

*Sexual Citizenship and
Caribbean-Canadian Fiction:
Dionne Brand's "In Another Place,
Not Here" and Shani Mootoo's
"Cereus Blooms at Night"*

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I have lost my place, or my place has deserted me. . . . The pleasure and the paradox of my own exile is that I belong wherever I am.
GEORGE LAMMING, *The Pleasures of Exile*¹

Madivine. Friending. Zami. How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty. . . . underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind up between the pages of a school-book. It was our own, my truly private paradise of blugoe and bread-fruit hanging from the trees, of nutmeg and lime and sapadilla, of tonka beans and red and yellow Paradise Plums.

AUDRE LORDE, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*

THE EPIGRAPH FROM George Lamming speaks of place and exile, claiming a sense of cultural belonging that transcends geographical locations. This article examines the withholding of such sense of belonging and cultural citizenship from lesbians and gay men in Caribbean cultural and national space and looks to Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) for strategies against and responses to this exclusion.² These two novels show the crucial links between place, culture, and belonging in relation to sexuality. Brand's and Mootoo's texts follow that of Audre Lorde, whose autobiography *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* makes the Caribbean a "home" and "paradise" for women who love women. Both Brand and Mootoo engage in a critique of homophobia in

Caribbean culture, at the same time asserting a sense of “ownership” over Caribbean cultural space by creating a semi-utopian Caribbean space for their lesbian and gay characters.

Before exploring the relationship between sexuality and nation-place in Brand’s and Mootoo’s novels, I want to consider a debate concerning the distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders” that often characterizes discussions of homophobia in Caribbean culture: in an article on homophobia in black popular culture and contemporary Caribbean culture (published in *Callaloo*, in 1997), Timothy Chin examines the case of Buju Banton, the performer of “Boom Bye Bye,” the Jamaican dancehall song that led to heated discussion in Caribbean and American communities on the question of whether its lyrics were homophobic. Chin argues that the controversy set up a polarization between Caribbean cultural politics and gay politics, and that Caribbean participants in the ensuing discussion failed to challenge a notion of Caribbean culture that “relies on certain fixed oppositions between native and foreign, indigenous and metropolitan, us and them” (128). Carolyn Cooper, for instance, points out that “translation is clearly an ideological issue” (442) and argues that the translated lyrics of “Boom Bye Bye” provided by The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and Gay Men of African Descent (GMAD) during the public debate about the song neglected the cultural specificity of dancehall and the cultural authority of Banton’s rudeboy posture in the context of “working-class resistance in urban Jamaica” (442).³ Cooper, however, firmly locates all resistance to the song *outside* Jamaica and the Caribbean, suggesting that “the impetus to publicly protest in Jamaica the heterophobia [her neologism for fear of difference, including fear of homosexuality] of ‘Boom Bye Bye’ seems to have come from Europe and North America” (439), and that “it would appear that homosexuals in Jamaica themselves accept the social contract, proverbially expressed, that ‘where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise’” (440). She argues that critiques of dancehall culture reflect “*imported* Western feminist notions” of misogyny, noting that “powerful organizations of homosexuals in the North Atlantic like GLAAD seem to be playing the role of imperial overlords in the cultural arena” (444; emphasis added).

Cooper's intervention goes beyond the necessary work of situating the Banton issue in its dense cultural specificity; she makes it impossible, in the terms she sets up, to envision resistance to homophobia in Caribbean culture as being anything other than "imported" or imperialist.

In contrast to Cooper's insider/outsider articulation of Caribbean culture and homophobia, Chin calls for "a politics that recognizes . . . the heterogeneous and contradictory (as opposed to homogeneous and monolithic) nature of all cultural formations" (128):

it is necessary—especially given the complex ideological issues currently surrounding the question of black cultural production—to formulate modes of cultural criticism that can account for the differences within as well as between cultures. (128)

Chin finds in Michelle Cliff's and H. Nigel Thomas's work attempts to articulate indigenous lesbian and gay sexuality that make "the critique of homophobic and sexist ideologies an integral component of what we might call a decolonized Caribbean discourse" (129).⁴ Chin's intervention in this debate is particularly useful for the way he acknowledges the ethnocentrism of the North American critics on the Buju Banton issue (notably their assumptions that "North American culture is more advanced and therefore less homophobic than its Caribbean counterpart" [128]) and yet challenges formulations of Caribbean culture that rely on an assumed parallel between Caribbean or African-based culture and heterosexuality on the one hand, and between European or imperialistic culture and homosexuality on the other. Such a formulation has everything to do with the questions this paper takes up—questions about who belongs and who does not, and about the nature of cultural and political citizenship and "authentic" decolonized culture. Likewise, Jamaican-Canadian writer Makeda Silvera has noted the effects of this insider/outsider dichotomy. She points out that in the exclusion of lesbians from Caribbean culture what is implicit is that "one cannot be a lesbian and continue to do political work and, not surprisingly, it follows that a Black lesbian/artist cannot create using the art forms of our culture" (530).

The "Boom Bye Bye" debate and the polarization of critical positions that it revealed indicate the urgency of imagining anti-

homophobic resistance that has Caribbean cultural authority. Brand's and Mootoo's novels take up this task of articulating Caribbean-based, decolonizing assertions of gay and lesbian subjectivity. Aspects of the "Boom Bye Bye" discussion pertain only to homophobia directed at gay Caribbean men, and the distinction between "African-Caribbean" and "European" that characterizes the Buju Banton example omits the Indo-Caribbean context of Mootoo's novel; nevertheless, the novels by Mootoo and Brand intersect usefully with this discussion of insiders and outsiders.⁵ In their attention to "place" and movement between locations—in particular with the utopic or imaginary quality of belonging—*Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here* are concerned with the connections between sexuality and the Caribbean diaspora. In fact, most of the Caribbean writers challenging the exclusions of lesbians and gay men from Caribbean social space—Michelle Cliff, Audre Lorde, Patricia Powell, H. Nigel Thomas, and Makeda Silvera, for example—have lived or are living and writing in North America.⁶ Since so many Caribbean writers, including central writers in the Caribbean canon, have either emigrated or spent much of their careers abroad, the North American location of these writers would not be as significant, were it not for the lines drawn between insiders and outsiders in discussions of homophobia in Caribbean culture. These writers refuse the designation "outsiders," however, and assert cultural warrant for claiming space for gay and lesbian representations in Caribbean culture. Lorde, for instance, insists on the cultural authority of Caribbean lesbianism by tracing histories of women loving women in Grenada, through naming the words "*Madivine. Friending. Zami*" (14). *In Another Place, Not Here* and *Cereus Blooms at Night* also claim this space; Brand's novel, in particular, does so by linking lesbian and feminist consciousness with anti-racist, anti-colonial politics in both Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic space. Furthermore, the novel asserts that diasporic movement, from "another place" to "here" and back, should not prevent full cultural citizenship of Caribbean lesbians in Canada and the Caribbean.

Much useful work has been done by such critics as Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha on the topic of the modern nation

as a self-generating symbolic community that maintains political unity through a continual displacement of plurality. Jacqui Alexander, in particular, has brought an analysis of Caribbean nationalism and sexuality together with a reading of legal texts in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas to “foreground the complicity of the state in sexual politics” (“Redrafting” 147). She points out that in order to assert their legitimacy, the Caribbean states she examines naturalize heterosexuality by criminalizing lesbian and gay sex, thereby revising the terms of citizenship to exclude lesbians and gays. “Not just (any) *body* can be a citizen any more,” she argues,

for *some* bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, *these* bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation. (“Not Just” 6)

Alexander’s critique is useful for proposing how, in a political and cultural desire for a nation free of Western intrusions, the Caribbean state may suggest some “originary . . . moment for the heterosexual founding of [the Caribbean] nation” (“Erotic” 85). However, because in Brand’s and Mootoo’s novels “the nation” does not appear in its singularity, this article points to the idea of “nation” not as “nationality” or particular nation-states, but rather as national space. This suggests citizenship in both a political and cultural sense—a wider form of social enfranchisement. This more flexible notion of citizenship can account for Kobena Mercer’s critique of “the latent heterosexism of certain cultural nationalist discourses in the present” (88). And it can also support Paul Gilroy’s comment that the “crisis . . . of black social and political life” has been taken up by black nationalist discourses as “the crisis of black masculinity,” with a resolution through “the mystic reconstruction of the ideal heterosexual family” (313).

Brand’s and Mootoo’s novels sever the link between homophobic or heterosexist allocations of Caribbean cultural citizenship and the work of decolonization and bring together an anti-racist politics with an affirmation of Caribbean gay men’s and lesbians’ cultural belonging. Both texts address the issue of

cultural citizenship or social enfranchisement through the use of a semi-utopian imagining of this cultural belonging. Annamarie Jagose, in *Lesbian Utopics*, points out that the category "lesbian" is automatically implicated when one imagines "a space beyond phallogocentric prioritizations of masculinity and heterosexuality"; in this sense, it is "at once liberatory and elsewhere . . . a utopic space" (2). She argues, however, that this conceptualization suggests that the lesbian is "beyond the reaches of cultural legislation" (2): "imagining 'lesbian' as a utopic site, subscribing to lesbianism's impossible dream of exteriority, misrecognizes the ways that category is elaborately and irretrievably enmeshed in structures it is imagined beyond" (160). Jagose's solution to the transcendentalizing, essentializing effects of "lesbian utopics" is to be mindful of the discursively constructed condition of lesbian (and other) bodies, an awareness that allows for an understanding that "the cultural meanings of the lesbian body, like those of any body, are neither fully self-determining nor fully determined" (161). In *Another Place, Not Here* and *Cereus Blooms at Night*, then, to the extent that they invoke a utopian Caribbean space for gay and lesbian subjects, use utopics in a way both emancipatory of and resistant to homophobic and colonial structures of power.

II

Mootoo, multi-media artist, video maker, and short story and novel writer, examines recurrently themes of identity, place, colonialism, and sexuality. Her short story collection *Out on Main Street* (1993) explores the complexity of culture, sexuality, and memory for Indo-Caribbean women characters primarily in Vancouver and Trinidad. Mootoo has also created six videos dealing with sexual identity, language, and place and displacement, entitled *Lest I Burn* (1991), *English Lesson* (1991), *A Paddle and a Compass* (1992; with Wendy Oberlander), *Wild Woman in the Woods* (1993), *Her Sweetness Lingers* (1994), and *Güerita and Prietita* (1996; with Kathy High). Her only novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, can be read in the context of the critical priorities of this wider body of work.

Cereus Blooms at Night is set in a sometimes dreamlike, fictional place called Paradise, in the country of Lantanacalara.

In this space, by no means protected from homophobia and sexual abuse, the novel gradually brings together a somewhat utopic community of outsiders who find healing and selfhood through their recognition of each others' "shared queerness" (Mootoo 48). Tyler, a male nurse, is the "witness" (100) and scribe of the story told to him by a mysterious elderly woman, Mala Ramchandin, who arrives at the nursing home where he works. The novel is full of characters living on and crossing over social and sexual borders: Mala's Indo-Caribbean mother, Sarah, gradually develops a passionate relationship with Lavinia Thoroughly, a wealthy white woman, and leaves her husband for her; Mala's suitor, Ambrose, has a daughter, Otoh, whose "transformation" into a man is "flawless" (110), and who falls in love with Tyler; Tyler, with growing confidence, expresses both his attraction to men and his love of wearing feminine clothes; and Mala herself, left behind as a child with her sister Asha after her mother leaves, sacrifices herself to save her sister by becoming her father's lover in a decades-long nightmare of incest.

The novel responds on a number of fronts to the idea of incompatibility between gay and lesbian identity and Caribbean-based decolonizing politics: it emphasizes these boundary-crossings and the characters' multiplicity of identity; it brings together a troubling of the divide between "perversion" and "natural" at the level of both characters and landscape; and it mirrors the metamorphoses of characters with metamorphoses in the natural world of the Caribbean landscape. It thus makes the Caribbean a space for a utopian community of queer subjects and both implicitly and explicitly links their stories to a project of imaginative decolonization.

Cereus Blooms at Night presents sexuality as a fluid form of identity and parallels sexual indeterminacy or outlaw sexuality with other forms of border-crossing identities. Tyler immediately offers a representation of transgressive gender roles when he speaks about his "ways" and his resistance to the idea that a man "ought to be strong and fearless and without need of protection" (10). He feels "neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing" (71) and yearns to feel "ordinary" (22). When Mala, his charge in the old-age home, offers him a

nurse's dress and pair of stockings, Tyler feels himself "metamorphosing" into a woman's body, excited by "the possibilities trembling inside [him]" (76) and by the freedom of feeling "ordinary." This freedom allows Tyler to acknowledge his attraction to other men, including Otoh. Otoh, born a girl called Ambrosia, imperceptibly changes into a man. His (Mootoo uses the male pronoun) preoccupied parents "hardly noticed that their daughter was transforming herself into their son"—a transformation that "was flawless" (109-10). The adult Otoh appears attracted to both men and women, dresses up in both his mother's and father's clothes, and has "the ability to imagine many sides of a dilemma . . . and the vexing inability to make up his mind" (110). In both cases, the emphasis on "in-between" identities, change, and process indicates the mutability of sexuality in the novel.

Tyler and Otoh's examples of sexual/gender border-crossing as metamorphoses find parallels elsewhere in the novel. Mootoo makes the risky move of associating both Tyler and Otoh with Mala—Tyler because of their "shared queerness" (48), and Otoh because each has "secrets" (124). The move is risky because the novel opens up the question of the "perverse" and the "natural" (48) in relation to the sexual abuse that Mala endures. When Tyler ponders his gender identity, he asks his grandmother, "Could a nephew be the father of his uncle? . . . could a mother ever be any other relationship to her child? Could she be the father? . . . Could your sister be your brother too? Could your brother be your father?" (25). He learns from Nana, in the context of the town gossip about Chandin and his daughter Mala, that "the father could be the grandfather too," but that "it's not good, it's not nice" (25). It takes Tyler a long time to distinguish "between his [Chandin's] perversion and what others called mine" (48).

Mala's identity-splitting—she sees herself as adult Mala, and as a child (Pohpoh) that she must protect—is another form of the multiplicity of identity in the novel, but is also a result of child sexual abuse. The question of incest also masks an instance of interracial attraction—Chandin's secret and unrequited love for Lavinia Thoroughly, the daughter of the rich white mis-

sionary family that adopts him as a native protégé. When his attraction becomes apparent to the Reverend Thoroughly, the Reverend forbids the relationship on the grounds that Chandin and Lavinia are “siblings,” even though it is clear that Chandin’s dark skin and role as representative “of the race that it was their mission to Christianize” (38) is the real obstacle. Thoroughly argues, “You cannot, you must not have desire for your sister Lavinia. That is surely against God’s will” (37). In this case, Thoroughly thwarts Chandin’s attempt to cross racial and social borders.

Cereus Blooms at Night consistently links these questions of sexual identity with the idea of metamorphosis or liminality, including the forms of border-crossing discussed above. The novel also plays with the designations “perverse” and “natural” in relation to the “natural” world of plants and insects that surrounds Mala’s house. This linking of the metamorphosis of sexuality with the larger metamorphosis of the natural world serves to authorize the location of these marginal characters in Caribbean space. Mala’s house is surrounded by the scent of decay, a result of the bodies of insects she collects, the snail shells she carefully boils, and her father’s decaying corpse she hides in the cellar. To Mala, this smell is not offensive; it is “the aroma of life refusing to end . . . the aroma of transformation” (128). This transformation reaches out to the main characters. The plant of the title, cereus, is an otherwise nondescript cactus plant that blooms once a year in an astonishing unfolding of petals and scent. The plant’s rare appearance of “exquisite elegance” for “one short, precious night” (54) occurs as Otoh, Tyler, and Mala are brought together in the narrative, a juxtaposition that demands associating the characters with the plant. Like the cereus, Tyler testifies that, through his connection with Mala, “my own life has finally . . . begun to bloom” (105). Mala, in turn, resembles many natural things: a bird, a “giraffe” (178), the mudra tree into which she blends. Initially unable to see Mala against the tree trunk, Otoh says that he could have “mistaken her for a shrub” (155). Mala is like the snails for which she cares; Lavinia tells her that snail souls protect the humans who care for and protect living snails; and Ambrose watches out for Mala, he tells

Otoh, because “you might simply consider charity towards such a creature as insurance toward positive retribution” (107-08). The novel links these major characters with the natural world in order to situate queer identity in Caribbean space.

Mootoo’s vision of the local Caribbean queer community of “Paradise” takes a utopian shape. Once Tyler “metamorphoses” into an openly gay man, he is accepted by his fellow nurses and staff at the nursing home. Mr. Hector, the gardener to whom Tyler is attracted, tells Tyler of his gay brother Randy, who was sent away by his mother in order to protect him from an abusive father. Mr. Hector says to Tyler, “Is like you bring Randy back to me, boy. . . . I want to ask you so many questions but I don’t even know what it is I want to know” (73-74). When Tyler later “unabashedly declare[s]” himself, “cross[es] [the] line,” and walks arm in arm with Otoh wearing a skirt, makeup, and scent, Mr. Hector says, “I wish my brother could meet you two. . . . By any chance, you know my brother?” (247-48). However, other experiences of the main characters are not so clearly positive, such as the double-edged form of acceptance Otoh earns from his mother, Elsie. Near the end of the novel, Elsie surprises him by indicating that she is fully aware of Otoh’s (technically) female sex; she reminds him that “you don’t have anything between those two stick legs of yours” (237), telling him,

you are not the first or the only one of your kind in this place. You grow up here and you don’t realize almost everybody in this place wish they could be somebody or something else? That is the story of life here in Lantanacamara. . . . every village in this place have a handful of people like you. And is not easy to tell who is who. . . . I does watch out over the banister and wonder if *who* I see is really *what* I see. (237-38)

Elsie Mohanty connects Otoh’s sexual identity with the novel’s larger themes of metamorphosis and indeterminacy of identity, but she does so in a way that divests Otoh’s sexual difference of its specificity at the same time as it brings Otoh into a larger Caribbean community. The novel ends with Tyler’s vision of a reunion drawing Lavinia, Sarah, and Mala’s sister Asha into this eclectic community. The utopian spirit of this vision, however, is compromised by Lavinia and Sarah’s haunting absence from the text, the violence of their exit, and the extremity of abuse inflicted

by Chandin on Mala and Asha after Sarah's necessarily hasty departure.⁷

The violence surrounding Lavinia and Sarah's absence ensures that the novel's utopianism is still implicated in (and resistant to) very real conditions of exclusion and oppression, as does its implicit linking of Mala, Tyler, and Otoh with decolonizing politics. The novel makes this link in part through the character of Chandin, whose abuse of his daughters cannot help but be linked to his role in the text as a representative (and victim) of colonizing missionary work. For a time, Chandin wholeheartedly adopts the manner, dress, and goals of Reverend Thoroughly and students from the Shivering Northern Wetlands (presumably a stand-in for England) and assists Thoroughly in the conversion of Indo-Caribbean field labourers. At another level, though, the text counterposes a monolithic colonizing discourse (represented by the exclusivity of the surname "Thoroughly") with the myriad possibilities and multiple identities offered by the central characters. Through a "both/and" approach to sexuality, Mootoo uses the flexibility of queer identity as a decolonizing tool.

III

Trinidad-born Dionne Brand's poetry, essays, documentary film work, and novel all respond politically and poetically to forms of oppression that include racism, sexism, and homophobia. *In Another Place, Not Here* extends the commitments of Brand's poetry to bring together more fully a lesbian love story situated in anti-racist and Caribbean anti-colonial politics. Her novel is structured around her protagonists' movements between nations and places, as indicated by the title, *In Another Place, Not Here*. But, as the title also indicates, place, or in particular a sense of belonging to a place, is always deferred. Verlia and Elizete meet while cutting cane on a Caribbean island identifiable as Grenada. Their love and their individual histories take shape in a non-linear, often fluidly poetic movement between Canada—where Verlia lived before meeting Elizete and where Elizete travels after Verlia's death—and the Caribbean, where both women grew up and later meet each other, and where Verlia

is killed during the American invasion. Canada and the Caribbean operate as poles in Brand's search for a home for her black Caribbean lesbian characters and in her efforts to claim legitimacy for lesbian subjectivity. As Mootoo's novel does with queer identity, *In Another Place, Not Here* asserts a sense of "ownership" over Caribbean space for lesbian sexuality and articulates it through a connection between lesbian erotics and Caribbean images. But the novel also suggests that, as a result of the various forms of oppression its characters are subject to, no place is home for Verlia and Elizete, except perhaps the metaphorical home created through political struggle and commitment. The novel therefore proposes a dialectic between a utopian vision of lesbian space and a more materialist or activist critique of the disenfranchisements of racism and homophobia.

The core of the book is a series of scenes at the beginning of the novel where the two women meet and begin their relationship on a cane field in a place called Caicou. Elizete's description of Verlia and of her growing attraction to her is phrased in sensual terms that connect both women to the Caribbean landscape around them. For Elizete, the connection between the two women is sweet like sugar. She says,

That woman like a drink of cool water. The four o'clock light thinning she dress, she back good and strong, the sweat raining off in that moment when I look . . . I see she. Hot, cool and wet. I sink the machete in my foot, careless, blood blooming in the stalks of cane, a sweet ripe smell wash me faint. With pain. Wash the field, spinning green mile after green mile around she. See she sweat, sweet like sugar. (3-4)

A constellation of images connects the two women sensually to the place they are in and to its history of (forced) labour: sugar, sweat, and sea; cane, water, heat, and blood. Verlia has a "mouth like a ripe mango" (13), and when she whispers "Sister" to Elizete, Elizete says the sound "feel like rum going through my throat" (14). Elizete herself, associated with the earth in this novel, becomes part of the land in her fantasy. When the man she lives with abuses her, she thinks, "I carried a mountain inside of me. The thought of him and his hardness cut at the red stone in me from sun-up to sundown" (11). She shovels in a quarry,

imagining that her body can have the destructive power of the earth:

I feel my body full up and burst. All my skin split. . . . I dream of taking his neck with a cutlass and running to Maracaibo, yes. I imagine it as a place with thick and dense vine and alive like veins under my feet. . . . I destroying anything in my way. . . . My stomach will swell and vines will burst out. I dream it is a place where a woman can live after she done take the neck of a man. Fearless. (11-12)

In other words, in these early scenes, the novel invokes the Caribbean landscape for at least two purposes: it uses sensual imagery that firmly situates the women's love in Caribbean space; and it links Elizete's body to the landscape to provide a means of fantasizing her resistance.

As indicated earlier, though, Brand's novel partly proposes a utopic space for lesbianism, not by disavowing any of the violent history or present of racism and sexism in the Caribbean and Canada, but rather by leaving unnamed the different geographies in which the novel takes place. Sudbury, Ontario is named, and so is Toronto, which is further identifiable by street names only; and Canada is identifiable primarily by extrapolation from the cities mentioned. The novel uses the word "islands" but does not mention Caribbean countries by name. Except for landmarks like Grand Anse and Morne Rouge that identify Grenada, or, in other cases, Trinidad, the litany of place names gives an impression of specific locations without, usually, offering the name of the country. This strategy reinforces the novel's focus on place rather than nation and allows Brand to imagine a utopian space for her Caribbean lesbian characters without the singularity of specific nation-states.

In dialectic tension with this utopian and affirmative vision of Caribbean lesbian space, *In Another Place, Not Here* suggests that no place (*ou-topos*, or utopia, means "no place") is home for Caribbean lesbians. The pattern for this sense of dispossession is set in the story of Adela, the great-great-grandmother of the woman who raises Elizete. When Adela is brought by slave ship to the Caribbean, she memorizes the route in order to find her way back. But when she arrives and "done calculate the heart of this place, that it could not yield to her grief, she decide that this

place was not nowhere and is so she call it. Nowhere" (18). She lets the maps fade in her head, refuses to name her children or anything in this new place, and forgets "she true true name and she tongue" (20). Elizete inherits from Adela this negation of the place she is in, and uses it to explain "how I don't know the names of things though I know their face. I know there is names for things but I cannot be sure of the truth of them" (19-20). Despite her sense of dispossession, Elizete understands Adela's reaction but decides to name the things around her, to bring back Adela's memory of herself, and not to "feel lonely for something I don't remember" (24). She says,

Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full of fullness, everything yielding, the milk of yams, dasheen bursting blue flesh. . . . Where you see nowhere I must see everything. Where you leave all that emptiness I must fill it up. . . . the place beautiful but at the same time you think how a place like this make so much unhappiness. But since then I make myself determined to love this and never to leave. (25)

Elizete gently takes possession of this place in the name of a woman, turning Adela's negations into affirmations.

In Canada, on the other hand, both women find that dispossession and alienation cannot be overcome. Elizete's strategy of naming does not work in Toronto. She says, "this place resisted knowing. When she tried calling it something, the words would not come. . . . Her names would not do for this place" (69-70). She lives as an illegal, underground. She cannot make a mark on this place:

Here, there were many rooms but no place to live. No place which begins to resemble you, had you put a chair here or thrown a flowered curtain in the window or painted the trim of a door pink or played a burst of calypso music through its air or even burned a spice. (63)

Abena, an activist in Toronto and Verlia's former lover, tells Elizete, "Go home, this is not a place for us. . . . No revolution is coming baby" (109-10). Elizete confirms this, saying, "Go home. And really no country will do. Not any now on the face of the earth when she thought about it. Nothing existed that she could live in" (110). She feels "cold and motherless" at the thought—

“Crazy, without a country” (109). She is without a home or country because of racial and sexual oppression in Canada, and because she has lost the woman she loves and cannot speak of this love to anyone; she connects nation-space with this love when she says, “Life already take a country and a woman from me” (111).

For Verlia, there are two worlds in Toronto. There is the white world that “runs things” and that she ignores as much as possible: it is “opaque” and “something to keep an eye on, something to look for threat in” (180). Then there is “the other world growing steadily at its borders,” the one “she knows and lives in” (180). Verlia lives in the world of black people and anti-racist movement in Toronto, and by her involvement in the Movement she claims this place as Elizete claimed her island. At age seventeen, escaping her family home in the Caribbean and travelling to Toronto to join the Black Power Movement, Verlia says, “it doesn’t matter that it’s Toronto or a country named Canada. Right now that is incidental, and this city and this country will have to fit themselves into her dream” (159). When she decides she can be most effective by joining the revolution in Grenada, she commits herself to this revolution as one would to a place. Elizete says of Verlia, “She bet all of she life on this revolution. She had no place else to go, no other countries, no other revolution” (114-15). She also loves the revolution as she would love a woman—she “falls as if in love” with the revolution and with Che’s words: “the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” (165). Verlia asserts that as a black lesbian she will not find a home anywhere but in political activity and “love of living humanity” (166), in challenging the dispossession that makes neither Canada nor the Caribbean her home.

In Another Place, Not Here, therefore, responds to the exclusion of Caribbean lesbians from national space in a number of ways. It sets up a dialectic that requires two mutual strategies: a utopic assertion of Caribbean lesbians’ *belonging* in Caribbean space, through a connection between lesbian erotics and Caribbean space; and an activist assertion that belonging is found through political activity, the attempt ultimately to create a social utopia. These two facets of the novel come together in the final scene,

when Verlia either jumps or is shot by American soldiers and falls off a cliff, tracing an arc in the sky. Elizete, at the top of the cliff, falls and tunnels into the ground. These images mirror an earlier scene in the novel, when the two women are making love, and Elizete says that Verlia writes her words “in an arc in the sky” (75) while her own words “come to grounds” (75). Verlia’s leap into the air also links her resistance with that of the Caribs in Grenada who, after fighting the French in 1651, leapt to their deaths over a cliff at Sauteurs Bay.⁸ In other words, the novel brings together the two women’s love with revolutionary action and situates these two things in the history of resistance in Grenada. Verlia’s death, which haunts the entire text, appears in these final pages as utopian, an escape into her dream of “going to some place so old there’s no memory of it” (246)—another layer of this scene’s meaning, invoking Africa and the myth of “flying back to Africa.”⁹ Yet the text is haunted also by the death of revolution in Grenada, about which Brand writes elsewhere, “there isn’t a hand large enough / to gesture this tragedy . . . / dream is dead / in these antilles” (“October 19th, 1983” 40). Perhaps it is this lost dream that prevents an easy bringing together of the two sides of Brand’s dialectic. Even though the final scenes of the novel may show the necessity of both utopian visions of belonging, and engaged political struggle to free places for this belonging, Brand refuses to compromise or suggest a middle ground.

Dionne Brand and Shani Mootoo, therefore, use utopianism to explore what it might mean to imagine a space for lesbians and gay men in the Caribbean. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, this imagined place is inhabited by a coalition of queer subjects who find healing and a space for the performance of their liminal identities. The fragile sense of “paradise,” however, is complicated by the sexual, spiritual, and physical violence of colonialism and other forms of oppression. In *In Another Place, Not Here*, the “no place” of utopia or Adela’s “Nowhere” (18), indicates a dialectic between an affirmative imagined space of Caribbean lesbians’ belonging and a recognition of the need for political revolution to make this vision real. The novel draws together erotic and political utopias by connecting the two women’s love with the

revolutionary's love for "the people." These decolonizing and sexually emancipatory projects are both collective: both novels focus on a pair or group of characters rather than on a single protagonist. Both novels, finally, call for an anti-homophobic articulation of Caribbean decolonizing politics, and for a fuller understanding of the diversity of Caribbean experience.¹⁰

NOTES

- 1 Teresa Zackodnik's use of this Lamming quotation as an epigraph to her paper "I am Blackening in My Way: Identity and Place in Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral*" suggested to me the appropriateness of the quotation for this paper on Brand and Mootoo.
- 2 The first part of my title is an allusion to Evans's book, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*.
- 3 A US-English translation of the lyrics appeared in the *New York Post* in the Saturday, Oct. 24/Sunday, Oct. 25, 1992 edition. Some examples of the lyrics from this source and others include "Get an automatic or an Uzi instead, shoot them now, let us shoot them" ("Hate Music" 1) and "rudebwoy nuh promote no nasty man, dem haffi de'd" (Noel 29). Cooper makes a number of arguments about the translation. She argues that "the privileging of the literal to articulate the abstract is not always understood by non-native speakers of Jamaican" and suggests that the Jamaican creole phrase "aal bati-man fi ded" is not a literal death sentence, but rather "an indictment of the abstraction, homosexuality" (438-39). She claims that the translation of "tyre wheel" into "firewood" in the line "Burn him like old firewood" divests the lyrics of their allusion to "the necklacing of traitors in South Africa" and thereby to "a pattern of ideological convergence in which both homosexuality and racism are constructed in dancehall culture as equally illegitimate" (443). Finally, she argues that the line "Hapi an yu lovit / yu fi jojos / bum bai bai" ("If you're happy and you love it / You should just / bum bai bai") is "a gun salute to heterosexuality itself, rather than the inciting to violence against homosexuals" (444). Cooper's efforts to explain the cultural contexts of the song do not adequately deal with the very real threats of violence against gay men both in New York and in Jamaica (two scenes for the debate over the lyrics) that are not allayed by nuances of translation.
- 4 Chin refers to Cliff's essay "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This In Fire" and her novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, and H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark*. For further articulations of gay and lesbian sexuality in the Caribbean, see Audre Lorde's *Zami*; Patricia Powell's three novels *Me Dying Trial*, *A Small Gathering of Bones*, and *The Pagoda*; Makeda Silvera's *Her Head a Village* and *Remembering G* and other stories and her edited collections *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* and *Má-Ka: Diasporic Juks* (edited with Debbie Douglas, Courtney McFarlane, and Douglas Stewart); and Lawrence Scott's *Ballad for the New World and Other Stories* and *Witchbroom*.
- 5 I should make clear here that I do not intend to open up the subject of how popular culture shapes cultural and sexual identity, or propose a dialogue between oral/popular culture and literary texts. Rather, I am taking my cue from the critical response to the Banton issue, and using this as an exemplary case of articulation of the problem of homophobia in Caribbean culture.
- 6 Certainly, my selection process in naming these writers (deciding what constitutes a representation of gay or lesbian sexuality) reflects my own position as a

white Canadian, and my outsider status vis à vis Caribbean culture. I am looking for certain *kinds* of representations that I recognize as gay or lesbian, after taking my cue from writers such as Brand and Mootoo. I have been struggling for ways to theorize and frame representations of gay and lesbian sexuality in Caribbean women's literature, and finding that "identity politics" models, and more mobile uses of the term "queer," often seem out of place. Provisionally, I think these concepts work with Brand's and Mootoo's novels, respectively; but I am finding that my evaluation of critical materials on Caribbean analyses of sexuality also falls into dichotomies of inside/outside.

On a different note, Cobham has pointed out the cultural specificity of sexuality in an essay on African writing, in which she argues for a distinction between homoerotic behaviours and homosexuality as "identity." Her distinction might be a useful framework for reading homoeroticism in other Caribbean women's texts, such as Jamaica Kincaid's.

⁷ Shazia Rahman has pointed out to me that Lavinia and Sarah may not have returned for Asha and Mala because the older women have died, which suggests that outside of the utopian space of "Paradise," the lesbians cannot survive. Perhaps the lesbians cannot survive *in* "Paradise," either, or perhaps they have found freedom elsewhere on the island, or abroad—the novel is inconclusive on the women's outcome.

⁸ This scene may be an allusion to Walcott's *Another Life*. (Thanks are due to Stephen Slemon for pointing out to me this connection) The reference to Sauteurs appears in Chapter 11 of *Another Life*:

yet who am I, under
such thunder, dear gods, under the heels of the thousand
racing towards the exclamation of their single name,
Sauteurs! Their leap into the light? . . . I am one with this engine
which is greater than victory, and their pride
with its bounty of pardon. . . . I am all, I am one . . . (69)

⁹ I would like to thank Heather Zwicker for pointing out to me the possibility that the "place so old there's no memory of it" is Africa.

¹⁰ This paper was first presented as a conference paper on Dionne Brand for the Sixth International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, in Grand Anse, Grenada. I would like to thank those conference participants who made comments on the paper and those colleagues who offered suggestions on both the conference version and the present version of this article: John Wilson, Heather Zwicker, Guy Beauregard, Stephen Slemon, Shazia Rahman, Teresa Zackodnik, Brendan Wild, Sujaya Dhanvantari, and Michelle Smith-Bermis. I would also like to thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship Fund, and the Sarah Nettie Christie Travel Bursary Fund for their generous support of the research for this paper.

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