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Contemporary Caribbean Diaspora Literature"

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I came up with the idea for this dissertation while living in Berlin, and lived in Vienna, then New York, then Ottawa and finally London while writing it. Finishing a project that has been with me through so many places and eras feels dizzying, impossible. I am grateful to have had this companion and grateful, too, to move on from it.

Abstracts

German Abstract

Diese Dissertation untersucht imaginative Mobilitäten in zeitgenössischer karibischer Diasporaliteratur. In Werken von Dany Laferrière, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz und Jamaica Kincaid bewegen sich Charaktere zwischen der Karibik und dem nordamerikanischen Kontinent. Diese Im/Mobilitäten tragen weitere Ortswechsel nach sich: Eine Migration in die USA oder nach Kanada kann später zu einer Remigration in die Karibik führen, ein Umzug in die USA kann einen Umzug innerhalb des Landes zur Folge haben, und selbst Charaktere, die sich fest auf dem Kontinent niedergelassen haben, reisen oft in die Karibik, um dort Urlaub zu machen oder die Familie zu besuchen. Zu diesen geographischen Im/Mobilitäten auf der Handlungsebene kommen imaginative Mobilitäten hinzu: Charaktere stellen sich eine zukünftige Mobilität vor oder erinnern sich an diese, was eine eigene Art von Mobilität darstellt. Selbst wenn die Figuren in diesen Werken starr wirken, bleiben sie in ihrer geographischen Vorstellungskraft, in ihrem Ausmalen von Orten und Ortswechseln, mobil.

Diese Arbeit baut auf dem Feld der Mobilitätsstudien auf und analysiert, wie die vorliegenden Texte solche imaginativen Mobilitäten lesbar machen. Dies kann in Form einer Träumerei geschehen, die das Narrativ unterbricht, in Form eines fragmentierten Textes oder in Form eines Switchens zwischen Genres oder Sprachen. Indem die Dissertation sich mit imaginativen Mobilitäten befasst, arbeitet sie nicht nur heraus, wie das Imaginative in Mobilitätsstudien zum Tragen kommt, sondern erweitert auch das bestehende Bild von Routen zwischen der Karibik und Kontinentalnordamerika. Dadurch, dass Verbindungen und Spannungen zwischen Fixiertheit und Bewegung, Imagination und Erinnerung gefunden werden, wird ‚Amerika‘ archipelagisch und mobil.

English Abstract

In my dissertation, I analyze imaginative mobilities in contemporary Caribbean diaspora literature. In fiction by Dany Laferrière, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, and Jamaica Kincaid, characters move between the Caribbean and continental North America. Their im/mobilities do not stop there: migration to the U.S. or Canada may later lead to remigration to the Caribbean, a move to the U.S. can later lead to a move within the U.S., and characters relatively settled on the continent often travel to the Caribbean for holidays and family visits. These geographic im/mobilities on the level of plot run alongside characters' imaginative mobilities – that is, characters imagining and remembering past and future mobilities, an act of imagination which I argue constitutes a kind of mobility in itself. Even when characters in these novels and short stories seem fixed, they remain mobile in their geographic imagining.

Building on the field of mobility studies, I analyze how these texts render such imaginative mobilities readable. This can take the form of the narrative being pierced by a reverie or a dream, of the text being fragmented, or of a switching between genres or languages. By training its gaze on imaginative mobilities, my dissertation not only carves out what the imaginative might look like in mobility studies but also adds to our reading of trajectories between the Caribbean and continental North America. In finding connections and tensions between fixity and movement, imagining and remembering, 'America,' too, becomes archipelagic and mobile.

1. Introduction

In Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Annie John*, Annie's reveries about life in other places seep into her life in Antigua, and although she remains there for a while, her imagined travels elsewhere change how she relates to her present surroundings. In the short stories in Edwidge Danticat's collection *Krik? Krak!*, characters walk around Manhattan only to get interrupted by thoughts about their home in Haiti. In Junot Díaz's fiction, a character may be speaking English before switching to Spanish and then back again, and in Dany Laferrière's writing, prose will suddenly give way to verse. What all these works of contemporary Caribbean diaspora literature¹ share is that they are located where the Caribbean and continental North America meet, and that they portray and navigate a plethora of im/mobilities. In fiction by Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, Dany Laferrière, and Jamaica Kincaid, characters move between the Caribbean and the U.S. or Canada. These mobilities are neither endpoints in themselves nor does one preclude the other: migration to the U.S. or Canada may later lead to remigration to the Caribbean, a move to the U.S. can later lead to a move within the U.S., and characters relatively settled on the continent often travel to the Caribbean for holidays and family visits. These different levels of geographic im/mobilities are tied to characters' imaginative mobilities – that is, they go hand in hand with characters remembering past mobilities and imagining future ones. I argue that these acts of the imagination constitute a specific kind of mobility in themselves, as they mobilize the characters' internal navigations and attachments to place. These are some of the imaginative mobilities that I explore in my dissertation.

Focusing on imaginative mobilities on the part of characters serves as a prism through which other aspects of these texts become visible. It brings up questions about the characters' location within a web of identities and mobility regulations, such as: Who is allowed to be mobile? How does having or not having a passport shape how characters in these texts imagine their own mobilities, and how does this intersect with questions of race, gender, and other markers of identity and realms of experience at play in the text? By tracing characters' im/mobilities, my dissertation carves out what a focus on the imaginative can add to our readings of trajectories between the Caribbean and

¹ The list of contemporary fiction writers from the Caribbean diaspora depicting im/mobilities is long and ever-growing; they include Julia Alvarez, Alexia Arthurs, Dionne Brand, Nicole Dennis-Benn, Maryse Condé, Ramabai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, Caryl Phillips, Néhémy Pierre-Dahomey, Olive Senior, and many others.

continental North America, between imagining and remembering, between one sentence and another, in these diasporic Caribbean texts.

Literature is, of course, itself an imaginative medium; all fiction imagines. Additionally, any thought process could be classified as imaginatively mobile. Despite this danger of imprecision, the term “imaginative mobilities” does important work, as it enables us to see ways in which the outwardly visible markers of a mobility process (such as getting a visa or boarding a plane) are just part of a complex process which includes an imaginative component. Throughout this project, I chose to speak of the ‘imaginative’ rather than the ‘imaginary,’ since the imaginative carries with it the sense of something new actively brought forth, whereas the imaginary “exists only in the mind” (Cambridge Dictionary). This sense of something “exist[ing] only in the mind” can have a pejorative dimension, as it is used to claim that something is not real. Rather than claim that the literary processes I analyze exist only in the mind, it is my contention that they are always both entangled with things beyond the mind and profoundly generative. These are acts of imagination which have a share in shaping reality. Through the concept of imaginative mobilities it becomes possible to see how imaginative processes can take place both in the presence and in the absence of outward markers of mobility: people can imagine migrating without ever having left their current home (indeed, that is the beginning of many people’s migration journeys); whether or not an actual relocation ultimately takes place, this envisioning of a migration is itself an act of mobility. Once someone has supposedly arrived, they will continue to mentally engage with, and imaginatively navigate, this mobility process. To imagine a movement elsewhere is thus profoundly entwined with the actual act of relocating; it can precede, accompany, and follow a relocation, but it may also be independent of one. To capture some of those entanglements, I speak of both mobilities and im/mobilities in this dissertation.

However, I use the term “im/mobilities” to showcase how mobilities and immobilities are always entangled in one another; speaking of “mobilities and immobilities” would create the impression that we are dealing with two distinct spheres, that someone, or something, is either mobile or immobile, the very dichotomy that I, along with Ahmed et al., want to void.² Their insight “*Being grounded is not necessarily about*

² Along with other theorists working in the field, Peter Merriman wants to “encourage mobility scholars to challenge the rather simplistic binary of mobility/moorings” (178).

being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached" (1; emphasis in the original) serves as both the guiding principle and a starting point for my work.

Imaginatively hovering between fixity and mobility can be highly productive. A certain hope speaks out of Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner 'Flight,'" for example, where the lyrical I reflects, "I had no nation now but the imagination" (n.p.) – here, a semantic closeness is opened up between the two words, as "nation" is rendered as part of the word "imagination." The line, while laden with historic losses, is nonetheless hopeful. A similar optimism speaks out of Rinaldo Walcott contrasting imagination with neoliberalism. He makes the argument that,

[i]f neoliberalism does anything, it attempts to interrupt human creativity and imagination. A *pure decolonial* project works the ruins of catastrophe to produce more hopeful tales of our present human intimacies and to allow the opportunity to reimagine the self anew again. (Rinaldo Walcott 356; emphasis in the original)³

Here, Walcott not only mentions that the imagination has frequently been hindered by neoliberalism, but argues that, in a Caribbean context formed by neoliberalism as well as colonialism and its aftermath, imagination can be a way to "imagine the self anew," rendering imagination a crucial part of an ongoing decolonial project.

In this introduction, I will outline some of the theories and approaches informing my dissertation, derived from the fields of mobility studies, hemispheric and archipelagic studies, and diaspora studies. In the following, I discuss the theories and fields that strike me as crucial and on which my work directly draws. After these theoretical discussions, I give a brief outline of each of my chapters, before concluding this introduction with a brief reflection on my own positionality as a European researcher working on Caribbean diaspora literature. Each of the following chapters will be drawing on some of the core theories outlined in this dissertation but will also be introducing additional theory integral to the literary analysis.

1.1 Mobility Studies

Mobility studies emerged out of the Social Sciences in the early 2000's and can be traced back to the spatial turn propagated by spatial theorists like Edward Soja and Gaston Bachelard. The field was announced and shaped by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, who co-

³ In his paper, Rinaldo Walcott quotes the same few words from "The Schooner 'Flight,'" writing that Derek Walcott had "an insistence on a hopeful self who has 'no nation but the imagination'" (351). I see a related hopefulness in Rinaldo Walcott.

founded the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe) at Lancaster University in 2003. In 2006,⁴ they outlined this field of inquiry in their paper “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” where they assert that “[a]ll the world seems to be on the move” (Sheller and Urry 2007). They argue that these “mobilities need to be examined in their fluid interdependence and not in their separate spheres” (212)⁵ and that “[n]ew mobilities are bringing into being new surprising combinations of presence and absence as the new century chaotically unfolds” (222), a formulation later taken up by David Bissell when he writes about the “complex folding of absence and presence” (44). Where Soja and others argued for a focus on the spatialities, rather than the historicity, of human life, mobility studies argues against the conception of space as just a “container for social processes” (Sheller, “Mobilities” 791). Space, in mobility studies, is seen not as a vessel for movement or as prior to movement, but as created *through* movement. Only by being crossed, traversed, left, returned to, inhabited, and moved around in does space come into being. Writing about the notion of a *Zwischenraum*, or in-between space, Uwe Wirth argues that,

Every change of place suggests a movement in the in between: a movement of walking, which constitutes space in the sense that it is only through movement between two spaces that these spaces are brought into topological relation. (8)⁶

In line with this thinking, I view the Caribbean and continental North America not as two separate spheres or as fixed entities in space. Instead, continental North America, the Caribbean, and the space in between are created by the characters’ geographical and imaginative routes.

Since its inception, mobility studies has had an expansive purview. In a later article by Mimi Sheller summarizing developments in the field, she writes that it includes “the spatial mobility of humans, non-humans, and objects; the circulation of information, images, and capital; critical theories of the affective and psychosocial implications of such mobility; as well as the study of the physical means for movement [...] that enable travel and communication to take place” (Sheller, “New Mobilities Paradigm” 792). Caren Kaplan writes, “[t]he oscillation and tension between the liberating promise of mobility and the security of fixed location is one of modernity’s most enduring and complex oppositional

⁴ In the same year, Tim Cresswell’s book *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* also made a significant contribution to the field.

⁵ Here, they list “such as driving, travelling virtually, writing letters, flying, and walking” (Sheller/Urry 212).

⁶ “Jede Ortsveränderung impliziert demnach eine Bewegung im Zwischenraum: eine Bewegung des Spazierens, die insofern raumkonstitutiv ist, als erst die —Bewegung zwischen zwei Orten diese Orte zueinander in eine topologische Relation setzt” (Wirth 8). Translation from German into English my own.

binaries" ("Transporting the Subject" 212);⁷ mobility studies formulates attempts to complicate this binary. Some academics have nonetheless criticized the term "mobility" for sounding too celebratory (cf. Salazar and Smart ii). This criticism loses purchase when one looks at specific points of inquiry within mobility studies. While a list such as Sheller's enumeration of possible angles can indeed create the impression that mobility is an unalloyed, desirable good, concepts such as Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt's *governmobility* have teased out the central role of mobility to governmental processes and societies as a whole, summarizing that "government through mobility has become the very central move in making societies" (30). He writes that "[s]ocieties are, to a high degree, run by way of their government *of* mobilities. However, this is an indication of maybe much more implicit processes in which societies are governed *through* mobility, circulation and freedom" (26; emphases in the original). While highlighting the systemic nature of mobility processes, Bærenholdt also argues that "[g]overnmobility describes a situation where the regulation of mobilities are [sic] internalised in people's mobile practices" (29): mobilities may be policed and regulated on the level of governmental processes, but they are also internalized on the individual level of a person's life and what options they see for their own lives and their own mobilities. People located within the Schengen zone take for granted their ability to cross national borders within (and even beyond) the zone with ease. Looking to the Caribbean, we can see how shifts in border policy can be jarring to people's internalized sense of mobility: before Brexit, the border between French St. Martin and British Anguilla was porous. As Britain was in the EU, it was possible to travel from one island to the other with ease, and people frequently went to see friends and family on the neighboring island. Once a policy shift loomed on the horizon, this had real implications for people's ability to visit family members or go to the dentist's, jeopardizing their internalized sense of mobility.⁸ In the texts I study, a character's sense of possible mobility is similarly highly circumscribed by the governmobility systems that are portrayed. Mimi Sheller, whose work on mobility includes thinking about "passports, visas, money, vaccines" (Sheller, "Spatial Turn" 631), uses the term "network capital" to speak of these kinds of capital which render mobility possible (cf., e.g., Sheller, "New

⁷ See also Kaplan's book *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, where she analyzes travel as a metaphor in literature and theory.

⁸ "Anguillians consider Saint Martin as 'downtown Anguilla'" (Morgan n.p.). The piece goes on to quote Sherman Williams, finance manager of the Anguilla Air and Sea Ports Authority, as saying: "'Brexit may be justified in Europe; however, in the Caribbean it almost amounts to the separation of families'" (Morgan n.p.).

Mobilities Paradigm” 795; Sheller, “Spatial Turn”). As Ahmed et al. remind us, “‘passports’ [...] are required not only to move between places, but also to stay ‘at home’ in them” (7), as being citizen of a place may be key to being allowed to stay; relatedly, Lily Cho refers to the passport as “a document of suspicion” (Cho, “Citizenship” 278). Caren Kaplan, while also thinking about such capital, draws our attention away from the technologies and towards subjects by asking, “Who suffers, who troubles, who works these technologies of travel?” (“Transporting the Subject” 219). In studying these fictional texts, both the suffering and troubling of these technologies, of being circumscribed by them while trying to circumnavigate them, is thematized. Importantly, it is the very act of imagining which can trouble such systems, as it “is an essentially creative act that facilitates people’s ability to move beyond structural imbalances of power and economic constraints” (Salazar 774).

This perhaps becomes particularly apparent in the everyday. I focus not just on migrations, family visits, and other larger moves—and the moments of stillness and waiting that are part of any such process—but also on the quotidian mobilities in these texts, such as walking around the city or daydreaming while talking to classmates. This focus on the everyday is in accordance with a “shift in mobility studies away from questions of hypermobility, towards the politics of small-scale, quotidian movements” (Murray and Upstone 14). While theories of the everyday have at times lacked a Black perspective,⁹ in recent years Black authors have increasingly conceptualized the everyday. Christina Sharpe’s *Ordinary Notes* consist of her “notes”—that is, her fragments, recollections, thoughts—on childhood memories, moments in history, scenes in literature. While the everyday is hinted at in the very title of the book, in its almost-synonym “ordinary,” Sharpe is continuously seeing the historical in the ordinary and vice versa, as in the note where her mother tells eight-grade Christina about the potential dangers of dating as a Black woman in their majority-white environment. Relatedly, Tina Campt speaks of “the black quotidian as a signature idiom of diasporic culture and black futurity” (9). In looking at the everyday, I will also be drawing on Michel de Certeau, specifically on his essay “Walking in the City.” By referring to the quotidian, I aim to pinpoint two different but related kinds of everyday im/mobilities I study: both small-scale mobilities that the text presents as out of the ordinary and ones that are part of a

⁹ One example of this being Ben Highmore’s 2002 book *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, which does not include writing on the Black quotidian.

character's routine. A focus on the everyday then renders visible movements which, though significant, might otherwise go unnoticed.

1.1.1 Mobility Studies and the Imaginative

Not only is human thought always mobile, but I argue that the imaginative is always interwoven in mobility processes involving human beings. Prior to the inception of the field, concepts like Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" and Edward Said's "imaginative geography" (55) link the imagination of spaces and spatial crossings to the real-life political contexts which they can bring about or to which they can respond, thereby viewing the imaginative as actively engaged with geographical, physical, and political realities. Despite these forebears, and despite the field's breadth, a more humanities-based approach has at times been missing or marginalized in mobility studies. Peter Merriman and Lynne Pearce (2017) and Merriman (2014) have called for even greater transdisciplinarity and, specifically, for the inclusion of the humanities in mobility studies, while Sheller has gestured to the role of "imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel" (Sheller, "New," 793). One way in which mobility is tied to the imaginative is by serving as a metaphor. Salazar and Smart write how, "Mobility is a central metaphor for the contemporary world, both in its physical form and its imaginative implications. Mobility explicitly privileges the notion of movement and process rather than stability and fixity across both space and time" (v). That they are here referring to mobility as both a metaphor and as something with physical form might at first sound like a contradiction but speaks to their simultaneity. Not only do we use the concept of mobility to make sense of such physical realities as traffic jams and the spatial mobility of moving to another place, but mobility is an almost-ubiquitous metaphor in contemporary life, as we talk about social mobility and the ability to travel freely.¹⁰ Mobility as both metaphor and fact is frequently how (Caribbean) subjects talk about their life. In the exhibition text for his exhibition "There Is Light Somewhere" at the Hayward Gallery in London in the summer of 2024, Bahamian conceptual artist Tavares Strachan writes: "I decided that it was going to be central to my practice to think about ways of leaving the island, both as a metaphor and also as a kind of physical reality" (n.p.),¹¹ thereby viewing both aspects of mobility as simultaneous. Importantly,

¹⁰ The ability to move has also been referred to as "motility." Cf., for example, Smart and Salazar.

¹¹ The full quote is: "[M]y interest in exploration has a lot to do with the intricacies of inhabiting a tiny island. When you grow up on a small island I think a huge part of your job as young child – at least for me –

imaginative mobilities can also be linked to the realm of feeling, such as when Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone state that “emotional experiences are often mediated by mobile imaginations, and by representations of mobilities” (15). One attempt to tie mobilities to imaginative and aesthetic considerations is Merriman and Pearce’s concept of *kinaesthetics*, by which they mean “movement enacted, felt, perceived, expressed, metered, choreographed, appreciated and desired” (498). They argue that

[t]his move to present mobility as an aesthetic that is integral to, and expressive of, specific art forms and textual practices forces us to rethink the idea of mobility and movement as simply the subjects/objects of representation, reminding us of the processual theoretical traditions [...] in which movement is the basic conceptual ‘building-block’ of thought as well as of the life-world in general. (Merriman and Pearce 502)

The metaphor of building blocks can also be unsettled, however. In “Of Blocks and Knots,” Tim Ingold unsettles our taken-for-granted way of thinking about the world as made of building blocks. He wants to move from an image of the world as made of blocks to one of the world as made of knots. The metaphor of knotting is of profound importance to this project: “the form of the structure emerges from the weave” (Ingold 62) speaks to the co-constitutive relationship between the form and content of literature. In the texts analyzed in my dissertation, it is not that mobility is simply depicted on the level of plot. Instead, the mobilities depicted in the text are intimately connected to a mobility of literary form, as when Laferrière’s narrator goes back to Haiti from Montréal in a novel which switches between prose and verse. Throughout my dissertation, I thus pay particular attention to mobile moments in the literary form. These include the fragmentary nature of Danticat’s short stories, which are made up of vignettes and empty space across which the reader has to move and which the reader has to assemble into a whole; moments of switching between one language and another; the interweaving of reminiscences, or visions of a possible future, with a present moment. Mobility also occurs when different parts of the text are interconnected in such a way that a reader asks on what page to find a certain passage (cf. McKittrick et al. 2018). In stops and gaps, lacunae, fragments, and the evocation of empty space, a particular rhythm is also being created, one which not only captures the characters’ mobilities but which the reader has to navigate.

is trying to figure out how you get off that island, and then that becomes a metaphor. I decided that it was going to be central to my practice to think about ways of leaving the island, both as a metaphor and also as a kind of physical reality” (Strachan n.p.).

Teasing out the back-and-forth relationship between the imaginative and the “real,” Salazar summarizes that “[i]magination can thus be conceived as a mental process, both individual and social, that produces the reality that simultaneously produces it” (770). That these processes are mutually constitutive becomes apparent in Peter Adey et al.’s description of how plans for a future railway line shape people’s imaginative engagement long before the railway is ever built:

The ‘imminent’ expectancy and hopeful attachments that are invested in the plans for yet-to-be-built railway lines, or the disenchantment in their forever deferred future promise. [...] [T]he anxieties or hopes invested in such infrastructures may exceed their capacity to carry them. (Adey et al. 184)

The very fact that a railway line will be built changes how those in the vicinity of this future railway line imagine their own future, long before their use of this railway line – perhaps even if they just contemplate using it but ultimately never do so. This shows how mobile, geographically engaged thought processes can take place even in a situation which looks, from the outside, like one of stasis. In *Uprootings/Regroundings*, Sara Ahmed et al. write that “even individuals who have not left the nation, region or town in which they were born, have not necessarily stayed at home, and if they have stayed at home, it is not necessarily the case that they have not moved” (7). This insight draws attention to a variety of complicating factors: emotionally and biographically meaningful movement may happen even within a nation, even within a town. Additionally, it also makes it possible to imagine a variety of attachments: even someone who remains in a place where they were born may not be “at home” there, as their familial and personal attachments may lie elsewhere. But importantly, it brings our attention to the key importance of movements beyond the geographical, as Ahmed et al. write that “the greatest movements often occur within the self, within the home or within the family” (5). My dissertation charts these movements as they are articulated in Caribbean diaspora literature.¹² Although the term “imaginative mobilities” has at times been used by other scholars (cf. Salazar), mine is perhaps the first sustained inquiry into what this term might mean within a body of literature.

Another way to think about imaginative aspects of mobilities lies in considering the constant mobility of culture as a whole. In *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Stephen

¹² Salazar makes the case that, “The study of the relation between imagination and mobility itself often requires ‘imaginative mobilities’” (774). While this is an apt observation, I will not be focusing on my own acts of imaginative mobilities.

Greenblatt argues that cultural texts are always in motion,¹³ and links this cultural mobility to human im/mobilities. He writes,

We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unintended consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of identity and language, and not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy. (Greenblatt 2)

These insights illustrate that the texts under consideration in my dissertation are not just mobile in the sense that they depict im/mobilities, or that they possibly emerged out of their authors' own im/mobilities. Instead, they are also, in some cases, continuations of other texts and story-telling traditions: Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* uses the back-and-forth call of the Haitian storytelling tradition as the title of her short story collection. Additionally, the short stories and novels that I study here are themselves mobile works of culture – since their first publication, their reception, distribution, and their standing in the literary field have changed. These changes—depicted *in* the text, but also happening *through* the text—are the very ways in which, according to Greenblatt, language and culture come into being. Setting these different im/mobilities into relation to one another is not meant to muddy the concept but means that movements and shifts are not seen as isolated moments.

Thinking mobility and the imaginative together, however, not only includes the future in this fold but also the past.¹⁴ For this reason, I also draw on insights from memory studies, particularly where the field engages with questions of mobility. According to James Clifford's concept of "travelling cultures," cultures are not static but changing and moveable. Expanding on this concept, Astrid Erll writes that

it is actually since ancient times that memory lives in and through its movements, and that mnemonic forms and contents are filled with new life and new meaning in changing social, temporal and local contexts. [...] Memories do not hold still – on the contrary, they seem to be constituted first of all through movement. (Erll 11)

A key claim of mobility studies is that space is constituted through movement; Erll here sees memories, too, as brought into being by movement. Accordingly, in the texts studied

¹³ One of the examples of this in Greenblatt's edited volume is Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which "not only inspired a mass American audience to oppose slavery but also, in a series of encounters entirely unimagined by Stowe herself, inspired the rhetoric of mid-nineteenth-century German feminists to demand equal rights for women, of Russian peasants to call for the abolition of indenture, and of English maids to rebel against domestic abuse" (17).

¹⁴ Relatedly, Ahmed et al. assert that, "Making home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present" (Ahmed et al. 9; emphasis in the original).

here, memory is not something static and stable carried around by the characters; instead, it is *through moving* that they remember: by making a pilgrimage to communal sites of grief and memory, returning to places significant in their own or their family's lives, or acclimating to new surroundings which bring up memories of the surroundings of their old home. Ahmed et al. create a link not just between mobility and experienced time, but also between bringing the past and the future into being, when they write that "[m]aking home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present" (Ahmed et al. 9; emphasis in the original). In analyzing the ways in which characters in these novels or short stories inhabit their current surroundings of Antigua or New York, Port-au-Prince or New Jersey, it becomes possible to see their imaginative mobilities. Such imaginative mobilities, even when pointing to the past, are building (towards) a future. As Atanasova et al. argue in *Entangled Future Im/mobilities*, "The future as an open horizon of possibilities also variably shapes people's everyday practices of im/mobility, manifesting at the level of im/mobility-related decisions, aspirations, hopes, imaginations," so that "futures are embedded within practices of im/mobility" (14) and entangled with the imaginative.

In order to look at a specific instance in which im/mobilities are interwoven in the texts I study, we can look at the importance of dreams in these novels and short stories as sites where the simultaneity of the freedom and boundedness of imagination is perhaps particularly acute. Several characters in these texts have dreams which they experience, and which the text depicts, as liberatory, enlightening, and, in a certain way, agentic. While the texts portray some of the characters' imaginative mobilities as voluntarily chosen, as they indulge in an extended daydream or code-switch mid-sentence, this is not the case with dreams. I still see at least two ways in which dreams can be read in this context of imaginative mobilities, however: Firstly, dreams are one instance in which characters *are moved*, as they are taken out of their regular spaces of experience and thought patterns and transported into different a realm. As psychoanalytic critic Jacqueline Rose writes, "sleep appears, less as a metaphor for, more a pathway *into*, something else" (110; emphasis in the original). Secondly, the texts call for engagement with the dream—they invite a viewing of the dream as an instance of mobility or flight, as something that can be woven into waking experience—thus leading to additional imaginative mobilities. Although "we never know what will happen – or where exactly we are going – when we go to sleep" (Rose 110), these texts view dreams

as something that can be made conscious upon waking. Though they started out in an involuntary register, they can be integrated into waking, agentic life.

One affordance of mobility studies is the way in which it enables us to consider such different phenomena as having (or not having) a particular passport alongside a character imagining a return; such legal apparatuses as border regimes alongside a text switching between genres or between languages; a character walking a city in a text that is highly fragmentary. All of these phenomena, after all, fall under the banner of mobility; not only that, but they help us see how mobility processes play out in literature, in a character's imagination, and in a national context. Reading such diverse parts of the lived and felt reality alongside one another should not, however, lead to a flattening. Rather than using the term "mobility" in a way that subsumes highly distinct and diverse phenomena, it can be a tool with which to analyze a certain moment in the text more precisely. Noticing that a sentence or paragraph deals with mobility in one way can make it possible to see other strands of mobility running through the same paragraph. Reading about a character who is thinking about crossing a border, we can see both the border and the character's thoughts about crossing it as integral parts of mobility processes as they are navigated in literature. This always, by necessity, points to both the mobility processes the text itself is embedded in and to mobility processes beyond. Situating my work in the field of mobility studies, then, enables me to keep tangible realities like borders and network capital in mind while focusing on their imaginative dimension in literature.

1.1.2 Mobility of Form

Form has meaning in mobility studies. Ian C. Davidson's "Mobilities of Form" analyzes how the form of some literary texts relates to those texts' treatment of mobility (2017). In his article, he examines literary works which were written in the U.S. in the late 1940s and 1950s, when motorization was on the rise. Davidson looks at Bonnie Bremser's autobiographical novel *For the Love of Ray*, Jack Kerouac's *Some of the Dharma* and the poems of Eileen Myles, analyzing how this newly available motorized mobility goes hand in hand with a mobility of form in these works. However, he uses the term "mobile" to refer to strikingly varied phenomena. According to Davidson, Bremser's book is mobile because it is "a non-linear narrative that [...] occurs in moments" (552). Its mode of production, too, is described as mobile by Davidson, in that it was written in fits and starts (553). Citing a paragraph from Bremser's work, he draws our attention to the ellipses

which puncture and interrupt her text, saying that this “aesthetic is mobile, occurring in ‘those minutes’ when you bridge the gap” of the ellipses (Davidson 553). Moving on to Jack Kerouac’s book *Some of the Dharma*, Davidson sees a mobility of form in the way “[f]orm becomes a kind of temptation that people, things and processes are drawn to or turn towards it, only to be destroyed” (553), as the book is a collection of different materials, among them handwritten observations, theological meditations, and poems (cf. 553). This text assemblage, says Davidson, is “indistinguishable from” everyday life (553-554). To depict this life, “[t]he only possible literary form is mobile, following the twists and turns of an unfolding life, resisting completion or the manipulation of material into plot and narrative” (Davidson 554). Additionally, Davidson sees mobility in the way the work “is always trying to catch itself in the moment outside time, while being completely dedicated to time” (554) – in the significant role time plays, while time is also both grappled with and countered. Davidson adds yet another level to this understanding when he argues that

[t]he mobility of the work’s form therefore occurs at two levels, at the level of the page, whereby different sections and fragments can be constituted and re-constituted, read alone or read in combination, and at the level of the work, where it remains in a fluid relationship to the total of Kerouac’s other works. (556)

Lastly, focusing on the poetry of Eileen Myles, Davidson sees mobility not just in Myles’ focus on driving, but in the speakers’ “moving between positions” (554) as well as in the way Myles’ work is “intensely biographical, even as it constructs new notions of biography” (554); “the speaker is [...] mobile, and capable of going in any direction” (556). Davidson’s essay, then, should be seen not so much as a specific articulation of what “mobility of form” means, but as an assortment of what it could be taken to mean. It is a rather large assortment – spanning a preoccupation with new vehicular mobilities; a switching between genres, modes, and materialities in the text; a disjointed production process mirrored in the text; a mixing up of the autobiographical and non-autobiographical;¹⁵ a conflicted relationship with time. The essay teases out how a mobility-studies lens might be adopted to consider the form of literary texts. Davidson uses the idea of the mobile to point to “mobility” between different genres within one text as well as between different subject positions within one text, and to refer to gaps which are filled by the reader. Ultimately, what Davidson seems to get at is a kind of openness,

¹⁵ One could make the argument that the idea of mobility is here used as a kind of synonym for “hybrid.”

as “[m]obility works with notions of endless circulation, rather than a journey that has a sense of completion” (550).

1.2 Caribbean Im/Mobilities

The Caribbean has long been theorized as particularly mobile even outside the field of mobility studies. As Édouard Glissant asserts, “The root is not important. Movement is” (*Poetics of Relation* 14).¹⁶ In his influential 1993 book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy writes about the Atlantic generating, circulating, and merging cultural forms which cannot be contained by nations and nationalities, and speaks of “routed and re-rooted Caribbean culture” (33). The book has been criticized for its focus on the African American situation in the U.S. and its lack of attention paid to languages other than English, among many other points of criticism (for a detailed reckoning, cf. Zeleza). Elizabeth DeLoughrey, meanwhile, bemoans that theorists such as Gilroy “depoliticize and dehistoricize trajectories of migration. Claiming marine travel as cultural or genealogical essence [...], these writers may overlook colonial and neocolonial motives for transnational migrancy” (27-28). I agree with DeLoughrey that it is useful to look at theories which have emerged out of island contexts to counter this essentializing stance. Caribbean writing has often theorized the Caribbean as not just mobile but variegated and diverse, describing an entanglement of islands which is at the same time profoundly entangled with other parts of the world. Here, mobility is often linked to rhythms. Antonio Benítez-Rojo employs the notion of “an island that ‘repeats’ itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs” (3). This approach views the Caribbean as being in a state of flux, a flux which is not contained but spills out into other parts of the world. The ‘Caribbean,’ both in these theories and in the different literary works under consideration, is created through movement while rippling out and engendering more movement. In viewing the Caribbean as mobile, these theorists are also thinking through the Caribbean’s historical role in the world, and the way in which these islands and their populations were im/mobilized by colonialism and slavery. As Glissant writes about the Plantation:¹⁷ “immobility and fragmentation lay at the heart of

¹⁶ While I will be quoting works of literature which are part of the main corpus of this dissertation—that is, novels by Dany Laferrière—in the original French, theoretical sources will be cited in their English translation.

¹⁷ I take his capitalization to refer to the plantation as a system, although other theorists (notably McKittrick 2013) analyze this system without capitalizing the word.

the system eating away at it" (*Poetics of Relation* 65). In the process by which the West Indies were rendered "the hub of empire" (Ganser 27), the populations brought to the Caribbean and those already present in the Caribbean were immobilized in brutal, often deadly ways. Dionne Brand describes this as "a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being" (5).¹⁸ This rupture must be taken seriously in any work that deals with the Caribbean or with Black literature in the Americas. Such an awareness should not, however, occlude the moments of agency and mobility that occurred even within the system of the plantation. In her historical account of Antigua, Natasha Lightfoot writes that, "In Antigua, huckstering was likely the sole opportunity for enslaved women to enjoy physical mobility, for they worked principally in the fields and rarely held positions that allowed the sort of movement about the island that enslaved men in skilled occupations enjoyed" (48), before going on to outline enslaved Antiguans' "regular defiance of the boundaries their owners erected around mobility" (56). She cites Stephanie M. H. Camp, who highlights motion: "Where planters' mapping of their farms was defined by fixed places for plantation residents, the rival geography was characterized by motion: the movement of bodies, objects, and information within and around plantation space" (Camp 7). Lightfoot's and Camp's accounts both illustrate how one approach to space—the colonizer's mapping and penchant for fixity, the enslaved people's motions—intersected and how even in tightly constrained mobility regimes engineered precisely for fixity, movement cannot be totally prevented. This is not the movement of colonialism; as Sara Upstone reminds us, "colonialism is about movement through space, *but it is not mobile* – that is, it does not facilitate and accept change, as much as it fixes that space" ("Footprints," 42; emphasis in the original). Instead, this is the movement that countered, and continues to counter, colonialism and its current iterations.

The nexus of the Caribbean and im/mobilities has often itself been linked to global patterns of consumption. Tanya L. Shields focuses on how "the Caribbean is a site

¹⁸ Rinaldo Walcott reflects upon the inadequacy of language to capture the transporting of Africans to the Caribbean. He writes: "Leaving? To leave? Left? Language can be deceptive. The moment when they 'left' the Old World and entered the New. Forced to leave? To 'leave' one would have to have a destination in mind. Of course, one could rush out the door with no destination in mind, but to 'rush' or 'to leave' would suggest some self-possession; rushing would suggest a purpose, a purpose with some urgency, some reason. Their 'taking'? Taking, taking too might suggest a benevolence so, no, it was not taking. So, having not 'left,' having no 'destination,' having no 'self-possession,' no purpose and no urgency, their departure was unexpected; and in the way that some unexpected events can be horrific. What language would describe that loss of bearings or the sudden awful liability of one's own body? The hitting or the whipping or the driving, which was shocking, the dragging and the bruising it involved, the epidemic of sickness with life which would become hereditary? And the antipathy that would shadow all subsequent events" (Walcott 343).

of consumption producing for others in terms of labor and pleasure" (7) – a history of consumption she makes visible by exploring "bodies and bones" in Caribbean literature.¹⁹ Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* is a book-length study of the ways in which this consumption plays out, as she writes not just about tourism in the Caribbean, but aspects as diverse as the export of fruits, European tourists gazing upon Haitian bodies, and the transportation of Haitian corpses to the U.S. for medical studies. She summarizes that "[t]he ties that bind the Caribbean to other places [...] are premised on everyday practices of consumption that occur through economies of movement, touch, and taste in overlapping fields of economic consumption, political consumption, and cultural consumption" (12). Only through an awareness of these everyday entanglements of the Caribbean with other parts of the world does the Caribbean become readable, and its central yet marginalized position within the global sphere come into view. As a scholar working on Caribbean diaspora literature, I must think about the ways in which this literature is itself a way in which the Caribbean is consumed, as publishing creates, and caters to, its own trends: "[t]he market welcomes the consumption of 'ethnic spice' associated with Other voices" (Machado 1). Taking account of this is all the more important as "[a]cademia shapes the literary market because of the centrality of the classroom to the publishing economy" (Machado 4). I must therefore be mindful of ways in which the Caribbean continues to be consumed, and how my own project contributes to existing trends of consumption. I will delve into these questions more deeply in my chapter on Junot Díaz (cf. chapter 5).

As all these different examples make clear, "mobilities," both as a term and in its varied applications, opens up a variety of queries within Caribbean studies. It can imply forced im/mobility, but also movements to subvert it; large, historical processes but also individual and fictional travel; mobilities between different Caribbean islands and ones which move out to other parts of the globe; mobilities which emerge out of natural phenomena such as waves lapping up unto the shore and distinctly human-made processes which turn such a shore into a border. How can these mobile realms in and of the Caribbean help us think about imaginative Caribbean mobilities? In zooming in on

¹⁹ Relatedly, a lot of theory on Caribbean (diaspora) literature has focused on commodities and their relationship to, and inscription in, both bodies and literature. Meredith M. Gadsby's *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* is one such example.

some fictional characters' imaginative mobilities within, amid,²⁰ and beyond the Caribbean, many of these other strands of im/mobilities appear in a changed or refracted form; like Benítez-Rojo's *repeating islands*, they appear and reappear, echoing within and between texts. Crucially, the Caribbean has always not just been mobile but has been constituted by the im/mobilities in which it has been entangled and which it has itself helped engender: the im/mobilities of people, of commodities²¹ and crops, of forms of life and culture. In drawing on mobility studies scholars along with Caribbean theorists, my goal (in line with Sheller's) is to bring the two fields into conversation. While it is unavoidable that this project "consumes" Caribbean literature and uses it in the service of Northern knowledge creation, I hope that reading Caribbean and non-Caribbean writers and theorists together sheds light on the imaginative and literary processes under consideration. By listening to Caribbean voices, it will hopefully resist extractive hierarchies, instead contributing to a many-voiced future of academic discourse.

1.3 Hemispheric and Archipelagic Studies

There are two recent approaches in American studies which, in going beyond the United States, aim to arrive at a more expansive view of the concept of America, thereby trying to resist hegemonic spatial hierarchies: hemispheric American studies and archipelagic American studies. Both fields aim to displace the United States from the center of what is meant by "America." "What American studies leaves out, of course," writes Diana Taylor, "are the Americas" ("Genre" 1423). Hemispheric American studies thus moves beyond the United States by focusing its gaze not on that nation, but on the American landmass as a whole, including Central and South America, thereby "exploring histories of the north and south as profoundly intertwined" (Taylor, *Archive* XVIII). Hemispheric approaches have become institutionalized over the past few decades, one example of which is the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at New York University, founded in 1998. The Institute studies "the oddly shaped landmass misidentified, mislabeled, and misrepresented from the moment of the first European explorations" (Taylor, "Genre" 1416). Taylor stresses that "*America*, however, is more than a misnomer. To colleagues in the south, it is an act of aggression" ("Genre" 1418; emphasis in the original). She goes

²⁰ For more on the word "amid," see my discussion of Brian R. Russell's *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America* later in this chapter.

²¹ One such commodity is sugar. For an in-depth history of sugar and an analysis of its role in the Caribbean, cf. Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*.

beyond this aggressive naming when she writes that “America, Americas, and hemispheric are terms not for places or objects *but for practices*” (“Genre” 1417; emphasis mine), going on to say that “the object of analysis is not a thing or fact. America is an act of passion or belief” (“Genre” 1421). Despite this, however, she suggests “looking at the Americas not only as a series of independent states or as a geographic fact but also as the enacted and contested arena of criss-crossings and encounters” (“Genre” 1426). This multiplicity is echoed by Susan Gillman when she writes: “Hemispheric studies would always operate not just in two or even three dimensions but in multiple, asymmetrical, and non-parallel dimensions, multiply related and arrayed” (330). According to Gillman, “translation might become a central and not simply an incidental aspect of hemispheric critical practice” (334-335). What hemispheric studies does, then, is, firstly, acknowledge, the aggression enacted by the U.S. through its “economic and military power, coupled with communications technology, to enforce its use of *America*” (Taylor, “Genre” 1421; emphasis in the original); secondly, it frames ‘America’ as a practice; thirdly, it highlights how this practice is linked to “passion” and “belief,” that is, to imagination, and, fourthly, it enables us to look at acts of translation in a hemispheric context. Crucially, hemispheric studies trains its gaze on encounters, and im/mobilities, within the hemisphere. Such a widening of one’s view, however, comes with its challenges. Along with Rodrigo Lazo, I see “Hemispheric Studies” as “more of an approach than a field” (172). Lazo asks, “How can we integrate scholarship on the southern Americas without creating an academic area so large that it becomes unmanageable, if not superficial?” (175). He suggests that one way of doing so is to follow “numerous threads: gender in the Americas, urban conditions in the Americas, hemispheric print cultures, museums, counterpublics, and even torture” (Lazo 181) – threads which cut across the hemisphere. Imaginative mobilities, too, can serve as an umbrella under which different parts of the hemisphere can be studied.

Even in hemispheric American studies, however, the focus frequently lies on the “landmass” (cf. Taylor “Genre”). However, “the culture of the Caribbean [...] is not terrestrial but aquatic” (Benítez-Rojo 11). The sea, in Caribbean thought, is highly meaningful, never just an empty expanse to be traversed. The lyrical I in St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History” responds to the question “Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?” by pointing to the sea, asserting, “The sea is History.” This History takes the form of a book, as “the ocean kept turning blank pages / looking for History;” it also takes the form of a church, as “these groined caves with barnacles /

pitted like stone / are our cathedrals" (n.p.). Rather than the overt monuments of other nations, Walcott argues that, "It's all subtle and submarine." Both Caribbean artists—in literature as well as other art—and scholars of Caribbean literature have, however, endeavored to make this subtlety of the sea's historicity more visible. In the realm of literature, M. NourbeSe Philip has written *Zong!*, which uses words from the Gregson vs. Gilbert court case and reorders them into a guttural scream from the sea which also functions as a tomb. Brathwaite ends his 1974 book *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* with the assertion that "[t]he unity is submarine" (64), while Glissant speaks of "submarine roots" (*Caribbean Discourse* 67). This density of meaning and origin means that the sea is the very opposite of empty. Furthermore, its "perpetual movement is radically decentering; it resists attempts to fix a locus of history" (DeLoughrey 21); it is perhaps this resistance of the sea which has made the conception of it as empty so tempting. According to Alison Donnell, the "sea is not charged with cross cultural flows or tides of intellectual exchange but with the fears and hopes of the 'Illegal Immigrant' and the 'stowaway' whose identities are lost at sea with no certainty of landing" (97). She insists we focus on the real human cost of crossings, on im/mobilizations and their devastation, moving away from depersonalized ideas of the sea as a site of exchange. While the sea, then, has been configured in different, multivalent ways, it is of immense significance in Caribbean thought past and present, and a constitutive part of America.

This is what archipelagic American studies tries to bring to the fore. While hemispheric American studies remains focused on the land, the field of archipelagic American studies helps shift the focus from the land to the entanglement of land and sea that is an archipelago. The field was announced with the 2017 publication of Michelle Ann Stephens' and Brian Russell Roberts' 2017 book *Archipelagic American Studies*. Here, America is studied not from the vantage point of the continent, but from that of the archipelago.²² This is in line with how 'America'—as a European invention rather than its own inhabited land—was first created:²³ Columbus landed at the island of Hispaniola, now shared by Haiti to the west and the Dominican Republic to the east, and from there

²² DeLoughrey reminds us that our entire planet could be seen as an archipelago, speaking of "our own location on a terraqueous globe, a watery planet that renders all landmasses into islands surrounded by the sea" (2).

²³ Another term for this might be "invented," as the Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman argues when he speaks of "la invención de América" in his book of the same title (1958).

went on to ‘explore’ and conquer other parts of the Americas. Archipelagic American studies decenters what “America” means, moving it from a conception focused on the continent (and, more often than not, just on the United States) and putting in its place a connected web of islands which make up the archipelago, including but not limited to the continental landmass. Hemispheric American studies, then, is important in highlighting how conceptualizations of America are an act of belief and imagination, a practice rather than a pre-existing fact. What makes archipelagic studies particularly useful is that rather than assuming one shared reality the way “hemispheric” arguably does, an archipelago is an assemblage of fragments, of land and sea, of bigger pieces of land and sea and smaller ones. While, terminologically, the hemisphere hints at unity, the archipelago hints at fragmentation. This idea has long been present in Caribbean theory and literature; in his Nobel Prize speech, Derek Walcott argued, “That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs” (n.p.).²⁴ A focus on fragments is not only generative because of the way it democratizes, placing different fragments on equal or at least on comparable footing and thereby highlighting the incompleteness of any one fragment, but by the way it trains our gaze on the connections and im/mobilities between them.

The field of archipelagic American studies therefore takes two steps: First, it proclaims that America consists of different fragments, all of which are important in their own right, thus dissolving the concept of it as consisting of a center and a periphery. In a second step, the field highlights connections, relations, overlaps, and interdependencies between and across these fragments. Long before the field emerged, Édouard Glissant gestured toward an archipelagic cultural and historical sphere when writing that, “[t]he ruins of the Plantation have affected American cultures all around” (*Poetics of Relation* 72). This “around” appears vague, diffuse, but also all-encompassing – no American culture, he is saying, has been left untouched by the machine of the Plantation. The “around” also implies a kind of circular, reverberating motion, akin to Benítez-Rojo’s notion of the *repeating island*. In *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America*, Brian Russell Roberts makes use of another preposition when thinking through

²⁴ In *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (1984), Kamau Edward Brathwaite coins the term “Nation Language” to point to the plethora of Englishes of the Caribbean.

archipelagic American interdependencies and relationalities: he argues for the use of the word “amid.” Teasing out the affordances of the preposition, he writes,

Amid this vast set of islands and waters, the *este lado/otro lado* distinction collapses with the proliferation of archipelagic spaces, where islands’ relationality is not a land-to-land binary of *lados* simply linked by water but is rather a multifarious and multidirectional land-water relationality [...] the binary *between* is replaced by the multicircuited and polyrelational *among* or *amid*.
(Roberts, *Borderwaters* 123; emphases in the original)²⁵

Conceiving of the continent as consisting of different pieces and placing them on equal footing makes visible mobile connections between them. We can then also see these im/mobilities as multidirectional, besides breaking up the dichotomy of center and periphery. In archipelagic studies, the sea then functions not just as an empty landscape to move across in order to reach meaningful land but is instead itself imbued with meaning. This move has theoretical and epistemological benefits both for thinking about what ‘America’ might mean as a ‘whole’ and for understanding and conceptualizing national histories within it. This extends to locales within the archipelago as much as it does to text: Dani Redd introduces the notion of an “archipelago of desire” when she reads a novel by Julieta Campos through an archipelagraphic lens.²⁶ Focusing on connections within the archipelago also makes it possible to render other histories visible: There was movement between the Caribbean islands and the American continent long before the arrival of Europeans, movement both human and aqueous. In an evocative description of an archipelago, Benítez-Rojo portrays it as

a discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos. (2)

While Benítez-Rojo is here describing natural phenomena, his analysis is not limited to this realm, as talking about “turbulences, whirlpools” and other phenomena is, in his work, never far removed from analyzing how the ‘Caribbean’ was made into a globally entangled entity along with a natural one: the notion of an archipelago points to the empiric facts of islands, eddies, the sea, but it also points to how archipelagoes have been

²⁵ Shields seems to almost be gesturing towards “amid” when she writes that “feminist rehearsal” in Caribbean literature “is about constructing a world across, between, among, and in spite of colonial legacies and histories” (Shields 13).

²⁶ My co-author Barbara Gföllner and I undertake our own archipelagic literary analysis in our paper “‘Near Enough to Smell and Far Enough to Desire’: Archipelagoes of Desire in Canisia Lubrin’s *Voodoo Hypothesis* and Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” published in the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*.

lived in and how they have brought about relationships eddying between the future and the past.

There are, then, several reasons why I find a discussion of hemispheric and archipelagic American studies relevant for my dissertation as a whole. One question posed by the writers in my corpus is how to conceptualize im/mobilities between the Caribbean and Canada/the U.S. – if texts and their characters are mobile, then what exactly are they moving between and/or across? Both the Caribbean and continental North America are, in themselves, incredibly diverse; neither of them is anything resembling a monolith. And the Caribbean, the U.S., and Canada are, along with Mexico, all part of North America. This diversity makes hemispheric and archipelagic approaches useful and indeed essential, as they both acknowledge the Caribbean and continental North America as part of something which is impossible to subsume under the one banner of ‘America.’ At the same time, these approaches acknowledge the many ruptures, gaps, and differences between different parts of America, differences which play out within the ‘regions’ of the Caribbean and the U.S. and Canada.

1.4 Defining ‘Diaspora’

Benítez-Rojo asks, “how can we begin to talk of Caribbean literature when its very existence is questionable?” (23-24), alluding chiefly to this literature’s “polylingualism.” We can ask the same question about Caribbean diaspora literature: how can we talk about Caribbean diaspora literature when all three components of the term—the Caribbean, diaspora, and literature—are such expansive, multivalent fields? Here, I want to approach this question by writing about diaspora, giving a brief overview of the field before laying out how I use the term in the dissertation that follows.

That the term “diaspora” can now be so affixed to the concept it describes is a fairly recent phenomenon, as the term has become much more expansive. While James Clifford has used it with surprising flexibility, finding points of comparison even between diasporic subjects and indigenous, “tribal” peoples (cf. Clifford), others, such as Khachig Tölölyan, the founder of the academic journal *Diaspora*, see the rise of the term “diaspora” with skepticism. Tölölyan bemoans that “diaspora” and “dispersal” have become synonymous, making any dispersed ethnic group into a diaspora, while Roger Brubaker goes so far as to speak of a “‘diaspora’ diaspora,” pointing to the way the term “diaspora” itself has been scattered to refer not just to the ‘original’ (Jewish, Armenian, Greek)

diasporas but to any dispersed group. This dispersal, however, does not necessarily include a wish to return (cf. Mayer).²⁷ Using the broad vs. the narrow definition has wide-ranging implications: When “diaspora” was chiefly used in the narrow sense, the concept suggested a group having survived and fled persecution. This part of the term’s meaning is much less present in the broader definition. However, there are compelling reasons to speak of “diaspora” as opposed to “dispersal”: not just because in allowing the term to be broad, we are refraining from setting a threshold of persecution which a group must face in order to be considered a diaspora (an exercise that would by necessity be fraught and exclusionary), but also because “diaspora” and “dispersal” differ not just in their reason for populations scattering at a large scale, but in their framing of groups: while “dispersal” points at the fact that a group’s members are no longer in their place of origin, “diaspora” foregrounds that the group has been (re)constituted elsewhere. In analyzing a certain diaspora, we have to look not just at the place of origin but at the place of reconstitution, as “the marginalization of the same transnational group differs remarkably from site to site, in line with the historical contradictions and nationalist projects in each” (Brodwin 36).

Nonetheless, criticism of the term “diaspora” abounds. Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera, going much further in his critique than either Tölölyan or Mayer, is unsure whether group belonging should matter in academic inquiry at all, posing the question, “What is the goal of using Cultural Groups as a forum of scholarly inquiry?” (159; capitalization in the original²⁸). Instead, he advocates for an approach which is both strictly focused on the individual and which destabilizes any assumed markers of belonging and identity, suggesting wordings such as “[trans/hyphenated-] American” instead of “American.” Such a focus on the individual, however, fails to account both for the ways in which being born into a certain community can impact someone’s life and the ways in which such forms of belonging can themselves function as important tools for building and making sense of that life, and thus for worlding.

It is certainly useful to think of what makes a diaspora, and both Tölölyan (2007) and Brubaker (2005) list requirements that should be fulfilled for a group to be seen as

²⁷ “[D]ie Idee, jede Diasporagemeinschaft strebe mehr oder weniger konkret die Rückkehr in eine Heimat an,” she writes, is “überholt” (10). (“The notion that every diasporic community more or less desires the return to a home is outdated.” Translation my own.)

²⁸ I take Herlihy-Mera’s capitalization of these words to gesture towards the presumed artificiality of any such groups, as capitalizing “Cultural Groups” serves to denaturalize them.

diasporic. Rather than examining how well the writing in my corpus meets the requirements thus listed, I suggest destabilizing the category in a different way for the texts in my corpus. I agree with Brubaker that, “rather than speak[ing] of ‘a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’ as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on” (Brubaker 13).²⁹ Avoiding a view of diaspora as given evades the danger of seeing diaspora as “a non-territorial *form* of essentialized belonging” (Brubaker 12; emphasis in the original), which may only exchange territorial, essentialized markers of belonging for a non-territorial form of it. An alternative lies in focusing on practices through which individuals, fictional or otherwise, engage with diaspora and with diasporicity. Lily Cho, in an approach which is complementary to Brubaker’s yet more precise, argues that “[d]iaspora must be understood as a *condition of subjectivity* and not as an object of analysis” (“Turn” 14; emphasis in the original). Rather than trying to evade mention of any kind of group belonging, as Herlihy-Mera suggests, Cho focuses on the movement of turning, writing that “diasporic subjects emerge in turning, turning back upon those markers of the self – homeland, memory, loss even as they turn on or away from them” (“Turn” 15).³⁰ Cho is here playing with the way “turn” is often used in academia—the diasporic turn, the spatial turn etc.—using it to describe the way diasporic subjects navigate their relationships to memory and homeland. In using the word “turning,” she thus points toward a kind of internal mobility which is close to the imaginative mobility I describe, as diasporicity is not solely a state foisted upon the subjects, but one which they can move closer to and farther away from: one which they themselves can at times negotiate. “To turn to diaspora,” in this way, “is to turn away from the seemingly inexorable march of history and towards the secret of memories embedded within the intimacies of the everyday” (Cho “Turn” 28). It is this idea of turning which I find particularly fruitful and productive. Firstly, it is productive because it retains some of the specificity of the term “diaspora” while denaturalizing and destabilizing it by framing diasporicity as something which can at times be chosen, and which can be engaged with and performed, rather than something into which one is

²⁹ A similar idea is brought forward by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, when he writes that, “Diaspora [...] simultaneously refers to a process, a condition, a space and a discourse” (42).

³⁰ Tölölyan’s language mirrors Cho’s when he argues that diasporic subjects “*turn* again and again toward the homeland through travel, remittances, cultural exchange, and political lobbying and by various contingent efforts to maintain other links with the homeland” (649; emphasis mine).

simply born. Brodwin describes this circumscribed agency in “Marginality and Subjectivity in the Haitian Diaspora,” where he makes the point that “[m]embers of a given diasporic enclave within a larger dominant society are both agents with the capacity to author their (dislocated) lives and ‘subjects’ fixed into place by surrounding structures and discourses” (14).³¹ This idea of authorship finds its echo in Rinaldo Walcott’s framing of indigeneity, where he describes it “not as identity but as process” (352). Secondly, the term “turning” is useful for the analysis of a novel such as Dany Laferrière’s, which turns not just between Montréal and Port-au-Prince, between Haiti and continental North America, but also between prose and verse. I also observe this kind of turning in the way Edwidge Danticat’s characters go to Haitian mass, or the way Junot Díaz’s characters switch between English and Spanish according to which member of their community they are speaking to: these are at times choices to turn to diaspora, to engage with diasporicity. And thirdly, it serves to bring together diaspora studies and mobility studies, two related fields of inquiry. Both diaspora studies and mobility studies examine travel while going beyond it, and both disciplines have interrogated notions of fixity and stasis. Tina Campt sees “stasis as a temporal modality of diasporic motion held in suspension,” “hover[ing] between stillness and movement” (10). By making it possible to consider these overlaps between the fields, the idea of “turning” to diaspora can perhaps serve to further mobilize the notion of diaspora. In this reading, people, and literary characters, are mobile with regard to diaspora in not one, but two ways: It is not just that their own, or their ancestors’, forced or voluntary movement made them into diasporic subjects.³² Instead, they are also mobile because the act of engaging with their diasporicity can itself be seen as an act of mobility, an inner turning toward or away. This mobility, however, must always include moments of stasis. Relatedly, Campt makes the case for “rethink[ing] foundational approaches to diaspora studies that emphasize mobility, resistance, and expressiveness,” instead highlighting “conceptual frameworks of quiet, stasis, and refusal to reclaim the black quotidian as a signature idiom of diasporic culture and black futurity” (9). This approach both highlights the everyday—similarly to Cho’s “intimacies of the everyday” (“Turn” 28)—and the overlaps between stasis and movement, between diasporicity and a sense of being settled.

³¹ Brodwin is here drawing on Purnima Mankekar.

³² If that is indeed how they see themselves or how we want to read them. Diasporicity should not be assumed from the outside, since not everyone “so counted identif[ies] as members of the respective diasporas at all” (Brubaker 11).

All of this has particular purchase in the Caribbean, as notions of diaspora and the Caribbean have long been especially entangled. For Sarah Phillips Casteel, they are so entwined that, in her book *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, she uses the doubled term “Caribbean/diaspora” (24) to talk about phenomena relating to these fields. Aaron Kamugisha, interweaving his own take with those of other theorists, summarizes

the dream of the Caribbean *as* diaspora. Diaspora as concept and method pays scrupulous attention not just to a tracing of the routes by which the Caribbean people have come into being, a people for C. L. R. James ‘more than any other people constructed by history,’ but also poses acute questions about our contemporary moment, as we cannot conceive of contemporary Caribbean citizenship without it. As Michelle Cliff once said, ‘the Caribbean doesn’t exist as an entity; it exists all over the world. It started in diaspora and it continues in diaspora.’ (202; emphasis in the original)

This paragraph highlights the fact that the ‘Caribbean’ has emerged out of diaspora, as its societies were forged out of people who were brought there first through slavery and, later, through indenture, and who had no choice but to create community. The Caribbean is seen both to have emerged in diaspora and to continue in diaspora: much like Benítez-Rojo’s *repeating island*, Michelle Cliff sees the relationship between the Caribbean and diaspora as reaching into the past and the future, in continuous movement and generation. This can also be seen as an echo of “Brathwaite’s concept of *tidalectics*, which takes its inspiration from the ocean’s continual cyclical movement, provid[ing] an ‘alter/native’ [...] to Hegel’s dialectics by foregrounding the shifting and unpredictable ties not only between land and sea but also between cultures and people” (Englert et al. 5).³³ Glissant, meanwhile, speaks of “[s]ubmarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches” (*Caribbean Discourse* 67): an image of the Caribbean people dispersing. Accordingly, the Caribbean diaspora is sometimes referred to as a “double diaspora.” As Stuart Hall points out: “The Caribbean is already the diaspora of Africa, Europe, China, Asia, India, and this diaspora re-diasporized itself” (501) by migrating elsewhere. The term “double diaspora” is most often used for people of South Asian Caribbean background who then migrate somewhere else; “this double diasporization of the Caribbean population engenders an analytical and discursive interrogation of identity and its corollaries” (Murdoch 234). While my literary corpus does not include writers

³³ The formulation “alter/native” is taken from DeLoughrey 2, where she quotes it from Brathwaite.

who are part of this particular double diaspora, they are nonetheless part of a two-fold diaspora. While their ties to the Caribbean diaspora is in the foreground, their African diasporic ties come into play, too; one example of this is the syncretic religious practice we see in Kincaid's *Annie John*.³⁴ Importantly, as Mariam Pirbhai argues, "[i]n leaving out the national and geographic point of origin, the term "double diaspora" implicitly draws attention to the extent to which diasporic subjectivity and interrelation is individually mapped for those whose cultural and geographic frames of reference are as multiple as they are varied" (13). The term "double diaspora," in hinting at several crossings and sites of heritage and affiliation, works against the idea that a diaspora necessarily has one clear point of origin, arrival, or return, that it leads from A to B, that the journey is finite. Instead, it calls attention to the fact that the situation under consideration—such as a Dominican character moving to a New Jersey housing development—may only be one node among others in the same character's life, generation, family, or community.

While hemispheric and archipelagic studies make it possible to think of America as a practice, then, Lily Cho and other diaspora scholars make it possible to conceive of diaspora as a practice as well. For the purposes of this dissertation, one can also think of them as mobility practices. These moves are indispensable for my conceptualization of imaginative mobilities in the works under consideration. The texts practice diaspora; they also practice America by critically engaging with the continent and its conception. While imaginative mobilities neither can nor should be reduced to these two aspects—neither are these im/mobilities just about diaspora, nor are they limited to the American landmass—these aspects nonetheless deeply inform geographic and imaginative mobilities.

1.5 Gaps and Rhythms

My project considers the gaps and moments of stillness inherent in any mobility process, such as the gaps between languages in code-switching and between genres in genre-switching. It is, then, highly attuned to lacunae and rhythms. At the same time, attention is paid to the non-lacuna—the meaningful, archival site—of the sea itself. Pointing out gaps in mobility processes, Merriman observes that, "Stillness, waiting, slowness and

³⁴ There is a long history of syncretic religious practice in the Caribbean. In her analysis of *Annie John*, Nicole Willey argues that "tradition (even a choice like obeah over Western medicine) is what gives a colonized female subject strength" (282). She also observes that "when Annie's condition worsens, she uses British medicine and also calls on her mother to practice obeah in order to make her well" (285), pointing at ways in which obeah and Western medicine are depicted alongside one another.

boredom may be just as important to many situations, practices and movements” (177), while Glissant argues that “Caribbean literatures, whether in English, Spanish, or French, tended to introduce obscurities and breaks—like so many detours—into the material they dealt with” (*Poetics of Relation* 71); neither Caribbean literatures nor mobility processes, then, can be understood without considering gaps. Benítez-Rojo similarly draws our attention to gaps. In *The Repeating Island*, he argues that

any expression of culture [...] is a kind of impersonal message, at once vague and truncated; an obscure and previous desire that was already moving around here and there and that can never be interpreted entirely by a performer or read completely by a reader; every effort by the one or the other to fill this essential gap will fail to lead him toward a goal, but will issue into lateral movements, spiralings, steps that go forward but also backward. (74)

Here, Benítez-Rojo creates a link between gaps and movement. He not only acknowledges gaps, which he calls “essential,” but also urges us not to try to fill this gap. In doing so, he brings together the performer’s and the reader’s tasks. The artist creating, and the reader reading, must both contend with the gap—that which cannot be fully understood, defined, or filled—that is part of any work of art. In this project, I similarly try to take both the text’s and the reader’s partial, incomplete traversals of gaps seriously. Imaginative mobilities can be seen as a reaction to a gap, as “[t]he process of imagination allows people to contemplate the gap between them and imagined ‘realities’ in ways that do not necessarily imply success or failure” (Salazar 774). A character may be in one place while wishing to make another place present; she then fills this gap by thinking of it or mentally traversing its terrain. In a different reading, these mental journeyings elsewhere can be read as “gaps” within the fabric of a character’s observable life. This is what happens in *Annie John*, when Annie is so lost in her reverie about Belgium that she stumbles in Antigua – for her walking companion, Annie’s daydreaming absent-mindedness presents as a gap in her presence. This gap of imagining, then, in some cases serves to puncture lived realities.

The reader, too, needs to traverse gaps. In my chapter on Díaz, this means that I study both what non-understood words in Spanish mean for the characters in the text and what they mean for the reader reading them; in my chapter on Danticat, I study breaks between a short story’s vignettes both as a portrayal of the narrators’ mental mobility and as an invitation to the reader to be mobile across this gap. A gap, then, is a useful way to grasp a variety of different lacunae: gaps between one language and another, or between one genre and another; gaps between understanding and not understanding; the physical

space on a page between vignettes or between prose and verse; between a character engaging in a mental activity (such as imagining themselves in a different location) and engaging in the everyday acts that make up their life.

One way to read both daily life and *tidalectics* is through rhythms. Both human life and ocean currents have their own rhythms; drawing on Antonio Benítez-Rojo as well as Henri Lefebvre, I also see rhythms as intimately related to gaps. A rhythm can be created through the interweaving of gaps and content – such as the rhythm between text on the page and a gap on the page, which may lead to quicker or slower reading rhythms. A rhythm can also help interpret a gap: in Díaz’s fiction, the very rhythm of his sentences means that the reader, even when not understanding a certain word or sentence, can follow along with the rhythm to get a sense of what is being narrated. Rhythms, however, can also be created, or changed, by the absence of a gap – by two things coming together in an immediate, at times violent way instead of leaving room in between. This is what we observe in Danticat’s short story, where the rhythms of cars and those of pedestrians clash and lead to momentary confusion; it can also be observed in the scene in Kincaid just mentioned, when Annie is so invested in her reveries that she is unable to follow a conversation.

Gaps and rhythms are both building blocks of the archipelago. The key insight of archipelagic studies, of course, is that the ocean is *not* a gap. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues, the ocean has long been seen as a “lacuna precisely where we should be able to trace the expansion of both capital and empire” (26); the sea, however, “cannot function as a facile aqua nullius or a blank template for transoceanic migration” (30). But similarly to the ocean, the gaps I am talking about here are never self-contained but are instead interwoven with what is around, next to, or amid them. Benítez-Rojo’s conception of the Caribbean is one that is both archipelagic and rhythmic, both in the sense that the fact of the islands “repeating” creates its own rhythms and in the way he zooms in on certain island rhythms such as “walking ‘in a certain kind of way’” (19), an idea echoed by Derek Walcott when he says that, in the Antilles, “the body moves like a walking, a waking island” (“The Antilles” n.p.). Archipelagic thought teaches that the Americas—including its islands, landmass, and waters—are fragmented; it then highlights the interconnections between them without, however, fully assembling them together. Gaps are folded in and traversed. Reading islands and mobility processes (such as waiting for, and taking, a train) *together*, it becomes clear how the gaps of waiting inherent in mobility processes can be

seen as archipelagic, too: that is, they are not just a space between fragments but itself a constitutive site. A rhythmic reading of the Caribbean, meanwhile, is attuned to the way characters experience their lived realities differently according to where in the American archipelago they are situated – Laferrière’s character Windsor getting reacquainted with Haitian rhythms, Danticat’s narrator juxtaposing her own urban rhythms of walking with tales of her mother’s travels around Haiti. A rhythm can also be something characters create in order to “turn to diaspora” (in Lily Cho’s formulation): characters may speak or walk in a certain rhythm in order to turn to the Caribbean – that is, in order to fold the Caribbean rhythms they know into their everyday lives and feel connected to them. Importantly, imaginative mobilities generate their own rhythms: they lead to a weaving together of imaginative and corporeal mobility, of absence and presence, of Port-au-Prince and Montréal, the character, the text, and the reader swerving from one node of connection to another.

Gaps and rhythms, then, are pivotal to how I read and understand mobility processes, both imaginative and embodied. Rhythms embed both a person and a text in their environments. For Benítez-Rojo, “the Caribbean performance”—of which rhythm is a crucial part—“including the ordinary act of walking, does not reflect back on the performer alone but rather it also directs itself toward a public in such of a carnivalesque catharsis [...] that in the final analysis was *already there*” (22; emphasis in the original), preexisting. Rhythms also entangle one Caribbean island in a web of islands, and the Caribbean as a “meta-archipelago” (Benítez-Rojo 4) in global processes, historical and current. Thinking gaps and rhythms together furthermore makes it possible to think about the complex ways in which agency and a lack thereof—and, relatedly, mobilization and immobilization—are entangled. Often, no clear distinction between the two is possible, and Ahmed et al. remind us that “both staying put and moving can take place out of necessity or force as well as ‘choice’, and thus depend on specific enabling or disabling relations of power” (5), placing quotes around “choice” to signal that choice itself is not clear-cut but emerges out of a confluence of restricting and enabling factors. Relatedly, a rhythm may be purposefully chosen or it may be thrust upon you. A gap might be something created and made use of or it may be so uncrossable as to render understanding and legibility difficult. In the texts I study, the line between what is agentic and what is not is often blurred: characters may switch between languages both out of playfulness and out of necessity. Dreams, which play an important role both in Danticat

and in Laferrière, are not themselves agentic—the characters do not choose what they dream—but they may lead to agency in the form of characters writing about them, contemplating them, or otherwise actively creating meaning out of them. Both the idea of rhythm and the idea of the gap hold those possibilities between choice and necessity, between mobilization and immobilization, and make room for this interplay. While imaginative mobilities are what I explore in this dissertation, gaps and rhythms are two of the tools with which I do so.

My corpus is made up of work by four writers. Three of them are writers now located in the U.S. who primarily write in English: Junot Díaz (b. 1968), who was born in the Dominican Republic and migrated to the United States as a child; Edwidge Danticat (b. 1969), who spent the first 12 years of her life in Haiti and then moved to the U.S. to join her parents; and Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949), who moved from Antigua to the state of New York to work as an au pair as a young woman. My corpus also includes one francophone Canadian writer, Dany Laferrière (b. 1953), who migrated from Haiti to Montréal in his early twenties. All four of these writers have long featured prominently both in scholarship and in the literary sphere. While I am then choosing to study writers who have already been the subject of much scholarly debate—including analyses of how memory and diaspora figure in these works—one of the things that are novel about my analysis is the lens of im/mobilities.

Rather than choosing for my title a quote from one of these writers' works, "They were home. They were far from home" (Gay 89) is taken from another diasporic Caribbean text: Haitian-American writer Roxane Gay's short story "In the Manner of Water or Light" from her collection *Ayiti*. I chose this quote because it captures the entanglement of home and its opposite, of distance and proximity, which is shared by all the texts I analyze here. Since it is a quote from a writer who is not otherwise in my corpus, it does not privilege any one of them, pointing instead to the vast landscape of diasporic Caribbean writing which lies beyond the scope of this study.

All four writers have written books that span several different genres, but I will be focusing on their fiction; namely, on their novels and short stories. Im/mobilities within the Caribbean archipelago—between the islands of the Caribbean and the North American mainland—as well as an engagement with diasporicity are crucial parts of this study. I chose these writers not for the facts of their lives but because there are both striking similarities and noteworthy differences between how their texts map out

im/mobilities across the American archipelago, differences which make for a fruitful analysis. They are contemporaries, have been active in the literary scene at the same time, and have, in some cases, read and engaged with each other's work.³⁵ In all of these writers' works, imaginative mobilities are interwoven with physical im/mobilities; small, quotidian im/mobilities go hand in hand with larger moves; and both the future and the past come into being through imaginative mobilities. All of this work navigates shifts and gaps; these shifts can take the form of switching between genres or languages, fragmentary vignettes or the insertion of dreams. Despite these similarities both regarding the position of these writers in the literary market and their thematic concerns, I have striven to counteract too much homogeneity. Of the four writers, Jamaica Kincaid is the only one whose ties to the Caribbean is not to Hispaniola, the island on which Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located, but to Antigua. She is a part of my corpus not just because she, Díaz, and Danticat are frequently in dialogue with each other and refer to each other's work; the inclusion of a writer who is from a part of the Caribbean other than Hispaniola also resists the casting of Hispaniola as a stand-in for the Caribbean. It subverts the notion of the Caribbean as one monolith in conversation with the monolith of continental North America, instead highlighting the multipartite reality of the American archipelago, and the diversity of the pathways within it. Similar thinking underlies my inclusion of Dany Laferrière: although he is the only francophone writer in my project, the other writers are not a monolithic English-language block, either. Díaz writes in a vibrant mix of Spanish and English, while Danticat includes words and phrases in Haitian Krèyol and French in her fiction, and Kincaid gestures toward Creole. The overt multilinguality that thus appears in my dissertation via Laferrière, then, helps render the multilinguality of the other texts visible. The fact that Laferrière not only writes in French, but that his text imagines Canada (an additional node in the American archipelago), furthermore brings an important dimension to my project, as it bridges nation states as well as languages, underlining the multi-sitedness of the American archipelago. His conclusion thus adds an additional comparative element to my work. As Eugen Banauch writes, "The recovering and re-grouping of an ensemble of writers [...] – in fact, any grouping – is always exposed to one point of criticism, namely its potentially arbitrary

³⁵ For example, Junot Díaz read Edwidge Danticat's short story "Seven" on *The New Yorker's* fiction podcast in 2017 (Treisman). Díaz also thanks Danticat in his acknowledgments in *Oscar Wao* ("for being mi querida hermana," *Oscar* 338).

character” (10). I have, nonetheless, tried hard to create a corpus bound together closely enough so that the texts speak to each other, but which also pushes against its own boundaries. As a result, the corpus of this dissertation is not a closed sphere but porous.

1.6 Comparative Literature / American Studies

My project is located at the intersection of Comparative Literature and American studies. Due to the primary literature I have chosen, its ties to American studies might be more readily apparent. That my project nonetheless ultimately falls under the banner of Comparative Literature is due to several reasons: while Comparative Literature has at times been pronounced “dead,”³⁶ the field has particular affordances, and my dissertation offers an important contribution. By reading the texts in my corpus through both the lens of Comparative Literature and of mobility studies, Comparative Literature can perhaps itself be rendered yet more mobile.

As a Comparative Literature scholar, I have always felt indebted to the field’s capaciousness. One reason that a project located within the Americas should fit Comparative Literature is because the field’s name, in many countries, is “General and Comparative Literature” (e.g. *Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* in German, *Littérature générale et comparée* in French). Often, this division has meant that in the “Comparative” part of the field, studies are undertaken which span languages, time periods, nations, or art forms, while more general inquiries in the realm of literary theory are housed in the “general” field. In practice, however, these boundaries have not been so fixed, as an analysis of one or more works of literature still grapples with many of the same questions raised within the “General Literature” umbrella, such as questions of form.

Along with these overarching concerns, I view my dissertation as situated in the field of Comparative Literature in several key ways. The first of these is the languages of the primary texts. Of the four authors in my corpus, three write primarily in English, while one of them writes in French. As Benítez-Rojo laments about the study of Caribbean literature, there is a “scarcity of comparative studies that transcend a single linguistic zone” (36). The anglophone and francophone Caribbean are not often studied and thought about together; there is “a still prevalent tendency to fragment the Caribbean into zones of linguistic influence or ideologically determined categories” (Dash 3). Often, the

³⁶ Gayatri Spivak famously titled her 2003 book *Death of a Discipline*.

English Caribbean is studied in American Studies, while the French Caribbean is often studied under the banner of *antillanité* or *francophonie*. This makes it seem as though the different linguistic spheres of the Caribbean were separate or unconnected; it also overemphasizes the ties which these parts of the Caribbean have to their former or current metropole at the expense of inter-Caribbean connections. The field of Comparative Literature, in making space for different languages to be studied alongside and perhaps even through one another, makes it possible to study these parts of the Caribbean together, thereby making a valuable contribution both to Caribbean studies and to Comparative Literature.³⁷ In addition, even those texts in my corpus which are primarily in English still make use of, and are entwined with, other languages: Junot Díaz switches between English and Spanish in his fiction, while Edwidge Danticat occasionally inserts words and phrases in Haitian Kreyòl. Jamaica Kincaid may at first seem to be an outlier in my corpus in that she exclusively uses English, but the absence of Antiguan Creole in her fiction is so marked, and so laden with meaning, that it constitutes its own interlingual presence in the text. Arguing that there can be no comparative work between languages done on the basis of these English-language texts, then, would elide the very real presence of languages besides, beyond, and alongside English in these texts. Additionally, Comparative Literature's aptitude at paying attention to different languages and their usage serves as a particularly useful tool for studying these linguistic swerves, switches, and absences in the text.

The field of world literature, or *Weltliteratur*, was inaugurated by Goethe; perhaps as a lingering result, Comparative Literature remains chiefly concerned with European literatures in many departments around the world. While there are historical reasons for this, and while European literatures are obviously more than worthy of study, it is my assertion that even a study of literature relatively unconcerned with Europe, such as mine, may be part of the field. Both the Americas and the scholars I study can be seen as comparative fields in their own right. I read scholars from the Caribbean—such as Benítez-Rojo, Glissant, and Brathwaite—alongside Marxists like Henri Lefebvre, African-American scholars like Katherine McKittrick and Tina Campt, mobility studies scholars such as Mimi Sheller, and theorists of World Literature such as Emily Apter and Pheng Cheah. In engaging with Apter and Cheah, my project situates itself even more firmly

³⁷ And to American Literature. Jonathan Arac argues for an American Studies that, informed by Spivak's conceptualization of Comparative Literature, steers away from monolingualism to include other languages.

within Comparative Literature by participating in two recent debates around World Literature. One of them is the debate around translation, wherein Emily Apter draws our attention to the *Untranslatable*, a concept I make use of in my chapters on Junot Díaz and Jamaica Kincaid. The other concept is *worlding*. While worlding has been thought through by critics both in Comparative Literature and other fields—including the Caribbean theorist Sylvia Wynter—and while it does not form one of the main bases of this work, Cheah's insights about literature as world-building nonetheless profoundly inform my dissertation. While mobility studies has gestured toward the importance of the imaginative for mobility processes since its inception, reading Cheah can help elucidate how world-building processes can be brought about by the imaginative acts of literature.

1.7 Chapter Overview

In my next chapter, on Jamaica Kincaid, the focus lies on imagining the future. The titular character of Kincaid's *Annie John* is trying to forge a future for herself by leaving, and imagining leaving, Antigua. This mere act of imagining to leave Antigua alters her relationship to the island, as Annie's imagined life elsewhere jangles up against her current life in Antigua. *Lucy* approaches this question from another angle, as Lucy remembers Antigua from the vantage point of her life in the U.S. Both novels ask how a future can be imagined into being: a future not primarily concerned with planetary survival or political progress, but one woven out of quotidian mobilities.

Chapter 3 is about Dany Laferrière. I start the chapter by giving an overview of discourses around Haitian literature and the notion of Haitian writers in exile, context which is important not only for this chapter but also for the chapter on Edwidge Danticat that follows. I then go on to analyze the genre-switching in Laferrière's novel *L'Énigme du Retour*, wherein his narrator Windsor travels between and across Canada and Haiti. I use Cho's concept of a "turn to diaspora" to analyze how the text performs instances of turning to diasporicity both by Windsor traveling between Haiti and Canada in his thoughts and by the novel switching between verse and prose. This switching creates gaps between the prose and the verse which the reader is asked to fill. I then turn my attention to Laferrière's novel *Pays sans chapeau*, where dividing lines between the realm of the dead and the realm of the living are both subverted and upheld, mobility being created between them.

In chapter 4, on Edwidge Danticat, I study several of the short stories in Danticat's collection *Krik? Krak!* to analyze imaginative mobilities. These often take the form of commemorative mobilities, as characters remember the Haiti they know from their own lives or from that of their family members while situated in the U.S. Much of this commemoration is profoundly embodied, and I use different theorizations of rhythm to read these stops and starts. A rhythm is also created by Danticat's text being full of gaps across which strands are interwoven, including the physical space on the page between vignettes in a short story as well as the space between the different interconnected short stories in the collection.

Chapter 5, on Junot Díaz, reads imaginative, linguistic mobilities through his code-switching between English and Spanish. I argue that code-switching can be seen not only as a continuation and result of the characters' geographic mobilities from the Dominican Republic to New Jersey, but also as an imaginative way of navigating mobility on the level of a sentence. His characters imagine their ties to the Dominican Republic and their place in their current American surroundings by choosing words and registers which will bring them closer to, or farther away from, one of these entangled sites. By using Emily Apter's concept of the Untranslatable, I also tease out how even those parts of a sentence which a monolingual reader does not understand still function as carriers of meaning, as the reader is mobilized to understand across a gap.

All of these texts negotiate and navigate im/mobilities. In many cases, they do so by engendering a mobility of form, such as switching between prose and verse, lacing the text with footnotes, or interrupting the main body of the text with short vignettes. They also do so through a mobility between languages, either by including more than one language or through a language's marked absence. All these texts explore Black, Caribbean diasporic life, and all of them are interested both in vast im/mobilities such as migrations and its echoes and imaginings, and in the small everyday im/mobilities that constitute a life.

My dissertation was born out of my thoughts on code-switching in literature. I then started to wonder: How do diasporic Caribbean writers open up room for, cross, and navigate im/mobilities in the absence of code-switching? What other ways are there of making im/mobilities tangible, palpable, representable? The answer, or part of it, lies in the methods I have outlined. Cheah argues for the world-building potential of literature, as literature not only reflects the world but actively contributes to its continual creation.

Thinking this together with Tim Ingold's image of "knotting," studying im/mobilities in literature becomes a way in which different entanglements—between movement and stillness, presence and absence, one place and another—become meaningful and readable through imaginative mobilities.

I am a white researcher primarily located in Europe. As such, it is crucial that I be aware of my own positionality when I do research on, write about, and teach Black writers with ties to the Caribbean. As a European, my work “is implicated in its own critique”³⁸ (DeLoughrey 29-30). I believe that my own biography and multi-national background have contributed to my interest in the topics I study. Born to Austrian parents who had immigrated to Switzerland, I grew up in Switzerland as an Austrian citizen, with that being my only citizenship. Since the Swiss village where I grew up is right at the border to Germany, I went to school in that neighboring country, crossing the border into Germany every day. In that way, I grew up in, between, and across three countries. They were relatively similar: all of them German-speaking and right next to each other. But still, regardless of which of the three countries I was in, I had to explain what exactly my relationship to the country was. Growing up, I was asked why I didn’t sound more Swiss in Switzerland and asked why I wasn’t a citizen in Germany. Later, having moved to Austria, I was asked why I lacked basic Austrian pop cultural and societal knowledge and, in a mirroring of Switzerland, why I didn’t sound more Austrian. My claim to any place was seen as lacking and as requiring explanation. While I am by no means suggesting that growing up across German-speaking Europe is comparable to a life spent between-and-across the Caribbean and continental North America, I believe that it was locatedness between different countries and contexts which early on made me interested in questions of diaspora and migration, and in mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The way characters police each other’s Spanish in Junot Díaz’s fiction is a mechanism I am deeply familiar with through the way my own native language, German, is continually policed.

While this facet of my biography hopefully sheds some light on what led me to this subject matter, it does not take away from the fact that I am inscribing and implicating myself into several problematic processes: the process of Europeans amassing knowledge about other parts of the world, and the process of extracting resources—in this case, literature and culture—from the Caribbean more specifically. While I find it crucial to acknowledge this context, I have tried to work against this extractive process by putting these writers’ works in dialogue with theories and approaches that go beyond the European, so that I am not (just) applying a European lens to a non-European body of

³⁸ DeLoughrey, of course, is speaking about her own position, saying that “my position as an American, residing in the belly of the beast, so to speak, means that this book is implicated in its own critique” (29-30).

work. Ultimately, my goal is to contribute to an academic landscape where Europe and the U.S. are not assumed to be the center, and where places and contexts now seen as marginal—or, in Kincaid’s words, as “the fringes of the world” (*Lucy* 95)—can come to the fore yet further.

In “The I Who Arrives,” Tayana L. Hardin writes about the ways in which any teacher is haunted by a plethora of histories, as “[t]he I who arrives in the classroom traffics in myths and ordeals, defiance and betrayals” (539). Arguing that this haunting is neither passive nor metaphysical, she calls it “a formulation of a demanding past that dares me to not flinch, to not turn away” (535), and draws attention to “the making and unmaking of this I” (532). What I take from her argument is that any “I who arrives”—including a teacher in a classroom, but also a scholar speaking to an academic audience—is haunted by the history that has come before, and that this haunting, even when it feels ineffable, is rooted in very real histories which have made the world as we inhabit it. What I also take from her argument, however, is that the I, in being part of this “making and unmaking,” speaks from a position which is not fixed. That is, while our positionalities as a scholar must continually be taken into consideration, we must also pay attention to the ways in which the past not only asks us to respond but also changes the very way in which we respond. While my own biographical and familial ties do not lie in the Caribbean and its histories, my own sense of positionality has been changed by the many years I have spent surrounded by these texts, thoughts, and hauntings. They have been shaped by spending time in the Caribbean and by living and doing research in the very Caribbean neighborhood of Flatbush, Brooklyn. My relationship to the Caribbean is shaped by the food I have eaten and the Haitian Kreyòl words I have learned to pronounce. To the best of my ability, I have aimed to do the Caribbean and its diaspora, their histories and hauntings, justice.

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2. “Across the Sea to Somewhere Else”: Speculative Mobilities in Jamaica Kincaid

Jamaica Kincaid’s personal history of mobility is summed up by Bénédicte Boisseron when she writes that “Kincaid is neither an immigrant nor an exile, but rather a second-generation diasporic writer who is defined by a process of uprootedness (deterritorialization) from her colonial history” (133). In Jamaica Kincaid’s writing, characters often either dream of going away or try to put distance between their current and former locales. Kincaid, who has been a prominent Caribbean-U.S. writer for several decades, was born in Antigua in 1949 as Elaine Potter Richardson. She left the island to move to Scarsdale in Westchester County, New York, at the age of 17, where she worked as an au pair. After being a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*, Kincaid published her first novel, *Annie John*, in 1985, followed by the novels *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *Mr. Potter* (2002), and *See Now Then* (2013) as well as the short story collection *At the Bottom of the River* (1983). In addition to these works of fiction, Kincaid has published several nonfiction books, among them *A Small Place* (1988), which is a travelogue to Antigua, the memoir *My Brother* (1997), and two books which explore her interest in botany: *My Garden (Book)* (2001) and *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas* (2005). Most of Kincaid’s work is set in Antigua; even when it takes place in the U.S., it looks back to, and out at, the island. There has been ample scholarship on Kincaid since the early 1990s; a critical companion was published by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert in 1999.³⁹

There are many books by Kincaid that lend themselves to a mobility-inspired analysis. Mobility is one of the chief preoccupations of her work: Not only are many of her books set between Antigua⁴⁰ and the U.S. and depict travels between the two, but mobility informs her books’ very narrative form and structure. Mobilities in her work range from the fast-paced, highly mobile stream-of-consciousness propelling the narrative forward in *See Now Then* to the vehicular mobilities in *Mr. Potter*, whose eponymous taxi-driver protagonist is perpetually moving around Antigua. As is often the case in Kincaid’s work

³⁹ A “literary companion” which has encyclopedia-like entries for different words relating to Kincaid’s oeuvre, such as “autonomy” and “belonging,” was published by Mary Ellen Snodgrass in 2008.

⁴⁰ In some of her books, Kincaid explicitly mentions Antigua; in others, the island she is talking about remains unnamed, but can nonetheless be assumed to be Antigua.

and beyond, different scales of im/mobilities are entangled here: It is not only that “the interior of a mobile vehicle or other form of transport is a different sort of place with its own rhythms” (Edensor 6), but Mr. Potter is in a constant state of mobility while simultaneously being enclosed in the space of the taxi. This is one of many instances where it can be impossible to tease apart these entangled im/mobilities.

While Edwidge Danticat’s characters are continually looking for ways to fold their memories into their everyday lives, as we will see in chapter 4, Kincaid’s characters often act on a different impulse: to leave places saturated with memory behind and draw a firm line between themselves and the place which they have left or are planning to leave. While past and present are still interwoven in Kincaid’s work, the past often figures as something the characters would like to shed. In this chapter, I will tease out imaginative mobilities in the novels *Lucy* and *Annie John*. I will be focusing on different mobile phenomena, such as linguistic gaps and their traversals, as well as the ways in which the characters experience Antigua both as small and as laden with meaning. I will bring those different strands together to analyze how the novels navigate time, arguing that in all their imaginative mobilities, Annie and Lucy are trying to carve out a future for themselves. One way in which these novels do this is through speculative mobilities, i.e. by imagining potential future mobilities. With this concept, I point to the ways in which characters imagine future mobilities and explore how imagining these future mobilities shapes their relationship to their current surroundings. As Ahmed et al. write, “even individuals who have not left the nation, region or town in which they were born, have not necessarily stayed at home, and if they have stayed at home, it is not necessarily the case that they have not moved” (7). The concept makes it possible to see the ways in which Kincaid’s characters are mobile long before they have started their journeys or migrations, as the mere act of imagining to leave Antigua alters characters’ relationship to the island. The concept of speculative mobilities thus suspends and voids the dichotomy between movement and fixity.

The concept of worlding can help shed light on this relationship between time and movement. In his 2015 book *What Is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Pheng Cheah sees time as key to the project of worlding, a (re-)making of the world through literature. He maintains that “of all narrative forms, the story has the most intimate connection with the force of time as an inexhaustible resource for opening other worlds because being grounded in the experience of finitude, it is a

narrative without a rationally determinable end" (314). *Lucy* and *Annie John*, both of which are short novels, are then ideal texts for thinking about how imaginative mobilities in and across time can be a way of bringing futures into being. In mobility studies, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, a sense of futurity was theorized by Peter Adey et al. when they write about "[t]he 'imminent' expectancy and hopeful attachments that are invested in the plans for yet-to-be-built railway lines" (184). There, Adey et al. argue that the mere knowledge that a railway is going to be built changes how people think about places and invest places, and potential mobilities between and within them, with meaning. I take their use of the word "imminent" here to mean that even if the railway takes years longer than planned to be built—even if the plans are scratched and it is never built at all—the railway and all that it makes possible nonetheless *feel* imminent; the mere announcement of the plan can lead to a sense of new possibilities opening up. Similarly, a character's awareness that they will leave their current home in the future changes how they relate to that home in the present. The future as a concept becomes especially flexible when viewed through the lens of both novels. In *Annie John*, the future of Annie's life outside of Antigua *remains* the future—distant, unattainable—until the novel's penultimate chapter. In stark contrast to this, *Lucy* sets in just after Lucy leaves the airport in New York, which means that a life outside of her native island is not just Lucy's anticipated future but the novel's present tense. In both novels, however, the future is more entangled with the past and present than such a clear delineation suggests. This is no accident – the past, present, and future intermingle in much of Black literature, often painfully so, since "to be heir to slavery is to have had one's native sense of time ripped away" (Lothian 13). Thinking about futurity, however, Kara Keeling concludes that "'Black futures' are here in every now" (32), thereby embedding the future in the present while seeing intimations of future Black flourishing in currently hostile circumstances.

I will start this chapter by outlining different approaches to futurity useful for, or adjacent to, my analysis. I will then delve into my analysis of *Annie John*; focusing on instances of Annie imagining herself elsewhere, I will read these imaginings as an act of speculative mobility. I will then go on to analyze the absence of Creole in the text, arguing that the gaps where Creole could be are sites which must be traversed both by Annie and by the reader in order to understand what it is that is being elided. I round off my reading of *Annie John* by a short archipelagic analysis, analyzing the aqueous language used to render her departure from Antigua. In the second part of this chapter, I turn my gaze to

Lucy. I examine how past and future are blurred in the text in such a way that they are both contingent on one another without there being a clear division between them. After an exploration of Lucy's archipelagic consciousness, I go on to analyze excesses of meaning—a certain overdetermination of every single local detail—which Lucy sees in Antigua and which she tries to escape all while supplanting them with her own meaning(s). In all these different parts of my analysis, I carve out how Kincaid creates space for her protagonists Lucy and Annie to imagine their futures, and how they do so through the imaginative mobilities of everyday life.

2.1 “Here in Every Now”: Future Mobilities

While Afrofuturism is often used to refer to fantastical genres, the label extends beyond such genres. One of Kincaid's short stories is included in the 2000 anthology *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* edited by Afrofuturist critic Nalo Hopkinson, which in its call for “[f]abulist, unreal, or speculative elements such as magic realism, fantasy, folklore, fable, horror, or science fiction” (XII) can be seen as a particularly expansive Afrofuturist anthology.⁴¹ While my own analysis does not read Kincaid's texts through an Afrofuturist lens, there are several ways in which my reading intersects with Afrofuturist thought. Scholars such as Lisa Yaszek have taken a positive view of Afrofuturism's capaciousness, stating that “Afrodiasporic histories insist both on the authenticity of the black subject's experience in Western history and the way this experience embodies the dislocation felt by many modern peoples” (47); my dissertation, in tracing imaginative mobilities, looks at one way of embodying and navigating the (dis)location she describes, as the texts I study imagine a future. Lonny J. Avi Brooks summarizes that “Afrofuturism combines science fiction and fantasy to reexamine how the future is *currently imagined*, and to reconstruct futures thinking with a deeper insight into the black experience” (101; emphasis mine). As Brooks' formulation “currently imagined” hints at, the future is never an isolated temporal plane but profoundly entangled with the present in which it is imagined and brought into being, a present in which the past continues to reverberate. Afrofuturism, then, despite foregrounding the future in its name, “is not just about reclaiming the history of the past, but about reclaiming the history of the future as well” (Yaszek 47). This multidirectionality of future

⁴¹ Samuel R. Delany takes a negative view of such capaciousness when he laments that “Afrofuturism is pretty much anything you want it to be and not a rigorous category at all” (184).

thinking is something I observe in *Lucy*, for example, when its titular character tries to assemble a future by assembling a past. In addition to these significant overlaps between Afrofuturist thought and my own project, there are more granular details we share, such as a focus on rhythm: “Afrofuturistic thought,” writes Alexis Lothian, “often figures disruptions to the dominant time line as rhythmic rather than directional” (103). Rhythms appear and are traced. Even more crucial to my project than Afrofuturist thought, however, is Tina Campt’s notion of “black futurity,”⁴² with which I carve out the nexus of imaginative mobilities and futurity I am interested in.

In her 2017 book *Listening to Images*, Campt is interested in “a grammar of futurity realized in the present” (17). She “listen[s] to” photographs for the IDs of diasporic African subjects. By listening, she means that she is engaging with these photographs in ways beyond the visual. She is “listening” to how Black subjects have carved out, imagined, and brought into being forms of freedom in the highly constricted, often anonymizing genre of the identity photograph. In her analysis, Campt highlights the key importance of both the quotidian and futurity for freedom. She argues that “the trivial, the mundane, or the banal are in fact essential to the lives of the dispossessed and the possibility of black futurity” (8). She writes,

The grammar of black feminist futurity that I propose here is a grammar of possibility that moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as *what will be* in the future. It moves beyond the future perfect tense of *that which will have happened* prior to a reference point in the future. It strives for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have had to happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be. It’s a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present. (17; emphases in the original)

In this view, there is nothing accidental about Black futurity. Campt describes a way in which Black subjects will the future into being; since they do this from a location in the

⁴² Both *Lucy* and *Annie John* have also been read through a queer lens, as both novels feature relationships that lend themselves to such a reading. While my own analysis will not have a queer focus, I nonetheless want to honor the valuable work that has been done in that field; I also want to point out that Black temporalities, such as the ones which I see as informing Kincaid’s novels, can be seen as related to queerness. In *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility*, Lothian argues that “Afrofuturistic analyses call forth cross-time touches and nonteleological histories that resonate with evocations of queer temporality” (103).

present, they thereby inscribe the future into this very present. There is agency and a certain defiance in this. Along with this agentic entanglement of the present and the future, Campt's work is extremely interested in lived realities. One of her examples is Black subjects choosing photos that they want to be used in the case of their death through police violence; they choose smiling photos of graduations and other accomplishments that they want to be used instead of the stereotypical, poorly lit photos of Black teenagers in hoodies which are often used instead (cf. Campt 108-113). In drawing on Campt for my reading of *Lucy* and *Annie John*, I do not mean to belittle the starkly violent realities that Campt outlines; the realities of dehumanization and police violence that inform her work markedly differ from Annie's and Lucy's experience. I nonetheless find Campt's work highly fruitful for my reading as she teases out the "anteriority of the future subjunctive" (82), giving us an instrument with which to read the temporally entangled, future-driven form and content of *Lucy* and *Annie John*. Both of these protagonists are willing a future into being that seems of utter necessity, a future that *will have had to happen*. Importantly, Campt makes clear that "it is this grammatical practice of futurity that constitutes my definition of *freedom*" (116; emphasis in the original). In sharp contrast to many of Campt's Black subjects, Annie and Lucy do not appear to be under immediate danger; nor are they committed to communal thriving or survival, as they are both resistant to any form of group belonging. Nonetheless, imagining a future is a matter of survival for them both, as they aim to escape a familial and communal life in Antigua which they have found not just stifling but abusive and untenable. Like Campt's subjects, they are answering to "a responsibility to create one's own future as a practice of survival" (Campt 114).

This sense of the future as both imminent and distant in Kincaid's novels is linked to how the world beyond Antigua tends to seem both far away and already present. The island has been a sugar-producing colony, a part of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, a tourist hub, and a node in the Caribbean archipelago, connected in multiple ways to the surrounding islands. In Kincaid's novels, there is a striking tension between the island's embeddedness in the global and its simultaneous remoteness as an outpost of the United Kingdom. In much of her writing, she describes how the Antigua of her youth "revolved [...] around England." She writes, "Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost completely around England? Well, that was so. I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to

do so through England" (*A Small Place* 33). We see one example of this mediation through England in the famous daffodil chapter in *Lucy*, wherein the protagonist is resentful at having had to learn a Wordsworth poem about them by heart at her colonial school instead of learning to name flowers native to Antigua. This phenomenon of having to learn a locally irrelevant fact about the imperial metropole is symptomatic of what Pheng Cheah calls "unworlding," arguing that "[c]olonial education unworlds: it disorients and alienates subjects by uprooting them from their local environment" (234). Some critics, notably Jane King,⁴³ have criticized Kincaid for her emphasis on smallness, while many critics have conflated Kincaid's portrayal of Antigua as small with it being static (Roşca 2022). At times, Kincaid subverts such a conflation. One example of this is her novel *Mr. Potter*. The novel is largely focalized through a taxi driver in Antigua; although perpetually mobile, he has not left the island, nor does he aspire to do so. In addition to this entanglement of im/mobilities, there is another, related entanglement to be found here: in this text with its supposedly narrow focus, the world keeps barging into Mr. Potter's vision, in the form of, e.g., Syrian immigrant Mr. Shoul and Eastern European Jewish refugee Dr. Weizenger. Although Mr. Potter may describe his world as small, for other characters in the novel Antigua is thus part of a trajectory which spans countries and continents far beyond Antigua. This multivalent sense of smallness ties into the relationship of Kincaid's work to mobility studies and to imaginative mobilities. When Kincaid's characters imagine themselves away from Antigua, they are imagining themselves to an elsewhere outside of the "small" place they inhabit. At the same time, they have always already been interwoven with these other places both in ways countering and in ways increasing their sense of Antigua's smallness. While being a node in the colonial school system adds to this feeling of remoteness, the characters' awareness of their island's embeddedness in the Caribbean archipelago and the world beyond works to subvert it.

⁴³ King, who is herself from a small Caribbean island (St. Lucia), laments that "Kincaid's attitude to the people of Antigua suggests that she believes that living in a small place coarsens both the understanding and the feelings—or that choosing to remain in the place where you were born would require such deficiencies" (890). Instead, she writes, "It seems to me that people go or stay for such a variety of reasons that I would hesitate to generalize" (902).

2.2 *Annie John*: “In Some Different Atmosphere”

Kincaid's 1985 novel *Annie John* is about a young girl growing up in Antigua. The novel follows an episodic structure; instead of contributing to one unified plot, the novel's throughline takes the form of Annie's adolescence itself, as each chapter deals with an episode in Annie's growing up, such as her friendship with a girl called Gwen and a long illness. During her adolescence, Annie routinely comes into conflict both with her home island and with people around her, the most important of whom is her mother.⁴⁴ After dreaming of moving away throughout the novel, the book ends with Annie leaving Antigua for nursing school in the U.K. *Annie John* is about dwelling in a place and wanting to go away, about being from a place and wishing oneself somewhere else, about when to seek closeness to, and when to seek distance from, both the people and the place one has known for one's entire life. As Annie grows from a child to a young woman over the course of the novel, much scholarship has read *Annie John* as a bildungsroman (see, for example, Brathwaite; Caton; Morris; Paravisini-Gebert, Vásquez). Writing about *Annie John*, Paravisini-Gebert has made the case that “[c]hildhood mirrors the colonial condition,” as it is “a state of absolute powerlessness,” albeit one with a “potential for defiance and resistance” (30). She goes so far as to see the colonial condition as mirrored in the pubescent body, as she argues that “Kincaid invites us to read in Annie's physical maturation—her breasts develop, she begins to menstruate—and emotional growth [...] a mirror to her island's movement from colonialism to independence” (Paravisini-Gebert 30-31). Giselle Rampaul, however, has questioned “whether the use of the child character in West Indian Literature is in fact appropriate for representing the postcolonial condition” (153), since “the child character is never able, like the ex-colonies, to define him/herself on his/her own terms and remains voiceless, subjected to and objectified by adult authority” (158). Other analyses have focused on a specific aspect of Kincaid's novel, such as the role of cloth in several of her books (Matos) or the importance of secrets in a child's development as depicted in *Annie John* (Chang). Sam Vásquez explores how *Annie John* resists “the negative impact of visual culture on black women's subjectivity” (63) by Annie “exhibit[ing] a different level of agency, serving as the camera that *produces* visual

⁴⁴ While Antigua is not named in *Lucy*, it is named in *Annie John*.

representations" (79; emphasis in the original).⁴⁵ Louis F. Caton reads the novel as a quest narrative, with the mother-daughter bond supplanting the usual romantic quest. Kej Vackermann, meanwhile, uses the term "archipelagic consciousness" to refer to the way in which "the protagonists in *Annie John* and *Lucy* are endowed with a holistic form of consciousness that illuminates the dynamics of human experience in connected worlds, at once African, European, Carib Indian, altogether Caribbean, an amalgamation" (99) – a highly idiosyncratic understanding of the term "archipelagic," since the idea of the archipelagic works against the notion of one undivided whole. Despite this thematic diversity, one thing almost every analysis of *Annie John* has in common is a focus on the mother-daughter bond. In this chapter, I will look at the mother-daughter relationship as one node among others in the novel's exploration of the intersection of mobilities, language, and time.

2.2.1 "How I Wished that Everything Would Fall Away": Imagining Herself Elsewhere

Rose-Myriam Réjouis summarizes that Kincaid's project is "to find a voice for an independent female Caribbean self who must face womanhood, colonialism, and exile" (214). In line with this, Annie is a young woman who has a fraught, intense love-hate relationship with her mother and her island of origin, both of which she longs to escape from. Linking both desires, Annie muses, "I was feeling how much I never wanted to see a boy climb a coconut tree again, how much I never wanted to see the sun shine day in, day out again, how much I never wanted to see my mother bent over a pot cooking me something that she felt would do me good when I ate it" (*Annie* 127). Here, the mother is almost equated with the land. Both stand for fixity for Annie, who wants to escape her mother just as she wants to escape the coconut tree and the island's reliable sunshine. Interestingly, both the mother and the land are tied to nourishment here, as Annie longs to escape food which "would do [her] good" or be on this island described in nourishing terms. While the conflation of women, specifically mothers, and land is not particularly

⁴⁵ Writing about a scene in which Annie describes a young Black girl called Sonia, Vásquez argues that "Annie replicates a camera, and by extension the media, that records images and produces a verdict about its subject's value regardless of the discomfort of the individual in question" (80).

new,⁴⁶ Annie wanting to escape both so fiercely points at her wanting to escape not just the geographical but the gendered circumstances of her life.

While the titular character of *Lucy* from Kincaid's later novel thinks back on the Caribbean from her perch in the U.S., Annie has never left Antigua when the novel sets in. The world beyond Antigua is thus unfamiliar to her. This does not stop her from imagining a geographically different life for herself and her classmates.

When I looked at them sitting around me, the church in the distance, beyond that our school, with throngs of girls crossing back and forth in the schoolyard, beyond that the world, how I wished that everything would fall away, so that suddenly we'd be sitting in some different atmosphere. (*Annie* 53)

Several things are striking about this passage. One is that there is a sense of remove here: Annie is describing her surroundings as if she was standing on a hill looking down at the valley below, as if it was all laid out before her. She is describing a landscape of which she is not a part, as if, to use Camp's formulation, her leaving Antigua is a future which has already *had* to happen. The other striking thing is the way Annie is seeing Antigua as distinct from the world, the world as being *beyond* Antigua. This is a sense that features prominently in Kincaid's work, most prominently, perhaps, in Kincaid's 1988 book-length essay *A Small Place*. In *Annie John*, the feeling of Antigua being at a remove captures Annie's adolescent yearning to get away. The fact that "Antigua is not explicitly mentioned in *Annie John*" (Réjouis 219) serves to heighten the impression that Antigua is experienced as almost a non-place for Annie. The idea of an island as removed, bounded, and other, however, is one that has also been prevalent in much, particularly Western, thinking for centuries, as islands were immobilized by colonialism. Similarly, what imaginative mobilities are possible or readily available can be subject to realities of schooling, politics, and the discourses by which they are surrounded.⁴⁷ Imaginative mobilities can seem full of agency – when Annie is dreaming of a different atmosphere, she is choosing to let herself enjoy her daydream. But much like any other thought

⁴⁶ One example of this can be found in the portrayal of nations as mothers in terms like "Mother India" or "Mother Russia." Another can be found in Dany Laferrière's novel *Pays sans chapeau*, where he writes: "Ma mère, elle, ne quittera jamais son pays. Et si jamais elle le quitte, j'aurai l'impression qu'il n'y a plus de pays. J'identifie totalement ma mère avec le pays" (129). "My mother will never leave her country. And if she ever leaves, I will have the impression that there the country no longer exists. I totally identify my mother with the country" (translation my own).

⁴⁷ This is in line with one of the key tenets of Aleida Assmann's *Is Time out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, in which she elucidates how the imagination of time, and of the future as an entity, have been contingent on historical and societal processes. Different futures, and, in my reading, different mobilities, are imaginable at different points in time.

process, imaginative mobilities are also necessarily bound by what it is possible to think at that moment and in that context. The way Antiguan children are subjected to a British education is a central motif in Kincaid's work. Her characters, educated in a British colonial school in Antigua, often cannot escape the notions with which they are raised, such as Antigua being small, as "[t]hrough the eyes of the child whose imaginative geography is fed on books depicting English idylls and European history, the Caribbean landscape is one which has little known history or virtue" (Hughes 19).⁴⁸ Mimi Sheller challenges the idea of island smallness when she writes that,

Islands may appear to be contained spaces par excellence, bounded by water on all sides; yet at the same time islanders dwell thanks to many different kinds of coming and going, pausing and waiting, producing a choreography of uneven spatialities and temporalities. (Sheller, *Island Futures* 17)

A critical approach sensitive to literary temporalities makes it possible to read Annie's speculative mobilities away from Antigua as more than just a response to what she has been taught to perceive as the island's provincialism. Instead, it relates Annie's reveries to a history of island thought which has allowed for, and produced, uneven temporalities. In the passage from the novel quoted above, Annie perceives the present company of her friends on one level and imagines it all falling away on another. The idea that if everything could just "fall away," they would be sitting "in some different atmosphere" speaks to a sense of artifice. Antigua appears to be at once too real and not quite real enough: Antigua is full of pressures which Annie dreams would fall away, but at the same time she seems to be convinced that other parts of the world are more real; that Antigua is a mock-up and if you just shoved it a little, or if it disappeared from one moment to the next, you would be left with a world more real. Annie's reverie gets punctured by the very real tolling of a bell calling the girls back to class, showing the way in which her perception of Antigua as not quite real gets punctured by its insistent reality. That this is furthermore a church bell, and that they are sitting in a graveyard, adds a funereal gloom to the scene. As this scene takes place right after Annie gets her period for the first time, it is not just the death of the graveyard but also a signifier of life—her living body which changes, and which may at one point produce new life—which are here entangled in this "choreography of uneven spatialities and temporalities," in different specters of the future.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ This quote is also notable for including a mention of "imaginative geography" in considering the work of Kincaid.

⁴⁹ This scene of the bell tolling is furthermore an echo of a similar episode in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where "a timed bell signals a shift in spatial order" (Levine 20).

This is Annie's private reverie. There is no mention of her sharing it with the other girls, or of them expressing a similar wish to escape. But what is interesting is that Annie nonetheless includes the other girls in this daydream, wishing that they could all sit in a different atmosphere together. While different temporalities and spatialities are entwined here—the past, present, and future; Antigua and an imagined place—what is also entwined is the solitude of thought and the simultaneous imagining of others into that space. As discussed earlier, David Bissell characterizes imaginative forms of mobility as a “complex folding of absence and presence” (44). In this folding, it matters both that Annie's speculative mobilities are a step *away* from her classmates and that peopling the space thus created is a step *towards* them. In that moment, the girls are sitting around her in the present; she is separate from them in her thought process, but with them in the next step within that process.

Although Annie experiences Antigua as bounded, including her classmates in a reverie is arguably a way of engaging with the archipelagicity of Antigua. An archipelagic reading pays attention to the Americas consisting of fragments while highlighting relations, overlaps, and interdependencies between and across these fragments. It sees islands as entangled and relational. Annie seems to be intuiting the way Antigua is in fact not bounded but entangled with other islands and spaces. When Glissant argues that “the reality of archipelagos in the Caribbean or the Pacific provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation” (34), he is describing archipelagic thought as making space for multiplicity. Similarly, the classmates' absence and presence are entwined. While this tug is shot through with agency as Annie chooses both to imaginatively step away from them and then toward them, it also mirrors Antigua's place in an archipelago constituted by a relationality that connects and entangles but does not subsume.

The next part of that passage of *Annie John* considers the future. After wishing they were all sitting “in some different atmosphere,” Annie's inner monologue goes on: “with no future full of ridiculous demands, no need for any sustenance save our love for each other, with no hindrance to any of our desires, which would, of course, be simple desires – nothing, nothing, just sitting on our tombstones forever” (*Annie* 53). In taking a stand against the future, Annie equates it with demands. The patriarchal, colonially inflected tasks of learning “all about manners and how to meet and great important people in the world” (*Annie* 28), of being sent to piano lessons and getting measured by the seamstress, all add up to a structure which confines a Black girl's future, present, and

agency. Annie pits the future against desires; however, the alternative to the future that emerges out of the above passage is death, as Annie imagines sitting on tombstones indefinitely as a way to avoid the future. Nicole Willey observes that “Annie is concerned with death throughout the novel” (278). Despite this negation of the future, a sense of futurity remains in how Annie imagines sitting on the tombstones “forever,” a word which suggests a continuous experience. Even her fantasies are thus, in a way, limited: It is impossible not to imagine the future. Overall, Annie’s reveries here can be seen as her toying around with what the future might mean, and what different futures might look like: she imagines a future which would be a continuation of the life she has been living, namely one full of obligation; a future in which she and her friends are able to follow their desires by freeing themselves of their obligations; and a future which is death. She also tries out different communal modalities for the future, as she retreats to the solitude of her own mind but imagines her friends as there with her. That *Annie John* has often been read as a bildungsroman perhaps seems particularly apt when looking at this scene. Annie toying with the concept of a future and looking at it from different angles foreshadows her ability to bring a new future into being when she goes to live in England at the end of the novel. The last line of the paragraph—“But that could never be, as the tolling of the school bell testified”—serves as an end to Annie’s daydream. She slots back into her everyday life, with its attendant practicalities and obligations and its focus on the present.

In this paragraph, then, thinking about the future serves several functions: it is a way of playing out different scenarios, a way of considering to what extent to include other people in one’s imagined future life, and a space in which one’s presence in a given space intermingles with a planned or imagined future absence from that space. In Danticat’s “New York Day Women,” a woman’s walk around Manhattan gets punctured by memories of her mother. In *Annie John*, a girl’s reveries about the future get punctured by the unignorable present tolling of the school bell. In both of these instances of imaginative mobilities, there is an entangling of absence and presence, one in which the protagonist makes choices about which vision to step into and who to include in it.

Annie also uses her speculative mobilities to do the reverse: to write someone out of her future. The novel is about a triumphant girl who is sure of herself – Annie’s heart “burst[s] open with joy at the thought of never having to see any of [Antigua] again” (Kincaid 132), thereby at times painting a markedly unambivalent picture. If the future, here, seems positive, joyful, and irreversible, appearing as “*that which will have **had to***

happen" (Campt 17; emphases in the original),⁵⁰ it is made more complex by the fact that Annie's speculative mobilities away from Antigua function as a site in which to navigate her difficult relationship with her mother:

My most frequent daydream now involved scenes of me living alone in Belgium, a place I had picked when I read in one of my books that Charlotte Brontë, the author of my favorite novel, *Jane Eyre*, had spent a year or so there. I had also picked it because I imagined that it would be a place my mother would find difficult to travel to and so would have to write me letters addressed in this way:

To: Miss Annie Victoria John
Somewhere,
Belgium
(92)

Annie dreams of Belgium because it is far away and hard to reach.⁵¹ The fact that she thinks her mother would not be able to travel there even if she wanted to is a big part of the appeal. She is not just imagining her own mobility, but implicitly framing her own mobilities as contingent on the perceived *immobility* of her mother: while Annie feels like leaving Antigua for Belgium is within her grasp, she cannot imagine her mother doing the same. Gendered expectations led to a sharp shift in her relationship to her mother – while Annie describes their early relationship as a "paradise" (*Annie* 25), once she turns twelve her life is taken over by having to learn to be a proper young lady: "Because of this young-lady business, instead of days spent in perfect harmony with my mother [...], she showering down on me her kisses and affection and attention, I was now sent off to learn one thing and another" (*Annie* 27). Annie tries to reenact this keenly felt banishment by in turn banishing her mother from her imagined future life. The mother's perceived immobility on a geographical level even extends to the letters she would write, as Annie assumes she wouldn't know the right address and her attempt to reach Annie through them would then have a whiff of the ridiculous. For Annie, her mother's immobility consists both of a practical, tangible lack of knowledge (not knowing the address) and of a more intrinsic quality: her mother leaving Antigua is just unimaginable. Where there is

⁵⁰ I want to emphasize again that Campt is not talking about Kincaid's text here – I am the one bringing Campt and Kincaid into dialogue with one another.

⁵¹ Although Charlotte Brontë spent time living in Belgium, the country does not figure in *Jane Eyre*. It is striking that Annie, instead of picking a location of the novel itself, picks a location with a more tenuous link to the text. This points to a mixing of fictional *Jane Eyre* and factual Charlotte Brontë, destabilizing a clear distinction – perhaps Belgium, by being one step removed from the novel, seem even more rarefied to her than England does, or perhaps she sees Belgium as the reality behind England's literary fictionality. Another explanation would be that Annie wants to identify with the profession of a writer and therefore chooses Brontë over Brontë's protagonist.

almost a community-building element to Annie's imaginings at school—at least within her own mind—here her speculative mobilities away from Antigua cut her off from the person with whom she is the most intimately entwined. Annie, perceiving her mother as immobilized by both Antigua and by patriarchic convention, wants to lead a different life.

At the same time, Annie's wish to be unreachable is linked to her mother's own history of migration. Annie's mother is originally from Dominica but left the island when her father refused to let her leave home before getting married. It is through her mother's trunk that her migration becomes tangible to Annie and that Annie's and her mother's journeys are entangled, as the mother chose the trunk used on her own journey to later store mementoes of Annie's childhood. Scholars like Réjouis and Tommie L. Jackson have focused on the trunk in their analysis of *Annie John*, while Helen Pyne Timothy argues that "[t]here is a recognition that like her grandmother and mother before her, she must carry a trunk, that is, the cultural baggage of a race, a country, and a class" (242). While "baggage" has negative connotations, I here want to rather see it as ambivalent and multivalent: What is relevant to my reading is that the tangible reality of the trunk helps imagine mobilities both past and future: it serves as a way to remember the mother's journey while prefiguring Annie's mobility. The novel takes place when the mobility of Annie's mother lies in the past, while Annie's mobility lies in the future; the trunk serves as a nexus between all three women's biographies, including the grandmother's. It can be seen to perform several acts of bridging: between the tangible and the imagined, between the past and the future, and between one's own mobility and that of generations of Caribbean women before her. H. Adlai Murdoch makes the case that

by putting the mother's departure into place as an integral stage in the development of the one with whom she identifies, it will allow Annie eventually to repeat this departure in her turn. (330)

While Annie seems to purposefully use her fixation on Belgium to imaginatively take a step back from her mother, Belgium also barges into her life at unexpected moments. While walking with her friend Gwen in Antigua, Annie narrates: "I was walking down a street in Belgium, wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles [...] when suddenly I heard these words come out of Gwen's mouth: 'I think it would be so nice if you married Rowan'" (*Annie* 92-93). Instead of introducing the sentence with the remark that Annie was daydreaming or imagining Belgium, or using a conjunctive, it starts with the factual claim that Annie is in Belgium. Annie, the narrator, is even describing what she is wearing, giving this short description of the imagined scene an embodied dimension: not only can the

reader picture what Annie's ankle-long skirt looks like, but she can also imagine what it feels like to be Annie and to have the skirt "c[o]me down to [her] ankles." In this short episode it becomes clear that Annie's imaginings of a life somewhere else and her current life in Antigua do not just co-exist, but at times clash. It also becomes clear how one of these mental tracks can intrude on the other – in this case, it is Gwen's words which intrude on Annie's reverie. Annie goes on to narrate, "I was brought back to the present, and I stopped and stood still for a moment; then my mouth fell open and my whole self started to tremble" (*Annie* 93). In daydreaming, Annie had traveled to Belgium and imaginatively wandered down its streets. But Gwen talking to her necessitates another, additional mobility – the mental pivot back to the present moment, a pivot which is not voluntary or chosen, as Annie is instead "brought back to the present," suggesting a hint of involuntariness. This is such a jarring experience for her that her physical mobility, her walking, is brought to a stop. The experience shakes Annie to her core; staring at Gwen, she thinks "something terrible had happened, and I couldn't tell what it was" (*Annie* 93). Annie's mental and physical presence, her imagined mobility along Belgian streets and the physical movements of walking with Gwen, are at odds. Up until that point, it had been possible for her imaginative and her daily life to go on parallel tracks, but in that moment, it is no longer possible for her to sustain both. This is figured as a loss of control. The novel's last chapter, called "A Walk to the Jetty," paints a more harmonious picture of the co-existence of different timelines. It depicts Annie's walk to the boat that will take her to Barbados, from where she will travel on to England. On the walk, she passes many of the markers of her life: "It was all of half an hour's walk from our house to the jetty, but I was passing through most of the years of my life" (*Annie* 138). Instead of an imagined alternate timeline disrupting her day, Annie can here exercise imaginative mobility in a more synchronous way, as everything she passes on her walk and sees with her eyes brings up memories.

2.2.2 "The Thimble That Weighed Worlds": Creole Gaps and their Traversal

Mobilities can take the form of linguistic mobilities, such as code-switching. Paradoxically, mobilities can also be portrayed and engendered through the palpable absence of any such linguistic leap. In Junot Díaz's fiction, linguistic mobilities between Spanish and English take shape in the form of code-switching; in some passages in Edwidge Danticat's texts, it takes place in the form of a Kreyòl word being inserted in an otherwise English-

language text. In *Annie John*, there is linguistic mobility across a gap, across a word that is invoked but never stated, which can be seen as a kind of opposite of code-switching. Such a linguistic gap is present in one of Annie's harshest arguments with her mother:

She went on to say that, after all the years she had spent drumming into me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young men, it had pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut (only she used the French-patois word for it) in the street and that just to see me had caused her to feel shame.

The word 'slut' (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word 'slut,' and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth. (*Annie* 102)⁵²

Réjouis argues that "[t]he English word 'slut' serves to designate an insult so unspeakable that, she cannot repeat it as she heard it. Kincaid thus inscribes in her text a speechlessness the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard has named the "différend" (Réjouis 219). The invocation and simultaneous omission of this word in Creole drives home both the powerful impact of the word and Annie's utter speechlessness when confronted with it. Additionally, this mobilizes the reader. The reader knows what the word "slut" means, but her attention is continually drawn away from this English word to another word—the word in Creole—which the non-Antiguan reader presumably does not know. Since the reader does not know this word, but has to imagine its contours, her attention then goes back to the English word used in the text. Like a boomerang, the reader moves from "slut" to a different word, one that is shapeless, and then back to "slut," which creates a way of reading which is rhythmic, as the word is repeated and as the reader's attention is directed to it again and again.⁵³ The text is archipelagic in a number of ways, such as through allusions to Antigua's connectedness to other islands and through the aqueous language I will explore in the next chapter. This gap of the word "slut," too, adds to the text's archipelagicity, as the unnamed Creole word becomes a site of traversal between different nodes of the text, underlining that it is not just the ocean but other gaps, other expanses, across which meaning is created. This sense of an

⁵² The other mention of patois occurs when Annie is sick and her grandmother Ma Chess visits her. Ma Chess says to Annie's mother, "in French patois, 'Not like Johnnie. Not like Johnnie at all'" (*Annie* 124).

⁵³ McKittrick et al. write about rhythmic reading as a practice where one talks with others about the text. Such a practice includes "conversations [which] bring forth moments of forgetting—moments where someone asks, 'What page or section was *that idea* on again?'" (871; emphasis in the original). Although they focus on rhythmic reading as a practice shared with others, I argue that rhythmic reading can also be created by a single reader who flips back and forth within a text, or whose mind boomerangs back and forth between a word and its imagined translation. For more on McKittrick's rhythmic reading, cf. chapter 4 of this dissertation.

archipelagic splintering may carry within itself some potential for relationality, as is emphasized when Annie, at the end of this encounter with her mother, recounts:

I couldn't move, and when I looked down it was as if the ground had opened up between us, making a deep and wide split. On one side of this split stood my mother [...]; on the other side stood I, in my arms carrying my schoolbooks and inside carrying the thimble that weighed worlds. (*Annie* 103)

It is not just the gap of the Creole word which creates a distance which must be traversed, as from one island of meaning to another. Additionally, Annie and her mother are positioned as no longer one unit, as there is now a divide between them.

This divide is laden with meaning. The absence of the Creole word brings to mind Emily Apter's concept of the Untranslatable (cf. Apter 2013). Apter argues that certain words have accrued so much historic meaning so as to be "Untranslatable," since a translation would not be able to capture its specific, layered connotations. I see something similar at play here: The reader may be tempted to think that "slut" encapsulates the meaning of the mother's words to a sufficient degree, as it remains a terrible insult to many English speakers even after some feminists' reclaiming of the term, particularly between a mother and daughter. But to the narrator, there is something to the English word that is more palatable than its Creole counterpart.⁵⁴ The reader becomes attuned to this difference between the valences this word has in different languages even without knowing what precise form they take. In addition to this sense of the highly specific, "Untranslatable" meaning of certain words, Apter's insight that something gets communicated even in non-understood words and phrases also holds true here. The majority of the time, the reader has both a signifier and a signified before her; she sees a word and knows its meaning. In the case of Díaz's code-switching, which I analyze in chapter 5, or code-switching of a similar variety, she may be confronted with a signifier without knowing the signified: she may see a word in Spanish but not know what it means precisely. This is a situation in which some meaning is nonetheless being transported, as I laid out in my chapter on Díaz. In this passage by Kincaid, the opposite is the case: there is a signified (the Creole word for "slut," which has a yet more painful connotation than its English counterpart) without the signifier (the actual Creole word). This, too, is not just an empty gap but one across which many meanings are being transported: firstly, a

⁵⁴ This is perhaps due to the colonizers' sexualization of Black women. They projected an "uninhibited, unbridled sensuality and sexual pleasure" (Kempadoo 162) onto them, which must have often been internalized while clashing with the Christian sexual mores imposed by those same colonizers.

sense of the word, its valence and its use, and secondly, a sense of how painful this encounter is for Annie, who cannot bring herself to tell us what word it is her mother said.

Annie is also speechless in this confrontation, thus pointing us to a speechlessness which goes beyond this one instance. As there are no Creole words in the text overall, Réjouis points out how

[t]he impossibility for the narrator to even begin to say how wounding her mother's use of the word 'slut' was results not only in the erasure of the actual 'patois' word for slut but of the patois itself [...]. Annie depicts her native Creole as being composed of 'unladylike words' [...] – unsuitable and unwritable. (220)

As the narrator and author both consider Creole to not fit into this text, there are no Creole words in *Annie John*. This does not, however, mean that Creole is absent from the text: it is there both in individual lacunae, such as when the narrator can't bring herself to mention the Creole word for "slut," and in the larger Creole-shaped lacuna in the text. That Annie considers Creole to be unladylike tell us much about the way English is valorized, and Creole undervalued, in the Antiguan society of the text and beyond. Although *Annie John* never specifies the year in which it is set, it is clear that it is set at a time when Antigua was not just a colony but several decades removed from the independence it would gain in 1981; presumably, the novel is set sometime in the 1950s. As I argued earlier, Annie's habit of imagining Antigua as removed and bounded should not just be explained away as an adolescent yearning for an elsewhere but can also be seen as an echo of colonial notions of islandness as remote. While Kincaid does not explicitly link Annie's perception of Antigua as remote to her British schooling, she is very clear in her disdain for the colonial school system. Annie went through a Eurocentric system the point of which is to make Antiguan into British subjects. The text works against this Eurocentrism not just through overt critique on the part of the narrator (something which many scholars have discussed), but also, as is the case with the lacuna of Creole, more implicitly. While Apter would agree that there must be something untranslatable about the unmentioned Creole word, it is my argument that it is not just the word but its striking absence, as well as the absence of the language of which it is a part, that carries meaning.

2.2.3 "A Vessel Filled With Liquid [...] Slowly Emptying Out": Annie's Archipelagic Departure

Annie's leave-taking, which is rendered in aqueous terms, also takes place in an archipelagic web. Walking to the jetty, Annie narrates that, "I felt that someone was tearing me up into little pieces and soon I would be able to see all the little pieces as they

floated out into nothing in the deep blue sea" (*Annie* 144). Mirroring the water-based language, J. Brooks Bouson states that Annie "is almost overwhelmed by a flood of contradictory feelings" (64) during her departure; at another point in her analysis, Bouson speaks of "the oceanic bliss of [Annie's] early childhood bond with her powerful and idealized mother" (148). In the novel's last lines, Annie is in the cabin contemplating the waves. "They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out" (*Annie* 148). The sea, which has been ubiquitous throughout Annie's childhood on a small island, is here rendered strange, foreign, and almost unrecognizable. Annie is on a vessel—a ship—but it is unclear of which vessel she is speaking here. Letting the novel end on an ambivalent note, this sentence performs a kind of inversion, as the role of the vessel and its content, the one pouring and the one poured, are all up in the air. Annie seems to both be taking leave of the contents of a vessel she wants to leave behind—her painful past in Antigua—and to be herself on a vessel, one that is on the verge of transporting her to England via Barbados. She is not relinquishing all her ties to it, however; the "as if" of Annie's sentence construction remains hypothetical and therefore not quite real. These aqueous phrasings appear somewhat out of place in *Annie John*, as the sea, despite its geographical ubiquity, rarely figures in the novel.

I want to draw attention to two earlier instances of water, however. First, water figures prominently in the chapter "The Long Rain," in which Annie suffers from a mysterious illness for several months while it is pouring outside, an episode seen as "a rite of passage" both by Kincaid herself (Bonetti and Kincaid 125) and by some critics (e.g. Bouson 61). Using aqueous language at the end of the novel then harkens back to that earlier time of transformation. Secondly, I want to make the point that in *Annie John*, as in other Caribbean literature, the sea is made present in subtle, rather than overt, ways. In *Annie John*, other Caribbean locales are present through characters' journeys – in Annie's mother moving to Antigua from Dominica as a young girl and her family living there, in Annie's friend, the Red Girl, being sent to Anguilla to live, and Annie's father reminiscing about his days touring the Windward and the Leeward Islands as a cricket player. Maritime movement between the islands is not remarkable but a fact of life; while Annie seems not to have visited any of the other Caribbean islands, she is highly aware that they are not far, and that Antigua is connected to them in the form of geographical as well as emotional ties and traversals. In leaving Antigua at the end of the novel, Annie is leaving

these archipelagic entanglements behind and making her way to England. At the same time, she is further inscribing herself into these archipelagic relations, as traveling to Barbados by boat opens up a part of the Caribbean archipelago hitherto inaccessible to her; by going to England, she is furthermore going to the place from which the archipelago has been forcibly mapped, named, and conquered, a place which both in its deep entwinedness with Antigua and in its diasporic Caribbean population can be seen as an engine, a site, and a node of this same archipelagicity. This, too, can be read with Tina Campt's "tense of the future real conditional, or that which will have *had* to happen" (114; emphasis in the original), as Annie is embarking along a route which has been imaginatively and spatially brought into being by herself, her family members, and her fellow Caribbeans.

2.3 *Lucy*: "A Young Woman from the Fringes of the World"

Lucy is often read as a sequel to *Annie John* (Jackson; Vásquez). Where the latter depicts a young girl hoping to leave Antigua and ends just as she is about to depart, the former sets in with a scene of arrival: a young woman from the Caribbean arrives in what appears to be New York City⁵⁵ to work as an au pair for a wealthy American family consisting of Mariah, Lewis, and their four children. Over the course of the novel, Lucy navigates her new surroundings. She has a close but ambivalent relationship to Mariah, embarks on several love affairs, makes a friend called Peggy, and discovers an artistic interest in photography. At the same time, she is continuously negotiating her relationship to the island, the memories, and the family—particularly her mother—that she has left behind, working out how they can fit into this new phase of her life. In many ways, then, *Lucy* continues the themes of *Annie John*; what differs is the characters' age as well as which stage of the mobility process the story narrates: Lucy is older than Annie; importantly, she has already migrated, while Annie is imagining her way towards migration. Many scholars have remarked upon these similarities. Paravisini-Gilbert argues that "Lucy picks up the narrative at the point of voluntary exile, of migration, as if continuing the story from the moment at which we took our leave from *Annie John*" (qtd. in Jackson 36). Tommie L. Jackson calls *Lucy* "the sequel to *Annie John*" (41), while Maria Helena Lima

⁵⁵ The city is not named in *Lucy*; critics usually assume it is New York City, while Simmons speaks of "a big American city *resembling* New York" (467; emphasis mine).

even goes so far as to use their names interchangeably, saying that, “Annie John/Lucy chooses not to replicate the life of her mother and instead leaves Antigua” (862).

One thing which a reading of the two novels as continuous glosses over, however, is that Lucy and Annie are headed to different locales in the Global North. While Annie leaves for Britain, Lucy has migrated to the U.S. This is an important distinction both in the novels themselves and in the socio-historical migration flows that serve as their context. When the two stories, which were published successively, are read as temporarily following one another, then Lucy going to the U.S. “after” Annie goes to the U.K. is in accordance with Caribbean emigration flows of these periods. *Lucy* takes place around 1967 (cf. Nichols; Ferguson). In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act closed off much of the immigration to the U.S., which led to more Caribbean nationals migrating to Britain. After 1965, however, new legislation once more made it possible to migrate to the U.S., which led to a sharp increase in immigration from the Caribbean (cf. Foner); that Annie migrates to the U.K., while Lucy migrates to the U.S., is thus in line with migration trends at the time. The difference in destination has significance for both Lucy and Annie. This has been overlooked by many critics. Akash Nikolas bemoans that “many critics [of Kincaid’s work] continue to treat the U.S. and the UK as interchangeable nations” (68). This despite the fact that the two countries are differently connected to Antigua and as such represent different futures for the two protagonists. Kincaid’s reader knows that the U.K.’s role as Antigua’s colonizing power leads to a relationship to the country that is fraught with resentment for many of Kincaid’s characters, even if this is not stated in *Annie John* itself.

Despite American pop culture and the idea of the American Dream, it is possible for Kincaid’s characters to imagine the U.S. as more of a blank page, as they do not yet have as many affective ties to it as they do to the U.K., and as they do not see their own personal and national histories refracted through it. As Nikolas writes, “West Indians can gain critical distance from both the home country and the imperial nation that has historically defined the home country only by migrating to an imperial alternative” (68); the U.S. is such an alternative. Nikolas’ claim is useful as it highlights the U.S.’s role as a de facto imperial center for Antiguan; while going to the U.S. makes it possible to avoid harkening back to the colonial arrangements of the past, it nonetheless speaks to current

neocolonial and neoliberal arrangements.⁵⁶ What Nikolas' comment elides is the critical distance from both Antigua and the U.K. which Annie and Lucy clearly achieved prior to leaving the island. While this critical stance is an important parallel, we crucially do not see Annie's future in the U.K., while we do see Lucy's future in the U.S. While some scholars, in conflating Annie and Lucy, seem to view them as creating the same future, another reading, then, might see them as charting two different futures, one of them British and one of them American, one of them in the colonial metropole and one of them in its neocolonial equivalent. While a plethora of diasporic Caribbean thought and literature has emerged out of North America in the twenty first-century, Anglophone Caribbean diasporic thought was almost exclusively articulated from the U.K. for much of the twentieth century; novels such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and George Lamming's 1960 collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* describe this diasporic move, the migration to the U.K., in fictional form, while theorists such as Stuart Hall established a theoretical framework. By not going to England, Lucy is evading both the colonial trajectory foisted on her by the metropole and avoiding the path that many of her fellow Antiguan and Caribbeans have tread. While Pheng Cheah reminds us that "there is nothing inherently liberating about mobility" (218), going to a place that stands outside the prevalent narratives which Lucy has inherited is one of the ways in which she attempts to make it so. This, then, is one way in which mobility can be empowering.

The two aspects of *Lucy* which have been studied the most are the difficult mother-daughter relationship (cf. Bouson; Fulani; Jackson; Lima; Mahlis; Nikolas; Simmons; Sugg; among others) and the daffodil episode (cf. Bouson; Braziel; Donnell; Gervasio; Jackson; Joseph; Lima; Mahlis; Majerol; Nichols; Simmons; among others). Other readings have focused on the question of assimilation (Cowart), have used Freud's writings on mourning and melancholia as a lens through which to analyze the text (Sugg), or have read *Lucy* through the lens of disidentification (Majerol). Several critics have taken up "refusal" as a key word in their analysis of the novel. In this vein, Nicola Gervasio summarizes that Lucy "refuses to work within the logic of the broken system trapping her" (49), while many critics have focused on the relationship between refusal and memory in *Lucy*, with Katherine Sugg writing about "the narrator's paradoxical refusal of

⁵⁶ In Mimi Sheller's *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in An Age of Extremes*, Antigua and Barbuda is one of the countries listed as an off-shore tax haven (chapter 4; online version n.p.).

the past – one that is embedded in a relentless, even obsessive, invocation of it” (157). Silvia Schultermandl zones in on “the novel’s dialogical relationship between memory and forgetting” (44), saying it creates “a paradoxical interplay” of the two (45). Florentina Roşca offers an insightful analysis of time in *Lucy*, making the claim that Lucy “dwells almost entirely in the past” (100): She argues that the novel contains “two different temporalities: one cyclical, uneventful, and static (belonging to her rural island), and the other one linear, corrosive, and alienating (which defines the metropolis)” (100). While I draw on this analysis of time in the novel, my own analysis specifically looks at how Lucy crafts a future through imaginative mobilities. Critics who have focused on time and/or mobility include Kristen Mahlis, who writes about how “Kincaid imagines an alternative space for Lucy, the space of the *female* exile” (180; emphasis in the original), and Jennifer H. Nichols argues that

Lucy uses continual mobility to resist the circumscription of her identity [...]: literally, she leaves behind places and relationships that threaten her unlimited movement. Figuratively, the novel deploys a motional metaphor through its language and formal structure, playing across multiple meanings, disrupting the assumptions and unexamined claims of secondary characters, and interrupting the smooth functioning of the reader’s sense-making processes. (Nichols 189)⁵⁷

This is an apt overview of mobility in *Lucy*, as Lucy is continually mobile while chafing against anything that threatens to immobilize her. I am interested in how this intersects with notions of time and futurity in the text. Although I am not aware of scholars who have looked at the nexus of the future and im/mobilities in *Lucy*, several critics have analyzed time in the novel. Edyta Oczkiewicz points to the entanglement of past and present in *Lucy*, arguing that “Lucy gains certain independence from both her past and present since she lives them both at the same time” (149), as well as to the disparateness of different aspects of Lucy’s past by speaking of “past/s” (156). Betty Joseph has also written about time in *Lucy*, using the term “chronotopic displacement” (77) to analyze “the question of the time lag” (78) in the novel. When Mariah points out daffodils to Lucy, she assumes that she and Lucy inhabit the same time. Instead, Joseph points out, there is a “time lag between sign and referent in colonialist cultural indoctrination” (73), as Lucy had heard of, but not seen, daffodils, resulting in a time lag both between her and Mariah and between being taught about a referent and experiencing it in real life. Joseph expands

⁵⁷ Suzanne Manizza Roszak also uses language informed by mobility when she summarizes that “Lucy’s movement is essentially lateral, leaving her with greater self-actualization as an artist and a feminist without asking her to attain more socioeconomic power than she has as an au pair” (282).

on this insight by asking “Who must wait in the shadow of one kind of self-production? How does one address this lag ethically?” (78). The term calls our attention to the ways in which time is never just experienced subjectively, but is governed by global capital and systems such as colonialism.⁵⁸ The concept of a time lag also complicates notions of the present – a focus on speculative mobilities and futurity in *Lucy* not only means looking at ways in which Lucy imagines the future in the text, but to look at the ways in which the future, the past, and the present are entangled. To Mariah, looking at daffodils with Lucy is a moment they share in the present and that anchors them there. For Lucy, they bring up the schooling she resents, therefore introducing both her own personal past from a decade prior into the scene and the long colonial past that has led to daffodils being included in Lucy’s schooling in the first place.⁵⁹ Drawing on Joseph, it becomes possible to view the future as inscribed into this moment, too. There is a time lag both between Lucy and Mariah and between Lucy’s schooling and reality. Lucy resents both lags; she will spend the rest of the novel not so much catching up as trying to free herself of the lags’ very structure. In that moment, then, Lucy’s future gets more sharply outlined because it becomes possible for the reader to imagine what it is Lucy wants to be free of, and to imagine a future in which she will be. At the same time, this quest for future freedom takes place against the backdrop of time being blurred and entangled in *Lucy*.

2.3.1 “Like a Flow of Water”: Blurred Boundaries Between Past and Present

The blurring of past, present, and future sets in on the novel’s first page with Lucy’s arrival in the U.S. Being driven from the airport to her new home, she looks out at the city unfolding before her,

In a daydream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul, for I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that – entering and leaving over and over again – would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for. (*Lucy* 3)

⁵⁸ This is reminiscent of Henri Lefebvre’s insight that “behind every rhythm lurks money” (34). While Lefebvre starts by focusing on the rhythm analyst’s highly individual experience of the city, he then states that the rhythms the rhythm analyst perceives are actually created by global capital. That insight does not take away from the rhythm analyst’s perception of them, but points to the larger processes of which they are a part.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that daffodils figure prominently in Danticat’s 1994 novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, where it is “as though they had acquired a bronze tinge from the skin of the natives who had adopted them” in Haiti (21) and where the narrator makes them the central allegory in a mother’s day card she makes for the aunt who raised her, where she writes: “My mother is a daffodil, / limber and strong as one. / My mother is a daffodil, / but in the wind, iron strong” (29). In Danticat, daffodils speak to strength, adaptability, and resilience.

A variety of mobilities come together in this paragraph. Lucy imaginatively traveled to these places before in a Camptian “anteriority of the future subjunctive” (Campt 82). Her imaginative mobilities to these precise places led her to develop an intimate relationship to them; they became “points of happiness” to her. She figures even this happiness in the language of mobility, as she calls them “lifeboats,” which points, firstly, to the feeling of desperation she must have felt when she had those daydreams, and secondly, to the way she felt sustained by those happy imaginings. Thirdly, the term “lifeboats” underlines how it was the mobility inherent in imagining future movement that made this daydream so resonant. Strikingly, the moment of leaving is inscribed into this fantasy before Lucy has ever been close to these places, let alone entered them. She imagines “entering and leaving over and over again”; Lucy’s “intention is always to depart, to keep moving” (Nichols 191). She does not want these places to be an endpoint, to be a destination she reaches in a linear fashion and which she is then locked into – instead, she wishes for an ongoing engagement with them. This evokes Glissant’s understanding of “archipelagic thought,” in the context of which he draws our attention to the meaning of repetition: “it is through repeating things that one begins to glimpse the emergence of something new” (19). Repetition points to continuous movement, one that defies any fixed location and instead oscillates between here and there. More than anything else, she wants the freedom to entangle herself with, and then disentangle herself from, these places as she sees fit. Her desire for self-determined mobility, then, is a desire both for the freedom to choose her own mobility and a desire for a mobility that is ongoing. It is leaving, and mobility, which are themselves seen to be the cure. This insistence on a back-and-forth has sometimes been read as a blurring. Schultermandl has thought through space and memory when saying that “the text gestures towards a transgression of the geopolitical boundaries that contain Lucy’s memories in two national contexts: an American and an Antiguan one” (49). Elsewhere in the article, she even argues that Lucy “cannot separate that which is American from that which is Antiguan” (Schultermandl 44). In my reading, however, the boundary between Antigua and the U.S. is not just blurred but also, simultaneously, reinscribed by Lucy. After her arrival, she thinks,

I was no longer in a tropical zone, and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground, creating two banks, one of which was my past – so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me happy now to think of it – the other my future, a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight. (*Lucy* 5-6)

In this paragraph, Lucy maps out the difference between her past and future. In doing so, she uses a language that is both spatial and highly related to mobility. She speaks of the realization itself “enter[ing]” her life, making it sound as if the realization had its own agency and was choosing to come into her life. Furthermore, it is entering “like a flow of water,” increasing its mobility and the sense of ever-present flux with which it moves. Her past and future are spatially divided here, each one a bank on either side of the water. Lucy describes her future with terms mixing her new and old surroundings – that the future is “a gray blank” and “overcast” sounds like the Eastern United States; but that she describes it as a “seascape” seems to link it to Antigua rather than the U.S., since Lucy’s U.S. life is free of boats; there are “no boats [...]” in sight (*Lucy* 6). This passage illustrates several things. Firstly, it shows how even in moments when Lucy is putting an emphasis on the stark division between her past and her future, she uses terms and metaphors which muddy and blur that distinction. Secondly, the way Lucy thinks about the temporal dimension of her life cannot be disentangled from the way she thinks about its spatial dimension – this goes beyond the way Antigua can neatly be cast as the past and the U.S. as the present when she first arrives. It is not just that Lucy maps time and space together; it is that she makes sense of time *through* space.

This blurring of the boundary between her past and present, her Caribbean home and her U.S. home, is not wholly welcome, however. Lucy muses that,

I used to make a list of all the things that I was quite sure would not follow me if only I could cross the vast ocean that lay before me; I used to think that just a change in venue would banish forever from my life the things I most despised. But that was not to be so. As each day unfolded before me, I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present take a shape – the shape of my past. (*Lucy* 90)

This is not the sameness Lucy has desired. What she wanted was for places to stay static while she would choose whether to leave or enter them, to be a mobile subject between places which remain. Instead, it is not just that these U.S. places are not stable monoliths, but also that they lose their novelty and appear to merge with places from her past. That she sees the present as taking the shape “of [her] past” figures the past and present as not just phenomena of time, but as deeply related to space – not just because for her, the past is nearly synonymous with Antigua and the present nearly synonymous with the U.S., but because “shape” is a profoundly spatial term. Her life and its contents are also rendered in spatial terms when she recalls wanting a new place to “banish” certain things from her life: she wants to move them away, to expel them.

This banishment is in tension with her desire to accumulate, as she wants to build not just a future, but a past of her own. After her first winter, Lucy muses, “I could now look back at the winter. It was my past, so to speak, my first real past—a past that was my own and over which I had the final word” (*Lucy* 23). It is striking that, in order to continue imagining a future into being, Lucy has to accumulate a past. Shortly before she moves out of Lewis and Mariah’s place at the end of the novel, Lucy realizes that “I would soon make living with Lewis and Mariah the past” (*Lucy* 140). In both of these points in the novel, Lucy looks around to survey her new past, seeing it as something which both accumulates because of the passage of time and something which she can actively bring about: moving out of Mariah’s apartment will make living with her not just a thing of the past but “*the* past” (emphasis mine). The past and the future are intimately entangled here, as Lucy imagines her current surroundings as something which will one day lie in the past, thereby imagining the future through the act of imagining a future past.⁶⁰ Writing about *Lucy*, Mahlis states that, “To leave a place is to erase it from one’s daily experiences” (166), rendering Lucy’s accumulation of a past as simultaneously a form of erasure. For Lucy, what matters is that this new past is neither Antiguan nor English, but new and freely chosen. She felt like her Antiguan past was not her own, which is why she had to discard it. Her past in the U.S., where she continues to be, can be built on as the basis for imagining a future.

This blurring between imagining the future and imagining the past is one of many instances of temporal blurring in the text. Yet another kind of blurring is present in *Lucy* and can, for instance, be found in the word “fringes.” Lucy says “I was a young woman from the fringes of the world” (*Lucy* 95). Many critics have employed synonyms to talk about Lucy’s positionality – Nichols writes that “Lucy knows that despite their physical proximity, Mariah stands firmly at the center of the world and Lucy moves precariously along its edge” (201), while Moira Ferguson argues that Lucy “chooses her own margins” (131). While similar to those words and to “periphery,” the word “fringes” has an additional, particular valence. While “periphery” points to something that is far from an assumed center, and “margin” has the connotation of social disadvantages, “fringes” is much less set in its meaning; additionally, there is something playful and light about it, as

⁶⁰ A similar entanglement of past and future occurs in other places in Kincaid’s work. Writing about how the days she spent in Topke Gola, in the Himalaya, felt like an entire year, Kincaid says, “Within a year, you can remember the beginning and from that anticipate the future and the end” (*Himalaya* 159).

it doubles as another word for “bangs.” A “fringe” is both less cut off from the rest of the fabric than the “periphery” or “margin” and marked by a kind of openness. Fringes like the ornamental border of a carpet or the bangs in someone’s face are a continuation of something—of a piece of cloth to walk on, of a head of hair—while opening it out onto the world. Choosing this particular word then has several implications: it is yet one more sign of Lucy being her own person; instead of picking an idiomatic, established term to describe her position, she will pick her own word. But it also hints at a change in Lucy’s relationship to Antigua: earlier in the novel, she tries to see it as sealed off, as an absolute periphery, an undesirable margin, a place she so willfully distances herself from that she will not even open letters sent from its shores. This is where she uses the word “fringe” – at this point in the novel she still thinks of Antigua as, to some extent, remote, but this remoteness has become less absolute. Lucy “makes the space she occupies into a field chiefly characterized by its mutability; margins, generally defined only in opposition to the center, become spaces to be imagined *outside of that binary*” (Nichols 204; emphasis mine). Her idiosyncratically figuring the Caribbean as “the fringes of the world” resists the binary by highlighting the Caribbean’s simultaneous historical position as an ostensible colonial outpost and a zone of continuation and entanglement with parts of the rest of the world: a part of the world where something opens out and pulses outward, as in Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s conception of the *repeating island*. Even if this is not what Lucy had in mind, her choice of words underlines how her current position and her former locality are not as sharply divided, and not as sealed off from one another, as she had earlier felt. The novel’s last word is “blur,” as Lucy’s tears blur when she writes in her journal for the first time.

I could write down only this: ‘I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it.’ And then as I looked at this sentence a great wave of shame came over me and I wept and wept so much that the tears fell on the page and caused all the words to become one great big blur. (*Lucy* 164)

By letting the words blur, Lucy is also blurring several distinctions. According to Majerol, she thereby “simultaneously embraces and rejects the notion of the self-assimilated and homogenized into a paradigm of upward mobility through this act of creation and then obfuscation” (26). While Majerol here highlights how the blurring relates to Lucy’s ambivalent relationship to her own mobility, Mahlis instead focuses on the blur’s location late in the novel, arguing that “[i]t is crucial that this blotted page appear at the end of the novel, which temporally marks both the end of the narrated story *and* the beginning of

Lucy's attempts to write the self" (181); Lucy is blurring the distinction between the past she has accumulated and the future she is beginning to create. Despite how clearly divided they seemed earlier in the novel, the reader is now left with a blur.

2.3.2 "In the Same Boat": Coming to an Archipelagic Consciousness

This blurring of boundaries can also be read archipelagically. Morten Hansen is one of a small number of critics who have considered Kincaid's texts through an archipelagic lens.⁶¹ He links archipelagicity to a lack of language: writing about *A Small Place*, he argues that "Kincaid attempts to uncover connections among what seem like distinct entities (the tourist, the condition of the native Antiguan, the colonial past, and the global present), while simultaneously suggesting that we not yet have the language to talk about how these things are related" (42). Vackermann, meanwhile, uses the term "archipelagic consciousness" to describe how Annie's and Lucy's consciousness is a mix of influences. What is absent from his analysis, however, is a consideration of the archipelago itself; the only way in which he considers the histories of movement that have led to what he terms their archipelagic consciousness is when he talks about Lucy's awareness of Antigua's colonial past. He does not, then, think about the archipelago in the way in which archipelagic studies has been invested in doing; he oddly takes "archipelagic" solely as a synonym for "holistic" rather than as grounded (in a way which merges the land and the aqueous) island reality. Furthermore, he speaks of "the creole protagonist, whose fluid and oceanic view of the world is free from binary thinking" (Vackermann 93). In contrast, I argue that Lucy is highly invested in binary thinking. It is through analyzing Lucy's binaries—her insistence on dividing the world into her way and Mariah's way of doing things, into her island past and her U.S. present, into love and sex⁶²—as well as the places in which her binaries shift or break down that we not only make sense of Lucy's progression in the novel, but of the novel's archipelagicity, wherein the

⁶¹ Similarly to my reading, Hansen's is concerned with both the archipelago and the future, as he argues that, "If the epic was once concerned with origins, it now must turn toward the future" (42) and reads *A Small Place* as one such epic.

⁶² To Lucy, sex and love are two separate realms. She uses the word "love" to talk about her homoerotic friendship with Peggy: "Because Peggy and I were now not getting along, we naturally started to talk about finding an apartment in which we would live together. It was an old story: two people are in love, and then just at the moment they fall out of love they decide to marry" (109), but bristles at the idea that love might have anything to do with the sex she is having with Paul: "the question of being in love was not one I wanted to settle then; what I wanted was to be alone in a room with him and naked" (100). The sex with him is about not love but pleasure, and she thinks about how "I had not known that such pleasure could exist and, what was more, be available to me" (113).

interconnectedness of the Caribbean islands, but also their forceful, colonial division into separate spheres, have shaped Lucy's sense of her place in the world. Lucy recalls a pen pal from a neighboring island she had as a girl, remembering that she used to think,

If only we had been ruled by the French: they were prettier, much happier in appearance, so much more the kind of people I would have enjoyed being around. I once had a pen pal on a neighboring island, a French island, and even though I could see her island from mine, when we sent correspondence to each other it had to go to the ruler country, thousands of miles away, before reaching its destination. The stamps on her letter were always canceled with the French words for liberty, equality, and fraternity; on mine there were no such words, only the image of a stony-face, sour-mouth woman. I understand the situation better now; I understand that, in spite of those words, my pen pal and I were in the same boat; but still I think those words have a better ring to them than the image of a stony-face, sour-mouth woman. (*Lucy* 136)

This underlines how colonial divisions—the border between one empire and another—seep into a child's understanding of her island. On the one hand, Lucy the child seems to have understood the absurdity of a letter being sent to Europe, and then back to the Caribbean from there, when the intended destination was so close she could physically see it. On the other hand, though, young Lucy naturalized this division to such an extent that she bought into some of its hierarchies, imagining that growing up on her French neighboring island would have been a vastly superior experience. Lucy's thinking therefore has stark binary attributes not just despite growing up in and amid⁶³ an archipelago, but *because* she grew up in an archipelagic colonial setting, one in which what was connected through water and eyesight was forcibly divided and fragmented. It is notable that Lucy chooses the phrase “in the same boat” to describe her later realization that her situation and that of her French-Caribbean pen pal weren't fundamentally different. While a standard figure of speech, the word “boat” here underlines the archipelagic awareness of her neighboring islands—archipelagic in the sense of “open” and in the sense of being part of the same aqueous island realm—that was disrupted by colonial realities. As Hansen writes, “The sea [...] is at once that through which a small place such as Antigua reaches out to the rest of the world and the one place where all the artificial distinctions and boundaries fail and where (at least the possibility) of relation is always present” (Hansen 43).⁶⁴ To get back to an earlier sense of shared archipelagicity,

⁶³ For the use of “amid” in an archipelagic context, see Brian Russell Roberts' book *Borderwaters* (123).

⁶⁴ This is also what Carole Boyce Davies gestures toward when she writes about Kincaid's work, particularly her book *Among Flowers*, stating that “the vision was not for me simply Atlanticist but a Caribbean Space that is recognizable beyond the Atlantic, a kind of larger unbounded mobile Caribbean trans-nation” (Boyce Davies 14).

of a connection and shared fate spanning islands and waters, Lucy renders her connection to her pen pal in archipelagic terms.

2.3.3 “Hundreds of Years in Every Gesture”: Excesses of Meaning

While Lucy finds a way to imaginatively close the distance between her and her pen pal, she also uses geographical distance as a tool for detaching herself from places, people, and the meanings with which they have been invested. Much of Lucy’s relationship to Antigua is played out in her relationship to her mother. Lucy seeks distance from both; throughout the novel, Lucy’s mother sends her letters which Lucy neither opens nor reads. Reflecting on that need for distance upon receiving a letter from her mother, she thinks that “I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came [...], would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?” (*Lucy* 31). This passage is reminiscent of a passage in *Annie John*, in which Annie looks around at Antigua and muses, “Everywhere I looked stood something that had meant a lot to me, that had given me pleasure at some point, or could remind me of a time that was a happy time. But as I was lying there my heart could have burst open with joy at the thought of never having to see any of it again” (*Annie* 131-132). Similarly to *Lucy*, the problem is not so much that Antigua is weighed down by sad memories, but that it is weighed down by memories at all. When Lucy says that she does not want to “see hundreds of years in every gesture,” she is saying that she experiences her life in Antigua as being overdetermined – in every action, there are echoes of past actions. This describes a kind of imaginative immobility in Antigua, where rather than “tak[ing] everything just as it came,” rather than encountering something new, she is trapped in experiencing echoes and repetitions. Even if the gestures she describes are different, she is unable to imagine the difference, instead seeing sameness. Patricia Yaeger and Amy K. King see the reason for the circum-Atlantic’s superabundance and excess in its relationship to commodities, among them sugarcane, and describe “circum-Atlantic aesthetics” as “an art concerned with the Atlantic commercial slave-sugar-cotton-tobacco trade and its aftermath” (Yaeger qtd. in King 217).⁶⁵ *Lucy* and *Annie John* may at first seem to illustrate the excess of meaning in different, much more private ways: for Annie and Lucy, Antiguan excess seems to lie in the

⁶⁵ Susan Buck-Morss had also gestured toward this relationship between abundance and the Triangular trade in her influential text “Hegel and Haiti,” where she writes that “the slave-holding class is indeed totally dependent on the institution of slavery for the ‘overabundance’ that constitutes its wealth” (847).

fact that they have known these people all their lives and have lost the capacity to be surprised by anything they do. However, the sense of excess extends beyond that: both *Lucy* and *Annie John* (and the wider œuvre of Kincaid's of which they form a part) are acutely aware of Antigua's embeddedness in a colonial machine that continually produces meaning. This awareness suffuses the books. That Lucy sees a hundred years in every gesture therefore not only speaks to the fact that she is from a tight-knit community, but also to her having grown up as a colonial subject in a colonial school. Although Yaeger argues that, in such a context, "to pile image upon image, word upon word, becomes one way of taking up property, reclaiming space" (774, also qtd. in King 217), such a sense of excess is not emancipatory for Lucy.⁶⁶ As Sugg writes, "Lucy abhors this over narration of her world, even as it effectively locates and maps her position(s) in it" (163). To her, this excess or over narration instead speaks of smallness, of the way she experiences Antigua as a place that folds in on itself, where everything, every thought, stays forever and is hoarded.

This excess of meaning is palpable even in the landscape itself. As Natasha Lightfoot writes in *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation*, both Antigua's spatiality and its natural beauty have historical and present implications:

[T]here is a haunting connection between the island's beauty and its long history of exploitation, from the beginning of slavery to the present moment. Many elements composing Antigua's beauty—including its fertile soils, its flat and easily traversed landscape, its ease of access to the sea, and its constant, if not searing, stretches of uninterrupted sunshine—laid the groundwork for colonial settlement [...] and African enslavement (21).⁶⁷

Something like that seems to be hinted at by Kincaid, when she writes, "the sun shone with what sometimes seemed to be a deliberate cruelty; we must have done something to deserve that" ("On Seeing England" 36). Kincaid here equates sunshine with cruelty

⁶⁶ Somewhat relatedly, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, when writing about lists in Dionne Brand's writing, observes that "[t]his kind of ongoing, multiple black Atlantic resignification is thematized and performed through these lists where words jostle against each other unexpectedly, breaking open and reconfiguring meanings" (209).

⁶⁷ In detailing practices of resistance and survival, Lightfoot, like Campt, draws attention to the everyday, focusing on "freedpeople's quotidian survival tactics" (3), such as clandestinely going to the market, rather than just on large-scale activities such as revolts. While Lightfoot and Campt insist on the quotidian as a key arena of resistance, Keeling, in her book *Queer Times, Black Futures*, cites the quotidian as a site of past and current injustice: "The wealth generated through chattel slavery, settler colonialism, and European colonialism in Asia, Africa, and the Americas provided the foundation for present relations of exploitation and domination to accrue their force and authority—in other words, for today's quotidian violence" (Keeling 24).

because it is hot and unceasing, and because it puts further experiential difference between her life and the English life she is constantly being told to desire. But as Lightfoot argues, the sunshine is connected to cruelty in a very tangible way, as its abundance facilitated slavery on the island. “Sugar’s social relations,” she goes on to argue, “were embedded in the landscape. The island’s precarious situation as a slave-holding, sugar-producing colony marked the ways that both planters and enslaved people used, constrained, and continuously redefined space” (Lightfoot 35-36). This speaks to Katherine McKittrick’s reading of “the plantation [...] as a meaningful conceptual palimpsest” (5). Although McKittrick focuses on “contemporary cityscapes” in the U.S. rather than current Caribbean island space, the term “palimpsest” captures how simultaneous and layered different moments in Antigua’s history are, and how tangible they would be to Lucy. Such an excess of meaning, and of cruelty embedded in seemingly innocuous or beautiful surroundings, is of course not unique to Antigua. However, Antigua, where the streets are “named after a famous English seaman—to be quite frank, an officially sanctioned criminal” (“England” 36), is one location where this simultaneity is particularly stark, and this is a simultaneity of which all of Kincaid’s texts are excessively aware.

Kincaid’s lists do not just depict an excess of meaning, however, but also serve to create excess. Diane Simmons argues that these lists serve the dual function of letting the characters take leave from certain aspects of their lives and lulling the reader. Kincaid’s] „protagonists, as if to gain some control over life’s eternal changeability, list the contents of a world that must soon be departed” (Simmons 469). She argues that “[t]he rhythms and repetitions charm and lull the reader, disguising what is actually happening in the prose, which is that one thing is constantly being transformed into another. The rhythm and repetition of Kincaid’s prose mark a clash of contradictions” (467).⁶⁸ This understanding can be brought together with my reading that Lucy’s and Annie’s propensity for list-making points to an overabundance they long to escape. The simultaneity of experience and impression held by the lists is dizzying both for the protagonist-narrators and for the reader, as “[t]he motion and fluidity that shape Lucy

⁶⁸ Also drawing on Simmons, R. B. Hughes instead concludes that “Kincaid’s stylistic devices—rhythms, repetitions and long, list-like sentences—actually work to disguise what is happening in the narrative; most often that one thing is being transformed into another under the cover of the ordinary rhythms of life” (20-21). While I don’t agree that they serve to disguise what is happening, his observation underlines the lists’ dizzying effect.

mentally move the reader to engage in the perceptual shifts Lucy orchestrates in her telling of the story” (Nichols 205). If the lists mean that some sharp, painful memories are jarringly mixed up with innocuous ones, with the reader having to parse out which is which, then the same is true for the narrator, who is confronted with a slew of memories and having to make sense of them.

Names are another realm with a palpable excess of meaning, as becomes clear both when names are elided and when they are re-signified. While Antigua is not named in *Lucy*, and is instead referred to as “the island,” Lucy can be assumed to be from Antigua not just because it serves as the setting for Kincaid’s other books (and because of her own biographical links to it), but also because Lucy lists certain facts about her home island: that “it was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493,” and that “Columbus never set foot there but only named it in passing, after a church in Spain” (*Lucy* 135). Both facts pertain to Antigua.⁶⁹ Despite the island’s identity being known to the reader, it is significant that Lucy chooses not to refer to her home island by its name. In addition to serving as a distancing mechanism for Lucy, the absence of Antigua’s name also renders abstract her issues with the island: her fraught relationship to it, her need to get away, are then not about any specific properties of Antigua (in sharp contrast to Kincaid’s nonfiction book *A Small Place*, which takes aim at Antiguan specificities), but about her own personal relationship to the place. In other parts of the novel, Lucy shows herself to be sensitive to names. She talks about liking none of her three names, Lucy Josephine Potter – Lucy because she feels “it seemed slight, without substance” (149), Josephine because she was named for an uncle called Mr. Joseph who made a lot of money but did not leave her anything in his will; and Potter because it “must have come from the Englishman who owned [her] ancestors when they were slaves” (149). What changes her mind is when her mother tells her she was named for Lucifer. Adding the additional layer of “Lucifer” to the name “Lucy” can also be seen as the reverse of the Creole gaps in *Annie John* – there, the reader is pointed to a word’s translation without knowing what that translation is; here, an additional layer is added where neither Lucy nor the reader knew there was one. Upon gaining this information, Lucy muses, “I went from feeling burdened and old and tired to feeling light, new, clean. I was transformed from failure to triumph. It was the moment I knew who I was. [...] I did not grow to like the name Lucy—I would

⁶⁹ See “Antigua’s History and Culture” on the country’s official website antigua-barbuda.org.

have much preferred to be called Lucifer outright—but whenever I saw my name I always reached out to give it a strong embrace” (*Lucy* 152-153).⁷⁰ Despite this changed relationship to her name, Lucy finds it liberating when, at the end of the book, she reflects that she is “living [...] in a place where no one knew much about me; almost no one knew even my name” (*Lucy* 158). Even when a name is felt to be a source of power and clarity, it can be freeing not to be tied to it.

Lucy, then, offers several ways of navigating the weight of names, all of which go hand in hand with a way of imagining and reshaping the past. By finding the “Lucifer” in “Lucy,” she not only sees the figure of Satan in her name; an additional dimension is also added to the name because her mother’s reasoning changes Lucy’s view of how her mother has been relating to her since (before) her birth. Having moved to a place where people do not know her name, meanwhile, Lucy feels she is unencumbered by her past and by people’s views of, and expectations for, her. Finally, by eliding the name of Antigua altogether, Lucy shifts the focus from the colonizer’s gaze—a gaze ultimately uninterested in Antigua, naming it only in passing, and making it into an echo of a church in Spain—to a place that, for her, holds fraught but specific meaning. This makes Antigua into both a more abstract Caribbean entity than if it was named and paradoxically into an arguably more intimate, personal locus.⁷¹ Names, especially in a former colonial setting such as Antigua, contain excesses as meaning. “Antigua” and “Lucy” function as counterpoints here, with the name of Antigua not mentioned because of the foreign, unwanted excess of meaning it colonially contains and Lucy’s name gaining a liberatory aspect precisely *through* Lucy finding out about its additional meaning. There is a playfulness here. Names, though always pointing toward a past, can be differently modulated into a future: here, we see the option of elision alongside the option of making one up in jest or excavating a layer of meaning not previously known.

⁷⁰ In Bouson’s reading of this scene, “Lucy employs a classic defense against shame—that of shamelessness—as she turns this maternal insult into a badge of honor” (69). My reading is less pessimistic, as I see Lucy as exhibiting real affection for herself and her name here.

⁷¹ Kincaid also thinks about naming in *The Garden Book*. In a chapter called “To Name Is to Possess,” she writes about how the flower *cocoxochitl*, native to Mexico, became known as a dahlia (after the Swedish botanist Andreas Dahl), which rewrote its significance and turned it from a beautiful, but everyday Mexican flower into the object of European dahlia mania. She writes that, “This naming of things is so crucial to possession—a spiritual pad-lock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is a murder, an erasing, and it is not surprising that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names” (*Garden Book* 122).

Conclusion

For both Annie and Lucy, leaving their home is a complexly entangled process. They are both, in a way, brought closer to home by leaving – for Annie this happens at the very moment she is leaving, as she walks toward the jetty and reconsiders all the places that have been important in her life. For Lucy, this happens much more gradually, and long after she has left. While not as conciliatory as Annie’s walk past the places from her childhood, Lucy’s reengagement with her first home lies in seeing it as not quite as separate from her current life. Reading *Lucy* and *Annie John* alongside one another at first sight seems to make it possible to approach imaginative mobilities from two sides of a divide: Annie imagines journeying far away while she is still spatially contained on Antigua, while Lucy contemplates Antigua after she has left the island and is in a different part of the world. Annie looks forward and Lucy back, Annie toward the future and Lucy toward the past. However, an analysis of the two novels makes clear that it is not quite so straightforward. In *Annie John*, Annie also reflects on her past—particularly in terms of her relationship with her mother—while imagining a highly mobile future. Lucy, meanwhile, uses the past as something from which to push herself off, hoping that her rejection of it will propel her into the future and keep her there. Analyzing *Annie John* and *Lucy* together makes it possible to see a kind of succession between them, as a teenage girl ‘grows’ into a young woman, and to analyze one and the same question, the question of leaving, from two sides of a rupture. Crucially, such a joint analysis also enables us to see how imaginative and spatial im/mobilities are entangled with each other, as well as with conceptions of temporality and the future, as both Annie and Lucy are following “a practice of *living the future they want to see, now*” (Camp 59; emphasis in the original). In their journeys and trajectories, Annie and Lucy inhabit a variety of positions; at each point, they look around themselves, surveying their geographical and emotional landscapes: the place they have left or long to leave, the place at which they have arrived. At each of these moments, they see something else, hitting upon a view that is both particular to that specific position and part of the wider, entangled web of mobilities—between Antigua and the U.S., between memories of their mothers and the desire to forge a new life—consisting of all those parts. Annie and Lucy, from their differing vantage points, are accumulating, bringing, imagining their futures into being.

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3. “I Go Around a Corner in Montreal / And Just Like That / I Find Myself in Port-au-Prince”: Imaginative Mobilities and Genre-Switching in Dany Laferrière’s *L’Énigme du retour* and *Pays sans chapeau*

Dany Laferrière is a Haitian-Canadian writer. Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1953, he worked as a journalist when one of his close friends was murdered under the regime of Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier. Fearing he might be next, Laferrière left Haiti for Canada in 1976 (cf. Tachtiris 179; Bessette, “Biography” 81). In Canada, Laferrière became famous as a TV personality (cf. Bessette, “Introduction” 4). His first novel, *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* was published in French in 1985 and, in English—as *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired*—in 1987. Since then, he has arguably become “the best-known francophone Haitian writer to live abroad” (Benedicty 169). Carrying dual Canadian and Haitian citizenship, Laferrière is now a permanent resident of the United States (cf. Coates and Laferrière 921). Surveying the past few decades of Haitian literary production abroad, Carrol F. Coates distinguishes between different generations of writers according to their political context, placing Laferrière

chronologically between a generation that fled Haiti in the mid-1960s (Franck Fouché, Paul Laraque, Roger Dorsinville, Roland Morisseau, Anthony Phelps, and many others) and a number of younger writers, most without direct experience of the twenty years of unrelieved violence and tension of the two Duvalier regimes. (“Meet Dany Laferrière” 922)

While Laferrière’s first few novels, which were seen as playful and risqué, earned him a cult following, Haiti was markedly absent from them. It has only been in his later work, including his 1996 novel *Pays sans chapeau* and his 2009 novel *L’Énigme du retour*, that Laferrière has turned his gaze towards Haiti, and towards the Duvalier regimes and their legacy. It is these two books that I focus on in this chapter.

L’Énigme du retour crosses several borders and boundaries and is in a perpetual process of mobility between them: The book is partly written in prose and partly in verse; it is partly a novel and partly a work of autobiography; and it not only crosses the space

between Canada and Haiti, but embeds the two places, as well as the United States, in one another. Like the other writers in my corpus, Laferrière maps an American archipelago through engaging with ideas of the mobile. Specifically, I will analyze how Laferrière, through the “mobilit[y] of form” (Davidson 2017) of switching between prose and verse, creates a diasporic as well as archipelagic, interconnected understanding of America.

One frequently speaks of different academic “turns” – mobility studies, e.g., is both indebted to the spatial turn and overlaps with the diaspora turn. In her article “The Turn to Diaspora,” Lily Cho stretches the idea of turning further, taking it to mean an active engagement with diaspora by diasporic individuals. In this chapter, I want to bring together the diasporic turn, as it informs mobility studies, with the literal movement of “turning” that I base on Cho’s work. “Turning,” as I argued in chapter 1, can be read on several levels: It can be used to grasp, firstly, a turn to diaspora studies, a field in dialogue with mobility studies. Secondly, it signals the turn toward diasporicity which Cho describes—a turn which makes diaspora, and diasporicity, into fluid processes rather than a set category. Finally, Laferrière, in *L’Énigme du retour*, can be said to *turn* toward diaspora both through switching between forms and through the protagonist switching between Montréal, Port-au-Prince, and New York.

In order to understand where *L’Énigme* fits in Laferrière’s work and how his literary output has been received, I will outline how Haiti’s perceived state of exception on the world stage has influenced what kind of literary output is expected and created as well as how that output is received. While these considerations can be put into dialogue with Danticat’s work, the reason they are placed here rather than in the preceding chapter is that I find them to be particularly pertinent in reading Laferrière. Specifically, it is necessary to consider how Haiti’s particular history has led to it often being seen as outside of history, of being a special case, and how this has led to the expectation that Haitian writers write about the pain of Haiti, an expectation that much of Laferrière’s work vehemently rejects. Since this chapter focuses on questions of exile and diaspora, I will discuss what those terms might mean in the context of Laferrière’s Haiti, and in the context of his novel *L’Énigme du retour* in particular. Continuing my argument from the preceding chapter, I argue that diasporicity, in Laferrière’s case, is intimately related to America as a hemisphere and an archipelago; I will tease out what can be gained from reading Laferrière’s work within this context. After having laid this groundwork, I will turn my attention to the novel itself. I will do this by first giving a brief summary of the

book and then focusing in on how the novel is embedded in, depicts, and enacts, different kinds of mobilities and turning. Here, I will be focusing on two levels: The mobility of form of the genre-switching novel, which swerves between prose and verse, and the geographic and imaginative mobilities enacted and experienced by the novel's protagonist and narrator, Windsor. Specifically, I will focus on the language *of* and *in* the novel and on spaces of heightened mobility, such as the hotel. I will then move on to Laferrière's novel *Pays sans chapeau*, where I write about entanglements between time, mobility, and the body, and about the suspended dividing lines between the realm of the dead and the living. In my conclusion, I will bring these different strands of my analysis together, showing how each of them contributes to Laferrière's mobile, archipelagic project.

3.1 Haiti's State of Exception

Haiti's state of exception on the world stage has had a marked impact not just on the kind of literature produced in and about Haiti, but on how this literature is read and received. Haiti has long had a particular standing in world history: due to its sugar industry it was incredibly profitable;⁷² in her piece "Hegel and Haiti," Susan Buck-Morss reminds us that "the half-million slaves in Saint-Domingue, the richest colony not only of France but of the entire colonial world, took the struggle for liberty into their own hands, not through petitions, but through violent, organized revolt" (833). This revolt, the Haitian Revolution, which went on from 1791 to 1804, is the only slave uprising that led to the foundation of a state. Buck-Morss makes the case that "[t]he Haitian Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment. And every European who was part of the bourgeois reading public knew it" ("Hegel and Haiti" 837), and that it "lies at the crossroads of multiple discourses as a defining moment in world history" ("Universal History" 13). As Aimé Césaire wrote in his poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Haiti was "où la négritude se mit debout pour la première fois" (Césaire 24); "where Negritude stood up for the first time."⁷³ "Thus while the revolution marked an aggressive bid on the part of the newly independent Haitians for inclusion in a global—if reconfigured—world order" (Glover 16), Haiti has suffered from its own specificity. As Glover argues, "postcolonial theorists have tended to emphasize the uniqueness of this event and, in so doing, to place Haiti outside of discussions of regional literature and culture" (15). This

⁷² Cf. also Brown University, "Economy."

⁷³ This is the translation used in Glover 15.

phenomenon has been observed by other scholars – Haiti’s “*excess of history*” (Munro cited in Glover 15; emphasis in the original) has led to its “stunning absence from the teaching of history just about everywhere except in Haiti itself” due to “the very fact of its perceived incomprehensibility” (Sotiropoulos 2). Haiti has thus significantly shaped the world but has been seen as apart from it; the country “Haiti has somehow often found itself forcibly positioned outside history, and outside the world it so dramatically transformed” (Hutchins 5).⁷⁴

This status of Haiti as an outsider has consequences not only for the reception of Haitian literature abroad, but also for the expectations Haitian writers are faced with both within and outside the country. Haitian writers are expected to grapple with Haiti, its trauma, and its specific history. Designating a small literature as marginal can serve to marginalize it further even when the opposite is intended. Catherine Khordoc argues that this is the case with the term “*écriture migrante*” in Québec,⁷⁵ in which Laferrière’s output has been placed and which has “become a ghetto from which it is proving difficult [...] to break free” (2) for him and others, as writers in this category are seen to be at a remove from unmarked, non-migrant Québec literary production even when the themes and concerns of migrant and non-migrant writers in Québec are profoundly related. Meanwhile, as Corine Tachtiris argues, “on ethical grounds, the West thus obligates non-Western authors to bear witness to conditions in their countries, reserving for itself—whose ideological house is presumably in order—the right to ‘pure’ literature” (178). This act of witnessing, however, is placed upon Haitian writers not just by the literary sphere in the Global North, but, often, by their compatriots and fellow writers; in the case of Haiti, the conditions writers are expected to bear witness to are hunger and pain.⁷⁶ Dany Laferrière, too, was expected to “bear witness to the horrors of the Duvalier dictatorships and portray life in the dark land of Haiti” (Tachtiris 188). Without this context, it can be hard to make sense of Laferrière’s literary output and its reception. In tracing Laferrière’s own geographic trajectory and his depiction of America, some scholars, such as Martin Munro and Lee Skallerup Bessette, appear at times to conflate author and narrator. While

⁷⁴ This impression of Haiti being a place apart is perhaps exacerbated by the country’s fraught relationship to, and violent history with, its immediate neighbor, the Dominican Republic, with which it shares the island of Hispaniola. Initiatives such as the Transnational Hispaniola Collective (Mayes et al.), however, try to engender a dialogue between the two parts of the island.

⁷⁵ In Québec, the largest group of migrant writers is Haitian (cf. Brazier 33-34).

⁷⁶ These are undoubtedly a fact of life for many Haitians. For a discussion of insecurity as an ontological, existential state of affairs in Haiti, see Erica Caple James.

this conflation is problematic, some background on Laferrière is helpful for a number of reasons: It makes it possible to place the novel within a certain historical and literary context and to read the archipelagic project of the novel together with Laferrière's (auto)biographical mobilities, where it finds its echo. Additionally, it makes it possible to account for the fact that *L'Énigme du retour* is a semi-biographical work in which the boundaries between the writer and protagonist-narrator are necessarily blurred. Looking at the backdrop against which he writes helps explain the mixed reception of his earlier novels, in which he focused on an immigrant's life in Québec without mentioning where that immigrant was from and without overtly engaging with Haiti. Talking about other Haitian writers, Laferrière says they "balked even at admitting that I might be a writer. For them, I was simply a guy writing for nothing but money. These people think there are no writers without some political commitment" (qtd. in Coates and Laferrière 920). Laferrière, in turn, "wanted to give an account of the life [he] was leading at the moment, not of the past" (qtd. in Coates and Laferrière 911). The life he was then leading, and the life he depicted in his often-autobiographical fiction at the time, was one in Canada, not one looking back at Haiti. Laferrière's positionality as an author became even more playful with the 2008 publication of his book *Je suis un écrivain japonais*, published as *I am a Japanese Writer* in English in 2010. That novel is narrated by a Black writer in Montréal announcing the title of his new book, "Je suis un écrivain japonais," which becomes a media sensation based on its title alone. Despite this farcical character, the text insists on its seriousness, by having the character proclaim, "ce n'est pas une plaisanterie, car je me considère vraiment comme un écrivain japonais" (15) / "that was no joke: I really do consider myself a Japanese writer" (3) and

Pour dire vrai, ces histoires d'authenticité m'ennuient à mourir. [...] Quand on évoque les origines en ma présence, je perds littéralement le souffle. On naît d'un endroit, après on choisit son lieu original. (24)

To tell the truth, all this business about authenticity bores me to death. [...] When people start conjuring up their origins, I literally find it hard to breathe. We're born in one spot, and afterwards we choose our place of origin. (10)

Here, Laferrière foregrounds playfulness, choice, plasticity. Origin is not seen as static or immovable, but instead as just one relationship to place among many. Despite this flexibility, the ties Laferrière chooses in his texts are far from random. The meta-narrative in *Je suis un écrivain japonais* includes meditations on the journey undertaken by Japanese poet Basho, thereby both foregrounding movement—between locations as much as

between categories—and showing an engagement with the country alluded to. In this context, we can read the engagement with Haiti in *L'Énigme* as just as carefully chosen: there is no sense, in Laferrière's œuvre, that one need write about the country to which one has a diasporic claim.

3.2 Exile, Diaspora, and Hemispheric Haiti

Both in Canada and in the U.S., Laferrière himself has emphasized that he is not in exile: “‘Je n’ai pas été exilé. J’ai fui avant d’être tué. C’est différent’ [‘I wasn’t an exile; I fled before they could kill me. That’s different’]” (qtd. in Braziel 31). Nonetheless, he has often been framed as a writer in exile. This may partly be due to the contested meaning of the word; Eugen Banauch speaks of “exile as a *fluid concept*” (10; emphasis in the original) to draw attention to how the concept is used in specific geographic and cultural spaces. The tendency to view Laferrière as a writer in exile is in line with much of the discourse around Haiti, where there is often a focus on “exile,” since many writers had to flee the Duvalier regimes. This plays out in two main ways – there is, firstly, the frequent assumption that Haitian writers living outside of Haiti must be writers in exile, and, secondly, the fact that more attention is paid to Haitian writers living outside of Haiti than to those living in the country itself. In “The Myth of the Exiled Writer,” Nadève Ménard argues both that “[t]he emphasis on exile for Haitian literature and writers serves to establish the Haitian space as marginal” (57) and that this gives a false view of Haitian literary production, since there are in fact numerous writers living in Haiti (cf. 54). She questions why Edwidge Danticat is frequently referred to as an exiled writer (cf. 55-57) even though she herself, too, has stated that she does not think of herself as exiled. Finally, Ménard traces the pervasive emphasis on exile in Haitian discourse to two contradictory ideas about Haiti in the global imaginary: “Haiti as barren, savage land and Haiti as culturally rich” (54). The trope of exile, here, makes it possible for both views to coexist: there is a wealth of Haitian cultural production, but this production takes place in a state of exile, making it possible to continue viewing Haiti itself as barren.

Rather than speaking of “exile,” then, “diaspora”⁷⁷ might offer a more promising term with which to examine Laferrière’s ties to Haiti.⁷⁸ Though I am reading Dany Laferrière as part of the Haitian diaspora in the context of this chapter and in my dissertation as a whole, that term, too, raises questions, as the capaciousness of the term “diaspora” has been debated in the field of diaspora studies; whether the term is indeed fitting for Haitians, and people descended from Haitians living abroad, has been the subject of debate, as I outlined in my introduction. Importantly, “diasporic subjectivity is finely calibrated to the experience of marginalization in a specific time and place,” as Paul Brodwin describes when writing about Haitians living in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe; “subjectivity—as both a structured and structuring response to marginality—differs across several nodes of the same diaspora” (33). What Laferrière writes about in the texts under consideration is not the diasporic experience outside of Haiti, but the experience of returning to Haiti after having been in a diasporic state.

What is of interest to me are the ways in which Laferrière’s texts turn to diaspora after the characters’ return to Haiti. Even though he doesn’t elaborate on his use of the term, diaspora studies scholar Khachig Tölölyan, too, describes diasporic subjects by saying that “they *turn* again and again toward the homeland through travel, remittances, cultural exchange, and political lobbying and by various contingent efforts to maintain other links with the homeland” (649; emphasis mine). While Cho’s figure of turning is focused on interior and imaginative processes, Tölölyan points us to the material aspects and results of such imaginative engagement. The figure of turning, then, also makes it possible to combine material, physical, and imaginative aspects of engaging with diaspora: Turning to diaspora can mean emotionally engaging with it, or it can mean sending remittances. It can mean imagining the diasporic country or it can mean a physical, literal turning to it, for example by attending a church service with other members of the diaspora. While sending remittances without any imaginative

⁷⁷ From a legal perspective, those Haitians who have left the country and adopted the citizenship of another one really are foreigners. Adelaide M. Russo calls this “a second level of exile [...]. The Haitians of the diaspora are perceived as having abandoned their country and considered as foreigners by the Haitians who have stayed” (228).

⁷⁸ Reading diasporic Haitian literature, or encountering other diasporic Haitian works of art, has its own specific implications. Bénédicte Boisseron (2014) writes about the remittance of Caribbean diasporic people as not just the remittance of money, but the remittance of art and of guilt. In her reading, the literature and art created by Caribbean diasporics does two things at once: It gives something back to the community and context from which the writer came, but also takes something *from* the community, namely the stories itself. In *Creole Renegades: Rhetoric of Betrayal and Guilt in the Caribbean Diaspora*, Boisseron maps the uneasy relationships that springs from this.

engagement seems unlikely, imaginative engagement without a physical dimension is easier to imagine. This tension between embodied and imaginative practices is noticeable when Adelaide M. Russo writes that “Dany Laferrière’s 2009 novel in verse, *L’Énigme du retour*, underlines the ambiguity of the gesture of return” (235). A “gesture,” here, is a turn, too – it is the physical, embodied act of returning which Laferrière’s novel portrays; additionally, a gesture is a physical movement imbued with meaning. In reading Laferrière’s novel as a diasporic novel, then, I am not making a claim about the extent to which Dany Laferrière sees himself as, or should be seen as, a diasporic Haitian. Not only would he surely resist any such definitive claim, but it would also be of limited theoretical usefulness. Instead, the category of “diaspora” offers a way of engaging with the text that is attuned to how it navigates its site-specific, situated mobilities in and between Port-au-Prince, Montréal, and other American locales.

In *L’Énigme du retour*, Laferrière turns not only toward diaspora, but toward a wider conceptualization of America. As outlined in my introduction, there are two recent approaches in American Studies which, in going beyond the United States, aim to arrive at a more expansive view of the concept of ‘America,’ one in which Montréal, Port-au-Prince, and New York exist side by side: hemispheric American studies and archipelagic American studies.⁷⁹ I will now carve out how Laferrière’s literary work, and especially his novel *L’Énigme du retour*, may be placed and read within these fields, and how this discussion adds to our understanding of imaginative mobilities in his writing.

Haiti, like all Caribbean islands, is entangled in an archipelagic Caribbean web. As Nihad M. Farooq argues, Haiti’s “dramatic shifts, from indigenous Arawak community to European colony, from transatlantic slavery to global sovereignty, are better viewed through a panoramic lens that envisions Haiti as part of the larger Caribbean archipelago and beyond” (n.p.). Such an archipelagic understanding of Haiti’s place in America is in line both with the way Laferrière describes his personal approach to America and with his literary output. In interviews, he highlights that Haiti *is* America and describes how he has moved from one American place to another as opposed to having moved *to*

⁷⁹ Another way in which the Caribbean and continental North America have been brought together has been in Pratt Guterl’s concept of “an American Mediterranean.” Writing about the Southern “belle” Octavia Walton, he draws out how the southern American planter class saw themselves in relation to their southern neighbors, particularly Cuba and Haiti. She was “a peerless exemplar of the hemispherics of the mid-century South—at home in the world of ideas, fluent in myriad languages and literatures, and a literal product of the slave-holding world of the American Mediterranean” (97). Southern slaveholders at the time, according to Pratt Guterl, “assumed that Cuba would inevitably become a part of the South” (98).

America when he moved from Haiti to North America. When Laferrière moved from Haiti to Canada and from there to the U.S., none of these moves was a definitive endpoint but part of one ongoing movement, a web of mobilities crossing America. Talking about his *Une autobiographie américaine*, a series made up of several of his novels, he argues for Haiti being America. He says,

I'm talking about the fact that Haiti is in America, a fact people tend to forget. The Caribbean is a region of America. I detest the word 'Antilles,' which alludes to France. When I say that I am an American, I do it in order to place myself and to say that I am not an Antillean (*Antillais*) – not a French subject. I belong to this continent that the United States has wanted to keep simply for itself. The idea of a "Great American Novel" is not a novel that can only take place in the United States. I think I am a better contender with *An American Autobiography*, which takes place in Petit-Goave, Port-au-Prince, Montréal, Los Angeles, Manhattan, Miami, and San Juan (the airport) than many U.S. writers. (Qtd. in Coates and Laferrière 915-916)

As Jana Braziel puts it, "To position Miami (and, by synecdochic abstraction, the USA) not as ideal point of migratory arrival, but rather as just another 'diasporic switching point' [...] as Laferrière does, radically alters and reconfigures America and the American" (31). Laferrière here frames Haiti as not just part of the American archipelago, but as equally American as any other place in the Americas, including the U.S. In doing so, he is destabilizing—mobilizing—how America is commonly understood.

3.3 *L'Énigme du retour*

3.3.1 Cœur, Tête, Corps: The Novel's Background and Title

L'Énigme du retour was first published in French in Québec in 2009. The English translation followed in 2011 as *The Return* in Canada, and in 2013 as *The Enigma of the Return* in the United Kingdom (although both versions were translated from the French by David Homel). The novel is written in two parts – part one, "Slow Preparations for Departure," takes up about a fourth of the book, while part two, "A Return," takes up the rest. *L'Énigme du retour* starts when Windsor Laferrière, the protagonist and narrator, receives a phone call telling him that his father, a Haitian exile living in New York, has died. Windsor travels to New York to attend his father's funeral. From there, he goes to Haiti in order to tell his relatives and his father's friends about the latter's death. As seen through the eyes of the son, it is a kind of doubled return: it is not just Windsor but also the father who is returning, or being returned, to Haiti from his point of exile or migration in continental North America. Once in Haiti, where the bulk of the novel is set, Windsor travels around the country, meets old acquaintances, and tries to reconnect with the

country he has left. While doing so, he is both engaging with Haiti from the point of view of someone who has spent several decades living in Canada and thinking of Canada from a Haitian vantage point. His physical mobility around Haiti thus goes hand in hand with his imaginative mobility between Haiti and Montréal. In *L'Énigme du retour*, Laferrière puts both America and diaspora into practice, as Windsor imaginatively engages with Haiti and Montréal while thinking about their location within diasporic and American realms of belonging.⁸⁰

L'Énigme du retour starts with its protagonist, Windsor, traveling from Québec to New York, from where he then travels onward to Haiti. The most prominent instance of mobility in the text is thus Windsor's return journey to Haiti after a long time away. Mobility also happens, however, through his travels around Haiti as well as his imaginative engagement with both Haiti and the memory of his life in Canada. For him, Haiti and Canada are imaginatively enmeshed, as when Windsor narrates, "Je tourne au coin d'une rue de Montréal / et sans transition / je tombe dans Port-au-Prince" (*L'Énigme* 22); "I go around a corner in Montreal / and just like that / I find myself in Port-au-Prince" (*Enigma* 11).⁸¹ This juxtaposition of cities can be read to gesture toward a hemispheric, or archipelagic, view of the American continent(s), as it resists conceptualizing a route from A to B and instead opens up an entangled assemblage of places. This archipelago nonetheless includes borders. Rachel Adams has argued that Latino Canadian literature displaces the border – while in "the United States, [...] the border with Mexico has become virtually synonymous with the very notion of borderlands" (325). Instead, in Latino Canadian literature, "the hemisphere itself has become a crucible for the complex intermixture of Anglo- and Latin Americas" (Adams 325). In her view, this widening of the border can be achieved by including Canada in the discourse more generally; a move in line with Laferrière's project in *L'Énigme du retour*. The border, in an American context, is then not just synonymous with the border between the U.S. and Mexico; instead "the entire continent has become a contact zone where Anglo- and Latin America meet up, clash, and interpenetrate" (Adams 321). Dissolving the concept of the border in this way achieves several things: Firstly, it allows one to view experiences which take place far from any physical border between nation states as entangled in, and predicated upon,

⁸⁰ Rebecca Grenouilleau-Loescher argues that the novel's "message has less to do with returning as such than it does with imagining the return differently" (173), thereby also placing an emphasis on imagination.

⁸¹ All English translations are from Laferrière 2018, David Homel's translation.

them. Even when an actual border is nowhere in sight, the border may be implicated. Secondly, this act of decentering the border makes it possible to conceive of places in a new way. They are not just starting points and endpoints in a journey, located on opposite sides of the border, but part of a more open-ended process. Rebecca Grenouilleau-Loescher speaks of the way that, in the novel, “exile and return join up in an ongoing and incomplete process” (170), and Jana Evans Braziel argues that “Laferrière decenters the USA in his nomadic re-routing of trans-American cartographies, and emphasizes Haiti and Canada as definitive American sites not just of departure and arrival, but also of being and becoming” (35). In *L'Énigme du retour*, then, the U.S., Canada and Haiti are embroiled in a complex entanglement, one in which borders within, between, and amid them are crossed regardless of how far away the next visible border is. Laferrière himself stresses that the American continent on which he lives encompasses profoundly different local realities, ones which he places on equal footing: in one interview, Laferrière likens the different parts of America in which he has spent his life to different parts of his mind and body, saying that,

J'habite dans trois villes en ce moment. Trois villes du continent américain: Port-au-Prince, Montréal, Miami. Port-au-Prince occupe mon cœur. Montréal, ma tête. Miami, mon corps. [I am dwelling in three cities at this very moment. Three cities of the American continent: Port-au-Prince, Montréal, Miami. Port-au-Prince occupies my heart. Montréal, my head. Miami, my body.] (Qtd. in Braziel 31)⁸²

As much as Laferrière emphasizes that he is from America, and that America includes Haiti, the Caribbean, Canada, and the U.S., it is, of course, necessary to keep in mind the vastly particular historical context of each island, nation, and place in the Caribbean. An earlier writer foregrounding his island of origin while navigating its connections to other locales was Aimé Césaire, who was speaking as someone who had gone from what is construed as the francophone periphery to the center, the metropole, before then going back to the assumed periphery. Césaire strove to center Martinique; he did so within the context of *négritude*, which located the roots of Caribbean identity in Africa. Édouard Glissant's *antillanité*, meanwhile, stressed what is different (“divers”) about West Indian identity, making the argument that, having been shaped by so many different cultures, it cannot now be subsumed by any one of them.

⁸² Braziel quotes these sentences in both English and French in her article.

Laferrière's project differs from both approaches. Haiti was the first black republic to become independent in 1804. In a way, Laferrière has two centers to contend with. One is the French language, as that is the language in which he writes his novels. But he also uses his work to place Haiti in America, to expand the term of what "America" means, to loosen the U.S.'s claim on the word. The particular American position of Laferrière's work, which may be called either "archipelagic" or "hemispheric," makes it apt for being studied alongside the other writers in my corpus in two ways. One is that it functions as an alternative to the concept of *antillanité*. Although *antillanité* has been thought of as "distancing [itself] from the hexagonal center" (Constant et al. 7),⁸³ the fact that Laferrière repeatedly calls himself American rather than *antillais* is a further move away from the metropolitan, former colonial center of France, which remains one of the reference points for the concept of *antillanité*. Additionally, his focus on the hemisphere means it is highly productive to study his work alongside Caribbean, and more specifically Caribbean diasporic, writers from other islands and other national and linguistic backgrounds. While francophone writers are usually studied either under the banner of *antillanité* or under the banner of *francophonie*, Laferrière can thus be studied through an archipelagic lens along with diasporic Caribbean writers who write in English. Whereas France is the reference point for *antillanité*, America itself, with all its islands and nations, is the reference point for the hemispheric and archipelagic.

The title, in emphasizing the act of return, makes reference to two canonical works of Caribbean literature – Aimé Césaire's 1939 book-length poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to my Native Land*) and V. S. Naipaul's 1987 novel *The Enigma of Arrival*.⁸⁴ Both of those works of literature are partly autobiographical: In his *Cahier*, Césaire conjures returning to his native island of Martinique after spending many years living in France, and mixes verse and prose to portray this experience and to explore his relationship to Martinique as well as the continuing colonial status of the island. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Trinidadian Naipaul writes from the point of view of someone who has left Trinidad and Tobago and has settled down first in the U.S. and then in the UK. Alluding to both works in the title firmly embeds Laferrière's novel within the field of Caribbean literature. In doing so, he also alludes to the movement of *négritude*, of which Césaire's

⁸³ Similarly to Lazo, she argues that the way "*Antillanité* brings together the people of the archipelago" is by focusing in on one specific topic (Constant et al. 10).

⁸⁴ Gabrielle Parker agrees with me on those two points but adds another reference for the novel's title: Giorgio de Chirico's painting "The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon" (cf. 33).

poem is one of the most influential examples. In addition, the field of Caribbean literature opened up by these references crosses several borders – the boundaries of language, since Césaire writes in French and Naipaul writes in English; the borders between different islands and nation states; the borders between sovereign nations (Trinidad and Tobago) and islands which continue to be subject to European colonial rule (Martinique). Moreover, both Césaire and Naipaul direct their attention to the place they are from, and do so very critically, navigating a profound ambiguity about their respective places of origin. However, Césaire focuses on return and Naipaul on arrival: for Césaire, it is returning to Martinique which brings up old emotions and new political convictions, and which makes a new relationship to the island possible; for Naipaul, it is the act of attempting to arrive at other places that changes his relationship to Trinidad. In giving his novel this title, Laferrière therefore not only marks his book as belonging to the pluricentric, multifocal field of Caribbean literature, but also speaks to the tension between arrival and return, between looking at one's (former) country from the outside, looking at it from within, and looking out from it to other points of departure and arrival, such as Canada. While both works are clearly alluded to in the title, it is Césaire's *Cahier* that Laferrière's novel particularly speaks to and which is mentioned in the text itself.

3.3.2 Interruptions and Continuity: Mobility of Form and Genre-Switching

Scholarship on *L'Énigme du retour* has focused on the novel's navigation of memory, nostalgia, return, and Haiti; little attention has been paid to the question of genre posed by the novel. The verse novel itself is by no means new – in *A Genealogy of the Verse Novel*, Catherine Addison argues that the verse novel is often, but not always, written in English (2-3) and traces the genre back to works such as Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1833) and Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-1824). While she argues that "William Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida* [...] may in fact represent the first attempt at a verse novel in English" (2), her placing Chamberlayne next to Pushkin reminds us that the verse novel has existed in different historical, geographical, and linguistic contexts. Among the requirements for a work in verse to be classified as a novel, Addison lists "substantial length, contemporaneity, verisimilitude, dialogism, characters possessing at least a modicum of interiority, a reasonably unified plot and a fictional world containing a redundancy of mundane objects" (7). Addison goes beyond her analysis of verse novels to argue that "form has meaning, or—to put it less radically [...]—form is always

implicated in the semantics of a literary text” (8). The form in *L'Énigme du Retour* is mobile in several of the ways Ian Davidson describes: there is automotive mobility, a jumping between genres and between subject positions, and a complex relationship to time. While Laferrière does not make use of the three-period ellipsis discussed by Davidson as a hallmark of a mobile text,⁸⁵ he does create two other kinds of ellipsis in the novel: Firstly, through the switching between two different genres (between which there is a gap for the reader to fill, cross, or otherwise contend with) and through the verse itself, which is a genre filled with gaps. What joins these different kinds of textual mobility together is that mobility, both for Davidson and in *L'Énigme du retour*, is closely related to a kind of openness – “[m]obility works with notions of endless circulation, rather than a journey that has a sense of completion” (Davidson 550). While Davidson’s phrasing serves as a common denominator to tie together the vastly different texts he considers in his analysis, there are two very concrete ways in which this open-ended journey plays out in *L'Énigme*: By depicting an open-ended journey from Canada to Haiti and then around Haiti, and by switching between genres.

Laferrière’s destabilizing of “America” is linked to what he does with genre in *L'Énigme du retour*. He decenters and multiplies what a “novel,” or a book akin to a novel, is: It is not just prose but also verse, and it fluctuates between the two, never quite settling on either one. While this can be read as a kind of fragmentation, as the novel is split into visibly different parts in prose and verse, it also opens up the possibility for mobility between them, thereby making the novel into a kind of archipelago. There is a tension here – while the parts written in verse and those written in prose are clearly delineated, they make up one and the same story and share the same thematic concerns. This creates two poles between which the story moves. Caroline Levine describes forms as “patternings, shapes, and arrangements” (13); the form of *L'Énigme*, then, is one in which prose and verse are arranged on the page and generating their own patternings.

This switching between prose and verse can be seen as a form of generic code-switching. By lifting the term “switching” from code-switching and applying it to genre-switching, I aim to put this analysis in dialogue with work done on code-switching, and to carve out that genre-switching affords possibilities related to those of code-switching. Switching from one language to another can, among other functions, be seen as a way of

⁸⁵ Unlike Bonnie Bremser, whose novel *For the Love of Ray* Davidson uses as an example.

saying something not quite expressible in the other language. Similarly, Laferrière uses the switching between prose and verse in order to approach a theme from a different angle, going from a space of straightforward narration to one of doubt and contemplation.

There is some blank space whenever the text switches from prose to verse or vice versa. Similar to the fleurons between the main text and the vignettes in Danticat's "New York Day Women," which I will analyze in chapter 4, the blank spaces between prose and verse both serve as interruptions and to create continuity. Much like the sea, in an archipelagic reading of America, is not just empty space but itself a highly meaningful site, the blank space on the page is infused with meaning.⁸⁶ One of the key theories in comics studies is the idea that the reader, in traveling across the empty space between the panels (the gutter) is assembling the story, a process known as closure. Similarly, in both Danticat's story and Laferrière's novel, the reader travels across the empty (or flower-filled) space and assembles the pieces. Throughout this act of assembling, the text, however, remains archipelagic, in that its splintered layout on the page serves to highlight connections between the fragments while rendering the space between them as meaningful. Grenouilleau-Loescher reads the novel through Glissantian relationality and highlights the role of the reader within this dynamic: "The reader, for her part, is tasked to navigate those points of impact actively, so as make meaning in their interstitial spaces" (171). As much as the different parts of the American archipelago resist being subsumed under one banner, the parts of the text, although gathered together by the reader, resist being subsumed into one whole.

In addition to this overarching function of genre-switching, it also serves more specific functions in the text. One of these is that genre-switching signals a switch from a straightforward narrative to a state of contemplation. This is the case when Windsor and his uncle go to the bank in an attempt to retrieve the suitcase which Windsor's late father had left there.

J'ai donc remis la valise dans le coffre-fort. Et l'employé a fermé le grand coffre de la Chase Manhattan Bank derrière nous.

Mes oncles comme hébétés
devant la porte d'acier.
Et moi plutôt léger
de n'avoir pas à porter un tel poids.

⁸⁶ Interestingly, Grenouilleau-Loescher argues that Windsor himself (whom she refers to as Dany) is "the tepid intermediary sea" (168) between the concepts, such as North and South, that the novel draws on, thereby likening Windsor to an archipelagic space.

La valise des rêves avortés.

(*L'Énigme* 68)

I slip the suitcase back into the safety deposit box. The employee closes the great vault of the Chase Manhattan Bank behind us.

My uncle stands in disbelief
in front of the iron door.
I feel light
not having to carry such weight.
The suitcase of aborted dreams.

(*Enigma* 48)

Windsor here observes and contemplates his uncle; by staging a kind of dialogue, he is trying to move from his own consciousness toward that of his uncle.⁸⁷ The opening up of the prose narrative to verse highlights this attempt at inter-subjective mobility as the narrator, in the verse, is aiming for a view which is not just more expansive and open but also more aware of other people and their potential inner lives. The uncle, who remains vague in the prose, gets much more defined here; through the description of him standing “in disbelief,” he comes into view.

The genre-switching in the novel, then, keeps the narrative in a state of archipelagicity in which, rather than positing a unity, different fragments are seen to be connected. It also entangles the reader in the imaginative mobilities of traveling across these genres and spaces, as the reader traverses both the differences of these two genres and the literal space between them on the page. Additionally, genre-switching is a vehicle for Windsor’s imaginative mobilities, as he takes his current circumstances—such as running an errand at the bank—and uses them as jumping-off points, imagining how the people around him might be feeling. In some instances, he then makes room for ambiguity and doubt on their part; in others, he carves out this space for himself. These are instances of imaginative mobilities not just because Windsor is mobile in his thinking, going from a place of facts and superficiality to one that is vaguer and more open. Instead, these are instances of imaginative mobilities for the additional reason that these openings and mobilities of thought take place in the context of a journey around his home island; they are part of the journey and part of how Windsor relates to Haiti. Imaginative mobilities are not just entangled with corporeal mobilities in the sense that traveling around a

⁸⁷ In Danticat’s “New York Day Women,” the switching between the main narration and the vignettes does likewise. This dialogue, while playing out both for the daughter in the story and for the reader, does not reach the mother, who remains unaware of it.

certain place may go hand in hand, or jostle up against, imaginative mobilities around that very place (or to other places). Instead, imaginatively engaging with a place can also take the form of allowing your imagination to unfold while dwelling in a certain locale, as Windsor is doing at that moment.

One other way this plays out is by creating room for doubt. When Windsor is thinking about his father, the text says,

La douleur de vivre loin des siens lui était devenue si intolérable qu'il a dû effacer son passé de sa Mémoire.

Je me demande
quand a-t-il su
qu'il ne retournerait
plus jamais en Haïti
et qu'a-t-il senti exactement
à ce moment-là?

(*L'Énigme* 64)

The pain of living far from his family had become so intolerable he had to erase the past from his memory.

I wonder
when he knew
he would never
return to Haiti
and what exactly he felt
at that moment.

(*Enigma* 45)

Here, the narrator first makes a statement about Windsor's father in a descriptive, matter-of-fact tone before switching to verse. The verse adopts a different tone entirely, going from stating an alleged fact to a state of enquiry. It opens up what was said in the prose to doubt, ambiguity, uncertainty, and open-endedness. The part in verse is made inquisitive not just by the word "demande"/"wonder," but by emotionally laden words like "jamais"/"never" and "exactement"/"exactly." Additionally, the switching between genres is not unidirectional, with the shut-and-dried prose giving way to verse. Instead, the switch is multidirectional, as the verse makes the preceding prose appear in a new light and enables the reader to see it differently. The reader may take Windsor's word for it when he matter-of-factly states that the father had to erase his past from his memory, but the verse invites her to reconsider.

The switching from prose to verse can therefore be seen as a turning to archipelagicity, as the switching means that the novel consists of fragments, fragments

which, though they cannot be subsumed into a whole, are in dialogue with one another and entangled. The switching can also be seen as a turning to archipelagicity on the part of Windsor, as he is, in those moments, thinking about how he relates to Haiti: he zooms out from his own experience and starts to contemplate those around him, the people with whom he shares a “diaspora space” (Brah 209).

3.3.3 “Une étrange apparition”: Language in *L'Énigme du retour*

While the form of the novel is in a state of flux throughout, the novel’s mobilities play out differently when it comes to language. There are two obvious ways in which language figures in Laferrière’s book – there is the language in which the book is written and there is Windsor’s navigation of language within the book. Mobility plays out, for some writers, on the level of code-switching between different languages and registers: Junot Díaz writes in an energetic mix of Spanish and English, often leaving the Spanish untranslated; Edwidge Danticat occasionally uses words and phrases in Haitian Kreyòl in her work, but often adds their English translation. Laferrière, meanwhile, writes in what appears to be standard French. Indeed, he is so firmly established in French literature that he has been included in the *Académie Française*. Jane Hiddleston has made the argument that although

the writing of return and of the ongoing journey for Césaire and Laferrière ostensibly takes place in French, it also dissociates return from any notion of an originary mother tongue and generates an eclectic linguistic experimentation that stretches the apparently monolingual frame of the French language. (181-182)

It is, however, *within* the French language that Laferrière stretches it, as he uses no Kreyòl in this novel. Writing about Laferrière and Césaire, Hiddleston states that both writers are “sceptical of figuring Creole as the language of return, and include only passing references to Creole language and lexicon, preferring to position their creative work outside national and cultural frontiers” (195). Windsor does, however, encounter Kreyòl. In one significant scene, he meets a group of Haitian school children. They look at him like he is “une étrange apparition” (*L'Énigme* 183); “a strange apparition” (*Enigma* 147); by speaking Kreyòl, he wants to show them that he is not strange, and not a stranger, but that he, too, is Haitian. It does not work and he remains “hors jeu,” “at a distance.”

De jeunes enfants nus du quartier
sont venus m’entourer
comme si j’étais une étrange apparition.
J’ai beau leur parler en créole rien n’y fit.
Leur étonnement me met hors jeu.

C'est là que j'ai compris
 qu'il ne suffit pas de parler créole
 pour se métamorphoser en Haïtien.
 En fait c'est un trop vaste vocable
 qui ne s'applique pas dans la réalité.
 On ne peut être haïtien que d'hors d'Haïti.

(*L'Énigme* 183)

Naked children from nearby streets
 come and encircle me
 as if I were a strange apparition.
 I speak to them in Creole but that doesn't work.
 Their astonishment keeps me at a distance.

That's when I understand
 that speaking Creole is not enough
 to become a Haitian.
 In fact it's too vast a name
 to apply to real life.
 You can be Haitian only outside of Haiti.

(*Enigma* 147)

By saying that he is speaking Kreyòl without including Kreyòl words or phrases in the text, Laferrière is placing Kreyòl off-center, outside the reach of the narrative. It thus becomes both unreachable and lacking in consequence – we are told of it but cannot see it, just as Windsor speaking the language does not bring him closer to the children or make him seem like less of a foreigner to them. It is not just Windsor but also Kreyòl which can be described as “une étrange apparition”/“a strange apparition” here. Using the language of exile, Lucy Brisley argues that, in this episode, “[l]anguage becomes a barrier rather than a tool of communication, and he finds himself doubly exiled, both in his adoptive country and on his return to the fatherland” (49). While “exile,” in this case, should not be seen as a fixed category, Brisley is right in pointing out that this is, in a sense, an instance of failed linguistic mobility. In this moment of immobility, Windsor’s mobility from French to Kreyòl does not lead to the desired mobility between his status as a native and a foreigner; he remains stuck in the latter category in the eyes of the children. Despite this failure, however, this interaction is also an act of turning, as Windsor, who often seems to view himself as more of a traveler than a diasporic, here turns to diaspora by speaking the language of his youth and by striving to not seem like a stranger in his ancestral place. This moment of turning to diasporicity destabilizes the dichotomy between the diasporic and the autochthonous subject, between a history of movement and one of fixity. Scholarship in mobility studies has long wrestled with the fact that travel presupposes

not just the traveler but also someone who does not travel;⁸⁸ this holds true for diaspora. Implicated in the processes and practices of diaspora are not just those who are part of the diasporic community but also those they come in contact with, those who have stayed or remigrated. As Noel Salazar writes, “[e]ven those who do not move are affected by movements of people in or out of their communities” (772). Not only are they affected by the mobilities around them, but they also perpetuate the Haiti that the diasporic subject tries to engage with. Where Herlihy-Mera insists on focusing not on groups, but on individual agency, it here becomes possible to observe that group affiliations can indeed be very meaningful: Windsor, part of the group which has left Haiti, needs the cooperation of people from the group which has stayed in order to imbue his renewed engagement with the country with meaning. In fact, both groups inhabit the same space. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah argues “that diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’, not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (209). As two different groups of inhabitants of this diasporic space encounter one another in the scene between Windsor and the children, the distance between them is rendered so vast as to not be easily bridged.

3.3.4 “Une présence concrète”: Mobility and the Body

It is not just in relationships to others, but also within the individual that *L'Énigme du retour* stages im/mobilities as well as the ways they can clash and intersect. In *L'Énigme du retour*, the cold is a recurring motif, as Windsor reflects on the Canadian cold from the vantage point of Haiti. The cold has such a pronounced and prolonged presence that it leads to a kind of mobility within Windsor's body. He describes this in the following way:

Mon corps subissant un processus d'adaptation hors de ma volonté. Je ne maîtrise plus rien. Toutes ces choses que j'avais évacuées de mon esprit là-bas pour éviter d'être ligoté par la nostalgie ont une présence concrète ici. Elles s'étaient réfugiées dans mon corps où le froid les avait gelées.

(*L'Énigme* 143)

My body is suffering an adaptation process that's beyond my will. I am the master of nothing. Everything I banished from my mind back there in order to live

⁸⁸ As Sheller writes in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*: “A key argument in this chapter (building on the theoretical work of Sara Ahmed) was that the mobilities of some things and people require the immobility of others. The very technologies (both material and social) which enable the mobility of those in positions of privilege also fix in place locations of disadvantage” (201).

without the bonds of nostalgia has a concrete presence here. Those things sought refuge in my body where the cold froze them in place.

(*Enigma* 113)

He describes how a bodily change has been set in motion by the changed climate; by moving from the Haitian heat to the Canadian cold, adapting to the cold, and now finding himself back in the Haitian heat. Although Adams is not quite convinced by Laferrière's "rather clichéd reference to Canada's coldness and whiteness" (319), this is a destabilizing change, one over which the narrator has no control but which colors his relationship to his surroundings. There are several things at play here – an interplay between the body and the mind, as well as one between the body and the environment. What seems to link both of those pairs is nostalgia. According to the above passage, Windsor has "banished from [his] mind" Haitian realities in order to live a life free from nostalgia; by banishing them from his mind, however, they instead seem to have lodged themselves in his body, migrating from the mental to the physical realm in what is itself an act of mobility and metamorphosis. In a second step, after Windsor found refuge in his body, Haiti was frozen in place inside him by the Canadian cold. By trying to evade nostalgia, he was thus no less enmeshed with Haiti in his Canadian life. But while nostalgia might have been part of a productive engagement with Haiti and with his past there, the willful absence of nostalgia leads to Haiti being physically present in his body in a way that is both outside of his control and unpleasant. Now that Windsor is back in Haiti, the country is present on a second, physical plane: in his body and outside of it, surrounding him. What I want to focus on here is twofold: Firstly, how Haiti traveled from Windsor's mind to his body, and secondly, how nostalgia, or the lack of it, informs the way Windsor relates to his Haitian surroundings.

In describing that Windsor's memories of Haiti "sought refuge in [his] body" (*Enigma* 113), Laferrière is using the language of involuntary mobility – his memories of Haiti were "banished" from his mind the way individuals or populations can be banished; these memories then "sought refuge" much like banished persons need to seek refuge elsewhere. Windsor thus performs a two-step process: In the first step, the history of physical, geographical mobility tying him to Haiti and Canada is translated into the realm of his mind and his body. In other parts of this dissertation, I have attempted to show ways in which mobilities are perpetuated through ongoing imaginative mobilities which are often consciously chosen and may involve commemoration; I am also studying cases of

characters disengaging from such imaginative processes in order to increase the distance between themselves and their country of origin (cf. my analysis of Kincaid's *Lucy* in chapter 2 of this dissertation). Here, Windsor is not saying that he needed to "banish" his memories in order to increase the distance to Haiti; that, in his view, happened when he left the island. What he wants to escape is not Haiti but nostalgia. Instead, however, the memories lodge themselves in his body. This migration from the mind to the body can therefore be seen as a first instance of mobility. In a second step, he is equating *this* migration—the memories' migration from his mind to his body, not his own migration from Haiti to Canada—to people and populations fleeing, being banished, and seeking refuge. That it is imaginative mobility, not geographical mobility, which Windsor here links to forced mobility, speaks to his ability to travel with relative ease, an ease and agency he lacks in determining his mind's movements.

This points to how imaginative im/mobilities are not necessarily freely chosen. Some critics of mobility studies have argued that the term "mobility" may sound too celebratory; according to Noel B. Salazar and Alan Smart, "mobility generally evokes a positive valence" (ii). They push back against such a romantic view of mobility:

Despite overly general celebration and romanticization, the ability to move (sometimes termed *motility*) is spread very unevenly within societies and across the planet. The world may be full of mobilities and complex interconnections; there are also huge numbers of people whose experience is marginal or excluded from these movements and links. (Salazar and Smart iv; emphasis in the original)

Similar assumptions could accompany the term "imaginative mobilities," since it marries "mobilities," which is itself read positively by some, to "imaginative," which hints at something done not only voluntarily, but maybe even indulged in, in a vein similar to daydreaming. It is not always the case, however, that the narrator, protagonist, or character (or indeed an actual individual) partakes of imaginative mobilities at will. As is so often the case with im/mobilities, a variety of factors are at play here, some hindering and some fostering movement. In a spatial im/mobility process, border regimes may simultaneously have both of those effects; in an imaginative progress, someone's lived experience might make some mobilities thinkable but not others.

While Windsor's unwillingness to engage with Haiti through nostalgia is a conscious act, the migration of his memories to his body happens unbeknownst to him; he is able to see it as a migration, it seems, only in retrospect. What might it mean for his memories to have "moved" to his body, and now to reside there? Mobilities, as multiple

scholars have pointed out, are often embodied (cf. Sheller and Urry; Merriman). In order to do this justice and to not disregard the physical, embodied nature of mobility, some scholars have suggested employing “mobile methods” such as walking alongside the participants one studies (cf. Sheller and Urry).⁸⁹ I argue that referring to the body achieves several things here: Firstly, it draws on Windsor’s physical experience of leaving Haiti for Canada. It is his body that undertook this journey, and his body which is now seen to experience not only a repercussion but also a reversal: while Windsor’s body traveled from Haiti to Canada, he now feels it to be “traveling” back to Haiti despite physically remaining in Canada. Secondly, by referring to his body, Windsor is describing something which, although an intrinsic part of him, is also, in a way, beyond his grasp: He can try to order the thoughts in his head; he cannot keep them from being absorbed by his body. Thirdly, he describes his body as a kind of repository, a suitcase: His body is where he carries Haiti around, as that is where his memories have lodged.

3.3.5 “Dans les couloirs de temps”: Mobile Time and Space

In addition to Windsor’s mind and body being mobile in the novel, time and space are mobile, too. The text portrays time and space as entangled, with a movement in one being experienced as a movement in the other. Additionally, some of the spaces evoked in *L’Énigme du retour* are seen as particularly generative of mobilities. The fact that Windsor is staying at a hotel is one of the factors which marks him out as different and foreign. Céline Barrère teases out the significance of hotels in literary works such as Laferrière’s, writing that

[t]hrough these narratives of displacements, the hotels become ‘places of cultures’ establishing a ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ that subverts the traditional system of binary relationships between cultures of the North and the South, between former colonial powers and their former colonies. [...] Therefore, the hotels embody a kind of battlefield of migrant identity: a ‘hybrid area’ within the meaning of Patrick Chamoiseau, that is to say a center of resistance, transfer, and compensation where identities are redesigned. (Barrère 111-112)

Indeed, in other Haitian works of literature, too, hotels are often informed with a specific meaning. In Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker*, a hotel offers refuge from the mayhem in the streets after Baby Doc flees the country; at the same, the safety of hotels is portrayed as highly tenuous. The Hotel Montana, where Windsor stays, is also specifically

⁸⁹ Sheller and Urry are here drawing on J. Morris’ unpublished PhD thesis *Locals and Experts: The New Conservation Paradigm in the MANUBiosphere Reserve, Peru and the Yorkshire Dales National Park, England*.

mentioned in Roxane Gay's "A Cool Dry Place" in her collection *Ayiti*, where "a red-faced American tourist" (156) aggressively asks the Haitian narrator for directions to the hotel. In *L'Énigme du retour*, the hotel serves as a comparably neutral perch – from there, Windsor can observe life in Port-au-Prince while still having the option of retreating from it. From this perch, he can choose when, if, and how he wants to be mobile, which is a marker of extreme privilege. At the same time, the setting of the hotel gestures toward tourist mobilities in the Caribbean. Although the cruise ship arguably figures more prominently than the hotel in tourists' Caribbean imaginary, hotels have profound implications not only for tourists, but also for locals. Some hotel resorts are built in such a way as to make it nearly impossible for locals to access the beach or to freely move around the island. As such, they are part of a process encompassing "the unanticipated mutations in Caribbean spatialities that twenty-first century development is producing" (Sheller, "Virtual Islands" 16). According to Clifford, too, hotels are linked to a particular kind of travel. He writes,

the hotel epitomizes a specific *way into* complex histories of traveling cultures (and cultures of travel) in the late twentieth century. [...] The hotel image suggests an older form of gentlemanly occidental travel, when home and abroad, city and country, East and West, metropole and antipodes, were more clearly fixed. (31; emphasis in the original)

The position of the hotel offers Windsor just such a way of standing apart. This point-of-view marks his difference from the Haitians he is observing, and "by using the hotel window/balcony to frame his narration he foregrounds his sense of disquiet" (Ravi 299). At times, Windsor is observing other's actions and rhythms much like the daughter in "New York Day Women." From the hotel, Windsor observes a little girl fetching water:

Je la suis avec une longue-vue prêtée par la propriétaire de l'hôtel. Elle grimpe la montagne comme une petite chèvre avec un bidon en plastique sur la tête et un autre dans la main droite. [...] La revoilà. (*L'Énigme* 78)

I follow her with the binoculars the hotel owner lent me. She climbs the mountainside like a young goat, with a plastic bucket on her head and another one in her right hand. [...] There she is again. (*Enigma* 58)

Grenouilleau-Loescher argues that staying at a hotel offers Windsor a chance to "remain[...] outside of the comings and goings around him" (164) and that "it separates him both from his family and from the hustle and bustle of Port-au-Prince" (165).⁹⁰ I argue

⁹⁰ Throughout her paper, Grenouilleau-Loescher refers to the novel's narrator as Dany. It is my understanding, however, that he is called Windsor.

that standing apart not only offers Windsor a chance to view his surroundings, but also, in a second step, a chance to reach out to them through his attention.

However, this freedom to view his surroundings, and to view them in this fashion, is not just allowed Windsor by this perch, but also by his masculinity. Laferrière's novel is written firmly in a male voice, and, along with the above description of a girl as "une petite chèvre"/"a young goat," there are several instances of jarringly casual sexism, as in the lines, "Le rire de ces beautés d'un soir / dans la nuit parfumée / permettra à ce jeune tigre en chasse / de les repérer aisément. / Et d'en choisir une / qu'il ramènera à sa tanière / pour la dévorer en toute quietude" (*L'Énigme* 168); "[t]he laughter of these one-night beauties / in the perfumed night / lets the young tiger on the prowl / locate them easily. / Then choose one, / bring her back to his lair / and devour her at his leisure" (*Enigma* 134). In writing about this novel, it is by no means my goal to endorse this outlook. It is nonetheless my view that there are some tendencies *within* the novel that counteract its own sexism. *L'Énigme du Retour* is, among other things, about the attempt to open one's gaze in order to imagine others, as Windsor encounters characters and wonders what might be going through their heads. Instead of painting a full picture of the uncle's mental processes, for example, Windsor instead lets the uncle's thoughts unfold in the gaps and interstices in the text. When it comes to women, one sees how Laferrière comes up against the limits of that attempt. Ideally, the space which characters like Windsor's uncle are afforded is a space that the reader, countering Laferrière, can afford to the women mentioned. While Laferrière and Windsor stop at marveling at the young girl's "goat"-like physical ease, glossing over her inner life, the reader, after noting how different this scene is from Laferrière's treatment of some male characters, can choose to afford the girl a similar inner life, contrary to the text. Additionally, in a novel chiefly concerned with mobilities, some of Laferrière's sexist writing can be instructive in making visible other mobility- and gender-related gaps in the text. While the above lines about the tiger choosing a beauty describe a sexually predatory scene, they also describe a scene in which the tiger (who is coded as male in these lines) is on the move—on the prowl—while the young women seem to be static until the young tiger picks one of them up and "bring[s] her back to his lair." That is, the man is moving, and women are moved. In other parts of the novel, the fact that men are afforded more mobility than women might have been easily missed; here, it becomes overt. These blatantly sexist lines, then, can sharpen the

reader's gaze for more subtle moments of misogyny in the book. It is thus my hope that *L'Énigme* can be read productively despite, and even with, its instances of sexism.

Time can produce its own murkiness, as it is ambivalently entangled with im/mobilities. "Entre le voyage et le retour / se trouve coincé / ce temps pourri / qui peut pousser à la folie" (*L'Énigme* 26); "[b]etween the journey and the return, / stuck in the middle, / this rotten time / can lead to madness" (*Enigma* 15). Here, the narrator prizes both the journey and the return. Not only is Windsor mobile on this journey, but the return itself is also mobile since it encompasses the spatial and imaginative mobilities which we see play out once he is in Haiti. What he cannot stand is the immobile period of fixity in between. What's striking here is the way Laferrière links time and space – he describes the time in between the journey and the return as a no-man's land, thereby conceiving of time as spatial, as geographic, and as akin to land. On the one hand, this metaphor points to the ways time and space have often been conceived of as entangled. In much Western scholarship and thought up until the spatial turn, time was given preference, and human life mapped as taking place along an axis of time. It is this privileging of time over space which the spatial turn aimed to turn on its head (cf. Soja). Here, Laferrière is taking a related approach: He is describing time through spatial terms. There is an additional layer to this temporal mobility. Usually, it is time that makes something rot, as food left outside will start to go bad. Here it is time itself that rots. It is the fact that it is "stuck in the middle" between the journey and the return that means that time is rotten. This is the no-man's land where Laferrière's narrator feels significantly less comfortable than in more charted parts of the journey.

Time itself is seen to be on the move. "Le temps file à une si folle vitesse / qu'elle fait de ma vie un magma de couleurs" (*L'Énigme* 51); "[t]ime moves at speeds so maddening / it has turned my life to a blur of colors" (*Enigma* 37). In other passages, time is not moving but is instead the thing through which one moves:

Je regarde mon pauvre corps couché
sur ce lit d'hôtel en sachant
que mon esprit vagabonde
dans les couloirs de temps (*L'Énigme* 94).

I look at my poor body lying
on this hotel bed knowing
that my mind is wandering
down the passages of time. (*Enigma* 70)

Physical and imaginative mobilities are entangled in several ways here. Firstly, Windsor juxtaposes his physical stasis—his body lying—to the mobilities, the wandering, of his mind. Secondly, the body is not just lying but is lying on a hotel bed, with all that a hotel implies in this text – itself a place of some mobility, as people come to stay for a while and then leave. His body, then, is not as immobile as he makes it out here. Thirdly, by calling his body “poor” in this stanza, Windsor is further valorizing mobility, framing his body as not mobile enough. Finally, this episode of mobility is focused on time, as Windsor describes moving “down the passages of time” as one would a hotel corridor. While at first glance he juxtaposes relative spatial immobility with commemorative mobilities, with a mind that travels into the past, the situation is more entangled than that, as his body is itself in a mobile place and as time itself is imagined in spatial terms.

The entangled relationship between time and space also means that mobility across time can superimpose itself onto what is intended as mobility across space. This is what happens when Windsor describes how close to the surface his childhood is:

Déjà l'enfance derrière les paupières closes.
Je flâne sous le soleil tropical
mais il est froid comme la mort.

(L'Énigme 19)

Childhood wells up behind closed eyelids.
I wander beneath the tropical sun
but it is cold as death.

(Enigma 8)

Windsor, walking under the hot Haitian sun, wants to enjoy the sun. Through his walking around Haiti, he is trying to grasp the Haiti of the present moment, the Haiti that surrounds him. He does not succeed: instead, being in Haiti brings up memories of his childhood, and these childhood memories get superimposed onto what he is trying to experience. Not only does the past of his childhood here displace the present, but it interferes with his sense of the presence even more drastically: time not only tips backward but also forward, toward his death. On the simplest level, this points to the way being back in Haiti jumbles Windsor's senses, interfering with Windsor's rootedness at a particular point in time. His mobility to Haiti, and movements around Haiti, lead to a new temporal mobility, one in which both time and space and the past, the future, and the present, are entangled. Additionally, the word “cold” here puts the reader in mind of the way Windsor usually describes Montréal; it can, indeed, be seen as an intrusion of

Montréal into this moment. This sense only lasts, however, for as long as the reader does not think about the fact that Montréal and Port-au-Prince were never separate for Windsor to begin with. Thinking about the two cities at a later point in the novel, Windsor sees these cities as encapsulating life:

Je n'ai qu'à faire circuler la rumeur
que je suis retourné vivre là-bas
sans préciser de quel là-bas il s'agit
afin qu'à Montréal on puisse croire
que je suis à Port-au-Prince
tandis qu'à Port-au-Prince on suit sûr que
je suis encore à Montréal.
La mort serait de n'être plus
dans aucune de ces deux villes.

(*L'Énigme* 124)

All I need is to start the rumor
that I've returned to live there
without saying which there it is
and in Montreal people will believe
I'm in Port-au-Prince
and in Port-au-Prince they'll be sure
I'm still in Montreal.
Death would mean not being
In either of those cities.

(*Enigma* 97)

Here Windsor unsettles the meaning of the word “there,” taking it to be able to mean both Montréal and Port-au-Prince. He imagines his acquaintances in Montréal and Port-au-Prince taking “there” to mean the other place, the other city, but he shows such differentiations to be a fiction. Instead, Montréal and Port-au-Prince seem profoundly entangled here; one exists as long as the other one exists; and Windsor is alive as long as he is in either city. While Windsor here equates being alive with being in one of these two cities, he also equates life with movement. When he is on his road trip around the country, he thinks, “On ne meurt pas tant qu'on bouge” (*L'Énigme* 224); “[w]e won't die as long as we're moving” (*Enigma* 182). Basing the very idea of being alive on Montréal and Port-au-Prince might be read as a kind of boundedness, limiting life to just two places in the world. However, being in one of the two cities is, in fact, a way of being mobile for Windsor, as Montréal and Port-au-Prince are themselves in a mobile, entangled web of meaning, and as he travels between them. It is this mobility between the two cities that Windsor equates with life.

The passage of time is also implicated in the absence and presence of memories, as being in Haiti confronts Windsor with a pronounced lack of memories. He encounters many people who recognize him and want him to recognize them in turn.

Je suis seul au milieu de huit millions de gens coincés sur une moitié d'île avec des traits de parenté et de caractère communs qui veulent tous que je les reconnaisse (*L'Énigme* 146).

I'm alone in the middle of eight million people with shared family and personality traits jammed onto half an island, and they all want me to recognize them (*Enigma* 115).

This renders his imaginative mobilities more complex and entangled. Returning to Haiti is here not a way to reactivate or recover memories but may make their lack all the more palpable. While this lack of memories arguably points to the limits of the remembering self, the novel also points to the limits of a communal identity. Windsor muses, "C'est peut-être cela un pays : / tu crois connaître tout le monde / et tout le monde semble te connaître" (*L'Énigme* 157); "[m]aybe that's what a country is: / you think you know everyone / and everyone seems to know you" (*Enigma* 125). This idea is reminiscent of the adage "Ma says all Haitians know each other" featured in Danticat's short story "Caroline's Wedding" (149).⁹¹ The two phrases, however, function differently. In Danticat, the phrase is linked to the way a Haitian congregation imagines, and remembers, people who died on a boat whom the congregation did not personally know. In Laferrière, the narrator is talking about the people Windsor encounters – the old friends and acquaintances who appear to recognize him. In both statements, expansiveness reaches its limit; the statement can't quite be believed by the characters. Danticat prefaces the phrase by "Ma says," while Laferrière signals uncertainty through "you think," both of which serve to distance the claim.

3.3.6 "Dormir dans une ville / pour se réveiller dans une autre": Imaginative Mobilities, Dreams, and Sleep

One additional way in which imaginative mobilities play out in *L'Énigme du retour* is through dreams. Firstly, dreams can be a relic of the country one has left; an unconscious way to hold on to it and continue to access it. Laferrière writes that, "Je tiens à ces rêves... C'est la seule chose qui me reste de ma vie d'avant..." (*L'Énigme* 117); "[b]ut I treasure those dreams. They're the only thing that's left of my life from before" (*Enigma* 92). Here,

⁹¹ Cf. chapter 4 for an analysis of this moment in the short story.

Windsor has divided his life into a before and after, and it is his dreams which allow him to reach across that rupture. Secondly, when dreaming of returning to the country one has left, the dream can provide a kind of anonymity, a chance to remain undetected by one's acquaintances, that would be impossible to find in waking life. Laferrière writes that, "J'ai dormi ainsi pendant une éternité. / C'était le seul moyen / pour rentrer incognito au pays / avec la vaste nouvelle" (*L'Énigme* 20); "I slept for an eternity. / That was the only way / to return incognito the country / with my momentous news" (*Enigma* 10). In real life, the only way Windsor can deliver the news of his father's death is by returning to Haiti as himself and making himself known to the people who knew his father. Here he thinks of dreams as a distancing mechanism, one that would allow him to deliver the news while disentangling himself from the telling. Furthermore, dreaming can not only serve to unconsciously disentangle oneself from one's physical reality by offering anonymity and cover, but they can also transport the dreamer somewhere new. This is the kind of dreams Windsor reflects on when he muses, "Une chute si douce. / Dormir dans une ville / pour se réveiller dans une autre" (*L'Énigme* 55); "[t]he surrender is so sweet. / To fall asleep in one city / and wake up in another" (*Enigma* 39). In this dream, even more so than in the other dreams quoted, dreaming constitutes a moment of mobility. This line seems to evoke vehicular mobilities such as night trains; even without a vehicle, however, Laferrière's narrator suggests that sleep, and dreaming, can be so transporting as to be reminiscent of physical, vehicular mobilities.

Evidently, there is a limit to the mobility afforded by dreams.⁹² His narrator bemoans: "Mais je continue à faire les mêmes rêves n'importe où dans le monde" (*L'Énigme* 117); "[b]ut I keep having the same dreams wherever I go" (*Enigma* 91). On one level, as with the memories that "sought refuge" in his body, this points to the limits and non-voluntariness of imaginative mobilities through dreams; the unconscious release offered by dreams is unable to override the rigid repetitiveness of this part of his imaginative life. But here, too, im/mobilities are entangled: while Windsor's dreams are fixed in their repetitiveness and he is unable to change them in the way he wishes, they are mobile in their portability. From place to place, the dreams remain the same, seemingly remaining untouched by a change in surroundings. In

⁹² In his poem "First Things at the Last Minute," Robert Hass writes, "Clean sheets are an example / Of something that, under many circumstances, / A person can control. The patterns moonlight makes / Are chancier, and dreams, well, dreams / Will have their way with you, their way / With you, will have their way" (Hass 76).

Uprootings/Regroundings, Sara Ahmed et al. complicate notions of fixity, arguing that one can be mobile even in a situation which looks, from the outside, to be static. Accordingly, they argue that “the greatest movements often occur within the self” (Ahmed et al. 5). Here, however, the reader sees the opposite situation play out. While Ahmed et al.’s distinction between the spatial and the mental realm, and between fixity and mobility, still holds, it is here the body which is mobile, and the mind which is not, thereby further complicating notions of the im/mobile self. While dreams do not lead to a sense of communication for Windsor,⁹³ they are part of how he makes sense of his relationship with the two countries that he feels make up his life: not merely in the sense that his dreams take him there (and, as is the case when they are repetitive, in a way keep him there), but in that he frames them as navigations of his multiple locations.

3.4 *Pays sans chapeau*: The Real and the Dreamed Country

Laferrière’s earlier novel from 1996, *Pays sans chapeau* (“Country without Hats”), which was never translated into English, shares many of the same thematic concerns. Here, too, Laferrière depicts a return to Haiti, as the narrator, Vieux Os (“Old Bones”⁹⁴) returns from Montréal to Haiti after a 20-year absence. The fact that he has been gone for twenty years is constantly repeated throughout the novel, as he cannot bring himself to believe that it has really been this long.⁹⁵ The novel narrates Vieux Os’s visit to his mother and his aunt, driving around Haiti and catching up with old friends. Though it mirrors *L’Énigme du retour* in these respects, *Pays* is different in some key ways. One is its method of fragmentation: While *L’Énigme* creates fragmentation by switching between prose and verse, the novel alternates between chapters called “Pays réel” (“Real country”) and “Pays rêvé” (“Dreamed country”). The chapters called “Pays réel” are further divided into short vignettes, which have names like “La valise” (“the suitcase”), “Le temps” (“time”) and “le taxi” (“the taxi”), each ranging in length from a few lines to several pages. Another difference is that while Kreyòl is mentioned in *L’Énigme* without actually featuring, here it is part of the text proper: underneath each of these repeated chapter headings is a

⁹³ In contradistinction to the effect dreams have in Danticat’s story “Caroline’s Wedding,” as I will discuss in chapter 4.

⁹⁴ Since the novel has not been translated into English, all translations are my own.

⁹⁵ Some examples of this are: „Mon premier repas à Port-au-Prince depuis vingt ans.” (26) (My first meal in Port-au-Prince in twenty years.) and “Moi qui viens de passer près de vingt ans dans le nord” (44) (Me who just spent nearly twenty years in the north).

proverb in Haitian Kreyòl along with its French translation. Additionally, zombies and death also play a prominent role in the text, as the disbelieving Vieux Os has many conversations with people who take it for granted that zombies exist in Haiti. Towards the end of the novel, Vieux Os even travels to the land of the dead, the “pays sans chapeau” of the title, before reemerging to the land of the living. In all three of these ways—by including Kreyòl, dividing the country into the real and the dreamed, and by placing death front and center—Laferrière can be said to be adding to the mobilities that are such a prominent theme of his work. The reader, in jumping between the heading *Pays rêvé* and the *Pays réel*, and between the proverb, its translation, and its placement in the novel, is navigating a mobile form.

One way in which the form is mobile is through the inclusion of Kreyòl. In *L'Énigme*, Windsor narrates trying to relate to some school children by speaking Kreyòl to them, but these Kreyòl words never appear in the text. While this means that Kreyòl has a presence through absence in that text, Laferrière creates a different kind of Kreyòl presence in *Pays sans chapeau*. In a note preceding the text, he explains that the proverbs were transcribed phonetically and translated literally. “De cette manière, leur sens restera toujours un peu secret” (8; “In this way, their meaning will always remain a little bit secret”). Laferrière is making the argument that it is through its very literality that a secret is being kept, as the literal meaning can never capture the meaning of the proverb. One example of such a proverb is “Pati pas di ou rivé pou ça.” / “Partir ne veut pas dire que tu es arrivé pour autant” (49; “Leaving nonetheless does not mean that you have arrived”). There are two immediate relationships going on here – one between the idea of departure and arrival in the proverb and another between the Kreyòl proverb and its translation. The proverb creates a surprising tension between departure and arrival. One is tempted to respond that *of course* leaving does not gesture at arrival, but this proverb claims, firstly, that such an assumption exists and, secondly, that it is incorrect. Just because one has left one place does not mean one has arrived anywhere else. In the case of Vieux Os, this could go in several directions – just because he left Port-au-Prince twenty years ago does not mean he has arrived in Montréal or anywhere else; just because he left Montréal does not mean he has arrived back in Haiti. The proverb breaks open the directedness of travel, instead opening up a vast space of limbo: one in which a departure has happened but not yet led anywhere, one foot having taken a step and the other foot hovering in mid-

air. In the Kreyòl of the proverb, this is an incredibly succinct idea consisting of just nine syllables. This in-between limbo space also plays out in Vieux Os's body.

3.4.1 "Toucher les choses différemment": Time, Mobility, and the Body

Similarly to *L'Énigme*, *Pays sans chapeau* creates a complicated interplay between time, mobility, and the body. Like Windsor, Vieux Os has to readjust his body to the temperature: "Cette chaleur finira par m'avoir. Mon corps a vécu trop longtemps dans le froid du nord" (34; "This heat will eventually get to me. My body has lived too long in the cold of the north"). Windsor almost objectifies his own body here, beholding it as if it was not his. This embodied alienation takes place on every level of the senses. In an attempt to reassure her, the neighbor tells Vieux Os's mother: "Il lui faut simplement réapprendre à respirer, à sentir, à voir, à toucher les choses différemment" (15; "He simply needs to relearn how to breathe, feel, see, touch things differently"), a seemingly comprehensive list of all the embodied processes Vieux Os needs to relearn. While this neighborly dictum frames the mobility of return as a profound rupture, a kind of regression which wipes the slate clean, mobility is elsewhere conflated with "staying," when Vieux Os makes the case: "Et je suis resté vingt ans en chemin" (19; "And I have stayed twenty years on the way"). The twenty years of Vieux Os' absence are here framed both as a time of incessant mobility and as a time of unchanging standstill. When his aunt asks him why he stayed away for so long, he blames time itself: "Pourquoi es-tu restée [sic] si longtemps sans revenir? Me demande-t-elle en me serrant fortement contre elle. C'est le temps qui a passé, tante Renée" (19; "Why did you stay for so long without coming back? She asks me, hugging me tightly. It is time that has passed, Aunt Renée"). Here, Vieux Os is abdicating all responsibility for his own hovering between departure and arrival, departure and return. Instead of explaining what kept him in Montréal for so long, he portrays himself as having stood still, while it was time that kept accumulating. Time, then, is framed as an active force in contradistinction to mobility's passiveness. In a different part of the novel, Vieux Os reflects on time's relationship to space, musing: "Le temps. Pas l'espace. L'espace est trop visible [...]. Le temps, lui, est invisible" (58; "Time. Not space. Space is too visible [...]. Time, though, is invisible"). In the context of the novel, one could make the case that the opposite is true: that Montréal is invisible to Vieux Os while he is in Haiti, whereas time is clearly visible in everyone looking different from how they looked twenty years prior. But in focusing in on time, rather than on his own leaving and staying, Vieux Os is

excusing himself from the equation. In so doing, Vieux Os also seems to hint at an alternate universe: if only time had refrained from passing, he would not have been gone for so long.

After his long absence, many things appear to him as worth describing, and a quotidian scene can give way to reflections on the self and mobility:

Je suis là, devant cette table bancale, sous ce manguier, à tenter de parler une fois de plus de mon rapport avec ce terrible pays, de ce qu'il est devenu, de ce que je suis devenu, de ce que nous sommes tous devenus, de ce mouvement incessant qui peut bien être trompeur et donner l'illusion d'une inquiétante immobilité. (35)

I am here, in front of this shaky table, under this mango tree, trying to talk once more about my relationship to this terrible country, about what it's become, about what I have become, about what we have all become, about this incessant movement which might well be misleading and giving the illusion of a disquieting immobility.

Here, Vieux Os paints a detailed picture, describing his physical location. He goes on to talk about his country, before widening his gaze to include himself in that description and then talking about them “all,” thereby entangling Haiti with himself and with his friends. The way he talks about movement and immobility almost appears to be a riddle. While he refers to the process by which Haiti and its people have changed as a kind of movement, he suggests the possibility that this movement might just be an illusion. As in so many other places in *Pays sans chapeau*—when describing his twenty years away as a certain kind of “staying,” or when saying that he wasn’t in fact away for very long, it’s just that time insisted on passing—Laferrière here twists the meaning of what might be movement and what might be its absence.⁹⁶ In the end, as Martin Munro says, „[t]here is none of Césaire’s epic tone in Vieux Os’s (self-)mocking narrative of return, no final (re)affirmation of collective identity” (Munro, “Ethnography” 86). The categories remain destabilized.

3.4.2 Death, the Real, and the Dreamed

An additional destabilization is enacted by the novel’s darting back and forth between the *pays réel* and the *pays rêvé*. At first the distinction between them is unclear. Despite hinting at alternating strands of the same story—such as in a novel told from alternating perspectives, for example—*Pays sans chapeau* actually tells one fragmented but coherent

⁹⁶ The title of Laferrière’s 2010 memoir *Tout bouge autour de moi* about the 2010 earthquake in Haiti can be said to accomplish something similar – a merging of movement and standstill.

tale, one that is divided into the real and the dreamed in name but not in content. As there is no noticeable difference between the *réel* and the *rêvé*, the border erected by the chapter headings is continually subverted and nullified by the story. Munro sees the ping-ponging between the two headings as linked to autobiography, as he argues that “Laferrière's fluid switching between autobiography and fiction in *Pays sans chapeau* opens up a space between what he calls the *réel* and the *rêvé*” (Munro, “Ethnography” 78; emphases in the original).⁹⁷ While Laferrière's playful approach to autobiography and fiction is well-established, one need not look at autobiography to see the tension between, and simultaneous blurring of, the two realms. The distinction between the two does not become meaningful until the end of the novel, when Vieux Os visits the land of the dead. However, “Vieux Os is decidedly unimpressed with the Haitian hereafter” (Munro, “Ethnography” 79); when Vieux Os comes back, he narrates: “Je suis maintenant dans le monde réel, et je ne vois aucune différence avec le monde rêvé” (215; “I am in the real world now, and I do not see any difference from the dream world”), mirroring the experience the reader has had the entire time of reading the two alternating strands of the book. While Munro writes, “The two worlds do not therefore exist in isolation, but merge, and dissolve into each other, so that, to Vieux Os, the Haitian ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ are impossible to distinguish” (Munro, “Ethnography” 80), I would add that *Pays sans chapeau* shows these two worlds as never having been separate – they are not merging, since merging suggests a point at which they were separate. Instead, the novel is structured in such a way that the reader knows that the two strands are the same; at the end of the novel, Vieux Os wakes up to this realization.

Nonetheless, the novel revisits the distinction on its very last page, which narrates a meeting between a journalist from the *New York Times* and a “primitive” painter. The journalist is surprised at the lush, joyous landscapes in the painting, which differ sharply from Haiti's physical reality. When he asks the painter about this, he replies: “Ce que je peins, c'est le pays que je rêve. Et le pays réel ? – Le pays réel, monsieur, je n'ai pas besoin de le rêver (224; “What I paint is the country that I dream. – And the real country? – The real country, monsieur, I don't need to dream”). While *Pays sans chapeau* voids the distinction between the real and the dreamed—we might also say imagined—Laferrière ends the novel on a note where this distinction does matter. That Laferrière

⁹⁷ Munro makes many of the same claims in “Master of the New: Tradition and Intertextuality in Dany Laferrière's *Pays sans chapeau*.”

mostly voids this dichotomy between the real and the dreamed while at times upholding it further adds to the novel's commitment to the unresolved in-between.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Dany Laferrière works with different categories—prose and verse, fiction and biography, departure and arrival, dream and waking life, Haiti and Japan—only to destabilize and mobilize them. At times, he does this by framing a certain category in a way that is unexpected, such as describing mobility as immobile. At other times, he mobilizes them by switching between one category and another. This creates a tension between them; it also frequently leads to white space on the page which the reader has to traverse. In some cases, the switch can signal a new openness, a widening of one's gaze – in the case of the genre-switching of *L'Énigme du retour*, the switching is at times tied to Windsor's attention and imagination reaching outward and including others. In *Pays sans chapeau*, frequent switching between the *pays réel* and the *pays rêvé* is both voided and upheld, the categories thereby remaining in an ontological limbo. In all these ways, Laferrière writes texts which remain in flux and in motion, and which engender and depict imaginative and geographical im/mobilities and their many contradictory simultaneities. In so doing, he also contributes to an archipelagic understanding of America. He does this not just by insisting that a Haitian novel can be a great American novel, or by having his protagonists and narrators turn between Montréal and Port-au-Prince in their dreams and in their bodies, but by writing texts that are archipelagic, fragmentary, fluid, and open. Crucially, the way in which his texts figure relationships between different categories and phenomena without pinning down what this relationship looks like—instead letting the relationship explode into different unexpected directions—is what makes his work archipelagic.

⁹⁸ As Arthur Mukenge and Emmanuel Kayembe write: "L'absence d'une séparation radicale entre le monde des vivants et celui des morts, la possibilité d'une circularité infinie entre les deux mondes nous met en face d'une réalité autre, plus complexe, et qui échappe aux filets réducteurs des logiques binaires" 4; "The absence of a radical separation between the world of the living and that of the dead, the possibility of an infinite circularity between the two worlds, puts us face to face with a different, more complex reality, one that escapes the reductive nets of binary logics.")

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4. “Mesmerized by the Many Possibilities of Her Journey”: Imaginative Mobilities in Edwidge Danticat’s “New York Day Women” and Other Stories

Edwidge Danticat’s literary output, for which she has won numerous awards,⁹⁹ spans novels, short stories, children’s books, young adult literature, picture books, memoirs, and travel writing. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, was published in 1994. Danticat’s other novels are *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *The Dew Breaker* (2004), and *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013). She has also published two memoirs *Brother, I’m Dying* (2007) and *The Art of Death* (2017) and two books of short stories – *Krik? Krak!* (1996) and *Everything Inside* (2019). Additionally, Danticat has written several children’s picture books – *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010), *The Last Mapou* (2013), *Mama’s Nightingale* (2015), and *My Mommy Medicine* (2019), as well as the young adult novels *Behind the Mountains* (2002), *Anacaona: Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490* (2005), and *Untwine* (2015). Additionally, Danticat has published an account of the carnival in Jacmel, Haiti, called *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (2002), and a collection of essays entitled *Create Dangerously: An Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010). She has also edited several anthologies. Across these different genres, Danticat chronicles the diasporic Haitian experience in the U.S., writing about becoming a member of the diaspora by getting from Haiti to the U.S., about the lives of Haitians and Haitian-Americans in the U.S., and about the way *dyasporas*, as diasporic Haitians are known in Haitian Kreyòl, are perceived back in their home country.¹⁰⁰

In Danticat’s writing, the spatial im/mobilities of moving, migrating, and fleeing are interconnected with the characters’ imaginative mobilities. These often take the form of commemorative mobilities, that is, of mobilities which play out on the level of memory.

⁹⁹ Including the MacArthur “Genius” grant in 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Amber Lascelles suggests reading Danticat’s fiction as belonging to “post-diaspora” rather than “diaspora,” arguing that “Moving away from defined origins and single distinct destinations, [the concept of post-diaspora] leaves room to push the fluidity of diaspora further” (Lascelles 228). While I agree that Danticat’s fiction moves away from single distinct destinations, I continue to find “diaspora” a fruitful concept.

According to Bharati Mukherjee, Danticat's work poses the question "how [...] a citizenry, even that portion of it now relocated far from the homeland, adapt[s] to the reality of their past, and the nightmare of familial memory?" (691), while Justine Dymond summarizes that "Danticat grapples with the ethics of remembering and forgetting in her fiction" (144). Isabelle Penier sees Danticat's focus on memory as "a feminist corrective to the project of nation," as Danticat "recovers from obscurity the history of Haitian women who have remained only a token presence in Haitian historiography" (130). She "stitches together—across the spaces of diasporic distance and the times of historical past to a reembodyed presence—an ancestral line for *femmes d'Ayiti*" (Brazier 84; emphasis in the original). This prominence of memory contributes to the way in which Danticat's characters are often highly mobile even when they are not in the process of migration or remigration or are otherwise physically im/mobile. Even in a situation which looks, from the outside, like one of fixity, people may be mobile by moving on a comparably small geographical scale or by mentally engaging with other places. As Ahmed et al. point out in *Uprootings/Regroundings*, "*Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached*" (Ahmed et al. 1; emphasis in the original). Conversely, highly mobile processes such as migration are punctuated by moments of stillness and waiting. My objective is to make legible this entanglement of movement and stillness in Danticat's writing on a spatial as well as imaginative level.

In this chapter, I study short stories from Danticat's 1996 short story collection *Krik? Krak!*. Analyzing *Krik? Krak!* as a whole, some scholarship has focused on the ways Danticat makes visible connections between the short stories of the collection. Connections between the stories, such as characters reappearing, lead Lisa Muir to conclude that "*Krik? Krak!* should more appropriately be labeled a novel" (112) than a short story collection, while Amanda Putnam speaks of a "short story montage" (2). Rocio G. Davis argues that "the genre [of the short story cycle], as with the oral narrative, intensifies the normally participatory act of reading by insisting that we 'fill in the blanks' as we go along; the discovery of connections is transformed into the reader's task" (70). Davis links the genre of the short story cycle to movement, arguing that "recurrence and development [are] the integrated movements that effect final cohesion" (66).¹⁰¹ Throughout the collection, certain names, characters, and events appear in one story and

¹⁰¹ Writing about another book by Danticat, Mukherjee says: "*The Dew Breaker* is a collection of linked stories (which seems to be a favorite form of the immigrant writer)" (Mukherjee 690).

later in another, asking the reader to integrate or weave one story into the whole of the collection. While the first part of my chapter is concerned with “New York Day Women,” the later chapter focuses on “Caroline’s Wedding” and “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” in the second part. I chose to devote the largest part of the chapter to “New York Day Women” because of the way it brings together rhythms of walking and thinking, im/mobilities of the body and of the mind, and entangles them in a way which sheds light on the characters’ relationship to one another, to their former home of Haiti, and to their current home of New York City. “New York Day Women,” then, strikingly brings together convergences, simultaneities, and differences that I am interested in exploring in this chapter. “Caroline’s Wedding” and “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” meanwhile, were chosen both because they each offer a specific approach to imaginative mobilities in Danticat and because they are both, in different ways, in conversation with “New York Day Women.” Looking at “Caroline’s Wedding” allows me to explore how familial bonds can be worked through via dreams and communicative games, which links the story to the way memory vignettes function in “New York Day Women,” while “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” allows a further explanation of the communality of memory evident in Danticat. While “Caroline” and “New York” are both set in the present-day,¹⁰² “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” is set in the year of its title, thereby shining a light on a different epoch, that, in the context of this collection and in Danticat’s work, is nonetheless closely entwined with stories set at a later stage. There is, furthermore, a specific reason I wanted to focus on several stories from the same collection, rather than including other short story collections or novels by Danticat in my analysis: The stories in *Krik? Krak!* both stand on their own¹⁰³ and are entangled with one another, certain characters and events linking these stories to one another. This enables me to not just analyze these stories separately and to compare them, but to read them as part of a larger web of mobilities in *Krik? Krak!*. This includes looking at the way the collection engenders imaginative mobilities on the part of the reader, creating readerly rhythms that go beyond the individual short story. Writing about this collection, Elvira Pulitano argues that

these narratives exemplify the condition of diasporic Haitians living in an increasingly twenty-first century transnational America and expanding the space of the original homeland beyond the constructed territory of the nation-state. (160)

¹⁰² Which, when the collection was published, was the late 1990s.

¹⁰³ As opposed to Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker*, they are not, in my reading, a novel-in-stories.

Building on this insight, I will be analyzing ways in which Danticat expands the homeland through imaginative, often commemorative, mobilities. In one of the stories in the collection, “New York Day Women,” a young woman is walking around Manhattan when she spots her mother, a Haitian immigrant who she assumes never leaves Brooklyn, and starts to clandestinely follow her around. This narrative of the daughter¹⁰⁴ secretly following her mother is interspersed with short vignettes¹⁰⁵ comprised of phrases the daughter remembers her mother saying. In this story, then, two types of mobility clash and intersect – the physical im/mobilities of walking and pausing converge, for the daughter, with the imaginative, commemorative mobilities of remembering things her mother said in the past. The field of mobility studies is interested both in physically observable movements and in “imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel” (Sheller 2014, 793). Using and expanding on this imaginative lens, I will be analyzing the short story by looking at imaginative mobilities, particularly making use of the idea of commemorative mobilities. With this term, I aim to grasp how characters continue to grapple with a place they either remember themselves or know via their families’ memories, arguing that these acts of memory are not just a result of geographic movement such as migration but can be seen as a kind of mobility in their own right. I further aim to make sense of this overlap of mobilities by reading Danticat through the lens of mobility studies literature alongside Henri Lefebvre’s concept of rhythmanalysis and Caribbean theorizations of rhythm. In bringing together these approaches, I see imaginative mobilities as prismatically visible in, and enacted through, the rhythms of everyday life and its interruptions.

In “Caroline’s Wedding,” the second story to which I devote this chapter, imaginative mobilities are enabled, and changed, by the network capital of a newly acquired naturalization certificate. Mimi Sheller, drawing on Anthony Elliott and John Urry, describes “network capital as a combination of capacities to be mobile, including appropriate documents, money and qualifications” (*Mobility Futures* 21).¹⁰⁶ Additionally,

¹⁰⁴ On the second-to-last page, the reader finds out that the daughter is named Suzette. However, since this is a late, indirect addition, and since the story is very much about the daughter observing, trailing, and remembering her mother, I will refer to her as “daughter” throughout the chapter.

¹⁰⁵ I call these insertions in bold “vignettes” to point to their short, fragmentary literary nature, and for the way they are distinguished from the surrounding text, as a vignette on a stamp is designed “as distinguished from the frame and lettering” (Merriam-Webster).

¹⁰⁶ She goes on to list “access to networks at-a-distance; physical capacities for movement; location-free information and contact points; access to communication devices and secure meeting places; access to vehicles and infrastructures; and time and other resources for coordination” (Sheller 2016, 21).

commemorative mobilities play out in a series of inventive forms of dialogue, such as an associative question-and-answer game. By focusing on these two short stories, then, I am able to analyze how Danticat navigates im/mobilities in a variety of ways. Both “New York” and “Caroline” depict remembering one’s parents as a way of imaginatively traveling to Haiti, and both stories use gaps and lacunae in dialogues to enable imaginative commemorative mobilities. The rhythms which reverberate both within the individual stories and throughout the collection, connecting but never subsuming them, find their echo in the constantly re-imagined entanglement of Haiti and the U.S.

4.1 Approaching Imaginative Mobilities through Rhythms of the City and the Body in “New York Day Women”

4.1.1 Rhythms and/of Imaginative Mobilities

While critics have mostly focused on *Krik? Krak!* as a whole, some have specifically trained their gaze on “New York Day Women.” Kathleen Gyssels analyzes the story in the context of Haitian folklore, specifically Haitian trickster tales. She argues that the story, which draws on Haitian twin symbolism and the trickster figure of Anancy, “unfolds two totally different lives in the same city; mother and daughter live in separate but doubled worlds” (Gyssels 11). Amanda Putnam, writing about self-mothering in Danticat’s short stories, argues that in “New York Day Women,” it is connecting to the city which makes self-mothering possible (cf. Putnam), and Julia Kadlec-Wagner, reading the story through the lens of hybridity, sees Manhattan as “the terra firma, the real physicality” of Homi Bhabha’s Third Space (13). While informed by these concepts, I will pay particular attention to rhythm, which plays a crucial role in European and Caribbean thinking. In the following I will outline conceptualizations of rhythm and its analytical potential in writings by French Marxist Henri Lefebvre and Cuban philosopher Antonio Benítez-Rojo, both of whom serve as important sources for my analysis of im/mobilities in Danticat’s writing. I will particularly focus on Lefebvre, since his theory of rhythmanalysis is at the intersection of the embodied and the mental, the individual and communal, the person and the city. Since these are the same intersections which “New York Day Women” explores, Lefebvre is particularly fruitful for an analysis of Danticat’s short story.

According to Lefebvre, a rhythmanalyst “concerns himself with temporalities and their relations within wholes” (24).¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre, a philosopher of urban and everyday life,

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre exclusively uses the male pronoun.

fleshed out his theory of rhythm over a range of essays published between the 1960s and 1980s; in 1992 they were published as a volume in French (titled *Éléments de Rhythmanalyse*); the English translation *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* followed in 2004. A rhythmanalytical reading of “New York Day Women” implies two rhythmanalysts. One of them is the reader, who follows the rhythms playing out in the mother and the daughter each walking, thinking and remembering, in the city. The other rhythmanalyst, however, is the narrator-daughter herself, who diligently observes, and aims to interpret, her mother’s rhythms and movements, actions which for Lefebvre constitute a rhythmanalyst. This rhythmanalytical way of thinking affords generative ways of thinking about the mobile, as rhythm can be a way both of describing im/mobilities and of mobilizing the reader. After thinking together scholarly work on rhythm with mobility studies, I will go on to analyze the role of rhythms regarding several aspects of Danticat’s short story: the rhythms of walking and remembering within the story, the repetition of certain words, the rhythms of imagined dialogues, the rhythms of money, and, finally, the rhythmic mobilities of the reader. Reading them together serves to analyze specific moments in the text and to interrogate how the text interacts with discourses around walking in the city, diaspora, and memory. This approach also makes it possible to read remembering and thinking as embodied processes which, by simultaneously embedding the characters in New York City and in the Caribbean, place them in an entangled, multi-sited home.

In his essays on *rhythmanalyse* (rhythmanalysis), Lefebvre analyzes the intersections of rhythms of the city with rhythms of the body. Lefebvre sees rhythm as that which is “most concrete” (3), by which he means that rhythms, be they vast or minute, are “lived, tested, touched in the sensible and the corporeal” (45). Lefebvre describes how different rhythms come together in a city – the rhythms of sound and noise,¹⁰⁸ of the relentless churning out of news,¹⁰⁹ of people walking and people stopping and pausing. Importantly, Lefebvre focuses on the way all these rhythms clash and interpenetrate. When a person is in a city, they inhabit not only their own bodily and mental rhythms, but also the rhythms surrounding them in their urban landscape. While the rhythmanalyst’s “body serves him as a metronome” (Lefebvre 19), “objective rhythms *translate*

¹⁰⁸ Cf. “He [the rhythmanalyst] will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises” (Lefebvre 19).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. “[T]he media day unfolds polyrhythmically” (Lefebvre 48).

themselves into our own rhythms” (69; emphasis in the original). I would argue that in this act of translation, new, additional rhythms may emerge, as the “objective” rhythm of a city street and someone’s internal rhythm of walking and thinking come together. This slightly alters one’s internal rhythm—a red light forces one to stay still—and it may also subtly change the “objective” rhythm, as everyone walking a street adds to it.

Through rhythmanalysis, it becomes possible to grasp the rhythms of the city and the rhythms of the city dweller together. Through a focus on rhythms, one can grasp the imaginative as well as physical im/mobilities of the city dweller, alongside the micromobilities of everything surrounding her—the many moving parts of the city, the im/mobilities of other people and of vehicles—since the way these micromobilities meet is through rhythm. In this sense, Lefebvre’s approach bears a resemblance to Georg Simmel’s conceptualization of city life. In Simmel’s 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (originally published in German as “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben”), he writes that people are “stimulated by the difference between present impressions and those which have preceded” (n.p.). Such a difference between past and present impressions is particularly acute in cities, where they take place with “every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupation and social life” (Simmel n.p.). While the person in a city, then, is entangled in a web of experience both pertaining to what is happening around her and what has happened in the past, the city itself is multiple and varied. Rhythmanalysis can thus link individual to collective, though manifold, experience.

Another aspect of rhythmanalysis which lends itself to a study of imaginative mobilities is that it is attuned to lacunae – to the tiny moments when a rhythm takes a break, or when it stops before it starts up again. Lefebvre writes that in rhythms there can appear “a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation” (44). A reading of im/mobilities informed by rhythmanalysis, then, sees im/mobilities not as progressing in a linear or neatly organized fashion, with different mobile and immobile strands running alongside one another, but as something which tends to happen in fits and starts. Lefebvre is particularly interested in the tension between being enveloped by a rhythm and having enough distance from it to perceive it in the first place: “In order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely” (26). In such a reading, the mere fact that the narrator’s mother has left Brooklyn and can now be seen walking around Manhattan is a highly noticeable disturbance of the everyday rhythm

which the mother and daughter had established together. It is this gap which creates space for everything which happens in the story: both the daughter following her mother, which is an unprecedented, profoundly new event in her life, and her reflections on things her mother has said and done, arise out of the lacuna left by the absence of their usual rhythms.

Recent approaches to imaginative mobilities within mobility studies share this understanding of absence engendering imaginative mobilities. Drawing on John Urry and reflecting on how webcams and looking at screens can lead to imaginative travel, David Bissell characterizes such new, imaginative forms of mobility as a “complex folding of absence and presence” (44). This idea of folding is related to Lefebvre’s assertion “Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and they hide” (36). Where Bissell states a simultaneity of two things—absence and presence—which might seem incongruous, and points to “folding” as a way of grasping this simultaneity, Lefebvre describes rhythms as a practice which brings this simultaneity to the fore, thus instantiating it. Related to Bissell’s idea of “folding,” Tim Ingold uses the term “knotting,” arguing that knotting is a more appropriate metaphor for “world-making-processes” than “building blocks” and that “the form of the structure [of the world] emerges from the weave” (62). It is possible to bring these insights into conversation not just with each other but also with an approach to literature (8). In studying literature, ideas around folding and knotting can help us explore how different narrative strands are interwoven in “New York Day Women,” and how this short story in turn is interwoven with other short stories of the collection *Krik? Krak!*. The study of rhythms then becomes a helpful analytical tool; in Danticat’s “New York Day Women,” what is interwoven is past and present, the mobilities of walking and of memory, the impressions of the daughter and what she remembers her mother saying.

Rhythm as a concept also occupies a central role in Caribbean theory. The work of Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant, e.g., explores the unpredictable and “chaotic” relations forming Caribbean cultures. Using the concept of “creolization,” Glissant describes “the meeting, the interference, the shock, the harmonies and disharmonies between cultures, in the realized totality of the world-earth” (119). It is not just the harmonies coming together, but the clash itself which can be seen as rhythmic, as one rhythm is disrupted or pierced by another. Similarly focusing on the rhythms as multitudinous, Katherine McKittrick et al. argue that, in the work of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter, “[r]hythm does not privilege singular ways of being but rather insists, in

advance, that collaborative engagement is necessary to who and what we are" (870); elsewhere, McKittrick argues that rhythms are "central to the reconstitution of black life" (166). One Caribbean theorist who has worked on rhythm is Kamau Brathwaite, whose theory of "tidalectics" mirrors the ocean's continual irregular and cyclical movement. This concept provides an "alter/native"¹¹⁰ to Hegel's dialectics by foregrounding shifting and unpredictable relations between land and sea as well as between cultures and people.¹¹¹ The Caribbean theorist whose work on rhythm I want to focus on the most here, however, is Cuban theorist and writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo. He posits certain rhythms as that which the different islands in the Caribbean have in common, arguing that "at least since the seventeenth century, there are rhythms common to the entire Caribbean, rhythms that follow a kind of polyrhythmic and polymetric percussion very different from European percussive forms" (Benítez-Rojo 76). While he is here speaking of the very specific and literal rhythm of percussion drums, Benítez-Rojo finally has a very capacious notion of rhythms, describing

a polyrhythmic that is Cuban, Caribbean, African, and European at once, and even Asian and Indoamerican, where there has been a contrapuntal and intermingled meeting of the biblical Creator's *logos*, of tobacco smoke, the dance of the *orishas* and *loas* [...]. Within this chaos of differences and repetitions, of combinations and permutations, there are regular dynamics that coexist. (81)

In addition to this concept, and linked to it, Benítez-Rojo speaks of the "island that 'repeats' itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth" (3). Underlying this is an understanding of the Caribbean archipelago, the Caribbean "island," as a place both mobile within itself and pulsating outward, in which nothing is fixed and static, but mobile and in a process of becoming. In addition to writing about the way shared Caribbean rhythms link different islands in the Caribbean to one another and positing the Caribbean as an island pulsating outward, Benítez-Rojo analyzes how the Caribbean is linked to the rest of the world through the totalizing historical social system of the Plantation.¹¹² Although these concepts are already linked in Benítez-Rojo's work, I want to interlink them further, combining them to see New York City as a place entangled in a rhythmic Caribbean which is pulsating outward. Benítez-Rojo's *repeating island* makes it possible to read the mother and daughter as not just walking around a city,

¹¹⁰ As cited in DeLoughrey 2.

¹¹¹ This paragraph is lightly adapted from Englert, Gföllner, Thomsen.

¹¹² Benítez-Rojo capitalizes the word Plantation "to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse" (9).

but as inhabiting and navigating an entangled net of islands. In their Lefebvrian rhythms—their micromobilities around New York, their daily rhythms—specific moments in their mobilities become visible. Taken together, these approaches to rhythm show how Danticat’s characters forge and navigate a home within the multi-directionality of memory and belonging.

4.1.2 “What Do You Think This is, a Dance Floor?”: Rhythms of Walking and Remembering

In “New York Day Women,” a particular kind of rhythm is created by switching between the daughter walking and the daughter remembering. At one point during their walk across Manhattan, the daughter observes first her mother and then two taxi drivers. “As my mother stands in front of Carnegie Hall,¹¹³ one taxi driver yells to another, ‘What do you think this is, a dance floor?’ My mother waits patiently for this dispute to be settled before crossing the street” (“New York” 128). In this snippet, one of the taxi drivers, seemingly secure in his particular, vehicular kind of mobility, accuses another taxi driver of acting according to the wrong set of mobility guidelines: He is accusing him of acting as if he was on a dancefloor, and while dance is one kind of movement, it is not the *right* kind of movement for their current situation. What one taxi driver is accusing the other one of, then, is following the wrong kind of rhythm. The mother, who is a part of these urban rhythms and who observes them, waits. According to Peter Adey et al., waiting, gaps, and moments of stillness are part and parcel of almost any mobility process: “When we are too focused on mobility as movement, we sometimes forget that it also may involve a great deal of waiting” (184), a claim shared by Peter Merriman when he writes that “[s]tillness, waiting, slowness and boredom may be just as important to many situations, practices and movements” (177). Lefebvre, too, sees moments of quiet not just as part of a rhythm, but argues that “the silences have a meaning” (96).¹¹⁴ The paragraph ends with the mother having continued to walk again, newly taking part in the rhythm in a way observable by her daughter. It is then that the paragraph stops and a vignette is inserted: “In Haiti, when you get hit by a car, the owner of the car gets out and kicks you for getting

¹¹³ The mention of Carnegie Hall here is possibly significant and may point to the way dance has been institutionalized and capitalized in the U.S., creating a dance landscape different from the one in Haiti.

¹¹⁴ Benítez-Rojo, interestingly, uses both the terms “silences” and “plastic immobilities” to refer to rhythmic, physical, nonverbal acts “such as [women] ‘carrying their hands on their hips,’ or balancing baskets on their heads ‘with their arm rounded like a pitcher’s handle’” (79). I would, however, argue, that what he is describing is not so much silences or gaps the way I, drawing on Lefebvre, think of them here, but acts of physical, corporeal mobility beyond verbal language.

blood on his bumper" ("New York" 128). On this page, the taxi drivers' everyday spat about rhythms sets the stage for a much harsher rhythmic disruption. The present moment is punctured by a remembered statement; violence erupts onto the page. The anecdote is inserted once the mother is walking again, as this change in the rhythm makes another eruption of rhythm in the story possible. Furthermore, the daughter's remembrance is linked to the paragraph that came before it in several ways: Firstly, on a superficial level, both the spat between the taxi drivers and the mother's statement about blood on a bumper refer to cars. Secondly, both episodes point to conflict and the possibility of its resolution: While the short spat between the two taxi drivers seems to have dissipated, other conflicts, Danticat reminds us here, are more fraught. In both paragraphs, the issue at play is that two rhythms have clashed; in one case, those of two taxis, and in another case, those of a car and a pedestrian. While one situation can be solved by someone making a jokey, albeit aggressive statement, the other one ends with blood. Beyond these specific links between the two paragraphs, what stands out is the rhythm of the narrative thus created, the point at which one vignette switches for another. For Lefebvre, the rhythmanalyst is someone who is at once surrounded by the rhythms of their town or city, and who, through a crisis, disruption, or reflection, stands apart from the city's rhythms enough so as to be able to analyze them. It is not only the mother who is standing "outside" the rhythm at that moment, as she is patiently waiting to cross the road, but also her daughter, the narrator, who performs the switch between observing and remembering, thus stepping outside the rhythm. The disruption in the city's rhythm functions as an opportunity for reflection on the part of both the mother and the daughter: while the mother is observing the spat, perhaps reflecting on how a similar situation would be handled in Haiti, the daughter is observing both the spat and the way it removes the mother from the rhythm, making her a rhythmanalyst of the rhythm as a whole and of the pause in which her mother dwells. Lefebvre argues that "to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been *grasped* by it; one must *let oneself go*, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration" (Lefebvre 27; emphases in the original). The daughter, who is grasped by her mother's rhythm to such an extent as to drop everything and follow her, is thus attuned to the gaps in her mother's rhythms. This rhythmanalytical endeavor on the part of the daughter is matched by that of the reader, as the reader's task is to observe, and make sense of, the rhythms of the story; for Lefebvre, the observation of rhythm *is* their analysis. These at times rather jarring transitions are softened by the

images of small flowers, or fleurons, inserted between the two strands of the narrative (cf. Fig. 1).

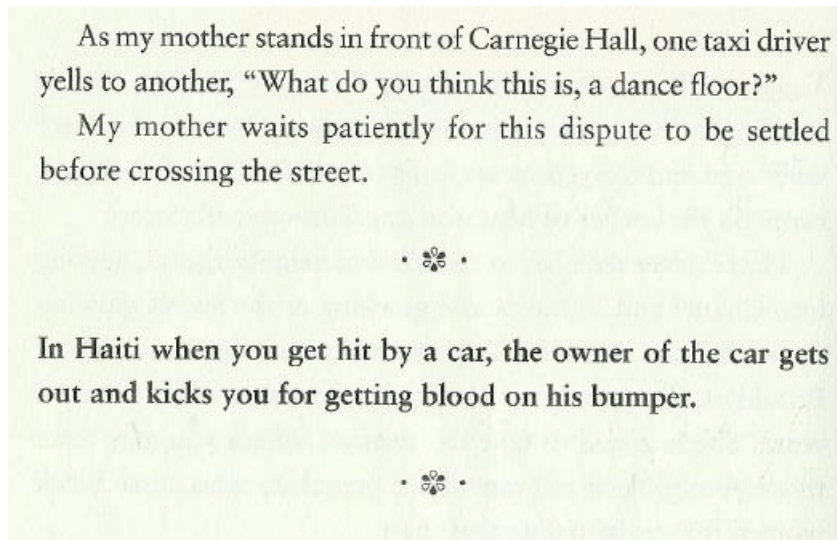


Fig. 1: Flowers in “New York” 128.

While these flowers highlight the division, making visible the gap, they also fill it. Standing in both for rupture and for continuity, they highlight the clash between the two strands while bridging the chasm thus created.

4.1.3 “Dashing from Building to Building”: Rhythms of Repetition

Rhythmanalysis is attuned not only to clashes and discontinuities, but also to connections. One way of doing a rhythmanalytical reading of the text is to look at the verb “dash,” which appears at several points in the story. Its first mention is on the first page of the story, when the daughter narrates: “My mother, who accuses me of random offenses as I dash out of the house” (“New York” 127). Later, the daughter uses the same word to describe walking behind her mother:

I follow my mother, mesmerized by the many possibilities of her journey. Even in a flowered dress, she is lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits, high heels and elegant short skirts, Reebok sneakers, dashing from building to building. My mother, who won’t go out to dinner with anyone. (“New York” 129)

Where, in the first instance, dashing is seen to be about the daughter escaping from her mother’s gaze, being youthful and energetic in dashing away from her, in this second instance, it is the mother who dashes, much to her daughter’s surprise. In this moment, then, there is a kind of reversal, in which the daughter and the mother change places. The daughter performs the dual task of observing her mother’s movements—checking up on them; almost, at times, policing them—while remembering a situation where her mother

was the one keeping track of movement. At the same time, this scene is grammatically ambiguous, since “Reebok sneakers, dashing from building to building” could be about the mother, but also about the people surrounding her, thus underlying the way the mother is, from the daughter’s point of view, simultaneously apart from the crowd and thoroughly a part of it. The third time the word comes up, the daughter watches as “a bicycle messenger swings so close to her [the mother] that I want to dash forward and rescue her” (“New York” 130). The daughter feels shaken from her observer’s perch¹¹⁵ and instead wants to take an active part in what’s happening by rescuing her mother, a wish which Kathleen Gyssels argues draws on “the vodou concept of the protecting and caring ‘angel spirit’ (*ti bon ange*)” (9). However, the daughter decides to stay in the role of the rhythm analyst rather than intervene in her mother’s journey. Nevertheless, mother and daughter remain connected.

In addition to rhythm, Benítez-Rojo identifies another key aspect of Caribbean life, something he calls “in a certain kind of way” (16). He describes it as

something remote that reproduces itself and that carries the desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence; something obscure that comes from the performance and that one makes his own in a very special way; concretely, it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant. (Benítez-Rojo 16)¹¹⁶

Lefebvre sees the rhythm analyst as someone standing outside a rhythm just enough to observe it, meaning that the rhythm analyst is not so entangled in the rhythm as to take it for granted, but still close enough to analyze it. While Lefebvre’s focus lies on the relationship of the rhythm analyst to the events and rhythms surrounding him, Benítez-Rojo is interested in the space between the onlooker and the participant. Like Lefebvre, he sees that space as fluid, amorphous, and shifting. The thing which bridges it—the ineffable quality of being “in a certain kind of way”—is what he sees as warding off apocalypse and disaster; a drive to hope and toward the future.

Additionally, being “in a certain kind of way” can lend itself to being both part of the crowd and apart from it. When the daughter says that “[e]ven in a flowered dress,” the mother is “lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits” (129), she is both clearly visible and enmeshed in a sea of others. The daughter juxtaposes the mother’s feminine outfit with the urban scene’s prevalent masculine style, and the mother’s casual dress with the

¹¹⁵ Uwe Wirth writes about the “Spannungsfeld von ‘Sehen’ und ‘Gehen’, von Voyeur und Flaneur” (Wirth 8), the “tension between »watching« and »walking«, between voyeur and flaneur” (my translation).

¹¹⁶ Benítez-Rojo also identifies a third factor, namely performance (cf. 16).

business-like outfits of those around her. By doing so, the daughter is pointedly inscribing her mother into a city scene; she is also inscribing her mother into diaspora by foregrounding her feminine style. Clifford argues that despite “[d]iasporic experiences [being] always gendered” (258), this often remains unmarked: “When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate” (Clifford 259).¹¹⁷ “New York Day Women,” then, can be seen as a rewriting of the often-male diasporic subject. Hers is a distinct way of inhabiting the city, as she walks “as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet” (“New York” 130) while being a female, diasporic, and laboring subject.

The term “dash,” moreover, has its own implications. In typography, a dash is a hyphen, a line between words, a kind of break. Much like the fleurons between the story’s plot and the interspersed vignettes, a dash is something which both connects and separates. Where a comma suggests a succession of events and a semicolon arguably points to a fuller rupture, a break almost as full as a full-stop, a dash does something else; quite literally, it dashes away from one part of the sentence and creates a line stretching to another part of the sentence. Dashes, then, most frequently frame an insertion into a sentence. They depart from the original sentence while keeping it intact, creating a space within an existing sentence. Much scholarship on the American poet Emily Dickinson has focused on her use of dashes. While Deirdre Fagan calls them “invariably ambiguous, often inscrutable” (70), Ena Jung focuses on their materiality. Drawing on the Benjaminian idea of the “gesture,” she writes of dashes as “a form of marking that calls attention to the emptiness” (2). She not only says that “dashes represent pictographically” (5), but even calls our attention to an instance in which Dickinson uses dashes to stand in for flowers. This gives us a way to think through Danticat’s flowers and “dashing” together (cf. Jung 5), as they both make a rupture visible, simultaneously bridging and accentuating it. Jung further highlights the way dashes mobilize the reader, arguing that “[t]he process of understanding Dickinson’s texts compels readers to partake in the process of inserting elements of understanding (sometimes words) dash by dash, ‘seam by seam,’ blank by blank, for each ellipsis” (13). While the fleurons between the vignettes of “New York” invite the reader to move across the space that separates them, assembling them together,

¹¹⁷ It has, however, long been the case that many diasporic subjects are women; see, for example, Avtar Brah on the “feminization of diaspora” (179).

the dashing has a similar function. Dashing mobilizes the reader in Danticat – in each moment of dashing, the reader follows the process of what is being moved toward, while also noticing the reoccurrence of dashing in the story and reading these instances together.

Of all the verbs one can use to describe mobilities of the body, it is significant that Danticat uses that word: while a typographical dash points to a departure and a return within the same sentence, Danticat frames the instances of dashing as scenes in which there is both a departing from and a sense of circling back to the place of departure. Dashing, then, not only describes a physical movement through which the mother and daughter navigate their homes of New York and Haiti but becomes a shorthand for the way home is an entangled web of arrivals, departures, and the states in between. In the first sentence in which the word appears, when the narrator dashes out of her house while listening to her mother's reproaches, the "dash" suggests an energetic movement away from the mother while also suggesting a way back to her. In the second instance, when the mother is "dashing from building to building," this is, firstly, an echo of the daughter's earlier dashing, thus connecting the two women, framing them as similar in their movements and bodily realities while reversing their relationship. Secondly, by adding "from building to building," Danticat suggests an ongoing movement in multiple directions, as each building is supplanted by another one. Here, the dashing away from one building can also be seen as the dashing to another building, all movement *away* therefore also being a movement *toward*. Whereas in the first instance, the daughter dashes away from her mother's accusations and, in the second, the mother dashes by herself and the daughter is reduced to an observer, the third instance adds a further dimension, as the daughter wants to come to the mother's aid. We thus see three different aspects of their relationship play out here: one in which the mother is a figure of authority, one in which the mother is an object of observation, and one in which the roles are reversed and it is the daughter who seems to have the power to save the mother from hurt and harm. By focusing on the verb "dash," it becomes possible not only to see the mobilities at work in each of the three episodes—mobilities which are captured by the verb "dashing"— but to see connections between them. A kind of mobility is then instantiated between the three episodes, as the mother and daughter are seen to be mobile and active both in their surroundings and in their relationship to one another, and

as the reader zooms in and out of these particular circumstances and the larger relational web of mother and daughter in which they take place.

All three of these aspects of their relationship are open-ended, with departure and return possible in each one of them. The “dashing” resists a finality of departure or arrival. Rather, it sees the points of arrival and departure as connected, as poles between which there is a dash, a typographical bridge. Not only is there a dashing, an element of movement and of change, in the relationship between the mother and daughter, but also in the movements of the bodies and of the city. While the mother’s and daughter’s dashing is subject to the rhythms around it—to the rhythms of cars, pedestrians, and the city as a whole—the repetition of this verb also creates its own rhythms, as the reader’s perception jumps from one instant of dashing to another.

4.1.4 Fat and Dried Grapefruit Peel: Rhythms of Imagined Dialogue

As a genre, short stories, are condensed and often focused on just one event, person, or point in time. At first glance, “New York Day Women” consists of two separate, juxtaposed strands—the vignettes in boldface and the main plot—but the actual relationship between the two strands is more complicated, as one strand comments upon or refracts the other. One vignette says, “Fat, you know, and cholesterol. Fat and cholesterol killed your aunt Hermione” (“New York” 130). But instead of the narration switching from this vignette to the level of plot, what follows in standard font is the daughter’s following recollection of her mother: “My mother, who makes jam with dried grapefruit peel and then puts in cinnamon bark that I always think is cockroaches in the jam,” before the daughter switches back to the present moment and describes how she is “trail[ing] the red orchids in her dress and the heavy faux leather bag on her shoulders. Realizing the ferocious pace of my pursuit, I stop against a wall to rest. My mother keeps on walking as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet” (130). There are thus not just two, but three levels of narration: the vignettes, which consist of the mother’s proclamations and adages, the daughter’s thoughts about her mother, and the plot. While the mother’s utterings are offset by the font and the flowers, the daughter’s memories and actions are grouped together in standard font. This both strengthens and subverts the dialogical relationship that is being laid out between the mother and the daughter: the daughter is elaborating on her mother’s adages in a freewheeling, associative way—the mother’s rant about cholesterol leads to a memory of the mother making jam—which nonetheless speaks to

the vignettes and puts them in relation to her own memories. In this way, the daughter is expanding on what she remembers her mother saying, making the latter's position more legible to the reader. At the same time, this structure is being subverted, since what we are confronted with is not just the mother on one side and the daughter on another, or plot on one level and memory on another, but a more complex interweaving of these elements. Gyssels describes how "the mother speaks directly to the daughter expressing her fear, frustrations, disappointment, while the daughter speaks to us about her mother, and the uneasiness she feels when she observes her mother" (3). Gyssels claims that, "[d]uring the narrative, the two voices never reply to each other, so we have two monologues rather than a dialogue" (3); in contrast, I would argue that the daughter is very much replying to her mother, leading to a dialogue on the page. In some instances this has the form of a direct dialogue, such as when, in regular font, it says "Will it feel empty when Papa kisses you?", before, in bold, there is the response "Oh no, he doesn't kiss me that way anymore" ("New York" 129). In other instances, the connection is less apparent, but still present, as when the daughter, in standard font, complains that "Twenty years we have been saving all kinds of things for the relatives in Haiti. I need the place in the garage for an exercise bike", before the mother's reply comes in bold: "You are pretty enough to be a stewardess. Only dogs like bones" ("New York" 131). In all these instances, the daughter draws upon a remembered statement from her mother for a reply to a thought she just had. Despite the variation in how closely connected those two imagined utterances are, in all of them the daughter-narrator is imagining a dialogue with her mother onto the page.

This mobility is both inter-subjective and commemorative. All of the daughter's remembered statements from her mother are acts of commemorative mobility; additionally, the mother's description of what happens in Haiti when you get hit by a car is itself an instance of commemorative mobility, as she remembers those kinds of situations from when she lived in Haiti and relays them to her daughter. The daughter is here entering into dialogue with her mother's memories. Both in the dialogue between the mother and daughter, and in the dialogue between Haiti and New York, a home is being imagined: not in any of these poles, but in the interplay, gradations, and tugs between them.

The vignettes of the short story are assembled by the daughter, and the mother does not get a chance to participate in this act of assemblage or to directly answer her

daughter's thoughts. However, the vignettes consist of things the mother has said to her daughter; they are scraps of remembered conversations. The daughter is weaving a dialogue out of her own thoughts and what she remembers her mother saying, thus not only folding her mother's absence into her presence but actively rendering her mother present. What is interesting is that this happens while the mother is, in fact, walking just a few feet in front of the daughter.¹¹⁸ According to Nick Nesbitt, "[h]istory is the absent presence in Danticat's writing" (210), "[t]his absence form[ing] the very material of Danticat's prose" (205). The daughter's and mother's dialogue, then, is an example of the way Danticat complicates ideas of absence and presence in this short story, within the short story cycle, and arguably in her work at large, writing absence and presence as not only coexisting but entangled.

This entanglement of absence and presence is linked to mobilities. For this insight, I draw on Bissell, who, writing about John Urry, argues that „[i]t is this complex folding of absence and presence that Urry found particularly fascinating about how mobility was changing the nature of social connections" (44). However, I wish to go beyond this claim about the ways contemporary life, with its arguably heightened mobility, leads to an increased entanglement of absence and presence. Rather, I want to locate a kind of mobility *in* the tug between absence and presence. For the daughter in "New York," her mother is present (walking in front of her) at the same time as she is absent; the daughter's engagement with these two simultaneous modes can be seen as a kind of mental mobility between them. In addition to this mental mobility on the part of the daughter, the mother can be seen to be mobile here, as she is moved, by the daughter, into a kind of presence without knowing about it. Rather than seeing mobility as a process which simply moves from absence to presence, then, I want to view mobility-related processes as ones in which both absence and presence and different kinds of mobilities are entangled. These entangled mobilities play out not only through the structure of Danticat's short story, but also through what exactly is being remembered and described. In the paragraph quoted above, commemorative mobility takes place through food; food is both what is being remembered and the means through which memory takes place,

¹¹⁸ With her theory of postmemory, Marianne Hirsch describes how the second generation, or in some cases even third generation, relates to the trauma experienced by the parents (the first generation). Postmemory, then, offers a way to make sense of collective trauma. While "New York Day Women" is not immediately concerned with trauma, the daughter is one generation removed from Haiti and from her mother's experiences and trying to make sense of them across that generational distance. For a thorough, wide-ranging analysis of the concept of a generation, also see Parnes et al.

both the method of transportation and the thing that is being transported.¹¹⁹ It is from this memory of food that the daughter-narrator switches back to describing how she is trailing her mother again.

Absence and presence are interwoven not just in dialogue and memory, but in the very act of walking in the city. According to Michel de Certeau, “[t]o walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place” (103). He argues that the person walking the city is engaging with absence because she is continually walking and seeking. In other words, the rhetoric of walking means that a choice is being made, as some routes are being actualized while others are not. Additionally, to live in a city is to be reminded of what used to be there, cities are “presences of diverse absences” (de Certeau 108). The short story enacts the presence of/in absence not only in its depiction of the city, but in its discussion of home. It is not just that neither Haiti nor New York are fully present or absent on any given page of the short story, as they instead jostle against each other, with one getting closer and the other receding. Instead, the very notion of home is one that is only graspable through an interplay of absence and presence; both walking around the city and switching between past and present are ways of making this simultaneity of absence and presence tangible and traversable. Similarly, de Certeau sees absence, and not just presence, as an affordance: “Far from expressing a void or describing a lack, it creates such. It makes room for a void. In that way, it opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a play within a system of defined places” (105-106).

4.1.5 “In This Kind of Neighborhood”: Rhythms of Money

In the case of rhythms, this clearing is contingent on the world of finance and capital. The sharp binary of Brooklyn and Manhattan in this short story needs to be placed in its historical context. In the 1990s, when this story is set, Brooklyn was still largely an immigrant, working-class borough. When the daughter thinks her mother never leaves

¹¹⁹ For an analysis of Haitian cooking in Danticat’s story “Caroline’s Wedding,” see Lascelles, 231. Corinne Bigot writes about how diasporic writers “use small and mundane details such as labels on jars of food, stains on a glass, the smell of a dish, the touch of a scarf or the feel of snow on one’s skin to bring a revelation about their characters’ complex lives and sense of identity” (98). The emotional importance of food, particularly its ability to engender both closeness and distance, also comes to the fore in Danticat’s first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. There, a mother tells her daughter: “After you left home, [...] the only thing I ate was spaghetti. I would boil it and eat it quickly before I completely lost my appetite. Everything Haitian reminded me of you” (*Breath* 182-183).

Brooklyn, it is thus a statement about both the mother's class and her position as an immigrant – to the daughter, Manhattan is an environment both glitzier and more 'American' than she can comfortably picture her mother in.¹²⁰ Money is also present both in the idea of rhythms and in their lived reality. For Lefebvre, behind every rhythm hides money. He states this in no uncertain terms: "The essential? The determining factor? Money" (34). While following her mother, the daughter sees her mother's journey as thoroughly enigmatic, a baffling mystery. The resolution, however, turns out to be quite banal: The mother is a caretaker for a young white boy, thus illuminating the story's title. "Day women," explains Kathleen Gyssels, are "'women who work during the day to make a living,' implying membership in the cheap labour force of (il)legal workers who fulfill difficult, badly paid jobs in global economies" (9).

The designation "day women" is reminiscent of Lefebvre's differentiation between cyclical, cosmic rhythms, such as "days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea" (8) and linear rhythms, which "come [...] from social practice, [...] from human activity" (8). At the same time as he distinguishes between the two, he also states that the two types of rhythms "in *reality* interfere with one another constantly" (8; emphasis in the original). Reading the title of Danticat's short story, "New York Day Women," with these interfering Lefebvrian categories in mind, the title speaks to both the cosmic and the linear: the rhythms of the mother are tethered to the cyclical, cosmic structures not just of days, but also to the waves and tides connecting New York to the Caribbean. At the same time, the story's revelation is that the mother, rather than being on a mythical, unknowable quest as her daughter imagines, is a caretaker, an activity very much rooted in the social and the human. The mere title of the story, then, hints at the ways in which different rhythms clash, interfere, and intersect in the story.

Gyssels' observation about cheap labor furthermore points us to the fact that money is "the determining factor" (Lefebvre 34) not just in the rhythms of the city, but in the rhythm pulsating outward from the Caribbean. The financial entanglements between the Caribbean and New York are rendered visible in the mere presence of the daughter and mother on the streets of New York, pointing to centuries of movement back and forth undergirded by money. They are also rendered visible by the mother's work as a

¹²⁰ Since the 1990s, the demographics of Brooklyn have drastically changed; if the story was set in the 2020s, the mother would perhaps be more likely to live in the Bronx than in Brooklyn. There are, however, still Brooklyn neighborhoods with a sizeable Caribbean population, among them Flatbush.

caretaker. When the daughter imagines her mother, she is picturing her mother as a flâneuse. But a flâneur is “[a]n aesthete who uniquely manages to engage with the realities of the modern city without fully surrendering to them” (Vermeulen 41), a luxury not afforded to the mother. In *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, Sheller analyzes ways in which the Global North has “consumed” the Caribbean, including through crops, art, human corpses, sex tourism, and labor. Consumption, too, can be seen as a way in which the Caribbean is pulsating outward, embedding the mother in a flow of cash, labor, and consumption stretching from Haiti to the U.S. and back again. By making visible ways in which the mother is embedded in this process and yet letting the daughter view her mother as someone walking a city, Danticat shows how taking in a city, owning the ground beneath one’s feet, can be entwined with labor both on an individual level and in the context of vast historical processes. Thinking with Lefebvre, being a day woman is tied to both the cyclical and the linear, both the human and the cosmic.

4.1.6 “All the Names I Wanted to Give Them”: The Reader’s Rhythms

The characters’ rhythms and mobilities in “New York Day Women” leads to, and is entangled with, the reader’s rhythms and mobilities when reading the story. In his paper “Mobility of Form,” which I touched on in chapter 1, Ian Davidson sees such a weaving together of fragments as one of the ways in which literary form can be mobile, taking *Some of the Dharma* as an example. In his genre-defying book, Jack Kerouac intersperses handwritten observations with text from his own notebooks, bringing together “theological meditations, instructions, journal entries and poems” (Davidson 553) on pages which are, themselves, subdivided. This assembling of fragments is, according to Davidson, a marker of formal literary mobility. In “New York Day Women,” the transitions between the main narrative and the memories, too, lead to a mobility of form, since they make the reader jump from one plane to another, keeping a flexibility between them rather than settling into one form. Danticat links this mobility on the part of the reader to the interweaving of physical and commemorative mobilities on the part of the daughter. Focusing on the rhythms of reading ties in with McKittrick’s work on rhythm in Wynter’s writing. McKittrick et al. write:

Positing rhythm as reading praxis, we can perhaps merge new or different stories together – tracking continuities, seeking out flows, noticing pauses that occur across a range of texts and ideas – and thus challenge disciplinary silos that currently define normative and disciplined ways of knowing. [...] Rhythmic

reading is thinking together, always, even when we do not realize that we are doing such. (871)

Here, McKittrick et al. first and foremost refer to the rhythms that arise when one reads different texts and talks to people about them, “moments where someone asks, ‘What page or section was that idea on again?’,” saying that “it is precisely these lapses that initiate a discursive rhythm prompted by memory, return, and the sharing of ideas” (871). They are not talking about the solitary experience of reading a single short story. However, “New York Day Women” functions like a collage in which different texts come together. The reader jumps from strand to strand, at times feeling compelled to jump back to an earlier part in order to see possible connections. Additionally, the conversational element McKittrick et al. mention—discussing something, and in so doing remembering a snippet, a snippet that may seem out of reach—is the very structuring element of Danticat’s short story. In a way, the daughter and the reader are reading together – the daughter is attempting to read and understand her present mother, the woman she is trailing behind, by trying to read and understand her past mother. This bears a similarity to de Certeau’s concept of “writing-reading” (168), as the daughter is both writing and reading the city by trailing behind her mother attempting to understand her. The daughter is “prompted by memory, return, and the sharing of ideas” as McKittrick et al. say; the reader observes this process and tries to make her own connections alongside the daughter.

This short story is less entangled with the rest of *Krik? Krak!* than other short stories from the collection. Even so, the fact that the reader of *Krik? Krak!* is attuned to echoes across the collection means that she is reading “New York Day Women” with an eye to connection, thereby engendering the particular rhythm described by McKittrick et al., asking “‘What page or section was that idea on again?’,” moving backwards and forwards in the text. Moreover, “New York Day Women” does contain references to other short stories. One reference is arguably the name Hermione (“Fat, you know, and cholesterol. Fat and cholesterol killed your aunt Hermione,” “New York” 130), which is somewhat mirrored in the short story “Between the Pool and the Gardenias.” In that story, the young protagonist remembers all the babies she has lost: “I called out all the names I wanted to give them: Eveline, Josephine, Jacqueline, *Hermine*, Marie Magdalène, Célianne” (“Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” 80; emphasis mine). This almost-sameness is not an accident, but part of the way in which Danticat “explores numerous techniques of re-

connecting lost ancestry by braiding previous and current generations together” (Putnam 7).

A connection to other short stories in the collection is also created through the mention of the fictional Haitian town of Ville Rose. At first, the two poles between which “New York Day Women” moves are New York City—specifically, the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn, in their respective specificity and difference—and Haiti. While other texts by Danticat, both in *Krik? Krak!* and elsewhere, have a more localized, specified sense of place, speaking of “Haiti” instead of specific Haitian locales can make the country seem like a monolithic entity. Comparing an entire country in the Global South to a set of boroughs in the Global North runs the risk of creating an imbalance – while the city in the Global North is afforded complexity, the country in the Global South is flattened, and differences and diversity within that country rendered invisible. However, in the case of this short story, these two poles reflect the way the daughter sees and navigates them. Although Haiti and New York come together to create an imagined home, the differences between the boroughs are part of the daughter’s daily reality in a way that different places in Haiti presumably are not. Secondly, I would argue that “Haiti” has become a signifier, for the mother and the daughter, that carries a wide array of memories, people, cultural practices, and feelings. “Haiti,” then, is a capacious signifier, one that, for the daughter, points toward everything from advice her mother has given her to the clothes her mother is planning to send to relatives. The short story shows the extent to which these different aspects of the mother’s and daughter’s relationship to Haiti are both fragmented kernels—vignettes—and the extent to which they can be gathered together.¹²¹ While “New York Day Women” gathers the different parts of its assemblage into a narrative, and while *Krik? Krak!* as a whole weaves together stories from a variety of epochs and contexts, the term “Haiti” does similar work here. It is the signifier the mother uses to impart a wealth of experiences to her daughter, and it is the signifier the daughter takes hold of when remembering. Corinne Bigot underlines that home is always imagined, saying that it is “also a discourse, a discourse of locality: a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it, and thus a spiritual, imagined location” (98). In “New York Day Women,” the daughter imagines Haiti, with its capacious meaning and its entanglements with New York, as home. There is, however, a paragraph

¹²¹ Vignettes, as I talk about them here, could also be set in relation to *kleine Formen*, e.g. by drawing on the work Annegret Pelz has done on the genre of the album (cf. Kramer and Pelz 2013).

in which the daughter names the specific, familial location of Ville Rose: “My mother, who has now lost six of her seven sisters in Ville Rose and has never had the strength to return for their funerals” (“New York” 133). By mentioning this particular locale, Danticat ties this short story in with other work she has set in the town.¹²²

In “New York Day Women,” Haiti and Manhattan become perceptible through one another. The mother and daughter of this story are dashing around Manhattan, a dashing which connects them to both Haiti *and* New York. As Lefebvre writes: “The recollection of other moments and of all the hours is indispensable, not as a simple point of reference, but in order not to isolate this present and in order to *live* it in all its diversity, made up of *subjects* and *objects*” (36; emphases in the original). It is the daughter’s recollection of her mother’s dictums about Haiti that allows her to live fully in New York, and to inhabit this moment; but it is also the daughter’s recollection of her mother’s dictums that makes her feel connected to that part of her life and family history. In this way, it is not just that Haiti is a repeating island, repeating, reverberating, and echoing all the way to Manhattan, but that Manhattan, too, is part of a Caribbean archipelago. Manhattan, too, repeats and reverberates, changing how Haiti is seen, lived, remembered, and embodied, an embodiment that, according to Amber Lascelles, “in its multiple literary forms, is a central part of this resistance and becomes a crucial way of engaging with diaspora” (230). Danticat links the im/mobilities of walking to the imaginative, commemorative mobilities in remembered statements; she also links these mobilities on the part of the daughter-narrator to those of the reader, who assembles the two narrative strands into a story and makes sense of the rhythm between and within them. Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis enables us to zoom in on specific, minute moments—the mother waiting at the crosswalk, one taxi driver talking to another, a dash out the door—while Benítez-Rojo enables us to read Haiti as “an island that repeats itself until transforming into a meta-archipelago and reaching the most widely separated transhistorical frontiers of the globe” (24). It is in this repetition of the island, this entanglement of Haiti and New York, that the characters reside.

¹²² Work set in the town includes Danticat’s 2013 novel *Claire of the Sea Light*.

4.2 “In Dreams We Travel the Years”: Imaginative Mobilities of Dreams and Communication in “Caroline’s Wedding”

At fifty pages, “Caroline’s Wedding” is by far the longest short story in *Krik? Krak!*.¹²³ The story is told from the point of view of Gracina, a young Haitian-American woman, and sets in when she has just received her naturalization certificate. Told in the first person and from Gracina’s point of view, the story takes place in the time leading up to her sister Caroline’s wedding to a man from the Bahamas. It explores what Gracina’s new citizenship status means for her and her future and how the sisters deal with the death of their father a few years prior. By foregrounding Gracina becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen and acquiring a passport, the short story is also deeply concerned with network capital and regimes of mobility. Gracina becoming a U.S. citizen changes the way she thinks of her life in the U.S.; it changes the way she can move around as well as imagine the place she has called home for almost all her life but in which she had always been in a precarious position.

At the same time, the story approaches the question of what it means to be Haitian through a plethora of imaginative mobilities. Many of these imaginative mobilities play out through communication, including an associative question-and-answer game, riddles, bedtime stories, and sermons. Additionally, I see Gracina and Caroline’s dreams of their father as one of these strands of communication, both because many of them feature attempts to talk to their father and because of their overall communicative function in the story. All these modes and methods of communication are ways for the characters to access parts of their Haitian heritage, to navigate their relationship both to Haiti and to United States, and to do so together. They are, then, vehicles for imaginative, commemorative mobilities. At the same time, these modes of communication bring different levels of the story and the narration together while creating specific rhythms and mobilities for the reader. Both of these functions tie in with the story’s tug between the individual and the communal, a tug that is made visible and at times bridged by imaginative mobilities. In this chapter, I will analyze these imaginative mobilities as they play out in the depiction of network capital and in communicative devices, before moving on to the individual and communal.

¹²³ In the short story collection, “Caroline’s Wedding” follows immediately after “New York Day Women.”

4.2.1 “Like Being in a War Zone and Finally Receiving a Weapon of My Own”: Network Capital

While Gracina’s sister Caroline was born in the U.S. and has therefore been a citizen since birth, Gracina spent the first few years of her life in Haiti. Only now, as an adult, has she been granted U.S. citizenship. It is Caroline who carries the very visible mark of the family’s struggle to become U.S.-Americans on her body: she was born with one forearm missing, which the family attributes to the girls’ mother having been given a tranquilizing shot in immigration detention. There is a stark difference between this physical inscription of the family’s attempt at citizenship on Caroline’s body and the ease with which she approaches themes around the family’s immigration status. When Gracina announces that she is now an American, Caroline playfully replies, “I don’t love you any less” (“Caroline” 142). This humorous nonchalance is missing from Gracina’s approach to her own immigration status; for her, becoming a citizen and receiving her papers cuts her life in two, separating it into a before and after. After receiving her naturalization certificate, Gracina, the narrator, tells us:

For the first time in my life, I felt truly secure living in America. It was like being in a war zone and finally receiving a weapon of my own, like standing on the firing line and finally getting a bulletproof vest. We had all paid dearly for this piece of paper, this final assurance that I belonged in the club. It had cost my parents’ marriage, my mother’s spirit, my sister’s arm. (“Caroline” 186)

In this reading of events, the things the family has gone through on their journey through the American immigration process and to a relatively secure, stable life in the U.S. has culminated in her possession of this document. Gracina integrates these violent events into a coherent narrative, one that does not just end happily but continues to have loss and destruction inscribed into it. At the same time as becoming a naturalized citizen can be seen as ending one chapter of the family’s mobility, it crucially opens up future possibilities both for movement and for stasis. As soon as she has a passport, Gracina will be able to travel. Her sister’s fiancé tells her: “Now you can just get on a plane anytime you feel like it and go anywhere in the world. Nations go to war over women like you. You’re an American” (“Caroline” 161), marking the profound shifts in her legal identity and corresponding motility. In addition to the tangible difference that this document makes in Gracina’s life, it also has consequences for her ability to imagine her future mobility. As discussed earlier, Peter Adey et al. write about the profound relationship between infrastructure and mobilities, pointing out that mere knowledge that a railway

is going to be built changes how people think about places and invest places, and potential mobilities between and within them, with meaning. Similarly, getting the passport makes imagining a variety of new mobilities possible. Gracina gets used to her new naturalization certificate so quickly that, when she has to temporarily hand it in order to apply for a passport, she “suddenly [feels] like unclaimed property” (“Caroline” 140). The certificate, with its promise of a passport, makes mobility seem possible; its absence—although in the service of enabling new future mobilities—makes her feel like a leftover remnant from a trip gone wrong. In addition to highlighting how fraught this new promise of mobility continues to be for Gracina, describing her as a suitcase figures Gracina as both a subject and object of travel. While she is now in a position to exert more agency over her mobility than ever before, this agency continues to take place within a state apparatus. The image of herself as a suitcase, then, embeds Gracina in realities of “governmobility” (cf. Bærenholdt), realities in which she has limited agency. Like a suitcase, her im/mobilities are circumscribed by larger powers. Bærenholdt argues that “government through mobility has become the very central move in making societies” (30); notably, his concept of governmobility “describes a situation where the regulation of mobilities are internalised in people’s mobile practices” (29). Gracina is aware of the way her own mobilities, both imaginative and corporeal, are circumscribed by this system, as a signifier of newly possible mobility, such as the suitcase, can be turned into one of involuntary stasis. While Bærenholdt makes this process of internalization sound automatic and unthinking, Gracina is highly aware both what she has internalized and of the internalization itself.

Along with mobilities, a passport can also make voluntary stasis and staying possible. Sara Ahmed et al. write that “‘passports’ [...] are required not only to move between places, but also to stay ‘at home’ in them” (7). It is this feeling of protection that the passport represents for Gracina, as she feels like she “want[s] to run back to my mother’s house waving the paper like the head of an enemy rightfully conquered in battle” (“Caroline” 139). This fraught and triumphant change in Gracina’s life serves as the story’s starting point, showing how bureaucratic realities undergird characters’ spatial and imaginative im/mobilities. The story then goes on to navigate im/mobilities in acts of communication and in dreams.

4.2.2 “Our Sole Inheritance”: Mobilities of Dreams and Dialogues

One way in which commemorative mobilities play out in “Caroline’s Wedding” is in Gracina’s dreams of her late father. I argue that these dreams can be seen as a kind of imaginative mobility—albeit one that is both involuntary and unconscious—for several reasons: Firstly, in dreaming, Gracina is mentally and imaginatively mobile, moving—or, rather, *being moved*—from one way of experiencing the world to another. In doing so, she interacts with the Haiti of her family’s past, with her father, and with the U.S. in a way that is distinct from her waking life. Secondly, the points where the story moves from the narration of events to the depiction of a dream affords a particular readerly mobility, as the reader jumps from one level of narration to another.

Several of the dreams are described in the short story. The first dream is one that Caroline and Gracina started having after their father died.

For a few months after Papa died, Caroline and I dreamt of him every other night. It was as though he were taking turns visiting us in our sleep. We would each have the same dream: Papa walking in a deserted field while the two of us were running after him. We were never able to catch up with him because there were miles of saw grass and knee-deep mud between us. (“Caroline” 150)

It is noticeable that the sisters share this dream – dreams, while being a kind of imaginative travel, are not usually a way of imagining together, since it is impossible to choose what to dream outside the realm of lucid dreaming. In addition to being shared, what is noticeable about this dream is that it is about mobility: Gracina and Caroline are dreaming of the father walking, and of themselves running after him. The dream is thus not just an instance of imaginative mobility: what is imagined *is* mobility, namely the movement of running. In the precise way this imagined mobility is described, the dream further bears striking resemblance to “New York Day Women” – the two sisters run after their father but cannot get to him. While in “New York Day Women” it is “a sea of pinstripes” (“New York” 129) which separates the daughter from her mother, here it is the “miles of saw grass and knee-deep mud” (Caroline 150). Where the daughter in “New York Day Women” enjoys the distance to her mother and the opportunity to observe her from afar, the daughters in “Caroline’s Wedding” would like to get closer. Furthermore, in “New York Day Women,” the daughter gets imaginatively closer to her mother by remembering things her mother has told her about Haiti; while the physical distance remains the same, she is profoundly entangled with the mother and the memory of her. Where the daughter in that story could get spatially closer to her parent but chooses not

to, Gracina and Caroline cannot. There is a difference in agency not just because the daughter in "New York" is awake and in command of her actions, as opposed to the sisters in "Caroline," but also because the first daughter has the possibility of reaching her mother, which the latter daughters do not.

These are drastic differences. Nonetheless, in both stories, it is imaginative mobility that, while not fully bridging the physical distance between daughter(s) and parent, opens up new ways of engaging with the parent. In both stories, too, there is a sense of a spell that is not to be broken. In "New York Day Women," one reason the daughter does not approach the mother is that it seems as if, by doing so, she would break a certain kind of spell: she would not be able to observe her mother and her mother's rhythms from afar anymore. This would stop her from being the "angel spirit" Gyssels describes, as well as from being a *rhythmanalyst* just removed enough from the rhythm to be cognizant of it. In "Caroline's Wedding," Gracina and Caroline aim to subvert their mother's counter spell: they are told by their mother to wear red underwear, as the color is believed to terrify the dead and will keep their dead father from visiting them in their sleep. They go against those wishes, thereby inviting their father into their dreams. Similarly to the daughter in "New York Day Women," the two women purposefully invite commemorative journeys related to their father, thereby actively re-negotiating their relationship to him. While they cannot be said to be exerting agency in their dreams, they are displaying a certain agency in inviting their dreams. In "Caroline's Wedding," dreams therefore straddle the dividing line between agency and the unconscious.

In the second dream, when Gracina again cannot physically reach her father, she instead opts to remember things he has told her.

That morning, I wrote down a list of things that I remembered having learned from my father. I had to remind myself, at least under my breath, that I did remember still. In the back of my mind, I could almost hear his voice saying these things to me, in the very same way that he had spoken over the years: 'You have memory of walking in a mist at dawn in a banana jungle that no longer exists. You have lived this long in this strange world, so far from home, because you remember.' ("Caroline" 155-156)

In the dream, Gracina's father sounds just the way he had sounded in the past. Similarly, the girls' mother says that "[i]n dreams we travel the years" ("Caroline" 165), thereby both linking dreams to commemorative mobility in the extent to which they can engage with the past and pointing out ways in which they, like memories, can collapse time. Dreams and memories, then, are here seen not as two distinct ways in which imaginative

mobilities can play out, but as linked. While her dreams navigate her memories of her father for Gracina, they also inform how she actively chooses to remember him: in this case, by writing. By not just writing down a memory of her father, but memories of things he used to say, the story is linked to “New York Day Women,” as verbal statements are remembered, re-worded, and reorganized into a sort of dialogue, one which enables commemorative mobilities and weaves together absence and presence.

For the reader, this creates a particular rhythm of back-and-forth. As opposed to the vignettes in “New York Day Women,” the dreams are embedded in the narrative and do not stand out visually, but the text nonetheless makes clear where dreams begin and end. The reader, then, does not have to guess whether a given line or paragraph is part of a dream or part of the main narrative but nonetheless has to navigate between these two levels of narration; while the dream’s content speaks to the rest of the story, it needs to be remembered as fictitious on the level of plot. This heightens the experience of readerly mobility that McKittrick et al. describe as “tracking continuities, seeking out flows, noticing pauses that occur across a range of texts and ideas” (871). Similar to asking on which page something took place, as in McKittrick’s example, a reader who half-remembers the story might have to check whether something happened while dreaming or awake. Along with these readerly mobilities engendered by the dreams, Caroline and Gracine, too, are together involved in a kind of readerly practice: the fact that they share a dream in a way makes them part of the same reading public. The dreams in Danticat’s “Caroline’s Wedding,” then, serve a communicative function both because the two sisters share the same dreams and because many of them are about the sisters’ attempt to reach, and speak to, their late father. In a later step, the sisters draw on this attempt to engender more of a sense of communication with their father by writing down what he used to say.

While I therefore see dreams both as linked to a desire for communication and as leading to further dialogue, there are other, more straightforwardly dialogic forms playing out in “Caroline’s Wedding.” In the earlier story, “New York,” the daughter is engaged in imaginative and commemorative mobilities to Haiti while remembering the mother’s own commemorative mobilities. The story stages an imagined dialogue between a mother and daughter which, while playing out on the page as well as in the daughter’s mind, the mother is not to her knowledge involved in. Similarly, in “Caroline’s Wedding,” commemorative mobilities take place through dialogues which push at the boundaries of what a dialogue can be. This is mirrored by the title of the short story collection *Krik?*

Krak!, which refers to a Haitian call-and-response storytelling technique. In both stories, these dialogues fold absence and presence into one another. This folding can take place either because the interlocutor is absent, because what is being discussed is itself concerned with absence, or because both of these absences are intertwined. One example of this is the associative question-and-answer game played by Caroline and Gracina.

We sat facing each other in the dark, playing a free-association game that Ma had taught us when we were girls.
'Who are you?' Caroline asked me.
'I am the *lost* child of the night.'
'Where do you come from?'
'I come from the inside of the *lost* stone.'
("Caroline" 145; emphases in the original)¹²⁴

Another story in *Krik? Krak!*, called "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," also includes a question-and-answer game, but there are notable differences. In that story, which I will analyze in the following subchapter, the game allows the women playing it to ascertain whether someone is from the same community of survivors and can therefore be trusted; there are specific answers which are seen to be right and which grant access.¹²⁵ The game in "Caroline's Wedding," meanwhile, is much more flexible; rather than giving answers to the questions asked, the sisters are spinning an open-ended, dialogic web, "coming up with endless possibilities for questions and answers, only repeating the key word in every sentence" ("Caroline" 145). This, then, is a highly mobile form of conversation, as the game flits into unexpected directions. The game is a way for Gracina and Caroline to navigate their relationship to their shared past and their family's history. Over the course of this short story, Danticat showcases both the things that Gracina and Caroline have in common—first and foremost by having them dream the exact same dream—and their differing experience of being Haitian and American, so starkly visible in Caroline's missing arm and in the sisters' different paths to citizenship; Gracina mentions that having been born in America is "something that [Caroline] very much took for granted" ("Caroline" 142). In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor writes about how the

¹²⁴ In Danticat's children's book *Anacaona: Golden Flower* about the Taíno chief, there is a similar question-and-answer game, this one played not with another person but with oneself. In this game, Anacaona poses a riddle to herself, such as "Why would I stay in Xaraguá, even if I remain unmarried?" (*Anacaona* 34), before providing herself with an answer.

¹²⁵ The later game in fact emerges out of the earlier one, as the girls' maternal grandmother "belonged to a secret women's society in Ville Rose, where the women had to question each other before entering one another's houses" ("New York" 146). This is how the girls' mother learned the game and later taught it to her daughters, which adds an intergenerational component to the game.

“repertoire” serves as a way of transmitting through performance even when the archive—consisting of documents and records—is lost.¹²⁶ Gracina and Caroline’s game can be seen as one such repertoire. The game works precisely because, while the sisters have a shared repertoire of memories and stories, it is unclear what part of the repertoire they will be touching on in any given moment and what they will each bring to it. The game is thus a vehicle for commemorative mobilities; additionally, it becomes part of the tapestry of dialogue within the short story. Although Muir argues that, “in their exchange of ritualized questions and responses, the women express fear and loss as well as hope and life, not to anyone but themselves” (109), their question-and-answer game is embedded in a variety of contexts: in a familial line of women in their family playing ritualized verbal games, in the context of the plethora of storytelling traditions in their family, and in the dialogic innovations of *Krik? Krak!* as a whole. It is therefore not just a conversation between the two sisters in which they do not communicate “to anyone but themselves,” but points far beyond their dyad. As with Benítez-Rojo’s concept of the *repeating island*, the communicative, archipelagic fragments of the game pulsate outward. Davis argues that the game opens up a space for the sisters to work toward constructing their subjectivity, writing that

[t]he words and the hidden meanings in their mothers’ verbal games form a significant starting point from which they can develop their own voice and autonomy because a space is created within the inherited contest in which their own representation is possible. Drawing from a rich source of oral traditions, as well as from their own experience and imagination, the daughters can then construct and claim their own subjectivity. (Davis 69-70)

This claiming of subjectivity which Davis describes happens through a variety of gaps in the game. The power of the question-and-answer game comes not just from this rich source the sisters share and from their agency in choosing from it, but from the gaps between the things they say as well as from the gaps between what they are each able to remember. Thinking of another communicative mode in the story—bedtime stories—Gracina narrates, “These were our bedtime stories. Tales that haunted our parents and made them laugh at the same time. We never understood them until we were fully grown and they became our sole inheritance” (“Caroline” 158). It is this heritage, in which absence and presence both of family members and of memories are so tightly interwoven, that the sisters navigate in their dialogic, communicative game. Both in “New York Day

¹²⁶ Also cf. chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Women” and in “Caroline’s Wedding,” ‘communication’ is so capacious that it is almost itself a synonym for ‘imagination.’ What Danticat proposes is a way of looking at communication which *is* imagination, and of looking at imagination in a way which *is* communication.

4.2.3 “All Haitians Know Each Other”: The Communal and Individual

These stories, then, are highly concerned with different kinds of mobility – the geographic and imaginative mobilities of characters, the mobility regimes of passports and network capital, and the mobility of the reader gathering different narrative strands together. In this highly mobile context, it is not a stretch to add another kind of mobility: the tug between two concepts, such as the tug between the individual and the communal. In “Caroline’s Wedding,” Gracina attends Mass with her mother when the priest lists Haitian refugees who have recently died trying to reach the U.S. The reader knows that these refugees are the characters of the story “Children of the Sea,” which opens *Krik? Krak!*. Jenny Sharpe brings our attention to the question how the priest could have known these names and these individuals’ fates. She writes, “The priest’s knowledge (how could he know?) and commemoration of the dead suggests that the Haitian boat people who drowned were not completely lost at sea” (Sharpe 108). While both the priest and the reader have detailed knowledge of the dead, Gracina and her mother do not, and so there is a tug, or tension, between the individual and the communal which plays out here. Both the reader and the priest see community: The priest is talking about the people who drowned because they are Haitian, and part of the community of Haitians which he and his congregation imagine. For the congregants, this appears to be a comparably de-individualized community, while both the reader and the priest see not just the expanse but the individuality of these people. What happens when a reader who has read “Children of the Sea” now reads “Caroline’s Wedding” is not just that the reader fills in a gap in “Caroline’s Wedding,” adding information which most of the characters lack. Instead, the reader sees both: she can add the information from another short story to this one, but she does so while experiencing the characters’ point of view. She is confronted both with the knowledge of these people’s names and individual fates and, through Gracina’s point of view, its lack. Like the flowers in between the two narrative strands in “New York Day Women,”¹²⁷ what happens here is that the lacuna, though made

¹²⁷ These flowers also appear at several points in “Caroline’s Wedding.”

visible, is not filled but remains. The reader sees the empty space, the gaps in knowledge, across which the characters move, imagine, and empathize.

After the Mass in which the priest reads the names of the drowned, Gracina tells Caroline about the service. Gracina speculates that their mother might have cried if they had stayed longer, to which Caroline replies: “It’s not like she knows these people.” Gracina disagrees: “Ma says all Haitians know each other” (“Caroline” 149). This line speaks to Benedict Anderson’s key insight in *Imagined Communities*, where he writes about nation-states as being imagined:

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (5-6)

The act of imagining the Haitians who died trying to reach the U.S., however, goes beyond what Anderson describes. It is not limited to the spatial boundaries of the nation-state but extends to the diaspora, thereby “expanding the space of the original homeland” (Pulitano 160), as Pulitano argues is Danticat’s project in *Krik? Krak!*. In Haitian parlance, the diaspora is often called the “tenth department,” thereby inscribing the diaspora into Haitian geography (cf. Boisseron 105, among others).¹²⁸

The congregants are also encouraged to enter into a dialogue with the Haitians who drowned. The priest starts the service by welcoming the congregants in a way which embeds them in a historical moment:

“We have come here this far, from the shackles of the old Africans,” read the priest in Creole. “At the mercy of the winds, at the mercy of the sea, to the quarters of the New World, we came. Transients. Nomads. I bid you welcome.” We all answered back, “Welcome.” (“Caroline” 147)

Immediately, the congregants are both placed in the context of their ancestors’ forced displacement through slavery and offered to enter into a dialogue with the priest and with the ancestral horizon he has just opened up. When the priest starts reading the names of people who were on the vessel that sunk, Gracina narrates, “[t]he list was endless and with each name my heart beat faster, for it seemed as though many of those listed might have been people that I had known at some point in my life” (“Caroline” 147). This church scene, then, expands on Anderson’s insight in several ways: By going beyond the spatial

¹²⁸ The tenth department is also, sometimes, referred to as the “floating homeland” (cf. Muir). Jana Evans Brazil points out that *Krik? Krak!* consists of nine stories and one epilogue, like nine departments and the diaspora (cf. 78-79).

boundaries of the nation-state, by letting the characters not only imagine their fellow Haitians but by staging a dialogue between them, and by figuring them as something half-forgotten, linking them to Gracina's sense that she had "known [them] at some point in [her] life." Additionally, the text mentions that the priest spoke in Kreyòl, but there is no Kreyòl on the page; the reader has to imagine it. The story weaves absence and presence together not just in remembering people who are unknown to the congregants and whose individual fates the priest could not have known about, but also in the lacuna of Kreyòl.¹²⁹

The adage that all Haitians know each other is also reminiscent of the vignettes in "New York Day Women." In both cases, a mother's adages are twice refracted: through her own memory as well as through the memory of someone remembering her. The daughter in "New York Day Women" remembers her mother's statements and brings them into dialogue with her immediate experiences in Manhattan, switching back and forth between the two. In "Caroline's Wedding," Gracina remembers an earlier adage of her mother's and proceeds to relay it to her sister. In both instances, something the (respective) mother said about a shared Haitian frame of reference is moved to, and mobilized within, a new context.

4.3 "Daughters of That River": Embodied Commemoration in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven"

In "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," the second story in *Krik? Krak!*, imaginative, commemorative mobilities are also used to connect daughters to their parents and ancestors, "braiding previous and current generations together" (Putnam 7). It does so by portraying the Massacre River as a site of communal trauma and pilgrimage. The title of the story refers to the year of the so-called Parsley Massacre, in which people suspected of being Haitian were murdered in the Dominican Republic under Trujillo.¹³⁰ In the story, the river around which the massacre took place stands in for disruption and continuity, for the past and the present. Thinking about her mother, the narrator describes

the Massacre River, the river separating Haiti from the Spanish-speaking country that she had never allowed me to name because I had been born on the night that El Generalissimo, Dios Trujillo, the honorable chief of state, had ordered the massacre of all Haitians living there. ("Nineteen" 29)

¹²⁹ When Danticat does include Kreyòl in her writing, she then usually goes on to render it in English.

¹³⁰ It got its name because people who were thought to be Haitian were sometimes made to pronounce the Spanish word "perejil" (parsley), the idea being that Haitians are unable to pronounce the Spanish word. The importance of this linguistic test for the massacre has, however, been questioned (cf. Langley 64).

The Massacre River was originally named for a different massacre. It got its name because thirty French buccaneers were murdered by Spanish settlers in 1728 (cf. Wucker cited in Vega-González 10). It also, however, played a crucial role during the Parsley Massacre, becoming a site of bloodshed. The Massacre River, then, has taken on the meaning of these two historical massacres. Additionally, by being the dividing line between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, two countries which Trujillo “‘imagined’ as far more different and distant from each other than they really were—one Spanish, the other French; one white, the other black; one Catholic, the other prone to African worship like voodoo” (Ayuso 51), represents a painful history of persecution that, while including the Parsley Massacre, goes beyond it.¹³¹ As such, it is a powerful and oft-used symbol, and a location that figures not only prominently in several of Danticat’s works—including her 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones*, which is set during the Parsley Massacre—but also in other (diasporic) Caribbean writing, such as Roxane Gay’s short story “In the Manner of Water or Light.”

“Nineteen Thirty-Seven” ties the story of the river in with a mother-daughter relationship. Each year on the first of November, the mother and daughter of the story go on a pilgrimage to the river. In their book *New Pathways in Pilgrimage Studies*, John Eade and Diogini Albera define pilgrimage sites “as sites of deep significance for both individuals and groups” (1), including both religious and non-religious pilgrimages. In “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” the daughter-narrator describes one such pilgrimage:

When I was five years old, we went on a pilgrimage to the Massacre River, which I had expected to be still crimson with blood, but which was as clear as any water that I had ever seen. [...] We were all daughters of that river, which had taken our mothers from us. Our mothers were the ashes and we were the light. Our mothers were the embers and we were the sparks. Our mothers were the flames and we were the blaze. We came from the bottom of that river where the blood never stops flowing, where my mother’s dive toward life—her swim among all those bodies slaughtered in flight—gave her those wings of flames. The river was the place where it had all begun. (“Nineteen” 35)

There are two main ways in which this speaks to my analysis of imaginative mobilities in this chapter. One is the way in which imaginative, commemorative mobilities are entangled with physical mobilities in this yearly pilgrimage; the other is the way the river stands in for continuity, survival, and cyclicity. The pilgrimage to the river is an instance of spatial mobility since it involves the mother, her daughter, and other women making

¹³¹ Initiatives like *Transnational Hispaniola* attempt to bring the two parts of the island of Hispaniola into dialogue with one another (cf. Mayes et al).

the trip to the river, temporarily changing their location for a place that is not part of their everyday life and which holds specific meaning for them. Additionally, once they are at the river, they dip their hands in the water. The physical act of putting their hands in the river puts them in an embodied relationship to the water. They are, for a moment, in the water of the very same river in which some of their ancestors died. Not only does the river hold great meaning for them; water is also afforded a particular role in many religious and spiritual traditions (cf. Ray), including Haitian vodou (cf. McAlister). One of the reasons is that water can point to cyclicity: As a child, the narrator is surprised that the water is “as clear as any water” (“Nineteen” 35) having expected it to be red with blood instead. The river, which for these women continues to be a site of trauma, is at the same time a site of continual renewal. This is made possible through the community of women who together travel to the river, and through the interplay of generations that this passage speaks to. Drawing on fire imagery, the narrator compares the mothers to ashes, embers, and flames, while comparing the daughters to light, sparks, and the blaze. In both lists of fire nouns, there is a progression, as mothers are compared first to ashes and then flames and daughters first to light and then a blaze. Both strands of women are here seeing as moving in the same direction, the direction of the flame. But the daughters are one step ahead of the mother, turning the dim half-aliveness of the mothers into something alive and vibrant. It is through the pilgrimage to the river that the daughter is able to feel that continuity, since they are standing in the very place where the narrator’s mother “could still see the soldiers chopping up *her* mother’s body and throwing it into the river along with many others” (“Nineteen” 35; emphasis in the original). Wilson Chen writes that “[t]hese pilgrimages to the river encapsulate what is actually a lifelong process of remembering, memorializing, and giving testimony” (50). The story links these commemorative mobilities to the spatial mobility of going on a pilgrimage to the river, the embodied action of dipping one’s hand in the river, and the community of women which mirrors the river in its constant renewal.

Conclusion

In the three stories from *Krik? Krak!* analyzed in this chapter, characters are imaginatively mobile. In “New York Day Women,” the story analyzed at length here, much of this is mediated via rhythms. The daughter’s imaginative mobilities mean that she imagines a dialogue with her mother onto the page, thus both inhabiting and creating a rhythm in

which the past and the future, the mother's presence and her absence, are navigated. In "Caroline's Wedding," the sisters open themselves up to imaginatively engaging with their father by wearing underwear that is supposed to invite him into their dreams, using the dreamed interaction to further engage with his memory by writing. In "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," finally, communal commemoration takes the form of an embodied pilgrimage, thus linking the imaginative mobilities of remembering to the spatial mobilities of a trip to the river. While these instances of imaginative mobilities differ significantly, they all share their location at the intersection of mental and embodied processes, spatial and imaginative mobilities, individual actions and the communal. They also share a "simultaneity of past and presence" (Sharpe 98), which Sharpe sees as characteristic of life for Black people in the diaspora. This simultaneity is also characteristic of Danticat's short stories. In the three stories analyzed here, this simultaneity of past and present, the folding of absence and presence, is mediated not just through acts of imaginative mobilities, but through attempts at communication, "dialogues [which] circulate over centuries; across rivers and mountains and seas; and beyond national borders" (Braziel 79). In addition to these dialogues within the short stories, these narratives create a particular kind of dialogue on the level of form. "Danticat's strategy of weaving traumatic memories across time and space" (Pulitano 164) leads to a tapestry in which memories and the present exist not only side by side, but in a web of meaning, one which the characters' imaginative mobilities and the reader's readerly mobilities come together.

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5. “How to Explain This Berserkería:” Code-Switching and Linguistic Mobilities in Junot Díaz¹³²

The fiction of Junot Díaz depicts and enacts im/mobilities. Díaz, who was born in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic in 1968 and migrated to New Jersey with his family in 1974, writes mainly about the Dominican immigrant experience in the United States. He has published two short story collections, *Drown* in 1996 and *This Is How You Lose Her* in 2012, as well as one novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2008, which made him “arguably the most renowned Dominican American write” (Horn 124). All three of these books are largely narrated from the point of view of Yunior, a young Dominican man who attends Rutgers University and finally becomes a writer and professor. Díaz has also published one children’s picture book, *Islandborn*, in 2018. In addition to writing, he teaches creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and serves as the fiction editor of the *Boston Review*; in all these ways, Díaz has been highly visible in the U.S. literary landscape for twenty years. Díaz’s fiction thematizes im/mobilities in a plethora of different ways: his texts show mobilities between the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, as Díaz’s characters go back to the Dominican Republic in order to visit family or to show the country to a U.S.-American lover, are sent back to the Dominican Republic as punishment, or go there searching for romantic bliss. In terms of language, New Jersey and the Dominican Republic are navigated via code-switching, as Díaz mixes Spanish and English in a highly distinct fashion, suffusing the languages with one another. Much of the scholarship on Díaz has studied his code-switching. In their introduction to *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, Monica Hanna et al. describe Díaz’s “creolized vernacular, equal parts urban and island slang, that moves seamlessly between English and Spanish” (3). However, the texts’ code-switching should not be seen as just a result of their characters’ past geographical mobility or diasporicity. I want to argue, instead, that the texts’ code-switching performs a kind of imaginative mobility in itself: Through code-switching, the texts let the characters imagine their ties to the Dominican Republic and

¹³² An earlier and significantly shorter version of this chapter was published as “Capturing Berserkería and Amor: Untranslatability and Migrant Belonging in Junot Díaz’s *This Is How You Lose Her*” in the volume *Transnational Narratives on Migration and Exile*, edited by Camilla Erichsen Skalle and Anje Müller Gjesdal, in 2021.

their current American homes by speaking, by choosing a language and words which will bring them closer to, or farther away from, one of these places. It is this navigation of homes, places, and mobilities via code-switching that I refer to as linguistic mobility.¹³³

In this chapter, I will outline how I view Díaz's code-switching in relationship with Emily Apter's concept of the Untranslatable and in current debates around World Literature. I will also contextualize Díaz's work within the literary marketplace, showing how the multilinguality of his texts is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the shifts within the market. Writing about code-switching in *This Is How You Lose Her*, I will analyze how his code-switching mobilizes the reader, how it both perpetuates and pushes back against patriarchal norms, and how code-switching can be linked both to community exclusion and inclusion in these texts. These latter strands of my analysis are related to im/mobilities both because code-switching is an inherently mobile phenomenon, and because it is a way of speaking which serves to further mobilize subjects, as code-switching can be part of a reorientation towards, or away from, specific aspects of the community. I will then go on to analyze the way *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*'s imagines future mobilities before focusing on the immobilizing space of the canefield, as this is both where characters are immobilized through abuse and where they engage with an imaginative realm that both mobile and magical. Rather than making the argument that code-switching is just one of several ways in which Díaz depicts, creates, and navigates im/mobilities, I make the argument that code-switching is a necessary and integral component to each of the mobile phenomena Diaz represents across his literary output.

5.1 Translation Zones and Untranslatability

The code-switching and lack of translation in Díaz's work is perhaps best studied by considering debates around World Literature and its interplay with translation. The fate and future of Comparative Literature as a discipline has long been under debate, a tendency which can be seen to be in tension with the field of mobility studies. Gayatri Spivak's influential book *Death of a Discipline* (2003) predicted the end of Comparative Literature over twenty years ago, arguing that the discipline, by translating large swaths of global literature into English and teaching them at university, was falling prey to a

¹³³ The term "linguistic mobilities" has at times been used in theoretical linguistics (Jeszenszky; Heyd), in engineering (Khosla), and in empirical linguistics (Anderson; Bonomi).

market logic undermining the discipline's validity. This question continues to reverberate, as the main crux of the current debate around World Literature¹³⁴ is whether Comparative Literature students and scholars should study literature exclusively in the original—in other words, how much mobility of texts and readers is desirable for the field to flourish.

Focused chiefly on the pedagogy of Comparative Literature, David Damrosch's answer to the question whether literature should just be studied in the original is a clear 'no,' as he makes a clear case for reading literature in translation. Defining the field, he summarizes that "*World literature is writing that gains in translation*" (*World Literature* 288; emphasis in the original), delineating World literature both from "[i]nformation texts" and from "works [...] so inextricably connected to their original language and moment that they really cannot be effectively translated at all" (288): it is literature which gains in translation, in mobility, then, that he views as world literature. Although perhaps at first glance not as connected to ideas of the mobile, I see Emily Apter's approach, which is not quite as straightforward or celebratory, as offering an even more fruitful way of thinking through literature and its (non-)translations. Apter opens her 2006 book *The Translation Zone* with a list of twenty theses on translation, among them: "Nothing is translatable," "Translation is an oedipal assault on the mother tongue," "Translation is the traumatic loss of native language," "Translation is plurilingual and postmedial expressionism," and "Everything is translatable" (xi–xii). The title of her book refers to "a field in which philology is linked to globalization, to Guantánamo Bay, to war and peace, to the Internet and 'Netlish,' and to 'other Englishes' spoken worldwide" (Apter, *Translation* 11). This assemblage of seemingly contradictory statements shows the breadth of theoretical reach for which Apter is advocating and which is characteristic of her own work, her ease with contradictions, and her awareness of the multifariousness to be found within a single language such as English. But what she is getting at here, first and foremost, is the disquieting pull between the inadequacy of translation on the one hand and its necessity on the other hand, seeing as scholars of Comparative Literature need translation unless they are content to work exclusively on literature written in languages they can read. Additionally, in sentences like, "The challenge of Comp Lit is to

¹³⁴ Caribbeanist J. Michael Dash remarked on "the increasing tendency to use the term *world literature* to denote a global, totalizing system of literary creation and influence" (2, emphasis in the original) as early as 1998.

balance the singularity of untranslatable alterity against the need to translate *quand même*" (Apter, *Translation* 91; emphasis in the original), Apter is playful about that which is untranslated in her own writing, making her an accomplice of Díaz not just in her theoretical convictions but even in the style of her prose.

In her more recent book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, Apter (2013) returns to the question of translation, but this time she focuses on that which she wants translation to leave out, or at the very least to approach carefully: the Untranslatable.¹³⁵ Basing this concept on Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, Apter argues that "[t]here is a quality of militant semiotic intransigence attached to the Untranslatable, making it more than just a garden-variety keyword" (34). Though this may not be immediately apparent, one group of words which falls into this category is words which encompass philosophical concepts, such as the Russian "*npavda*" /pravda/. Though this word has often been translated as 'truth' without much ado, there is much that such a translation leaves out: the fact that *Pravda* was the name of the USSR's government-controlled newspaper, and as such has gained connotations of "that which is philosophically off-limits in its home country" (Apter, *World Literature* 34); as well as its history as the antonym of *slovo*, which leads to *pravda* connoting "'word,' 'discourse,' 'logos,' and linguistically embodied rationalism" (ibid.). As in *The Translation Zone*, such minute considerations lead Apter to more sweeping claims about the entrenchment of translation in national and global structures. When Apter writes that "[e]ven the term 'translation,' which in a sense signifies language in a state of non-belonging, or nationalism degree zero, is nationally marked" (36), she further subverts the assumption that translation (which is often understood to hint at assimilation, sameness, intelligibility) makes belonging. This is reminiscent of Ahmed et al.'s assertion that "*Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached*" (1; emphasis in the original), a statement which serves as one of the guiding ideas of this dissertation and which decouples straightforward ideas about belonging, fixity, stasis, and movement. While Apter links translation to non-belonging, I suggest going one step further and linking non-translation, such as it happens in Díaz's texts, to a certain kind of belonging: through code-

¹³⁵ By capitalizing the term, Apter is cementing the Untranslatable as a category. Since I am using Apter's category, I have adopted this capitalization. Further work could be done on the question whether this way of stylizing the term makes the Untranslatable seem more separate from other words than it necessarily is.

switching, characters are made to belong to a multilingual world, one where they can vacillate between being grounded and being mobile within the same sentence.

Apter wants the discipline of Comparative Literature to become capable of a “kind of socioeconomic mapping” (40). This, then, looks like “a critical praxis capable of adjusting literary technics—interlinear translation, exegesis, gloss, close reading—to the exigencies of a contemporary language politics marked by [...] the impact of accents, vernacular, code-switching, argot and diglossia within non-standard language use” (43). An approach informed by Apter makes it possible to pay attention not just to code-switching as we often understand it—from one language to another—but to the many ways in which there can be shifts within a textual utterance. In its focus on the small, this approach therefore has something in common with “small” mobilities in the field of mobility studies, specifically with Sheller’s suggestion that we aim to get “data that are more small-scale, more intimate, more interpersonal, and more enacted in everyday relations” (“Spatial Turn” 630). It is the granular, detail-oriented approach of Apter’s which can make us attuned to the many micro-mobilities happening on the level of a sentence or paragraph.

Apter’s detailed focus on certain words goes hand in hand with her argument that we need to make “comparative literature geopolitically case-sensitive and site-specific in ways that avoid reproducing neo-imperialist cartographies” (42). This approach argues that we should not unthinkingly subsume literary traditions into the canon, but that we must pay attention to differences, and that gaps in translatability, and in that which can be transported into another language, are bound to remain. In her writing about what successful practices of translation and of Comparative Literature look like, Apter is especially attentive to that which can be gained from their overlap. Both when dealing with translations and when carving out a future for the discipline of Comparative Literature, we need “an approach to globality that fully activates the Untranslatable” (Apter, *World Literature* 38); switching between English and Spanish, this is what Díaz does. While he is not a scholar or a translator, I argue that Apter’s and Díaz’s concerns are profoundly related. They can help illuminate each other through their shared commitment to the insoluble specificity of certain words, through the precise attention paid to minute details, and through their effort to resist “neo-imperial cartographies” (42), an approach particularly useful when looking at colonial im/mobilities and their echoes.

However, this careful approach to translation does not need to lead to a wholesale dismissal of World Literature concepts. Studying texts from genres and contexts with which one is not familiar has at times been seen as a mere consumption of different text forms. Yet I do not see Damrosch's views as being quite as starkly opposed to Apter's as is often claimed. To Damrosch's mind, "It is not necessary [...] to read hundreds and hundreds of poems in order to get our bearings and develop an intelligent first appreciation of a tradition. [...] [T]he essential first step is to gain enough of a foothold in a tradition that an initially flat picture opens out into three dimensions" (*How to Read* 23). While this validates steps even into traditions in which we are not already fluent, Damrosch urges us to study a language so that we are not just tourists, saying that "[t]he learning of languages provides a crucial mode of access to other cultures, the best way to ensure that the student will become more than a cultural ecotourist"¹³⁶ (*World Literature* 290) – this is not so wholly different from Apter's reminder that Comparative Literature needs to be "site-specific." Where they do differ is that for Damrosch, reading texts involves looking at them from a distance, as he argues that "a degree of distance from the home tradition can help us to appreciate the ways in which a literary work reaches out and away from its point of origin" (*World Literature* 300). What he is describing here—literature reaching out and away—is reminiscent of the mobility of Benítez-Rojo's *repeating islands*, as Damrosch describes the way in which any piece of literature, though emerging in a specific context, reverberates outwards. There is a way in which reading just a few haikus by zooming really in on them can perhaps mean an in-depth engagement with the text¹³⁷ —an engagement not so totally different from Apter's focus on specific words. Importantly, Damrosch also highlights the multiplicity within every language, and even the multiplicity within one language spoken by one single user, arguing that "even a single language may disintegrate within the fragmented consciousness of a single user, and different speakers of the same language are doomed to mean different things with every word they say" (Damrosch, *World Literature* 292).

The debate about World Literature has consequences for how we think about translated and untranslated words in a text, how we think about translation more broadly,

¹³⁶ By using the term "ecotourist" here, rather than just "tourist," I take Damrosch to be pointing to the way in which some readers may view their own position towards the literature as one that is conscientious and non-harmful.

¹³⁷ Damrosch avoids the term "close reading," presumably because of his simultaneous investment in distance.

and how we think about the wider literary system of which the text is a part. All of these are realms in which language and mobility intersect. Both Apter and Damrosch think about what it means for literature to be mobile: the extent to which literature, by being im/mobile, is or is not available to us, and whether it should be. I thus find them fruitful in thinking through Díaz not just because they are attuned to translation, but also because they are attuned to circulation: while Damrosch mostly zooms out, Apter's zooming in on granular specificity is particularly fruitful for thinking about Díaz.

5.2 Multilingualism and the Literary Marketplace

Díaz's work, while including many Spanish words and phrases, rarely translates them for an assumed anglophone reader; there are few glossaries, translations, or explanations of words. Writing about multilingual books, Allison E. Fagan outlines that,

the spectrum runs from very accommodating (with 'cushioned' or contextually translated words and phrases) to resistant (less willing to translate) to defiant (published mostly or entirely in Spanish). These approaches are enhanced, altered, or mitigated by the goals of publishers, editors, translators, and critics who all have different ideas about language as well as thresholds for understanding. (6)

Although Díaz's work is not "mostly or entirely in Spanish," its multilinguality nonetheless falls into the "defiant" category, as the Spanish is not limited to certain words or contexts and is only rarely translated. Importantly, Fagan points out the role the wider literary sphere plays in determining a text's multilinguality. Díaz's first short story collection, *Drown*, includes a two-page glossary at the end, in which Díaz explains some, but not all, Spanish terms used in the stories. These are written not just in an informative tone, but in his fiction's signature voice; for example, "fulano" is explained as "Tom, Dick and Harry all balled into one" (*Drown* 165). This makes the glossary feel like an extension of the literary text, as the format is humorously subverted. In his next work, the 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, there is no glossary; the novel is, however, littered with footnotes, some of which explain Spanish words.¹³⁸ In the 2012 short story collection *This Is How You Lose Her*, there are neither footnotes nor a glossary. While it may seem like a progression on the part of Díaz—that he included a glossary in his first work of fiction, footnotes in the second, and then no translation at all in his third, the Spanish thus

¹³⁸ Yunior's voice, repeated and refracted through these different paratexts, could be said to render Díaz's texts into their own *repeating islands*.

becoming less and less markedly explained—it was, at least in part, the publisher’s decision to add these paratexts in the earlier text. The glossary was “[a]dded at the insistence of his publisher” (McDermott n.p.), noting Díaz’s “annoyance at the inclusion of the glossary in *Drown*” (McDermott n.p.). The absence and presence of glossaries, then, is one site at which the entanglement of a book’s multilinguality and its publishing process becomes apparent.

Beyond this editorial input, any piece of fiction is, of course, part of the literary landscape, and literary marketplace, more widely. This literary landscape is itself in flux. While works such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s genre-bending *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* from 1987 and Giannina Braschi’s postmodern novel *Yo-Yo Boing!* from 1998 switched between languages in a highly radical manner, code-switching arguably did not reach the mainstream until the 2010s. Preti Taneja’s 2017 *We That Are Young* includes Hindi sentences, while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* includes Igbo. This shift also extends to American fiction by writers whose first language is Spanish. While earlier classics, such as Sandra Cisneros’ 1983 novel *The House on Mango Street* and Julia Alvarez’ 1991 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* only sparingly include words in Spanish, later U.S.-Latinx literature, such as Sandra Cisneros’ 2002 novel *Caramelo* and Eduardo C. Corral’s 2012 volume of poetry *Slow Lightning* draw more heavily on Spanish, even if Díaz’s multi-register code-switching verve remains the exception. The U.S. publishing landscape, then, has become increasingly accepting of, and welcoming to, fiction with untranslated elements, thereby better reflecting the linguistically mobile lives of many writers and their readers.

However, the fact that the publishing landscape has become more welcome toward texts in multiple languages can also be seen in a critical light. In her book *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, Mimi Sheller outlines some of the ways the Caribbean has been consumed by the Global North. Her far-ranging analysis, which includes foodstuffs, sex tourism, and medical experiments, also touches upon literature. Drawing on bell hooks, Sheller argues that “Ultimately Caribbean literature [...] becomes a commodity valued for its ‘flavour’ while the first-world subject is positioned and consolidated ‘as a consumer’” (Sheller, *Caribbean* 187). I agree with Sheller’s insight that the U.S. literary marketplace is one sphere in which the Caribbean is first exoticized and then consumed. Tension arises because publishing houses need to simultaneously make Caribbean literature palatable in order to sell it, and it becomes palatable and

intelligible when elements which are assumed to be foreign to an American audience are either translated or explained. There is therefore an interesting pull here, one in which literature needs to be consumable at the same time as it needs to be ‘foreign’ enough so that readers will want to consume it in the first place. While the latter market need makes room for Díaz’s Untranslatables, the first one necessitates a kind of translation of those Untranslatables. This creates a tension, one in which untranslated words, seemingly mobile in entering a ‘new’ language environment, are simultaneously immobilized. Apter’s keyword of the *site-specific* can help us here, as it can draw our attention not only to the specific realities of Díaz’s characters, but also to the specificity of the U.S. literary marketplace at the time of the publication of his books, a marketplace which is itself always in flux. As Arlene Dávila writes, “the market plays a central role in the production, consumption, and circulation of all cultural texts and where Latino/a authors surface as ‘discursive’ objects to be discussed, sold, referenced, or analyzed as embodiments of Latinidad” (40). In this way, the shift in Díaz’s intertextual self-translation must also be attributed to a publishing landscape in which multilingual, heteroglossic fiction is increasingly common and sought after. It is then not just Díaz’s Dominican New Jersey but the U.S. publishing landscape which is a specific site reflected in the text, as it makes certain textual mobilities—the mobilities of code-switching and of ultimately circulating the book—possible.

5.3 Díaz’s Code-Switching

Apter’s approach is an attempt to make “comparative literature geopolitically case-sensitive and site-specific in ways that avoid reproducing neo-imperialist cartographies” (*World Literature* 42). Díaz’s code-switching, too, is case-sensitive and site-specific, since it is a way of insisting that some things are untranslatable and that this is a valid, potent, and indeed normal state of affairs. In a 2008 interview, he explains: “Since I can remember, English was present in my Spanish. And clearly Spanish was always present in my English. It may have taken me a while to systemize this at the level of narrative. But the technique, the mixture, has always been within me” (qtd. in O’Rourke n.p.). Díaz frequently code-switches, saying things like “[q]ué irony” (qtd. in Moya and Díaz 392) or “[it] moves the fucking pueblo” (qtd. in BOMB n.p.). He goes so far as to say that he approaches both languages from the outside, explaining “I’m as much an immigrant to Spanish as I am to English” (qtd. in Cresci n.p.) and that “both English and Spanish are in

italics in [his] brain” (qtd. in Knight n.p.). This approach denaturalizes the idea that for someone whose first language is Spanish, English is the language they are ‘foreign’ to; at the same time, it works against the notion of someone who spent the vast majority of their life in a majority-English language country now ‘going back’ (remigrating) to Spanish.¹³⁹ This move denaturalizes both Spanish and English and untethers them from a clear directionality, where one is left behind in order for the other one to be arrived at. Instead, both languages are seen to be part of a realm in which one can be mobile. In framing himself as an “immigrant” to Spanish and English, Díaz spatializes and mobilizes these languages, using a term usually reserved for people who change physical locations. This spatialization hints at the ways in which language and space often cannot be disentangled, as is the case when Díaz’s characters move from their Spanish-language environment of the Dominican Republic to an environment where English is dominant. Díaz’s suggests that non-translation is necessary—that these words need to be rendered in Spanish since something would be lost if they were translated into English—and that code-switching is a linguistic, socioeconomic, and “racial reality” (qtd. in Moya and Díaz 395) in the communities his texts portray. On an even grander scale, the coexistence of Spanish and English in Díaz’s work points to the fact that “it is in fact monolingualism which is the global exception rather than the rule” (Gardner-Chloros and Weston 184). The use of code-switching goes beyond individuals, fictional or otherwise, who have recently been geographically mobile; others, too, speak more than one language in their everyday life, supplant the use of one language by another, or code-switch between them. In resisting subordinating everything to one language, code-switching can thus be said to “avoid reproducing [the] neo-imperialist cartographies” (*World Literature* 42) Apter warns of.

In this way, then, a text which code-switches is a more apt representation of immigrant and diasporic worlds than a monolingual text would be. But while it may be tempting to think that by including Spanish in his majority-English texts, Díaz is simply recreating how he himself speaks, it is crucial to remember that code-switching in literature is never a spontaneous utterance. As Rainer Grutman makes clear when writing about code-switching in Díaz: “Unless we are willing to suspend our disbelief to the point

¹³⁹ This is echoed by Erika Gisela Abad in an autoethnographic poetry piece where she both enacts and reflects on her own Spanish-and-English bilingual poetry practice: “One’s native tongue does not necessitate innate knowledge,” adding that she “encountered a great deal of suspicion from peers as a result of the presumed ease any person raised in a bilingual household would have” (553).

of forgetting that we are dealing with a carefully crafted work of fiction, we would do well to remember that literature is never a carbon copy of reality” (22). While this holds true for any work of literature, it is perhaps especially true for Díaz’s code-switching: at times the Spanish we see on the page matches the Spanish being spoken in the world of the text, as in “she’d missed the couch and busted her ass—the last time hollering, Dios mío, qué me has hecho?—and I had to drag myself out of the basement” (Díaz, “The Pura Principle” 92). Here, the framing sentence is in English and the direct quote is in Spanish, thereby attributing the Spanish sentence to the character. At other times, however, something is rendered in a language other than the one that was used within the world of the text. We see one example of this in the short story “Invierno,” which is set during Yunior’s childhood, when Yunior, his brother Rafa, and their mother have just joined the boys’ father in New Jersey. Yunior approaches his father and “asked him if he thought we would be going back soon. For what? A visit. You ain’t going anywhere” (“Invierno” 131). This conversation must have happened in Spanish, as Yunior does not speak English at this point and is unlikely to have an entire conversation with his father in English. Despite this, it is relayed to the reader in English, thus transporting her into Yunior’s mind at a moment in which he is trying to move towards the English language. Similarly, in *Oscar Wao*, when Oscar’s mother Beli is pleading for her and her unborn baby’s life, the text quotes her as speaking both English and Spanish: “My baby, Beli wept. Mi hijo precioso” (*Oscar* 149). At this point in the story, she has not yet immigrated to the U.S. and does not speak English, which means she would not have said “My baby.” While code-switching in literature is always, as Grutman reminds us, “carefully crafted” and not to be confused with code-switching in spoken conversations, the code-switching in Díaz further emphasizes this fact by letting code-switching on the textual level diverge from code-switching on the narrated level. In addition to highlighting the narrator’s voice and thus the text’s constructedness, creating tension and disjuncture between the two textual levels also keeps the code-switching in them mobile, unfixed, in a way reminiscent of the mobility of form in Dany Laferrière’s genre-switching between prose and verse.¹⁴⁰

Considering that code-switching in Díaz happens in so many directions, and that it happens throughout the text, does it even make sense to speak of code-switching? Could we not perhaps speak of a thoroughly integrated, multilanguage text instead? There are

¹⁴⁰ For an analysis of Laferrière’s genre-switching, cf. chapter 3 of this dissertation.

other terms with which such a mixing of languages and alternating between them has been grasped. In her book of the same title, Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien coins the term "weird English" to describe how Díaz and others "denormalize English out of resistance to it, and form their own language by combining English with their original language" (6). Another possible term is *translanguaging*. As Mi Sun Park writes, "Translanguaging is similar to code-switching in that it refers to multilingual speakers' shuttling between languages in a natural manner. It started as a pedagogical practice, where the language mode of input and output in Welsh bilingual classrooms was deliberately switched" (50). In recent years, *translanguaging* has also migrated into other theoretical spheres—Manuela Guilherme, for example, describes how "[t]ranslanguaging [...] highlights the creative potential of 'language' use, in the context of linguistic diversity, without being attached to codes, that is, 'language' without 'languages', an explosion of linguistic swirls" (50). While translanguaging could thus also prove useful for a discussion of literature, the concept of code-switching is still meaningful when engaging with Díaz's texts. Using the term makes it possible to add a mobilities angle to existing conversations about code-switching which scholars like Cecilia Montes-Alcalá have started both around Díaz and in the wider context of U.S. Latinx literature. It also serves important functions here, since it speaks to a constant switching, a constant shifting, turning, and reorienting. Furthermore, the term "code" in "code-switching" has a democratizing function here, too, as it puts all the languages and registers being switched between on an even playing field: all these variants are codes, equally un/natural and in/authentic. No one variant alone can encompass the characters' lives. Additionally, the word "code" hints at communication, at subtly making something understood—such as in the term "gay-coded"—thereby speaking to the subtle meanings Díaz's texts, and the narrators and characters within them, communicate by code-switching. These considerations, then, help us examine the code-switching in Díaz: not just what is being switched between, but what is communicated in this switching, and to whom.

In *This Is How You Lose Her*, switching happens not just between languages, but also between points of view. Some of the stories in the collection are told in the first person, and some are told in the second person – this, too, a sort of meta code-switching, not just because Díaz moves between modes of narration (and, in the case of the second person, of address), but because the reader needs to be equally mobile. Just like moments of code-switching seep into the rest of the text—the fact that parts of the text are in

Spanish tinging the whole text in Spanish—so the different perspectives from which the stories are told mean that the “you” reverberates even in stories told in “I,” the boundaries between them becoming blurred. This is how Regina Galasso sees the relationship between Spanish and English in Latinx literature too, arguing that:

[R]egardless of a Latino [sic] author’s decision to use Spanish or English, for whatever reason, the other language is considered even if it does not visibly present itself on the page. In other words, whatever the choice may be, the presence or the absence of the other language is a constant of Latino literature. Spanish is always present, and so is English. (335)

I agree that Spanish would still figure in the text even if Díaz refrained from using Spanish terms,¹⁴¹ or followed them up with translations. Instead, Díaz makes his characters’ daily linguistic navigations a highly visible part of the text, and the readers—some of whom may be more familiar with monolingual literature—have to adjust to Yunior’s bilingual reality. One useful way of thinking about this code-switching is via the categories established by Lourdes Torres, who differentiates between: (1) “Easily Accessed, Transparent, or Cushioned Spanish”; (2) “Gratifying the Bilingual Reader”; and (3) “Radical Bilingualism” (Myers 49). In her paper “Radical Code-Switching in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*,” Eugenia Casielles-Suárez is one of the many scholars drawing on Torres when she writes:

Rather than include whole paragraphs in Spanish, which a monolingual reader could simply skip, or offer a neat kind of code alternation [...], the quantity and quality of the Spanish words and phrases which are constantly inserted in English sentences create hybrid phrases with the result that rather than alternating with English, Spanish becomes part of English. (477)

This new, Spanish-infused English serves to “prioritize the bilingual reader and may cause instances of discomfort or annoyance to the monolingual reader” (Casielles-Suárez 476). The embeddedness of Spanish and English within each other also explains that “Díaz’s innovative use of radical bilingualism is not due to the quantity of sentences including Spanish, rather to the quality of mixing and switching in his works” (Derrick 309), which leads her to “consider them fully radically bilingual texts” (317). The idea that “Spanish becomes part of English” is reminiscent of the concept of Spanglish, which is used by scholars such as Glenda R. Carpio in their analysis of Díaz’s work. The term “Spanglish” not just describes but itself is a product of two languages that are so intermingled that the

¹⁴¹ Such as is the case with Creole in those texts by Dany Laferrière and Jamaica Kincaid where it is not rendered and instead functions as a gap, an elision.

boundary between them has dissolved. While both the term and Casielles-Súarez' analysis speak to how thoroughly integrated Spanish and English are in Díaz's text, my claim is a slightly different one. While I agree that the code-switching works to create one text, I am also interested in the tensions that are being navigated through these seamless-seeming switches. Rather than arguing that the boundaries between Spanish and English have dissolved in the text, I am saying that while the boundaries remain, they are continually being mobilized, questioned, and crossed.

5.4. *This Is How You Lose Her*

5.4.1 "Hey, Muñeca, You Say, Prevaricating to the End": Code-Switching in Díaz's Short Stories

This Is How You Lose Her consists of nine short stories, all but one of which ("Otravida, Otravez") are narrated by Yunior; several of those are told in the second-person singular. The links between the stories, then, are more overt than they are in Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*: they are not just subtle hints which the reader picks up on, such as a name from one story reappearing in another story, but consist of Yunior narrating different episodes from his life. His brother Rafa appears in many of the stories, but at different moments in time: in some, he is young and healthy; in others, he is suffering from cancer; and in yet others, he has already died of cancer. These different temporalities, however, do not just play out on the level of the short-story collection, but also within individual short stories, as they include time jumps and references to things which have not yet happened chronologically. José David Saldívar argues that "Yunior spatializes Oscar's temporal periodizings in which the whole planet (and possibly entire galaxies) is involved at every stage of his wondrous, tumultuous life" ("Conjectures" 133). While Saldívar makes it sound as if the different time periods were thoroughly enmeshed, there are real switches and breaks between them. These switches between points of view and points in time can be likened to code-switching. Derrick describes "the innovation of Spanish-English [code-switching] as an ongoing practice" (339). This ongoingness, which I view as the crux of the code-switching in Junot Díaz, is related to the phenomenon of switching between time periods and focalizations in *Oscar Wao*, and between first-person and second-person narration in *This Is How You Lose Her*. Instead of figuring code-switching as an isolated phenomenon, then, the text bonds it to other kinds of switches, thereby rendering visible the ongoing nature of mobility.

In *This Is How You Lose Her*, characters code-switch for a variety of reasons: for emphasis (“No, jamás, never”, p. 5), for terms of endearment or family (“mami,” “abuelo”), someone’s nationality (“ecuatoriana,” “dominicana”), and swear words (“sucio”), but also in ways that are not so easily classified. The code-switching takes place both in dialogue and in the narration. However, such a categorization does not capture the way in which both Spanish and English are crucial parts of Díaz’s texts. As Galasso says, “Spanish is always present, and so is English” (335) in Latino literature, and this holds true even in the rare instances in Díaz’s texts when only one language is visible. Todd Womble, whose linguistics paper on Díaz includes quantitative analysis, writes that Díaz’s “revolutionary use of CS is not due to the *quantity* of sentences including Spanish (only 14% in BWLOW and 7.7% in THYLH), but to the *quality* of the mixing and switching which creates radically bilingual texts” (337; emphases in the original), as “they contain use of continuous, intense alternation of lexical, morphological and syntactic variants, producing hybrid texts” (337).

The text is hybrid not just because it switches between English and Spanish, but because Díaz switches between different registers of these languages. There is the childlike English in “Invierno,” where Yunior narrates how he and his brother learned English from watching American TV after they first arrived in the U.S.: “Throwing my scarf over my mouth, I stumbled across the uneven crust of snow. I caught up to the brother and sister at the side of our building. Wait up! I yelled. I want to play with you.” (“Invierno” 132). Here, the “I want to play with you” is put very simply. The phrase, through its simplicity, sounds like someone’s first fledgling attempts at speaking English; by standing in sharp contrast to the high-octane voice of much of the rest of the text, this phrase serves as a switch in registers.

This mix of registers is present throughout the collection, as Díaz uses specifically Dominican expressions and American vernacular along with standard Spanish and a heightened literary register, such as in the line “Hey, muñeca, you say, prevaricating to the end” (“Alma” 48). There is the English-Spanish switch from “hey” to “muñeca” and the switch from informal English to formal English and then back again in the part of the sentence following. This works to the languages even more than the code-switching: the mix that is created consists not of two monolithic languages, but of languages which are in themselves multiple, and between which the characters move with ease. While some of the Spanish Díaz uses will be intelligible to anyone with a knowledge of the language,

regardless of where they learned it, highly distinctive Dominican terms such as “parigüayo” are not – according to a footnote in *A Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the word “is a corruption of the English neologism ‘party watcher.’ [...] The kid who don’t dance, who ain’t got game, who lets people clown him – he’s the parigüayo” (Díaz, *Oscar* 20). Sources other than Díaz also explain this specific Dominican word to an English-language audience. Among them is a Dominican magazine for tourists, *Casa de Campo Living*: “Today, ‘pariguayo’ isn’t really used to mean ‘party watcher’ anymore [...]. ‘Pariguayo’ is attributed to a slow-witted, shy or silly person” (Agramonte n.p.) A language website explains that “[t]he Military used to throw parties for the US soldiers stationed in the island. In these parties you would find people who didn’t dance or engage in social activities, instead they would just watch. [...] A ‘pariguayo’ is a ‘party watcher.’ The term has since expanded to include a shy or gutless person in any given situation” (*Listen and Learn* n.p.). “Parigüayo,” a corruption of an English word, was thus created in response to U.S.-Americans’ presence in the Dominican Republic, and is now marketed back to tourists (many of them U.S.-American) as an example of an authentically Dominican word. It therefore serves as a particularly illustrative example of an Apterian Untranslatable, having accrued and even changed meaning—such as in Apter’s example of *pravda*—and thereby pointing at the multilayered linguistic mobilities Díaz’s text engages with: the words his narrator and characters use when they are linguistically mobile are themselves highly mobile.

Being a colloquial term, “parigüayo” furthermore functions as an example of Yunior switching not just between languages but between registers. Díaz’s English, too, moves between different registers, most clearly between standard English and between very colloquial English. In *Oscar Wao*, Díaz additionally switches between different pop cultural terrains – *Oscar Wao* draws heavily on science fiction and comics. Rare is the reader who will understand every single reference.¹⁴² The characters’, narrators’ and readers’ mobility between languages, registers and ways of relating is thus one in which no destination can ever be reached by all of them or shared by every reader. The untranslated, and the Untranslatable, remain prominent and vested with meaning, and keep the text in a state of non-fixity.

¹⁴² There is even an online resource, *The Annotated Oscar Wao: Notes and Translations for The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz*, which, in explaining many of the references made in the novel, serves both to mobilize the reader—helping her move beyond Díaz’s text and then back into it—and to render things comprehensible through translation, an approach contrary to Apter’s.

This is heightened by the fact that Díaz does not just switch between English and Spanish. The site-specific significance of code-switching also becomes clear in the book's only mention of Russian, when the narrator describes Alma: "Spent nearly every teenage day on the Lower East Side, thought it would always be home, but then NYU and Columbia both said *nyet*, and she ended up even farther from the city than before" ("Alma" 45). This small, monosyllabic word not only makes the line more humorous and unexpected, but speaks to the fact that the Lower East Side saw a lot of immigration from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In including "*nyet*" at the end of the line, the text is keeping up this propulsive, code-switching, multilingual nature, but also gestures to the context of the place described in that line. In doing so, it not only adds (however briefly) another language to the multilingual New York City landscape of the text, but also shows that the Spanish which the reader has so far encountered in the text exists in relationship to other languages in the city.

5.4.2 "A Half-Crooked Semantic Angle:" Mobilizing the Reader

While it is a fair argument to say that there are many readers of Díaz who are familiar with Spanish and for whom Spanish is not transmitted at a "half-crooked semantic angle" (Apter, *World Literature* 35), the fact that it is different registers of Spanish coming together, and that a kind of code-switching takes place not just between English and Spanish but also between different (pop) cultural spheres, means that arguably every reader of Díaz encounters some of his texts at such a "half-crooked" angle. According to Womble, "the unmarked, untranslated portions of these narratives afford a peculiar role for the reader: he or she *becomes* the translator" (58; emphasis in the original). Another way to put this would be that the untranslated passages mobilize the reader's understanding. In her article "Now Check It: Junot Díaz's Wondrous Spanish," Glenda Carpio argues that Díaz's 'bilingualism' [...] aggressively shifts the power balance away from monolingual readers" (272). While I would not go so far as to call Díaz's code-switching "aggressive," Díaz's code-switching, in privileging multilingual readers, is a marked, decisive move. At the same time, however, there are unique affordances of being a monolingual reader of Díaz's text, as the monolingual reader is faced with a series of choices: "Do I use the context to guess at what is being said? Do I pause to consult a translation? Do I use an online tool or dictionary to translate the passage myself? Or do I simply skip over the Spanish?" (Womble 72). This mobility, then, can take place within

the text—by the reader following the text switching and then switching again—and it can point beyond the text, e.g., when the reader feels compelled to open up a dictionary, underline unfamiliar words, ask someone about them, or otherwise engage with questions opened up by the text. In the latter instance, the reader leaves the realm of the text for a limited amount of time, engages with the text in an indirect way, and then returns to the text. While the first instance of reader mobilization—reading along with the code-switching—is thus something which the reader automatically does just by reading the book, the second type of reader mobilization is something which the reader undertakes by themselves; they may take a step out of the book in order to take a step back into the book,¹⁴³ which brings a web of readerly mobilities into being.

Crucially, meaning is transported whether or not the (monolingual) reader understands what exactly is being said. While a bilingual reader will be able to understand all the words in a sentence like, “This is the endgame, and instead of pulling out all the stops, instead of pongándome más chivo que un chivo, I’m feeling sorry for myself, como un parigüayo sin suerte” (“The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” 21-22), I argue that an assumed monolingual reader, too, is likely to glean some understanding from the Spanish passages. Apter’s assertion that there is an “effect of the non-carry-over (of meaning) that carries over nonetheless (on the back of grammar), or that transmits at a half-crooked semantic angle” (Apter, *World Literature* 35) holds here, which means a particular situation arises: The monolingual reader does not understand every single word, but neither are those un-comprehended words in Spanish just a blank; they, too, contribute to a sense of understanding of the text. Just like Apter’s Untranslatables, they are not voids but their own carriers of meaning. They achieve this in three different ways: Firstly, by constituting an instance of code-switching, which means that what Yunion is expressing about the “endgame” and about the failure to pull “out all the stops” needs language beyond these words—we are dealing with more than just the endgame, more than his failure to make his gestures big enough by pulling out all the stops. Secondly, there is meaning inherent in the words being in Spanish, a language which, from the first page of any Díaz text, evokes a depth of emotion and ambivalence. The Spanish words the reader has been able to guess at so far resonate in the ones which remain obscure. Thirdly,

¹⁴³ This is not dissimilar to the rhythm Katherine McKittrick et al. describe which is created by someone asking “‘What page or section was that idea on again?’” (871), an idea I elaborate on in my chapter on Danticat and briefly touch upon in my chapter on Kincaid.

a rhythm remains perceptible: there is the word “chivo” once and then another time, turning the non-understood sentence into a recognizable example of Yunior’s energetic style of narration. We know that what happened was too tragic to be adequately captured in the word “endgame,” but we also know it was not quite so tragic as to cancel out Yunior’s stylistic swagger and bravado.

It wouldn’t make any sense, thus, to picture a sentence like this one translated into mere English. Here we are dealing with not just one Untranslatable word like *pravda*, but with an Untranslatable sentence structure, and an Untranslatable tug between the lack of lexical understanding and another understanding, one that may seem comparatively vague but which achieves the task of pulling us into Yunior’s emotional state and social reality. While a bilingual reader is therefore the only kind of reader capable of knowing what each and every word means, there is a particular way in which a monolingual reader gleans meaning from the text. Whether Díaz intends his texts for a bilingual or a monolingual readership or both, the specific kind of understanding experienced by monolingual readers corroborates Díaz’s claim that a lack of understanding by some does not make a language marginal. Drawing on Apter, translation may not always be the best way to carry over meaning: untranslatedness can be as mobilizing as translation.

5.4.3 “M’ija Has Tetas Now:” Moving Beyond Sexualization

Díaz portrays a highly gendered, patriarchal world; as Maja Horn observes, “the rigid division of women in the story into ‘good girls’ on the one hand and, on the other, ‘sucias’ for those women who are willing to have more casual sexual encounters with the narrator, reflects a gender system where women are constrained in ways that men are not” (135). Beyond the division of women into “good girls” and “sucias,” women are also highly sexualized, as notions of *Dominicanidad* and of a certain expected masculinity converge in code-switching. One aspect of Yunior’s distinctive narrative voice is its highly sexualized description of women. The short story “Alma,” which is narrated in the second person, starts with the words: “You, Yunior, have a girlfriend named Alma, who has a long tender horse neck and a big Dominican ass that seems to exist in a fourth dimension beyond jeans. An ass that could drag the moon out of orbit” (“Alma” 45). Díaz sometimes uses Spanish words to refer to women’s body parts in sentences otherwise completely in English. This happens both when focusing in on sexualized body parts, as in the line, “M’ija

has tetas now, the woman whispers to her neighbor" ("The Sun" 9) and when body parts stand in for supposedly annoying traits such as talkativeness, as in the line, "She's a talker, a fucking boca" ("The Sun" 11).¹⁴⁴ By rendering these body parts in Spanish, Díaz highlights their sexualization while placing such emphasis on them as to almost cut them off from the rest of the sentence; the word seems to be as divorced from the sentence surrounding it as the body parts described are from the woman they belong to. Díaz has been criticized for this sexualizing aspect of his fiction, for example by Alicita Rodríguez in her satirical poem "How to Know You're a Woman in a Junot Díaz Novel." She writes,

There will be mention of your ass. Your big ass. An ass so big it could alter the movement of the planets. / Sometimes it might be called your *culo*, which makes it more exotic. / But you will be punished for your power by being called *puerca* instead of Paula, *fea* instead of Felicia, and *sucia* instead of Sofia. (Rodríguez n.p.)

Díaz's focus on female bodies is, however, not as straightforward as it first appears: When Yunior calls his girlfriend "a talker, a fucking boca" ("The Sun" 11), he is describing his sadness at her having lost that trait, at no longer talking to him as freely as she used to. And the woman Yunior quotes as saying, "M'ija has tetas now" is traveling from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic to see her daughter for the first time since she was a child, excited to see her all grown up. That the woman would choose *tetas* as proof that her daughter is now a woman speaks to the physical and sexualized way society charts a girl's progression to womanhood; a mechanism so thoroughly normalized that it takes Díaz's inclusion of this line, with the forcefulness of the body part untranslated and divorced from the rest of the person, to put it into relief. The Untranslated here, then, renders visible the routine ways in which women are often sexualized even in representations less overt than Díaz's. Moving towards Spanish in an otherwise English sentence is, at first glance, a move towards further sexualization, but in its overtness, and in the context of the work, it also becomes an argument for a move away from misogynist sexualization.

¹⁴⁴ In 2018, multiple women made allegations of verbal abuse and sexual misconduct against Junot Díaz. The question they raise is whether we should continue to give academic legitimacy to Díaz by working on his literary work. While I can't answer this question for anyone else, I have decided to continue working on Díaz's texts because, I would argue, they subvert the very patriarchal notions that it seems he has at times wielded against others. In thinking about what to do with the art of people whose behavior has been problematic or abusive, I have also found Claire Dederer's piece "What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?" and her book *Monsters* insightful. Dederer carefully considers the "twin and seemingly contradictory imperatives" of "want[ing] to be a virtuous consumer" as well as "a citizen of the world of art" (*Monsters* 4). Rather than reaching a conclusion, Dederer charts her emotional and intellectual reactions to works of art by people with a known history of harmful behavior, thereby showing one way of grappling with the art and the artist simultaneously.

Relatedly, one of the major themes of *Oscar Wao* are cycles of sexual violence and of abuse. Melissa González writes that Díaz's work "is fundamentally [...] about transnational, Dominican masculinity, femininity, and sexuality and the disciplining discourses that produce them" (287). Even though Yunior is a strutting male, *Oscar Wao* is attentive to the ways in which he, too, is a victim of the patriarchy. Yunior seems to hold all the power – it is he who describes the women in his life in a highly sexualized manner in passages like: "Mari Colón, a thirty-something postal employee who wore red on her lips and walked like she had a bell for an ass" (*Oscar Wao* 12-13). He has the first as well as the last word in his stories, and much of his time is spent sleeping around and hurting the women in his life. While González says that he is "represented not as a repressor, but as a repressed subject himself" (287) "as part of the novel's ideological critique" (ibid.), I argue that the novel's ideological critique lies precisely in the fact that Yunior is depicted as both.

Díaz shines a light not just on pained repressors and oppressors but also on characters who are much more obviously hurt by the patriarchal system than Yunior is: The titular character of *Oscar Wao*, a young Dominican-American man, does not correspond to the notions of masculinity expected of him because he is a gentle, fat geek who is into sci-fi. He is often excluded from the community for that reason: "Tú no eres nada de dominicano, but Oscar would insist unhappily, I am Dominican, I am. It didn't matter what he said. Who the hell, I ask you, had ever met a Domo like him?" (*Oscar* 180). At another point in the novel, Oscar makes the same point in Spanish: "The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You're not Dominican. And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy" (*Oscar* 49). Here Oscar is even changing the syntax, switching first from English to Spanish and then following up a verb-object-sentence with an object-verb sentence, as if he only had to hit the right words in the right sequence in order to be accepted.

Notions of gender are policed and enforced not just by the community at large, but within the family unit. Oscar and his sister Lola—who besides Yunior is the only character granted first-person narration and doesn't adhere to traditional notions of femininity either—are continually policed by their mother Beli, who calls Lola a "lesbiana" and Oscar a "maricon" (gay), an "accusing refrain [...] in the novel that function[s] to define the limits of socially acceptable heterosexuality" (Gonzalez 290). The mobile phenomenon of code-switching is here used to erect and reinforce a boundary.

Additionally, by using the Spanish terms here, heteronormative expectations and Spanish are bound together further. This creates an assumed gendered Dominican norm which can lead to exclusion, the topic of my next subchapter.

5.4.4 “You No Deserve I Speak to You in Spanish”: Community Inclusion and Exclusion

For the characters and narrators in Díaz’s work, speaking Spanish, or a mix of Spanish and English, can be a way of both moving away from, or toward, their *Dominicanidad*. For Yunior, who is “neither black nor white, neither American nor Dominican, neither Spanish-speaking nor English-speaking” (Moya, 248), his poor Spanish is, to quote Ylce Irizarry, a “fissure through which he loses his Dominicanidad” (164). Diasporic belonging is not just something which the characters themselves can turn to or move toward, such as in Lily Cho’s conception of “turning to” diaspora, but a mode of being from which they can be excluded.

Everyone in the stories is aware that speaking Spanish configures them socially and racially, as their code-switching cements their ties to the Dominican Republic and makes them a community. José Saldívar refers to this as a “London Terrace multiverse” (“Decolonial Aesthetics” 334), bringing together the name of the apartment where Díaz’s characters live with an idea from comics and science fiction. I see this term as both gesturing towards community cohesion and multiplicity. For Díaz’s characters, the question of which language to speak, and how to speak it, is highly fraught. For some of them, having spent the majority of their lives in the U.S., speaking Spanish can demand an effort, and speaking it to someone else therefore communicates several things: Firstly, in speaking Spanish with someone, the characters acknowledge that the other person has the right to lay claim to the same linguistic and cultural heritage as they do. Secondly, it means they are willing to put in the effort to speak a language they might be alienated from or struggle with after a life spent in the U.S. In “The Cheater’s Guide to Love,” Yunior is dating a recent female immigrant from the DR who is “always trying to prove you’re not Dominican. If I’m not Dominican then no one is, you shoot back, but she laughs at that. Say that in Spanish, she challenges and of course you can’t” (“The Cheater’s Guide to Love” 193). Here, Yunior’s lack of fluency in Spanish is used as a reason to make fun of him. A different kind of exclusion takes place when a letter proving Yunior’s infidelity toward his girlfriend Magda turns up, which leads to Magda’s father telling him: “You no deserve I speak to you in Spanish” (“The Sun”). Spanish is here seen as a privilege Yunior has not

earned; Magda's father withholding the language from him is both a sign of lack of personal respect and an expulsion from the Dominican community.

This way of seeing only some community members of worthy of the language, of imposing linguistic expectations on one another, hints at a connection between past colonialism and present marginality. Spanish was imposed on Hispaniola, in what became the Dominican Republic; in the context of Díaz's New Jersey, it is English which is seen to take precedence over other languages. While lines of dialogue such as the one by Yunior's date create a dichotomy between Dominican immigrants who speak perfect Spanish and ones who, because they lack perfect Spanish, are not seen as Dominican, Díaz's code-switching continuously questions such neat categories, as both Oscar and Yunior yearn for Dominican belonging. In the passage from "The Cheater's Guide to Love" quoted above, where Yunior's date laughs at his lacking Spanish, it becomes clear that the categories of masculinity and Dominicanidad are linked for Yunior; doubts about the former are seen as threats to the latter. This means that in moving towards Dominicanidad, Yunior is trying to move towards his masculinity, and vice versa, his code-switching thereby constituting a gendered mobility.

This is just one of the ways in which the use of Spanish is highly freighted and emotionally charged. Elisa Pérez-García and María Jesús Sánchez write about linkages between code-switching and emotionality, arguing that "[t]his cross-cultural difference in emotionality is a reminder of the way both cultural communities understand family ties, the Spanish speaking world being a more collectivistic culture as opposed to more individualistic North American English-speaking societies"¹⁴⁵ (109), unhelpfully conflating emotionality and collectivism. It is true that "bilingualism is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also an expression of a person's affective relation to his or her languages" (Pérez 285), and that the use of Spanish, in Díaz, often denotes community belonging or community exclusion. However, code-switching is just as likely to go hand in hand with community exclusion as with a positive community experience. In moments where Oscar would like to be part of the collective, he is often excluded. Sánchez and Pérez-García somewhat simplistically conclude that "Díaz, as a Latino author, makes conscious choices about both languages: he writes in L2 English to address an English-dominant readership and switches to L1 Spanish to reaffirm his Dominican identity"

¹⁴⁵ They are here also drawing on Anna Wierzbicka.

(111). It is not just that I want to refrain from guessing at Díaz's affirming his own identity as an author in his text, but also that even on the level of the text itself, it is not always so simple: speaking Spanish, in these texts, is not enough to affirm anyone's Dominican identity. We see this when non-Dominican characters speak Spanish: In "Flaca," Yunior is involved with a white girl who has been to Santo Domingo three times. Addressing her, Yunior narrates: "You tried to talk to me in Spanish and I told you to stop" (82). We also see it in the many instances when the Spanish the characters use is deemed by others to be not quite right. At one point in *Oscar Wao*, there is a sudden appearance of quotation marks, as young Beli has an affair and feels distant from her neighborhood and the people in it: "Dismissing her barrio as an 'infierno' and her neighbors as 'brutos' and 'cochinos,' she bragged about how she would be living in Miami soon, wouldn't have to put up with this un-country much longer" (*Oscar* 128). Spanish is usually rendered without quotation marks, which places it on an equal footing with English, and leads to the languages merging in "radical code-switching" (cf. Eugenia Casielles-Súarez). The single quotation marks here serve to add distance: since Beli has "fallen in the pueblo's estimation" (*Oscar* 127), the words in quotation marks here serve a double function. While the words 'infierno,' 'brutos,' and 'cochinos' portray Beli's disdain for the neighborhood, the quotation marks around these words communicate her neighbors' disdain for Beli. The quotation marks seem to be focalized through them; adding them makes the words appear less organic, more put on. This shows how the mere fact of speaking Spanish is not enough – the Spanish itself is not what leads to belonging. Instead, while the choice of language carries immense cultural weight in these texts, this choice is not just between English and Spanish; instead, it is between one of the many versions of English and Spanish that exist in these texts, and how to meld them together into one textual body. Crucially, the choice also lies with the listener, who can either affirm the speaker's utterance as a valid, community-cementing move or use it as a reason to exclude. The mobilities of code-switching and of orienting oneself towards community are therefore entangled at a every step, as characters—to use Cho's term—can attempt to 'turn to' their diasporic community, an attempt which may be counteracted by others.

5.4.5 "If This Was Another Kind of Story": Gaps and Allusions

Code-switching constitutes movement from one language to another. In Díaz's work, there are also other ways in which movement between two different poles is created in one and

the same sentence. While Spanish and English jostle for space by both being markedly present in a sentence, in other sentences, it is presence and absence between which movement is created. In "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," for example, Yunior travels to the Dominican Republic with his girlfriend Magda. The trip takes place after he has cheated on her and has been found out; he is now trying to salvage the relationship. When they arrive in the Dominican Republic, he narrates:

If this was another kind of story, I'd tell you about the sea. What it looks like after it's been forced into the sky through a blowhole. How when I'm driving in from the airport and see it like this, like shredded silver, I know I'm back for real. [...] I'd tell you about my abuelo and his campo hands, how unhappy he is that I'm not sticking around, and I'd tell you about the street where I was born, Calle XXI, how it hasn't decided yet if it wants to be a slum or not and how it's been in this state of indecision for years. But that would make it another kind of story, and I'm having enough trouble with this one as it is. You'll have to take my word for it. Santo Domingo is Santo Domingo. Let's pretend we all know what goes on there. ("The Sun" 10)

Yunior is here making recurring use of the rhetorical device of apophasis: while claiming that he is not telling us about the sea, and his grandfather, Yunior is in fact telling us about them. In claiming that he is not telling us about them, Yunior is putting some distance between himself and what he is describing, repudiating it at the same time as he is affirming it. In a move mirroring his code-switching, Yunior vacillates between stating and not stating; he is opening up a space but refusing to fill it.

There are several ways to read this evasion. One is that Yunior is trying to avoid a gendered discourse: it could be that he thinks it might be 'girly' to talk about the sea, about the way it looks "like shredded silver." Yunior strives for a hypermasculinity where anything but the most 'masculine' behavior is better avoided. In this reading, Yunior is not allowing himself this feminized discourse; nonetheless, the feminized discourse breaks through, rupturing the text. Another way to read these evasions is that Yunior does not want to add to the manufacture of images of Santo Domingo. Yunior and Magda, while traveling together, are on two very different trips: Yunior is returning to the place he lived in as a child and is thereby engaging in a diasporic, commemorative mobility, while Magda is in the Dominican Republic as a tourist. The two types of mobilities clash in the short story, evoking Mimi Sheller's work on the ways in which touristic mobilities come into conflict with local im/mobilities in the Caribbean, for example in her study of how touristic infrastructure such as luxury resort developments hinder locals' mobilities (cf. "Virtual Islands"). Although Magda is herself Caribbean and Latina by virtue of being

Cuban, this shared background is not something that brings her and Yunior together when they're in the Dominican Republic. Instead of spending time at Yunior's grandfather's, Magda wants to stay at a mega resort which Yunior describes as "The Resort That Shame Forgot" ("The Sun" 13). Yunior tries to act as a tour guide: "There I was. Pointing out all the shit that had changed since the year before. The new Pizzarelli and the little plastic bags of water the tigueritos were selling. Even kicked the historicals. This is where Trujillo and his Marine pals slaughtered the gavilleros, here's where the Jefe used to take his girls, here's where Balaguer sold his soul to the Devil" ("The Sun" 11). But while we see here an attempt to experience the Dominican Republic with Magda, we also see Yunior's unease with the fact that being there with Magda means that he cannot focus on what he usually focuses on in the DR. Even in showing her landmarks, he mostly resists a touristic point of view by pointing out sites that feel meaningful to him in an attempt to reconcile touristic and commemorative mobilities.

Additionally, Santo Domingo is presented as such a rich tapestry, one which is both rich in itself and evokes memories of his entwined-with-Santo-Domingo past and present, that it would take up page after page if he were to describe it all. Much like it is not Yunior's job to render every part of his and Oscar's story intelligible through translation into English, or through avoidance of overly specific pop cultural references, he also does not display the need to make Santo Domingo overly accessible and legible to readers not familiar with the city. Instead, what happens here is that Santo Domingo is transported at exactly that "half-crooked semantic angle" Apter describes. This nonetheless creates a kind of imaginative mobility for the reader, who fills in the gaps of what Yunior is describing. Yunior is underlining the fact that not all of us know what goes on in Santo Domingo; at the same time, this can be read as a sincere call for those of us who do not know Santo Domingo to imagine it. In this reading, then, Yunior's elliptical, apophysis-heavy description of Santo Domingo provides the reader with the bare bones, the scaffolding, for our own imagination rather than the place itself governing the details of that imagination. Imaginary mobility is here made possible for the reader, but it is not direct, and it is not complete, as the reader has to fill in gaps themselves.

5.5 *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

5.5.1 “My Own Patch of the World:” Imagining a Future

Díaz’s 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, too, is largely told from the point of view of Yunior, even though Yunior is an outsider to much of what he describes: *Oscar Wao* tells the story of a Dominican-American family, especially that of the titular character Oscar, his sister Lola, and their mother Beli. Yunior, who tells us the story, is Lola’s ex-boyfriend. The book is divided into parts set in different periods: there is Oscar’s youth in New Jersey set between the 1970s and the 1990s, Beli’s life in the Dominican Republic of the 1950s and 1960s, and the fate of Beli’s father Abelard in the 1940s. In addition to switching between languages, the novel also jumps backward and forward in time and switches between different focalizations.

In *Oscar Wao*, migrating from the Dominican Republic to the United States is also articulated as an epistemological move. Reflecting on what Oscar’s mother Beli knew before her immigration to the U.S., Yunior addresses her in his narration to say,

Oh, Beli; not so rashly, not so rashly: What did you know about states or diasporas? What did you know about Nueba Yol or unheated ‘old law’ tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about *immigration*? Don’t laugh, mi negrita, for your world is about to be changed. Utterly. [...] You laugh because you’ve been ransacked to the limit of your soul, because your lover betrayed you almost unto death, because your first son was neverborn. [...] La Inca told you you had to leave the country and you laughed.” (*Oscar*, 160)

In this passage, there are only two phrases not in English – “Nueba Yol,” and the appellation “mi negrita.”¹⁴⁶ “Nueba Yol,” which is the title of a 1995 comedy film about a young Dominican man immigrating to New York, places Beli in the context of other Dominican migrants in the U.S. and draws on her pop-cultural imaginative knowledge, which precedes her own first-hand knowledge of the United States. Importantly, “Nueba Yol” refers to a story of migration which does not go as well as hoped, as the protagonist’s hopeful dreams are soon shattered. “Mi negrita,” meanwhile, does three things: firstly, it addresses Beli in Spanish, her first language and the language of the place she is leaving; secondly, it creates intimacy not just by addressing her in her native language but also via the “mi” (my) and the diminutive of “ita”; and thirdly, it addresses Beli as Black, since “mi

¹⁴⁶ In the film, a young Dominican “finally gets an opportunity of realizing his lifelong dream of reaching New York and living the “American Dream,” but soon finds out that things aren’t as pretty as he thought” (“Nueba Yol,” imdb.)

negrita” means “my little black one.” It therefore can be seen to prefigure the fact that in the United States, Beli will be seen as Black in a way distinct from the Dominican Republic. This does not mean that the Dominican Republic does not have its issues around race,¹⁴⁷ too, but that the U.S. has its own specific racial context. In this short passage, two co-existing though different approaches to imaginative im/mobilities are therefore made apparent: in his silent appellation of past Beli, Yunior is drawing on Beli’s experience—of being Black, of being cared for and called by a diminutive, of watching a Dominican movie which in a tiny way foreshadows her own future experience of immigration—but he is doing so while, at the same time, saying that the future mobility of her immigration to the U.S. is beyond her powers of imagination. This is, however, not an instant of apophysis, saying something while claiming not to be saying it; rather, Díaz, through Yunior, is here making the argument that both are true, and that this tension is something that Beli must, and will, live with. She has already experienced vast suffering, and yet her future U.S. life, with its specific suffering, is not yet imaginable to her. She is part of a group now, part of a diaspora; her (im)migration is not an isolated incident but connected to other Dominicans, whether she ever meets them or not. And yet, these imaginations cannot fully (or even slightly) prepare her for the reality of what her life will be like once she is in New York. It is the few words in Spanish here which do that work, which manage to hold both truths, and which communicate the very tension inherent in the phrase “imaginative im/mobilities” – the way Beli *can* imagine and is therefore imaginatively mobile and the way she *cannot* imagine, remaining imaginatively immobile until she herself gains first-hand experiences.

At another point in the text—set after Beli’s immigration to the U.S., but placed in the novel before the paragraph quoted above—Beli’s daughter Lola imagines a future untethered from her current New Jersey surroundings. She narrates:

I was fourteen and desperate for my own patch of the world that had nothing to do with her. I wanted the life that I used to see when I watched *Big Blue Marble* as a kid, the life that drove me to make pen pals and to take atlases home from

¹⁴⁷ Haiti and the Dominican Republic have long had racial tensions. Drawing on Jim Nielson, Carol McCurdy writes about how “Dominicans have built barriers of prejudice and racism to distance themselves both from their own African roots and from their neighbors” (19). In *Oscar Wao*, a character exclaiming that Beli may be a “haitiano” (151) carries a racialized charge. I write more about the bloody racial history between the two countries—as exemplified by the Parsley Massacre—in my chapter on Edwidge Danticat. For an attempt to create scholarship among and between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, cf. April et al.’s project on “Transnational Hispaniola;” for an analysis arguing that racial attitudes in the Dominican Republic are not as straightforward as the scholarly literature typically holds, cf. Eva Michelle Wheeler.

school. The life that existed beyond Paterson, beyond my family, beyond Spanish” (*Oscar* 55).

Here, Lola yearns for an elsewhere in a way that is very similar to Annie’s longing to leave Antigua in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*. Like Annie, Lola specifically imagines a life far away from her mother, as she wants to be somewhere “that had nothing to do with her” (*Oscar* 55). Differently to Annie, Lola has this yearning while she is located in the U.S., not in the Caribbean of her family’s past. Of course, New Jersey is where Lola grew up, much like Antigua is where Annie is growing up. But while Annie saw Antigua and the world beyond the Caribbean as separate, bridged in her imagining but otherwise distinct, Lola’s New Jersey includes both Spanish and Paterson, both her family’s heritage and the place to which they brought it. She is trying to get away from both. While the paragraph on Beli’s imaginings lists all the things she does not and cannot know, this paragraph on Lola lists her activities: programs she watched, pen pals she made. Reading these two paragraphs together, we see two different futures being hinted at: Lola is a teenager dreaming of a “beyond;” while there are things she can do to feel closer to this beyond, the ‘beyond’ is itself defined *ex negativo*: as not being New Jersey and not including her family’s Spanish. In the paragraph addressed to Beli, meanwhile, Beli is depicted as embarking on a chapter unknown to her, but clear to the narrator. Both paragraphs, then, navigate tensions between knowledge and the future im/mobility that awaits.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the repetition of “beyond” in “beyond Paterson, beyond my family, beyond Spanish,” not only is an example of the rhythm of much of Díaz’s writing, but also draws attention to the preposition being repeated. Similarly, Brian Russell Roberts theorizes the preposition “amid,” saying that “[a]mid this vast set of islands and waters, the *este lado/otro lado* distinction collapses” (123). While “amid” connects and contextualizes, “beyond” cuts off, it overcomes and escapes. However, in enumerating three words here in a parallel way—Paterson, her family, and Spanish—Lola is writing a list of sorts. This is not a list of (over)abundance, such as in Kincaid, but one that is sparse. In placing these three parts of her life next to each other and setting them in relation to each other, she makes them into an archipelago. Describing an “archipelagraphic” text, Dani Redd summarizes that “it both disassembles and reassembles,” “perform[ing] these movements” (306). While Redd limits her analysis to texts which are about islands—the

¹⁴⁸ Cf. my chapter on Kincaid for an analysis of how knowledge that a railway line is going to be built changes how people envision potential future mobilities (cf. Adey et al.).

archipelago thereby figuring literally—I argue that what Lola is describing, too, is an archipelago: not just because she is describing a positionality from within the American archipelago—one that spans New Jersey just as much as it spans the Dominican Republic—but because she both “disassembles and reassembles” parts of her life. Traces of mobility and archipelagicity can also be seen in other words in the passage: in the word “drove,” which highlights the mobilizing nature of Lola’s imaginings, and in the word “patch,” which is reminiscent of how Lucy, in Kincaid’s novel of the same name, refers to herself as a woman from the “fringes” of the world. “Patch,” like “fringes,” evokes sewing and garments. Both images, then, describe a world made up of different parts, but one in which these different parts are not separate but crossable. In Lola’s imaginings of her future mobilities, she wants to get out of an archipelagic amid toward a beyond.

5.5.2 “The Diaspora Engine:” Multidirectional Mobilities of Return

At one point in *Oscar Wao*, Beli and other diasporics return to the Dominican Republic for a holiday, an experience which is rendered in a mix of English and Spanish:

Every summer Santo Domingo slaps the Diaspora engine into reverse, yanks back as many of its expelled children as it can; airports choke with the overdressed; necks and luggage carousels groan under the accumulated weight of that year’s cadenas and paquetes, and pilots fear for their planes – overburdened beyond belief – and for themselves; restaurants, bars, clubs, theaters, malecones, beaches, resorts, hotels, motels, extra rooms, barrios, colonias, campos, ingenious swarm with quisqueyanos from the world over. Like someone had sounded a general reverse evacuation order: Back home, everybody! Back home! From Washington Heights to Roma, from Perth Amboy to Tokyo, from Brijeporr to Amsterdam, from Lawrence to San Juan. (*Oscar* 272)

As with Lola’s sparse list, there is something almost archipelagic about this list of giddy overabundance. All these barrios, malecones, and bars are fragmented yet connected instances of what it might mean to be back in Santo Domingo. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, writing about lists in Dionne Brand’s texts, describes how “[t]his kind of ongoing, multiple black Atlantic resignification is thematized and performed through these lists where words jostle against each other unexpectedly, breaking open and reconfiguring meanings” (209). In this list, it is as if Yunior were opening up a suitcase, or a plane door, people tumbling out. The resignification lies in the unexpected combination of places Díaz lists. From Perth Amboy, the city in New Jersey, the text dashes first to the Japanese capital and then to Brijeporr—perhaps a Spanish pronunciation of Bridgeport, Connecticut—and then to Amsterdam, a former and current colonial center. The archipelago that Díaz usually sets his work in here breaks open and becomes yet more mobile, expanding to

include other locales. Rather than describing one returnee's experience of being back—how she spends her time and how she feels about it—these items on a list also take on a highly symbolic, synecdochic quality, as “bars” stands in for all bars, encapsulating all the experiences to be had at bars that summer. Furthermore, this passage allows the reader to see beyond the cast of characters of Díaz's fiction. Different characters' navigations of their Dominicanidad, their identities, and their belonging are always tied to community in Díaz's texts. But this community often consists of identifiable people; here, the zooming out is such that the “children” and “the overdressed” all merge together. No one singular character can be disentangled from the crowd; instead, a whole vista of people becomes visible. By capitalizing “Diaspora,” the word is made to appear like a toponym, the counterpart to Santo Domingo, the nearest node in its archipelago. By speaking of a “Diaspora engine [slapped] into reverse,” Díaz seems to suggest that diaspora can in fact be temporarily reversed or suspended—that a visit back in the DR might be enough for the state of diasporicity to be momentarily paused before it starts back up again—pointing toward the entangled fixity and movement to be found in this mobility of return.¹⁴⁹

The mobility of return not only leads to a new view of Santo Domingo, but also positions Oscar anew. Yúnior narrates,

after he stopped being dismayed that everybody called him gordo (and, worse, gringo), after he'd been overcharged for almost everything he wanted to buy, after La Inca prayed over him nearly every morning, after he caught a cold because his Abuela set the air conditioner in his room so high, he decided suddenly and without warning to stay on the Island for the rest of the summer with his mother and his tío.” (*Oscar* 278)

Oscar's body needs to adjust to the climate. Sara Upstone reminds us that “There is [...] inherent in mobilities a movement across spatial scales – from the transnational space, to the nation, to the city or rural space, to the body itself as a space of movement” (53-54); here, we see mobility playing out on the scale of Oscar's body. In this passage, what he has to adjust to in the Dominican Republic is not, as one might expect, the heat, but instead the cold of the AC. In much Caribbean (diaspora) writing, the cold is associated with the North to which one has migrated, and warmth and heat are associated with the Caribbean, as in Laferrière's writing or in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, among many other

¹⁴⁹ This passage also brings to mind theories about (aspects of) the Caribbean as a type of engine, as when Amy Clukey and Jeremy Wells remind us that “the plantation has long been both a central engine of transnational modernity and the staging ground for its myriad conflicts, clashes, and contradictions” (6).

texts. By here equating the DR with the cold instead, Díaz does not just turn this common idea on its head but also transforms the mobility between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic from something straightforward and unidirectional to something refracted. The cold cannot be attributed to one country only; it resists such containers. In *This Is How You Lose Her*'s story "Invierno," New Jersey might be equated with the cold and the snow; in *Oscar Wao*, the Dominican Republic is felt to be sunny but cold. Benítez-Rojo, in writing about reverberating islands, captured the way in which the Caribbean islands are entangled with other parts of the world through plantations, language, culture. Here, we see something akin to that on an individual yet expanded level – the weather of the Caribbean bleeds into New Jersey, but the temperature of New Jersey also bleeds into the Dominican Republic. Through the help of air conditioning, concepts such as the "cold" become untethered from a specific place, as they are ways for the text to signify ongoing im/mobilities, a moment in time where mobility has taken place but the body has yet to catch up. In this passage, there is also a hierarchization of the ways in which Oscar is physically othered in the DR: he gets called "gordo" (fat) as well as a "gringo" (*Oscar* 278). The text makes clear that being called a gringo is worse: the community exclusion cuts deeper than not being deemed conventionally attractive. While Oscar tries to move towards his Dominicanidad by physically returning to the Dominican Republic, his attempt at mobility is thwarted: being called a "gringo" cuts him off from Dominican belonging.

5.5.3 "The End of Language:" Immobilization and Speechlessness in the Canefield

One key difference between *This Is How You Lose Her* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is that the latter includes magical elements.¹⁵⁰ From its very first lines, which start with an invocation of the curse of fukú, the novel invokes the magical:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another

¹⁵⁰ There is a debate about whether these magical elements constitute magical realism. Silvia Méjia, who says that "magical realism is all about creating storyworlds in which presumably magic events are treated as mundane" (211), claims that *Oscar Wao* only exhibits "a somewhat watered-down version" (212) due to Yunior's scepticism. Yunior "may accept the existence of supernatural events but neither experiences nor narrates them as mundane" (Méjia 212), a stance which, she argues, ultimately "disenchant[s] magical realism" (Méjia 217). Taking the opposite approach, Maria Kaaren Takolander, meanwhile, argues that Yunior's ironic distance is very much in line with magical realism, as "magical realist literature is a fundamentally ironic form of writing" (112).

began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*. (Oscar 1)¹⁵¹

Fukú can be seen as colonialism, rendered metaphorically by Díaz as a curse. It can thus be read as a result of im/mobility: when people were transported from Africa to the Caribbean as slaves, fukú followed along; this mobility of the curse happened alongside people being enslaved and immobilized. In addition to this interplay with the im/mobilizations of slavery and colonialism, the magical realism¹⁵² in *Oscar Wao* also engenders a particular kind of imaginative mobility. Violence and magic are linked here, as it is only through the magic of fukú that the violence of enslavement, the rupture, becomes at all communicable. While there does not appear to be scholarship that thinks through magical realism and mobility studies together, there is much to be gained in using both lenses together. As a starting point, I want to use Maria Kaaren Takolander's argument that "magical realist texts suggest" that the history of colonialism and its traumas "must be confronted in order for a productive future to be imagined" (107). In her reading and mine, magical realist elements function as a kind of bridging: they are a way to bring the traumas of colonialism, which are often hidden (such as in Oscar's family), to the surface. Magical realism is a way of affirming "that that the intergenerational trauma of colonialism has an origin, a history, even if it seems hidden and supernatural" (Takolander 110). At the same time—and here I see its interplay with im/mobilities, and, specifically, with imaginative mobilities—it is a way to imaginatively move towards a future.

Much of the magical realism in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* takes place in canefields, which is also where the novel's pivotal acts of violence happen. There are three episodes set in a canefield: in the first, Oscar's mother Beli is taken to the canefield as a young woman, where she is beaten and left for dead, for being involved with a man only referred to "the Gangster" (who turns out to be the husband of Trujillo's sister). In a later part of the novel, Oscar is first brought to the canefield for seeing a semi-retired prostitute called Ybón whose boyfriend, a policeman (called "the capitán" in the novel), is jealous; Oscar narrowly survives the brutal beating and goes back to the U.S. When he

¹⁵¹ For an analysis of fukú in *Oscar Wao*, see José David Saldívar, who views "the *fukú americanus* as an alternative unit of analysis beyond the unit of the nation-state" ("Conjectures" 133).

¹⁵² Recent scholarship on magical realism has critiqued "the ethnographic trap—or the widespread misinterpretation of magical realism as an ethnographic portrait of Latin America" (Méjia 212). Magical realism has also been expected to "authenticate[e] fantasy" (Takolander 101), an expectation of "authenticity" which Takolander problematizes and critiques.

returns to the Dominican Republic to see Ybón again, he is once more taken to the canefield; this time, he dies. In all those cases, it is the authority of the state, mixed with personal revenge, which leads characters to the canefield. The canefield is at the very heart of how the 'Caribbean' was forcefully brought into being, as the triangle trade would not have been possible without crops such as cane; it is also a space apart, separate from everyday life in its heightened violence. In *Oscar Wao*, it is a space where the power of the state is very much present, where it rules and destroys. While his mother survives, Oscar dies. Both of them are, thus, first brought to the canefield in yet another act of forced mobilization, before they are then immobilized there. This immobilization of Beli and Oscar happens at the very site—the canefield—that was itself part of “colonial attempts to fix space” (Upstone 48). By being beaten, Beli and Oscar are tethered to the field, rendered incapable of running away. But the canefield is also, in those moments, a place so separate from the rest of the world that it is thoroughly unclear how anyone should make the way from that sphere to the present, to other people, to safety; there seems to be no clear map, no way to navigate or to cross the distance. When Beli comes to,

[i]t rivered into the cane, and Beli, blinking tears, realized she had no idea which way was out. As some of you know, canefields are no fucking joke, and even the cleverest of adults can get mazed in their endlessness, only to reappear months later as a cameo of bones. [...] She clung unsteadily to the cane, like an anciano clinging to a hammock, and, panting, took her first step, a long dizzy spell, beating back a blackout, and then her net. Precarious progress, because if she fell she knew she would never stand again. [...] The cane didn't want her to leave, of course; it slashed at her palms, jabbed into her flank and clawed her thighs, and its sweet stench clogged her throat. (*Oscar* 149-150)

The cane—through its material, bone-like reality, through its being both geographically and emotionally a place apart, and by being a space soaked through with violence remembered and reverberated—makes leaving it almost impossible. The juxtaposition of “slashed [...] jabbed [...] clawed” with “sweet” exemplifies the violence underneath the product for Western consumption. Díaz leaves gaps where the sexual violence would be.¹⁵³ “Was there time for a rape or two? I suspect there was, but we shall never know because it's not something she talked about. All that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope” (147).

Similarly, there is a pronounced absence of language in the case of Oscar's death. Death figures as the ultimate immobilization here: the canefield becomes impossible to

¹⁵³ This is also what Roxane Gay does in her short story “In the Manner of Water or Light,” another narrative about sexual assault in a canefield.

leave not just through physical force and immeasurable-seeming distance, but forever. Not even Oscar's body will be able to leave on its own accord. Especially interesting, however, is that the canefield is also depicted as being a space apart from language. When Oscar is brought to the canefield, he begs for his life: "They looked at Oscar and he looked at them and then he started to speak. The words coming out like they belonged to someone else, his Spanish good for once" (*Oscar* 321). His assassins listen to him and then murder him, but the murder is not described. The chapter ends with "Oscar –" – a dash, a lacuna. Even though Beli's beatings are described as "the end of language" (*Oscar* 147), the novel finds words for some of Beli's ordeal after all. Oscar's death, however, is languageless. It is not put into words and not presented to us to read. The next chapter starts with the sentences, "That's pretty much it. We flew down to claim the body" (323). The space of the canefield—and the fukú, the colonial violence, which brought it about—is thus ultimately unreadable and divorced from language, and, for Yunior, unnarratable. This sequence is not about switching between two languages, but a switch from life and narratability to death and wordlessness. Oscar's final act in life is giving a speech—attempting to escape the canefield alive by filling the void of that space with words, with reasons for why he should stay alive. He fails on two counts, as his words reach neither his assassins nor, ultimately, the readers of Díaz's novel. However, this very lacuna, similar to the flowers in Edwidge Danticat's "New York Day Women," is itself a meaningful site the reader travels across: in this case, because it communicates the very unnarratability of Oscar's death and of the colonial violence of which it is an echo. In *Oscar Wao*, the motif of the "página en blanco" is not confined to the canefield; according to Garland Mahler, the idea of the blank page stands in "for the impunity that allows tyrants [...] to never be held accountable for their actions" (131). Although the canefield is only one instant of this motif, it is a highly significant one, since the canefield is at once a space of pure presentness—people's lives are being decided, and now—but also a site of layered, historic violence, much of which can never be known in any detail. This impossibility to know through language brings to mind Diana Taylor's differentiation between, as the title of her book states, *The Archive and the Repertoire*. While the archive is often lost due to the loss of historical records, the repertoire is a way of transmitting which is linked to performance: "Is performance that which disappears, or that which persists, transmitted through a nonarchival system of transfer that I came to call the *repertoire*?" (XVII,

emphasis in the original). In Díaz, the canefield is a place lacking in language and the archival ability to transmit.

The function of the repertoire is served by the magical-realist appearance of the mongoose, which stages a performance first with Beli and then, decades later, with Oscar. A link is created between the two moments not via language or the archive, but via the performance drawn from a shared repertoire. When Beli is almost dead, “flitting in and out of life” (149), a mongoose appears and starts talking to her.

You have to rise.

My baby, Beli wept. Mi hijo precioso.

Hypatía, your baby is dead.

No, no, no, no, no.

It pulled at her unbroken arm. *You have to rise now or you'll never have the son or the daughter.*

What son? she wailed. What daughter?

The ones who await.

(Oscar 149)

Several kinds of im/mobilities intersect in this passage. Beli's body is immobilized in the canefield, a consequence of the physical abuse which she has sustained there. In this space, which has functioned as both an engine and a result (cf. Clukey and Well) of the im/mobilizations of colonialism, the conversation with the mongoose renders the future imaginable. The code-switching we see here differs from the linguistic situation which we can assume happened intradiegetically – while Beli would presumably have communicated with the mongoose in Spanish, there is here a switch from English to Spanish in her wailing, as if Beli were using different tools that she has or will have. By mentioning a son and daughter who are not yet alive (referencing Oscar and Lola), an additional layer of mobility is added, both because the temporal incursion of the future creates the sense that the mongoose is mobile between time periods and because it gives Beli a glimpse of a possible future. Finally, this scene is in conversation with its later mirror episode, where Oscar finds himself in a canefield for the first time. Hovering between life and death, Oscar, too, encounters the mongoose:

Oscar remembers having a dream where a mongoose was chatting with him. [...]

What will it be, muchacho? it demanded. More or less?

And for a moment he almost said less. So tired, and so much pain—Less! Less! Less!—but then in the back of his head he remembered his family. Lola and his mother and Nena Inca. Remembered how he used to be when he was younger and more optimistic. The lunch box next to his bed, the first thing he saw in the morning. *Planet of the Apes*.

More, he croaked.

-----, said the Mongoose, and then the wind swept him back into darkness.
(*Oscar* 301)

In this dream sequence, much like in the scene where Beli encounters the mongoose, different time periods are mobile and intersect. However, in the case of Oscar, it is thoughts of the past, not thoughts of the future, that help him cling to life. Except for the word “muchacho,” there is no code-switching between English or Spanish here; instead we are presented with the lacunae of the mongoose’s utterance, as it seems to say something which is Untranslatable, unrenderable in human language. In much of Díaz’s code-switching and linguistic playfulness, rhythm and meaning are perceptible even when words are not literally understood, much in line with Apter’s idea that meaning continues to be transported “on the back of grammar” (*World Literature* 35). This is not the case here, where no part of what the mongoose says is legible. Although mother Beli and son Oscar do interact in *Oscar Wao*, their stories are especially connected by these mirrored experiences. Additionally, Elisabeth Maria Mermann-Jozwiak argues that the mongoose shows “the migratory nature of culture” (10), since the mongoose, originally an animal from Africa, was later introduced to the Caribbean and is now firmly embedded in Dominican culture. This migratory background is also highlighted in the footnote where Yunior narrates:

The Mongoose, one of the great unstable particles of the Universe and also one of its greatest travelers. Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to the other India, a.k.a. the Caribbean. [...] Believed to be an ally of Man. Many Watchers suspect that the Mongoose arrived to our world from another, but to date no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed. (*Oscar* 151)

Rather than conflating African’s immobilizing, forced migrations from Africa to the Caribbean with the mongoose’s journey, the mongoose is portrayed as an ally and a companion, rewriting the history of the “rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being” (Brand 5) of the Middle Passage such that it was accompanied. Although there are dreamlike elements here, these encounters with the mongoose are different from the dream sequences in Danticat or Laferrière. In those texts, characters are transported into the realm of dreams. While these dreams are interwoven with the characters’ waking lives by the characters both inviting them and then reflecting on them upon waking, dreams and waking life are still distinct from each other in those narratives, and agency, though present in characters’ engagement with the dream, is absent from the dream itself. This is markedly different from the mongoose episodes in Díaz. Rather than Beli and Oscar

being transported into a dream, mobilization takes the form of the mongoose coming to them when they cannot move physically. Agency, in this moment of absolute helplessness, lies in Beli being encouraged to try to cling to life, and Oscar being asked about his wishes. These moments of agency do not stay in the dreamlike moment but lead to the characters' survival. What we see here, then, is an in-between moment—a moment and a movement between life and death—which is made more mobile by the arrival of an external figure, one which will help the characters imagine their future and free them from immobilization. The mongoose, then, is an especially potent example of the entanglement of im/mobilities, appearing in moments of characters' spatial and imaginative im/mobilization and helping them out of them. By not speaking a decipherable language in the scene of Oscar's death, however, Díaz is making the case that some things are truly beyond human understanding, pointing towards the limits both of the Untranslatable and of the mongoose's mobilizing magic.

Conclusion

Díaz's texts render experience intelligible through the mobilizing use of both code-switching and magical realism. By switching between English, Spanish, and different registers within them, Díaz's texts depict characters continuously navigating their relationship to their past and current lives and locations, trying to make those navigations understandable to themselves and others. In his texts, settling somewhere does not lead to an end of mobilities; instead, mobilities continue to reverberate, and be enacted, even on the level of daily conversations. Here, code-switching can be a sign of community exclusion or inclusion; acceptance or rejection; a moving toward, or away from, Dominicanidad. The text, the characters, and the readers, are all mobilized by a switching which, though turning from here to there to somewhere else, refracts but never settles. Meaning, here, resides not just in what a word literally means—how one would translate it into another language—but what it means in the language in which it is rendered, with its particular history, when uttered in a particular instance. I see this as an example Apter calls the "site-specific," an attunement to small shifts and the realities they point towards. In Díaz's texts, it is both the words themselves and the switches between them which serve to communicate and navigate this site-specificity, as meaning is transported across the Untranslatable and its gaps.

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Conclusion

Our lives are shaped by dynamics of movement and stasis. We may not use the term “small-scale mobility” when we are moving apartments, or “linguistic mobility” when we include a word from a different language in our speech, but none of us are strangers to what it means to be im/mobile. And all of us have experienced the lulls, the gaps, in mobility processes – such as waiting for a train that is delayed, stuck in a limbo between being on the move and being, for the moment, stationary. In this dissertation, I have applied a mobility-studies lens both to literary texts which are very obviously concerned with the mobile as well as to phenomena not often read as such: the textual mobilities of switching between different languages or between different genres, of envisioning a future migration, of having one’s daily rhythm interrupted, of imagining a person’s inner thoughts while on a road trip. Throughout, particular attention was paid to the imaginative, carving out what imaginative mobilities might mean in the entangled processes of fixity and movement depicted in these texts. Doing so destabilizes these very categories, showing how there can be movement within apparent stillness and vice versa. This went hand in hand with viewing the analytical categories that are the basis of this dissertation—e.g. of the ‘Caribbean,’ of ‘diaspora,’ of ‘America’—as themselves in flux and mobile. Both ‘diaspora’ and ‘America’ are something the characters, to borrow Lily Cho’s phrasing, “turn toward,” an approach which helps frame them as practices rather than givens.

In chapter 1, I laid the theoretical groundwork for this dissertation, delineating the fields with which my analysis is in conversation. Among them are not just mobility studies and its intersection with Caribbean studies, but also approaches which decenter the U.S. by viewing ‘America’ as a hemisphere and an archipelago, thereby highlighting movement rather than the fixity of the (U.S.-centric) landmass. This then served as the basis for the chapters in which I trace imaginative mobilities in the works of Jamaica Kincaid, Dany Laferrière, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz. In analyzing how imaginative mobilities figure in these texts, one thing I have drawn out across the different chapters is how these texts render ‘America’ into an archipelago, making visible connections between different points within this web of islands: Lucy doing her best not to remember Antigua from where she is in the U.S.; Windsor, in Laferrière’s *L’Énigme*, feeling like he only has to turn a corner in Montréal to “find [him]self in Port-au-Prince” (11), these cities thus entangled

and proximate in his imagination. In my reading, texts by all four writers share a concern with navigating imaginative mobilities within the American archipelago; despite these similarities, im/mobilities feature in a variety of ways across their work. In chapter 2, I focus on what I call speculative mobilities, analyzing how Jamaica Kincaid's characters aim to bring both a future and a past into being through an engagement with the characters' im/mobilities: Annie imagines a future into being by thinking herself far away, and Lucy aims to accumulate a new, American past now that she has left Antigua and arrived in a U.S. city. Here, im/mobilities and temporality are profoundly entangled. Chapter 3, on Dany Laferrière, focuses on narrator Windsor traveling in the opposite direction, from Montréal back to Haiti. In the chapter, I study the imaginative mobilities performed by Laferrière's narrators along with his switching between genres (in *L'Énigme*) and between the realms of the living and the dead (*Pays*). I draw out the ways in which Laferrière, by both upholding and undermining the distinction between these genres and spheres, renders his text highly formally mobile. This chapter also considers Haiti, which, after having long been both at the very center of Caribbean creation and at the assumed periphery of the world, is purposefully staged as an American locale by Laferrière. Chapter 4, on Edwidge Danticat, takes up this theme of Haiti as part of the American archipelago and teases out the importance of commemoration, and of the communal, in her depiction of diasporic life. I see the im/mobilities in Danticat's work as profoundly related to rhythms. Consequently, much of the chapter is about two types of rhythms clashing in Danticat's short story "New York Day Women": the rhythms of walking and remembering. These two concerns—the body and its movements on the one hand, and memory on the other—also come into play in Danticat's other stories, as "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" depicts the embodied commemoration of returning to a site of a massacre. "Caroline's Wedding," meanwhile, is about both the relief of finally feeling physically safe in the U.S. through becoming a citizen, and about the mobilities made possible by dreaming, thereby linking the material realities of network capital to unconscious processes. In chapter 5, on Junot Díaz, the question of multilinguality only hinted at in the other texts is more fully explored, as Díaz's code-switching between English and Spanish is read as a mobile phenomenon in several ways; moving between languages also serves as a way to continually chart and contest questions of belonging, Dominicanidad, and masculinity. Díaz ties linguistic mobility into every aspect of his literary rendition of diasporic Dominican New Jersey life. Tracing the concept of

‘imaginative mobilities’ across these different texts has made it possible to carve out the specific purchase of the ‘mobile:’ the mobile is a site of intersection, where physical movement, small-scale as a walk and large-scale as a migration, meet the imagination and are made sense of imaginatively.

My study set out to contribute to several fields: one of them is Caribbean studies, where there is “a still prevalent tendency to fragment the Caribbean into zones of linguistic influence or ideologically determined categories” (Dash 3). Instead of seeing literature as contained within these linguistic zones, I analyzed both English- and French-language texts, working towards a Caribbean studies where texts are studied across linguistic difference. This cross-linguistic perspective also enabled me to develop points of comparison which would not otherwise have been possible, such as between the daughter in Danticat’s “New York Day Women” imagining her mother’s thoughts and Laferrière’s narrator Windsor imagining his uncle’s, both characters aiming for inter-subjective mobility. In Laferrière’s text, the narrator, Windsor, is traveling around his home island of Haiti, feeling foreign, when this happens; in Danticat’s text, this act of imagining another’s thoughts takes place in the context of the daughter following the mother while assuming that the mother must be the one feeling out of place. Both these texts, then, are about diasporic subjects’ im/mobilities—walking and a road trip, respectively, with the characters moving “in a certain kind of way” (Benítez-Rojo 16)—wondering what it means to belong while widening their gaze to imagine the inner life of someone else.

Additionally to bringing texts in different languages into conversation, I teased out the linguistic navigations inherent even to texts which might at first glance appear to be monolingual. Even a language’s absence can be a meaningful site navigated by the text and the reader. Here, too, points of convergence are found across a linguistic divide: both in Laferrière’s *L’Énigme de retour* and in Kincaid’s *Annie John*, Creole functions mostly as a lacuna, a gap the reader has to traverse. In Laferrière’s text, the gap of Kreyòl functions to underline his alienation from the place he grew up in; in Kincaid’s text, it points toward Annie’s fractured relationship with her mother. In both, however, Creole’s absence itself becomes a site of meaning, pointing to the characters’ past and future diasporic mobilities and the imaginative peregrinations—the imaginative mobilities—with which they make sense of these. Neither of these points of convergence between Laferrière and Danticat,

and between Laferrière and Kincaid, have been explored in studies of Caribbean literature, which are traditionally divided into anglophone and francophone studies along (former) colonial borders.

This dissertation is also a contribution to mobility studies, which, though supplying us with many tools with which to study literary texts, has at times struggled to integrate “imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel” (Sheller 793) into its often empirical outlook. My study focuses on the first of those terms, “imaginative travel”: the many ways that texts and characters are imaginatively mobile, and bring the past, the future, and the present into being through these imaginative mobilities; that is, by imagining future mobilities, remembering past mobilities, or imaginatively navigating im/mobilities in the present. In Kincaid, this navigation of temporality takes the form of imagining a future which “*which will have **had to happen***” (Campt 17; emphases in the original); in Danticat, one of the forms this nexus of time and im/mobilities takes is a commemorative, embodied pilgrimage to the site of a massacre. In Díaz, the future and the present intersect in the magical-realist moment of the mongoose appearing to Beli, telling her about her future children, and in Laferrière’s *Pays sans chapeau*, a kind of reverse imaginative travel takes place: while the text stages a crossing from the land of the living to the land of the dead, the narrator realizes that there is in fact no difference between the two, and that no true crossing has taken place.

By “communicative travel,” the second term in Mimi Sheller’s list, I take her to mean communicative technologies like email or the telephone. Danticat’s “Caroline’s Wedding,” however, carves out a different kind of communicative travel – that of willing someone to appear in one’s dream, then writing down what they said upon waking, this act of imagining a dialogue onto the page functioning as a weaving together of absence and presence. Another kind of communicative travel happens in Danticat’s “New York Day Women” when the daughter imagines a dialogue between her and her mother. This is a dialogue the mother does not know about even though the daughter is inwardly reacting to things the mother has said. While Sheller lists imaginative and communicative travel as two distinct kinds of mobilities which the field of mobility studies could pay attention to, what the analysis in my chapters on Laferrière and Danticat has shown is that imagination can sometimes function *as* communication when characters imagine conversations with others. These imagined dialogues, which feel real to them, are thoroughly entangled with their im/mobilities. Linked to this focus on the imaginative,

my dissertation has also focused on “small-scale, quotidian movements” (Murray and Upstone 14): like walking, daydreaming, or even speaking. Although these small-scale mobilities are often entangled with larger-scale ones, they are also im/mobilities in their own right, as rhythms get interrupted, change, start up again. In centering the imaginative, the communicative, and the small—and in centering works of literature—my dissertation has thus built on existing mobility studies concepts while markedly expanding the field.

Finally, being located at the crossroads of Caribbean studies and Comparative Literature, this dissertation has aimed to not only draw on, and add to, live debates within Comparative Literature—especially the debate around World Literature and translatability—but to show that scholarship can be comparative even when comparing works of literature in presumably close linguistic or geographical proximity, such as a text from one side of Hispaniola to a text from the other. This is a Comparative Literature which takes the literary locations within the American archipelago just as seriously, and sees them as just as vast and varied, as literary traditions which have more traditionally fallen under the purview of the field, such as those of European nation states. This makes for a Comparative Literature which is “site-specific” (Apter 42), attuned to the “impact of accents, vernacular, code-switching, argot and diglossia within non-standard language use” (Apter 43). By viewing switches between these registers as mobilities—and by seeing not just Apter’s Untranslatable but even the non-understood as sites of meaning—this is a Comparative Literature which pays attention to small shifts in form, content, and language, both across a corpus of texts and across one single sentence.

Throughout, the figure of the archipelago has played a key role. Archipelagos are themselves mobile, as they are constituted through currents, tides, and waves, as well as through human and non-human mobilities between the islands. Thinking the concepts of the archipelago and of im/mobilities together highlights the archipelagic nature of mobility processes themselves, as any such process is an assemblage of moments of movement and waiting, of motion in one direction and then perhaps a spurt to another. There are certain quotes and images that come up again and again in my text – Sara Ahmed et al.’s voiding of the binary between being grounded and being mobile; Peter Adey et al.’s image of waiting for a railway to be built; David Bissell’s “folding of absence and presence” (44). These insights have clearly served as key inspirations and starting points for my work. It is my hope that continuously invoking these and other concepts has

not been repetitive in the sense of redundant, but rather repetitive in Antonio Benítez-Rojo's sense: they serve as nodes connecting the different parts of an archipelago of interpretations and analyses. Speaking with Benítez-Rojo, my dissertation, I hope, reverberates outwards.

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