated by C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1962), including Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Paul Gilroy's notion of a Black Atlantic (1993), including the work of Alasdair Pettinger (1998), Carole Boyce Davies (2002), Alan Rice (2003), Kezia Page (2010), and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (2010), among many others. These studies engage important projects that track migratory subjectivities of the African diaspora into and throughout the Americas, or the so-called "New World." These and many other critiques offer timely genealogies of a newly postmillennial neoliberalism in which xenophobic sexism and racism have been further normalized and encoded under the jingoistic banners of "Brexit" and "Trumpism." These two socio-political ideologies are currently re-shaping the transatlantic, "special relationship"¹ between the UK and US. Despite the genocide and death that indentureship, slavery, colonialism, eugenics, apartheid, etc. violently imposed on these "abject subjects," scholars have paid relatively less attention to the migratory flows between this mortal coil and the afterworld, or the relationships between worlds rather than simply within the material world that we often take for granted as the sole reality.

The movements of haunting figures and the spaces they inhabit appear, that is, to be marginalized in the corpus of scholarship that documents black migratory experiences in the Caribbean. Indeed, as Raphael Dalleo aptly argues in *American Imperialism's Undead*, academic discourse on the U.S. occupation of Haiti, and the grisly bloodshed that attended it, has greatly been ignored (p. 12). Such intellectual elisions reify the very material(ist

First) world that subjugates oppressed, black and brown peoples and their descendants. Indeed, even when the otherworldly is depicted in popular culture, it has, particularly in the last two decades, disproportionately focused on the figure of the zonbi.² This zonbi figure, which Western popular culture has aggressively assimilated as "zombie" and appropriated as white, has arguably become a staple of popular, hipster narratives of horror (Hedengren, 2014). Its ubiquitous appearances throughout bourgeois, Western culture range from "zombie" t-shirts and tarot cards for purchase at Urban Outfitters³ to starring roles in the music video of "Everybody Talks" by U.S. indie rock band Neon Trees.⁴ As such, the zombie appears as a privileged figure in both Caribbean and popular American cultural discourse which is widely depicted in many literary and filmic artifacts as a figment of the indigenous colony that has been appropriated by the West.

In contrast to the manufactured, hipster-chic "zombie," Kaiama L. Glover observes that the "zombie" in Haitian literature embodies "inherent ambivalence" but "usefulness" (Glover 2005, p. 106). The figure's utility is precisely inherently ambivalent because of the transformations it has undergone in its ideological migrations from East to West, and South to North. Glover goes on to clarify that:

the Haitian zombie is not at all the crazed, bloodthirsty monster raised from the grave by some compulsion to hunt down humans and feast on their brains. Such a conception of the zombie- drooling, stiff-legged, arms outstretched- is strictly a Hollywood invention... Unlike the zombie presented in all of these B movies and straight-to-video productions, the zombie in Haiti is a victim, and not a predator; deserving of pity more than fear. Figure of exploitation par excellence and staple of the Vodou universe, the Haitian zombie is a being without essence -- lobotomized, depersonalized, and reduced through malevolent magic to a state of impotence. Without any

recollection of its past or hope for the future, the zombie exists only in the present of its exploitation. (p. 107)

We may from the outset learn much about the zonbi as a victimized figure of exploitation caught in a twilight limbo between life and death. In Kevin Alexander Boon's (2007) reading, the zonbi consolidates the "dynamic interdependency between the human self and monstrous other," and reminds us that "In the zombie, death is given agency" (p. 34). Boon notes that the infiltration of the zonbi myth into western consciousness resulted from the very U.S. occupation of Haiti on which Dalleo's research seeks to unearth (ibid, p. 35). As a result, in Gina Wisler's (2015) words, "The landscapes and urban territories of the colonizers, and the colonized, are each imprinted with the living memories of horrors and dehumanizing behaviors which established and maintained colonial and imperial oppressions and regimes (p. 512). The figure of exploitation that Glover so powerfully identifies, in other words, aptly embodies the theme of precarious life that so bloodily characterizes colonization of and slavery in the Americas.

This essay seeks to recuperate silenced histories of identity oppression by de-centering the zonbi by instead examining the less-popular figure of the "duppy" in relation to supernatural phenomena in the Caribbean. In engaging this work, my bigger concern is to expound on the transnational links between "Vodou" and obeah -- how both intertwine and travel together across maritime borders, land, and reconstitute in displacement. I also seek to critically consider the migratory movements between supernatural and sexual realms of embodiment, and thus view the duppy as a diasporic figure that marks the threshold of both. To do so, I turn to two queer Caribbean novels as a means of mining the relationships between realms of the supernatural, on the one hand, and those of the sexual on the other, in relation to movement and space. The first novel is the late Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984), a postcolonial "counterbildungsroman" (Gairola, 2005, p. 26) that tracks the lesbian awakening of Clare Savage, its adolescent protagonist, in

contemporary Jamaica. The second is Shani Mootoo's freshman novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), which explores the mysterious death of the father of Asha Ramachandin, the novel's "insane," lesbian protagonist.

Both Cliff and Mootoo are queer writers of the Caribbean diaspora who experienced multiple migrations between disparate parts of the world that contain distinct, yet connected, histories of racialized inequity. Cliff spent her formative years between Jamaica, the U.S., and the U.K., and her fiction reflects a distinctive feel of migratory identities. Mootoo was born in Ireland, raised in Trinidad, and currently divides her time between Vancouver, Canada, and Brooklyn, New York. Mootoo's life and work draws attention to, in the words of Lavina Dhanra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth (2000), "the complex array of national and cultural influences on diasporic South Asians" (p. 375). As such, these queer, Caribbean writers destabilize, on the surface, the very notion of a national identity as an organizing principle of citizenship, sexuality, and worldliness in their fictions. The watery, bloody histories of racialized oppression whose traces saturate the Caribbean herein emerge from paranormal, rather than abnormal, queer figures. But like the iceberg, we must plumb the depths of both novels to flush out the queer and tragic spectres that circulate the narratives through persistent hauntings.

Both novels, as I will show, feature otherworldly duppies, queer phantom figures, and supernatural landscapes in which histories of colonialism and queer sexuality mediate movements between the terrestrial and spiritual realms. The supernatural and the sexual become vehicles for one another in facilitating and complicating postcolonial, queer of color sexualities of the women protagonists in both novels. Given the immeasurable sorrow wrought by the middle passage and maritime capitalism on the African diaspora, it appears fitting that haunting figures would linger amongst the living in these two innovative novels of the queer Caribbean. For Helen C. Scott (2016), these writers and their

contemporaries “use experimental formal techniques as they interrogate gender inequality and interrupt conventional notions of (hetero-)sexual roles and identities” (p. 5). Such movements and space exceed, yet are linked to, the material world through traces of queer sexuality that are yet lived and felt by proxy agents. I hereon unearth our mortal fears of the underworld and other worlds, and those spirits who maintain a migratory agency between both. The haunting figures herein inhabit the threshold between both, transfixed between twilight and dawn by the follies of those who have lent to their troubled states.

Epistemologies of the Supernatur(e)al

The epistemology of the supernatural in the Caribbean also carries the traces of Eurocentric sensibility which we can track back to more than half a century. For example, in his 1961 ethnographical account “Jamaican Duppy Lore,” MacEdward Leach outlines the characteristics of the *duppy*. In his formulation, the subhuman portrayals used by slavery and colonialism to denigrate Africans seem to be resurrected in how he defines, and perhaps unconsciously views, the “duppy.” He writes,

In Jamaica most non-Christian spirit lore centers around the duppy. Duppy has three related meanings in Jamaica :1) the soul of a dead person ,manifest in human form; (2) the soul of the dead manifest in a variety of fabulous beasts, and also in the forms of real animals like lizards and snakes; (3) an order of supernatural beings only vaguely associated with the dead...Generally the duppy takes human form, and often it takes on the appearance of the body that it inhabited. It is never a ghost in the European sense as something white floating around or as something that "goes bump in the night. (Leach, 1961, p. 207)

This passage details the form of the duppy, as well as its ability to transmogrify into animals and its ability, as such, to complicate

movement between and within different worlds. Yet, for all of its detail with the duppy form, Leach's dated account contains zero critical acumen on the gender and sexuality of the duppy – as if the very materiality of the supernatural is unlinked from the mortal identities of the Caribbean. The ghastly form, I would insist, is crucial for us to consider in relation to themes of migration in postcolonial literature because it signifies differences in culture and practice that mark the boundary between practices of domination and subordination. In other words, we can read the spectral figure as a symbol, like the ghost of Mama Elena in Laura Esquivel's magically-real novel *Como Agua Para Chocolate* [*Like Water for Chocolate*] (1989), who polices non-heteronormative sexuality in the context of the postcolonial nation-state.

I would moreover note that the multiple movements of Cliff and Mootoo enrich the Anglophone texture and traditions embedded in both queer women's writing, as well as the ways in which they link the supernatural world to the material world through the fraught experiences of settler colonialism, queerphobia, gender fluidity, and rape. These and other queer women writers compose literature in which, in Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's (2010) elegant formulation, "both sexuality and landscape emerge as ongoing *processes* that can be interrupted and redirected...[and engage] imagining space for postcolonial studies to map the material and symbolic contributions of historically unseen, feminized, and sexualized bodies to decolonizing nations [original emphasis]" (pp. 3-4). Before sojourning into an analysis of both texts, I would briefly like to offer some background on how race and the supernatural have been linked with respect to the Caribbean. I do so in the spirit of offering context and agency to the undead, rather than lapsing into pedantic monotony on the known. The ominous presence of "black" magic, both literally and figuratively, has historically justified the violent policing and disciplining of the Americas' so-called darker races.

For example, in *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* (2011), Roger Sansi and Luis Nicolau Parés opine that "in the wider historical and

geographical framework of the Black Atlantic...the expansion of discourses, accusations, and practices of sorcery have often been integral to processes of colonization and state formation in Atlantic history” (p. 4). In colonizing discourses, as is well known through ideologies that cradle social movements like the White Man's Burden, Manifest Destiny, eugenics, social Darwinism, apartheid, segregation, anti-miscegenation legislature, etc., such practices of sorcery have often been viewed by western conquerors as testament to the heathen, in addition to inferior, "nature" of the darker races. In contrast to such simplistic reductions of human nature, the Caribbean has viewed the supernatural as a more complex network of extraterrestrial agencies. There, black magic is colloquialized as *obeah*, and it manifests in both beneficent and diabolical ways as the embodiment or disembodiment of various spirits (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 1997, p. 6). As a pastiche of religious practice, ritual, and folk magic, and witchcraft, obeah is said to have descended from West African slaves who often deployed its powers against their European colonizers. Its malevolent supernatural manifestations roam this mortal coil as the *jumbee*, which is more commonly called "duppy" in Jamaica.

The duppy is conceptualized as a trinity of subjectivity where the individual is comprised of three parts: the body, soul-spirit, and duppy-ghost, or “shadow” (Murrell, 2010, p. 261). The duppy and zombi, though differing material manifestations of fraught histories, “express trapped histories and spirits, dehumanization and silencing through false education and imposed power” (Wisler, 2015, p. 513). The major distinction, however, is the remarkable degree to which the latter is today greatly appropriated by western popular discourse in their imaginings of the horrific undead. In meditating on the differences between the duppy and the zombi, which appears as a liminal position in Vodou, Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken (2013) draws on the work of Colin Dayan. She observes that for legally-codified citizens of Haiti:

an unofficial system of thought that defines beings outside of the law - a system like Vodou - presents itself as a terrifying, uncontrollable domain, populated by specters from a distant past returning to make them accountable for having written them out of existence. Vodou is ultimately a for itself system, one that creates care networks for such non-citizens, but in the eyes of the 'official' citizens, Vodou represents a system that is out for revenge. As a result, official citizens perceive these unofficial citizens, these non-citizens as the haunting icons that inhabit the landscapes of the American South and the Caribbean. (p. 35)

Benedicty-Kokken here nails the notion of Vodou as an extra-judicial system whose subjects and agents are always already illegal because they are inhuman, and thus expands on previous research on citizenship and otherness in Caribbean literature (Saunders 2007). I would here add that this supernatural subject, beyond the law as viewed by "official" legislation, strikes a chord with the queer Caribbean women who are subject to what M. Jacqui Alexander (1994) calls,

powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the nation and about the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship. Not just (any) body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain...these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation. (p .6)

Roberto Strongman has also offered models of queerness in Latin America that add to the transnational texture of thinking of sex across borders in the Global South (2002, 2007). While I will later return to Alexander's notion, the more important point here is the

shared milieu in invalid subjecthood shared by both the zonbi and queer women in the Caribbean.

In contrast to the ghastly figures invoked by Vodou, duppies can appear on earth in a diverse array of forms. As Dayan (2011) writes, "But duppies, or the unquiet dead, returned in varying guises. The relics and scraps of bodies bought, bartered, and sold as in cattle, coins, parcels of land, or pieces of furniture returned as ancestor spirits, caught in the evil that had created them. Their metamorphoses record the rudiments of a legal sorcery that converted human animals into things or nonhuman animals" (p.130). Dayan, Alexander, and Benedicty-Kokken here draw our attention to the commodification of duppies and zonbis, as does Glover. The former three, however, focus on the legal parameters that constitute the very definition of living against dead; Benedicty-Kokken even stretches back to G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic and fuses it to Giorgio Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer* to render a panoramic genealogy of the human construction of the un-human (2013). In the next section, I anchor intersecting ideas of sexuality and the supernatural via socially transgressive characters in Michelle Cliff's 1984 novel *Abeng*.

Queerphobia, Madness, and the Ghosts of Time in *Abeng*

In *Abeng*, Cliff refuses to unlink queer sexuality from supernatural haunting as she mines and re-writes British renditions of Jamaican history. As Elvira Pulitano (2016) notes, "Mindful of the burden of colonial education in the Caribbean, herself a product of it, Cliff is very adamant about locating homosexual relationships at the intersection of race, gender, and colonialism rather than imposing Eurocentric notions of lesbianism or gayness on the island histories" (p. 63). Here, Pulitano's observation is key, although I would insist that Cliff's quasi-autobiographical novel stretches beyond the identificatory binaries of "homosexual," "lesbianism," and/or "gayness." Rather, I would from the outset insist that *Abeng*

is a queer novel, and that its queerness pivots, like a revolving door, into many divergent realms. I would add that in reading the novel as such, Cliff enfolds this queerness into the next world even as she subtly critiques the ongoing legacy of the Victorian-era, Section 377 of the British Penal Code that banned all queer sex throughout many of the British Empire's possessions and gradually became integrated into postcolonial anti-sodomy laws (Sáez, 2015, p. 7). In plain terms, queerphobia in Cliff's novel is an experience for both the abject departed as well as the traumatized living.

Readers first encounter the anxieties surrounding Jamaican transgressions of disciplinary gender roles and sexual behaviors through Mad Hannah, a homeless black woman who is regularly ridiculed by the townsmen (Gairola, 2016, p.52). "Mad" Hannah is perhaps the most emblematic character in the narrative who exemplifies the tension between the vestiges of colonialism, masculine scorn, and maternal grief. She is the butt of patriarchal ire, a victim of postcolonial disenfranchisement, and divested of a safe home. The woman's "mental condition" is onset by the traumatic death of Clinton, her only son, and by the queerphobic ragging that precipitated it. Readers learn that Clinton drowned when a leg cramp impaired his ability while swimming. As he drowned, local men and boys went "about their business, while their shouts of 'battyman, battyman!' (faggot, faggot!) echoed off the rocks and across the water of the swimming hole" (Cliff, 1984, p. 63). This tragedy is followed by the suicide of Robert, Clare's uncle. Robert's lover, a dark-skinned, African American sailor, asks the former to "make a home together," after which Robert ultimately rejects him (ibid., p.125). The latter then "swam too far out into Kingston Harbor and could not swim back. He drowned just as Clinton – about whom there had been similar whispers – had drowned. The stigma was removed, the family became more relaxed, telling each other there had been an uncommonly strong riptide that afternoon" (ibid., pp.125-26).

Here, the “natural” course of the terrestrial world’s ebbs and flows erases the unnatural taint of Robert’s unacceptable queerness in postcolonial Jamaica. The family’s rationalized obliteration of gay agency in Cliff’s narrative aptly yet disturbingly reflects queerphobic trends throughout the Caribbean. According to Jennifer Thorington Springer (2007), “*Abeng* reveals that in popular Caribbean culture, neither interracial nor homosexual relationships are tolerated. This intolerance is a result of the society’s problematic acceptance of heterosexuality as the norm both in traditional and contemporary contexts” (Cliff, 1984, p. 54). Indeed, the omniscient narrator suggests that Clinton and Robert’s deaths are casualties of heteronormative bigotry that is articulated by the postcolonial community in Jamaican patois. However, Clinton’s “unnatural” sexuality and “natural” death by drowning, as with uncle Robert, yield the birth of a supernatural entity which wanders between worlds. This migratory twist between realms in Cliff’s story reflects Gina Wisler’s contention that, “The ghostings and hauntings of the colonial and precolonial past lie like a human and natural palimpsest decipherable in many different ways” (Wisler, 2015, p. 512).

In this frame, I would argue that Clinton’s duppy is a palimpsest of his secular existence, even a marker of a moment in time, before his death manifests on earth as his mother’s madness and her expulsion from communal life. The duppy as a postcolonial trace of heteropatriarchy testifies to the acute violence that the social elision of queerness mandates in nationalist Jamaica. Unlike Robert’s corpse, which is swept away into the sea from Kingston Harbor, Clinton’s body is dishonored and abandoned, even in death, as it was as a living, social pariah. Just as Robert’s family views his body as conveniently consigned to the sea, Clinton’s corpse is abandoned on the mainland itself. Cliff writes,

No one came to sing the duppy to rest and put bluing on the eyelids of Clinton, nail his shirt cuffs and the heels of his socks to the board of the casket. No one to create the pillow filled with dried gunga peas, Indian corn, coffee beans, or to

sprinkle salt into the coffin and make a trail of salt from the house to the grave...So Mad Hannah buried her son alone the next morning when it should have been done at midnight. On the third night after the burial she saw his duppy rise from the grave. (pp. 63-64)

Cliff here elucidates the collusion of colonialist ethos with heteropatriarchal violence and queerphobia, which victimizes Clinton during his life, and even in death vis-à-vis the neglect by the community, that leads to the duppy's resurrection. Indeed, at times readers are unsure whether his duppy has "really" appeared from the netherworld, or if the apparition is a figment of imagination of Mad Hannah. Yet one gets the uncanny sense that the voices inside Hannah's head and the spirits that evoke them are tangible echoes from a violent past. In re-thinking madness in contemporary Caribbean literature, Kelly Baker Josephs (2013) examines madness as "central to representing both the still-ongoing process of decolonization and the (more) contemporary concern with the residues of migration" (p. 5). In *Disturbers of the Peace*, Josephs forcefully labors to "find the repeated representations of madness at the juncture of creative expression and political and social commentary. Mad figures (whether marginal or central to the text itself) work as plot devices and creative gambits not only on the level of artistic and aesthetic choices, but also on the metaphorical level of the concerns [Kenneth] Ramchand (2013) lists as crucial to West Indian writers of the period" (pp. 2-5). As such, Hannah operates like a medium through which her son's duppy can gain agency in the material world as she simultaneously serves as a conduit for the narrative's historical refutations of situated, colonialist histories.

We should also note that aside from the neglected burial rites, Hannah has run out of time to perform them. She thus resolves "to find his duppy, to find it and work a spell with the two flat rocks she had gathered at the side of the river, and put him once and for all to rest. He must be somewhere" (Cliff, 1984, p. 64). Time thus

functions in the novel like a catalyzing agent for the duppy; the terrestrial and spiritual worlds, the secular and nonsecular realms, lie at the threshold of chronology.⁵ These chronological windows, for Cliff, are punctuated by superstition, myth, legend, and rituals that run through *Abeng* as counter-narratives to the powerful afterlife of the Crown's postcolonial hegemony. These deadlines and time periods serve as interchange points, like airport hubs for mortals, for migrations between realms of unsettled spirits. The self-resurrection, or inter-realm migration, of Clinton's queer specter from beneath the grave to "somewhere" occurs precisely because of its neglect in death.

We can moreover read Clinton's resurrection as an anguished invocation of his mother, who now substitutes for him as the community's scapegoat for deviation from postcolonial heteropatriarchy. In Sophie Croisy's reading of the novel, Hannah's memory of her only son marks the local community's ultimate failure in protecting one of its own. Croisy reads Hannah as a traumatized figure who indicts the community for abetting her son's death, while the agents of Church and State read trauma as madness to disavow their own guilt and culpability. They foreclose on Hannah's life by encoding her as a lunatic:

Clinton's gayness, his 'sinful' destabilization of the patriarchal/ colonial, strictly gendered structures regimenting St. Elizabeth's community – structures internalized by its members – requires punishment even after death. Mad Hannah's wandering around the city looking for her son's duppy is a reminder of the community's failure in assisting one of its members, a reminder of their guilt in choosing the values of a system that alienates them from their beliefs and cultural roots. The guilt, however, disappears with Mad Hannah after the Baptist preacher of St. Elizabeth – representative of the very discourse that condemned her son and his like for their

‘sin’ in the eyes of the community – has her arrested and sent to an asylum. (Croisy, 2007-8, p.137)

In this frame, both dead son and living mother are transmogrified into phantoms – Clinton haunts the material world as a duppy while psychological specters haunt Hannah’s mind. In the formulation of the homophobic, disciplinary Jamaican state, Mother Hannah becomes “Mad Hannah,” and thus becomes the ire of the Jamaican state as does the figure of Miss Winifred at the end of the novel. The latter is an "old Creole woman who has retreated mentally and physically after having a child for her family's black servant" (Baker, 2013, pp. 5-6), and her act of miscegenation is thus codified as madness. Whereas Miss Winifred's father marries her off to "cure" her, the agent of the Church commutes Hannah's incarceration in the asylum. The duppy, whose father is never mentioned and whose mother is now put away, is a bastardly trace of social transgression, in how he is “queer” in many ways: black, non-human, fatherless, sexually-deviant, outcast, etc. He is a reminder, even in absence, of his mother’s apparent marital infidelity, which is reproduced by him as abomination to the heteropatriarchal order and an assault on black Jamaican masculinity.

As a symbol of Jamaican society’s intolerance, the duppy’s only possibility is to migrate between the material and netherworld in a purgatory that is catalyzed by the grisly bigotry of the very agents of Church and State who have betrayed their roles as the guardians of society. In my reading, Clinton’s duppy is thus caught in a queer migratory cycle between worlds that echoes the middle passage, wherein the Black Atlantic churns in-between as a fluid zone of anchored, illegitimate subjectivities. However, the restless figures that haunt Cliff’s novel between memories and dimensions, the supernatural opens up means for imagining different lives -- even in and through insanity and the ability to tell living stories of dead people. In Croisy’s words, “This everlasting presence of the ‘ghost’ of the British Empire is reflected in [Michelle] Cliff’s work

as she fictionalizes the near-impossibility for Jamaica in general, and Clare in particular, to escape the island's oppressive colonial past" (p. 137). Readers perhaps best witness these transfers of ghostly agency in dialogical moments between Clare and her girl crush, Zoe; here, Cliff's own experiences of sexual awakening surface the novel (Schwartz, 1993, p. 604).

This merging of autobiography with fiction invests the text with questions of gender and sexuality, and the power relations that they wield, respectively, like metaphysical phantoms of ideology on the human race. As such, the narrative nexus of queer sexuality and the supernatural in *Abeng* crystallizes into what David Butz and Lawrence D. Berg call "duppy feminism," or a way for readers to confront the "malicious ghosts of masculinism in ways that resonate with our own experiences of both contesting and unwittingly reproducing masculinism and sexism within geography" (Butz and Berg, 2002, p. 87). This concept is especially useful in reading *Abeng*, as it opens up a reading that connects the deceased and their pasts to the living histories of the mortal coil. In Croisy's reading, Nanny's "ghost seems to haunt Kitty [Clare's mother] and other female characters of Cliff's fiction as Nanny reappears throughout the novel when her intervention as counter-traumatic remembering of the past is needed. She is a haunting presence made visible and audible through punctual hysterical calls for rebellion against colonial practices and discourses" (Croisy, 2007-8, p. 149).

Cliff deploys Nanny throughout her text as a queer phantom figure who weaves in and out of windows of chronology. The latter, a "small and old Black woman whose only decoration was a necklace fashioned from the teeth of white men" (Cliff, 1984, p. 22), functions as an anti-colonial, mythological warrior who is much feared by the British colonizers. Another narrative apparition in the novel who tangibly manifests "duppy feminism" is Mma Ali, a one-breasted obeah woman who "was a true sister to the men – the Black men" who were reputed to teach the women "all manner of the magic of passion" (ibid., p. 35). Cliff's characters in *Abeng*, most

notably her queer adolescent protagonist, Clare Savage, resonates with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of Antoinette (disparagingly re-named "Bertha" by her un-named husband) in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Spivak views the woman's re-naming as an allegory for colonialism wherein "so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism" (Spivak, 1985, p. 250). In the next section, I will extend the connection between colonialism and intimacy as it is braided with queer hauntings. Like Cliff's mythical character Mma Ali, Shani Mootoo shapes her queer protagonist Mala into an obeah woman in *Cereus Blooms at Night* who wields an uncanny relationship to all things natural, namely birds and plants.

***Cereus'* Intersections of the Supernatural and Sexual**

Like Hannah, Mootoo's central protagonist also suffers from a bout of what society codes as "madness" which is likewise linked to queer sexuality and layered hauntings. Thus Mootoo's Mala, Cliff's Hannah, and Rhys's Antoinette join the repertoire of other black women characters like Toni Morrison's Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Avey in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), and Nyasha in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), among many others, who shoulder the weight of colonialist historical affect. Despite a number of these literary figures in Caribbean writing, Letizia Gramaglia (2008) recognizes the dearth of studies that focus on them in comparisons to studies of madness in western women's literature (p. 16). Like Cliff, Mootoo deploys a nonlinear narrative as a tool for exploring supernatural figures who oscillate between life and death, *yet present this as their reality in stark contrast to the hyper-modern and "polished" settlers from colder islands*. Mootoo's debut novel unfolds on the fictitious island of Lantanacamara in a small town called Paradise. Through interspersed windows of time and memory, the novel discloses Mala's heart-wrenching biography in relation to the effect of missionary colonialism and white supremacy on the island,

especially on her sycophantic-turned-abusive father, Chandin Ramchandin.

The novel experiments with narrative form and memory as a strategy for invoking the ghosts of the past and jolting to life the skeletons in the closet lying dormant alongside lesbian sexuality. Reverend Thoroughly adopts Chandin, an indigenous boy, who he treats more like a pet than a son, secularizes him, offers him shelter, and essentially attempts to assimilate him into white Christianity. The young boy initially assimilates, and soon Chandin repudiates his own mother and father for their “reluctance to embrace the smarter-looking, smarter-acting Reverend’s religion, and there soon came a time when, to his parents’ dismay, he no longer visited” (Mootoo, 1996, p. 30). Unable to win the heart of the Reverend’s daughter, Lavinia, who spurns his advances, Chandin proposes to and marries a local woman named Sarah whose accent and skin colour he repudiates. Mala and her sister Asha must endure the incestuous violence of their father after he discovers that the girls’ mother and Lavinia have fallen in love, and intend to leave him with the girls in tow. As twists in plot go, a scuffle ensues when Chandin returns home early and catches the couple in the act of absconding and the two girls are inadvertently, we assume, left behind “huddled on the verandah floor, unsure and terrified” by Lavinia and their mother (Mootoo, 1996, p. 63).

This conjugal betrayal acutely consumes Chandin because, as readers come to know, he has been obsessed with Lavinia, with whom he grew up as a foster sister in the Reverend’s home. The reality of his black wife running off with the white woman he loves, after he has already left behind his biological family and indigenous faith, assaults his masculinity to the core by amplifying back to him his racialized self-abnegation. Chandin, who echoes the character traits of Cholly and Soaphead Church in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970), quits church, is excommunicated by the horrified Reverend and his congregation, and sinks into violent despair. Chandin’s emasculated ability to have Lavinia or retain Sarah drives

him to heavily drink, then nocturnally abuse and rape the little girls, whose trauma is gradually revealed like the eponymous blooming cereus. As a figure who is unable to release his demons through a spiritual outlet via a duppy or the Lord, Chandin transforms into a monstrous figure of mythic proportions in *Cereus* by indulging in the drink.⁶ The narrator Tyler discloses to the horror of readers that after initially raping Mala (Poh Poh), “they both [the sisters] came to know that he [Chandin] would call for one or the other to pass at least part of the night in his bed” (Mootoo, 1996, p. 66).

Like Cliff's Hannah in *Abeng*, Mala experiences grief that is socially-read as insanity and is consigned to an asylum by the state's disciplinary mechanism in the form of the Church. Michel Foucault recognizes the asylum as a disciplinary institution that lies at the intersection of church and state power, and which justifies the confinement of those deemed unable to assimilate to the order of things. In *The Birth of the Asylum* (1984), Foucault writes, “The asylum is a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure morality, of ethical uniformity...The asylum reduces differences, represses vice, eliminates irregularities. It denounces everything that opposes the essential virtues of society” (pp.148-149). While I would agree with Foucault's statement, it is clearly lacking in the context of the novel's narrative and Baker's (2013) scholarship on madness in Caribbean literature. For Mootoo's asylum not only projects neocolonial order and conformity as its religion, but it moreover deploys postcolonial queerphobia in a dangerous space in which the other nurses ridicule the ostensibly effeminate mannerisms of Tyler, the novel's cross-dressing narrator. I have given readers this selective summary of *Cereus* because it is necessary to understand some aspects of the narrative in order to track how the supernatural and sexual intersect in ways that Mootoo juxtaposes socially-transgressive modes of embodiment against the Reverend's ordered, hegemonic theism.

Thus, within this punitive, assimilatory space that enforces “proper” sex and gender norms as a matter of public wellbeing in

Lantanacalara, Tyler and Mala both conspicuously stick out as outlanders within the institution. But beyond the asylum's walls and the dark memories they contain lies an ethereal landscape punctuated by Mootoo's fecund prose. Mootoo's novel deploys lush imagery, against the horrific backdrop of this sexual violence and its social encoding as "madness," to blur reality from the unreal. Mootoo's imagery and language unhinge the meaning of "natural" from reality for readers as we gradually come to understand and feel empathy, the very survival strategy that the sisters must engage to survive in their broken home. Tyler reveals that it was Mala's mission "from the first day her father put his mouth on her little body to prevent Asha from experiencing the pain of his touch" (Mootoo, 1996, p. 142). Mala's selfless martyrdom comes with a massive price as she learns to succumb to her father while mentally teleporting elsewhere.

Just as images of insects, snails, and butterflies cover the pages of the novel, the fictive landscape of Paradise is also saturated with buzzing insects and fecund foliage growth, conveying an extraordinarily earthy sensation to readers. As Grace Kyungwon Hong writes, Mootoo's luscious prose, with its meticulous description of Paradise's flora, permeates a supernatural aura as it links the past to the present. Hong writes, "Natural history is a discourse that corresponds to a past colonial regime. Yet the past gets recycled and emerges in unexpected ways, as fundamental aspects of the workings of neocolonialism. Natural history is such a compelling trope for this novel because it reveals the ghostly residues of the colonial past within the neocolonial present" (Hong, 2006, pp. 74-75). Like supernatural figures, the flora and fauna throughout the novel are archival entities that have indexed silenced stories of the surreal worlds around them. As living entities that are not viewed as human, the flora and fauna haunt the text throughout, and render Mala's home a living, evergreen abode with an ethereal aura through which the life of the plants is enabled by the decomposed organisms in the soil. Indeed, unlike the commodified "zombie" or Western "haunted house" with dark stairwells and

barren rooms, Mala's home is a cavernous house whose haunted nature is invoked by nature itself.

Hong's notion that natural history is a moving force herein is arguably more compelling when we consider how it invokes and intersects with nonheteronormative sexuality and the supernatural. When queer sexuality emerges from the closet, so do the skeletons and the "madness" that postcolonial heteropatriarchy routinely cathects to lesbian sexuality. Mootoo accomplishes this through dialogue between characters who speak creolized English which she juxtaposes against Tyler's first person narration. The novel's supernatural tone here intervenes, mediating between the so-called "natural" order of disciplinary heteronormativity and the irrational realm of madness and the otherworldly embodied by the protagonist and a few other characters. Mootoo blurs the boundaries between the natural and ethereal worlds in everyday life experiences of nature, thus also interrogating the constructed boundaries between "natural" and "unnatural" social articulations of sexuality. For example, for Tyler, the world beyond this mortal coil contains multiple spiritual personae of a single human; he admits, "I often want to call out to Nana up in heavens – where I am sure *she is* and quite sure *Bible Quoting Nana is not* – and say, 'You were right, you were right [emphasis mine]" (p. 46).

The constrictions of the asylum's ordered "sanity" and its disciplinary gender roles, in another scene, are subverted when Mala instigates Tyler to indulge his desire to get into drag. As if reading his mind, she steals a nurse's uniform for Tyler to try on and nonchalantly offers it to him. He obliges her, and his own, desire and emerges from behind a curtain fully dressed in the women's uniform. Here, Mootoo draws a distinction between the socially-sanctioned madness that society facilitates through the girls' father's alcoholism and the state's engagement of persons who are viewed as "off system." This moment solidifies an unspoken understanding between them both:

I walked over to her and stood where I was bound to be in her vision. At first I felt horribly silly, like a man who had put on women's clothing for sheer sport and had forgotten to remove the outfit after the allotted period of fun. I felt flat-footed and clumsy. Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence... The reason Miss Ramachandin paid me no attention was that, to her mind, the outfit was not something to either congratulate or scorn – it simply was. She was not the one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom. (Mootoo 1996, p.77).

Mootoo prosaically transforms Mala's disciplinary room into an ethereal chamber of gender transgression, a twilight zone between "existence and nonexistence" for Tyler. Themes of the supernatural seem to emerge in "real" spaces, transforming into comfort zones for queer characters who must take refuge from the ugliness of the material world. This emergence includes a disavowal of "nature" in the asylum that stands in stark contrast to the fecund overgrowth of vegetation that otherwise populates the island. As Gayatri Gopinath (2005) writes in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, "Mootoo's novel allows for a conceptualization of sexuality in motion: in the context of diasporic movement and migration as well as in relation to those movements that occur within and across bodies that seemingly remain geographically rooted with the home" (p. 177).

In another poignant instance, Aunt Lavinia tells Pophoh (Mala's nickname as a little girl): "Killing snails amounts to courting bad luck, sweetheart,' she said, narrowing her eyes and shaking her head. 'But let me tell you a little secret. Protect a living snail and when it dies, it doesn't forget. Snails, like most things in nature, have long memories. A snail's soul, which is invisible, mind you, will come back after it has died, looking for its old home'" (Mootoo, 1996, p. 54). Here, the narrative links animal hauntings through Lavinia, the lesbian lover of Mala's mother, Sarah. Like

Clinton, the restless duppy in Cliff's *Abeng*, the soul of the snail resurrects in search of an abode in the next world that it was deprived of in its material world. This aspect of the novel, in particular, and Caribbean lore, in general, reflects Butz and Berg's (2002) contention that, "Duppies, like other ghostly phenomena, find their homes in the uncertain spaces between consciousness, social relations, and material social practices. In societies with a strong duppy-sensibility, duppies are ever present, sometimes with tangible and material effects, but always as a threatening potential, a possibility waiting for an opportunity, a constant gnawing constituent of subjectivity, but not fully under control of the subject" (p. 100).

As Mootoo develops the narrative, the sense of queer Caribbean supernatural phenomena shifts from sites like Heaven, where the benevolent duppy of Nana, Tyler's grandmother, sits (p. 46), to the local cemetery. Ironically, this "home" for these spirits serves as a refuge for Mala and Asha from the school's homophobic bullies. Upon kneeing one of a gang of bullies, the sisters flee "to their safest place, the cemetery a block over and across the road, where the other children never entered for fear of being attacked by people who made their homes under the roofs of crumbling tombs or, worse, of being whisked away by the restless corpses to some remote place from which there was no return" (Mootoo, 1998, p. 87). This juncture in the plot underscores the notion of impossible movement between realms of the living and dead for some and not others, and the fear of being abducted upon transgressing that prescribed space of the undead. In Zoran Pecic's words,

All of the characters in the novel [*Cereus*] live on and across various physical and psychological borders...These boundary crossings emphasize not only the multiplicity of identity on Lantanacamara but also the decolonising politics in the Caribbean landscape. Thus, the notions of citizenship on Lantanacamara are closely tied to the notions of what constitutes natural and unnatural sexuality. Moreover, the

sites of multiple identities and histories, only visible through travel, through distance from the site of erasure, call attention to the importance of geography, of place and space and the multiple transformations various bodies go through during the process of acquiring citizenship. (2013, p .37)

The multiple identities and border crossings that Pecic invokes are bound up with “the notions of citizenship on Lantanacamara,” or who is a valid subject in the eyes of the nation-state. While it may seem commonsensical to say that a ghost cannot be a citizen (although capitalism accords this very human agency to capital and the corporation even as it divests it from abjectified subjects around the globe), Mootoo’s characters nonetheless imbibe elements of magical realism that allows strategic transformations of their identity. Indeed, I would here note that citizenship is inextricably bound up with queer sexuality and the supernatural in this novel even as both categories disqualify one from being a valid subject in the purview of the Caribbean nation-state. Despite this double transgression, Mootoo’s characters slip around the state’s expectations with surprisingly fluid mobility.

No other character in the novel more nimbly accomplishes this than Otoh, the sex object of Tyler’s affection. Ambrosia is born the daughter of Mr. Ambrose Mohanty, known as Boyie to Mala and Asha during their childhood days. While her father slips into month-long naps, Ambrosia begins to transform into a boy. Mootoo writes, “The transformation was flawless. Hours of mind-dulling exercise streamlined Ambrosia into an angular, hard-bodied creature and tampered with the flow of whatever hormonal juices defined him. So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later, marveled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl” (p.110). In this narrative kernel of the plot, as in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* and Radcliffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, both published in 1928, respectively, a pivotal character defies societal norms of gender. Like the protagonists in these novels, Otoh, formerly “Ambrosia,” embodies

elements of the African trickster figure that is both witty and unconventional (Gates, 2004, p. 990). Like other literary characters who exhibit "freak identities" in Christian Flaugh's (2012) formulation, Otoh transforms into "the hyperbolic embodiment of ability-charged identity formation" as his body is "shuttled throughout the spectrum of bodily abilities" (p. 19).

What might normally have rendered him a social outcast, as exemplified by the cruelty of the children's playground, ostensibly empowers Otoh. That is, his ability to slip between genders and sticky situations with potential suitors, and even during a particularly fateful encounter with Mala Ramachandin, renders his supernatural nature an evasive technology that can skirt the disciplinary categories of gender upon which citizenship in Lantanacamera is predicated. Indeed, Otoh is even able to skirt the "gaydar" of married men who want to have sex with him. M. Jacqui Alexander (1994) notes that "not just (any)body can be a citizen any more, for *some* bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain [original emphasis]" (p. 6). In this context, Otoh evades normative citizenship and sexuality by slipping through gender categories in chapters that punctuate magical events in Mootoo's novel. In Miriam Pirbhai's (2005) reading, "He/ She slips between genders as he/ she slips between sexual encounters. Even his nickname, Otoh ["On the other hand"], stems from his/ her predisposition to in-betweenness...In his seemingly flawless *trans*formation [my emphasis] into a man, together with his sexual encounters with men and women, Otoh underlines the shifting codes of nature and, by extension, the constructedness of truth/ conviction/ identity" (pp. 182-183).

Conclusion: Altered States and Cryptic Fates

Readers drift through the pages of the text like Otoh drifts through its narrative. That “magical” shape-shifting between genders bestows upon Otoh a mobility to move between spaces and worlds in the narrative and eventually come face-to-face with Mala in a freak encounter that leads to the discovery of her father’s corpse and her institutionalization in the asylum. Attendant to his fluid gender is a queer sexuality that is unhinged by gender binaries that organize sex into a socially symbolic system which, as Frederic Jameson has powerfully written about, constitutes a political unconscious in which “everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political...[and] proposes that we undertake just such a final analysis and explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts” (Jameson, 1981, p. 5). As he moves through these spaces as a queer Caribbean trickster figure, Otoh arguably counter-haunts the colonial histories of domination and evangelism symbolized by Reverend Thoroughly and his congregation, as well as their heteropatriarchy. In Zoran Pecic's appraisal, “Sexuality, in *Cereus*, is what links the various identities and narratives, challenging the imperial and neo-colonial assumptions of what constitutes sexuality, and investigating the questions of knowledge, power and representation and the violence inherent in those assumptions” (2013, p. 37).

As such, queer sexuality operates, as it does in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, as a conduit for accessing the skeletons in the closet, the ghosts of the past, and the phantoms of memory as they are manifested and contested by violent power relations that threaten women of color. Perhaps no other symbol in Mootoo's novel demonstrates this more than the dilapidated, even macabre, house in which Mala has hidden her father's corpse. Indeed, this “haunted house,” to use popular terminology around Halloween, is at once fecund with life in its external overgrowth and consumed by death from within due to the rotting cadaver. Mootoo's narrative writes into prose Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte's (2009) contention

that both postcolonial and gothic discourses have “for some time been paired in critical invocations of the ‘unhomely’ or ‘spectral’ legacies of imperialism and globalization. This legacy, which appears in the form of unresolved memory traces and occluded histories resulting from the experience of colonial oppression, diasporic migration, or national consolidation, is readily figured in the form of ghosts or monsters that ‘haunt’ the nation/ subject from without and within” (p. vii).

Indeed, we might even see that Mala’s “haunted house,” which is heavily populated by buzzing scores of insects and vegetation species, powerfully allegorizes Cliff’s roaming duppy and its restless haunting in the wake of queerphobia. That is, the home itself, in these novels, is configured as a living repository of the deceased and thus serves as a repository of the past and itself cobwebbed memories even as it is materially, and territorially, anchored in the present. Alive on the inside and dead on the inside, it is arguably the most salient transfer hub between the mortal and spiritual realms. Indeed, while in their childhood Mala and Asha flee into the cemetery to ward off childhood bullies, it is within her home that Mala takes refuge in living conditions that resemble the inside of a decrepit mausoleum. Even as it resembles a grave on the inside, Mootoo presents it in opposition to the Christian church, and its civilizing mission, that symbolizes Reverend Thoroughly and his white congregation from the Shivering Northern Wetlands -- a tongue-in-cheek reference to the United Kingdom and Scandinavian nations.

We may here note that the magical in Mootoo’s novel operates as a form of queer agency, whereas in Cliff’s novel it appears to mark traces of trauma and death. While Uncle Robert’s death and the resurrection of Clinton’s duppy, both catalyzed by the community’s queerphobia, suggest the emergence of unhappiness due to public disclosure of “sexual deviance,” Mootoo’s characters not only seem empowered by their queer sexual awakenings, but moreover transform the spaces which they inhabit, even in the face

of the asylum's medical surveillance and queerphobia, in which the ghostly is embraced into daily life rather than something anterior to it. As Gayatri Gopinath (2005) writes about *Cereus*,

It is precisely the construction of home under indentureship as a site of the violent establishment of sexual and gender normativity that Mootoo's novel contests. The novel suggests that if heteronormativity—and more specifically heterosexuality—is a means by which to discipline subjects under colonialism, then one of the means by which to escape the sexual and gendered logic of colonialism is by escaping heterosexuality. Given the complex valences of home under indentureship, it is not surprising that Mootoo's novel is intensely preoccupied with evoking various home spaces: the white missionary home, the 'native' home that Chandin's Indian plantation worker parents inhabit, and finally Chandin's own home, which his daughter Mala reterritorializes after killing Chandin. (pp. 181-182)

In Gopinath's formulation, I draw readers' attention to her invocation of "indentureship" as a reference back to the maritime corridors of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea with which I opened this essay. These watery passages facilitated indentureship in the forms of slavery, colonialism, which, as noted by Gopinath, crystallize in the domestic formations of home and belonging in the conquered territories. For Mootoo, the sexual and the spiritual converge in the allegory of the haunted house, as a material remnant of the two sister's sexually violent past that also serves as the refuge in which Mala's snail shells and cereus plants proliferate.

The house moreover carries the remnants of Sarah and Lavinia's love affair and Chandin's rage, yet becomes a site of Mala's release and embrace of the ghosts of the past. In Anna Royal's words, "Despite this trauma, Mala does not leave home, but rather becomes its protector and guardian, ultimately rebuilding her house in her own imagination" (Royal, 2014, p. 1). I would end this

section by saying that Mala escapes the memories of her father's cruelty with the ethereal environs that nature affords her, as well as the "magical" properties of the red chilies upon which she copiously chews to slip in and out of altered mental states of reality (Mootoo, 1996, p. 133). We may here recall the queer women characters in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, namely the one-breasted, revolutionary figure Nanny and the queer obeah woman Mma Ali, who engage in the sexual through magical rituals and food-making arts. In recalling these figures within and between both texts, various versions of history, and linked windows into traumatic memories, readers perhaps experience a fey malaise that could best be described as unhomely, or as Homi K. Bhabha puts it, "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" (1992, p. 141).

In her dazzling study *The Intimacy of Four Continents* (2015), Lisa Lowe seeks to meticulously examine the fraught relationships between Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas in their constitutive construction and justification of Western liberalism. For Lowe, it is utterly crucial to construct a counter-genealogy by carefully sifting through the administrative annals of domination. She writes,

The consideration of the colonial archive as intrinsic to the archives of liberalism permits us to understand that as modern liberalism defined the "human" and universalized its attributes to European man, it simultaneously differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human. Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance. (p. 6)

Lowe goes on to track how sexuality became implicated in such maritime adventures of capitalist cavaliers. She continues, "The colonial archive reveals the altogether fantastic structure of racial

imaginings based on ideas about Asian female sexualities. Throughout the nineteenth century, the racialized sexual differentiation of Africans and East and South Asians emerged as a normative taxonomy that managed and spatially distanced these groups from the spheres within which “freedom” was established for European subjects (p. 34). This urgency in breaching the hegemonic obfuscations of Western liberalism as it has been worlded through various terrains of domination is a key narrative strategy in these and other Caribbean women's novels. In both texts, queer female characters are likewise conduits for the supernatural even as they are figures that transmigrate between realms – not, as Leach notes, the flying white ghosts of Western myth but rather as diasporic figures who embody what Mary Condé terms “a flight from certainty to subvert the categories of ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (2001, p. 69).

In what we might consider two of the most important Caribbean women's novels to treat sexuality and the supernatural as intersectional, to invoke Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's notion of “intersectionality” (1989, p. 140) in which race and gender are constitutive, queer male figures seem lost even in the magic of gay sex and gender swapping. This is not to say that Clinton and Uncle Robert in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Otoh and Tyler in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* have no agency of their own. Clinton's duppy seems to circulate throughout the narrative, emerging and disappearing in the novels non-linear form like a citation of his and Uncle Robert's living selves. Otoh and Tyler's budding queer love affair harkens back to that of his father's and Mala's brewing romance, during which Ambrose tells her, “Imagine a finely woven curtain miles high in the sky, hung between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. A curtain that would not deny light, yet could contain and halt a hurricane!” (Mootoo, 1996, p. 213). Ambrose's magical curtain, forcefully whispered to Mala like an incantation surely here likens the European agents of the slave trade to a hurricane that can be stopped. The image invokes Ato Quayson's (1999) description of the

Caribbean as “a crossroads of various historical processes whose multiple centres lie all across the Atlantic” (p. 331).

In both Mootoo and Cliff’s fictive formulations, the nexus of the Caribbean and Atlantic is indeed, as Quayson observes, a hub of various histories with multiple reference points. This hub, however, is also a shuttle point between the sexuality and the supernatural where both are thought to be constitutive of one another rather than binary opposites anchored by opposing notions of the material (as rooted in the flesh/ body) and the intangible (as experienced with the ethereal). I would stake, by way of concluding, that new ways of theorizing sexuality and the supernatural are warranted, especially with respect to postcolonial diasporas of color in the wake of Brexit and Trumpism. Surely the rise of rightwing intolerance compels us to think in less nationalist and more planetary terms not only to re-think the world, but also recognize that there are many worlds beyond this one, for many creatures in many ways. In “World Systems & the Creole,” Spivak prescribes “an analytic frame that reflects, not the life of a single nation, and not the life of a single language, but something like the life of the species as a whole, in all its environments, all its habitats across the planet” (Spivak, 2006, p. 103). Such a planetary consciousness will also account for the supernatural and the queer, and also the belief systems and social practices that support unconventional identities that meet in-between.

This heuristic would also need to encompass the Caribbean and the waterways that lead into and out of its island and archipelagos – the same maritime passages on which slave vessels traveled and which Cliff and Mootoo’s migratory paths re-write. In her mediation upon the waterways that flow between and connect the four continents, which Lowe forges innovative heuristics for intimacy, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley writes, “as the crosscurrents between Atlantic and Caribbean, Atlantic and Mediterranean, Atlantic and Indian Ocean are richest in marine life, so they will be richest in depth of theorizing. Most simply, our challenge is to be

like the ocean: spreading outward, running through bays and fingers, while remaining heavy, stinging, a force against our hands” (2008, p. 212). Just as we consider the swathes of sea that lie between bodies of land, we must also reconfigure our relations to the supernatural and the sexual as the residue of the ghosts of the colonial past. Rather than viewing the Caribbean as an entity that scrubs Uncle Robert from the text or which causes Clinton’s duppy to trouble "Mad" Hannah, we may see it as a regenerative site for contesting beliefs and rituals. We may view subjectivity and disorders as essentializing categories that are complicated by local and regional European and American colonialisms (Good et al., 2006, p. 14).

The sea as a cultural superhighway on which Asha, Sarah, and/ or Lavinia may return to Mala now that the novel – written as a letter to Asha from Tyler – has been published in the form of Mootoo's lush narrative. Cliff's novel serves as a corrective to the renditions of British colonialist history that continues to efface the lost voices and stories of the Arawak people who were murdered in the name of whitewashed gold in the so-called "New World" (Sheller 2003). The turn to the supernatural and the sexual, both which increasingly and exponentially constitute one another through augmenting territorializations of desire and intimacy, are apt literary strategies for both writers. For through Spivak's striking call to arms for a planetary analytic (2012) and Tinsley's lovely imagery prose, both which recognize the colliding waves of the world's waterways and the ghosts that ride their surf, we can more sharply read Michelle Cliff's and Shani Mootoo's haunting prose and the hegemonic scripts that shape them. Such readings compel us to then delve into the depths beyond, at which queer sexuality and the supernatural meet in lyrical prose that challenges the ongoing colonial legacies and their appropriations of, in, and beyond the Caribbean.

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¹ While "special relationship" is the signature term trumpeted by former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the notion has more recently come under scrutiny. See Alasdair Soussi, "The U.K. and the U.S.: The Myth of the Special Relationship." <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/02/uk-myth-special-relationship-170221082834995.html> [accessed 25 June 2017].

² We should here note that "zonbi" is the Haitian Kreyòl appellation of the word "zombie." Just as "Vodou" has replaced "voodoo," in the past few years, so too has "zonbi" replaced "zombie." See p.17 in A. Benedicty-Kokken , *Spirit Possession* (Lexington Books, 2015).

³ Urban Outfitters is a Philadelphia-based, U.S. multinational apparel company that heavily markets hipster, retro, bohemian, vintage, and kitschy clothing, accessories, and arguably useless products.

⁴ See "Everbody Talks" by Neon Trees (The Island Def Jam Music Group, 2012).

⁵ For more on a sense of time through a Caribbean cosmology, see Brathwaite (1996) and Josephs (2013a).

⁶ According to Zahrah Sita, "The word 'Alcohol' comes from the Arabic 'al-kuhl' which means 'BODY EATING SPIRIT', and gives root origins to the English term for 'ghoul.' In Middle Eastern folklore, a 'ghoul' is an evil demon thought to eat human bodies, either as stolen corpses or as children. The words 'alembic' and 'alcohol,' both metaphors for aqua vitae or 'life water' and 'spirit,' often refer to a distilled liquid that came from magical explorations in Middle Eastern alchemy." See Sita 2017.