

## FORM, GENRE AND THE THEMATICS OF COMMUNITY IN CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S WRITING

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My thoughts here are framed by what I see as two moments of crisis in my contemporary Caribbean, one political and regional and the other, personal and professional. The first has to do with what Faith Smith calls "the violence of the heteronormative postcolonial state" (138), violence which is reaching epidemic proportions in the region. Domestic violence, male on male gang violence, hate crimes against racial groups and non-heterosexuals - it is the stuff of everyday reporting. In Jamaica, the exceptional nature of a 'Murder Free Day' makes the headlines of the national newspaper. And three men "branded as homosexuals" have to be rescued by the police from an angry mob ("approximately 2,000 people . . . which included men, women, teenagers and small children") who "hurled insults [and stones] at the three men, with some calling for them to be killed."<sup>1</sup> Recent events in Guyana beggar belief. The Barbados Daily Nation reports a "culture of death stalking Trinidad and Tobago as family and friends bade farewell to a 16-year-old student who was stabbed to death during a fracas at school."<sup>2</sup> Yet in relatively safe, stable Barbados, a man drops a large boulder onto a woman's face after raping her, "crushing the left side of her face into her brain." He asserts in court that "The Lord knows I love she."<sup>3</sup> It gets closer and closer to my home: a female student is held up and sexually assaulted at knife point on a path leading to the University, and it takes five days before Campus Security turns up at her apartment to take a statement. Significantly, she is a non-Barbadian.

This relates to another kind of tacitly sanctioned verbal violence in Barbadian public fora against 'foreigners,' formerly directed against 'white shadows' and more recently, against Indo-Guyanese immigrants; against women who do not know their place; and against 'perverts,' a shorthand term for transgressive sexualities located outside the heteropatriarchal norm. These acts of violence are committed by citizens of sovereign Caribbean territories against their own. But, as Jacqui Alexander queries, *who* is a 'citizen' – that is, who can be assured of their rights in our heteronormative postcolonial states?

Faced with this crisis of violence, what is my response as a teacher and 'scholar' of Caribbean women's writing? I want, then, to query the nature of what we do when we 'do' Caribbean women's writing in the regional academy. The much publicized "Decline and Fall of Literature" (see Delblanco) has filtered into public consciousness, along with doubts about the relevance of literary studies, so that in the Caribbean academy, far more respect accrues to the study of social science and professional disciplines which

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<sup>1</sup>Karyl Walker, "Cops Save Three Alleged Homosexuals from Angry Crowd," Jamaica Observer, Thursday, February 15, 2007.

<<[http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20070214T220000-0500\\_119155\\_OBS\\_COPS\\_SAVE\\_THREE\\_ALLEGED\\_HOMOSEXUALS\\_FROM\\_ANGRY\\_CROWD.asp](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20070214T220000-0500_119155_OBS_COPS_SAVE_THREE_ALLEGED_HOMOSEXUALS_FROM_ANGRY_CROWD.asp)>>

<sup>2</sup>Daily Nation, Wednesday, March 5, 2008: 13A.

<sup>3</sup>"Crushed by his Love," Sunday Sun, July 3, 2005: 16A.

are seen as a fast track to the accumulation of capital. Since our governments tell us our capital resides in our people and culture, everyone wants to manage people (as labour/ capital), and 'cultural studies' is perceived as more 'connected' to everyday life; both social sciences and cultural studies are valorized as offering insights into the state of our crumbling communities. What of literature and the arts? In an unpublished lecture given at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies many years ago, Gordon Rohlehr presciently expressed concern at the contempt for things of the sensibility which our societies have unconsciously bred in the minds of young men who have absorbed a notion of development based on the idea of science and technology, to the exclusion of the Arts. Is this now as true for Caribbean women, who make up the majority of my students?

Is it the case that attending to Caribbean women's narratives constitutes a luxury, a pastime for students en route to the 'real world' of work? Does the ethos of 'dollar dollar bill, y'all' reign supreme in our classrooms? And more insidiously, is the writing itself increasingly shaped by economic/publishing imperatives, and the marketability of specific political (racial, sexual, national) orientations? Or can we revisit the notion that women's fictions and the visions they construct, particularly the projection of affective communities, *can* effect epistemological change? Wilson and Mordecai asserted in 1989 that in the face of "contempt for things of the sensibility" (xiii), women's writing refers "directly to issues of value" (xiii), making judgements "against the valuing of *things* and for the valuing of *people*" (xiii). Is such "ethical purchase," as Alison Donnell puts it, part of the way we teach this writing or have we ceased to believe that there is a link between textual exegesis and the achievement of social change?<sup>4</sup> Do we all share a belief in what Andrew Delblanco terms the connection of "aesthetic response with moral . . . knowledge, and even with the imperative to take reformist action on the world"?

Certainly, Caribbean women's writing has helped to foreground what has *not* been achieved in our societies: the emancipation of the marginal (race and ethnic groups, queer subjectivities, underclass women and children). I want to look briefly at the work of Oonya Kempadoo, Shani Mootoo, Erna Brodber and Dionne Brand (among others ) to query whether they offer us *alternatives* to this failure; whether in their imagined communities we may find transformative way to read our worlds. Reviewing Alexander's *Pedagogies*, Tracy Robinson observes that "Caribbean feminism has been a potent force in articulating what women should be saved *from* - poverty, disease, violence, bigotry and so on. . . . There is now an urgent need to speak to and work through what we want to save women *to*, what diverse, partial, unsettled possibilities we can imagine for ourselves and our communities" (123).

According to Alexander, the dualistic and hierarchical thinking (mind/body/soul; male/female; master/slave) which informed colonization, facilitated social and

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<sup>4</sup>This quotation is from the privately circulated abstract of Donnell's presentation for the Scholars' Round Table at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, St George's University, Grenada, May 19-23 2008.

psychological divisions that mitigate against our innate desire for “wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong” (281-2). This “desire to reproduce home in ‘coalitions’” (288) leads to discovery of the sacred within each of us, that is, the deep knowing that we are interdependent - neither separate nor autonomous. As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our Souls. There is great danger, then, in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. . . . What we have devised as an oppositional politic has been necessary, but it will never sustain us. (282)

Have we as writers/teachers/scholars acknowledged the importance of interdependence and coalition in community? Or does an investment in an oppositional politics contribute to the derailing of supposedly collectivized social movements, as Robinson points out, dividing us from each other (124)? Divisions and tensions such as those between Caribbean and African- American feminist social scientists, to which Alexander alludes, or divisions of sexual orientation, so that within Caribbean feminism, as Robinson notes, an unwillingness or inability to “divest itself of heterosexual precepts” (126) mitigates against the inclusion of gay and lesbian feminist agendas.

Alexander bemoans the “fierce revival of ethnonationalisms of different kinds [which] has frustrated solidarity projects” (272) and emphasizes that whatever “our countries of origin, decolonization is a project for *all*” (272). Yet while her ‘I/we’ sometimes speaks for a Caribbean and sometimes an African-American feminism, it ultimately speaks to/for women “who experience and define themselves as black” (275). Which suggests that their race precludes many Caribbean feminists - teachers, scholars, writers – from participation in her vision of a community of ‘coalitions.’

Further, if we continue to locate the study of Caribbean women’s writing solely within an oppositional politic focusing on *resistance against* (the ‘oppressor,’ the ‘Other’) rather than within an *impetus toward* (community), surely we replicate the very colonial epistemological hierarchy that Alexander denounces? Have we no choice but that identified by Maureen Moynagh (in her study of Dionne Brand’s work): either feeding the ghosts of slavery or exorcizing its spectre? Out of such a historical legacy, what coalitions are allowed, what interdependence is permitted? Yes, Tracy Robinson is right to acknowledge “the vagaries of interdependence” (125): intimacy, as manifest most dramatically in the Caribbean plantation, is fraught with danger and risk. But is not the risk worthwhile if the alternative is a never ending cycle of divide and rule (us/ them, insider/ outsider, citizen/ non-citizen)?

Similarly, we need to query whether our teaching takes account of an internal oppositional politics. In the contemporary Caribbean, nation states pay lip service to the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME) but – the point of Annalee Davis’s documentary On the Map and Alissa Trotz’s lecture “Gender, Generation, and Memory” – they *also* tolerate, if not encourage, mistrust and suspicion of each other’s citizens. Trotz discusses “xenophobia occasioned by [intra-Caribbean] migration” (7) and suggests “ways in which we might rework narratives of exclusion” (8). Shocked by the Barbadian media’s vitriol against Guyanese visitors and immigrants, with Indo-Guyanese being singled out and racialised as particularly incapable of integrating, and of threatening to import Guyana’s ‘ethnic’ problem into the island, she notes that even Barbadian prostitutes are constructed

as threatened by Guyanese competitors who allegedly do more for less. As Trotz argues, "women are the grounds on which claims to community are made" (8) and in this case, the national 'community' polices "the allegedly pure national body from contamination or penetration by the other" (9). A student in my own class bravely admitted being tempted by the alleged bounty of BDS\$75 a head for all Guyanese 'illegals' reported to Immigration authorities. As Trotz observes, by "denying or refusing to recognize the myriad unscripted ways in which people chance upon, live and love each other, different categories of belonging are created, rendering some families less normal or less valued" (9). This, despite a history of Caribbean migration that clearly reveals the importance of those who "stitch the Caribbean together in ways that make it impossible to insist on separability over connection" (15). The narrative tapestry of Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon illustrates this inclusivity: presences from Africa, India, Europe, the Dutch, English, French Caribbean and Latin America 'stitch the Caribbean together.'

I am positing, then, an ethical pedagogy that inverts oppositional logic, that reads for connections rather than differences in order to map a new concept of belonging in the Caribbean - a decolonization, in the fullest sense, for *all*. This would involve reading texts which not only anatomize the poisoned chalice of history, but question the assertion of group identities (based on race, nation, political/religious affiliation and sexual orientation) that demonize others at home (non-nationals, racial others, gays, lesbians, transgenders, Muslims and so on).

Trotz's notion of differential families/communities provides the fulcrum on which my reading strategy pivots. I want to mention a few texts engaged in the charting of 'alternative families.' In doing so, I reference Shalini Puri's suggestion of a generational shift in Caribbean women's writing: from addressing gender to addressing sexuality (both erotics and intra-family sexual violence). More centrally, I cite Alison Donnell's reading of Caribbean women's writing as a map toward "mutual empowerment, inscribing the project of community in the face of competing . . . belongings . . . elective affinities and an oneness to the other" (affective communities). And of course, I allude to Sandra Pouchet Paquet's concern with the "creole family romance."<sup>5</sup>

In Kempadoo's Buxton Spice, we initially encounter an apparently linked community of difference which coheres. All too soon, however, the sustaining community fragments and suspicion of difference (race, class, political affiliation) destroy relationships. In Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night, the very notion of community is moot. Most strikingly, after passively witnessing her abuse, then ostracizing her, "the village seemed to have finally forgotten about Mala Ramchandin" (123). The family is supposedly the basic unit of community. Dysfunctional family = dysfunctional community. Hence, when the family fails a member, alternative families/communities have to be found to fill the void: gangs and 'block' culture, for example, serve this purpose for young Caribbean working class men. 'Family' is problematic in Mootoo's novel, despite the fact that family affiliation

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<sup>5</sup>These are all quotations drawn from privately circulated abstracts of presentations made by these scholars at the Scholars' Round Table of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, St George's University, Grenada, May 19-23, 2008.

markers are important in the text. Old Man Ramchandin's son is, for the Thoroughlys, both "a son of theirs" (32) and not a son; his "newly acquired sister" (33) is both sister and beloved; when the 'family' gathers, he is both a part of and apart from. Mootoo exposes his cuckoo status in the nest: "at times he felt most thoroughly [pun] assured of a place, more significant even than a chair, in his new family" (34). 'Family' is used to enforce obedience to the missionaries' imposed religious doctrine and its taboos: "Do we not feel like a family to you? . . . If I have performed as your father and my wife as your mother, what is the relationship of my daughter to you?" (39), asks the Reverend.

The spectre of incest – reinforced by Lavinia's engagement to her cousin (47) – becomes a reality later in Chandin's life. The question also echoes Tyler's question to himself/his Nana: "Could a nephew be the father of his uncle? I wondered, or could a mother ever be any other relationship to her child? Could she be the father? . . . Can your Pappy be your Pappy and your Grandpappy at the same time?" (26). The ramifications of these questions are played out in Mala's family. So Pohpoh is sister and mother to Asha, and both daughter and 'wife' to her father. 'Forbidden' relationships are the subject of the narrative; but the real 'perversion' of course, is the revenge Chandin takes on the bodies of his daughters ("the inevitable ripping apart of the night" [71]) for his (forbidden) desire for his white 'sister' and Lavinia's (forbidden) desire for his wife. The family and its 'relationships' are corrupted, most horrifically, in Chandin's 'mistaking' his daughter for his wife, as his wife mistook another woman for her husband (117). As Paula Morgan states, in *Cereus* the 'nuclear family' is constructed as "a site of incipient and manifest violence as opposed to nurturance and protection" (109). Peeling away "ideologies of the loving, happy family" (127), Vivian May asserts, Mootoo uncovers the violence hidden within, and links it "with the violence of heretronormative, racist . . . colonial institutions (including the Christian mission, colonial education, and slave and indentured labour)" (127).

If slavery's dehumanization rendered the nuclear family unit irrelevant, the historian Brinsley Samaroo argues, the "Indian brought a ritualistic, clearly defined family structure in which the institution of the family is of supreme importance as the basis of society; where each member had a secure and useful place and would be looked after from death to birth" (444; also qtd. in Morgan, 110). *Cereus* paints a different picture. Interestingly, Morgan finds parallels between Mootoo's "grim evocations of family life" (110) and "that of another Indo-Trinidadian /Canadian writer Harold Sonny Ladoo who wrote in horrific terms of the correlation between the psychic laceration of indentureship and the horror of alcoholism and insane violence, within the domestic space" (110).

Mootoo's deconstruction of the family home as the result of acts of violence uncomfortably echoes abuse in her *own* childhood home. Further, she has noted the 'unhomeliness' of the Caribbean to transgressive sexual orientations: Mootoo, a lesbian feminist, writes back to a dysfunctional motherland. As in Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, an absent mother is at the centre of the text. Mala is abandoned as a daughter by both her father and her mother, as a sister by Asha, and as a citizen by her so-called community. Eventually she is abandoned as a lover (and possible wife and mother) by Ambrose. The only corrective to the dysfunctional 'normal' families of Paradise, is the alternative family of linked outsiders or 'perverts' who come together by the close of the text. Tyler (a male homosexual) and Otoh (a transgendered woman), along with a miraculously revived Ambrose, form Mala's new family. The text hints that Lavinia and Mala's mother - women

who chooses to love women – may form Asha’s alternative family when she flees to Canada.

Mootoo inverts categories so that good, bad and queer families are revalued in the text: the Thoroughly/ Chandin families disintegrate, while alternative families (Otoh, Tyler, Ambrose, Mala; Sarah and Lavinia) support loving interdependence. Difference does not divide, but is embraced in community. Otoh is drawn to the elderly, insane Mala:

I felt as though she and I had things in common. She had secrets and I had secrets. Somehow I wanted to go there . . . and say, ‘Look! See? See all this? *I am different!* You can trust me, and I am showing you that you are the one person I will trust. And I am one person, for sure, for sure, that you can trust. I will be your friend. (133)

Normal and abnormal are interrogated; hence, Mr. Hector’s recognition of Tyler’s sexual orientation, connecting Tyler to his brother Randy (beaten and ejected from Hector’s family) brings a joyous “feeling of ordinariness” (78). Significantly, the setting for these alternative families/communities is outside the centre of Paradise: it exists in Canada, or in the island almshouse. The latter “is not en route to anywhere. To get there one must leave the main road, cut through a cane field. . . . There is nothing beyond” (131). It is an alternative space, off the ‘main road,’ for a different model of community. The text constructs habitable spaces for communities of *other* possible identities and sexualities. Mala and Ambrose in youth saw themselves as the “protector of snails and all things unable to defend themselves from the bullies of the world” (128). They were too vulnerable to succeed in goal for very long; but the new family/community will carry on the task.

More elliptically, Brand’s At the Full and Change of the Moon also reinvents notions of community and family. Her earlier novel, In Another Place Not Here, movingly charts the personal cost to one woman of the failure of community at every level. Like Cereus in its referencing a Caribbean history of brutality, Brand’s island is a world where powerless *people* (women, children) are given as *things* (to men, employers, owners). As in Cereus, no community nurtures or rescues the abandoned Elizette. A revolution of the dispossessed (personal and gendered; political and communal) offers a vision of another kind of family; it fails on both counts, and only belatedly – again, in Canada – does the connection of Elizette and Abena offer hope for a potential community. Nalo Hopkinson’s Brown Girl in the Ring also stages the creation of alternative families and communities in a post-apocalyptic Caribbean-Canadian diaspora.

Maureen Moynagh cites Brand’s dimly apprehended consciousness as a colonial child in Trinidad of the wound of history, the self-hatred, shame and rage (which Derek Walcott’s Omeros movingly evokes) as the legacy of the Middle Passage. The wound is passed on in At the Full and Change of the Moon, which traces the scattered descendants of the rebel Marie Ursule “across the Americas and Europe . . . where they search for home and fail to find it” (61). The Caribbean diaspora is configured as a melancholic site: Bola’s countless children are dispersed across continents, passing each other, meeting, even marrying without full recognition. The trauma of non-belonging, the lack of interdependence and connection, leads characters such as Priest, Adrian and Maya to commodify their bodies in ways that feed reductive and essentialized stereotypes (the drug don, the ‘yardie’; the junkie mule; the black woman as erotic body) used by their new countries to justify their

'otherness.' Eula, who has abandoned her daughter Bola, writes to her own mother in a vain quest for family information, aware that history is being lost: "we forget who we were. Nothing is changing, it is just that we are forgetting. All the centuries past may be one long sleep" (234). Indeed, as Erica Johnson argues, the novel "builds toward a grand, collective unforgetting of a family history" (20).

Yet Eula's daughter does not forget; she (literally) lives with ghosts, being visited by ancestors including the matriarch Marie Ursule. So in Moynagh's reading of the text, the *narrative* effectively counters the melancholy of forgetting by reanimating forgotten ghosts (and memories), in that the *reader* grasps the links and family connections, the sense of a history which eludes the characters. In common with *Cereus*, "genealogy is at the core of [Brand's] novel" (62) and while we can read diaspora as "the absolute loss of family, ancestry, traceable lines of genealogy in the anonymity of the losses" (68) of various crossings, the novel also *creates* a community "through the act of reading" (68). "Bola was not one for sadness" (Brand 36), the novel reiterates; so too Moynagh reads Brand's sad tales of loss in light of Glissant's poetics: the transformation of the "violence of the slave trade and its 'replacement' with a Creole unity that makes a home of the loss of home" (69).

As a postscript, let me mention another text which interrogates and explores the meaning of Caribbean family and community: Erna Brodber's *The Rainmaker's Mistake*. Brodber's is another (allegorical?) take on post-emancipation Caribbean history, focusing on the 'pickney gang' who form a variety of alternative family groupings in their efforts to transform themselves from *things* (yams, slaves) to full subjects, to *people*, through a monumental act of unforgetting. The text culminates with a new family of free people, making the future in their child.

To conclude, these suggested readings point toward my own pedagogical practice which, I hope, reads literary texts, particularly those of Caribbean women, as what Delblanco terms a "means by which students may become aware of their unexamined assumptions and glimpse worlds different from their own," learning in the process to "confront ethical complexity" (Booth 48). I hope that exposing students to visionary writing can transcend the impasse of historical determinism (what happened then has screwed us up forever). I hope I can help them realize that *their* choice of identity politics (race, class, gender, nationality, sexual orientation) must involve tolerance of others who choose differently, and that they resist notions of a reductive essentialism no matter how politically exigent. And I hope that we can all follow textual clues in the work of writers like Mootoo, Brodber, Brand, Espinet and Hopkinson, decipher where we have gone wrong/thought unprofitably/seen in a limited fashion, and begin the work of forging new *communities* in the best sense of the term.

#### Afterword: Some Very Preliminary Thoughts on 'Form and Genre'

During the roundtable discussion from which my comments here are drawn, Shalini Puri wondered what kinds of *poetics* might enable the literary explorations and re-positionings we see in these new sets of public conversations. Let me gesture to that question by way of a textual trope from Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice*. At the start of the novel, Lula lies

upside down on a chair and gazes at the tray ceiling of her home, discovering a fascinating landscape: "I spent a long time walking on the smooth ceiling, stepping over the little partitions in the upside-down doorways and sitting on the fretwork. No furniture cluttered those rooms. No dust" (3). It may be rather prosaic to offer this inverted perspective under the topic of 'poetics' but I do think Kempadoo's Buxton Spice offers a different way of looking. For example, normative concepts of male and female are defamiliarized; gender is a game, a performance, not a natural 'given' determined by biological sex. This is simply taken for granted by the narrator; everyone has a 'man-self' and a 'she-self' and so what? There is also inversion of moral hierarchies: children are *not* pure and innocent, but relentless and even cruel in their pursuit of knowledge and pleasure; the text reconfigures notions of the savage (tropical nature) and the civilized (human society).

In Cereus, one can call attention in terms of poetics to the foregrounding of metanarrative: the emphasis on artifice, the unreliability of storytelling. The novel is a web of connected stories, each revealing a secret only to open up another. Tyler is linked with Mala though stories told by Cigarette-Smoking Nana long before they ever meet (44), as is Othoh through the stories told by his father and the gossip and rumours circulated by the community. Like Kempadoo, Mootoo 'denaturalizes' the normative, in this case heterosexuality, as she inverts the values conventionally linked to the perverse and the natural. Hence Heather Smyth notes that *Cereus* "plays with the designations of 'perverse' and 'natural' in relation to the 'natural' world of plants and insects that surrounds Mala's house" (149). The natural world always in the process of change and transformation; so too, are sexual identities.

Writing about Kempadoo's work, Simon Lee makes the provocative claim that it reaches "beyond the sterile self-congratulating celebration of past identity that passes for official culture, towards a provocative oversight of the modern Caribbean in all its complexity" (55). Several of the texts I have mentioned, which deal with past identity or the identity of the past, are *not* celebratory. Quite the opposite. In fact, as the May and Johnson articles suggest, Caribbean women writers like Brand are engaged in a kind of mourning of the past. Put less negatively, they explore ways to convey the haunting of their texts by the past, personal or familial.

I will end by briefly noting some possible 'trends' in this regard. Firstly, many of the more recent fictions - say, since 2000 - are stories of hauntings: as noted above, the motherless Bola is haunted by the future in Brand's Moon just as her scattered children in the diaspora are haunted by their lack of connection with the past, and with each other. The gothic element of Wide Sargasso Sea recurs in Elizabeth Nunez's Prospero's Daughter - although the figure of Dr Prospero cavorting around a bonfire in cape and hat is more ridiculous than sinister - and in Cereus, where the entire community is haunted by denied and silenced secrets, its landscape is poisoned by what has been hidden. The protagonist in Maria Elena John's Unburnable is haunted by visions and voices of her foremothers and, like Mona in Ramabai Espinet's The Swinging Bridge, is driven to revisit her Caribbean landscape and exhume silenced family secrets no matter the cost.

Secondly, some recent fictions eschew the past and *are* squarely focused on the contemporary (Kempadoo's Tide Running); or in the case of Hopkinson, the future. The term 'speculative fiction' used to characterize Nalo Hopkinson's work takes on a new and



complex form in Brodber's (similarly allegorical) experiment with historical fiction (time travel, the equation of physical and temporal markers) in The Rainmaker's Mistake. Thirdly, the dystopian visions of the future which haunt Bola in Brand's Moon, recur in Rainmaker:

The pauper to whom you gave your last dime owns a hotel in the hills but if he doesn't behave like a pauper, someone will kill him because he dares to own a hotel. Make sense? Women stand half-naked in the streets selling themselves for money to build a house in which to worship their God who is against fornication. (94-95)

A dystopian future also haunts Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw's new collection of stories, Four Taxis Facing North, where the Trinidadian future looks remarkably like its present: the have-nots burn the houses of the rich but first "they looted and gutted the houses, they made the living room a toilet, they kicked the fathers, sexed the mothers, and made the children watch even though they tried very hard to cover their eyes and their ears with their tiny hands" (80). These brief observations on the poetics of recent Caribbean women's writing seem to me to underscore possibilities for reading ethical concerns into such texts, reinforcing their urgent call for a new revisioning of our crisis of community.

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