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Imagining the [Unbounded] Grounds of [Caribbean Canadian] Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

The "Introduction" to this Special Issue on "Recognition and Recovery of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production" surveys the multiple creative directions and critical orientations of Caribbean Canadian cultural production and raises key questions about the grounds on which Caribbean Canadian cultural production is recognized, especially in Canada. The guest editors also explore the productive, but sometimes problematic, relationship between Caribbean Canadian archives and the nation, Blackness, Indigeneity, queerness, publishing, popular culture, and settler colonialism. Even so, the writers see the possibilities of communities of relations as well as political alliances between different constituencies in both Canada and the Caribbean in confronting racial capitalism and the many afterlives of colonialism. Re-conceptualizing Caribbean Canadian cultural production as an archive, rather than a field of study, allows the guest editors to recognize the importance of certain commitments and values: an investment in an ethically conscious methodology, a refusal of reductive and essentializing conceptualizations of race, gender, sexuality, as well as the modern human, and a desire to build collectivities of political alliances. The unbounded and sometimes ungrounded nature of the Caribbean Canadian inspires an openness to new ways of thinking about the politics of cultural production in Canada and beyond.

Keywords

Caribbean Canadian; Archive; Black Canadian; Black and Indigenous Relations; Caribbean Canadian Self-Publishing; Queer Caribbean; Diaspora; Recognition; Recovery.

Does Caribbean Canadian¹ Exist?

The invitation to do a Special Issue on Caribbean Canadian literary and cultural production for the Spain-based journal *Canada and Beyond* provides a unique opportunity to audit the values and commitments of this archive. In the minds of the guest editors, we thought it prescient that we frame the issue through the concepts of recognition and recovery. Given the ways in which imperialist, colonialist and racial capitalist dogmas have informed what is privileged, empowered, or legible in Canada, how recognizable is Caribbean Canadian cultural production or its workers? We note in our Call for Papers that, in recent years, Caribbean Canadian writers and artists have received increased recognition in the form of major awards and prizes,² national and international honours, more reviews and critical writing on their work, and incorporation into secondary and post-secondary curricula in both Canada and the Caribbean. This increased attention to Caribbean Canadian artists and writers has led to an improvement in the sales of their work and in some cases the achievement of celebrity status. Though the increased income might represent their improved ability to

1. A Caribbean Canadian writer/cultural worker is traditionally understood as someone born in or with heritage from the Caribbean AND who lives, studies, or publishes in Canada OR someone born in or with heritage from Canada/who lives, studies, or publishes in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Canadian may live elsewhere at various times in their lives, but they would have experienced at firsthand, or through parents and grandparents secondhand, both societies. These traditional frames of inclusion might not be exhaustive.

2. In the past five years, Caribbean Canadian writers have been recipients of major literary awards. The Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize was awarded to David Chariandy for *Brother* in 2017, and to André Alexis in 2019 for *Days by Moonlight*. Alexis was also a recipient of one of the prestigious Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes for his body of work in 2017; Lorna Goodison (2018), David Chariandy (2019), Canisia Lubrin (2021), and Dionne Brand (2021) were also recipients of the Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes. In 2019, Ian Williams became the third Caribbean Canadian writer to receive the Scotiabank Giller Prize for his novel *Reproduction*. Kaie Kellough (2020) and Canisia Lubrin (2021) were also awarded the Griffin Poetry Prize. The recipients of prizes noted here are but a small sample of the recent recognition Caribbean Canadian writers have received within North America in the past five years.

continue their work and have their worth remunerated, their more recognizable status, we imagine, might create bigger platforms for their creative work.

Nevertheless, we wonder if the designation Caribbean Canadian, even in this moment of magnified recognition, is overshadowed, often hidden in plain sight. Much like a “visible minority” subject or writer in a predominantly white dominated society, the Canadian Caribbean might “vanish in the harsh light of overlooking” (Senior quoted in Collett 81).³ Even as works by Caribbean Canadian artists and writers are recognized, their status as Caribbean Canadian is often subsumed under other means of identification, as part of a multiculturalist regime of recognition, namely Black Canadian, South Asian Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Queer Canadian, or either Canadian or Caribbean, but rarely both. What, then, are the political stakes of recognizing this body of work as Caribbean Canadian? What does this recognition obscure or reveal? The question of recognition raises the issue of the terms through which Caribbean Canadian becomes visible, legible, or legitimate in Canada, the Caribbean, and in its trans-national diasporas. What does this doubly-pronged labelling signal about our understanding of Canada and beyond?

Some fields/areas of literary study in Canada have been experiencing what Smaro Kamboureli calls a “belatedness”⁴ in their recognition and perhaps in their recovery efforts as well (9). One of the most recent examples is Karina Vernon’s black⁵ prairie archive project, recovering archives that go back

3. See, for example, Anne Collett’s reference to Olive Senior’s account of the paradox of hypervisibility as part of a racial/ethnic minority in Canada: “to come here [to Canada] is to suddenly become a member of a visible minority and all it entails. Visibility here implies over-exposure; you are too readily seen, but you can fade and vanish in the harsh glare of overlooking” (quoted in Collett 81).

4. Kamboureli uses the term “belatedness,” following on Imre Szeman, to refer to the “formation of Canadian literature and Canadian studies in Canada,” and to denote not so much “Canadians’ obliviousness to their literature, ...but more Canlit’s own ambivalence about itself” (9-10). The belatedness of the recovery and recognition is less about knowing of the work of Caribbean Canadians, but an ambivalence about its significance in literary studies.

5. We maintain the lowercase ‘b’ when speaking about the black prairie archives in accordance with Vernon’s publication to honour the critical impetus behind Vernon’s choice to not think of blackness as a singular phenomenon but rather as one that is trans-historical and thus has resonances that may differ from contemporary urgings to capitalize. We too recognize the validity of this maneuver. However, elsewhere in this introduction we capitalize the B in Black to signal our investment in Blackness as an espoused political and cultural identity as opposed to an imposed racial, ethnic, or phenotypical category.

as far as the 1800s, even as she has given visibility and recognition to more contemporary archives that would still be overlooked in the present (1). In our Caribbean Canadian publication, what are we recovering, belatedly, or giving a spotlight in this contemporary moment? Certainly, the recovery is not just about material archives or cultural workers, but also the political, critical, and philosophical efficacy of an area of study that might be better understood as a body of archive. Does recovery imply hiddenness, obfuscations, loss, absence, political ambivalence, institutional neglect? How does recovery connect to recognition? Yet, even as this moment will most likely belatedly uncover a more prominent stature of the Caribbean Canadian, is recovering not an ongoing activity? Each moment in history carries its own pressures of production and recovery, its distinctive frames of reference and political urgencies. Indeed, the archaeology of literary and cultural recovery and recognition exposes the ongoing politics of institutional preferences and practices informed, no doubt, by the dominating ideologies of colonialist exclusions, disavowals, suppressions and disciplinary violences. Acts of recovery must be deliberate to shatter the preserved glass cases and ceilings of multicultural provisions and pretenses and the ways that systemic national-exclusions operate. The very issue of framing these questions through the construct of the nation itself invites interrogation and requires expansion.

Between elasticity and limit?

In a Canadian scholarly context in which Black Studies has been given greater institutional currency, how might a special issue dedicated to the recognition and recovery of Caribbean Canadian literary and cultural studies fare in this academic environment?⁶ What might be the generative relationships between Caribbean Canadian cultural production and Black Canadas, as well as the more expansive diasporic spaces of Canada and the Caribbean? Indeed, in the last account of Caribbean Canadian writing, entitled "Rooting and Routing Caribbean-Canadian Writing," and edited by Bucknor and Coleman, George Elliott Clarke,⁷ one of the prominent proponents of Black Canadian studies, raised the issue of the "existence of Afro-Caribbean Canadian" in and of itself and,

6. This is evinced, for example, through cluster hires of Black faculty at the University of Alberta, Brock University, McMaster University, Queens University, OCAD University, Simon Fraser University, University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University.

7. We will use G.E. Clarke in the shortened form to distinguish from Clarke which would be a reference to Barbadian Canadian writer, Austin Clarke.

secondarily, “in the Caribbean” (260). That 2005 publication by G.E. Clarke suggested that “African-Canadian literature,” not to mention Afro-Caribbean Canadian writing, held a “fragile,” even “brittle” existence that was both “elastic” and “limited;” the relationship between Canada and the Caribbean and, more pointedly, the place of blackness in Caribbean and Canadian spaces become heated touchstones in our cultural debates (260). Since the publication of the *JWIL* Special Issue, important critical works by Canadian thinkers have reignited and sustained interest in the political “currencies of blackness,” to borrow a phrase from Phaniel Antwi. A sample of such texts includes Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), Phaniel Antwi’s Ph.D thesis, “Hidden Signs, Haunting Shadows: Literary Currencies of Blackness in Upper Canada” (2011), Paul Barrett’s *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism* (2015), Winfried Siemerling’s *Black Atlantic Reconsidered* (2015), and Andrea Davis’s *Horizon, Sea and Sound: Caribbean and African Cultural Critiques of Nation* (2022). Three of these texts explicitly mobilize Caribbean Canadian authors to think through and interrogate race and/in the Canadian nation, despite Rinaldo Walcott’s caution about the hypervisibility of Caribbean Canadian in Black Canadian studies (*Black Like Who* 39).

Given G.E. Clarke’s idea of label-fragility, why is this Special Issue invested in this named constituency, Caribbean Canadian, at this time in the critical histories of the Caribbean, Canada and beyond? In that 2005 article, Clarke argues that an identity quandary forces the “Caribbean immigrant writer [in] Canada” to “imagine the grounds of ‘Can-Carib’ or ‘Caribbeanadian’ consciousness” (261). For G.E. Clarke, Afro-Caribbean Canadian writing has a “spectral” presence in the Caribbean, though it is ironically “landed” in Canada, but “grounded” in the Caribbean, and finds “shelter,” if not shade, under Canada’s multicultural umbrella. By landed, he could be invoking the idea of living on Canadian lands, being landed immigrants, a country where they “settle,” where one’s creative work lands a publication contract, while “grounded” implies that their creative energies, foci, stylistics, concerns remain rooted in the Caribbean. Yet, long celebrated Caribbean Canadian writers such as Dionne Brand, Myriam J. A. Chancy, Austin Clarke, Dany Laferrière, and Makeda Silvera ground their content in both places.⁸ The contrast between “landed” and “grounded” suggests a temporary touch down versus a permanent planting. Caribbean peoples of

8. G.E. Clarke qualifies his position thus: “Few of Caribbean origin respond explicitly to Canada; most celebrate ties with an external homeland or lament their loss of those bonds. That is not to say Canada is ignored or that the attitude toward former homelands is uncritical or nostalgic... Yet—and rightly—Canada is often an alien space where they mainly happen to be, putting up with the blizzards and the racist epithets” (260-261).

a certain generation believe that their burial ground should be where they are most culturally and/or emotionally rooted, usually where their parents buried their “navel strings” (umbilical cords). While G.E. Clarke exploits the seeming irony of Afro-Caribbean Canadian writers grounding their work in the Caribbean, even as such work does not seem to be resonating in the academy there, he does not offer any in-depth critical reflections on the ungroundedness of Caribbean Canadian writing in Canada. Perhaps, we see being ungrounded in Canada as a political value—recognizing Canada as a land of “touch down” and not one of groundedness is in one sense an ethical acknowledgement of Indigenous rights to their ancestral lands, and an ethical stance to refuse being complicit with settler colonial violence, as Andrea Davis argues (5). What does it mean for the creative imagination of Caribbean Canadian consciousness to be grounded or ungrounded in Canada? Jamaican Canadian Olive Senior’s work, for example, has been critically flagged in this way, as Anne Collett has shown in her article, “Why Don’t you Write About Canada?”. For Collett, “Senior writes almost exclusively ‘about’ the Caribbean,” while at the same time, even when “the poems do not reference Canada specifically,” “the poems speak to and of Canada—Canada in the world” (79-80). Is there a particular value in seeing Caribbean Canadian cultural production as an ungrounded and unbounded archive?

In terms of recognition, is Canadian content or “grounding” in Canada required for Caribbean Canadian inclusion in the Canadian canon or necessary to attract Canadian critical attention? Frank Birbalsingh, almost like an apology, explains that there is “a pattern common in South Asian [Canadian]⁹ writers who deal with their countries of origin in their earliest work before moving on to Canadian subjects and settings” (95). The question of Caribbean Canadian “ungroundedness” is important for exposing the terms on which some critics are granting recognition. These critics demand either inclusion of Canadian content or “settlement,” if not on Canadian lands, then immersion in Canadian culture. The misleading nature of G.E. Clarke’s provocation undergirds other critical accounts that see Caribbean Canadian writers becoming more Canadian or claiming Canada as a space of belonging the longer they remain in Canada. In “From Landscape to Territory in Caribbean Canadian Literature,” for example, Rodolphe Solbiac, while not arguing that the Caribbean Canadian has a stronger connection to the Caribbean (grounded) than with Canada (merely landed), as G.E. Clarke implies, he still offers a progressive narrative of greater settlement in Canada, as time moves on, than their previous sense of placelessness in an earlier period. He uses 2000 as the turning point evidenced in three

9. Birbalsingh’s category of South Asian Canadian writers includes Caribbean Canadians.

books published by David Chariandy, Ramabai Espinet, and Austin Clarke in that year. The temporal milestone is troublesome because these writers are of different generations and the choice of *More* (Clarke 2008) is unfortunate because its creative production was far in advance of its eventual publication in 2000, thus problematizing the significance of 2000 as a critical turning point. We think that this progressive narrative aligns with settler colonial imperatives that require assimilationist strategies and explicit Canadian content for acceptability into the Canadian canon. If groundedness is determined through these terms of Canadian content and settlement, then “ungroundedness” is worth imagining and conceptualizing for the Caribbean Canadian archive.

Even without explicit or central focus on Canadian situations, Canadian colonialist influences in the Caribbean mark the works of Caribbean Canadian writers. For example, Birbalsingh argues that in *Yesterdays* (1974), Harold Sonny Ladoo features “the imperialism of Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, who, in the process of converting Indo-Trinidadians to Christianity, instilled in them western European cultural values that tended to replace their ancestral, cultural habits inherited from India” (95). Also, Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) is read by Mariam Pirbhai as “a novel which indicts the Canadian Presbyterian Mission’s deracinatory policy of making education accessible to the indentured labourer’s children on the condition of religious conversion” (138). This imperialist practice in the works of Caribbean Canadian writers set in the Caribbean is very relevant to the ongoing critical engagement with Indigenous and decolonial scholars’ work in Canada about church schools and colonial violence. Anne Collett, in her defence of the Canadian relevance of Olive Senior, confronts the question of what Caribbean content has to do with Canada.

If Canada is a “confluence of diasporas” (Bucknor “Postcolonial Crosses” 20), then Caribbean “elsewhere[s]” (Siemerling 158)¹⁰ are central to Canadian considerations. Using the poems “Gastropoda” and “At the Slave Museum,” from Senior’s *Shell*, Collett argues that although the poems do not appear “to have anything to do with Canada” because of a lack of explicit reference, “the poems speak to and of Canada—Canada in the world” (80). Beyond Bucknor’s idea of Canada’s diasporic make-up, Collett proposes the idea of “entangled histories” and “the worlding of the Caribbean and of Canada” as ways of reading the

10. To refer here to Siemerling’s idea of “elsewhere(s),” which he uses primarily to recognize a Black Atlantic connection to Black Canadas, is not to suggest that diasporic elsewhere is limited to Blackness. We would argue that all settler Canadians are connected to elsewhere. Secondly, in using Siemerling’s term, we, like Lizette Gerber, are as equally guided by McKittrick not intending the term to be “reducing black specificities to an all-encompassing elsewhere” (simply not Canadian) (99).

extra-Canadian content as Canadian. Invoking notions of a larger geo-politics of racial capitalism where first world development relies on the thwarted development of the “so-called third world,” Collett correctly argues that “Senior’s poetry acts to insert the Caribbean within the world and to remind Canadians of their relationship to the Caribbean and that world” (82). Implied in the first part of Collett’s statement is the idea that Senior has a right to use first world publishing platforms to foreground the Caribbean; she feels no reservation in inscribing the Caribbean in the world, including nations like Canada. Further, the entangled history of Canada and the Caribbean is illustrated by Trinidadian Canadian Dionne Brand who shows that Canada carries over the diasporic colonial legacy from Britain through “Lloyd’s Bank... who got their bullish start insuring slave cargo” (qtd. in Collett 82). Other writers such as Jamaican Canadian Lillian Allen go beyond this diasporic colonial paradigm to Canada’s direct engagement in extractive (neo)colonialism in the Caribbean through companies such as Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) and ALCAN (Allen “I Fight Back”): “ITT, ALCAN, KAISER, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce/ these are privilege [sic] names in my country/ but I am illegal here” (*Women* 139).¹¹ The entangled histories of racial capitalism and colonialist violence make the Caribbean subject a Canadian concern in Caribbean Canadian writing, an issue we return to later in this introduction. The return to these histories of violence produces a poetics of discomfort that perhaps is not agreeable to the civil palate of Canadian literary and cultural criticism. The Canadian nation may be better engaged as the Canadian international, a place where the world comes and a place that engages other worlds, like the Caribbean, deemed available for exploitation.

Caribbean Canadian as Black Canadian?

Although Curdella Forbes in her 2005 publication *From Nation to Diaspora* suggests that we are making the nation less a conceptual crux of Caribbean studies, is Canadian studies still obsessed with the nation as a centralizing construct? Earlier, in Bucknor’s 1998 Ph.D. thesis, he envisioned the Caribbean Canadian literary archive as establishing Canada as a “confluence of diasporas” (20), thereby already marking the “multicultural” Canadian nation as already widening to what Siemerling refers to as Canadian “elsewhere[s]” (158). Yet as

11. See also G.E. Clarke’s account in which he produces evidence of both Canada’s imperial ambitions for the Caribbean—various plans to annex islands such as Jamaica and the Bahamas—and capitalist incursion into the Caribbean: “although Canada never established a political empire within the Caribbean, its capitalists have been perennially present” (282).

recently as 2015, Canadian critic Paul Barrett in *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism* maintains the importance of the nation in his interrogation of “diaspora, race, multiculturalism” (1). Three creative writers, who are Caribbean Canadian, form the bedrock of his study that aims to interrogate Canada’s racist, multicultural nationalism. As Barrett correctly argues, the “cold mechanisms of racism operate subtly, invisibly, and persistently in Canada” (8). Due to racism’s persistence and, perhaps, the urgent need for interrogations of the kind of racism that overshadows immigrant exclusions, Caribbean Canadian writing has been put in service of Black Canadian cultural politics. Consequently, Barrett contends that the narratives of the Canadian nation—multiculturalism, hyphenated designations, colonialism, anti-black racism—need interrogation and he sees Black Canadian writing doing this work. While the Black Lives Matter Movement in Canada (and throughout the world) continues to engage in this disruption of racial capitalism, it also makes important demands for systemic change. Even so, Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir see the containment of Caribbean Canadian writing within the nation as a limit. They reference Barrett’s “chapter on the Caribbean-Canadian writer Clarke” as paradigmatic of Barrett’s “demand for Clarke’s [and, by extension, Caribbean Canadian writers’] inclusion in Canadian national canons” (4). For Cummings and Mohabir, “rather than simply seeking to confirm a place within nationalist discourses and canons for Black writers and writing in Canada,” their articulation of a “community of relation exceeds the nation as the space of dialogue (even as it intervenes from the geographic space of Canada)” (4). This idea of a “community of relation” is reminiscent of Maynard and Simpson’s community coalitions: “we are both committed to thinking through what it means to engage in community-building across communities and toward building Black and Indigenous futures without relying on appeals to whiteness or to the state” (quoted in Davis 32). Beyond Barrett’s use of Austin Clarke to show the racial limits of the nation, Bucknor has argued that Clarke exposes Canada’s expansion into Black Atlantic intimate and political networks, thereby recognizing Canada’s place in the world of Black transnationalism and acknowledging “the community of relation” Clarke achieved through affective artistic alliances (“Canada in Black Transnational Studies” 53).¹²

For other interlocutors of race in Canada, such as Karina Vernon, the nation is not the orienting axis; regional literary production is her starting point. While at some level the regional representation of race reflects what happens generally at the level of the nation, it displaces the centrality of the multicultural state and its limits from this raced recovery. In bringing this archive to public

12. See also Kris Singh’s Ph.D. dissertation (34-63).

attention and into public circulation, Vernon is not just revising literary history, but also re-orienting critical approaches, as well as re-reading literary archives. This recovered archive (including Caribbean Canadian arts workers) shifts the predominant reading of the prairies as a naturalized geographical construct, to one that Vernon views as an “ideational space” (3). Using geographer Nicolas Entrikin’s definition of “ideational space” as “a field ‘in which individual and collective identities are worked out,’” Vernon views the prairie relationally (3). Consequently, rather than viewing the “sanitizing” of black cultural production from the literary and critical construction of the prairies as primarily evidence of the erasure of black lives, she has shown how race was central to the making of the region. As she argues, “writing between 1872 and 2019, black authors reveal the key role race has played in shaping the prairies as a region, politically, culturally, and ideologically” (2-3). The very act of “rejecting [black] presence and producing it as the outside boundary that defined the legitimate spaces of the region” was an acknowledgement of the presence of blackness. Rather than just a belated “blackening” of the prairies,¹³ Vernon’s project recognizes black presences in Early Canada, much like the Ph.D work of Phanuel Antwi in which he demonstrated “what cultural work ‘undefined and indefinable’ blackness did in early Canada and in contemporary imaginings of it” (iii). Also, like Anne Collett who sees Caribbean Canadian writing as showing Canada connected to the world, Vernon’s approach resists the focalization on the nation, but shows how regional literatures, through the black prairie archive (25% of which are Caribbean Canadian writers), connect to the wider world. For her, “Black writers produce the prairies differently ... as a place that is connected to and transformed by its relation to the black world, including the transatlantic slave trade and resulting cultures and networks of the black Atlantic” (3). The use of Caribbean Canadian archives under black prairie cultural production offers us some productive concepts to think through the value of this archive to Canada, the Caribbean, and the world. For Vernon, the black prairie archive establishes relationality as a central concept that connects Canada internationally, mobilizes an ethics of archival relations engaging in reciprocal sociality, and redefines historical entanglements to emphasize empowerment and not extraction.

13. While there is no doubt that Barrett has the laudable intention to critically assess the shortfalls of the masked and contradictory racial profiling of multiculturalism, the term “blackening” might suggest that blackness was absent from Canada all along. Though we understand that Barrett uses “blackening” as a restorative gesture, it also carries the other connotation of the reductive, imperative interpellation of people of colour into performing/inhabiting blackness as a subject position because of a strict racial logic. To read Tessa McWatt, for example, as a Black subject, is to restrict the elasticity of her Caribbean Canadian racial and ethnic variability.

Moving from an emphasis on nation and multiculturalism by Barrett, and region and the archive by Vernon, we turn to Andrea Davis who gives priority to gender and intersectionality as a means of engaging Caribbean Canadian artistic production. Although taken from a different vantage point, she, like Vernon, also offers us the concepts of relationality and ethics, plus a suspicion about the potential for equity and justice in postcolonial nationalisms, for either Canada or Jamaica. So, like Barrett, the nation appears in Davis' account. However, the optimistic investment that Barrett seems to have in the multicultural nation's capacity to incorporate Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of colour within its regime is robustly challenged by Davis. She dubs the postcolonial settler nation as the "hegemonic nation" and the Jamaican Canadian critic positions herself as an Afro Caribbean woman seeking to "ground her sense of self," even as she faces gender, class, and race precarity in both Canada and Jamaica (1). The idea of the grounding of the Caribbean Canadian, is not so much an "identity quandary" as G.E. Clarke sees it, but a matter of negotiating the restrictive patriarchal, heteronormative, and racial capitalist regimes the Afro Caribbean Canadian woman confronts. While G.E. Clarke's question of "ungrounding" finds resonance in this gendered, intersectional account, which is both personally and communally related, grounding is not a matter of simply belonging, but more about how to live ethically and how to "be in the world" (xiii). As she notes, "I use the term 'be/longing' ... (differentiated with a slash) ... not to mark a desire for national belonging, but to signal Black women's right to be; as in, to exist in time and place across our differences without fear" (xiii). Senior's "ungrounded" creative activities in Canada reroute our critical endeavours to Canada's "entangled history" of racial capitalism in the Caribbean that raises ethical questions about transnational dispossessions.

In her work, Davis insists on an ethical basis for resisting inclusion in Canada. In parting company from Barrett's optimism in Canada and canons, she questions the terms on which she might be included, when she asks, "is it possible for a Black woman—or anyone, for that matter—to live in Canada and participate *ethically* in the project of the capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal nation state" (xiii; emphasis ours). This ethical concern is not about establishing some self-righteous posture around the gospel of racial reckoning, but perhaps more to signal the value in the politics of discomfort that might be generative in Caribbean Canadian consciousness. To "imagine the grounds of Caribbean Canadian consciousness" requires a decolonial, transnational approach. G.E. Clarke's seeming regret that Caribbean Canadians are landed, but not grounded in Canada (116), Barrett's lament about the raced erasure and disavowal of Caribbean Canadians in Canada, and Olive Senior's uneasy relationship with Canada may all be fruitful to our ethical response as Davis argues to refuse "complicity with racial capitalism" and to "make the nation accountable for the violence of Black subjugation

and Indigenous conquest” (5). Finding common cause with indigeneity and other subaltern subjects is to recognize a history of hegemonic entanglements that requires interruption and challenge. Notions of groundedness are also central to some of the contributions in this volume. For example, Lizette Gerber’s extended analysis of Nalo Hopkinson’s speculative fiction in her article, “‘There is no solid ground beneath us’: The Shoals and Detours of Nalo Hopkinson’s ‘The Glass Bottle Trick,’ ‘Precious,’ and ‘Greedy Choke Puppy’” revolves around the concept of “ungroundedness” and the power of women’s creativity in imagining other futures for Caribbean Canadian subjectivities. Gerber connects “ideas of self-creation and subjectivity ... with the imagery of shoals and detours to emphasize ... the interconnectedness of physical geographies and metaphorical understandings within the diasporic self of Caribbean Canadian identity” (54). For Vernon and Davis, to “imagine the grounds of Caribbean Canadian consciousness” (G.E. Clarke 261) not only requires epistemological shifts but must also include commitments to ethics and relationality.

Caribbean Canadian Writing, Black Canadian Studies, and Indigenous Studies

It is not surprising then that several contemporary scholars explore Black, Caribbean, and Indigenous relations in the Americas—a space characterized by the interaction of settler colonialism, empire, and slavery—as a consideration of the positionality of so-called “arrivants” to the region. Within the context of Canada, Sto:Loh poet and critic Lee Maracle has suggested that immigration policies represent a settler colonial legitimizing of “chronic and continuous invasion” (qtd. in Vernon, *The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing* 152), a further rendering of Indigenous bodies as absent, precarious, and lacking sovereignty.¹⁴ Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence argue that Black people who cannot trace a heritage to Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island “exist in a profoundly contradictory relationship to Indigenous peoples,” as, despite sharing a history of brutality and marginalization under colonial regimes, they

14. Even as Maracle offers this insightful critique of Canadian immigration policies, her solidarities with Black peoples transnationally is unquestionable. In *I Am Woman*, she asserts her politics clearly: “To Black mother do I offer a piece of CanAmerica, unconditionally, for she had to sacrifice so many of her finest daughters. With her alone do I strike a partnership, an equal right to rebuild a nation more lovely than settlers can imagine. Everyone else will have to fall in line or be left behind, outside the warm circles of our fires” (120-21).

“have little option but to struggle for power as settlers in Canada” (Amadahy and Lawrence 126). We are sympathetic to this line of argument, especially considering certain histories, such as those of Black Loyalists in the eighteenth century who were offered land grants, settled in Mi’kmaq territory (also known as Nova Scotia), and consequently co-opted in the regime of settler colonialism. However, we contend that such assertions of settler status bypass the complex systems of subjection that positioned Black Loyalists in relation to American sovereignty. This is not to deny the agency these subjects may have had, but rather to suggest that relations within settler colonialism are complex and often contradictory. For example, in the American context, Barbara Krauthamer’s *Black Slaves, Indian Masters* details the participation of Indigenous peoples in the enslavement of Africans. However, the acknowledgement of those histories is by no means meant to demonize Indigenous nations, but to suggest that the binaries in which Native and Black relations on Turtle Island have been framed by recent academic discourse—particularly that of the status of the Black peoples as Settler—do little to account for the complex ethical relations that settler colonialism produces.

The status of the slave, native, and settler represents a field of relations that signals different positionalities and practices. Though Tuck and Yang assert that the “settler-native-slave triad structures settler colonialism, this does not mean that settler, native, and slave are analogs that can be used to describe corresponding identities, structural locations, worldviews, and behaviors” (7). From some perspectives within Black Canadian and Indigenous studies, to name the status of the African-diasporic person as Settler ignores the reality that Black peoples have yet to achieve the freedom in which to claim such a privilege; this view is based entirely on the presumption that emancipation has already arrived for Black subjects and that the ontological status of slave has already been surpassed. Jared Sexton argues that current formulations of Black and Native alliances require a reconfiguration of the ontological positions that have been presupposed by scholars in Settler Colonial Studies. He proposes the main ontological difference has to do primarily with the status of the African in the ‘New World’ and their relationship to indigeneity. Amadahy and Lawrence suggest that from Indigenous perspectives the most horrific aspect of slavery was that it “created generations of ‘de-culturalized’ Africans, denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base, denied even knowledge of who their nations are” (127).¹⁵ This point is taken up by Sexton as the primary

15. Despite these gestures to linguistic and cultural deracination, Caribbean scholars (Brathwaite; Warner-Lewis; Tomlinson) have acknowledged and researched the cultural retentions of Caribbean peoples.

wedge between Black Studies and Native Studies, as while the loss of indigeneity by most Native peoples can be “named and its recovery pursued”—to the extent that it becomes the main focus of their political mobilizations around resurgence and land claims—for Black peoples the loss of indigeneity can only be acknowledged in an abstract sense and “its recovery is lost to history, and so something else must (and can) become central to political mobilization” (Sexton 7). Sexton denies the possibility of the total reclamation of language, lineage, kinship, and tradition for descendants of the enslaved, opting instead to insist on the impossibility of a return of any kind in a praxis of abolition. For him, the forming of alliances based on a shared cultural history of indigeneity can never be enough, as the ties that contemporary Black people have to their indigeneity cannot justify a politics of resurgence. Whilst in the past, in the early period of chattel slavery in the Americas, alliances based on cultural similarities such as “a spiritual worldview, land-informed practices, and ... kinship structures” (Amadahy and Lawrence 127) could bring about meaningful collaboration, contemporary Blacks require something wholly different in order to negotiate how “stolen people on stolen land” can be situated “in relation to today’s existing Native peoples who are still struggling to reclaim stolen lands” (Amadahy and Lawrence 125).

Despite the differential positionality of both subjects, Sexton’s conclusion proposes a re-evaluation not of Indigenous demands or Black positionality, but rather to think of alternate modes that a praxis of abolition might create. His affirmation, in a direct rebuttal of the binaries established by Amadahy and Lawrence, is that “Blacks need not be indigenous and/or enslaved Africans in order to be allies to native peoples in the Americas,” but rather what is needed is *creative thinking* that asks, “What if there are, and will have always been, ways to pursue settler decolonization otherwise than as indigenous peoples and their immigrant allies, a movement from within that slavery whose abolition is yet to come?” (Sexton 7). Our goal in this survey of critical approaches so far has not been to accentuate divisions or differential thinking towards decolonization as sites of conflict, as this would only be for the advantage of the settler colonial state which wishes to see our communities in perpetual crisis. Instead, by making these distinctions and identifying difference, we are seeking to contribute to a conversation which so far has been limitedly taken up by scholars about what impedes the “analytic and political dream of a ‘Savage/Slave encounter?’” (Wilderson 182). Identification of difference here is also not meant to signal a preference for the conclusions that are arrived at by Sexton (which is that the current ideological positions must be abandoned for solidarity) or Amadahy and Lawrence’s failure to fully account for the ontological status of Blackness. Rather, in bringing to the fore these concerns, we are more interested in what Caribbean Canadian cultural production might offer to these conversations.

We contend that Caribbean Canadian writing complicates the binaries that inform the current conversations in Black and Indigenous studies. Caribbean Canadian studies detours from Black Canadian studies by not centring Black ontologies (and differential claims to sovereignty) alone but affirming the need to account for creolized Caribbean subjectivities, which phenotypically may be Black, mixed race, Indigenous, Indian, and/or Chinese Caribbean, yet marked by concomitant histories of slavery, genocide, and indentureship. It is from the epistemological background of the Caribbean, that new languages for thinking about Caribbean presence in Canada against impositions of Settler identity can be articulated. Edward Kamau Brathwaite conceives of “arrivant” as a category or concept rooted in Afro-Caribbean unsettled and unsettling relations to place which manifest in diasporas. Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) subsequently borrows the term *arrivant* “to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe” (xix). Through this, Byrd expands the *arrivant* from solely Afro-Caribbean and transmutes it to be able to signify the multiplicities of forced labour, migrations, and dispossessions that inform the Americas. This expansion of the conceptualization of the term *arrivant* fundamentally enables us to consider the relation between the settler-colonial nation state and, for example, both non-Black and non-European peoples with significant histories in the Americas, such as Indian and Chinese Caribbean peoples. As Angie Wong observes, “while both Indigenous people and *arrivants* are made subordinate to settler colonial nation-making projects, their experiences under settler colonialism differ vastly on the basis of being racialized differently. Settlers will allow agreeable or desirable *arrivants* to assimilate into the norms of the settler state, such as by way of extending apologies to a historically wronged group, but this is entirely for the benefit of the settler colony” (93). Wong’s caveat that these inclusions are in the service of the settler colony underscore the importance of articulating differing relations to the state in ways that do not obscure Indigenous presence, or ongoing settler colonial violences.

Grounds for Landing in Caribbean Canadian Writing

What the discourses above highlight are how Caribbean people have already begun to negotiate their presence on the Indigenous lands that constitute Canada. The consideration of what it means to inhabit the lands of dispossessed and disappeared Indigenous peoples is not new to Caribbean Canadian writers. Despite histories of cultural and material genocide, Indigenous people continue to inhabit and affect the—psychic and material—realities of Caribbean life. The work of Olive Senior exemplifies an attentiveness to these complex

histories. As a Caribbean Canadian writer her work is marked by an ethics that understands contemporary inhabitants of the Caribbean as *making life*¹⁶ on Indigenous lands in the afterlife of slavery, indentureship, and genocide. Senior's writing challenges renderings of Indigenous people in the Caribbean as dead and belonging to the past by pointing to Indigenous cosmogonies and their impact on the cultural inheritances of contemporary Caribbean people, as well as the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in the region.¹⁷

Though a writer living in Canada for several decades, Olive Senior's work is almost exclusively set in the Caribbean. Anne Collett argues that Senior's "focus on the Caribbean acts not only to assert the value of Caribbean community but to lay claim to, and indeed to remind readers of, the value of that community to Canada" (81). The "value" of the Caribbean community to Canada, we would argue, is dissimilar to the narrative of multiculturalist diversity that is often touted by Canadian government officials. Rather, the "value" that allows for Senior's writing *about* the Caribbean to be resonant to Canadian audiences is rooted in Caribbean people's ethical and onto-epistemological orientation to histories of colonialism and their ongoing presence on lands they are not indigenous to. Across Senior's oeuvre, is a call to presence Indigenous cosmogonies in negotiating the conditions of contemporary Caribbean life. Senior's landmark collection of poetry, *Gardening in the Tropics*, focalizes Taíno history, knowledges, and practices alongside African, Indian, and Chinese negotiations of place in the Caribbean. In doing so, Senior's writing models an ethics for Caribbean Canadian people, in her attentiveness to the "shared catastrophe" (Gahndi 45) of Indigenous genocide, and transatlantic slavery and indentureship; Senior's writing suggests what it means to be in relation to Indigenous knowledges, without foregoing recognition of Black precarity and without casting Indigenous peoples in the past. The poetry of Lillian Allen is also rife with moments that suggest an awareness of the shared precarity of Caribbean and Indigenous North American life. In her poem "I Saw a Perfect Tree Today," Allen juxtaposes industrialization in Canada with Indigenous dispossession. An Indigenous figure in the poem remarks, "Where I come from they cut them all down, / long, long, long before I was born" which prompts Allen's persona to lament

16. In Lorna Goodison's poetry and fiction, references to "making life" emerge as a Caribbean diasporic rhetorical mode of place-making. In Edward Baugh's review of Goodison's *Controlling the Silver*, he writes that, "this Jamaican expression, 'making life,' constitutes and affirms a variation on a standard global phenomenon. By acting out the transformation of 'exile' into 'making life,' [Goodison] represents the creative capacity of a people, their capacity for 'making' something of circumstance, necessity, and lack, as in another Jamaican saying, 'turn you hand make fashion'" ("Making Life").

17. See for example, her poem, "Meditation on Yellow" in *Gardening in the Tropics*.

that "This land, this land / Where cities have sprouted, / Blooming glistening skyscrapers at night / T'was all covered with trees once / One big forest we were once / All perfect trees" (np). Both Senior and Allen's engagement with indigeneity signal their investment in building community around shared environmental issues.

As a Caribbean Canadian, Senior offers the space of Canada a model of what it means to meaningfully engage in good relations with Indigenous peoples and histories. Additionally, Senior offers an affirmation of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's assertion that a collective life built on solidarity in search of a better world "does not belong to black people alone but to all who must be against this worlding of racial capitalism, to all who have suffered a displacement of—in the murderous imposition of—body, of land, of home, to all who would live in earth, as flesh, in and as the theory and practice of indigeneity under duress" (np). The concept of "indigeneity under duress" as characteristic of the life of many who endured the violence of modernity, is a compelling frame especially when considering that racialized peoples in the Caribbean "were indigenous, displaced in the most brutal way by European sociopathic greed" but who "were constrained to feel it as the settled coloniality of their own atmospheric condition" (np). The work of Caribbean Canadian writers like Senior urges people in the Caribbean as well as Canada to foreground the matrices of history that render different relations to the land. This gesture offers scholars in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies to consider alternate modes of engagement with cross-racial solidarities that depart from the contemporary models emphasizing competing identity politics at the expense of collectivity.

Beyond the work of Olive Senior, Caribbean Canadian cultural production also models what it means to engage with Indigenous communities as a Caribbean person within Canada itself. The Jamaican Canadian poet Lorna Goodison's engagement with Indigenous life in Canada is also worthy of further study particularly as her very identity as a Caribbean Canadian writer is often obscured. In poems such as "Spirit Catcher," "Rites," and "Medicine Bundle of a Blackfoot Woman," Goodison situates her own African Caribbean epistemologies alongside those of Indigenous North American peoples. For Goodison, affective affiliation between herself and Indigenous peoples is borne through a shared commitment to spiritual worldviews that resist the extractive practices of coloniality. This concern with the spiritual is signaled through not only the content of these poems which invoke Indigenous figures such as the "Blackfoot medicine woman," (80) and the "Big Indian hawking / spirit catchers," (75) but also through the title of the poems themselves. These moments of indigeneity in the North American context which appear across Goodison's oeuvre are worthy of scholarly inquiry to further elucidate attempts at building collectivity and solidarity among racialized and diasporic peoples in Canada.

Similarly worthy of further study is how the work of Tessa McWatt negotiates Caribbean, particularly mixed race Caribbean, experiences alongside Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. In McWatt's novel *Out of My Skin*, the protagonist Daphne—a thirty-year-old adoptee to Anglo-white Canadian parents—attempts to understand “her birth family's Guyanese background and the circumstances of her biological mother's immigration to Canada” (Medovarski 59). Throughout *Out of My Skin*, —which is largely set in Montréal during the Oka crisis, a 1990 land dispute between Mohawk people and the town of Oka, Quebec, which lasted 77 days—the question, “what are you?” which haunts Daphne, is paralleled with the Mohawk people's desire to assert their sovereignty and right to self-determination. The coupling of this individual Caribbean Canadian subjectivity alongside Indigenous peoples' struggles produces a narrative that intimates the *grounds* on which Caribbean people attempt to make life on Indigenous *land*.

Exposing the violence of the question, “what are you?” defines McWatt's literary endeavors, and is most explicitly interrogated in her memoir, *Shame on Me: An Anatomy of Race and Belonging*. “What are you?”—asked of an eight-year-old McWatt in her “suburban Toronto elementary school” (13)—serves as the point of departure for her exploration of the pathologizing narratives of the racialized body, and the challenges of liberal citizenship in a settler colonial nation. Rather than seeking to answer the violent and racist question posed to her throughout her life, McWatt opts instead to offer a critique on the bio-essentialism that undergirds contemporary understandings of identity politics. For McWatt, “[t]he single most powerful tool we have is our language and its ability to reinvent realities,” and so, she “desire[s] a new language of belonging. A who-are-you space to gather in with others, rather than the biological ‘what’ am I” (205). By situating the politics of belonging and identification within the “space [we] gather in with others,” McWatt asserts the value of relational encounters, more so than ethnoracial-based identity politics, as the basis for anti-racist activism. McWatt encourages shifts in how we language the questions of subjectivity and belonging and turns towards alliances built upon shared values and shared desires for a renewed politics of recognition that is disaggregated from the essentialist logics that inform Canada's regime of liberal multiculturalism and settler colonialism. In doing so, McWatt affirms what Caribbean Canadian may offer the nation of Canada. McWatt's rejection of a liberal identity politics allows for a more expansive understanding of Caribbean Canadian, not as a category interested in individual identity, but as a way of thinking two epistemologies alongside each other. Put differently, Caribbean Canadian can be understood as a way of thinking, what might the Caribbean—a site of cultural and racial hybridity, the world's most modern civilization, and a space where multiple identities have been forced to make relations to land in different ways—offer

Canadian and Indigenous studies, and other avenues of thinking. In highlighting the work of Caribbean Canadian artists here, we hope to underscore how the foregrounding of Blackness in relation to Indigeneity disappears Caribbean Canadian associated epistemologies that would otherwise be valuable to these discourses. Indeed, what concerns us, and instigated this special issue, are the ways in which the work of Caribbean Canadian cultural workers disappears under institutional priorities that often fetishize and hierarchize precarity.

Caribbean Canadian Ecologies

In a *Harvard Magazine* interview Fred Moten argues that “the work of black culture was never to civilize America—it’s about the ongoing production of the alternative. At this point it’s about the preservation of the earth” (McCarthy). Moten’s invocation of the ‘preservation of the earth’ to the casual observer appears figurative, even lyrical, and thus without material consequence. However, what would it mean to take the figurative as consequential, what would it mean to think of Black and Caribbean life as central to the ecology and the threats faced by the environment? The emergence of theories of the Anthropocene are evidently exclusionary in their totalizing narrative that foregrounds certain manifestations of life and demands accountability of the human in relation to their belatedly occurring actions towards the environment. But the case cannot be read as this undemanding. As Elizabeth Povinelli and others have highlighted, the relational experiences of other inhabitants of the earth differ from those within the Western conceptualization of the human. Some lives exist despite the human, they persist relationally to the earth as opposed to dominating it.

Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* employs figuration as an intellectual praxis to probe the conditions in which Black life is made to suffer in the ongoing afterlife of slavery. The notion of ‘afterlife of slavery’ is key here and continues to circulate as a compelling turn of phrase in contemporary Black, Caribbean, and Diaspora Studies. The afterlife is sustained in a state of recursion through the weather which provokes modes of *being* in the afterlife that has the primary goal of survivance. Sharpe figurates and repurposes the weather and climate to meet the demands of the Black diaspora. Weather becomes “the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack” (104) and slavery is always the undercurrent fuelling this ecology. Sharpe’s figuration of Blackness emerges alongside Sowande Mustakeem *Slavery at Sea*, which takes up figuration within the weather as a mode of thinking about Black diasporic life. The publication of Sharpe and Mustakeem’s texts in late 2016 and their focus on the environment [and breathing] as linked to the slave trade

can be read as signalling the response of Black scholars to the Anthropocene entering public discourse and its ongoing elision of Black life.

In *Slavery at Sea* Mustakeem argues that “The inability to breathe worsened slaves’ conditions as they crossed the Atlantic” and that “respiratory problems frequently emerged through immersion in and the ingestion of *toxic air* from bodily fluids and excrement” (60; emphasis added). “Toxic air” stands out as immobilizing as it pollutes; it is a belatedness of death, and failure to maintain the environment, long before the emergence of fossil fuel and industrialization. If “a stigma of filth became associated with a ship’s sail and Atlantic arrival within different ports,” (62) that stink continues today as a product of slavery, a pollutant of Black and Caribbean life. Each time a Black person’s blood spills onto grass/ into water/ on the pavement, each time a black body is made to stop breathing, we are reminded of the nexus between Black life, racial capitalism, and ecological crises. The figuration of climate and weather in the wake of the Anthropocene asks of us to *believe* in Black life, *before* the life beyond the human (the locus of post-humanist desires), to think laterally about the belated and recursive present of Blackness. Considering new materialist theories emerging in the form of epochs such as the Anthropocene, which, in its elision of Blackness, “solidify and make continuous the colonial project of violence ... What kinds of ethical viewing and reading practices must we employ, now, in the face of these onslaughts? What might practices of [figuration] offer?” (Sharpe 116-17). As Sharpe articulates, “the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?” (106). The work of improvisation, re-imagining, and indeed poetry is central to the creation of Black ecologies.

In this Special Issue, Titilola Aiyegbusi reads Brand’s *Ossuaries* as eco-poetry, particularly in its attentiveness to the varied entanglements between the human and nonhuman worlds. Aiyegbusi’s argument in “Situating the Ecological in Dionne Brand’s *Ossuaries*” centralizes the relationship between anthropogenic environmental catastrophes and marginalized bodies, and also reads *Ossuaries* as invested in prompting ethical considerations of “the histories of the spaces we inhabit, of lost dialects, cultures, identities, lives, and worlds” (79). Through close readings of the poem, Aiyegbusi asserts that “woven into the fabric of [anthropogenic] destruction of nature, are the bones of Black bodies, disarticulated, branded, scattered, and held in ossuaries” (80). Similarly, in the poetic contributions of Canisia Lubrin to this Special Issue, climate catastrophe accentuates and accompanies the laments, erotics, and demands of the Black subjects. “In the Middle of the Burning” evinces a concern with social and environmental crises, Black intimacies, and histories that structure modernity, through lines such as

“the dogged tide we make / the world shoring its dark scars between seasons,” “the granite sky,” “the velocity / of the burning world,” “snow in May,” “the frost-
ed rich,” and “a fearsome autumn ending spring” (207-208). Moreover, Lubrin’s
“This that We Have” depicts a post-apocalyptic world, which is simultaneously
the present, the past, and an indeterminate future. The temporal ambiguity sig-
naled through the repetition of “call the year anything” followed by a temporal
example, “3020-something,” and “1492,” suggests the long *durée* of environ-
mental catastrophe stemming from colonial contact in the Americas to a distant
future (209). Surrealist images and diction referencing degradation further this
coupling of ecological crises with coloniality, as evidenced in lines such as, “the
diaphragm of oceans, soils we find bearable,” “flesh-chambered engines
we widen widen like the sea,” “every sunset, an emergency,” “our preventable
catastrophes,” and “the plantations at the sea’s beginning bend” (209-210).
Lastly, Myriam J.A. Chancy’s excerpt from her novel *What Storm, What Thun-
der* details the life of Anne, a Haitian working for a non-profit organization in
Kigali, Rwanda months following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Anne reflects
on the capitalist orientations of environmental disaster relief organizations, call-
ing them “disaster vultures” (178). She continues, “in our line of work, it would
be the emergency shelter crowd we would see first... Shelters had become a
business opportunity” (178). This excerpt prompts consideration of the capital-
ist and neo-colonialist undercurrents of contemporary environmental and social
crises, particularly as it relates to the lives of Caribbean peoples.

Formal Experiments in Caribbean Canadian Writing

Linzey Corridon’s interview with H. Nigel Thomas offers engaging inquiries into
the metanarrative of Thomas’ oeuvre; Montréal as a significant site for Carib-
bean Canadian cultural production; as well as the ethical, psychological, and
intergenerational terrains of Caribbean diasporic experiences. Corridon’s mo-
bilization of the interview lends to our thinking about the methodologies avail-
able to scholars of Caribbean Canadian culture. As he notes, this interview “is
only one of many ongoing conversations unfolding across Canada between
Caribbean and non-Caribbean peoples” (157). In recent years, the interview
has been prioritized as a form suited to the recovery and recognition of Carib-
bean Canadian archives, figures, and movements as it foregrounds relational-
ity as a praxical site of knowledge production. The interview can rebuff trad-
itional scholarship’s tendencies to reinforce masculinist and colonial modes of
self-defensiveness, as it “reach[es] for different ways of inhabiting our scholarly
domains—and more primordially, of inhabiting ourselves” (Singh 8). Ronald
Cummings and Nalini Mohabir’s interviews with Faizal Deen, Frank Birbalsingh,

and ahdri zhina mandiola are among the recent output that signal the utility of the form. Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has produced new archives of conversations with Caribbean Canadian figures resulting from digital recordings of book launches, panels, and lectures. This turn to the digital in the midst of unfolding global crises “encapsulates [how Caribbean people] sit together from time to time, reasoning about life” (Corridon 157), increases the accessibility of Caribbean Canadian voices to interested publics, and extends the durationality of the knowledges produced through relational encounters. In addition to its appearance in this Special Issue as a critical practice, the interview emerges as a creative form in a creative contribution from Shane Book, an imaginative interview that serves as the prologue to his new work of poetry.

Among the highlights of the interview between Corridon and Thomas are their exploration of how Caribbean Canadian writers circulate in the Caribbean, as well as the relationship between multiculturalism and Caribbean Canadian identity. This interview raises important concerns that we have pondered ourselves, namely, to what extent are Caribbean writers in Canada read within the Caribbean region? And what are the networks of circulation and institutional recognition available to Caribbean diasporic writers within the Caribbean itself? In recent years, answers to these questions have become somewhat discernable as literary culture has found more institutionalized grounds in the region through festivals such as Calabash (Jamaica), the Nature Island Literary Festival (Dominica), WordALIVE (St. Lucia), NGC Bocas Lit Fest (Trinidad and Tobago), and the Bim Literary Festival and Book Fair (Barbados); the emergence of new literary magazines such as *Moko* and *Pree: Caribbean Writing*; as well as podcasts and digital communities like *Rebel Woman Lit* (Jamaica) and *Bios and Bookmarks* (Trinidad and Tobago).¹⁸ Yet, for Thomas, there is still much to be done as he explains, “I don’t think I’ve ever sold more than fifty copies of any of my books in the entire Caribbean” (160). While this is indeed lamentable, Corridon’s response that “those are 50 copies that end up in different households. Each reader then internalizes your writing, becoming both a reader and an orator of the narratives you create” (160) is illuminating in its foregrounding of the informal and incalculable networks of circulation in the Caribbean which are elided by the metrics of the publishing industry. Additionally, the

18. In particular, the NGC Bocas Lit Fest has featured several Caribbean Canadian writers since its inception in 2011, namely, André Alexis, Cyril Dabydeen, David Chariandy, Myriam Chancy, Dionne Brand, Gail Morong, H. Nigel Thomas, Honor Ford-Smith, Olive Senior, Kaie Kellough, Madeline Coopsammy, Nalo Hopkinson, Neil Bissoondath, Canisia Lubrin, Pamela Mordecai, Shane Book, Shani Mootoo, Sheena Kamal, Yolanda T. Marshall, and Zalika Reid-Benta.

interview with Thomas offers interesting grounds for considering the lingering currency of multiculturalism for some Caribbean Canadian writers. For Thomas, who affirms multiculturalism as a category through which to understand himself and his work, “multicultural need not exclude Caribbean Canadian ... what I am overflows—or has expanded—the perimeter of Caribbean Canadian” (166). Thomas’s understanding of “Caribbean Canadian” as a confining identity emerges as an important prompt for future scholarship to explore how identity politics have been mobilized in the popular imaginary, and thus, incorporates Caribbean Canadian under a capitalist liberal regime.¹⁹ Despite his disavowal, Thomas nonetheless asserts that “there’s much to be said about the contribution to Caribbean literature by the Caribbean diaspora writers living in Canada” (167), a comment that this special issue affirms.

Queer Caribbean Canadian Returns

H. Nigel Thomas’ presence in this Special Issue signals the significant history of queer writing and cultural production by Caribbean writers in Canada. In his tracing of queer Caribbean writing, Silvio Torres-Saillant observes that there appears to be a new “generation bringing ... energies to Caribbean writing, [including] Jamaican Kei Miller and Trinidadian Anton Nimblett, who join an earlier generation of mainly Canadian-based LGBT writers such as Dionne Brand, [Makeda] Silvera, and [H.] Nigel Thomas” (155). This comment is important as it reorients a genealogy of queer cultural production that is often obscured in criticism of Caribbean Canadian writers by scholars in Canadian, Caribbean, diasporic, and queer studies. In addition to the writers above, the archive of queer Caribbean Canadian cultural production includes figures such as Nalo Hopkinson, Faizal Deen, Whitney French, Linzey Corridon, Cornel Bogle, Trey Anthony, Shani Mootoo, Richard Fung, Suzette Mayr, and d’bi.young anitafrika among others. Our insistence on Caribbean Canadian is not meant to fetishize, nor essentialize, this category, but to insist that considering the field of relations inherent in Caribbean Canadian continues to raise pertinent questions that enrich our analyses. In their introduction to the 2005 special issue of the *Journal of West Indian Literature* on Caribbean Canadian writing, Bucknor and Coleman characterize Caribbean publishing and criticism as still “grapp[ing] with issues of [gender and sexuality]” even as Caribbean Canadian cultural production

19. See Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò’s *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* for an examination of liberalism’s co-option of identity politics, which Táíwò argues has stripped it of its political substance and liberatory potential.

offered useful texts “for exploring these crucial issues” (xix-xxx). Since 2005, queer visibility and institutional recognition in the Caribbean has increased significantly. Recent historic rulings and legislations in the Cayman Islands, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, and Trinidad and Tobago have allowed for a reduction in the legal challenges faced by queer Caribbean people. Additionally, queer visibility in the region has been marked by highly publicized Pride events. While these actions are noteworthy, it is important not to overstate their impact on everyday attitudes towards queer people in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, they signal compelling shifts in the context of the Caribbean from the time of Bucknor and Coleman’s previous assessment. Moreover, Caribbean scholarship has expanded its investigations into queer life, with notable publications emerging, as well as conferences, and university courses.²⁰ Consequently, considering these developments in the region, it is worth asking, what does queer Caribbean Canadian writing still have to offer to the Caribbean region?

To us, the value of Caribbean Canadian cultural production to queer Caribbean life today is to foreground the importance of recognition and recovery of queer archives. Enacting a version of Rinaldo Walcott’s “queer returns,” Caribbean Canadian writing today prompts readers to acknowledge the progress made in the contemporary, whilst simultaneously urging investigations into queer histories, moments, and fictions that have been obscured by hegemonic constructions of sexuality. We are attentive to recent publications by—and about—Caribbean people in Canada, like the excerpt from Suzette Mayr’s novel, *The Sleeping Car Porter*, which narrativizes the journey of a Black Bahamian sleeping car porter on a train travelling from Montréal to Vancouver. In an interview regarding this novel, Mayr explains, “part of my writing about him is trying to dig into the archives and find people like me there. Who are my ancestors, who are my family in terms of people who are Black and queer in Canada” (Goddard). Faizal Deen’s *The Greatest Films*, and Antonio Michael Downing’s *Saga Boy: My Life of Blackness and Becoming* also interrogate personal and public histories through the perspective of queer recovery to animate questions concerning Caribbean and diasporic constructions of gender and sexualities. Additionally, the Guyanese Canadian scholar Frank Birbalsingh’s personal remembrance of his close relationship to the Jamaican-born literary critic

20. See for example manuscripts by Rosamond S. King (2014); Alison Donell (2021); Lyndon K. Gill (2018); Nadia Ellis (2015); Maria Christina Fumagalli, Bénédicte Ledent, and Roberto del Valle Alcalá (2013); Kate Houlden (2016); Rinaldo Walcott (2016); and Thomas Glave (2008); as well as conferences such as Beyond Homophobia at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, and conference presentations at the annual West Indian Literature, and Caribbean Studies Association conferences.

Cliff Lashley in a recent issue of *Caribbean Quarterly* not only seeks to position Lashley as an early queer figure in the region's literatures, but to also orient readers to Lashley's work in Canada as a librarian at the University of Western Ontario in the late 1960s, and thus incorporate him within the archive of Caribbean Canadian.

Several queer returns comprise this Special Issue and raises the value of Caribbean Canadian writing to both Caribbean and Canadian discourses on race, citizenship, sexualities, and gender. H. Nigel Thomas's short story "Cockadoodle Nonsense?" opens with a queer Vincentian Canadian couple on a flight to the Caribbean. Thomas details the conflicts in their relationship, stemming from financial, immigration, gender, and sexual insecurities. He refuses to offer an idyllic narrative of queer Caribbean life in North America, opting instead to demonstrate the competing demands of class, mental illness, and religious identity that inform the subjectivities of his characters. In the literal return to St. Vincent, "to inform [Millington's] mother of [their] marriage," Thomas intimates the complexities that attend to the confluence of a Caribbean Canadian consciousness with material space of the Caribbean (173). And yet, in foregrounding their return in this short story—and their desire to share their life with family in the region—Thomas signals the shifting demands made of heterosexual Caribbean publics by queer people from the region. These demands include not only recognition of themselves as queer men, but also of their multiple positionalities resulting from their experience as Caribbean Canadian.

While Thomas' story interrogates the anxieties attendant to returns to the Caribbean, Lidia María Cuadrado-Payeras' "Alterities in Conflict: The Queer and the Animal in Makeda Silvera's 'Caribbean Chameleon'" focuses on a story by Silvera which dramatizes the return of a woman from Jamaica—her home country—to Canada, the country in which she now resides. Cuadrado-Payeras situates the story as generically multiple, straddling the lines of both fiction and drama through its mobilization of "scriptwriting conventions" (117). Reading the airport setting of "Caribbean Chameleon" as an exemplar of "non-space" which "represent[s] a break in the individual's experience of place where, against the latter's subjective inscription" Cuadrado-Payeras argues that inhabitants of the airport not only "interpret ... the spatial text" but are required to "perform it adequately" (118). Invoking theories of animality, queerness, alterity, and migrant experiences Cuadrado-Payeras furthers our understanding of Silvera's fiction as invested in showing the racist and dehumanizing underpinnings of borders and Canadian civility. Moreover, this article gestures to the limiting conceptions of the human that renders those outside of the conscripts of respectability as non-human, or animal, and thus unincorporated into the national imagination.

Heather Smyth's "'Usable Paradoxical Space': Negotiating Captivity and the Gaze in Michelle Mohabeer's film *Blu in You*" examines the Guyanese Canadian

Mohabeer's work for its critical and creative exploration of "complexities of diasporic, queer, mixed-race, experiences" (138). Smyth argues that Mohabeer's *Blu in You* challenges the hegemonic racial and sexual violences crucial to modernity through its foregrounding of queer Caribbean Canadian women—exemplified in the film through a conversation between Nalo Hopkinson and Andrea Fatona, "archival stills and video images of Black women, especially in entertainment/performance contexts; and in the film's imagery and filmic techniques and its incorporation of queer erotica" (136)—as Sarah Baartman's resistant diasporic inheritors. Smyth's critical intervention, along with the community and performance work discussed earlier, signals the ongoing need to think critically about Caribbean Canadian cultural production beyond the literary.²¹

Translating Memory for Futures Untold

We envision this Special Issue as a gesture to the wide-ranging archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production. While we have so far foregrounded institutionalized literary figures and publications in our introduction, we by no means wish to signal that as our only interest. However, before detailing our more comprehensive vision of what constitutes the archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, we also want to acknowledge other modes of recognition—such as memorials, translations, and collaborations—in honour of

21. Though our attention throughout this introduction has mostly focused on the literary arts, we are also attentive to the ways in which the work of filmmakers expands the archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production. Many Caribbean Canadian writers have also pursued creative projects in film, demonstrating the intermedia affinities of this archive and their creative practices. For example, Dionne Brand has served as director and narrator for several documentary films. Additionally, Shani Mootoo has produced and directed short films. A number of Caribbean Canadian literary texts have also been adapted for film and television, such as Trey Anthony's *da Kink In My Hair*; and more recently Clement Virgo's adaptation of David Chariandy's *Brother*. Virgo, a Jamaican Canadian filmmaker, maintains an influential presence in Canadian film. Richard Fung and Michelle Mohabeer as well continue to have a prominent presence within Canadian art institutions as video artists. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of Caribbean Canadian filmmakers, we nonetheless want to gesture to how film remains an important media for artists in this archive. This is perhaps most evident in the success of the CaribbeanTales International Film Festival, founded by Trinidadian Canadian filmmaker Frances-Anne Solomon and staged in Toronto. The festival has been an important medium through which Caribbean Canadian films have made their way to audiences, both in Canada and globally, through the festival's online video-on-demand platform.

Caribbean Canadian writers. Following the death of Austin Clarke in 2016, for example, several recognitions of his life have emerged, including Paul Barrett's edited collection, *Membering Austin Clarke*, a special issue of *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* focusing on Clarke and his writing co-edited by Andrea A. Davis and Leslie Sanders, a celebratory conference on Austin Clarke's legacy held at York University in 2017, and the Royal Ontario Museum's recently commissioned portrait of Clarke by the Jamaican Canadian artist Neville Clarke. We continue to remember Clarke in this Special Issue, through an essay by the Guyanese Canadian writer Cyril Dabydeen. In "'Man, I know 'bout you': A Reminiscence of Austin Clarke," Dabydeen recounts his first encounter with Clarke in Guyana in 1970; his subsequent meeting with Clarke a decade later at the Black Writer in the Canadian Milieu conference at McGill University; his correspondences with Clarke; and his last memorable contact with him at the Miami Book Fair. Dabydeen's recollection affirms the significance of Clarke as the first major Caribbean Canadian writer to be published in Canada.

This Special Issue also features a translation to the introduction of the French pocket-book reprint *Soucougnant*, of David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant*, originally published in French by Éditions Zoé in 2012. The introduction, written by the Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau, and translated to English by Lyse Hébert, is a remarkable moment of recognition of a Caribbean Canadian writer, by one of the most significant Caribbean writers of our time. Chamoiseau celebrates Chariandy as a "writer of relation" () in his attentiveness to metasporic realities, cultural and personal memory, and the figure of the soucouyant in Caribbean folklore. Translation allows for an expansion of the perceived nationalist and linguistic boundaries of Caribbean Canadian writing. The translation to French of *Soucouyant* allows for new readers across the Francophone world to become acquainted with Chariandy's writing. Additionally, this translation of Chamoiseau's introduction, exclusively published in this Special Issue, adds to David Chariandy's archive of literary production and reception in English. A consideration of the linguistic terrain of Caribbean Canadian cultural production also informs Michał Obszyński's contribution to this Special Issue. Obszyński's "From Paris and Rome to Quebec: Reading Fanon in Radical Montreal Intellectual Circles of the 1960s" adds to the critical archive of recent publications—e.g., Austin's *Fear*; Mill; Cummings and Mohabir—concerned with recovering Black and Caribbean Canadian radicalisms in Montréal. The article traces the reception of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* among left-wing intellectuals, artists, and activists in Montréal between 1950 and 1970. Through this, Obszyński further elaborates the role of not only Montréal, but of Caribbean Canadians, in the development of a Black global consciousness, expanding beyond the literary to include community relations and engagements. Moreover, this article furthers our understanding of the reception of publications by Fanon in Canada.

Caribbean Canadian Publishing, Self-Publishing, and Children's Literature

Caribbean Canadian cultural workers have had access to several historical and contemporary publishing opportunities. Simultaneously, these opportunities allowed for a shifting of the scope of the audience for Caribbean Canadian writing, however, in some cases it resulted in the limited availability of some forms of cultural production to wider audiences. While early, predominantly male, writers such as Austin Clarke developed, albeit tenuous, relationships to established Canadian publishers such as McClelland & Stewart, opportunities for publication for other marginalized Caribbean Canadian writers were scant. Consequently, the founding of Sister Vision Press (1985-2001) by Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin was significant. It allowed for more opportunities for Caribbean Canadian writers and was the first press in Canada whose mission was to publish writing by and for women of colour, particularly those living in Canada, but originally from the Caribbean. The significance of Sister Vision Press was not only due to its focus on its recognition of the importance of race and gender, but also sexuality and language. Early publications such as *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* were ground-breaking in their scope and timing; additionally, the linguistic commitment of the press is evidenced in many of its publications being written in creole languages, namely, ahndri zhina mandiel's *Speshal rikwes [Poems in Dialect]*, the Sistren Theatre Collective and Honor Ford-Smith's *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*, among others. Sister Vision Press also engaged in collaborations with organizations in the Caribbean which resulted in several publications, as well as community development through its offering of workshops and mentorship to emerging writers.

Beyond Sister Vision Press, an often-overlooked publisher of Caribbean Canadian writing is Pamela and Martin Mordecai's Sandberry Press (1988-2005). Initially, based in Jamaica, the press continued its work as both founders moved to Canada in 1993. Sandberry Press has published several Caribbean Canadian writers, such as Edward Baugh,²² Gloria Escoffery, and Pamela Mordecai, as well as the anthology *Calling Cards: New Poetry from Caribbean/Canadian Women*. That Pamela Mordecai self-published through Sandberry Press is noteworthy, as it speaks to the resources that marginalized writers draw on to circulate their creative endeavours into the public. Dallas J. Baker contends that "the stigma attached to self-publishing is, surprisingly, a relatively recent phenomena (historically speaking), arising around the same time that

22. Edward Baugh can be considered Caribbean Canadian as his poetry is published with a Canadian publisher and he lived and studied at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada.

publishing houses were transforming into corporations" (np). He argues for tracing the history of the stigmatization of self-publishing alongside histories of gender inequality, especially considering research by Alison Baverstock and Jackie Steinitz in the UK which shows "that 65% of self-publishers are women" as "traditional publishing houses heavily favour male authors," consequently, "self-publishing offers women writers the opportunity to share their work and gain readers" (np). Critics and scholars have largely ignored the work of self-published writers. The reasons for this critical neglect are multiple, ranging from institutionalized snobbery, a generalized and assumptive perception of self-published works as lacking editorial rigour, to more innocuous gaps in awareness of the breadth of self-publishing. What Mordecai's publishing of her own writing by Sandberry Press makes clear is the need for scholars to attend to the cultural and economic significance of self-publishing. What might an attentiveness to Caribbean Canadian self-published literatures—as opposed to the existing, yet unfinished, archive of traditionally published writing—tell us about the otherwise unknown ethical, creative, and political investments of Caribbean Canadian cultural production?

Recent self-published works by Caribbean Canadian writers signal the importance of recognizing and recovering the creative pursuits of Caribbean Canadian people, regardless of their institutional origins and relationships. Self-published Caribbean Canadian writers face different pressures than writers who are published through more traditional means. Oftentimes, self-published writers are tasked with the marketing, production management, and distribution of their works. However, these writers have also been resourceful in their seeking of networks and communities for the development of their writing. In an interview with *Quill and Quire*, Stacey Marie Robinson, a self-published Caribbean Canadian urban fiction writer and founder of the Toronto Urban Book Expo, remarks that the Expo provides an opportunity for writers of different backgrounds to share their work. She notes, "a lot of self-published writers were given the chance to present ... I wanted to create a safe, culturally familiar space for like-minded writers to come together to share with an audience that would be supportive of their efforts, despite where they were in a publishing sense" (np). The networks of support for self-published writers extend beyond the more traditional Expos and book fairs, but also to digital platforms. Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian blogs serve an important function for the promotion of both traditionally published and self-published writers. Zetta Elliot's blog, for example, is an archive of both Elliot's own journey with self-publishing as a Caribbean Canadian woman, but also features interviews, reviews, and discussions with other Caribbean Canadian self-published writers. Social media platforms such as Twitter have also fostered community amongst self-published writers of similar backgrounds.

Recent self-publications expand the existing archive of what we understand to be Caribbean Canadian. Zetta Elliot—who has both self-published as well as published with traditional publishers—and whose background is Nevisian, gives visibility to Caribbean Canadian writers from smaller ‘home countries.’ These writers are usually overshadowed by writers from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, who enjoy a more prominent publishing profile. Moreover, Stacey Marie Robinson’s urban fiction challenges American generic characteristics, as she observes, “I’m coming from a Caribbean-Canadian background ... Urban fiction in the U.S. is more underground, gritty, and seedy. I hope in Canada it can be less so, and be more diverse and represent more experiences in the city” (np). Robinson’s writing expands the conventions of the genre associated with U.S. urban fiction by acknowledging the particularities of Canada, and refusing the generic hegemonies produced by urban fiction in the United States. Self-publishing has also created more spaces for queer and trans Caribbean Canadian writers to engage in literary endeavours. Noticing an absence in safe and supportive writing spaces for non-mainstream writers, the Toronto-based writer Dianah Smith created a reading series (‘A’ is for Orange) and courses and workshops specifically for emerging queer and trans writers of Caribbean descent. A former participant in the now-inactive ‘A’ is for Orange reading series, Barbadian Canadian Akhaji Zakiya self-published *Inside Her*, a collection of linked short fiction and poetry, which focuses on four women of colour living in Toronto. The collection explores queer life in all its joys and complexities in the contemporary world and adds to the archive of queer Caribbean Canadian writing. The expanding archive of queer writing overall by Caribbean writers challenges stigmas and narrow narratives of what it means to be a Caribbean subject.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also given way to new writing by self-published Caribbean Canadians. Canute Lawrence’s *Pathology of a Pandemic*, a collection of poetry, has received noteworthy reviews and discussion on various platforms including Amazon, as well as traditional media outlets. Lawrence describes the collection as “a creative chronicle and documentation of the individual and collective experiences we have faced during the 2020 pandemic” (back cover). Similarly, Olive Senior has also ventured into self-publishing, with her collection *Pandemic Poems*. Though Senior has historically published with traditional presses, her self-published collection might signal the appeal of self-publishing to writers who see their work as timely. In her introduction, Senior explains that the poems appear “in the order in which they were written and posted on my Twitter and Facebook pages between May and September—the COVID-19 summer of 2020” (vii). The initial publication on social media, and their subsequent collection in a book format, demonstrates the utility of self-publishing as a vehicle for real-time social commentary. While the work of documenting self-published Caribbean Canadian writing is still to be done, it

is worth noting here that children's literature is the genre of self-publishing that is most prominent among Caribbean Canadians.

Children's and Young Adult literature, whether self-published or traditionally published, is an often-neglected site of inquiry, and thus limits our ability to fully recognize the range of Caribbean Canadian writing. For example, the writer C. Everard Palmer, is often considered as only a Jamaican writer, even though he emigrated to Canada in 1974 and lived there until his death in 2003. That at least five of his published children's books were written while he resided in Canada is significant, and it most certainly incorporates him into an archive of Caribbean Canadian. This raises the question of how might the inclusion of Palmer into the archive of Caribbean Canadian shift how we understand his oeuvre? Likewise, many Caribbean Canadian children's writing disappears from wider recognition, regardless of their publishing status. Gail Morong, a Trinidadian Canadian children's writer who emigrated to Canada in 1993 and currently resides in Kamloops, British Columbia, observes that "at the time of taking up residence in Canada, I was not sure that the book would sell well to a foreign market, so I didn't actively pursue [writing]" (np). It was not until two decades later that Morong decided to take writing seriously again and published *Lost at Carnival* in 2015. Morong describes the challenges and joys of self-publishing as a children's writer in an essay in *Ananseem*. She explains, "I recently found out through Twitter and Facebook that my book has made it to Egypt and London, so I know there is potential for it to be sold more widely to a Caribbean and international audience ... It has taken me twenty-eight years to get to this point" (np). Other Caribbean Canadian children's and young adult writers, both self-published and traditionally published, such as Sharon Dorival, Shauntay Grant, Nadia L. Hohn, Yolanda T. Marshall, Carol Ottley-Mitchell, Kristina Morgan, and Kelbian Noel, have also described their struggles for recognition, not only as writers, but as writers of a particular background that they view as integral to the stories they tell.²³ Recognition and recovery of Caribbean Canadian children's and young adult writers is important if we are to understand the fullness of this archive and its investments.

23. Not only are all the writers mentioned here women, but they are women whose presence in Canada further nuances our conception of the breadth of Caribbean Canadian writing. Put differently, their countries or provinces of origin are places that are not always incorporated into the archive of Caribbean Canadian. For example, Sharon Dorival is a Dominican living in Alberta; Shauntay Grant lives in Nova Scotia and is a descendant of Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons and Black Refugees who migrated to Canada some two hundred years ago; and Kelbian Noel was born in Moncton, New Brunswick to Guyanese immigrants.

In addition to providing spaces for community making for Caribbean Canadian self-published writers and writers of young and adult and children's literature, digital platforms have also been important for archiving Caribbean Canadian cultural production. As mentioned above, Olive Senior's recent poetry collection began as posts on social media, however, Senior's online presence goes back even further. A digital platform featuring a biography of Senior, bibliographies, and samples of her writing, hosted by Toronto Metropolitan University, and curated by Hyacinth Simpson has served as an online resource to researchers and students interested in Senior's writing. Winfried Siemerling's companion website²⁴ to his 2015 monograph *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, is a resource accessible to publics interested in Black Canadian writing and culture. As much of the resources referenced in Siemerling's monograph are in the public domain, this website curates the primary texts alongside historical documents, information about authors, scholarly and newspaper articles, and other digital platforms. Lastly, Stephanie McKenzie, of Memorial University in Newfoundland, has curated several online collections of Caribbean poets reading their work and has made these recordings accessible to the public. Among the writers who have dedicated digital platforms on Memorial University's website are Pamela Mordecai, Tanya Shirley, and the St. Lucian poet Vladimir Lucien. The inclusion of Shirley and Lucien challenges us to consider how does a writer become incorporated into the archive of Caribbean Canadian? In the case of Shirley, her presence in Canada dates to her time as a secondary school student in the country, however, her status as Caribbean Canadian, like Lucien, is further concretized as they are made institutionally legible within Canada through McKenzie's efforts.

Expanding the Archive of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production

It is not surprising that as literary critics, both G.E. Clarke and Barrett primarily privilege traditional literary archives. However, by this specialized focus, they delimit the registers of recognition to academic machineries and scholarly protocols, and the relationship of Black Caribbean Canadian cultural production to the nation. G.E. Clarke, for example, uses such rubrics of recognition as critical accounts, bibliographies, library holdings, thesis-production, interviews with academics and writers, and syllabi in schools. Barrett turns to institutional mechanisms, and popular discourses/narratives of the nation in order to show the exclusions of Black subjects and the ways

24. Visit the website at: <http://blackatlantic.ca>

in which Caribbean Canadian writers help in the “blackening of the nation” (22). We have already discussed the broadening of the significance of the Caribbean Canadian beyond the Canadian nation and content, but what value might accrue to our critical practice by recognizing an expanded archive beyond literary canons and academic concentrations? Black Canadian archival recovery has always had to go beyond the establishment sites (G.E. Clarke’s use of non-literary sources; Lorris Elliot’s examination of memoirs and self-publishing; Makeda Silvera and Dionne Brand’s oral histories of Black women in Canada) and this is no different in the work of both Vernon and Davis who turn, for example, to popular culture as sources of Black Canadian/Caribbean Canadian cultural production. Even as Vernon notes that “oral cultural forms” (“folk spirituals, plantation songs, shouts, prayers, dances, folk tales, and stories”) might have been lost because of inadequate records, she turns to alternative archives to excavate black lives in the prairies (15).²⁵ Via the alternative archive, she has included “oral literature, slam poetry and rap” (16), but also drama and film.

Our Special Issue features the spoken word artist Brandon Wint, Ontario born, with Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, who in 2020 published his debut poetry book *Divine Animal*. We hasten to say, he has other printed appearances in national anthologies, but most importantly, he has published via other audio-visual and digital formats (digital albums—*Infinite Mercies* (2018) and *Freedom Journal; Antidotes to Violence* (2018/2019) and many on-line videos of performances). As a two-time national slam poetry champion, his *Freedom Journal*, much like the digital publication of (Senior and Lawrence’s) pandemic poems, provides a contemporaneous account of “the racial violence—and the varied response to it—in 2018 and 2019” (*Freedom* np). Wint uses his digital album—a popular cultural mode of production—to widely circulate his artistic response to racial violence and to expose “the experience of being black in North America, with its attendant histories, joys and its tough reconciliations” (*Freedom* np). The poem, “Backbone,” that he offers in this issue mines the Black body as a source of debilitation and damage, but also reaches towards ancestral memory (“the pain above my hips/ now leads to my grandmother’s doorway”) and to landscape (“my toes sunned or shadowed in tall grass”) for healing, even as it articulates the role of light in the imaginative/creative impulse and customs for shifting the black subjects vision about their reality: “Every day, light ribboning my mattress,/ morning announcing itself in the flame/ that turns the blinds to shadow puppets” (). Essentially, the poem advocates Black joy as an antidote to historical damage to the bodies and psyches of Black subjects

25. As she argues, members of the first period, “belonged to a more oral than textual culture, and their oral forms were rarely registered in the colonial archive” (15).

through Barbadian communal food (“macaroni pie and coucou”), leisure activity (“old men slamming dominoes”), music (“the trumpet of an old song”) and dancing (“I last saw them dance/ my grandfather’s fingers soft as rain on her shoulders”). Wint does not only expand our archives into the popular domain and wider circulation, he does not only provide us with other sites of validation and recognition, but he also suggests ways of building communities of relations especially through his connecting damage to bodies of people of colour as a kind ecological disaster that benefits from the epistemologies of Indigenous thinking. Even as he self-consciously connects with the work of Christina Sharpe, Dionne Brand, Robin DG Kelly, Cedric Robinson, and others, Wint develops a Caribbean Canadian aesthetic practice that moves beyond these works.

While Wint uses various medias of popular culture for the circulation of his work, Shane Book’s poems “Caribbean Flex” and “Nice for What,” which appear in this Special Issue, mobilize allusions to popular culture, creole languages, and surrealist images to interrogate Caribbean diasporic masculinities, capitalist greed, and ongoing climate crises. The speaker in “Caribbean Flex” performs masculinities through dancehall cultural rhetoric (“Bless-up! Big-up!”) and Black American vernacular and allusions to rap culture, “Skrrt-skrrt-skrrt,” a reference to the 21 Savage song of the same name. Accentuating the profile of masculinities in the poem are moments of disclosing covert desire and sexual longing—in lines such as “Started at the bottom / and kissed on it. / Loved that bottom so much / I wanted to piss on it / (I never told you that)” and “Lemme watch so much online porn I hurt / the fleshy-ribbed crook of my hand,”— that suggest the relationship between Black and Caribbean popular culture and the erotic. Indeed, the shifting of “starting from the bottom,” from its initial resonance and referent to the Drake song “Started From the Bottom” which explores the singer’s early life, career, and upward social mobility, to a provocative sexual image, signals the speaker’s temporality as within the age of “online porn” and “Black people on Netflix,” as well as intimating the masculinities of the speaker as belonging to a particular temporality, that of the 2010s era when figures such as Drake achieved widespread popularity. Like “Caribbean Flex,” “Nice for What” interrogates masculinities and popular culture through references to Drake. The title of the poem alludes to Drake’s 2018 song of the same name. The presence of Drake in these poems is significant for several reasons, namely because, as a mixed race Canadian, he is the most successful rapper in the country’s history. His music frequently features Caribbean artists (for example, Popcaan and Rihanna), incorporates Caribbean musical forms (namely, dancehall and reggae), as well as Caribbean languages. His masculinities reject the stereotypical hypermasculine and overtly violent performances associated with American rap. More often, he opts instead for masculinities that foreground the vulnerability of men

without compromising popular images of a “real man.” These performances of masculinities by Drake have been influential on many young men in urban spaces. “Nice for What” attempts to capture the temporality of Drake’s rising prominence (“Wall Street / and the billionaire class,”) his influential masculinities, his mixed race identity (“I learned Courvoisier and frenemies / is a Chex Mix type of a mixture,”) while questioning—through spectacularizing—the politics of aesthetics (“Gucci, Ozwald Boateng and Kiton,” “Prosecco popper,” “fashion-less asses,” and “Fake diamond earrings”). Through their embeddedness in popular culture via allusions and linguistic experimentation, these poems speak to the influence of Caribbean people in Canada (the modes through which Caribbean aesthetics become urban Canadian aesthetics) as well as to the appealing unwieldiness and hypervisibility of Caribbean, Black, and Caribbean Canadian culture.

The Commitments and Values of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production

While earlier considerations of Caribbean Canadian understood it as a field of study, our reflections in this Special Issue provoke a shift in perspective that urges us to consider it more so as an archive. The ungrounded and unbounded nature of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, as well as its multiple resonances across several fields of study (Gender and Sexuality, Critical Race, Migration and Diaspora, Critical Ethnic, Caribbean, Canadian, Black Canadian, Environmental, and Postcolonial) encourages an engagement with David Scott’s conceptualization of an archive as a “*generative system*” (82). Deborah Thomas’s elaboration of Scott’s notion of the archive animates our desire to conceive of the “process of developing archives as one that creates new possibilities, possibilities for seeing connections previously unexamined” (27). Some of the possibilities of the Caribbean Canadian archive brought to the fore, in both this introduction and the Special Issue itself, include the connections between ecological damage and Black life; the relationship between Indigeneity and Blackness, and how these categories become further complicated by Caribbean diasporic life; the creative movements between “high” and “low” culture; artistic collaborations among friends, as well as allusions to other artists; diasporic life as a queer improvisational practice; and the circulation of critical and creative thought across languages, and the influence of this work on artists, community activists, and critical thinkers, both inside and outside the academy and other institutionalized spaces. We think of these possibilities as embodied in figures such as Lillian Allen, who engages in community as well as institutionalized intellectual work, and engages with popular culture, improvisation,

and performance to develop knowledge around issues of gender, sexuality, diasporic place-making, and ecologies.

We see the possibilities that emerge from the Caribbean Canadian archive as examples of some of the commitments and values that ground a Caribbean Canadian consciousness. This consciousness, which is also a method of analysis, is one that understands the archive (considering Karina Vernon's *Black Prairie Archives*) as demanding an ethical relationship, built on trust, respect, and reciprocity. Moreover, we see the Caribbean Canadian consciousness as one that refuses reductive and essentializing conceptualizing of race, gender, sexuality, and the conscripts of the modern human. We are also inspired by Andrea A. Davis's ethical orientation, rooted in her intersectional analysis, that allows her to understand the unequal relationships to power and build solidarities with others through collectivities of relationalities. Our interest in this archive is borne out of our eagerness to celebrate the creative endeavours of Caribbean Canadian cultural workers, who inspiringly offer new ways of understanding the contemporary moment through an ungrounded and unbounded archive opening to new possibilities. In our curation of recoveries and recognitions of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, we attend to the ways that this archive is often obscured or subjected to institutionalized limits that disappear cultural workers who should otherwise be accounted for. Even as this curation is an act of discovery, of bringing attention to people, places, and concepts not previously explored, we are excited for the work that is yet to be done, the connections yet to be made, and the additional grounds through which this archive will be expanded. Essentially, as CLR James writes, "all we can do [is] give some idea of what Ground is and why it is necessary ... It is the analysis of Ground which tells us exactly what [our] movement is ... If you want more Ground, there it is" (98).

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