

## Tidalectic Poetics

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*Publication date:*  
2023

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Mortensen, A.-S. B. (2023). *Tidalectic Poetics*. Roskilde Universitet.

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# Tidalectic Poetics

PhD dissertation by

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2023

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you...

To my supervisor Heidi who guided me right from the beginning. Thank you for all your time, consideration, and encouragement. Without your insights and consistent involvement this dissertation would never have been. To my co-supervisor Carsten who joined us for the last half of the ride. Thank you for your thoughtful readings and your excitement.

To all my inspiring and supportive colleagues at the Institute of Communication and Arts at Roskilde University. You know who you are. Thank you for making this process less daunting and much more enjoyable than I could ever have hoped for.

To all the professors, teachers, and mentors I have met along the way, both in and outside of universities. Thank you for your kind words as well as your critique, it is more appreciated than you will ever know.

To all the Caribbean poets who, without even knowing it, have shared their work with me. Your words have widened my view of the world in ways beyond my imagination, thank you. There are more of you than I can count, but particularly thank you to Kamau, Anthony, Jennifer, and Celia.

Lastly, to my son Erik. Thank you for everything, always.

## Abstract

*Tidalectic Poetics* analyzes contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry in the cross-section between colonial, environmental and ecological histories. Taking its basis from the poetic-theoretic writing of Barbadian poet, historian, and philosopher Kamau Brathwaite, this study examines the heuristic values of engaging with Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing in decolonial ecological poetry analysis.

Chapter One analyzes Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode, the tidalectic as articulating a counter-poetics to the colonialist perception of time, place and writing, and Chapter Two maps out and analyzes five of his thematical concepts, as modalities of the tidalectic. Following this in-depth analysis of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing, the study utilizes the poetic-theoretic insights gained from this to analyze selected works by three contemporary poets from three different islands of the Anglocreole Caribbean region. Each analysis focuses on a particular island and its colonial histories of exploitation, as well as a particular human and more-than-human relation. Chapter Three explores the relation between humans and various water(s) in Barbadian Anthony Kellman's writing, Chapter Four explores the relation between humans and various earth(s) in Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim's work, and lastly Chapter Five explores the relation between humans and hurricane(s) in Dominican Celia A. Sorhaino's work.

Analytically the project draws on theories and formulations from poetry studies, critical geography, and non-western philosophy, and strives to demonstrate how Anglocreole Caribbean poetry contributes to a reconsideration of our epistemic categories, and challenges anthropocentric and colonial dichotomies such as culture/nature, past/present/future, and History/histories. The overall intention of the project is therefore twofold: Firstly, it aims to communicate the applicability of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing in a broader poetic context. Secondly, it aims to demonstrate how the abovementioned Anglocreole Caribbean poets contribute to the conversation on human and more-than-human relations and decolonial ecologies in poetic expression.

## Abstract (dansk)

*Tidalectic Poetics* analyserer nutidig anglokreolsk caribisk poesi i krydsfeltet mellem koloni- og klimahistorier. Projektet baserer sig på den barbadiske digter, filosof og historiker, Kamau Brathwaites poetisk-teoretiske oeuvre og undersøger de erkendelsesmæssige værdier ved at applicere Brathwaites poetisk-teoretiske konceptualiseringer i en dekolonial økologisk analyse af nutidig caribisk poesi.

Kapitel 1 analyserer Brathwaites poetisk-teoretiske modus, *the tidalectic*, og kortlægger hvordan modusset formulerer en mod-poetik til den kolonialistiske opfattelse af tid, sted og skrift. Kapitel 2 kortlægger og analyserer fem af Brathwaites tematiske koncepter som udtryk for særlige modaliteter af *the tidalectic*. Efter denne dybdegående beskæftigelse med Brathwaites poetisk-teoretiske skriftproduktion benytter jeg de opnåede indsigter fra kapitel 1 og 2 til at analysere værker af tre digtere fra tre forskellige caribiske øer. Hvert af disse analysekapitler fokuserer på en specifik caribisk ø og dens særlige kolonihistorie, såvel som på en specifik menneskelig og ikke-menneskelige relation. I kapitel 3 analyseres relationen mellem mennesker og vand i Anthony Kellmans poetiske værker, i kapitel 4 analyseres relationen mellem mennesker og jord i Jennifer Rahims værker, og i kapitel 5 analyseres relationen mellem mennesker og orkaner i Celia Sorhaindos værker.

Analytisk trækker projektet på teori og forskningslitteratur fra litteraturvidenskaben, den kritiske geografi og ikke-vestlig filosofi, og studiet søger at demonstrere, hvordan anglokreolsk caribisk poesi bidrager til en revurdering af epistemiske kategorier og udfordrer de antropocentriske og koloniale dikotomier såsom kultur/natur, fortid/nutid/fremtid og Historie/historier. Studiets har to overordnede intentioner: For det første tilstræber studiet at formidle det teoretiske udbytte ved Kamau Brathwaites poetiske-teoretiske produktion i en bredere poetisk kontekst. For det andet søger studiet at demonstrere, hvordan de tidligere nævnte anglokreolske caribiske digtere bidrager til den miljøhumanistiske diskussion af menneskelige og ikke-menneskelige relationer i en poetisk kontekst.

*Tidalectic Poetics*

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# *Introduction*

## *Tidalectic Poetics*

*In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.*

(Sharpe, 2016)

*it takes me back & drags me tidalectic into this tangled urgent meaning to & fro . like foam . saltless as from the bottom of the sea . dragging our meaning our moaning*

(Brathwaite, 1994)

*(i) Poet*

*is a craftsperson, oral or literary, ideally both, who deals in metrical and/or rhythmical – sometimes riddmical – wordsongs, wordsounds wordwounds & meanings, within a certain code of order or dis/order what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls creative chaos (...)*

*And from the ground of that culture is he/she grown/ / is he/ she known/ / is he . she be/ come*

(Brathwaite, 1994)



In 1492 the world changed. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, Christopher Columbus went ashore on an island referred to by the indigenous population as Guanahani, a small piece of land we today know as part of the island state Bahamas. This event marked the beginning of the colonization of the ‘New World’ and soon the European nations with maritime resources would propagate throughout the Caribbean archipelago and the South and North American continent. The socio-ecological event of colonization in the Americas was fuelled by economic ambition and extractivist ontologies, and the region was irretrievably altered by the monolithic plantation culture, that not only sought to utilize soils, plants, waters, and minerals as pure tappable resources, but also inscribed non-white human-beings into the same logic of profit (Moore, 2015; Niblett & Campbell, 2016; Carrigan, 2015; Grove, 1996; DeLoughrey et al., 2005; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Malm, 2018). The consequences of that vast socio-ecological disturbance continue to reverberate through time and space and are still ominously present in the Caribbean archipelago to this day.

*Tidalectic Poetics* sets out to explore how we may draw on Barbadian poet, historian, philosopher, and writer, Kamau Brathwaite’s writing in a reading of the ways in which the continued coloniality still marks the relationship between humans and more-than-humans<sup>1</sup> in the Caribbean, but also how decolonial ecological alternatives to the colonial habitation of the archipelago emerge in contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry. The tidalectic is a word that does not figure, at least not yet, in the Oxford English Dictionary, or any other official English dictionaries. Yet the term has been picked up by numerous scholars from a variety of disciplines over the last twenty years. Formulated by Brathwaite this ‘tidal dialectic’, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls it (DeLoughrey, 2007, 3), redefines Hegel’s idea of the dialectic and the common colonial understanding and portrayal of history and time as linear. However, in this study I will argue that the tidalectic also brings about new epistemic considerations of place and writing in the Caribbean archipelago.

In this dissertation the tidalectic will be defined as poetic-theoretic mode. I use the term poetic-theoretic to underline, that Brathwaite’s poetry performs theoretical work<sup>2</sup>, and that in his writing passages that might at first read as solely a poetic expression carries significant theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> I define more-than-human as a counterpoint to the dualism between culture/nature. In my definition the term refers to the multitude of both biotic and abiotic agents that shape the world, including but not limited to waters, plants, soils, minerals, weather phenomena, animals, stones etc. I prefer the term more-than-human rather than non-human, which is employed by Malcolm Ferdinand, in the attempt to de-centralise my focus.

<sup>2</sup> I take this formulation on poetry as performing theoretical work from Adam Drury’s dissertation “Imagine there’s no human” (2020). While Drury’s project differs significantly from mine, by focusing on the intellectual legacy of anti-colonial psychoanalysis in the French and English-speaking Caribbean islands and engaging a vast variety of authors from different linguistic fields, I do find his consideration of poetry as performing, rather than conducting or doing, theoretical work inspiring. I shall return to this notion briefly in Chapter One in which I engage with Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic in depth.

substance and heuristic value once examined carefully. I am thereby also in critical dialogue with the long-standing tradition within Western academia to hold theory or philosophy in higher esteem than poetic or general artistic expression (for more on this see Drabinski, 2019, 137 – 183)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, I employ the term “mode” to highlight the importance of the sensed or experienced element that is at the core of the tidalectic, which Brathwaite himself describes as a “perception of xperience” (Brathwaite, 2000, 46 – see also Chapter One). Over the course of the dissertation I will argue, that as a poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic reveals the entanglement of colonialism, environment, and ecologies in the Caribbean archipelago, and that it offers Caribbean decolonial ecological alternatives to various colonialist epistemic categories. Furthermore, I consider, in line with Chris Campbell and Mike Niblett, Anglocreole Caribbean poetic works as “historical agent[s] in this ecological revolution” (Campbell et al., 2016, 5). Thereby in this study poetry is to be understood as an aesthetic object that is not just shaped within and out of the colonial, environmental, and ecological reality from which it arises, but that also contributes to the making and remaking of a set reality.

Throughout the dissertation, I will use the terms coloniality/colonial/colonialism to define the continued coloniality that is present in the Caribbean archipelago from 1492 on. With “continued coloniality” I am referring to the continued consequences of colonialism and plantation society, as well as to how today’s tourism might be perceived as a contemporary form of colonialism, fuelled by the same logics of profit and cross-Atlantic interests (Carrigan, 2011; 2013). By using the terms coloniality/colonial/colonialism I also intend to signal my positioning in the aftermath of the discussion of the term post(-)colonial, with or without hyphen, that has been a contested term within the field of postcolonial criticism and theory since the early 1980s (Ashcroft, 2001; McClintock, 1992; Shohat, 1992, and others). As concisely concluded by McClintock:

The word "post," moreover, reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronologic, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-). In other words, the world's multitudinous cultures are marked not by what distinguishes them, but by a subordinate retrospective relation to linear, European time. (McClintock, 1992, 86)

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<sup>3</sup> In his book chapter “Aesthetics of an Abyssal Subject” (2019) Drabinski writes on the importance of Césaire’s, Glissant’s and Lamming’s aesthetics as a disolvment between art and theory: “Césaire and Lamming nicely frame Glissant’s aesthetics; all three share a commitment to collapsing the distinction between art and theory, whether that be in evocative, lyrical essays or in creative work saturated with ontology, epistemological questions, ethical and political drama, and so forth. And so the questions raised between Césaire and Lamming are of the highest theoretical concern generally, while also rooted in the specificity of the aesthetic for historical, cultural transformation in the Caribbean context.” (Drabinski, 2019, 143)

I will not dwell further on the discussion of this term, but simply make clear, that I use the wording coloniality/colonial/colonialism as interchangeable with the wording ‘on-going colonialism’ or ‘continued colonialism’ intentionally to circumvent the “logic of linear development” (McClintock, 85) that is implied in the hyphenated version.<sup>4</sup> I will return to the discussion of linearity and progress in Chapter One, where I map out and analyze Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic.

Drawing particularly on Walter D. Mignolo, along with Anibal Quijano, Catherine Walsh, and Malcolm Ferdinand, I define decoloniality as the epistemic reconstitution of language, culture, ways of living and being, that is needed if non-Western states, communities, and subjects are to free themselves from the shackles of the West’s claim to universalism (Mignolo, interviewed by Mattison, 2012; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Whereas decolonization refers to the struggle to (re)claim the nation state from the colonial power structures, decoloniality refers to the struggle to (re)claim the mind and imagination.

How does the tidalectic enable such a reclaiming? I will argue, that the tidalectic both lays bare the insidious connections between the on-going colonialism and environmental and ecological exploitation and devastation in the Caribbean, but it also offers hopeful counter-poetics<sup>5</sup> and in part heals what political ecologist Malcolm Ferdinand refers to as “modernity’s double fracture” that has sought to separate environmental and ecological histories from human histories of colonialism. (Ferdinand, 2021). The tidalectic in part heals this double fracture through a poetic-theoretic engagement with time. In her seminal book *In The Wake* (2016) Black Studies professor Christina Sharpe draws on French philosopher Maurice Blanchot’s definition of *desastreux* (disaster<sup>6</sup>) as something immanent; that which is always already there and that continues to echo, reverberate, through a time that is not linear, in order to describe the

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<sup>4</sup> In his book *Post-colonial Transformation* (2001) Bill Ashcroft presents a critique of this discussion, arguing that the hyphen in post-colonial or post-colonialism should not necessarily be perceived as being disabling, but rather that “this radical instability of meaning gives the term a vibrancy, energy and plasticity which have become part of its strength, as post-colonial analysis rises to engage issues and experiences which have been out of the purview of metropolitan theory and, indeed, comes to critique the assumptions of that theory.” (Ashcroft, 2001, 11).

<sup>5</sup> While it might seem natural, given the context of this dissertation, that I use counter-poetics in reference to Glissant’s employment of the term in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) (orig. *Le Discours antillais*, 1981), where he defines counter-poetics as the necessity for a specific Caribbean expression, yet the inability to express due to the structures of the language that is made available in the colonized region, my definition is closer to that of Michel Foucault’s definition of counter history, as developed in his seminar series *Society Must be Defended* (1974-1975). When I refer to Brathwaite’s the tidalectic as offering healing counter-poetics, I mean that his poetic-theoretic writing provides epistemic alternatives to various Western epistemologies that have sought to separate humans from more-than-humans and the History of man from the histories of ecologies. More on this in Chapter One.

<sup>6</sup> While Blanchot, and Sharpe who draws on his work, use the term ‘disaster’ I prefer catastrophe, due to its more severe and on-going connotations. Furthermore, it is also the term Brathwaite himself uses repeatedly in texts such as “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” (1974), “Metaphors of underdevelopment: A poem for Hernan Cortez” (1985), “World Order Models—A Caribbean Perspective” (1985), “History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self” (1990) and “Caliban’s Garden” (1992). Brathwaite’s famous quote “Art must come out of catastrophe”, that I also use as an introductory quote for this dissertation, exemplifies the poet’s usage of the term. For more on Brathwaite’s writing as based around catastrophe see Elaine Savory’s review of *Words Need Love Too* entitled “Journey from Catastrophe to Radiance” (2008).

continuous impact of the transatlantic slave trade on Black subjects. In the wake of the disaster that was the Middle Passage<sup>7</sup> “the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.” (Sharpe, 9) and much later, once again drawing on Blanchot “there is no before the ongoing event of the disaster. How, after all, to split time?” (130) It is exactly this idea of a catastrophic past that is not past, but that continuously ruptures through the present, that is at the core of the tidalectic (see Chapter One). Drawing on Blanchot’s conclusion that disaster wrecks language (Blanchot, ed. 1995, 7), Sharpe suggests the need for repurposing words from the perspective of the enslaved that were kidnapped and shipped to the Americas as human cargo. Tidalectic, I would suggest, is such a word. It holds a multitude of meanings, always taking the Anglocreole Caribbean and all its inhabitants, human as well as more-than-human<sup>8</sup>, as its starting point.

I will argue that when we engage with the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode, meaning as poetry that performs theoretical work, it fosters the realization that the environmental and ecological catastrophes all inhabitants of the Earth are faced with today, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, is the aftermath of that massive catastrophe that was the colonialist expansion conducted by European nations over hundreds of years ago. There is no separating that initial catastrophe that enslaved both humans and more-than-humans. As Brathwaite states in his essay “World Order Models” (1985): “First man (slavery), then fossil; and always a consumption of landscape” (Brathwaite, 1985a, 55). *Tidalectic Poetics* argues that contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry can assist in the realization of the connection between colonialism and environmental and ecological exploitation and devastation and, perhaps, point in new directions for moving, not forward as in away from the past, but, as DeLoughrey potently argues in her book *Routes and Roots* (2007), via alternative routes.<sup>9</sup>

### **Analytical approach, the dissertation’s structure, and research questions**

*Tidalectic Poetics* aims to formulate a kind of decolonial ecology, similar to the one that Malcolm Ferdinand expresses in his book *Decolonial Ecology* (2021, originally published in French, *Une écologie décoloniale, Penser l'écologie depuis le monde Caribéen*, 2019), that confronts the colonial habitation of the earth from the vantage

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<sup>7</sup> Here I again choose a different wording than Sharpe, employing the Middle Passage rather than the transatlantic slave trade. I mainly do so to align my own wording with that of Brathwaite, who uses the term repeatedly in his writing.

<sup>8</sup> I define more-than-human as a counterpoint to the dualism between culture/nature. In my definition the term refers to the multitude of both biotic and abiotic agents that shape the world, including but not limited to waters, plants, soils, minerals, weather phenomena, animals, stones etc. I thereby also use the term more-than-human in its simplest definition. I prefer the term more-than-human rather than non-human, which is employed by Malcolm Ferdinand, in the attempt to de-centralise my focus. There is a long-standing academic discussion within the field of Environmental Humanities on the term more-than-human, which I will not get into in this dissertation. For more on this see for example Astrida Neimanis’ article “No Representation without Colonisation? (Or, Nature Represents Itself)” (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s book *Routes and Roots* (2007) has been an essential inspiration for the dissertation’s overall argument, as will be clear through-out the dissertation.

point of the Caribbean. This is considered as a “renewed critique of historical and contemporary colonisations and their legacies, a critique that takes the world’s ecological challenges seriously” and recognizes that “the colonial relationship cannot be reduced to a relationship between human beings, but must also include specific relationships to non-humans, to landscapes, and lands” (Ferdinand, 175). It has been a hypothesis from my study, that Brathwaite anticipates this perspective in his writing, and brings about nouvelle insights into how colonialism affects the relationship between humans and more-than-humans in the Caribbean archipelago. As we shall come to see over the course of this dissertation this relationship is neither one of simple harmonious solidarity or connectiveness, nor one of pure hostility or animosity. Rather in both Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing as well as in Kellman, Rahim and Sorhaindo’s work, the human and the more-than-human is related via histories of exploitation and devastation, as well as via practices of decolonial ecological rebellion towards colonial forces, intentional or not.

*Tidalectic Poetics* is divided into two parts. Part One is an in-depth exploration of Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing and conceptualizations from a decolonial ecological viewpoint, and Part Two consists of three chapters (Chapters Three to Five) that each analyse work by a contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poet and their decolonial ecological poetic vision.

My main method of engagement with the poetic-theoretic writing of Brathwaite as well as the poetic work of Anthony Kellman, Jennifer Rahim and Celia Sorhaindo, is the literary method of close reading. According to ecocritical scholar, Timothy Morton, it is via a close reading that is “slower than thou” that the individual can develop a new “environmentality” that is aware, both physically and mentally, of the environment as the invaluable setting for every living entity’s survival (Morton, 2007, 12-13). The slow reading that I have done has been explorative and inductive. Knowing that I wanted to study the heuristic value of engaging with Kamau Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing, particularly his formulation the tidalectic, and examine to what degree his work could be employed as a theoretical lens through which to read other poets’ work, I decided to break down poetic expression into its three most basic elements, to see what the tidalectic could teach me about these three. The three basic elements that I believe constitutes any poetic expression is: a perception and presentation of time, a perception and presentation of place and lastly a perception and presentation of writing.<sup>10</sup> After I had sketched out these three basic elements, I read Brathwaite’s texts in which the tidalectic is mentioned to map out how he engages with these three basic elements and to what extent his engagement formulates a particular Caribbean understanding or perception of them. This close reading, mapping and analysis of tidalectic

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<sup>10</sup> The latter is relevant since I am engaging with written poetry. Had my focus been on oral poetry writing could be replaced with performativity.

time, place and writing, is what is at stake in Chapter One, which formulates the basis for the rest of the entire dissertation.

From this foundation, Chapter Two dives into the more interdisciplinary aspects of Brathwaite's writing. By sketching out five sub-categorical concepts that emerge from a broad nexus of Caribbean catastrophes, including socio-geographic, cultural, linguistic, and geologic catastrophes, the chapter demonstrates how Brathwaite both conceptualizes catastrophes, but also how he, from the ruins of colonialism and environmental destruction, envisions new creative connections to the socio-ecological environment and offer reparative histories from within the region.

Part Two is dedicated to exploring contemporary Anglocreole poetry via Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode and sub-categorical thematic concepts. The three chapters ask how and in what capacity we can trace Brathwaite's epistemic in these works and what new insights into the relation between humans and more-than-humans in the context of the continued coloniality of the archipelago. In other words, these chapters explore how the decolonial ecological legacy of the tidalectic (Chapter One) and Brathwaite's thematical concepts (Chapter Two) is apparent in three selected poet's writing.

The dissertation sets out to explore the question:

How does Kamau Brathwaite's writing contribute to a theorization of the relation between the human and the more-than-human and which tools does he provide for decolonial ecological readings of other contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poets?

To answer this question, I have formulated two research questions:

- i) How does Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing offer epistemic alternatives to the colonialist perception of the three basic categories of time, place, and History writing?
- ii) How can the poetic-theoretical tools provided by Brathwaite help us understand the representation of the relation between human and more-than-human in the poems of Anthony Kellman, Jennifer Rahim, and Celia Sorhaindo, as marked by the continued coloniality of the Caribbean as well as formulating new decolonial ecologies of the archipelago?

The first research question will be answered in Part One, in which I engage with Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic, (Chapter One), and subsequently five of his thematical concepts that can be read as modalities of the tidalectic and that each perform theoretical work (Chapter Two). The second research question will be answered in Part Two by the three analysis chapters, in which I engage with three different poets from three different islands via three focuses on the relationships between

humans and more-than-humans in the archipelago. Chapter Three is dedicated to Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman's poetic work and focuses on the relation between humans and water(s), Chapter Four is dedicated to Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim and focuses on the relation between humans and earth(s), lastly Chapter Five to is dedicated to Dominican Celia Sorhaindo and focuses on the relation between humans and hurricane(s).

### **Three interdisciplinary conversations**

Aside from Brathwaite a small handful of other scholars, theorists and writers have been essential for the development of this dissertation's argument. These include Christina Sharpe and her writing on being in the wake from her 2016 book of the same name, Elizabeth DeLoughrey's extensive work on Caribbean and Pacific Island literature over the last two decades, Michael Niblett and Chris Campbell's writing on world-ecology and Caribbean literature, and lastly, Malcolm Ferdinand's book *Decolonial Ecology* (French 2019; translated 2021). These scholars and theorists' work will be cited, analysed and discussed throughout the dissertation.

In addition to these central scholarly voices, my investment in analysing Anglocreole Caribbean poetry and how the various poets contribute to understanding decolonial ecologies springs from the scholarly conversations developed across the disciplines of literature studies, ecocritical postcolonial theory, critical geography, and the broad interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities. The three primary interdisciplinary conversations I engage with can be categorised as follows:

- i. World-ecology and decolonial ecologies
- ii. Human and more-than-human histories
- iii. Postcolonial ecocritical Caribbean literature studies

In the following three sections I will sketch out these three conversations in broad strokes, to provide a scholarly context for the dissertation, and to highlight significant theorists and thinkers within these various fields that have shaped my argumentation.

#### *i. World-ecology and decolonial ecologies*

Ecological thinking and world-ecology<sup>11</sup> merge in their dedication to uproot epistemic frameworks of human engagement with the physical world from their Anthropocentric outset. Instead, these install an epistemology that is attentive "to human and historical-geographical diversity and well equipped to

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<sup>11</sup> World ecology is understood here, as first developed by Jason W. Moore, and expanded on by scholars of world literature such as Chris Campbell, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George Handley, Helen Tiffin, Kerstin Oloff, Mike Niblett, Nick Lawrence, Sharae Deckard, and many others.

interrogate and unsettle the instrumental rationality, abstract individualism, reductionism, and exploitation of people and places that the epistemologies of mastery have helped to legitimate” (Code, 2003, 21). The investment in the conceptualization of ‘world’ poses difficult questions to “among other things, the nature of what constitutes a ‘world,’ and the (ever-shifting and equally vexing) relations between ‘global’ and ‘local’ space” (Moore, 2003, 308). Thereby world-ecology in part dissolves the dichotomous relationship between the categories of the global and the local that often frame current conversations pertaining to public environmental debates. This approach blurs the harsh lines between the temporal categories of past, present, and future, while remaining attentive to the historical and geographical specificity of engaging with, as in the case of this dissertation for example, areas like the Caribbean archipelago and each islands individual colonial, postcolonial, environmental, ecological histories, and potential futures. This dissertation sets out to examine the interconnected histories of human and more-than-human relations and processes as portrayed in contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry. As formulated by Moore:

Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans – and human organization. (...) World ecology asks us to put our post-Cartesian worldview to work on the crucible of world-historical transformation – understood not as history from above but as the fundamental co-production of earth-moving, idea-making, and power-creating across the geographical layers of human organization. (Moore, 2015, 3)

As noted by scholars such as Chris Campbell and Michael Niblett, literary analysis is particularly apt for considering and contemplating this post-Cartesian worldview that Moore suggests, and so, by coupling world-ecology with questions of world literature, we might ask the question: “What specific kinds of aesthetic forms are generated in situations of ecological revolution in peripheral regions?” (Niblett, 2012, 20) Part Two of my dissertation is, in part, an attempt to answer set question from three different Anglocreole Caribbean contexts, namely Barbados, Dominica and Trinidad. To that extent the scholarly conversation on world-ecology insists on viewing human and more-than-human histories, a formulation I shall return to shortly , not just as interrelated, but as inseparable, and literature as an apt medium for conveying this.

In the same vein, and inspired by Malcolm Ferdinand’s concept of decolonial ecology, I embrace the Caribbean as a scene of decolonial ecological thinking: “To think ecology from the perspective of the Caribbean world proposes an epistemic shift in the conceptualizations of the world and the Earth at the heart of ecology, meaning that there is a change of scene from which discourses and



knowledge are produced” (Ferdinand, 2021, 13). As a scholar in political ecology and philosophy, Ferdinand does this by engaging with numerous empirical and theoretical narratives arising in the Caribbean and conceptualizes a decolonial ecology that unifies political struggles of gender equality and racism with the aim to protect the Caribbean environment. I attempt this “epistemic shift in the conceptualization of the Earth” (Ferdinand, 13) that Ferdinand suggests, via an engagement with poetry and poetic expression, arguing that poetry offers a creative re-tuning of our epistemic categories. And just as Ferdinand in *Decolonial Ecology*, points towards the “colonial inhabitation of the earth” (Ferdinand, 25), as well as towards decolonial alternatives, the dissertation will not only lay bare the insidious connections between the painful histories of the relation between ongoing colonialism, environmental and ecological devastation in the Caribbean as portrayed in Brathwaite’s writing and the three selected poet’s work, but also point towards the more hopeful histories that these poetic voices engage with.

This engagement also corresponds to the pivotal work on decolonial thinking done by Latin American scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo from the late 1990s onwards, that Ferdinand draws on in his book as well (Ferdinand, 2021, 14). Mignolo and Escobar highlight other ways of thinking that arise from the spaces that have been repressed and devaluated by the so-called “modern epistemology” (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010, 2). As argued by Mignolo, there is no extricating modernity from coloniality, and there is no way of perceiving our modern world without accounting for the unavoidable presence of the modern/colonial universalism, that continually seeks to dominate and exploit non-Western spaces and societies as well as dismiss the knowledge produced in these spaces:

each local history of the planet, today, has to deal with the modern/colonial world, the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. Each local history has its own language, memory, ethics, political theory, and political economy (...) all of which are also marked by traces of the local in the relations of domination and exploitation within Western knowledge. The ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectations’ are diverse, or rather, pluri-verse what each diverse local history has in common with others is the fact that they all have to deal with the unavoidable presence of the modern/ colonial world and its power differentials, which start with racial classification and end up ranking the planet. (Mignolo, 2007, 497)

To counter Western universalism and its inherent desire to present itself as neutral and unbiased, Mignolo suggests and coins the term pluriversality. The term highlights the multitude of embodied, lived experiences that emerges from different cultures and cosmologies, and that Western universalism has sought to dismiss or simply ignore. Pluriversality is not the total dismissal of Western universalism, or

more precisely the Western cosmology of universalism, but rather an insistence on juxtaposing it with a multitude of other cosmologies:

(...) pluriversality as a universal project means that the universal cannot have one single owner: the universal can only be pluriversal (...) All of us on the planet have arrived at the end of the era of abstract, disembodied universals—of universal universality. Western universalism has the right to coexist in the pluriverse of meaning. Stripped of its pretended universality, Western cosmology would be one of many cosmologies, no longer the one that subsumes and regulates all the others. Thus conceived, pluriversality is not cultural relativism, but the entanglement of several cosmologies connected today in a power differential. (Mignolo, 2018, x)

I would argue that one way of approaching pluriversality as a universal project, is by considering the multitude of histories that inform the various ontologies that form the “pluriverse of meaning” (Ibid.) Thus, Mignolo’s dedication to pluriversality as a universal project brings us to the second interdisciplinary scholarly conversation on human and more-than-human histories.

ii. *Human and more-than-human histories*

The second overarching transdisciplinary conversation I engage with is that of human and more-than-human histories. My usage of the term histories is inspired by historian Hayden White’s concept of metahistory from his 1973 book with the same name. By employing this term, the dissertation implicitly argues that there is no singular, authoritative History, but rather a multitude of histories that need telling. As argued by White, and after him many others within his discipline<sup>12</sup>, history writing is at its core a poetic endeavour based on aesthetic choices (White, 1973), and should therefore partly be subjected to similar aesthetic analysis. However, the reverse is also true of poetry. Indeed, according to White, just as there is a poetic element to all history writing, there is a historical element to all poetry (White, 1978, 234)<sup>13</sup>:

The older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable. As this conceived, historical narratives

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<sup>12</sup> Philippe Carrard provides a good overview of the field he terms poetics of historiography in the article “History as a Kind of Writing” (1988) as well as some points of critique. However, since this dissertation is focused on the poetic production of the Anglocreole Caribbean, and not broader discussions within the field of historiography, I will not dwell on the potential challenges that poetics of historiography might present.

<sup>13</sup> I find it important to note here, that White might be one of the first to theorize this poetic element to history writing, yet prior to his theorization a handful of Caribbean poets, such as Aimé Césaire and Octavio Paz, had suggested this consideration in their own poetic expression. One could discuss the problem of how it is a white, Western, not to mention male, scholar, who gets to develop a theory based on this consideration that had already been theorized in artistic expression by poets of color from this region, yet for the sake of focus I will not dwell on this discussion.

are complex structures in which a world of experience is imagined to exist under at least two modes, one of which is encoded as “real”, the other which is “revealed” to have been illusory in the course of the narrative. (White, 1978, 234)

Similar to the work done by critical geographer and decolonial scholar, Katherine McKittrick, in her exploration of storytelling as a decolonial methodology that re-frames our perception of science <sup>14</sup> (McKittrick, 2021), this dissertation sets out to unhinge the grand narrative of History (capital H), and instead insert a multitude of histories, told from the perspective of both human and more-than-human agents. Whereas much of the conversation on world-ecology turns away from the conceptualization of History as a master narrative of past events, but still pertaining to history as a basic scholarly concept, I insist on employing the formulation ‘histories’, to highlight the storied or literary component to every re-telling of past, present, or future events. Furthermore, by employing histories rather than History I am also attempting to highlight the multitude of aspects or perspectives stories might be told from or by, thereby opening up a more-than-human perspective on narration. As a result, the question of who is included in the implicit ‘we’ that tends to structure our perception of narration, pertains not only to human considerations, but expands into the more-than-human realm as well. As formulated by Donna Haraway in her pivotal article “It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories” (2019): “the question intrudes: whose stories are these? Who lives and dies, and how, in these geostories? The coral themselves story the earth. What is at stake and for whom in making their stories our own? Who are this ‘we?’” (Haraway, 2019, 568).

By employing the term histories consistently throughout the dissertation, I believe two goals are achieved. Firstly, an abandonment of the linear master narrative, or History capital H as Glissant calls it in his essay “Creolization in the Making of the Americas” (Glissant, 2008, 87-88), and an instalment of a multitude of histories told from a variety of perspectives, including the more-than-human. Secondly, an attentiveness to different forms of narration and their validation. This is essentially a question of genre hierarchy, and how historical archives consisting of journals, letters and forms by white, European colonizers have been granted a higher historical legitimacy than other scribal and non-scribal genres such as song, recited poetry, myths and so on.

I take inspiration from formulations by such scholars as Elizabeth DeLoughrey who in her book *Routes and Roots* (2007) writes on the “complex intersection of multiple colonial histories” (DeLoughrey, 2007, xi) as well as from previously mentioned Katherine McKittrick, who in her collection

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<sup>14</sup> Of note is McKittrick’s subtle nod to science as storytelling by referencing the scholars in her bibliography as ‘storytellers’, rather than references. See McKittrick, 2021, 194

*Dear Science and Other Stories* (2021) insists on decolonizing academic narration from the perspective of “black livingness and ways of knowing” (McKittrick, 2021, 2). Much like Brathwaite’s conceptualizations on the fluidity and interrelations between the various histories of the Caribbean, so does McKittrick try to install an understanding of science, in the broadest sense of the term, as a practice that is “restless and uncomfortably situated and multifarious rather than definitive and down-pressing.” (McKittrick, 2021, 3).

iii. *Postcolonial ecocritical Caribbean literature studies*

The last significant interdisciplinary scholarly conversation I engage with is in postcolonial (ecocritical) Caribbean literature studies. I put ecocritical in brackets, since some of the scholars whose work I draw on do not directly refer to their work as ecocritical, however, I would argue, they all have a particular attentiveness to the way continued coloniality affect the ecological and environmental conditions of the archipelago. Scholars such as Edward Baugh and Gordon Rohlehr, both significant figures at the University of West Indies, just as Brathwaite was at the Mona Campus for many years, have both conducted important if not to say seminal work on the poetic writings of the region in a postcolonial and decolonial context.

Baugh’s *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (1971) is a seminal contribution to outlines of the poetic tradition in the region of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his writings on Derek Walcott, particularly his 2012 essay “The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History”, in which Baugh attributes philosophical and theoretical agency to Walcott’s poetic expression (Edwards, 2012, 39) has been of great inspiration to the dissertation’s overall argument. The dissonance between History as written by the colonial powers and history as lived experience that Baugh notices in Walcott’s writing is essential for understanding why poetic expression is such a vital source for the development of a new historiography in the Caribbean and in part corresponds to my employment of the formulation histories (see section above Human and more-than-human histories).

Rohlehr’s work on the oral tradition of the region, particularly his essay “The Problem of the Problem of Form: The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-Switching in West Indian Literature” (1985) and his thoughts on “aesthetic energy” (Rohlehr, 1985, 4) as a geopoetic concept within the oral tradition in the Anglocreole Caribbean, has been crucial to my readings of Brathwaite’s poem-lectures (for more on this genre see Chapter One). What scholars like Baugh, Rohlehr and Chamberlin have in common is their interest and attentiveness to the rebellion against the English colonizers language that informs many of the modern Caribbean poet’s work. As formulated by Chamberlin in the epilogue to his pivotal study of Anglocreole poetry *Come Back to Me My Language* (1993):

West Indian poets have done what many others have tried, especially in the past half century. They have taken back what belongs to them – not only their language, but the freedom to use it. (...) This achievement is not a marginal one. (...) The nations of the English-speaking West Indies have gone their own ways, and political federation have eluded them. But they have shared one common enterprise, a federation of the arts, and a vision of the West Indies that accepts the prismatic variety of local lives and their surroundings. (Chamberlin, 1993, 272)

Indeed, the attentiveness to this “prismatic variety” as Chamberlin calls it, was essential when I chose to work with poets from across the Anglocreole Caribbean region, rather than focusing on the poetic tradition of one particular island. Furthermore, the focus on what Chamberlin calls “a federation of the arts” highlights the significance of artistic expression as a form of political engagement in the region. Similarly, the work of literature scholar James Arnold, who in his pivotal study of Martinican writer Aimé Césaire suggests that poetry is a way of working through “collective emotional shock” (Arnold, 1981, 59), Chamberlin suggests that there is a communal understanding of the Anglocreole Caribbean, across vast geographical spaces, that is best achieved via an engagement with the artistic expressions of the region. This however should not take away from the importance of being attentive to the histories of colonization and ecological exploitation in the individual island.

Comparably, yet from an eco-historical rather than eco-literary perspective, the work by historians such as Alfred Crosby (Crosby, 1972; 1986), Peder Anker (Anker, 2002) and Richard Grove’s (Grove, 1994; 1997; , 2002) and their extensive research on the history of colonial ecologies informs my considerations of each island’s unique history of ecological exploitation. These scholars have helped me gain a deeper understanding of the great variety of eco-history that is present in the former British colonies of the Caribbean archipelago. Grove has been instrumental due to his attentiveness to early environmental thinking as emerging in the Caribbean archipelago back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well to the importance of differentiating between the colonies, not in their brutality towards the enslaved, but in their extremely destructive ecological exploitation of the islands they colonized:

For it is the colonization of the Caribbean islands by the British that we have to consider most carefully [from an eco-historical standpoint], both because of its rapid and uncontrolled impact in response to new market conditions and because the British conceptualisation [sic] of environmental degradation in the seventeenth century was so relatively haphazard, particularly in comparison with contemporary Dutch formulations of ecological crisis. (Grove, 1995, 64)

I find it important to emphasize that this is not a dissertation on postcolonial Caribbean literature, but on the intersection between postcolonial, environmental, and ecological histories as expressed in poetic-theoretic literature and poetry. While there is no subtracting the colonial histories of the Anglocreole Caribbean from the current ecologic and environmental catastrophes facing the region today (DeLoughrey et al. 2005; Grove, 2002; Nixon, 2011 and others) a study that focuses solely or mainly on postcolonial literature or poetics would include a vastly different canon of scholars than this study does. Therefore, scholars such as Bill Aschcroft, Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, and others who have done significant work within the postcolonial studies will not be cited for their early work on postcolonial theory, such as the seminal *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), but instead for their later pioneering work within the field of postcolonial ecocriticism via such publications as *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010/second edition, 2015) and *Caliban's Voice* (2008).

The intent of this dissertation is not to provide the reader with an overview of the eco-literary history of the Anglocreole Caribbean over the last 50 years, nor over the entirety of the field of postcolonial ecocriticism in a Caribbean context. For that there are already many excellent publications one can turn to. Therefore, there are also several canonized authors from the Anglocreole Caribbean who engage with some sort of “eco-literary production” (Campbell, 2004) that I have not engaged with in this dissertation. Well-known names, both within and outside of the region, including authors such as Derek Walcott, George Lamming, Grace Nichols, Jamaica Kincaid<sup>15</sup>, Olive Senior, Shani Mootoo, and Wilson Harris, as well as others, will only be mentioned in passing. This is not to ignore their substantial contribution to the canon of Anglocreole Caribbean literature, or the richness of their writing from a postcolonial ecocritical standpoint, but simply because this dissertation favours close reading and therefore, I have chosen to work in-depth with the work of a small handful of poets, which has left little room for broad literary overviews. Furthermore, while many of the above-mentioned authors have not yet received nearly the amount of scholarly attention that they deserve, they have however received far more than the three poets whose work I analyse in Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five. Therefore, while this dissertation seeks to bring new and detailed attention to Brathwaite, a canonized poet of the Anglocreole Caribbean if there ever was one, it also aims to contribute to a widening of the literary canon of the region and reveal the richness that is present in the poetic expressions that are developed there.

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<sup>15</sup> I have written a book chapter in Danish on Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* with the title “Skraldeturisme i Jamaica Kincaids *A Small Place*” (title in English: “The tourist as postcolonial trash in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*”). The book chapter traces and analyzes the figure of the tourist as trash.

## **On the importance of poetry and the selection of poets**

Multiple scholars within the broad field of environmental humanities have engaged with the importance of literary narration as a tool for engaging with ecological and environmental crisis (Chakrabarty 2009; DeLoughrey et al., 2005; DeLoughrey, 2007; Ibid., 2019; Morton; 2007; Nixon, 2011 and others). As analyzed and discussed by these scholars' literary narration provides new understandings of our ecological and environmental past as well as allows us to envision potentially different futures, and thereby expand our ecological and environmental awareness as well as imagination. For instance, Mary Louise Pratt argues, that the Anthropocene is best conceived via Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory of the chronotope (Pratt, 2017; Pratt, 2022), Haraway's 'SF's' are structured around the idea of speculative fabulation and science fiction as a genre (Haraway, 2011), and DeLoughrey dedicates an entire book to the literary device of the allegory (DeLoughrey, 2019). So, if it has already been established that literature plays a crucial role in environmental humanities as a way of analyzing how we as humans portray and thereby perceive the ecological crises, what then is the specific role of poetry in the field? Or, corresponding to the title of this dissertation, why poetry and not literature?

First, poetry provides a better opportunity for performing this ecological and environmentally aware close reading that is "slower than thou" (Morton, 2007, 12-13), since poems are often shorter than novels, book chapters, novellas, and short stories, and thereby provide 'smaller' literary spaces. Second, while some prose does work with sound and rhythm, these are mostly considered to be poetic features, and if we assume that the experience of living with and within times and spaces of ecological and environmental devastation also influences the way we perceive the auditory aspects of our lives (see Chapter One and Chapter Five), poetry seems more apt in portraying this. Third, while there are certainly many authors of prose who do not follow a plot-based structure within their work, features like plot and character development, are often crucial elements within the prose genre. On the opposite end the aesthetic portrayal is often the key element in poetry, and it is exactly the aesthetic portrayal, that often allows us to implicate, in the words of American author and poet Ursula Le Guin, ourselves in the world around us. Le Guin writes:

One way to stop seeing trees, or rivers, or hills only as 'natural resources' is to class them as fellow beings – kinfolk. (...) Poetry is the human language that can try to say what a tree or a rock or river *is*, that is, to speak humanly *for it*, in both senses of the word 'for'. A poem can do so by relating the quality of an individual human relationship to a thing, a rock, a river, or tree, or simply by describing the thing as truthfully as possible. Science describes accurately from outside; poetry describes accurately from inside. Science explicates, poetry implicates (...) by demonstrating and performing aesthetic order or beauty, poetry can move minds to the sense of

fellowship that prevents careless usage and exploitation of our fellow beings, waste, and cruelty.” (Le Guin, 2017, 16)

The three poets have been selected based firstly on their aesthetic value and merits, as well as due to their attentiveness to the relation between human and more-than-human relations in the region, which makes them particularly apt for a decolonial ecological consideration, and secondly due to their rather limited place in Caribbean literary history, not to mention world literature. Inspired by literature scholar and ecocritic Lawrence Buell, who in his pioneering work *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) lists four points one might look towards to determine if whether a text is environmentally oriented<sup>16</sup>, I have developed three points of criteria, that I used to determine if whether a poetic work was oriented towards decolonial ecologies of the Caribbean.

- i) The work engages with geological, meteorological, hydrological, and or geographical circumstances, occurrences, histories, and issues that are specific to the Caribbean archipelago, thereby offering an environmental and ecological orientation that moves beyond the landscape-oriented perspective, and into both the oceanic depths (see Chapter Three), the terrestrial roots (see Chapter Four) and skies of the islands (see Chapter Five) in their exploration of human and more-than-human relations.
- ii) The work engages with or presents complex configurations of time and place, both in relation to colonial as well as environmental and ecological histories, thereby challenging the common Western understanding of for example climate crisis as an immediate, current event, and instead offering conceptualizations of prolonged, often hidden histories of devastation and exploitation (Nixon, 2013 – see also Chapter Two).
- iii) The work engages with some form of more-than-human narration or histories writing, thereby attempting to offer a narrative perspective that is non-anthropocentric (see also Chapter One).

The three poetic explorations that I choose based on these three points of criteria are located between various catastrophes that unfold over various temporal and spatial scales: the sudden eventful disasters, such as the drowning of enslaved during colonization (Kellman), the destruction of island communities

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<sup>16</sup> These four points are: i.) The non-human environment is present not only as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. ii.) The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. iii.) Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation. iv.) Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (Buell, 26) <sup>16</sup> I was inspired to develop my own three points by Christopher Michael Campbell who utilizes Buell’s points to select texts in his dissertation *Visions of Interconnection* (2004).



due to increasingly violent hurricanes in the present day (Sorhaindo), the socio-political consequences of earthquakes and their aftermath (Rahim), and the prolonged disasters of slow environmental violence (as theorized by Rob Nixon): the plantation society, from colonialism till this present day with oil extractions, importing of foreign crops, droughts formed due to destruction of local watersheds, (Kellman, Rahim), shore destruction for the sake of tourism and private property building (Kellman, Rahim), the overall endangerment or blatant destruction of local environments for the sake of non-local interests (Kellman, Sorhaindo), among others.

Importantly, my reading strategy assumes an influential relationship between Brathwaite and the three selected poets in the sense that Brathwaite stands as a figure of poetic authority from which the other poets draw inspiration. However, as I use Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing as a lens via which to read the three other poets (Kellman, Rahim and Sorhaindo) new insight and potential points of critique towards Brathwaite's writing might also emerge in Part Two of the dissertation.

As mentioned earlier the three poets I have selected for analysis have primarily been chosen due to the aesthetic quality of their work that I believe deserve a wider recognition. Furthermore, they also each represent a specific yet highly diverse connection to the Caribbean archipelago as a socio-geography as well as to Anglocreole as a linguistic field. Anthony Kellman, who lives in the United States but predominantly writes about his birth-island Barbados, Jennifer Rahim who still lives, writes, and teaches in Trinidad where she was born and raised, and lastly Celia A. Sorhaindo, who left Dominica at eight years old, spent most of her childhood and young adult life in England, only to return to Dominica as an adult and begin writing in her mid-forties, and published her first book there. I have chosen these three poets because the consideration of their three representative positions (those who stayed, those who left, and those who returned), highlights the consideration of the Caribbean archipelago as defined by an oscillating movement between leaving and staying, or as DeLoughrey would refer to it, routes and roots (DeLoughrey, 2007). Paul Gilroy has famously argued in his seminal work *The Black Atlantic* (1993) that the movement of Africans during colonization as part of a commodity chain, which led to various struggles towards freedom, also encourages a consideration of the problems with defining culture within national and or ethnic borders (Gilroy, 1993, 29). Indeed, the theme of the Caribbean author as an exile has been a prominent discussion within postcolonial studies of Caribbean literature for many decades now and exile has been described by Barbadian author George Lamming in his essay collection *Pleasures of Exile* as the natural condition of Caribbean author<sup>17</sup> (Lamming, 1960). However, the exiled condition

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<sup>17</sup> For more on George Lamming's interpretation of the Caribbean author as an exile see Theo D'haen's "Exile, Caribbean Literature, And The World Republic of Letters" published in *Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture* (2009).

of the Caribbean writer is not easily defined as either pleasure or punishment, since the sense of cultural and linguistic alienation is inherent in Caribbean culture, as argued by Guyanese author Jan Carew back in 1979:

The Caribbean writer today is a creature balanced between limbo and nothingness, exile abroad and homelessness at home, between the people on the one hand and the creole and the colonizer on the other. Exile can be voluntary or it can be imposed by stress of circumstances; it can be a punishment or a pleasure. The exile can leave home for a short time or he can be expelled forever. The colonizing zeal of the European made indigenous peoples exiles in their own countries. (...) The Caribbean writer, by going abroad, is in fact searching for an end to exile. (Carew, 1979, 453).

Due the fact that a majority of published and acknowledged Caribbean authors, writers and poets live, work, and teach outside of the region, the discussion of who should be considered as a Caribbean poet and who should not is quite intricate, and weaves together socio-geographic, cultural, and linguistic considerations, and the three poets I have chosen arguably represent the complexities of this task quite well. Furthermore, since Brathwaite will play such a large part in this dissertation as my central interlocutor, I feel it is vital to include work done by female poets. It is a well-known fact, that female poets of the Caribbean up until the 1990s were vastly underrepresented both in terms of publishing, literary awards, and scholarly dealings with their work.<sup>18</sup> The Anglocreole Caribbean writers who have previously been highlighted in international contexts are names such as Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Earl Lovelace, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul and so on. More recently, over the last 30 years or so, female poets and essayists, such as Dionne Brand, Olive Senior, Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff and Sylvia Wynter<sup>19</sup> have gain increased acknowledgement and interest, both in and outside of the Caribbean, but male poets still constitute the main canon of the region. My choice of female poets is thereby both a result of my interest in dealing with less well-known poets of the region, as well as the outcome of a gender-ethical consideration of representation, even though questions of ecofeminism and the gendered aspects of environmental justice are not a significant consideration in this dissertation.

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<sup>18</sup> Brathwaite himself has even written on the issue, see the article and review “Submerged Mother(s)” (1985). This point will be developed further in Chapter Two: Caribbean Catastrophes Across Space and Time under the section Submerged mother(s).

<sup>19</sup> For more on the feminist work done by these writers and poets see for example Emily L. Taylor’s “Rewriting the Mother/Nation”, Alison Donnell’s “The Lives of Others – Happenings, Histories and Literary Healing” and Donette Francis’ “Strategies of Caribbean Feminism”, all three published in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (2011).

### **How to read this dissertation**

I am mindful of the very real effects of environmental and ecological destruction in the Caribbean, a geography in which I, as a Western scholar do neither reside in nor experience daily. This is why I engage with Brathwaite's work with humility in order to learn as I seek to be challenged and startled in my analytical habits. His writing has functioned almost as epistemological guidepost, that has helped me shift my own perceptions of experience. I undoubtedly still have blind spots, in part due to my personal positionality and in part due to my educational background as formed by Western modernity, and I therefore consider this work and the teachings from Brathwaite's writing as a learning process that I hope I will be able to continue.

In terms of structure, as previously mentioned, this dissertation consists of two parts. Part One (Chapter One and Two) is devoted to analysing and interpreting Brathwaite's writing and conceptualizations from a decolonial ecological viewpoint. The affordances made in these two chapters will be employed in Part Two, which consists of three chapters (Chapter Three-Five), that each analyse work by a contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poet and their decolonial ecological poetic vision. Each chapter can be read as an individual text, but in their collectiveness, they unfold a much more complex argument on how Kamau Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing might inform decolonial ecological ways of reading, as well as Caribbean poetry as a contribution to the consideration of colonial, environmental, and ecological histories as intertwined in the region. Chapter Three, Four and Five provide three different perspectives on how and to what extent Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing can be employed as method for poetic analysis. Thus, the three chapters of Part Two are experimental at their core and should be read as such.

# *Part One*

# Chapter One

## The Tidalectic

*how ev-vathing flows underwater & slowly un/ curls this island my island &  
the other islands there just beyond the horizon / ships fishermen ga  
ulin frigatebirds passing . I see them I feel how they curve away into  
their own space(s) their own shape(s) out of their own histories. The  
waves comin in/ comin in/ tidelect tidelect tidelectic con/ nect/ ing th  
emTime w/ their Clocks/ Sound w/ their Silence their Quiet/ And b-  
ow to write this to write this to write thisWhat triggers of wonder What  
wonder of song?*

(Brathwaite, 1994)

*Why is our psychology not dialectical – successfully dialectical – in the way that Western philosophy has assumed people’s lives should be, but tidalectic, like our grandmother’s – our nanna’s – action, like the movement of the ocean she’s walking on, coming from one continent/ continuum, touching another, and then receding (‘reading’) from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future...*

(Brathwaite, 1997)

## **An introduction to Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing and the tidalectic**

This chapter will introduce and define Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic and draw out its heuristic values for considering how human and more-than-human relations are marked by the continued coloniality in the Caribbean archipelago and can be analyzed in contemporary poetry. I will do so via four interlinked sections: The first will sketch out four different interpretations of the tidalectic, to bring a scholarly context to the chapter. The second will present my interpretation of the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode, followed by the third section which briefly summarizes Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing style. The fourth part presents my positioning in relation to these four interpretations, based on my analysis of selected passages from Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing, including titles such as *Barabajan Poems* (1994), "Newstead to Neustadt" (1994), *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1997), "New Gods of the Middle Passages" (2000) and others. In this section I will present how we may consider the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode and an analytical tool that dismantles the apparent "universal" colonial perceptions of time, place, and History writing. The chapter will conclude by summarizing the heuristic values of the tidalectic and how the poetic-theoretic mode will be employed as an analytical tool in the rest of the dissertation. I interpret the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode that formulates a particular Caribbean way of "perceiving xperience" (Brathwaite, 2000, 46) that functions as a counter-poetics to the "dialectics of Wester(n) philosophy" (Ibid.).

This chapter will aim to answer the two questions: How is the relation between the human and the more-than-human configured in Kamau Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic, and how is this relation marked by the continued coloniality of the region? And how might we draw out analytical tools from the tidalectic fit for a decolonial ecological reading of contemporary Angocreole poets?

### **Four interpretations of the tidalectic**

Over the past fifteen years Kamau Brathwaite's formulation 'the tidalectic' or 'tidalectics', has become the topic of discussion in a variety of academic fields, spanning from cultural geography and sociology to literary studies and visual arts. However, few scholars who mention or utilize the tidalectic in their own writing have attempted to define it. This might be due to the fact, that Brathwaite himself performs the tidalectic as a type of poetic-theoretic mode, more than he truly defines it in any of his work, a point to which we shall return later in this chapter. In this dissertation the tidalectic will be defined as a poetic-theoretic mode, a way of writing and reading the Caribbean as a region where the on-going colonialism and environmental and ecological devastation, but also poetic creativity, is always already entangled. However, before we get to my definition I will, due to the multifaceted and interdisciplinary attention

Brathwaite's concept has received in these last years, present four interpretations, to provide an overview of how the formulation has been interpreted and utilized by a variety of scholars from diverging fields. I will draw on all of these in my own interpretation and employment of the tidalectic in my own analysis, as well as I will challenge and critique these interpretations over the course of the dissertation.

*i. The tidalectic as a geopoetic model of history*

The most well-known interpretation is perhaps the one conducted by Professor in English and Environmental Humanities, Elizabeth DeLoughrey in her book *Routes and Roots - Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007). Being one of the first to write on the tidalectic<sup>20</sup> as a neologism with conceptual qualities DeLoughrey characterizes it as a "geopoetic model of history" (DeLoughrey, 2007, 2), with the neologism being a play on the word 'dialectic', where 'dia' is replaced with 'tid(e)' indicating the idea of a natural and dynamic fluctuation in history, identity, and landscape, similar to the motion of the tide of the sea. This 'tidal dialectic', as DeLoughrey also calls it, is a redefinition of Hegel's idea of the dialectic, and the common colonial understanding and portrayal of history as linear (Ibid.; see also Steinberg, 2022). DeLoughrey's characterization refers to the fact that the tidalectic as an alternative historiography is modelled on the geophysical attribute of the Caribbean archipelago, in which the movement of the sea shapes the shores of the Caribbean islands: encroaching and then receding, altering the landscape for a moment, only to return it as it was. By DeLoughrey's definition, the tidalectic is thereby to be understood as that dialogue between oceanic routes and terrestrial roots<sup>21</sup>, that forms not just the Caribbean diaspora but a multitude of Global South diasporas around the world.

Thus tidalectics foreground three key ideas: how both regions share a complex history of migration patterns before and after col- onization; how the island topos entails an exchange between land and sea that translates into the discourse of "ex-isles" and settlement; and finally, how these vital links between geography, history, and cultural production facilitate a reading of island literatures. (DeLoughrey., 7)

In DeLoughrey's interpretation of the tidalectic from 2007, the Caribbean emerges as a place from which to *read* the Caribbean and the rest of the archipelagic world and its rooted/routed constitution. In this, there is also a reversal of historical hierarchy: rather than allowing for the Caribbean to be considered as

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<sup>20</sup> DeLoughrey first wrote a scholarly piece on the tidalectic back in 1998 making her one of the first if not the first scholar outside of the Caribbean to engage with the tidalectic. For more see DeLoughrey "'Tidalectics: Charting the Space/Time of Caribbean Waters.'" (1998).

<sup>21</sup> DeLoughrey's 2007 book also bears the name *Routes and Roots*, in which she defines the tidalectic as a geopoetic model, to indicate the basic structure of going and staying.

a peripheral region, the archipelago is instead portrayed as an epicentre and dispenser of historical narration and cultural theory, that can be employed in non-Caribbean contexts as well.

ii. *The tidalectic as a decolonial methodology*

Five years later Carmen Beatriz Llenín-Figueroa in her doctoral dissertation “Imagined Islands” (2012) referred to the tidalectic as “a philosophical concept” (Llenín-Figueroa, 2012, 5), grouping it with Derek Walcott’s exploration of the island as a particular place in his *Isla Incognita* and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s conceptualization of rhythm, as developed and explored in *The Repeating Island* (1997). Llenín-Figueroa utilizes the three authors and their concepts to develop a method of engagement that values a form of not-knowing-completely, which is opposite to the arrogant colonial explorers’ self-perception as knowing *everything*:

This project uses, always remembering that it is not “known to itself appropriately,” a tidalectical method “opposite to the explorer’s” –whose approach tends to be arrogant, vertically-constituted and arrow-like; whose itinerary goes from the ocean, through the coast, and to the island; and in whose process “hints, contradictions, terrors” are inadmissible– in order to illuminate the extent to which such method is already being produced, tidalectically, between the different Caribbean islands and their literary texts. (Llenín-Figueroa., 8)

In Llenín-Figueroa’s dissertation the tidalectic becomes a part of a larger decolonial methodological weaving that attempts to dissolve the all-knowing academic subject, which, according to Llenín-Figueroa, is similar to that of the colonial explorer (Ibid.). Thereby Llenín-Figueroa juxtaposes the academic subject with the colonial explorer as two subject positions which often enact the same kind of epistemic dominance. My approach bears important similarities with that of Llenín-Figueroa’s, since I also value the decolonial approach of dissolving the apparent naturalization of both the privileged colonial *and* academic subject.

iii. *The tidalectic as a palimpsestic re-writing of history*

Canadian author Wayde Compton has proposed a definition of the tidalectic in a diasporic historical context that develops on DeLoughrey’s definition of the tidalectic as a way of foregrounding historical trajectories of migrancy and dispersal (Smyth, 2014, 393). In the introduction to the anthology *Bluesprint*, Compton describes tidalectics by utilizing the textual concept of the palimpsest. He writes:



Tidalectics describes a way of seeing history as a palimpsest, where generations overlap generations, and eras wash over eras like a tide on a stretch of beach. There is change, but the changes arise out of slight misduplications of the pattern rather than from essential antagonism. (...) In a European framework, the past is something to be gotten over, something to be improved upon; in tidalectics, we do not improve upon the past, but are ourselves versions of the past. (Compton, 20)

By employing the imagery of the tide and the palimpsest, Compton highlights the materiality of the tidalectic as both a geophysical and textual idea or concept. In Compton's reading, the tidalectic reveals a different understanding of the connection between history and identity, viewing both as palimpsests that can never be wiped completely clean, but only re-written repeatedly, as tides that wash over a beach.

*iv. The tidalectic as an aquatic epistemology*

Finally, one of the most popular interpretations of the tidalectic in Europe was produced by German curator and art theorist, Stefanie Hessler, in the introduction to *Tidalectics - Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (2018). This anthology includes contributions that span from academic articles to poetic essays and visual art. The anthology also includes excerpts from previously published groundbreaking articles and books, including Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us* (originally 1951), Tongan-Fijian anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa's essay "Our Sea of Islands" (originally 1993) as well as Brathwaite's *DreamStories* (originally 1994 – the excerpt in question is the poem entitled "Dream Haiti"). Spanning over a multitude of fields, from geography, philosophy, law, and poetry, to mention a few, the anthology takes its readers on a journey crossing numerous troublesome waters. Here Hessler presents the tidalectic as a dedication to water and thereby a dedication to "being in flux", by quoting the French philosopher of poetics, Gaston Bachelard:

If dialectics is the way that "Western philosophy has assumed people's lives should be," (Brathwaite) then Tidalectics delves into deeper layers of meaning, involving a range of different readings and interpretations—for water is a transitory element, and a "being dedicated to water is a being in flux." (Gaston Bachelard) (Hessler, 2018, 33)

This dedication to water, and shores as transitory sites, allows Hessler to consider the tidalectic as a dedication to an aquatic epistemology, that values the continuation of cycles and non-linear movement, both environmental and social, cultural and so on.:

From a dead-calm sea to angry tsunamis, the tide never returns to the same spot twice, and its movement is affected by several forces that themselves continually change (...) Tidalectics thus assumes the shape of an unresolved cycle rather than a forward-directed argument or progression. (...) Tidalectics allows us to think of hybridity, cross-cultural syncretism, incompleteness, and fragmentation. It holds a flexible approach to geography that accounts for land forming in volcanic eruptions and islands disappearing over time due to climate change and other processes that remain unresolved. (Hessler, 2018, 33-34)

This sense of the ‘unresolved’ in the tidalectic corresponds in some ways to Compton’s definition of history in the Caribbean as that which continues to wash over us. However, in her definition Hessler is risking conflating the tidalectic with Bachelard’s far more universal consideration of a dedication to water as being a dedication to constant movement (Ibid.). Hessler thereby loses sight of the painful colonial histories that inform Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic mode. At times Hessler’s definition diverts into a simple expression of a relational watery or aquatic way of being and thinking, in other words, an aquatic epistemology, which, as I will argue in the forthcoming sections, is a significant yet also at times problematic simplification.

In summation, these four interpretations of the tidalectic all have one feature in common: an interpretation of the tidalectic as a way of engaging with a non-linear configuration of time and or academic argumentation. This characteristic of the tidalectic is important, however, I argue and will demonstrate that there is value in adding nuanced perspectives to the heuristic value of the tidalectic. This moves beyond the four interpretations of the tidalectic as given here and represents the contribution this dissertation makes to the field.

### **The tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode**

Now that I have presented a handful of other scholars’ definition of the tidalectic I will move on to my own definition. However, this is a rather tricky task. In fact, Hessler’s definition of the tidalectic underscores one of the complexities with defining it. The tidalectic is in many ways particular or specific at its core, anchored to a specific historical and socio-geographic context, which is that of the Caribbean archipelago and the region’s complex colonial, environmental, and ecological histories. At the same time, it is also largely relational or universal, flowing through numerous waters, crossing national borders, and contesting or even defying the very idea of both geographical and academic territory and boundaries. When I say that it defies ‘academic territory and borders’, I refer to the important characteristic of the tidalectic, that only few scholars have managed to properly portray, which is that it seems to arise in the threshold between poetry and academia, ‘fiction’ and theory. It also refuses to settle down into any of

these isolated categories but is always expanding and retracting into and away from them. As a poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic problematizes normative and often Eurocentric approaches and divisions between genres of writing and is therefore closely related to decolonial transdisciplinary methodology. Rather than referring to the tidalectic as a geopoetic model (DeLoughrey), a methodology (Llenín-Figueroa), a re-writing of history (Compton) or an aquatic epistemology (Hessler) I will, as previously mentioned in the Introduction, refer to tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode, thereby insisting on making Brathwaite's poetics central to my engagement and focus on how his poetry performs theoretical work, while at the same time remaining open to the dynamic qualities of the tidalectic that DeLoughrey's 'model', seems to defy.

To account for exactly where or when the tidalectic first appears in Brathwaite's work is a complicated task. Despite what many other scholars highlight in their exploration of the tidalectic, as demonstrated in the previous section, I will argue that the tidalectic is not just formulated, but also performed in Brathwaite's work, as a poetic-theoretic mode that structures his entire vision of and dealing with the Anglocreole Caribbean. This complicates the task of specifying its origin. Most of Brathwaite's later texts, beginning with the late 1980s and moving up until 2017, three years prior to his passing in 2020, perform via their formalistic features their own argument of what we may call "pluriversal ontology", a formulation that both refers to Mignolo's writing on the term (Mignolo, 2007; 2018) as well as mobility scholar Mimi Sheller's engagement with it (Sheller, 2018). In my reading, this pluriversality is expressed in most of Brathwaite's texts via a variety of poetic repetitions and displacements or a so-called relief of fragmentation (Bonfiglio, 2015). The repetitive formalistic mode of these texts is in fact quite similar to Brathwaite's tidalectic, in that it is a form of discourse that is on the move: always circulating and returning, but to a slightly different place than where it started, thereby mimicking how the sea's waves picks up debris or the likes on the shore and returns it to a slightly different spot. Due to this continuous spiralling movement, it can be difficult to trace the exact 'origin' of the tidalectic or place it on any linear literary timeline.<sup>22</sup>

In the following section, I will mostly draw on two of Brathwaite's major publications, *Barabajan Poems* from 1994 and *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* from 1997, to explore what the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode is and how I will utilize it in the structuring of my forthcoming

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<sup>22</sup> At this point I would like to briefly touch upon the problem with the idea of historic or literary timelines when engaging with epistemologies relating to any geography clearly defined by shorescape. Indeed, as professed by historian John Gillis: "The idea of the coastline arrived with other notions that are now integral to modern understandings of the world. Until the end of the 18th century, charts highlighted points along the shore-harbors and reefs-but paid little or no attention to that which lay between, known then as the 'straight shore.' The mapping of coastlines was part of the project to impose rationality and mastery on nature, not just for the mariner seeking safe harbors, but also for the landlubber keen on fixing the boundary between land and sea, banishing the uncertainty and anxiety that had been previously associated with shore." (Gillis, 2013, 16)

literary analysis of other Anglocreole Caribbean poet's work. However, before delving into this topic, I will provide a brief overview of the style and genre of these two publications.

### **Brathwaite's Sycorax video style**

In the 1990s, Brathwaite started to develop a new writing style which he dubbed 'Sycorax video style'. This style was inspired by Sycorax, the name of Caliban's mother, who has passed away years before the events of the famous Shakespeare play *The Tempest* (årstal) takes place and who therefore functions as a form of silent subtext throughout the play. This style is characterized by the usage of various fonts and symbols, that constantly break up the text, mimicking a form of disrupted speech. It has been described by Elaine Savory as an attempt to fuse the oral traditions of the Caribbean with the format of the book (Savory, 1994, 216). As argued by Kelly Baker Josephs, Brathwaite uses the style to resolve one of the major language issues presented in "History of the Voice": the contrast between speech and writing in the Caribbean, in line with Glissant's notion of the connection between noise and speech in the Caribbean: "For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound. Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse. (...) It seems that meaning and pitch went together for the uprooted individual, in the unrelenting silence of the world of slavery" (Glissant, 1989, 123). But whereas Glissant only concludes to this issue of noise/sound and speech, and how this problematizes the Caribbean individuals' relation to the written word, Brathwaite develops this writing style as a solution to the discrepancy between speech and writing in the Caribbean. As noticed by Josephs:

With the Sycorax video style, Brathwaite can inject the noise into his written "nation language," he can recapture some of the meaning lost in writing words. He can shout, whisper, "speak" quickly or slowly, authoritatively or in play, all with his fonts and symbols. He can also recapture the ambiguity that is an essential part of speech. (Josephs, 2003, 8)

Sycorax video style can therefore be considered as a poetic solution to some of the problems with language in the former colonized islands that are brought forward by Brathwaite. Brathwaite does not just present the problem of speech versus the written word thematically, nor does he simply present us with a solution to it, he *performs* a potential healing or reparation of the division between the two, allowing the content and the form to reveal the depth of his poetic thought-process behind the style.

Along with the development of the Sycorax video style in the 1990s, Brathwaite also began publishing in a new kind of format or genre, which Anna Reckin has convincingly classified as "poem-lectures" (Reckin, 2007, 29). To create these poem-lectures Brathwaite utilized recorded speeches,

interviews or performances, transcribed them and then re-worked and re-wrote them, incorporating excerpts from previously published and unpublished poems, essays and articles, as well as newspaper clippings, email exchanges, personal letters and so on.<sup>23</sup> Due to their basis being the transcribed performance, Reckin characterizes the poem-lectures as sound-spaces transformed into text-space (Ibid., 91) This palimpsestic publication style was particularly emblematic for two of his major publications during this period: *Barabajan Poems* in 1994 and *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* in 1997, alongside many other smaller publications and journal contributions. It is to these publications that I now turn, to engage in depth with selected passages where Brathwaite writes about the tidalectic in order to draw out its heuristic value.

Thus, the tidalectic emerges as a poetic-theoretic mode on two levels in Brathwaite's writing: first, as a conceptual poetic-theoretic mode that binds together the particular or specific Anglocreole Caribbean experience (roots) with the relational (routes), and second, as a poetic-theoretic mode that performs itself continuously over the course of Brathwaite's writing. There are, I argue, three points of tidalectic perception that describe how the tidalectic emerges as a counter-poetics to the colonialist perception of time, place, and History writing. I will draw out these via a close reading of selected passages from Brathwaite's writing, focusing on his poem-lectures *Barabajan Poems* from 1994 and *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* from 1997, as well as a handful of his other poem-lectures.<sup>24</sup> By doing so I will attempt to concretize what insights into the relation between the human and the more-than-human in the Caribbean that are gained when engaging with the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode and I will finish the chapter by summarizing the tidalectic in three characteristics that can be considered as points of perception for the dissertation's readings of other contemporary Anglocreole poets representation of the relation between human(s) and more-than-human(s) in the archipelago.

### **Colonialist time/Tidalectic time**

My first point of tidalectic perception relates to the question of time. The denouncement of European linear time from a postcolonial perspective is not new. As discussed by numerous scholars of postcolonial studies (Ashcroft, 2013; Chakrabarty, 2000; McClintock, 1992; Ibid., 1995; Shohat & Stam, 1998; Young, 2004 and many others), the European or Western perception of linear time, also referred to as historical time, is related to the idea of progress and change. In that way, the colonialist perception of time is characterized by the desire to move *forward*. Tidalectic time on the other hand, is best characterized by

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<sup>23</sup> I have written in-depth on this in the article "Brathwaite and the Palimpsestic Poem-lecture" published in the journal *Interviewing the Caribbean* in 2020. For more on this subject see Mortensen, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> These include titles such as *SHLAR: Hurricane Poem* (1990), "Newstead to Neustadt" (1994) "New Gods of the Middle Passages" (2000), "Namsetoura and the Companion Stranger" (2003) and "The Namsetoura Papers" (2004) and others.

the desire to, or perhaps more accurately and acute need to, engage with the past and those who came before. However, tidalectic time should not be reduced to cyclical time. While most of the scholars whose work on the tidalectic I have engaged with conclude that the tidalectic formulates a kind of cyclical engagement time (DeLoughrey, 1998; Ibid., 2007; Gargaillo, 2016; DeLoughrey & Flores, 2020; Nwadike, 2020; Hessler, 2018; Nadarajah, 2021 and many others), I will suggest a slightly different interpretation.

As DeLoughrey points out in 1998, in one of the first interpretations of the tidalectic, Braithwaite's usage of aquatic metaphors facilitates a kind of "reterritorialization of post-colonial historiography. Tidalectics draw upon the movement of the water backwards and forwards as kind of a cyclic motion, rather than linear." (DeLoughrey, 1998, 18) Indeed, I agree with DeLoughrey's point that the movements of the water, backwards and forwards, are the main inspiration for the formulation of tidalectic time. However, I do not on this basis interpret tidalectic time as cyclical. Rather I have found that Compton's definition of the tidalectic as a palimpsest, where generations wash over generations, and where change arises as "slight misduplications" (Compton, 20) comes closest to my reading of tidalectic time. Here tidalectic time functions more like a spiral than a circle. It does not return to the exact same moment or spot, rather it spirals, mimicking the sea's movements: tides that expand and retract in relation to the shore, waves that come in, again and again. Nothing is returned to exactly the same spot, yet nothing remains completely the same. Instead, the reader encounters multiple slight misduplications. I want to turn to a few examples from Braithwaite's own writing to highlight how tidalectic time reveals itself and is described by the poet as this 'washing over' that results in slight misduplications.

In his 1994 essay "Newstead to Neustadt" the poet reflects on his own writing practice and the relations between his various collections, claiming that their relation to each other express a form of "tidalectic time":

In the wider architectonic structure of the trilogies, certain corridors appear . I can speak this way now that these poems have in a way 'settled' as new structures & in a way make the meaning/structures of the 'older' ones 'clearer' though since time in these poems is not linear or 'missilic' & therefore has no target Or Object & therefore no 'end' Or destination ('in my end/beginning is my end/begin-ning' etc etc etc), there is no real sense of 'older poems' xcept in a crude chronological or formal sense, w/'old'(er) ('earlier') structures capable (if that's the word) of being renewed as they reappear in new time/places, linked often by fluid corridors of water (Oshun) poems such as 'South' which appears first early in *Rights of Passage* & is present again towards the end of *Masks* (though not yet in the trilogy 'text') preparing the way for *Islands*, *Mother Poem* & *Sun Poem*. The way the verse moves in its accumulation of sound/sense (the way Oshun xpresses herself here in essesses, countering the ing sounds of the riverbank & the dark ripples of rapids ('wreck', 'arrest', 'hatred', 'flats')) mark

this for me as another of the special libations or signposts or stele - radar stations of a certain kind of tidalectic time<sup>25</sup>

(Brathwaite, b1994, 657)

Here, Brathwaite quite clearly opposes any interpretation of his authorship as adhering to a linear structure (“since time in these poems is not linear or ‘missilic’ & therefore has no target Or Object & therefore no ‘end’ Or destination”). However, he also implicitly discredits the idea of a cyclical poetic structure. He writes that his texts are “renewed as they reappear in new time/places” (Ibid.), meaning, they are not cyclical, they do not return to the same place or time, but are rather moved and “linked through liquid corridors of water” (Ibid.) This is tidalectic time as performed in Brathwaite’s own writing practice. In his writing texts flow over and onto other texts creating a kind of liquid or watery poetic time, where there is no clear beginning and no clear end, however, there is also never a complete return to the same time or spot. The “slight misduplications” (Compton, 20) of Brathwaite’s own writing still moves us forward.

We see a similar notion in Brathwaite’s poem-lecture “New Gods of The Middle Passages” (2000), where the poet reflects on how the tidalectic structures his own work as well as the Caribbean way of perceiving experience, as a form of tidal ‘overlapping’, or, to use Compton’s interpretation, ‘a washing over’:

So you begin see what happenin to this talk: the  
repetition the overlapping of xperiences the concept at last of  
what I call tidalectics

(...)

There’re two ways of perceiving of xperience in wester  
(n) philosophy. One is the one that we have been grown up on  
= dialectics

(...)

Yet here in the Caribbean the tide comes lapping to the doe of  
my room and then it goes back again & over time this happens  
over & over

(Brathwaite, 2000, 45-46)

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<sup>25</sup> As with so many other of Brathwaite’s texts “Newstead to Neustadt” is written in his emblematic Sycorax Video Style, which is difficult to reproduce. I would urge reader to engage with the original text to see Brathwaite’s italics, his usage of different fonts etc. See also previous section on his Sycorax Video Style.

In the same year as “Newstead to Neustadt” (1994), Brathwaite’s first major poem-lecture, *Barabajan Poems* (1994) is published. The poem-lecture is one of the first, if not the first, thorough engagement with Barbados as a literary and cultural community. The publication is described by Elaine Savory as “an intensely detailed and personalized account of Barbadian culture in the transitional period from colonialism to independence to this present uneasy economic space in the ‘new world order’ ” (Savory, 1994, 750). In *Barabajan Poems* Brathwaite transforms his personal experiences of growing up on the island into a “deeply valuable communal document”(Ibid.) Savory’s reading of this over 400-page long publication printed on A4 paper, strikes many chords with the argument I will be presenting here, in regard to the potentiality of the book and the formulation of the tidalectic that appears in it. However, I do not fully agree with Savory’s temporal framing of the publication. The book might begin with the colonization of Barbados and then moves forward to the present day, but it also pulls its readers back, again and again, to an ancient time much prior to that of colonization, to the prolonged moments of the island’s geological constitution. As explained by Brathwaite in the introductory sections of the book, Bajan culture should be understood through the lens of the geological and geographical circumstances of the island, “this shared collective xperience on a rock of coral limestone, half-way from Europe, half-way (?back) to African”(Brathwaite, 1994, 21).

I will argue that this ‘pulling back’, which takes place on multiple levels, to which we will return to shortly, is a mimicking move that Brathwaite employs to bring the sense of tidalectic time to life in both form and content. This is exemplified in numerous places, one of them being a scene where Brathwaite describes one night hearing singing from a ‘Sunday shop’ and upon entering the shop, the sound-space becomes an almost transcendental experience, that drags both the singers and the poet himself back towards the shore, into the sea and across the seafloor:

(...) they are into the  
 pull of an alteration of consciousness of the tides of their lives have paused on the brin  
 (k) of falling onto our beaches & (...)  
 sweeping away into a new dark wail that sweeps us all up . pebbles & plankton & memories & the  
 shale that is like a low moan now . out out towards a new meaning out there  
 (...)  
 it takes me back & drags me tidalectic into this ta

ngled urgent meaning to & fro . like foam . saltless as from the bottom of the  
 sea . dragging our meaning our moaning/ song from Calabar along the sea-fl-  
 oor sea-floor with pebble sound & conch & wound & sea-sound moon



(Brathwaite, 1994, 182)

In this passage we come to see quite explicitly how the tidalectic functions as a ‘dragging’ of the poet through time. In this quote the dragging is not just performed via the Sycorax video style, in which the text interrupts itself, pulling the reader back and forth between different time-spaces, genres, narratives and voices, but also thematically brought forward. While a specific place is mentioned, the beach, as the place where to the poet and the singers are being dragged to by the pull of the sea, this motion is also very much transfigured as a dragging through time, through ‘memories’, ‘meaning’ and ‘moaning’ these three signifiers of the past as always already present that appear as connected, almost interchangeable, in the text. Thus, tidalectic time is best described as a either a dragging through time and thereby the painful pasts of the Middle Passage, “our meaning our moaning” (Ibid.), or as the continuous washing over of generations into generations, like waves on a beach. (Compton, 2001, 20). This dragging is also, again, related to the Middle Passage, as that initial aquatic image and event, that stays with the poet, and that continues to painfully drag him back in time. If we return to *New Gods of the Middle Passages* we see how the Middle Passage is configured as an on-going event:

But there are also other things: the whole nation of middle passage which this presentation is 'about'. Already you will notice from the way I'm using passages-i.e xcerpts & quotations- that < the concept & poetry of passage is not only the traditional << one(s) of the human cargoes of Europeans & Africans into the Caribbean in the 16th century, 17th century & 18th century; > but there is a passage back across the Atlantic in the other direction. Most of them physical, and all tidalectic. So that if there is the savage, we must remember & look for also the special & the sacred; i.e the metaphysical middlepassages which we all < constantly undergo and undergrow . . .

Returning to his idea of passages in his own writing, while also evoking the continued importance of the Middle Passage in his writing, Brathwaite implicitly notes how these passages are not just spatial but also temporal, in that they allow him to be moved between times and to connect to the painful ancestral experience of the Middle Passage: “there is a passage back across the Atlantic in the other direction. Most of them physical, and all tidalectic.” (Ibid.)

To sum up, tidalectic time refers to a non-linear perception of time that is modelled on the tidal movements of the sea. Exemplified in the very word ‘tidalectic’, that replaces ‘dia’ with ‘tide’, tidalectic time suggests a perception of time in the Caribbean that mimics the movements of the sea, both time as a continuous washing over, where generations wash over generations, like waves on a beach, as well as time as a kind of tidal dragging, where the poet finds himself continuously dragged back in time, rather than arching forward, as in the colonialist perception of time as a forward moving motion of progress. This interpretation of the tidalectic also at least in part corresponds to Christina Sharpe’s consideration of what it means to be in the wake: “In the wake the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.” (Sharpe, 2016, 9), as it, just as Sharpe, invokes the Middle Passage as that defining moment that continues to return and haunt the present. Yet Brathwaite adds a considerably more-than-human aspect to this consideration of the Middle Passage as a defining moment that returns, again and again, by utilizing the various movements of the sea to describe the perception of time in the Caribbean archipelago as either continuous ‘a dragging back’ or ‘a washing over’.

### **Colonialist place / Tidalectic place**

My second point of tidalectic perception relates to the question of place or inhabitation. Whereas most scholars have focused on the temporal aspect of the tidalectic, I will now be turning to the spatial aspects of the tidalectic, to highlight how the poetic-theoretic mode also carries significant heuristic value when engaging with questions of place and inhabitation. It offers an alternative perception of place, or inhabiting place, to that of colonialist place. Malcolm Ferdinand describes colonial inhabitation as structured around three basic principles. The first principle is that colonial habitation is geographical in two ways: it has a “designated location, an enclosure” (Ferdinand, 28) and secondly, it is geographically subordinate to another location, referring to the export of produce from the Caribbean islands to the colonizing power’s home nation. Within this principle also lies a more general idea of subordination: the inhabitants of islands, both human and more-than-human, are subordinate to the inhabitants of the mainland, and therefore their lands can and should be used for the mainlanders to gain profit (Ibid.). The second structural principle is that of exploitation of the land for profit: “Far from being just about ‘maintenance of human life,’ the purpose of colonial inhabitation was the commercial exploitation of the land” (Ferdinand, 28) And the last structural principle is ‘othercide’: “the refusal of the possibility of inhabiting the Earth in the presence of an other, of a person who is different from a ‘self’” (Ferdinand, 29).

Corresponding to Ferdinand’s discussion of colonial inhabitation Brathwaite in his 1975 essay “World Order Models” formulated a theory on what he called “functional shapes” (Brathwaite,

1975, p. 56) that describe a specific culture's way of inhabiting land. Quoting American poet and environmental activist, Gary Snyder (1977)<sup>26</sup>, in this essay Brathwaite expands on two different types of territorial societies: ecosystem cultures and the biosphere cultures. These two cultures adhere to a certain shape.<sup>27</sup> The ecosystem cultures align to the form of the circle or the drum, in other words, the form that represents circular or rhythmic repetition and a focus on the movement of returning, whereas the biospheric cultures adhere to the form of the arrow or the missile, the form that seeks to “explore, explode, destroy” (Brathwaite, 1975a, 55) and that focuses on forward-moving, progressive motion. In these two different types of culture, represented by the functional shapes of the circle versus the arrow, two different perceptions of place or inhabitation exist: one that seeks to sustain (ecosystem cultures), and one that seeks to expand and extract (biosphere cultures). In his turning to the functional shapes of the circle Brathwaite conceptualizes a way of inhabiting Caribbean place that seeks to sustain via circular repetitive movements. In this way, the circle or the concept of cyclical structures is of utmost importance in Brathwaite's writing, however I would argue, not so much in relation to the temporal aspects of the tidalectic, as discussed in the previous section, as to the spatial aspect of the poetic-theoretic mode.

Tidalectic place or tidalectic inhabitation offers an alternative to colonial inhabitation or to the biospheric inhabitation in that it is defined by continuous acts of sustaining and care, rather than through an expansionist logic. This is exemplified in Brathwaite's other major poem-lecture, *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1997), published five years after *Barabajan Poems*. Here Brathwaite, much more explicitly than in *Barabajan Poems*, touches upon his idea of the tidalectic as the answer to what the Caribbean archipelago is, with all its diverse islands, populations, cultures, and histories, this “paradoxical and pluraradial situation” (Brathwaite, 1997, 29). He does so, by referring to a specific situation he once encountered in Jamaica, that provided him with an image that would stay in his poetic imagination afterwards. The scene is of an old woman who is sweeping her yard for sand repetitively every morning:

This is ole yard, okay? and this old woman is  
Sweeping, sweeping the sand of her yard away  
From her house. Traditional early morning old  
women of Caribbean history. She's going on  
like this every morning, sweeping this sand – of

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<sup>26</sup> Brathwaite does not specify in which Snyder text he finds this quotation; he only adds the year 1977. I have not been able to locate the text in which Snyder refers to the biospheric versus the ecosystemic cultures. However, see Snyder's work in relation to inhabitation in his short essay “Reinhabitation” (2013).

<sup>27</sup> For more on this and Brathwaite's notion on “functional forms” see for example Torres-Salliant's article “The Trials of Authenticity in Kamau Brathwaite” (1994).

all things! – away from. . . sand from sand,  
seen?. . . And I say Now what's she doing?  
What's this labour involve with? Why's  
she labouring in this way? all this way?  
all this time? Because I get the understandin  
(g) that she somehow believes that if she don't  
do this, the household – that 'poverty-stricken'  
household of which she's part – probably head  
of – would have somehow collapse  
(Brathwaite, 1997, 29-30)

Rather than viewing the grandmother's sweeping as a pointless labouring, Brathwaite considers her sweeping as a form of continuous, circular sustaining – a way of keeping and tending to a place, a habitat, she considers to be hers. A household that she believes might collapse if she does not continue this labour. This keeping and tending to place is not the expansionist, arrow-like movement of the colonizing states and the postcolonial powers as is expressed in tourism for example, but a circular movement of preservation that can be read as caretaking for a place. A few pages later he returns to the scene, contemplating how this repetitive movement of sustaining a place is linked to the ancestral continent of Africa and to the ancestors who died during the Middle Passage:

And then one morning I see her  
body silhouetting against the  
sparkling light that hits the  
Caribbean at that early dawn  
and it seems as if her feet,  
which all along I thought were  
walking on the sand . . . were  
really . . . walking on the wa-  
ter . . . and she was tra-  
velling across that middlepass-  
age, constantly coming from  
where she had come from – in her  
case Africa – to this spot in  
North Coast Jamaica where she  
now lives . . .

That was the ‘answer’ to my quest/in. The ‘meaning’ of the Caribbean was in that humble repetitive ritual actio(n) which this peasant woman was performing. And she was always on this journey, walking on the steps of sunlit water, coming out of a continent, which we didn’t fully know how to understand, to a set of islands we only now barely coming to respect, cherish and understand  
(Brathwaite, 1997, 34)

The image of the grandmother, who in her tending to her yard by sweeping sand from it is also connecting to a place far away, across the Atlantic Sea, reveals how Brathwaite’s tidalectic perception of place is inherently linked to the African continent. After this initial image Brathwaite goes on to meditate on the question of the Caribbean psyche as structured, not dialectically, as opposite forces wrestling with each other to provide a forward moving motion, but tidalectically, as moving like the rhythm of the sea and its tides, back and forth, in a dynamic motion:

Why is our psychology not dialectical – successfully dialectical – in the way that Western philosophy has assumed people’s lives should be, but **tidalectic**, like our grandmother’s – our nanna’s – action, like the movement of the ocean she’s walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding (‘reading’) from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future. . .  
(Brathwaite, 1997, 34 – original italic)

In these passages from *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* the tidalectic arises as a poetic-theoretic mode that inspires a particular consideration of place or inhabitation. This tidalectic consideration opposes the colonialist inhabitation of the Caribbean, particularly its geographical constitution as being bound to a particular place and at the same time subordinate to another location, particularly, the colonizing state to which all the produce and goods are exported. The grandmother’s simple, repetitive act of sweeping sand from her yard on the north coast of Jamaica is transfigured into a decolonial way of both sustaining a local place, while also connecting to the ancestral continent of Africa. It is her repeated movement of sweeping that allows for the Jamaican grandmother to travel, to move between her ancestral continent and the island she now lives in. Here there is no extracting from the land and no exporting to a continent, but rather a constant, mutual exchange of inherited histories between the islands of the archipelago and the African continent.

In summation tidalectic place emerges in “that humble repetitive action(n)” of tending to and sustaining a place for oneself. A place that is both constricted and local, a habitat, yet also always connected to the ancestral continent.

### **Colonialist History writing / Tidalectic histories writing**

The third and last point of tidalectic perception of experience relates to the question of histories and writing. As touched upon in the Introduction this dissertation employs the formulation histories rather than History and is inspired by historian Hayden White's concept of metahistory alongside Glissant's formulation on the difference between the two: "multiculturalism is not disorder, not extinction; that we can escape from the jail of History (with a capital "H") and put together our histories (without this capital "H"); that we can imagine diffracted times coming together, without this imperial linear perception of time that Columbus brought with him" (Glissant, 2008, 88).

Tidalectic histories writing adds an important nuance or layer to the concept of histories in that it not only writes against the colonialist idea of History as a singular, linear narrative, as seen in the section on tidalectic time, but that it also looks towards environmental and ecological more-than-human entities as indispensable in the writing of Caribbean histories. I will argue that there is an inherent desire in all of Brathwaite's writing, to approach the Caribbean environment and ecology that has been made alien via the colonialist inhabitation of the land, as well as the imposing of the colonizer's language. Brathwaite himself formulates the problem with writing during a lecture given in 1996:

Because of the things that have happened to me, there is a kind of unsolicited desire to understand certain things about my own environment. And this comes about because the environment in itself has in a way been closed to us. Although we live in a very beautiful setting, although we live in this magnificent Caribbean, it is not an everyday living and breathing experience to understand it because the educational system, the whole procedure of colonialism (...) made it very difficult for people like myself (...) to really write with any ease. (...) I grew up on the beaches on Barbados, my poetry was a desire to write about that (Brathwaite, "My Poetry", 1996, 21:15, my own transcription)

The tidalectic arises from the desire to understand one's *own* environment, to become part of the physical surroundings that have been made unavailable, or perhaps unattainable, to one's own imagination due to the lack of language, a point which shall be expanded upon in Chapter Two under the section Nation language. So how does Brathwaite attempt via a tidalectic involvement to approach this environment? I return once again to *Barabajan Poems* (1994) to a particular passage where Brathwaite writes of his childhood experiences with writing in Barbados:

So I am growing up here and dreaming of how to write someth  
ing that wd catch the gleam the word of water clink & pebble where th  
I wave folds on/to the sand, the fans of sunlight in the water, its var-

ious colours & histories, coralline grains settling/ xploding// fish crab  
sails empty shells whorls worlds of sea-floor sea-flour sea-flower sea-  
moss moses boats deeper more morose colours holiest grails . how ev-  
vathing flows underwater & slowly un/curls this island my island &  
the other islands there just beyond the horizon / ships fishermen ga  
ulin frigatebirds passing . I see them I feel how they curve away into  
their own space(s) their own shape(s) out of their own histories. The  
waves comin in/ comin in/ tidelect tidelect tidelectic<sup>28</sup> con/nect/ing th  
emTime w/their Clocks/Sound w/their Silence their Quiet/ And h-  
ow to write this to write this to write thisWhat triggers of wonder What  
wonder of song?  
(Brathwaite, 1994, 114)

In the quotation above, Brathwaite's dream of writing is expressed as the desire to fuse together the sounds and songs of both the man-made word and the wonders of song of the island's more-than-human inhabitants, as well as the sound of the island itself that "curve away into their own space(s) their own shape(s) out of their own histories" (Ibid.). The dream of a tidalectic way of writing the Caribbean that Brathwaite is putting forward here, is presented through an assemblage of environmental and ecological more-than-human entities and their histories. In this quote, the histories of the small pebble on the beach are no less important than that of the fisherman, so that human and more-than-human histories are juxtaposed. The way Brathwaite is describing these material processes of the shore, how the waves are folding onto the sand, the coralline is settling and exploding at the same time and the fish crab's shells are 'whorling' a whole world into being, he is allowing these environmental and ecological more-than-human entities to be considered as writers of histories. They are writing the island, so to speak, curving away into their own spaces and their own histories. In short, he is formulating a poetic-theoretic mode in which humans are not the only writers of histories in the world. It is largely a formulation in which every entity, even the pebble, has a literacy to it: it can be written, and it can be read, but it is also a reader and a writer of the island. This is both an ecological and decolonial endeavour, since Brathwaite is looking towards the writing of a place as an act that can be viewed from a multitude of perspectives, both human and more-than-human.

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<sup>28</sup> You will notice in this quotation, that tidalectic is spelled as tidelectic. The spelling of the word varies over Brathwaite's writing, even within the same publications. I have chosen to stay with the spelling tidalectic used by most other scholars as well as that which is most common for Brathwaite.

Occasionally Brathwaite shows this through the more-than-human inhabitants having their own voices, and at other times it is figured as if the more-than-human inhabitants are streaming through the poet, who emerges almost as a porous entity, who is merely a vessel that conveys their meaning and intent. As exemplified earlier in *Barabajan Poems* where Brathwaite writes that Barbadian culture and tradition is that which “filters & fuses in / to you [the poet] from yr landscape people happenings mysteries fossils histories time” (Brathwaite, a1994, 86) While the more-than-human entities do not have the ability to write as such, the poet cannot separate his own perception of experience from the physical environment in which he lives. His writing becomes dependent on, almost inseparable from, the more-than-human entities that surround him. This final quote from “Newstead to Neustadt” (1994) illustrates how the word and world fuse in Brathwaite’s tidalectic perception of histories writing:

And I'm not saying this because I'm xpected to

SAY SOMETHING

on an august day in September such as this, but because the constant i wd even say consistent fabric & praxis of my work has been to connect broken islands, cracked, broken words, worlds, friendships, ancestories & I have seen the sea outside our yard bring grain by gentle grain out of its granary, cost upon coast, & then in one long sweep of light or night, take all away again A poem tree of tidalectics. A strange 12-branching history of it which I leave you with.

(Brathwaite, b1994, 653)

The more-than-human inhabitants of the island emerge as histories writers or, as I prefer to call them to echo Brathwaite’s conflation between poetic word and metaphysical world, more-than-human wor(l)d-makers.

Thereby this third point of tidalectic perception on histories writing unsettles the perception of writing as a strictly human endeavour and instead portrays a poetic world in which both biotic and abiotic entities function as more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, thereby offering a counter-poetics not only to the perception of History as linear, but also the perception of History as a singular rather than a plurality of histories. Brathwaite expands on the postcolonial critique of History capital H, as formulated by Glissant, and installs a perception of the Caribbean experience as being based on a multitude of not just human but also more-than-human histories.



## Final remarks

This chapter has presented, interpreted, and discussed Kamau Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode, the tidalectic, based on close readings of a variety of his essays, poems, and hybrid texts. Indeed, this is an experimental format, and my intent has not been to create a generalised formula for how to apply the tidalectic in poetry analysis. Rather it has been to sketch out how one might think with his tidalectic poetic-theoretic mode as a way of approaching Caribbean poetry. Therefore, the tidalectic has been analyzed according to its heuristic value in poetry analysis, more than its simple applicability. Based on my own readings of Brathwaite's poem-lectures, as well as other scholars' work and writing on the tidalectic, I can draw out three tidalectic points of perception that function as guideposts for when analyzing the relation between humans and more-than-humans in the archipelago as marked by the continued coloniality of the region. These three points have shaped my reading of the three poet's works in Part Two, in that they have been tidalectic reminders as to how to perceive the epistemic categories of time, place and histories-writing from a Anglocreole Caribbean standpoint, and how these three epistemic categories are shaped by the relation between humans and more-than-humans. The three formulate a form of poetic-theoretic counter-poetics to the colonialist perception of experience, and in their place installs a decolonial ecological poetic-theoretic way of engaging with the Anglocreole Caribbean and the world. Based on my readings of Brathwaite I can conclude that the tidalectic unsettles three colonialist epistemic conceptualizations:

- i. Colonialist time as a linear, forward moving motion.
- ii. Colonialist perceptions of island place as subordinate to continental place.
- iii. Colonialist History-writing as a solely human endeavour.

In their place the tidalectic suggests three Caribbean alternatives that are a reflection of the relation between humans and more-than-humans in the region. The tidalectic emerges as a poetic-theoretic mode that is deeply dependent, if not inseparable, from the many more-than-human inhabitants and entities of the Caribbean shore. Furthermore, the three reveals the deep-seated and insidious connections between colonial History and environmental and ecological devastation in the region, and, at least in part, attempt to repair "modernity's double fracture" (Ferdinand, 2020) that seeks to separate colonialist histories from environmental. The three tidalectic points of perception are:

- i. Tidalectic time as a continuous 'washing over' or 'dragging back'.
- ii. Tidalectic place as defined by acts of expansion/retraction and repetitive sustaining.

iii. Tidalectic (hi)stories-writing as reliant on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers.

All three points of tidalectic perception correspond to Brathwaite's focus on the Caribbean shore as the place where the tidalectic arises and particularly tidalectic time and place are deeply dedicated to the histories of the Middle Passage, as well as the sea and shore, and their many more-than-human habitants, as informing these conceptions. However, whereas most scholars who have engaged with the tidalectic as mainly productive for engaging with aquatic contexts, I will insist that the poetic-theoretic mode is also fruitful when reading poetry that engages with other environmental and ecological settings. This is what is offered in Chapter Four and Five of Part Two. Therefore, I argue, that the tidalectic is not just an aquatic epistemology, but a decolonial ecological poetic-theoretic mode, that can bring new epistemic insights to the configuration of time, place, and histories-writing in contemporary Anglocreole poetry.

Via an engagement with the tidalectic we come to see how it is not just the relationship between humans and more-than-humans that needs dissolving to consider a decolonial ecological world. As a poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic dissolves the dichotomous relationship between various positions that are implicit in the dialectic process, and instead reveals to us the processual relationship between human and more-than-human as well as between past, present and future, the ancestral continent of Africa and the Caribbean archipelago and, most importantly, between the physical environment and ecologies and poetic histories, that inform the Caribbean "perception of xperience" (Brathwaite, 2000, 46).

## Chapter Two

# Five Concepts on Caribbean Catastrophes

*a history of catastrophe (...) requires a literature of catastrophe to hold a broken mirror to a broken nature* (Brathwaite, 1985)

*these landscapes are often themselves--or become--the contexts of ancient & recent personal + historical + catastrophic cultural & environmental disasters w/ which i realize now that i relate w/ as in an act of perhaps healing*  
(Brathwaite, b1994)

*Art must come out of catastrophe. My position on catastrophe, as you say, is, I'm so conscious of the enormity of slavery and the Middle Passage and I see that as an ongoing catastrophe. (...) What is it that causes nature to lunge in this cataclysmic way, and what kind of message, as I suspect it is, what message is nature trying to send to us? And how are they connected, these violent forces that hit the world so very often— manmade or nature-made or spirit-made—they hit us increasingly violently.*

(Brathwaite, McSweeney interviewing Brathwaite, 2013)

## **A reading of five thematical concepts on Caribbean catastrophes**

In Chapter One we learned how Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode, the tidalectic, unsettles the colonialist conceptualization of time, place and History-writing and installs three alternative tidalectic perceptions of experience: time as continued washing over, place as expanding and retracting and emerging through acts of sustaining, and histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. I demonstrated how the physical environment and the ecologies of the shore inform and even structure Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing, and so Chapter One provided a broad poetic-theoretic heuristic framework for the dissertation. However, Brathwaite's writing is an intricate web of poetic-theoretic formulations and conceptualizations, and while I have argued that the tidalectic provides the basis for my engagement with contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry, I have also found, that numerous thematical concepts of his are essential for performing a so-called 'Brathwaitian' reading of other Anglocreole poet's work. Whereas the tidalectic is poetic at its core and speaks to a basic epistemic reconsideration of the perception of experience in the Caribbean in relation to time, place and histories writing, these five thematical concepts are formulated in the intersections between a variety of disciplines, including geography, geology, sociology, history, philosophy, linguistics and of course, literary studies and criticism. Therefore, I argue, they add an interdisciplinary and thematical dimension to Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic oeuvre, which is valuable for my poetic analysis in Part Two. Thus, the work done in this chapter places itself somewhere between literary analysis and a theoretical review. As a result, this chapter is dedicated to mapping out and analyzing the following five thematical concepts that I have identified in Brathwaite's writing: submerged mother(s), the unity is submarine, nation language, hurricane poetics and lastly, yam/nyam(e)/nam

The five concepts I have selected for this chapter have been chosen based on their inherent environmental or ecological qualities, meaning, that they all engage with considerations or questions of the Caribbean human's relationship with the more-than-human entities that surround them. All five concepts emerge out of a consideration of what I have chosen to call 'the Caribbean as a catastrophic zone'. When referring to this 'catastrophic zone' I do not mean that the Caribbean is a region without a future or a potential catastrophic future. The phrase rather intends to suggest the Caribbean as a geography has been formed by a multitude of geological, social, economic, cultural and linguistical catastrophes from the moment of first contact with the Spanish colonists on the island of Guanahani in 1492, where catastrophes, both 'natural' and 'man-made', are interwoven in an intricate web of interrelated histories. Nevertheless, in the wake of catastrophes, be these 'natural' or 'man-made', new, creative poetic expressions emerge, as part of a survival strategy. In the words of Brathwaite himself: "Art must come out of catastrophe" (Brathwaite, 2013). As we shall see in both this chapter as well as in the

forthcoming analysis chapters of Part Two, the creative potentiality that arises from these catastrophes, be they environmental, ecological, cultural, social or a combination of all four, does not take away from their impact. I look towards formulations such as Mimi Sheller's, in her most recent book *Island Futures – Caribbean Survival in the Anthropocene* (2020), in which she asks the question, "How can we tell (and in doing so help bring into being) a different story about the Caribbean future by connecting with alternative narratives that arise from those contesting the future from within the region?" (Sheller, 2020, 17). I argue, that poetic expressions are pivotal in the endeavour that Sheller sketches out. As concluded by Jamaican scholar Rex Nettleford the "anguished urgency" of Caribbean culture illustrates that "turbulence and chaos are ready handmaidens to creativity and renewal" (Nettleford, 1997, 73). As expressed by Sharae Deckard in her analysis of storm aesthetics in Caribbean literature, an engagement with the aesthetic potentiality that arises in the wake of catastrophe does not romanticize or hinder an acknowledgment of the very real and severe consequences catastrophes have on the afflicted population (Deckard, 2016, 26).

I will argue that catastrophe and poetic creativity combine in Brathwaite's conceptualizations of Caribbean catastrophes. The five thematical concepts developed by Brathwaite bring together different spatial and temporal scales of catastrophes, connecting for example pre-historic geological catastrophes with contemporary man-made catastrophe. This provides a mapping out a Caribbean socio-geography that is not just laced with destruction, but is in fact constructed on catastrophe. Furthermore, the concepts also bring together different types of catastrophes, spanning from cultural, linguistic and educational catastrophes, such as the Anglicization of Barbados, with environmental catastrophes, such as the construction and continuous maintenance of the Deep Water Harbour<sup>29</sup> of the same island.

In keeping with my own explorative question I ask: What can Brathwaite's five thematical concepts, submerged mother(s), the unity is submarine, nation language, yam/nyam(e)/nam and hurricane poetics, teach us about the relation between the on-going colonialism, environmental and ecological devastation in the Caribbean archipelago? What histories of catastrophe and of reparation emerge? To answer this question each section will be devoted to one of the thematical concepts, and each section will be concluded by summarizing the catastrophic histories that the concept is based upon, be these agricultural, socio-geographic, linguistic, geological, and so on., as well as the reparative histories that Brathwaite offers as a potential resolution to the catastrophe. This is not to frame Brathwaite's concepts as naïvely hopeful for the future of the region, but to underline that his devotion to exploring

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<sup>29</sup> Deep Water Harbour was the original name for what is today commonly known as The Port of Bridgetown. It was constructed in 1961 and was dredged out again in 2002 to make the passage deep enough for the larger cruise ships to enter the Barbadian harbour. The harbour handles approximately 700,000 tourists every year.

Caribbean catastrophes is most often connected to a similar devotion to offering alternative ways of being and thinking: to formulate decolonial Caribbean ecologies. I would argue that Brathwaite often writes with the intent of demonstrating, that what colonialism has torn apart Caribbean creativity might be able to re-assemble.

### **Considering scale and invisible catastrophes**

Before exploring each of these five concepts, it is important to frame the expansion of temporal and spatial scales that Brathwaite performs in these concepts. These expansions of the temporal and spatial scales correspond to the various modalities that are present in the three tidalectic points of perception (Chapter One), in which colonialist perceptions of time, place and History writing are countered by a decolonial ecological consideration of these categories. The five thematical concepts present different modalities of the tidalectic and bring concrete contexts to the poetic-theoretic mode. By briefly framing these five concepts in the context of three central thinkers from the Environmental Humanities I want to bring awareness to how Brathwaite's writing corresponds to current discussions within the field.

These three theorists and thinkers are: Rob Nixon's famous concept of slow violence (Nixon, 2013), Elizabeth Povinelli's formulation on quasi-events (Povinelli, 2011), and Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of humanity as both a geophysical force and a political, and I would add social and cultural, agent (Chakrabarty, 2012). Nixon's concept of slow violence, as environmental, but also cultural, social, and economic violence that, opposed to the eventful catastrophes such as the earthquake of Haiti in 2010 or the 1979 oil spill off the shore of Trinidad, occurs so gradually and slowly, that they tend to fall outside of the spectrum of overt violence, and become invisible or semi-invisible.

Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. In so doing, we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence. (Nixon, 2013, 2).

It is however important to note that, slow violence is not *always* in opposition to eventful violence. Some major environmental catastrophes that seem to occur suddenly, such as floodings, hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, show a burden of negligence similar to those which unfold over long timespans, due to their geographical situation. To this extent Nixon's concept of slow violence, and the importance of temporality and its slow unfolding as that which 'hides' violence, also corresponds to anthropologist

Elizabeth Povinelli's formulation of quasi-events. For Povinelli, quasi-events are those events or happenings that seem to never *fully* take place, either due to their hiddenness or their prolonged temporality: "If events are things that we can say happened such that they have a certain objective being, then quasi-events never quite achieve the status of having occurred or taken place. They neither happen nor not happen" (Povinelli, 2011, 13). These two formulations, Nixon's which correspond directly to environmental destruction, and Povinelli's which asks questions regarding 'hidden' events of deprivation and violence, both encourage a redirection of our gaze towards different temporalities of destructive occurrences, whilst reminding us, that some histories of violence, be these environmental, social, cultural, never become known.

Similarly, Chakrabarty's famous argument that humanity is expressed as a geophysical force insists on considering humanity as both a passive sufferer and an active agent in the forming of our planetary future. Chakrabarty writes:

A geophysical force—for that is what in part we are in our collective existence—is neither subject nor an object. A force is the capacity to move things. It is pure, nonontological agency. After all, Newton's idea of "force" went back to medieval theories. (...) This is why the need arises to view the human simultaneous on contradictory registers: as a geophysical force and as a political agent, a potential bearer of rights and as author of actions; subject to both the stochastic forces of nature (being itself one such force collectively) and open to the contingency of individual human experience; belonging at once to differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species, and of human societies. (Chakrabarty, 2012, 13-14).

Notably, Chakrabarty's approach here shows an underlying species-thinking that is evident through most of his writing on environmental destruction from the mid-2000s onward. This is problematic as it allows him to neglect the differentiated vulnerabilities that exists across all human societies (Malm & Hornborg, 2014, 66). Indeed, this stands in stark contrast to both Nixon and Povinelli's engagements with slow and invisible violence. However, Chakrabarty's formulation on these "contradictory registers" upon which humans reveal themselves as both subjects *and* objects of environmental catastrophes, and how these come to influence the cultural production of a specific region/geography, could be considered as prominent in Brathwaite's thematical concepts that will be analysed in the following sections. Chakrabarty's formulation does allow for an understanding of the current epoch as a time of human sovereignty as well as vulnerability, a seemingly paradoxical dualism that is very present in all the poetic works I will be engaging with. Where Nixon, Povinelli and Chakrabarty's approaches overlap is the emphasis on expanding one's view towards different temporal and spatial scales as well as registers of

catastrophe. It is this shared insight which is vital when engaging with Brathwaite's thematical concepts of Caribbean catastrophes across both time and space.

### **Concept one: Submerged mother(s)**

The first mention of the submerged mother(s) appears in Brathwaite's short text "Submerged Mothers" that was published in the *Jamaica Journal* in 1975. The text was a comment on the importance of Lucille Mathurin's book on the significance of black women during the enslaved people's uprising in the West Indies, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery*. Here Brathwaite praises Mathurin's work while also discussing the role of women, especially black women, as both submerged literary figures, that have been partly ignored in the history-writing of the Caribbean, as well as black women as submerged literary voices, that have been pushed underneath the audible surface of literary history (Brathwaite, b1975, 48). Strikingly, Brathwaite's first formulation of the submerged mother(s) is two-fold: It engages with women as invisible in historical literature as well as unappreciated as authors of both fiction and non-fiction. Brathwaite finishes his comment by noting that Mathurin's work is not the only historical work done by a Caribbean woman on the importance of black Caribbean women in history, that has been elided in many academic circles. These women, Brathwaite argues, narrate from a point of "double submergence" (Brathwaite, b1975, 49), since both their race and gender has kept their histories both out of the history books and on the periphery of literary communities, making it particularly hard for them to break through the surface and make themselves audible. Therefore, I will argue, that at the core of the submerged mother(s) as a thematical concept are the issues of (in)audibility as well as (in)visibility. To be submerged indicates, that one is held by either external or internal forces, under water. Thereby force is often implied. However, voluntary submersion might also relate to the opportunity represented by remaining hidden, which indicates a subversive potentiality.

It is only later in Brathwaite's writing, more specifically beginning in 1977 with the publishing of the collection *Mother Poem*, that Brathwaite draws a connection between the submerged mother(s), and the element of water and the geological construction of his birth island Barbados. It is also here that the plurality of the formulation, the submerged mother(s) as those literary voices held beneath the audible surface, emerge in the singular format as well, the submerged mother, who comes to represent the childhood landscape of Barbados. In his own reading of *Mother Poem* (1977) published in *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1997) Brathwaite writes:

And so **Mother Poem** is at last about **my mother**  
and increasingly the social world that she created – sl-



owly slowly ever so slowly – like the polyp – and at the same time ?therefore, a poem about the island, the coral limestone colour from which she come (...) (Brathwaite, 1997, 51 – original italics)

By comparing his mother and her life to the slow workings of the coral polyps, whose skeletons are a vital part of Barbadian geology, the mother emerges as an entity or subject that transgresses human time and instead adheres to slow, geological processes. Here Brathwaite both evokes the tidalectic perception of time as a non-linear construction, by continuing to go back, again and again, to the time of the island's geologic formation, in order to conceive of the role his mother played in the household when he was growing up. This image also allows the submerged mother to emerge as a more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, who merges with the polyps of the island, and through this merging, emerges as a living, porous geo-human archive. Brathwaite continues:

in **Mother Poem** there is a great deal of leaking –  
water thru limestone, light thru green, the erosion of  
**the Mother's** hopes dreams expectations etc but still there  
is this rock this granite this eternal/?maternal ?Wordsworthian ocean..." (Ibid., 54 – original italics)

In the image of the submerged mother, we do not only see a merging of the human and the more-than-human, but also between the personal and the more universal: from Brathwaite's portrayal of his own mother ("my mother") to a contemplation of 'the Mother' (capital M), as this eternal, mythological figure of care. This is of course also a point of potential criticism one might direct towards Brathwaite. While the submerged mothers as discussed in the 1975 article from *Jamaica Journal* very much emerge as a socio-political subject, Brathwaite's submerged mother in *Mother Poem* and his later readings of the collection, seems almost completely deprived of political influence, and instead portray a mythological figure that merges with the porous geology of his birth island of Barbados.<sup>30</sup>

As opposed to Walcott's famous phrase "the sea is history" (Walcott, 1979), Brathwaite does not place the Caribbean archive specifically in either the sea or the ground, but rather defines it through its submergence. This contemplation of the submerged archive would later come to inform

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the mother as an archetype in Brathwaite's writing see for example Caroline Rody's *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fiction of History* (2001) or Rachel L. Mordecai's article "Heroes, Mothers, and Muses: Teaching Gender in Kamau Brathwaite" (2022). Since gender is not a key topic in this dissertation I will not be developing further on this point, but there are significant points of critique one could address in Brathwaite's archetypal considerations of the mother as a caring, feminine figure.

much of his writing. As explained in an interview, when asked about this return to the water flow that exists within the concept of the submerged mother(s), Brathwaite insists that it is not a conscious choice in his writing to continuously apply or work with the submerged mother but that it should instead be perceived as an intuitive way of remembering and commemorating the histories of the formerly enslaved people of the Caribbean (Brathwaite, interviewed by Burrowes, 2008, 15). For Brathwaite to submerge becomes a tool for an intuitive understanding of the many histories that form the archipelago:

There is no reason why there should have been slavery, there's no reason why there should have been a ring of volcanoes around the Caribbean that created the very Caribbean; so that the intuition, the underground, the submerged, the fact that we do not know our history is part of it all. The only way you can recover history when you don't know it is either to study it, which is a very laborious process and almost impossible because most of the history is in ruins, the archives are in ruins or are already centred in such a way that whatever you read, you're reading only part of it, so that the only way to approach what really happened to get back to Genesis is to submerge yourself into intuition. (Brathwaite, interviewed by Burrowes, 2008, 15)

Here Brathwaite explains how the concept of the submerged mother(s) moves away from the context of gendered inaudibility in literature and history writing, and into the poetic realm of an intuitive writing of histories that bases itself on the geological constitution of the birth island and the environmental and ecological archives that it provides. Therefore, as a thematical concept the submerged mother(s) provide a tactile and geohistorical dimension to the tidalectic considerations of time as a continuous washing over or dragging back and histories-writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers by evoking the island's geologic constitution itself as an archive of histories. This illustrates clearly that catastrophic histories function as the submergence of Caribbean narratives and voices, whereas reparative histories reflect an intuitive writing of histories that bases itself on the environmental, ecological and geological archives of the region.

### **Concept two: 'the unity is submarine'**

In the same year as Brathwaite first formulated the concept of submerged mother(s) he wrote the essay "Caribbean Man in Space and Time" (1975) that was published in the Caribbean journal *Savacou*, of which Brathwaite himself was also founder and editor at the time. The essay begins with a poem, and it is from the last lines of this poem, "the unity is submarine", that I draw out a recurring thematical concept. This concept follows a similar connection between Caribbean geology and Caribbean literature as envisioned in submerged mother(s), and which seemed to inspire a great deal of Brathwaite's writing from the mid-

1970s on.<sup>31</sup> But whereas the submerged mother(s) concept focused mainly on the geological histories of the islands, ‘the unity is submarine’ adds a socio-geographical dimension to the geological considerations of Caribbean histories and archives and moves into the depths of Brathwaite’s cultural-geological exploration of the Caribbean region. Here we are dragged, tidalectically, back into the past, to a time well before to any human civilization, when the Caribbean archipelago was still a part of a continental geology, and then we are pushed forward in time, to the time of colonization and onward. Below I quote the poem in full:

archipelago: fragments: a geological plate being crushed by the  
pacific’s curve, cracking open yucatan; the arctic/north American  
moonlight: hence cuba, hispaniola, puerto rico: continental outriders  
and the dust of the bahamas. atlantic africa pushing up the beaches  
of our eastern seawards.

the history reflects the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone,  
earthquake, crack, coral: their rise and fall of landscapes: destructions,  
lost memories: atlantis, atahualpa, ashanti: creations: fragments

it would be better to begin with caribbean man: crouched: legitimate  
bastard: against space: dwarf, clenched fist of time

the unity is submarine

breathing air, the societies were successively amerindian, european,  
creole. the amerindian several; the european various; the creole  
plural

subsistent plantation maroon

multilingual multi-ethnic many ancestored

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Campbell’s excellent article “Limestone and the literary imagination: a world-ecological comparison of John Cowper Powys and Kamau Brathwaite” (2020) analyses and discusses Brathwaite’s fascination with geology in-depth, particularly in relation to *Mother Poem* (1977). As Campbell writes: “This magisterial long poem (the first instalment of his second trilogy) reveals the fact that Brathwaite had always been a poet of the stone as much as of the force of the winds. The foundation of his Caribbean experience is the geology of Barbados; his understanding of historical and social relations grounded in landscapes of coral limestone.” (Campbell, 2020, 10). I shall return to this text in Chapter Three where I analyse two poetry collections by Barbadian Anthony Kellman.

fragments

the unity is submarine

breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments/whole (Brathwaite, 1975, 1)

By quoting the entirety of the poem one comes to see how the famous quote “the unity is submarine” is not just an argumentation about submarine relationality between different Caribbean islands, but rather that it reveals a poetic vision of the Caribbean as a geological region formed by fractures and cracks. Most scholars of Brathwaite tend to simply quote the famous line “the unity is submarine” (Siklosi, 2016; Josephs, 2003; DeLoughrey, 2001 and others) from which one could easily draw the conclusion that Brathwaite argues for a harmonious unity of the archipelago based on its geological constitution. However, as is clear when one sees the quote in its wider poetic context, that this concept is one of geological and socio-geographical fragmentation as well as unity. Brathwaite explores fragmentation on two different levels in his writing: the geological fragmentation of the Caribbean and the socio-geographical fragmentation that occurred during colonization, where the islands were divided into territories between the five main colonial powers in the archipelago at the time. Hence this concept also formulates a paradox; it is a call for or perhaps an ascertainment of unity amid fragmenting catastrophe. As expressed by Brathwaite during an interview in 1991 with Jamaican poet and scholar Edward Baugh:

the Caribbean, although artificially divided into English speaking, French speaking, Dutch speaking, Spanish speaking, is really part of a whole underground continent of thought and feeling and history (...) Let us look at the colonial development first because before Columbus (...) these islands were part of a single culture, let us say the Amerindian culture, and it is with the intrusion of Columbus, of the Europeans, that the islands had their second fragmentation, the first one being the destruction of the mountain range [cordillera] into these little juts and tips... What happened was that Columbus arrived with the Spanish concept of nation and they appropriated certain areas for their own. Then later on when the English they did the same, and the French, later on the Dutch and so on... As a result, the economic policies of these various nations also began to have an effect, so that people in the Caribbean were no longer in touch with each other. (Brathwaite, interviewed by Baugh, 1991, 09:30, my own transcription)

The sense of unity that is lacking in the socio-geographical context of the archipelago is still present in the geological constitution of the islands which, geologically speaking, are still one. Therefore, geology comes to represent a way of uniting what colonialism attempted, and in part succeeded, in tearing apart. The unity is submarine concept has been dealt with by other scholars, however, these have mostly turned to Glissant's definition of the concept (see Baucom, 2001; Siklosi 2013; Cooper, 2013 and others). Glissant writes on the concept:

The poet and historian Brathwaite (...) summarizes the third and last section of his study with the single phrase: "The unity is submarine." To my mind this expression can only evoke all those Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown overboard whenever a slave ship was pursued by enemy vessels and felt too weak to put up a fight. *They sowed in the depths the seeds of an invisible presence.* (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 66-67)

My reading of Brathwaite's text does not directly oppose Glissant's interpretation, I will however challenge, the lack of attention in Glissant's reading towards the geopoetic qualities and the more-than-human expressed in this one sentence, within the complete poem. If one reads the entirety of Brathwaite's poem, it becomes quite clear, that it attempts to unify the histories' cracks and collisions of the geological constitution of the archipelago with the socio-geographical and socio-economic forces of slavery, and how these two concepts overlap and interact in the Caribbean. The reparative histories that emerge as a consequence, are Brathwaite's attempt at working towards an idea that unites both the geological fragmentation that occurred ("pacific's curve, cracking open (...) the history reflects the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone") with the cultural fragmentation of the region ("multilingual multi-ethnic many ancestored" and "amerindian, european, creole"), and in turn instate a whole, a submarine unity, that can hold all of the fragmentation(s).

However, Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' or the fragment/whole concept is also defined by its reliance on catastrophic movement ("earthquake, crack, coral: their rise and fall of landscapes: destructions"). This is also where Brathwaite's formulation in many ways separates itself from other likeminded ideas arising from the Anglocreole Caribbean at the time. One of the most well-known came from the Guyanese author, poet, and landscape surveyor Wilson Harris. Chris Campbell argues that much of Harris' work, both fictional and non-fictional, can be read as an attempt at giving space to a history of the Caribbean region that goes beyond the human realm and utterances and moves into the more-than-human (Campbell, 2004, 19-20). This amounts to a particular interest in the tectonic movements of the earth, which also challenges ideas of steady continents and landscapes (Campbell, 2004, 20). But whereas Harris' geological vision of the Caribbean emerges as one of duality, yet

simultaneous stability and melting,<sup>32</sup> Brathwaite's vision of the Caribbean is one of fragmentation and cracks: "archipelago: fragments: a geological plate being crushed by the / pacific's curve, cracking open (...) the history reflects the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone, / earthquake, crack, coral: their rise and fall of landscapes: destructions, / lost memories (...) creation: fragment". One might even go as far as to say, that Brathwaite is highlighting the connectivity between the collision of the more-than-human entities of the tectonic plates and the collision of cultures, "amerindian, european, creole", and how these are rarely, if ever, peaceful. In the collision of tectonic plates, at a convergent boundary, one plate must succumb to the other or risk being destroyed, and similarly in his study of cultures which reveals how one culture has repeatedly been forced to succumb or submit to another.

What is apparent in Brathwaite's turn towards geology, however scientifically unprecise it might be, is the poet's astonishment at a potentially different social organization in the region, drawn from his engagement with the geologic constitution of the region. Brathwaite wrote in his short essay "Caliban's Guarden" from 1992:

I began to recognize that these broken islands were the sunken tops of a mountain range that had been there millions of years before. That in addition to the death of the Amer-Indians I was also witnessing the echo of an earlier catastrophe. That the islands had been part of a mainland. That we once had been whole – and that what we now had between each other was holes. (Brathwaite, b1992, 4)

I will conclude, that the 'the unity is submarine' concept formulates how the catastrophic histories of colonialisms socio-geographic fragmentation can perhaps be healed by the reparative histories of geological unity that in turn creates a sense of cultural unity across the archipelago.

### **Concept three: Nation language**

Nation language is one of Brathwaite's most famous concepts, however it is often considered strictly from a linguistic point of view. First described in his well-renowned essay "History of the Voice" (orig. 1979, published in *Roots* 1986), nation language according to Brathwaite is "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers [sic]" (Brathwaite, 1986, 260). Brathwaite utilizes nation language to oppose the idea of for example Barbadian English as merely a dialect, which insinuates a hierarchy between proper and

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this in Wilson Harris' writing see Gemma Robinson's exceptional article "The reality of trespass: Wilson Harris and an impossible poetics of the Americas" (2013).

improper language use and argues that despite its lexical features that might resemble English, it should be considered as a language on its own merits (Brathwaite, 1986).

Nation language has been a frequent topic of discussion in Creole language studies for decades<sup>33</sup> and in the general study of the linguistic Brathwaite's oeuvre. Many have explored this concept of nation language and its connection to orature as well as to the music genre calypso, which are also highlighted by Brathwaite himself in the essay.<sup>34</sup> However, where the concept emerges as particularly interesting in the context of this dissertation, is in its connection to perceptions of Caribbean environments and language practices. Brathwaite highlights the discrepancy between the English language and the Caribbean environment, and argues, that new 'perceptual models' are needed, if the people of the Caribbean islands are to understand and relate to the environment that they live in:

In terms of what we write, of our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow for instance – the models are all there for the falling of snow – than we are of the hurricanes that hit here every year. (...) we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience; whereas we can describe the alien imported experience of snowfall. (Brathwaite, 1986, 263)

These perceptual models are, according to Brathwaite, what actualizes an environmental and ecological sensibility. If a community is deprived of perceptual models that can correspond to the environmental and ecological experience they are encountering, the outcome is alienation.<sup>35</sup> One of Brathwaite's famous examples of set alienation from "History of the Voice" is the child, who confuses the Caribbean environmental and ecological experience with the British when writing an essay for school:

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<sup>33</sup> Brathwaite himself has contributed to the field, particularly in his book *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974), which analyses creole languages across a variety of geographies, from Peru to Sierra Leone. I would very much have liked to include some aspects taken from the monograph in this dissertation, but since the book has been out of print for years and I have been unable to acquire any unused or used copies, I unfortunately had to leave it out. Particularly his discussion of 'lateral creolization' would have been of the outmost interest for this section.

<sup>34</sup> For more on this see for example the anthology *Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite* (2006), edited by Annie Paul and Paola Ravasio's book chapter "The routes of soundpoems: Nation language in Central America" (2021). For anyone particularly interested in how nation language and orature are connected by Brathwaite's pan-African dedication I suggest Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's essay "Kamau Brathwaite: The Voice of African Presence" (1994).

<sup>35</sup> This also corresponds in part to Glissant's writing on forced and free poetics. Due to both focus and space I will not be able to consider the resemblance and discrepancies between Brathwaite's nation language and Glissant's forced versus free poetics. Instead I will encourage any reader with a particular interest in this to see Heidi Bojsen's article "Édouard Glissant and the Geography of Relation" (2021) and Celia Britton's "Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance" (1999).

‘The snow was falling on the cane fields.’ The child had not reached the obvious statement that it wasn’t snow at all, but rain that was probably falling on the cane fields. She was trying to have both cultures [English and Caribbean] at the same time. But that is creolization. (Brathwaite, 1986, 264)

In Brathwaite’s example the child is deprived of any real sense of the environment she lives in due to the inadequate language models made available to her. She might be approaching some sort of understanding, but this is one of environmental confusion, which her intermingling of British weather with the monocrop of the Caribbean islands. This also corresponds to the tidalectic sense of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. The child is alienated from the land in which she resides and is at the same time unaware of how the colonialist language models have modelled her perception of place. This is where Brathwaite’s notion on maroonage comes into play. As expressed by Brathwaite himself in an interview done in the early 2000s, his theories on language or poetics should not be read from the point of creolization, but rather from the vantage point of maroonage: the practice of the maroons, who escaped from the plantations and formed communities in the areas of the islands that appeared as unfit for agriculture to the colonizers. Maroonage therefore comes to represent a separate agricultural society outside of the plantation logic:

It is not that [creolization]. It is maroonage . . . I went along with creolization because that was a step in my development, I mean I came out of Goveia and she showed me (...) I suddenly realized that the heart of the plantation discourse was the alternative notion of maroonage — the people who left the plantation and set up and gained re-creolization, they set up African ancestral modes based upon local reality. (...) My literature, my literary work and my literary criticism is based on the concept of maroonage, although I have not in history done more to write about it. (Brathwaite, interviewed by Burrowes, 2001)

Considering nation language as a form of language maroonage allows us to reflect on it as a proper alternative to the dominance of the English language and in part culture in the former British colonies, since marooning is both the creation and sustaining of an alternative living system. This alternative living system is intertwined with the histories that surround the land and places in which the maroons reside.

In his novel *Texaco* (1992) Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau, writes about how it was the logic of the maroons to claim the hills, the mountains, the hinterlands, those places that were no good for plantation: “those places in which no one could foresee our ability to unravel their History into our thousand stories” (Chamoiseau 1998, 54).<sup>36</sup> This unravelling of the master narrative of History is also

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<sup>36</sup> I came upon this quote by Chamoiseau in Malm’s article “In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature” (2018).



inherently connected to a consideration of remembering and archiving. Since secrecy was a key part of surviving and thriving for the maroons, they never left behind any written archives (Malm, 2018, 13), and therefore the histories of how to tend to and sustain the land was passed on orally. In keeping with a tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining, nation language thematizes a form of maroon education or knowledge, as to how to tend to and sustain those ‘uncultivated’ places that were the habitat for the maroons.

This consideration of nation language as connected to a philosophy of education corresponds to Trinidadian Amon Saba Saakana’s later argument, on the correlation between environmental and language alienation as a tool for colonial suppression, and how both were utilized in the British colonies to secure a continuous control over the African-Caribbean population, even after slavery was abolished:

A society which educates its people away from its own history and environment is a colonial society (...) When slavery was abolished, under the persistent ravaging destruction of rebellion, a new form of control was instituted: education<sup>37</sup> (...) they [the British colonizers] taught English history, English language (with an emphasis on English literature) (Saakana, 1987, 102)

The teaching of English language, History and, most importantly for this dissertation, *literature*, in the school systems of islands such as Brathwaite’s birth island Barbados was yet another way for the British to ensure their dominion over the Afro-Caribbean population in the wake of the abolition of slavery. In sum, I suggest that nation language should be perceived as a concept that relates to Caribbean maroon models of environmental understanding and how these are expressed in for example literature and how they were and are taught in the school system in the former British colonies of the Caribbean. In the formulation of the nation language concept, a connection between what tidalectic histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers and the language practices, both scribal and oral, that are taught in the island societies emerges. The connection between language models and the Caribbean environment that nation language attempts at bringing forward functions as a maroon alternative to the dominion of English. In other words, the catastrophic histories of colonialist language control and in consequence of that environmental alienation can perhaps be healed by setting up a new land(g)uage of maroonage that can approximate the environment of the Caribbean archipelago.

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<sup>37</sup> The role of creole in the educational system of the former colonizing countries has been a topic of scholarly interest for quite some time. For more on this see Bojsen “Creole Practices as Prescriptive Guidelines for Language Didactics? A Selective Overview of Glissant's Thoughts on Language and Social Identity” (2014).

#### Concept four: Hurricane Poetics

I have chosen to call this thematical concept ‘hurricane poetics’ although I will also refer to the term seametrics. The two formulations resemble each other in some respects, since they both engage with more-than-human entities as foundational for nouvelle poetic expression, while also lending very different yet interwoven perspectives on the potentiality of Caribbean weather phenomena<sup>38</sup> as poetic inspiration for both form and content.

In his own description of the term seametrics, Brathwaite describes the form as both a material reality, the way the sea moulds and shapes the Caribbean landscape, and a poetic concept, how the sea influences the rhythm of the poetry produced in the region (Brathwaite, *Trinidad Express*, 1992). Many scholars have bundled Brathwaite’s approach with for example Walcott’s historic sea, “the sea is history” (Walcott, 1979) or Michelle Cliff’s “history sunk under the sea” (Cliff, 1988) (see Jagessar, 2012 for example). But opposed to these two, seametrics is not related to a new concept of the singular history, as it is to a new form of poetic histories as expressed via poetic rhythm and narration, and the relation between these and the landscape of the shore and sea. This clearly corresponds to the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode that continuously performs itself by mimicking the movements of the sea, as previously discussed (see Chapter One, section Sycorax Video Style and the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode). Brathwaite emphasises this expression quite early, as it can be detected in his very first poem collection, *Rights of Passage* (1967), in which the narrator thematizes the sea as an essential part of the Caribbean poetic consciousness (“By these shores I was born: sound of the sea / came in my window, life heaved and breathed in me then / with the strength of that turbulent soil (...) We who are born of the ocean can never seek solace / in rivers” (Brathwaite, 1967, 57), as well as plays around with a narrator, that attempts to immerse themselves in the sea (“new ancestors; will flow like this tide fixed // to the star by which this ship floats / to the new worlds, new waters, new / harbours, the pride of our ancestors mixed // with the wind and the water” (Ibid., 11)

In these examples seametrics emerges as the poetic desire to fuse with the sea and its movements, these “sounds of the sea” and the “turbulent soil” that the poet considers himself to be borne by. Indeed, this formulation might indicate to the reader, that seametrics relies on a harmonious, poetic connection to the shore and the sea, and as noted by Edward Baugh, the formulation does in many ways correspond to Brathwaite’s continuous search for wholeness or a unitary Caribbean condition (Baugh, 2001, 8).

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<sup>38</sup> Of course, hurricanes are not a strictly Caribbean weather phenomenon but occur in and affect many other regions as well. I still qualify the hurricane as particularly Caribbean due to the frequency and ferocity with which they strike the region as well as due to the word’s origin. The word hurricane is originally derived from the Taíno word hurucane meaning evil spirit of the wind. More on this in Chapter Five where I analyse Celia Sorhaindo’s poetry book *Guabancex* (2020).

This is where Brathwaite’s hurricane poetics come into play and provides a much-needed nuance to such a reading. Whereas seametrics carry somewhat normative implications, this indication of an ideal poetic form that can convey the Caribbean experience of living with and by the sea, hurricane poetics expresses a more circumstantial and indeed catastrophic environmental reality, namely the hurricane’s havoc. One of the most famous quotes from Brathwaite’s “History of the Voice” essay is on the problem with rhythmic representation in relation to the violent weather of the region: “The storm does not roar in pentameter” which ventures on into a discussion of poetic-environmental rhythms: “And that is the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience” (Brathwaite, 1986, 265) To that extent, hurricane poetics and seametrics emerge as a form of poetic-performativity, that moves with the hurricane and the sea, rather than against them.

Brathwaite’s hurricane poetics also implies an implementation or perhaps even a fascination with syncopation as a disruptive rhythmic element (Puri, 2014, 210). Like the hurricane as a disruptive weather event, syncopation pulls the reader out of their rhythmic expectations and multiply attempts to mimic the overwhelmingly disruptive experience of being caught in the hurricane. Therefore, hurricane poetics emerges as more than just a new metric form, but instead as a poetics of disruption. As exemplified in his own long-poem *SHAR: Hurricane Poem* (1990), which the poet published two years after Hurricane Gilbert had destroyed his home and personal archive in Jamaica, the fusing between human and environment is sometimes filled with struggle and ambivalence, rather than simply the promise of trans-geographic understanding. In this poem, the poetic imagination is invaded by the elemental occurrence of the hurricane, resulting in a stuttering grammatical form, where both words and lines are interrupted by the hurricanes pounding:

And what. what. what . what more. what more can I tell you  
 on this afternoon of electric bronze  
 but that the winds . winds . winds . winds came straight on  
 & that there was no step . no stop . there was no stopp.  
 ing them & they began to reel . in circles. . scream. ing like Ezekiel’s wheel

&

that the valley of destruction filled with buzz . with kite tails wild.  
 ing  
 tug & tear & rip & tatter up & like old women laugh

ing. warn. ing. child

ren. scream.

& they were really scream. ing let me tell you.” (Brathwaite, 1990)

Clearly, the intent of the poem, to tell the readers of the hurricane (“what more can I tell you (...) let me tell you”) is almost made impossible, or perhaps illegible, as the frantic experience of being caught in the pounding winds results in stuttering diction. In *SHAR: Hurricane Poem* the hurricane takes over the narrative in both form and context, resulting exactly in what the title indicates, a poem told from the point of the hurricane. As described in the previously quoted lines from “History of the Voice”, nation language according to Brathwaite would sound “like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave (...)” (Brathwaite, 1986, 266) indicating his poetic relation to the destructive winds and waves of the hurricane season, that most people living in the Caribbean know all too well.

While the link between the two is clear, I choose to separate nation language from hurricane poetics, to highlight their various thematical considerations of language and poetry. Whereas nation language questions the availability of language models from a didactic point of view, hurricane poetics connotes the experience of the hurricane as fundamental to the Caribbean psyche<sup>39</sup> as well as to the poetry produced in the region. Indeed, nation language and hurricane poetics are two deeply interlinked concepts, but they in part stem from two different experiences with language scarcity – nation language relating to everyday life and language-practice, both scribal and oral, within the educational system, and hurricane poetics relating directly to the performative production of poetic expressions in relation to specific environmental experiences, such as the hurricane.

This shows that catastrophic histories read the hurricane as a destructive weather phenomenon in the Caribbean archipelago, and reparative histories works with with the hurricane and attempts to capture and mediate the environmental experience. This shows that the catastrophic histories of the hurricane as destructive weather phenomenon in the Caribbean archipelago needs reparative histories of poetic expression as that which can attempt to capture and mediate the environmental experience of the hurricane.

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<sup>39</sup> I am wary when using the term Caribbean psyche, since it does bear essentializing connotations that could be considered as problematic and as adhering to a colonialist mindset. However, I turn to the term in lack of a better one since it is what Brathwaite himself uses repeatedly. See as examples “Caliban’s Garden” (1992), “The Zea Mexican Diary, 7 Sept 1926-7 Sept 1986” (1993), “New Gods of the Middle Passage” (2000).

### Concept five: yam/nyam(e)/nam

The triad of the 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' only appears in one of Brathwaite's texts, his 1974 essay "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature", however, each word is used repeatedly throughout Brathwaite's oeuvre. The visual and auditory play between the three words underline their semantic connotations in the West African and African-Caribbean culture, yam (root food), nyam(e) (which means to eat) and nam (name of God or spirit-given name). Nam in particular plays a significant role in Brathwaite's authorship and takes on a variety of meanings: from strictly being described as the name of God, to later, in *ConVERSations with Nathaniel MacKey* (1997), being described as the spirit-given name of a Ghanaian descendant. On the connection between *yam* and nam in Brathwaite's writing DeLoughrey writes:

'Nam is the heart of our nation-language which,' says Brathwaite, like the cultural distinction between the provision grounds and the plantation, 'comes into conflict with the cultural imperial authority of Prospero.' Thus yam/nam is a signifier of subterranean cultural roots and the vehicle of articulation and reassemblage itself. (DeLoughrey, 2011, 62)

The yam/nyam(e)/nam concept also expresses most clearly the connection between Brathwaite's vision of the Caribbean and the Ghanaian geography and culture. By connecting the history of Christian missionaries in the African continent and in the Caribbean after colonization, Brathwaite brings forward a connected triad of earthly constitutions: yam, nyame (Twi word for God + to eat), and nam/nommo (Bantu meaning the divine Word + name). He writes:

In the first place, the missionaries were naturally against African or African oriented religious practices among their ex-African adherents. Hence the banning of the drum (voice of god or worship: *nyame* – one of three Akan names for the Supreme Being); the gradual replacement of African foods and foodstyles [sic] (*nyam/yam*) by European or creole substitutes, and the Christianization of names (*nommo* – Bantu for the Word) and ideas (nam). (Brathwaite, 1974, 75 – original italics)

In this sequence Brathwaite ties together a history of disciplining food culture and crops with a history of religious control in the colonial society. Thereby he is aligning the dislodging from the African continent and the indigenous populations of the Caribbean from the land of the islands, with a dislodging of mythologic cosmology. In this word play the cosmological nyame (name of God) and the subterranean *yam* (food from the ground) are brought together, thereby annulling the distinction between the mythological or cosmological and the subterranean. In the same essay ("The African Presence in

Caribbean Literature” (1974) Brathwaite writes on the natural vibrations that exist inside certain words that describe environmental occurrences.

Vibrations awake at the center of words. From the pools of their *nommo*, onomatopoeia and sound-symbols are born: *banggarang*, *boolooloops* and *boonoonoonoos* (Jamaica); *barrabbattabbattabba* and *bruggalungdung* (Barbados); *umklaklabulu* ("thunderclap": Zulu); *dabo-dabo* ("duck"), *munumm* ("darkness": Twi); *pampam*, *primprim*, *prampalam* (Bajan/Twi sounds of contact/movement); *patoo* ("owl": Asante/Jamaican); *felele* ("to blow in the wind, to flutter": Yoruba). (Brathwaite, 1974, 91)

The languages mentioned are all either indigenous Caribbean languages, such as Carib or Kalinago, creole languages, such as Bajan (Barbadian English) or Jamaican (Jamaican English), or indigenous African languages, such as Zulu, Yoruba or Twi. These words are all, according to Brathwaite, onomatopoeias, or sound-words: their meaning is reflected in their sound and vice versa, thereby, to a certain extent, annulling the distinction between signifier and signified. In this theorization of the importance of wording, and particularly naming, the potency of vibration is once again brought forward. From deep within the word vibrates a meaning. The term *nommo*, the generative power of the Word according to Bantu cosmology, sums up the belief, that by naming one gives life (Halsey, 1988; Asante, 1990). From the name vibrates the power of the object or subject.

Compared to the other concepts mentioned in this chapter little scholarly attention has been given to the importance of vibrations between language and land in Brathwaite’s writing, and how he insists on a re-naming that is related to the earth’s vibrational energy as a significant African and pan-African practice of reclaiming one’s own name and identity. Indeed, we know from Brathwaite’s personal history that names are central to both his poetic and personal life. The poet himself chose to rename himself Kamau after a trip to Kenya.<sup>40</sup> According to Brathwaite, the name Kamau was given to him as the result of a ceremony held at the famous Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s grandmother’s home. Encircled by a group of elderly women Brathwaite describes how they “began chanting deep deep down inside their chests & deeper down into their bellies searching for my **nam** so they cd find my name” (Brathwaite, 1994, 236, – original italics). In this image of the Kenyan women who are digging deeper and deeper into themselves to find the name for the poet, some sort of conflation/fusion between human body and earth occurs: the two become one in the search for the ‘deep’ vibrating name of the poet. This concurs with Brathwaite’s own description of himself as kneeling “outside in the grounds, on the

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<sup>40</sup> For more on this see *Barabajan Poems* (p. 266) and Elaine Savory’s article “Wordsongs & Wordwounds / Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite’s *Barabajan Poems*”. Kamau Brathwaite’s birth name is Edward Brathwaite.

grounds” (Brathwaite, 1994, 236). Similarly, to the earlier discussed conflation between the divine (nyam(e)) and the earth resource (yam), the ritual of re-naming, by calling upon the earth to reveal the poet’s true name, bares similarities to the funeral ritual, as Brathwaite is described as not just kneeling on the ground, but *in* the ground, as if his body, for a moment, is transformed back into its earthly state; ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Whereas Brathwaite in much of his work looks to the environment and ecologies of the shore and the sea when formulating his poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic, (see Chapter One, section Sycorax Video Style and section The tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode), it appears that when it comes to the act of naming, he instead seeks subterranean voices. Naming or nommo, if we are to use Bantu terminology, is portrayed as related to a subterranean understanding of the subject or object that is being named. In this ritual the hierarchy of language, between the ‘active’ subject that names and the ‘passive’ object that receives the name, is also reversed. As opposed to agricultural practices, in which human-beings name plants, soils, worms and so on, here it is the ground, the subterranean, that is the active part, providing the subject with a destined name. Therefore, one could say, that the triad between yam/nyam(e)/nam reverses the hierarchy between the soil or earth and the human.

Referencing both Jamaican journalist H.G. de Lisser’s *Jane’s Career* (1913) and Martinican Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (orig. in French, 1939), Brathwaite argues in the 1974 essay, that within the Caribbean cultural belief system, nam/nommo (naming) as a practice carries within it, a conjuring power. Naming becomes an act of divination, or, as Brathwaite’s formulates it later in the essay, “Language, as we saw in the discussion of names, may be conceived as having the power to affect life.” (Brathwaite, 1974, 92). Therefore, in Brathwaite’s writing, naming becomes a deeply environmental-spiritual experience, not just through its connection between body and earth, as in the example from Brathwaite’s own naming ceremony during his time spent in Kenya, but also through its presumed ability, to breathe life and intent into various natural phenomena, such as earthquakes.

The triad therefore comes to represent the reclaiming of both land and language [lan(d)guage<sup>41</sup>], and how the practices of cultivating and farming with the Caribbean soil and engaging with language and naming as a spiritual practice that traces back to the Ghanaian ancestors, are intrinsically connected, perhaps even inseparable. Here a tidalectic perception of place as dependent on continuous acts of sustaining, rather than expansionist acts of claiming is also present. This is shown and thematised by yam/nyam(e)nam as the aspiration to work with the land, rather than disciplining it. The

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<sup>41</sup> The wording lan(d)guage is my own, and one that I have thought of repeatedly when reading Brathwaite. I return to in my analysis of Jennifer Rahim’s poetic work in chapter four. I have not come across any other scholars who use it, yet I sense it as an underlying current in DeLoughrey’s article “Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds” (2011) and in many other of DeLoughrey’s articles.

triad also exposes the destructive nature of detaching language from land and vice versa, as a tool for suppression of both natives and enslaved. The intrinsically connected history of disciplining both land and labour in the Caribbean is also linked to the educational history of the British colonies, and the disciplining of language and literature. To that extent, the concept of yam/nyam(e)/nam is linked to similar ideas of language control as those expressed in Brathwaite's previously discussed nation language concept. In this final concept the catastrophic histories of the Caribbean are expressed as a form of disciplining of land, food, and agriculture in the British colonies, whereas the reparative histories that are offered in turn suggests a re-suturing of agriculture, food consumption, spirituality and language based on a pan-African considerations.

### Final remarks for Chapter Two

The five thematical concepts that have been analysed and discussed above are gleaned from a wide range of Brathwaite's poetic, historic, and poetic-theoretic writing. Whereas the tidalectic is to be considered as the overarching poetic-theoretic mode that structures the entirety of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic production, these thematical concepts are to be considered and valued for their specific context and thematical constitution, arising, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, out of different eras of Brathwaite's writing. While the tidalectic offers a kind of epistemological or heuristic framework, these five concepts engage with various aesthetic modalities and function as prominent thematical conceptualizations of the tidalectic, that I argue as being recurrent in a Brathwaitian reading of contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poetry.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to frame how the five thematical concepts correspond to Brathwaite's three points of tidalectic perception (tidalectic time, tidalectic place and tidalectic histories writing) and what insights they provide into the relation between the on-going colonialism and environmental and ecological devastation. First, all five thematical concepts highlight both the slow (Nixon) and hidden (Povinelli)

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<sup>42</sup> I consider it important to note, that there are other concepts one might have included from Brathwaite's writing. These could be concepts such as the mwe, Sycorax Video-Style, total kinesis, amongst others. My own engagement with Brathwaite's mwe comes in the form of a published conference paper entitled "Environmental We's In Kamau Brathwaite's Hybrid Poem 'The Namsetoura Papers'" (2020) given at the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and published in *Music, Poetry and Language: Sound, Sight and Speech in Comparative and Creative Connection* (2020). For more on Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-Style I recommend Elaine Savory's "Returning to Sycorax / Prospero's Response" and "Wordsongs & Wordwounds / Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite's Barabajan Poems" (1994), Kelly Baker Josephs' "Versions of X/Self: Kamau Brathwaite's Caribbean Discourse" (2003) and Anna Reckin's dissertation *Landscape as Poem: Poem as Landscape* (2008). Practically no work has been done on Brathwaite's formulation on total kinesis which he formulated in numerous essays and poem-lectures including "History of the Voice" and *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey*. For the reader who is invested in the performative aspect of Brathwaite's writing total kinesis would be an apt place to begin one's exploration. These four concepts are not thematical and all have a particular focus or interest in the performative aspects of poetry, and since performativity is not the focal point of this dissertation, I have chosen to exclude them.



ecological and environmental violence that occurs continuously in the region, whilst drawing back to pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial histories of the archipelago. Furthermore, the concepts draw attention to humans as both vulnerable and powerful earth-agents (Chakrabarty). All five thematical concepts have an inherently tidalectic structure in that they dismantle the colonialist perception of experience. However, it is important to note that not all three tidalectic points of perception (time, place and histories writing) are equally apparent in each concept. The geological and socio-geographic oriented concepts that Brathwaite develops in the 1970s, including submerged mother(s) and the unity is submarine, appear as particularly attuned to questions of tidalectic time as a continuous washing over or dragging, as well as to tidalectic histories-writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. Submerged mother(s) as a concept expresses a particular thematic interest in the submerged voices of the region and in turning to the geology of Barbados into a geophysical archive, thereby considering storying and storing the past in a physical-poetic manner. This also means that the past is constantly present, it is never really past, but rather constantly there, in the form of the geophysical archive. The unity is submarine turns to geology, particularly tectonic shifts, to tell alternative histories about the socio-geographic fragmentation of the region, and thereby thematizes how geo-histories and human-histories are connected in the region. Thus, time is perceived of as an almost physical entity, something that can be felt and seen in the landscape of the island. Here, in these two thematical concepts, tidalectic time as a non-linear construction and histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers merge.

The thematic concepts that focus more on agriculture and ‘contemporary’<sup>43</sup> environmental and ecological issues, including nation language, yam/nyam(e)/nam and hurricane poetics, are more focused on the tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining and caring, as well as histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. Nation language and yam/nyam(e)/nam both thematizes the connection between the plantation society and language control in the British colonies, and offer alternative ways, be they pan-African or maroon, to perceive the connection between land and language. Hurricane poetics thematizes the connection between the destructive weather phenomenon of the hurricane and new poetic formats. In essence, the three concepts nation language, hurricane poetics and yam/nyam(e)/nam all formulate a considerable focus on language practices in relation to environmental and ecological issues, whereas the submerged mother(s) and the unity is submarine are more focused on questions of geophysical archives and geo-histories.

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<sup>43</sup> I use the adjective contemporary with reluctance, since, as presented in the Introduction, it is impossible as well as problematic to wrestle today’s environmental and ecological issues that are facing the Caribbean from the archipelagoes past (and in part present), as a colonized geography. However, when using the word contemporary, I intend to indicate, how some of these issues, such as soil exhaustion or shore erosion, are becoming increasingly apparent today.

Brathwaite's concepts also point in the direction of creative and new decolonial ecologies in the wake of catastrophe. While the many catastrophic histories of human and more-than-human exploitation and devastation the Caribbean, including plantation society (yam/nyam(e)/nam), destructive weather (hurricane poetics), language control (nation language), tectonic shifts and socio-geographic fragmentation (submerged mother(s) and the unity is submarine), and so on, is evident, each concept also offers the possibility of reparative Caribbean histories via an engagement with various more-than-human agents, be these reparative histories enacted via language rebellion and attuning to the environment (nation language), poetic inspiration from destructive weather (hurricane poetics), maroon ecologies<sup>44</sup> as a caring way of engaging with land and soils (nation language and (yam/nyam(e)/nam), cross-sea community building bases on geological unity (the unity is submarine) or new considerations of more-than-human geo-archives (the unity is submarine and submerged mother(s)). While laying bare the insidious connection between continued colonialism and environmental and ecological destruction, each concept also offers a perspective on healing "modernity's double fracture" (Ferdinand, 2021).

This concludes Part One of this dissertation. It has been my intent with Part One to provide an in-depth exploration of Brathwaite as a poetic-theoretic thinker, whose writing can be considered as essential for considering the relation between humans and more-than-humans as marked by the continued coloniality of the archipelago and for imagining nouvelle decolonial ecologies from the Caribbean. One of the main objectives in both Chapter One and Two has been to highlight Brathwaite as a decolonial ecological thinker and to provide a form of overview of his most crucial conceptualizations by creating what I have called 'a Brathwaitian library' to draw on for Part Two of the dissertation. I will now be moving on Part Two of the dissertation, in which I will analyse and discuss the works of three contemporary Anglocreole poets through the lens of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic as well as via the above analysed and discussed thematical concepts, and how they might assist us in analyzing and understanding the relation between human and more-than-human in the poems of Anthony Kellman, Jennifer Rahim, and Celia Sorhaindo, as marked by the continued coloniality of the Caribbean, and how they might also assist us in drawing out how each poet formulates a poetics of decolonial ecology.

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<sup>44</sup> In this context I find it crucial to mention Andreas Malm's article "In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature" (2018) which lends many vital perspectives on the geography of 'maroon ecology'.

# *Part Two*

# Chapter three

## Water poetics

*what filters & fuses in  
to you from yr landscape people happenings mysteries fossils histories time*  
(Brathwaite, 1994a)

*I am haunted by the sound of running water & the meaning of trickles of silver*  
(Brathwaite, 1994a)

*(iii) Bajan culture  
is this shared collective xperience on a rock of coral limestone, half-  
way from Europe, half-way (?back) to African (...)  
world of art & dream&meaning was for too long a time ignored,  
eroded, submerged; treated not only as if it did not exist but that  
it could not*  
(Brathwaite, 1994a)

## **A tidalectic analysis of water poetics in Anthony Kellman's *Watercourse* (1990) and *Limestone* (2008)**

In Part One of this dissertation, I explored how Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing allows for a decolonial ecological perception of experience that functions as a counter-poetics to the colonial perception of the Caribbean. In Chapter One I analysed his poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic and provided three points of tidalectic perception that function as counter-poetics to the colonialist perception of time, place, and History writing. Drawing on this, Chapter Two engaged with five thematical concepts gleaned from Brathwaite's writing, that all thematized the catastrophic as well as reparative histories of human and more-than-human relations in the Caribbean archipelago. Ultimately, Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing brings about new epistemic considerations of how human and more-than-human relationships are constituted in the Caribbean, and how these relationships are marked by the continued coloniality of the archipelago. how we might perceive poetic expression as a reflection of socio-geographic, geological as well as cultural and linguistic circumstances.

I will now go into Part Two of the dissertation, in which I will analyse and discuss three contemporary Anglocreole poet's work via the 'Brathwaitian library' that I developed in Part One. I will begin each of the following three chapters (Chapter Three, Four and Five) by highlighting which tidalectic points of perception and thematical concepts from Brathwaite the reader should keep in mind when engaging with my analysis, hence underscoring the way in which Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing and his concepts can be viewed as lenses one can look through when reading other contemporary Caribbean poet's work and how they engage with both the catastrophic and reparative histories of human and more-than-human relations in the archipelago.

In this chapter I will examine how the geologic, geographic, socio-geographic, and socio-cultural water poetics of Barbados are filtered through and fused with both the island Barbados and the characters presented in two collections by Barbadian poet, author, musician and literary scholar, Anthony Kellman. I will do so by approaching Kellman's work via Brathwaite's three tidalectic points of perception (Chapter One) as well as by employing the thematical concept 'submerged mother(s)' from Brathwaite's writing as a point of comparison.

My analysis will be divided into two interlinked parts. The first will mainly be dedicated to Kellman's *Watercourse* (1990) and analyzing the various representations of water, both salt and fresh, that appear in this collection. To do this, I will particularly engage the tidalectic perception on histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers (see Chapter One, section Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing) as well as with the thematical concept of the 'submerged mother(s)'.

In my analysis I will bring this point of tidalectic perception in histories writing as well as the thematical concept into a dialogue with cultural theorist and hydrofeminist Astrida Neimanis' conceptualization of bodies of water (Neimanis, 2017). Neimanis asks us to consider ourselves as bodies of water, both in a biological sense but also as a philosophical, embodied concept. Considering ourselves as bodies of water, containers almost, through which the waters of other bodies, both human and more-than-human, are constantly streaming through, we become more receptive to understanding our deep dependence on the world around us, and thereby, hopefully, more caring in our attending to it (Neimanis, 2017). Here poetry, I argue, plays a pivotal role since, according to Neimanis: "What water *is* is inextricable from how we imaginatively produce it. (...) It is a substance but it is also an idea. To ask what is water is thus to implicitly ask: what is water, in this place at this time?" (Ibid., 157)

The second part of this chapter will be dedicated mainly to Kellman's latest collection, his epic long-poem *Limestone – An Epic Poem of Barbados* (2008). For this section I will engage particularly with the tidalectic perception of time as a continuous washing over or dragging back as well as with the tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining (see Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place). In keeping with my explorative question as presented in the Introduction I will ask and attempt to answer the question: How can the poetic-theoretical tools provided by Brathwaite help us understand the representation of the relation between human(s) and water(s) in the poems of Anthony Kellman as marked by the continued coloniality of Barbados and the Caribbean archipelago? And how, if at all, does Kellman formulate new decolonial ecologies of the archipelago?

### **The ravenous waves of Cattlewash beach**

Kellman takes the small, limestone island of Barbados as the starting point in most of his poetic publications.<sup>45</sup> His collection *Watercourse* (1990) dedicates itself particularly to the multiplicity of both sea- and freshwaters of the island: From the furious waves on the East side of the island (see "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea"), the under currents and the devious tides (see "Tropical Graveyard"), to the river water that trickles down from Mount Hillaby (see "Watercourse"), the heavy rain that falls in the months of summer (see "After the Rain") and the cool pools of fresh water in Harrison's Cave (see "Sea Island"). However, in *Watercourse* Kellman does much more than simply describe these various bodies of water of Barbados. The poet also plays with how these bodies of water are connected, as the title *Watercourse* indicates, by layering them on top of each other, creating a form of 'watery palimpsest', in which poetic

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<sup>45</sup> Other publications in which Kellman examines the watery sites of Barbados could include his novel *The Coral Rooms* (1994) and his two poetry collections *The Long Gap* (1996) and *Wings of a Stranger* (2001). While the three are all excellent examples of Kellman's water poetics, I have excluded them from this chapter due to considerations of space and analytical focus.

imagery leaks and seeps between the poetic layers of his authorship: from poem to poem within the collection, but also across Kellman's other publications. This creates poetic connections to his own later work, as well as other major Caribbean poetic contributions, via his repeated utilization of various water metaphors and imagery. Spanning over just 64 pages, including a brief introduction, a short glossary and author bio in the end, Kellman presents his readers with a Barbados full of watery contradictions and inspirations.

Let us begin with the first body of water we encounter in Kellman's *Watercourse*. The four-stanza introductory poem entitled "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea" begins in a type of 'watery media-res', plunging us directly into the wild sea of Cattlewash beach on the south side of Barbados. In this poem, the waves are depicted as lions that are attacking the shore with their claws and teeth, digging deeper and deeper into it:

Roaring, the lions raise their brazen  
claws and dig deep into the shore. Non-stop,  
these carnivorous whiteheads chop  
and plough, splaying across the sand. (Kellman, 1990, 3)

Here the violent hunt is an invasion of the shore. This depiction of the waves as ravenous predators brings a quite literal meaning to the standardized phrase on erosion of the shoreline: the sea is eating away at the shore. In this chaotic scenery an 'I' suddenly appears. We never hear how, when, or why the I of the poem wades into the sea, we just hear of the I's struggle with the violent waves while in it. In other words, the seawater engulfs both the I and the readers from the beginning. But whereas the waves' violence was introduced in the first stanza as being directed at the shore, in the second stanza it is directed at the human body:

The routed pebbles rattle  
like bones around my ankles.  
One, sharpened by time  
and the water's grinding stone,  
slices me. I groan and whine,  
bending, clapping saltwater to my ankle bone. (Kellman, 1990, 3)

The 'I' cuts his ankle on a sharp pebble and as he<sup>46</sup> reaches for it, pain-stricken, his hands accidentally clasp "saltwater to my ankle bone". This, I will argue, can be read as a violent entry of the sea into the body of the 'I': the saltwater of the sea enters the 'I's' bloodstreams, and his body is thereby not only engulfed by the seawater around him, but permeated by it as well. This permeation in part corresponds to Brathwaite's considerations of Barbadian culture and his tidalectic point of perception of histories writing. In Brathwaite's consideration on the tidalectic there is also a permeance between human body and water, this idea of Barbadian culture as that which "filters & fuses in / to you [the poet] from yr landscape people happenings mysteries fossils histories time" (Brathwaite, 1994, 86), but it is much less violent than here on Kellman's Cattlewash beach, where the man is also wounded by waves.

The forceful entry of the seawater into the human body is analogous with other islander poets and their devotion to seawater as an inherently significant part of their bodily being. Consider for example, the late Fijian writer and scholar of Pacific Islands, Teresia Teaiwa's exclamation on the importance of the sea for island people: "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood"<sup>47</sup> which is quoted in the beginning of Epeli Hau'ofa's pivotal essay "The Ocean in Us" (1998). Both Kellman and Teaiwa highlight pain as that which binds the saltwater of the sea to the human body. In Kellman's poem the saltwater of the sea forces itself beyond the porous limits of the skin via violence and pain ["the water's grinding stone, / slices me. I groan and whine, / bending, clapping saltwater to my ankle bone."] whereas in Teaiwa's poetic exclamation the saltwater of the sea does not enter the human body through pain, but reveals itself in moments of either pain or struggle through two other saltwater based liquids that exude from the human body, namely tears and sweat ["We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood"]. However, the "routed pebbles" that "rattle like bones" around the 'I's ankle also insinuate an affiliation with the Middle Passage, and the image of the bones of the enslaved who died during the passing.

In Kellman's poem the pain of the saltwater is not just historically, but also phenomenologically present. Here it is the tactile, bodily sensations that arise when the individual is struck down by saltwater, that fills the poetic imagination, however the historical pain affiliated with the Atlantic, seems to haunt the imagery as well. This connection between both bodily and historical pain and the

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<sup>46</sup> I use the pronoun he to characterize the narrator, despite of the fact that a gender is never mentioned in this specific poem. However, the image of a drowning man on Cattlewash Beach is repeated through-out much of Kellman's poetry writing and is later described as being the father of the author who died in those waves, and I therefore choose to apply the pronoun he in this context as well, to highlight the consistency in Kellman's writing and his repeated return to that same traumatic scene.

<sup>47</sup> To any reader with a particular interest in the relation between blood and saltwater in Pacific literature I recommend reading chapter four in DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019).



waves of Cattlewash beach is continued, in the representation of the famous boulders of Barbados in the poem's fourth stanza that reads:

In this primal place bannered  
by the flowing hair of seagrape,  
the boulders, choiceless labourers, hold  
their impervious wake.  
The water pelts its deadly jabs  
and scathed rocks are cornered.  
The boulders eyesockets weep crabs.  
(Kellman, 1990, 3)

These immovable and humanized victims of the wave's deadly jabs are furtherly anthropomorphized by their ability to weep, as the waves force their small inhabitants, the crabs who live in the holes, to escape from their hollows to seek shelter elsewhere. And in the final stanza of the poem a middle-aged man, about to drown in the "ravenous mouths" of the sea, is presented before the entire scene is dissolved into a chaotic soundscape of the seas howling, roaring, and ploughing:

Trapped in this shout  
of salty ravenous mouths,  
a middle-aged man flays his small arms all about,  
and the wind howls, and the sea  
roars, and the waves plough—  
a blight in this geography.  
(Kellman, 1990, 3)

The blight in the geography might be the wild shore of Cattlewash, it might be the man, who has waded into the waves of the sea and is now being devoured by it, or it might be the Middle Passage, that infiltrated the shore with its painful histories of human drowning. The poem ends in a chaos of watery sounds – howls and roars and ploughs – and the man's voice of desperation is nowhere to be found. The very epistemological concept of geography, earth-writing, as a human practice is dissolved, and a new, more-than-human wor(l)d-maker of the shore emerges. In the two final stanzas we see a tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, but to an almost

extreme, violent degree. Here the actual narrator of Cattlewash beach is not the man, who foolishly enters the ravenous waters, but rather the waves themselves.

This is also clear from a narratological point of analysis. Suddenly, the first-person narrator, who we encountered in the second stanza, is no longer trapped in the waters, but has completely disappeared, and left us with an impartial third person narrator in the third and fourth stanza, who is merely an observer of the middle-aged drowning man. The narrative position moves from being outside the waters in the first stanza, to inside in the second, and then outside again in the final two – almost as if getting pulled in and out of the poem by the waves themselves, which dictate the poetic narration completely. I argue, that in Kellman’s poetic vision of Cattlewash beach the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers is not just present, it is also reconfigured as a more violent practice. This reflects how Brathwaite’s tidalectic perception of histories writing often included the human, but at times as a porous entity, through which histories of the more-than-human would stream. As we saw in Chapter One:

The dream of a tidalectic way of writing the Caribbean that Brathwaite is putting forward here, is presented through an assemblage of environmental and ecological more-than-human entities and their histories. (...) At times it is figured as the more-than-human inhabitants having their own voices, and other times it is figured as if the more-than-human inhabitants as streaming through the poet, who emerges almost as a porous entity, who is merely a form of vessel that conveys their meaning and intent. (46)

In Kellman’s “Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea” the waves of the sea emerge as the ultimate more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, in that they are both shaping the physical shorescape, as well as drowning out the human voice, making themselves the only audible voice. Thereby Brathwaite’s tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers is also in part challenged in Kellman’s poem, where the sea is encroaching on the shore, leaving less and less dry land to stand on. Indeed, the colonialist perception of History writing, that not only seeks to centre the singular, Western perception of “History (with a capital "H")”, as Glissant calls it, but also insists that the human is the only real narrator of history, is clearly contested in this poem.

The implicit engagement with the painful histories of the enslaved who drowned during the Middle Passage, a theme and motif in Kellman’s writing we shall return to later in this chapter, insists that a multitude of histories about the Caribbean shores must be told. But there is also a physical submerging of the man’s voice, that marks a new kind of narrative that is dominated by the violence of the waves. Indeed, this is a different vision of submergence from the one illustrated by Brathwaite’s

thematical concept of the submerged mother(s) (Chapter Two, section Submerged mother(s)). Here, in Kellman's poem "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea", the human is being pushed beneath the audible surface, in the same manner as the submerged mother(s), but this is not done by colonial forces, but rather by the sea itself, which drowns out the man's voice, thereby allowing itself to become the only voice that can be heard on the shore. However, as we shall see later in this chapter, other aspects of the submerged mother(s) also emerge later in Kellman's writing.

I argue, that in Kellman's poetic vision of Cattlewash beach there is no room for the human voice. Thereby the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers is both present but also challenged, in that in Kellman's poetic vision the human and the more-than-human do not co-write or co-tell the histories of the shore, rather the waves insist on being the only voice that can be heard. The poem ends in a watery roar as the sea encroaches on the Barbadian shore, carving away at the semblance of solid ground to stand on. Thus, we begin this collection with the complete obliteration of a human voice and the destruction of our imagined terrestrial safety.

### **Porous bodies in rakish seas**

In Kellman's *Watercourse* the Barbadian shore and the Atlantic Sea that surrounds the small, porous limestone island, is presented not just as a place where new epistemological considerations arise, as on Brathwaite's Brownes beach that inspires the tidalectic, but rather as a place where human-beings are engulfed and violently permeated by the saltwater around them. While this is a quite forceful vision in Kellman's poem, that in part adds a more frightening dimension to the tidalectic perception on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, there are perhaps also epistemic considerations to be gained from this consideration of permeation by saltwater.

In her book *Bodies of Water* (2017) Astrida Neimanis argues that we should attempt to consider bodies of water as a constructive way of understanding our human interconnectedness with other biotic and abiotic entities in the world and to act more caringly and responsibly towards these, even when they might seem far removed from our own bodies of water (Neimanis, 2017, 170). A dedication to water, as Neimanis argues, is the ontological and epistemological counter-thesis to an Anthropocentric way of being and thinking (Neimanis, 2017, 12). According to Neimanis, to think with water, or to think of ourselves as bodies of water, also relieves us from the constraints of the culture-nature dichotomy:

Bodies as bodies of water are themselves milieus for other bodies and other lives that they will become as they relinquish their own: human bodies ingest lake bodies, lake bodies are replenished by rain bodies, rain bodies inhale ocean bodies, ocean bodies slake fish bodies, and fish bodies feed whale bodies, which eventually sink

to the seafloor to be swallowed up again by the ocean's dark belly. (...) bodies of water undo the idea that bodies are necessarily or purely human. Our watery relations in/as a more-than-human hydrocommons thus challenge an anthropocentrism that privileges embodiment as a human attribute. (Neimanis, 2018, 56)

Brathwaite's framing of Barbadian culture and tradition as being that which "filters & fuses in/to you" and Kellman's porous human body trapped in the waves of Cattlewash beach, support obvious connections to Neimanis' argument on thinking with bodies of water as an alternative to Anthropocentric epistemologies and ontologies. Accordingly, moving with Neimanis' formulation on the human body as a body of water, that is constantly being made and re-made by the various waters that filter through it and fuse with it, new insights are opened up in relation to both Brathwaite's tidalectic perception on histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, as well as Kellman's violent vision of the Barbadian shore as a place where the human voice is completely drowned out.

In Kellman's "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea" the Barbadian shore defies all colonialist-tourist desires for a pleasant shorescape, and instead reveals the watery histories of human pain, both current and the histories of pain felt by the enslaved who died during the Middle Passage. However, in Brathwaite's writing on the Barbadian shores we see, that being a body permeated by Barbadian waters does not necessarily entail being physically present in Barbados but appears almost as a state of mind. In a section from *Barabajan Poems* (1994) Brathwaite describes how he dreamt himself back into the state of being in Barbados, at Brownes Beach while sick with malaria in Ghana, during the seven-year period he spend in the African country, thousands of kilometres away from his birth island:

I wish you to vision me five thousand miles away on the other end of the Middle Passage/ but about to turn the corner back to Brownes Beach and Mile&Quarter. For is here, high up in the forests of the Volta, with my first real attack of malaria & dreaming, within the miasma, of water & river & coastline & blue/green & whitewater breaker & ocean, that I saw, in the dream, as it were, not Elmina, not Accra, not Keta, not Lomé, not Lagos, but the sea & not just the sea but *my* sea Brown'(s) Beach & the morning & the meaning of *home* with which I began, I begin and that now – I knew – I could sing — (Brathwaite 1994, 82 – 83)

In this section Brathwaite attempts to bring Brownes Beach, the place in which his poetic identity and the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode first developed (see Chapter One), to life via this assemblage of watery sites: water in blue, green, and white, river, coastline, breaker, and ocean, creating an imagined Barbados that is never fully comprehensible, but that seems to exist in its ever-shifting watery formations. The repeated (&) between every named body of water gives the impression of a continuous flow of water that never ceases but is always adding more watery layers to it. In other words, a multiplicity of water

sites, including the ocean, coastline and river are being created and re-created and re-connected in the mind of the poet repeatedly. The meaning of home, that Brathwaite himself italicizes in the quote, is never fully there, it is never anchored down, but goes on in a seemingly endless accumulation of and's. Even the last sentence of this sequence refuses to punctuate itself. Instead, the poet inserts a long dash (—), thereby evoking the sense of an extended sound that is the poet's song.

If we compare this section from *Barabajan Poems* to Kellman's "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea" or to *Watercourse* as a collection, we see a similar accumulation of water sites in Kellman's poetry. The same phenomenology of tugging and pulling by the Atlantic are present in the following three poems, "Insomnia" (10), "Barbadian" (11) and "Beached" (12), that almost function as a poetic triad, in which a Barbadian sense of homelessness is portrayed via the image of the Barbadian human being as a sea creature that has no permanent home, except from in the rakish sea that surrounds the island:

My partner slipped into the night before me / like saltwater over the stern / or those vacillating groupers  
which all night evaded us, / our feet wearied by the long haul of the sea. (Kellman, 1990, 10)

I come back again, the Barbadian castaway tumbling / across those rakish seas. // Worlds overlap / whirl in  
arcs of islands / There is only the grey mass of twilight / and nothing's fixed in one place (Kellman, 1990, 11)

The sea, swollen with our dark history, steadily turns / its gilded pages. (...) /I rise and pace. / Creature of  
land and sea, I have no permanent home. (Kellman, 1990, 12)

In all three poems the first-person narrator is defined by the movements of the sea, the rising and hauling of the tide, similar to how the poet's body is getting tugged and pulled by the various waters, in his feverish dream many, many miles away, in *Barabajan Poems*. To this extent both Brathwaite and Kellman also engage with Elizabeth DeLoughrey's previously discussed definition of Caribbean identity as being both rooted and routed (DeLoughrey, 2007), as well as Gilroy's consideration of the Black Atlantic as a form of oceanic counter-narrative to modernity's inherent desire for ethnically exclusive definitions of national belonging (Gilroy, 1993; 2003 – see also DeLoughrey, 2017 for commentary on Gilroy). In Kellman and Brathwaite's writing these two homophones are presented in a more tactile sense, since both Kellman and Brathwaite's 'T's seem to be defined by the movements of the waters that both surround the island and filter through it.

However, Brathwaite's occasionally idealized envisioning of the importance of the waves and tides of the sea as a source of poetic inspiration, something that creates a poetic voice and calls the poet home, seems challenged directly in Kellman's envisioning of the drowned-out voice in "Cattlewash:

The Cruel Sea”, where the sense of rootedness, is in part problematized. In Kellman’s vision the Atlantic with its roaring waves of seawater do not just filter and fuse through you, it engulfs you, pulling you further and further out. When Kellman writes on “nothing’s fixed in one place” (Kellman, 1990, 11) and to have “no permanent home” (Ibid., 12), the poet is also alluding to a kind of tidalectic homelessness that in part distinguishes itself from DeLoughrey’s idea of roots and routes as interlinked in the Caribbean. This differentiation is one that will become increasingly important as his authorship develops, and which we shall return to later in part two of this chapter, where Kellman’s 2008 collection *Limestone* is analysed.

In these poems from Kellman’s *Watercourse* we almost see a merging of tidalectic perception on histories writing and the tidalectic perception of place as that which emerges through continuous acts of sustaining. The sea is described by Kellman as a book, “The sea swollen with our dark history / (...) turning its gilded pages” (Kellman, 1990, 12), thereby bringing a literalness to the tidalectic perception on histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. But the sea with its waves and hauling tides is also that which pulls and tugs at the human, creating a sense of homelessness in the ‘I’ of the poems, who is always routed, but never rooted. Thereby there is no opportunity for the ‘I’ of the poems to create a proper tidalectic sense of place, via continuous acts of sustaining, since the sea is constantly pulling him away from the island as a terrestrial space. The sea becomes that which defines the histories of the ‘I’ as well as the island, and which prevents any kind of “permanent home” (Kellman, 1990, 12).

Although the sea is a powerful force, which prohibits any sustaining of a home in Barbados, the other waters of the island are far from threatening and powerful, but rather threatened in their continued existence, by the encroaching sea water and the heat of the sun. In *Watercourse* Kellman repeatedly portrays the constant struggle between the scarce supply of freshwater sources and the overwhelming saltwater, which threatens to set the island and its inhabitants off balance. As formulated by Neimanis, when humans begin to intermingle with the global water cycles, by increasing sea-level temperatures, acidification in the oceans, controlling and re-directing freshwater sources, and many other factors, the saltwater-freshwater balance is challenged, sometimes resulting in catastrophic consequences (Neimanis, 2017, 160) This is especially true for smaller island societies, such as Barbados, that are not only surrounded by saltwater, but are also highly dependent on vulnerable freshwater cycles, that are under increasing pressure due to rising temperatures and prolonged dry seasons (Pulwarty et al., 2010; Karnauskas et al., 2018). Neimanis writes that “as warmer temperatures result in higher amounts of water vapour into the atmosphere, the water cycle is intensifying – meaning that what is wet becomes wetter, while the dry turns to dust” (Neimanis, 2017, 161). It is this notion of the “wet becoming wetter” and

the “dry turning to dust” that is so compellingly present in both *Watercourse* as well as Brathwaite’s *Mother Poem*, and which underlines the delicate balance between the various bodies of water in the island that is under threat. In Kellman’s collection this is expressed by the portrayal of the sun’s beating rays, the rising temperatures and the resulting droughts that are a recurring theme in many of the poems:

Outside my window the sun’s syringes hover / persistent as drug pushers. / Lord, what have I done? / When is this drought going to break? (10)

Heat heat heat / of my anguish, of my pain / Beat beat beat / of the broken sun in my brain // Earth’s heart pounds (35-36)

The sun’s deep rays keep coming /and, hearing the final drainage-drop, / you drink the warm air / and forget the rain. (56)

Island / is a womb of a cave / Island / is a wave inside me / By the seashore, I will come back again / and the pain of the strain of the rain in my heart / will be no more (57)

And while the freshwater is scarce, threatened under the beating heat of the sun, the saltwater from the Atlantic Ocean seems to be constantly threatening to break the barriers and flood the island and all its inhabitants, human and more-than-human, out to sea. The Atlantic Sea is portrayed as a graveyard – and a greedy one that seeks to constantly expand its mortality count:

there, where the undercurrent pulled / away your feet and tugged your teeth, / there, in the frothing pounding // pounding blood, sand, and saltwater. (41)

The sea vomits and reswallows its cargo of dead bodies, / The bones of the reef tremble and howl (60)

As with “Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea”, in *Watercourse* the Atlantic Sea is not a friendly ally for an epistemological expansion of one’s perceived connectedness to the surrounding world. Instead, the sea is a violent force that forces itself beyond the bodily borders of the human, and threatens to dissolve it, into nothing but a frothing pulsation of blood, sand, and saltwater. Again, the image of the ancestral enslaved, the sea’s “cargo of dead bodies” reminds the reader of the gruesome histories of the Middle Passage, and even the coral reefs tremble under the threatening force of the Atlantic.

In essence, in Kellman's *Watercourse* we see how the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers emerges in the roaring waves of the Atlantic Sea, that take over the narrative on Cattlewash Beach, completely drowning out the human voice and permeating the body. Here the Barbadian shore does not just reveal itself as a place of poetic inspiration, but as a place of destructive forces. Thereby Kellman's poem also adds complexity to Brathwaite's tidalectic point of perception on histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers: what if human histories writing is not dependent, but rather drowned out by the voices of the sea? We also see how tidalectic place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining is suspended or made impossible, due to the tugging and pulling of the human bodies, that are never allowed to settle in the island, but are instead subsumed by the waters of the Atlantic. And lastly, in the portrayal of the scarce fresh water in the island and the violent waves of the Atlantic, we come to see how Kellman bring together the colonial and ecological histories of the island, aligning the readers of Kellman with the struggles of living in a small island surrounded by saltwater, yet drained of freshwater – a place in which “the wet is getting wetter, while the dry is turning to dust” (Neimanis, 2017, 161).

However, in Kellman's *Watercourse* the movements of the sea is also what drags the narrator back to his home, “Island / is a wave inside me / By the seashore, I will come back again” (Kellman, 1990, 57), and the sea therefore also functions as an inescapable fate, that permeates the body and mind of the narrator, and tugs and pulls at him, just as in Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems* in which the sound of the sea “takes me back & drags me tidalectic” (Brathwaite, 1994, 184). In this notion we see the slow emergence of a tidalectic perception of time as a continuous washing over or dragging back (see Chapter One, section Colonialist time/Tidalectic time) and how this merges with a tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining (see Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place). And it is this consideration of time that is expanded upon in Kellman's epic long-poem *Limestone* (2008) which requires a closer reading.

### **Dragging coral bones**

*Limestone* (2008) is, as the sub-title *an epic of Barbados* also indicates, Kellman's longest and perhaps most ambitious publication. Published 28 years after *Watercourse*, this almost 200-page long epic poem relays the histories of the small limestone island, from the colonial genocide of the islands' Indigenous population, the Amerindians, up until the present day, all in Kellman's characteristic tuk-tuk style.<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> For more on the tuk music style that Barbados is known for see Curwen Best's two articles “Rhythm of Tuk: A Barbadian Style” or “Barbadian Aesthetics: Towards a Conceptualization”. Kellman himself has also written on the topic in the article “Projective Verse as a Mode of Socio-Linguistic Protest”.



collection details the lives and perhaps more importantly in relation to tidalectic place, the movements of the islands' many different inhabitants. From the arrival of the British in 1627, to the arrival of the enslaved Bussa<sup>49</sup> from the ancestral African continent to the present day where a young man with the fitting name Livingstone travels to England to study, and a teacher, Levinia, leaves her home to try her luck in the States. The collection employs a wide range of narrative voices as it moves up and through the history of the island, attempting to capture the multiplicity of the island that forms this so-called 'Little England' by employing the multilayered narrative structure of polyphony (Anspach, 2012). However, through all these depicted lives and narrative voices, there is but one main character of the entire poetic epos: the island of Barbados itself. By situating this collection as *an epic of Barbados*, Kellman is inscribing this work into a longstanding epic writing tradition, where the most famous epics tend to focus the narrative on a particular human or non-human (God or semi-God) hero or main protagonist, which is often reflected in the title of the epic<sup>50</sup>. In Kellman's epic it is the abiotic material constitution of the island, limestone, that is set as the main character, while different characters from various historical periods filter in and out of the narrative. Hence, in Kellman's 2008 collection the limestone as a mineral and a more-than-human materiality which is usually rendered as "outside the sphere of life" (DeLoughrey, 2019, 136), emerges as both full of life as well as poetic and narrative intent. Consequently, in Kellman's *Limestone* we see a turn to the abiotic, stratigraphic constitution of the island as that which emerges as a tidalectic more-than-human wor(l)d-maker (see Chapter One, section Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing).

Limestone is a motif that is equally present in British fiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it is in Barbadian poetry. In his comparative reading of limestone as a literary motif in English poet and philosopher John Cowper Powy's writing and Kamau Brathwaite's *Mother Poem* Chris Campbell argues that the basis for Brathwaite's Caribbean experience is the geology of Barbados, and that his understanding of historical and social relations is chiselled into the landscape of limestone (Campbell, 2020, 10). Similarly, Arthur Rose in his article "Limestone Poetics in Adrian Stokes, W. H. Auden and Kamau Braithwaite" (2022) insists, that a 'limestone poetics' might remind us that "relations with the lithic are not simply vertiginous encounters with either deep time or capitalist exploitation; they can also creep up on us, in familiar encounters with mineral homes: places whose landscape we have always lived

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<sup>49</sup> Bussa was an enslaved West African man who was transported to Barbados in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to work on Bayley's Plantation. In April 1816 he allegedly led the biggest slave rebellion in Barbadian history. To this day he remains a national hero. A statue of him was erected in 1985 in Bridgetown and in 1998 the Parliament of Barbados named him one of the eleven national heroes of Barbados. For more on the slave rebellion and Bussa as a figure of freedom see Lambert's article "Part of the blood and dream': surrogation, memory and the National Hero in the postcolonial Caribbean" (2007)

<sup>50</sup> Earlier examples could be Epic of Gilgamesh (approximately 2100 – 1200 BC), The Odyssey (approximately 700 BC), The Aeneid (approximately 29 – 19 BC), Beowulf (approximately 700 – 1000 AD), The Saga of Grettir the Strong (approximately 1400 AD) and many others.

in, but scarcely realized we knew” (Rose, 2022, 14). Campbell and Rose perform a comparative analysis between John Cowper Powys’ novel *Maiden Castle* (1936), W.H. Auden’s poem “In Praise of Limestone” (1948) and Brathwaite’s *Mother Poem*. But while both mention Kellman’s *Limestone* in passing, neither of them engages with it as an object of analysis, thereby also disregarding the analytical potential in engaging with Barbadian limestone as more than just a literary motif.<sup>51</sup> I will argue, that in Kellman’s epic, limestone emerges as a motif, similarly to in *Mother Poem* as analysed by Campbell and Rose, but also as a more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, that remembers and tells the various watery histories of Barbados. This is present already in chapter two, in which a yearning for a time prior to any human interaction on the island is vividly described, and where the island itself appears as a living, breathing, and singing entity:

Now lost from human hands,  
the island waits,  
faintly choralling breath a hiss

of surf.

This rest, this pause  
restores to soil its  
virgin vigour, tempts lustful eyes.

(Kellman, 2004, 12)

As foreshadowed in the final lines of the second stanza, this tempting scenery is what will later lead the island to its ecological and socio-economic exploitation. The small and relatively flat landscape made the island ideal for cultivating sugarcane, and at one point, Barbados housed one of the largest sugarcane industries in the world, despite its humble size (Handler, 1998, 127). This production also led to an immense demand for enslaved that could tend to the fields, and between the years 1650 and 1807 approximately 350.000 enslaved Africans went ashore on the small island. To lend some comparison, in the same period, the entire British North American territory imported 375.000 enslaved Africans (Handler, 1998, 129). These voices will also play a pivotal part in *Limestone*, where Kellman, like in “Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea”, plays around with different narrative voices, that come together in the island, almost like a chorus of voices. However, the first human voice we encounter is the enslaved Bussa, who becomes the first-person narrator in chapter five and six, narrating how his people suffered during

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<sup>51</sup> It should however be noted that Campbell refers to limestone as “the structuring principle” behind Brathwaite’s *Mother Poem* and thereby grants it a particular significance that goes beyond an analysis of it as a motif. However, he does not engage with it as a narrative structure, which is where this engagement differs.

the plantation society in Barbados. Here Kellman again, just as in *Watercourse*, turns to the imagery of saltwater as that which ties together human and ecological suffering:

Yet, it hurt me to hear the cries,

Creole and African –  
me own dying kind  
grating and threshing my spirit.

(...)

Freedom's redeemed with sacrifice

and sweat of mothers, fathers,  
children: all our sweat  
running together like a flood.

(Kellman, 2008, 54 – 55)

The cries and the sweat of the enslaved who are suffering on the island are described as “running together like a flood”, creating a powerful imagery of joined pain as a mode for collective action. The flood of tears and sweat could be read as a forewarning of the slave rebellion that is about to erupt on the island. The following chapter depicts the battle between the enslaved and the British, in which 50 enslaved were killed including Bussa himself, and where 214 were executed afterwards. However, in part six, after the battle is lost and Bussa has died, we move into the spirit-world of Barbadian histories. Here Bussa, from the afterlife, tells the histories of enslavement and pain, and these are described as encapsulated in the reef-bones of the ancestors whose spirits reside in the Atlantic Sea:

Over heavin broad-backed  
water with its reef-bones  
that clatter with my people's grief

ancient wings, with widest  
threshing urgency  
mount in dazzling immensity

(...)

My spirit grows heavy,  
But beating ancestral wings bear

the weight of my sorrow –  
an undertow sighing,  
breaking like the water below.  
(...)  
Lamenting ocean's sighing breast.

Laments, chants, prayers  
rise triumphant  
over reefs of ancestral bone.  
(Kellman, 2008, 60-62)

As the tears and sweat of the enslaved formed a flood of collective uprising, so is Bussa admitted to the collective space that is the “reefs of the ancestral bone” (62) after he passes away. Here Kellman is evoking the common trope of the bones of the enslaved who drowned during the Middle Passage as covering the Atlantic Sea floor, that feature in poetic works such as Derek Walcott's famous poem “The Sea Is History” (1978), Grace Nichols' *Startling the Flying Fish* (2006), Marlene NourbeSee Philip's *Zong!* (2008)<sup>52</sup>, American-Caribbean Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *DUB* (2020) and many others, and which is also present in *Watercourse*, as demonstrated in my analysis of the poem “Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea”. This trope is granted a particularly stratigraphic quality in Kellman and Philip's work, as the two poets share what I would call a poetics of layering or piling. In NourbeSe Philip's collection this poetics of layering or piling emerges through both the multiple narrative voices in the book<sup>53</sup> as well as through layering of letters on words on the visual book page, whereas in Kellman's *Limestone* it emerges through a thematic and metaphoric dedication, as well as through the polyp(honic) limestone narratives that are heard throughout the epic. However, in Kellman's *Limestone* the Atlantic Sea is not just filled with the bones of the enslaved ancestors as in Philip's work, this “heavin broad-backed / water with its reef-bones / that

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<sup>52</sup> Philip's engagement with this trope is particularly interesting, since she attends to the submerged, subaltern voices of the enslaved who died during the Middle Passage and attempts to “give a body, a materiality so to speak, to the lives that appear as the smallest of fragments within official archives.” (Sharpe, 2013, 466). Philip's engagement with the poetic page as a form of mineralogic construction, in which letters and words are piled onto the page in a manner that almost seem to imitate the stratigraphic layering of the Atlantic seafloor. Philip is thereby also much more experimental in her format than Kellman, who turns to thematic content, narration, and symbolism, rather than experimental form in line breaks and spacing to reveal his limestone poetics. However, due to space limitations and focus I will not dwell further on this comparison.

<sup>53</sup> I will argue that the polyphonic structure of *Zong!* is present in two characteristics: through a “polyphonic maelstrom” of multiple languages and sounds (Corio, 2014, 337), as well as through the mentioning of names of the enslaved who were drowned on the bottom of every page for the first part of the collection entitled “Os”. The coauthor of the book, Boateng, represents the multiple voices of the deceased ancestors.

clatter with my people's grief" (Kellman, 2008, 60), but the island itself is constructed on another calcium-based construction, the remains of polyps, seashells, and conch. These billions of tiny more-than-human agents, that have piled up over millennia and then have broken through the surface of the sea millions of years ago, and emerged, slowly, as the island we today know as Barbados. In that way, the bones of the enslaved who died during the Middle Passage and the bones of the millions of sea creatures, merge in the island of Barbados, creating an ecology of the "living-dead" (Kellman, 2008, 190), and an ever-present ancestry of the both human and more-than-human entities that gave, or were forced to give, their lives in the creation of the island.

This poetics of layering also corresponds to Brathwaite's submerged mother(s). (see Chapter Two, section Submerged mother(s)). Whereas in Kellman's previously analysed poem "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea" (1990) we saw how submergence was not related to the colonial forces as it was to the sheer force of the sea itself that drowned out the human voice, in *Limestone* the submerging of the ancestors' bones and voices emerges as a form of geopoetic archive. And so, with the employment and repetition of the coral-to-bone image in *Limestone* Kellman appears to be ascribing to an engagement with the potentiality of submergence as carrying a poetic capacity that is much closer to Brathwaite's consideration of the submerged mother(s) as a geophysical archive. However, as we shall come to see in the following section, this submerged archive of ancestral voices also appears to have a form of power over the characters in the collection.

### **A living-dead ecology**

As the epic develops, Barbados and the Atlantic Sea continue to be ever present as a tidalectic more-than-human wor(l)d-maker that shapes the way the histories of the epic are told. But the island also emerges as a gravitational force that continues to tug and pull at anyone who tries to leave it. It is in this configuration of Barbados as a gravitational force that we see a turn to the tidalectic perception of time as continuous dragging back or washing over. In some of the final chapters, the narrative is moves towards the present day, and here we encounter the character Levinia, a young schoolteacher who travels to the US with hopes of a brighter career than the one her birth-island can provide, and is continuously haunted by the island that calls her home:

But there were other voices in  
her head, the sound of coral stones  
all hissing, 'Lost.' Deep in her bones  
she felt her limestone island calling. (Kellman, 2008, 179)

In this passage some sort of collapse or dissolution between human and more-than-human is taking place: through the imagery of the limestone stone calling Levinia from deep inside her bones, the materiality of the island, consisting of the bones of millions of polyps, seashells, and corals, transgresses the boundary of their own habitat and moves into Levinia's body, calling her home from within. Once again, the abiotic more-than-human is granted both poetic and narrative agency. And this home-calling is so potent, that not even when Levinia tries to join the American-Caribbean community is she freed from the call:

But when pressed to join  
the Caribbean Club she found  
again an itch, a complex wound  
that rankling made her pine,

stung with the tang of memory's salt  
of plant, polyp, animal. Soon  
island voices piled like limestone  
on her dreams, her peace assault.  
(Kellman, 2004, 181)

By describing the island voices as those of "plant, polyp, animal" Kellman is granting narrative agency to these more-than-human entities, but he is also presenting them as voices of haunting island ancestry, that Levinia cannot escape from, no matter how hard she tries. They are part of her bones, part of her dreams. The line "island voices piled like limestone" (Ibid.) functions as a meta-comment for understanding the narrative construction of the collection, with its multiplicity of voices that are piled on top of each other, to create a thick yet porous narrative construction, in which the multiple histories of Barbados are filtered through the various narrative voices, both human and more-than-human, like water through limestone.

For Levinia these piled up ancestral voices, this "tang of memory's salt / of plant, polyp, animal" (Ibid.), is also what holds her back from truly committing to the American lifestyle she sought out when she left the island. Here memory is tied directly to the materiality of the island, the stratigraphic construction of limestone that is essentially piled up seashells and dead corals, this "living-dead ecology" as the narrator refers to it (Kellman, 2004, 190). But it is not just Levinia who seems to be constantly tugged and pulled at by the island. The young musician Livingstone feels just as trapped between his island ancestry and what he perceives to be a promising future in the former colony of England. Not

only is he listening for the “sounds of the sea” (Brathwaite, 1967, 57), the echo of seashells, the summons of conch, but he is also tired from fighting to stay afloat:

Chris’s words echoed like sea shells  
from other well-meaning mouths  
where was now the summons of the conch?  
A distant fading, a dying knell

His creole residue, he feels  
was holding him back; it was now  
a drag, tiring him like a sea-sloughed  
swimmer under scowling swells.

(...)

But in his head

were murmurs of plants, animals  
that should mean nothing to him any more.  
Oblique, unclear – he tried to ignore  
the rustling of their teasing calls.

(Kellman, 2008, 151)

It seems impossible for Livingstone, just as for Levinia, to escape the pleading calls of his limestone home. Similarly, in *Watercourse* Kellman in this passage returns to the imagery of the powerful seawater, yet here it is not drowning out the human character, but instead dragging or pulling the Barbadian characters back (“His creole residue, he feels / was holding him back; it was now / a drag, tiring him like a sea-sloughed / swimmer under scowling swells.”), to the island that they have sought to escape. For Brathwaite this tidalectic perception of time as a ‘dragging back’ was filled with both “meaning” and “moaning” (Brathwaite, 1994, 182), that seemed impossible to escape, however in *Limestone*, the characters are resisting this pulling back, refusing to get dragged along by the haunting calls of the limestone island, that seek them out when they are trying to live across the sea in the land of their former colonial masters. This also creates a rather complex sense of time and place in *Limestone*. It is not just time but also the island as a place that is dragging the characters back. As a result Kellman also reconfigures the tidalectic perception of time as a dragging back, and adds a spatial aspect to this, merging time and place in the repeated image of the island that pulls the characters back again and again. To add

to this idea of the return to Barbados as being both a spatial and a temporal matter, in *Limestone* death is deeply tied in with the calling of the home island. It takes his mother's passing for Livingstone to return to the "limestone rock" (Kellman, 157) where he was born. The same place where his father died, drowning in the waves on a beach day with the family, many years prior:

Again he recalls the day the sea  
sucked his father into the tides  
beyond the reefs. Alone, he died.  
He'd been swimming with the family.  
(...)  
The son wept with renewed grief,  
And back-dragging guilt broke like a wave.  
(Kellman, 2008, 129 – 130)

The image of the drowning man, that we first encountered in the very first poem from *Watercourse*, is re-invoked in Livingstone's story of how his father passed. And it is in this repeated image of the drowning father and a "dragging back" that we come to see a tidalectic perception of time evoked in Kellman's *Limestone*. Here the dragging of the sea becomes emblematic in the Barbadian poetic consciousness of both the poetic characters and their narrators, similarly to in Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems*. But as noted before, in Kellman's invocation of Barbados this dragging that the sea is performing is filled with violence and death. The "back-dragging guilt" (Kellman, 2008, 130), which resembles the waves as they pull back from the shore, is what holds Livingstone in a death-grip, and prevents him, in the beginning of chapter fifteen, from leaving the island, but also from staying and fully making a life for himself there: "How to live here? Or how to leave?" (Kellman, 2008, 127).

It is exactly this paradox, this entrapment of never fully living nor fully dying, that seems to have a hold on Livingstone. In true tidalectic form, we circle back, in these final passages of *Limestone*, to the same image that I began this chapter with – the drowning man in the poem "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea" in *Watercourse*. Returning to Wayde Compton's definition of the tidalectic as a palimpsestic re-writing of history and tidalectic time as a continuous dragging back or washing over (see Chapter One, section Colonialist time/Tidalectic time), we can read Livingstone's desire to move away from his past as an attempt at cutting himself free from his Barbadian roots. Livingstone's aspiration to leave his painful past behind him can be read as an exemplification of his implicit desire to be European or British, rather than Barbadian. He fools himself into believing that only by leaving the past can he move forward towards a brighter future, and so the quest to be British is linked to the colonialist conception of time as a forward



moving motion (see Chapter One, Colonialist time/Tidalectic time). However, the attempt to escape from the sorrow of his father's passing reveals itself to be not only futile, but destructive, leading Livingstone to feel like he is slowly succumbing to rising waters, drowning, just as his father did many years ago. Once he allows the waters of his home island to drag him back home, rather than fight against them, he is, at least in part, released from his torment. Thus, by engaging with tidalectic time as a continuous dragging back or washing over in *Limestone* we come to see how Livingstone, in order not to figuratively drown, must come to understand the past not as something to be gotten over, but as an inherent, inescapable part of himself.

It is also from this point of realization that the connection to his ancestors that perished during the Middle Passage must emerge. In the image of Livingstone as drowning due to his desire to move forward, and away from his Barbadian roots, the boundary between the past and the future is dissolved, similar to what occurs in the image of the coral bones of the ancestors, who continue to be a part of the materiality of the island. The painful past is never truly behind Livingstone, but always coming up from behind, washing over him, again and again, or dragging him back to his home island. Or, as Christina Sharpe potently writes: "In the wake the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe, 2016, 12). This might read as rather bleak depiction of tidalectic time as a dragging back or washing over which prohibits any form of development for the character Livingstone. However, despite being constantly in the wake of that cross-generational trauma that is his father's death and the perishing of his ancestors during the Middle Passage, there is also the potential promise of or at least hope for a better life for Livingstone engraved in the limestone ecology of Barbados.

As the epic poem comes to an end, Livingstone finally returns home for good, and here, on the shore that he previously condemned for taking his father from him, he finds a finality in seeing how the ecology of the limestone island is held together, by a polyphony of life and death, past and future, human and more-than-human:

Now blessed by coral's hissing cure  
They lie together hand in hand.  
(...)  
All over coral tree, traces  
of love, death, a rich complex fabric  
of two weaving quilting architects:  
bone upon bone of former races.  
(Kellman, 2008, 189)

The image of the bone upon bone of the ancestors, both human and more-than-human, illustrates the deep connection between geological, and socio-geographic histories of this porous island. And in the end, it is these intertwined material histories of different bones, that also lend the poly(p)honic structure to the epic itself. In some of the final passages these revelations are elevated to a meta-level of consideration, in which the multiplicity of voices that have been heard throughout the book, are brought forward as a “plural patchwork” of creole voices:

Here creole voices, black and white,  
and all else in between, in plural  
patchwork bless with carnival,  
each one same but yet unique.

Here the chance for true passion  
where reefs, corralling, recreate,  
unlike dream’s united state,  
fabled illusion, where metaphor is con.

(...)

Here within carnival’s bright inn,  
the rising forest of the sea,  
emblem of living-dead ecology

(Kellman, 2008, 190)

However one chooses to interpret the deictic “Here”, as being here on the shore as a more general space of tidalectic encounters, or here as in here on the Barbadian shores specifically, the shore emerges once again, as a place of both belonging and becoming – a place of continuous recreation (“where reefs, corralling, recreate”). In the poetics of Kellman’s *Limestone*, death and liveliness are not in opposition to each other, but filter and fuse in and through each other, in tidalectic time, pulling the poetic characters back and forth between the ancestral world, in both the socio-eco-and geo-historical sense, and the world of the now-living. Here, on the tidalectic shore of Barbados, the past is not something “to be gotten over” (Compton, 20) but instead filters into and fuses with the present. And so here, in some of the final stanzas of *Limestone*, we see a merging of the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers with the tidalectic perception of time as a dragging back or washing over. And in this merging, there appears to be some sort of hope in the constant becoming and re-

becoming, between two co-creating materials, water and limestone, and between past and present, always in the wake of the Middle Passage.

### Final remarks

I return to my initial question to summarize this chapter, asking: How is the relation between the human and the various water(s) of Barbados portrayed in Anthony Kellman's two collections and how has Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic tools, as developed in Part One, contributed to our understanding of this?

Firstly, by reading Kellman's two collections via an engagement with tidalectic time as a continuous washing over or dragging back, we come to see how Kellman quite literally engages with the waters of Barbados, both salt and fresh, as connectors to two levels of the painful past: the individual painful past of the poetic characters and the ancestral past of those who perished during the Middle Passage. The repeated image of the drowning man/father, which is present in both *Watercourse* and *Limestone*, comes to represent a cross-generational pain that is both personal (the father) as well as historical (the drowning of the enslaved ancestors during the Middle Passage), and one that brings a literalness to tidalectic time as a continuous dragging back or washing over (Chapter One, section Colonialist time/Tidalectic time). As is shown in the first poem of *Watercourse*, the roaring waves of the Atlantic Sea pull the characters back and forth, tugging their bodies to the point of almost tearing them apart, and it is the same water that pulls the back and forth in time in a continuous tidalectic movement. Here tidalectic time as a continuous dragging back merges with the violent waves of the Barbadian shore.

Secondly, by engaging with Brathwaite's concept of the 'submerged mother(s)' as a particular modality of the tidalectic in Kellman's water poetics we can track two levels of submergence in Barbados: those submerged voices of the enslaved ancestors who perished during the Middle Passage and the limestone polyps whose skeletons form the bones of the island. Here Kellman's writing provides us with an added layer to the otherwise common conception of the scattered pathway of human, specifically African, bones that mark the routes of the Middle Passage<sup>54</sup>, by also turning to the geological constitution of the island and revealing how the colonial histories of the Middle Passage are connected to, or perhaps even fused with, the geological constitution of the island. Indeed, while the painful colonial histories of the Middle Passage are of course never healed by a turning to deep time and geology, in Kellman's writing there is an invocation of an interspecies community, that might in part provide some sort of relief for the poetic characters. In Kellman's water poetics the thematical concept of the

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<sup>54</sup> I am of course here referencing African-American historian John Henrik Clarke's famous sentence: "If the Atlantic were to dry up, it would reveal a scattered pathway of human bones, African bones marking the various routes of the Middle Passage" from his introduction to artist, author and illustrator Tom Feelings' graphic novel *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* (1995).

submerged mother(s) take on a literal, tactile and geo-historical shape and this in part provides a resolution to the sorrow of the drowned father and ancestors, who will never return, but who are commemorated in the living-dead ecology that is represented by the coral-bones of the island.

Thirdly, on a meta-level, Kellman's two collections function as watery palimpsests, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, in that poetic imagery and scenes leak between them. This significantly imitates how the poet portrays Barbados as a leaky palimpsest, where the past is always rupturing, or more precisely flowing, through the present. And so Kellman's way of engaging intertextually with his own writing imitates the geological construct of the Barbados as a porous, leaky island, where the pain of the Middle Passage is always seeping into the present.

Both Brathwaite and Kellman reveal to us a Barbados in which land and water, human and more-than-human, poetic production and the island's geological constitution, flow in and through each other in ways that urge us to re-evaluate considerations of various bodies of water, both human and more-than-human, as separate from each other. Kellman's water poetics engages with a perception of tidalectic time that encourages a consideration of the dead and dying ancestors who perished during the Middle Passage, and bridges this with the struggling ecologies of the island, thereby uniting colonial and ecological histories of human and more-than-human exploitation in his portrayal of Barbados.

# Chapter Four

## Earth Poetics

*breathing air, the societies were successively amerindian, european, / creole. the amerindian several; the european various;  
the creole / plural / subsistent plantation maroon / multilingual multi-ethnic many ancestored / fragments / the unity is  
submarine / breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments/whole*

(Brathwaite, 1975a)

*The plantation does not contain all that is planted.*

(Brathwaite, 1975a)

*to save what we have left, to take back, if we can, some of what we've lost & spoiled / despoiled – before it is too late*

(Brathwaite, 1994a)

**A tidalectic analysis of earth poetics in Jennifer Rahim's *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002), *Redemption Rain* (2011), *Ground Level* (2014) and *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021)**

Thus far, this dissertation has dealt at length with how the tidalectic perception of experience reveals itself in relation to water. As we saw in the previous chapter on Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman's *Watercourse* (1990) and *Limestone* (2008) the tidalectic functions as a structuring principle in the meeting between the human body and other bodies of water. In Kellman's writing it was particularly the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers as well as the tidalectic perception of time as a continuous dragging back or washing over that was apparent. These tidalectic points of perception revealed themselves repeatedly on the shore of Barbados, a favorite topos of Kellman's, that embodied the coming and going that DeLoughrey would describe as the rooted and routed Caribbean identity, as well as the painful ancestral past of the Middle Passage.

In this chapter the discussion of roots and routes will continue to play out as a significant point of analysis, however, as will be demonstrated in the following sections, particularly the rooted part of Caribbean identity will be considered in a much more literal sense than in Chapter Three, as we move inland to the island of Trinidad, from which poet, author, literary critic and scholar, Jennifer Rahim, writes. I will engage with four of Rahim's collections, spanning over nineteen years: *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002), *Redemption Rain* (2011), *Ground Level* (2014) and *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021). Whereas in my analysis of Kellman's work the focus was on water poetics, the porous histories of Barbados and how they are influenced by the Atlantic and Caribbean Sea, while looking towards the geological histories of the island and its impact on the poetry that emerges from there, in this chapter I will be engaging with what I have called earth poetics in Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim's poetry. However, questions of submergence, here in relation to the terrestrial rather than the aquatic realm, will remain a focal point of analysis, and provide a point of contrast to Kellman's engagement with submergence.

In keeping with my explorative research approach, in this chapter I will consider what insights Brathwaite's writing and conceptualizations bring to understanding how the various 'earths' are portrayed Rahim's writing and ask the question: How can the poetic-theoretical tools provided by Brathwaite help us understand the representation of the relation between human(s) and earth(s) in the Jennifer Rahim's poems as marked by the continued coloniality of Trinidad and the Caribbean archipelago?

However, since this chapter also explores the heuristic values of engaging with the three tidalectic points of perception in a terrestrial poetic context, I will also implicitly be reading Rahim via an engagement with the tidalectic which can bring forth new perspectives on the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode that is not just related to the aquatic, but to the terrestrial realm as well. Indeed, there are

multiple examples in Rahim’s authorship in which she brings forward quite a literal tidalectic poetic vision. In the poem “Wherever I go...” from her latest collection *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021), the poet most noticeably writes of a Caribbean identity that is defined by the constant wavering between going and coming, (rooting and routing (DeLoughrey, 2007),) whilst also evoking the shore or the beach as the ultimate place of home-coming, quite similar to Brathwaite’s Browne’s Beach in Barbados (see Chapter One):

(...) we leave to find

what is left behind  
and that holds us,  
more than we know,

like a small beach  
has the ear of the great sea

and a trillion ebbs  
are never without returns.

This flow is the staying,  
though we depart. (Rahim, 2021, 56)

In this evoking of the ebbs, the shore as a space and the oxymoronic image of flowing and staying, (“This flow is the staying / though we depart”), Rahim is aligning her own poetics with that of Brathwaite’s, particularly if we adhere to DeLoughrey’s interpretation of the tidalectic as a routing and rooting (see Chapter One). We also see this tidalectic vision of rooting and routing in one of Rahim’s earliest collections, *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002), for example the poem “The Islander”, in which a conflation between the human umbilical cord, tree root and the waves of the sea, are juxtaposed through the repetition of the phrase “One must” that initiates each new stanza:

One must have a navel-string buried under  
a mango tree (...)

One must thrust roots deeper than teak  
(...)

One must have considered long  
the endless arrival of breakers  
to believe in a beauty bluer than the sea (Rahim, 2002, 36)

The imperative in the repetition of “One must” appears almost as an insistence on holding both the terrestrial root and the flowing of the sea inside oneself at the same time. To this extent Rahim’s poetics offers a very concrete understanding of the relationship between routing and rooting in her preoccupation with ‘planting’ as both a practical and a poetic practice. In the poem “An Independence Echo” from *Ground Level* it is the question of what constitutes home in the island space that allows for some tidalectic revelations about the cyclical nature of belonging in the Caribbean:

We reach – each; is there such a shore, an assurance, such a reach?  
(...)  
home is, is home, a home... finally? We.  
Or is... is it a wave, a waving out of  
reach, far from, near to, reach FOR the ST...  
ARS over... never... reverse back and begin? (Rahim, 2014, 36)

Here the punctuation, that marks the pauses and considerations of the narrator, and the continuous questioning, reveal the cyclical way home is constituted through motion, particularly the motion of the wave, as it approaches and retrieves from the shore. Here there is no ‘root’ in the biological sense, but rather a home which attempts to root the narrator, who instead seeks a sense of belonging through this back-and-forth motion, the waving out, reversing back and beginning once again. There is also a pointing outward and perhaps more importantly upwards, to the terrestrial objects above, in this case the stars, that are reminiscent of Brathwaite’s beloved “sea-sound moon” (Brathwaite, 1994, 182 – see Chapter One, section Colonialist time/Tidalectic time), that in collaboration with the Sun, the largest star of our universe, produces the ebbs and flows of his Brownes Beach.

These examples are only a small reflection of what can be read as quite explicit representations of tidalectic poetics within the four collections under consideration here. However, what I am interested in doing in this chapter, is examining the not so explicit examples, to see how Rahim utilizes and importantly re-works the tidalectic as a poetic-theoretic mode and brings it into a more terrestrially focused poetic realm. In this context the quite literal practice of rooting, the act of assisting or causing a plant to grow roots in soil, reveals itself as profoundly important in Rahim’s writing. In other



words, one could argue that Rahim brings a literalness to DeLoughrey's interpretation of the tidalectic that allows us to connect or reconfigure Brathwaite's seemingly aquatic based epistemology with a terrestrial one.

As in Chapter Three I will continue my engagement with Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic and the three points of tidalectic perception in relation to time, place and histories writing, whilst also including two thematical concepts from Chapter Two: 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' and 'the unity is submarine'. My analysis of Rahim's earth poetics in her four collections will point to three major socio-ecological disasters that spring from the earth: the prolonged and on-going disaster of the plantation society in Trinidad during the island's colonization, the sudden catastrophe of the 2010 earthquake of Haiti and lastly, the global planetary concern of CO2 emission into our atmosphere. To that effect, Rahim's earth poetics should be considered as spanning between the local soils of Trinidad and the global Earth – our planet within a larger galactic universe. Thus Rahim's earth poetics also articulates what DeLoughrey has referred to as “a multiscalar method of telescoping between space (planet) and place (island) in a dialectic or “tidalectic” way to see how they mutually inform each other.” (DeLoughrey, 2019, 2). I will begin my exploration of this “multiscalar” method with the smallest place in Rahim's work, in which she engages with the histories of planting in her home island.

### **Histories of yam**

Rahim's 2002 collection *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002) is a deep poetic dedication to colonial and decolonial histories of plants in the formerly British colony of Trinidad. A simple glance over the titles of the various poems reveals not only a devotion to the topic of plants and the plantation, but also to the role of plants as narrative agents: “About Seeds in Rich Soil”, “Tamarind Lesson”, “A Drive Through Green”, “Considering Bush”, “The Revolt of Yam”, “Wild Cane”, “When Buttercups Chime”, “The Feeling of a Tree”, “Walk Like Trees” and “A House-Plant Speaks: after reading the postmodern”. Here, Rahim's work can be ascribed to the tradition of especially female Anglocreole Caribbean author's dealings with agriculture, plants, gardens, and botany as a way of expressing colonial distress as well as global relationality, a thematic that literary scholar and postcolonial ecocritic, Isabel Hoving, has dealt with at length.<sup>55</sup> Some of these other works include Jamaican Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics*, Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden Book*, Irish-Trinidadian Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Jamaican-American Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Abeng*, just to name a few. In her work Rahim turns to the provision grounds of her formerly colonized home island, as well as to the tropical

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<sup>55</sup> For more on this violent 'plant-aesthetic' as an ecocritical practice see Isabel Hoving's introduction to her book *Writing the Earth, Darkly: Globalization, Ecocriticism, and Desire* (2017).

dry forests that cover a large percentage of the island's inland. Hers is a poetics of re-connection and re-claiming of the formerly colonized land through an engagement with these terrestrial topoi.

Despite this quite local focus on specific plants and agricultural practices that take place in Trinidad, Rahim's 2002 collection is also deeply invested in questions of migration and alienation in her birth island, a consideration that might at first seem oppositional. However, as noted by DeLoughrey, Gosson and Handley in their introduction to the anthology *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005) the colonial process "involved a simultaneous uprooting of plants and peoples, reminding us that the etymological root of the word 'diaspora' is 'seed'" (DeLoughrey, et al., 2005, 18). It is in many ways the complicated process of trying to make roots in an environment one's ancestors were placed in by colonial forces, that is considered in Rahim's 2002 collection. And, as we shall come to see, a tidalectic perception of place, as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining, that becomes apparent in Rahim's engagement with the Trinidadian soils.

I will be engaging with the poem "The Revolt of Yam" (2002) mainly via the perspectives Brathwaite's thematical concept 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' provides. As we saw in the discussion of this perspective (see Chapter Two section Yam/nyam(e)/nam), the yam plays a pivotal role in the Caribbean poetic consciousness, and for Brathwaite in particular, it becomes emblematic in the understanding of the connection, and alienation, between land and language in the Caribbean region. Similar to nation language, the triad of yam/nyame(e)/nam expresses the deeply seated disconnect between agricultural practices and language practices in the Caribbean, in which colonizers were in charge of the land in both a practical, spiritual, and, I would add, cultural sense. As described by Martinican Yves Renard back in 1979: "In our world, the earth, the landscape, almost always has belonged to the 'master.'... The world, the environment is the property of the other, the one who possesses them through money or through his spirit" (Renard, 1979, 8). According to poet Derek Walcott, it was considered almost comical in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to rely on and develop Caribbean or pan-African plant metaphors such as yam or breadfruit in one's literature, since these were considered as inferior crops in the colonies, and thereby not worthy of poetic consideration (Fleming, 1978, interviewing Walcott). Brathwaite's triad therefore highlights both this problematic disconnection between the one who cultivates the earth and the one who profits from it, as well as illustrates an attempt to re-suture or re-assemblage land and (agri)culture in the continued colonized Caribbean society.

In Rahim's poem an unnamed 'you', a female Trinidadian resident, is given a yam to plant or cook by a neighbouring woman, who has "dug from her land" (37). Unwilling to put in the effort, "not wanting dirt under your nails" (37), the vegetable is placed on the kitchen countertop by its new owner and quickly forgotten. However, the yam survives this mistreatment:

The root lay on the kitchen counter  
for days sleeping in its dirt.

(...)

The yam witnessed neglect  
and never wasted. (Rahim, 2002, 37)

Indeed, one might argue that Rahim in this section, is tapping into the yam's plantation history and particularly its history of survival in the Caribbean. As has been well documented by numerous scholars it became customary across many colonies around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to grant the enslaved Africans small provision plots of land of poor soil quality, in which they could grow few crops to feed themselves, or to trade or sell at markets (Fog Olwig, 1993; Fog Olwig, 1995; Wynter, 1971; DeLoughrey, 2011). This was a way for the plantation owners to decrease their expenses of feeding the enslaved, but also a way to provide a small sense of independence for the enslaved, which was thought to potentially prevent uprising (Olwig, 1996). One of the most favoured crops to grow in these plots was yams. In fact, the vegetable was so prominent, that the plots were often referred to as yam grounds (DeLoughrey, 2011; Carney & Rosomoff, 2009). But despite this prominence, the yam also continues to grow in the soils of invisibility:

The yam's location in the provision grounds outside of the plantation complex (often out of view), as well as its subsistence underground (where it collects nutrients for the community), underlines its significance as an invisible resource, one that must be physically and imaginatively sought, cultivated, and excavated in terms of both time and space. (DeLoughrey, 2011, 61)

Referring to the yam as an invisible resource opens the possibility of multiple readings. Biologically speaking, the yam is a tuber, meaning, it grows underground, spreading its rhizomes. Therefore, it is in fact partly invisible from the surface point. However, it can also be considered an 'invisible resource' from the vantage point of the colonizers, since the yam often grew in provision grounds on the fringes of the plantation, and thereby out of the plantation owner's sight (Ibid.). And so, the yam as a literary motif embodies a similar notion of hidden histories to that of Brathwaite's thematical concept of the submerged mother(s). Although the submerged mother(s) referred to an intuitive form of histories writing that drew from the geology of the region and paid tribute to the submerged voices of the Caribbean (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three), the yam instead reveals the invisible or hidden histories of the provision grounds, as places of subversive, decolonial agriculture. Here it is not submergence, as

in something or someone being held under water, but rather the roots of both culture and plant, hiding under the surface of the soil in plots hidden from the plantation owner's sight.

In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant writes on the importance of growing and cooking with yam, as well as other indigenous crops or crops brought over by the enslaved from the African continent, to reconnect to the land. While crucial, Glissant emphasises the challenge of replacing Western products such as “Coca Cola, wheat bread, or dairy butter with yams, breadfruit or a revived production of madouy mabi or any other 'local' product” (Glissant, 1990, 148). According to Glissant, a reconnection to the earth of the island itself would be necessary, and as such could take place through the cultivation of local, communal gardens, that grow set crops, like the provision grounds of the plantation era (148). Rahim seems to be suggesting a similar notion of estrangement from the earth, by referencing the American products that the ‘you’ of the poem prefers to eat, over the yam:

Kentucky Fried best serves busy lives.

Another lie (in full sight).

A plant grows without visible soil,  
drawing from its own resources

all day, all week and year  
even as you cook Uncle Ben's rice,

phone in a pizza,  
or save on Mc Donalds [sic] burgers. (Rahim, 2002, 38)

The easy availability of these Western food items is presented as lies ‘in full sight’ (Rahim, 38), that serve to alienate the ‘you’ of the poem from her own land and the crops that already grow there. An alienation that, if one looks for other literary sources on the topic, is not just a modern one, but dates to the colonization of the island and enslavement of its indigenous population and the imported Africans.<sup>56</sup> The play on sight versus (in)visible soil(s), also serves to highlight the point made by DeLoughrey; that the yam served as a resource for the enslaved during colonization, that could exist out of sight of the

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<sup>56</sup> This alienation not only relates to food but several other essential living products, such as building materials and clothing. In his pivotal work *The Black Jacobins* from 1963 Trinidadian C.L.R James describes how all the crops of the plantation are shipped abroad while everything the enslaved had, clothes, food, etc. was imported into the island: “The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloths the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported.” (392). I became aware of this specific quote via Dominique Bourq Hacker's dissertation *Acts of Gardening* from 2019.

European masters, since they could not see it due its biology and were it was grown. As discussed by DeLoughrey, the yam is a trope of transplanted culture, histories, and language, but it might also be considered as an entryway to a re-suturing or reassembling of the relation between culture and agriculture in the Caribbean: “Thus yam/nam is a signifier of subterranean cultural roots and the vehicle of articulation and reassemblage itself.” (DeLoughrey, 2011, 61).

Taking a step back and contextualizing Rahim’s poem with one of the most famous texts on revolutionary planter culture in the Caribbean, namely Sylvia Wynter’s essay “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation” (1971), that DeLoughrey draws on in her article alongside Brathwaite’s yam/nyam(e)/nam concept, we can come to see how the yam ties in with the histories of Trinidad. Wynter argues that the dichotomy between plantation and the slave plot is a key figure and a main characteristic of Caribbean literature, and that the two represent two distinct ways of perceiving and framing Caribbean fiction. Whereas the plantation, in which humans are reduced to laborers and plants to resources, comes to represent History, the master narrative that perceives time as linear, reflected also in the lines of the sugarcane plantations. The plots in which yams grow come to represent a plethora of histories, similar to the rhizomatic roots of the crop. I argue that this plethora of histories allows for multiple layers of voices, both human and more-than-human, to be able to be heard, which means that Wynter’s devotion to the slave plots is not just deeply decolonial but also neocritical.

If we consider the yams’ rhizomatic constitution as that which allows for a plethora of histories to emerge, we also see how Rahin’s engagement with the tuber plant is ascribing to a tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers. Indeed, this tidalectic point of perception becomes increasingly apparent towards the end of the poem. In the final stanzas the yam reveals itself as a forceful more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, that reveals a tidalectic understanding of histories telling as a more-than-human endeavour (see Chapter One section Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing). As the poem nears the end the ‘you’ of the poem finally surrenders to the yam, and plants it. And as it turns out this is not just a practical, but in fact a revolutionary act:

The yam didn’t wait on apologies  
but kept straining after light.

You had one choice: plant it.

(...)

Cooked or planted,

You were working for the revolution. (Rahim, 39)

Arguably, Rahim ends her poem by allowing her protagonist to move from being one of “those who justify and defend the system” to being one of “those who challenge it” (Wynter, 1971, 102). Throughout the poem, Rahim contextualizes the yam as a plant that contains histories of both mastery and surrender: the plant is dependent on the planter, a caretaker, but it also has an inherent ability to grow, to strain for light and thereby survival, on its own. In this poem, Rahim reveals a deep understanding of the importance of plants in the histories of the island, and her poetic position can be considered as oppositional to “the human (mis)conceptions of plants as passive and static organisms without agency” (Jacobs, 2019, 1-2). By reading Rahim’s poem “The Revolt of Yam” within the context of the agricultural history of the tuber plant in the Caribbean and engaging with Brathwaite’s triad of soil vibrations, ‘yam/nyam(e)/nam’, the yam emerges as a plant that not only provided the enslaved population with essential nourishment, but also with a sense of earthy belonging.

Rahim’s poem highlights the difference between being planted (by external forces) and taking root (becoming settled in a place), for both plants and humans, and this underscores the cultural significance of pan-African agricultural practices in the region. Here we also see a tidalectic perception of Caribbean place, as that which emerges through continuous acts of sustaining, as well as in the relation between island and the ancestral continent of Africa, rather than the colonialist attempts to territorialize and expand (Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place). Indeed, whereas Kellman’s water poetics offered a reconnection to the island Barbados by turning to the geologic histories of the island, in Rahim’s earth poetics we see a reconnection to the island and a new connection to “the revolution” (Ibid.) via the planting of yam. Thus Rahim places the yam as central to the emergence of a “new social order” (DeLoughrey, 2019, 41), just like Sylvia Wynter did. And while the many painful histories of the plantation society in Trinidad and the transplanting of both humans and plants might not be resolved within the narrative of the poem, the relationship between the ‘you’ of the poem and the land is reinvigorated by this simple everyday practice of tending to the soil of the island.

On a meta-level Rahim is also practicing a form of poetic revolution, by engaging with the yam, a plant that was considered an inferior crop during colonization, as a literary motif worthy of poetic attention. In a tidalectic sense then, the yam in Rahim’s poem can be read as manifesting the rooting part of the poetic-theoretic mode that DeLoughrey describes in her interpretation (see Chapter One, section Four interpretations of the tidalectic). Rooting as the voluntary connection to a place that continues to sustain and nurture its inhabitants, rather than the involuntary planting of both people and plants. Rooting as the ability and the willingness to draw both physical, cultural, and poetic nourishment from the soil. As Brathwaite himself phrased it: “The plantation does not contain all that is planted” (Brathwaite, 1975a, 4).

Thus, in Rahim's poem from 2002 we see planting as that which roots the Trinidadian to the land her ancestors were transplanted to and alienated from by the colonizing forces, and so here ancestral agriculture and culture merge in the image of the yam. In "A history of yam" the relationship between human and earth or soil, is one of reconnection, or voluntary rooting, via local, agricultural practices.

### **Seismic stirrings**

I will now be turning to the second concept from Brathwaite that I will employ in this chapter, 'the unity is submarine', for my engagement with Rahim's two later collections *Ground Level* (2014) and *Redemption Rain* (2011). At the core of both the 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' and 'the unity is submarine' concepts is the idea of reconnecting to a pan-African and or Caribbean language and culture via the matters of the earth. But whereas the thematical concept 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' focuses on pan-African agricultural practices as cultural practices that connects Caribbeans to their ancestral continent, and thereby writes forward a tidalectic perception of Caribbean place as always related to the ancestral continent (see Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place), the 'the unity is submarine' concept focuses on the earth as a geologic agent in the Caribbean, one of "earthquake, crack (...) the rise and fall of landscapes: destructions (...) creations: fragments" (Brathwaite, 175). This makes the concept particularly apt for engaging with what I have chosen to call Rahim's earthquake collections where the poet moves away from the local focus on Trinidad and into an engagement with a broader Caribbean reality of catastrophes. In these two collections geopolitical questions of mobility hierarchies, border control and questions of national versus global responsibility in the face of catastrophe are elevated as poetic themes through a continuous engagement with the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, killing between 85.000 and 316.000<sup>57</sup> and which is considered as one of the largest humanitarian disasters in recent times. By turning to Brathwaite's thematical concept 'the unity is submarine', we might ask, what kind of 'earth' unity is created in the wake of the 2010 catastrophe and how does Brathwaite's concept illuminate this for us?

The first poem of *Redemption Rain* (2011) with the simple title "Earthquake 2010" follows the construct of synchronic time in the moments before, during and immediately after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. As the narrator depicts her own route, moving through customs in a Canadian airport, while travelling home to Trinidad, each new section of the poem is marked by a date and time to

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<sup>57</sup> The official number of casualties provided by the Haitian government largely varies. Due to insufficient funds, inconsistent data acquisition and a necessarily quick disposal of the dead, a confirmed number of casualties has never been established.

indicate, how her actions correspond to the occurrence of the 2010 earthquake. The first part of the poem reads:

Tues. Jan 12th: 2.30p.m.  
Before the earthquake rocked  
Port-au-Prince with more fury  
than an autonomic bomb,  
BW 610 from Port-of-Spain  
was safely on the ground  
and my sole shake down  
was from an immigration officer (...) (Rahim, 2011, 3-4)

In this initial image, the catastrophic event of the earthquake, that is about to occur many hundred of miles from the narrator's location, and the seemingly mundane situation of moving through customs, are brought closer to each other through the imagery of violent, tectonic movements ("rocked" and "shake down") that are used to describe the narrator's affective state. By utilizing these along with the time indications, a contraction of time and place seems to occur, which brings the narrator who, like Jennifer Rahim herself, lives in Trinidad, closer to the Haitians during this time of devastation. As the poem progresses, the tectonic plates are anthropomorphized through their ability to negotiate their movements in 'secrecy', indicating a lively intent in the event of the earthquake:

When tectonic plates,  
began secretly negotiating  
their catastrophic shift,  
the officer was asking,  
"How much did you pay  
for your sweets, miss? (Ibid., 4)

In the above stanzas, the two border zones, the geological (the convergent plate boundary) between the tectonic plates and the socio-geographic borders between nations, are juxtaposed. The airport customs control emerges as a human border zone, with frictions and collisions, that imitate the convergent plate boundaries that cause the earthquake. In this chronological time, in which the 'I' of the poem is 'pushing against the border control', Rahim is writing towards a connection between socio-geographic and geological cracks and collisions that are reminiscent of Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' concept (see



Chapter Two, section The unity is submarine). However, where Brathwaite looked to the connection between tectonic movements and the colonial context of the plantation, maroon culture, and creolization in the face of Western domination, Rahim is moving the issue forward, to the modern Caribbean world and consciousness. In Rahim's work the need for a submarine unity is due to the contemporary socio-geographic fragmentation caused by border control, immigration laws and mobility hierarchies.

Furthermore, I argue, that through a conflation of time and place, in which the disaster of the earthquake is brought closer to the first-person narrator of the poem, Rahim is reminding us, that 'natural disasters'<sup>58</sup> such as the 2010 earthquake, cannot be handled within a national border (Sheller, 2018). In this context, questions of voluntary versus forced mobility in the Caribbean are brought to the forefront in Rahim's writing. As argued by sociologist and mobility studies scholar Mimi Sheller, in the wake of 'natural disasters' in the Caribbean mobility is a privilege that is often withheld from those who most desperately need it (Sheller, 2020).<sup>59</sup> In her most recent book, *Island Futures: Caribbean Survival in the Anthropocene* (2020) Sheller focuses on the 2010 earthquake and its aftermath in Haiti, which, according to Sheller, "brought to light the highly uneven interdependence and fragility of the complex mobility systems and infrastructural moorings that create the possibility for people to weave together everyday life" (Sheller, 2020, 1). Tying together "immediate disasters" (Sheller, 2020, 8) with the concept of slow violence<sup>60</sup> (see Chapter Two, section Considering scale and invisible catastrophes), Sheller argues, that the 2010 earthquake, alongside many other environmental disasters in the Caribbean region, highlight the great variation (and injustice) in mobility capabilities between various groups of humans. As we saw previously in this chapter, the plantation society might be an act of slow violence that unfolded over hundreds of years in Caribbean societies such as Trinidad, but it is also an on-going violence that rears its head to this day. In the case of Rahim's poem "The Revolt of Yam", this slow violence reveals itself in the Trinidadian resident's alienation from the land she lives on and with. Here a reconnection is offered through planting, an act which can be understood through the triad of earthy vibrations, 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' (see Chapter Two, section Yam/nyam(e)/nam). In Rahim's poem "Earthquake

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<sup>58</sup> I employ the term 'natural disasters' to align myself with Sheller's argumentation, however, Sheller herself, alongside other scholars such as literary scholar Rob Nixon and Sharae Deckard and historian Mike Davis have remained critical of this formulation, since it implicitly neglects to account for how the aftermaths or consequences of catastrophic events such as earthquakes are always the result of socio-economic and geopolitical structures. I will expand on this in Chapter Five in relation to Hurricane Maria. For some in-depth perspectives on the matter see for example Nixon's *Slow Violence* (2011), Mike Davis' *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1999) and Sharae Deckard's book chapter "The Political Ecology of Storms in Caribbean Literature", in *The Caribbean - Aesthetics, World-Ecology, Politics* (2016).

<sup>59</sup> Glissant has written extensively on the different sorts of mobility present in the Caribbean as a region best defined by his term relation. Since this is not the main topic of discussion for this dissertation, I will not expand on this, however I will refer the reader to Heidi Bojsen's article "Édouard Glissant and the Geography of Relation" (2021) that provides a very concise overview of Glissant's various definitions of mobility within the region as both oppressive and liberating.

<sup>60</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two I utilize the concept of slow violence primarily by referencing Rob Nixon's definition from his 2013 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

2010” a reconnection is offered through an attempted radical sympathizing with the victims of the 2010 earthquake, by aligning the narrator’s body with those inflicted by the earthquake in Haiti. This alignment continuous as the structuring principle behind the poem:

*“3.45 pm*

The earthquake was a nightmare  
tossing in Haiti’s consciousness  
when my train sped  
to Castle Frank (...)” (7)

*“4.50 pm*

It must have struck  
as I boarded the No. 65 to Parliament” (8)

After the earthquake has occurred, this attempt at solidarity is further highlighted by the narrator’s insistence on how the other island nations of the Caribbean should act and assist Haiti in recovering from the devastating catastrophe. At first this is rendered through the insistence on taking action:

This is not a time  
For sleep (10)

As the poem goes on, the narrator becomes more and more specific in her insistence on what the Caribbean community should do to support Haiti and its citizens:

*Wednesday Jan. 13: 11.21 a.m.*

Trinidad called to say  
(...)  
*Haiti I’m sorry*  
pleading for all our abuses,  
demanding reparation for your losses  
from a Caribbean  
that moves on the strength of your steel

Even here, Ayiti  
I see the kaleidoscope  
of your makeshift tents stretched  
like a quilt of solidarity  
that shames us, silences  
our insipid religion  
and hand-out politicking. (11-12)

Referring to Haiti by its indigenous Taíno name Ayiti, can be read as a call to a solidarity between the islands that might have existed prior to the colonizers division of the islands as colonized territories.<sup>61</sup> By doing this Rahim is also inscribes her poem into a similar socio-geographical context as Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' concept (see Chapter Two, section The unity is submarine), meaning, she is highlighting how the fragmentation of the islands in the archipelago is a construct created by the colonizer's borders, and that solidarity should be sought across nationalities in the Caribbean. Just as in Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' concept, in which both a geological and socio-geographical perspective on fragmentation in the Caribbean is proposed, Rahim is utilizing the earthquake of 2010, the result of a geological collision, to underscore and problematize the socio-geographic fragmentation of the region. In this way Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' concept presents us with the possibility of understanding the earthquake of 2010 in Rahim's writing as a catastrophic event that points to the deeply seated socio-geographic fragmentation between the islands of the region, and how to potentially, through a form of alignment and radical re-sympathizing, re-suture these islands back into some sort of 'Caribbean whole'<sup>62</sup> or unity. Indeed, in this call for political action across geographical borders lies a form of hope

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<sup>61</sup> For more on the importance of the usage of the Taíno name Ayiti see Malcolm Ferdinand's *Decolonial Ecology* (eng. 2021). Ferdinand provides an excellent reading of the island Haiti as a figure that is considered outside of modernity by the Western, colonialist world, and how the island is a breeding ground for essential decolonial, environmental movements and processes: "Ayiti embodies the entanglement of environmental processes and social and political configurations that undermine the capitalism and the totalitarian grip of global financial markets. By evacuating Haiti, the rich forms of political resistance and interspecies alliances offered by the denied were also evacuated." (Ferdinand, 245).

<sup>62</sup> When I use the wording 'Caribbean whole' I am referencing Brathwaite's own formulation on the difference between whole and hole societies. For more on this see the essay "World Order Models" (1985). I am specifically referencing the passage: "Societies are either whole or hole. By whole we mean those where the geo-politics coincides with the culture. (...) A hole (or partial) society is one where this integrity does not exist, although through time, force, circumstance and cultural interaction, a group of people living together in a specific area, often, through a process of conflict, attempt to create a whole from hole. World models cannot be evolved from hole societies; although the prismatic complexities of such societies may give us omens from the past towards the future. The Caribbean: the region as defined: was once a whole society: or rather, an aspect of homogeneous culture. Before the missilic intrusion of Columbus (...)" (Brathwaite, 1985, 57) I am also reminded of the introductory lines in Chamoru poet Lehua M. Taitano's debut collection *A Bell Made of Stone* (2013): "inside me an island / shaped hole" (Taitano, 2013). Indeed, a comparative analysis between Brathwaite's whole/hole formulation and Taitano's writing on the matter would be an interesting point of departure for a close comparative reading of the two and a discussion of 'wholeness' in archipelagoes.



safe from harm, and evokes a fearful vision of future catastrophes or “stirrings” that might be coming from below:

Haiti 2010 was a sign	not for <i>them</i> –
for us who stand	
on solid ground	waiting
(...)	
But they will come	the stirrings
from the deep that return	

(Rahim, 2014, 8)

The phrasing “the deep that return” can either be read as the deep tectonic stirrings that cause earthquakes that will undoubtedly strike again, whilst the nations surrounding the vulnerable nation of Haiti passively wait instead of taking sympathetic action, or it can be read as the stirrings of the downtrodden, those forced to stay beneath the audible surface, and who will eventually rise up, and disrupt the system of colonial mastery and socio-geographic fragmentation that still prevails in the Caribbean. Like the yam in Rahim’s “The Revolt of Yam”, that refuses to be ignored but keeps “straining for light” (Rahim, 2002, 39) and eventually succeeds in convincing the female ‘you’ of the poem to plant it thereby making her “work for the revolution” (ibid.), the earthquake in Rahim’s two collections *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level* allows for a revelation of the downtrodden voices of the region. And so once again, like in Kellman’s *Limestone* (see Chapter Three, section Dragging coral bones) we see a turn to geology, in this case the forces of the earthquake, as that which allows for otherwise silent voices to come to the audible surface. While in Kellman’s work these voices were submerged under seawater, as the enslaved whose bones mark the routes of the Middle Passage and Brathwaite’s thematical concept ‘submerged mother(s)’, in Rahim’s earth poetics these voices have been pushed down below the terrestrial surface but are now, in the wake of the catastrophic earthquake, rising, “from the deep that return” (Rahim, 2014, 8). Hence, we see here a moment where Brathwaite’s two concepts, ‘the submerged mother(s)’ and ‘the unity is submarine’, almost merge into one, but from two different physical realities.

Still, this revelation of the submerged voices is not just limited to the human realm. In the poem “Haiti” (2011), that follows the above discussed “Earthquake 2010”, the earth itself is provided with the ability to speak in human-like terms:

For the earth has spoken,  
to you, her magma Creole.

Full-throated syllables, up-  
rising from deep down,

an honest elocution —  
rudimentary sound: guttural

nouns, forthright, strong,  
the rumbled conviction of verbs

unfettered by reticence  
as the first poetry of creation. (Rahim, 2011, 13)

The earth is once more anthropomorphized, as in “Earthquake 2010”, but this time it is done by providing it, the earth, with both human language (“spoken”, “magma creole”, “verbs”, “nouns”) and by the evoking of sounds produced within the throat and gut of the human body (“full-throated”, “guttural”). In other words, the earth is figured as a language-producing human body. This could be read as the appearance of what I will refer to as the seismic poetic in Rahim’s work. As the poem goes on it becomes clear, that this seismic poetic carries within it a deep and valuable knowledge:

Only the wise among us pin  
our ears to the ground,

listening in the hope of catching  
even half a syllable

of the language forming  
like a new world on your tongue. (Ibid.)

Rahim’s narrator here is, quite literally, arguing for a conflation between word-making and world-making (“of the language forming / like a new world on your tongue”), and thereby very much engaging with a tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers (see Chapter One, section Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing). In this conflation between the seismic and the poetic, between the physical world and the word, Rahim is underscoring the importance of poetic language as a catalyst for potentially understanding or comprehending the earthquake as a

catastrophic event with devastating consequences. However, from an ecocritical perspective Rahim's continuous anthropomorphism of the earth could be considered as a problematic re-instatement of the Anthropocentric world order, in which humans only relate to the more-than-human realm by inscribing it with human-like features and qualities (Buell, 2005, 134), rather than considering it on its own merits. Indeed, one could argue, that anthropomorphism as a poetic device falls dangerously close to anthropocentrism, or rather, the idea that humans are the centre of the universe. On the other hand, as argued by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010), anthropomorphism can be helpful in that it can serve to "catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materiality that form confederations. In revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up parallels between material forms in "nature" and those in "culture" (Bennett, 2010, 99). Based on Bennett's formulation, one could indeed argue, that Rahim is attempting not to 'de-centre' or de-value the seismic, or alter it to fit into a strictly human realm, but instead is attempting to dissolve the boundary between human language and seismic stirrings.

In her two collections *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level*, published respectively one and four years after the event of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Rahim employs the catastrophic seismic event to highlight the unjust mobility hierarchies that are still evident when dealing with catastrophic events in the region. However, she also calls for a form of Caribbean unity in the face of catastrophe, portraying a radical sympathy across island nations. The poet is evoking a trope quite similar to the one utilized by Brathwaite in his 'the unity is submarine' concept, when calling to see her home-island Trinidad as both connected and, in some ways, indebted to Haiti. To read these two earthquake collections through the lens of Brathwaite's 'the unity is submarine' concept, it is clear that Rahim offers an earth poetics that pleads for solidarity in the wake of the seismic catastrophe and potentially offers new alliances. And so, in the wake of the seismic catastrophe the new language that is forming like a new world on the tongue of the earth, might be one of cross-national Caribbean unity or, as Brathwaite calls it in 1975, a Caribbean whole. However, as we shall see in the forthcoming and final section of this chapter, this strategy is altered in Rahim's latest collection, in which a call for an even broader, planetary sense of unity is highlighted.

Whereas in these previous sections I have mainly engaged with Brathwaite's thematical concepts yam/nyam(e)/nam and the unity is submarine as revealing different modalities of the tidalectic (see Chapter Two, section Final remarks) in this final section I will be turning to how the tidalectic perception of place allows for a reading of Rahim's latest collection as a call for a global sense of environmental and ecological responsibility.

### Cyclical, planetary breaths

Rahim's movement between rooting, in her dedication to the local soils in *Between the Fence and the Forest*, and routing, in her geopolitical focus on the earthquake in *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level*, are combined in her latest collection *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021). Inspired by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that affected nations around the globe, including Rahim's home nation Trinidad<sup>64</sup>, the poet's latest collection *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021) is in many ways a testimony to the human triggers that create world-wide catastrophes, be these linked to the spreading of new and deadly viruses or to the destruction of the planet. As in the earlier discussed collections Rahim is once again reminding her readers of the connection between colonial histories and environmental devastation, however, as we shall see in the forthcoming sections, in this collection she is moving from the Caribbean and into a more general planetary concerned poetic, in which her previous interest in the earth as matter is replaced with an interest in Earth as a planet<sup>65</sup>. This tidalectic "telescoping between planet and island" (DeLoughrey, 2019, 2) is variously portrayed in Rahim's latest collection, and it is to these representation to which the discussion now turns.

Bridging her previous collection, the poem "Negotiating with a pending earthquake" in many ways begins where *Ground Level* (2014) ended, by engaging with the earthquake as a humbling event, that highlights human vulnerability, yet also allows for new poetic and poetic realizations. In this instance, the new poetic realization seems to be on the transience of humans and the continued life of the planet:

We are dust. Like grass we disappear.  
So pending your arrival, we name you Ciba<sup>66</sup>, Rock –  
Be stable ground beneath us  
While we fool ourselves, think ourselves movers  
And shakers of worlds, builders of civilizations (22)

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<sup>64</sup> Many Caribbean communities were deeply affected by the pandemic due to a number of factors, including poor health facilities as well as travel bans, that put a great strain on the economies of the islands, many of whom depend heavily on tourism as an income. In Trinidad the economy was not only affected by travel ban and restrictions, which decreased the income from tourism heavily, the country's economy (Trinidad and Tobago consists of 23 islands in total) also depends heavily on revenues from crude oil and natural gas exportation, which the demand for, due to global travel restrictions, was significantly reduced.

<sup>65</sup> In "Chapter One: Gendering Earth" in her book *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019) DeLoughrey provides a short, yet highly enlightening analysis of Jamaican author Erna Brodber's *The Rainmaker's Mistake* (2007) through a similar engagement with place as being both earth (soil) and Earth (planet).

<sup>66</sup> Ciba is the old Taíno name for rock.



In contrast to *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level* this collection, published seven years after the latter, Rahim's narrator is no longer just describing the earthquake nor simply considering it as a geopolitical event that insists that we reconsider national border systems, but rather speaks to the Earth about it, asking for the ground beneath her feet to remain stable and still. Indeed, the first lines of the poem ("We are dust. Like grass we disappear.") presents the rather bleak, from an anthropocentric perspective, realization of humanity as dispensable for the planet, and indeed fragile in existence. Thereby Earth is not just provided with agency through the poetic description, but in fact is given primacy or superiority. In the face of this grand catastrophe humanity is infinitely small. This inquiry or pleading format is highlighted by the later and much more conclusive remarks on the changing climate of the planet that is evident from the coldest areas of our world to the warm shores of the Caribbean Sea:

Earth is restless.  
Glaciers are migrating. Coastlines  
are reinventing themselves (...)  
(Rahim, 2021, 23)

I argue that this new format demonstrates a new insight represented in Rahim's poetic vision, that seems to engage with a question of human accountability towards the Earth – an insight that was also present in the poet's earlier writing but featured in a less prominent manner. Rather than turning to anthropomorphism to make sense of the seismic stirrings arising from the deep, as shown in *Ground Level*, in this earthquake poem Earth is presented without the human as a poetic or poetic conveyer. The planet is its own more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, and thereby Rahim also reveals a rather radical tidalectic perception of histories writing not just dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, but as independent of the human realm entirely. As the poem goes on, the narrator, with a sense of critical self-reflection, promises a less greedy way of engaging with the planet and its resources, but also expresses a fear that this promise might have come too late:

We're not good with promises,  
but we will walk lightly upon the earth. We will cease gobbling  
chunks of ground – drilling, digging, extracting.  
Is any of this relevant? Will you be satiated  
if we dispense with bombs charged to shift orbits?  
(...)  
Please tell us what will make you happy.

We're mere pebbles in your palms,  
And these, we know, are children's prayers (22)

In the final lines of these stanzas we return, as in the very first lines of the poem, to a humbling of humanity. Humanity is presented as passing guests, who, on the larger geologic and astronomic scales of time, are but a speck of dust on an infinite long timeline. This realization is one that carries a prolonged postcolonial ecocritical history. As formulated by literature scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her prominent essay “An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization” (2012): “The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it” (Spivak, 2012, 338). It is this strange almost alienating sensation of planetary otherness that Rahim is bringing forward in her poem, yet also fuelled with a desire to approach, to ask questions of a planet that will most likely refuse or be unable to give an answer. This brings about both a humbling yet also urgently desperate effect in the poem, in which the narrator seems aware that all might already be lost yet also seems unwilling to fully accept it.

The we-format, by which the pleading is done from a collective rather than individual level, is quite different from what we have previously seen in Rahim's writing. Whereas there was a clear division between the indigenous, the enslaved and the colonizer in the earlier collections, particularly in *Between the Fence and the Forest* as we saw in the analysis of the poem “The Revolt of Yam”, in “Negotiating with a Pending Earthquake”, humanity is presented as a broad category, an unidentified “we”. I would argue that the humble plea in these stanzas (“Please tell us what will make you happy”), is a call for a collective sense of responsibility and humility. One that goes well beyond the defined borders between ethnicities, nationalities, economic status and so on. Furthermore, the line presents the rather bleak realization, from an anthropocentric perspective, that humanity is dispensable for the planet, and that humans as a species is indeed fragile in our existence.

Even though there is an increased focus on a global sense of humanity in “Negotiating with a Pending Earthquake”, Rahim does not dispense of the decolonial aspects of her poetic vision in the rest of the collection. One of the most prominent examples of a continuation of her consideration of colonization and its planetary consequences is seen in the poem “The Orbis Spike, 1610”. The poem's title is a reference to the research published by geologists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin of University College of London in *Nature* in 2015, which revealed that there was a recorded dip in carbon dioxide levels in the year 1610, because of the extermination done by European settlers of approximately 50 million native people in the Americas. This extermination was due to numerous factors, most notable of which was the spread of smallpox through the Indigenous communities, who lacked immunity to it. According to Lewis and Maslin, the year 1610 marks the beginning of the epoch that we know today as

the Anthropocene (Lewis et al., 2015). Rahim ties this scientific discovery with a tidalectic poetic, as the first stanza of the poem reads:

Rock, ice and sediment tell  
their own stories.  
They keep this memory:  
in 1610, CO<sup>2</sup> levels dipped –  
(Rahim, 2021, 12)

Here Rahim thematizes the matters of the Earth (rock, ice, sediment) as having narrative abilities: they tell their own stories. And so, Rahim is subverting the colonialist conception of History-writing as a strictly human endeavour and instead allowing for a tidalectic conception of the importance of more-than-human wor(l)d-makers to come forward (see Chapter One, section Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing). By beginning the poem with fronting the ‘more-than-human wor(l)d-makers’ of Lewis and Maslin’s research, the rock, ice, and sediment that allows to measure this dip in carbon dioxide, I argue that Rahim repositions this scientific History and brings it into the realm of poetic histories. Rather than describing the sediments of the Earth as sources of strictly scientific knowledge, reducing them to inanimate material that only conveys scientific facts fit for humans to discover and interpret, Rahim refers to the rock, ice and sediment as histories writers and memory preservers, providing them with a form of lively, narrative intent, just as we saw with the yam and the earthquake earlier in this chapter. As the stanza progresses it is also made clear, how human-made histories and geological and ecological histories are tied together in the soil of the Earth:

an Orbis Spike marks the martyred  
on fields emptied of trees, emptied  
of the dead that could no more labour.  
(Rahim, 2021, 12)

Rahim writes on the histories told by the earthly materials, and how these preserve the memory of the injustice done upon the various native populations of the Americas during colonization. To that end, the materiality of the earth emerges as a mouthpiece for the silenced dead bodies of the Indigenous people who perished during colonization. In this first stanza, the grand narrative of the Earth and its material constitution is juxtaposed with the narrative of the dead populations of the Americas, both the Indigenous people who were killed in the colonial genocides and the imported enslaved Africans, who

died working the soil for the colonizers. By doing so Rahim is tying together the destruction of land (“fields emptied of trees”), with the elimination of human populations (“the dead that could no more labour”), which ties back to the plant-or soil-based poetic in *Between the Fence and the Forest*, in which, as previously analysed, the colonialist exploitation of humans and plants in the plantation are juxtaposed. As the stanza goes on this juxtaposition is replaced with a merging between the human laborers and plants of the plantation:

Breathing hectars &  
breathing lungs – limbs of bark & limbs  
of flesh. No more alive.  
Some tell that living wreaths sprung  
upon the ungrieved  
(...)  
Air was breath again;  
but never the same  
an infinite absence remains. (12)

The image of breath is repeated throughout the poem, referencing in these stanzas, the breathing humans and soils that were forced to labour under the masters’ watchful eyes. The ungrieved are both the enslaved, who worked, suffered, and died in the plantations, as well as the “breathing hectars [sic]” of plants, that were cut down, and soil, that was drained, in the growing of plantation crops. But the myth of the “living wreaths” (12), that emerges as incarnated elegies from the earth, contains a reminder of those humans and more-than-humans who suffered and died. When History forgets, the soil remembers. In this realization, there is also a merging of the tidalectic perception of histories writing and the tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining. Indeed, the living wreaths in many ways embody a tidalectic perception of place, in that they sustain the memory of those who died in the plantation, grieving, and commemorating them when no one else will. This tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining becomes increasingly significant as the poem goes on and counterpoints the destructive engagement with the soil of the earth.

At the end of Rahim’s poem, breathing, the most necessary act for staying alive for every living mammal, emerges as a potentially dangerous or even impossible task. Pollution and forest fires, and the enhanced levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into our atmosphere, due to numerous factors including deforestation of large forest areas that serve as one of the main absorbents of carbon dioxide, leads to a dip in ‘breathable air’, and the cutting down of trees and the inability to breathe are connected. And so,

breathing in this poem materializes not just as the concerning build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> in our planet's atmosphere, but also as an uneven system of possibilities; breathing is not for everyone. Returning to Christina Sharpe's *In The Wake* once again, the connection between breath and colonialism is made, asking the questions: "It is to the breath that I want to turn now. To the necessity of breath, to breathing space, to the breathtaking spaces in the wake in which we live (...) Who has access to freedom? Who can breathe free?"<sup>67</sup> (Sharpe, 109 - 112). In Sharpe's work breath is connected to freedom, and the lack of respite of the enslaved in the plantations exemplified how even the simple act of breathing, which was of course profoundly affected by the labour and living conditions of the enslaved and the weather of the particular island, was monitored by the slave owners to calculate the life expectancy of their work force (Sharpe, 112). By negating the word 'breathtaking', and thereby focusing on the breath that gets taken away, Sharpe reminds us how the simple act of breathing is not so simple in a world shaped by the extractivist logic of colonialism. And so, breath emerges as a continuous cycle of "antiblackness" (Sharpe, 112) that continuously shapes our colonial world. We see this unevenness in the access to breathe freely even more clearly in the following lines, in which the hierarchy between human beings, those who dies first when the world burns and those who live on, is solidified:

Forests burn like cancerous lungs  
and First Nations are still  
the first to die.  
                    Ancients say, the land breathe for us,  
and we for the land.

Here, the sense of ancestral time and knowledge, "Ancients say, the land breath for us, / and we for the land." highlights the seeming impossibility of breathing freely in a colonial world irretrievably shaped by plantation societies. However, all is not lost, a small hope for a future in which the planet does remain, or perhaps becomes 'breathable' for those whose ancestors had their breath taken away from them, is also presented. In some of the poem's final lines, Rahim professes an explicitly planetary poetic vision, that plants itself in the subterranean workings of the soil of the Earth:

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<sup>67</sup> Wilson Harris writes a short yet compelling passage on breath and enslavement in his essay "History, Fable and Myth in The Caribbean and Guianas" (orig. 1970, 2008) where he analyses a poem from Brathwaite's collection *Masks* (1968): "One must remember that breath is all the black man may have possessed at a certain stage in the Americas. He had lost his tribal tongue, he had lost everything except an abrupt area of space and lung; he possessed nothing but the calamitous air of broken ties in the New World." (Harris, 2008, 33) Sharpe takes her point even further, arguing, that breathing freely is a complicated if not almost impossible task still to this present day in the (post)colonial world of antiblackness.

Today I plant a poem.  
I put its roots down in soil  
brown as cosmic dust. (12)

In these lines we return to the fusion of the earthly materiality and the planetary realm in the image of the soil that is “brown as cosmic dust”. The poem is planted in soil, like the yam in “The Revolt of Yam”, perhaps as a way for the narrator of the poem to re-connect to a planet that is ‘other’, as Spivak would say. However, this time the re-connection is not to the local, ancestral soils of the Caribbean Trinidad, as in “The Revolt of Yam” but instead to the Earth as a planetary part of a larger galactic or universal whole. The image of a return to soil in both the previously discussed “The Revolt of Yam” and “Orbis Spike, 1610”, underscores the deep devotion to an earth poetics in Rahim’s authorship, that does not waver, but takes on different forms as her writing progresses over the years, moving from the local soils of her Trinidadian home island in *Between the Fence and the Forest*, to the seismic stirrings between tectonic plates in *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level*, and lastly advances, to the planetary realm in *Sanctuaries of Invention*. Whereas in “Seismic” the re-assembling or re-suturing of land and language emerged via the humble act of the human narrator “pinning her ear to the ground” and listening for the “language forming / like a new world on your tongue” (Rahim, 2011), in this poem, the image of planting a poem “in soil brown as cosmic dust” emerges as the ultimate re-connection or re-suturing of earth and language in Rahim’s writing.

Indeed, through the image of planting a poem the text itself also invigorates the poetic format with a form of hope – whereas before there was only listening, now there is an attempt to take action. This act of “planting a poem” corresponds to a tidalectic perception of place, I would argue, through Rahim’s poetic strategy of uniting the soils of the earth with the Earth as a planet in orbit. This approach in many ways creates a tidalectic perception of place as expanding and retracting, as well as emerging through continuous acts of sustain (see Chapter One, Colonialist place/Tidalectic place). However, whereas Brathwaite turns to the Barbadian shore and its tides to formulate this tidalectic perception of place as expanding and retracting, Rahim turns her attention to the oscillating movement between the island as a place and the earth as a planet, to reveal a tidalectic perception of place. In this image of the poem that is planted in soil “brown as cosmic dust” Rahim’s earth poetics emerge as a planetary poetics, a poetics of the Earth. In the final stanza we come to see how the tidalectic perception of place as expanding and retracting (Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place) emerges not by a turning to the tides, as in Brathwaite’s writing, but rather by turning to the life-preserving motion of breathing:

With every you encircled in every cell,  
I ask for a multiplication of leaves –  
and for First-Garden breeze.

Dear Earth,  
we have grown so apart.  
Now that we are full-blown, obscenely  
anthropocene, will you forgive, allow us, again,  
to breath... (13)<sup>68</sup>

Here the dynamic and in part cyclical motion that arises is not that of tides on a shore, but instead that of breath and photosynthesis (“With every you encircled in every cell / I ask for a multiplication of leaves –”): how all other living and breathing beings on planet Earth are deeply dependent on the plants that convert carbon dioxide into oxygen.<sup>69</sup> This connection between the human body and the global environment was, at least in part, also apparent in Kellman’s water poetics, where we saw, the porous bodies of water in Barbados allowed for a reconnection to the ancestors as well as to the local ecologies of the island, thereby creating a kind of cross-species care, which was reminiscent of Neimanis’ writing on how thinking with water creates a radical understanding of more-than-human co-dependence and care (Neimanis, 2017; 2018). Similarly, in Rahim’s poetry we see this consideration of co-dependence and planetary care as enacted through the simple act of breathing. To breathe, to take air in and out of the lungs, becomes a form of sustaining act, attempting to make place for those descendants of the enslaved in a colonial world where respite is continuously taken away (Sharpe, 2016, 109 – 112). Hence in Rahim’s work we see a particular attentiveness to tidalectic place, as an expanding and retracting formation, that can only be ‘kept’ via continuous caring acts of sustaining. This is similar to Brathwaite’s image of the grandmother who sweeps sand from her yard every morning in order to care for and continue to claim a place that is hers. Breathing too becomes a way of claiming place, as an insisting act of being allowed to breathe in a world shaped by colonizers and the extractivist logic of the plantation society. Nevertheless, this is also connected to the global concern of ‘planetary breath’, and so, in her engagement with breath,

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<sup>68</sup> Due to Rahim’s focus on breathing as that which brings all living beings together, and the loving address in the final stanza of the poem (“Dear Earth, / we have grown so apart”) I am instantly drawn to a comparative reading between “The Orbis Spike, 1610” and American poet Juliana Spahr’s long-poem *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005), a text that is perhaps best categorized as a planetary love poem. Indeed, there is the potentiality for a very interesting comparative reading between the two, but since that is not the focus of this chapter, I will leave this perspective out.

<sup>69</sup> Our planet’s oceans are believed to absorb between 30 and 50 percent of the CO<sub>2</sub> emission, meaning, it is not just the terrestrial but also the aquatic realm of our planet that plays a large role in neutralizing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Rahim formulates an earth poetic where the concerns of the planet's atmosphere and the "breathtaking" (Sharpe, 2016) practice of the plantation society are inherently connected.

### **Final remarks**

In this chapter I have examined three interrelated levels of earth poetics in Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim's poetry: soil-poetics in *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002), seismic poetics in *Redemption Rain* (2011) and *Ground Level* (2014) and lastly, planetary Earth poetics in *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021). By engaging with Rahim's four collections via Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode the tidalectic, particularly his two tidalectic points of perception in relation to place and histories writing, as well as his two thematical concepts 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' and 'the unity is submarine', I have attempted to sketch out the intersections between colonial, environmental and ecological histories that occur in Rahim's writing, how these come to life via various poetic strategies, and what they might teach us about Rahim's Caribbean earth poetics.

So, what have we learned about the relation between the human and earth in Rahim's poetry via a tidalectic reading engagement? And to what extent does Rahim's work reveal how we can trace the tidalectic in poetry that goes beyond the aquatic realm?

Moving from the local planter histories of the yam and the soils in which it grows in her home island of Trinidad, towards the relational histories of a broader Caribbean community in the face of seismic catastrophe, and lastly, into the histories of our Earth as part of a larger planetary system, Rahim demonstrates a Anglocreole Caribbean earth poetics that is concerned with different scales of catastrophic events: from the sudden (earthquake) to the prolonged (plantation society) to the almost infinite (atmospheric concerns). The quite literal act of rooting, as analysed and discussed in the section histories of yam, corresponds to the routing of Caribbean humans due to catastrophic events, as analysed and discussed in the section 'Seismic stirrings', and so Rahim's writing in many ways embodies DeLoughrey's interpretation of the tidalectic as a formulation about the Caribbean condition as defined by both roots and routes. By engaging with Brathwaite's 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' concept we saw how Rahim attempts to re-connect her poetic characters to the enslaved ancestors of the island via the revolutionary act of planting and thereby rooting oneself in the soil of the island. Whereas Kellman's reconnection, or "back-dragging" (Kellman, 2008, 130) was related to the painful histories of the Middle Passage and revealed itself in his engagement with tidalectic time as a continuous dragging back or washing over, in Rahim's work tidalectic temporalities are much less present. Instead, here the connection to the painful ancestral past is revealed via an attention to tidalectic perceptions of place as emerging through



continuous acts of sustaining, as well as through a connection between island and ancestral continent. Ultimately, Rahim engages repeatedly with Caribbean place as a dynamic constellation that is constantly expanding and retracting.

Whereas Rahim in *Between the Fence and the Forest*, *Redemption Rain* and *Ground Level* dealt more directly with socio-geographical issues relating to earth that are specific to the Caribbean region, in her latest collection *Sanctuaries of Invention* it is a broader planetary concern that seems to emerge as the focal point. However, what Rahim offers in her final collection is not a universalist epistemology, in the Anthropocene sense, in which Caribbean experiences of social, geographic, and ecologic exploitation due to colonization and neocolonial structures are reduced to global, universal issues. Instead, by moving from the small, local scale, the yam plots of Trinidad, to the large planetary scale, the Earth as a planet within a galactic system, one could say that Rahim offers a way of reading the world via Anglocreole Caribbean histories. Rather than having the Caribbean be a peripheral geography, one that is subjected to the History of other historically powerful and expansionist regions, Rahim centres the Caribbean region as the vantage point from which the poet considers a new planetary engagement of environmental and ecological awareness. Essentially through all four collections Rahim is calling for a re-connection to both earth as a materiality (soils, sediments, rock) and Earth as a planet, an ancient terrestrial entity part of a larger galactic order, that every breathing mammal need in order survive. This Earth that preceded us and that will undoubtedly outlive us.

## Chapter five

# Hurricane Poetics

*The storm does not roar in pentameter. In terms of what we write, of our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow, the models are all there for the falling of snow, than we are of the hurricanes that hit here every year. (...) we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience; whereas we can describe the imported experience of snow fall. It is that kind of situation that we are in.*

(Brathwaite, 1986)

*(...) no lasting civilization can build on hurricanes (...)*

(Brathwaite, 1997)

*It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most efficiently rebelled.*

(Brathwaite, 1971)

### **A tidalectic analysis of hurricane poetics in Celia A. Sorhaindo's *Guabancex* (2020)**

In this final chapter of Part Two I will turn my attention to the hurricane poetics of Dominican poet Celia Sorhaindo in her chapbook *Guabancex* (2020). Whereas Chapter Three engaged with a tidalectic reading of water poetics in two of Barbadian Anthony Kellman's collections, and Chapter Four engaged with Jennifer Rahim's earth poetics, in this chapter I will turn my attention to weather to see what insights a tidalectic reading engagement with Sorhaindo's hurricane collection might bring. In this chapter I will continue my engagement with questions of colonial language control and how it relates to the more-than-human realm. However, whereas in the previous chapter I focused on how land and language alienation due to colonization was connected in Rahim's poetic works, and how non-colonialist agricultural practices offered a potential reconnection, in this chapter I will focus on how language alienation is reconsidered in the wake of the hurricane, and how the hurricane might, despite its catastrophic consequences, offer new poetic formats.

Sorhaindo's chapbook centres around hurricane Maria, the eleventh most intense Atlantic hurricane to ever have been recorded (Straub, 2021) and it was the third costliest hurricane in the history of the United States<sup>70</sup>. Hurricane Maria began as a tropical wave outside of the west coast of the African continent on September the 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 and reached hurricane status five days later, just as it passed over Barbados and into the Caribbean Sea. Sweeping across both independent Caribbean nations, oversea regions of France as well as American territory, the hurricane killed over 3,059 people in total and created economical damage of approximately 91.6 billion US dollars. The two islands that were hit the hardest were Puerto Rico and Dominica, where large parts of the two island's infrastructure and fresh water supplies were destroyed, and numerous casualties occurred.

Hurricanes and Caribbean literature have been tethered to each other throughout the entirety of the region's cultural history. As concluded by Sharae Deckard in her article "The Political Ecology of the Storm" the hurricane is "almost over-determined in Caribbean literature as a figure signifying a social ecology" (Deckard, 27), and one of Brathwaite's most well-known sentences "The storm does not roar in pentameter" (Brathwaite, 1986) exemplifies the problem with describing the hurricane via European poetic formats. Adding to the significant corpus of poetic work that engages with the hurricane as a literary trope a couple of noteworthy poetry collections were published in the wake of hurricane Maria. Richard Georges' collection *Epiphaneia* in 2019, Lasana M. Sekou's *Hurricane Protocols* from Saint Martin published the same year,<sup>71</sup> and most recently Jamaican Olive Senior's *Hurricane Watch*:

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<sup>70</sup> See National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone report, [https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL152017\\_Maria.pdf](https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL152017_Maria.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> For more on the two collections I recommend Christina Kullberg's comparative analysis in the book chapter "Vernacular soundings: Poetry from the Lesser Antilles in the aftermaths of hurricanes Irma and Maria" published in the anthology *Vernaculars in an Age of World Literatures* (2022).



hurricane experience. Second, by drawing on the tidalectic perception of time as a continues dragging back and tidalectic place as expanding and retracting and emerging through practices of sustaining, I will analyse how the hurricane emerges as a disrupter of linear time and confined place in Sorhaindo's portrayal of Dominica, and instead urges a reconsideration of community in the wake of catastrophe.

Jennifer Rahim's earth poetics, as discussed, foregrounds breathing, specifically how breath emerges as a tidalectic way of sustaining and caring for place, while also, with Sharpe in mind, being reminded that we should be considerate of who can breathe freely in the neocolonial world that we all still inhabit. From the perspective of Rahim's earth poetics in *Sanctuaries of Invention* breath was what connected Caribbean human beings to the plantation system and in turn to the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into our atmosphere. Engaging with breath also allows Rahim to formulate a decolonial ecological vision, that points to the direct connections between the colonial plantation system and the global problems of atmosphere that are facing our planet. And so bridging Rahim's earth poetics to Sorhaindo's hurricane poetics I want to briefly point us back to Sharpe's analysis of how colonialism, slavery, and atmosphere are connected. But this time, in the spirit of Sorhaindo's hurricane poetics, rather than engaging with breath, I will look to Sharpe's formulation on 'weather' as antiblackness:

In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place (...) those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. (Sharpe, 106)

Building on the histories of slavery, in Sharpe's work weather is climate, meaning, not just a single event or a series of events, but that "total environment" (Sharpe, 104) of on-going anti-blackness that began with the Middle Passage, and which prevails to this day (Neimanis, 2019; Huzar, 2023). This understanding of weather as anti-blackness is of course insidious, but it also installs in the lives of Black human beings the necessity for creating new ecologies. As a result, the weather also becomes the catalyst for creative processes, in other words, for relating and living differently in the Caribbean.

I will venture a rather literal reading of Sharpe's formulation, to connect her formulation with Brathwaite's conceptualization of 'hurricane poetics', 'nation language' and the tidalectic, and therefore focus on the hurricane not as a weather event, meaning something that literally 'blows over', but instead as an on-going climate of anti-blackness. By doing so I will consider how hurricanes and Black, precarious lives in the Caribbean are deeply interconnected and how this is portrayed in Sorhaindo's chapbook. As Brathwaite himself put it in *ConVERsations* in 1997:

no lasting civilization can build on hurricanes (...) if we don't create archives of our culture in a land of drought, roaches, rodents, fire, damp, termites, volcanoes, earthquakes and hurricanes – we might have very little 'culture' left by the year 2000, okay? (...) I remember in 88 I'm at Harvard as I've said and I remember telling professors there, *'you know, yu-a-ll fortunate here not to have hurricanes!'* And they couldn't understand what I sayin – that Harvard and hurricanes are very closely unconnected. If you have hurricanes – or tornadoes! – at Harvard, you could never have Harvard. But they didn't understand what I sayin. . . (Brathwaite, 1997, 308 – 310)

And so, while institutions like Harvard can only persist because of their close *unconnectedness* to hurricanes, according to Brathwaite, in the Caribbean the hurricane emerges as a kind of total climate, that intermingles social, economic, and cultural spheres with the meteorological. And it is this intermingling that creates the need for the formation of new creative ecologies. How can the poetic-theoretic tools provided by Brathwaite help us understand the representation of the relation between human(s) and hurricane(s) in Celia Sorhaindo chapbook? How is this relationship marked by the continued coloniality of the Caribbean, and how, if at all, does Sorhaindo formulate new decolonial ecologies of the island Dominica and the Caribbean archipelago?

Before I begin my analysis of Sorhaindo's chapbook a brief overview of hurricanes significance as both a meteorological and cultural phenomenon in the Caribbean is required to effectively contextualise my analysis.

### **A few histories of hurricanes**

In the Caribbean the histories of hurricanes are a whirlwind of cultural, social, political ecological, and economic forces wrestling with each other. Today, hurricanes are known around the world as destructive weather phenomena, that often causes severe material damage, however, the hurricane as a distinct phenomenon did not enter the European imaginary until after the colonization of the Caribbean. In fact, the British colonizers only knew of the much less violent phenomena of the storm and were shocked by the impact and severity of the Atlantic hurricanes that they encountered upon colonizing the archipelago and the nearest mainland (Hulme, 1981). Indeed, hurricanes, as both a meteorological phenomenon and a literary trope, have shaped Caribbean culture both before, during and after colonization. In the precolonial Caribbean both the Ciboney, Kalingo and Taíno<sup>74</sup> population had a complex mythology and

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<sup>74</sup> There has been quite a lot of debate about the proper names for these indigenous populations, as well as discussions as to which names that describe a particular Caribbean population, and which that describe particular speaking groups. See for example: "The European explorers met the Ciboney or Guanahacabibe, whom they said were wild and 'as fleet as deer'. They also met the three major Caribbean groups whom they labelled Arawaks, Caribs and Maya, although these groups had their own names to define and identify themselves. Historians now believe, for example, that the people called Arawaks and

iconography surrounding the annual occurrence (Hartman, 2023) that corresponded to the general mythologization of the environment:

physical landscapes were prototypes for symbolic landscapes and the kind of sacred beings that inhabited them. Gods, spirits, and ancestral beings embodied forces of the natural world, from hurricane winds to earthquakes, from volcanic eruptions to eclipses of the sun and the moon. (Saunders, 2005, ix)

Imbedded in these mythologies was also a profound understanding of the hurricanes and their ecological impact on the various islands and the archipelago as a marine community. Archaeological findings show that the Indigenous populations of the Lesser Antilles had developed both architectural and food procurement strategies, to ensure quick rebuilding after a hurricane occurred, along with strong community networks across islands, that ensured resilience and adaptability in the face of sudden disruptions in the environment, such as those caused most frequently by the hurricanes (Cooper, 2012). Furthermore, the Taino people, whose meteorological mythology was centred around the female spiritual entity Guabancex that Sorhaindo has named her collection after, appeared to have a profound understanding of the hurricane's meteorological constitution, which revealed itself in the art produced by the people. The hurricanes were often depicted on petroglyphs as a face or an eye with two arms swirling around it in opposite directions, in many ways resembling the satellite images of the hurricanes that we know from today, indicating, that despite not having the technology that would allow them to see the hurricane from above, the Taino people understood what it would look like if seen from space (Hartman, 2023).

During colonization the hurricanes also served as metaphors for the slaveowners' concern of slave rebellion (Deckard, 2016, 26) and according to Schwartz multiple historical sources reveal that it was a legitimate fear amongst the British that the enslaved subjects, be these of African or Indigenous Caribbean descent, would utilize the chaos of the hurricane and its aftermath to either escape or rebel (Schwartz, 2005, 33). These fears might not strictly have been bound up with superstition. In fact, in Sorhaindo's home island, Dominica, such an instance did occur. In 1530 the Kalinago populations (Caribs), who had overthrown the Arawak population only a century prior to the colonization of the Caribbean region began, utilized a great hurricane to plunder the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico, and kidnap several Spanish colonizers along with some of their enslaved subjects and bring them back to

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Caribs were the Taino and Kalinago respectively. In recent times, the term 'Taino' was used to define the Arawakan speaking group, and now appears widespread in the literature." (Beckles & Shepherd, 2004, 4) I am no expert on the matter, and so following the example of Beckles and Shepherd I use the names Taíno, Ciboney and Kalingo to describe the three major populations of the archipelago prior to colonization.

their island, Dominica, which was still not colonized at that time<sup>75</sup> (Schwartz, 36-37). This, along with other similar occurrences, might have laid the ground for the conviction, that the Indigenous population of the Caribbean was not just better at adapting to the hurricanes, but even had the ability and knowledge to gain from their occurrence.

From an ecological viewpoint the hurricanes serve as important elemental neutralizers, that assist in maintaining the global heat balance, lowering sea temperatures, redeposit sediments as well as stripping the earth of any excess vegetation. (Deckard, 26; see also Long, 1774) The hurricanes functionality as potential fertilizers that could contribute positively to the sugarcane production of islands such as Dominica was recognized in the late eighteenth century by numerous historians, including the Jamaican residing Edward Long, who was a colonial administrator, slave-owner, prolific defender of the enslavement of Africans and author of the controversial book *History of Jamaica* (1774), in which enslavement is described as the natural state of the African subject (Long, 1774). The saying “better hurricane than no cane” was, according to Schwartz, a saying that persisted in many islands during the years of colonization (Schwartz, 2016, 42). Of course, this saying was also a result of the fact, that the hurricanes often affected the enslaved subjects much more than the colonizers, given their poor living conditions (Schwartz, 2005; 2016). To this effect the hurricanes and their impact on colonial society became part of an economic calculation that estimated the destruction of land and crops and the death of enslaved Africans against the profit that could be gained because of this revitalization of the soil.

Due to meteorological circumstances hurricanes affect communities in the Global South much more frequently than in the Global North, and especially archipelagic and coastland areas close to the equator, such as the Caribbean archipelago. When hurricanes do hit a mainland area in the Global North, such as the infamous Hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans in the U.S. in 2005, they often have a much more significant impact on the economical less fortunate communities, whose population often consists mostly of people of colour, descending from either formerly enslaved, downtrodden Indigenous populations or immigrants (Bonilla, 2017; Sheller, 2018). As argued by historian and urban theorist Mike Davis, the social construction of the so-called natural catastrophes is often hidden from view, allowing many to forget that the outcome of catastrophes such as hurricanes are reflections of socio-economic

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<sup>75</sup> In fact, Dominica was one of the last islands of the Lesser Antilles to be colonized. The island did not succumb to the British colonizers until 1761, more than 160 years after Columbus went ashore on Guanahani. With its lush green forests Dominica appeared as an obvious heir to the profitable sugar plantations that had drained the soil of other islands such as Barbados. However, the island proved particularly problematic for the British to colonize due to its vast forest hinterland in which the maroons ruled. Immediately after the abolition of slavery in 1834 the island was completely ruled by maroons and the formerly enslaved who joined them. For more on the forest history and the maroon society in Dominica see Lennox Honychurch's *In the Forests of Freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica* (2017) and Andreas Malm's article "In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature" (2018).



structures (Davis, 1999, 9). And so, the histories of hurricanes' impact on modern society are often the histories of the precarious lives of non-white subjects and the communities they are part of. As described by Deckard: "Hurricanes such as Katrina, Hugo, or Ivan are ecological disasters only when social conditions cause them to be experienced as such, exposing the hidden geographies that attend environmental crisis" (Deckard, 2016, 27).

### **White page, black feeling**

The first poem of Sorhaindo's *Guabancex* is entitled "a poem filled with words not metaphors" (1), a text that puts into words the very complex task of writing poetically about the hurricane catastrophe. The first four lines of the poem reads:

im not going to sit here and paint a heavy hurricane picture for you to  
visualize in pretty clever metaphor words will never carry you to what  
its like actually lets just leave it like that words cannot take you  
there at all (...) (Sorhaindo, 2020, 1)

Inserting herself between the world and the word, insisting that the reality of the hurricane can never be properly captured by poetic expression, Sorhaindo begins her collection by denouncing the metaphor as a conjuring act that can transport the reader to the moment when hurricane Maria hit. As Celia Britton's states in her book *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Literature* (2011), to consider the importance of the hurricane as solely allegorical is not just a reductive reading of the phenomenon, but also a Eurocentric and therefore problematic one. Many societies in the Caribbean are heavily affected by hurricanes and it is important to start by taking the impacts and the destructiveness of the hurricane literally (Britton, 111-112). Britton's critique of the allegorical use of the hurricane ties in directly with the colonial issue of dealing with the Caribbean archipelago as a *real place*, rather than a fictional fantasy.<sup>76</sup> On a similar note Deckard concludes that the hurricane, even in fictional texts, must never be understood merely as symbolic, but as a material representation of the ecological reality that constitutes the environment in which we live (Deckard, 42).

As the poem progresses, the narrator underscores the inadequacy of not just metaphor, but words or language more generally, and how this relates the impossible task of representing not just

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<sup>76</sup> A critique of the common Western presentation of the Caribbean as an exotic, Eden-like fantasy region, that in no way accounts for either the socio-economic or ecologic catastrophic history of the region has been phrased by numerous Caribbean studies scholars. For more on the topic I recommend Richard Grove's *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600–1860* (1995), Polly Pattulo's *Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean* (1996) and Krista Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics* (2006).

the hurricane as a meteorological phenomenon, but as an event that affects black, precarious lives to a much larger degree than white privileged ones (Bonilla, 2017). Sorhaindo writes:

all word is metaphor  
this will never be real  
in a billion years i dont  
want some reader come here think  
this world of words was literal think  
this blank ink represents black feeling  
or that this white page feel anything  
this is what the hurricane left me with  
go out and experience it for your self  
metaphor the world however you want (Sorhaindo, 2020, 1)

Indeed, *Gnabancex* begins with a denouncement of the poet as a conveyer of any universal truth, but also a denouncement of the potentiality of poetic language in the wake of the hurricane. This denouncement can be interpreted on two interlinked levels. The first is decolonial. In the lines “i dont / want some reader come here think / this world of words was literal think / this blank ink represents black feeling / or that this white page feel anything” (Ibid.) the narrator is not just insisting on the fallacy of colonial language in the wake of the 2017 hurricane catastrophe, but also on the fallacy of the literary genre, “this blank ink” and “white page” that seems incapable of capturing the devastation felt in the Black, Dominican community. And so, whilst the narrator of the poem is contemplating the role of metaphor in the wake of hurricane Maria, she is also insisting on the fallacy of both colonial language and the literary genre to convey Black, precarious suffering in the wake of the catastrophe. Furthermore, Sorhaindo’s employment of the oppositional triad of “blank ink”, “black feeling” and “white page” almost functions as an anticipatory kind of self-critique. Fully aware that the “black feeling[s]” that are related to the hurricane experience are most often ignored or grossly underrepresented in the broader conversations on the calamities of violent weather, as expressed by Ferdinand’s “anonymous blackness” (Ferdinand, 2021, 65) and Sharpe’s weather as antiblackness (Sharpe, 2016), Sorhaindo’s narrator seems to initiate the collection with a form of critical self-reflection on poetry as a tool for portraying catastrophe. As described in one of the only reviews the collection has received so far “she [Sorhaindo] leaves the door open for us to ponder how we, in turn, may live through poetry that does not paint the world in images and metaphors, but exposes us to the realities of more storms to come” (Saint-Loubert, 2021).

This decolonial interpretation of Sorhaindo’s denouncement of the metaphor as a poetic tool in the wake of the hurricane’s havoc, and the self-critique of the status of the poet and the entire genre, is of course also intertwined with an ecological consideration. If we turn to one if not the most well-known poetic portrayal of storms from the Western world, Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, we see how Sorhaindo’s critique can be read as a direct response to this Elizabethan play. In *The Tempest* the marooned King Prospero has spent twelve years on a practically deserted island with his daughter Miranda, as well as an Indigenous man, Caliban, and the spiritual entity Ariel, both of whom he has enslaved by threats of magical punishment. Prospero raises a storm that shipwrecks six men, including Prospero’s former nemesis Alonso, onto the island. Therefore, the internal logic of *The Tempest* is, that the elements can be controlled by humans through acts of sorcery; sorcery that Prospero performs by his potent command over language. According to both Caliban and Prospero himself, Prospero’s magical powers are derived from the books of spells that he hastily brings with him when he is fleeing Milan, and therefore, Prospero’s ability to read, as opposed to Caliban’s illiteracy, is what allows him to enslave both the elements, including the weather, and the inhabitants of the island (Mowat, 2000, 27). *The Tempest* has a long history as a favoured object of analysis and discussion in postcolonial literary criticism, and, since the early 2000s, as it has emerged as a topic of ecocritical analysis as well.<sup>77</sup> Also, any reader of Brathwaite knows that *The Tempest* is a favoured reference of his, particularly when discussing rebellion against colonial language.<sup>78</sup>

While this detour to Shakespeare might seem trite due to its long history of representation within the scholarly conversation in postcolonial literature, it does serve an important comparative point that demonstrates the decolonial ecological focus in Sorhaindo’s chapbook. I argue that Shakespeare’s play highlights the alignment between the mastery of poetic language and the presumed mastery of both non-white human-beings and more-than-human entities, such as the weather, and that poetry or poetic language in Shakespeare’s play emerges as a conjuring act in line with magic (Knopp, 2004, 338). This

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<sup>77</sup> Whilst a significant amount of writing has been done on *The Tempest* from a postcolonial perspective, for more on the play in an ecocritical context I suggest the reader to turn to Jonathan Bate’s chapter “A Song For Ariel” in *The Song of the Earth* (2000), and David Gray’s article “‘Command these elements to silence’: Ecocriticism and *The Tempest*” (2020). The latter has particularly inspired my reading in this chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Brathwaite engages with *The Tempest* and particularly Caliban as a literary figure on numerous levels in his writing. He names an entire layout style after Caliban’s mother, the witch Sycorax who never enters the stage but functions as a form of ‘sub-text’ throughout the play, he refers to all formerly enslaved Caribbeans as Calibans, i.e., enslaved under the sorcery of the colonial masters, and dedicates numerous poems to the enslaved character. For more on this see for example Peter Hulme’s chapter “Prospero and Caliban” in *Colonial Encounters* (1986), Silvio Torres-Saillant’s article “The Trials of Authenticity in Kamau Brathwaite” (1994), Éric Doumerc’s article “Caliban Playing Pan: A Note on The Metamorphoses of Caliban in Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s ‘Caliban’” (2014) and Bill Ashcroft’s *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2009). Since this dissertation’s focus is not Brathwaite’s engagement with Caliban as a literary figure and *The Tempest* as a play I will not delve further into these very rich discussions. However, for any reader who is interested in the topic I would encourage them to read Brathwaite’s own writing on the matter, including texts such as his essays “Caliban’s Garden” (1992) and “Caliban, Ariel, and Unprospero in the conflict of creolization” (1977).

structuring principle in *The Tempest*, that the one who commands poetic language also commands the weather, is exactly the idea of language dominion over the hurricane that Sorhaindo, at least in part, writes against in this initial poem: “all word is metaphor / this will never be real” (Ibid.). So, the question then, productively, becomes centred on what strategies for going forward as a poet is Sorhaindo’s narrator suggesting instead and how this in turn corresponds to Brathwaite’s concept of ‘nation language’.

Perhaps an answer can be found in the narrator’s diction. As she is undermining the metaphor’s ability to reveal reality, the narrator is also ‘failing’ at, or perhaps rather *refusing* to, produce ‘proper’ English: the ‘i’ is not capitalized, the apostrophe is missing from the contracted ‘dont’, the verb ‘think’ is not properly conjugated amongst others. Like Shakespeare’s Caliban, the native of the island who Prospero has enslaved, who speaks perfect English and eventually uses his language ability against his master later in the play,<sup>79</sup> Sorhaindo’s narrator also produces a language that goes against the colonizer’s. However, Sorhaindo’s narrator does not just repurpose the colonizers language as Caliban, but rather purposely misuses, as Brathwaite would say, colonial language, this grammatically ‘proper’ English, and transforms it into her own by using Anglocreole grammar, her own nation language. As Brathwaite writes himself in his historical monograph *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770 – 1820* (1971/2005) on the topic of enslavement and language, in which he pre-empts his later development of the concept nation language: “It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis)use of it that he perhaps most efficiently rebelled.”(Brathwaite, 1971, 237)

Reading Sorhaindo’s “a poem filled with words not metaphors” via an engagement with Brathwaite’s nation language it is clear how Sorhaindo’s denouncement of the metaphor can be read as an act of active language rebellion, and how this is a deeply decolonial and ecological endeavour. In the poem, Sorhaindo refuses to make metaphor out of the very real pain inflicted on the Dominican population by the hurricane, and instead thematizes an abandonment, or marooning, of the poetic tools utilized by the English colonizers. Thus, corresponding to Brathwaite’s ‘nation language’ as analysed and discussed, Sorhaindo presents her book as a poetic work that practices a kind of language maroonage, by abandoning the language models, including the metaphor, made available by the colonizing powers. As Sorhaindo sets up her poetry as a kind of ‘maroon language alternative’, to stay with my conceptualization of Brathwaite’s nation language, to the English poetry’s fondness for metaphor, it is important to consider which poetic strategies she does instead turn to in her depiction the relationship between human and hurricane in *Guabancex*. How the poet circumvents the colonial power structure of ‘proper’ language and

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<sup>79</sup> The legendary line spoken by Caliban reads: “(...) you taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (Shakespeare, org. 1611, ed. 2008, 29 – 30)

the colonial myth of poetic language as weather control, as we saw in *The Tempest*, moving beyond the problematic world of the “blank ink” and “white page” needs to be explored and understood.

### **Invoking the hurricane matterphor**

Turning to Brathwaite’s concept ‘hurricane poetics’ to analyse how Sorhaindo presents alternative ways of representing the hurricane experience of 2017 aligns with how Sharae Deckard defines the hurricane in Caribbean literature. For Deckard the hurricane interrupts the human everyday life, by not only disturbing structures and patterns of labour and social interactions, but by subverting our anthropocentric idea of humans as the privileged centre of the world (Deckard, 2016, 26). Similarly, Celia Britton, in her analysis of one of the Francophone Caribbean most famous hurricane tales, *Les Fruits du cyclone: Une Géopoétique de la Caraïbe* (2006) by Guadelupian Daniel Maximin, concludes that “[in *Les Fruits du cyclone*] human beings have no absolutely privileged status in comparison with the rest of the natural world” (Britton, 112). In a Caribbean literary context, the hurricane as a weather phenomenon does not just disrupt or disturb our anthropocentric ways of being and thinking, but can also function as a poetic trope or structure that is utilized to create narratives that attempt to move beyond human narration. Brathwaite’s hurricane poetics articulates this reversal of narrative or poetic hierarchy, displaying how the poet’s desire to narrate the hurricane is interrupted by the hurricane itself, resulting in a poetic stuttering, reflected in both content and form: “And what. what. what . . . what more. what more can I tell you” (Brathwaite, 1990, 9 – see Chapter Two, section Hurricane poetics for full quotation and commentary).

A similar kind of hurricane poetics is embodied in Sorhaindo’s poem “Invoked” (14 – 17), which functions almost like a narrative intermezzo in the collection. However, Sorhaindo seems to evolve Brathwaite’s performative poetic. As analysed and discussed in Chapter Two, hurricane poetics can be considered as an attempt at creating a poetic expression that can relay particular Caribbean environmental and ecological experiences, such as the hurricane, and how they influence the Caribbean human beings’ psyche. Sorhaindo indeed plays around with this on several levels. First, via the poem’s layout that imitates a *literal* turn of events: its first two pages of the text is printed horizontally (landscape mode), forcing the reader to flip the entire collection to read it. Here a carnivalesque dissolving of hierarchies and social structures as the result of a storm seems to imitate the visual format of the poem. The following page is written entirely in upper case, standing out from the rest of the collection. Secondly, on the narrative level the poem is relayed from Hurricane Maria’s perspective, abandoning human narration completely. Almost as a nod to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in which Prospero conjures up the storm by his command over the spirit Ariel, the poem begins with the hurricane condemning the humans who



By using stylistic devices such as alliteration, simile, metonymy and idiophones, hurricane Maria is unveiled as a more-than-human wor(l)d-maker with a well-evolved poetic consciousness. Whereas other Caribbean poets have dealt with the hurricane as a poetic force on a thematic level, this uncompromised form of hurricane-narration, in which the disastrous event does not just influence the poet's writing through metaphor, rhythm, layout and narrative structure, but where the narrator is the hurricane, is much rarer. As an example of the former, the famous Haitian poet and playwright, Frankétienne, in his poem "Dialecte de cyclones" (2012) writes about speaking "the dialect of lunatic hurricanes", the "Languages of storms" and "the patois of furious rains"<sup>80</sup>, however, he does not perform it in his poem. Where Frankétienne chooses the meta-contemplation, Sorhaindo throws her readers right into the wild winds of hurricane narration. This strategy is partly similar to Kellman's watery media-res seen in "Cattlewash: The Cruel Sea", where Kellman invokes the Atlantic Sea as a violent more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, whose ravenous waves drown out the human voice completely (Chapter Three, section Ravenous waves at Cattlewash beach). However, Sorhaindo's vision of this hurricane as a more-than-human wor(l)d-maker is not just thematized, as in Kellman's poem, but also visualised through her layout of the poetic page.

As in the case of Prospero, who conjures up the tempest by language-sorcery, so does hurricane Maria accuse humans of having "teased her out" by giving her a name, leading to their own demise. Indeed, the first two pages of "Invoked" emerges as a tale of the wrathful hurricane, that humans have believed they could control, but that, once teased out, does not obey, but instead releases hell upon them. To that extent, the poem can be interpreted as a testimony to the consequences of the human arrogance imbedded in not just the logic of *The Tempest*, as previously discussed in this chapter, but in the general notion of humans as being able to control the elements.

This idea of human language control as both false and insufficient in the wake of the hurricane catastrophe, that we see continued from the former "a poem filled with words not metaphors" is also connected to Brathwaite's short but precise notion that: "The storm does not roar in pentameter" (Brathwaite, 1986, 265). Indeed, this quote, as previously discussed, indicates the need for different poetic formats and rhythms to encapsulate the experience of living through a hurricane. I argue, that by playing around with both layout and more-than-human narration, Sorhaindo is attempting to show the hurricane not as a metaphor, but rather as a what ecocritic Lowell Duckert has referred to as 'matterphor': a fusion of language and matter. Duckert suggests the term in his introduction to the anthology *Elemental*

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<sup>80</sup> Deckard translates an excerpt of the poem into English in her previously cited book chapter "The Political Ecology of Storms in Caribbean Literature" (2016). I reference this translation since no other has been attempted by any other scholar or translator.

*Ecocriticism* (2015) when describing the cultural and material intermixing of elemental words such as hurricane (derived from the Taino word for storm god) or tsunami (meaning harbour-wave in Japanese). According to Duckert these elemental words function as matterphors in their ability to bond materiality and narrative, substance and word, in a thick and agentic coil (Duckert, 2015, 11). Duckert writes:

These words of wind, whorl, and water yearn to be metaphors, linguistic conveyance devices. The elements might be described as metaphor magnets, but their ability to bond materiality and narrative is deeper than mere impress or gravitational trajectory. Through their action metaphor becomes *matterphor* (...) word and substance together transported: of language but not reducible to linguistic terms, agentic and thick. (Duckert, 2015, 11)

Duckert's portmanteau of the matterphor adds a layer of commitment to Brathwaite's hurricane poetics, which focuses on the problem of rhythm, this issue of the poetic format of the traditional English that cannot express or approach the environmental experience of the hurricane. The matterphor also corresponds to Brathwaite's hurricane poetics which, as discussed in Chapter two, would be a poetic expression that approximates the experience of the hurricane, which sound "like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave (...)" (Brathwaite, 1986, 266- see Chapter Two, section Hurricane poetics for commentary). Thus, Brathwaite's hurricane poetics is also connected to a tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers, in that it does not just seek out a poetic expression that comes close to the hurricane, but also attempts to express how poetics language structures are deeply indebted, for good and bad, to the hurricane as a weather phenomenon. Thereby Brathwaite is also indicating his poetic commitment to the destructive winds and waves of the hurricane season, that most people living in the Caribbean are familiar with. Or in other words: hurricane poetics would employ 'matterphors' rather than metaphors, since it would attempt to fuse language with matter, or word with world (see Chapter One, Colonialist History writing/Tidalectic histories writing).

Indeed, this sense of matter or physical reality and poetic language as bound together becomes increasingly clear on the following page. Moving away from the visualization of chaotic cataclysm, emphasized by the usage of varied blank space and caesuras on the first two pages of the poem, the text seems to literally *thicken*, and hurricane Maria's voice is now both visualized in a condensed, vertical spiral, and speaks with such ferocity, that it is voiced by large, capitalized letters, signifying an intensification of the voice of the pounding storm:

I WILL TURN YOU LOOSE

I WILL TORNADO YOU OUT



OF YOUR RIGHT MIND  
I WILL LEAVE YOU LEAVE YOU  
LEAVE YOU WITH NOTHING  
WORTH SAVING—  
THY. WILL.  
BE. DONE.

In quite a matterphorical manner, the layout of the page could be perceived as resembling the centre of the hurricane, a condensed spiral. I would argue, that in this poetic moment, in which the hurricane is expressed like the voice of some wrathful God through layout, font, punctuation, as well as semantic meaning the hurricane emerges from the page in full force as a matterphor – a fusion of the hurricane’s material constitution, and its linguistic meaning. In the three lines “I WILL TURN YOU LOOSE / I WILL TORNADO YOU OUT / OF YOUR RIGHT MIND” the distinction between word and matter are dissolved – the word tornado that is derived from the Spanish *tornar*, which means to turn. The hurricane’s ability to turn the inhabitants of Dominica’s world upside down is not metaphorical here, but rather matterphorical. Simultaneously, the poem also utilizes the font size and capitalisation of the letters to simulate a furious roaring, that is quite similar to the one found in *SHAR: Hurricane Poem* (1990) in which the layout steadily grows over the final pages, to a point where the font on the last page is so large that it can only fit five lines and seven words in total. And so, returning, once again, to Brathwaite’s famous line, “The storm does not roar in pentameter”, one can conclude, that within the logic of Sorhaindo’s hurricane poetics, the hurricane does not just defy the pentameter, indeed it whips and wails in interrupted and abrupt lines, condensed spirals, and capitalized letters, destroying the poetic format of the English colonizers. And it turns both the lives and minds of the residents of Dominica upside down, just as we as readers have to do with Sorhaindo’s chapbook.

So, in both Brathwaite’s hurricane poetics as well as in Sorhaindo’s two poems there is a reversal of the narrative and poetic hierarchy evident in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The poet does not command weather via language, as Prospero with his magic books, instead weather, in this case the hurricane, commands what language is made available to the poet. And so, by engaging with Sorhaindo’s poems via Brathwaite’s two language concepts ‘nation language’ and ‘hurricane poetics’ we see the two levels of language rebellion that are present in *Guabancex*: one that refuses the colonizers language and one that utilizes the poetic page as a medium for immersing the reader into the physical experience of the hurricane.

## A home after the hurricane

This ‘turning upside down’ implied in Sorhaindo’s employment of the poetic page as a medium for relaying the hurricane experience is also present in relation to questions of time within the collection. In her analysis of time in *Epiphaneia* (2019), *Hurricane Protocol* (2019) and *Guabancex*, Kullberg concludes, that it seems to be a general theme for the poetry coming out of Hurricane Maria that it seeks to connect “intimate experiences of time and a larger timeframe that would be questioning rather than adapting revolutionary temporality” (Kullberg, 2022 b, 177) In *Guabancex*, the hurricane emerges as splitting time: there is always an implicit before and after the hurricane, but the sense of future is often completely absent. This sense of a splitting of time is underlined by two practices, preparation (before) versus rebuilding (after). “In The Air” (3) is structured around the post-hurricane circumstances, beginning its first four stanzas with a repetition of the sentence “After the hurricane (...) After the hurricane (...) After the hurricane (...) After the hurricane” (Sorhaindo, 3-5) and the poem portrays the eerie life immediately after the hurricane, where the island is turned into a society where resources are scarce, and the communal desperation starts to grow:

After the hurricane,  
after Mass  
tales of rampant looting  
circled around them like rampant dogs; (...)

After the hurricane,  
came the crazed lines for food...  
for any kind of fuel;  
came the tell-tail spoors  
of rats and roaches tracking rubbish;  
dank despair  
threading desperation through the dark.

After the hurricane  
she said sometimes it felt  
like man eat man survival (...)  
(Sorhaindo, 2020, 4)

In this almost postapocalyptic Dominica every action, every encounter, every experience, is measured as occurring after the hurricane, as a defining moment in time. Indeed, there is no mention of a before, as if time only began after the hurricane struck. This structure of repetition also reveals the regularity of the hurricane, and how the island is always in the wake of the hurricane, be it Maria or another one. In his article on maroon ecologies Andreas Malm concludes, that whilst previously there might have been hope for an island like Dominica today, with the constant increase in violent weather, re-building after hurricane Maria seems practically impossible, and to a certain extent pointless:

In an earlier epoch, Dominica could perhaps have been rebuilt and the vegetation regrown, but in a warming world, we know, the hurricanes will return again and again, stronger and stronger, fuelled and refuelled by the excess energy stored in the ever-warmer rising seas. This island has been thrown towards a state of uninhabitability. (...) (Malm, 2018, 30-31)

Almost mirroring Malm's bleak conclusion, Sorhaindo's "In the Air" illustrates how it is not just the hurricane catastrophe itself that destroys the island, but also the desperate actions of a despairing population and that it is the constant state of being in the wake of the hurricane catastrophe, which is not singular but on-going, fuelled and re-fuelled as Malm writes, that throws the island into a state of almost uninhabitability. This sensation of time, as being always measured as after the hurricane catastrophe, is a common theme throughout the collection. In the poem "Horology – TimeXemiT(ion)" (13) the narrator describes a dislodging of time, through the concrete image of a lost watch:

This timepiece had survived Maria; no  
Chronosphere but its quartz calibre powered a precise and steady pulse.

Unlike Me. I feel it will take years for things to run normal again  
like clockwork. This time after the storm, I can't work out  
exactly what month, day, hour my life so frantically inhabits.  
(Sorhaindo, 2020, 13)

In "Horology – TimeXemiT(ion)" the hurricane is that which disrupts the sense of 'natural time' or daily rhythm: the sense of repetition, of time as something steady, is completely absent. Also, in that absence a sense of distress and anxiety emerges. As the poem continues, we come to see that the fear of the missing watch is not so much a fear of the lost artifact, but rather a fear of losing one's sense of time and rhythm completely, in the wake of the catastrophe:

Now, I am reminded yet again – no thing is lost to the universe not even Dad’s Timex watch or ring. I rewind the weeks and hours, retrace movements and spend the day in search of another lost possession.

Listening for its distinct tick-tock emission, I hope it will turn up. Something else I can’t see or find for looking. For a second another beat skips – what if it hasn’t been misplaced – but taken? (Ibid., 13)

The fear of having lost the watch for good, and thereby the sense of timeliness and steady tick-tock rhythm, is complete when the ‘I’ of the poem dares the thought that the watch might not simply be misplaced, but has perhaps been taken. Suddenly, the fear that the watch is gone for good becomes symbolic to the fear of losing one’s sense of steady time – of not being able to get back to the daily rhythm – after the hurricane. The science of measuring time (horology) seems lost in the wake of the catastrophe, and with this the sense of definitive distinctions between past and future are also lost. And while this might at first read as a loss, if read through the tidalectic perception of time as a continuous washing over or dragging back, it becomes clear that this dissolution of the “tick-tock emission”, that measures time as something fixed, might also allow for new, potentially more fruitful ways of engaging with what is to come. Similarly in the poem “H2.5AZ (Strong ties, Galvanized)” (18) in which the practice of rebuilding, becomes the essence of the attempt at preparing for future hurricane scenarios, we see how the distinctive sense of future is lost, and how the ‘I’ of the poem might be accepting of the fact, that fixed, permanent time is not a possibility. The poem in its entirety reads:

They are building me a new roof since the old one went  
with the wind—category 5+. I have learnt a whole new  
vocabulary—purlins, rafters, wall plates, hurricane ties.  
It is chaos on top of chaos—the necessary brutal breaking  
down to build back better, stronger—mitigate against future

blows they say will come more frequently—ferociously unpredictable.  
I look up—sturdy wet new treated pine above my head, see the thicker  
rafters—bird beaked—sitting tied down on edge of anchored plate.  
They say you must have such cuts and ties to firmly lodge onto ledges—  
The price to be secure—to be more—permanent; more knowledgeable? (Ibid., 18)

To the unidentified “they” of the poem, the sturdiness of the home is considered as a way of preserving oneself for the future. The hurricane is a catastrophe that is said to “come more frequently—ferociously unpredictable”, which is a nod to the increase in hurricane strength and frequency felt across the Caribbean region. This means that to survive a hurricane “they” are building stronger. To that effect, the event of the hurricane seems tied directly to the desire for permanence, which takes its physical form in the stronger re-construction of the home, the “sturdy wet new treated pine above my head, see the thicker / rafters—bird beaked—sitting tied down on edge of anchored plate.” However, the irony of the poem centres on this idea of sturdiness as a possibility. As the narrator concludes that one must pay the price of cuts and ties in order “to be more—permanent”. However, this idea of permanence is also linked to being “more knowledgeable?”. The poem ends with a question mark, implicitly asking, if permanence and being knowledgeable might even be possible in Dominica post hurricane Irma. Or, perhaps, whether it is wise to strive for permanence to begin with.

When the narrator splits the stanzas between the lines “mitigate against future // blows they say will come more frequently” (18) it leaves us with two very different analytical possibilities. Either we read these two lines as one sentence, meaning that the rebuilding of the home is a way of lessening the impact of future hurricanes *or* we read them as two different lines, by which the first “mitigate against future” is read as if the reconstruction of the home is a way of working *against* the future. The poem seems to suggest, that rather than making the home more sturdy, more permanent, perhaps it should be made more adaptable. Cuts and ties might fasten the ‘I’ to a place, a home, but in the event of the hurricane tying oneself down is not necessarily the most viable option. By ending the poem with a question mark I argue that the narrator is questioning whether these hard, sturdy materials, “purlins, rafters, wall plates, hurricane ties” (18), are in service of permanence, or whether a different approach to the preservation of home might be more productive. Going back to the tidalectic perception of place as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining (Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place), we can interpret Sorhaindo’s narrator’s question mark as an opening to reconsider what the home can and should be in the wake of the hurricane catastrophe. Brathwaite’s image of the grandmother sweeping her yard for sand, suggests that one sustains a home, cares for it, by continuously tending to it, but in Sorhaindo’s poem the question of whether sustaining a home is even possible in the world of hurricanes is at the forefront. As the previously quoted line from Brathwaite concisely states: “with hurricanes you can’t accumulate anything” (Brathwaite, 1997, 309), perhaps not even the small material goods that are needed for constructing a house.

Similarly in the poem “Ode for Mum’s Missing Roofing Screws (Somewhere Still In The Universe)” (11-12) it is the practice of rebuilding in the wake of the hurricane that emerges as the main theme, just as in “H2.5AZ (Strong ties, Galvanized)”. However, in this poem it is the problem of some roofing screws that are needed for rebuilding the mother’s home, but that never make it to the island:

We walked slow, back and forth, across that strange taut rope lying

Between horror and happiness, self reliance and assistance, being al-  
one and in the spirit of community, holding on to... and letting go;

constantly; the joy—pain feelings of this un-covering redis-covering.

I know I have to let these missing roofing screws go. No-one can tell

me why they never made the sea passage from one land mass to this  
one; just insured commodity they say, no matter—this time I agree.

(Ibid., 12)

Here Sorhaindo highlights how affordances and privileges determine the ability to re-build a home after the catastrophe strikes and sketches out the hindrances of this when living on an isolated island dependent on the import of building materials. Here we also see, at least in part, a vocation of the colonialist perception of islands as subordinate to other places of inhabitation (see Chapter One, section Colonialist place/Tidalectic place). To those who do not live on the island the roofing screws are just “insured commodity” lost at sea, however, they are indispensable for rebuilding the mother’s home. Furthermore, in the portrayal of the back-and-forth movement, between “being al-/one and in the spirit of community, holding on to... and letting go;” there is an imitation of the movements of the “sea passage” that the roofing screws should have been transported across. This also reminds the reader of how an island like Dominica, where local production options are limited, is deeply dependent on materials being transported to them in time of need. In these two poems the repeated focus on the materials with which one builds and sustains a home underscore how Dominica in the wake of the hurricane is both a community of “self-reliance and [in need of] assistance” (Ibid.) from the outside world. So, if maintaining a place one can call home by either sturdy materials or simple acts of sustaining seems impossible in Sorhaindo’s *Guabancex*, which opportunities for reparation are instead presented in the wake of the hurricane?

### Expansion and retraction in the world of hurricanes

Questions of community in Dominica after hurricane Maria culminates in the final poem of the collection entitled “Hurricane PraXis (Xcorcising Maria Xperience)” – a tour-de force in both the practical and emotional labour that reveals itself in the wake of the hurricane. It also provides a contemplation on how new communities can be built and sustained after the traumatic event. Spanning over nine pages the poem is set up almost like a chant, or a call and response, echoing the poems sub-title, “(Xcorcising Maria Xperience)”, that might indicate the poem as a potential purging force. But the poem it also a testimony to the conflicting emotions and experiences related to the hurricane as an event, as discussed in the previous section. In her reading Christina Kullberg concludes that the final poem of the collection is “like a long litany built around contradictions” (Kullberg, 2022, 119). Setting the tone for the centralization of these conflicting emotions the very first line reads:

we are grateful to be alive                      we are stunned to be still alive (24)

And later in the poem.

we feel tired                                      we feel energized  
we feel scared                                    we feel courageous  
we feel hopeful                                   we feel hopeless  
(Sorhaindo, 2020, 32)

Rather than referring to the structure of “Hurricane PraXis” as one of contradictions, as Kullberg does, and thereby in part adhering to a dialectic reading, in which opposing forces or contradictions are wrestling with each other, I consider a tidalectic reading and instead interpret the poem’s structure as a movement between affirmation and negation or, to use the phrasing from Chapter One, expansion and retraction. This oscillating movement structures a large part of the poem and, I argue, creates an almost paradoxical poetic space, in which both communal emotions and reality are constantly contested and challenged. I am drawn to the formulation of movement between affirmation and negation, or expansion and retraction, because it, rather than suggesting a dichotomous relationship between being tired and energized, scared and courageous, hopeful and hopeless, seems to imply that the two are co-constitutional: they are becoming with each other. The poem is narrated by a first-person plural narrator, ‘we’, and thereby seems to suggest a form of communal coming together in the wake of the hurricane catastrophe. As Kullberg suggests:

The movement between intimacy and the outside world is also a tension between individual and collectivity, a personal and a shared sounding that must remain differentiated. (...) They [environmental and ecological catastrophes] call for action, practice, as a mode of survival and rebuilding. Within the communitarian “we,” a number of voices resonate and emerge in contradictions. (...) It is a song sung by one single body containing many individual bodies (...) (Kullberg, a2022, 119)

Whereas Kullberg turn to the concept of resonance and identifies the ‘we’ narrator in the poem as consisting of “many individual bodies” that come together, I will stay with my formulation on histories in my interpretation of the plural first-person narrator. The unidentified ‘they’ in “H2.5AZ (Strong ties, Galvanized)”, emerge as a form of authoritative voice of History, who only speaks in absolute truths, hence the conclusion “blows they say will come more frequently—ferociously unpredictable. (...) They say you must have such cuts and ties to firmly lodge onto ledges” (18). Whereas the ‘we’ narrator of “Hurricane PraXis” comes to represent the conjoining of histories; how multiple voices, narratives, and histories filter into each other, creating a communal voice, that is never absolute in its conclusions, but always moving back and forth between emotions, or, to put it in tidalectic terms, expanding and retracting. As a result, there is also a curious re-working of the tidalectic perception of place in this poem, since the oscillating movement between expansion and retraction is not just related to physical place, but also to the emotional. Furthermore, the expanding and retracting structure also underscores how there is no clear distinction between the singular and the plural in Sorhaindo’s poem. Instead, the poem seems to focus on who is included and who is excluded from various communities in the world of hurricanes. In this inclusion or exclusion, it is also important to note, that Sorhaindo does not leave her readers with a tale of harmonious, communal survival. Rather “Hurricane PraXis” repeatedly illustrates the hard manual labour that comes after the hurricane, the fear of those who might take advantage of the situation both inside and outside of the community, and the desperation that arises when resources on the island run short.

Returning to my preoccupation with the poem as adhering to a tidalectic perception of place as emerging through expansion and retraction (Chapter One, Colonialist place/Tidalectic place), one could say that the hurricane creates a new sense of place in its wake, in which the individual is dissolved into a community (we), and the sense of privacy or home, is merged with the significance of a larger community. The tidalectic perception of place as emerging, not only through acts of sustaining, but also as a dynamic construction of expansion-retraction, is present on both a thematical and a formal level. On a formal level the sentences are separated by gaps, never by punctuation, which can be read as visually signifying an ongoing movement between positions. The visual gaps, these empty ‘in-betweens’,



also leave space for contemplation. What lies between the words? What thoughts or concerns are mediated in these seemingly blank pauses?

Brathwaite himself performs a similar reading of Wilson Harris from the 1960s<sup>81</sup>, in which he argues that the “physio-cultural explosions” of the Caribbean (Brathwaite, b1985, 457) are expressed in Harris’ writing by utilising a stylistic in which “some of the words are actually blown out of the novel” (Ibid.), creating a literary page that consists of fragmentation. This sense of fragmentation is in fact also present in the formation of the ‘we’, who is of course not a universal ‘we’ but is rather limited to those subjects inflicted by the hurricane in Dominica, as well as those subjects who seem to abide to a certain code of behaviour. For example:

we are fearful of looters                      we are angry with looters  
we are angry with the police (25)

And –

we are grateful for the Haitians who sell provisions by the muddy road  
we are not grateful for the Haitians we tell them to move somewhere else  
(...)  
we hate that some are behaving like criminals  
(Sorhaindo, 2020, 29)

This also creates an oscillating movement between communal intimacy as well as division: those who are a part of the ‘we’, and those who are not. Furthermore, it underscores the sense of isolation from the outside world after the catastrophe, which Mimi Sheller refers to as “the islanding effect” (Sheller, 2012, 188) in the wake of catastrophe, which in turn, as argued by Kullberg, creates a sense of an enclosed present, in which the news of the hurricane’s destruction is reported around the world, but where the local experience is one of isolation (Kullberg, 2022 b, 184). The ‘we’ of the poem have each other, but they are isolated from the rest of the world:

we hold each other                      we are grateful we have each other  
we are alone  
(Ibid., 25)

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<sup>81</sup> These include *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *The Whole Armour* (1962), *The Waiting Room* (1967) and lastly *Tutatumari* (1968).

Certainly, “Hurricane PraXis” illustrates how in the wake of the hurricane emotions of community and solitude do not only co-exist, but are co-constitutional, in their reinforcing of each other. In the wake of the catastrophe the local, afflicted community and its inhabitants move closer together, whilst the outside world, the non-afflicted, seems to move further away.

On a thematical level this tidalectic perception of place as constantly expanding and retracting is mostly present in the discussion of staying versus leaving, or, as DeLoughrey might say, in the relationship between routes (movement/moving) and roots (home/staying). This is a recurring theme throughout this analysis, represented in slightly different ways by each poet under consideration. In Kellman’s *Limestone* the relationship between roots and routes was thematically expressed by the continuous tug and pull of the home island Barbados versus the desire to free oneself from both the economic and social restraints of the island (see Chapter Three), and in Rahim’s earth poetics it was thematically brought forward by the literal desire to take voluntary root in the island by the act of planting, as well as the desire for mobility in the face of the earthquake as a catastrophe (see Chapter Four). However, whereas Kellman and Rahim only thematically engaged with the tidalectic perception of place as expanding and retracting, Sorhaindo, as analysed above, also engages with it on a formalistic or visual level, via gaps, no punctuation and so on. The ‘we’ of the poem senses the tugs and pulls to both stay home, attempting to salvage what little they have left, and to leave, to potentially create a better future for themselves and their loved ones away from the hurricane ridden island. For instance:

we stay together                      we stay alone  
we leave together                    we leave alone we are left alone  
we separate  
we are forced to leave when we do not want to we can’t wait to leave  
we are forced to stay we have nowhere else to go no money to go  
we stay when loved ones want us to leave  
we leave when they want us to stay  
we stay with each other and for each other  
we leave each other and leave for each other  
(Ibid., 27)

In the above excerpt the sense of place, home, appears as an ever expanding-retracting formation that the ‘we’ of the poem appear to have no control over; a push-and-pull that is not directed by the ocean’s waves and tides, as in Brathwaite’s tidalectic poetics, but rather by the push-and-pull of external forces

(family, economy, global politics etc.) and internal forces (conscience, obligation, personal desires, sense of community, etc. ), all affected by the hurricane. Implicit in this dilemma of staying versus leaving is also the revelation of the fragility of the ‘we’. The almost paradoxical lines “we stay alone (...) we separate” underscores how the ‘we’ is a constant expanding and retracting formulation, like the tides that expand and contract against the shore, but also as a formation that can potentially break down. Like the image of the grandmother in *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey*, who tends to her yard by sweeping it for sand each morning (Chapter One), so can “Hurricane PraXis” be read as an attempt at preserving a home or a community via repetitive, circular acts of sustaining and communal care. These circular acts of care relate to both a tidalectic sense of place, as well as a tidalectic sense of time. Particularly Wayde Compton’s definition of the tidalectic as a palimpsestic understanding of history in which “we do not improve upon the past but are ourselves versions of the past” (Compton, 2001, 20), the act of communal care and sustaining in “Hurricane PraXis” is also an act of remembering and grieving for those who came before and those who perished:

we may never stop grieving	we will never stop caring
we have always been resilient	we wish we did not have to be
(Ibid., 32)	

The two seemingly contradictive adverbs, ‘never’ and ‘always’, illustrate a tidalectic understanding of time, in which no catastrophic event, including the hurricane, is ever over, but is always circling or spiralling back upon the inflicted community. In the line “we have always been resilient” a sense of continuous time, a sense of generations ‘washing over’ generations, is implied. Whereas tidalectic time was present in a most literal sense in Kellman’s water poetics, where the ‘washing over’ of generations was signified by the repeated image of the drowning man/father, in Sorhaindo’s hurricane poetics the sense of tidalectic time features in a much less concrete sense. Here tidalectic time as a ‘washing over’ ties the current Dominican community back to the ancestors, who were also forced to manage and create communal care in the wake of the hurricane, just as those who survived hurricane Maria in 2017. And it thereby connects to tidalectic time, not so much as a ‘washing over’ but rather as a ‘whirling’ – time as going around and around, and the ancestors and their painful past circling back to the present day. Ferdinand writes on this connection to the ancestral in the hurricane as a phenomenon:

In this imaginary [of the hurricane as associated with the transatlantic slave trade], the storm is no longer only a spiral of winds and torrential rains. It is charged with the memory of the ancestors who were lost in the

Atlantic (...) In this movement, the storm behaves like a slave ship recalling past injustices and reinforcing contemporary inequalities (...) (Ferdinand, 2021, 66)

Hence, in its 'whirling', rather than 'washing over', the hurricane disrupts the linear or chronological order of time, that the grand narrative of History ascribes to, it disrupts the colonial master's theories of "climate as proceeding in a rational quadri-linear order" (Deckard, 31). Thus, in the final poem of Sorhaindo's chapbook tidalectic time as a dragging back or washing over is reconfigured or reworked. Here the hurricane is a continuous catastrophe, that always looms over the inflicted communities and so, there is no moving forward or getting over the hurricane since it will inevitably strike again, or circle back, at some point in time.

### **Final remarks**

This concludes Part Two of the dissertation, in which I have attempted to demonstrate the applicability of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing via three poetry analysis and study the relation between human(s) and various more-than-human(s), water, earth and hurricane, in different configurations. Ending Part Two on a whirling note, in this chapter I have analysed Dominican Celia Sorhaindo's hurricane poetics as presented in her 2020 chapbook *Guabancex*. I have drawn on Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic as well as two of his more language focused sub-categorical concepts, 'nation language' and 'hurricane poetics' in order to answer the questions of how Sorhaindo's hurricane poetics portrays the relation between humans and the more-than-human as well as what new insights Brathwaite's the tidalectic and his concepts nation language and hurricane poetics have brought to our reading of these whirled histories.

The first half of the chapter explored the poetic language practices of the chapbook and how Sorhaindo engages with poetry writing on a metalevel in the wake of the hurricane. By analysing Sorhaindo's two poems "a poem filled with words not metaphor" (1) and "Invoked" (14 – 17) through the lens of Brathwaite's two concepts 'nation language' and 'hurricane poetics' we came to see that Sorhaindo, by denouncing metaphor and 'proper diction', engages with a form of language rebellion or language maroonage similar to Brathwaite's nation language. As formulated by Malcolm Ferdinand, the hurricane lays bare the colonial socio-geographic structures that leave some humans and more-than-humans to fend for themselves in a colonial, hostile world: "Hurricanes accelerate the world, contract it, stretch it, and reveal its structural fractures, as well as radicalize its lines of non-sharing, lines which differentiate with whom the world is shared and with whom it is not shared" (Ferdinand, 73-74). I want to expand on Ferdinand's point and add, that while the hurricane reveals with whom the world is not

shared, it also, in the case of Sorhaindo's hurricane poetics, reveals with whom language is not shared. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, the hurricane emerges as an experience that cannot be captured by the colonizer's language models. It needs its own rhythm, its own "syllabic intelligence" (Brathwaite, 1986, 263) and its own re-thinking of the poetic page as a medium. The second part of the chapter engaged with how the hurricane expands and retracts place in Sorhaindo's collection, thereby engaging with a tidalectic perception of place as dynamic and as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining. In her poem "Hurricane PraXis (Xcorcising Maria Xperience)" Sorhaindo not only engages with a tidalectic perception of place as expanding and retracting on a thematical level, but again also employed the poetic page to visualize this oscillating movement between positions. In *Guabancex* the hurricane creates a new sense of community in which the I is dissolved into a we. Yet this unison is also one of estrangement from the rest of the world, that seems to move further away from the inflicted Dominican community in their time of need.

As a final remark, before we move on to the Conclusion, I want to quote the last lines from DeLoughrey's essay "Revisiting Tidalectics: Irma/José/Maria 2017" (2018) in which she returns to her previous writing on the tidalectic in the wake of hurricane Maria: "In tidalectics we see the merging of water and land, north and south, human and nature. And we look for those tools—poetic and otherwise—to proffer the opportunity and resources to take what is 'fragile' and envision what 'we must still build.' ≈" (DeLoughrey, 2018, 99) And so while "no lasting civilization can build on hurricanes" (Brathwaite, 1997, 308) decolonial ecologic poetic expressions might emerge from the debris that it leaves behind.

# *Conclusion*

*Decolonial ecology is a centuries-old cry for justice and an appeal for a world.*

(Ferdinand, 2021)

*Here there is disaster and possibility.*

(Sharpe, 2016)

*And how to write this to write this to write this*

(Brathwaite, 1994)

I began this dissertation with what has been described as the initial catastrophe by Brathwaite himself: the colonization of the ‘New World’ led by Columbus in 1492. I did so to analyze how the catastrophic consequences of colonization reverberate through time, creating a continued coloniality in Caribbean archipelago, that affects the relation between human and more-than-humans to this very day. In *Tidalectic Poetics* I have sought to study how we can draw on Brathwaite’s writing in analysing how the continued coloniality marks the relationship between humans and more-than-humans in the Caribbean, as well as how decolonial ecological alternatives to the colonial habitation of the archipelago emerge in poetic expression. I have attempted to theorize Brathwaite, meaning, attempt to draw out the heuristic value of engaging with his poetic-theoretic writing as offering tools for poetic analysis. The dissertation sets out to explore the question: How does Kamau Brathwaite’s writing contribute to a theorization of the relation between the human and the more-than-human and which tools does he provide for decolonial ecological readings of other contemporary Anglocreole Caribbean poets?

To answer this question, I formulated two research questions:

- iii) How does Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing offer epistemic alternatives to the colonialist perception of the three basic categories of time, place, and History writing?
- iv) How can the poetic-theoretical tools provided by Brathwaite help us understand the representation of the relation between human and more-than-human in the poems of Anthony Kellman, Jennifer Rahim, and Celia Sorhaindo, as marked by the continued coloniality of the Caribbean as well as formulating new decolonial ecologies of the archipelago?

As expressed in these questions the dissertation implicitly explores how one can theorize poetry, or, to return to my initial formulation, how poetry performs theoretical work. Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing offers a healing of modernity’s double fracture in its reliance on the more-than-human, be this the sea with its waves, the hurricane’s pounding, the pebble on the shore etc. etc., to formulate new epistemic considerations. Without the movements of the shore there would be no formulating the tidalectic. Brathwaite can only formulate this “perception of xperience” (Brathwaite, 2000, 16) because he has lived with and by the shore for most of his life. In an attempt at drawing out the theoretical work that is performed in Brathwaite’s poetic formulations on the tidalectic I drew out three tidalectic points of perception that would function as guideposts for my readings in Part Two, arguing that the three formulate a form of counter-poetics to the colonialist perception of experience and that the tidalectic unsettles three colonialist epistemic conceptualizations. These three were:

- iv. Colonialist time as a linear, forward moving motion.

- v. Colonialist perceptions of island place as subordinate to continental place.
- vi. Colonialist History-writing as a solely human endeavour.

In their place the tidalectic presents three Caribbean alternatives that function as decolonial ecological Caribbean counter-narratives. These three were:

- iv. Tidalectic time as a continuous ‘washing over’ or ‘dragging back’.
- v. Tidalectic place as defined by acts of expansion/retraction and repetitive sustaining.
- vi. Tidalectic (hi)stories-writing as reliant on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers.

I argued that these three points of tidalectic perception offered a dissolution of the dichotomous relationship between temporal categories (past/present/future), spatial categories (land/sea and island/continent) and species categories (human/more-than-human), thereby also arguing against the dichotomous epistemic considerations that are implicit in the dialectic process. Each of the three points of tidalectic perception reflected how the Caribbean as a cultural region is inseparable from the environment and ecologies of the archipelago. If we return to Mignolo’s definition of decoloniality as discussed in the Introduction it is clear via the three points of tidalectic perception that Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing formulates a deeply decolonial epistemology, in that it articulates the struggle to (re)claim the imagination or perception of time, place and writing from the clutches of the continued colonialism. This is done specifically via a reconsideration of the three epistemic conceptualizations. Indeed, whereas Ferdinand argues, that modernity’s double fracture needs to be repaired or healed via decolonial ecologies that are attentive to the entanglement of colonization and ecological devastation, Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic writing theorizes, how this endeavor must also be linked to a primary reconsideration of basic epistemological configurations such as time and place.

However, as I worked my way through Brathwaite’s poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic I also came to see, that there were several other concepts in Brathwaite’s writing that would offer valuable theoretical insights into the relation between the human and the more-than-human in the Caribbean archipelago, and that provided more context to the tidalectic. In Chapter Two I therefore sketched out five thematical concepts which presented different modalities of the tidalectic points of perception on time, place, and writing, and that each brought concrete contexts to the poetic-theoretic mode. These five concepts were:

- i. Submerged mother(s)



- ii. The unity is submarine
- iii. Nation language
- iv. Yam/nyam(e)/nam
- v. Hurricane poetics

Arguing that creativity functions as survival strategies in the wake of catastrophe in Brathwaite's writing, I situated his five concepts between catastrophic histories and reparative histories. By doing so I sought to demonstrate how they uncovered connections between colonialism, environmental and ecological devastation in the Caribbean archipelago, that were barely visible if not entirely hidden, and how each concept provided creative new ways of relating to the physical environment and ecologies of the region.

To sum up in Part One we learned how Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing articulates a counter-poetics to the Western fixation on linearity and progress, as implicit in the dialectic process, which was revealed both in the tidalectic perception of time as a continuous dragging back or washing over, as well as in several of the thematical concepts. There is no 'getting over' the catastrophic histories of the Caribbean archipelago again, related to Christina Sharpe's potent formulation on the wake as a place where: "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present." (Sharpe, 2016, 9). I carried this consideration with me in Part Two in which the relation between the human and the more-than-human was configured via three different poetic engagements: Barbadian Anthony Kellman's engagement with water(s) in Chapter Three, Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim's engagement with earth(s) in Chapter Four and lastly Dominican Celia Sorhaindo's engagement with hurricane(s) in Chapter Five.

Looking across all three chapters of Part Two through the lens of Brathwaite's three points of tidalectic perception I can see how the relation between humans and more-than-humans that are represented in each chapter all bring a physicality to Sharpe's notion on the past that is not past. In Rahim's collections the soils remember the devastation of the plantation, in Kellman's *Limestone* the living-dead ecology of the coral island carries the memory of those who drowned during the Middle Passage, and in Sorhaindo's chapbook the hurricane is a constant reminder of those ancestors who had to be resilient year after year.

Indeed, the relation between humans and the various more-than-humans was marked by the continued coloniality of the region, but in very different ways. In my analysis of Kellman's two collections *Watercourse* (1990) and *Limestone* (2008) I engaged particularly with the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers and the tidalectic perception of time as a continuous dragging back or washing over, alongside Brathwaite's thematical concept 'submerged mother(s)'. In Kellman's work it was mainly on the shore that we saw a fusing of human and

more-than-human histories and a quite violent vision of their entanglement. I argued that Kellman fuses personal histories of loss with the ancestral histories of drowning in the Atlantic, and that he invokes the sea as a violent more-than-human wor(l)d-maker, that does not only contain the histories of those who perished during the Middle Passage, but also drowns out any human who tries to have his voice heard. By engaging with Kellman's writing via a tidalectic perception of time, we come to see how the sea emerges as that which continues to haunt the poetic characters, pulling them back and forth between the present and the painful past, and revealing the island itself to be a "living-dead ecology" (Kellman, 2008, 190) where both the human and the more-than-human dead and dying are always already filtered into each other. To that effect an engagement with Kellman's writing via the lens of Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing challenges the Western fixation on linearity and progress, and the polyphonic structure of the collection reveals the deep narrational interrelation between human and more-than-human voices in Kellman's work.

In my analysis of Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim's four collections *Between the Fence and the Forest* (2002), *Redemption Rain* (2011), *Ground Level* (2014) and *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021) I moved into the terrestrial realm in this chapter, engaging particularly with the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers and with the tidalectic perception of place as an expanding and retracting formation and as emerging through continuous acts of sustaining. Here we learned how Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic mode of the tidalectic as well as his thematical concepts 'yam/nyam(e)/nam' and 'the unity is submarine' might be employed in a terrestrial context, thereby refuting the more common conception of the tidalectic as strictly relating to the aquatic realm. I explored three levels of earth poetics in Rahim's work, arguing that when looking across Rahim's work one can detect what DeLoughrey have referred to as a "a multiscalar method of telescoping between space (planet) and place (island)" (DeLoughrey, 2019, 2).

Rahim's collections revealed how submergence not only plays a pivotal part in relation to the Atlantic as place of submerged histories and voices, as seen in Chapter 'Three' in relation to the submerged mother(s), but also in the fusing of 'hidden' and decolonial agricultural and language practices. Moving from the local planter histories of Trinidad to a wider consideration of solidarity in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, to a planetary consideration of breath, the chapter illustrated how Brathwaite's poetic-theoretic writing can also contribute to poetic-theoretic considerations that goes beyond the Caribbean, and where the archipelago might even emerge as a space from where to read the rest of the world.

Ending the dissertation on a whirled note, I explored the relation between humans and hurricanes in Dominican Celia Sorhaindo's chapbook *Guabancex* (2020). In this chapter I engaged

particularly with the tidalectic perception of histories writing as dependent on more-than-human wor(l)d-makers and the tidalectic perception of place, as well as Brathwaite's two language-oriented concepts, 'hurricane poetics' and 'nation language'. In the final chapter we saw how the hurricane lays bare the colonial structures of both socio-geographic formations as well as colonialist language models in the region, and how new poetic formats are needed in order to imagine a decolonial way of re-building after the hurricane. Employing both the poetic page as a way of literally turning the reader's poetic engagement upside-down, as well as refusing the metaphor as a poetic device, Sorhaindo enacts a form of poetic language rebellion, in which the furious winds of the hurricane and the anger of the inflicted community that is left to fend for itself, merge.

Taken together, Part One and Part Two formulate and provide examples of how the poetic production of Kamau Brathwaite performs theoretical work that might be employed in poetry analysis. This by his combination of particular aesthetic modalities, such as narrative positions, metaphors, and formatting, with particular themes and localities, including the physical arenas of the shore and the plantation. Each poet also implicitly sketches out strategies for moving, not forward towards some kind synthesis, as implied in the dialectic process, but, as I formulated it in the Introduction by inspiration from DeLoughrey, via alternative routes.

For Kellman these alternative routes are marked by an attentiveness to the past that as implied in the living-dead ecologies of his island, for Rahim these alternative routes are presented via a continuous consideration of community and solidarity that goes beyond national and ethnic borders in the face of catastrophe, arguing for a form radical cross-sea solidarity, and lastly for Sorhaindo they emerge not so much as a historical or practical engagement but rather by denouncing the colonizers language models and allowing for both the hurricane and the Caribbean populations anger to be heard, rather than just imagined via pretty metaphors.

With this study I hope to contribute to the conversation on Brathwaite as poetic-theoretic thinker and writer, whose epistemic contribution to the conversation on the relation between humans and more-than-humans in the Caribbean archipelago and the formulation of nouvelle decolonial ecological insights via poetic expression deserves a broader recognition. This is one of the most significant contributions of the dissertation, since Brathwaite's work has been the subject of poetic analysis for numerous decades, yet in-depth explorations of his contribution to the field of poetry studies as poetic-theoretical thinker is still limited.

In his pioneering work on decolonial ecology Malcolm Ferdinand potently concludes: "Decolonial ecology is a centuries-old cry for justice and an appeal for a world." (Ferdinand, 2021, 16) To this I would add that the decolonial ecologies of the contemporary Anglocreole poets that are

explored in *Tidalectic Poetics*, including Brathwaite, cannot just be read as appeals for a world, but for words as well. Words, poetic formats, and poetic strategies, or perhaps “syllabic intelligence” (Brathwaite, 1979, 263), that can approximate a decolonial ecological Caribbean world. As famously stated by Edward Said: “(...) land is recoverable at first only through the imagination.” (Said, 1988, 225).

I want to end this dissertation with a single sentence from two monumental pieces of literature that have been instrumental for the writing of this dissertation: Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2016) and Kamau Brathwaite’s *Barabajan Poems* (1994). Together they formulate the difficult yet hopeful task of writing poetry from within the colonial ecological catastrophe:

*Here there is disaster and possibility.* (Sharpe, 2016)

*And how to write this to write this to write this* (Brathwaite, 1994)

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