Islands in the Air: Travelling by Plane in Anglophone Caribbean Literature

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Abstract: Although airports figure prominently in contemporary Caribbean life, literary responses to this space are less common than one might expect—and critics have largely neglected the few that do exist. This article analyzes key texts from the Caribbean diaspora, including short stories by Jamaica Kincaid, Earl Lovelace, Dionne Brand, and Makeda Silvera, which examine air travel as a reflection of the larger forces reshaping Caribbean space in the twenty-first century. Each of these authors grapples with the rise in air travel in the Caribbean in the 1980s because of cheaper fares and increased routes. Unlike many Caribbean narratives which actively avoid the airport to negate the tourist takeover of Caribbean space, these authors reclaim the airport as an important site of creative transformation and political critique for diasporic Caribbean identity.

Keywords: Caribbean literature, airports, diasporic identity, tourism

A wall at the Aéroport Martinique Aimé Césaire, named after the legendary poet in 2007, displays the following lines from his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: "Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheurs qui n'ont point de bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissent au cachot du désespoir" ("My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who break down in the solitary confinement of despair"; "At Martinique's"; Eshelman and Smith 45). Can such a voice of resistance be heard in an airport setting? This article, which examines the literary representation of the

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Caribbean migrant figure in airports and airplanes, takes this question as its starting point. Picturing passengers reading these lines on the wall as they race by to catch their flights illuminates both the intense contradictions of Caribbean space and the struggle to define such spaces in Caribbean terms. Some of the busiest airports in the Caribbean are named after important male figures who are associated with island nationalisms: Norman Manley, José Martí, Luis Muñoz Marin, Grantley Adams, and Juan Gualberto Gómez. Such names encourage us to view airports as symbols of postcolonial independence. Yet as tourists and migrants pack through checkpoints and crowd around luggage carousels, it seems ironic to celebrate nation-building here. A name like the Aéroport Martinique Aimé Césaire evokes a nationalism rife with conflicting realities and competing versions of cultural memory. For people familiar with *Cahier*, the poem's nautical imagery, evoked by such phrases as the "sonorous water" (Césaire 37), starkly contrasts with the reality of migration that has been reshaped by aviation.

Ocean imagery and ships abound in Anglophone Caribbean literature, but airports and air travel appear less often. The frequency of nautical tropes certainly makes sense given the legacy of the Middle Passage and the predominant themes of migration, exile, return, and diaspora. In his foundational work *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy establishes how "the image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—" becomes a symbol of the black diaspora and a Bakhtinian chronotope for moving beyond nationalistic perspectives (4). Yet most people sailing on ships in the Caribbean Sea today are tourists. Migrants, if they can afford it, travel predominantly by air.[1] In 2007, 19.5 million people arrived in the Caribbean on a cruise ship, while 22.55 million arrived by air (Goddard 574).

Yet Caribbean authors seem disinclined to explore airports and airplanes in great detail. Even in narratives of migration, many authors leave out the air journey or omit a description of the airport's interior. For example, Makeda Silvera begins her novel *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002), about a Jamaican family torn apart by emigration, with an active refusal of the airport: "[The family matriarch] didn't go to the Palisadoes Airport to see her son Freddie off. She never went to airports,

not even when her son Peppie left in 1958 and then her daughter, Glory, in 1960" (16). The mother's refusal to go to the airport to say goodbye to her children represents her efforts to resist migration's fragmentation of her family. The dates mark an important historical shift in the modes of transportation used for Caribbean emigration. Prior to the late 1950s, the majority of islanders left by boat and many canonical texts explore the experience of immigration by ship, especially during the Windrush period, such as George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954).[2] Leaving by plane is a late twentieth-century phenomenon that fundamentally transformed the circuits of diaspora. Silvera evokes an airport space, the Palisadoes airport in Jamaica (now the Norman Manley airport), only to repudiate it.

Another example of the avoidance of airports occurs in V. S. Naipaul's story "How I Left Miguel Street" (1959), in which the emigrating main character leaves the airport to eat lunch with his family during a flight delay rather than wait in the lounge. Similarly, Elizabeth Nunez's novel *Beyond the Limbo Silence* (1998), despite being a contemporary story of migration, evokes nostalgia for ocean travel and omits the main character's departure from the airport. In the opening chapter, the first-person narrator describes a port scene and her cousin's return on a ship, but for her own migration, the story jumps from Trinidad to New York, and she does not describe her own experiences at the airport or on the plane. When I began this project, I was surprised at how often I would turn to my bookshelf and find that migration narratives that I assumed would involve an airport scene did not have one. Airplanes and airports are both everywhere and nowhere in Caribbean literature.

Yet references to aviation begin to appear occasionally in migration narratives in the 1980s. During this period, air travel in the Caribbean surged because of cheaper fares and increased routes. While these changes were driven by the tourism industry, they also opened up new possibilities for the migrant subject to return home. This article examines three short stories that engage this new potential: Earl Lovelace's "Joebell and America" (1988), Dionne Brand's "Sketches in transit. . .going home" (1989), and Silvera's "Caribbean Chameleon" (1994). Brand, Silvera, and Lovelace use airport and airplane settings as catalysts in their nar-

ratives rather than as spaces to be bypassed. Lovelace tells the story of a Trinidadian man trying to enter the United States via a Puerto Rican airport, while Silvera and Brand depict migrant women based in Toronto who fly back to the Caribbean. Their fictions explore the lived realities of these spaces to consider what Deborah Thomas describes as "the broader questions of how we can make and remake ourselves in the contemporary world" (7). She asks: "How in a postcolonial, post-Cold War context, do we redefine citizenship so that it is a meaningful concept—politically, economically, and socioculturally—particularly for those who have been formally excluded from significant engagement?" (8). To echo Césaire, we need to ask what "voice of freedom" (45) is possible within airports and on airplanes. Can Caribbean self-determination be achieved from within these globalized sites, where the passports that we carry still control how we move through them? Each of these authors reclaims airports and airspace as important sites of creative transformation and political critique while still acknowledging them as sites of Caribbean loss. Their protagonists grapple with (and to some extent overcome) how such spaces create new forms of subjugation that are both related to yet distinct from older forms of territorial takeover. These short stories demonstrate the value of engaging with aerial routes to revise oceanic models in Caribbean literature and orient them toward the future.

This article addresses two overlapping blind spots in scholarship: the neglect of aviation in Caribbean discourse and the focus on metropolitan sites like London Heathrow in the cultural studies scholarship on airports. Both of these perspectives eclipse the distinctive features of small island airports and the Caribbean migrant's experience of air travel. In the first part of this article, I explore why aerial routes have largely been neglected in the Caribbean imaginary and what is at stake in omitting them; I then examine the history of island aviation and its ties to imperialism and globalization. Gilroy argues that the sailing ship is "a living, micro-cultural and micro-political system in motion" (4), but so too are airplanes and transit lounges. In the second part, I analyze the politicized, racialized, and gendered dynamics of airplane and airport spaces in Lovelace's, Brand's, and Silvera's fiction and how their

migrant characters refashion agency within them. To borrow from the metaphors of flight, this article should be read as a takeoff rather than a landing. It opens what I believe needs to be a much broader conversation about the cultural impact of aviation on Caribbean identity.

I. Aviation History and Colonial Fantasies

The invention of airplanes in the early twentieth century suggested the fulfillment of a colonial fantasy. Founded in 1924, the aptly named Imperial Airways was Britain's first national long-range air transport company (Gordon 15). Travellers could reach the Caribbean in approximately eight hours by air rather than three weeks at sea. Many colonial officials hoped that the airline would help Britain build stronger relationships with its colonies and save an empire that was beginning to fall apart (Gordon 74). However, rather than preserving the British Empire, the technology of air travel inspired a new invasion fantasy—tourism.

Although Westerners began to vacation in the Caribbean in the late nineteenth century, it was not until airplanes revolutionized travel in the early twentieth century that island tourism really got underway (Gordon 14). Flights began from Florida to Havana in 1921 (Goddard 572). In 1927, Pan American Airlines started offering daily service from Miami to Cuba and then expanded to many other islands (Gordon 36). In this nascent example of globalization, private industry—Pan American Airlines—helped to build many of the first rudimentary airports in the Caribbean, transferring foreign control from Europe to the US and from government to corporation. Long before many islands achieved post-colonial independence, the foreign-owned airline industry had already begun to undermine possibilities for self-determination. After World War II, corporate control and tourism boomed as US military bases were converted into passenger airports. By the 1960s, the development of long-haul jets made the Caribbean accessible to the middle-class traveller (Pattullo 21). Traffic at Caribbean airports increased significantly in the 1980s due to newly formed postcolonial nation states staking their success in the expansion of tourism. In addition, the 1978 US Airline Deregulation Act made fares more affordable and increased the number of routes throughout the globe (Gordon 245). These developments all

contributed to what Mimi Sheller describes as "the disembedding of island space from structures of local governance and territoriality" (20). This brief painful history partially explains why many Caribbean authors prefer to avoid airplanes and airports in their texts.[3]

As Jamaica Kincaid eloquently addresses in her generically hybrid text *A Small Place*, planes full of tourists become symbolic of ongoing foreign invasion. She uses an airport setting to represent the continual foreign control of Antigua after its independence in 1981. By drawing attention to the links between the airline industry, tourism, and colonialism, she articulates a Caribbean perspective on aviation missing from cultural studies accounts of metropolitan airports as symbols of globalization and futurity. For example, J. G. Ballard suggests that airports engender a privileged type of postmodern alienation. He describes airports as "a new kind of discontinuous city" and praises them as emblematic of the potency of modernity—embodying the utopian potential of flight, speed, and urbanism (26). Exemplified by the businessman who endlessly travels, like George Clooney's character in the film *Up in the Air*, the middle-class traveler experiences alienation as a consequence of his unrestricted mobility; this alienation is quite distinct from the alienation the migrant subject feels. Yet Ballard argues that "[w]e are no longer citizens with civic obligations, but passengers for whom all destinations are theoretically open, our lightness of baggage mandated by the system" (26). In Ballard's satirical admiration of "the unitary global culture of the departure lounge" at London Heathrow (28), he fails to note how the colonial legacy of the airline industry cultivates the desires of tourists.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid exposes the insidiousness of tourists' desires by using the second-person pronoun to force the reader to take up the position of the tourist arriving by airplane: "As your plane descends to land, you might say, What a beautiful island Antigua is—more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen" (3). She illustrates how an aerial perspective reinforces the fantasies tourist brochures perpetuate. From the sky, the Caribbean appears as endless sandy beaches; however, in Kincaid's tour of Antigua, she shows the tourist what they cannot see from the air, such as the lack of a "proper sewage-disposal system" (14).

Kincaid highlights how the fantasy of mobility associated with air travel is only available to a privileged few:

> You disembark from your plane. You go through customs. Since you are a tourist, a North American or European—to be frank, white—and not an Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives, you move through customs swiftly, you move through customs with ease. Your bags are not searched. You emerge from customs into the hot, clean air: immediately you feel cleansed, immediately you feel blessed (which is to say special); you are free. (4–5)

She contrasts the tourist experience with that of Caribbean citizens for whom airports function as conduits for intimate exchange where they can access essential goods that their family members bring home. The end of this passage, "you are free," aimed at the white tourist, comes across sarcastically. Her narration of tourists' movement through the airport reveals the insidiousness of their compliance with the pattern of "free" movement assigned to their privileged subject position, which depends on islanders' subjugation. By identifying the two distinct groups of travellers, she also illustrates how the smallness of the Antiguan airport makes the otherness of tourists highly visible, as compared to a metropolitan airport where passengers remain anonymous because of the high volume of people. Kincaid's brief representation of the terminal underscores why we need to take a closer look at such spaces to understand the social dynamics that they engender. For her, small Caribbean airports are not sites to celebrate the mobility of modernity but places where extreme inequalities of wealth and privilege become glaringly obvious.

In a similar vein, the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant counteracts the Western myth that airports symbolize progress. Glissant associates the building of airports, supermarkets, and roads with what he defines as the period of oblivion in Martinique, characterized by economic assimilation to neoliberalism: "Triumph of the system of exchange (public funds for private benefit) and pseudoproduction. . . . Ports and air-

ports." (91). He dates this period's beginning to the 1960s, a moment when airport infrastructure expanded to accommodate the new wide-bodied jets. Governments prioritized investing in this infrastructure to serve tourists, rather than investing in programs and services that would improve life for poor islanders who do not travel (Gmelch 10). Glissant describes the destruction of the mangrove swamp where he played as a child in the building of the Aéroport Martinique Aimé Césaire: "The delta has been chewed by make-believe enterprises, by an airstrip. Falling away before us, tiers of banana trees, a curtain of dense green foam between us and the land" (10–11). He draws attention to how the airport impacts the mangrove ecosystem and severs people's relationship to the land. For him, the mangrove is a key symbol of Caribbean identity, which extends back to a history of Maroon resistance in these areas. His depiction of the devouring airstrip illustrates how airport construction destroys both the environment and cultural memory. He also uses a metaphor of odorless flowers cultivated for export to depict the airport as a cultural void. As compared to the fragrant flowers in the mangrove, the flowers grown in Martinique today "are nothing but shape and color," and these flowers "adorn our airport" (52). He describes these flowers as representations of how "the land [has] rejected its 'essence' to concentrate everything in appearance" (52). Odors create a visceral connection to the environment that airports erase.

Glissant's condemnation of airports recalls the French anthropologist Marc Augé's characterization of airports as non-places, yet there are some important distinctions between their views. Like Ballard, Augé's description of airports as non-places reflects his analysis of large metropolitan airports, specifically Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport. According to Augé, while places maintain a connection to the past and engender social creativity, non-places obfuscate social community and exist in a transient present disconnected from past and future: "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77–78). For Augé, airports are non-places because of their generic vacuousness and their contractual surveillance, which makes us feel alienated. He defines "the traveller's space" as "the archetype of *non-place*" (86; emphasis in original), and he refers specifically to the tour-

ist. By contrast, Glissant emphasizes how airports annihilate cultural memory for Caribbean citizens. The double meaning of oblivion as both destruction and forgetting underscores the link between environmental destruction and cultural loss. In his study *Airspaces*, David Pascoe suggests that "in order to exist, airports do not simply pre-empt and efface such territory [he is referring specifically to agricultural lands used to build London Heathrow]; they also evacuate the historical significances of areas" (84). Governments often build airports with complete disregard for what was previously on the land.[4] Like an empire, airports grow "voraciously" (Pascoe 95). For Caribbean people, whose history is already fragmented and whose land is limited, this exacts more damage than in other parts of the world. The emotional losses of diaspora and neocolonialism, not bland detachment, make Caribbean airports non-places. Airports threaten to turn entire islands into temporary vacation spots—and therefore non-places. Bypassing the airport becomes a way to challenge the tourism industry's threat.

Kincaid's and Glissant's work forms an important theoretical starting point for thinking about aviation in the Caribbean. They provide ample justification for why authors omit aviation journeys in their texts. Put more simply, Glissant suggests that writers should set stories in mangroves forests and seaside villages rather than in airports. However, by defining airports as harmful—even antithetical—to Caribbean identity, we overlook how they have become an integral part of island experience and how citizens, particularly migrants, must negotiate their identities from within them. Given that disrupting hegemonic space has a long history in the Caribbean, extending back to the slave ship and the plantation, what are the social dynamics of airplanes and airports? I now turn to an examination of Lovelace, Brand, and Silvera, who set their stories in these non-places to challenge the erasure of Caribbean identities within them.

II. Aerial Short Fiction

Lovelace sets the second half of his short story "Joebell and America" in a Puerto Rican airport. This is an unusual choice for him because the majority of his fiction takes place on his home island, Trinidad. The story

underscores how air travel refigures the territorial limits of Caribbean islands away from ocean shores to kiosks inside airport checkpoints. To borrow from the cultural studies theorist James Clifford, Lovelace draws readers' attention to "the contested *edges* of cultures, nations, and identities" that airport lounges make visible (Clifford 7; emphasis in original). Given Puerto Rico's status as an unincorporated US territory, this particular setting hinges on the contested edge between American and Caribbean territory. I use Clifford's word "edge" here deliberately. While it might be taken simply as a synonym for border, an edge also connotes the violence of a sharp blade. Lovelace's main character, Joebell, an Afro-Trinidadian man who is trying to immigrate to the US illegally, experiences the painful cut of this border when he tries to cross it. He decides to immigrate because "he seeing too much hell in Trinidad" (Lovelace 111). After winning money gambling, he buys a fake American passport and travels by boat to Venezuela. From there, he takes a flight to Puerto Rico, believing that it will be easier to enter the US from this territory (119). Once he arrives at the airport, the story concludes with his interrogation and his arrest by border officials.

Similarly to Kincaid, Lovelace laments the failure of independence to empower the lives of working-class individuals, identifying the airport as the threshold for a new form of colonialism. Rather than taking on the tourist perspective, Lovelace focuses on the migrant perspective to illustrate how the mobility of air travel is available only to a privileged few. When Joebell enters the waiting room at the airport, the narration abruptly changes from the anonymous third-person voice to the first person so that the reader cannot distance herself from Joebell's experiences at this crucial moment. He describes the airport as a series of queues, interviews, waiting rooms, and doors, all of which are under constant surveillance. The setting creates a mood of isolation and suspicion. His first sentence indicates his awareness of the officials' gaze: "I sit down there by myself alone and I know they watching me" (121). Rather than attempt to hide from the officials' gaze, he embraces performance as his only means of mobility. Lovelace depicts Joebell as a fast-talking rude boy who "believe the whole world is a hustle" (119). The story hinges on Joebell's efforts to impersonate the African American

individual named on his passport: "James Armstrong Brady of the one hundred and twenty-fifth infantry regiment from Alabama, Vietnam Veteran, twenty-six years old" (119). He claims repeatedly that through his exposure to US popular culture he feels American even though he was not born there. When he enters the Puerto Rican airport wearing a cowboy hat and boots, "he walk with a stagger and he puff his cigar like he already home in the United States of America" (119).

At first glance, Joebell's idealization of the US—"where everybody have a motor car and you could ski on snow and where it have seventy-five channels of colour television that never sign off and you could sit and watch for days" (111)—seems like a straightforward example of the negative consequences of Americanization. However, Shalini Puri points out that "Joebell's deep identification [with] and admiration for America is based precisely on his association of America with certain values of reputation: the arguably *carnivalesque* values of risk, reckless-ness, and impetuosity, gambling against the odds, rising to the chal-lenge, and spectacular scale" ("Beyond" 30; emphasis in original). In other words, Joebell values the US for qualities that he identifies as Caribbean. More precisely, Joebell's love of popular culture comes in part from his strong identification with its African American elements. To reassure himself that he knows how to act American when he is being interrogated, he recalls specific cultural moments: "I see Sammy Davis Junior dance Mr. Bojangle's dance and I hear Nina Simone hum-ming humming 'Suzanne,' . . . and I hear Harry Belafonte's rasping call 'Daay-o, Daaay-o! Daylight come and me want to go home'" (Lovelace 124). His reference to Belafonte in particular highlights the influence of Caribbean music on African American culture.

Although Joebell's performance underscores the creative exchange be-tween Caribbean and African American cultures, his predicament forces him to avoid any African Americans whom he encounters at the airport. When he buys his fake passport, he voices concern that he does not re-semble the photograph, and he is told, "Listen, in America, every black face is the same to white people. They don't see no difference" (118). Then Joebell asks, "Suppose I meet up a black immigration?" He is told, "it ain't have that many, but if you see one stay far from him" (119).

Lovelace illustrates the consequences of the non-place for the Caribbean migrant: it reinforces racial hierarchies and undermines the possibilities for black diasporic connection.

Although a person's movement and social interactions seem to be governed by legal documents and state power in airports, Lovelace also demonstrates the pivotal role that performance plays in producing the materiality of the border. The guards know Joebell's passport is fake; however, they must prove this through their verbal interrogation. By drawing attention to the power of stylized linguistic performance to produce national identity, Lovelace challenges the idea that citizenship depends on firm geographic demarcations that are substantiated by legal documents. Eventually the border guards prove that Joebell is not an African American and send him back to Trinidad; however, Lovelace encourages readers to interpret his deportation as less than pure defeat: "They catch me. God! And now, how to go?. . . I might as well take my losses like a West Indian, like a Trinidadian. I decide to sing" (124). Joebell questions what identity he should perform as the officials escort him out of the airport in handcuffs. He finally negotiates an empowering performance strategy when he decides to leave the airport singing a calypso, as a Trinidadian. The story ends with Joebell's song lyrics:

> We gonna travel far
> To New Orleans
> Me and ma baby
> Be digging the scene (124)

Lovelace offers another example of US-Caribbean cultural exchange by referring to New Orleans. It would be easy to interpret Joebell's song as a sign that he embraces his pure Trinidadian identity and rejects his desire to be American; however, the edges are more complicated here. Through his calypso performance, he finally accepts his creolized Caribbean identity, which shares ties to the US. Although US state power enforces a sharp edge between the US and the Caribbean, Lovelace's story draws attention to how the cultural boundaries are much more fluid. By making the airport into a site for Caribbean performance, Joebell also challenges the non-place's erasure of culture. Augé suggests that the trav-

eller's experience of the non-place is passive; however, Joebell actively resists the effects of the non-place through his efforts to exit the airport on his own terms.

Rather than tell the story of successful immigration, Lovelace draws attention to the people who do not benefit from aviation's promise of mobility. Comparing Kincaid's and Lovelace's portrayals of the airport from the tourist's and migrant's perspectives reveals how aviation engenders what Sheller calls "bifurcated mobility within the Caribbean, in which islands are splintered into fragments that are highly accessible to a mobile elite while local populations are more and more tightly controlled in their ability to move, to access public space, or to control their own national territory" (31). Yet at the same time, Lovelace conveys a sense of hope through Joebell's defiant calypso exit from the airport. His repatriation suggests the possibility for a renewed sense of community affiliation when he returns. Joebell describes his exit as "the classiest thing that ever pass through the Puerto Rico airport, me with these handcuffs on, walking between these two police and singing" (Lovelace 124). Although Joebell is denied the freedom of mobility, even the police escort and handcuffs cannot completely restrict his movement. Through walking and singing, he asserts his creolized identity. If, as Antonio Benítez-Rojo argues, improvised performance is a key form to express the Caribbean's "historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamor" (3), Lovelace placing such a performance in an airport suggests that it can become a way to defy the punitive force of this disciplinary environment. Joebell's identity transformation works against the assumption that the spaces of air travel only encourage migrants to lose their cultural identity.

In her short story "Caribbean Chameleon," Silvera also represents the airport as a site for disruptive Caribbean performance. While she only briefly mentions an airport in *The Heart Does Not Bend*, she sets her short story entirely in two airports. Her title suggests that the ability to camouflage oneself becomes an asset in such a space. The four-page story begins in Jamaica at the Norman Manley Airport waiting room and concludes with a confrontation between her and a customs agent at the Toronto Pearson Airport. Silvera provides very little descrip-

tion of the built environment, placing emphasis instead on the people moving through it. As she describes, it is "theatre, live at the airport" ("Caribbean Chameleon" 399). Set in the early 1980s, the story grapples with air travel's significant alteration of the pathways of migration by making temporary or even permanent returns more feasible.

The protagonist of the story is an unnamed domestic worker, the "woman in black polka dot pant suit," who has just concluded a short visit with her family in Kingston (Silvera, "Caribbean Chameleon" 399). Silvera presents a list of the types of people in the Jamaican airport: "Yard. Xamaica. Jamdown. Jah Mek Ya. JA. Airport. Gunman, mule, don, cowboy, domestic, refugee, tourist, migrant, farmworker, musician, political exile, business exile, economic exile, cultural exile, dreadlocks, locks-woman, fashion-dread, press-head, extension hair, higgler" (399). The six one-word sentences dispense with the non-essential parts of speech, implying that each term is an equivalent of the last term. The second, third, and fourth are vernacular names for Jamaica. By bookending these terms with "yard" and "airport," Silvera suggests that the airport terminal is an extension of the yard space.[5] Formally, she employs fragmentation to represent the protagonist's alienation. By putting "gunman" first in her list of people in the airport, Silvera emphasizes the airport as a violent space in which everyone becomes a potential suspect. By not separating each word with a period, she emphasizes how the airport brings diverse types of people into close proximity. The descriptive titles, as well as physical descriptions such as "fashion-dread," emphasize how people become categorized according to their physical appearance in airports.

While the Jamaican customs agent leaves her alone, upon arrival in Toronto, an officer accuses the main character of carrying drugs. He is suspicious because she stayed at a hotel rather than with her family. She responds, "What yuh saying, sir? Black people can't tek vacation in dem own homeland?" (Silvera, "Caribbean Chameleon" 401). The main character challenges the binary between migrant and tourist. In his interpretation of the story, Roy Miki suggests that this demonstrates how the "border zone tolerates no divergences, no irregularities" (301). One must visibly fit into clearly demarcated identity categories. Unlike

Joebell, the "woman in black polka dot pant suit" has her "landed papers" (Silvera, "Caribbean Chameleon" 401), but this does not matter because her racialized body makes her other in this environment. When the border agent orders a body search, she begins to strip and the agents arrest her for indecent exposure. She has no way to camouflage herself. While the Jamaican airport forms an extension of the yard space, the Toronto Pearson International Airport, similar to the Puerto Rican airport, becomes a rigid border where the black racialized body must be disciplined. Like Joebell, this story's protagonist exits the airport under arrest, which underscores metropolitan state power. Silvera also demonstrates how border patrol lines isolate individuals and undermine collectivity. The narrator makes clear that none of the other Jamaicans in the lineup try to help the protagonist: "Woman in black polka dot pant suit talking loud. Black people, Jamaican people in line behind. Dem close eyes. Look other way. Dem shame. Black polka dot pant suit nah get no support" (402). Because the woman's outburst transgresses the rules of respectability, the other Jamaicans ignore her.

However, the story suggests that the woman's disruption in the airport is a subversive strategy. She manages to make the officer "frighten like hell" because he "don't understand di talking of tongues" (402). The narrator uses the language of religious possession to describe her disobedience, underscoring the woman's claim to a higher power: "Black polka dot woman speaking in tongues. Dis woman gone, gone crazy. Tongue-tie. Tongue knot up. Tongue gone wild" (402). Even under arrest, she challenges the compliance the officer demands. Both Silvera's and Lovelace's stories suggest that to be a voice of resistance in an airport, one must challenge the rigid prescription of identity categories through performance and civil disobedience. Reading these two stories as intertexts also draws attention to Caribbean gender politics. Although Joebell's defiant rendition of a calypso gets described as "the classiest thing that ever pass through the Puerto Rico airport" (Lovelace 124), Silvera's female character cannot achieve the same level of dignity. Her disobedience can only register as threatening madness and as shameful to the other Jamaicans. Joebell also only gets verbally humiliated by the border guards, yet the woman gets physically humiliated through her

strip search, reinforcing the victimization of black women's bodies. As Puri notes, in the Caribbean public sphere, women are often equated with respectability and men with transgressive street culture ("Beyond" 31). As troubling as this dynamic is, Silvera demonstrates that within the metropolitan airport these Caribbean norms prevail when the Jamaicans in line censure the woman for not performing respectability. Both Silvera and Lovelace explore Caribbean cultural dynamics that cannot be suppressed by the non-place of the airport. In Silvera's story, these dynamics extend beyond the geographic boundaries of the Caribbean to Toronto. She also underscores that the cheaper fares and increased routes in the early 1980s fail to give a migrant woman the freedom of mobility.

To conclude, I want to move from the airport terminal to the airplane itself. Brand's short story about an airplane journey, "Sketches in transit. . .going home," is more optimistic about the possibilities of accessible air travel for the woman migrant returning to the Caribbean. Although Lovelace's and Silvera's protagonists find their aerial journeys blocked, Brand's accesses a new route home through flight. The majority of the story takes place in the air. Brand provides character portraits of the different passengers, revealing their divergent reasons for "going home." The airspace becomes a temporary haven for diasporic subjects who struggle to feel at home anywhere. Many of them are heading to Trinidad for a vacation during Carnival; others like a character named Vidya are being deported; and the main character, Ayo, although originally from Trinidad, plans to settle in Grenada to help in the revolutionary struggle. Ayo, who "could not identify with the affected happiness on the plane" expressed by the Trinidadians bound for Carnival, also questions how they can become complicit in a tourist economy when their former home has become a vacation spot (Brand 140–41). The name Ayo means "joyful" in Yoruba, yet Brand emphasizes the toll of migration by describing her, throughout the story, as humorless. Ayo's migrant alienation is markedly different from the traveller's postmodern ennui defined by Ballard and Augé. Ayo's underlying struggle to feel at home is both exacerbated and transformed by air travel. Although airplanes fuel the economy of capitalist labor migration by making it easier to leave the Caribbean, they also make it easier to return, and Brand is

concerned with these opportunities for return in this story. On what terms does a migrant return? How does air travel redefine the meaning of home?

Through her different passenger sketches, Brand offers two conflicting answers to these questions. As the narrator puts it, "Ayo, noticing them [the other passengers] in the baggage line and now sitting among them, was going home too. Not like them, she was really going home" (Brand 134). Ayo's journey to Grenada embodies the potential for Caribbean reconnection, whereas the passengers bound for Carnival are still responding to the imposed social codes that make home inaccessible. Brand writes of one passenger: "In the plane, now up above the office buildings she had cleaned for the last twenty years, she was going home. Like the rest on the plane, she'd saved for the trek every five years. Home! To be rich for two weeks and then back to the endless dirty floors at night and the white security guard trying to feel her breasts as she left the building" (132). In airspace, this woman temporarily escapes the drudgery of her life. She rises above her problems and briefly becomes immune to racism and sexism. Brand points out that although the lower fares in the 1980s make air travel more affordable for tourists, they are still relatively expensive for most migrants. The story suggests that the trip home often only exacerbates a migrant's alienation because she must maintain the illusion of affluence in order to perpetuate "the myth of easiness and prosperity in the metropole" (134). This passenger saves for the trip only to return "to starvation for the next six months and her back bending over a mop, burning against the naked fluorescent lights as payday crawled toward her" (132).

Similar to Lovelace's Americanized Joebell, Brand's passenger portraits question the capitalist culture of labor migration and its impact on island societies. If the culture perpetuates the myth that one needs to leave to better one's "class and station" (Brand 134), how will postcolonial islands develop and prosper? She notes of one passenger that "she, like them, had been grown for export, like sugar cane and arrowroot, to go away, to have distaste for staying" (134). By comparing migrants to the most profitable Caribbean product of the transatlantic slave trade, Brand emphasizes how the contemporary migration economy continues

to objectify workers. Evoking sugar also stresses a visceral understanding of "distaste": to remain in the Caribbean tastes bitter. The narrator notes that "it was a sign of prosperity to lose the taste for homemade bread" (133). The sense of taste becomes a prominent metaphor in the story to address the bodily impact of dislocation, particularly for women migrants.

Brand begins her story by establishing her critique of capitalism as a catalyst for patriarchy and competition. In the first sentence, the narrator describes a male passenger boasting about his sexual exploits (131). This familiar scene—in which an obnoxious passenger annoys his neighbours in a confined transport space—encourages readers to identify with the other passengers on the plane. Many of the women characters have migrated to escape sexism only to encounter it in their new home in Toronto. The claustrophobia of the aircraft becomes a metaphor for the woman migrant's inability to find a safe home anywhere. Yet the airplane is also safer than many other public spaces because of the hypervisibility of all the passengers.

Despite the passengers still feeling the pressure to compete with one another for status, they experience more freedom than they do on the ground. As soon as the flight leaves, they feel an immediate sense of relief: "They waited for the doors of the plane to close behind them. They sense their ordinary cheerfulness rising to be released. . . . Behind the doors they would breathe out the relief of leaving Toronto, that uncomfortable name of a city, where their lives were tight and deceptive" (134). The plane departs from Toronto Pearson then stops at Antigua and Barbados on its way to Port-of-Spain:

> The small airport at Antigua lit up as they trooped off the plane. The tri-star, Trinidadians called it. They sailed on it as if it were not an ordinary plane and they boasted about it as if no one else ever sat in one. The boasting had become boisterous by Canadian standards. The entire group going home, more confident and assured.
>
> Unsuspecting Antiguans slept through the invasion of huge tape recorders, walkmans, jheri curls, crepe soles (now

called running shoes), digital watches, male sacks, pot bellies, Carnival, kaiso, intent arguments about american commodity items, who had what and what was more expensive than what, how much money who had, how much scotch cost and who didn't drink rum anymore, grand charges about the coming parties at the public service association, and lastly, insults at how small the Antigua airport was compared to Piarco and Toronto.

4:00 a.m. The rush of excitement came and left Antigua like a lone Carnival band in Princess Town. (142)

The passengers grow confident as they head home. Compared to their lives in Toronto where they are continually reminded of their inferiority, in the Caribbean they are afforded a higher status as migrants. However, in this passage the Trinidadians' confidence turns into a feeling of superiority. Like Kincaid, Brand emphasizes the smallness of the Antiguan airport. Rather than recover the value of the small place, the Trinidadian characters interpret it as a sign of Antigua's inferiority and lack of modernization. By equating the Port-of-Spain airport, Piarco, with Toronto, they insist on their own island's modernization. Ayo notices how the passengers compete with one another and "size up each other's clothing and hairstyles" (134). She also feels as though "they were too big island/small island conscious to appreciate what a little place like Grenada could do" (140).

As a microcosm of Caribbean migrants, the plane emphasizes how gender, nationality, and class hinder the formation of diasporic community. The characters reorganize the social hierarchies of the diaspora on the plane but never disassemble them. Brand uses the military terms "trooped" and "invasion" to describe the plane's arrival, making a direct link between air travel and previous incarnations of colonialism. She suggests that Trinidadians, as well as the American commodity items on the plane, are part of the "invasion," along with tourists who undermine "unsuspecting" Antiguans' sovereignty. The description of goods arriving echoes Kincaid's description; however, Brand's list also emphasizes how such objects bring outside cultures with them. She depicts the air-

port as a ceaseless flow of people and commodities that residents have no control over.

Although the aircraft becomes an anodyne space for the Caribbean passengers, the white gaze is still omnipresent. The narrator describes a passenger spitting out her bland meal, a piece of spinach quiche, and remarks that "[i]t was what white people ate and she wanted to get the taste for it, but it made her ill. It was the kind that they put on aeroplanes to confound immigrants and third world people" (Brand 135). She goes on to explain: "And so in the middle of the plane you would make a fool of yourself and they would be able to identity you and take away your passport when you arrived or give you a curt nod off the plane, when they kicked you out" (135). Similar to Joebell's attempts to perform his fake American identity, the airplane poses tests for competency in white culture that are designed to make "third world people" fail. The bland-ness of the airplane food also recalls Glissant's flowers with no fragrance to underscore how air travel mutes one's senses and encourages a bland detachment. The metaphor of taste returns in this story to illustrate the passengers' alienation from their own desires. However, Brand suggests that the aircraft does not necessarily have to exacerbate one's alienation.

She sets her story on a TriStar jet flown by British West Indies Airways, Trinidad's national airline in the 1980s, which became privatized in the 1990s. The narrator compares the plane to a Carnival band, which refer-ences the airline's steel pan logo on the side of their planes. The partying passengers on their way to Carnival "felt they owned the airspace, the skies going south. . . . They blared the music even louder and danced in the aisles" (Brand 141). By using a Caribbean airline and redefining avi-ation using the metaphors of sailing and Carnival, Brand suggests that self-determination depends on the reclamation of airspace by Caribbean peoples. Because of the potential for solidarity, it might become a space where the desire and taste for the Caribbean can return, if the material conditions of the immigrants' lives change.

Through Ayo's perspective, the passengers' return to Trinidad is hollow and inadequate. For them, home becomes a commodity—an expensive plane ticket and a two-week party—that furthers their alienation. Yet like Lovelace's and Silvera's endings, Brand still suggests that air travel

holds possibility. Moreover, both Brand and Lovelace focus on how aerial routes facilitate repatriation rather than separation from home. Ayo exits the capitalist culture of migration by moving to Grenada to help with the socialist revolution: "She was going home to own some place, before she died. She was determined to end the ambiguity. What she had said for years. When the revolution comes, I'm going to be there" (Brand 145). Ayo hopes to overcome her displacement and find a real sense of home in Grenada.

During the Revolution, the building of what is now called the Maurice Bishop International Airport became a prominent symbol of self-determination. It was designed to boost the economy by allowing for more foreign trade, ensuring that large jets could fly directly to Grenada, rather than being routed through neighboring islands (Puri, *Grenada* 42). Although the airport symbolized an innovative approach to socialist development, it would become the site of the US invasion at the end of the Revolution in 1983. Brand makes no mention of this in the story; however, her story relies on a Caribbean audience aware of Grenadian politics. The ending is haunted both by the potential and the demise of the Revolution embodied by the airport. A reader must deduce that Ayo's determination "to end the ambiguity" will fail. But I argue that Brand shows in "Sketches in transit. . .going home" how aerial routes offer an opportunity to recover potential through ambiguity. She neglects narrating the outcome of the Revolution to suspend her readers in the air, to invite them to contemplate different possible endings for Ayo and the other passengers. Moreover, she leaves readers in the ellipsis of airspace, bypassed by most migration narratives, to recover a taste for radical transformation.

III. Moving Beyond Oceanic Models

All three authors reterritorialize airports and airplanes as Caribbean spaces, despite the attempts to flatten or erase Caribbean-ness within them. Lovelace makes the Puerto Rican airport a site for improvised performance in the spirit of Carnival, Silvera represents the Jamaican transit lounge as an extension of the yard space, and Brand insists that airplanes can help migrants find new ways to reconnect to the Caribbean. In their

short fiction, aviation is neither antithetical to Caribbean-ness nor a symbol of population depletion. By analyzing the dialogue among these three aviation stories, I hope to redirect the oceanic paradigm that has dominated Anglophone Caribbean literary studies toward a consideration of the aerial routes that are reshaping Caribbean identity. I have begun by analyzing these three short stories because they challenge some of the assumptions that are often made about air travel in the Caribbean.[6]

In their recent collection *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, editors J. Dillon Brown and Leah Reade Rosenberg call on scholars to revise "the narrative of Windrush writers as the founding generation of Anglophone Caribbean literature" (4). Brown and Rosenberg note how "the critical predilections of this influential set of postwar writers have largely set the terms of debate for understanding both the force and nature of West Indian literature in scholarly terms" (4). The *Empire Windrush* ship, which carried close to five hundred West Indians to England in 1948, has become symbolic of both the wave of West Indian immigration to Great Britain and the cultural production that it inspired in the mid-twentieth century. Many canonical Caribbean authors, such as Lamming, Naipaul, Sam Selvon, and Derek Walcott, who went to London during this period, became known as the Windrush generation. Travelling to London in the 1950s, these writers arrived by ship or by airplane. This may seem like a trivial point, but the Windrush designation underscores how nautical imagery also seeps into our critical frameworks and the stories that we tell about how Caribbean literature developed.

Alison Donnell draws a direct link between the Windrush narrative and the emergence of the black Atlantic paradigm in the 1990s, noting how both critical frameworks neglect the local dweller in favor of the Caribbean subject abroad (86). She expresses concern that this approach has "dominated critical interests and clearly privileged one construction of a Caribbean literary archive over others" (77). The consequence of focusing on metropolitan engagement results in "little attention . . . being given to the Caribbean region as a site of possibility" (93). At first glance, my article's examination of the literary representation of

migrants travelling by plane seems to also direct attention away from the region, yet in Lovelace's, Silvera's, and Brand's short stories, airports and airplanes facilitate return and even a recommitment to the Caribbean. Both Brand and Silvera depict women migrants returning to the Caribbean, which Donnell notes is "an often neglected dimension of the migration story" (95). Lovelace, too, highlights another aspect of the migration story that often goes untold: those who try to migrate but are stopped at the border and sent back home. Moreover, these authors intervene in the cultural studies scholarship on aviation by drawing our attention to the perspective of the migrant figure and to the particularities of small island airports. Rather than view airplanes and airports as generic mazes of globalization, these authors point to the persistence of Caribbean cultural dynamics within them.

As early as 1945, the Martinican writer Suzanne Césaire anticipated how air travel would reshape our perspective of the Caribbean in her poetic essay "The Great Camouflage." She explains, "Our islands seen from above, take on their true dimension as sea shells" (40). Rather than air travel undermining an oceanic identity, she suggests that it has the potential to enrich and transform it. In a similar vein, Lovelace, Silvera, and Brand refuse to accept that aerial pathways must exclusively lead to Caribbean loss. By taking on the lived realities of these spaces in their fiction, they begin to unravel the ceaseless reinvention of colonialism in the Caribbean, both in the air and on the ground.

Notes

1 It is important to acknowledge that many people still migrate by boat to the United States, often taking great risks to do so. See DeMichele.

2 According to a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article, 1958 was the first year that more passengers crossed the Atlantic by plane than by ship ("More").

3 In addition to the association of air travel with colonial legacies, writers avoid writing about air travel because nautical travel is more in line with the emphasis on oceanic identity in Caribbean discourse. In migration narratives, the focus is also often on the destination rather than the journey and the departure.

4 Brathwaite's attempt to stop the Barbadian government's repossession of his property Cow Pasture to build an airport road is a distressing example of how airport infrastructure damages cultural memory in the Caribbean. (Brathwaite's home on the property is called "Cow Pastor" and the land is called "Cow Pas-

ture"; however, these names are often used interchangeably to describe the controversy.) In poems such as "Namesetoura," Brathwaite documents Cow Pasture's relationship to the submerged history of enslavement of the Barbadian people, a history that he fears the airport will annihilate (77).

5 In *The Heart Does Not Bend*, Silvera also describes the waiting area in the Norman Manley Airport as a site where Jamaican culture is vibrant, suggesting that it is "like Christmas morning in downtown Kingston" (17).

6 Other Caribbean texts that standout for their consideration of air travel include Clarke's *The Meeting Point* and *The Prime Minister*, Danticat's *Brother, I'm Dying*, Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Kincaid's *Lucy*, and Marshall's *The Chosen People, The Timeless People*.

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