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Fragmented Lines: the Impossibility of Ancestry in Dionne Brand's "At the Full and Change of the Moon"

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Preface:

This study aims to offer an interpretation of the variety of existing diasporic realities through the analysis of Dionne Brand's novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* in order to prove how the experience of diaspora contributes to the erasure of genealogy. The book directly and indirectly addresses the majority of the central themes discussed in both seminal and innovative works in the postcolonial field, thus presenting the reader with a comprehensive overview of the multiple consequences of the black diasporic experience.

Brand's novel spaces from the Caribbean to Europe, passing through Canada, Venezuela and the United States. The coral narration of the characters is often interrupted by the haunting intrusion of their common ancestors, who appear as ghostly presences or voices. All the characters, having different degrees of memory loss and trauma, navigate times and spaces that endlessly force them to question their identity; in doing so, the author portrays how each of them developed their own way of surviving.

Given the diversity of the stories presented in the book, the analysis carried out in this dissertation has multiple focuses: it provides an introduction to the concept of the Black Atlantic from a historical and cultural standpoint; it addresses the role of water both in the novel and in postcolonial theories; it analyses the interplay of masculinity and femininity and the characters' position as subalterns; it offers a rhizomatic reading of the concept of ancestry and, finally, it focuses on trauma and on how the cycle of remembering and forgetting leads to the development of feelings of longing and haunting.

Contents:

1. Dionne Brand: poet, writer, activist

Born in Guayaguayare, Trinidad, in 1953, Dionne Brand is an Afro-Caribbean Canadian poet, writer, activist, filmmaker, teacher, and editor. Following her graduation from Trinidad's Naparima Girls' High School, she relocated to Toronto in 1970, where she still lives. Brand completed her education in 1975, when she graduated from the University of Toronto with a bachelor's degree in English and philosophy. Years later, in 1989, she also earned her master's degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in philosophy of education. She meant to continue her education with a PhD in Women's history, however, she later left the program to devote herself to her writing career.

Whilst publishing books, co-editing anthologies and collaborating with the National Film Board, Brand also pursued her path in the education field by teaching literature and creative writing at universities in Ontario and British Columbia. Currently, she is a professor of English and Creative Writing and the University of Guelph, Ontario, and she holds a Research Chair for the School of English and Theatre Studies at the same university. Previously she held the Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair in Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. Outside of Canada, she has also been a Distinguished Visiting Professor and residence writer at St. Lawrence University in New York in 2004 and 2005. Dionne Brand's input on English literature and women and black's studies over the years has been acknowledged with an honorary doctorate by Thorneloe University in 2015. In 2017 she was appointed Honorary Doctor of Laws at the University of Windsor and Honorary Doctor of Letters at the University of Toronto in 2018.

Brand's contributions to literature and her battles for the rights of minorities led her to receive a significant number of awards and recognitions both inside and outside Canada. She was assigned the Royal Society of Canada Fellowship in 2006 and became a Member of the Order of Canada in 2017. The membership is the highest honour assigned by the Canadian government and it "recognizes outstanding achievement,

dedication to the community, and service to the nation"[1], while the fellowship is awarded by the Academies of Arts and Humanities to people who distinguished themselves in a variety of fields spacing from art to science. She was Toronto's third poet laureate from 2009 to 2012, a position granted to Canadian poets who for three years will become the literary representative of the city. Their position as ambassador consists of promoting and inspiring people to invest in the literary arts by taking part in events and conferences, as well as developing a legacy project for the city.[2]

Moreover, she was granted the Harbourfront Festival Prize in 2006, now discontinued, which acknowledges a writer's contribution to Canadian literature based on the quality of their own published work and the effort they have put into developing the next generation of writers.[3] In 2019 she won the Blue Metropolis Violet Prize, which yearly honours a Canadian writer who identifies as LGBTQ for their body of work and contribution to Canadian LGBTQ literature.[4] Furthermore, in 2021 Brand became one of the eight authors from across the world to win the Windham-Campbell Prize. The award, established in 2013 and managed by Yale University, is decided by anonymous judges who secretly nominate authors of fiction, non-fiction, theatre, and poetry.[5] In addition to the awards that she won for her overall literary production and contribution to Canadian reality, Brand is also the winner of a great number of prestigious prizes granted to her specific productions. Being a polyhedric artist, the overview of her works will be conducted by dividing them into poetry, fiction, non-fiction, edited and co-edited works, and documentaries.

As far as her poetry is concerned, in her first years of writing her body of work was less experimental and highly focused on colonialism and the lives of black people, themes that she will never abandon exploring. Her literary production began with the

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[1] National Defence. *Member of the Order of Canada (CM) - Canada.ca*. <www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/medals/medals-chart-index/member-order-canada-cm.html>.

[2] "Poet Laureate Terms of Reference." *City of Toronto*, 18 Dec. 2017, <www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/poet-laureate/poet-laureate-terms-of-reference>.

[3] "Harbourfront Festival Prize." *Toronto Int'l Festival of Authors*, 25 Apr. 2021, <www.festivalofauthors.ca/harbourfront-festival-prize/#:%7E:text=About%20the%20Prize,the%20next%20generation%20of%20voices>.

[4] "Dionne Brand Named Recipient of 2019 Blue Metropolis Violet Literary Prize | CBC Books." CBCnews, CBC/Radio Canada, 3 Apr. 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/dionne-brand-named-recipient-of-2019-blue-metropolis-violet-literary-prize-1.5083360>.

[5] "Canadians Dionne Brand and Canisia Lubrin among Winners of $165k US Windham-Campbell Prize | CBC Books." CBCnews, CBC/Radio Canada, 23 Mar. 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadians-dionne-brand-and-canisia-lubrin-among-winners-of-165k-us-windham-campbell-prize-1.5959340>.

publication of a collection of poems called *Fore Day Morning* in 1978, centred on colonialism and its aftermath. The collection was shortly followed by her first poetry book for children inspired by her childhood in Trinidad, *Earth Magic*, published in 1979; despite being a children's book, with this work Brand invites children to be curious about their heritage and history. In 1982 she publishes *Primitive Offensive* and in 1983 *Winter Epigrams* combined with *Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defence of Claudia* on the theme of exile. A year later she releases *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun,* which reflects on the revolution of Granada in 1979 and the country's subsequent invasion by the United States. As illustrated by Laurie Lambert, the book reflects the author's early stages of writing and Grenadian revolutionary feelings of innocence, optimism and anger: "Brand uses poetry to think through what it means to claim sovereignty in the late 20th-century, post-independent Caribbean and to unsettle "facts" about the revolution's history. The poems in *Chronicles* discredit US imperialist rhetoric and policy in the Caribbean".[6]

In 1990 she publishes one of her most influential works, *No Language is Neutral*, which firstly introduces issues of language and her own sexuality in her works: "in this poem Brand attempts to construct place in language, creating a space which would incorporate all the different time and space elements that make up her culture".[7] In 1997 *Land to Light On* was released, a work immediately acclaimed by the critics that selected her for the Trillium Book Award and the Governor General's Award. The collection of poems addresses the Canadian landscape as a hostile space not only for the writer, but for all the displaced people in Canada.

In 2002, her following publication *Thirsty* earned the Pat Lowther Memorial Award thanks to its poems juxtaposing beauty, violence, and racism in the city of Toronto. The book "recovers and re-inscribes a flashpoint police shooting in the long history of racial violence in urban Canada. The poems seem to circle the violence as a point of rupture – a departure in its own way – in traumatic repetition, written through

[6] Lambert, Laurie R. "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: Poetic Authority and the Fiction of North Atlantic Universals in Dionne Brand's Chronicles of the Hostile Sun." *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 26, no. 2, SAGE Publications, July 2014, p. 174.
[7] Krakovsky, Violetta. "Dilemmas of Place and Identity in Dionne Brand's prose poem No Language is Neutral". In *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. 4, Iss. 3, Conway: University of Central Arkansas, 2007, p. 51.

the voice of an authorial witness".[8] Her following book of poetry, *Inventory*, was published in 2006 and it is structured as a recollection of data, numbers and names relative to death, violence, and displacements. In 2010 Brand was awarded the Griffin Poetry Prize for *Ossuaries*, with a rambling woman named Yasmine as its protagonist. Alongside *Thirsty* and *Inventory*, *Ossuaries* can be considered the end of a trilogy of tales of violence, inadequacy, and errantry.[9]

In her book *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (2018) Brand takes a different approach and engages in a metapoetical text by starting a discussion between the poet and the Blue Clerk, who is the guardian of the poet's writings. Through their discussions, Brand probes the difficulty of writing, the connection between the poet and the outside world, and the relationship between the author and their art. Her latest work, *Nomenclature for the Time Being* (2022) features some new poems and a collection of almost thirty years of Brand's poetry; it also includes an introduction by Brand's fellow Canadian writer and theorist Christina Sharpe. Whilst maintaining the same core elements, Brand's poetic production reflects a highly experimental approach to the genre and its subjects, which evolved and expanded during the years. Brand portrays her own experiences, angers and doubts alongside those of millions of people who struggle with their cultural, political, and sexual identity.

Shifting to her fictional works, in 1996 she debuts with *In Another Place, Not Here*, which was featured in the *New York Times* Notable Book list in 1998. It depicts the love story of two modern-day Caribbean ladies Elizete and Verlia; the former fantasises about escaping to another location, while the latter, constantly on the move, has returned to her island of origin in the hope of starting a revolution. Her subsequent publication, *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (1998) is a collection of short stories about women, sexuality, rape, and moves across cities. In 1999 she releases *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, the book addressed in this paper that, by taking inspiration from VS. Naipaul's *The Loss of Eldorado*, gave birth to her progenitor Marie Ursule. The novel narrates the lives of the descendants of a rebellious slave in the modern diaspora in the time span of a century.

[8] Tesla Schaeffer. "Readers Would Seek Grief: Dionne Brand's thirsty and the Textual Legibility of Trauma." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2016, p. 125.
[9] Quéma, Anne. "Dionne Brand's Ossuaries: Songs of Necropolitics". *Canadian Literature*, no. 222, 2014, p. 53.

Brand's fourth novel *What We All Long For* (2004) won the City of Toronto Book Award in 2006 thanks to Brand's depiction of the lives of four second-generation friends living in Toronto, each of them with a problematic relationship with their family, and the parallel narration of the journey of one of the friend's long-lost brother. Her fifth novel called *Love Enough* was published in 2014 and narrates the lives of four characters crossing paths with each other whilst recounting family, love, and violence. Her latest novel, *Theory* (2018) won the Toronto Book Award and the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature in the fiction category, an award established in 2011 for writers of Caribbean birth or citizenship. The novel revolves around the love affairs of three characters who embed emotional, logical and spiritual love. In her fictional works Brand seems to privilege short, interconnecting stories as opposed to a single narration. This might be due to the impossibility of representing the fluidity and variety of reality as perceived by the author; Brand is hardly ever an omniscient narrator who seeks to impose her opinion; her job is rather to display reality, bring to light memories, showcase the complexity of not only the black diasporic experience, but of people's lives in general.

She is also the author of a series of non-fictional books starting with *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920-1950s* (1991), an edited compilation of black working women's oral histories from Ontario. She highlights how the experiences of black women have been disregarded and she addresses the scarcity of documented history about the experiences of black women. In 1994 she releases *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming and Politics*. The book is an innovative and powerful examination of race, sex, and politics in modern culture. The recollections focus, as always, on the core topics of Brand's vision: sexism, rape, and the representation of black womanhood juxtaposed to the centrality of Canadian whiteness.

A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes On Belonging (2001) is, alongside *At The Full and Change of the Moon*, the other work of Brand mainly referenced in this study. The book does not have a clear structure and it is organized in a stream of short and long thoughts summarily organized. Brand addresses notions of time and space in the diaspora drawing from her childhood in Trinidad, her present in Toronto, and her voyages around the world, in order to provide the reader with the idea that the definition

of the concept of belonging is a complex and intricate process for those haunted by an undefined past; a past that she identifies with a door to which one (in the past, slaves) cannot longer return. Lastly, in 2020 she publishes *An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading*, turning once again to colonialism and how she read colonial literature in the past. She investigates her knowledge of racism, imperialism, and colonialism, and questions how it influences her reading and writing habits, as well as displaying the difficulties of crafting a black life story.

Besides poetry and prose, much of Brand's commitment goes to her editorial work. She co-edited various non-fictional works, namely: *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism* (1986) with Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, which is a collection of articles and interviews about experiences of racism in various circumstances; *Luminous Ink: Writers on Writing in Canada* (2018) with Rabindranath Maharaj and Tessa McWatt on how an array of Canadian writers perceive the act of writing nowadays; and finally, she was a co-author of *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (1994) with Peggy Bristow and other authors, a book in which she personally collaborated with an essay on black female workers in Ontario.

As an essayist, Brand's collaborations extended also to other volumes: *Imagination, Representation, and Culture* in 1994 and *A Kind of Perfect Speech* in 2008. In addition, she edited two anthologies *The Journey Prize Stories: The Best of Canada's New Stories* (2007) and *The Unpublished City* (2017). After being an editor at McClelland & Stewart from 2014 to 2021, she is currently the head of "Alchemy", a new project launched by the publishing house Knopf Canada which mainly focuses on casting light on innovative postcolonial works to promote a revolution of the genre.

Her contribution to the world of art also extended to cinema, with the realization of several documentaries, some of them for the National Film Board. She took part in the "Women at the Well trilogy" project, which includes *Older, Stronger, Wiser* (1989), a portrait of older black Canadian women; *Sisters in the Struggle*, on the involvement of black women in feminist associations; and *Long Time Comin'*, which displays the lives of two lesbian Afro-Canadian artists.

Furthermore, she participated in *Listening for Something: Adrianne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation* (1996) and *Beyond Borders: Arab Feminists Talk About*

Their Lives…East and West, an effort to raise awareness of the Arab feminist battle for equality and the worsening of women's rights in the Arab states. She also worked on *Under One Sky: Arab Women in North America Talk About the Hijab* (1999) on Arab women's roles throughout history, from the earliest colonial missions until the Gulf War era, and *Borderless: A Docu-Drama About the Lives of Undocumented Workers* on the lives of two non-status immigrant workers (2006).

Her writing proves that Brand's interest is deeply committed to feminist and equality issues, for which she is a proud ambassador. Her role as a human rights activist is not limited to black people's problems or the feminist agenda; she often critiques societal and governmental power systems that perpetuate patriarchal modes of action and she condemns any kind of discrimination, especially against people of colour, women, and the LGBTQ community, which are three fundamental aspects of her identity.

As a person committed to Marxist philosophy since the beginning of her career, Brand has always been active not only in the humanitarian field, but also in the economic and political spheres. The author headed the Women's Issues Committee of the Ontario Coalition of Black Trade, an association whose mission is to achieve social justice and integration for Afro-Canadian citizens and immigrants by tackling racism, unemployment, education, and healthcare in Canada. They "pledge to continue the struggles of our ancestors dating back to slavery and throughout our history in Canada to create a more just society by working in coalition with organized labour and other allies whose mission is consistent with these objectives".[10] Moreover, she was on the board of direction for the Shirley Samaroo House, a refuge for abused immigrant women in Toronto established in honour of Shirley Samaroo, a woman killed by her husband after years of abuse in 1984.

In addition, she worked as a counsellor for the Toronto Immigrant Women's Centre and collaborated in the development of the first Canadian newspaper with a focus on black women called *Our Lives* from 1986 and 1989. The newspaper was published by the Black Women's Collective, a feminist and anti-racial organization in which Brand played an active role. The Collective was welcoming of LGBTQ individuals and greatly concerned with the need for accountability of racist actions

[10] "Mission." *Coalition of Black Trade Unionists | Ontario Canada Chapter*, <www.cbtu.ca/mission>.

carried out by Toronto's police forces in the 1980s. She also participated in the Black Education Project, the aim of which is to offer after-school classes and teach Toronto's black youth about black culture.

Brand's writing cannot be separated from her political beliefs, and it inevitably reflects her political engagement. Her contribution to English literature is recognized worldwide, with Kamau Brathwaite defining her the "first major exile female poet".[11] She is amongst the most acclaimed Caribbean and Canadian writers. Her experimental take on poetry and fiction represents an authentic revolution of postcolonial and neo-slave narratives. Alongside her outstanding social commitment, Brand dedicates her life to making others feel represented, accepted, and visible through writing.

[11] Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Dionne Brand's *Winter Epigrams*". *Canadian Literature,* no. 105, 1985, p. 18.

2. Diaspora and Black Atlantic studies: an overview

2.1 The starting point

Much has been written about postcolonial and diasporic studies, but this everchanging field constantly reveals new aspects to discover and redefine. Among the substantial number of theories to draw from, the notion of Black Atlantic by Paul Gilroy certainly represents a seminal work in postcolonial studies together with Frantz Fanon's inferiority complex and Homi Bhabha's subversive ambivalence, both of which will be shortly discussed in the following paragraphs.

Gilroy's canonical book *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* is constantly used as a starting point to introduce issues and consequences surrounding the Black Diaspora. In the book's first part, Gilroy presents a critique of commonly established categories, such as nationalism, ethnocentrism, and race. He achieves that through the use of the metaphorical and physical space that he identifies in the (Black) Atlantic. Before engaging in the analysis of the experience of diaspora and its consequences, it is crucial to gain a perspective of one of the pivotal historical events that led to its occurrence, namely slavery. While it could be argued that other forms of slavery are still in place, in this chapter I will exclusively refer to the Atlantic slave trade.

Through the trade, millions of Africans were deported from their homeland to Caribbean plantations across the Middle Passage; they were either captured or directly sold by the reigning powers in their native country, and then exchanged for goods to be brought back to Europe after being transported to America. The slave trade represents perhaps the most evident and massive source of an ongoing diaspora that finds its birth in the Atlantic. It is common knowledge that slavery is a long and rooted practice; however, it seems that some have forgotten that the Euro-American slave trade ended just a little more than one hundred years ago and that its symptoms are still very much observable, to such an extent that a whole field of studies came to revolve around this occurrence and its implications. Generally, England, France, Spain and sometimes Belgium are addressed as the main protagonists of the trade; nevertheless, several other countries were more or less implicated in this practice. The majority of them are rarely

mentioned when referring to the topic and what is more, they have formally recognized and apologized for their role in the development of the diaspora only in recent times or have not done it at all. Among these countries is Canada, whose role in the trade and the diaspora will be addressed later in this chapter. Gilroy's work represented a novelty for at least two reasons: firstly, he denounced the fact that cultural studies relied too much on nationalistic and ethnocentric notions; secondly, he stated that slavery is not a mere chapter in Western history, on the contrary, it is a constituting part of modernity.

As far as the first point is concerned, in current times people are becoming increasingly aware that words such as 'ethnicity' or 'nationality' are to be used carefully, but that was not always the case. The main issue relating to both of the terms is that they tend to be used as a stable concept. Theoretically, this should not be a dangerous practice; however, the problem lies in the fact that in the past this same practice has been used as a strategy for encapsulating a series of characteristics into determined spaces in order to justify the actions carried out by the West in the course of history, therefore denying these categories the possibility to flee those spaces. Despite that, ethnicity and nationalism are no longer (and should never have been) definite concepts. First of all, it could be argued that in the West the term ethnicity is confined to the Other, while nationality is the term through which a European person would define themselves. When something is defined as ethnic, it carries an exotic and foreign overtone that unconsciously indicates something alien to the reference culture. While some scholars argue that the two terms are opposite, here they will be considered almost synonyms in the interest of the following argument.

It is fundamental to understand that cultures cannot be restrained inside definite borders; they can surely have a centre, but borders are blurred and cultures mingle constantly. What defines national or ethnic groups are a series of characteristics that have a tendency to change over time. These continuous redefinitions can lead to similarities or further differentiations between groups. The main limitation in the definition of cultural borders is represented by the fact that the word 'border' itself conveys a space that cannot, or at least should not, be trespassed. Racism finds its roots in this division. Frontiers, borders and boundaries communicate the idea of the existence of an 'us' versus a 'them', and inflate the sense of differentiation between two or more groups. The key, then, is to consider borders as an entity that is only established

in maps and cartography, while in the actual world they are to be considered as merely conceptual. Therefore, the time has come to move away from useful but inaccurate expressions in favour of truthful ones. While national and ethnic references are convenient concepts to use in certain contexts, it must be taken into consideration that their use might not always be correct. A notable and widespread example in a European daily conversation would be that of referring to Africa and Africans as a synecdoche for a specific population; a lack of knowledge should not justify the complexity of the African continent by reducing it into a category that is mostly made of Western stereotypes.

Cultures and languages intertwine, people travel, move to other countries and learn about other cultures. The aforementioned interconnections represent what could be called the bright side of globalization. Gilroy argues that cultural studies should precisely incorporate this: a transcultural and transnational reality. What better to represent this reality than the captivating yet haunting image of the Black Atlantic? The picture of a place through which millions of people were displaced and travelled physically and metaphorically through water seems to fulfil the purpose. The idea of crossing the water is naturally associated with the mean of transport to do so, the ship, in this case slave ships. Gilroy gives an extensive explanation of the importance of the ship as a symbol of modernity; the ship is the place where cultures were destroyed and reformed to create the multiplicity of African-American and Caribbean cultures. Nevertheless, in retrospect, it could be argued that for the slaves their journey was less of an occasion for bonding than a trip on Charon's ship, which in Dante's Inferno had the duty of carrying the damned souls of the dead to hell by crossing the Acheron river. It is public knowledge that a significant portion of the slaves died whilst crossing the sea, hence the name Black Atlantic, but perhaps a few know that a considerable number of them threw themselves into the ocean or let themselves die gripped by fear. Slaves represented a great investment for businessmen (because a business it was), and it was in their interest not to lose perfectly healthy and valuable goods due to suicide. Those who were able to survive the prohibitive living conditions of slave ships were sometimes granted a few liberties, such as singing or seeing the sun.

On the other hand, there is also a drawback to globalization: it does not translate into a globalized acceptance of the Other. If in the past racism was based on biology,

now it is rooted in culture. While hardly anybody argues about the shared biological nature of human beings, the bias towards a different culture is still very much active in modern societies. In the West, the only conceivable way of adapting to modernity is the one employed by the West itself. Any other attempt at adaptation is refused by deeming it as primitive. This is clearly illustrated in the scientific paradigm that dominates Western mentality; science revealed itself to be an efficient way of coping with reality, in so far as religious beliefs are increasingly disappearing or heavily criticized because they do not withstand the authority of evidence. Western understanding of other cultural practices is considerably limited and avoided by and because of scientific omnipotence. Cultural practices such as shamanism, voodoo rituals or other unfamiliar approaches are instantly attributed to a lack of education and resources and they tend to be mocked and taunted. While numerous anthropological studies and expeditions have proven that no place in the world remains unaware of civilization and its conveniences, the West has proven to be irreprehensible in the perpetuation of its models. The attestation that some populations simply find their way of adaptation to be more efficient towards their perception of modernity is hardly believable to Western eyes. What is more, their society would risk being destructed if forced (as it happened multiple times) to comply with Western beliefs, even if one could say that they are not beliefs as much as they are truths.

The imposition of these alleged truths is a widespread phenomenon both in the past and in the present. Voodoo rituals perfectly illustrate the narrowmindedness of this mentality as well as the limitations entailed by cultural racism. Voodoo is highly demonized in the West, while in Haiti it represents one of the official religions of the population. It is not well-known that voodoo originated as a culture of compensation that benefitted the life of slaves on the plantations. Since they were deprived of their language and beliefs to be forced into the master's language and Christianity, they managed to find a way of surviving through the commixture of elements taken from their natural African religions and the newly imposed Christian beliefs. Therefore, before stigmatizing voodoo practices, one should be aware that its origins are deeply rooted in Christianity.

The second main innovation that Gilroy proposes in the first chapter is that of moving away from the habit of considering slavery as a mere chapter in Western

history, or even more exclusively, as a chapter of black history. The very definition of the existence of an exclusively black history is inherently wrong, for history is a common experience that impacts the world as a whole and cannot be circumscribed to an individual community. Concerning history, in *Caribbean Discourse* Édouard Glissant explained how, in the Caribbean, there is no correspondence between nature and culture, hence the difficulty of individuating a History and, consequently, a collective memory. About this global historical conscience, he claims that:

> its relation with its surroundings (what we would call its nature) is in a discontinuous relation to its accumulation of experiences (what we would call its culture). In such context, history as far as it is a discipline and claims to clarify the reality lived by these people, will suffer from a serious epistemological deficiency: it will not know how to make the link.[12]

Indeed, it is often stated that the history of the diaspora is characterized by ruptures, followed by "ruptures in the quality of being".[13] Glissant strongly denounces the same connotation of history that Gilroy himself refutes by deeming it as a "highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone "made" the history of the world".[14] In fact, the West has long been accused of having established European history as a collective history in order to shape the Other and have control over it, while simultaneously avoiding being held accountable for its actions. Gilroy insists on auspicating the abandonment of the idea of purity of cultures and advocates for a multifaceted approach to ourselves and others.

Slavery heavily contributed to the development of modernity and the creation of national identities. In Britain, the concept of Englishness became a signifier of the characteristics that are supposed to qualify an English person and that are shared among an established English community. To counteract this ideology, the concept of Blackness gained ground in black cultural studies. That being said, the juxtaposition of Englishness and Blackness stands inaccurate. Gilroy asserts that this inaccuracy is the

[12] Glissant Édouard, and J. Michael Dash. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. University Press of Virginia, 1999, p. 61.
[13] Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Vintage Canada, 2001, p. 9.
[14] Glissant, 1999, p. 64.

product of two reasons: firstly, the principles of Englishness are fallacious; a supposed English identity did not arise from England itself, but from the interaction of England and the outside world, slavery included. Secondly, it is equally wrong to assert the existence of a certain Blackness and to attribute to its definition the incorporation of the entirety of black people. Similar attempts have also been made in the Caribbean through the concept of *négritude*, which was later abandoned because of similar limits in its ideology. It can be argued that every attempt at encompassing a series of characteristics into one category produces similar racist outcomes, as exemplified in the development of internal racism against mulattoes inside black communities. Historically, another evidence of this phenomenon can be seen in the celebration of black nationalism that long maintained Duvalier's regime in Haiti. Nevertheless, Gilroy does not categorically reject such concepts. National and ethnic identities, if envisioned correctly, represent a powerful instrument for the definition and empowerment of one's identity. The lack of self-determination for Caribbean people and diasporic figures is the result of the impossibility to find themselves in a series of pre-determined characteristics. The keystone in the use of national and ethnic terms and attributes would then be the disengagement from the speculative and unrealistic expectations of homogeneity. In its place, the use of national terms to comprise a broader and shared sense of history and selfhood proves to be an increasingly valuable option. Related to this topic is Gilroy's extensive use of Du Bois' concept of double consciousness to portray the resulting condition of diasporic processes. Du Bois, in his book *The Souls of Black Folks*, defined double-consciousness as a "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity".[15] He goes on to express how the only wish for a black man is the ability to be two things at a time and yet they cannot.

At present, this longing sentiment appears surpassed by many scholars in favour of a newly embraced hybrid identity, which better suits modern-era challenges; in spite of this, legacies of this desire still seem to arise in a variety of forms, whether in academics essays or, as in the case of this thesis, through Brand's characters in her novel. Diasporic figures seem to be confined in a form of limbo which forces them to be contemporarily outside and inside a community. They are both the protagonists and the

[15] Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Common Classics, 2021, p. 89.

spectators of the same narrative, in a continuous perpetuation of an undefined role. Bhabha, in his analysis of the relation of power between the colonizer and the colonised, leveraged the term ambivalence to redefine the connotation of weakness that had been automatically attributed to the word. His merit was claiming that ambivalence does not stand as an origin of weakness, on the contrary, ambivalence can generate a powerful counter-discourse that is able to insinuate a rupture in the perpetuation of the colonial ideology.

This powerful concept can still be applied in the present time, perhaps with a slight adaptation in light of what has been said about hybridity until here. By taking once again inspiration from linguistics, instead of ambivalence, a term such as multivalence could perhaps represent a new form of discourse-rupturing practice in a world that still perpetuates covert colonial approaches through politics and economics. The term ambivalence, also etymologically, refers to something that has a double aspect, and it often carries the implication that these two aspects are opposite or at least in contrast. It could be said, however, that in this modernity such absolute divisions seem to have increasingly less to do with transcultural perspectives. Similarly to Du Bois, one hundred years later, in *A Map to the Door of No Return* Brand writes: "through the BBC broadcasts we were inhabited by British consciousness. We were also inhabited by an unknown self. The African. This duality was fought every day from the time one woke up to the time one fell asleep" (A MAP, 21). It is true that here Brand refers to this contrast as a duality (hence ambivalence) but the object of ambivalence is, by her word, unknown. The majority of Caribbean and Afro-Americans are not first-hand victims of the diaspora in the same way that their ancestors were. They have no tangible memory of Africa to hate or love, the second term of their ambivalence equation is therefore blurred. Their desire is the dissipation of this dimness, but there is an inherent inability to focalize what exactly stands behind it. Before having something to remember or to forget, one must follow the sometimes-atrocious path that will lead them to gain the knowledge they so desperately long for.

Although the various processes of the determination of the identity are to be discussed in Chapter 4, it is essential to briefly underline how diasporic identities can be defined through the colonizer's eyes. For this purpose, I will briefly move away from Gilroy's work in order to shortly present what Fanon defined as the white gaze. This

gaze has the power of moulding the black identity, because "white eyes are the only real eyes"[16] and the black subject moves in function to the white men's expectations: it becomes black only in relation to the white. The gaze is likely to have two potential natures: the dominant white gaze can emphasise racial disparity or, on the other hand, it can convey sympathy, but together with sympathy comes pity. Both these relations are unsatisfactory in their outcome. In fact, in the two scenarios the white gaze never meets the same level as its object, but it continues to stand above it. Whether it be for hate or pity, it is high time we needed to disrupt the structure of the Western gaze towards what is perceived as different. Likewise, the black gaze is equally unbalanced, as it fails to place itself at a matching level.

Taking all of this into account, cultural studies should not neglect the profound bond which links modernity and slavery. Gilroy auspicates that cultural studies would shift from a binary conception of modernity in favour of the more suitable transatlantic and transnational perspectives. He identifies the Atlantic Ocean as the symbol of modernity and advocates for future scholars to do the same. There can be plenty of metaphors to designate a space around which hybrid cultures form, but the image of the Atlantic remains canonical in diasporic studies. The Black Atlantic also came to represent a virtual region within which diasporic figures are able to regain their agency and right of speech. It can be considered as a space that allows inherently hybrid figures to finally move freely. Even if Gilroy's desire is far from being the norm, a great number of academics have shifted their perspective since then. They continue to build their transatlantic and transcultural theories by taking the Black Atlantic as the cornerstone of black cultural studies.

2.2 Other theories

Being published almost thirty years ago, Gilroy's essay on the Black Atlantic sustained several criticism and expansions. I will now address the object of these criticisms before presenting how the concept of the Black Atlantic has been furtherly problematized over the years.

[16] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press, 2008, p. 87.

In Simon Gikandi's essay "Outside the Black Atlantic" [17], the author illustrates how Gilroy fails to acknowledge the significance of Africa in the discourse concerning the diaspora. There is little to no reference towards Africa as a counterculture of modernity. Throughout Gilroy's writing, Africa seems to remain still, while the duty to produce culture is attributed to North America. It appears clear that while promoting fluidity and transnationalism, Gilroy fails to apply his very own ideology to the major term in his equation, i.e. Africa. By refuting the idea of Africa as a mythical place of origin, Gilroy fails to offer an alternative role to the country, and he unconsciously keeps its presence at a margin. Gilroy is right in considering surpassed the idea of Africa as root; however, this should not translate into Africa having any role at all. Today, African culture and the African reminiscences of diasporic subjects have found a way of making themselves heard, and the African element is far more represented and recognized in the global culture. Through international figures spacing from literature, through architecture and art, the African found the means to surpass its particularization and it developed an influence on the global. Instead of being perpetually subjected to the overbearing power of the West, it is beginning to undermine Western hegemonic cultures.

When further exploring the denial of Africa as the root, one could come to wonder what a diasporic figure can make of the term home. Brand herself in the title of 'A Map to the Door of *No Return*' denies the possibility of a return by stating that "the sense of return in the Door of No Return is one of the irrecoverable losses of those very things which make returning possible" (A MAP, 26). Although in various parts she refers to Canada as her home, the feeling of frustration is tangible in these few lines, as Brand seems to feel that her possibility of returning has been somehow taken from her. For second-generation diasporic subjects this concept of home is further problematized by the lack of direct experience, and the sentiment of longing that they inherit cannot possibly be fulfilled by a trip to their family's place of origin in Africa, provided that this place is known. The reliance on Africa as the epitome of home and origin is, therefore, to be set aside. In addition, she goes on to say that "too much has been made of origins. All origins are arbitrary. This is not to say that they are not also nurturing, but they are essentially coercive and indifferent" (A MAP, 56). Brand does not deny the

[17] Gikandi, Simon. "Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2014, pp. 242-245.

existence of a desire for an origin or a home, on the contrary, she recognizes that some people want and seek a place of origin, a nation, a home, but she remains indifferent in the face of concepts that she deems as romantic, and that ultimately clash with her fluid way of approaching modernity.

Gikandi subsequently addresses how Gilroy also presents a narrow vision of diasporic subjects and geography by referring exclusively to North America and African-American people to enunciate his beliefs. There is little to no mention of Caribbean subjects, who withstood the same diasporic process and similar slave experiences. Gikandi finds three reasons for these exclusions: Gilroy's interest in black music, which became highly popular in North America, the hostility of the time towards pan-African campaigns and ideologies, and thirdly, he claims that Gilroy wanted to create a criterion through which a black person could be identified as a British subject. As far as the latter reason is concerned, the African-American subject is the one who better exemplifies this model, because they somehow became producers of culture in America. This is only partially true, as nowadays there is an increasing appropriation of black music, language and aesthetics. Nevertheless, although African-Americans are indeed producers of culture, this culture continues to be confined to racial characteristics and it is giving rise to protests from the black community. Gilroy hoped that by becoming producers of culture, black people could be considered citizens instead of mere subjects.

In "Notes on cultural citizenship in the Black Atlantic world"[18], Kamari M. Clarke advocates for Black Atlantic studies to comprehend the concept of cultural citizenship in their reasoning, instead of focusing solely on nationalistic notions. This type of citizenship is especially suitable for the purpose as it can be understood to have a certain heterogeneity. It has been established that the Black Atlantic is not a geographical space and that the people that inhabit it are scattered all over the world. Given this premise, it becomes necessary to redefine the idea of citizenship. While to Western's eyes the notion of citizenship is profoundly bound to the concept of the nation-state, Black Atlantic studies require a different frame of reference. The concept of cultural citizenship successfully suits this vision, for it can bear heterogeneity while

[18] Clarke, Kamari M. "Notes On Cultural Citizenship In The Black Atlantic World." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2013, pp. 464-74.

achieving the aim of comprising the diasporic experience. Gikandi eventually claims that neither Africa nor the Caribbean can do what Gilroy wishes for, that is for culture to enable a minority to become a subject.

Furthermore, the author of "Africa and the Black Atlantic" Yogita Goyal criticizes Gilroy's heavy reliance on the use of slavery as the only metaphor through which the diaspora moved and shaped modernity, while failing to identify other historical events as an influence in the shaping of the diaspora. At present, even if "none of the political challenges that gave rise to Black Atlantic studies has diminished, for many scholars, the critical methods associated with ideology critique and the study of race, nation, and empire seem outmoded or insufficiently supple enough to meet the challenges of the present".[19] At that time the idea of diaspora was shaped around certain creative powers and impulses. However, the present world politics and social structures are constantly changing and evolving, hence, scholars are presented with the need to redefine diaspora and adapt it to a modern framework characterized by neoliberal tendencies. The present is characterized by a strong erasure of the sense of community in favour of the amplification of individuality, this amplification is giving rise to a number of problems spacing from depression and anxiety to suicidal tendencies, especially among younger generations. Generally, the ones who are provided with the environment and conditions to succeed can and usually thrive under this economy, while the less fortunate ones are crushed under its concessions. By enhancing the freedom of the single and rewarding them for their accomplishments, the drawback of this ideology is the little attention it reserves for those unable to succeed in these same circumstances.

Together with this drawback comes a significant structural problem: the nation-state operates in this same freedom, and from an economic standpoint it aims at the maximization of profits, as the market commands. This implies that former colonies, although supposedly granted the same freedom of action, are prevented from thriving in this economic and social climate. Needless to say, postcolonial and diasporic subjects struggle to find their redemption even when migrating to a country such as the United States, a place where everything is deemed possible and the American dream embeds freedom and success as its slogan. Consequently, Black Atlantic scholars are trying to

[19] Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2014, p. 5.

move along this axis to understand how this different social and economic perspective is affecting the concept as it was originally theorized by Gilroy.

Black Atlantic studies are moving in many different directions in the hope to find this new paradigm. In a modernity that is characterized by a renewed attention to inclusion in all aspects of society, the male-centred vision of Black Atlantic studies is no longer feasible. The new concern with the role of women both in the past and in the present and issues of sexuality and fluidity impacted Black Atlantic studies by giving rise to new queer theories inside the diasporic framework. The issues concerning diaspora and Black Atlantic studies have too long been masculine and focused on the male experience while giving little attention to the implication of women and the development of sexuality. In her essay "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic", Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley argues that:

> During the Middle Passage, as colonial chronicles, oral tradition, and anthropological studies tell us, captive African women created erotic bonds with other women in the sex-segregated holds, and captive African men created bonds with other men. In so doing, they resisted the commodification of their bought and sold bodies by feeling and feeling for their co-occupants on these ships.[20]

In her ground-breaking paper, she criticizes the persistent use that postcolonial and Black Atlantic studies have made of sexuality, she condones its use as a metaphor rather than a reality and she underlines the need for an objective read of sexuality in Black Atlantic literature. She also makes express reference to Brand's fluidity in A MAP. Although she overtly states that the text does not present itself as an immediately queer reading, Brand's views of water and sea are representative of a certain erotism, especially when she refers to the Atlantic and the Caribbean – both feminized – mingling in an embrace. Moreover, Tinsley cites the following passage from A MAP, which encompasses this idea of liquidity and subsequent categorization that represents one of the pillars of queer theories, but this idea is likewise to be found in anthropological studies on the arbitrarity of gender determination.

[20] Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2-3, 2008, p. 2.

There are ways of constructing the world – that is, of putting it together each morning, what it should look like piece by piece…Before that everything is liquid, ubiquitous and mute. We accumulate information over our lives which bring various things into solidity, into view. (A MAP, 115)

In these few lines stand much of Brand's core ideology towards not only gender and sexuality but also on the determination of the self. Brand addresses her own sense and experience of the diaspora in the writing of A MAP. In this story-like essay, the door is a reference to the door of the house of slaves on Gorée Island, Senegal, which became a memorial site. The door stands as an emblem of the door that slaves went through before embarking on their journey across the ocean. Brand uses it as a metaphor, a lingering presence in the present of every diasporic subject, and she keeps it as the pivotal point that ties stories from her ancestors to her present self. For people in the ships then, as for people in the diaspora now, there is no definite sense of destination. To them, it is just departure, a departure – and therefore a rupture – from the self. Brand claims that:

For those of us today in the Diaspora this door exists as through a prism, distorted and shimmering. As through heat waves across a vast empty space, we see this door appearing and disappearing. An absent presence. Though few of us have seen it, or consciously attach importance to it, this door in its historical connectedness was the point of departure, not only physical departure but psychic renting, of our ancestors. (A MAP, 24)

Through the painting of this rather poetic picture, Brand tries to give a tangible idea of her perception, and the communal perception, with which the inhabitants of the Black Atlantic are forced to live with. This door can never be closed, it is its brooding openness that discomforts the subject's mind. Brand tries to find at least a communal point of departure, yet many people lack even that, herself included. In A MAP she recalls asking her grandfather for the name of the people they came from. Not that it

would have answered all of her questions, but she was desperate to know what her point of departure was.

Brand is also greatly concerned with the diasporic body. In the diaspora, the black body is heavily regulated, she defines it as "the place of captivity" (A MAP, 35) and proceeds on illustrating different examples of this captivity, both positive and negative. Black bodies are expected to accomplish certain stereotypes, they are relegated to their own place in modernity. This place is hardly ever the centre. They are forced into corners, edges, and margins. Images that are recurrent in diasporic literature. If this argument is true for black bodies, it is even more true for the bodies of black women.

In conclusion, the determination of a modern paradigm is far from being achieved and it is revealing itself to be an increasingly difficult challenge. It is not clear if such a paradigm can, and should in fact, exist in this fast-developing world. It might be time to abandon the idea of trying to find at all costs a stable paradigm to account for complex and mutable phenomena such as this. As time passes, it becomes increasingly easier to define the past, while on the other hand, the definition of the future appears more and more uncertain. Paradigms are subjected to criticism and disagreements, and the urge to interpret and delimit reality might give rise to imprecisions or mistakes. Nevertheless, for many, Gilroy's Black Atlantic still represents one powerful tool for the interpretation of modernity, as long as it is met with some adjustments along the way.

2.3 Canada

The following section will mostly refer to Winfried Siemerling's book *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past*. In this book, the author thoroughly addresses the history and literature of black Canada. The author begins with a historical overview of the involvement of Canada with slavery and the early developments of black Canadian writing at this stage and throughout the nineteenth century. Siemerling does not focus solely on anglophone Canada, he also considers French Canada and the Caribbean in his historical and literary analysis.

This work is a relevant one because it represents the latest and most comprehensive insight into black Canadian history and its literary protagonists, whose works and lives are thoroughly presented, often in a comparative manner. It has already been stated that one of the faults pointed out by several scholars in Gilroy's Black Atlantic is the author's inability to individuate other actors besides North America. *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* has the merit of trying to gather in a single book every piece of information related to black Canada and introduce its role in the Black Atlantic world and history.

For the purposes of this paper, the author's detailed recollection of Canada's involvement in slavery will be mentioned only briefly in order to give contextual support to his literary analysis, which is more relevant to the content of this study. Siemerling's extensive research illustrates that the beginning of black Canadian history can be traced back to the 1600s with the first accounts of slavery plantations in New France and Anglophone Canada. It must be pointed out that resources on the topic are extremely scarce and mostly made of texts written by settlers instead of actual slaves, nevertheless these accounts "underline the fact that Canadian history is also black history (and that the Black Atlantic history is also Canadian).[21]

According to the author, the literary production to date has tended to focus only collaterally on slavery, thus preventing the development of a true thread about slave and neo-slave narratives. According to Siemerling, one of the issues that prevented its formation is the scarcity of authentic slave texts: "contemporary black Canadian writers have repeatedly evoked slavery. Yet there are no fully formed narratives by slaves in what is now Canada that could serve as antecedents".[22] In his book Siemerling tries to reunite all the testimonies of slavery in Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to try and provide the field of contemporary black Canadian writing with the clearer historical base of slave narratives that he claims to be missing. While in black Canadian works slavery is certainly a theme, the specific involvement of Canada is often overlooked. In Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* the denunciation of slavery in Canada is not mentioned despite being the tale of a slave and her descendants. Brand refers to it only collaterally by hinting at slavery and its aftermath in various parts

[21] Siemerling, Winfried. *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past*. 1st ed., McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, p. 21.
[22] Siemerling, 2015, p. 47.

of the book, while mostly concentrating on its contemporary consequences with a collection of stories located in different countries or at least in different cities.

In the years from 1960 to 1990, Canada experienced a sharp increase in black writing, with the population of black people augmenting due to immigration from Africa and the Caribbean. It is also important to remember that Canada underwent French colonialism in the territory that is now Quebec, therefore attracting even Francophone immigrants to the country. While Siemerling only partially addresses it in his book, he evidences how, although extensive research has been carried out on Black Atlantic and postcolonial studies, the role of Quebec has been overlooked by French and francophone theorists. The academic disregard for French Canada took place despite it being one of the main destinations for diasporic subjects up to this day, especially as far as the Haitian diaspora is concerned. The production of texts in Francophone and Anglophone Canadas augmented during those years, but the newly developing black Canadian writing initially failed to obtain academic recognition outside national borders. Towards the end of the century, black Canadian literature reached its peak production with black authors releasing influential works, such as Brand's *No Language is Neutral* and *No Burden to Carry*, and gaining awards recognized worldwide.

One of Siemerling's main aims with his analysis of black literary production in the context of the Black Atlantic is to evidence the opportunities that black Canadian writing can provide for the further development of Black Atlantic studies. According to the author, the fundamental inadequacy and major deficiency in previous studies have been that of neglecting the role of Canada as one of the Black Atlantic actors and as a generator of new time-spaces of modernity, as shown by the country's rich literary production which positions it as a nodal point in the diaspora. Canada is also a space of multiplicities and on this subject, Siemerling highly resonates with Glissant's philosophy. As a matter of fact, the author goes as far as considering Canada a "caribbeanized" space because, as the Caribbean, it has been a place where diversity collided and gave birth to a supposedly multicultural space. However, such speculation might appear somewhat hazardous when considering Canada's active role in slavery. What truly causes Siemerling's approach to be particularly intriguing in terms of comparing Canada with the Caribbean is his vision of Canada as a contact zone

imitating a creolized Europe. On this topic Siemerling claims that "with regard to the particular "contact zone" of the Caribbean Canadian, of course, Canada is mostly a "European presence" Yet as a site of multiple racial, ethnic, and linguistic encounters, Canada is also to some extent a "creolized" and hybrid version of that European presence".[23] While Siemerling chooses to depict a rather flattering image of Canada as a hybrid space where new routes and time-spaces of the Black Atlantic can arise, Brand's opinion in A MAP paints a different picture, one that denounces the very same resemblance between Canada and Europe that Siemerling seems to praise:

> Some would say, well, no, Canadian identity has changed over the last thirty or fifty years. Not at all. We are drawn constantly to the European shape in its definition. A shape, by the way, which obscures its own multiplicity. And when we read the hyphenated narratives we see the angst produced by this unchanging quality. (A MAP, 62)

As stated by Canadian scholar Rinaldo Walcott, Canada is commonly seen as a white space "contaminated" by non-white presences. The country's efforts to promote itself as the multicultural space theorized by Siemerling practically created a multicultural lie: "Canadian-ness functions on the premise of an ethnicity-free ethnicity […]. It is a logic which makes the Canadian phenotypically white with little room outside of official multiculturalism for imagining blackness".[24]

On the other side, in Siemerling's view, Brand's approach to belonging and Canadian identity is a pessimistic one compared to that of some of her fellow writers such as Marlene Nourbese Philip. In fact, nearly all of Brand's works present an ambivalent representation of Canadian spaces which usually leads to condemnation rather than national appreciation and identification. Walcott seems to agree with Brand's view on Canadianess by stating that "not all Black Diaspora people can or do belong to their national spaces in the same way".[25] On this matter, he individuates three approaches to black Canadianess: conservative nativism, Brand's discontinuous

[23] Siemerling, 2015, p. 244.
[24] Walcott, Rinaldo. "Rhetorics of Blackness, Rhetorics of Belonging: The Politics of Representation in Black Canadian Expressive Culture." *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1999, p. 15.
[25] Walcott, 1999, p. 5.

diasporic identification, and a racial democratic reformist approach.[26] Conversely to Siemerling's attempt to prove Canada as a multicultural space for the totality of its inhabitants, Walcott's point of view meets that of Brand in seeing diasporic identities as impossible to align with the notion of black Canadian subjectivity because they are fractured selves with fractured desires. In Walcott's opinion, one can only identify with Canadian subjects to the extent to which one's political views concede.[27]

[26] Walcott, 1999, p. 17.
[27] Walcott, 1999, p. 19.

3. The role of water

3.1 Memories of the sea

The sea wields an influence on everyone who stops to look at it. There is something majestic and hypnotizing in the ebbing and flowing of water that captures a person's soul. Yet, besides its beauty, the charm of the sea also lies in the sensing of its lurking menace, its energy, its limitlessness. In A MAP Brand writes:

> The sea would forever be larger than me. [...] It reduced all life to its unimportant random meaning. Only we were changing and struggling, living as if everything was urgent, feeling – the ocean was bigger than feeling. (A MAP, 15)

It is an atavic presence in the face of which one cannot be indifferent. It intimidates with its immensity. The link between diasporic figures, islanders and the sea is innate. It could not be otherwise, their identities originated in water and their lives move through it and often flow under its surface. As Brathwaite said: "unity is submarine".[28]

The sea is seen as a space that offers opportunities, but it also carries and takes up memories with each of its waves. The water incessantly torments its observer; at times it can bring reconciliation and be a peaceful companion, while in other moments it haunts one's mind and becomes the enemy of individuals. The abyss of the ocean screams to people stories that they want to forget. Often these are not stories at all, but cries and groans, and yet the voice of the sea cannot be shunned. They are drawn to it like a sailor to the chant of mermaids. The sea lures its children, it nurses and rocks them in its calm water, but it is capable of swallowing its sons and daughters in a sudden storm. Unsurprisingly, in A MAP Brand recalls something that was said to her when she was a child: "Never turn your back on the ocean" (A MAP, 12).

[28] Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Caribbean Man in Space and Time." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2021, p. 90.

Evidence of the beauty and brutality of the sea is present throughout all the author's writing, and it is especially evident in ATF, where the sea reaches out to faraway places and connects faraway stories. In the book everything seems to unfold in a timeless space, with Bola foreshadowing the future behind the horizon and remembering a past that took the form of a whale's back. In fact, at her birth, Marie Ursule gifts Bola the ability to "see beyond the conclusions that flesh can come to".[29] The mother does not see tears in her daughter's eyes but the sea, and through this sea, the journey that her daughter and her further generations have to embark on.

The Atlantic Ocean is the place where the Black Diaspora originated. Likewise, Bola's story begins not only in the Atlantic, but also in another, more circumscribed sea, Marie Ursule's womb, from which she emerges "like a moon" (ATF, 38). Much like the moon, her whole self is connected with water, from the sea in her eyes to the water in her breath. In relation with this spiritual consideration of the sea, Brand in A MAP also mentions Yemaya, a Yoruba goddess:

> I make my ablutions, dipping my hands into the water and signing to Yemaya. I am not religious, but this I do each time I am at the ocean. It is impossible for me not to be overwhelmed by it, not to pay respect. I never turn my back on it. I wet my forehead, throw handfuls of water into the air and back into the sea. Then I back away over the concrete breaker onto the asphalted roadway, praising Yemaya and asking for my favour. (A MAP, 139)

Yemaya is an important spirit in the pantheon of the Yoruba religion, which is composed of various other spirits named Orishas. In this religion, Yemaya is a spirit of water. Her cult is fairly active in the Caribbean and she became one of the most important Orishas for enslaved people. She is said to be a motherly figure, therefore caring and nurturing, but equally violent when angered. She is affiliated with everything concerning the water, therefore seas, rivers and oceans, but also the moon and women, especially pregnant ones.

The correspondent divinity in the catholic world would be the Virgin Mary, which is a remarkable correspondence if associated with the figure of Bola in ATF.

[29] Brand, Dionne. *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Grove Press, 2000, p. 38.

When considering the book from a Catholic perspective, Tegan Zimmerman in her essay draws an apt comparison between Marie Ursule as a counter-Mary and Bola as Christ, except that in ATF it is Marie Ursule who sacrifices herself to save her daughter so that her legacy can continue. According to the author, an additional similarity with Catholicism is the expression pronounced by Marie Ursule to one of the nuns: "*Pain c'est viande beque, vin c'est sang beque, nous va mange pain beque nous va boir sang beque*" (ATF, 11), which means: "Bread is the flesh of the white man, wine is the blood of the white man, we will eat the white man's flesh, we will drink the white man's blood" (ATF, 11). This is a clear reference to the last supper of Christ and the transubstantiation of his flesh and blood into bread and wine. However, in the book this image is used by Marie Ursule as a threat to the nun and the atrocities she and others suffered because of slavery.[30]

With regards to Yemaya as perceived in the Yoruba community, Bola is the character who embodies the Yoruba goddess. She was born in the sea of Marie Ursule's womb, whose afterbirth is described as an ocean and a torrent, and she "landed her on the dirt floor, balled into a moon" (ATF, 8). Given Brand's awareness of the existence of the goddess and the sense of respect she feels towards her, it is impossible not to see the influence of this religious reference on the book's main character. At the end of the novel, Bola even threatens to go back into the water if her children do not cease to disturb her, hinting once again at divinities such as Yemaya, who assume a human-like figure when engaging with the human world and later return to their spiritual status.

Consequently, the depiction of Bola was not made for dramatic purposes. It directly draws from the author's experience and memories. Brand in A MAP recalls various episodes of her perceptions of the sea, she writes: "water is the first thing in my memory [...]. In the daytime it was indistinguishable to me from air" (A MAP, 13). While for many water is drowning, fumbling, and gasping, for Brand/Bola it is life, air, breath. Submerging their head into the sea is peace, a return to a part of their selves that struggles to survive outside the water:

[30] Zimmerman, Tegan. "'Between the Specters': Caribbean Neo-Slave Novels by Canadian Women." *Vienna Working Papers in Canadian Studies*, vol. no. 3, 2019, p. 12.

On those days when I simply could not leave the ocean, running back time and again to fall into it when I was called out, I would later dream of being floated and rocked. I would dream of the ocean at my throat rocking and swelling. I liked these dreams. Lying in my sleep I would feel as if I were still in the sea, my head dipped in the water, the sharp disconcerting taste of water in my nostrils, the feeling of breathing water instead of air. (A MAP, 63)

Always in A MAP, Brand defines the sea as something that was "either taking a child or would take a child. To take a child away. That type of away was the most fearsome news" (A MAP, 12). In ATF every one of Bola's children was taken away by the sea and she let them go with it because she trusted the ocean and its ways. Moreover, since her character embodies water, the children that went away through the sea never truly left their mother. Perhaps she is described as little caring towards her offspring owing to the connection that they have through water.

According to the family tree that precedes the events narrated in the book, Bola had a total of fourteen children, who were either taken by water or willingly decided to travel across the ocean to create their own story. In order of birth, the reader is presented with a series of characteristics (only seldomly names) which identify Bola's offspring: the one unrecalled, born in 1841; the ones left at sea, born in 1846, 1849 and 1850 (of whom there is no other mention in the book); the one she made in the dry season, born in 1856; Eugenia, who went to Bonaire in a basket, born in 1858; Rafael Simon, who loved gold things and who was taken to Venezuela, born in 1860; the one who was taken in a hurricane, born in 1869; the one who loved dolls, born in 1863; the one she washed out with lime, born in 1865 after a series of aborts; the one who ran to the Rupununi (a river in Guyana), born in 1872; the one who pointed at the sea saying "boto bayena" and who loved to iron clothes and who was taken to Curaçao, born in 1865; the one who stole her footsteps, born in 1869; and Augusta, born in 1881.

As previously stated, while some children have names and others are simply described by a characteristic, in the brief presentation that Brand does in the first chapters of the book, nearly every one of them is introduced in connection with the sea or at least water. One was born in the rainy season and brought floods and rain wherever she went, another, born in the dry season, cried incessantly and her mother "milked his tears for water" (ATF, 71). The one taken by a hurricane disappeared helplessly before the power of the sea, which dragged him away mercilessly. The girl who travelled in a

basket, Eugenia, was taken by a friend of Bola, who nevertheless never told the child the truth about her real mother. What is more, her adoptive mother forbade Eugenia to go near the sea and the waves, because they "were like Bola's eyes" (ATF, 71). In another chapter, Eugenia is depicted as an ordinary person who lived an ordinary existence. Having no knowledge of her past prevented her from developing the full of her capabilities, and by living this naive life "she forgot her power to keep dead things alive" (ATF, 115). Bola, who remains a lingering presence in the life of her descendants, cannot be seen by Eugenia because no memory of her past has been passed down to her. The lady who took her away deprived her of her past and consequently of herself: "Everything depends on memory" (ATF, 115). In the third chapter of the book Private Sones, Augusta's child, crossed the sea to serve a country that despises him and he is sent back for misconduct. In another chapter Cordelia, Rafael Simon's granddaughter, travelled back to Culebra Bay, but looking at the "bilious sea" (ATF, 108) while on the boat caused her a sense of vomit. However, once in Culebra "Cordelia loved the swelling and heaving of the grey-green water. She loved the sea whatever its emotion, whatever its whim" (ATF, 120). Her husband, Emmanuel, is her second cousin, Eugenia's grandson. He also travelled to Trinidad with his brothers, not aware that for them the trip to Culebra could be considered a return.

The one who stole her footsteps is described as a boy who fears the ocean. The interesting factor in this description is his juxtaposition with her mother. Bola loves the ocean but the boy wants her to turn away from it. He is forced to follow her mother's footprints, hoping not to lose her. The boy fears the ocean and yearns for the land because the ground is certain, while the ocean is mysterious and impossible to track. On land traces can be followed, routes can be retraced and recreated, but the sea leaves no traces to follow and the waves erase even his mother's footsteps on the beach. The boy's fear of the ocean is the fear of having no traces to follow, no ancestry. This feeling and fear of abandonment are also passed down to his five grandchildren whose story is narrated in the chapter "Priest".

Adrian Dovett, the descendant of the one who pointed at the sea saying "boto bayena" and who loved to iron clothes and who was taken to Curaçao, found himself working as a drug mule against his will while being abused on a boat by some fishermen. His only consoler becomes the ocean. Contrarily to the one who stole Bola's

footsteps, Adrian wants to walk "the street of the ocean" (ATF, 187) and thinks of water as a road. Deeply frustrated with his life, he submerges his head in the water and "for a while he thought he could breathe water – it was running in his veins and he wasn't in the boat but deep in the ocean where he had come from in the first place" (ATF, 187). The character's identification with water as his birthplace could be a reference to both the diaspora and to Bola and her reincarnation with water and the sea. He dreamed of the ocean and therefore, in a sense, he also dreamed of her.

3.2 A theoretical framework

The ocean, sea, and water are used as a trope in literature, poetry and other fields of work. Therefore, this metaphor is not exclusive to Caribbean and Black Atlantic studies, but it is certainly fundamental for their imagery. Brand's writing style in certain instances of ATF is a hybrid between prose and poetry, and her reflections sometimes reach the rim of the philosophical. Her influences for ATF have sure been many, but two of the most evident approaches that she intertwined with her writing are those of Glissant's poetics of Relation and Brathwaite's tidalectics. The two points of view have some key similarities and only minor differences; their contribution can therefore be equally useful for the interpretation of the role of water in ATF.

Glissant's insights on the concept of Relation pervade every aspect of Caribbean and diasporic lives. In his book, he deals with a wide range of aspects that vary from poetics to politics in order to prove that the Caribbean is a place where Relation makes itself seen, and where identities are formed according to the principle of multiculturality and continuous interchange. The vector of this relation is the ocean. Starting from this theoretical standpoint, one of the powerful images addressed by the author is that of the abyss. In everybody's mind, the abyss is linked to darkness and the unknown, it is a place of bewilderment. Starting from the ship, and therefore the Middle Passage, the author presents the instances through which the abyss and the unknown manifest their presence.

Firstly, he compares the belly of a ship to a womb, a womb which carries death and delivers slaves. Interestingly, he draws attention to the fact that people who are not related to slavery perceive the image of the ship differently, as something linked to the

open and thus something that "has no belly".[31] The slaves had little to no access to the open and in the circumstances in which they travelled the ship was only made of the belly to which Glissant refers.

The second idea of abyss is the best-known one, that is the abyss in relation with the sea. Those delivered by the belly of the ship while they were still at sea ended up at the bottom of the ocean to form what Glissant calls "underwater signposts".[32] These signposts could be considered the only concrete evidence that makes it possible to trace the map of the trade, although underwater. Combining these two definitions of the abyss, Bola's womb has been the abyss for her children in the same way that Marie Ursule's womb has been the abyss for Bola. Although she did not give birth to slaves, Bola's sons and daughters all experienced the unknown, and they metaphorically travelled over the signposts of their ancestors. It is not important whether this passage was conscious or not, because once one is born in the abyss, the abyss cannot leave one's soul.

As previously indicated while arguing Bola's embodiment of the ocean, it must be stressed that the character not only embodies the waves and the tides, but also the depths and obscurities of water. Bola, therefore, functions both as the cradling surface and the haunting abyss for her offspring. This embodiment of the abyss is not a willing action as in the case of slave ships, but a condition that was passed down through the centuries. In the same way in which the sons and daughters of slaves were born slaves, the sons and daughters of the diaspora are born with the inherent trait of the experience of the abyss. However, the characters manage to orient themselves in this abyss because it is everything they have ever known and it is the environment in which they were born. However, this idea of orientation might not be the one that people are accustomed to; it could not be otherwise, since for a person who lives outside of the abyss the very idea of finding a way into the unknown is almost inconceivable. Instead, for the inhabitants of the abyss finding this way is the only choice they have to survive. It would be more correct to say survive rather than to live, because in their existence they are forced to remain on the edge, gasping for air whenever they are offered the

[31] Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 32.
[32] Glissant, 1997, p. 32.

opportunity. They cannot decide to escape it because "experience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss".[33]

When arguing about completely different matters, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that "when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you".[34] This famous citation, although not intended in the following meaning by its author, well suits the diasporic experience. It might be argued that for a diasporic figure this gaze into the abyss is not the experience of a single person, but a communal matter that reunites what was never unity to begin with. What is more, the weakening experience of the unknown can become subversive and powerful under the right circumstances.

According to Glissant, the experience of the abyss eventually becomes knowledge. Not a specific knowledge but a knowledge of the Whole, and this knowledge is shared in a way that remains a mystery for both the people who live it and those who observe it. Knowledge of the Whole is thus Relation. While one might ask what the terms of this relation are, Glissant is quick to explain why it is impossible to define the requirements of this connection: "to the extent that our consciousness of Relation is total, that is, immediate and focusing directly upon the realizable totality of the world, when we speak of a poetics of Relation, we no longer need to add: relation between what and what?".[35]

Considering water as the vehicle of Relation further clarifies this apparent confusion. It is sufficient to imagine the possibility of tracing a line that links two established places in water. The already unsolvable problem of tracing a line is only secondary to the fact that the definition of determined points in a mass of water is impossible; currents, tides and waves make the water an everchanging environment which cannot be considered in any other way than a totality. Indeed, Relation as a Whole is movement, not stillness. Like water, it is not static but a flux, it is fluid and in constant change. This idea of fluidity highly resonates with Brand's view in terms of the definition of the self. With regards to this, Glissant explains that "the time came, then, in which Relation was no longer a prophecy made by a series of trajectories, itineraries

[33] Glissant, 1997, p. 33.
[34] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 69.
[35] Glissant, 1997, p. 53.

that followed or thwarted one another. By itself and in itself Relation exploded like a network inscribed within the sufficient totality of the world".[36]

The author's concern with the Caribbean as a place of Relation comes from his direct experience as well as the inherent peculiarity of the Caribbean space. An insightful comparison is made between the Caribbean as a sea that diffracts in contrast to the unifying power of the enclosed Mediterranean sea. While the latter channels unity, the former is exposed to constant diversity. Nevertheless, these diversities have to coexist and cope with one another, and this is possible because of their shared relationship with the unknown. Moreover, this separation between individuals is also mimicked by the landscape; not even the earth is united in the Caribbean, on the contrary, it is fragmented into hundreds of islands, some similar in culture and others completely opposite because of the constant battles between European countries to claim their right to the lands in the New World.

Finally, Glissant ascribes Relation to circularity. Not in a sense of a closed circle, but a circle that opens to allow Relation to survive. If the circle was close, as it happens in the Mediterranean sea, Relation would eventually fade away and extinguish itself once all the possibilities of Relation had been consumed:

> Thus, at every moment Relation becomes complete but also is destroyed in its generality by exactly what we put into action in a particular time and place. Relation that is destroyed, at every instant and in every circumstance, by this particularity spelling our opacities, through this singularity, becomes once again the experience of relation.[37]

In order to continue, Relation must ceaselessly shatter only to be born again, each time differently and more completely. This is one of the reasons why Glissant and other writers choose the Caribbean as the place of Relation par excellence. The historical circumstances and geographical location of this region enable the creation and continuous reproduction of Relation. Conversely, the Mediterranean sea is an enclosed

[36] Glissant, 1997, p. 55.
[37] Glissant, 1997, p. 229.

sea, which makes it an ideal space for the development of unitarian perspectives, inevitably suffocating the possibility of Relation.

Alongside Glissant's circularity, which is still a suitable model because of its openness, Brathwaite's tidalectics equally refuse the image of the closed circle in favour of a cyclicality represented by the irregularity of movement provided by tides. Before engaging in the complicated concept of what Brathwaite's tidalectics is, whose name is a portmanteau of tide and dialectics, it is essential to address its immediate relationship to ATF by analysing some quotes in which Brand pictures the character of Bola sweeping sand from the front porch. This action is relevant because, as it will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the sight of a woman sweeping sand from her front porch is the image that gave Brathwaite the inspiration for his tidal poetics. The character does this action various times throughout ATF, both as a person and as a ghostly figure. This sweeping, which might appear uneventful to the reader, may be a reference to Brathwaite's tidal poetics instead. By means of example, two references are here are reported:

> Her chair was in the yard near the clothesline and she would rock there after sweeping the dirt clean leaving lines from the broom crossing themselves and making arrows and swirls, and he would play around her drawings, destroying her lines and brushing her feet with his stick. (ATF, 81)

> Looking up and then back to where his friends might be, he saw an old woman sweeping the sand. He stopped to laugh at her useless task, thinking that she was an old woman out of her head. (ATF, 145)

In the first citation, there is again a mention to Bola's rocking, hinting at the ocean. Then the author describes an interaction between Bola and one of her children. Apart from the sweeping of the sand, which is already a reference, it is interesting to notice that Brand's narration stops to give the reader a description of the lines left by the broom while sweeping. These lines that cross with one another and make arrows and swirls might refer to the various paths that were forced upon people by the diaspora and they might be a metaphor for people's decisions when it comes to dealing with their sense of homelessness. Some might move in an arrow and therefore have a direction,

plans, objectives; others move in swirls, circling back to where they were before or simply remaining disoriented and at the mercy of wherever the world takes them.

In ATF various characters embed this disorientation. The one who most evidently incarnates this idea of swirling is Priest/Carlyle, who is always on the move. From Canada, he crossed the border to go to the United States and went to Florida and other cities all across North America, then he came back to Canada to see his wife, making it difficult to cross the border a second time. Nevertheless, in all of his travel and moves, he always circles back home when he asks his sister Eula for help.

Moreover, the lives narrated in the novel continuously intersect. Cordelia comes across Private Sones, Priest, and marries her second-cousin Emmanuel, while Priest makes Adrian his double and his mule in North America. The characters' lives in ATF are lines that cross and clash with each other like the lines left by Bola's broom. Perhaps, in her sweeping she was already envisioning her descendants' journeys across the world.

The second key element in this citation is the boy who destroys the lines created by the broom. This action of destroying lines might be a reference to ancestry lines that are destroyed or erased because of the loss of memory or the complete absence of it for some of the characters in the novel, a representation which would reflect the status of many diasporic people whose links to the past were erased by a failure in the mostly oral practice of passing down memory. In conclusion, the lines traced by Bola's sweeping could be considered a metaphor for both movement and memory when it comes to diasporic experiences inside and outside ATF.

In the second citation, Bola appears sweeping as a ghostly figure and the character only catches a glimpse of his ancestor. Yet, even in these few lines, there is a reminder of Brathwaite's experience in the definition of this task as apparently useless. As it will be explained later, Brathwaite considered this action as pointless the first time he witnessed it, but later he was not able to stop himself from trying to find the meaning behind the sweeping ritual. In the last chapter young Bola is also pictured sweeping the porch like her mother used to do, and while doing this action she sees the ghost of Dear Mama for the first time. Young Bola's sweeping and the simultaneous reappearance of her mother might suggest an additional meaning to the sweeping of the sand in accordance with Brathwaite's tidalectics: the resuming of sweeping by young Bola is

the resuming of memory. Her mother – and later her grandfather and Marie Ursule – all come alive again in the same way in which the sea cyclically comes forward to the beach.

After clarifying the previous Brand's citation, it is possible to explore Brathwaite's tidalectics more deeply. The following paragraphs surrounding this theory, which is complex to encapsulate in a clear definition, are to be intended purely as a mention. Brathwaite's complex thinking proves to be a useful framework to fully understand the role of the sea as it was intended by the author during the writing of this novel.

In *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, he recalls the story about how the idea of tidalectics firstly originated in his mind:

> Traditional early morning old woman of Caribbean history. She's going on like this every morning, sweeping this sand – of all things! – away from…sand from sand, seen?…And I say Now what's she doing? What's this labour involve with? Why's she labouring in this way? all this way? all this time? Because I get the understandin(g) that she somehow believes that is she don't do this, the household – that 'poverty-stricken' household of which she's part probably – head of – would somehow collapse […] So she's in fact performing a very important ritual which I couldn't fully understand but which I'm tirelessly tryin to…[38]

> And then one morning I see her body silhouetting against the sparking light that hits the Caribbean at that early dawn and it seems as if her feet, which all along I thought were walking on the sand…were really…walking on the water…and she was travelling across that middlepassage […]. The 'meaning' of the Caribbean was in that humble repetitive ritual actio(n) which this peasant woman was performing. And she was always on this journey, walking on the steps of sunlit water.[39]

When considering Brand's reported citation and Brathwaite's experience, it is hard not to draw a comparison between the two. Despite the fact that one might argue that Brand did not wish to exactly refer to the author's vision, it is probable that Brand was at least inspired by Brathwaite's conversations when writing parts of ATF. Although technically a cyclical phenomenon, tides are influenced by a variety of factors that despite their repetition do not generate a constant set of values, these factors are the

[38] Brathwaite, Kamau, et al. *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. Staten Island, NY, We Press, 1999, p. 29-30.
[39] Brathwaite, 1999, p. 33-34.

gravitational pull exercised by the moon and the force generated by the rotation of the Earth. Unsurprisingly, even the title of Brand's book is a reference to tides. In A MAP she explains that the expression "at the full and change of the moon" comes from a paper written by George III's cartographer, who, while studying the best way to land in Trinidad, claimed that the ideal time to land would be "at the full and change of the moon" when "the sea will rise four feet perpendicular" (A MAP, 160). Nothing appears suspicious in this assertion, except for the fact that their reason for landing was the release of slaves on the island. The very movement of slave ships that came and went from Europe to the Caribbean is a movement that is tidal in nature. The ships ebbed and flowed and the people they carried were always different; the journeys were ritual, but no voyage was the same as the other. Besides the title, Brand also uses the same expression when narrating Marie Ursule's arrangement of the mass suicide:

> At the full and change of the moon. Everything get measured here by the moon. And when it was a good moon, as it was big and round and the rim of it was white with clouds, they say that it was not a good day for the leaving. A good day was at the end of the moon's rounds when the evening come dark, so dark as they could pass the medicine without discovery. (ATF, 296)

The appropriation of the line is a clear sign of rebellion and repossession of power. At the same time in which they were once hurled to an unknown island, they now reclaimed their authority to leave the island. Yet the leaving can never be physical, because "the body was a terrible thing that wanted to live no matter what. It never gave up, it lived for the sake of itself. It was selfish and full of greed" (ATF, 17). The mind will always be stronger than the body, and they were aware that the body meant nothing to them, not only because this is what they were taught, but also because they learned that "only in the head could you kill yourself, never in the body" (ATF, 17).

The idea of a tidal movement instead of a circular one is more suitable for the Caribbean context. Circularity, if not envisioned as an open circle like Glissant's, represents an incorrect choice for the description of a space that is inherently dynamic. The image of a circle suggests the presence of recurring fixed elements that cyclically reappear in the same way in which they first emerged; with tides instead, there is

repetition, but a repetition that in Bhabha's words could be defined as "almost the same, *but not quite*".[40] One tide can never be the same as another, there is always a difference and the result of this difference is the creation of something new. Tides and waves, with their vertical and horizontal movement, are responsible for two phenomena: the taking and leaving of objects (and people) and the redefinition of the coastline.

As far as the former is concerned, when they are washed ashore, things and people are never the same as when they were initially grasped by the tide. The following passage from ATF stems from this principle:

> Things fall into an ocean, he thinks, like bodies and small pieces of buckles, and bits of shirt cuffs, cloth washed threadbare. Things that eventually belong in the sea and are indescribable on land. Sometimes you find that the smallest grain of sand was a button once. (ATF, 204)

At various times in Brand's writing, ordinary things are causally positioned alongside gruesome images, as illustrated in the pairing of bodies with a variety of clutter falling into the water. Bodies are not perceived as people, but as things that, like buttons and buckles, casually fall into the ocean. This perception, coming from a character who is conscient of being a descendant of slaves, results in a consideration of the self which is utterly demeaning, even more so when two hundred years have passed since the abolition of slavery. In this passage, it is almost hinted that bodies belong to the sea and that the grains of sand that make the beach might as well be bodies.

Concerning the other consequence of tides, their rising and reductions allow for a change in the structure and shaping of beaches and more generally of coasts, which function as the border of islands. When generally considering an island, especially if it is not particularly large, the first impression is that of confinement and restriction. It is hard to imagine that one's world is made of a distance that one can cover on foot. However, the idea of borders can be revisited with respect to tides. What might seem a minimal rise in the level of the sea is actually the displacement of an enormous mass of

[40] Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October*, vol. 28, 1984, p. 127.

water, which twice a day for billions of years has changed the configuration of the landscape.

This tidal movement is deeply linked to the concept that those who lived the Middle Passage and those that are now living in the diaspora are destined to be continuously redefined while their return to an origin is prevented by the lack of the same. As Brathwaite said when referring to the woman he saw, these people are always on a journey, both on land and on water, which is not a straight line in the shape of an arrow, but a tidal movement of coming and going, of travelling through time and space with the mind, the body, or both. Brathwaite's sweeping woman "illuminates the possibility of sweeping water; of combining territory with deterritory; History with history; history with imagination, myth and metaphor".[41]

For as much as scholars have tried to define tidalectics, there is not a single definition of what it entails. It can be seen as a historical, sociological, sexual or political statement depending on the point of view of each author. Brathwaite's great achievement was that of introducing a new and well-suited metaphor for the delineation of Caribbean's spaces, time and people. In the same interview with Mackey, Brathwaite's own definition of the term was more of a general idea than a true explanation. Tidalectics in his mind is:

> Dialectics with my difference. In other words, instead of the notion of one-two-three, Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear.[42]

The reference is to Hegel's three moments of dialectics: the intellectual, the dialectical and the speculative, which proceed in the linear order from which Brathwaite wants to distance himself.

When mutating the general concept of tides and tidalectics into Brand's writing, ATF proves to be in accordance with Brathwaite's ideas not only for the storyline but also for the structure of the book itself. If looked at it simplistically, ATF may appear as

[41] Llenín-Figueroa, Carmen Beatriz, *Imagined Islands: A Caribbean Tidalectics*, Duke University, PhD dissertation, 2012, p. 7.
[42] Mackey, Nathaniel. "An Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite." *Hambone*, 9, 1991, p. 44.

a circular book, it starts with the tale of Bola's birth and it ends with a new Bola, who reminds of the former one (whose presence is constantly lingering). Although fairly logical, this consideration is not adequate both in terms of the author's fluid vision concerning time and space and in terms of various clues that an attentive reader might observe.

First of all, despite the deception that the family tree at the beginning of the book might suggest, a closed-circle ideology is prevented by the lack of a proper origin. It is easy to consider Marie Ursule or Bola as the origin of their descendants' lives, but the stories narrated in ATF are to be ascribed to a certain atemporality. The events in the book are only apparently chronological; the materialization of Marie Ursule or Bola throughout the book and the ghostly yet real Ursuline nuns/men-o-war are clear examples of the little importance that the linear flowing of time has in this book. In order not to be confused by the reading of this novel one must consider and accept the atemporality of it, without striving for the recreation of a definite timeline. The ghostly or lingering figures that often appear are not the only element to determine the futility of time in the book. The characters' stories are written in an unsettling way that confuses the reader; present events are interrupted by lengthy flashbacks, intrusions, personal considerations and so on. This writing technique could be a way of demonstrating that, when considering the lives of diasporic subjects, time is relative. In ATF it is not essential for the reader to know if one event occurred before another. It is not relevant to the narration, and since time is not relevant there is no reason for this story to have an origin. The forced attempt at identifying it could result in a flawed and unnecessarily difficult reading of the novel.

A comparison can therefore be drawn between this atemporality and the ocean. The title of Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History"[43] has extensively been used when dealing with slavery or the Caribbean. However, the objective of the following paragraphs is to demonstrate that the sea, much like Brand's book, is a place of atemporalities.

The sea is history because it bears the passing of means and people, but this history was forced upon the sea by those who sailed it – willingly or unwillingly. In the water there truly is no past or present. Imagine taking a cup of water from the ocean: it

[43] Walcott, Derek, and Edward Baugh. *Selected Poems*. First, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. 118.

is impossible to determine how old the water in the cup is. The sea is history because its purity was corrupted by the greediness and selfishness of people. The slave trade was the pollution that turned water into history, it contaminated the water with the most despicable substance: death. In this thesis, the idea that the sea is history is not completely refuted, but it is presented as a consequence rather than an intrinsic fact. In the analysis of ATF carried out in this paper, the ocean, the sea and water will be mainly considered as pure entities, alien to the contamination of the human world. In the novel the main role of the sea is not that of being a carrier of memory as suggested by Walcott, but that of being a comforting place, an opening towards the future with its hopes and its possibilities. The sea can become history when a person searches for their history in the sea, an action that makes water become as comforting as it is haunting. The preoccupation of ATF's characters with water and their references to it are never concerned with the historical contamination of the ocean. This is why the appeal of Walcott's poem, which is widely cited in a great number of postcolonial works, hardly resonates with Brand's depiction of the sea in this novel.

Finally, there is a last similarity to be addressed between ATF and water: the lack of origin. While the futility of searching for an origin in ATF has already been discussed, as far as water is concerned there is not a centre from which the water that forms the ocean naturally flows. Returning to the cup mentioned before, it is not possible to claim from which point in the ocean it has been taken, nor from which specific ocean it comes. There is a habit of differentiating bodies of water between one another and this often creates the illusion that they are divisible, different, when in reality it is the same water which eternally mingles. The water that was collected in a cup and the water sailed by the first sailor is just there, at the exact same time. Similarly, every character cannot be separated from the other, they function as water that is taken from two different oceans: by being one and multiple.

4. Masculinity and femininity in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

4.1 Women in the postcolonial: Spivak's subalterns

The aftermath of colonialism is a fertile ground for the development of countless studies on current issues. It has generated a strong countercultural movement which is still struggling to find a clear delineation. Every country, island or town that was colonized lived colonization and what it has left in radically different ways, so much so that nowadays it is difficult to define clear theoretical parameters that could incorporate the totality of former colonies. The reason why a clear definition is needed is also a question that must be raised, since the creation of clear parameters of what postcolonialism is or is not proved to originate conflicts between the different approaches to the subject. Despite its unclear limits, every current occurrence can be seen through postcolonial eyes because the shaping of the Old and New World are necessarily tied to the historical events of domination and subjugation derived from colonialism. Therefore, the theoretical body of works surrounding postcolonialism also created a polarized gaze that permeates the inhabitants of this modernity.

When considering its relation to identity, the general consequences of colonialism on the self are abundantly shared among formerly colonised people. Postcolonial identities, as well as politics and economies, are constantly changing in accordance with globalization and new forms of modernity. Nonetheless, there is an aspect of postcolonialism that has long been left unvaried: the dominant male perspective. Every theoretical body of work which obtained significant critical attention was written by male theorists and about male characters, which were established as the representational form of every postcolonial subject. The process of self-formation, hybridization and redefinition of the self has forever been a male prerogative.

The first author to effectively open a theoretical, critical path for female representation and recognition in postcolonial studies was Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with her most notable work *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. There she clearly states that "the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as

female is even more deeply in shadow".[44] Her perspective on subalternity and feminism is unique and compelling thanks to the author's multicultural background combined with the interdisciplinary interests that she matured during her studies. Her work is remarkable not only because it represented a novelty in her field, but also because of its density and depth of analysis which makes it a complex and absorbing reading; moreover, it was one of the first works in postcolonial studies that did not come from a Western perspective. If on the one hand she raised the problem of female representation in postcolonial studies, on the other she criticized Western feminism and found an additional layer of racism and discrimination even inside a movement that claimed to universally represent women.

Before illustrating Spivak's main ideas, it is useful to briefly refer to one of the authors that inspired her subaltern thinking: the Italian intellectual and politician Antonio Gramsci. In his consideration of culture, Gramsci divided the Italian post-unitarian society into two main groups, those characterized by a "hegemonic culture" and those characterized by a "subaltern culture"; the former pertains to the dominant class of society and the latter comprises everybody else, hence the subalterns. In his vision, the second group is denied class consciousness because it is overruled by the hegemonic impositions of the dominant group. It is then the duty of the intellectuals to give the subaltern the class conscience that they supposedly lack.

The term 'subaltern' did not immediately gain its status, it became prominent when it was later retrieved by Spivak to be applied to women, in particular postcolonial women, yet with a slightly different meaning. She criticized the vision of the subaltern held by Western authors, which allows them to have agency and power. Instead, Spivak argues that her subaltern's voice is silenced by colonial and patriarchal powers and that the intellectual, which is often a male figure, cannot be the one who makes them speak, because in doing so he would be further depriving the subaltern of their voice. She says that "for the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is to not abstain from representation […]. Their project, after all, is to rewrite the development of the consciousness […].[45] In this way the subaltern is not only

[44] Spivak, Gayatri "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Williams, Patrick, et al. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Routledge, 2015, pp. 82-83.
[45] Spivak, 2015, pp. 81-82.

deprived of agency but also of their ability of self-representation in favour of a representation which stems from the intellectual, a third-party subject. The issue would not be that concerning if the third party was expressing an opinion or suggesting a way of representing a subject that already achieved a strong sense of identity; the problem arises from the fact that a third dominant party imposes its opinion while preventing the original identity to be formed or at least voiced and, what is more, the intellectual stands for a salvific figure, the only one that is able to give the subject a voice. The redemptive role of the intellectual, who always speaks from a Western – and therefore partial – perspective, is completely reversed in Spivak's analysis; the intellectual may be an inspiring figure, but his words are no longer the carriers of an indisputable truth. Reading every piece of work critically is surely exhausting, but it is a necessary step in order not to be an accomplice of the repetition of discriminatory constructions of reality.

Spivak then goes on to illustrate that women living in the postcolony are the product of a double colonization stemming from imperialism and patriarchal modes of action: "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappear, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization".[46] Often, the minor role that is relegated to women is believed to be the result of them being in the shadow, carrying on unnoticeable actions which make them a dull subject to be analysed. Spivak here argues that this is not the problem at all. On the contrary, women do have a voice and they do carry on meaningful actions, but they are silenced by the representations generated by imperial and patriarchal forces. What is more, the question of double colonization is only partial to the state of oppression that already burdens the female gender beyond the issues related to the subjugation of colonial approaches. However, this does not seem to be enough for the creation of a united front. Feminists of the so-called "first world" discriminate against third-world women while fighting for the ending of the discrimination that men perpetrate against them. The inconsistency seems evident when highlighted, yet it remains sadly hidden in the everyday life.

The combination of these processes through politics, art, literature and culture in general, results in an act of violence against the subject, which she calls 'epistemic

[46] Spivak, 2015, p. 102.

violence'. It is widely known that during colonization the most effective weapon used by the empire was culture. The creation of a discourse around the opposition between the supremacy of the West and everybody else was – and some argue that it still is – the most effective way in which empires managed to maintain dominance on their territories. The empire effectively commits an act of violence by employing what is in its power in order to cancel, leave out and silence the subaltern. Since we create through naming, depriving a subject of the right to speak is depriving them of the possibility of creating their reality and developing their identity.

Spivak's controversial question "can the subaltern speak?" has no unique answer and she does not demand it from her readers. It has been a source of misinterpretations, even more so because at the end of her essay she claims that no, the subaltern cannot speak. However, Spivak's essay does not deny the subaltern the possibility to speak *per se*, but the question and the subsequent discussion aim to be a warning for the reader; a pledge to let the subaltern speak without the presence of an intellectual to carefully place their words in the subaltern's mouth.

In addition, when briefly switching to linguistics, the basis of every communication theory is a three-element model in which there is a speaker, a message and a receiver. The act of speaking itself does not produce communication, the message can be sent, but to become real information it needs to be received and decoded. Therefore, even if the subaltern manages to speak, it does not mean that they are heard, not to mention being understood. Proceeding from Stuart Hall's reflections on the power of representation, the act of speaking is not enough because, besides language, the parties need to share the same system of representation in other to understand one another. He claims: "it is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is constructed *by the system of representation*".[47] Therefore, the representations of black people and especially black women that are deeply rooted in the West are a result of colonial discourse. As intended by Michael Foucault, discourse can be defined as a set of statements that is able to produce knowledge through language[48] and knowledge is always a form of power that

[47] Hall, Stuart, et al. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* 2nd ed., SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013, p. 21.
[48] Hall, 2013, p. 44.

determines the actions we take over a certain topic.[49] To conclude this section, when reading anything related to the postcolonial it is always important to be aware that what may pass as truth is only the result of a dominant system of representation becoming established to the extent that it overshadows every other attempt at claiming representation by subaltern subjects.

4.2 Marie Ursule and Kamena

Together with colonial and postcolonial approaches to freedom and femininity, the diasporic experience represents another crucial moment for the problematization of the self. It is true that one's identity is subjected to changes or modifications during one's life, but some core elements of the identity of a person are inevitably unchangeable. Nationality and the family environment are two fitting examples of this. Part of the stability that is naturally provided by these characteristics is challenged in the diasporic experience, which demands a deeper redefinition of the self when compared to the regular changes that a person's identity might undergo during the course of their life. This is even more true if the subject of reference is a woman. As claimed by Connor Ryan: "we might substitute the question of redefining race, class, or gender identity with redefining a woman's role as wife, daughter, or mother; her sense of her home(land); her opportunity to negotiate her positionality from specific locations or by specific migrations across histories, geographies, and symbolic orders".[50]

Since the role of women has been hyper-fixated in the great majority of contexts, the anomaly of the diasporic experience opens a breach in the stillness of female roles. With ATF Brand navigates this very breach while trying to give multiple examples of where these redefinitions might lead. In this case, the author does not take a political or even remotely judgemental stance, she rather seems to let her characters talk as if she was not in control of what is happening. She gave these subjectivities a voice that does not resemble her own, and this contributes to the feeling of authenticity that

[49] Hall, 2013, p. 48.
[50] Ryan, Connor. "Defining Diaspora in the Words of Women Writers: A Feminist Reading of Chimamanda Adichie's The Thing Around Your Neck and Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon." *Callaloo*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2014, p. 1231.

permeates her writing. Brand's stance on the centrality of women's voices appears clear: her characters are positioned at the centre of their own narrative and she gives little to no space to strong male leadership. Nevertheless, all of them remain at the margin of the ruling white society. Brand, by being an oppressed subject herself, gives a voice to her fictionally subaltern characters without falling into the temptation of speaking through and for them.

The interplay of masculinity and femininity in ATF is strongly present from the first pages of the book. The family tree is only made of Marie Ursule's descendants as parents, with no mention of whom they married. The only exception is Kamena standing close to Marie Ursule but without any lines to effectively connect him to the chart. The initial father figure in the tree is absent as it is absent at the beginning of the story, since Kamena is never explicitly confirmed as Bola's father, nor does he behave as the typical fatherly figure. He flees with the child only to abandon Bola for his research of Terre Bouillante. When she was little, Bola already seemed to be more lucid than her supposed father, whom she did not acknowledge as such.

The following sections will follow the narrative line of the book in order to address the characteristics of both male and female characters in relation to their position alongside the oppression spectrum and in relation to their position as subaltern figures. Each of them has both weaknesses and strengths which confine them to their position of subaltern or let them break the silence to which they seem to be compelled.

The obvious point of departure for this analysis is Marie Ursule, presented as "queen of the Convoi Sans Peur; queen of rebels, queen of evenings, queen of malingerings and sabotages; queen of ruin" (ATF, 5). This is the first character that appears in the book and it is immediately placed in her role of dominant rebellious slave. Although clearly an oppressed figure, she is never described as a weak or silenced character, quite the contrary: she is a queen and a symbol of resistance. Brand is able to gift the reader with a compelling presentation of an ambivalent character, brutal and romantic at times. The preparatory events for the mass suicide organized by Marie Ursule are described as an act characterized by calm and meditative tones. The wait for death is compared to the wait for a loved one and is lived with the same type of emotions: excitement, peace and fear of rejection. On the fateful morning her body is indeed paralyzed by the thought of death, yet her mind never fully gives in to her bodily

instincts. Brand gives Marie Ursule full agency. Regrettably, this agency is only enforceable in the context in which she is placed and the reader has no insight into Marie Ursule's life before her enslavement. To say that she is not oppressed would be a wrong assumption, yet Brand gives her the necessary agency to partially rise from her condition as a silenced subaltern. She is not spoken for, either by slaves or masters. She is the one who speaks for herself and, when needed, her actions help her in the process. The only way she accepts to be silenced is by taking her own life.

This action might be seen as an echo to Spivak's tale of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young woman who hanged herself because she could not bring herself to commit a political assassination in favour of Indian independence. However, the conditions in which she hanged herself, that is during her menstruation circle, were carefully planned so that nothing could be traced back to a pregnancy or a failed love affair. Even if Marie Ursule and Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's stories are different, both decide to use their body and resort to suicide to send a message that otherwise they would have never been able to send through speech.

Moments after the deaths of her companions she awaits her master surrounded by the dead bodies of those who followed her in order to let him see what she has done, to prove that she was the one responsible for his ruin. "This is but a drink of water to what I have already suffered" (ATF, 21) are her last, tremendous words prior to being hanged. Before being owned by de Lambert, Marie Ursule was the property of two Ursuline nuns and before that, she was owned by a man called M. Rochard. With regards to Marie Ursule's past before slavery, there is no account of her origins except for some French inserts throughout the book. If it is assumed that Marie Ursule is the name given by the nuns, even her real name remains unknown. To propose a second interpretation of the inspiration for the character's name, Lucy Evans argues that Marie Ursule's name resembles that of Erzulie, a Yoruba and Voodoo Goddess pertaining to the Haitian pantheon. This mythical figure, which is a complex one that accounts for many womanly characteristics, is accredited for the launch of the slave rebellion in Haiti. Connor Ryan further problematized this comparison by tracing Erzulie's myth farther back in time. His starting point is Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's vernacular theory of Osun as the iconic empowered mother. He states that:

Osun was the only female *orisa* among those *orisa* first created by Olodumare in Yoruba cosmology. Osun embodies a variation on the theme of the ancestral mother, whose greatness stems from enduring anguish and gendered hostility to become what Ogunyemi terms the "public mother" (Ogunyemi 23). Osun's immaculate pregnancy provides contemporary Nigerian female writers with a symbol for "the original statement of the power of women's fecundity and creativity, a *tour de force* synthesizing the biological, by producing children, and the literary" (Ogunyemi 24). Thus, the orisa Osun becomes a vernacular reference to the intimate control women exert over the authoring of ancestry. When Osun crosses the Atlantic, her re-embodiment appears in many female forms, including that of the Haitian Vodoo figure Erzulie.[51]

Following this reading of the origin of Erzulie, the similarities between the two characters are clear, and despite not having confirmed or denied the theory, it is plausible that Brand took inspiration from the African-American religious context. The crossing of the Atlantic could be interpreted as a reference to the slave trade, while the mentions to the control over ancestry and motherhood are an issue that is already problematized when the reader is presented with the family tree, even before the beginning of Brand's story. Marie Ursule has the possibility to choose the fate of her child, and although this is a responsibility that every mother must face, the consequences of such actions are exacerbated by the environment and time in which the choice has to be made: a plantation system during the organization of a mass suicide. While the act of conceiving frequently eluded such responsibility, since female slaves were frequently raped, the decision of effectively birthing a child was not always the obvious choice. Marie Ursule refuses to condemn Bola to death. She wants the child to live, but she does not want to make her suffer by bringing her into her world of complex schemes and hatred. She is the one who decides to let her live and let her leave. Therefore Kamena, the supposed father, does not have any power nor any credit for the development of Marie Ursule's ancestry. Instead, as a woman, Marie Ursule appears to have a vision of the future that is precluded to the men in the book:

[51] Ryan, 2014, p. 1235.

Deciding to send this child through breathless dawn when the morning wasn't morning and the light was still dark was like sending messages, but not knowing their destination. She was long past caring. Everything had happened already. She had seen it, and sent Bola to that life. (ATF, 20)

Kamena is merely the carrier of the message, he cannot see nor understand what the message is. Conversely, the only power left to Marie Ursule is that of sending those messages; although she cannot clearly see their destination, she is past the act of caring because she is aware that they will not get lost, they will arrive somewhere and it is no longer important where. She sent Bola to an unknown life because the unknown was better than everything she knew.

Other than Marie Ursule's male colonial masters, in the book there is also a space for the portrayal of female figures as the oppressor. The role and representation of Ursuline nuns is unclear, as they are presented in a variety of ways which lead to them being a spectral presence that resurfaces multiple times throughout the book. The reader is told more about the origins of the nuns than of the origins of Marie Ursule. As suggested by Tegan Zimmerman, Brand's refusal to acknowledge Marie Ursule's place of birth – Africa or the Caribbean – might signify that she does not wish or care to separate the two. She simultaneously is an African daughter-mother, a Caribbean daughter-mother, and a Canadian-Caribbean daughter-mother, and "all three represent maternal non-history".[52] Shortly after being sold to them, Marie Ursule is quick to state her own terms for the captivity. These terms are exemplified by the recurring menace, rigorously expressed in French, of eating the white man's flesh and blood. Following ineffective punishments and beatings, Marie Ursule is ultimately sold to the one who would become her last master, De Lambert.

Despite the difficulties of coming to terms with her own decision of dying, Marie Ursule is tied to her fate because she is too "full of wrath" (ATF, 6) and she wants the kind of peace "that could not be settled in escape" (ATF, 7). Despite not being able to envision her life outside the plantation, she wants to give her only child a chance to avoid the same bittersweet sentiment towards life. The child is perceived as a miracle and an ode to life. The reader is told that nothing can be given life in Mon Chagrin – My Sadness – Estate, both because of the inhuman conditions of slaves and

[52] Zimmerman, 2019, p. 12.

because it is an act of rebellion not to give birth to future slaves. Once deprived of everything they had, slaves, especially female ones, used their body as their revolutionary weapon. They refused to furtherly implement De Lambert's collection of slaves, let alone their children being the result of rape by their colonial master. Nevertheless, Bola embodies life, hope, and possibility. Yet, this identification is only possible because of the immanent promise of freedom brought by the plan for the suicide mass; otherwise it could be argued that Bola might have been just another victim of the plantation system.

Marie Ursule's last morning is a special one because it is one of the few mornings in which she was going to do something "that was not directed or ordered from the outside. What woke her […] was dreaming the thing she had to dream. Dreaming her generations. Dreaming of a safe place for Bola. And she only remembered to dream when she heard the child singing in the damp ochre shade of the morning" (ATF, 15). The child inherited the power of speech from her mother and is described as a "one-word child, *jealous, thief, spirit, goat, hiding, naked*", yet "certain people drew the length of her tongue and shut up right away" (ATF, 8). This is a characteristic that Bola will preserve throughout the novel; when speaking she only says a few piercing words to her interlocutor, and sometimes even a glance is sufficient to make the other person fall silent.

The remaining of the first chapter is dedicated to Kamena's escape with Bola. As previously stated, Kamena is not presented as the typical strong figure that is generally associated with male slaves, or maroons in his case. On the contrary, he appears weak and inconsistent in comparison with Marie Ursule. In fact he "would have died with her if she'd willed him to" and "he loved her fatal resolve but he himself could only think of escaping. He realized with a blessed relief that she did not mean him to follow her" (ATF, 32). Although not in an explicit or denigratory way, he is presented almost as a coward and selfish figure whose attachment to the child seems to be based entirely on a promise that he made out of love for Marie Ursule. He brought the child with him but gave her little to no attention while searching for the mystical maroonage site of Terre Bouillante. Bola grew up with the ocean and the whales, fleeing the spectres of the nuns and waiting for the increasingly less frequent returns of Kamena. Unlike Marie Ursule's melancholic victory, Kamena is a character that fails to

find the object of his research both concretely and metaphorically, since the existence of Terre Bouillante is continuously challenged. Kamena has only limited speech and agency when compared to the far more significant role of Marie Ursule. As stated by Brand in A MAP, Kamena failed quest serves as the blueprint for the rest of the characters' search for peace:

> Kamena's unending and, as history will confirm, inevitably futile search for a homeland is the mirror of the book's later generations – their dispersal, their scatterings to the extreme and remote corners of the world: Amsterdam, New York, Toronto. Their distraction and fights resound in him and back to him. It is their condition of being. This is what they give all cities; they inhabit temporariness, elsewhere – thinking of something they cannot remember but thinking furiously. The journey is the destination. (A MAP, 62)

4.3 Private Sones, Cordelia Rojas and Emmanuel

The next man introduced in the book is Private Sones, Marie Ursule's great-grandson. He is once again a weaker figure with respect to the female ones, and he is compared to the tree under which he sits every day, an African plant called *Tamarindus Indica*. The idea that the character has about the origin of the tree is an obvious hint to the colonization era and the slave trade; he dreams of the tree seed being brought there for him by his ancestors, perhaps in a pocket or in their mouth. When one's lines of ancestry are blurred, the mind resorts to tricks to compensate for the unknown and it clings to everything at its disposal. The character acknowledges his foolishness but refuses to analyse it. Laying under the tree and believing that the tree is there for him brings him a necessary consolation.

The *Tamarindus Indica* is described as a rather vapid plant and the character often speaks to it while enjoying its shade. The tree is a comforting place and standing in its shade is a form of return to and recollection of the past, yet it also represents the place in which the character decides to be relegated, so much so that "he wishes the tree did not stand there" but he simultaneously "longed for its shade" (ATF, 64). Isolation is a complex condition; the wish to escape it is only natural, but it gives a sense of security and peacefulness that an open space or a centre cannot convey. To leave the shade of

the tree means to adventure into the world and face the obstacles of the open spaces, while to remain relegated offers security and a dull sense of serenity.

The character's main story is connected to the war. Sones went away to fight and did so with great pride: "Yes sir was not a hardship. Yes sir, no sir. That was the result of his birth. But a man could rise. A man could strive. And he had been let into the Second West India Regiment, proving that men of colour were improving their situation and would be repaid of their duty" (ATF, 79). He felt that he was given recognition and importance, but then he inevitably faced racial discrimination when he trusted that he could be at the same level as a white man, whom he naively believed could be his friend. This is the only overt reference that Brand decides to make to racial discrimination and to the consideration of Britain as the motherland for Caribbean subjects. When Private Sones attacks his supposed friend De Freitas, he is sent home for misconduct. Once home, he chooses this tree as the symbol of his status:

> He could have picked a flame tree, cooler and at least colourful, an orange one or a red one; he could have picked a poui, again indescribably coloured, and soft, when the petals fell […] but no, he had chosen Tamarindus indica with its sour fruit and spindly dry branches, its unnoticeable flower and its dusty bark. He didn't move from the tree now, because some days he just couldn't make the walk or some days he thought that he had already done it. (ATF, 96)

The aspect that again reiterates the prominence of female characters over male characters is that Private Sones is preoccupied with the laugh of his grandmother, Bola, whom he hears "laughing in another century" (ATF, 97). Bola is never depicted as a figure concerned by questions of honour or pride, she rather stands above these futile issues and laughs at the vain concerns of his grandson, even more so if he acts proudly because he believed he could rise from his position by fighting alongside Britain. When he realises that, he feels the shame of his narcissism and he regrets making the decision to enlist. He is ridiculed when he goes back home and he does not care to explain the reasons behind his actions. The way in which he decides to try and escape his condition of oppression does not reveal to be successful and instead of trying to do better, he indulges in his regrets, thus embracing his subalternity.

The representation of women's leadership continues with Cordelia Rojas in the subsequent chapter of the book. Here Brand faces a range of racial, bodily and sexual stereotypes. She does not linger too much on the fundamental questions that she hints at, and the reader is the one who decides whose side to take on Cordelia's story. There is an evident change of perspective from the previous chapter. Brand's aim with these stories seems to be that of presenting various types of male and female representation as if she wanted to comprise all the eventualities that men and especially women might experience in their diasporic experience, but it is not exclusively that. The appeal of some of the author's writing also stands in the fact that the experiences she writes of are those of millions of women around the world. It is possible to empathise with her characters without necessarily being part of a diaspora. Cordelia functions as a different kind of female representation because, while Marie Ursule is the most straightforward example of resistance and strength, the title of the chapter: "A Sudden and Big Lust", already suggests that Cordelia's strategy for escaping subalternity is desire-related.

The idea of the freedom provided by lust is something that is usually associated with male desire. In this case, Brand reverses the male and female roles in the couple by rendering Emmanuel, Cordelia's husband, canonically feminine in his own relationship with lust and desire. This inversion is symptomatic of the way in which the expression of passion by women is generally condemned and commonly criticised and shamed by both men and women. Brand does not moderate her tone when describing Cordelia's sense of lust. Her images and descriptions are vivid and intense to read. The author wants to give the reader a vision that is as close to reality as possible in order to make them understand how the character feels when Cordelia's discovery of her own sense of lust "startled her when she passed a mirror and looked at her eyes and looked at her figure" (ATF, 99).

Her desire is initially described as a purely sexual experience that needs to be conducted outside her marriage. Her relationship with her husband is based on the power she has over him and the possibilities that this power has to offer; Cordelia does not lack love for Emmanuel, yet she despises him as a man and proceeds to treat him as a child in their intimacy. On Sundays, they have a ritual that consists of Emmanuel bathing Cordelia, an experience that she does not seem to fully enjoy, as she "tolerated

Emmanuel's bath both as a lesson for him and as the obedience she felt she deserved for marrying Emmanuel Greaves" (ATF, 105).

Her perception of these actions is again typically male if one thinks that the concept of obedience in marriage is commonly assigned to wives. Cordelia lets Emmanuel bathe her only to imagine that the hands that touch her are those of somebody else. She inexplicably insists on this ritual being executed despite her repulsion for her husband's touch and "quick breathing that interrupted her saintly reverie and made her think of a little panting dog" (ATF, 105). Some pages later, the essence of their marriage is stated in the following sharp lines: "since a woman could not by herself take over the world or act as if she had her own will, Cordelia would find Emmanuel Graves and he would be her hand in the world. Her children she determined would marry upward if not in colour in money" (ATF, 109).

Here, the interplay between masculinity and power is evident and Cordelia does not hide the reasons for her marriage. Skin colour plays an important role in this chapter because the reader understands that Cordelia is desired by a great number of men with red skin, hence lighter-skinned, yet she refuses them because she is aware that the implication of their lighter skin would just be another way in which a man could assert his domination and control over a darker-skinned woman like her. Therefore, she marries Emmanuel for convenience. One might be quick to blame her if it was not that in a world where equality does not exist, even a marriage of convenience can represent an escape from a certain lack of agency. What can be found in Cordelia Rojas' story is a new ownership and dynamic of power with respect to the things that usually make the black female body an inanimate subaltern. Her blackness becomes her power because she has the awareness of "the intelligence that colour gives" (ATF, 113), a capacity to which she refers in contrast to the weaknesses of lighter-skinned bodies. Through this character, it appears that Brand wants to underline how something which is commonly referred to as an advantage – such as having lighter skin – is actually what can make a person weaker, for they are accustomed to being complacent with a condition that archaic social norms still associate with a higher status.

On the other hand, being part of groups that are frequently subjected to discrimination, namely black and female, forces the character to be smarter and more aware of her surroundings and her possibilities, even if this might lead to immorality. In

fact, during her first departure from Venezuela at twenty years of age, Cordelia sadly discovers that "you'd start off innocent enough but circumstances forced you to see that the hard-scrabble place you were born in had to be got out of else it would choke you to death" (ATF, 109).

As far as Emmanuel's character is concerned, it is revealed that his only aspiration is that of marrying Cordelia. He is surprised because he thought that a woman like her could never consider marrying a man as mediocre as he is. Instead, this mediocrity reveals itself to be a blessing for him. It is Cordelia who decides to marry him, and the event is described as Emmanuel's most important moment in life, "the most glorious thing that would or could happen to him" (ATF, 114). It seems almost impossible not to notice a hint of irony in these words; Brand counters racial, sexual and relationship stereotypes again and again by making Emmanuel fulfil conventionally female roles.

Generally, women's only aspiration is considered that of marriage and the moment in which a man decides to marry a woman (never the opposite) must represent the highpoint of her life, a life which would otherwise be dull and uneventful if a man did not enter it and give it meaning. What is more, Cordelia is also a desired and highly considered woman in her small reality, which echoes the stereotype of women marrying higher social class men only to enjoy the benefits of a life they could not have provided for themselves. In Cordelia's case, it is Emmanuel the one who marries her because of her higher status.

Apart from Cordelia and Emmanuel's relationship dynamics, the reader is also presented with a brief insight into Cordelia's life before Emmanuel and her relationship with her mother. The mother-daughter relationships in Brand's ATF are almost never a classic example of maternal love, and Cordelia's experience is no different. Her mother is jealous of her. She confines Cordelia to a little room because, in her opinion, two women cannot live in the same house with a man. The reader quickly discovers that Cordelia was molested by her father during her sleep and that her mother was aware of it. Nevertheless, she refuses to admit it to her daughter and to herself because otherwise her life would be crushed in truth.

There is no sign of solidarity between the two women. Cordelia is the victim of a double injustice: the sexual harassment of her father and the initial rejection and

subsequent silence of her own mother. Cordelia repressed her trauma until late in her life, until the "sudden and big lust" surprised her and left her unarmed. Finally, "she was greedy for everything she had not had. What she had not had was the enjoyment of her body clear and free. Her father had terrified it, her mother had found in it an enemy" (ATF, 121). These are the premises that lead to Cordelia's sexual relationship with the man who fixes ice-cream freezers and the seamstress.

There is no ending envisaged for Cordelia's sense of lust. Her desire only produces more desire in an apparently never-ending cycle. With desire comes power, and with power comes desire. It is in this perpetual chase that Cordelia finds the ideal space in which she can break free from her silence. While previously she was able to speak only in the fake intimacy she constructed with her husband, she has now sprouted from the limits of her bedroom to inhabit the freedom of her body in all of its nuances, regardless of gender, decency, or even violence.

4.4 Priest and Eula, Adrian and Maya

The longest chapter in the book introduces three key characters, Priest, his doppelganger and unknown cousin Adrian, and Eula. Since the last two both have dedicated chapters, the following paragraphs will mainly concentrate on Priest. This character embeds emotional ambivalence. He is incredibly childish and uncaring, yet sensitive and frightened in some fleeting instances. His actions may resemble those of men who try extremely hard to be tough and indifferent towards life, but who do so just to compensate for the deficiencies of their past. These deficiencies are hinted at here and there in the chapter's continuous flashbacks and the character's vulnerability briefly emerges only to be violently buried in the following line.

Priest's primary language to assert power is fear. He thrives when his loved ones are frightened of him and he longs for the sensation of wielding an influence on others. Brand writes that "he watched them to see if they loved him and what they would do for him if they did" (ATF, 137). This behavioural pattern started when he was little and he stole some food at a gas station; his mother did not react in the loving way that he hoped for, and that is when he realised the power of shame. His family, apart from his menaces, help him because they are moved by shame. Priest's power derives from the

abandonment of this emotion and this has made him invincible to his and other people's eyes, who start to see him as a fanatic. When he finally gains the awareness of the "relief at not having to appear good to anybody" (ATF, 139), his transformation truly begins. He starts to place himself in the corners, sitting on a bench where he could be "visible and invisible at the same time" (ATF, 142). This doubling is persistent in the character's life (it is sufficient to think of his double Adrian). Priest deliberately lives in his marginality because it is not imposed by necessity. Contrary to Private Sones, he does not stand in the corner because he regrets his decisions and therefore feels ashamed; he decides to own the corner as a way to confront life and avoid shame.

It is important to notice that in both cases the only spaces in which one can seek refuge or that one can conquer are places of marginality. Therefore, even if Priest's actions may make him appear stronger than Sones, his space of agency is equally limited, whether he is in the street with a switchblade or praising God in revivals. Priest only lives in the illusion of being in charge, when in reality corners are the spaces that society has imposed on him without him realising it. He fancies himself a badjhon (a name for a man with violent behaviours who bullies others and is generally respected) and he lives for this title in the same way in which he is able to morph into Priest's character and live life that way. It comes as no surprise that being called by his real name by his family startles him, as he lost awareness of his true self.

Initially, his life on the bench does not last long, because in a moment of religious conversion he begins to lead congregations of people in revivals, hence the name Priest. If at the beginning this feeling of being wanted and praised seemed to suit his ego, it quickly turned into a burden and his life on the bench became once again appealing. In his infantilism, "he saw no contradiction in going back to his life on the corner. In him it was the same source of energy and vigour, the same calling to be singular and alone, and his time with the revival had confirmed his power and his command of his own being […] Nothing stood between him and the acts he was to perform." (ATF, 148).

Despite the inadequacy of his reasoning, Priest is able to perceive that he is robbed of his agency and this perception makes him try to escape this condition, however recklessly. It is evident that he is not conscious of the source of his uneasiness, yet the fact that he acts on it already represents a further step in comparison to other

characters such as his silent and silenced girlfriend Gita. By skimming the limits of legality for the first time, he realises that shame was the leitmotif of his life. He notices the heaviness of carrying on everyday actions whilst feeling ashamed and he perceives the foolishness of this way of living:

> He no longer had to do anything inside the tight line of shame he had felt around his head, the waking up in the mornings ashamed, washing his feet and his face and his mouth ashamed, eating whatever little there was with his head bowed, ashamed, and walking up to the street like a good boy going to school ashamed. An enveloping sense of shame wrapped around them all, and there was no cause he could point to for all this shame, and he didn't understand it and he didn't want it. (ATF, 139)

When he refutes the shame that hindered his agency, he becomes somewhat deranged by his newly found freedom. When discussing shame in this chapter, Brand seems to hint at the fact that this is a condition that black people grow up with as a result of racial discrimination and colonial legacies. As stated before, Priest's mother and siblings are rather moved by shame than love when they decide to help him; they are afraid that their name will be on the papers and that other people might see it. They do not want it ruined. On the other hand, Priest dismisses this line of reasoning. He despises anonymity and does everything to fight against it. What Priest fails to realise is that by refusing shame and engaging in criminal actions he is not leaving his condition of subalternity, he is merely changing its appearance. It might be true that operating outside of the law and being able to live inside and outside the borders may give a greater sense of freedom with respect to conducting a modest life characterized by a feeling of shame; however, Priest is unable to realise how he is simply impersonating an African-American stereotype as a result of his fear and incapacity of confrontation. Ultimately, his cowardness is what keeps him subaltern.

By deciding to live his life in this way, he does not assert his masculinity, nor does he fall under the umbrella of femininity: he is just childish. As a child would do, every action is done with the purpose of testing the reaction of others, to see if they would come to help, in which way or with which words. He makes others worry about him to see if they are going to come for him, and if they do not he forces them by using

fear. When Eula was born, he tried to mend his ways by assuming a better behaviour, but when his mother rejects him he realises that "he had come back to the house on instinct but whatever was between them was gone, he had come back to the house first for their love and then for their fear and he knew that fear would always work so he need not come back" (ATF, 152). He plays these games especially with Eula because she is the one he perceives as the most similar to him and, most importantly, the only one who may not be moved by fear as the other members of the family. In fact, the reader discovers that he is suffering for the seemingly new way in which his sister treats him. He understands that this time he may have exaggerated, yet he is not able to express it in any way apart from insults and acts of madness. At the end of their infernal car ride "he reached to jostle her shoulder in friendship, sensing that he was losing her. She was the only one of them not really afraid of him and that was why he didn't want to lose her. But all he had was threats. All his skill was violence. So he couldn't say, as he wanted to, thanks, Eula, thanks for coming" (ATF, 171).

Finally, Priest differs from the majority of diasporic subjects because he does not long for stability. He longs for and thrives on change and his childish and thoughtless approach to life prevents him from sinking into the meanderings of self-determination. The idea that Brand's aim is that of illustrating the complexity and variety of characters in the diaspora is gradually confirmed as the book proceeds. There is more than one way to cope with the experience of diaspora and while it is easy to argue about this character's faults, the purpose behind his story is not that of developing a positive or negative judgment about the character. Brand's intention is that of making the reader aware that these ways of coping with traumatic and self-related experiences are not fictional and that these dynamics are constantly put into practice in the real world. Priest's carelessness and foolishness are not to be condemned, they rather need to be understood sympathetically. The resolution of his approach to life could be summarised in these lines:

> He believed in nothing. Which is why his departures and his pursuit of the most intense feelings and acts were so radical, so deep and so honest. The truth of life was perfectly clear to him. Nothing was made, every new morning was clear. His only challenge was inward. He had not been disillusioned or had some bad experience that he could put it all down to. He had simply seen the world and that was that. And he understood how slippery every moment was and he liked the thrill of it. Slipping from the knowable to the unknown, walking from one street to the next, being different all the time. In one afternoon he could slip from one personality to another. Why not? (ATF, 161)

In this citation it can be noticed how the author does not have the intention of denouncing carelessness; on the contrary, Brand seems to portray Priest's attitude with a hint of praise. This may derive from the fact that it is easier to face life with this rationality. However, it can be argued that there is a fine line between rationality and superficiality, and it is not sure which is the line that Priest is walking. One possibility might be that of interpreting his ambivalence simply as a fluctuation between moments of extreme awareness and blinding shallowness, but the question is left deliberately open.

On the other side of this spectrum, there is Priest's counterpart Adrian. The chapter begins with a tragic description of his emotions and perpetual sense of despair in the face of a life that only seems to hurt him. While being incarcerated in an INS camp in America, he describes how he longs for "an ounce of tenderness" (ATF, 184) from other men, yet he knows that in the prison environment even remotely sexual acts are correlated to dynamics that have everything to do with power and nothing to do with tenderness. When a man verbally harasses him, the reader joins Adrian in a flashback to his time as a drug dealer on a boat, where he is raped by a fisherman. A pivotal point in the description of Adrian's sexual desires and experiences is the fact that rape from a male perspective is generally disregarded and given little consideration both in literature and in the actual world. This is exemplified by the fact that, if taken outside of the context, the description of the character's emotions would normally lead to the assumption of the character being a female: "He felt broken into and cracked and weak from the shock of something inside him that wasn't there even before" (ATF, 185). Despite his anger, he continued to carry on his tasks of drug mule for other fishermen, as "he had only enough courage for pissing in the water […] and doing what they said" (ATF, 189).

He is unable to perform a proper act of rebellion and he can only take comfort in such actions. While at the camp, he is determined to behave like a man and that is why he substitutes his desire for tenderness, which is usually associated with femininity, with the anger towards the fisherman who raped him. He uses violence, which seems to be the only acceptable male language, and breaks another man's face to assert his superiority. In doing so he is aware that he is going against his true, docile nature, but his resolution is that "the shrinking at his core was something he was going to have to ignore" (ATF, 192).

This is a stereotypically male behaviour aggravated by Adrian's condition as a diasporic subject. Since, unlike Priest, he is unable to change his personality with just willpower, he eventually falls under his own inconsistencies when he confesses that all he wants to do is disappear and stop the fact that he constantly has to prove that he is a man: "he was tired of running away from men who were like iron, men who prided themselves on knowing everything even if they didn't. These men like his father made a lot of mistakes with other people's lives. They were so certain. They left him speechless because in the end he couldn't be so sure of anything. Most of all how to make himself like these men." (ATF, 202). Ultimately, Adrian is unable to fulfil his desires as a subaltern subject and his efforts to achieve canonical masculinity and make his voice heard both culminate in failure.

Far more determined than her brother is Maya, Adrian's sister. She works in a red-light district in Amsterdam where she performs, framed in a window. Despite the different ways of naming it, the space in which Maya moves is to be assimilated with borders and corners. It is an enclosed space that provides her shelter from the open world that would otherwise crush her. The window is "a place to see and be seen and therefore a place where complications were clear and strangely plain" (ATF, 209). Framed in this transparency, she finds a new dimension for herself. After an initial discomfort, she quickly realises that it is a place where she can behave freely. This kind of mystical freedom given by the window is obviously not met by the requirements of the manager/pimp, who believes that "pussy was wasted on women" and that "a man would know how to work that shit" (ATF, 209), but Maya does not give in to the man's overbearing attitude. She knows that her body is her power and she uses it willingly. Nothing of what she does in the window is forced upon her by her manager or those

who watch her. She is pictured as a character who has reached a certain degree of maturity and who is already beyond the tyrannies of her own body. She secretly begins a non-sexual relationship with a man outside her working hours and she knows that "he wanted her for the show" because "he walked her like an exotic, showed her like spun silk from some other country" (ATF, 211). The over-sexualization of the black female body is a topic that has long been discussed in postcolonial theories. As Edward Said observes in *Orientalism*, in Western cultures the Eastern woman is constructed as an exotic beauty, both submissive and promiscuous. In A MAP Brand recalls:

> Looking at Black Entertainment Television's *Midnight Love*, a music video show, I notice the extreme sexualizing of both the male and the female Black body. It is not the colonizing watcher who creates these bodies; these extremely sexualized bodies are created, and inhabited or invaded, by Black women and men themselves. It is a curiously complicated doubleness. The Black person inhabits the Black body which is a cipher of the dreams, memories, horrors, and ears of Black bodies, in a performance of sexuality cut through with racialized assumptions of the Black body as "overly" sexual (whatever Puritanism that concept contains). This performance is primarily for an audience of Black people who are invited to join in this inhabiting and invading. The performances themselves are further exaggerations of sexual prowess; the sexual prowess is itself performance. At times inadvertent and at times mocking, these videos execute the racialized fantasy of the Black body. (A MAP, 38)

This is a clear example of how strongly the ideology of the West is rooted in non-Western people. The authority that it exerts makes it hard to define where the limit is between the use of the black body as an act of subversion and the use of the black body as an internalised stereotype that continues the affirmation of black bodies as sexual metaphors.

Maya's experience is further complicated by the exaggerated ease with which she comes to live in the window. Her comfort seems to be the shield with which she is able to divert the permeating violence of the place, but she senses that she can no longer keep the violence at bay by using the window as a shelter. She asks herself if maybe this is every woman's destiny, to eventually succumb to violence while living in the wretched ordinariness of domestic life, "decorating the abattoir where they were soon slaughtered" (ATF, 212). Between violence and the ecstasy of her body, Maya's manager discovers her relationship with the man and reclaims his ownership of Maya's

body with a knife. It is in that moment that the violence she was repulsing bursts into her reality and shatters the micro-environment that was her window. She kills him, revealing that the violence she was afraid of was both inside and outside of herself.

After an undisclosed amount of time, Maya is still with the other man and she now has a child. A baby she clearly does not want, because "it is as if the child is flooded in whatever she, Maya, is feeling at the moment, and Maya is afraid of feeling nothing or revealing everything" (ATF, 225). In the family tree the child does not even have a name, she is simply referred to as "the girl who was flooded in everything".

Lastly, there is Eula. Her character is presented in the course of two chapters, the latter being a tormented letter to her deceased mother. From the former chapter, it can be perceived that Eula and Priest are more similar than they would like to demonstrate. This underlying feeling is eventually confirmed by Eula when she reluctantly admits to her mother that "he and I are the same and that is why I drove so fast leaving him in the middle of nowhere" (ATF, 236). Eula's feelings for her brother are doubled by the same internal contradictions that permeate him.

Her superior sense of responsibility is only apparent, as it actually conceals a greater and far more devious feeling of pride, which she satisfies by being the younger sister who rescues her desperate older brother. She takes satisfaction in the act of saving others only to complain about it happening. However, as she drives closer to him, another part of her comes to light. She remembers her nights in Terre Bouillante, her mother's struggles, and the fact that he forced his family to live in fear of his return. In the letter, she confesses to her mother that he used to molest her at night, until the one day in which she stabbed him with a pin and did not stop, even when he hit her. That is when she realised that they shared the same wickedness; Eula is simply less childish, more assertive. The similarity and the hatred cause her to have contradictory feelings to which she reacts with anger and inadequacy. When she struggles to adapt to the university environment, she writes to her mother: "I was afraid of what would come out of my mouth. I was afraid that it would seem unintelligent and some days I simply wanted to curse, to spit at the whole room of people and the teacher" (ATF, 238).

A similar reaction is described when she talks about meeting her boyfriend's parents for dinner. Although nothing traumatic happened, she is overwhelmed by anxiety when faced with her boyfriend's loving and caring family, especially when

confronting his mother. Despite Eula's clear love for her mother, she suffered the chaos of her family, and she is unable to relate to canonical familiar stereotypes. Most of all, she yearns for control and stability: "our life always scared me. You had so many of us, there was always so much confusion. I got lost at the end. Everything was uncontrollable. Our house was so small with so many people and things changing there every day" (ATF, 239-240). As a result, Eula collapses when she discovers that she is pregnant. She "hated the child. She was an intrusion" (ATF, 243).

Once again, motherhood is not portrayed as the traditionally joyful time that every woman has to experience. Bola was unaffectionate with her children, Cordelia got pregnant because this is what society expected of her, Maya cannot stand the look of her child, Sese (Eula's sister) gave her baby away to a white family and Eula sends her child to live with her mother, never revealing her true identity.

4.5 Motherhood

In the analysis of ATF's female characters, it is essential to consider how motherhood is perceived in the diaspora and how diasporic mothers decide to confront their pregnancy. In the patriarchal vision of the experience, motherhood is usually portrayed as a blessed circumstance in which new mothers must conduct a set of pre-determined actions that are stereotypically associated with female figures. This view of motherhood enhances the constraining aspect of this experience, with the feminist movements requesting higher degrees of equality between mothers and fathers in raising their children.

ATF does counter the stereotypical ideology of motherhood but does not address the themes of equality, nor does it try to completely reverse these stereotypes by portraying invincible mothers. Brand's characters make unpopular choices as if the author's aim was that of annoying the prude reader while simultaneously displaying the complicated reality of diasporic motherhood. In "Engaging Empowered Mothering: Black Caribbean Diasporic (M)othering Under Patriarchal Motherhood", Erica Beatson considers the development of motherhood in a different culture, claiming that:

> In our imaginings of the "good mother," we neglect to acknowledge how a woman's nationality could influence not only her self-perception as a mother but also her engagement with the state. Normative patriarchal motherhood assumes that a mother is participating in the process of

"mothering for a na-tion" and has been mothered within this nation. Therefore, women who have conflicting associations with their understandings of "home" – perhaps they do not reside within the country they were born and raised – are faced with another set of barriers in their roles as mothers as well as in their alignment with the "good" mother. The process of migration whereby mothers are no longer closely associated with their immediate family, culture, and community presents an isolating process for them.[53]

As far as the characters of this novel are concerned, each of them has a problem with the identification of home spaces. More specifically, the female characters all struggle with their integration in the country in which they currently live and they often long for or recall soothing memories of their childhood or their ancestors' tales in the Caribbean. It is understandable that the intrusion – as it is often perceived – of a child in this reality is far from representing the stereotypical blessing. Benson's concept of "good mother" strongly appeals to the women of ATF because for the external reader the novel's lack of typical maternal love enhances the portrayal of these characters as "bad mothers". Their choices are easy to be condemned if the reader is not sufficiently acquainted with the struggles of diasporic families.

Another significant contribution concerning the cultural implication of motherhood is that of Charmaine Crawford, an Afro-Caribbean activist born in Trinidad who moved to Canada, as Brand did. In a short paper titled "African-Caribbean Women, Diaspora and Trans-nationality" she starts from three of her core memories to initiate a discussion about the concept of home, culture, and family. She states that:

Within the migratory process, more pressure may be placed on women than men to preserve traditions of their original culture because of their reproductive role in nurturing and socializing children. But the notion that women are carriers of culture is a gendered construct, and not a pre-determined disposition, which nonetheless could be used to control female sexuality. […] African-Caribbean women's diasporic experiences are racialized and gendered within the processes of global capitalism. African-Caribbean women have had to negotiate their roles as workers, mothers, and citizens across borders.[54]

[53] Beatson, Erica, "Engaging Empowered Mothering: Black Caribbean Diasporic (M)othering Under Patriarchal Motherhood". *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, vol. 4, no. 2, Dec. 2013, p. 75.
[54] Crawford, Charmaine. "African-Caribbean Women, Diaspora and Transnationality". *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, Jan. 2004, p. 100.

While Crawford makes a valid point, which certainly comprehends a great part of diasporic experiences of motherhood, Brand decides once again to take another direction. The women of ATF are not carriers of culture for their children, they rather seem to hope that their children do not grow up with their same doubleness. When writing to her mother, Eula does not want her child to know the truth because she does not want to "saddle her with a memory that's not hers" (ATF, 250); she longs for the simplest memories of her life in Trinidad and she does not want her child to long for anything. Eula wants her to stay with her mother and grow up within the Caribbean context, she wants her to "listen to the song of sucrier and think of Kamena wandering through the balata and teak and tangles undergrowth trying to find his way to Terre Bouillante" (ATF, 250), without having to be reminded of her Afro-Caribbean Canadian mother who wanted her out of her life as soon as she was born.

To conclude this chapter on the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in ATF, it can be stated that the characters never have complete agency. In some cases they live in the illusion of having it, while in others they settle in their marginality or they do not care for it. Both men and women suffer the exploitation of their bodies willingly or unwillingly, with men fearing emasculation and women living through unwanted or at least indifferent pregnancies. As previously stated, Brand's wish to display different degrees of agency and different experiences purposely lacks the two most common representations of men and women. There is not one man without weaknesses in the same way in which there is not one woman who incarnates the stay-at-home submissive mother. Perhaps, the author's intention was that of avoiding the inclusion of characters that are over-represented and who would otherwise continue to perpetuate stereotypes that are slowly destined to fade out of contemporary realities.

5. The rhizomatic structure of the novel

5.1 The concepts of roots and rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*

With the illusion of circularity, Brand's story commences and finishes with two Bolas, the daughter of Marie Ursule and Eula's daughter sent away to live with Eula's mother back in Culebra Bay. However, as previously stated, the simplification of considering ATF as a circular story may cause the risk of missing the freedom and fluidity of the novel by tempting the reader to interpret it as a story of reincarnation and repetition with a clear end and a clear beginning. It is in this perspective that the ground-breaking work of Deleuze and Guattari offers an intriguing and relevant frame of reference. Their advocation for the revisitation of reality from a rhizomatic perspective instead of an arborescent one seems to highly resonate with Brand's fluid poetics. This chapter will initially present a brief introduction to the two concepts and their application in postcolonial studies, as well as highlight the structural characteristic that ATF shares with the two authors' idea of what a book is, or at least should be. Subsequently, the following sections will each analyse the characteristics of a rhizome as individuated by the authors, and these characteristics will be associated with the structure and themes of ATF, especially in relation to ancestry.

First of all, it is useful to describe the juxtaposition between root and rhizome from a botanical standpoint: the root is the structure that is the most familiar. It develops vertically in the terrain and it has a centre from which the roots stem and grow downward. It is the typical structure of trees, plants and flowers. On the other hand, the rhizome develops horizontally and runs slightly below the terrain. It does not have a definite centre and it is the typical structure of tubers and bulbs. Given the rhizome's absence of a centre and the presence of multiple nodes from which it expands, it cannot be eradicated as simply as a root. In the authors' vision, the rhizome is ascribed to multiplicities for these characteristics, while the root embeds linearity. Following this line of reasoning, Deleuze and Guattari transpose these qualities from botany to a wide range of economic, social, and historical phenomena in order to demonstrate, among other things, how people's mindsets are shaped according to one of the two structures.

As a consequence, they attribute the root structure to the West and the rhizomatic one to the East:

> it is odd how the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy…: the root-foundation, *Grund, racine, fondement.* The West has a special relation to the forest, and deforestation; the fields carved from the forest are populated with seed plants produced by cultivation based on species lineages of the arborescent type; animal raising, carried out on fallow fields, selects lineages forming an entire animal arborescence. The East presents a different figure: a relation to the steppe and the garden (or in some cases, the desert and the oasis), rather than forest and field; cultivation of tubers by fragmentation of the individual; a casting aside or bracketing of animal raising, which is confined to closed spaces or pushed out onto the steppes of the nomads. The West: agriculture based on a chosen lineage containing a large number of variable individuals. The East: horticulture based on a small number of individuals derived from a wide range of "clones." […] Here in the West, the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes. We have lost the rhizome, or the grass.[55]

Considering these statements, Glissant's adoption of the concept of rhizome is easily understandable. The Caribbean is a fitting example for the juxtaposition with the West arborescent structure and Glissant makes use of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as the theoretical basis for the definition of Caribbean identities in his Poetics of Relation. Relation is represented by the rhizome in opposition to the idea of identity as unity, therefore an identity that is rooted and able to be reconstructed backwards. Since the Caribbean is often praised as the laboratory of modernity, it does not come as a surprise that for these authors the rhizome is something that the West has lost and should try to retrieve, while in places where cultures are composite a rhizomatic operating principle is still in place in reference to the formation of identities. As far as composite cultures are concerned, in "Creolization in the Making of the Americas", Glissant presents two types of cultures: composite and atavic.[56] While not addressing Deleuze and Guattari's work directly, the main idea behind Glissant's distinction is that in composite cultures the rhizome continues to operate whilst their inhabitants strive for an arborescent mode

[55] Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 18.
[56] Glissant, Edouard. "Creolization in the Making of the Americas." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 81-89.

of action, meaning that they aim at achieving continuity and atavism. On the other hand, atavic cultures may choose one of two ways: move towards the rhizome and question themselves, or secure their arborescent position, thus rigidifying the root model. While Deleuze and Guattari's work proceeds in a far more abstract discussion, they share with Glissant the desirability of embracing a rhizomatic modernity.

Having discussed the general classification of roots and rhizomes, the second theme of interest for this introduction is the conceptualization of the structure of books as introduced in the first page of ATP. This representation functions for both ATP and ATF, since the authors claim that: "A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations" (ATP, 3). This vision engages in the aforementioned simplification of a superficial reading of ATF; by focussing solely on the book as a diasporic work or by relegating it to the subject of circularity and repetition, there is the risk of eradicating the very nature of the book, thus depriving it of its multiplicity.

Moreover, they present two types of books: the root-book and the radicle-system. While this section will not be addressing directly this specific and intricate distinction, it is nevertheless useful to try to better clarify their complicated concept of multiplicity, which will often return in the following pages. The root-book is said to follow the Maoist principle of "one becomes two" (ATP, 5); when something is divided, from a unity it becomes two, therefore evoking duality and dichotomy. Even if in nature taproots behave linearly rather than strictly binarily, "the book as a spiritual reality, the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One that becomes two, then of the two that become four…Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree" (ATP, 5).

Both the natural and spiritual vision do not fathom the idea of multiplicity in the way that the radicle-system does. This second type follows the rhizomatic principle of expansion without a centre but it "does not really break with dualism […] unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity triumphs in the subject. The world has lost its pivot; the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination, in an always supplementary dimension to that of its object (ATP, 6). The outcome of this distinction

is the formula *n* - 1, which according to the authors is the only way in which a multiplicity can be represented and created in the abstract. "The multiple *must be made,* not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available – always *n* - 1 (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at *n* - 1 dimensions" (ATP, 6). The concrete counterpart of this formula for the representation of multiplicity is precisely the rhizome.

This elaborate passage described both the concept of multiplicity and the link between the botanical and Deleuzian rhizome; however, there is one last important definition of 'book' that serves two functions: explaining the meaning and choice of the word 'plateau' and connecting this conceptual representation of a book with ATF. The authors argue that:

> A book composed of chapters has culmination and termination points. What takes place in a book composed instead of plateaus that communicate with one another across microfissures, as in a brain? We call a "plateau" any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs. Each morning we would wake up, and each of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there. We had hallucinatory experiences, we watched lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants. We made circles of convergence. (ATP, 2)

The appeal of this description stands in the fact that it immediately resonates with the sometimes equally hallucinatory experience of ATF's narration, oscillating between violence and love, poetry and prose. As ATP, the novel does have chapters, but they could all potentially be read singularly. However, this does not mean that they do not or cannot communicate with one another, and it is not only a matter of shared ancestry or repetitive characters. Sometimes even irrelevant expressions may function as "microfissures" through which the plateaus of the book subtly communicate with each other. By way of example, Eula and young Bola both exclaim "I heard a mot-mot this morning" (ATF, 255, 272) in two different chapters; young Bola came out of Eula

"like a moon" (ATF, 38, 243) in the same way in which Bola came out of Marie Ursule; Kamena and Adrian are both maroons of different centuries, and so forth. As Deleuze and Guattari did, Brand seems to have given the book a circular form, yes, "but only for laughs". Brand's narration is transversal to the chapters/plateaus, and it is often interrupted by out-of-line feelings and images, as if the section was composed of disconnected fragments that communicate emotionally rather than rationally.

5.2 Principles of connection and heterogeneity

> "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be"

Deleuze and Guattari initially attribute the two principles of connection and heterogeneity to the rhizome. However, the authors then continue their analysis by mainly relying on a linguistic framework that demands for a comprehensive knowledge of not only linguistic theories, but also political thoughts. In general terms, they take Chomsky's linguistic tree as the representation of binarity, criticise its lack of abstractness and compare it once again to the more fluid and variable rhizome. Although enlightening, this section will not address their comprehensive thought on linguistics and semiotics because for ATF the main application of these two principles is that related to Brand's initial family tree.

They insist on the fact that a tree, or a root, "plots a point, fixes an order" (ATP, 7) which is precisely what the authors and Brand's fluidity of thought try to resist. By shifting ATF's family tree horizontally, perhaps it could be possible to move away from the fascinating yet simplistic temptation of considering it a root. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, rather than as a family 'tree' the initial scheme of the novel will be referred to as family 'structure' from now on. As a rhizome, the family structure has neither an end nor a beginning. Marie Ursule and Bola are not to be considered a starting point, since this consideration works against the lack of rootedness that characterizes the Caribbean and diasporic movements. The fact that Marie Ursule's

origins are not stated clearly signals the author's wish to leave the character rootless and highlight the partiality of her ancestry; therefore, the desire to pinpoint a clear beginning for this story would only be a distortion of what seems to be Brand's intention.

A chance to avoid the natural tendency to the arborescent structure could be the one offered by shifting the family structure from the vertical to the horizontal position, which would make it more similar to a rhizome and increase the structure's visibility as an interconnected and heterogeneous organization. By leaving the role of time out of the equation for the time being, the horizontal axis accentuates how every point of a rhizome is connected to one another, not only in a cascading way as in a root, but also transversally, as evidenced by Brand's fragmented narration. The two authors believe that "there is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people" (ATP, 8). This statement is contradictory as much as it is relevant. The word genealogy in itself refers to something that has to do with people, and the main form taken by genealogical representations is precisely that of a tree. By replacing the tree with a rhizome it becomes evident that what is implied is the presence of an anti-genealogy, a characteristic which will be more thoroughly analysed in the fourth principle.

As far as connection and heterogeneity are concerned, it could be argued that the characters are connected to one another by blood and this should suffice, however, in many cases the connection is not manifested and the lack of awareness of ancestry represents itself once again. The power of the rhizome is that its interconnection is imperative to its nature, so that even those connections that are not visible are nevertheless present and become palpable through alternative channels other than filiation. Moreover, since these channels are non-linear and tend to fluidity, their outcome must be heterogeneous. The order and symmetry of the tree structure are disrupted by the far more puzzling, and yet more open-ended, chaos of the rhizome.

5.3 Principle of multiplicity

> "it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive "multiplicity" that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world"

This principle is intrinsically connected to the aforementioned conception of ATF as a story that rejects unity and whose fluidity well adapts to Deleuze and Guattari's multiplicity. There are several key points to be addressed in relation to this principle; first of all, it is important to clarify that they advocate for a mindset shift for which something rhizomatic in nature should no longer be defined as 'multiple', because the implication of the term supposes duality and therefore the existence of a pre-existent unity, which is exactly what the rhizome decries. As a result, Brand's book should not be considered as a collection of multiple yet linked stories, but should be referred to simply – and solely – as a 'multiplicity'. The emphasis on 'solely' is the result of the authors' tenet that a rhizome or multiplicity "never has available a supplementary dimension" and that the rhizome "fill or occupy all of their dimensions" (ATP, 8). This defines what the authors call the "plane of consistency" of a multiplicity. The definition serves to demonstrate that there is not an additional way in which a book such as ATF should be considered; the schemes required by an arborescent reading could not be ancillary to fluidity. Although in their conclusion the authors do not intend for the arborescent and the rhizomatic to completely exclude one another, it is clear that under those principles an arborescent view of ATF cannot be left alongside a rhizomatic one, as it would signify that the multiplicity is inconsistent and therefore unfeasible.

In consonance with these affirmations, a second point of interest is that Deleuze and Guattari add these principles to their definition of how a book should be by saying that "the ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations" (ATP, 9). The plea is surprisingly suitable for a utopic reading of Brand's novel, in which the reader is often forced to browse back and

forth through the pages of the book in order to keep track of the intricate storyline, not to mention the radically different speeds of narration and the presumed knowledge of Afro-Caribbean-related history.

Thirdly, in the brief explanation that follows the principle, they make one important argument: "there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (ATP, 8). Even after a quick read of ATF, one should immediately be reminded of Eula's yearning for a clearer ancestry in her letter to her deceased mother: "I would like one single line of ancestry. Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace" (ATF, 246). Eula's wish is perhaps the most transparent and immediate call for historical and familiar definiteness. Evans's analysis of this passage is relevant because she introduces Glissant's concept of filiation in relation to Eula's strain; she claims that the character:

> reacts against the narrative dynamic of dispersal in Moon and the temporally and spatially fractured diasporic experiences with which it engages. While Glissant's s errant subject rejects the 'linear force' of 'filiation' in favour of the web-like '[e]xpanse' of relation, Eula falls back on the idea of filial connections as the only available model of collective consciousness.[57]

Filiation is often referred to as a Western tradition that, in Glissant's view, has exhausted its purpose and should be replaced by the far more unrestricted idea of Relation. It is interesting to notice how Eula struggles with her lack of filiation whereas a Caribbean author of the calibre of Glissant advocates for its abandonment. Following Glissant's previously mentioned juxtaposition of atavic and composite culture, Eula's wish for a single line of ancestry perfectly entails the characteristics of composite culture that strongly desire to become atavic and individuate an origin from which their genealogy can clearly stem and be directly traced back.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Gigi Adair in "Shattering the flow of history: Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*", Eula is portrayed as a relatively ambivalent character, her "longing for the simplicity and security represented

[57] Evans, Lucy. "Tidal Poetics in Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2009, p. 14.

by a 'line' of genealogical kinship […] is contradicted by Eula's own life and migration choices: she has never returned to Trinidad since moving to Toronto; she has cut off all contact with her sisters who also live there; she writes this letter to her mother only after her mother's death. Although Eula seeks lines of ancestry as a comfort, she rejects kinship in practice".[58]

Eula's desires are in conflict with the obligations entailed by the reality that surrounds her. In addition, she rejects to be recognized by her daughter, whom she left in Trinidad, therefore perpetrating the same pattern of dispersion that she is currently wishing to evade. Although Eula, like the other characters, strives for the security of rootedness, her rhizomatic identity interferes not only with her actions but also with her integrity. Deleuze and Guattari claim that "the tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be', but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and…and…and…'. This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be'" (ATP, 25). Stemming from this, the maximum to which the characters might aspire seems to be that of having allies rather than ancestors, and when it comes to their identity their being is hampered and prevented from independence.

5.4 Principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure

"A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot,
but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines"

This principle is the one that most applies to the problematization of Brand's genealogy. With slavery, genealogies have been broken because of the separation of the person from their native time and spaces, and in many cases the separation from their relatives

[58] Adair, Gigi. "Shattering the Flow of History: Dionne Brand's at the Full and Change of the Moon." *Kinship Across the Black Atlantic*, 2019, p. 120.

and loved ones in general. This rupture in their genealogy, however, operates according to the pattern indicated by this principle. That is, even if the genealogy has been shattered at a given moment, it can start up again on old lines if memory is still present or recollected, or on new lines if memory has not been passed down.

When diasporic realities are taken into consideration, the rupture is never oversignificant, that is to say that the cut is never clean, and that the structure is never singular, but made of countless lines of deterritorialization. These lines are one of two types of lines postulated in the characteristic of a rhizome hereby presented. The result of rupture within a rhizome gives birth to segmentary lines and lines of deterritorialization. The former constitutes the rhizome in its organization and stratification, while the latter represents its escape points. According to the authors, the two types of lines are connected on the basis that a segmentary line can "explode into a line of flight" (ATP, 9), which is nevertheless part of the rhizome since they always "tie back to one another" (ATP, 9).

When taking ATF's family structure, there are both segmentary and deterritorialization lines. The segmentary lines would be the visible ones, which constitute the structure and which push for the territorialization of the family rhizome. Flight lines, on the other hand, are complicated by their opacity; these lines are transversal, invisible as the missing line between Kamena and the rest of the characters, yet his name is not omitted. Some of the characters also represent lines of flight because they wish to escape the structure but are unable to do so; they are forced into being the constituting part of a common rhizomatic identity. The fact that there is rupture within the rhizome does not signify that there is division. There is an ambivalence that permeates the characters in the book on the subject of belonging, and what transpires from their observations is the simultaneous wish to be the constituting part of a defined family structure as opposed to being in no way related to their reality. However, a rhizome can develop an infinite number of deterritorialization lines, to the extent that it could only be constituted of those lines. Therefore, the characters' desire for escape is only an illusion because even if they manage to create a line of flight, as Kamena did when he lost his way to find Terre Bouillante, they are tied back to the rhizome whatever their effort. In this regard, the authors challenge writers to "write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the

point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency" (ATP, 10).

Another point of relevance in their theorization of the existence of lines of flight is their argument on how "transversal communication between different lines scrambles the genealogical trees" which would therefore mean that "the rhizome is an anti-genealogy" (ATP, 10). Brand's novel is the representation of this anti-genealogy and it is characterized by transversal communication both in its content and in its structure. The scattered lives of its characters and the discontinuous organization of the chapters mimic the familiar fragmentation of the characters' ancestry, and it conveys the sense of disarray that is forced upon the protagonists of the novel.

In order to better understand the abovementioned classification of a rhizome, there is a need to explicate what exactly is meant by the words 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization'. The authors give great space to the two concepts by trying to account for the following rhetorical question: "how could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterri-torialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?" (ATP, 9). The resulting answer is an intricated metaphor to which not only ATF, but the diasporic experience in general, could be linked.

Prior to defining the two concepts, it is useful to remember how a territory can be defined. There are widely varying definitions of this term and a precise description of territory has proved to be elusive. This thesis, in accordance with Deleuze and Guattari's elucubrations, will consider it as a space characterized by a set of determined structures included in a given system. Deterritorialization can therefore be described as the way in which this set of determined structures disappears in order to change, i.e. reterritorialize. Reterritorialization is the new set of structures, systems and spaces acquired by the deterritorialized territory. The two movements occur at the same time because deterritorialization implies a fleeting moment of unsustainable void which must abide by the natural reterritorializing impulse. The issue concerning these movements is the gradual loss of the original territory, which is continuously hindered by the lines of flight (or deterritorialization) that displace it to the point where its original characteristics are made unrecognizable.

Deleuze and Guattari's example to introduce the topics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization takes into consideration an orchid and a wasp: some types of orchids imitate wasps in order to attract other wasps to carry around their pollen, therefore it could be said that "the orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp" (ATP, 10), while the wasp reterritorializes itself in this image because it identifies with it. While the orchid deterritorializes into a wasp, the wasp also deterritorializes into the orchid's reproductive apparatus by taking its pollen and transporting it, therefore reterritorializing the orchid not only metaphorically, but also physically. In total, there are four movements that must occur in the exchange that assures the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of both the orchid and the wasp. An initial interpretation could lead to the less elaborate thought that the orchid merely imitates the wasp, however, the authors insist on making it clear that it is:

> not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence […]. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (ATP, 10)

From the vegetable and animal realm, these two movements can also be easily ascribed to social, political, and cultural phenomena; by means of example, the authors use them in connection with the methods through which capitalism is able to continuously reshape modernity. A relevant way of applying these concepts to this thesis and in particular to Brand's philosophy in ATF is to consider them from a cultural perspective.

As far as the diaspora is concerned, the first and concrete act of deterritorialization is the forced laceration of the link between the person and their native land. When removed from their homes, soon-to-be slaves were immediately relocated into the micro-environment represented by slave ships. Since deterritorialization cannot happen without reterritorialization, the second

reterritorialization occurred in the proto-capitalist environment embedded by the plantation system, a place in which the forced eradication of cultural and personal identity causes the process of deterritorialization to drive the movement even further. Once reterritorialized, the end of slavery enforced another deterritorialization which reterritorialized in the modern Caribbean space, while some people experienced an additional double movement if engaged in the diaspora.

Since Caribbean identities and diasporic movements in general are contemporary phenomena, reterritorialization may also be considered as an event that is still taking place in the current world. One hypothesis could be that of considering rhizomatic spaces and identities as locked in a constant replacement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which in addition to moving cyclically, is also moving further away from its starting point every time it is forced to deterritorialize so that it forms the mentioned "circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further". This interchange may also provide an explanation for why there is so great an issue with the definition of such identities, in so far that a substantial number of previous theories are constantly being challenged or developed in accordance with these lines of deterritorialization.

Returning briefly to Deleuze and Guattari's initial metaphor, as reported in the characteristics stated in the citation the orchid and the wasp are tied by the rhizome; likewise, those who inhabit the diaspora or live through rhizomatic time and spaces could be pictured as tied to one another by their unintelligible rhizomatic identity. The problem of this subterranean relation lies in the fact that the rhizome cannot be ascribed to something that carries specific meaning, therefore genealogy is prevented by the lack of one of its most important premises: significance. A genealogy, however clear but with no significance, has no reason to be considered. ATF's resemblance to a rhizome endorses the book structure as an anti-genealogy by depriving the familiar structure of an impactful role, and what is more, it sometimes posits genealogy as an obstacle that weighs negatively on the characters' lives.

5.5 Principle of cartography and decalcomania

> "a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model.
> It is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure"

This is the last principle illustrated by the authors. It highlights once again the distance between rhizomatic qualities and the core characteristics of genealogy by initially referring to the fact that the rhizome lacks two of the properties that constitute genealogy: the genetic axis and the possibility of disassembly provided by a deep structure like that of Chomsky's linguistic tree, which can always be broken down. However, the main innovation of this principle is the introduction of two new metaphors for the rhizome and the root: the former is able to make a 'map', while the latter can create a 'tracing'. The abovementioned genealogical features are referred to as principles of tracing, a set of qualities that conflicts with the rhizome's capacity of making a map. The authors' explanation articulates similarities and differences between the two concepts to prove that however different, rhizomes and roots are not completely antithetical. From a literary point of view, the distinction that they propose can be employed as further confirmation of the close association that can be drawn between Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome and the fluid structure of Brand's ATF.

The first and most significant difference that they present is that a map has multiple entries while a tracing has only one point of access to which it incessantly returns. In this perspective, it is clear why the tracing pertains to the root and the map to the rhizome: the previous principles in this chapter highlighted how there is not an end nor a beginning to the rhizome, even from a biological standpoint it has as many entries as it has ramifications, or lines of flight; on the other hand, the tracing represents a root in the sense that it has a single origin from which it branches and to which it can be easily *traced* back. The two depictions can be successfully adapted to ATF's initial family structure to further emphasize its resemblance to the rhizome, given that the family structure can be accessed from multiple points. As will be later explained in this section, accessing it strictly from Marie Ursule or Bola would restrict the map into a

tracing, therefore confining it into an arborescent structure. Likewise, Eula's longing for a rooted structure, a tracing that can connect her directly to her mother, is contrasted with her love for maps, as she claims to "collect maps of all kinds" (ATF, 231). In spite of that, subsequently, she proves that she cannot resist the pulling force of the rhizome as she contradicts herself when describing the reason behind her love for maps, and how she uses them when feeling exhausted or alienated: "their steadiness steadied me, it did not matter that they were not where I was. Their definite lines brought order to my head" (ATF, 231). Eula wishes to be able to follow the tracing, but its limits do not quench her puzzlement. When analysing Canadian neo-slave novels, in her essay Zimmerman identifies several reasons for the use of a family structure at the beginning of a novel such as ATF. Firstly, the structure denounces the neglect of mothers in the familiar structure; secondly, it highlights how the Caribbean transcends borders and languages; and thirdly, it criticizes "postcolonial feminist frameworks of root theory".[59]

Returning to the explanation of the principle, since the authors strongly reject dualism, a plain division of these two concepts would eventually clash with their own vision. On this subject, they proceed to find similarities and overlays between maps and tracings that ultimately prove that, while one concept must be distinguished from the other, there are premises for an integration between the two. The root and rhizome's essence can be layered because it is a part of the map "to be traceable" (ATP, 13) and it is a part of the rhizome "to intersect roots and sometimes merge with them" (ATP, 13). Therefore, the fundamental point that Deleuze and Guattari want to enhance with this principle is that "the tracing should always be put back on the map" (ATP, 13). Having stated that possibility, or better, that duty, it is important to stress that the opposite is never possible, or at least never recommendable for a series of reasons that they meticulously illustrate. In fact, when there is an attempt to put the map into a tracing, "what the tracing reproduces of the map or rhizome are only the impasses, blockages, incipient taproots, or points of structuration […]. Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces (ATP, 13-14).

In order to better understand these considerations, it might be useful to imagine a real sheet of paper with a section of a map of a city, and on another sheet of paper the

[59] Zimmerman, 2019, pp. 7-8.

tracing of a route, perhaps with some reference points, which can be pursued on the map. The tracing has a point of departure and a point of arrival within the sheet, while it is obvious that the map continues outside the borders of the paper. If one were to give someone directions to reach a certain destination, there are several possible solutions, two of them being the different sheets of paper, one with a map and one with a tracing. The person asking for the directions could either be provided with a complete map, or be given only the tracing of the route they are supposed to follow. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the desirable option would be that of combining the two by giving the person the map and the tracing on a single piece of paper. This would enable the person to have the complete picture and it would provide them with a way from which they could easily detour if they wish to consider alternative routes.

According to the previously cited passage, it becomes evident how the image of the tracing alone only constrains the endless possibilities offered by the map because in it excludes every other possible itinerary. In this sense "the rhizome […] acts on desire by external, productive outgrowths. That is why it is so important to […] plug the tracings back into the map, connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome" (ATP, 14). On the other hand, with a map it is possible to create a great number of itineraries, but its vastness could easily become disorientating if not supported by some type of optional but useful indications, in other words, a tracing to lead the way. The most important difference to be mindful of is the fact that a map alone has no points of arrival and departure, while the tracing must establish them in order to be classified as such. In other terms, the rhizome itself has neither an end nor a beginning, but if a root were to be superposed onto a rhizome, the root-like image of a single entry with multiple outputs would become immediately visible.

When examining the role of desire in the establishment of these pathways, if one were to consider the lymph that runs through the rhizome and the roots as desire, it could be claimed that within a tracing the lymph is prevented from flowing freely. The lymph would be forced to follow certain paths and encounter eventual blockages. What is more, a root is far more prone to death if not correctly sustained, and when a root dies the central structure is immediately affected by the weakening of part of its system. Within the rhizome, the lymph has continuous entries and endless possibilities of

flowing because its lines of deterritorialization push outward and produce new reterritorialized entries that prevent the rhizome from ever dying.

The aim of putting the tracing back onto the map instead of the opposite is to open the dead ends of the root through flight lines, therefore letting desire flow deliberately, without the risk of annihilation. It is thus pursuable to choose the origin of a tracing as the entry point of a structure, but is important to do so only "assuming the necessary precautions are taken" (ATP, 14).

It is not surprising that all of the characters in ATF struggle with various definitions of desire, whether it be the longed sexual freedom of Cordelia or Kamena's wearying search for Terre Bouillante. Their desire is never material, never related to money or commodities. Their desire is the rhizome's lymph, something that flows internally and burst externally, something that keeps the character alive and rambling. It pushes them towards deterritorialization in order to be able to thrive and expand through renewed lines of flight.

In A MAP, Brand provides her own reflections of what desire might be and what it entails for her. She states that in her opinion "writing is an act of desire" and "desire, too, is the discovery of beauty as miraculous. Desire in the face of ruin. How in these lines there is such wreckage and that too is beauty, how in those lines there is such clear-eyed dread, such deeply mocking knowledge, and that too is desire" (A MAP, 154). Bearing in mind this impression, ATF altogether could be seen as a story made of wreckages and broken lines, which nonetheless convey a deep and pervading sense of flowing desire.

5.6 A final consideration

This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of the ideas illustrated in the introduction to ATP by relating Deleuze and Guattari's description of a rhizome to ATF, Brand's writing style, and the diasporic experience on the whole. While there are no further principles to analyse, there are two last aspects that are worth considering with the purpose of exhausting the opportunities for reflection offered by Deleuze and Guattari's influential essay: the futility of localization and the connection between rhizome and memory.

As far as the first aspect is considered, in their final observations the authors remark on the vanity of trying to individuate a point of departure and arrival at all costs, insisting on the meaninglessness of such pursuit:

> Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...). […] proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing. […] the middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. (ATP, 25)

The obsession with the sense of direction could indeed be pointless, yet it is almost unavoidable. Concepts like beginnings, endings, aims, and origins have been a part of society for such a long time that they have become firmly internalized in every aspect of the modern Western world. As exemplified in a book such as ATF, the middle is a plausible, even desirable point of access; the consideration of the novel's moral as a voyage that starts and finishes with Bola would inevitably convey a false sense of movement by implying not only the existence of a fabricated origin, but also a conclusion and a direction to be followed. Further confirmation of this is the fact that, during Kamena's search for Terre Bouillante, he tries to remember his way to the place by giving Bola the amount of information that he was able to collect each time he went away for several days; he repeats "hold this for me" (ATF, 58) while giving her his mental notes, expecting a child to remember his meanderings. Kamena's instructions are generally believed to be a metaphor for the holding of memory, which would lead to the consideration that "Bola's inability to 'hold' Kamena's stories suggests to readers the futility of attempting to map the text by designating Bola's character as a foundational figure of ancestral origin".[60]

The beginning of Deleuze and Guattari's citation almost seems to dismantle the whole of the diasporic and postcolonial experience by disrupting the core concern of diasporic subjects, as well as minimizing identity-related challenges which are shared on a universal basis. Having the knowledge of where one's life is headed is an

[60] Evans, 2009, pp. 7-8.

obsession that can seldomly be ignored, but the challenge should be attempted nonetheless. When commenting on how an extract from Thomas Jefferys' notes inspired the title for the novel, Brand herself is the first to confirm the impossibility of definite directions by making a similar point to that of Deleuze and Guattari: "my characters can only tear into pieces, both history and Jefferys' observations, they can only deliberately misplace directions and misread observations. They can take north for south, west for east. Anywhere they live is remote. They can in the end impugn the whole theory of directions. They inhabit everywhere […]. Their lives take any direction at any moment" (A MAP, 162). The focus in ATF is rarely on the characters' future aims and frequently on their present issues. The past is referred to not in terms of origins, but in terms of privations, trauma, and nostalgia. Beginnings and endings are not a priority in Brand's writing and most of her characters are portrayed in the middle, picking up speed.

As previously asserted, when applying all of the aforementioned principles to ATF the act of considering Marie Ursule or Bola as the sole entry or point of origin is feasible only if one decides to consciously enter the family structure through this path. While doing so, one must be aware of the possible consequences illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari, and therefore take some precautions in the interpretation of Brand's story. There is a dead end every time the characters' lives are considered as unrelated experiences, as well as when memory is blocked or trauma is suppressed. As far as the former is concerned, the reader is the one in charge to "forge the (absent) links that are impracticable for the characters themselves", and in doing so they acknowledge "the loss of community and its creation through the act of reading".[61]

Although mentions of memory and trauma will be treated in greater detail in the following chapter, the second aspect of ATP to be considered in this section is the creation of one last comparison between the rhizome and short-term memory, and the root and long-term memory:

[61] Moynagh, Maureen. "The Melancholic Structure of Memory in Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2008, p. 68.

> Short-term memory is in no way subject to a law of contiguity or immediacy to its object; it can act at a distance, come or return a long time after, but always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity. Furthermore, the difference between the two kinds of memory is not that of two temporal modes of apprehending the same thing; they do not grasp the same thing, memory, or idea. The splendor of the short-term Idea: one writes using short-term memory, and thus short-term ideas, even if one reads or rereads using long-term memory of long-term concepts. Short-term memory includes forgetting as a process; it merges not with the instant but instead with the nervous, temporal, and collective rhizome. Long-term memory (family, race, society, or civilization) traces and translates, but what it translates continues to act in it, from a distance, offbeat, in an "untimely" way, not instantaneously. (ATP, 16)

It is natural that, given the comparison, the authors are enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by short-term memory against the apparent dullness offered by the qualities they attribute to long-term memory. The characters in ATF have flashbacks and reminiscences of their past and ancestry that could be initially attributed to long-term memory, yet these flashbacks appear suddenly, often unexpectedly or for reasons beyond their comprehension. These are moments of rupture in the narrative as much as they are moments of rupture in the self. The impossibility of a single line of ancestry translates into the impossibility of long-term memory, there is not a single tracing of family, race, or society to be revisited; there are fragmented lines of short memories through which the characters navigate while trying to stay afloat. Short-term memory is as unstable as the rhizome, yet it is its power that allows stories such as ATF to be written.

6. The haunting weight of memory

6.1 The birth of trauma

One fundamental component of Brand's novel is the presence, visible or hidden, of traumatic events in the characters' past and present. The opening of the novel is itself the tale of a traumatic story, the rebellious Marie Ursule, forced into slavery, is a figure that exemplifies physical as well as psychological trauma, an experience that will be passed down for more than a century. Her daughter Bola loses her mother, while most of her descendants experience rape, violence, racism or brutality. Despite the fact that the repercussions of these episodes are not overtly stated throughout the novel, the reader can connect the dots that suggest how the characters have been shaped by the occurrence of various traumatic events in their past and present lives.

In addition, since Brand's novel focuses on a century of diasporic experiences stemming from Africa and the Caribbean, the characters' struggles are further problematized by the fact that they are also forced to live with the shared trauma of a past that has been broken by slavery. A better definition of the meaning of trauma and the various ways of approaching it is a useful tool for engaging in a deeper analysis of the specific traumatic occurrences and painful memories of the novel; for this purpose, I will mainly refer to the theoretical framework presented by historian Dominik LaCapra in his essay "Trauma, Absence, Loss".[62]

Every traumatic experience bears an intense emotional component that the subject often perceives as impossible to overcome, which can sometimes culminate in irreversible consequences. The only certainty is that the mindset of a person that undergoes a traumatic experience will be inevitably impacted by its aftermath. According to LaCapra, trauma is fundamentally a result of two movements that often overlap, but that should be distinguished nonetheless: absence and loss. The failure to apply this distinction generates two consequences depending on the direction of the movement. When absence is intended as loss, it can generate "misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community", while when loss

[62] LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1999.

moves towards absence "one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia".[63] The need for a distinction between the two is better exemplified by the principle that what has never been there in the first place cannot be lost, although the feelings caused by the absence of a certain thing that is perceived as needed can be mistaken for a feeling of loss. This thought seems an immediate and logical fact, nevertheless, it is obscured by the complexity of the traumatic experience, which tends to blur the borders between rational and irrational, past and present.

Loss has an object that absence cannot afford, it carries the meaning of finding, while absence never implies that something can be found again. Of course, this is obvious when the element of the equation is an object: if one loses a pen, one could eventually find it or buy a new pen at worst. When deeper losses are considered, the retrieval of the loss can be impossible, yet for some reason, a comforting feeling of finding remains. LaCapra rightfully claims that "paradise absent is different from paradise lost";[64] in a hypothetical situation one who loses paradise can retrieve the hope of regaining it, or at least one can find comfort in remembering the times when paradise was at one's hand. The implication of the absence of paradise does not contemplate hope, nor remembering.

A range of feelings of discomfort is commonly associated with trauma, anxiety being the most prominent one. Since anxiety is a pervading and at times debilitating emotional state, the brain works to diminish its impact on the person's functionality. In this perspective, absence-related trauma tends to conflate into loss because it needs to find an object to soothe the person's recklessness.[65] An ulterior consequence of the shift of absence towards loss is that "one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity which others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made "us" lose. Therefore, to regain it one must somehow get rid of or eliminate those others – or perhaps that sinful other in oneself".[66] This wish for unity and wholeness is something that Caribbean and diasporic subjects frequently experience as a result of the complexity of their genealogy, if not a total absence of it.

[63] LaCapra, 1999, p. 698.
[64] LaCapra, 1999, p. 706.
[65] LaCapra, 1999, p. 707.
[66] LaCapra, 1999, p. 707.

Their identity has been jeopardized first by colonialism and the slave trade, then by forced migration and the subsequent exposure to modern racism. This involuntary contamination creates a kind of "suspended" identity, which is endlessly changing and questioning itself. Since the past cannot be altered, those subjected to the jeopardization of their identity cannot eliminate the crimes of the British Empire (or French or Belgian and so on) and its consequences. The only other possibility left is trying to regain this unity from within, which sometimes translates into fighting the sinful African or the sinful Caribbean part in themselves, or even relying solely on one of the two as the cornerstone of their identity whilst forgetting every other genealogical influence of which they might be aware. This wish to escape their identity or part of their identity often translates into a concrete movement that, among other reasons, pushes a person to leave their place of birth because it has the blame of excessively reminding them of their suspended identity. In A MAP Brand reflects on return in three consecutive moments. Firstly, she addresses the impossibility of returning to her unknown place of origin in Africa, secondly, she states how moving away immediately changes a person, and thirdly, she recalls the moment in which she decided that she was not going to live in Trinidad:

> I cannot go back to where I came from. It no longer exists. It should not exist.
>
> When you take a journey, you are no longer yourself. Already no one knows you anymore, neither your family nor your friends. The day you decide to leave, the tablecloth seems foreign, the room where you have slept forever seems unfamiliar, as if someone has left it already.
>
> I remember standing at the top of the street to my house when I was thirteen thinking, I will leave here and never return, I am not going to live here. Already the books in my mind were read, already I was forgetting faces and names, already all that was happening had happened. The street was a ghost. I never returned to that street. The house with the hibiscus fence and the butterflies hovering over zinnias. From then on I imagined only. (A MAP, 75)

Eula, which is the character that perhaps shares the most with her author, exemplifies the difficulty of returning when confessing that "the farthest back I've been is Jamaica and there I saw people clinging to the rim of that island, gripping tight to the

dry heat and the broken buildings and I knew that that was as close as I could come" (ATF, 256).

In a collection of his texts, Deleuze addresses the creative power of islands as utopian spaces, arguing that "the *elan* that draws humans toward islands extends the double movement that produces islands in themselves. Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew".[67] It could be argued that this vision of the island is made from a mainland perspective because in the Caribbean context islands are places that their inhabitants often flee. Islands not only physically separate people, but they also operate the separation of a person from within. A European person dreaming of leaving everything behind them to live on a desert island does want to have a new beginning, they do want to separate themselves from the mainland. On the other side, the average inhabitant of the Caribbean dreams of the mainland and chases a unity that is as mental as much as it is physical (Bola is often portrayed as watching the "Main", namely Venezuela). As a result, the utopian power of islands theorized by Deleuze is reversed in this case.

Returning to LaCapra's distinction between loss and absence, the traumatic events in ATF, such as Marie Ursule leaving Bola, Priest molesting Eula as a child, Adrian being raped, or Maya's glass shattering, all imply loss, not absence. Bola's mother is her object of loss, and although she will never be able to find it again, she treasures all the memories to which she can come back, such as the back of her beloved whales which remind her of Marie Ursule curled up, preparing the poison for the mass suicide. However, there are memories to which one might not wish to come back, but the excruciating difficulty of dealing with the pain brought by trauma lies in the fact that one cannot escape it, its power is intrusive and pervading. The brain tries to process the traumatic event by repeating it incessantly, therefore paralysing the person into their past to the extent that remembering becomes an involuntary torment: the subject is "locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object".[68] The continuous replication of the traumatic event is employed as a coping strategy by the brain, which by repeating

[67] Deleuze, Gilles, et al. *Desert Islands: And Other Texts 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e), 2004, p. 10.
[68] LaCapra, 1999, p. 713.

the trauma gains the illusion of control. At the same time, the subject almost becomes convinced that by endlessly going through their suffering they will be able to dominate it somehow.

In some cases, a person can identify with their trauma to such an extent that they become convinced that it is a part of their identity, thus sanctioning their selfhood to the very events that they wish to escape. In ATF, characters' traumas are "constitutive of their subjectivity […]. Insofar as readers are made conscious of the losses each character has sustained, we are arguably the ones who undertake the work of mourning in our reading of this novel".[69] The reader is the one to notice how certain characters have been shaped by their traumas and, as in the case of the tracing of unknown genealogical lines, the reader is given the faculty of forging the links between a traumatic event and its consequences, inevitably assimilating with the story of the character and proceeding to mourn (or act out) on their behalf.

There is a great number of ways in which individuals might react to trauma and this chapter cannot possibly account for all of them. The following section will continue to use LaCapra's essay as a structural support in the analysis of how ATF's characters' reactions to trauma might be classified according to the approach of one of the most influential representatives of trauma studies.

6.2 Overcoming trauma: remembering and forgetting

According to LaCapra, there are two main responses observed in post-traumatic situations: acting out (especially in relation to repetition and melancholia) and working through (in relation to mourning). None of the characters in ATF actually engages in a conscious and responsible approach to their traumatic past or present. However, there are two notable representations that can correspond to the two modes of action theorized by LaCapra. An example of acting out and repetition would be young Bola's coping mechanism with her mother's death, while an example of working through and mourning could be the content of Eula's letter to her deceased mother. The tentative effort of facing trauma exemplified by Eula's letter not only confronts the loss of a

[69] Moynagh, 2008, p. 63.

parental figure, but it also addresses what her brother did to her, what she felt while being abused, and what she is feeling at the moment of writing. This is a representation of what could be intended as working through trauma because "mourning involves a different inflection of performativity: a relation to the past that involves recognizing its difference from the present – simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it […].[70]

Remembering and forgetting are crucial processes while facing trauma. The two can be voluntary or involuntary; sometimes there is a wish to remember or retrieve something that feels lost, such as the happy memory of Eula's mother sitting at the edge of her bed and bringing her a sense of peace, while other times remembering is an intrusive experience that allows negative emotions to resurface, therefore causing the urge of forgetting. On that matter Eula is once again ambivalent; after having stated the impossibility of forgetting her mother: "I do not forget you at all. It's just that I am too lazy to go through all the emotion it involves. I will never forget you" (ATF, 235), a few pages later she affirms: "I was just living. Yes, living and forgetting […] (ATF, 237), and also: "I'm forgetting you even as I write this letter. The more I write the more I forget. Perhaps that is why I never wrote until now, perhaps I need to forget you now, though that frightens me" (ATF, 239). The hypocrisy is tangible: if at the beginning she believes that it is impossible to forget her mother, as she writes she realizes that forgetting is part of her living and that she needs to forget her mother, at least to a certain extent, in order to detach herself from the past. The very act of writing to forget is itself contradictory since writing is almost everywhere the primary form for the conservation and passing on of memory. Eula is frightened that she will forget her mother because remembering is the only way of keeping her alive in her memory, yet this process is a painful one for Eula because along with the memory of her mother come all the other memories that she does not want to remember, in fact she claims to "hate the past and for that matter the present" (ATF, 255).

When evaluating the quality of her memories Eula reaches the conclusion that the negative memories outweigh the positive ones, therefore the most rational and reasonable thing to do is to try to forget her past while avoiding all the elements that can bring back her memory in the present, such as seeing her sister or her brother, opening

[70] LaCapra, 1999, p. 716.

letters, and meeting with the father of her baby. Although her attempt to work through her trauma is far from successful, she does not appear as a character that is stuck in repetition. When recalling the abuse perpetrated by her brother she re-experiences the sensations that she felt but she is able to distance herself from the situation and she quickly grounds her body and mind in the present. This ability does not make the present a peaceful and pleasant place, but it still represents an improvement. It is necessary to highlight that, even though Eula tries to work through her trauma, "Eula's decision to send her daughter back home is a way to "unremember" Bola and consign her to that past from which she can't escape".[71] In doing so she proves that she thinks that being blocked in the past is better than the experiences she is having in the present. She wants her daughter to be stuck in the comforting past because she has been robbed of that possibility by Priest's abuses. However, this decision becomes the source of a double loss for young Bola, since she "has not only lost, through death, the woman she knows as her mother, she has lost her actual mother through not knowing".[72]

Young Bola seems to remain unaware of the identity of her real mother even when she clearly hears her sisters mentioning that she was abandoned. It remains unclear if she truly does not understand because she is living in a limbo or because she refuses to do so, she is hopelessly delusional nevertheless. Seemingly accepting her mother passing away in the first moment, young Bola then believes her mother reincarnated in a ladybird, which unsurprisingly dies on the following day. Once her mother is buried in the cemetery, young Bola goes to visit her and talks to her in the same way in which many people find relief in talking aloud to a loved one when dealing with their death. However, one day she sees her mother coming alive and young Bola begins to spend all of her time at the cemetery and then at her old household. She is believed to be mad by her sisters, whom she does not even recognize because, according to her memory, the two women that sometimes come to visit her are older than her sisters are supposed to be. This is the first clear sign of young Bola's incapacity of moving on from the past, therefore engaging not only in the acting out of trauma by living in the fear that if she leaves her mother alone she will disappear again, but she is also living in a deeply delusional state of existence where she does not recognize the passing of time.

[71] Bernabei, Franca. "Transatlantic Poetics of Haunting." *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2011, p. 497.
[72] Moynagh, 2008, p. 63.

Besides seeing her mother, she is also able to see her mother's father (which would be her great-grandfather, since one must not forget that young Bola really is Eula's daughter) who is the child that at the beginning of the novel is identified with the one who stole Bola's footsteps and found Terre Bouillante without looking. His appearance shows how remembering and forgetting is an act that is passed down during generations, because as he recalls the death of his brother (the one taken by the hurricane mentioned in the first chapter of the novel), young Bola's mother reassures him by telling him "Father, you know how you get when you remember. Please forget" (ATF, 280), therefore implying that at times the act of remembering is painful to the extent that forgetting a loved one is a piece of advice to be taken into consideration.

Conversely, young Bola does not seem to conceive of forgetting as an option and she does not understand how her sisters could have forgotten their mother so fast, given the fact that she is always by her side, well visible to her eyes. As Kamena did when telling Bola to hold his memories during his search for Terre Bouillante, young Bola compares herself to her sisters by claiming that, while they are prone to forgetting, "our mother said that I had a good memory and she would give me little things to remember for her. I am full of memories for her […] I recall everything […] I never forget" (ATF, 289-290). On the other side, her sisters may have surpassed the loss of their mother either by sufficiently and healthily mourning her – which is the desirable but less probable option – or by heavily suppressing the trauma as exemplified in one of the sisters constantly insisting on the statement "well that's the end of that then" (ATF, 260-261, 265).

Young Bola not only seems to be stuck in a past where her mother is alive, but her time somehow mingles with that of her great-grandfather and the rest of Bola's sons and daughters. It could be argued that she is stuck in someone else's past. At a certain point in the novel, she also witnesses the appearance of Marie Ursule, limping and singing and cursing the white man's flesh and blood. However, the question is whether this time of reference is something finished or something that can be layered by ascribing it to a different temporality. Marie Ursule existed more than one hundred and fifty years before young Bola's birth, and yet the girl is able to live in the same time-space of Marie Ursule, Bola, Bola's children, and her grandmother. As stated by Lauren Gantz: "although the ghostly archive can bring the past and the present into contact,

allowing them to occupy the same physical and psychic space, it does not always bring them into conversation".[73] However, Brand provides yet another explanation for the reason for the superposition of different timelines in one temporal plane:

> There is time that is always happening. The time that is lost or forgotten or deliberately misplaced; the time well left unremembered or the time that is wasted on human stupidity; and the time that is unresolved and therefore unmoving […]. There is time in this archipelago that returns and returns because no one truly belongs here except the Arawak close to extinction and the Carib retreating into denser interiors down the South American Main. The rest are cargoes of human beings without a recognizable landscape, whether they are slaves or masters. (ATF, 36).

Marie Ursule and Bola's time is constantly re-emerging in the moments of the book when even the littlest of things can open a fold through time, be it a tune, a seashell, or something as vermillion as Marie Ursule's last morning. The several appearances scattered throughout the novel never match the intensity of young Bola's experiences, perhaps because, according to Franca Bernabei, young Bola has a specific role to fulfil:

> Along with her grandmother she has incorporated her transgenerational phantoms, their unvoiced secrets. She has become both a repository of memory and the melancholic, unconscious site of communal trauma. Incapable of accepting historical time as progress and change, she cultivates her excess of memory and her yearning for an ''old'' life. That is why she can't mourn, and thereby exorcise, her loss.[74]

According to Gantz "Young Bola provides hospitality for the ghosts in that she is *literally their host* – they emerge from her unconscious, where they have been interred by generations of family silence".[75] Yet, the eventuality of forgetfulness is clearly stated from the first pages of the book. The plotting of Marie Ursule's suicide is

[73] Gantz, Lauren J. "Archiving the Door of No Return in Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon." Meridians, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, p.136.
[74] Bernabei, 2011, p. 496.
[75] Gantz, 2016, pp. 134-135.

interspersed with her envisioning of the future, what sending her daughter Bola into the future could entail not only for her, but for the generations to come. Marie Ursule's decision is not a hope for the passing on of her legacy, she does not have such egoistic intentions when she decides to spare a child from death, she is aware that "centuries are forgetful places, Marie Ursule's great-greatgrandchildren would face the world too. But even that forgetfulness Marie Ursule had accounted for. Forgetfulness is true speech if anyone listens. (ATF, 18). In fact, in the various stories of her generation narrated by Brand, there are only a few mentions of Marie Ursule; sometimes she is clearly remembered, others she appears as a limping figure or she is not mentioned at all, but in the days preceding her final act "she had taken account of forgetfulness and remembrances" (ATF, 19) and decided that her sacrifice was not something to be done with the purpose of making others remember her grandiose act of rebellion. Bola's appearances are equally brief, but perhaps more significant. Maureen Moynagh resume parts of Plato's thinking when arguing that

> Brand develops a binary subset of the state of being where Marie Ursule and Bola both exist in the spiritual or uncreated world as well as the material human world. A difference lies in the fact that Marie Ursule's living state is not one of becoming, as she is confounded to the point of unavoidable death, and thus she remains in a *material state of negative being*. However, the Diaspora that will nonetheless spawn from Bola signifies the unborn spirits in her eyes, her *material state of positive being* […]. Bola certainly embodies this eternal state of becoming as an old woman rocking back and forth in the physical space occupied by her chair as well as throughout the mental space consumed by her memory.[76]

According to this distinction, Marie Ursule's appearances are closer to a memory with respect to Bola's performative manifestations, as exemplified in this confession by Eula to her mother while she was driving with Priest, Adrian, and Gita: "I remembered what you said about Marie Ursule with her iron ring, limping through forests. I saw her caught in vines and tangle, hurrying back before daylight. I thought that I heard the thudding of her ring on wood and stone until I opened my eyes and it was the rim of my tire on a curb" (ATF, 236). On the other side, Bola's interactions

[76] Laramee, Michael. "Maps of Memory and the Sea in Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon." Anthurium A Caribbean Studies Journal, vol. 6, no. 2, 2008, p. 8.

with the present are far more vivid, to a point in which she is able to mysteriously engage with her descendants: Private Sones "could clearly hear his grandmother laughing in another century" (ATF, 97) when resting under his tree, but "Marie Ursule, was not someone who could live another century" (ATF, 22). Contrarily to Eula's experience, this is not an image from which he awakes, it is a reality because Bola, unlike Marie Ursule, is able to transcend time as a tangible figure.

In the description of the years that young Bola passes alongside her late mother, Brand also decides to include the recital of parts of a poem by William Wordsworth titled "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". The title is already emblematic as it features a mention of immortality, as that of not only young Bola's mother, but also other characters that cyclically reappear from the past. In addition, the poem refers to childhood specifically, an echo of the fact that both Bola and young Bola were children when they were abandoned by Marie Ursule and Eula respectively, with the difference that young Bola does not have any memory of her real mother. The first cited verses of the poem are also evocative of one of the book's underlying themes. The portion of the poem cited reads: "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting […]" and it ends with the lines: "[…] nature yet remembers/What was so fugitive!" (ATF, 278-279). The inclusion of these verses, particularly the initial ones, seems to resume the very condition of slave descendants in the diaspora. They are born with forgetfulness as their legacy, remembrance as their sentence.

6.3 A threshold to haunting and longing

"The door exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures toward this door" (A MAP, 27). This citation represents just one of the many ways in which Brand tries to articulate the feeling of living with the lingering presence of the ghosts of the diaspora. There seems to be a continuous play, which the author also tries to transpose in the novel, between oxymorons: first of all, the door is described as something that "exists as through a prism, distorted and shimmering. As through heat waves across a vast empty space we see this door appearing and disappearing. An absent presence" (A MAP, 24). How can something that is absent be

also present? One explanation might be considering the door not as something absent, but as absence itself. The door cannot represent something that is absent, but it can certainly be a paradigm for absence. Since the door exists and is perceived, no matter how vaguely, it can also be referred to as a presence.

In the differentiation between absence and loss LaCapra argues that "when absence, approximated to loss, becomes the object of mourning, the mourning may (perhaps must) become impossible and turn continually back into endless melancholy. The approximation or even conflation of absence and loss induces a melancholic or impossibly mournful response to the closure of metaphysics, a generalized 'hauntology'".[77] The word hauntology was firstly used by post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* and was then adapted to a variety of fields, one of them being literature and, in this specific case, Caribbean and diasporic experiences of haunting. The word "supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive",[78] a definition that not only highly resonates with Brand's definition of the door, but also with ATF's Marie Ursule, Bola, and the nuns.

The merit of the development of a reasoning around the idea of hauntology is the fact that it is "part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought. The ghost becomes a focus for competing epistemological and ethical positions".[79] In both A MAP and ATF Brand focuses on the absent presences that linger through the present; while in A MAP she does it from an almost academic standpoint, in ATF she achieves it from a literary and at times lyrical perspective. Either way, her interest is funnelled towards the liminality of things, continuously accompanying the reader inside and outside the thresholds of time, space, and reality. Although this choice might be confusing for the reader, it allows the exploration of new dimensions of writing and literary analysis which contribute to the three-dimensionality of the novel.

[77] LaCapra, 1999, p. 715.
[78] Davis, Colin. "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms." *French Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2005, p. 373.
[79] Colin, 2005, p. 379.

As previously discussed, there are plenty of losses in ATF, but there is also one strong absence that contributes to the development of the novel's hauntology: the root. In the novel and the Caribbean in general, root is not lost but altogether absent. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to conflate this absence into a loss, therefore giving birth to the endless melancholy theorized by LaCapra. Since mourning is desired but impossible, the characters are assailed by their longing for rootedness and circled by fleeting appearances of the door, the combined action of these two pressures reminds them of the existence of an absent presence within their lives and fills them with longing; a longing that, however, is never matched to an object. Eula recalls a calypso about Los Iros and tells her mother that she has "never longed for Los Iros but I longed for longing for it […]. I wish there was a place like Los Iros that I could long for" (ATF, 242).

Brand lives a similar sorrow as that of Eula when in A MAP she recalls the inability of her grandfather to "summon up a vision of landscape or a people which would add up to a name", calling this inability "profoundly disturbing" (A MAP, 9). Brand longed for an object to attach to a sense of loss that was not even hers, but it was felt on a communal level in her everyday life: "Africa. It was the place we did not remember, yet it lodged itself in all the conversations of who we were. It was a visible secret" (A MAP, 21). She held on to this feeling and transformed it into one of the core aims of A MAP, which is "probing the Door of No Return as consciousness" (A MAP, 27). Her voracious longing for a place and an answer eventually lessened as she grew older and understood that her "grandfather's forgetting was not personal. It had been passed on to him by many, most especially the one in my family who stepped through the Door of No Return. It was a gift. Forgetting. The only gift that one, the one bending reluctantly toward the opening, could give" (A MAP, 178).

Perhaps with time she felt that she was leaning towards the door herself and began to understand that the insatiable sense of haunting and longing that she was feeling will inevitably become part of her life and herself. In fact, initially, Brand claims of having always been aware that people were "unhappy and haunted in some way. Life spoke in the blunt language of brutality, even beauty was brutal" but she "did not know what we were haunted by at the time" (A MAP, 14-15). The final acknowledgement of the door's presence in her adult life is not as comforting as one might believe. While

acknowledging is often referred to as the first step towards healing, in this case recovery is impossible. When recounting people who went to visit the actual door on Gorée island, Brand claims that "one does not return to the Diaspora with good news from the door except the news that it exists and that its existence is the truth. Its perpetual "no" denies them relief, denies an ending or reconciliation […]. No seeing can truly verify the door, no real place can actualize the lost place" (A MAP, 27).

On the subject of real and lost places, Kamena's search for Terre Bouillante is the epitome of the lack of sense of place and adds on to the impossibility of returning that permeates the novel. Kamena found Terre Bouillante in the culmination of his despair, when he was neither dead nor alive; through the first journey "Kamena acquired its ghostliness […]. He had no memory of his own mother, and what he knew of his life was not worth remembering" (ATF, 32). Forced to leave Terre Bouillante to fulfil his promise to Marie Ursule, he begins to realise that one cannot find the way to Terre Bouillante when alive. The maroonage site is a place where only ghosts can enter and where memory is not welcomed. Kamena carrying Bola implies carrying someone alive with hope and memory into a land that can only be reached through deep despair and forgetfulness. When he decides to pursue his search alone and return for Bola, he continuously asks her to hold his memories so that they would not obfuscate his frantic search. Terre Bouillante is his promised land because memory cannot exert its wickednesses on men that are turned into ghosts, and to Kamena it "was like entering his own blood" (ATF, 30).

On the other hand there is Culebra Bay, a place that only exists by virtue of memory and that is dwelled by the memories of Marie Ursule: Mere Marguerite and Soeur de Clémy. Bola is taken care of by the ghost of the Ursuline nuns (contrarily to young Bola, who is the one to take care of ghosts). According to Moynagh, "understanding melancholy as a means of keeping open a relationship to loss makes it possible to understand why Marie Ursule leaves her infant daughter Bola in the care of these ghosts",[80] since the reader is told that she summons them "the way one summons a bad memory believing it to be as usable as a good one" (ATF, 40). As the years pass, Kamena's returns become increasingly less frequent, Bola finds a way of escaping the man-o-war nuns by standing on a rock out in the sea and Culebra Bay attracts new

[80] Moynagh, 2008, p. 62.

people with the end of slavery. Bola is never portrayed as a child in distress when she is left alone by Kamena; however, she "witnesses Kamena's obsession with and eventual consumption by the past, and rejects that path for herself".[81] As a result she decides to engage in what Lauren Gantz calls "radical presentness";[82] she dwells perpetually in the present of Culebra Bay and refutes every memory that is not that of Marie Ursule. She "cannot travel back any farther than she can remember, and her memory is consumed by Culebra Bay, her rock and Marie Ursule",[83] Bola "only knows time in the memory of Marie Ursule" (ATF, 26).

Sayman, the boy who found Terre Bouillante without looking and who stole her footsteps, once stole a drawing that Bola made of the sight that she enjoyed from her rock and this drawing reached Eula, Sayman's granddaughter. Eula does not seem to understand the drawing: "there is no one in the drawing but the rock, the ocean, the far shore and man-o'-war birds in the air. She had so many children, so many lovers, so much life, I wondered why this is all she drew" (ATF, 254). Yet, in writing to her mother she realizes that what she longs for are not the children, the lovers, or the life, but the few things in Bola's drawing: "I would like a village where I might remain and not a village I would leave. A village with tin shacks and flame trees. A village like the one […] where great Mama Bola once lived. A village that I long for" (ATF, 247). Eula is not only burdened with longing for something specific, she also longs for longing, which is perhaps worse; she "desires exactly what her great-grandmother Bola has left with her, and what she and Dear Mama have left with young Bola: the image of Culebra Bay and the representative longing of the Diaspora as a result of displacement".[84]

When the drawing is discovered by young Bola, her being a bridge across timelines makes her feel immediately connected to the picture: "sometimes the drawing of the far shore disturbs me. There was something familiar about it" (ATF, 286), she seems to know the object of her longing, which is her house, but she is simultaneously aware that "the picture was for some other longing, which came and went when I looked at it" (ATF, 286), she decides not to dive in a past that she does not perceive as hers, leaving the longing of the drawing to her ghostly mother.

[81] Gantz, 2016, p. 141.
[82] Gantz, 2016, p. 140.
[83] Laramee, 2008, p. 3.
[84] Laramee, 2008, p. 5.

When young Bola initially finds the drawing, she licks the sand off of it, realizing that she "had never tasted sand before" and that "It was salty" (ATF, 283). She explains that she "licked the sand because maybe this was my mother's way of taking me to the sea. I licked the sand and I smelled the sea in it" (ATF, 284). This apparently isolated episode might be tied to other moments in the novel when the characters are caught in the act of licking sand and/or tasting salt: Cordelia found one pink shell like the ones Bola used to blow and "felt like drinking from them, tasting the salt and the pearl of her great-grandparents' Desire", she "licked the shells, feeling the last warm blood of the abuela's deeds fall out of her" (ATF, 120), and Private Sones licked the dirt off the ground only to realize that he was no longer at home. A possible explanation for the act of tasting the saltiness of the sand is Brand's reminiscence of an African story "Africans born in Africa were said to know how to fly. If when they arrived in the Americas, one legend has it, they did not eat salt, they could fly back home. Salt would weigh them down or turn their blood" (A MAP, 40). Brand including various passages concerning salt could therefore be an additional way in which she tries to state the impossibility of returning for her characters.

To conclude this chapter, ATF is a story full of traumatic losses and prevailing absences. The reaction of each character, although modulated according to their lived experience, eventually leads into an insurmountable feeling of longing and haunting determined by the impossibility of determining the object of their mourning. The immediate avoidance of the uneasiness of these feelings is the desire to forget, which is nevertheless contrasted by an equally urgent desire to remember, an act that can be as soothing as it is painful. Brand bases much of her characters' development on the interplay between the two poles and places her protagonist alongside different points in the forgetting-remembering continuum, some moving, some stuck. As hypothesized by Brand, who moves alongside this continuum herself, at the origin of this shifting there is the haunting spell cast by the physical and metaphysical space of the door of no return, which serves as a point of connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead, therefore rendering the lives of the inhabitants of the diaspora hopelessly haunted by a door that can in no way be closed.

A beautifully written passage describes the upcoming descendants of Marie Ursule, already accounting for their inexplicable recklessness:

> The lives of her great-great-grandchildren, their lives would spill all over floors and glass cases and the verandas and the streets in the new world coming. Their hearts would burst. When asked they will say they had no reason for knifing someone or blowing a kiss. They had no reason at all for sitting numb, with cocaine or gin or music coursing through their fingers. Singers will pierce them dipping into their ribs. They would come to be whatever impulse gathered the greater in them, like threatened forests flowering. (ATF, 20)

Despite not being a canonically positive outcome, the feeling conveyed by this prediction overwhelms the reader with life. As Adair stated: "this is a vision of an uncertain future which does not deny the suffering it may entail, but which, in imagining lives which will spill—like spilled blood and flood tides – out of the frame of racist colonial modernity, offers radical and yet unknown possibilities".[85] The lives of the characters are neither intact nor undamaged, they are fragmented by history and they are spilling in all directions; this spillage might be a blessing for some and a curse for others, and this is well exemplified by the variety – yet simultaneous similarity – of the characters' lives.

[85] Adair, 2019, p. 126.

Conclusions

By exploring the complexity of the diasporic experience presented in Brand's novel, this thesis examined the variety of themes that contributed to the formation of the relationship between past and present for three generations of Afro-Caribbean subjectivities. Since the shaping and changing of any identity is the result of multiple factors, this work used the variety of ATF's stories to examine the influence wielded by a range of different elements in the definition of the consequences of the Black Diaspora, with its main aftermath being the erasure of genealogy and the corrosion of ancestry.

The field of diasporic studies is a flourishing one in which Brand has found her own niche in experimental poetry and coral novels. Her works seldom linger in the past, in order to focus on present-day problems and concerns of black people, issues that are inevitably tied to their connection to the Middle Passage. The scattering of their ancestry makes it difficult to linearly retrace their present to their past, and since the past – not only the immediate one, but also the communal and ancient one – partly determines a person's present self, their sense of identity results compromised.

As an part of the diaspora and a second-generation Afro-Caribbean herself, Brand's life in Toronto has always been impacted by her past's fragmentations, which she tries to come to terms with through the therapeutic act par excellence: writing. Among her rich body of work, there are cases in which the reader can hardly identify the author's clear opinionated thoughts on the diaspora. Whilst her feminist and political beliefs are explicitly stated in her non-fictional works and essays, in Brand's novels her thoughts on the diaspora does not transpire as easily. She rather opts for a wider approach aimed at encompassing totality at the expense of specificity. Her choice to not impose her considerations on the reader, despite treating an issue that has implications in every conceivable field of a person's reality, represents an unusual choice in similar writings and positions Brand as a trailblazer in postcolonial and neo-slave literature.

In order to understand the author's innovative stance in writing, Brand must be seen in relation to a literary canon which, despite some modifications, is still in place in postcolonial studies. Chapter 2 aimed to provide an entry point for understanding how

Brand's vision and writing style contribute to a redefinition of Black Atlantic studies, while offering a unique Afro-Caribbean Canadian perspective. However, it is necessary to remember that the author's insight into Toronto's life and the shaping of Canadian identities result in a reflection that is less preoccupied with the country's involvement in slavery than it is with the country's role as a destination for diasporic subjects.

Brand's focus is heavily centred on the present, with the writer turning to the past only to retrieve information impacting the present or explaining it. Gilroy's thinking, which firstly warned against limiting concepts such as ethnicity and nationalism, is followed by Brand's warning against the development of a certain solidity. Her ideology does not come as anti-Canadianess specifically, yet she appears critical of every attempt at clearly defining selfhood through categories that have national borders as their main significance. Even the concept of Englishness, so strongly felt in the immediate post-colonial period, is far surpassed by ATF's characters, with Private Sones being a brief exception when, after a short moment of disillusion, he realises the pointlessness of his British desire. Brand's philosophy seems to move towards fluidity of not only borders, but also sex and identity.

The initial common disregard of other actors besides the USA and England as participants in the Black Atlantic was followed by a great concern with Africa as the true motherland to which eventually to return. However, Brand firmly states the impossibility of this return for diasporic subjects whose selves have been broken. This dramatically illustrates the difficulty in developing a sense of community between people whose genealogies have crumbled under slavery. Brand makes her own attempt at restoring an idea of community by using the Door of No Return as communal consciousness, therefore trying to unite people through pain rather than origins, land, or ideologies.

Canada, as one of the abovementioned overlooked actors in Girloy's Black Atlantic as well as in other postcolonial works, is home to a great number of successful Caribbean-descendant writers and diasporic people in general. However, despite having the characteristics to be a multicultural space, it still presents some problems with allowing even second-generation migrants to feel welcomed and not become just the country's black minority. On the other side of the spectrum, being affiliated with Marxist ideologies, Brand's writing does not particularly praise globalization either, and

in ATF there are no elements that could make the reader think that she supports the interconnectedness promoted by a globalized world.

In an interview with Rinaldo Walcott and Leslie Sanders, she explained how much of her inspiration for the characters in ATF came from things she randomly saw at the time of writing, such as a man on the corner of a street or a woman through a window in Amsterdam. Her point of departure with ATF has never been political or sociological in the first place, since even the historical parts of the book were never intended to turn it into a historical novel. She is "not looking at something called History. But something like, a small impression in a book".[86] With fiction, Brand takes a rest from her duty as an activist in order to devote herself to a freer version of writing:

> All black writers are expected to make signs for other people that will identify black bodies and code them. So that someone who's living this other life will be able to identify what's this that's happening now, and why this is happening now. I don't want the job of addressing, or signing "black behavior." This is just this guy I saw on a corner, that I was curious about. This is just curiosity.[87]

With her effortlessness and lack of a pre-existent objective when creating and writing specific characters, Brand manages to give rise to an inclusive space of representation which does not become limited to black people. Not only those who shared a similar experience to her can identify with her books. While some of the themes are specific to the Black Diaspora, others are shared worldwide and make Brand's narration accessible and compelling from every cultural background.

One of the elements that especially calls to diasporic subjects is water. When writing, Brand asks herself "how to write what looks like journeys across water, across mind, space, and how people are always able to adapt, to fit, to figure out how to do this hustle which life has presented us with".[88] As illustrated in Chapter 3, ATF's characters inhabit the Black Atlantic space, but not every one of them embarks on actual journeys across water, some of them have journeys that only look like they are moving through

[86] Sanders, Leslie, and Rinaldo Walcott. "At the Full and Change of CanLit: An Interview with Dionne Brand." *Canadian Woman Studies* vol. 20, no. 2, 2000, p. 24.
[87] Sanders and Walcott, 2000, p. 25.
[88] Sanders and Walcott, 2000, p. 23.

water. While the book does not specifically start with a crossing, it is implied in the undisclosed past of the foremother, Marie Ursule, whose occasional French expressions lead one to think that she has been uprooted more than once in her life. The characters, scattered everywhere, themselves face a conscious journey through water and across the ocean, with some of them remaining in their place of birth while others move to North America, Canada, or even Europe.

Water, the sea, and the ocean almost represent another character in the novel, one that is able to connect their lives where ancestry and genealogy failed. However, the ability of the sea to become a place of Relation is always subjected to its constant movements, therefore it would be wrong to assume that there is the possibility to achieve the same linearity of ancestry through water connection. Since the sea cannot be ruptured and cannot be fragmented, in the book it becomes a secure pathway and a comforting place for the characters, as it is for Brand herself. The ocean in ATF takes as much as it leaves, being haunting and consoling at once, yet always allowing the connection they lack.

While the characters are all connected through water, in the family structure there is no connection or mention of the male counterpart to female progenitors Marie Ursule and Bola. Bearing in mind Brand's feminist beliefs, her portrayal of the stereotypical male masculinity is carefully eluded without, however, being perceived as a forced omission made with the sole purpose of affirming an ideological statement. When stereotypical masculinity is displayed, it is immediately counterbalanced by expressions of failure and vulnerability. Chapter 4 discussed how not only male, but also female roles are undermined to display once again diasporic variety and consequences in familiar and romantic relationships involving subaltern subjects.

Although it is true that women are immediately portrayed as stronger and more grounded than men, they are not transformed into inviolable superheroes just because their role in life and literature usually positions them on the opposite side of the spectrum. In the reality of the diaspora, men are usually expected to assert their masculinity in a new environment while women often end up caring for the family while doing occasional jobs. In ATF, both fail to comply with the norm of their gender; men are overwhelmed by weaknesses while women reject motherhood. This rejection is also one of the consequences of ancestral breakages. The lack of awareness and the

impossibility of past knowledge lead female characters to an altered consideration of motherhood, which heaps into problematic relationships with their mothers and their own role as mothers. Their broken selves are not ready to properly welcome the unity and innocence of a child in their lives. Moreover, violence and rape are equally experienced by both genders, with males reacting worse than women to these occurrences. Resignation plays a key role in the female response, which might suggest that Brand's revolutionary characterization of women remains close to the reality of their condition, only granting her female protagonists few sporadic victories.

ATF's impossibility of tracing a line and other structural characteristics of the novel emphasize its perception as a story about reconnecting with one's own roots. This impression, as explained in Chapter 5, could wrongfully lead to the individuation of Marie Ursule or Bola as the root, a vision that is also highly influenced by the tree-like image portrayed by the family structure. The root, which is actually absent, could be substituted by the far more suitable concept of rhizome in the meaning theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. When addressing the characteristics that define a rhizome, ATF easily fits in the two authors' determinations. Being a story about people's lives spilt across the world with the multicultural Caribbean as a background, the multiplicity of ATF has little to do with the unity embodied by the Western root tradition. The rhizome is a fluid system that agrees with Brand's vision of the experience of the diaspora, and which, thanks to Glissant, became an acknowledged descriptor of the Caribbean space.

The fragmentation of genealogical lines in the diaspora is already contemplated by the structure of the rhizome, which expands through ruptures. Root breakages, on the other hand, represent weakening occurrences. Nevertheless, the two paradigms are not complete opposites; the analysis of ATF from a Deleuzian standpoint has proven to be an effective framework of reference for this novel, yet it might be argued that an arborescent consideration of Brand's work could not be completely wrong. This is true only to the extent to which there is also the awareness of its rhizomatic nature, otherwise the root-oriented analysis can only end up being naive and ultimately incomplete. While to some people in the diaspora it might be reaffirming or soothing to place their roots in the sometimes mystified Africa, they must be aware that the connection they are making is not as linear as they would hope for it to be. The linearity

of tree structures is only possible by virtue of the fact that the lines only represent a tracing on the map that is the rhizome.

Finally, Chapter 6 addressed how ATF's representations of trauma are abundant as are its consequences and coping mechanisms. Brand's approach to trauma is a double one; in an attempt not to limit herself and be cast uniquely as a black writer, she addresses two levels of trauma. The first type involves experiences to which the totality of the readers can identify to different degrees, such as death, rape, or abandonment. The second type of trauma is more specific to slave descendants and diasporic subjects because it is devoid of an object. It can be argued that one of the reasons that inspired Brand to write on such topics might have been a need for representation and comprehension. The beauty of engaging in literature is being able to know that you are writing and reading something that is not only helpful to you, but to which millions of people can equally relate. It contributes to the creation of a sense of community, a sense that Brand, as other diasporic subjects, lacked and perhaps wanted to retrieve through writing.

When there is a trauma that does not have an object, it cannot be tackled in the same way as common traumas. Being prevented from the possibility of processing, the individual is thrown into a spiral of remembering and forgetting. Bola even forgets to be pregnant, she is not touched by anything that is not related to her memory of Marie Ursule. Conversely, young Bola seems obsessed with remembering and gets attached to the slightest of things. The characters navigate between these two extremes, and it inevitably leads them to feel haunted and longing for something unknown. The lack of an object might even prevent the ability to long itself, thus making a person long even for the feeling of longing. The inability of escaping these emotions ends up becoming almost a founding trait for those in the diaspora, who are forced to take upon themselves a weight that remains unfamiliar to the majority of people.

In conclusion, Brand's absorbing novel brings the reader into a ghostly and at times fascinating reality, which depicts how contemporary lives are forever impacted by lines that started breaking centuries ago with the Middle Passage. Aside from the author's laudable political battles, in her works on how black people experience the diaspora, little space is left for hopes of healing. ATF itself is deprived of a happy ending because, as a novel that is as mystical as it is grounded, it complies with the

depiction of a harsh reality in which there is no successful outcome for those in the diaspora. Brand claims "I'm giving up on land to light on"[89] as she continues to create stories of adaptation rather than recovery.

[89] Brand, Dionne. *Land to Light On*. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1997, p. 48.

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Summary in Italian

É il 1824 e in una piantagione di schiavi si sta silenziosamente organizzando un suicidio di massa capeggiato dalla schiava ribelle Marie Ursule. Queste sono le premesse del romanzo *At the Full and Change of the Moon* scritto dall'autrice afro-canadese Dionne Brand e pubblicato nel 1999. Seguendo l'albero genealogico proposto all'inizio del romanzo, la storia narra le vicende dei discendenti di Marie Ursule attraverso il tempo e lo spazio, collegandone le storie in maniera a volte evidente ed altre appena accennata. L'esistenza di queste storie è resa possibile dalla figlia di Marie Ursule, Bola, nata nella piantagione prima del compimento del suicidio. La sopravvivenza di bambini nati nelle piantagioni è un fatto storicamente poco frequente per molteplici ragioni: le condizioni di vita delle madri portavano spesso a gravidanze problematiche e le regole del tempo stabilivano che i figli nati in schiavitù sarebbero diventati automaticamente schivai, un destino che nessuna madre augurerebbe al proprio figlio. Inoltre, non di rado le schiave erano vittime di stupro, il che portava a gravidanze indesiderate e spesso all'aborto. Marie Ursule stessa è descritta come una donna che ha abortito più volte, ma sua figlia Bola viene salvata in virtù della sua somiglianza con il mare, una somiglianza che porta con sé l'idea di orizzonte, futuro, speranza. Per Marie Ursule ed i suoi compagni, risoluti nella loro decisione, queste parole significano ormai poco, ma gli occhi taglienti di una bambina faranno sì che la discendenza della schiava ribelle si protragga nei secoli.

L'acqua e il mare che Marie Ursule vede in Bola sono elementi da sempre scelti da scrittori e poeti, ma con riferimento a schiavitù e Caraibi essi rappresentano una costante in ogni opera postcoloniale. L'acqua è sia una presenza confortante che una minaccia; l'oceano Atlantico ha inghiottito centinaia di migliaia di schiavi ed è stato il vettore della tratta per eccellenza. Tuttavia, nel romanzo l'oceano è il luogo che più di tutti offre conforto e sicurezza ai personaggi, probabilmente per la sua sovrapposizione con il personaggio di Bola, una figura che, seppur materna, incarna alla perfezione l'ambivalenza dell'acqua. Di tutte le speculazioni fatte sul ruolo di questo elemento nell'ambito delle teorie postcoloniali, gli spunti offerti da Édouard Glissant e Kamau Brathwaite sono probabilmente i più adatti a fare da sfondo teorico ad un romanzo come ATF.

Con Glissant viene innanzitutto ribaltata l'idea di abisso e di ignoto, che vengono proposti come elementi fondamentali attraverso i quali solo coloro nati nell'abisso dell'Atlantico Nero possono muoversi. Inoltre, l'acqua è il veicolo attraverso cui un'identità di Relazione – e quindi ibrida – nasce, si sviluppa e soprattutto si muove. La Relazione è come l'acqua, ovvero sempre in movimento. L'immobilità ne rappresenta il peggior nemico poiché ne esaurisce il potere creativo. I Caraibi, vista la loro posizione e la loro popolazione, sono il luogo ideale in cui la Relazione si manifesta nella sua struttura di cerchio aperto attraverso cui la Relazione si crea e si distrugge costantemente.

Per quanto riguarda l'approccio di Brathwaite, il concetto di *tidalectics* da lui sviluppato usa la marea come metafora e risulta di gran lunga più opaco rispetto a quello di Relazione di Glissant. Seppur simile nei contenuti, l'idea di *tidalectics* è forse la più adatta alle esperienze dei personaggi del romanzo. Il suo punto di partenza è l'immagine di una donna che l'autore vede intenta nell'atto di spazzare la sabbia. Incuriosito dal fatto, Brathwaite è ossessionato dalle ragioni di questo rituale, che prende una piega quasi onirica quando, una mattina, egli nota la donna spazzare la sabbia, ma ad egli sembra che i piedi della donna non si stiano più muovendo sulla sabbia, ma sull'acqua, come se la donna stesse in qualche modo ripercorrendo le tracce della tratta atlantica col suo rituale. Da questa immagine nasce una considerazione delle maree come quel movimento ripetitivo, ma mai uguale, che ha in sé infinito potere creativo. Il percorso di coloro che vivono nella diaspora non seguirebbe quindi un ciclo, ma il movimento delle maree in un continuo andare per ritornare ogni volta diversi rispetto a come si è partiti. Questo movimento si rivela importante anche per la struttura stessa del romanzo, che può sembrare ciclica solo in apparenza. Nonostante l'albero genealogico inizi con Marie Ursule e Bola e finisca con una bambina di nome Bola che assomiglia molto alla sua progenitrice, la visione di ATF come di una storia circolare ne oscura la complessità e ne limita il significato.

A questo proposito, l'opera di Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari *A thousand plateaus* può essere usata come base teorica per fornire ad ATF un'alternativa al concetto di origine che più si adatti alla struttura del libro e al pensiero dell'autrice. Nell'introduzione al loro saggio i due autori presentano dei principi per la classificazione di un rizoma, principi che possono essere facilmente applicati alla

narrazione di ATF e alla sua struttura. Innanzitutto è necessario abbandonare il concetto di radice, estremamente consolidato in occidente, in favore del più elastico concetto di rizoma. Mentre nel mondo occidentale tutto prende la forma di una radice che dall'unità si divide, luoghi eterogenei come i Caraibi necessitano di una forma di rappresentazione più libera, molteplice, ovvero il rizoma. Tenendo presente questa distinzione, l'albero genealogico presentato all'inizio del romanzo dovrebbe essere considerato orizzontalmente, come una struttura genealogica interconnessa ma senza una chiara radice in Marie Ursule o Bola. Inoltre, il sistema radice rappresenta un'entità più debole rispetto al rizoma poiché una lesione ne compromette la sopravvivenza, mentre nel rizoma una rottura dà vita a quelle che vengono definite come linee di fuga, che a discapito del nome continuano ad essere parte costitutiva del rizoma. La genealogia presentata in ATF è indubbiamente una genealogia frammentata, erosa dalla tratta e dalle memorie che non sono riuscite ad essere tramandate. Tuttavia questa frammentazione ha dato vita a linee di fuga che seppur caratterizzate da una rottura rimangono parte della struttura genealogica senza che questa ne risulti indebolita.

La risoluzione finale dei due autori, nonostante il loro auspicare per una realtà rizomatica e l'abbandono della limitante idea di radice, è quella di considerare la radice solo in relazione alla sua esistenza con il rizoma. Nel chiarificare questo punto essi concepiscono la radice come traccia ed il rizoma come mappa. La traccia di per sé è limitante mentre la sola mappa può essere disorientante, ma sovrapposte danno la possibilità di avere un'immagine più completa della realtà. Applicato ad ATF, è possibile considerate la struttura genealogica iniziale con Marie Ursule come punto di partenza solo tenendone presente la natura rizomatica, il che implica essere coscienti del fatto che l'accesso alla struttura possa avvenire da qualsiasi punto della struttura senza che questa perda di significato. In questo senso la narrazione di Brand non solo non contempla la possibilità di una genealogia, anzi, ne rifiuta la natura dando vita ad un anti-genealogia capace di sovvertire l'idea di discendenza che influisce così pesantemente sul senso di identità dei soggetti diasporici.

Proseguendo con la narrazione del romanzo, Bola viene affidata a Kamena (forse il compagno di Marie Ursule), ma cresce quasi da sola nel fittizio spazio di Culebra Bay, dove dà alla luce, in maniera non curante, quattordici figli. I suoi nipoti e pronipoti sono i protagonisti delle storie narrate nei vari capitoli nel libro. Queste storie,

apparentemente affrontabili come singoli avvenimenti, contribuiscono alla creazione di un romanzo che riesce a mostrare la varietà di realtà esistenti e incarnate dalle vittime della diaspora, costrette ad un continuo riadattamento del loro essere dovuto alle mire espansionistiche dei paesi europei nei secoli.

Di luna piena e di luna calante. Questi sono i momenti in cui è ideale approdare nelle coste dell'isola per rilasciare il prezioso carico delle navi provenienti dall'Africa, e questa è la frase, pronunciata dal cartografo di Re Giorgio III, che fornisce a Brand il titolo del suo romanzo. Tutta la narrazione ha come filo rosso le conseguenze della tratta atlantica a più di due secoli dalla fine della schiavitù. Tutt'oggi i discendenti di chi ha affrontato questo passaggio sono costretti ad emigrare in ogni parte del mondo, dando vita ad una continua diaspora che da secoli mina il senso di identità di milioni di persone. L'immagine più citata relativa a questo spostamento è ancora quella dell'Atlantico Nero, uno spazio teorizzato da Paul Gilroy negli anni '80 dove per la prima volta si mettono in dubbio categorie dapprima considerate come verità intoccabili e dove si affronta il fatto storico della schiavitù non come un'oscura parentesi della storia europea da dimenticare, ma come avvenimento costitutivo della modernità nella sua interezza. Quest'ultima considerazione mette in crisi le ideologie razziste in quanto afferma che un'identità pura e superiore come veniva considerata quella Britannica è in realtà il frutto della contaminazione con altri popoli. L'apporto di Gilroy è importante per la messa in discussione del paradigma storico stabilito dall'occidente, che ha imposto la sua storia a livello universale con una tale veemenza che tutt'oggi è difficile distanziarsi dalla sua egemonia.

Tuttavia, vi sono stati e vi sono tutt'ora movimenti volti a contrastare quest'andamento in favore di una riappropriazione delle proprie origini o di un'accettazione della propria identità come ibrida, eterogenea, facendo di quello che prima era visto come una debolezza il proprio punto di forza. La visione di Brand rimane indifferente al concetto – a suo dire restrittivo – di origine, per focalizzarsi più profondamente sull'idea di ibridità come identità fluida, indefinibile, sempre in mutamento. Seppur efficace, quest'approccio si rivela difficile da mantenere a causa delle molteplici forze che ogni giorno spingono verso l'idea di identità come definizione. Questa è la tendenza naturale dell'essere umano, egli ha bisogno di definire la realtà per comprenderla ed il concetto di fluidità lo turba e lo confonde. La stessa

Brand è vittima di questa tendenza quando, nella sua opera sul concetto di appartenenza (*A Map to the Door of No Return)*, descrive la sensazione di vuoto causata dalla mancata conoscenza delle sue origini. L'ombra inquietante di questo vuoto viene associata con l'entità fisica e immaginaria di una porta. Fisicamente questa è la porta dalla quale gli schiavi passavano e non facevano più ritorno nell'isola di Gorée, Senegal, ma a livello metafisico la porta è una presenza di cui chi oggi vive la diaspora non riesce a liberarsi. Essa rappresenta il punto in cui il legame con il loro passato è stato spezzato, e l'eco di questa rottura impera sulla loro quotidianità.

La frattura di questo legame è la fonte di un trauma che continua ad essere tramandato. La particolarità di questo tipo di trauma intergenerazionale è la mancanza di un oggetto di riferimento, il che rende impossibile attuare azioni efficaci volte alla risoluzione definitiva del problema. Il recupero dell'oggetto è reso impossibile dalla rottura col passato e quindi dall'assenza di una memoria attraverso la quale poter agevolmente rintracciare la propria ascendenza. Nonostante la mancanza di un oggetto, le sensazioni comunemente associate col trauma permangono nei soggetti diasporici, che si ritrovano intrappolati in un circolo vizioso per cui desiderano dimenticare e ricordare allo stesso tempo. La volontà di ricordare è spesso accompagnata da sentimenti di nostalgia e desiderio per qualcosa che rimane indefinibile, dando nuovamente vita ad un sentimento senza oggetto.

Nel romanzo ogni personaggio vive queste emozioni e sviluppa diverse modalità di adattamento anche in base ad ulteriori traumi vissuti. Sentimenti di nostalgia si manifestano spesso in concomitanza all'apparizione di Bola, Marie Ursule o altri personaggi come figure spettrali che si palesano per tormentare il personaggio che in quel momento è capace di vederle. Solo per la giovane Bola il fantasma di quella che lei crede sia sua madre, ma che in verità è sua nonna, si presenta non come una figura che perseguita quanto più una figura che accompagna la giovane Bola attraverso il trauma della sua morte, un avvenimento che blocca la ragazza in un limbo al di fuori del tempo dal quale non riesce ad uscire poiché ossessionata dalla paura di dimenticare.

Brand, nata nell'isola di Trinidad ma successivamente trasferitasi in Canada, rappresenta la fluidità sotto il punto di vista narrativo e identitario, ma la sua intera opera letteraria è la prova che non c'è modo di liberarsi dello spettro della porta o scappare dal senso di inadeguatezza. Se in certi momenti disprezza Toronto e anela i

Caraibi o l'Africa, in altri abbraccia la sua vita canadese e fa di Toronto la sua casa. Il Canada, data anche la sua parte francofona, ospita molti discendenti di immigrati, ma non è per tutti uno spazio accogliente. Dato il suo doppio ruolo di spazio colonizzato ma partecipe della tratta, esso è per certi esempio di multiculturalità, mentre per altri, tra cui Brand, rimane ancora troppo legato alle sue radici europee rivelandosi quindi uno spazio discriminante.

Un ulteriore fattore di discriminazione affrontato nel romanzo è quello legato al ruolo di uomini e donne in ambito postcoloniale e della diaspora. Per molti anni la narrazione postcoloniale è stata unilaterale, costituita solo dal punto di vista maschile sia a livello narrativo che a livello accademico. L'opera che fa da spartiacque per l'introduzione della figura femminile è *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, saggio provocatorio dell'accademica Gayatri Spivak. La sua teorizzazione della donna come figura subalterna sottoposta ad un ulteriore sottomissione dal punto di vista patriarcale ha riportato in auge il concetto di subalterno espresso per la prima volta da Antonio Gramsci, portando in primo piano problematiche quali lo scarso accesso alla rappresentazione della figura femminile e la sua relegazione – spesso da parte dell'intellettuale maschio occidentale – ad una figura alla quale non solo è stata tolta la parola, ma a cui vengono attribuite, senza possibilità di intervento, parole altrui.

L'intero romanzo presenta figure maschili ossessionate dalla possibilità di perdere la loro virilità e figure femminili che rifiutano il concetto di maternità innalzandosi, con vari gradi di successo, dalla loro posizione subalterna. Nonostante la visione dell'autrice sia ricostruibile dal suo impegno civile e politico, nonché da altre sue opere, in ATF al lettore è lasciata ampia libertà sull'interpretazione delle situazioni proposte da Brand. Più che guidare il lettore verso una determinata considerazione del genere maschile o del genere femminile, Brand decide di presentare una varietà di situazioni, escludendo la classica rappresentazione che di solito viene fatta dei due generi. Questa scelta sembra voler sottolineare il fatto esista uno spettro molto ampio attraverso cui uomini e donne possono muoversi e che nell'esperienza della diaspora spesso il soggetto si sente forzato a soddisfare i requisiti che la società impone solo al fine di sentirsi più accettato.

In più istanze e da molteplici punti di vista, Brand sottolinea come l'impossibilità di riparare le rotture nel passato di coloro che fanno parte della diaspora

dia vita a realtà estremamente diversificate, ma tutte ugualmente problematiche. Il romanzo analizzato in questa tesi, nonostante la varietà delle storie che racconta, non concede ai suoi personaggi alcun tipo di lieto fine. Le loro vite rimangono sospese in quel limbo che caratterizza la diaspora e Brand assolve il compito di rappresentare una complessità di cui lei stessa si vede protagonista.