

Copyright
by
Junika Hawker-Thompson
2022

**The Report Committee for Junika D. Hawker-Thompson
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Report:**

**“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-
Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Christen Smith, Supervisor

Samantha Pinto, Co-Supervisor

**“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-
Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices**

by

Junika D. Hawker-Thompson

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2022

Dedication

This is dedicated to my mother, grandmother, and great aunts, who immigrated from Guyana in the 1980s. These women continue to inspire me and learning life from them has been a beautiful process. Without them, there is no me. This work is a culmination of their stories and our collective family history.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge Carmen Subryan and Dominique Hunter, whose work I engaged in this piece. Their work is central to my report, and without them, I would not have been able to form this intervention. I would like to thank my supervising committee: Dr. Christen Smith and Dr. Samantha Pinto—their grace and support greatly shaped my project and sustained me through this research and writing process. A very special thank you to my colleagues, Shukri Bana and Faith G. Williams, for reading the many drafts and helping me talk through my work with them on countless occasions.

Another thank you to my sister/friend, Aja Imani, for coworking virtually with me through this all and holding me accountable. Lastly, a deep thank you to my loving family, friends, and partner, Shy, for supporting me always.

Abstract

“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices

Junika D. Hawker-Thompson, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2022

Supervisors: Christen A. Smith and Samantha Pinto

This paper focuses on Afro-Guyanese women’s literary and visual meditations on the rivers that run through Guyana and the Atlantic Ocean that borders the country. In this report, I examine Carmen Subryan’s *Black-Water Women* and Dominique Hunter’s *Transplantation* to discuss the transtemporal connection between Guyanese women’s bodies and the physical and political environment of Guyana. Afro-Guyanese women’s meditations on their material experiences highlight the way post-colonial political arrangements are hinged on gendered-based violence in the country. Further, I offer that focusing on the historical lineages of the river that flow into the Atlantic Ocean, which may broaden our understanding of the Black Atlantic.

Table of Contents

“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices.....	11
De/Colonial Enunciations of Atlantic Waterways.....	14
Women’s Political Organizing in Post-Colonial Guyana.....	23
“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices.....	30
A ‘Black Atlantic’ Re-orientation: A False Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography	40

“I Had Drunk the Sparkling Waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices¹

I recalled growing up in a family where the women entranced me because of their distinctive personalities. Some were strong, others weak; still others were just plain ornery. But four faces most captured my imagination. They were my grandmother Cleo and her daughter Sara, my aunt Tina, and Sanka, the sensitive cousin with whom I most identified. Most of these women had endured despite tremendous odds, yet in numerous ways, their lives mirrored the lives of other women in the small town and even in many parts of the country. Actually, they were, for the most part, sisters beneath the skin, sisters who shared a common bond, sisters who were dominated by their men, who paid a price just by being women, sisters whose lives were reflected in the dark, sparkling waters of the Demerara River.”²

Carmen Subryan’s *Black Water Women* introduction concludes with the above epigraph.

Subryan clarifies the environmental and social connections her family members have to the bodies of water surrounding them. While *Black-Water Women*, the title of the book, and the locations where the book’s plot develops are the Demerara River, water and waterways show up in various ways throughout the progression of the text. Subryan lays bare Black Guyanese women’s communal and environmental connections. We witness the ways gender and class shape Guyanese women’s lives while also witnessing mechanisms of survival. Communal means of survival exist on multiple dimensions. It is embodied, spiritual, and political. Outlining Black Guyanese women’s relationship with the rivers that run through and empty into the Atlantic Ocean, which borders the country, creates room to discuss the historical and contemporary manifestations of gendered and racial violence against Guyanese women.

¹ Carmen Barclay Subryan. *Black-Water Women: A Novel* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 1997), 236.

² Ibid, 21.

Afro-Guyanese women experience a transtemporal and transnational political orientation and creative methodology that tends to ancestral and historical relationships with surrounding bodies of water. This paper focuses on *Black Water Women*, alongside Dominique Hunter's *Transplantation* to better understand the ways that Afro-Guyanese women engage with the creation of Blackness through their relationship to the water. Subryan and Hunter focus on the circadian acts of survival enacted by Black Guyanese women amid extraordinary and customary gestures of intra and inter-communal violence. Throughout both works, there is an engagement and critique of the physical and mental effects of violent interactions for Black Guyanese women. Subryan and Hunter's work has a twenty-three-year gap between production. Placing their work in conversation invites a multigenerational and transtemporal conversation about Guyana's political evolution and how it continues to impact Guyanese women's material lives.

Afro-Guyanese women connect Guyana's political, social, and spiritual realities and the urgent importance of environmental sustainability that directly impacts coastal post-colonial countries. Histories of enslavement, indentured servitude, and displacement all manifest and are held by Guyana's rivers. Focusing on interactions with water, such as bathing, spiritually or otherwise, washing, movement across, towards, or within the water, and historical event which shape Guyana's social fabric, such as colonization, dispossession, enslavement, and indentured servitude, brings together the embodied, historical, and embodied effects of continued violence against Guyanese women. Black people across the African diaspora. In this way, I do not reify political processes of the racial and ethnic divide by attending to Black Guyanese women's specific experiences but rather seek to unpack the specificity of their experiences to understand their stories as diasporic Black women more completely, and the deeply complicated, spiritual, and nuanced relationship they have with bodies of water.

Carmen Subryan is a Black Guyanese author whose work focuses primarily on Black Guyanese experiences through the lives of her family members. Her work functions as narrative, archive, rememory, and critical intervention of how race, class, colonization, and nationalism influence the lives of Guyanese women.³ Subryan's primary focus is her family members in Mackenzie, Guyana. Mackenzie, Guyana is located alongside the Demerara River and embodies a long ancestral history for Subryan. Her maternal family, the Allicocks, have lived alongside the Demerara for generations and Subryan's work serves to highlight how their lives have been shaped and mirrored by the Demerara River. Subryan's *Black Water Women* was originally published in 1997 and is one of three books in Subryan's Black-Water series. In *Black-Water Women*, Subryan is specifically detailing four women in her family who shaped her political and spiritual consciousness by reflecting on how they navigated Guyana's patriarchal society from the 1940s to the 1960s. I was drawn to Subryan's work because of its familiarity.

³ In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Morrison presents the concept of "rememory." Rememory tends to the recollections of events that have been repressed, primarily traumatic events that one desires to be forgotten.

De/Colonial Enunciations of Atlantic Waterways

My maternal grandparent's stories about their lives in Guyana up until the 1980s are reflected in the intimacies Subryan reflects in *Black Water Women*. I grew up hearing stories of abundance, poverty, and kinship that deprioritize the biological to honor the way communities come together in times of celebration and need. I heard stories about my grandfather's love of the rivers and his miles-long run to the seawall every morning with his brothers. I grew up learning the stews and their significance, how to tell if the fruit was sweet, and the ways to avoid getting eaten by mosquitoes. While I have not had the chance to visit yet, my family is sure to share the very embodied, visceral moments they remember and adore from their home. Their movement away from home was driven by the desire for something different, hopefully, better. I start here to make clear the deep, ancestral connection I have to this work. My understanding of embodiment, movement, and viscosity was shaped by these stories and my imagination grew with the attempts to visualize the textures of their home. *Black Water Women* details the processes of immigration for Guyanese women. Subryan's work captures the interior lives of her family members, providing a broader understanding of societal pressures felt by working-class and poor Guyanese women, specifically Afro-Guyanese women.

Traveling in and across the water, the ability and refusal to swim, and access to drinkable water all have their own deeply complex, separate, but related histories that inform Black people's material reality and ontological understandings of Blackness. Blackness as an identity marker and ideology is expanded and limited by its relationship with water. I was inspired by Yomaira Figueroa-Vaquez's engagement with the intimacies found amongst Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects and her analysis of the visual, sonic, and literary creations that tend to the

erotic possibility amidst domination and exile.⁴ Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* argues that anti-Blackness is a formative ontological and epistemological framework. She offers thinking about our current world as existing in the wake of transatlantic slavery—a decidedly water-based experience that centers on the Atlantic Ocean. Occurrences of Black death and negation are a continued manifestation of enslavement and the ontological formation of Blackness as a social position collapses the assertion that time is linear. It also reminds us that the ontological formation of Blackness in the Americas is in part defined by our ancestral, political, and spiritual relationship to the sea—the water defines us as Black people.

Sharpe meditates on the voyage across the middle passage as a meaning-making occurrence. She states, "In the wake, the river, the weather, and the drowning are death, disaster, and possibility."⁵ Holding death, disaster, and possibility in tandem honors ancestral legacies of life-sustaining practices crafted amid gratuitous and mundane violence. The Black Atlantic serves to ground the creation of anti/Blackness. The complexity and im/possibility of finding steady ground within the ocean, the vastness and depth of the ocean also serve to exemplify the im/possibility tied to ideological formations of Blackness.

Thinking alongside these scholars, I argue Blackness was invented and maintained by the Middle Passage's formation. The Black Atlantic is a geographic and theoretical space where instances of gratuitous and mundane violence occur which continue to collapse notions of past, present, and future. Christen Smith argues, "To be nowhere and to be suspended in place and time is to be mapped onto the Black Atlantic then and now. The slave ship leaving the known

⁴ Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez, *Decolonizing Diaspora: Radical Mappings of Afro-Atlantic Literature*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

⁵ Christina E. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 105.

into the unknown/Americas is the site of the birth of Blackness in the modern hemisphere and its correspondent African diaspora. It is also the scenario of police terror that is then and now, somewhere and nowhere at the same time, “suspended in the ‘oceanic’ of transnational Black experience.”⁶ While I am drawing from theorization of the Black Atlantic, my work focuses directly on the *rivers* of Guyana that empty into the Atlantic Ocean. In thinking about Guyana’s major rivers as a conduit towards the Black Atlantic, I am pushing for a more expansive understanding of Black Anglophone Caribbean womanhood and how histories of dispossession, African enslavement, and indentured servitude shift transnational articulations of self-redefinition through literary and visual mediums.

Guyana does sit on the Atlantic but its waterways feed into the Atlantic which also illustrates the way Guyanese political, feminist, visual, and literary theory influence conversations tending to Black Atlantic subjects across colonial histories. To this end, Guyanese women’s literary and visual works complicate how we understand manifestations of violence and survival. Further, this political orientation destabilizes the necessity of Guyana’s transition from British Guiana to a free state marking a historic shift in Guyana’s political and social formation. *Black Water Women* is outlining this transitional moment where racial and ethnic lines are being drafted alongside the emerging political parties, PNC, and PPP. Further, there is increased political organizing around Guyanese women’s rights, across racial and ethnic backgrounds, which is focused on labor rights and access to living wages for women across the class spectrum.

Hearing stories about home, knowing and imagining the differences between home and here, learning traditional dishes, and being told secrets that everyone knows, defined my transition from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. As the firstborn away from home, I situate

⁶ Christen A. Smith, “Counting Frequency: Un/Gendering Anti-Black Terror,” *Small Axes* 39, no. 2 (2021): 28.

my intellectual interests between home and here, back then and now.

Subryan outlines the daily labor that happens at the Demerara's bank, such as washing clothes and other household essentials, and the formative presence of the river. She states, "The day before returning to America, I stood beside the sparkling brown waters of the Demerara River and gazed across to the place where I lived as a child.... I remembered the numerous trees I had climbed in search of fruit..."⁷ In this moment, we must take seriously how violence, restoration, movement, and spiritual and communal practice are enacted and made possible in/at/because of Guyana's waters. To this end, Black Guyanese women have reinvented, renegotiated, and engaged in redefinition through their embodied, spiritual, and political affinities to the bodies of water in the country. The main bodies of water— The Courantyne, Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo River which all flow north and empty into the Atlantic Ocean—are core to Guyana's labor market.⁸

Shanya Cordis' article, "Forging Relational Difference: Racial Gendered Violence and Dispossession in Guyana", leads me to think deeper about the ways colonialism, dispossession, and gendered violence influence the lived experience of Black Guyanese women within Guyana and its diaspora. Cordis begins by writing about Samantha Benjamin's death, a US-based Afro-Guyanese woman whose body was found along the seawall of Annandale and Buxton.⁹ She speaks expansively on the ways sites of violence against Afro and Amerindian Guyanese women collapse histories of enslavement, indentured servitude, and dispossession along Guyana's

⁷ Subryan, 235.

⁸ Bauxite is mined and shipped out of Guyana through the Demerara River

⁹ Shanya Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference: Racial Gendered Violence and Dispossession in Guyana," *Small Axe* 23, no.3 (2019): 19.

coastline and in the hinterlands. She states, “The site of Benjamin’s death, the seawall, highlights a different sense of geography: how the spatial legacies of colonialism, slavery, and dispossession extend and map onto the gendered body—the Black female body in particular—through ongoing colonial imperative to dismember, dispossess, and dislocate, even as it forms the very grounds on which communities attempt to carve livable lives”¹⁰ Cordis’ theoretical intervention, relational difference, “tracks the geographies of land and sea, of coast and hinterland, and then daunting imperial and colonial forces the converge on the site of the body/flesh.”¹¹

Building on Shayna Cordis’ relational difference, I argue that the connection Guyanese women have with the various water pathways and uses of water throughout the country pushes us to think about their spiritual and embodied survival practices as a political orientation and creative methodology that begs to question what creates and sustains Guyana’s national identity. This political orientation is committed to ecological, spiritual, and embodied freedom from processes of colonization, politically sanctioned gendered violence, and environmental devastation and is demonstrated through a focus on how the Black female body physically, emotionally, and psychically moves between space(s) of violence and relief. It recognizes the black female body as a place where meaning is made, complicated, and destroyed. Further, in inventing this political analytic, Black Guyanese women showcase a commitment to ensuring the physical and psychic survival of marginalized people, in the very sites where violence is repeatedly enacted, such as baptisms and spiritual cleanings taking place at the seawall where Samantha Benjamin's body was found. Contemporarily, volatile political and environmental Demonstrating the ways the visual and literary domains provide room to explore or make clear

¹⁰ Ibid, 20.

¹¹ Cordis, 30.

different orientations of being. It is a relational practice, established within and because of community, in deep self-reflection, and in meditative spiritual practice.

Politics is also a creative methodology and tradition that can be traced in Carmen Subryan's *Black Water Women* and Dominique Hunter's series of collages, *Transplantation*. Their works showcase Guyanese women's focus on their bodies as a site where political and creative resistance is enacted. Both Subryan and Hunter family histories reflect Guyana's racial fashioning that attempted to draw hard lines between racial groups. In Alissa Trotz's *Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana*, Trotz questions these divisions and their maintenance. Trotz states, "Yet nationalists representations of Guyana as a "land of six races"¹² beg the question of how such purportedly stable differences are reproduced, through whose bodies and at whose expense."¹³ The nationalists' representations are deeply influenced and made possible through colonial renderings of race, gender, and class, with non-white women, queer people, disabled people, and poor people being most vulnerable to the outbreaks of violence that enable and perpetuate this social fractioning. Political ideologies require active and layered participation for the systems of destruction to be maintained, which is demonstrated often through gender-based violence. For example, Andaiye cites a case of sexually assaulting or humiliating women of the "other side" to humiliate men on the "other side" that showcases "the idea that women are the 'nation' and dishonor then as dishonoring the

¹² Guyana's "six races" are split across the Indigenous, East Indian, African, Portuguese, European, and Chinese. These rudimentary ethnic and racial groupings foreclose ideals of cultural fluidity and historically accurate accounts of ethnic exchange.

¹³ D. Alissa Trotz, "Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana," *Small Axe* vol 8, no 1(2004): 6.

nation.”¹⁴ At this moment, Trotz is making clear that the “land of six races” is made possible by the violent sacrifice of people’s bodies and livelihoods to maintain this political and social positioning. The preservation of these racial, and I will add, gendered and class divides do not come without physical and psychic harm to the most vulnerable populations to ensure the popular political dogma.

Both Subryan and Hunter engage in archival practices that attempt to document the ephemeral and perpetual properties of water. The way interactions with water hold memory, sensation, history, and possibilities of peace. In their works, there emanates a tension between and desire for breath, safety, and release. How does the desire for safety and breathe, or what Christen Smith offered, a moment of pause, shape our political and creative endeavors? How do the visual and literary offer, what Yomaira Figueroa-Vazquez calls, discursive spaces, to reevaluate necessity of nationhood since it comes at the expense of the nation’s women?

Literary and visual renderings of Guyanese women reflecting on what it means to be living in and migrating from a country that is positioned under sea level and now prone to flooding due to global warming, serve to address the violence that created this social position. Through processes of creation, there is a destruction of a flattened understanding of Guyanese womanhood and clear connections between the ways migration, movement, and bodies of water influence their material and spiritual experiences. In addressing this vulnerability, through this destruction, Afro-Guyanese women are articulating a decolonial reality that grates against the land of six races that allows exceedingly higher rates of gender-based violence against Guyanese women.¹⁵ Black

¹⁴ Andaiye, “Women as Collateral Damage in Race Violence,” in *The Point Is to Change the World*, ed. Alissa Trotz (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 207.

¹⁵ “At 55% Guyana is well above the global average of 30% of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Ruth Rodney, Denise Gastaldo, D. Alissa Trotz, and Claire V. Crooks. “Sex

women's literary and visual projects tending to their relationship to the surrounding waters begs the question of who and what survives and under what conditions and at whose expense. Black Guyanese women's relationship with the rivers that flow through Guyana demonstrates a political orientation that centers their presence as a live-sustaining strategy.

To swim, to wash, to labor on/at the river invites an alternative ontological orientation that faces catastrophe and the continued impacts of colonization, globalization, and dispossession head-on. Holding together the impacts of gendered violence due to Guyana's political and racial conflicts and Guyanese women's visual and literary projects detailing their relationship to water as a haven, a window into their interior selves, and an exemplar of peace and destruction addresses the false division between the body and the land. This false division communicates the notion that spirituality is not a viable site to draw inspiration and create knowledges that are committed to the pleasurable and erotic aspects of *living*. In *Poetry is not a Luxury*, Lorde states, The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am and the Black mothers in each of us-the poet-whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom. However, experience has taught us that the action in the now is also always necessary."¹⁶ The poetic, literary, and visual are integral in charting a way away from the land/body divide that allows us to do *unto* the earth instead of existing *with*.

as Boys' Fame, But Girls' Shame: Adversarial Adolescent Gender Roles and Gender-Based Violence in Guyana." *Journal of interpersonal violence* 37, no. 21-22 (2022): NP19237–NP19264.

¹⁶ Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," 2007. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press Feminist Series. Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=739170&site=ehost-live>,

Black Caribbean women are consistently negotiating their relationship with the land that surrounds them through literary, visual, and political mediums. In an interview, Edwidge Danticat details what led to *The Farming of Bones*, her novel about the Parsley Massacre. Danticat states, “I decided to write that book because I visited the Massacre River where some of the killings took place and saw no markers whatsoever...The pain goes into the telling, both for me and for her [Amabelle]. The rituals don’t exist. No markers. We have to recreate them. Our words are the markers.”¹⁷ Rivers are geographical spirits that hold these violent and healing lineages and make possible reflections of pain and resistance because of their meditative properties. Sitting along the riverbank and partaking in daily survival practices, Danticat’s beautiful assertion that our words are markers gracefully connects Black women’s poetic literary production and material experiences as archival processes. As Christen Smith, Archie Davies, and Bethânia Gomes argue, “Black women’s flesh is memory.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Edwidge Danticat and Maxine Lavon Montgomery. *Conversations with Edwidge Danticat*. Ed by Maxine Lavon Montgomery. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 45.

¹⁸ Christen Smith, Archie Davies, and Bethânia Gomes. ““In Front of the World:” Translating Beatriz Nascimento,” *Antipode* 53, no 1(2021): 287.

Women's Political Organizing in Post-Colonial Guyana

One of the most notable Guyanese women-run political organizations is Red Thread. Red Thread, which originally started as The Women's Development Project in 1986 and ran embroidery classes to gather women across racial and ethnic backgrounds to discuss the impacts of low wages and gendered violence. Red Thread was co-founded by Andaiye, an Afro-Guyanese feminist, who was deeply inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology and started her political organizing career with Walter Rodney and the Working People's Alliance (WPA). WPA at its prime in the mid-1980s mobilized broadly across racial and ethnic lines, having many participants organizing for income generation for Guyanese women.

Andaiye discusses how political violence leaves Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese women particularly vulnerable. In her essay, *Women as Collateral Damages in Race Violence*, Andaiye links the increased violence that is “necessary” to land a political solution being carried out on the bodies of women. Guyanese women's experience and vulnerability to physical violence are vital to the country's political stability. This “necessary” violence is supposedly aimed to force the government to agree on a political solution. Andaiye states, “Various players have said that the costs we are paying are necessary to achieve this solution: there's an echo here of George Bush's collateral damage. At the risk of being called (again) hopelessly naïve and “typical of a woman,” I want to ask again—on whose bodies will this solution be constructed?”¹⁹

Andaiye's critique, question, and meditation on the physical manifestations of Guyana's political solution highlight the relationship between Guyanese women and Guyana's sociopolitical and economic landscape. Posing the question “on whose bodies will this solution

¹⁹ Andaiye, 206.

be constructed?” questions and pushes back on the necessity and regularity of this violence. Further, Andaiye makes evident the embodied and visceral experience of Guyanese women and how their bodies are integral to maintaining the nation as a physical and ideological entity. Red Thread understood the interlacing dynamics of race, class, and gender and how power and violence shape Guyanese women’s experiences in the public and domestic sphere. I take time to outline Andaiye’s political and ideological contribution to place Carmen Subryan’s *Black Water Women* and Domonique Hunter’s *Transplantation* in context with a broader political movement occurring in Guyana. Subryan was writing within the context of grassroots activism against the increased politically driven violence against women.

Like Keguro Macharia, I am caught up in “the banal fact of embodiment,” and how the material reality and quotidian nature of violence against Guyanese women can influence how we extrapolate theories about the African diaspora, Black geographies, and movement.²⁰ In documenting women’s movement away from Guyana and within the Guyanese border, Subryan and Hunter provide a commentary on the destabilizing and forceful nature of violence on women and their family’s lives. The way bodies, specifically Black women’s bodies, move across borders is not something that should be abstracted, and outlining the ways that violence, negotiations of womanhood, and racial identity forms mechanisms of diasporic movement for Black women need to be central to theories of violence.

Guyanese women’s visual and literary meditations of their bodies are intricately tied to a complex understanding of the land and the spiritual and liberatory necessities to experience survival. Guyanese women engaging in literary and visual arts are demonstrating a way of

²⁰ Keguro Macharia. *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2019. Accessed December 1, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 23.

dictating and reflecting the construction of this relationship between their bodies and the surrounding bodies of water. Guyanese women engaging in literary and visual articulations of what Guyanese womanhood means complicates or rejects colonial constructions of womanhood and femininity by showcasing the inaccessibility of binary gender for Black women.

Trotz provides an extensive overview of the shifting political environment of Guyana and the way politics impact the material experiences of Guyanese women, specifically Indo-Guyanese women.²¹ To this end, she discusses the increased levels of physical and sexual violence against Indo-Guyanese women as a mechanism of violence and power that maintain the segregated racial and ethnic social and political system and perpetuates the structural position of Guyanese women as second-class citizens. She outlines the elections from 1953 to the 1980s, clarifying the political divide between the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC).

The two political parties are segregated across racial and ethnic lines: the PPP has a political resonance with the Indo-Guyanese population, and the PNC has a strong political resonance with the Afro-Guyanese population, led by Forbes Burnham. Trotz states that this divide is deeply rooted in Guyana's coastal politics. Trotz says that "this marginalization that has resulted from the economic crisis, and, since the late 1980s, neoliberal policies, is accompanied by increasingly polarized camps among these two dominant groups."²³ On December 15th, 1997, the PPP took the majority vote, and the PNC claimed electoral irregularity, causing widespread civil disobedience. Trotz continues to outline the catalyst of violence against Indo-Guyanese

²¹ D. Alissa Trotz, "Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana," *Small Axe* vol 8, no 1(2004).

²³ Trotz, 2.

women during this political moment. The trigger was the dismissal of the PNC injunction as unconstitutional by Chief Justice Desiree Bernard, a decision that immediately promoted widespread looting and brutality against Indo-Guyanese businesses, women, and men on the streets of the capital city, Georgetown.²⁴

This demonstration of civil unrest leading to escalated cases of physical and sexual violence against Indo-Guyanese women showcases the structural and ideological foundations of a system that depends on the racial/ethnic divide and the second-class citizen status of women to maintain the current status quo. These political and subject positioning leaves women vulnerable to various manifestations of violence and (re)affirms the ideology that necessitates the presence of women and their bodies as receivers of violation. Indo-Guyanese women reported instances of physical and sexual assault, making clear the connection between women's material experiences and the political domain.

Guyana's historical, cultural, and geographical locations tell a story of immense diversity, political struggle, and social fashioning. Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America, due to British colonization from 1814 to 1966. While Guyana's colonial history includes Spanish, French, Dutch, and British settlers, Guyana's longest colonial regime was under British rule and heavily influences the current political struggles in the country. Colonial regimes necessitated the pillaging of Kalina, or Carib, people's land and the shipping and African enslavement and plantation economies. The abolition of slavery in 1834 established an economy dependent on indentured servitude. Dealing with political turmoil and famine after British intervention, Indian people entered laboring contracts with Britain that created an

²⁴ Ibid, 3.

opportunity to establish life elsewhere. Newly freed African people and indentured servants were often competing in the labor market, which resulted in social, political, and economic tensions.

Guyanese women's artistic creations complicate an idea of a post-colonial Guyana and make clear that violence against Guyanese women is a continued colonial necessity that attempts to solidify Guyana as a post-colonial nation. Guyanese women artists address the compounding impacts of colonization, the necessity of cheap labor, movement, and (dis)placement as formative to their experience. Further, I am focusing on Guyanese women's artistic meditations on water because of the prominence of water in Guyanese culture. I am arguing that Guyanese women's relationship with water provides an encompassing space to discuss migration, movement, violence, and spirituality. These complicated histories are all configured and meet at the oceans and rivers that touch Guyana's lands.

While assessing these archival materials and practices, I became particularly interested in how Guyanese women are meditating, making sense, and therefore documenting the between their internal and external environments. I am interested in literary and artistic articulations of Guyanese women communicating/articulating the connections between movement across and alongside bodies of water, specifically the multiple rivers and waterways that shape Guyana, and formations of Guyanese womanhood as ideological projects and lived experiences. The tensions and divide between Guyanese womanhood as a political project and as lived experience is a phenomenon that has been detailed across Caribbean feminist literature and art for decades. Interactions with water are poetic. Water gives and takes; it provides and receives. Bodies of water hold memory, history, and catastrophe and are often at the focal point of new beginnings.

In *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Munity and Free on the Wild Coast*, Marjoeine Kars details their archival and fieldwork research on the 1763 Berbice slave rebellion. Kars

describes Guyana's landscape at the beginning of Dutch colonization of the land: she states, "Water dominated life in the colony. People moved about in dugouts and "tent boats," light, swifts barges with awnings for shade, rowed by six or more enslaved men. Indian trading paths fanned out to neighboring colonies and native towns deep in the interior, where few Europeans dared venture."²⁵ Kars continues to note the tensions between the European settlers and the indigenous communities. The plantations were directly on the bank of the river. Going deeper would create conflict between the settlers and the indigenous communities. Kars discusses the slave rebellion leader, Coffj, which is the Dutch spelling of the West African name Kofi.²⁶ As researched and documented in other slave economies, enslaved African people would escape and establish maroon communities, often integrated with the country's indigenous communities. Kars showcases that slave rebellions were multilayered practices with proximity to water being central.

Resistance took place on a physical, mental, and spiritual level. It was common practice for enslaved African planning a rebellion to rely on spiritual practices to assist in the success of the escape. For example, a rebellion along the Berbice River was led by a charismatic spiritual leader, Adam. He was employed as an Obeah practitioner and assured protection against capture. Kars states, "He concocted a "fetich" drink, a magic potion of rum, water, and blood, to seal the coconspirators' oath of loyalty. The sacred oath linked those who swore it in bonds of solidarity and ritual protection."²⁷ When visiting the Berbice river, Kars found buried pieces of china, pottery, and Dutch glass beads that were once used for trade with Guyana's indigenous

²⁵ Marjoleine Kars, *Blood On The River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (New York: The New Press, 2020), 27.

²⁶ Ibid, 29.

²⁷ Ibid, 32.

population along the riverbank.²⁸ The Demerara is home to small merchant shops and is a travel route for bauxite. Rivers bear witness to generations of violence, rebellion, and healing.

Guyana's rivers serve as historical reservoirs that reflect the complicated and intersected histories that inform Guyanese women's experiences. The plantation economies that lined the rivers during Dutch and British colonization turned into laboring spaces for Indian indentured servants, which often silences indigenous struggles to maintain connections with their land. Taking seriously the histories that were made on Guyanese rivers means addressing the complicated intersections of colonization, enslavement, indentured servitude, and environmental degradation that inform Guyanese women's political and social organizing.

I offer that Guyanese women's artistic reflections of Guyana's waters provide a transtemporal meditation on the complexity of migration, desires of home and belonging, and colonial body politics that attempt to foreclose liberatory possibilities. Carmen Subryan's *Black Water Women* and Dominique Hunter's *Transplantation* address the complicated claims of womanhood and femininity for Black Guyanese women. Placing Subryan's novel and Hunter's creative non-fiction and series of collage address similar questions. They both ask: Where is the safety in migration? And additionally, how does Guyana's legacy of colonization, enslavement, and indentured servitude impact how they experience womanhood and what it means to them?

²⁸ Ibid, 6.

“I had drunk the sparkling waters of the Demerara River:” Afro-Guyanese Women’s Embodiment and Self-Referential Practices²⁹

Water functions as a subtle and peripheral literary tool to move the individual and collective stories forward, but also as a symbolic marker of race, gender, class status, migration, and one’s understanding of the land that surrounds them. Water also functions as a marker of distance and location. As stated previously, Guyanese rivers embody intricate histories of enslavement, colonization, and (dis)placement. The Demerara River’s literal and metaphorical reflective qualities serve as *Black Water Women*’s underlying framework. The author notes the social, geographic, and embodied connection that influences Guyanese women’s experience within their romantic, familial, and communal relationships. Subryan positions the Demerara River as a reflective mirror, a memory-holding entity, and a marker of a geographic and social location for Guyanese women. The dark, murky waters of the Demerara serve as a point of reference and historical emblem that communicates the historical past and present of transatlantic slavery and colonization. Additionally, the Black water description communicates the color of oak leaves and other local sediments that are soaked and dissolved in the water. The dark murkiness of the water holds the blood, sweat, and flesh that created the ontological meaning and negation of Blackness.

The river is used for bathing, cleaning, fishing, communal events, and spiritual practices. Across the Americas, rivers have served as points of war, rebellion, and cleansing. Guyana, formally known as British Guiana, is an indigenous word for “land of many rivers.” Guyana has four main rivers, the rivers provide a shared space for locals and hold Guyana’s complex history within its banks.

²⁹ Subryan, 236.

The rivers' water has a haunting, ghostly feature that manages to hold cultural and personal memories and the histories of British enslavement and colonization. In positioning Guyanese women's lives as reflective of the river, Subryan is claiming that women's bodies and social positions undergo the same ideological shaping that places power hierarchies on the physical land. Subryan begins with a personal reflection on a trip home that led to the creation of the novel. She writes openly about returning to Guyana's murky waters due to her mother's passing. In processing her grief, Subryan explores her generational connections to Guyana as a physical and ideological location. She uses the Demerara river's dark, murky waters as a freeing and limiting metaphorical concept within the book, as explicit naming of the river only exists at the text's beginning, ending, and title.

Black Water Women details the legacies of four family members and demonstrates the various ways the extensive and complex history of Blackness and water impact Black women's material realities. The expressive writing of physical, mental, and emotional violence against Subryan's family members makes the way interpersonal violence and structural violence reinforce each other exceedingly clear. While Subryan is writing about women in her family, she is also explicating how gendered and racialized violence is enacted against Black Guyanese women.

The Demerara River's literal and metaphorical reflective qualities serve as the text's underlying framework. The author notes the social, geographic, and embodied connection that influences Guyanese women's experience within their romantic, familial, and communal relationships. Subryan positions the Demerara River as a reflective mirror, a memory-holding entity, and a marker of a geographic and social location for Guyanese women. The dark, murky waters of the Demerara serve as a point of reference and historical emblem that communicates

the historical past and present of transatlantic slavery and colonization. The dark murkiness of the water holds the blood, sweat, and flesh that created the ontological meaning and negation of Blackness. Subryan is writing within a lineage of Caribbean feminist organizers whose political focus included gender and class struggles across Guyana and internationally.

Andaiye, a leading Guyanese public scholar, writer, and organizer whose work primarily focused on the connection between gendered and class oppression, also analyzed the power differentials reflected by the waters surrounding Guyana. In *The Point is to Change the World*, Andaiye details her formative educational experience in grade school. She speaks about growing up in British colonial Guyana as a young Black girl and her education was influenced by the British colonial power. In this instance, Andaiye discusses the misrepresentation of water surrounding her home and the commonplace practices of establishing colonial power in education. Andaiye narrates this unfinished short story during her political commentary on feminist organizing in the late 1990s and early 2000s. She argues that feminist organizers need to continue interrogating class, race, and gender positions and provide a personal and historically rooted narrative on the teachings of power and hierarchy.

The quoted excerpt of the story is found under her segment titled “How and What We First Learn About Power,” which tracks the inconsistencies in colonial education that insidiously enforces the disempowering of colonized people. Andaiye explains the tethered onset of racial, gendered, and colonial consciousness that ultimately influences how she navigates political and personal spaces. Her geographic location is integral to her political and social commitments. Through this understanding, she can assess the racialized and gendered inequalities that cause Guyanese women to be more vulnerable to poverty and violence. I have included an extended citation here so that Andaiye can tell her own story.

In school, the teacher asked, “What color is the sea?”
“Brown, teacher, brown,” we chorused.
“Brown?” she shouted. “Brown? Is how yuh mean brown? Open yuh book at page 3. Repeat after me: The sea is blue. The sea is blue. The sea is?”
“Blue, teacher, blue.”
But we knew the sea. It was where daily, boys swam, behind the wall, where At Easter, we all flew kites, and where, on Sunday afternoons, teenage boys would sit to catch the eyes of teenage girls riding by.
We had seen what we knew as the sea, and it was brown; brown with the mud and silt washed down by the Amazon. So we ran after school to look again, to stare at the dark, muddy water, and repeat in reluctant acquiescence, “Blue, teacher, blue. The sea is blue.”³¹

The stark differences between what is learned through living and what is learned in school demonstrate the ways colonial power attempts to replace embodied knowledge with colonial imagination. Andaiye is describing a particular form of intimacy between Guyanese people and their waters that cannot be reflected in the assertion that seawater is blue. The muddiness of the water represents their geographic location and all that is filtered in and out of the Demerara from the neighboring lands. Metaphorically, the assertion of blue water and the reluctant acquiescence practiced by the students showcases a sense of disappointment, resistance, and confusion as it does not accurately hold the memories made in and around the water.

There is power in being able to maintain shared and generational memory. The forced assertion of blue sea water attempts to sever the generation and communal memory tied to the water. Andaiye’s analysis of how power is enacted through this teaching demonstrates that power’s influence knows no bounds. Power influences geographic and embodied knowledge, as well as social processes. Andaiye places herself in conversation with Black feminist scholars

³¹ Andaiye, “Women as Collateral Damage in Race Violence,” in *The Point Is to Change the World*, ed. Alissa Trotz (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 6.

addressing the connections between physical land, Black women's social position, and hierarchies of power.

Black Water Women begins with Cleo Morton's pregnancy with Sara Morton. The chapter spans Cleo's pregnancy until Sara leaves for the United States for college. Subryan beginning the text with a pregnant Black mother and young Black girl signal a symbolic function of Black motherhood and Black girlhood in literary and visual texts and political organizing. Black Girlhood studies have outlined how Black girls and women symbolically and, often, quite literally demonstrate forward progression for their communities and the Black race at large across the African diaspora.

Subryan demonstrates the power of the Black girl within communities and the way Black girls, in this case, Sara, are symbolically suggested within the text. Sara's story is one that focuses on coming of age in Guyana—alongside Cleo's struggle with culturally expectations of Guyanese womanhood—and the different social expectations that young Guyanese women are expected to navigate. Subryan is explicit in the childhood abuse Sara endured and the normalized nature of abuse across the different stages of Guyanese girlhood and womanhood. Sara and Cleo's beginning *Black Water Women* may suggest an interior example of how Guyanese women navigate and negotiate the oppressive social pressures that serve to draw distinct lines between boy/girl, man/woman, wife/"wutless."³³

Cleo's pregnancy opening the text demonstrate the deadly pressures of having to perform motherhood and respectability. Subryan writes of Cleo's disinterest in mothering, as she is on her eighth pregnancy, and her exhaustion from being the primary caretaker, cleaner, and cook for her entire family. "Beside the Morton's three-roomed, wooden house which Lucius and his friend

³³ Guyanese colloquial term that means "worthless"

had built near the river, Cleo Morton was stooping under a mango tree doing her daily washing, but Cleo Morton was pregnant again—for the eighth time, and she was tired—tired of babies, tired of washing and scrubbing all day long and tired of her husband who came in grumpy and demanding.”³⁴ Here Subryan is demonstrating what Red Thread defines as “unwaged work” or “housework” that is severely disrespected and oftentimes goes unpaid. This daily labor is often enacted in communal settings amongst other women, and in this section, at the Demerara river’s bank. The river’s bank witnesses the labor done by Guyanese women, which serves to support the men and children in the community. The novel subtly rests on the character's proximity to the Demerara River and how their lives are figuratively and literally shaped by their interactions with water, overall. As stated earlier, rivers hold geographic, spiritual, political, and social significance to Guyanese people across racial lines.

Liminal Space: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora was curated by Grace Ali and was a moment where fifteen Guyanese women artists reflected on their relationship to migration and the formation of Guyanese womanhood through visual and literary mediums. In Ali’s introduction to the book, she states, “In tandem, the title *Liminal Spaces* reflects the ways in which Guyanese women bear witness to what drives them from their homeland as well as what keeps them emotionally and psychically tethered. It is a title meant to encapsulate how they examine the notion of homeland as both fixed and unfixed, a constantly shifting idea or memory, and a physical place and psychic space.”³⁵ *Liminal Space* addresses the complexity of citizenship, body autonomy, and belonging to Guyanese women amid mass migration to Britain, Canada, and the United States. The museum curation includes multimodal reflections on seventy years of

³⁴ Subryan, 24.

³⁵ Grace Aneiza Ali, “Introduction: Liminal Space,” in *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, ed. Grace Aneiza Ali (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 4.

Guyana's social and political history through Guyanese women's perspectives that either live in or migrated from Guyana or are first-generation living outside of Guyana.

The work is embodied as much as it is meditative, ancestral, and archival through the materials used and how the artists approach tending to their various connections to Guyana. The artists showcase their experiences with colonial British Guiana and "post"-colonial Guyana and the mass migrations that occurred and continue to happen. *Liminal Spaces* is an archival, meditative, reflective, and generative project that takes seriously Guyanese women's contributions to literary and artistic discourses around migration, immigration, and diaspora. Literary and visual projects, across various artistic mediums, hold the vast, nuanced experiences of Guyanese women across racial and class lines. Each work tends to questions of belonging, memory, and (dis)placement at the intersection of gender and class. The visual realm captures the literal faces, landscapes, and objects that color the quotidian and jarring experience of migrating and the difficulty of being rooted.

The contributing artists are from different ethnic and racial backgrounds which impact their articulations of Guyanese womanhood which begs necessary questions about the sustainability and functionality of these racial and ethnic divides. The curation destabilizes the idea of harsh racial and ethnic lines and the reproduction of colonial narratives about Guyana's social, political, and environmental landscape. Guyana is understood as "the land of six races." These stark divisions fall apart and are reaffirmed through the way Guyanese post-colonial politics informs the gendered body politics that attempt to categorize and control Guyanese women across racial and ethnic backgrounds.

I will be engaging two of Dominique Hunter's digital collages and written work that appears in the *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*. Dominique

Hunter is a Guyanese multi-disciplinary visual artist with Indian and African ancestry who has had her work featured in galleries in the Caribbean and the Americas. Her visual work in *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, “critiques the (non)-representation of Black female bodies in art history and stereotypical portrayals in contemporary.”³⁶ Further, Hunter’s work is centered on the necessity of self-care for Black femmes under consistent societal oppression. In the digital collage series, silhouettes and a Black body are centered among thick vegetation and water that is found on the sea wall of Guyana, specifically green morning glory plants. Her series, titled *Transplantation*, includes three digital collages and a step-by-step “Guide to Surviving Transplantation and Other Traumas.”³⁷ All three collages, *You will Find Solace Here*, *Contemplating Strategies*, and *Black Water Remedy* feature black bodies in some capacity amid nature and a body of water. Hunter positions bodies in a meditative state, whether laying down on a deck, gazing over a well that encapsulates a bright blue sea, or diving (or floating) upside down into dark waters.

The bodies present in Hunter’s work is a self-referential figure and exists outside of overrepresented ideals of Black femininity in visual works. Gender is elusive and ambiguous motioning toward the intangibility of binary gender for Black people. Hunter’s work functions within a Black feminist legacy to (re)define and provide nuance to Black femme representations in visual works, the framing of the Black female body in visual arts, and the way Black women artists negotiate autonomy, identity-making, and representation. Black female Guyanese body, the waters that surround them, and the necessity of taking care of the mind, body, and spirit in the constant transitions that are migration, immigration, and displacement.

³⁶ Grace Aneza Ali, xi.

³⁷ Dominique Hunter, “A Guide to Surviving Transplantation and Other Traumas,” in *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, ed. Grace Aneza Ali (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 85.

The images featured in Liminal Spaces manifest her focus on migration, Guyanese womanhood, and the importance of self-care. Hunter provided two different series of collages in the museum exhibit and the physical book about the exhibit. Consistent through both renderings of her work is the presence of a white or black silhouette, where there is no head or face, the abundant vegetation in Guyana, and the morning glory flower. I am focusing on Hunter's work because of its ability to connect the complicated stories and social processes that are made on and connected through Guyana's waters. Centering Black femme bodies in her work responds to the silences around the way Blackness and womanhood shape and are shaped by Guyanese politics and social understandings of the country's landscape and geography.

Hunter's work is set within the lineage of Afro and Indo-Guyanese people brought to the country through British and Dutch colonization for cheap labor and the body politics that emerged from this exploitative laboring system. *You will Find Solace Here* opens the series and emerging from the bottom left, under the black body sunbathing, and assisting in the division between forest ground and dark water, the morning glories are centered in the collage and bind together the different visual and thematic parts of the collage. It intersects the spliced images and is the closest to the viewer. Morning glories are known for their resilient nature and their ability to survive under extreme weather conditions. Hunter placing morning glories in relationship to afro-Guyanese femme bodies highlights the tense relationship between life and death under violent political and social circumstances. Further, morning glories exemplify the increasingly hostile environmental circumstances Guyanese people are facing because of global warming. Guyana is positioned under sea level. There is a sea wall that runs along the Atlantic coast of the country to avoid flooding when possible. However, Guyana has been experiencing major,

destabilizing floods in recent years due to rising ocean levels. The symbol of resiliency ties together Black femme livelihood and the fight for overall environmental sustainability.

Additionally, the Black female body sunbathing between the forest or jungle ground and the dark waters is further communicating the layered relationship between Afro-Guyanese women and their physical environment as a potential space for safety and healing. Hunter



Dominique Hunter. *You Will Find Solace Here*, 2016, digital collage, *Liminal Space: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, 83.

complicates the notion of self-care that is not only dependent on internal, isolated care. Rather, the solace found *here* is in community with the outside, physical world, and internal environment. The rootedness and understanding of the physical environment that surrounds the body enables the possibility of care. Through acts of

grounding and forging an intentional relationship with the physical environment, though it is fraught because of the histories of migration and placelessness, Hunter's work captures the potential peace in this tension.

Hunter's work speaks to ancestral practices present in Guyana, Obeah. In Obeah, like other African ancestral spiritual and religious practices, there is an emphasis on the relationship between herbs, plants, and water to create potions, baths, and powder that assist in easing anxiety, communicating with spirits, attracting a lover, or enacting psychological or physical

harm, to name a few practices. Obeah received its name after the Tacky Rebellion and its elusive, ambiguous status is directly tied to colonial fear. Obeah is understood as antithetical to colonial and political law and order because of its ability to be enacted and successful despite legal restrictions. Janelle Rodriques states, “Obeah, therefore, was and perhaps still is as much the practice of freedom as it was a means to survive enslavement. In this, as in all its manifestations, Obeah was a counteraction the totality of terror that characterise daily slave life.”³⁹

Back women’s relationship with water is discussed in relation to African diasporic cosmologies, such as Condomblé in Brazil, Haitian Vodou, and Santeria (Lukumi) in Cuba, and there is little focus on Anglophone Caribbean practices, specifically, Guyanese religious and spiritual cosmologies. As previously stated, Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America and is situated between three countries with different colonial histories. Due to British colonization, Guyana is culturally like other formally British colonized islands, such as Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. The primary African diasporic spiritual practice in Guyana is the Spiritual Baptist faith. Spiritual Baptism is extremely understudied, limiting the focus of Caribbean religions, which greatly influences the social uptake of African diasporic religions. In Lyndon K. Gill’s essay, *I Am a Messenger: Spiritual Baptism and the Queer Afterlife of Faith*, Gill discusses the unexplored queer and gender non-conforming practices within Spiritual Baptism. While Gill’s work is focused primarily on Trinidad and Tobago, there is a significant overlap between what he has written, and the stories told to me by my mother and grandmother. Gill states,

³⁹ Janelle Rodriques. “Introduction: Obeah as Cultural Signifier.” In *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature*, 1–41. 1st ed. Routledge, 2019, 7.

Although, like most syncretic faiths, Spiritual Baptism resists definitive, singular, or linear origin narratives, one of its most convincing genesis stories—corroborated by much of the available historical evidence—identifies in its constitution a Strong African American Southern Baptists tradition deeply accented in the Caribbean with West African and Catholic aural aesthetics, ritual objects, adornment practices, initiation rites, and spirit possessions precepts.

Like a current or a breeze, the Spiritual Baptists emerges from, transforms through, and calls attention to movement across space and time. The peregrinations that creates the religion are a testament to the mobility of the sacred—across various physical and metaphysical sites—which parallels temporal mobility by which the faith passes fluidity between the past and the present.⁴⁰

Typically, when discussing African diasporic cosmologies in Guyana, Obeah is a foundational part of the conversation. The connection between Obeah and Spiritual Baptism is very similar to the relationship certain dominations of African American Christianity and Hoodoo have. In the quoted moment, Gill addresses the fluid aspects of Spiritual Baptism that refuse hard and fast definitions to confine the boundlessness of the practice. In Guyana, Spiritual Baptists are understood to be church-going people that also engage in herbal and ancestral divination. Spiritual Baptist practitioners find great peace and healing in the waters surrounding Guyana. Spiritual cleansing and ancestral rituals are performed around the sea walls, where the ocean and rivers meet when the tides are high.⁴¹

A ‘Black Atlantic’ Re-orientation: A False Conclusion

⁴⁰ Lyndon Gill, “I am a Messenger: Spiritual Baptism and the Queer Afterlife of Faith,” *Small Axe* 55, (2018): 72.

⁴¹ My mother shared the multiple Spiritual Baptists ceremonies she witnessed firsthand. She stated that it is common to wait until the tides get a bit higher, as Guyana is located under sea level, and perform baptisms and other spiritual practices. The connection with water, the moon, and the earth are core to Spiritual Baptist workings.

Both Carmen Subryan's *Black Water Women* and Dominique Hunter's *You Will Find Solace Here* showcase the expansiveness achieved in Guyanese women's visual and literary practices. This essay functions as a meditation on Afro-Guyanese women's literary and visual projects that tend to racial and sexual politics and how it informs their self-referential works. Their works function as archival and meaning-making projects in an environment that quickly forecloses their potentialities to that of the patriarchal political arrangement.

I offer that we engage Subryan and Hunter's work in tandem to discuss the range, temporally and methodologically, of Guyanese women's creative and political practice with the possibility of expanding who/where/what is studied in the Black Atlantic. Further, this intermingling between time, method, process, and waterways holds historical and contemporary colonial and environmental devastation in tandem through Afro-Guyanese women's creative works.

Bibliography

- Ali, Grace Aneiza. "Introduction: Liminal Space," in *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, edited by Grace Aneza Ali Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020.
- Andaiye, "Women as Collateral Damage in Race Violence," in *The Point Is to Change the World: Selected Writings of Andaiye*, Edited by Alissa Trotz London: Pluto Press, 2020,
- Cordis, Shanya. "Forging Relational Difference: Racial Gendered Violence and Dispossession in Guyana," *Small Axe* 23, no.3 (2019): 18-33.
DOI:10.1215/07990537-7912298.
- Figueroa-Vásquez, Yomaira. *Decolonizing Diaspora: Radical Mappings of Afro-Atlantic Literature*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Gill, Lyndon. "I am a Messenger: Spiritual Baptism and the Queer Afterlife of Faith," *Small Axe* 55, no 5 (2018): 71-84. DOI 10.1215/07990537-4378936
- Hunter, Dominique. *You Will Find Solace Here*, 2016, digital collage, *Liminal Space: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*.
- Hunter, Dominique. "A Guide to Surviving Transplantation and Other Traumas," in *Liminal Spaces: Migration and Women of the Guyanese Diaspora*, ed. Grace Aneza Ali (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020).
- Kars, Marjoleine. *Blood On The River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* New York: The New Press, 2020.
- Lorde, Audre. "Poetry is Not a Luxury," 2007. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press Feminist Series. Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=739170&site=ehost-live>.
- Macharia, Keguro. *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2019.
- Rodney, Ruth, Denise Gastaldo, D. Alissa Trotz, and Claire V. Crooks. "Sex as Boys' Fame, But Girls' Shame: Adversarial Adolescent Gender Roles and Gender-Based Violence in Guyana." *Journal of interpersonal violence* 37, no. 21-22 (2022): NP19237–NP19264.

- Rodriques, Janelle. "Introduction: Obeah as Cultural Signifier." In *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature*, 1–41. 1st ed. Routledge, 2019.
- Sharpe, Christina E.. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Smith, Christen A. "Counting Frequency: Un/Gendering Anti-Black Terror," *Small Axes* 39, no. 2 (2021): 25-49. DOI 10.1215/01642472-8903591.
- Subryan, Carmen Barclay. *Black-Water Women: A Novel*. Lincoln: iUniverse, 1997.
- Trotz, D. Alissa. "Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana," *Small Axe* vol 8, no 1(2004): 1-20. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.1215/-8-1-1>.