Hell and grace: Palimpsestic belonging in *The True History of Paradise* and *Crossing the Mangrove*

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Abstract
The Caribbean has been characterized as paradise, yet the region’s story is a more complicated one. A means of accessing stories that move beyond the tourist brochure representations is to engage with regional fiction. This essay employs the idea of palimpsestic belonging, which highlights the layers of each generation’s negotiation with colonial legacies, as a tool to explore familial and community attachment in the novels *The True History of Paradise* (1999) and *Crossing the Mangrove* (1995). Burial rituals and haunting are mechanisms to engage with the multiple disruptions of an imaginary and unified postcolonial nation. By highlighting the collisions of history, gender, sexuality, and class, these novels navigate national (un)belonging in two distinct Caribbean spaces—Jamaica and Guadeloupe.

Keywords
Guadeloupe, haunting, history, Jamaica, literature, memory, palimpsestic belonging

The history of our island [Jamaica] is a history of hell. It is also a history of grace terrestrial. I lived in a brightness beyond description, and did not know true darkness until I came here [England].

—Rebecca Crawford Landing, 1682–1751 (one of Jean Landing’s white ancestors)

Romanticized as paradise, the Caribbean landscape has also been characterized as hell, a hopeless paradise lost. The region graced by bountiful, beautiful lands quickly becomes unbearable due to manmade and natural disasters. Hell and grace become layers

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in the quest to reconcile history and make home. The desire for home and belonging manifests in two oppositional ways in Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s *The True History of Paradise* (1999) and Maryse Condé’s *Crossing the Mangrove* (1995), and it reveals the conflicted nature of belonging. In Cezair-Thompson’s work, set in Jamaica, home is fragmented and characters leave; in Condé’s Guadeloupe, characters return but long to escape. The countries in both novels flow between contested notions of (in)dependence that highlight how colonial forces impede postcolonial attempts of realizing new models.¹ Jamaica has been nominally independent since August 1962, while Guadeloupe, a French overseas department since 1946 and an administrative center since 1974, remains enmeshed in a dependent relationship with France, its mother country.² Jamaica is represented as a country of physical and psychological runaways, while Guadeloupe hovers in limbo between “civilized” France and its untamed and suffocating mangrove swamps.

In both texts, palimpsestic belonging is the vehicle for postcolonial reckoning. Palimpsests were documents written on animal vellums that were reused after washing or scraping off the text. In recycling the parchment, traces of the previous manuscript would seep into the new document. These traces are called underwriting, and modern laser technology enables researchers to access the multiple stories embedded in ancient documents.³ Despite repeated usage, the original form is never completely effaced, allowing the earlier trace to function as a ghost haunting the text and bearing witness in the new “document.” US feminist literary critics Gilbert and Gubar (1979) use the palimpsest to discuss the work of 19th-century women writers. They argue that women achieved “literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.”⁴ There was the doubleness of text and subtext in a quest to rupture the norms of female literary representation. This doubling is also true of Condé’s and Cezair-Thompson’s work, particularly in terms of how haunting and ritual help readers access the dualities and subversions of the text. I foreground the original notion of the palimpsest to explore historical traces; I also highlight the way these two Caribbean women writers disrupt what is imagined of the region. The scholarly pieces on *The True History of Paradise* focus on the ethnic diversity and multivocality.⁵ On the other hand, numerous articles on *Crossing the Mangrove* range from discussions on intertextuality, liminality, relations of space and place, queer politics, and creolization to allegory.⁶ Dawn Fulton’s characterization of allegory as a doubling device that emphasizes “the interplay of reading, history, and temporality” aligns with my own interests.⁷ My intervention considers how haunting and ritual provide the mechanism to access the layers of palimpsestic belonging. In this essay, I argue that Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s *The True History of Paradise* and Maryse Condé’s *Crossing the Mangrove* use hauntings and burial rituals as thematic devices through which alienated characters confront and reconcile the legacies of colonialism and the realities of postcolonialism. I coin the phrase “palimpsestic belonging” to suggest that each generation’s inscription of history is impacted by persistent traces of colonial brutality.

Both novels are part of a generation of Caribbean writing that eschews social realism as a mode to contest the unity and coherence of nationalist literary projects. As such, they function as “double agents,” meaning that they “enable an opening up of the possibilities for Caribbean women and their literary works to be read as resistant, rebellious texts that demand a more specific and differentiated understanding of [their subject
positions].” These texts disrupt social realist conventions by fusing the space between past and present. Since there is no clear separation between temporalities, haunting becomes an effective tool for understanding these spaces. The novels provide contrasting Caribbean geographies and histories. Yet, they illustrate the ways in which dynamics forged by plantation economies mitigate political autonomy and affect 20th-century sociopolitical possibilities—despite so-called independence or geopolitical support from the colonizing country. Politics and policies may differ, but approaching these two sites from a literary perspective provides the analytic elasticity needed to stretch beyond statistics. The contradictory voices in these works disallow easy resolutions; the continual probing in the texts emphasizes the socio-historical processes that made and remake the Caribbean. As they reexamine and rearticulate Caribbean nationalisms, these texts are celebratory, affirming liberation, even as they also reveal ideological fissures entrenched in national projects.

In palimpsestic belonging, repetitions leave traces from previous stories and provide an epistemological frame for knowing the region. Haunting is a constitutive component of the palimpsest, and as Avery Gordon (1997) writes in *Ghostly Matters*, it “is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (p. 63). Gordon argues that the ghost shocks one into clarity or “a different kind of knowledge.” The specter’s ways of apprehending the world breaches the present into fragments, even when its stories appear coherent. In Condé’s novel, it is the funerary ritual, or wake, through which the villagers understand their belonging to Rivière au Sel, Guadeloupe. In Cezair-Thompson’s text, however, more general aspects of ritual—break or disaffection; transition or liminality; and return or incorporation—haunt and inform how those characters come to terms with (un)belonging to Jamaica. As buried traces resurface on the reused parchment of the nation state, they mediate what is known of the past and how that knowledge is lived. In the case of these novels, access to phantom fragments creates seemingly new scripts, but both texts illustrate the ways that social forces repeat older structures. Each repetition is not a clone but part of a process of claiming home or deepening palimpsestic belonging. There are three overlapping, and not always distinct paths, that signify the muddied process of making and finding home in palimpsestic belonging: exploring and disrupting the known narrative, exploring the empty spaces of possibility, and living among ghosts.

Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s *The True History of Paradise* explores Jamaica’s political, economic, and social turmoil in the 1970s through protagonist Jean Landing’s flight out of the country. As part of Jamaican history since the 17th century, the Landing family represent continuous presence on the island. Yet, with her sister Lana’s death, Jean, unlike her mother Monica, is unable to manage the nation’s economic and political instabilities. Buttressed by ancestral voices that she channels from the earliest moments of the country’s colonial past, Jean leaves Jamaica while Monica stays. Cezair-Thompson’s narrative, constructed like a ripple, starts with Jean and extends outward to her ancestors by sharing Jamaica’s stories as she and Paul, a family friend who remains in Jamaica, drive from Kingston in the southeast to Montego Bay in the northwest. In the text, ancestral voices from Sephardic Jews, enslaved Africans, English slave owners, German migrants, and Asian indentured workers populate the island terrain from the 17th century to the state-of-emergency 1970s. Ancestral voices inform the political choices of the
novel’s present and come to the fore through Jean’s crisis of belonging, and as the known story of Jamaica’s political instability is supplanted by the other stories, Jean becomes *egun iponri*—a person through whom the ancestors live.

Crossing the Mangrove offers a different perspective. Instead of one person who channels the past, this novel foregrounds multiple perspectives, with each one casting a different shadow and sometimes amplifying the mystery of the central character, Francis Sancher. Sancher’s demise, like the death of Jean’s sister, Lana, in *True History*, is the catalyst for the novel’s action. At Sancher’s wake, the inhabitants of Rivière au Sel reflect on the man and the myth, recounting their own experiences of leaving and return. Readers not only get a complex picture of the villagers but also of Sancher, a man seeking his own death in the hope of reconciling with the ghosts that haunt him (and Guadeloupe). The wake is a vehicle to interact with the dead that haunt the nation. Home emerges from current experience and past memories as 19 community voices, though never Sancher’s voice unless it is part of someone else’s recollection, recount their experiences with the man. In essence, each villager’s incomplete rendering of Sancher ruptures what we know of him and of Guadeloupe. As each voice unsettles the known narrative of Guadeloupian dependency, they also expose the tensions between insiders and outsiders. In both novels, the haunted quest to belong is a mechanism for living with history.

In *The True History of Paradise* the conventional image of Jamaica as an easy going place is unsettled as characters inhabit a range of belonging from grace to hell. The novel begins with Jean, penned in by the grillwork of her gated community that is to keep her safe from disenfranchised marauders, thinking about how to escape Jamaica’s political turmoil. The 1973 oil embargo by Arab states severely affected Jamaica because cheap oil had quadrupled in price, and in the wake of this global recession and the need to subsidize necessities, the country borrowed heavily from the international community, specifically the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Knight, 2016: 86). The novel opens in 1976 with the declaration of the state of emergency and the promise of Prime Minister Michael Manley’s socialist democracy having all but failed. Despite the Manley administration’s policies, which included 35,000 new jobs, redistribution of income from the rich to the poor, “legislation giving children born out of wedlock equal rights of inheritance, … equal pay for equal work, and an innovative maternity leave law which gave new mothers … three months of paid leave” (Meeks, 2000: 122), the country remained in crisis. And the flight of capital, “organized violence … directed against ruling party strongholds in Kingston … [and other areas, meant that parts of the city] had to be evacuated, creating internal refugee colonies” (Meeks, 2000: 123). All of this culminates with a state of emergency that lasts for over 8 months. Headlines in *The Gleaner*, the national conservative paper, on Sunday, 20 June 1976, encapsulated the stress of daily insecurity and highlighted how historical forces were coterminous with the present by comparing the 1976 situation with the 1966 national emergency. The Governor-General, Sir Florizel Glasspole, declared the state of emergency along with Prime Minister Michael Manley. Both invoke public safety, and the fear of “gunmen and terrorists,” to exercise the power of the state. During the 1972 elections, Manley, a light-complexioned member of the ruling class, was dubbed Joshua, the biblical prophet who “epitomized the anger of his people.” Manley, as Joshua, wielded a wooden stick, allegedly a gift from Ethiopian leader and Rastafarian icon, Emperor Haile Selassie,
which became the almost mythical “rod of correction.” Manley-Joshua, or “‘the comrade leader’, who was for the people, but never quite of the people,” 18 would brandish this staff to destroy the various ills of the young nation. Manley’s charisma, color, and pedigree point to Jamaica’s racial politics in which light-complexioned people disproportionately enjoy the privileges afforded to the upper class—wealth, high social status, political power, and deference. National anxieties about color and class wreak havoc with Manley’s coalition for change and unsettle the nation’s united postcolonial sense of self.

The unsettled political climate of the 1970s echo earlier periods of instability and also repeat the violence that has been present since the colony’s founding. In essence, violence is part of palimpsestic belonging. The novel specifically addresses the “epidemic of violence” and the rape of women during this period:

Rape had become prevalent on the island (and horrible stories of gang rape—the girl at the end of the street, the shopkeeper’s wife, every day another story of sodomy, burning, tearing women apart; vile, sadistic things that made even policemen cry) it was beginning to seem like a war against women; rape of the nation’s women, rich and poor, had become a casual and ubiquitous weapon, like stones in the hands of bad boys. (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 245)

The violence against women—“tearing women apart”—is a manifestation of the overall insecurity in the state and the nation’s violence against itself. Violence that marked the colonial space revisits the independent nation. State violence entangled with brutalizing women haunts the country. 19 For Jean, this violence manifests a crisis of authority that the Manley government sought to suppress through the state of emergency. However, both Manley’s administration and the Seaga-led opposition weaponized gangs of men indicating the absence of egalitarian structures. The novel suggests that the only way out of this circle of violence is to leave the country, which over “fourteen thousand trained Jamaicans [did] between 1972 and by 1976.” 20 A marginalized story in postcolonial narratives of new nations, rape nonetheless has been romanticized in origin stories of the earliest colonizers. Here, the continued rape of women is linked to the demise of the republic. The state has lost stability. Cold War structures, specifically, the United States’ anti-communist containment polices interfere with Jamaica’s path to be non-aligned—outside of US and USSR geopolitical spheres. European stakeholders who armed the region since the 16th century continue to have power in the post-independent state. Imperial original sin bleeds to the surface and underwrites the possibilities of these besieged territories.

Jean’s lifelong best friend, Faye Galdy, a white Jamaican and lesbian, occupies an ambiguous position that is tested when the firebombing of a home for elderly women traumatizes her (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 220). As a rich, white lesbian aligned with the Jamaican masses and their uprising against the “shitstem,” 21 the killing of these women by freelance gangsters, who are operatives of one of the political parties, unleashes her vulnerabilities. As a child with a debilitating spinal disorder, Faye was locked in her body at the mercy of those who would take advantage of her; similarly, as a lesbian who faces “BURN ALL LESBIAN” graffiti on the community theater she founded (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 304), Faye is destabilized. Her position reveals the tenuous illusion of safety and home.
Moreover, as a childless lesbian, Faye is besieged because she does not participate in the sexual economy of the nation. Like the elderly women whose home was bombed, Faye is targeted and trapped by the violence that implodes in Jamaica. The generational bridge between apparently childless women (or women abandoned by children) who built Jamaica, but are terrorized by men, is graphically made: “There were women in that building older than the century: legendary singers, beloved teachers, ancient prostitutes, the daughters of slaves” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 220). Similar to Jean’s role as mediator between the living and the dead, the juxtaposition between Faye, the 153 dead women, and the casualness of the brute force against women, rich and poor, is another example of how violence mitigates belonging particularly for women without children. The national space allegorized as female and maternal discards barren women. Women who represent a transition from Jamaica’s enslaved past to its independent status are marked by colonial and postcolonial assault. These women—the nation’s embodied and living history who testify to struggles or the postcolonial past—are obliterated. As documents that provide the basic background for new stories, their deaths mean that they survive as faint traces on which the national story continues to unfold. Overlapping “nationalistic” violence onto the bodies of women signifies that here, regardless of the class and cultural barriers that can divide women, it is their female identity that victimizes them.

Besides overt acts of rape, murder, and dismemberment, a miasma of fear permeates the novel. Monica, Jean’s mother, initially resists putting grillwork around the house, refusing to turn her home into a prison (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 205). Yet by the time Jean leaves the country, their house and the houses of all those who can afford it are encased in iron. They are physical and psychological prisoners afraid of criminal gunmen, police, and soldiers. Criminal elements pervade each stratum of society, and insecurity magnifies corruption, economic crisis, and the physical and sexual vulnerabilities particular to women.

Beyond Faye’s function as a woman who experiences physical and psychological violence, she offers a counterpoint to the known story of Jamaica’s black majority, in terms of race, sexuality, and access to another version of history. Faye has advantages of class, color, and to a degree history (given that her ancestors have been part of the ruling elite throughout most of the colony’s history), but her privileges are not unshakable. At boarding school, Faye challenges her British teacher’s notion of who belongs to the Caribbean, particularly regarding white belonging. Faye objects to her teacher’s assumptions that she and Faye share the same Anglo-Saxon identity. Miss Locke incredulously asks, “You don’t consider yourself Jamaican, do you, dear?” Faye replies, “I am Jamaican … my family has been here since Lewis Galdy fell into a crack during the Great Earthquake of 1692 and was spat up alive some time later” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 74, emphasis added). Faye’s mitigated belonging to the Jamaican national space marks her throughout the novel because white belonging to “this black slave country” tests Faye’s resolve and places her in a liminal space. While the minority throughout Jamaican history, white people have enjoyed power and privileges disproportionate to their numbers because European structural power continues to seep into the black majority nation state.

Faye accesses several paradoxes of palimpsestic belonging because she highlights the loss of women’s lives and Manley’s interrupted democratic socialist path. The
players in Jamaica’s independence and post-independence struggle are men, who espouse and embody a type of violent masculinized nationalism that precludes acknowledging the women who built and sustain the nation. The men who inherit the colonial apparatus maintain the ideals of a colonial gender hierarchy that relegate women to a passive backdrop. The violence against these women foreshadows Faye’s brutal beating and the murder of her lover, Pat (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 310–316). As others visibly linked to national politics, they are sacrificed. There are two types of violence here—the brutality against lesbians and the disposability of women. The violence perpetuated against Faye and Pat is in part because of their visibility as an interracial lesbian couple. Pat and Faye are disposable because, as Makeda Silvera (1992) and Rosamond King (2005) argue, Caribbean lesbians, especially those who are black and brown, are invisible. While same-gender loving women are part of the Caribbean story, their audacity to proclaim their erotic relationships become fodder for social stigma and physical violence. Ultimately, Faye’s childhood disability, lesbianism, and whiteness compromise her sense of belonging in this predominantly black country.

Cezair-Thompson’s plot exemplifies the competing stories—within one nation and sometimes within one character—engulfing Jean. While most of Jamaica is not racially or ethnically mixed, the novel’s ethnic composition tells a story enshrined in many Caribbean national mottos, which is one of racial and ethnic inclusivity and diversity. Jean, though dark-skinned with light colored eyes, is part of a colored elite, her class position elevating her above the darker, poorer black masses. She is a medium mostly for the stories of her white relations, though there are two black family members from the pre-twentieth century past—Mary “Iya ilu” Landing and Pastor Moses Landing—whose narratives are also accessed through Jean.

As an “egúngún … [who] commemorates dead ancestors,” Jean is the means of placing the voices of the recently dead—her father, Roy; Deepa, Lana’s father; and her grandfather, Mr Ho Sing—in conversation with long-gone forebears and descendants now navigating Jamaica’s national space. Most of Jean’s deceased family members are disaffected and disappointed by the country. They tell Jean to flee, not to engage with her nation, because Jamaica, island of natural excess, is a putrid hell. Jean recognizes that:

Ghosts stand on the foothills of this journey. She smells their woody ancestral breath in the land’s familiar crests and undulations. She has heard them all her life, these obstinate spirits, desperate to speak, to revise the broken grammar of their exits. They speak to her, Jean Landing, born in that audient hour before daylight broke on the nation, born into the knowledge of nation and prenation, the old noises of barracks, slave quarters, and steerage mingling in her ears with the newest sounds of self-rule. On verandas, in kitchens, in the old talk, in her waking reveries and anxious dreams, she has heard their stories. (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 17)

These ghosts encourage Jean to abandon Jamaica. Although as egun iponri, Jean will carry their stories, their voices will be fainter and fainter in the nation further disrupting the narratives of inclusion, unity, and postcolonial promise.

The most “favorable” voice from the past is Jean’s most distant black ancestor, Mary “Iya ilu,” whose life spanned three centuries. Mary asks Jean to return to Africa
and “Tell dem we did mek it cross de water. Mek dem know. Mek dem know we is here [because] dem no know say we tuff it out here an’ mek it, dem no know say we survive-o” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 299–300). Symbolic of the millions of Africans enslaved over several centuries, Mary, who was captured in Ife as a child, survives in Jamaica for 93 years; her name, “Iya ilu,” roughly translates as motherland. The crisis in the country demoralizes Mary: “Everywhere me see black people’ bone. How come no white hand on de knife? We come all dis way fe slaughter-o!” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999:300). In spite of this reality, Mary, a ghost familiar with the country’s present, instructs Jean to claim Jamaica, while Jean’s other relations tell her to run. Survival in Jamaica is the pinnacle of belonging since all notions of home as comfort is chimerical. Mary’s suggestion that Jean travel to Africa is a temporary one to facilitate healing and reconnection rather than escape.

By grappling with symbolic mothers and motherlands, both True History and Mangrove reveal the tautness between hell and grace, as well as propriety and subversion. The “Iya ilu” or motherland in Mary’s name demonstrates how mother and land serve as palimpsests throughout the text. Jean’s relationship with her mother, Monica, and her relationship to the land—Jamaica as a territory—predominate in the book. Unlike Jean’s other ancestors who encourage Jean to run away, Mary tells an alternative story. She does not dwell on the lushness of the land other than to center it as a disorienting mechanism from her Middle Passage journey. When Mary invokes geography, it is to characterize the contemporary pain of Jamaicans: “Rain a-fall, but dutty [land] tuff … River dry, wheel a-stop, tree cut down, belly bawl. Dem burnin’ an’ kil-lin’ baby” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 300). Mary’s concern for her progeny is in stark contrast with Jean’s forebearers whose stories center their experiences in the past. Their observations limit them to one story that ignores the traces of Jamaica’s grace that might attenuate the experiences which are habitually compromised, corrupted, and turned into hell.

Monica, Jean’s mother, is the sole character to belong unambiguously to Jamaica. In the era of gun proliferation, she becomes a cowboy to stake her claim to her country. Monica, one of the three central female characters, is described not as political but practical: “[she] who never professed any love of country … had what it took to endure here. Monica, selfish and adamant, would be the last drum left beating” (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 327). Monica’s selfishness and ambition are highly prized traits for surviving in her homeland. In material terms, Monica has produced daughters, a successful bakery, and an envied reputation as a leading figure participating in charitable works. Yet, Monica is abandoned by her progeny; first, by Lana, her daughter, whose immolation propels the narrative and second, by her younger daughter, Jean, who flees Jamaica’s chaos. Monica is able to protect her property but not her daughters who are flawed as national promise because both leave the nation—one through exile and the other through death. If Jamaica was secure and open to home building, her daughters may have stayed or survived. Instead, they disappear, unable to endure as their mother does. Despite Lana’s two pregnancies and her surviving son, Claude, who lives in Canada with Monica’s sister, Gwen, Monica is the only major female character who has any success in (re)producing Jamaican citizenship.
Monica’s bakery allows her to have economic and political power. In response to Michael Manley’s government’s desire for self-sufficiency by taxing imported flour, Monica stops baking bread after her storehouse of foreign flour is finished:

She paid her workers a month’s wages in advance, gave them a vacation, went to the empty bakery every day, and waited. One day a crowd appeared … Monica took the gun from her desk and went outside … somebody shouted: “Look ya, John Wayne” … Monica picked up one of the rocks that had been thrown and the crowd grew quiet again … “is this I mus tek mek bread? I mus mek bread from stone?” … a man hurled a rock … Monica shot the man. (Cezair-Thompson, 1999: 207–208)

There are several references to Monica as Clint Eastwood, John Wayne, or a cowboy in general. The cowboy captures Monica’s frontier-like persona, one not bounded by the law but by necessity devising a process as she goes along. Cowboys are closely linked to masculinity and the gun; the cowboy outlaw in 1972’s The Harder They Come, a crime drama, exemplifies Jamaican fascination with this figure. Monica engages with the ever-present specter of violence, and through her ritualistic and single-minded performance with a gun, she is intertwined with her daughter Lana, who sets herself on fire and burns; yet, Monica remains—fighting other Jamaicans, a corrupt system, and obliteration. The True History of Paradise delivers on the paradoxes of belonging by disrupting the narratives of nation and those of race and class. The racial, sexual, and class politics of the novel are messy. If the nation is a symbolic parent who nurtures self-sufficient subjects, Jamaica has failed. Jean, Faye, and other women leave in some fashion, but Monica, who learned the lesson of violence as self-sufficiency, stays. Monica’s story, one in which she rejects romantic love to pursue economic success and political ambition, constitutes what it takes to survive and thrive in her home. Monica’s ability to see Jamaica without blinders, to see past its physical beauty, enables her to remain in a country that others have escaped.

Escape is the defining trope for most of Jean’s relatives who are unable to tell happy tales of their lives in Jamaica; rather, most anecdotes are bleak, filled with melancholy, and most encourage Jean to leave the country. Unwelcomed among those living in a state of emergency, disembodied voices such as Rebecca Crawford Landing counsel, “Know what I know: Time has shaped you from a hundred histories which will never be told; our voices are not welcome among the living. Stay and die there, unaccounted for. Or escape, live, and be silent among the migratory whose lives are like a discontinued letter.” Cezair-Thompson provides a glimpse at the 100 histories with the ancestral voices in the text that continuously contradict the idea of a definitive past that can unify the country. The discontinued voices emerge from eight of Jean’s relations, and, like a kaleidoscope, each entry makes an aspect of the past visible, even if distorted. Rebecca Crawford Landing shares the trials of the earliest English colonists, while Moses Landing is one of the Baptists hung as a traitor during the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, another period that necessitated martial law and the curtailing of rights by state agents. Mr Ho Sing, Jean Falkirk, and Daniel Stern are 19th-century relations who connect “lore, history, and nightmare.” They concretize many of the struggles and conflicts present throughout Jamaican history. In fact, many problems, ranging from “the political, economic and social domination of whites” to the control of the judicial system by whites and lack of
access to land by blacks that galvanized the Morant Bay insurrections remained grievances in the 1970s. Jean’s multiethnic relations speak in many accents but with one voice: counseling her to leave. The physical and psychic deaths they endure are preferable to the silence of the migratory that Rebecca Crawford Landing lived.

Collectively their stories allow readers to experience multiple periods and to understand how each era shapes Jean’s present. Individually, ancestral histories of separation serve as disruptions from the conventions of their time. Jean Falkirk and Mr Ho Sing represent challenges to the proprieties of their time. He gives a false name to escape Hakka persecution in China and she marries a “colored gentleman” after working in the previously all-male domain of a bookshop. Story fragments bleed from one life into another, rarely cohesively, but as segments. Particular versions of the past suspend Jean’s contemporary narrative, making it possible for readers to experience multiple lives. The abeyance of 1970s narrative creates a flexible space between stories that allows readers to access previously buried texts. Jamaica—the colony and independent country—is the parchment that is repeatedly written on and over. Both the reader and Jean scrutinize the hegemonic stories of the past by juxtaposing the lives she channels with the nation’s contemporary violence and decay.

Like Jean, the novel functions as an egun ọnọ̀rọ̀ and holds a mirror to Jamaica of the 1970s, when the book is set, and Jamaica of the 1990s, when the book is published. The novel as egun ọnọ̀rọ̀ extends into the moment when the reader engages with the text. Jean experiences palimpsestic belonging in a discontinuous way through the breaks or removals in her life and those of her ancestors. She is symbolically removed from the Jamaican masses by her class position—physically away at boarding school or encased in a gated house on a hill and, finally, her flight to New York is her final physical break with her homeland. Yet, while in the country, Jean is detached, occupying a limbo space that hovers between the insistent voices from the past and her inability to come to terms with her country as it is. The ability to process history and bring it into a productive conversation with the present can be the disruption that produces new understanding. However, this shock of recognition does not happen for Jean.

Disruption is what Lana Ramcharan in True History and Francis Sancher in Mangrove are known for because they are characters incapable of processing the past to secure stable homes. Lana travels between the United States and Jamaica in search of something she never finds, while Sancher, described as a man who is neither black, white nor Indian, searches for an ancestral home where he can reconcile the sins of his fathers’ and end his family’s curse. Born Francisco Alvarez-Sanchez in Medellin, Columbia, Francis Sancher has always known of the curse on male family members. As a child, his mother compelled him to pray alongside his brother for an end to the curse that “takes the form of a sudden unexplained death, always around the same age, in the early fifties.” The familial malediction originated with his great-great-great-grandfather, François Désiré, who fled Guadeloupe for the swamps of Louisiana to avoid the curse, but drowned there the morning after his second wedding. Throughout his life, Sancher, a doctor, has tried to assuage the spirits. He joined the Cuban revolution for his rebirth—a chance to begin anew and escape the curse—but he deserts because he is disillusioned with the gap between its rhetoric and reality. In his 50s, Sancher’s quest brings him to Guadeloupe for a reconciliation with historical ghosts and his own death. Before arriving
in Rivière au Sel, Sancher scoured the world for absolution; in addition to Cuba’s revolution, he was part of Angola’s revolution before landing in Guadeloupe to “end his sinister lineage [which began with] a Frenchman, the son of a wealthy family, who, after committing the first of his crimes [in France], crossed the sea and settled these islands with his vileness.” Sancher’s arduous search ends in death, and his wake, a transitional ritual, is the occasion for a community gathering that reflects on and is haunted by his influence.

In many Caribbean spiritual practices, the wake, even when Christian in outlook, retains African-derived elements. Physically divided between the sacred space of the house in which the corpse rests and the secular space of the yard, or the outdoors, the dualism of wakes structures this separation ritual. Behavior in the two spaces differs with sacred songs, prayers, and ritual food for the ancestors in the home; profane songs, dancing, “and tall tales about ghosts and mythological figures such as campers, old hags, la diablesse, and papa bois, denizens of the woods and swamps” are shared outside (Meighoo et al., 2013: 28). The wake in Mangrove offers a ritual space in which African, Asian, and European traditions commingle. The novel retains the physical duality of the wake with most of the male characters outside in the rain and the female characters in the house. Similar to True History in which both Jean and the novel functioned as an egun iponri, the wake structures Crossing the Mangrove and is the vehicle for understanding and exploring Francis Sancher as both reprobate and a transformational figure.

Villagers assemble for Sancher’s wake at his home and through their reminiscences show the fractured nature of Rivière au Sel. Those who attend because they despised him glory in his demise, such as the outraged fathers Loulou Lemeaulnes and Sylvestre Ramsaran, whose daughters were both impregnated by Sancher. Désinor Décimus, the Haitian gardener, attends to eat and bask in his temporary equality with the petit bourgeoisie who regularly demean him; while the retired school principal, Mademoiselle (Mlle) Timothée, attends because of social compulsion. The pressures of belonging compel deeply connected community members and the most recent arrival to attend this ritual. Although Sancher was a stranger and outcast, the ritual gathering for the dead becomes the occasion to assess belonging to this community. Each character reiterates how the landscape of the village, their interactions with each other, French France, and the wider world all impact the relations they have developed in Guadeloupe. The smallness of the place and the spatial relations it generates informs this community, as Moïse, the postman, observes, “You need to have lived inside the four walls of a small community to know its spitefulness and fear of foreigners.” Despite such parochial sensibilities, this community conditioned by fear and spite comes together in ritual, which provides a transitional space for those alienated from each other. The wake adheres the antagonistic community in a common purpose (Ackerman, 2005: 90–98). The gateway to palimpsestic belonging is ritual that functions on two levels—as a rite for the dead but also as tie that binds people.

Unbound from this community, Mira Lemeaulnes, daughter of the whitish planter Loulou Lemeaulnes and his black lover Rosalie Sorane, is a troubled wild child, born on the day her mother dies. Mira’s strained relationship with her father and incestuous
coupling with her half-brother, Aristide, are the backstory for her liaison with Sancher. Mira cultivates her status as outsider by shunning all social codes and customs. Her mythical quest for her mother embedded within the landscape leads her to the gully at the edge of town whenever she needs comfort. It is in this spot that Mira encounters Sancher, who imagines that she is “Death.” Despite this misidentification, they have sex: “We made love on the bed of leaves at the foot of the giant tree ferns. He succumbed, without resistance, but watched my every movement as if he thought I would deal him some fatal blow. Then he lay motionless a long while beside me and finally he said, ‘My name is Francis Sancher’.” So begins Mira’s association with Sancher, which, like the other ones he has, devolves into obsession on her part and eventual indifference on his. Nonetheless, their relationship culminates with the birth of their son Quentin.

As outsiders, Mira and Sancher initially find comfort in each other. Mira, in particular, believes Sancher will be the balm for her solitary wounds. It turns out that Sancher is an even more tragic mulatto than Mira and he cannot move beyond the ancestral ghosts that haunt him. Her mother, Rosalie Sorane, haunts Mira while Sancher’s specter is the family curse. Sancher becomes the agent by which Mira transforms herself. In fact, Deborah B. Gaensbauer (2004) asserts that Mira and Sancher are mirrored characters but that she “effectively invades and undermines Sancher’s role as the principal signifying figure” (p. 3). Mira and Sancher disrupt the behavioral conventions of Rivière au Sel by shunning erotic and familial codes. They both torment the villagers as phantoms and fantasies. On Sancher’s first encounter with Mira, he imagined her to be death—a phantom to fulfill the curse. Sancher left his original home and traveled around the world, yet he can find neither a home nor reconciliation with the specters of the past. Sancher’s palimpsest is a familial curse that bleeds through and kills men in his family. His parchment is both blood and history that he writes over through his work as a medical professional, but he is without hope and degenerates awaiting the filial underwriting—the history that will not remain buried—that consumes him. All relationships in the novel are manifestations of a tormented colonial legacy, particularly those by parental figures unable to love and nurture children.

A nation’s promise is connected to children’s ability to flourish. In Mangrove, parental sins seep into the lives of children. Vilma, Sancher’s pregnant lover at the time of his death, is the despised and unwanted teenaged daughter of Rosa and Sylvestre Ramsaran. The Ramsarans, a third generation Indian family, amassed wealth and influence through strategic land purchases and investments in banana and crayfish production. Sylvestre remarks that money is the marker of success, not skin color, although every character in the novel comments on their complexion, and color prejudice is deeply ingrained in their worldviews (Condé, 1995: 108). Sylvestre is determined to increase his wealth and influence through his daughter’s marriage to Marius Vindrex. Instead of marrying, Vilma seeks refuge with Sancher and they become lovers. Vilma’s unborn child, like Mira’s son Quentin, will inherit the vitriol or affection directed at Sancher and perhaps his curse. All of Sancher’s children, including Quentin whom he tried to abort, will have the economic and color advantages wielded by the Lemeaulnes and the Ramsarans, but they will also be haunted by the nightmare of history (Condé, 1995: 196), inheriting spaces “afraid of understanding” (Condé, 1995: 139). Historical ghosts are the incubus that kills Sancher and the reason he did not want to reproduce his cursed line. If his history is a reference point, Sancher will become the palimpsest for his children and will seep into their futures.
Rosa, Vilma’s mother, realizes that she has failed her daughter by constantly comparing her to her dead daughter, Shireen. Vilma is the darker and unloved substitute of her sister who died a few months after birth. Shireen’s ghostly presence made it impossible for Rosa to treat Vilma as an individual. Rosa realizes that Vilma’s actions are the result of lack of love, “a child’s misfortunes can always be traced to the parents” (Condé, 1995: 136). Any sense of familial cohesion that supports national solidarity is absent. Even when families sustain each other, as with Moïse and his mother, Shawn, and sister, Adele, they are alienated from the larger community—his mother’s Chineseness keeps her on the margins of her Rivière au Sel neighbors. The familial relationship is extended to Guadeloupe, which is characterized as a “cruel stepmother, [who] no longer nurtures her children, and so many of them are forced to freeze to death in the Paris suburbs” (Condé, 1995: 21). Families ideally provide cohesion and a sense of belonging for children. Both parents and the nation in Mangrove are unable to do so; Guadeloupe instead rears its children to leave and suffer in French France, a distant and problematic mother. The funerary ritual awakens the desire in some mothers to do more for their children. Along with Rosa and Mira, Dodose Pélagie vows to support her developmentally disabled child, Sonny, by “lay[ing] siege” to every possible medical intervention. Reclaiming the disabled child, like reclaiming the disen-chanted land, is a desire that is voiced but not given much attention in the novel. Symbolic mothering in Mangrove similar to True History subverts normative notions of motherhood and toggles between hell and grace. Circumstances disrupt and undermine mothers and motherlands. Mangrove upends the unitary and supportive idea of mothers and mothering, particularly the nation as nurturing.

Francis Sancher generated loathing for many things, but his citizenship status was not one. Though a stranger, his acceptance in the village is based on the description of him as a man who could be from any place and of any race. This ease of belonging is not the case for Désinor Décimus, the Haitian gardener. Désinor’s undocumented status, Haitian nationality, and agrarian work doom him to disrespect. His only friend is Xantippe, another dark complexioned character linked to the soil. On the periphery of Guadeloupean society, Haitians work as migrant cane cutters and construction workers who live in fear of police raids because they lack immigration documents (Condé, 1995: 165). Initially recruited as agricultural strikebreakers in the 1970s and then as construction workers in the 1980s, Haitians once regarded as honest and hardworking quickly became “delinquents” (Ferly, 2010: 60). Odile Ferly (2010) argues that Haitian representation in Condé’s novel reveals the racial politics at play in the Guadeloupean imagination, particularly Haitians as darker skinned, Vodou (i.e. pagan) practitioners, and “vermin” who drain on the social system (p. 62). Ferly (2010) contends that Désinor and Xantippe, the characters most tied to the land and the least racially mixed, offer a connection to a radical consciousness: “Haitians are a vivid reminder to Guadeloupeans of the Caribbean identity discarded in return for economic prosperity and sociopolitical stability through assimilation to France” (p. 63). For Ferly, Haiti is a space of radical and “authentic” blackness and Caribbeanness. Guadeloupe’s path, aligned with France and not the region, manifests in a loss of regional connection. The repugnance for foreigners displayed in Mangrove is reflected in other Caribbean territories and ruptures notions of a unified Guadeloupe and an integrated Caribbean.

Regionally, Haitians disrupt the rhetoric of Caribbean unity and reveal its absence. Désinor Décimus is not just foreign but Haitian, the identity most incongruous and
vilified in Guadeloupe since the 1980s as demonstrated by the 21st-century court case against singer-cum-politician, Ibo Simon. Guadeloupe Standing Up is the anti-immigrant political party founded by Simon. He rose in popularity through xenophobic attacks on his popular television show, “Everyday 1:00 pm.” In 2000, his party won seats on the island’s senior representative political body, the Regional Council.50 Phillippe Zacaïr chronicles how Simon cultivated the Haitian threat by characterizing Haitians as “scum” and “vermin” out to get natives. Simon stated, “Guadeloupans, when a Haitian attacks a Guadeloupean, you must react, you must fight … they are bloodthirsty … Haitians will put shit in your mouth.”51

Although Simon’s narrative was embraced by many Guadeloupans (Zacaïr, 2010: 48), it also was resisted. In 2001, Simon was put on trial, found guilty, and his television show cancelled for “calling for racist hatred and violence against Haitian immigrants and other Afro-Caribbeans residing in Guadeloupe” (Zacaïr, 2010: 42). That same year the Collective against Barbarism, founded to combat the vitriol against immigrants, stressed Haiti’s history as a purveyor of black freedom and culture as an antidote to Simon’s invectives.52 Zacaïr (2010) notes that “Guadeloupans have combined rabid anti-Haitian prejudice with admiration for and borrowing from elements of Haitian cultural expression” (p. 43). This paradox is at the heart of Guadeloupe’s identity and the tension between France and “the contours of an imagined ‘Guadeloupean space’ that is conceived as authentic and pure.”53 Such xenophobic sentiments are not just in Guadeloupe but evident throughout the region as competition for scarce resources impacts the movement of Caribbean nationals.54

In Crossing the Mangrove, the idea of Haitians as perennial outsiders in the region (Ferly 2010: 65) is extended through Désinor’s sexual relationship with Carlos: “One day, tired of being refused by these heartless women, they climbed on each other, and to their surprise found the same flash of pleasure at the end of their lovemaking. So they had started all over again ....”55 This same-gender loving relationship amplifies Désinor’s unbelonging in the hyper heteropatriarchy of Rivière au Sel. Yet Désinor’s sex life and thus his difference is revealed only to the novel’s readers. Moïse, Désinor, and Xantippe have their sexual expressions stymied, homo-eroticized, or relegated to the primordial past alienating them from the Rivière au Sel residents. Christopher Ian Foster believes that Desinor’s “queer identification troubles notions of normative community [in terms of] his disidentification with his nation of origin [and with] the heteronormative family.”56 Similar to Faye Galdy and the elderly women who were firebombed in True History, Moïse, the postman, Désinor, and Xantippe are outside of the sexual economy of the nation. Their sexual desires thwarted—Xantippe’s wife and children incinerated in a long-ago fire, and Moïse and Désinor, rejected by women, their “natural” procreative masculinity curtailed making them failed patriarchs unable to reproduce the nation. They are estranged from the nation—the Haitians who do not belong, and Xantippe and Moïse who are strangers in their own land, while Sancher “the stranger” is embraced in ways they are not. These strangers do not reproduce. Xantippe, representing primordial blackness, loses his entire family; no one wants to sleep with Moïse who is barely tolerated; and Desinor is gay and without a female love interest. Yet, Sancher, the outsider, fathers two children while in Rivière au Sel. These male characters,
unable to reproduce children, remain on the periphery and function as marginal specters for other characters.

*The True History of Paradise* and *Crossing the Mangrove* are novels rooted in haunting and (un)belonging. The political turbulence of the 1970s Jamaica is a place of reckoning “of souls of the dead answering to the souls of the living but never to the satisfaction of either, and of the living being burdened by those dead whose remorse keeps appearing like an unwanted child in every generation.” Women who flee, fight, and forge ahead people *The True History of Paradise*. These women, signifiers for the troubled nation, are at various points embroiled in the paradoxes of belonging to a violent paradise. The novel explores the idea of belonging to a nation that has limited economic possibilities, vast disparities in wealth and education, and escalating violence—particularly against women. Each story recounts the pain and possibility of this paradise with most voices advising Jean to leave the country.

Similarly, Guadeloupe of the late 1980s suffers from a malaise centered on belonging: who are we and where do we belong—with French France or with other Caribbean spaces? The color, class, gender, and regional conflicts in Guadeloupe manifest throughout the region. Condé’s refusal to create “pure” spaces *Crossing the Mangrove* manifests in the discordant community that grapples with ethnic, economic, and political legacies of the postcolonial Caribbean. *Crossing the Mangrove* explores the dualities and subversions of palimpsestic belonging through the figure of the foreigner embodied by Francis Sancher and Désinor Décimus as well as the ruptured family as seen through various mothers, including the nation as a failed nurturer. These novels do not make a strong case for grace or the virtue and benevolence of Caribbean spaces. Rather, they rupture the imaginings of cohesive and coherent national spaces and offer Jamaica and Guadeloupe as a disfigured and dismal paradises, or hell that the layers of history continue to intrude upon. The rituals and aspects of ritual in Condé’s and Cezair-Thompson’s work show uprooting, liminality, but no integration. The most realized sense of home is a liminal one—in which characters hover in a haunted in-between space that become places of reckoning. Both *The True History of Paradise* and *Crossing the Mangrove* illustrate that literature can be a tool that simulates liminal spaces which allows readers to reimagine and rearticulate their relationship to their communities. In essence, literature has the power to help us imagine, reflect, interpret, rearticulate, and ultimately reinvent home. As crucially, these novels challenge the official narratives that shape history, nation, and belonging. These works demonstrate how the literary form creates enough ‘threshold’ spaces to help the reader experience types of haunting that makes it possible to negotiate the suffocating paradoxes of hell and grace.

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**Notes**

1. Yarimar Bonilla (2015) contends that “the majority of Caribbean polities are non-sovereign societies, even those that have achieved ‘flag independence’ still struggle with how to forge a
more robust project of self-determination, how to reconcile the unresolved legacies of colonialism and slavery, how to assert control over their entanglements with foreign powers, and how to stem their disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of political and economic modernity” (xiii–xiv, italics in original).

2. In her book, Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment, Bonilla (2015) writes, “This political status [overseas department] promised full integration into the French Republic, political representation in the National Assembly, the extension of French civic institutions, and a socioeconomic leveling with citizens of mainland France. Yet, as their name suggests, the departments outre-mer remain marred as both geographically and categorically distinct: outside of, and separate from, the (unmarked) departments in the French Republic” (p. 2).


5. The essays on Cezair-Thompson’s novel include: Lisa Li-Shen Yun, “An Afro-Chinese Caribbean: Cultural Cartographies Contrariness in the Work of Antonio Chuffat Latour and Margaret Cezair-Thompson, and Patricia Powell” and Rachel Mordecai’s “Blackness and the Creole Multiracial Subject in Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s True History of Paradise and Robert Antoni’s Carnival” (Yun, 2004).

6. Some articles include: Jean Jonassaint’s “For a Caribbean Intertext: On Some Readings of Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove”; Wangari Wa Nyatetu-Waigwa’s “From Liminality to a Home of Her Own?: The Quest Motif in Maryse Condé’s Fiction”; Odile Ferly’s “The Mirror that We Don’t Want: Literary Confrontations between Haitians and Guadeloupeans”; Pascale De Souza’s “Crossing the Mangrove of Order and Prejudice”; Pius Adesanmi’s “Anti-Manichean Aesthetics: The Economy of Space in Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove and Calixthe Beyala’s Loukouni”; Deborah B. Gaensbauer’s “Reconfiguring Boundaries in Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove”; Christopher Ian Foster’s “The Queer Politics of Crossing in Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove”; Heather Smyth’s “Roots beyond Roots: Heteroglossia and Feminist Creolization in Myal and Crossing the Mangrove”; and Dawn Fulton’s “Reading Death: Allegory in Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove” (Nyatetu-Waigwa, 1995).


9. Gordon (2008: 63). See also Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging (2014) in which feminist rehearsal is used in a similar way. Feminist rehearsal is another mechanism to engage with history, to repeat its lessons through literature to develop empathy for oneself and the other.


11. In Arnold van Gennep’s The Rites of Passage, he delineates three stages within each rite: (1) separation—leaving a specific location or geography; (2) transition, the liminal space of ambiguity where one is between the positions decreed by convention, custom, and law; and (3) incorporation, when the one undergoing the rite is reintegrated into society (Ackerman, 2005: 88–96). In this essay, I am using a slightly different interpretation of these stages to evoke an emotional separation (disaffection) and reincorporation. Thus, hell and grace are used to signify psychological and emotional separation rather than a physical separation and reincorporation from a social group.

12. In Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging, I use feminist rehearsal as a methodology to engage with regional archetypes. The palimpsest is an extension of those ideas.
13. According to Michael Kaufman, “democratic socialism is ‘a political and economic theory’ under which the means of production, distribution and exchange are owned and/or controlled by the people. It is a system in which political power is used to ensure that exploitation is abolished, that the opportunities of society are equally available to all and that the wealth of the community is fairly distributed. A process rather than a rigid dogma, its application must depend on the particular conditions which obtain from time to time in each country. It emphasizes co-operation rather than competition; and service rather than self-interest as the basic motive forces for personal, group and communal action. Its ultimate objective is the building of a classless society by removing the element of entrenched economic privilege which is the basis of class divisions” (1985: 78).


19. See the diaries of Edward Long and Thomas Thistlewood, Jamaican planters who chronicled the violence, often meted out by them, against black people, especially women.


21. Attributed to Peter Tosh, shitsem refers to “political and socially corrupt system of government that facilitates the rich and powerful and further impoverishes the poor” (Murrell et al., 1998: 452).


23. Despite the fact that East Indians have been part of the Caribbean landscape since 1838, their acceptance is not always an easy celebration of multiculturalism as the motto implies. In Jamaica, Indians are relatively small in number especially when compared to their 50% of the population in both Trinidad and Guyana. In countries with a more sizable Indian presence, the notions of belonging shift especially since Indians in both those territories have led governments. They are not the marginalized Indians of Guadeloupe and other places where they are numerically subsumed by blacks. Likewise, despite their multi-generational presence in the region, “Caribbean” people of Syrian and Lebanese extraction are regarded as suspicious, gravalicious interlopers. See Jean’s fiancé Mark Silvera, whose parents did not approve of Jean because she was too dark-skinned, “The Silveras were a well-known family—Jamaica-white, meaning there was black blood somewhere in the genealogy but it didn’t show” (154). The Silveras relent only in light of Monica’s wealth, 157.


25. As Daniel Stern, Jean’s German great-grandfather recounts, “The vegetation, the rivers, the people do give fruitfully of themselves to civilized commerce with farms, vistas, loyalty, and marriage. But nothing will stay still: rivulets seek new beds, tendrils new hosts, spouses new rooms, new actions. Love is not betrayed but betrayal. England brought me peace.
I lived in the city. No garden, no songbirds, no bright, tropical deceptions … England is not without beauty, as the poets will tell you, but the beauty is circumspect and does not betray men” (p. 241).

26. It is interesting to note that while it is challenging for most Jamaicans to build home in their country, the country has become a refuge for tourists and those who can afford to make it home on a temporary basis.

27. “Food security is a little more sophisticated than growing cassava to substitute for imported wheat and rice as world food prices soar, triggering riots in several countries. The cartoonists are having a field day with the ‘Cassava Plan’. And generally, their critique is more trenchant than any column or broadcast. It has to be, boiled down to a single panel or two which has to deliver the whole punch. It is not the first time that a government is pushing import substitution for ‘self-reliance’ and food security. The Manley government of 1972–1980 had this as a central plank of democratic socialism, establishing collective food farms and a cassava factory in Goshen, St Elizabeth. It didn’t work. People, including the cartoonists, are saying Bruce Golding is uncannily like Michael Manley—in elements of manner, speech, and policy, and, certainly, in the matter of taking over portfolios deemed too important to be left in the hands of ordinary ministers. Why didn’t the Manley food plan succeed? If Golding is going to succeed where Manley failed, it is important to have a reasonable answer to the question” (http://www.caribhaccp.com/de/news_details.php?refNo=710&bereich=DPS_BGVV-News &area=verb&bgcolor=white).

28. One reviewer suggested perhaps channeling the Indian practice of sati in which Indian widows throw themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands. While Lana is half-Indian and half-black, or dougla in the Caribbean context, her death by fire is not characterized in those terms, though as readers Lana’s act calls sati to mind.


30. In 1868 Governor John Eyre was charged with high crimes and misdemeanors for imposing martial law, Heuman (1994: 137).


34. In an interview with Randall Kenan when asked if she thinks of the ancestral figures as voices or spirits, Cezair-Thompson (1999) responds, “For me, they’re so much more voices than spirits. You don’t really see the ancestors, Jean doesn’t see them. She really is ‘clairaudiant’, if that’s a word, rather than clairvoyant. And for me, that’s where the emphasis is, on voices that have been lost or drowned through the events of history again, and are coming alive for her through the landscape, through situations, through memory. I read a description of my novel someplace that said she’s ‘attuned to the spirit world’. In a way that’s true, in that Yoruba sense of having the Egun in her. That Yoruba word ‘Egun’ can mean manifold or multiple spirits. But the novel is really more about a multiplicity of voices” (p. 58).


41. In Suriname though Winti rituals are taboo for Creole Christians, Winti practices and beliefs nonetheless are part of separation rituals such as wakes. Winti belief divides the soul into two parts, the kra unites with “spiritual parents [and] after an indefinite time comes back to the world to be reincarnated” usually through the mother’s line. The yorka, “the
inner, spiritual self … then permanently joins with the ancestors in the land of the dead,” which some characterize as heaven (Meighoo et al., 2013: 17). Because the yorù́kà does not immediately disengage from the earthly plain, collective rituals for a “good farewell” are performed to “guarantee repose of the soul and separate the deceased person from … the living” (Meighoo et al., 2013: 17).

42. van Gennep (1960: 146–148).
44. In the broader Caribbean, also considered a “small space” globally, it perhaps is hope in our rituals that will allow us to confront and transcend our own prejudices. The question becomes which ritual(s) can provide such spaces at the regional level?
45. I use “whitish” to connote that Loulou’s non-white ancestry. Though he is treated as white and has the power and privilege of white skin, he also has black ancestry.
48. But Mira’s description connects her to the “river goddess Oshun who represents death” (Romero-Cesareo, 1997: 253). Mira is also connected to folkloric figures like La djabless, the beautiful woman with one cloven foot who entices men to their deaths (Olmos, Fernandez and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 151 and Romero- Cesareo, 1997: 252).
54. For instance, see stories on Guyanese migrants in Trinidad and Tobago and Haitians anywhere in the region from the Bahamas to Guyana.

References


