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READING 'EMPEROR OIL' IN THE EXPANDED CARIBBEAN:

Petroleum, Ecology and
Caribbean Literature
in the Twentieth Century

By
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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नानी के लिए ।

मुझे आप की याद आती है ॥

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~

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, who I know would have rapped me hard on the head with her wooden spoon for sitting at a computer for so long (four years long!), but who I know would've burst her seams with pride, nevertheless. Nani, I wish you had been here to see this.

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Natasha Bondré, 21/12/2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and analyses selected literatures from the region that Peter Hulme has called the ‘expanded Caribbean’. This term, it is worth clarifying, theoretically encompasses the island archipelago and South American rim lands, connecting them through their history of shared lived experiences as part of the growth of the modern/colonial capitalist world economy. The thesis uses the novel and short story as critical vehicles to consider the ways in which Caribbean writers register and react to the impact of petro-capitalism across the region. I borrow Hulme’s term because it emphasises the unity-in-diversity of experiences across the colonial Caribbean, but also the contemporary infiltration of a far-reaching oil-culture across the islands and rim lands. I utilise the work of eco-critics such as Jason W. Moore to highlight the fact that the region has been used as series of commodity frontiers throughout its history, the most notable of these being sugar. However, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the nations of the expanded Caribbean have experienced a new set of vast changes thanks to the hegemony of oil-capitalism. The thesis examines the regionally specific socio-cultural changes wrought by petroleum’s dominance in the expanded Caribbean, but also the ways in which these changes are part of a larger global economy, a contemporary capitalist world-system which is powered by the oil commodity and is, as such, a specifically *petro-capitalist* system. Moreover, as Moore points out, the capitalist world-system is, and (throughout all its various historical permutations, industrial, financial, etc.) has always in fact been a ‘world-ecology’. With this premise in mind, the thesis examines various co-optations of the Caribbean’s human *and* extra-human natures in service to (petro) capital accumulation. This co-optation appears in various guises within the selected literatures, from the exploitation of labour power and natural landscapes on the frontiers of oil extraction; the merging of oil, ethnicity, and politics; the specifically gendered and racialised exploitation that is engendered by the arrival and hegemony of oil corporations working alongside local governments; the transformation of lifeways through objects such as the automobile and the aeroplane. Each author’s response to the presence of petro-capitalism in the region varies. Each work examined either resists, eludes, embraces, or critiques the nature of the global oil-economy, and its fallout in the expanded Caribbean, in terms of its impacts on the region’s ecology, economics, politics and culture. These different literary registrations of petro-capitalism and petroculture are essential because they display a profound awareness of (petro-) capitalism as an ecological regime, but also because they are part of a global literary network of petrofiction, albeit from a region that has been relatively understudied in the energy humanities. I connect various strands of theory to these texts and utilise a tripartite disciplinary framework (of world-literature, eco-criticism, and oil-studies) to illustrate two facts – the first, I hope, reveals the importance of the second. Firstly, the thesis demonstrates the varied and profound consequences of petro-capitalism’s infiltration into Caribbean life. In its very demonstration of this fact lies the second one; the thesis strives to act as a clarion call to conjoin Caribbean literature to petrocultural work. It is a small contribution to the emerging body of literary scholarship which has begun to analyse Caribbean petrofiction within the wider field of the energy humanities.

El Caribe es una región en la que se da una perfecta simbiosis —o se da más claramente que en otras partes del mundo— entre el hombre, el medio natural y la vida cotidiana. Viví en un pueblo olvidado de la selva calurosa en la ciénaga caribeña de Colombia. Allí, el olor de la vegetación descompone los intestinos. Es una realidad en la que el mar tiene todos los azules imaginables, los ciclones arrastran las casas por los aires, los pueblos subsisten bajo el polvo y el calor invade todo el aire respirable. Para el habitante del Caribe las catástrofes naturales y las tragedias humanas son el pan de cada día. Y en medio de ese mundo existe además la fuerte influencia de las mitologías traídas por los esclavos, mezcladas a la mitología de los indios del continente y a la imaginación andaluza. Eso ha producido un espíritu muy peculiar, una visión de la vida que da a todo un aspecto maravilloso [...] Es el lado sobrenatural que tienen las cosas, una realidad que, como en los sueños, no está regida por leyes racionales.

In the Caribbean there's a perfect symbiosis – well, let's say one more evident than elsewhere – between the people, daily life and the natural world. I grew up in a village hidden away among marshes and virgin forest on the Colombian north coast. The smell of the vegetation there is enough to turn your stomach. It's a place the sea passes through every imaginable shade of blue, where cyclones make houses fly away, where villages lie buried under dust and the air burns your lungs. For the Caribbean peoples, natural catastrophe and human tragedy are part of everyday life. And in the middle of this world, moreover, exist the strong influence of the myths brought over by the slaves, mixed in with Indian legends and Andalusian imagination. The result is a very special way of looking at things, a conception of life that sees a bit of the marvellous in everything [...] There's a supernatural side to things, a kind of reality that ignores the laws of reason, just like in dreams.

~ *Gabriel García Márquez*

Oil, along with natural gas [...] is today the chief fuel that keeps our world in motion; it is a raw material of rising importance for the chemical industry and is the basic strategic material for military activities. Nothing compares with this 'black gold' as a magnet for foreign capital, nothing earns such lush profits, no jewel in the diadem of capitalism is so monopolised, and no businessmen wield the global political power of the great petroleum corporations. Standard Oil and Shell seat and unseat kings and presidents, finance palace plots and coups d'état, have innumerable generals, ministers, and James Bonds at their command, and make decisions about peace and war in every field and every language. Standard Oil of New Jersey (now Exxon) is the capitalist world's biggest industrial enterprise; outside the United States no industrial enterprise has greater power than Royal Dutch/Shell. Affiliates sell crude petroleum to subsidiaries which refine it and sell it to branch organizations for distribution: there is no loss of blood in the whole internal circulatory system of the cartel, which also owns the pipelines and most of the oil fleets on the seven seas.

~ *Eduardo Galeano*

Dear future generations, please accept our apologies. We were roaring drunk on petroleum.

~ *Kurt Vonnegut*

INTRODUCTION:

Considering (Petro-) Capitalism: An Ecological Regime

The mural of the economic history of Latin America and the Caribbean has been painted the color of its commodities: the gold and silver that attracted early explorers and conquistadores, the green gold of sugar, the brown of coffee, the magenta of cochineal, copper and the “black gold” of the twentieth century. Commodity exports have always powered the economies of the region, filled its government coffers and served as its main link to the global markets.

~ Emily Sinnott, John Nash, Augusto de la Torre.¹

The ‘Expanded Caribbean’: From Plantation to Refinery

This study examines select literatures which register, in multitudinous and sometimes subtle ways, petroleum production and its use in what Peter Hulme has called the ‘expanded Caribbean’.² My analysis of specific nation-states in this area and their relationship to the oil commodity (an analysis which uses the novel and short story form as its primary critical vehicles) is predominantly informed by the expanded Caribbean’s place within the wider context of the capitalist world-system.³ I understand this world-system to be hierarchically

¹ Emily Sinnott, John Nash, Augusto de la Torre, *Latin and Caribbean Studies: Natural Resources in Latin America and the Caribbean – Beyond Booms and Busts* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2010), p.1.

² Peter Hulme, ‘Expanding the Caribbean’, in *Perspectives on the ‘Other America’: Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture*, eds. by Michael Niblett and Kerstin Oloff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 29–50 (p. 39).

³ My use of the term ‘world-system’ follows the conceptual rubric of critics such as Immanuel Wallerstein and other world-systems analysts (Terence Hopkins, Christopher Chase-Dunn and Giovanni Arrighi, for instance). World-systems analysis understands capitalism as what Stephen Shapiro calls a ‘historically periodizable formation that operates by altering the formal shape between national sovereignty and world markets in response to cyclical contradictions generated by its operational logic’ (p. 30). Some analysts, Wallerstein among them, define capitalism as distinct from other historical forms of government. Unlike these previous forms, the modern world-system ‘exists as an interstate system, a shared economic and sociocultural space dominated by capitalist drives where congeries of nation-states, conjoined in relations of competition and cohabitation, gain preeminence based on their ability to manage domestic class conflicts and an international division of labour through core–(semiperiphery)–periphery relations’ (32). As Wallerstein explains, in the study of world-systems, ‘we are dealing with a spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated

striated by an axial division of labour between core and peripheral regions.⁴ Furthermore, following the work of environmental theorists such as Jason W. Moore, I begin from the conceptual premise that this world-system is not only economic but also ecological (it is a ‘world-ecology’ or a ‘web of life’, as Moore puts it).⁵ Given the fundamental role of petroleum in shaping all manner of life- and environment-making practices in the contemporary global economy, it makes sense to refer to this system as a specifically petro-capitalist world-system. Understandings of this particular world-system are being continually

zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules’ (*World Systems Analysis* p. 24). The modern, capitalist world-system differs from ‘non-, proto- or embryonic capitalist ones’ because of the types of commodities that dominate trade (Shapiro p. 32). Earlier world markets traded in ‘nonperishable preciosities [...] rare superfluities’ while the modern world-system trades in ‘food and energy staples where profit depends on economies of scale (rather than economies of scarcity), lowered transaction costs and the reorganization of local modes of production, according to capitalist dictates’ (Shapiro p. 32). Modern/historical capitalism, Wallerstein argues, is the first and only example of a functioning world-economy and emerged in Western Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century. This basic understanding of the term world-system, of which capitalism is the first of its kind, informs the references made in this study.

Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 24-29; Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University State Press, 2008), pp. 30-35; Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘The Rise and Future Demise of the World-Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis’, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 1-36.

⁴ The axial division of labour in a capitalist world-economy means that production is divided into ‘core-like products and peripheral products’ in core and peripheral zones respectively (Wallerstein 24). The core-periphery division relates to the ‘degree of profitability of the production process’: profitability, being linked to monopolization, means that core production processes are often controlled by ‘quasi-monopolies,’ so when exchange occurs, these monopolized products are in a competitive position (Wallerstein 25). Subsequently, ‘there is a constant flow of surplus value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like products.’ In other words, there is an unequal exchange. As Wallerstein reminds us, ‘for shorthand purposes we can talk about core states and peripheral states as long as we remember that we are really talking about production processes’ (26). Shapiro elucidates: ‘[...] a core zone is analogous to the middle classes, which refers to a set of elites who compete against each other [...] core regions consist of strong nation-states that define the traffic in goods and commodified labour power to their advantage, while the periphery includes weak or noncentralized state regions that are violently seized for the natural resources of their terrain, strategic location and labor of their peoples’ (33). Moreover, each ‘spatial level’ as he calls them (‘area, national, regional, urban, familial’) contains its own core-periphery demarcations (33). Nation-states have their own core and peripheral zones (the north/south, or urban/rural divide, for example) and cities too possess class-differentiated regions. Patriarchal nuclear families and racialized societal structures too have white males at their core and women and non white peoples as ‘peripheral actors’ (34). Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, pp. 24-29; Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel*, pp. 30-35.

On the history of world-systems theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘The Itinerary of World-Systems Analysis, or How to Resist Becoming a Theory,’ in *The Uncertainties of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), pp. 83-108; for more on capitalism as a world-system see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Hopkins, eds., *World-Systems Analysis: Theory and Methodology* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982); Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Thomas R. Shannon, *An Introduction to the World-System Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); Christopher Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation: Structures of the World Economy* (London: Blackwell, 1989); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994).

⁵ Jason W. Moore, ‘Toward a Singular Metabolism: Epistemic Rifts and Environment-Making in the Capitalist World-Ecology,’ *New Geographies* 6 (2014), 10-19 (pp 12-13).

expanded, thanks to emerging scholarship in areas such as the energy humanities, wherein analyses of the implications of oil's dominance over socio-economic life have become increasingly understood as relevant and worthy of examination.⁶ Nevertheless, the pan-Caribbean region remains relatively understudied in relation to both the consequences of the oil-commodity's socio-economic hegemony and the many forms of cultural production which seek to resist and critique its damaging socio-ecological effects. This study, then, is an addition to the ever-expanding body of petrocultural scholarship, and it seeks to assist in a bridging of the gap between petrocultural studies and literary criticism of the pan-Caribbean.

I use Hulme's phrase throughout the course of this work; the term 'expanded Caribbean' usefully encompasses not only the archipelago, but also parts of the South American rim lands. As such, it speaks to the essential need to grasp the region as a unity-in-diversity. A little context is useful here. Hulme's geographical delineation of the expanded Caribbean draws from Michael Dash's theorisation of what he calls the 'other America'.⁷ Dash, for his part, borrows the phrase from Édouard Glissant's *Le discours antillais* (published in 1981), where Glissant references what he calls '*l'autre Amérique*'.⁸ The work of individuals such as Hulme, Dash, and Glissant is key in understanding *how* to relate the Caribbean archipelago to the wider American landmass, and *why* it is theoretically and practically important to do so.⁹ Despite the unique and heterogeneous modes of life- and environment-

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the importance of the energy humanities, see the introduction to *Energy Humanities* edited by Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer. *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*, eds. by Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017) pp. 1-27.

⁷ See J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 90.

⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p.229; *Caribbean Discourse; Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), p. 115.

⁹ The work of these three thinkers also stands on the shoulders of earlier critics who considered how best to relate the Caribbean archipelago to the wider American landmass and who attempted to respond to the larger question of how to divide the Americas into North and South. According to the United Nations, the Caribbean islands are one third of three subdivisions: the other two being Central America, (including Mexico) and South America. These three categories belong to Latin America. However, Hulme's question of how 'the Caribbean as a region should relate to the American continent' remains. While America is the mediating context for the Caribbean, the Caribbean is not completely part of either of the two Americas; rather, it is the thread between them, separating them but also holding them together. In *Discours antillais*, Glissant's discussion of the 'Other America' contains two footnotes which refer to earlier attempts to divide the continent and earlier attempts to understand how to unite the Americas: Glissant's first footnote refers to the work done by Brazilian ethnologist Darcy Ribiero, the second, to Jamaican historian Rex Nettleford. Incidentally, Nettleford was also part of the New World Group, a small group of Caribbean scholars working in the 1960s, who developed an idea first postulated by sociologist and anthropologist Charles Wagley. The work of scholars such as Glissant, Ribiero, Nettleford, Wagley and the New World Group helps to clarify the concept of the 'expanded Caribbean' as a region which consists of Ribiero's 'New Peoples' and is part of Nettleford's 'Plantation America.' The phrase

making that are found in each country of the region, the Caribbean islands and parts of South America (particularly Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, the coastal zones of Venezuela and Colombia, and much of Brazil) are united by several shared historical realities and lived experiences, spawned from the European colonial enterprise. As is now widely recognised, the creation of the expanded Caribbean is rooted in a history of profound exploitation, beginning with the widespread extermination of multiple indigenous populations; the horrific experiences and long-lasting legacies of transatlantic slavery; post-slavery indentureship; and the painful struggle for freedom from colonial rule.

The fact of the importation of enslaved (and later indentured) labour to work on the plantations has come to be the most emblematic or representative experience of the expanded Caribbean among scholars and governments alike. Cuban essayist Antonio Benítez-Rojo, for example, famously deemed the plantation to be the ‘extraordinary machine’ that ‘repeat[s] itself continuously’ across the region, defining its existence and unifying it in terms of both historical experiences and contemporary realities.¹⁰ Of course, there is no doubt that the plantation systems which were imposed across the archipelago and the South American continent have profoundly influenced the region, and were also essential to the expansion of the modern capitalist world-system. As Hilary Beckles puts it, it was ‘in the Caribbean vortex of the Atlantic Basin that [...] international capitalism took its early cultural and social identity’.¹¹ Commercial capitalism and slavery were intrinsically linked, the former a

‘expanded Caribbean,’ then, encompasses the Caribbean islands and South America (particularly the southern continent’s rimlands but also countries such as Brazil), all of which share similarities in the ways they were each affected by their rapid, damaging introduction to the capitalist world-system. For more detail on the division of the American populace into three groups and five regions (firstly, the Witness People [the Mesoamerican and Andean indigenous communities], the Transplanted Peoples [European descended populations of the River Plate, the U.S.A. and Canada], and the New Peoples [the mixed populations of Chile, Brazil, the old region of Gran Colombia and the Caribbean islands]), see Darcy Ribiero, *As Américas e a civilização: processo de formação e causas do desenvolvimento desigual dos povos americanos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970); *The Americas and Civilisation*, trans. by Linton Lomas Barrett and Marie McDavid Barrett (New York: Dutton, 1971). For further detail on the division of the Americas into ‘Plantation America’ (the Caribbean islands and the eastern littoral of the continent), ‘Mesoamerica’ (Peru, Mexico and Guatemala) and the ‘Euroamericas’ (Argentina, Chile, the U.S. and Canada), see Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies and UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979); for more on the notion of a tripartite America (i.e. Euro-America, Indo-America and Plantation America), see Charles Wagley, ‘Plantation America: A Cultural Sphere,’ in *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, ed. Vera Rubin (Seattle: 1960), pp. 3–13 (p.3).

¹⁰ The arrival of the European powers, Benítez-Rojo writes, and the way in which each of these powers ‘steered their economies along the most radical capitalist paths, helped to lend a heterogenous aspect to the colonial Caribbean [...] it’s clear that there are certain regular and common factors, held in place by experiences more or less shared’ through the experience of colonization’. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 34–35, p. 8.

¹¹ Hilary M. Beckles, ‘Capitalism, Slavery and Caribbean Modernity,’ in *Callaloo*, 20.4 (1997) 777–789 (p. 785).

consumptive enterprise, and the latter a project that produced consumer goods for the metropole, to paraphrase the words of Guy Emerson Mount.¹² Capitalist development in the colonial Caribbean also created what Sidney Mintz has called a ‘precocious modernity’.¹³ This ‘precocious modernity’ was a consequence of the complex industrial nature of the plantation-system, but it was (crucially) also a result of the lived experience of the enslaved African labour force. In their resistance to the multiple forms of exploitation that they encountered, enslaved Africans constructed ways of life-making that were uniquely modern.¹⁴ The plantation was a site which bound together capitalism, science and technology, a profoundly ‘modern system’ in which enslaved Africans were ‘from the very start liv[ing] a life that was in its essence a modern life’.¹⁵ A life that, as Jacolien Volschenk puts it, ‘was characterised by alienation and fracturing social, political and economic pressures’.¹⁶ The plantation was, of course, also an essential cause and consequence of the accumulation of capital responsible for Western Europe’s industrial advancement. Inextricably connected to this European development was the simultaneous *underdevelopment* of the New World. Across the expanded Caribbean, it was the creation of multiple infrastructures (such as the industrial-plantation complex) that allowed for the appropriation of regional commodities, and in doing so, shaped the region in immeasurable ways. As Mintz pithily writes, the Caribbean was ‘both “urbanised” and “westernised” by its plantations, oil refineries and aluminium mines, more than by its cities’.¹⁷ It is the sugar plantation in particular that has become the defining symbol of this urbanisation

¹² Guy Emerson Mount, ‘Capitalism and Slavery: Reflections on the Williams Thesis’, in *African American Intellectual History Society* (21 November 2015) Web [Accessed 13 November 2016].

¹³ Sidney W. Mintz, ‘Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene,’ in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 2 (1996) 298–311 (p. 298).

¹⁴ Mintz notes that:

[...] the enterprises for which these people were carried across oceans were intimately associated with Europe and its growth. Their development was an instance of precocious modernity, an unanticipated (indeed unnoticed) modernity—unnoticed especially, perhaps, because it was happening to people most of whom were forcibly stolen from the worlds outside the West. No one imagined that such people would become “modern”—since there was no such thing; no one recognised that the raw, outpost societies into which such people were thrust might become the first of their kind.

Mintz, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, p. 298.

¹⁵ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Second Edition (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1989), p. 392.

¹⁶ Jacolien Volschenk, ‘Haunting Temporalities: Creolisation and Black Women’s Subjectivities in the Diasporic Science Fiction of Nalo Hopkinson’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2016) p. 3

¹⁷ Sidney W Mintz, ‘The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area’ in *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* 9, 2 (1966), 912–37 (p. 925).

and westernisation for the entire region.¹⁸

Of course, there is no doubt that the plantation is ‘indispensable’ to a study of the societies of the area; ‘the proliferation of plantations is the most important historical phenomenon to have come about in the Caribbean,’ as Benitez-Rojo reminds us.¹⁹ By now, it is widely and generally acknowledged by Caribbean scholars that the plantation has been a central institution in the economic (under)development of the region and that the expanded Caribbean itself has been equally indispensable to the historical rise of global industrial capitalism.²⁰ The current presence of petro-capitalism in the region stands, then, on the shoulders of sugar-capitalism and the history of colonial commodity frontiers. Sugar’s hegemony in the expanded Caribbean is, then, a useful springboard for considering the sociocultural implications of oil’s contemporary dominance. During its colonial reign, sugar (like oil today) was as much a social phenomenon as an industrial product. Michel-Rolph Trouillot allows us to grasp the immensity of this saccharine influence when he writes of sugar’s material and cultural power in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now the nation-state of Haiti). He explains that:

[Sugar] was not simply the main source of revenues. It had acquired a *social culture*: the socially drawn monopoly to subject to its refraction all other commodities and human beings themselves. Socially selected, socially identified, it became the principle around which human life was organised. Towns were built because of its proximity. Time was marked by its harvest. Status was linked to its possession. In Saint Domingue (and indeed across all of the sugar producing islands of the Caribbean archipelago and the Latin American rimlands) there was a ramified sugar *culture*.²¹

¹⁸ The academic work that has been done (and indeed, that continues to be produced) on the relationship between sugar plantations, capital and modernity in the Caribbean is voluminous. To begin with, see: Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); César J. Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean 1898-1934* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1999); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London: Penguin, 1986); Franklin W. Knight, ‘Imperialism and Slavery,’ ‘Social Structure of the Plantation Society,’ *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nation*, 3rd Ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 74-80, pp. 85-108; A. B. Leonard and David Pretel, *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge 1650-1914*, eds. by Leonard and Pretel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁹ Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p. 38.

²⁰ For more detail on the general concept of underdevelopment, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and New York: Verso, 2018).

²¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘Motion in the System: Coffee, Color, and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue,’ *Review* 5, 3, (1982), 331-388 (p. 372).

Indeed, the wealth of academic critique surrounding the institution of the colonial sugar plantation ‘has, in [of] itself, become an influential social actor in the contemporary Caribbean’.²² However, such prolonged scholarly attention to the sugar plantation as the ultimate symbol of Caribbean history has led, perhaps, to insufficient consideration of the other movers and shapers of more recent processes and patterns of urbanisation and westernisation. As Mintz suggests above, the oil refinery has also played a crucial role in the ongoing capitalist industrialisation of the region. Yet, the expanded Caribbean’s role in the global oil economy has been relatively overlooked in academic, particularly literary, studies (even as ample scholarly attention has been paid to other peripheral oil-producers and ex-colonies such as Iraq or Nigeria).

Since the middle of the twentieth century, it has been oil, rather than sugar, that has played a ‘pivotal but often neglected’ role in the region.²³ Generally speaking, much more scholarly attention has been paid to the plantation-complex’s formation of a socio-economic and ecological system which repeated itself across the islands and rimlands of the region, irrevocably transforming the human and extra-human natures of the expanded Caribbean. However, the contemporary oil industry’s expansive network of refineries, ports, fields, pipelines and subterranean reserves also extends across the region, transmuting and altering human and extra-human natures in equally important and often disturbing ways. Like sugar capitalism, petro-capitalism has tangible and cataclysmic consequences for the human populations of the expanded Caribbean: worker migration, exploitation, and the existence of racialised labour systems are all essential to the maintenance of what Eric Williams has pithily termed ‘Emperor Oil’s’ reign in the Caribbean.²⁴ Extra-human natures, too, have been co-opted by oil’s presence across the region. As I will posit throughout this study, the respective exploitation and despoliation of the Caribbean’s human and extra-human natures under petro-capitalism continues and builds upon the long history of socio-ecological devastation begun by European colonisers. The region’s role in the global oil-economy, then, allows us to meditate upon the numerous historical and contemporaneous connections which link the nation-states of the expanded Caribbean. Three of the most important connections for the purposes of this study include current intra-Caribbean oil relations, the region’s position in a petro-capitalist

²² Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 604.

²³ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 604.

²⁴ Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (New Jersey: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2017), p. 13.

world-system and the way the oil-industry carves deeper furrows into older patterns of regional exploitation, adding newer layers to older substratums of colonial damage. In the twentieth century, the physical presence of the plantation is of course fading and, as Bond points out, ‘working plantations (but also export-oriented agriculture more generally) are in a state of decline’.²⁵ As such, it is reasonable to state that sugar is no longer the commodity which may be seen to define and unite the region, but instead, in its place stands oil, the most important ‘hyperobject’ of the contemporary world-system.²⁶

Oil’s dominance in the expanded Caribbean began from the middle of the twentieth century, when the region became a ‘key energy outpost for imperial powers’.²⁷ David Bond notes that ‘as the Panama Canal brought new global shipping lanes to the region and as European navies and trading concerns retrofitted their fleets to run on bunker fuel, oil depots and refineries were built across the region’.²⁸ Nevertheless, these infrastructures did still reflect the region’s peripherality; they were constructed to serve the needs of the core nations. ‘Unlike refineries built in the U.S. and Europe, designed to serve adjacent urban markets, these outsized Caribbean refineries were scaled to the oceanic merchant and military networks they supported’.²⁹ Despite this, their significance is illustrated by their strategic importance during the Second World War, when, for example, the Royal Dutch Refinery on Curaçao became the largest in the world. This was closely followed by Standard Oil’s Aruba refinery, which yielded over eighty percent of the Allies’ aviation and naval fuel, leading to repeated attacks from German U-boats.³⁰ After the war, the region became ‘an attractive site to expand refining capacity while sidestepping the demands of organised labour and rising environmental oversight’ in the U.S.³¹ As Barry, Wood and Preusch add, the Caribbean’s ‘political stability, its deep harbours, lack of environmental regulations and proximity to major shipping lanes’ all proved highly attractive for the siting of North-American, offshored petro-based-

²⁵ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 603.

²⁶ Morton describes the hyperobject as one which can be studied and computed and considered, but not necessarily *seen* with ease. Hyperobjects are entities so massively distributed in time and space that they transcend localisation or any kind of stable definition. Morton refers his reader to the example of oil, but also plutonium and the climate, all of which exist on ‘almost unthinkable’ spatio-temporal scales. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 1–24 (p.1). See also Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 604.

²⁸ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 604.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

infrastructures and the mainland's imperialist ambitions.³² By the tail-end of the twentieth century, approximately one sixth of the oil used in the U.S. and over half of the refined oil imported there (including the petroleum from African and Middle Eastern locations) was transported through Caribbean refineries.³³ Since the early- to mid-twentieth century, oil has become the cornerstone around which human life revolves. Like sugar during its own period of hegemony, oil has now amassed its own ramified social culture across the world. As Graeme Macdonald elucidates, oil has come to 'dictate our daily conceptions, expectations and organisations of time and space' in profound, unexpected and powerful ways for over one hundred years.³⁴ This study, then, aims to illuminate a relatively understudied aspect of Caribbean modernity. I will engage in the examination of specific examples of literary production whose perspectives stem from the region's position in the global oil economy and the simultaneous influence of its colonial history and post-colonial struggle.

By reconfiguring Hulme's focus from sugar's unification to oil's underpinning of the expanded Caribbean, I consider the ways in which literature from the region registers, critiques, elides and resists local oil-economies and the pressures of the larger petro-capitalist world-system. By conjoining the fields of Caribbean literary criticism and petroculture, I hope to illustrate the complexities of the oil-economy in the region, petro-capitalism's nature as an ecological regime, and the literary resistance enacted by Caribbean authors against foreign oil corporations' invasive practices. While this existing body of literature is beginning to receive more nuanced attention from critics, there remains much work to be done in the study of Caribbean petrofiction and its connections to the wider literature of the capitalist world-economy (to world-literature, that is). But before focusing further on the Caribbean's place in

³² Tom Barry, Beth Wood, and Deb Preusch, *The Other Side of Paradise: Foreign Control in the Caribbean* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 89.

³³ At this juncture, it is useful to acknowledge that the region's position in the twentieth-century oil-economy has always been in relation to the burgeoning energy networks of the U.S. The continuation of capitalist relations of production have led to the exchange of one empire's reign over the Caribbean for another. As such, the U.S.'s imperial ambitions in the region should not be forgotten in a study of Caribbean petroculture. As David Bond points out, even as 'the sugar plantation became the defining image of the Caribbean for critical scholars and national leaders alike, the expanding energy networks of the United States underwrote much of the area's contemporary aspirations'. Bond goes on to write that 'Caribbean refineries [have] played a pivotal, if largely unrecognised role, in the imperial realignment around properties of fossil fuels [...] around crude oil [...] the constituent field of empire changed from the racial ordering of labour to the techno-political ordering of energy flows. Joining domestic desires for energy intensive lifestyles with a realignment of global energy infrastructures, crude oil heralded a fundamental shift in the texture and technique of U.S. empire'.

Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, pp. 604-6.

³⁴ Graeme Macdonald, 'Improbability Drives: The Energy of SF,' *Paradoxa 26: SF Now* (2014), reprinted (2016) at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf/>> (accessed 28 May 2020) (para. 6 of 43).

the petro-capitalist world-system or its relationship to literatures of this system, it is pertinent to consider the oil-commodity in some more detail.

Oil in the World-System

The editors of *Petrocultures*, Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman and Adam Carlson, observe in their introduction to the book that ‘oil and its outcomes – speed, plastics, and the luxuries of capitalism, to name a few – have lubricated our relationship to one another and the environment’ throughout the twentieth century.³⁵ Indeed, it is difficult to overstate just how profoundly the resource and its byproducts have completely transformed human life and extra-human environments over the course of the last hundred years or so, and even more difficult to imagine the contemporary ‘luxuries of capitalism’ existing without the oil-commodity. Western contact with hydrocarbon energy systems has created an ‘age of exuberance’.³⁶ Yet, as this age comes to be increasingly defined by the ‘dwindling finitude’ of the resources upon which the luxuries of capitalism depend, it also has become, as Frederic Buell puts it, an age ‘haunted by catastrophe’.³⁷ The use of coal, then oil, allowed core nations to ‘overcome material and seasonal constraints while causing new and much larger environmental constraints’.³⁸ Nevertheless, as the Petrocultures Research Group (PGR) point out; the ‘luxuries of capitalism’ are accompanied by ‘economic cris[es]’ which in turn create ‘environmental cris[es]’.³⁹ Of course, there is no doubt that oil’s ‘uniquely dense, powerful and volatile properties’ have allowed for a complete remaking of the globe, with significant improvements to ways of life-making and seductive benefits.⁴⁰ The phenomenon of using

³⁵ Adam Carlson, Imre Szeman and Sheena Wilson, ‘Introduction – On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else,’ in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, eds. by Adam Carlson, Imre Szeman and Sheena Wilson (Canada: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), pp. 3–19 (p. 15).

³⁶ William R. Catton Jr., *Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 5–6 (p. 5).

³⁷ Buell goes on to explain that, in the context of coal-capitalism, ‘exuberance is no longer just surplus energy creating optimism, and its catastrophe is not hapless dependency on what is running out. Exuberance and catastrophe materialized as historically specific forms of capitalist triumph and oppression, of environmental domination and destruction, and of human liberation and psychic and bodily oppression’. The same logics certainly apply to oil as well.

Frederic Buell, ‘A Short History of Oil Cultures; or the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance,’ in *Oil Cultures*, eds. by Daniel Barrett and Ross Worden (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 69–88 (p. 71).

³⁸ Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2016), pp. 9–29 (p. 18).

³⁹ Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, p. 18.

fossil fuels has since created in the West (and indeed, across the entire world-system) the conviction that with coal and oil as vehicles of progress, the idea that ‘mankind could encounter hardships that simply [would] not go away’ became not only improbable but ‘unthinkable’.⁴¹

Across the contemporary world-system, petroleum and its refined byproducts have come to be the movers of social, economic and political life, radically shaping the ways in which populations work, eat, travel, shop, clothe and house themselves, form habits and forge beliefs.⁴² Oil and oil culture underpins consumer-culture, and as such underpins much more than material realities or objects; it also underpins feelings, emotions, memories and habits. Oil is more than either an abstraction in the global economy (that is to say, as numbers crunched on the stock markets and trading floors of Wall Street) or its material, prosaic uses in people’s homes and workplaces. As the PGR point out, ‘oil (as a metonym of the larger fossil economy) is [...] not just a substance one pumps into the car [...] Oil names a way of organizing society, of bringing people together and of keeping them apart. Put another way, oil is not simply a source of energy: mere fuel, brute input. It is inextricably social’.⁴³ Yet, while oil is elemental in its influence on and presence in political decisions, industry, agriculture, cultural, emotional and social life across the globe, it is also, more often than not, invisible. The resource is so wholly ingrained in quotidian life and environment-making that most people (in the core nations of the world-system that is) no longer notice its presence unless it is physically present, leaking from a pipeline or polluting the oceans after a marine spill. As Bob Johnson points out, ‘we industrial peoples have preferred to keep our energy dependencies out of sight’.⁴⁴ It is not due to some magical property of the resource that it is so influential and simultaneously impalpable, but rather the fact that it embodies a particular type of social system which is inextricably connected to the historical rise of modern industry and industrial capital.⁴⁵ The infrastructures, mobilities and social relations shaped by petroleum, made possible by petroleum, have naturalised its presence in social reality, to the point where it has become omnipresent and invisible.

⁴¹ Catton, *Overshoot*, p. 5.

⁴² The *rapidity* with which *wholly metamorphic* changes in human lifestyles have been forged render hydrocarbon energy systems far more transformative than previous energy forms such as wood.

⁴³ Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Bob Johnson quoted in ‘Introduction,’ *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Oil possesses a bipartite status: it is simultaneously ‘a natural entity’ and a ‘cultural centrality’ and allows for ‘an uncritical faith in the capacity of human genius’.⁴⁶ As a result, the work of fields of scholarship such as the energy humanities becomes essential. The emerging field of the energy humanities ‘position[s] oil and energy as the fulcrum around which many of today’s most pressing social, economic, and political issues must be analyzed and understood’.⁴⁷ Petrocultural studies examine not only the facts of oil’s essential and elusive nature, but also demystify and grapple with the illusions created by the ‘uncritical faith’ in oil-powered possibility and progress. Petrocultural studies attempts to unravel the logics of oil – its associations with modernity, mobility, progress and personal liberty, as well as its darker underbelly of ‘capitalist oppression [...] environmental domination [...] and psychic and bodily oppression’ – in order to understand and assess the material and cultural infrastructures that shape our petro-powered world. Yet, there remains much more work to be done, especially in order to understand the profoundly uneven global distribution of oil-wealth and its (often violent) consequences, particularly in peripheral nations.⁴⁸

As I have made clear, this thesis, by conjoining Caribbean literary studies with the ambitions of the energy humanities, aims to contribute to an analysis of the oil-commodity (and its economic, political and cultural consequences) in the expanded Caribbean. To do so, we need to take the full measure of the ways in which petro-capitalism reorganises the relationship between human and extra-human natures in the interests of accumulation. It is for this reason that my study situates itself within a tradition of eco-materialism that draws on the work of Karl Marx, as well as the more contemporary scholarship of critics such as Jason W. Moore and John Bellamy-Foster.⁴⁹ These thinkers have contributed in essential ways to the chalking out of a historical materialist framework in which the specific project and ambitions of capital can be grasped from a perspective that considers not only economics and politics, but also – crucially – ecology.

⁴⁶ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xv.

⁴⁷ Carlson, Szeman, Wilson, *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ There has been much critical work done on the relationship between violence and the oil-industry. For example, see Lief Wener, *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence and the Rules that Rule the World* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2016).

⁴⁹ While I do not discuss Bellamy-Foster’s work directly in this study, his ecomaterialist understanding of capitalism is an extremely useful one for my purposes. See John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 1-20, pp. 141-170, pp. 171-176.

Marxist Ecologies

‘Man has not created matter itself. And he cannot even create any productive capacity if the matter does not exist beforehand’.⁵⁰ Karl Marx’s words, taken from his 1844 manuscripts, demonstrate a cognizance of the fundamental importance of nature to his materialist analysis of capitalism. Nor is this ‘matter’ to which he refers separate from humanity: he goes on to note ‘that man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature’.⁵¹ These two passages alone demonstrate Marx’s profound understanding of nature as of foundational importance (and the basis of all labour), as well as of the fact that humans are a part of nature rather than externalised from it. Marx’s work forms a crucial foundation from which to construct a sound understanding of materialist eco-criticism, attentive as he is to the uniquely capitalist predicament of human alienation from the means of production and from nature (which is, after all, the original means of production).⁵² One of his important contributions to materialist eco-criticism involved clarifying the type of relationship that existed between humans and non-human environments, and clarifying that this relationship is mediated by the labour process. As Marx explains in the first volume of *Capital*:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces [...] by thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.⁵³

In other words, as Pablo Mukherjee puts it, ‘although initiated by humans, labour can be seen both as a mediating and a differentiating process through which humans interact with nature as

⁵⁰ Howard L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, ed. by H. L. Parsons (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 122.

⁵¹ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 112.

⁵² Of course, there has emerged a vast wealth of work that expounds on the fact of Marx’s attentiveness to the eco-critical angle, much of which makes for valuable reading. See Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), pp. 26–139; Raymond Williams, ‘Ideas of Nature’ in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 68–81; Howard L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (London: Greenwood Press, 1977); John Bellamy Foster, *Ecology Against Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009).

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 177.

a part of itself at the very moment they change it'.⁵⁴ Indeed, 'it is with the idea of labour as a force linking earth's humans and non-humans that we begin to move from the dualism of "man" and "nature" to the singularity of an 'environment' that is the sum of the relationship of all its components'.⁵⁵ This concept of the relationship between human and extra-human nature, a 'social metabolism' mediated through labour, was central to Marx's work. To put it another way, the labour process that mediates between man and nature is always social. The particular form the labour process takes at any historical moment is dialectically related to a particular social organisation of human beings. In and of itself, the labour process is never independent of nature's own wealth creating potential since 'material wealth, the world of use values, exclusively consists of natural materials modified by nature'.⁵⁶ For Marx, the process of production was a two-pronged relationship, both natural *and* social. The 'result of this process under capitalism, the commodity, is always composed [then] of the human and non-human elements'.⁵⁷ In other words, the wealth-creating potential of nature remains in the bodies of commodities themselves. Commodities are, as Marx writes, 'combinations of two elements – matter' (or nature) 'and labour [...] if we take away the useful labour power expended on them a material substratum is always left, which is furnished by nature without the help of man'.⁵⁸ Under industrial capitalism, the value placed on the commodity involves the minimisation of the environment's contribution and the abstraction of human labour-power. This view of commodities and labour, containing within it the essential kernel of the part played by nature in this process, is a key perspective in the work of more contemporary thinkers such as Moore, and contributes powerfully to critiques of the oil-commodity.

It follows, then, that the organisation of the relationship between human and extra-human nature under capitalism involves a specific metric of value – one that privileges labour productivity over natural sustainability. Capitalism depends on the breaking of the connection between labourer and environment, worker and soil, and the rupture of this connection then 'generates the motor of demand which animates the capitalist system'.⁵⁹ This results in the worker's 'dissolution of the relation to the earth – land and soil – as natural conditions of

⁵⁴ Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, 'Towards Eco-Materialism' in *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 59-77 (p. 65).

⁵⁵ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 65.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 500.

⁵⁷ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 66.

production – to which he relates as to his own inorganic being’.⁶⁰ As Marx writes, ‘this pulling away of the natural ground from the foundations of every industry, and this transfer of its conditions of production outside itself, into a general context – hence the transformation of what was previously superfluous into what is necessary, as a historically created necessity – is the tendency of capital’.⁶¹ The devaluation of nature, in other words, is not symptomatic of capitalism, but inherent in its function. Marx’s understanding of the indivisible and essential relationship between humans and nature led him, in turn, to recognize the crucially important fact that capitalist relations of production actively ‘undermine the original sources of all wealth, the soil and the worker’.⁶² In *Capital*, Marx writes that ‘the capitalist system supposes the complete separation of labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour’.⁶³ The historical basis of capitalist production and accumulation is, in other words, the ‘expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant from the soil’.⁶⁴

Marx also recognised that capital ‘created a world system under its control that extracted wealth and raw material for capitalist industry for the benefit of Europe, while destroying communal systems of property elsewhere’ in peripheral regions such as the Caribbean.⁶⁵ The ecological project of capital necessitates the ‘entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market’ and hence ‘the international character of the capitalistic regime’ is essential for its expansion.⁶⁶ Marx understood the fact that the growth of urban centres and the coeval despoliation of rural peripheries, as well as the growth of economically powerful core nations and their exploitation of human and extra-human natures at the peripheries of the world system, are all rooted in the ‘violation of the soil’s fertility’ as well as the expropriation of the worker from the soil.⁶⁷ His work retains its usefulness because his analysis of ‘capital accumulation, labor, and the natural environment permits a holistic analysis which ties together the looming crises [that are part of] world capitalism today—the deepening inequality between core and periphery, the growing militancy of workers’ movements, and the global ecological crisis’.⁶⁸ His is the crucial materialist, ecocritical foundation that contemporary

⁶⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 497.

⁶¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 527–8.

⁶² Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 510.

⁶³ Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 507.

⁶⁴ Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 508.

⁶⁵ Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, p. 347.

⁶⁶ Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 367.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 367.

⁶⁸ Jason W. Moore, ‘Marx and the Historical Ecology of Capital Accumulation on a World Scale: Comment on Hornborg,’ *Journal of World-Systems Research Vol 6 No. 1* (2000), 134–139 (p. 137).

thinkers such as John Bellamy-Foster, Jason W. Moore and others have built upon. Moore in particular elaborates on Marxist conceptualisations of the world-ecological project of capitalism, the *Stoffenwechsel*, nature as the source of (apparently cheap or free) wealth, and the fact that it exploits the environment while also draining human labour power. His theorisation of capitalism as an ecological regime marks a crucial advance in ecomaterialist thought and is indispensable for my own study.

World Ecologies, Commodity Frontiers and Cheap Natures

Building on ecomarxist critique, Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, and 1970s ecofeminism, Moore's work focuses on the concept of capitalism as what he terms a 'world-ecology'.⁶⁹ As he himself puts it, 'the theory of capital accumulation I am advocating illuminates how ceaseless capital accumulation necessitates the expansion and increased exploitation of the proletariat, which in turn necessitates the expanded and intensified exploitation of the natural environment through successive transformation of the world division of labor'.⁷⁰

Moore begins his argument with the explanation that the Cartesian binary of Nature/Society (first conceived of by Descartes to delineate the division between body and mind) has led to a misleading compartmentalisation of so-called natural problems and social problems, wherein ecology does not register human activity and society is seen as detached from the natural world. In the Cartesian optic, Moore explains, human nature, 'the stuff of class struggles and world markets and imperialism, goes into one box; extra-human nature, the stuff of soil and forests and rivers, goes into another'.⁷¹ The 'agencies within each box interact

⁶⁹ Of course, Moore is not the only thinker to put forward explicitly world-ecological views with regards to capitalism. In 1988, for instance, James O'Connor, founding editor of the American journal 'Capital Nature Socialism', proposed the idea of a 'capital-in-nature relation' in order to analyse how capitalism reproduces and ultimately undermines itself. Meanwhile, John Bellamy-Foster, in *Marx's Ecology*, (published in 2000) used Marx's critique of the *Stoffwechsel* to consider in more detail the concept of the metabolic rift between capitalist society and nature: the compulsion to accumulate ever more capital rules out the metabolic equilibrium that would allow a society to maintain indefinitely the environment from which it indefinitely takes its livelihood.

⁷⁰ Moore, *Journal of World-Systems Research Vol 6 No. 1*, p. 137.

⁷¹ Jason W. Moore, 'Madeira, Sugar, and the Conquest of Nature in the "First" Sixteenth Century: Part I: From "Island of Timber" to Sugar Revolution, 1420–1506', *Review: Fernand Braudel Center, Vol. 32, No. 4* (2009), 345–390 (p. 348).

but their relations do not change the boxes themselves'.⁷² It is important, then, to find a language which moves from the interaction of the independent units of Nature and Society to the dialectic of what Moore calls 'humans in the web of life'.⁷³ Moore rejects Cartesian dualism and instead utilises the Greek philosopher-botanist Theophrastus's concept of the *oikeios*, which originally indicated the organic, symbiotic relationship between different plant species and their environment. This paradigm of thought, rooted in the connectivity of all living things, means that 'nature-as-*oikeios* is not offered as an additional factor to be placed alongside culture or society or economy. Nature instead becomes the matrix within which human activity unfolds and the field upon which historical agency operates'.⁷⁴ Much like Marx's concept of the social metabolism, Moore makes the point that human societies and natural environments continually co-produce each other (albeit, perhaps not in equivalent relationships, depending on the specific temporal context under consideration) so the relationship between the two should be understood synthetically as one of 'humanity-in-nature' and 'nature-in-humanity' rather than merely additively, as one of humanity plus nature.⁷⁵ The configurations of society and nature are, in other words, a constantly interacting, co-produced bundle of human- and extra-human relations. He writes conclusively that:

Capitalism is ecological in the sense of the *oikeios*; it is a way of harnessing that creative relation in the service of the endless accumulation of capital. The world-ecological perspective says, in short, that the great movements of modern world history – imperialism, transitions in family and gender relations, commodification, financial expansions, and much more – are messy bundles of human and extra-human relations. The theory of capitalism as world-ecology starts from a simple proposition: just as a farm is a way of organizing nature, so is a market, a financial center, a factory, or an empire. The production of nature has been as much about factories, stock exchanges, shopping centers, slums, and suburban sprawl as it has been about soil exhaustion and species extinction. Capitalism as world-ecology therefore seeks to connect what is typically disconnected, even in the work of radicals: the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the production of nature.⁷⁶

⁷² Jason W. Moore, 'Wall Street is a Way of Organising Nature,' *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*, Issue 12 (August 2017) <<https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/12-wall-street-is-a-way-of-organizing-nature>> [accessed 15 June 2017] (para. 4 of 38).

⁷³ Jason W. Moore, 'From Object to Oikeios: Environment-Making in the Capitalist World-Ecology' in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), pp. 33-51 (p. 35).

⁷⁴ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Moore, 'Wall Street,' para. 7.

As such, the ‘endless accumulation of capital’ equates to the ‘endless conquest of nature’.⁷⁷ It is a dialectic of plunder and productivity, appropriating the ‘free gifts’ of nature (which, as Marx understood, are not truly ‘free’ but are treated as such by capital) outside of the commodity system in order to maximise labour productivity, resource appropriation and economic profit inside of it.⁷⁸ Of course, the dynamics of capital accumulation as a ‘type of gravitational centre that survives by turning the rest of the world into a commodity’ are inherently contradictory.⁷⁹ By commodifying ever more zones of social existence (and then exhausting them) ‘capital undermines the very webs of life that sustain its project’.⁸⁰ Related to this dialectic of plunder and productivity is Maria Mies’s extrapolation of capital’s externalisation of ‘Mother Earth, Women and the Colonies’ – all three of which are most rapaciously exploited and exhausted by capital, cheapened in both senses of the word (that is, cheaply exploited and degraded).⁸¹ Oppositionally categorised from male human society/culture, and as such defined as less-than-human (‘defined into nature by the modern capitalist patriarchs’ as Mies puts it), women, nature and the colonies are then co-opted by capitalism’s ecological regime (one which, by this logic, is inherently patriarchal, classist and racist).⁸² Mies writes that ‘the progress of European Big Men is based on the subordination and exploitation of their own women, on the exploitation and killing of Nature, on the exploitation and subordination of other peoples and their lands’ — consequently, exploitation of certain regions and populations always results in contradictory progress and development in others.⁸³ Mies’s theorisation of this ‘structural

⁷⁷ Moore, *Fernand Braudel Center: Review*, p. 346.

⁷⁸ Moore writes that:

[...] the world-historical genius of capitalism, in contrast to all previous world-ecologies, has been its capacity to maximize labour productivity by drawing in massive flows of nature’s “free gifts.” This is a term that Marx used to refer to capitalism’s appropriation of sources of wealth that it did not produce – the difference, for example, between an old growth forest and a tree plantation. These gifts included natural resources like timber and coal, but also included human nature in the form of labour – and [...] the reproduction of labour power. An abundance of these gifts has fueled capitalism’s technological dynamism, which is directed at the development of new machines that allow a geometrically rising volume of extra-human nature to attach to an average hour of work performed. More stuff can be produced in less time.

Moore, ‘Wall Street,’ para. 21.

⁷⁹ Moore, ‘Wall Street,’ para. 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., para. 8.

⁸¹ Maria Mies, ‘Colonization and Housewifization’ in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2014), pp. 74–111 (p. 75).

⁸² Maria Mies, ‘Preface to the Critique, Influence, Change Edition’ in *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, p. xx.

⁸³ Mies goes on to write that ‘the law of this “progress” is always a contradictory and not an evolutionary one, echoing previous points made about underdevelopment of specific (peripheral) regions and nations at the expense

separation and subordination,' of women, nature and the colonies connects to Moore's explanation of capitalism's use of commodity frontiers and of human labour power.⁸⁴ These commodity frontiers are reconfigurations of nature which allow for (and indeed, are essential to) the hegemonic rise of capitalism. Moreover, as Moore points out, they are frequently found in the peripheries (often ex-colonies) of the world-system, where extra-human natures and non-European peoples (designated as 'natural,' savage, and primitive in opposition to modern Euro-American humans) are brutalised by capital's ecological project; both are rapidly consumed by capital in order to maximise profit accumulation, exhausted and then externalised.

As Jason Moore and Raj Patel point out in *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, 'capitalism thrives not by destroying natures but by putting nature to work – as cheaply as possible'.⁸⁵ The expansion of and commodifying tendencies of capital have been specifically organised to treat the appropriation of global (as opposed to specifically local, or specifically national) space as the basis for the accumulation of wealth (as Marx outlined in his discussion of the 'international entanglement' of capital's relations). As Mukherjee points out, this global expansion is predicated on geopolitical inequality across the world-system. He notes that the 'basic feature of capitalism, as Marx and Engels remarked long ago, is its tendency to over accumulate and concentrate capital in one zone at the same time as it empties another of it [...] this has always been a profoundly spatial and geographical affair. The rhythm of over accumulation and underdevelopment means that capitalism is compelled to reorganize space, to expand geographically and to insert itself unevenly across the globe'.⁸⁶ Capitalism has always sought to secure via its use of commodity frontiers (and all the exploitation of human and extra-human nature that they embody) what Moore and Patel call the 'Big Four inputs: labor-power, food, energy and raw materials'.⁸⁷ As these four inputs are

of others.' She explains that 'progress for some means retrogression for the other side; "evolution" for some means "devolution" for others; "humanization" for some means "de-humanization" for others; development of productive forces for some means underdevelopment and retrogression for others. The rise of some means the failure of others. Wealth for some means poverty for others. The reason why there cannot be unilinear progress is the fact that, as was said earlier, the predatory patriarchal mode of production constitutes a non-reciprocal, exploitative relationship'. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, p. 76.

⁸⁴ Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, p. 76.

⁸⁵ Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature and the Future of the Planet* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 19.

⁸⁶ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 14–15.

⁸⁷ Moore and Patel, *A History of the World*, p. 21.

cheaped through the appropriation of the unpaid work of women, nature and colonies, they become the 'Four Cheaps'. As the authors point out, cheap:

[...] is not the same as low cost – though that is part of it. Cheap is a strategy, a practice, a violence that mobilises all kinds of work – human and animal, botanical and geological – with as little compensation as possible. We use 'cheap' to talk about the process through which capitalism transmutes these under nominated relationships of life making into circuits of production and consumption, in which these relations come to have as low a price as possible. [...] cheap things are not really things at all – but rather strategies adopted by capitalism to survive and manage crises, gambits made to appear as real and independent entities by the original sin of cheap nature.⁸⁸

Of course, it is the phenomenon of cheap energy that is of foremost concern to me here.

Cheap Energy and Oil's Hegemony

From the mid-nineteenth century, cheap, abundant sources of hydrocarbon energy have powered the material expansion of capitalism. The role of cheap energy is tripartite: not only is cheap energy its own industry and force for 'scaling production in other industries but [it] also provides a substitute for labour power and serves to keep that labour power affordable and productive'.⁸⁹ Moreover, when energy is made cheap, it is a way of 'amplifying – and in some cases substituting for – cheap work and care'.⁹⁰ By understanding the histories and ontologies of cheap energy, we can understand capitalism's bipartite nature as economic and ecological. Or, as Matthew Huber puts it, 'by focusing on fossil fuel we can begin to construct an ecology of capital where nature is not only seen as something 'produced' by capitalism or as an external, uncommodified "condition" of production but is constitutive of and internal to the production forces and social relations of capital'.⁹¹

Oil is now the most essential form of 'cheap energy' which sustains capital's compulsion to appropriate new ecologies (or cheap nature) and new workforces (cheap labour). While oil had been utilised by nations such as China and Iran for centuries, and was first extracted in

⁸⁸ Moore and Patel, *A History of the World*, p. 22.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 164.

⁹¹ Matthew Huber, 'Introduction: Oil, Life, Politics,' in *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom and the Forces of Capital* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. vii-xxi (p. xviii).

Russia, the contemporary oil economy as we know it today was birthed in the U.S.⁹² The first discovery of oil by North-Americans was made in Titusville, Pennsylvania in 1859 and the second at Spindletop in 1901.⁹³ However, it was after World War Two that the shift from coal to oil-based energy systems in Europe and North-America completely reorganised pre-existing (coal-based) 'fossil-fuel networks in ways that were to alter the mechanics of democracy'.⁹⁴

During the nineteenth century, coal (and by extension, coal-capitalism) had been imagined as a force which had the ability to liberate Western societies from the restrictive relationships to nature imposed by agricultural production. However, the high productivity levels of coal and the revolutionary transformations it brought about in industry and transportation were (for the bourgeoisie) offset by the system's propensity to worker sabotage. A significant factor in oil's increased use in the U.S. and Europe was that the extraction and production of the resource was significantly less susceptible to industrial stoppages than coal, and less prone to other problems such as (as was thought then) pollution.⁹⁵ Moreover, since 1944 and the creation of the Bretton Woods agreement, North-American hegemony, the value of the dollar and the oil-commodity became intrinsically connected. The value of the dollar was sustained due to the fact that countries had to use U.S. currency to buy essential materials that formed the majority of international trade, above all oil. As Timothy Mitchell points out:

[...] under the arrangements that governed the international oil trade, the commodity was sold in the currency not of the country where it was produced,

⁹² The earliest extraction of oil occurred in Russia in 1848, in the region that is now Azerbaijan. By 1884 nearly two hundred small refineries operated in Baku. In 1878 the first oil tanker was launched on the Caspian Sea and the first ever oil refineries were built in Poland between 1854 and 1856. These were small-scale, since the demand for oil products was limited (oil at this time was primarily utilised in asphalt, machine oil, lubrication and lamps). By 1900 Russia produced half the world's oil and dominated international markets. This hegemony would change with the discovery of oil in Titusville in 1859.

⁹³ The discovery of the Spindletop field set off an immediate frenzy of oil drilling that soon spread across the nation as the search for productive oil fields extended oil production into Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, California and so on. This copious domestic oil output abruptly transformed the American petroleum market, giving rise to some of the first American multinational corporations, among them John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, progenitor of current industry giants such as ExxonMobil, Chevron - which is now combined with Texaco - and Amoco - now part of British Petroleum. The discovery of oil in Titusville was also crucial to the rise of other mammoth industries such as the Big Three automobile manufacturers, DuPont and other chemical companies, as well as large airline and freight companies. For the first time, oil began to be used as a means of transportation fuel rather than as kerosene for lighting.

⁹⁴ Timothy Mitchell, 'Machines of Democracy,' in *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 12-43 (p. 42).

⁹⁵ For more on coal capitalism, see Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy*.

nor of the place where it was consumed, but of the international companies that controlled the production. “Sterling oil” as it was known (principally oil from Iran) was traded in British pounds, but the bulk of global sales were in “dollar oil.” The rest of the world had to purchase energy they required using American dollars. The value of the dollar as the basis of international finance depended on the flow of oil.⁹⁶

At Bretton Woods, Frederick Hayek made the case for an ‘international commodity standard’ which was intended to replace the gold standard wherein currency would be exchanged for a ‘fixed combination of warehouse warrants for a number of storable raw commodities’.⁹⁷ This effectively meant the increasing movement of a singular commodity, which was to provide the ‘mechanism that stabilised or threatened to disrupt the democratic order’.⁹⁸ With the shifting dynamics of political and economic power in the wake of World War Two, oil dependency and North-American influence (in that order) became hegemonic across the world-system.

Culturally and socially speaking, then, oil has become totally synonymous with a North-American way of life, a fact which many critics argue has created a dangerous dependency in the States and a propensity for war-mongering.⁹⁹ For the U.S. worker, oil has come to symbolise (as cultural historian David Nye puts it) a ‘high-energy regime [which has] touched every aspect of daily life. It promise[s] a future of miracle fabrics, inexpensive food, larger suburban houses, faster travel, cheaper fuels, climate control, and limitless growth’.¹⁰⁰ Oil provides what Michael Klare calls the ‘feedstock’ for a voluminous amount of products

⁹⁶ Mitchell, ‘Fuel Economy,’ in *Carbon Democracy*, pp. 109-114 (p. 111).

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁹ As Michael Klare notes, ‘the American military is being used more and more for the protection of overseas oil fields and supply routes that connect them to the U.S.A. and its allies. Such endeavours, once largely confined to the Gulf area, are now being extended to unstable oil regions in other parts of the world. Slowly but surely, the U.S. military is being converted into a global oil protection service’.

Michael T. Klare, *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America’s Growing Dependency on Imported Petroleum* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004), p. 7.

See also: Mary Kaldor, Terry Lynn Karl and Yahia Said, *Oil Wars*, ed. by Kaldor, Lynn Karl and Said (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

For more on the U.S. and Middle Eastern oil, see Mahmoud. A. El-Gamal and Amy Myers Jaffe, *Oil, Dollars, Debt and Crisis: The Global Curse of Black Gold* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *Failing States, Collapsing Nations: Biophysical Triggers of Political Violence* (Cambridge: Springer, 2017); Abdulhay Yahya Zalloum, *Oil Crusades: America Through Arab Eyes* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ David Nye, *Consuming Power* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 202.

(paints, plastics, pharmaceuticals, textiles and so on) across the entire world.¹⁰¹ It is vital to industrial agriculture for farm machinery and pesticides, herbicides and so on. Multinational oil corporations (Exxonmobil, British Petroleum, Royal Dutch Shell, Saudi Aramco and China National Petroleum) are among the richest in the world.¹⁰² The intrusion of oil (and, indeed, of these oil companies) into the fabric of the lived experiences of the citizens of core nations has, in general, been achieved by ‘extending the productive sources of capital (i.e. large scale industry powered by fossil fuels) to the reproductive forces of everyday life’.¹⁰³ This means that a ‘specific stratum of American workers’ (but also workers across all nations of the core) can ‘[...] live, think and feel an individuated sense of power over the geographies of everyday practices [...] entirely produced by and reducible to one’s own life choices and entrepreneurial efforts’.¹⁰⁴ Oil’s centrality to specific forms of life-making in core nations has created a set of ‘lived practices and meanings that naturalise capitalist forms of power and hegemony’.¹⁰⁵ In these nations, oil has created what Matthew Huber calls a ‘specifically capitalist form of despotism over “work” or the labour process,’ as well as the simultaneous ‘construction of a way of life aligned with the logic of capital: freedom, property and entrepreneurship’.¹⁰⁶ However, as Michael T. Walonen’s extensive study has demonstrated, the advances and benefits made possible by oil are always partnered with the destruction of ‘traditional spatial orders’ and with ‘vast levels of material inequality’.¹⁰⁷ This ‘progressive-destructive logic travels the length and breadth of the world-system through the variously violent manifestations of oil frontiers’ which as Michael Watts points out, are both ‘permanent and dynamic’.¹⁰⁸ As Graeme Macdonald elucidates:

¹⁰¹ Klare, *Blood and Oil*, p. 7.

¹⁰² Analysis done by Taxpayers for Common Sense in a February 2020 study showed that the six largest oil and gas companies reported in excess of \$55 billion in combined profits in 2019. Just these six companies have generated \$2.4 trillion in profits since 1990. Exxon was the most profitable of the big four over the past three decades, making a total of \$775bn. Shell was second with \$524bn, followed by Chevron on \$360bn and BP on \$332bn.

Matthew Taylor and Jillian Ambrose, ‘Revealed: Big Oil’s Profits since 1990 Total nearly \$2tn’, *Guardian*, 12 February 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/feb/12/revealed-big-oil-profits-since-1990-total-nearly-2tn-bp-shell-chevron-exxon>> [accessed 15 February 2020].

¹⁰³ Huber, *Lifblood*, p. xv.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. xv.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. xv.

¹⁰⁶ Huber, *Lifblood*, p. xv.

¹⁰⁷ Michael T. Walonen, “‘The Black and Cruel Demon’ and Its Transformations of Space: Toward a Comparative Study of the World Literature of Oil and Place,’ *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies Vol. 14, No. 1* (2012), 56–78 (p. 59).

¹⁰⁸ Michael Watts, ‘A Tale of Two Gulfs: Life, Death and Dispossession along Two Oil Frontiers,’ *American Quarterly, Vol. 64, Issue 3* (2012), 437–467 (p. 446).

Like a tidal system, the oil frontier can fade and return, re-establishing itself in different territories or economic moments, or resurfacing in new forms and striations within an established site of oil extraction or production. [...] As oil technology develops, prices fluctuate, new deposits are discovered and land, property, people and states become increasingly beholden to carbon-democratic forms of energy securitization. Oil thus becomes a fixed and paradoxically finite resource. Its frontiers are permanently elastic and expansive; willing to move and grow while benefiting from ongoing petrocultural hegemony at a global level.¹⁰⁹

Capitalism's world-ecology repeatedly masks or disguises the fact that oil is a finite resource while continuing to extract it (in both conventional and unconventional ways) in order to sate global energy demands. As Macdonald explains, 'oil's transnational zone of transaction has always involved the occlusion of ever-expanding extractive spaces and conditions'.¹¹⁰ It is oil-bearing peripheral (and semi-peripheral) regions and nations of the world-system, in other words (many of them ex-colonies), which experience the most brutal devastation of their environments and damaging labour practices due to the fact that in these regions, extraction is characterised by various short-term (often violent) practices, rentier-based corruption, and the combined efforts of state and capital. The hyper-modern, oil-fuelled urban centres of the core nations ('petrotopias', as Stephanie LeMenager has dubbed them) and petrotopian lifestyles of their citizens, are premised on the exploitation, despoliation and occlusion of peripheral peoples and environments.¹¹¹ Steve Lerner has called these ecologically despoiled and toxified nations/regions of petro-production the 'sacrifice zones' of modern capitalism.¹¹² These zones of the petro-capitalist system witness the destruction of what Walonen calls 'traditional spatial orders' and 'vast levels of material inequality'.¹¹³ They are also locations in which oil ideologies cannot manifest themselves in the same way as in the global North, as later chapters of this study will illustrate in more detail. (When speaking of socio-economic divisions in terms of global North and South, I refer not only to the latter, where poverty is disproportionately

¹⁰⁹ Graeme Macdonald, "'Monstrous Transformer': Petrofiction and World Literature,' *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol 53, Issue 3 (2017), 289-302 (p. 291), DOI: <10.1080/17449855.2017.1337680>

¹¹⁰ Graeme Macdonald, "'Monstrous Transformer': Petrofiction and World Literature,' *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol 53, Issue 3 (2017), 289-302 (p. 291).

¹¹¹ LeMenager's concept of 'petrotopia' is one I will return to at a later stage of this study.

Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 74.

¹¹² Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), p. 2.

¹¹³ Walonen, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, p. 59.

concentrated, but also to the poor populations of core nations, who themselves reside in peripheral regions of countries such as the United States, the U.K., and European nations, which are commonly designated as those of a more developed global North).

To put it another way, the combination of contemporary neoliberal economics and petro-capitalist imperialism results in policies which disproportionately affect the poor in these regions, as Vandana Shiva points out. These populations are also the primary victims of the current climate emergency. 'The poor are three times over the victims of the fossil-fuel driven industrial system,' Shiva writes; 'first, they are displaced from work, then they bear a disproportionate burden of the cost of climate change through extreme droughts, floods and cyclones, and they lose once more when pseudo-solutions like industrial biofuels divert their land and food'.¹¹⁴ Shiva's focus on these displaced and impoverished populations (of the global South specifically, in this case) whose lives and livelihoods are most drastically affected by the fallout of oil-use is important. 'Whether it is industrial agriculture or industrial biofuels, car factories or superhighways,' she goes on to write, 'displacement and forced evictions of indigenous peoples and peasants from land are an inevitable consequence' (one of many, it should be said) 'of an economic model that creates growth by extinguishing people's rights'.¹¹⁵ Petro-capitalism has created, particularly in (semi-)peripheral regions and nations such as those under consideration in this study, populations which are 'subaltern, redundant, structurally unemployed [and] immiserated [...] who are completely ignored, with nothing to gain from what petro-capitalist civilisations have to offer and the hardest hit by ecological catastrophes'.¹¹⁶

In the expanded Caribbean, as we will see, the consequences of petro-capitalism's world-ecology are often disproportionately damaging, 'extinguishing people's rights', immiserating local populations and despoiling Caribbean natures.

Oil in the Expanded Caribbean

Fossil fuels have had resounding social, economic and ecological consequences in the expanded Caribbean. However, the history and presence of petroleum in the region, although

¹¹⁴ Vandana Shiva, *Soil, Not Oil: Climate Change, Peak Oil and Food Insecurity* (London: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁵ Shiva, *Soil, Not Oil*, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Shiva, *Soil, Not Oil*, p. 6.

pivotal, has often been neglected in petrocultural studies. It is worthwhile, therefore, to emphasise at this juncture the importance and singularity of Caribbean and South American oil experience[s] as well as the presence (and influence) of oil in specific nation-states of the region.

Known reserves of oil in the Americas make up 20% of global underground oil reserves of nearly 1.7 trillion barrels.¹¹⁷ While South American nation-states possess significant quantities of oil, in the Caribbean archipelago, only Barbados, Cuba, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have been found to possess oil reserves, with hydrocarbon-rich Trinidad being the only island which is a significant exporter.¹¹⁸ The other nation-states of the Caribbean remain dependent on imported oil and countries such as Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica remain party to the San José Pact, under which Mexico and Venezuela supply crude oil and refined products under favourable terms. Natural gas and hydropower are used in countries that have these domestic resources. Natural gas is used most extensively in Trinidad and Tobago, where natural gas-intensive industries, such as steel, fertiliser, and petrochemicals are of crucial importance to the country's economy. Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic import liquefied natural gas from Trinidad and Tobago for power generation.

Oil was first discovered in the Caribbean archipelago in the mid-nineteenth century when the U.S. oil company Merrimac drilled an oil well at La Brea, in Trinidad, in 1857, striking oil at a depth of 280 feet. However, as has been outlined earlier in this chapter, it was during the twentieth century that the Caribbean assumed a significant role in the global oil industry, not least as an energy outpost for the imperial powers. The construction of the Panama Canal introduced new global shipping lanes to the region and with European navies and trading concerns retrofitting their fleets to run on bunker fuel, oil depots and refineries

¹¹⁷ Gonzalo Ortiz, 'Latin America Holds One-Fifth of World Oil Reserves', *Al Jazeera*, 16 July 2011 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/07/201171613719358164.html>> [accessed 13 October 2016].

¹¹⁸ Venezuela possesses 85 per cent of the region's crude reserves and South America has the second largest oil reserves in the world after the Middle East, which has 55 per cent of the global total, according to figures presented by the Latin American Energy Organisation (OLADE). Brazil has also made large undersea oil discoveries in the waters off its Atlantic coast, like the Tupí oilfield in 2007 with possible reserves of 33 billion barrels, and the Jupiter oilfield in 2008, with 12 billion barrels, raising the country's share to five per cent of South America's reserves. Third in the regional ranking is Mexico, which in spite of seeing its proved reserves decline over the last 15 years, nevertheless possesses four per cent of the region's reserves thanks to quantifying over 137 billion barrels of crude underground in the Paleocanal Chicotepec oilfield, in 2009. Ecuador is next, with three per cent of the region's proven crude reserves. Its reserves grew 63 per cent in 2008 compared with 2007 figures, partly because of certification of the ITT oilfield complex which has reserves of 960 million barrels.

were built across the Caribbean.¹¹⁹ By the 1940s, the U.S. was becoming increasingly dependent on imported oil for its energy needs, given its dwindling domestic reserves.¹²⁰ The turn to Caribbean oil in the 1950s and '60s paralleled a critical reorganisation of U.S. energy infrastructure. Until it was lifted by Nixon in 1973, domestic U.S. refineries were bound by the Mandatory Oil Import Program that imposed strict quotas for imported oil. Designed to minimise dependence on foreign oil, the program set a maximum level of imports at about twelve percent of domestic demand.¹²¹ In 1965, U.S. territories in the Caribbean were granted exemptions from these quotas and soon refineries in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands became part of an advantageous route for cheaper imports to slip into the United States outside existing import controls. Additionally, that same year the U.S. Congress authorised a series of tax exemptions that encouraged domestic oil companies to build new export-oriented refineries and petrochemical plants in Caribbean territories. As a result, between 1950 and 1970 a dozen export-oriented refineries were built by U.S. oil companies across the Caribbean. The investment was very unevenly spread across the different territories, but nevertheless, as the United States moved significant portions of its hydrocarbon infrastructure offshore, the Caribbean region became the world's largest exporter of refined petroleum products in the world. Almost all of these products went to the United States.¹²² Between 1950 and 1990, oil refineries became the largest site of capital investment in the Caribbean, a leading source of state revenue, and one of the region's largest employers, especially during the construction boom of refineries in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

However, it was not only the U.S. which encouraged the expansion of refineries in the expanded Caribbean. The World Bank and other international organisations encouraged Caribbean and South American nation-states to embrace this new 'enclave-type' processing of oil for export to the U.S. as a vital step in developing Caribbean economies and, as David Bond puts it, 'disciplining its societies into the expectations of the modern economy'.¹²³ The OPEC embargoes in 1973 and 1979 reinforced the importance of Caribbean refineries, which acted as a back door for OPEC oil to seep into the U.S.¹²⁴ To reiterate an important point

¹¹⁹ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 605.

¹²⁰ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 605.

¹²¹ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 605.

¹²² Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 604.

¹²³ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 605.

¹²⁴ 'A Political Evaluation of the Arab Oil Embargo,' *MERIP: Middle East Research and Information Project* Vol. 23 (May 1974), 23–25 (pp. 23–24).

from earlier on in the chapter, by 1990, approximately one-sixth of the oil consumed in the United States and ‘over half of the refined petroleum imported to the U.S. (including oil from African and Middle Eastern sources)’ passed through Caribbean refineries.¹²⁵ From the end of the Second World War, then, Caribbean refineries were pivotal in redefining the political economy of the region and ‘constructed an exceptional pathway for imported crude oil and petroleum products to enter the United States’.¹²⁶ Not only was oil from the expanded Caribbean materially important, but it became ideologically vital too, playing a crucial (if often uncredited) part in the imperial realignment of fossil fuels as described by Timothy Mitchell. (Around crude oil, Mitchell argues, the constituent field of empire changed from the racial ordering of labour to the techno-political ordering of energy flows).¹²⁷ What C. Wright Mills has described as ‘new and less visible forms of imperialism’¹²⁸ brought renewed attention to the Caribbean and South American rim lands; North American territories in the Caribbean became primary sites for ‘retrofitting the U.S. empire around the oceanic distribution of crude oil’.¹²⁹ These island territories became, as Ruth Oldenziel puts it, ‘critical nodes’ in the ‘networked empire’ of contemporary U.S. power.¹³⁰ However, this ‘petro-economic boom inevitably generated its own petro-economic bust’; the increasing number of Caribbean refineries and the resultant increase in supertanker traffic that came to the region meant that coastal oil spills became more common.¹³¹ By 1976, marine-bound crude oil was designated ‘the pollutant of highest priority concern to the Region’ by the United Nations Environmental Program and a commission of Caribbean representatives.¹³² The resulting initiative, called CARIPOL, faced an unexpected difficulty in reining in hydrocarbon effluent: the Caribbean Sea was so contaminated with petroleum that it was practically impossible to determine a ‘normal’ baseline against which to compare levels of petro-pollution.

Materially, then, petro-capitalism has acted as a destructive ecological and neo-colonial regime in the expanded Caribbean, as it has done in other regions of the post-colonial world.

¹²⁵ Bonham Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492–1992: A Regional Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 116.

¹²⁶ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 606.

¹²⁷ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, pp. 207–8.

¹²⁸ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 4.

¹²⁹ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 606.

¹³⁰ Ruth Oldenziel, ‘Islands: The United States as Networked Empire’, in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. by Gabrielle Hecht (War. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 13–42 (p. 13).

¹³¹ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 601.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 601.

The hegemony of oil is also connected to the colonial history of the region; U.S. companies, for example, regarded the colonial status of many Caribbean ports as useful and advantageous to their global operations and ambitions. Critiques of the previous mode of empire – embodied in the sugar plantation – became a justification for aligning Caribbean and Latin American nation-states with an ‘emergent modality of empire’¹³³: the enclave refinery, the embodiment of modernity which would supposedly dethrone the racially hierarchical system of the plantation and hasten the arrival of the ‘colourblind modernity of industrial capitalism’.¹³⁴ Postcolonial governments have contrasted the racialised history of the plantation regime to the contemporary promise of the so-called post-racial petroleum industry, the development of which would propel Caribbean and Latin American economies into the ‘modern’ age. In other words, one type of empire has been replaced for another, and critiques of the plantation have been used to justify more contemporary imperial interventions in the region.

It is important to remember that even though only certain nation-states within the expanded Caribbean possess reserves of oil, the reach of petroleum extends far beyond the physical, tangible geographies of producer-sites, wellheads and pipelines. Studying different nation-states within the Caribbean archipelago and Latin American rimlands, even if they are not directly producing oil, is relevant and of urgent importance; to undertake scholarship with the assumption that the influence of oil unfolds solely within the geography of extraction ‘loses sight of the extensive investments in distribution, refining and consumption that make the empire of oil possible’.¹³⁵ Examining both producer and dependent nation-states within the expanded Caribbean is essential in order to build up a fuller, richer and more productive picture of the regional nodes where petroculture’s reach extends (and indeed, it is essential in order to better understand the region’s place in the petro-world-system at large).

¹³³ Bond, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p. 607.

¹³⁴ Karen Thurland, *Ralph Paiewonsky: Economic and Social Reformer of the Virgin Islands* (Garden City, N.Y.: Adelphi University Press, 1979), p. 167.

While Thurland captures, in the quotation above, the ideological association between oil and industrial capitalism, it is worth emphasising that, as noted earlier, the sugar plantations themselves were already modern and the embodiment of industrial capitalism.

¹³⁵ Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, ‘Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrain’ in *Imperial Formations*, eds. by Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2007), pp. 3–4.

World-Literature and Petroculture

In his now-famous 1992 review of the first two novels in Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* quintet (1984), Bengali author Amitav Ghosh pondered the absence of the great American oil novel.¹³⁶ He made the salient point that the violent and difficult political geographies of the resource have made 'the history of oil [...] a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic' and that this embarrassing history has led to a 'great deal [being invested in] ensuring the muteness of the Oil Encounter' not only within North-American literature, but in the Western world in general.¹³⁷

As Graeme Macdonald points out, some of Ghosh's queries about the unspeakability of oil are still relevant today, nearly thirty years later. These queries were taken up by scholars who began to chart in earnest the cultural consequences of petro-capitalism, certainly propelled to undertake this scholarship thanks to the variety of 'crises triggered by the depletion of proven fields and the petroleum industry's increasing reliance on crude produced by risky and violent oil frontiers' at the end of the twentieth century.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, Ghosh's question about the invisibility of oil in cultural production (and his more strident claim, that there did not exist a 'Great American Oil Novel') is still a pertinent one.¹³⁹ Indeed, as Macdonald wrote in his 2012 article entitled, 'Oil and World Literature,' 'from a vantage point twenty years hence, as the study of petroculture and petrofiction develops, the question remains pressing: why is it that this mineral, utterly pervasive in the everyday lives of people in developed economies, remains mostly "offshore" in social and cultural consciousness, surfacing now and again in the wake of foreign wars, gas price hikes, or Gulf-of-Mexico-type disasters?'¹⁴⁰ The fact is, as Macdonald points out, that there does exist petrofiction, which has

¹³⁶ Amitav Ghosh, 'Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel', *The New Republic* 2 (1992), 29–34 (p. 29).

¹³⁷ 'The experiences that oil has generated run counter to many of the historical imperatives that have shaped writing over the last couple of centuries and given it its distinctive forms. The territory of oil is bafflingly multilingual [...] while the novel, with its conventions of naturalistic dialogue, is most at home within monolingual speech communities (within nation states, in other words). Equally, the novel is never more comfortable than when it is luxuriating in a "sense of place" [...] but the experiences associated with oil are lived out within a space that is no place at all, a world that is intrinsically displaced, heterogeneous and international.' Ghosh, *The New Republic* pp. 30–31.

¹³⁸ Graeme Macdonald, 'Oil and World Literature,' *American Book Review*, No. 3, Vol. 33 (March/April 2012), pp. 7–31 (p. 7).

¹³⁹ Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, 'Introduction' in *Oil Cultures*, eds. by Ross Barrett, Daniel Worden and Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. i–xxxiii (pp. xxi–xxii).

¹⁴⁰ Graeme Macdonald, 'Oil and World Literature,' *American Book Review*, No. 3, Vol. 33 (March/April 2012), pp. 7–31 (p. 7).

been published both after and before Ghosh's review. 'The issue,' he notes, 'is more how this material should be situated rather than the problem of its absence'.¹⁴¹

Despite later revising his opinion with the recognition that there is indeed a sizeable body of oil fiction, North-American or otherwise, Ghosh's piece nevertheless prompts a meditation on the invisibility of oil in material life and cultural production. Ghosh is not alone in his line of questioning. In his 2010 essay, 'Oil in an American Imaginary', Peter Hitchcock corroborates Ghosh's point, noting that while oil has 'saturat[ed] the infrastructure of modernity' and so its '[...] representation seems ubiquitous [...] [oil is] relatively absent from critically and creatively articulated claims on space, history and social formation'.¹⁴² It is precisely this particular problem of a specifically *cultural* invisibility which has created long-standing problems for writers, artists and academics, limiting the possibilities for the creation and extrapolation of specific definitions and representations of oil.

The critical attention given to the fact of oil's invisibility, as exemplified by Ghosh in 1992, is important to consider for a moment. The general lack of oil's visibility in the material world (at least in the global North) means that the task of representing – making visible – oil in cultural output has been regarded as a difficult, mystifying task. Nevertheless, more modern cultural output (and academic understandings of this output) is engaging with increasing vigour and productivity with petroleum, whether this be in literature, film or art. Nevertheless, making oil visible and then getting to grips with its omnipresent nature, is difficult, to say the least.¹⁴³ 'Oil's primal associations,' writes Stephanie LeMenager, 'are with

¹⁴¹ Macdonald, *American Book Review*, p. 7

¹⁴² Peter Hitchcock, 'Oil in an American Imaginary', *New Formations*, no. 69 (2010), 81-97
DOI:<[10.3898/NEWF.69.04.2010](https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF.69.04.2010)> [accessed 1 January 2007] (p. 81).

¹⁴³ As Barrett and Worden point out:

[...] the global oil economy is at root a spectacular system, built on and sustained by proliferating cultural significations. This symbolic imperative arises in part from the peculiar physical properties of oil, which more than any other commodity demands the unceasing generation of imaginative interpretations of its value (the sort of mystifying signs that constitute the spectacle in Debord's account). As a material whose utility is largely realized through its own destruction, oil requires creative accounts of its worth that depart from its physical form. As a substance that can (at least initially) be extracted without much work, moreover, oil encourages fetishistic representations of its value as a magical property detached from labor. And as a fluid generally recognized to be dirty, sensually offensive, volatile, and transient, oil has long required especially elaborate affirmations of its economic and social benefits. In order to remake the difficult physical material of oil as a viable market commodity, then, petroleum producers and distributors have been continually forced to make intensive efforts to imaginatively recode the resource since its nineteenth-century rediscovery. Articulating oil's value in innumerable creative ways that transcend (and obscure) its actual material constitution, the resulting images, narratives, and discourses have contributed to the

the earth's body, and therefore with the permeability, excess and multiplicities of all bodies', making it notoriously difficult to register either in material, quotidian lifeworlds or in literary production.¹⁴⁴ Because of its simultaneous associations with capital and with ecology, oil poses a 'representational problem' insofar as it 'retains the indeterminacy and openness of mystification of a living, performing spectacle' which profoundly affects both human- and extra-human natures, but is also ultimately part of nature itself, in its crude form.¹⁴⁵ If, as Michael Niblett has pointed out, to represent oil is to represent the world-system, then we find ourselves with a dilemma:

[...] for to attempt to make oil the direct subject of a narrative is to attempt to subjectivise the world-system — to make it representable in the terms of ordinary (subjective) experience. But whereas the lived experience of the effects produced by the system's petro-driven dynamics would be representable in this way, the system as such, an immense bundle of human and extra-human relations in movement, could not be reduced to such a subjective experience. To put it another way: if oil is that through which the system articulates its structure, then oil is a relation — the "real" of oil is not a substance but a set of far-flung and systemically patterned relationships between humans and the rest of nature.¹⁴⁶

The difficulty for cultural production lies in the representation of these 'far flung and systematically patterned relationships' between humans and nature within the petro-capitalist world-system. There is also the issue of how to make oil 'visible' in order to analyse and critique its socio-economic and ecological consequences. It is important, then, to 'excavate petro-culture from its surrounding bedrock, to read oil as cultural as well as material' for 'part of the point in theorizing energy as cultural is [...] to expose and determine reasons for our acculturation in its hierarchy of material (and increasingly immaterial) forms and the manner in which they dictate fundamental aspects of social life and organization'.¹⁴⁷ But 'excavating petroculture from its surrounding bedrock' prompts even more questions – one such query,

formation of an oil spectacle that has sustained industrial and financial commitments to the expanding system of petrocapiism.

Oil Cultures, pp. xx.

¹⁴⁴ Stephanie LeMenager, 'The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after Oil!' *American Literary History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2012), 59–86 (pp. 73–4).

¹⁴⁵ LeMenager, *American Literary History*, pp. 73–4.

¹⁴⁶ Niblett, *Global Ecologies*, p. 275.

¹⁴⁷ Macdonald, *American Book Review* p. 7.

posed by Andrew Pendakis and Ursula Biemann, asks if there is (and if so, what might constitute) a ‘generalised aesthetics of oil’:

In what sense [they ask] can we speak about an aesthetics of oil cultures, a set of recurring spatial, infrastructural, or architectural motifs, for example, or even a dominant structure of feeling or experience which seems to pass through the very molecules of a whole historical reality? Is there an aesthetics of oil or are its cultural manifestations too diverse and localized to be usefully generalized?¹⁴⁸

I believe that literature is one (of several) effective channel(s) by which to begin the cultural excavation of petroleum, since it provides ‘access to the structures of feeling and affective modes’ that correspond to ‘specific socio-ecological formations’.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, as Macdonald points out, ‘the world reach of the carbon web requires and endorses a reformulated world-literary outlook that serves as a compass of interpretation for energetic resource fictions. For if oil’s ubiquity lends it relationality on a world-scale, across all points of its production cycle, then its cultural extrapolations have somehow to manage that scope, scale and uneven connectivity.’¹⁵⁰ A world-literary approach, which connects petrolic literary forms whose ‘unlikely likenesses’ dovetail with the world-system’s ‘carbon flows, exchanges, relations and circulations’ allows for useful analyses which demonstrate that there is, in fact, an aesthetics of oil, commonalities and similarities shared by seemingly disparate and specific petrofictions from different locations of the world-system.¹⁵¹

Michael Sprinker, in his analysis of the differentiation between ideology and art, argues that both ‘present the “lived experience” of a particular social formation at a given moment in history, in distinct ways. In art, the mode of presentation is perceptual or phenomenal, which means that through and with art, we see and feel the lived experience of ideology’.¹⁵² Ideology ‘thus appears in aesthetic presentation, but at a distance’.¹⁵³ Applying Sprinker’s concept to the political ecology of oil, it can be argued that literature (a form of art) can allow us to identify

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Pendakis and Ursula Biemann, ‘This Is Not a Pipeline: Thoughts on the PoliticoAesthetics of Oil’ *Imaginations Vol 3 Issue 2* (2012), 6–15 (p. 8).

¹⁴⁹ Niblett, *Global Ecologies*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁰ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293.

¹⁵¹ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 291.

¹⁵² Michael Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 282.

¹⁵³ Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations*, p. 282.

the way oil has come to commandeer society ‘at the level of daily practice’.¹⁵⁴ Because literature performs the function of the ‘distantiation of ideological materials’, it can help us to grasp the reality of petroleum’s social domination and to unravel oil’s ‘ontologies’ (to borrow Imre Szeman’s phrase),¹⁵⁵ contributing to the ‘denaturalization of the hold these commodities exert over social life’.¹⁵⁶ In *After Oil*, the Petrocultures Research Group note that art, literature and other disciplines in the energy humanities utilise unique methods of interpretation which help to visibilise oil (and other hydrocarbons) in cultural production. The PRG make the point that the energy humanities are particularly important in understanding our current petro-dependence and the dangers of the era of peak oil because ‘we will not make an adequate or democratic transition to a world after oil without first changing how we think, imagine, see and hear energy in our culture’.¹⁵⁷

Given the representational difficulties posed by oil, the effort to visibilise it in literary production can prove to be a challenging one. Signal in this regard is the fact that the resource possesses what Macdonald calls an ‘automatic international provenance’ from the moment that it is found, because as soon as a well is hit and the crude brought to the surface, its location becomes ‘immediately internationalized thanks to the global nature of multinational capital’ and the knowledge required for its extraction and transportation for sale on global trading markets.¹⁵⁸ Because of this inherently global nature, any reading of energy cultures or literatures must have, as Macdonald points out, a ‘fully worlded horizon, because to “see” oil is to see it systemically, and to see it systemically requires a relational and consciously energetic world-ecological outlook’.¹⁵⁹ The cultural medium through which we view petroculture as capitalism, in other words, must utilise a world-systemic and comparative approach in order to even begin grasping the immensity of oil’s economic, cultural, political and social webs, which span the whole world-system.

Moreover, as the systems of cultural production themselves become increasingly international, following the globalized patterns of oil’s extraction, production and consumption, it becomes necessary to remind ourselves again of Pendakis and Biermann’s

¹⁵⁴ Niblett, *Global Ecologies*, pp. 268–9.

¹⁵⁵ Imre Szeman, ‘System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 106, No. 4 (Autumn 2007), 805–23 (p. 806).

¹⁵⁶ Niblett, *Global Ecologies*, pp. 268–9.

¹⁵⁷ Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁵⁸ Macdonald, *American Book Review*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 292.

question: what precisely constitutes an aesthetics of oil? With regards to world-literature, ‘what constitutes a North-American oil text, a Trinidadian, Mexican, Iranian, Russian, Venezuelan or Nigerian oil text?’¹⁶⁰ What, in fact, is an oil text? As Macdonald asks, ‘must a work explicitly concern itself with features immediate to the oil industry? Given that oil and its constituents are so ubiquitous in the material and organisation of modern life, is not every modern novel to some extent an oil novel?’¹⁶¹ It is the difficult task of capturing the ‘complex, multiscalar [and] global nature’ of the petro-capitalist system which petrofiction deals with, both at the geographical points of oil’s production and refinement, and at the innumerable locations which are indirectly affected by petro-capitalism.¹⁶² What Macdonald has called a ‘reformulated literary outlook’ is essential when trying to interpret oil in literature.¹⁶³ Because while the commodity (and its literature) are inherently global in nature, so too are they locally specific. In other words, oil is also defined by the location in which it is domestically produced, due to the specific conditions of production in divergent regions, each of which are affected by the intersection of local cultural, political and economic issues. The work produced in these divergent locations – geographical nodes across the petro-capitalist world-system – nevertheless share certain key aesthetic characteristics that are shaped by oil’s specific yet globalised effects, whether or not they deal directly or indirectly with local situations and global oil economy. Meanwhile, literature itself, like petroleum, is a ‘world resource produced and impacting within and beyond the nation’: both are fluid and complex, simultaneously global and national, developed and manifested in different ways due to the uneven development of nations in the world-system.¹⁶⁴ These connections between oil and literature’s global and national natures mean that the resource’s very ‘multinational structures, routes and determinations ensure [that] petrofiction’s contemporary identification as a subgenre of literature [is] more productive under the rubric of world-literature than it is under that of any national literary corpus’.¹⁶⁵ With this in mind, it is crucial to consider oil-literature from any nation-state on levels both local and global, to chart and connect the vast networks of the oil imaginary in their diverse yet unified locations across the world-system.

¹⁶⁰ Macdonald, *American Book Review*, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶² Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 292.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁶⁴ Niblett, *Global Ecologies*, p. 268.

¹⁶⁵ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293.

It is worth emphasising at this point the degree to which the problem of oil's (cultural) invisibility is differentiated across the uneven contours of the world-system. Generally speaking, it is in the lifeworlds of core nation states where oil is rarely seen in its raw form (as opposed to naked and intrusive extraction sites in semi-peripheral and peripheral regions). In (semi-)peripheral regions of the oil-producing world-system, (unlike in core nations and regions), a:

[...] strong critical insistence on the general "invisibility" of oil increasingly stands alongside recognition of its spectacular violence and the huge material impositions that have accompanied its terraforming of territories and reorganization and publics across the world. For the many extraction sites on the (semi-)periphery of the world-system – and within cultural production from those areas – oil is or has been overtly visible, even if it is subsequently made "unseen", either by privatization, securitization and military enforcement or by its mediated mystification.¹⁶⁶

Having said this, whether it be overtly visible, dripping from pipelines, embodied in rigs and drills, or 'invisible,' (and disguised in the accoutrements of everyday life), oil has a profound effect on the ways in which the majority of humans live. Even in fiction which does not deal immediately with the petroleum industry, oil is still present, shaping narrative form and content, perspectives and locations, the way characters (like people in the real world) move, eat, play and live. We must then, remember Macdonald's question (is not *every* modern novel an oil novel?) and examine both the fiction which deals explicitly with petro-production, and that which describes or even only insinuates the socio-economic implications of oil's use.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, 'petroculture is enacted *wherever* there is detectable reliance (conscious or otherwise) on fossil energy'.¹⁶⁸ Where the reliance is unconscious, or not immediately detectable, is where the ontologies of oil are the most deep-rooted. And it is here that the critic must work hard to, as it were, extract the oil from the text. After all, oil is, as Hitchcock reminds us, 'a

¹⁶⁶ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293.

¹⁶⁷ Literary criticism, being obligated to conduct the processes of cultural excavation, as Macdonald so pithily puts it, must engage with both the 'immediately identifiable petro-sites [...] drilling platforms, pipelines or gas stations but [...] can and must also incorporate the hitherto under-connected sites, actions, motives and events that form the wider petroculture: the myriad products and uses of consumer plasticity, for example, or of carbon transport systems and everyday life in suburban infrastructures.' Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293.

¹⁶⁸ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293 (emphasis my own).

cultural logic that dares any writer to express its real, not as some character or passing reference, but as a very mode of referentiality, a texture in the way stories get told'.¹⁶⁹

To summarise, then: to adequately understand and represent the world-systemic nature of the oil-commodity, literature must be able to register its direct and indirect effects across a range of locations in the world-system. This prompts another question: what mode of literary analysis is best suited to the task? I would suggest that it is the mode of world-literary analysis proposed by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) that is perhaps best placed to examine the systemic nature of the oil-commodity in cultural production.

The concept of world literature has been discussed by numerous thinkers, among them Goethe, Marx and Engels, Auerbach, Said and others, but world-literature (with a hyphen) has been coined by the WReC, who connect the world-system school of economic theory to the concept of world literature. As Franco Moretti elaborates in his *Conjectures on World Literature*, 'international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*; with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx) or, perhaps better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly *unequal*'.¹⁷⁰ The WReC observe that Moretti's definition is indispensable in two ways; firstly, it understands 'world literature' as 'neither a canon of masterworks nor a mode of reading, but as a system'.¹⁷¹ Secondly, it 'proposes that this system is structured not on difference but on inequality'.¹⁷² World-literature, then, as per the WReC formulation, is 'understood in the broadest sense as literature of the capitalist world-system'.¹⁷³ They explain that 'the effectivity of the world-system' and its inherent patterning of over-accumulation at certain poles and underdevelopment in others is 'necessarily [...] discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes

¹⁶⁹ Hitchcock, *New Formations*, p. 86.

¹⁷⁰ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature,' *New Left Review* 1 (January – February 2000), 54–68 (pp. 55–56).

¹⁷¹ Stephen Shapiro, Benita Parry, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Neil Lazarus, Nicholas Lawrence, Sharae Deckard and Graeme Macdonald, 'World Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development' in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 1–48 (p. 7).

¹⁷² Shapiro et. al., *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 7.

¹⁷³ Shapiro et. al., *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 7.

shape and comes into being'.¹⁷⁴ In *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature*, the Warwick Research Collective summarise the 'kernel of their argument,' their conception of world-literature within the global paradigm of capitalist modernity as:

A single but radically uneven world-system; a singular modernity combined and uneven; and a literature that variously registers this combined unevenness in both its form and its content to reveal itself, properly speaking, as world literature [...] we prefer to speak then not of literary forms spreading or unfolding across empty time (and hence of literary history as being divided into sequential 'periods') but of forms that are brought into being (and often into collision with other, pre-existing forms) through the long waves of the capitalisation of the world – not of modernism (or even modernisms) but of the dialectics of core and periphery that underpin all cultural production in the modern era.¹⁷⁵

The WReC's theoretical intervention with regards to the definition of world-literature is useful when thinking through how to tackle the problems of oil's cultural invisibility. If the task of the energy humanities, and of petrofiction more specifically, is to register the nature of petro-modernity and to compare texts from 'all links in oil's value chain,' as Macdonald puts it, then world-literature, with its understanding of the core/periphery dynamics that underpin capitalist modernity and economics, is able to begin connecting the cultural dots of the hydrocarbon web that enmeshes us all.¹⁷⁶ If, as Macdonald writes, world-literature is the literature of the world-system, then the approach of comparative reading allows for the 'linking of energetic texts and literary forms whose unlikely likenesses correspond with the world-system's carbon flows, exchanges, relations and circulations'.¹⁷⁷ World-literature is, in other words, a useful way to manage the 'scope, scale and uneven connectivity' of petro-capitalism and petro-modernity.¹⁷⁸

With regards to the expanded Caribbean (and indeed, other regions of the global South), world-literature is a rubric which, by acknowledging the dialectics of core and (semi)periphery through which capitalism functions, recognises the systematicity of the

¹⁷⁴ Shapiro et. al, 'The Question of Peripheral Realism' in *Combined and Uneven Development*, pp. 49-80 (pp. 49-51).

¹⁷⁵ Shapiro et. al, *Combined and Uneven Development*, pp. 49-80 (pp. 49-51).

¹⁷⁶ Macdonald, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 293.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 291.

region's incorporation into historical capitalism, and the region's historical (and current) role as a peripheral commodity frontier within the (petro-) capitalist world-system. The contemporary Caribbean literatures examined in this thesis explore the socio-ecological effects of these tensions, tensions which are rooted in specific, localised (and often pan-Caribbean) issues but always simultaneously inflected by the globalising nature of the oil-commodity. Nevertheless, identifying the set of aesthetic and thematic attributes of the hydrocarbon network's cultural production, as well as the network's creation of petro-violence at the peripheries is only half the story. The next task, as Macdonald points out, is to 'connect and compare resource texts from all points, or links, in oil's value chain, from (semi-)periphery to core, (refined) pipeline liquid to global stock liquidity'.¹⁷⁹ It is this connection of petrocultural works from relatively underrepresented nodes of oil's value chain in the expanded Caribbean which I am interested to compare: texts which consider explicit resource imperialism but also 'register oil's 'offshoring' into financial systems where it is circulated, leveraged and mediated in various 'fictitious' ways, with bloody and material world-ecological consequences'.¹⁸⁰

Producers, Dependents and Caribbean Futures

In the main body of this study, I examine the consequences of oil's hegemony in specific nation-states of the expanded Caribbean. I use the novel and short story form as my primary lenses through which to view the social, political and ecological ramifications of petro-capitalism in the region. The temporal focus of the study spans from the early twentieth century to the first decade or so of the twenty-first. The texts studied segue from charting the century's early years of exuberant, prolific oil use to the fear of imagined and imminent dystopian futures as hydrocarbon-driven climate change increasingly devastates the region.

In the first two chapters of the study, I consider two major producer states. The first is Venezuela. In the 1920s and 1930s (the early decades of the nation's petro-production), Venezuela's oil industry was closely intertwined not only with the politics of its first dictatorship, but with relations of (petro-) coloniality and North-American imperialism. Despite issues of racism, inequality and corruption, by the end of the 1930s Venezuela had

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 291-2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 291-2.

become the third-leading oil producer in the world (after the United States and the Soviet Union), and the world's leading oil exporter. 'The Coloniality of Oil on the Frontier of Modernity,' the first chapter of the thesis, examines two Spanish-language texts, *Oficina No 1* by Miguel Otero Silva (1961) and *Guachimanes* (1954) by Gabriel Bracho Montiel. Both writers are highly critical of the racist treatment of Afro-Caribbean and indigenous Venezuelan workers on the oil-frontier, the despoliation of Venezuelan extra-human natures and the profit accumulated on the stock markets and trading floors of the North-American core for corporate shareholders, while local obreros (workers) remain underpaid and inadequately cared for by transnational oil-companies.¹⁸¹ Adapting Quijano's theory of the 'coloniality of power,' I examine the coloniality of oil on the Venezuelan oil frontier through the lenses of these two texts, considering the interplay of oil's political ecologies, North American imperialism and racially divided labour on the frontline of modernity.

The second producer state examined in this study is Trinidad, from the time of its independence in 1962, through to the 1973 oil boom and the subsequent bust in 1982. This second chapter considers the tumultuous nature of the Trinidadian situation in the latter half of the twentieth century through the lens of three English-language novels: *Guerrillas* (1975) by V.S. Naipaul, *Is Just a Movie* (2011) by Earl Lovelace and *A Casual Brutality* (1988) by Neil Bissoondath. Using these texts, I examine the interplay between the oil-inflected politics of Eric Williams's government and the 'misplacement'¹⁸² (to borrow Roberto Schwarz's term) of core 'oil ontologies'¹⁸³ to Trinidad both before and during the oil boom. Alongside an examination of the oil inflected politics of this twenty-year period, the texts describe (from varying perspectives and with their differing biases) the failed Black Power uprising in the years before the boom, which may be seen as an alternative focal point for the organisation of society, as opposed to the Trinidadian government's false promises of oil-based progress. The latter's promises proved instrumental in heightening old racial tensions among the island's two biggest communities. Williams connected (middle-class) Afro-Trinidadian identity to the 'black gold' of oil, promising petro-powered change for some and not for others. As we shall

¹⁸¹ I do not italicise Spanish words throughout this thesis, based upon a decolonial objective that aims to resist privileging English.

See Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell, 'Tracing the emergence of Latina/o Vernaculars in studies of Latina/o Communication', in *Latina/o discourse in Vernacular Spaces: Somos de una voz?* Eds. by Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell (Lanham: Lexington Press, 2001), pp. 17-30.

¹⁸² Roberto Schwarz, 'Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Brazil', in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London: Verso, 1992). pp. 20-30 (pp. 22).

¹⁸³ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 806.

see, his government ultimately failed to deliver on the promises of an oil-fuelled, industrialised future for the island.

I then move to consider Puerto Rico, an unincorporated territory of the United States, which suffers from what Catalina M. de Onis has dubbed the phenomenon of ‘energy coloniality’, due to its entanglement in the North-American system of energy imperialism.¹⁸⁴ I focus here on a specific element of petro-capitalism’s incursion into Puerto Rican life – automobility –and its accompanying cultures, as well as the car’s effects on Puerto Rican landscapes. To consider what this specific form of petro-mobility represents, I utilise *La Guaracha del Macho Camacho* (*Macho Camacho’s Beat*, 1980) by Rafael Luis Sánchez. I focus in this chapter on the continuation of class-, gender- and race-based hierarchies on the island as a result of energy imperialism and inequalities in automobility, using Luis Sánchez’s text as a springboard for thought. As well as a consideration of the automobile and the accompanying cultural signifiers which it encapsulates, I consider another important icon of cultural petromobility in Puerto Rico, la guagua aérea, or the aeroplane. Like the automobile, the aeroplane has allowed for the creation of new types of Puerto Rican identity, and has led to new questions regarding the nation’s relationship to the U.S. Like many other Caribbean island nations, Puerto Rico is also a vital barometer by which to consider the future of hydrocarbon-based climate change. Events such as Hurricane María in 2017 (whose colossal damage was preceded by a decade of austerity and followed by examples of the phenomenon that Naomi Klein has famously dubbed ‘disaster capitalism’) have greatly increased the island’s vulnerability, both to North-American imperialism and the vagaries of ever-worsening climate change.¹⁸⁵ Such moments of (un)natural disaster in the expanded Caribbean point to not only the limited longevity of capitalism’s ecological/economic project, but also to the region’s particular vulnerability in a climactically uncertain future.

On this note of climactic speculation and regional vulnerability, the final chapter of the thesis considers Haiti through the lenses of disaster studies and speculative fiction. This last node of geographical focus in my study is an apt one for our current times, as it begins to consider the impending ecological and socio-economic uncertainties involved in the unfolding

¹⁸⁴ Catalina M. de Onis, ‘Fueling and Energy Delinking from Energy Coloniality in Puerto Rico’, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Volume 46, Issue 5 (2018), para 6.
<<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00909882.2018.1529418?scroll=top&needAccess=true&instName=University+of+Warwick>> [accessed 16 September 2018] (para 1.)

¹⁸⁵ Naomi Klein, ‘Blank is Beautiful: Three Decades of Erasing and Remaking the World’, in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allan Lane, 2007), pp. 3-23 (p. 6).

of multiple potential petro-dystopian futures (which take various forms: a world without oil, or a world in which hydrocarbon-fuelled climate change has led to a significant remodelling of life).

Like María in Puerto Rico, the 2010 earthquake which struck close to Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, was a devastation. It was regarded by many Haitians as a portent of apocalypse, the coming of the world's end. However, the *goudougoudou*, as the Haitians call it, is but one contemporary apocalypse which has emerged out of what Bajan poet Kamau Braithwaite has called the original, 'ongoing catastrophe' of the expanded Caribbean's initial colonisation.¹⁸⁶ The chapter borrows Braithwaite's phrase and its logic as a conceptual premise from which to consider the idea of compound catastrophes in the expanded Caribbean, which, arguably, are most explicitly embodied or manifested in nations such as Haiti. Saint Domingue, or Ayiti, as it was called by the original Taíno inhabitants, was birthed out of the original catastrophe of European colonisation (and later rejection from the western world for its independence struggle and revolution) has ever since continued to exist (as some critics argue) in a perpetual and ongoing state of catastrophe. Like other Caribbean nation states, and indeed of countries of the global South more generally, Haiti is also disproportionately vulnerable in the face of catastrophic climate change, (which, of course, is itself rooted in our current global hydrocarbon-dependency). The chapter weaves together various temporally specific apocalypses — the impending eco-apocalypses of potentially dystopian, post-oil futures and the historical apocalypses of colonisation and slavery, catastrophes which have become compounded in a way that is quite specific to the expanded Caribbean region. In the first section of literary analysis, I examine two Afrofuturist sf texts, both short stories: Junot Díaz's 'Monstro' (2012) and Rodney Saint-Éloi's 'The Blue Hill' (2011). In these works, I consider the trope of the zombie as a symbol which embodies the compound catastrophes of the Caribbean's past, present and future. In the second section of literary analysis, I consider Rita Indiana's novella *Tentacle* (2015) alongside the utility of the sf genre for both depicting dystopian futures and critiquing the current realities that are leading to these futures. Sf (and particularly Afrofuturism) productively grapple with both the original, 'ongoing' catastrophe of colonisation and the apocalypse of slavery, as well as the current apocalypses of neoliberalism and hydrocarbon-based climate change.

¹⁸⁶ Kamau Braithwaite and Joyelle McSweeney, 'Poetics, Revelations and Catastrophes: An Interview with Kamau Braithwaite' < <https://www.raintaxi.com/poetics-revelations-and-catastrophes-an-interview-with-kamau-brathwaite/> > [accessed 19 December 2016] (para. 6).

My hope is that this body of work will, in some small way, help to bridge the (ever-closing) gap between the energy humanities and Caribbean literature, and contribute usefully to the emerging scholarship on Caribbean petrofiction by offering a specifically transnational, region-wide study. I hope too, that it will engender an understanding of the damaging socio-ecological consequences of petro-capitalism in the expanded Caribbean. Across the highly uneven contours of the contemporary world-system, oil-use has transformed and transfixed humanity. The damage created by this obsession is seemingly irreparable, yet a future without oil is currently difficult to imagine (although not impossible!). It is imperative to begin creating a world in which we are not yoked to petroleum, a world in which the catastrophic potentialities of oil are not forever snapping at our feet. A part of the process of creating this new world is continuing to relentlessly and imaginatively critique the one that currently exists.

I

PRODUCERS

Chapter One

Venezuela: The Coloniality of Oil on the Frontier of Modernity 1922-1936

Petroleum is the fundamental and basic fact of Venezuelan destiny. It presents to Venezuela today the most serious national problems that the nation has known in its history. It is like the Minotaur of ancient myths, in the depths of his labyrinth, ravenous and threatening.

~ Arturo Uslar Pietri.¹⁸⁷

¡Petróleo! ¡Zumo negro de la entraña escondida! ¡Saliva de los gnomos del tío Sam! ¡Lubricante para los goznes de la puerta de los palacios y de las arcas de Rockefeller y Mellon! ¡Susiento de Wall Street! ¡Tortura de mil Tochitos! ¡Supiste un día ser el símbolo del alma venezolano! Como ella, tuviste hondo el yacimiento, tumultuoso el escape, ardiente la expresión, inexorable el fallo.

Petroleum! [The] black juice of [a] secluded heart! Saliva of Uncle Sam's gnomes! Lubricant for the door hinges of the palaces and coffers of Rockefeller and Mellon! The sustenance of Wall Street! The torture of a thousand Tochitos! You knew that one day you will be the symbol of Venezuela's soul! [That] like her, your deposits are deep, your leakages are tumultuous, your gestures are passionate, [and] your rule is implacable.

~ Gabriel Bracho Montiel.¹⁸⁸

Black Blood and Open Veins

In his magisterial *The Open Veins of Latin America* (1971), Eduardo Galeano writes with a powerful and compelling rage of the plunder that took place during the colonisation of the Americas. He observes that ever since the fifteenth century, the continent's resources have been 'transmuted into European [...] capital and as such [have] accumulated in distant centres

¹⁸⁷ Arturo Uslar Pietri, *De una a otra Venezuela* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1972), p. 18.

¹⁸⁸ Gabriel Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes: Doce aguafuertes para ilustrar la novela el petróleo* (Santiago: Francisco Javier, 1954), p. 68.

of power [...] the soil, its fruits and mineral depths, the people and their capacity to work and consume' have all been exploited in the name of capitalism's development and expansion.¹⁸⁹ His words are a productive starting point from which to consider Venezuela's most important and influential resource – one which, as Uslar Pietri reminds us in the epigraph, is the 'fundamental and basic fact of Venezuelan history'. Historian and former communist leader, Juan Bautista Fuenmayor, has called oil the 'key that permits us to decipher the political enigma of Venezuelan politics in the last seventy years'.¹⁹⁰ Venezuelan journalist and politician, Domingo Alberto Rangel, writes that 'no event in Venezuela can be separated from oil [...] It is the fundamental force that shapes national life. All aspects of the Venezuelan economy are the legitimate or bastard children of that substance that irrevocably stained our history'.¹⁹¹ Whether it be the nation's first dictatorship under Juan Vicente Gómez, the Trienio period of 1945 to 1948, or the presidency of Hugo Chávez that lasted from 1999 to 2013, oil has always been an intrinsically important player in Venezuelan history.

Buried in Venezuela's rich subsoil, petroleum has long attracted the attention and baited the energies of transnational corporations and power-hungry politicians, who, throughout the twentieth century, have forcefully 'transmuted into capital' (as Galeano puts it) both the human and extra-human natures of the country in the name of the modernity — not to mention the financial miracles — which oil is heralded to bring. The story of oil in Venezuela (and indeed '[...] of other oil-bearing Latin American lands') is one of 'organised looting [...] a long story of infamies, [and] deeds of business prowess which have spread a black curse across the earth'.¹⁹² I keep in mind oil's tremendous importance for the contemporary capitalist world-system throughout this chapter, but also the fact that oil, as Galeano puts it, 'allows for the domination of many countries [and] the penetration of many governments (for an infinite capacity for corruption, in other words),' as I explore the tumultuous repercussions of the discovery of oil in Venezuela's subsoil.¹⁹³

As we have seen, the rhythm of capitalist accumulation inevitably results in strategic

¹⁸⁹ Eduardo Galeano, '120 Million Children in the Eye of the Hurricane,' in *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (London: Serpents Tail, 2009), pp. 1–8 (p. 2).

¹⁹⁰ Juan Bautista Fuenmayor, *1928–1948: Veinte años de política* (Madrid: Mediterráneo, 1968), p. 9.

¹⁹¹ Domingo Alberto Rangel, *La moneda ladrona: la devaluación en el banquillo* (Caracas: Pensamiento Vivo, 1964), p. 1. Rangel's work provides a useful and detailed history of Venezuelan oil. See Rangel, *Capital y desarrollo, el rey petróleo* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1970); Rangel, *Venezuela en 3 siglos* (Caracas: Vadell Hermanos, 1998).

¹⁹² Galeano, 'The Invisible Sources of Power' in *Open Veins*, pp. 134–170 (p. 159).

¹⁹³ Galeano, *Open Veins*, p. 159.

underdevelopment in the peripheries of the world-system: this has meant that throughout their histories, peripheral nations have been continually subjected to the exploitation and expropriation of their human and extra-human natures. Irakli Khodeli writes that ‘today, over 60% of the world’s poorest people live in countries rich in natural resources [...] [yet] twelve of the world’s twenty-five most mineral-dependent states and six of the world’s twenty-five most oil-dependent states are classified by the World Bank as “highly indebted poor countries with some of the world’s worst human development indicators.” As the profits of multinational oil companies continues to soar [...] so do the rents flowing to the governments of the developing countries that host the significant share of global operations but the people rarely seem to share in the wealth’.¹⁹⁴ Khodeli’s words ring true when applied to the context of the expanded Caribbean. The islands and indeed, the entire South American continent, is, as Galeano writes, a ‘menial [...]: it continues to exist at the service of others’ needs, as a source and reserve of [...] raw materials and food destined for rich countries which profit more from consuming them than Latin America does from producing them’.¹⁹⁵ He goes on to explain that ‘the history of Latin America’s underdevelopment is [...] an integral part of the history of world capitalism’s development. *Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others – the empires and their native overseers*’.¹⁹⁶ Still today, the situation of the majority of South American countries reflects this uneven pattern. Even nations such as Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil, all of which have become (at times) more self-sufficient in terms of food

¹⁹⁴ Irakli Khodeli, ‘From Curse to Blessing? Using Natural Resources to Fuel Sustainable Development’, *International Social Science Journal* ed. by Irakli Khodeli (Oxford: UNESCO, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ Galeano, ‘120 Million Children’ in *Open Veins*, p.1.

¹⁹⁶ Galeano’s outraged, lyrical prose chimes with Moore’s extrapolation of capitalism’s externalisation and exhaustion of commodity frontiers, and the human and extra-human natures plundered for fiscal productivity. He writes of how:

Potosí, Zacatecas, and Ouro Preto became desolate warrens of deep, empty tunnels from which the precious metals had been taken; ruin was the fate of Chile’s nitrate pampas and of Amazonia’s rubber forests. Northeast Brazil’s sugar and Argentina’s quebracho belts, and communities around oil-rich Lake Maracaibo, have become painfully aware of the mortality of wealth which nature bestows and imperialism appropriates. The rain that irrigates the centers of imperialist power drowns the vast suburbs of the system. In the same way, and symmetrically, the well-being of our dominating classes— dominating inwardly, dominated from outside— is the curse of our multitudes condemned to exist as beasts of burden.

Ibid., pp. 2–3 (emphases his own).

production and industrial output, remain 'locked in the historical pattern of exporting raw materials for the world market and importing manufactured goods'.¹⁹⁷

In the expanded Caribbean, the exploitative logic of commodity extraction and racialised structures of domination have gone hand in hand with the importation of a particular set of ideologies, which equate core, capitalist models of socio-economic progress with modernity as such. The implicit, long-standing assumption at work here, of the 'West' (or the core nations) as the original flag-bearer(s) of modernity, means that all other, non-Western/non-core nation-states, are consequently regarded as 'lagging behind' and need to 'catch up' to the core's standards of modernity using whatever vehicle is most efficient.¹⁹⁸ Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the vehicle of modernity – and 'Westernisation' – in Venezuela has been associated with oil. In 'Western' models and narratives, oil is '[...] synonymous with progress, even with the future itself'.¹⁹⁹ As Gerry Canavan puts it, the discovery of oil in one's region means the quick infusion of cash and jobs; the discovery of oil 'on one's own property translates immediately and inevitably to indescribable riches'.²⁰⁰ Oil use in Euro-American nations is deeply entrenched as a normalized part of quotidian life: this everyday dependency is inextricably attached to 'fundamental socio-political assumptions and aspirations' [...] [It allows for the] inventi[on] and promoti[on] [of] new forms of social practice premised on cheap energy, refiguring oil consumption as a natural and unassailable category of modern existence, as well as seeking to avoid critical considerations of oil's social and ecological costs'.²⁰¹ In these (relatively) more prosperous nations, then, 'energy has become the currency of political and economic power, the determinant of the hierarchy of nations, a new marker even for success and material advancement. Access to energy has thus emerged as the overriding imperative of the twentieth and twenty-first century'.²⁰² But these optimistic 'ontologies of oil', that serve to prop up petrotopian societies of the core nations, are complicated by the material and psychic realities of peripheral nations such as Venezuela.²⁰³

¹⁹⁷ Howard J. Wiarde and Harvey F. Kline, 'The Context of Latin American Politics,' in *Latin American Politics and Development*, ed. by Wiarde and Kline (Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 4-12 (p. 10).

¹⁹⁸ I employ here, and throughout this study, a critical understanding of the 'West' as an ideological, geopolitical construct, rather than simply a geographical location.

¹⁹⁹ Gerry Canavan, 'Retrofutures and Petrofutures: Oil, Scarcity, Limit', in *Oil Culture*, ed. by Ross Barrett, Daniel Worden and Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 331-349 (334).

²⁰⁰ Canavan, *Oil Culture*, p. 334.

²⁰¹ Canavan, *Oil Culture*, p. 334.

²⁰² Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *The Politics of the Global Oil Industry: An Introduction* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005), p. 5.

²⁰³ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 806.

In countries such as these, both in the expanded Caribbean and the global South more generally, the legacies of colonial history and the ongoing reality of uneven (and under-) development mean that the petro-magical promise of a rapid infusion of ‘cash and jobs [...] [of] indescribable riches’ is unachievable for the vast majority of the population.

Nevertheless, in Venezuela, the oil boom of the 1920s–30s announced the miraculous (and as we will come to see, misleading) promise of such indescribable riches. As José Ignacio Cabrujas points out, the boom which began in 1922 ‘created the illusion of a miracle; it created, in practice, a culture of miracles’.²⁰⁴ For the majority of the population, who lived in abject poverty, the financial miracles created by oil revenues and rents were, indeed, illusory, or at least highly transient. In Venezuela, oil was heralded as the key which would unlock the door to modernity (i.e. ‘Westernisation’), but realities did not reflect hopes or expectations. The spectacle, miracle, and magical happenstance of wealth-through-petroleum for the *entire* population proved to be a false promise. Indeed, ever since 1922 Venezuela has been defined economically, politically and socially by oil, but also by what Donald Kingsbury calls ‘the national project to transcend the status of “oil country”’.²⁰⁵ I am interested to consider the disconnection between the ‘Western’/core ideologies of oil-powered modernisation and the problematic consequences of their importation to a peripheral nation such as Venezuela.

This chapter, then, examines Venezuelan oil-politics from 1922 to 1936 through the lens of two novels located in the nation’s oil camps. They are set on the very frontlines of oil-extraction (in other words, on the frontier of modernity): Miguel Otero Silva’s *Oficina No. 1* (1961) and Gabriel Bracho Montiel’s *Guachimanes: doce aguafuertes para ilustrar la novela el petróleo* (first published only in Chile in 1954, and not in Venezuela until 2008).²⁰⁶ Both novels describe the explicitly racialised and gendered violence at work on the oil frontier, but also attempt to connect the immediate, localised experiences of Venezuelan oil-workers – subaltern populations toiling at the peripheries of the petro-capitalist world-system – with the abstract machinations of larger financial forces in the global economy. Each author attempts in his own way to track the petro-capitalist ‘rhythm of over-accumulation and under-

²⁰⁴ José Ignacio Cabrujas, quoted in Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 2.

²⁰⁵ Donald V. Kingsbury, ‘V: Venezuela,’ in *Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environments*, ed. by Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 369–372 (p. 369).

²⁰⁶ Miguel Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1961); Gabriel Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes: Doce aguafuertes para ilustrar la novela el petróleo* (Santiago: Francisco Javier, 1954).

development' (as Mukherjee puts it) both on the oil-frontier and at more distant nodes in the world-system.²⁰⁷ While written in the fifties and sixties, both authors seem to somewhat conflate different moments in the history of the Venezuelan oil-camps, describing a period that, when compared to the nation's history, corresponds to the period from the 1920s onwards, all the way up to the 1950s, in the nation's oil camps.

Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva's primary concern lies with the neo-colonial structures of power employed by the triumvirate of political elites, transnational companies and rentier profit stakeholders in their control of labour relations in the oil camps. However, their novels also repeatedly and insistently register the nature of oil as a commodity which connects vastly different spatial and geopolitical nodes (and also human- and extra-human natures) across the world-system. While examining the authors' descriptions of the physical processes of oil extraction and the Venezuelan attempts to 'catch up' with Western petro-models by using oil as the vehicle of modernisation, I will also discuss the coloniality of oil – a term adapted from Anibal Quijano's original theorisation of the 'coloniality of power'. The structural oppression associated with oil imperialism in Venezuela (and, as we will see, in other nations of the expanded Caribbean) recall Quijano's emphasis on the persistence of certain implanted colonial structures and systems of domination that were implemented during the colonisation of the Americas. Quijano's theory is a particularly useful one to understand the industry, allowing as it does for an examination of contemporary domination whose roots lie in colonial history.²⁰⁸ When applied to Venezuela, Quijano's work throws into relief the relationships between the determinants of the petro-capitalist world-system (namely oil-soaked local politics and transnational oil-corporations) and how these determinants play a role in the formation of the coloniality of oil, maintaining Venezuela's peripheral position in the international neo-colonial matrix of power.

Venezuela in the American Century: 'Fountains of Oil'

It is useful to first briefly contextualise the rise of Venezuela as a major oil producer/exporter in the world-system during the early years of what Evans, Buckland and

²⁰⁷ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 14–15.

²⁰⁸ Kingsbury, *Fueling Culture*, p. 370.

Baker call the ‘American century’.²⁰⁹ This allows the reader to better appreciate the interlinkages of oil-soaked politics and foreign corporate interests that underpin the cultural production of the period under consideration. As Guillermo Móron explains, Venezuela has never had a diversified range of exports and the capacity to pay for imports has always sprung from one or two products.²¹⁰ From the time of the Spanish conquest in 1522 to the 1820s, agriculture, gold-mining and stock-raising were the crux of the colonial economy while the hacienda system used both the forced labour of the indigenous population and imported enslaved Africans. The eighteenth century was overdetermined by the cacao bean commodity, again harvested using enslaved African labour on plantation-systems.²¹¹ From 1873, coffee became the leading product for export in Venezuela. Being thus ‘condemned to the cyclical rise and fall of coffee and cacao prices’²¹² the nation remained mainly agricultural until the mid to late 1920s when, as Galeano writes, it suddenly became a ‘fountain of oil’.²¹³ Since then, the oil industry has been ‘and remains the central component of the Venezuelan economy and has been a decisive factor in the evolution of social and class structures’ in the country.²¹⁴

The first uses of oil products had been by Venezuela’s indigenous populations, who ‘utilised asphalt for caulking boats and impregnating sails, pitch for lining baskets, waterproofing their roofs, lighting torches, catching animals, and crude oil, collected from surface seepages (called *menes*) for medicinal and illumination purposes’.²¹⁵ Widespread commercial interest in the country’s oil-reserves took off shortly after Edwin Drake’s discovery of oil in Titusville, Pennsylvania, and North-American businesses began to look south of the border for ever-larger reserves.²¹⁶ The widespread instability caused by the 1910

²⁰⁹ Harold Evans with Gail Buckland and Kevin Baker, *The American Century* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1998), p. 5.

²¹⁰ Guillermo Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, trans. by John Street (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964), pp. 204–228 (p. 224).

²¹¹ Galeano points out the succession of commodities which each, for a time, reigned over nations of South America like Venezuela. He notes, for example, the fact that ‘cacao coexisted with indigo, sugar, tobacco, and a few mines, and cattle-raising on the plains [...] but the people correctly baptized as “Gran Cacao” the slave-owning oligarchy in Caracas, which supplied cacao to Mexico’s mining oligarchy and to the Spanish metropolis [and] thus us[ed] black labor to enrich itself.’ His words remind us not only of Eric Williams’s remarks regarding ‘King Sugar and Emperor Oil,’ but also of Moore’s explanation of successive, exploitative commodity frontiers. Galeano, ‘King Sugar and Other Agricultural Monarchs,’ *Open Veins*, p. 91.

²¹² Galeano, ‘King Sugar and Other Agricultural Monarchs,’ *Open Veins*, p. 91.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 91

²¹⁴ Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture and Society in Venezuela* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 1.

²¹⁵ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, 39.

²¹⁶ However, the initial exploration for and extraction of oil in the Venezuelan subsoil was a slow process; 1,312 contracts were awarded between 1878 and 1920 for oil exploitation which resulted in very little extraction. In

Mexican Revolution led major foreign oil companies to seek out other, less politically volatile oil-states in Latin America. British, Dutch and North American companies moved to Venezuela where Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorship, with its liberal concessions policies, was considered more suitable for their ambitions. There were some initial successes: in 1914, the Caribbean Petroleum Company (which would later become part of the Shell conglomerate) discovered the Mene Grande field, east of Lake Maracaibo. In 1917 Shell discovered the Bolívar Coastal field. But progress was slow and Venezuela, until the mid to late 1920s, remained primarily agricultural. As 1917 came to an end, for example, the country was still exporting more asphalt than oil and most Venezuelans continued to depend on agriculture for subsistence.²¹⁷ Nearly a decade passed between the beginning of extractive operations in Mene Grande and the discovery of the Barroso no 2 well at La Rosa in December 1922, which was the next important stage in the development of the Venezuelan oil industry. Barroso no 2, a well which had been abandoned in 1918, erupted for ten consecutive days, in a manner 'reminiscent of the famous Mexican gushers [which had produced, in their heyday] 12,000 tons of oil per day'.²¹⁸ Much of this was wasted due to the insufficient or non-existent collection and storage facilities, but eventually 60,000 tons were saved when some 500 labourers dug a hole around the well to contain the oil.²¹⁹ From 1908-1929 exports increased in value from 83 million bolivares to 739 million bolivares, a 790% increase. By 1926 oil had displaced coffee as the country's most valuable export commodity and biggest generator of revenue: by 1929 it was providing 76% of Venezuela's export earnings and half of government revenues.²²⁰ By the 1930s petroleum already accounted for 80% of total exports.²²¹ After the eruption of Barroso no 2, Venezuela became the next oil hotspot and the industry began to

1883 the Compañía Petrolia de Táchira was created by just six men. The company functioned on a very small scale of about 'fifty barrels a day of crude which were carried to a primitive distillery and refined in large vats'. Juan Carlos Boué, *Venezuela: The Political Economy of Oil* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 7.

²¹⁷ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 53.

²¹⁸ Judith Ewell, 'Oil and the Fever of Political Freedom, 1923-45', *Venezuela: A Century of Change* (London: 1984, C. Hurt and Co.), pp. 61-91 (p. 67). See also Ewell, *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum Empire* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

²¹⁹ Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century of Change*, p. 67.

²²⁰ Juan Carlos Boué, 'Oil and the Venezuelan Economy,' *Venezuela: The Political Economy of Oil* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 179-193 (p. 179).

²²¹ In the following years, oil exports boomed exponentially: from 1933-85, petroleum's share of exports was over 90% of total national exports, from 1950-83 98% and even after nationalisation in 1976 this share remained at 95%; only during the 1990s did the share of oil exports decrease below the 90% mark, regaining this level after 2005 and powerfully illustrating Venezuela's potent dependency on oil since the commodity's first discovery in the early twentieth century. María del Mar Rubio-Varas, 'Oil Illusion and Delusion: Mexico and Venezuela over the Twentieth Century', *Natural Resources and Economic Growth: Learning From History*, eds. by Marc Badia-Miró, Vicente Pinilla and Henry Willebald (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 162.

take off: Gómez's continued support of foreign intervention²²² and the huge oil deposits in the Lake Maracaibo basin transformed Venezuela from an 'insignificant agricultural nation' at the end of the First World War to the 'world's second producer and leading exporter of petroleum by 1928'.²²³

By 1929, Venezuela was producing 137 million barrels of crude oil a year, second only to the United States in total levels of production. Venezuela became the number one oil exporter in the world, overtaking Mexican levels of production by 1929, and its oil sector continued to grow at a continuous pace from 1922-35.²²⁴ However, despite its colossal petroleum reserves, the nation's oil market remained almost entirely dominated by foreign companies. The actions of these foreign oil companies 'played out on a vast stage [...]. [T]hey reorganised physical space, determined national policy, transformed the lives of employees and in the end influenced the perspective of generations of Venezuelans' while pocketing most of the profits.²²⁵ In 1928, for example, 107 foreign companies were operating in Venezuela, with the big three controlling 98% of the market.²²⁶ These big three — the Creole Petroleum Corporation (subsidiary of Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey, later ExxonMobil), the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Co. and Mene Grande (subsidiary of Gulf Oil) — worked alongside the Gómez regime, providing the dictator with 'the political legitimacy and economic resources needed to consolidate power' and 'for their support they were generously rewarded.'²²⁷ 'During the Gómez era,' Miguel Tinker Salas notes, 'the foreign oil industry and the Venezuelan state became inextricable'.²²⁸

Juan Vicente Gómez (Venezuela's 'first magician,' as Fernando Coronil wryly calls him) headed a dictatorship that encouraged an unsustainable and illusionary discourse of modernisation.²²⁹ Venezuela was to be (supposedly) propelled into modernity by the magical commodity of oil, which would transform the country from being agricultural, rural, (and therefore 'backward') into an efficient, technology-driven (and such, a 'modernised') state. As

²²² In 1918 for example, Gómez allowed the companies to draft the kind of petroleum legislation under which they themselves wanted to operate. The creation of the 1922 Oil Law, drafted by the companies themselves, also created co-operative legal conditions for extractive operations.

²²³ Edwin Lieuwen, *Venezuela, Second Edition* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 48.

²²⁴ Boué, 'Historical Background and Institutional Set-Up,' *Venezuela: The Political Economy of Oil*, pp. 5-29, (p. 8).

²²⁵ Tinker Salas, 'Introduction: Oil, Culture and Society', *The Enduring Legacy*, pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

²²⁶ Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century of Change*, p. 63.

²²⁷ Tinker Salas, 'Introduction', *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 2.

²²⁸ Tinker Salas, 'Introduction', *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 2.

²²⁹ Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 69.

Tinker Salas explains: ‘the notion of a backward Venezuela is rooted in the idea that the discovery of oil was synonymous with progress and modernization, an argument that has [...] proved unsustainable not only in Venezuela but also in other oil-producing countries throughout the world’.²³⁰ Under Gómez, the Venezuelan state became a ‘magnanimous sorcerer [...] endowed with the power to replace reality with fabulous fictions propped up by oil wealth’.²³¹

Political Ecologies of the Venezuelan Oil-Frontier

It is precisely these ‘fabulous fictions’ of oil-wealth-for-all with which Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva wrestle in their work. Both *Guachimanes* and *Oficina No 1* eschew presentations of oil’s synonymy with progress and modernisation, and instead focus on depicting the socio-economic exploitation of workers in the nation’s oil-camps as well as the abstract yet inextricably connected violence of finance capital, far away on the trading floors of North-American and Western European offices. Both authors constantly strive to illustrate the fact that it is the company stockholders in core nations who pocket the colossal profits of oil extraction, while exploiting workers (and Venezuelan extra-human natures) to ever-greater degrees, as well as working alongside a corrupt Venezuelan government that facilitates and encourages this exploitation. In addition to this, Otero Silva and Bracho Montiel both recognise the fact that western models of oil-as-development cannot play out in the same way in peripheral nations which have been (and continue to be) subject to imperialist domination and systematic underdevelopment. Their depictions of worker exploitation on the oil-frontier continuously register the bipartite nature of the oil-industry, which accumulates profits in the core and exploits human- and extra-human natures at the periphery.

Particularly after World War Two, the institutionalisation of oil camps across Venezuela created a ‘certain normalcy [...]: exploration continued and well production increased, but the chaos and exhilaration of the early years no longer permeated operations’.²³² Instead, a ‘more settled and established industry’ was created, which included ‘formal relations

²³⁰ Tinker Salas, ‘Introduction’, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 15.

²³¹ Ignacio Cabrujas quoted in Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 2.

²³² Tinker Salas, ‘Introduction’, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 4.

between the large oil companies, national and state governments, labor organizations, the church and civil society'.²³³ By the 1960s, over 25% of Venezuelans lived in or near to an oil camp.²³⁴ As Tinker Salas points out, the expansion of the labour working in the oil camps meant that 'camp life became [through necessity] more routinised and hierarchically stratified. For both expatriates from the United States and Venezuelans, status in the company determined one's social networks and living arrangements'.²³⁵ Separate living arrangements meant that camps were sliced up into senior and junior staff residences, and a separate *campo obrero*, or workers camp.²³⁶ Tinker Salas expounds on the nature of social stratification in the oil-camps when he writes that:

The residential communities, or *campos petroleros*, that the foreign oil companies fashioned to house their local and foreign employees became the most important stage for the profound economic, social and cultural changes that Venezuelans experienced after the discovery of oil [...] the creation of Venezuelan residential enclaves involved an unparalleled degree of social engineering. The oil camp thus embodied a multidimensional process of social adaptation and acculturation that ranged from the uses of private and public space to the encouragement of preferred cultural norms and social practices.²³⁷

In both *Guachimanes* and *Oficina No 1*, it is precisely this 'social engineering' that both authors seek to represent and critique. The site of the oil-camp, the frontier of modernity, is a particularly important space which embodies not only the 'rhythm of over-accumulation and underdevelopment' that takes place across the petro-capitalist world-system, but also illustrates the racialised hierarchies that govern everyday life.²³⁸ Both novels depict a variety of Venezuelan and Afro-Caribbean characters who all live, work and die in this hierarchically

²³³ Ibid., p. 4.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

²³⁶ These separate living arrangements, and the more attractive social spaces, came to be 'the exclusive domain of largely white employees from the U.S.' and as such, the geographies of the oil camps came to embody the racial and social prejudices that were the norm in the States. These living quarters, given English names such as 'Hollywood, Sunset, Star Hill, Victory, Tortilla Flats' symbolised the relative material privilege of foreign workers in contrast to the larger living quarters that surrounded them, which lined the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo and other oil towns, and were given Spanish names such as 'La Rosa, Tía Juana, La Salina, Miraflores' and so on. The few Venezuelan professionals who shared the U.S. living quarter space, the 'junior staff' of doctors, lawyers and lower-level administrators, had to grapple with the power relations that were exercised by the foreigners; 'framed by the dominant role of the oil industry, U.S. culture and practices acquired a new cachet that defined modernity for many in the Venezuelan middle class' and within the camps themselves. Ibid., pp. 144-145.

²³⁷ Tinker Salas, 'Introduction', *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 4.

²³⁸ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 14-15.

stratified camp society, in a microcosm that represents the larger inequalities of accumulation and dispossession at work across the petro-capitalist world-system.

On the local level of the Venezuelan experience, both authors make clear two key, interrelated issues. The first is the neo-colonial, explicitly racialised structures of domination on the oil-frontier. The second is the depiction of physical oil infrastructure as the embodiment of socio-ecological exploitation, as part of capital's project to commodify both human bodies and non-human landscapes in Venezuela. The disjunction between the possibility of living out Western 'oil ontologies' and the brutal reality of Venezuelan lived experience is made evident by both authors, through descriptions of the harsh inequity and violence experienced in the oil frontier, supposedly the foremost site of modernity and progress.²³⁹ Depictions of everyday life in the oil camps highlights the profundity of the socio-economic discrimination at work throughout the novels, as well as the wholesale exploitation of certain types of bodies. Larger themes are distilled into highly telling everyday experiences. In *Oficina No 1*, for example, Otero Silva outlines the comfortable living conditions enjoyed by North-American workers:

The Americans lived separately. There no longer existed the temporary canvas-clad camp of the pioneering explorers, nor the mobile, prefabricated houses of the nomadic drillers, but sturdy villas built with the intention to remain for an indefinite period of time, in an area that began to appear marked in red asterisks on the petroleum maps that were printed in New York and London. They were small, quite comfortable houses, with baths and showers, electrical stoves, windows made of a metallic canvas that stopped flying insects in their tracks, small front gardens and guard dogs. Level with the ground, at the border of the asphalt path, they could read the names of the tenants marked out in white on black rectangular slabs: G. W. Thompson, J. White, S. H. Corbett, Ch. Reynolds, P. D. Smith, W. Rada. Yes sir, just like that. W. Rada. The Company doctor and Guillermito Rada were the only natives who had access to that privileged area.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 4, p. 806.

²⁴⁰ 'Los Americanos vivían aparte. Ya no existía el transitorio campamento de lona de los exploradores pioneros, ni las movibles casas prefabricadas de los perforadores nómadas, sino sólidas quintas levantadas con ánimo de permanecer por tiempo indefinido en una zona que comenzaba a figurar señalada por asteriscos rojos en los mapas petrolíferos que se editaban en Nueva York y en Londres. Eran pequeñas casas bastante confortables, con baño de regadera y cocina eléctrica, ventanas de tela metálica que detenían en seco el vuelo de los insectos, jardincitos delanteros y perro guardián. A ras de tierra, al borde del camino asfaltado, podían leerse los nombres de los inquilinos trazados en blanco sobre rectangulares tablillas negras: G. W. Thompson, J. White, S. H. Corbett, Ch. Reynolds, P. D. Smith, W. Rada. Sí señor, así como suena. W. Rada. El medico de la Compañía y Guillermito Rada eran los únicos nativos que tenían acceso a aquella region privilegiada'. Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 137. All translations, unless indicated otherwise, are my own.

The U.S. workers occupy houses that with their ‘baths and showers, electrical stoves and [...] gardens’ imitate bourgeois North-American suburban comforts. Similarly, in Bracho Montiel’s *Guachimanes*, the U.S. worker quarters of the oil camps consist of ‘symmetrical streets bordered by beautiful little wooden houses, constructed on spikes of cement and well fitted with metal grilles to evade the threat of mosquitoes.’ Each house is equipped with its own ‘pristine quadrilateral of a tennis pitch’ and a ‘wide swimming pool of blue waters in which handsome little blonde men bathed happily and nimbly, muscular and robust’.²⁴¹ All of this luxury is in stark contrast to ‘the workers’ quarters’ of the non-white labourers, which consist instead of ‘filthy alleyways, sandy floors; houses built like barricades [which were] constructed with planks of *pitchi-pan*, of previously discarded packaging, very low roofs of galvanised iron that heated up at noon until they seemed to imitate a surge of fire under the fury of the sun’.²⁴² The women of these barrios, ‘unkempt and ragged sat by the frames of the doors’ while small ‘potbellied children, the bare skin of their small stomachs exhibiting the dry streams of the hot chocolate or black cacao that they drank’ run from house to house.²⁴³

The infrastructure of oil extraction itself, meanwhile, is depicted in sinister terms that emphasise the relentlessness of exploitation in the camps. ‘For the Company night and day were the same, drought and rain, calm and wind, because the work of drilling could not be abandoned for an instant’.²⁴⁴ The rigs, drills and towers of the oil-camps in both novels are not only structures which represent the power of transnational interests and symbolise the oppression of the workers of colour, but are simultaneously part of a new eco-system, an alien set of extra-human natures, which take the place of the natural landscape that they have destroyed and disfigured. They are monstrous not only in their size, but also in the psychological impact and sensory influence that they wield over the inhabitants of the camps. In *Guachimanes* the reader witnesses how the Venezuelan pueblos in which oil has been found have become sensorially saturated with the oil-commodity:

²⁴¹ ‘[...] las simétricas calles bordeadas de hermosas casitas de madera, levantadas sobre espigas de cemento y bien provistas de rejilla metálica para burlar la acechanza del zancudo; el limpio cuadrilátero del tenis; la piscina amplia de aguas azules en la que lindos rubecitos nadaban alegres y ágiles, musculados y rollizos [...]’. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, pp. 49-50.

²⁴² ‘Eran callejuelas sucias, de pisos arenosos; casas hechas como parapetos contruidos con tablas de *pitchi-pan* de embalajes ya rechazados, techos bajísimos de hierro galvanizado que se calentaban en el mediodía hasta fingir un oleaje de fuego bajo la furia del sol; chiquillos ventrudos, exhibiendo sobre la piel desnuda de las barriguitas los chorros secos del chocolate de agua o del cacao negro que tomaron.’ Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, pp. 49-50.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 50.

²⁴⁴ ‘Eran las tres de la madrugada y la cuadrilla de Tony Roberts había iniciado su turno a media noche. Para la Compañía eran iguales la noche y el día, la sequía y la lluvia, la calma y la viento, porque el trabajo de perforación no debía detenerse un instante’. Otero Silva, *Oficina No 1*, p. 66.

[...] Even at the edge of the lake stained with floating patches iridescent with oil, and after having woven amongst drills spraying water into the soil, one finds the motorboat at the long, narrow pier of some town or oil camp. It smells of tar, of gasoline, of mene, of smoke. It smells of the cheap perfume of prostitutes [...] At the foot of every drill the hoist of the rocker arm moves incessantly, without any worker to oversee the automatism of that constant suction of the subsoil: [...] and in that way from the deposits the oil runs runs directly into oil pipelines towards the collector tanks, immense, cylindrical, the colour of money and smoke, situated close to the pier, repeatedly crisscrossing the ends of the town's streets. And when the exploited ground is far from the coast, from those bulky tanks are also borne thick tubes that cross kilometres, which pass through foreign lands, cross grain-fields, skirt rivers of clear waters constantly threatened by the seepage of oil, until [they] arrive at the ports where the bellies of tanker ships wait to take away the riches that never return. In the silence of the burning noon, during the cool nights, in front of the birds at midnight, at every hour, the rocker bends forward its lever and drinks petroleum, drinks tirelessly. No-one stops to observe the monotony of that movement: only the watchman, on horseback, passes through the streets, throwing tired glances at the foot of the drills, or sometimes a dirty, half naked child takes shelter near the slow rhythm of the rocker-arm [...].²⁴⁵

The oil-drills, hoists and rockers form part of a new, massive, invasive landscape, constantly creaking and whirring and dripping 'floating patches' of polluting, 'iridescent' effluent into the rivers and lakes of the towns (and indeed, all across the country as they make their journey to the coast for exportation, skirting rivers of 'clear water' which will soon be polluted by petroleum). Moreover, the oil-infrastructures described by Bracho Montiel explicitly symbolise the workings of the petro-capitalist world-system at large, as the oil which the hoists and drills extract is transported across 'foreign lands' through pipes to the 'bellies of tanker ships' to be taken away for refining and sale in other nation-states. This is a powerful

²⁴⁵ [...] También al margen del lago manchado por flotantes zonas tornasoles de aceite, y después de haberse tejido entre cabrias sembradas aguas adentro, encuentra la lancha gasolinera el muelle estrecho y largo de algún pueblo o campamento petrolero. Huele a brea, a gasolina, mene, a humo. Huele al perfume barato de las prostitutas [...] Al pié de cada cabria hace su incesante movimiento de báscula el balancín, sin que ningún obrero vigile el automatismo de aquel constante succionador del subsuelo; [...] y así, del yacimiento corre el aceite directamente por oleoductos hasta los tanques colectores, inmensos, cilíndricos, color de plata y humo, situados cerca de los embarcaderos, tapando muchas veces el fin de las calles del poblado. Y cuando el suelo explotado dista mucho de la costa, nacen también de estos tanques gruesas tuberías que atraviesan kilómetros, pasan sobre las tierras ajenas, cruzan sembrados, bordean ríos de claras aguas amenazadas para siempre por el escape aceitoso, hasta llegar a los puertos donde esperan los vientres de los buques cisternas para llevarse la riqueza que nunca vuelve. En el silencio de los mediodías ardientes, durante la noche fresca, frente a los pájaros de la madrugada, a toda hora, el balancín cabecea su palanca y chupa petróleo, chupa incansablemente. Nadie se detiene a observar la monotonía de aquel movimiento, solo el guachimán de caballo, pasa por los caminos lanzando miradas cansadas hacia el pie de las cabrias; o tal vez un niño sucio, semidesnudo, se acoge al ritmo lento del balancín [...]. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 10.

representation of the global network of trade and exchange and the emptying out of natural resources from peripheral regions of the world-system.²⁴⁶ These structures of oil architecture, then, embody the overlapping realities of, firstly, the despoliation of Venezuelan extra-human nature; and secondly, the shadowy, abstract presence of the world-systemic forces that convert oil into profit. The 'tanks [...] the colour of money and smoke' emphasise the idea of oil-profits as ethereal, money that is rapidly made and then removed from the country, or in Bracho Montiel's own words, 'riches that never return'.²⁴⁷

On a fundamental level, then, the structures of oil extraction form a potent sensory backdrop – one which is part of the rhythm of everyday life in the oil camps; 'no one stops to observe' their motion but they are 'invasive' and insistent in their physical domination of the spaces of the camp. Yet they also seem to possess more agency than the characters themselves, 'incessant' in their work and in constant, unsupervised motion, a 'monotony of movement' that becomes not only normalised but also completely overpowering and perniciously seductive. They loom over the characters' lives, in a manner hypnotic for the most downtrodden protagonists such as Bracho Montiel's long-suffering Tochito García, as he goes about his own day-to-day activities: 'In his slow march he stared with fixed eyes at the

²⁴⁶ On the historical reality of ecological degradation as a result of oil extraction in Venezuela, see Miguel Tinker Salas who writes of the oil wells dug in small towns which 'often spewed their contents over lakes, land and foliage. The smell of oil and leaking gas wafted over the communities, and the once pristine Lake Maracaibo, the largest body of freshwater in South America, became quickly contaminated'. Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 7.

²⁴⁷ Indeed, Bracho Montiel's description of the oil infrastructure resonates with a similar description given by Galeano about Lake Maracaibo:

The lake is a forest of towers. Within these iron structures the endlessly bobbing pumps have for half a century pumped up all the opulence and all the poverty of Venezuela. Alongside, flames lick skyward, burning the natural gas in a carefree gift to the atmosphere. There are pumps even in houses and on street corners of towns that spouted up, like the oil, along the lakeside-towns where clothing, food, and walls are stained black with oil, and where even whores are known by oil nicknames, such as "The Pipeline," "The Four Valves," "The Derrick," "The Hoist." Here clothing and food cost more than in Caracas. These modern villages, of cheerless birth but quickened by the euphoria of easy money, have discovered that they have no future. When the wells die, survival becomes something of a miracle: skeletons of houses remain, oily waters lick abandoned shores and poison the fish. Mass firings and growing mechanization bring misfortune, too, to cities that live from exploiting still-active wells. "Oil has come and gone for us here," people were saying in Lagunillas in 1966. "It would have been better for us if these machines had never come [...]" Cabimas, which for fifty years was Venezuela's biggest oil source and brought so much prosperity to Caracas and the oil companies, does not even have privies. It has two asphalt streets.

Galeano, *Open Veins*, p. 168.

constant nodding of the rocker-arms tirelessly drinking, drinking, drinking'.²⁴⁸ The sheer size of the drills, rigs and towers seem to 'fence in the horizon' but also seem to become part of the characters' own physicality.²⁴⁹ Cerefino, for example, the father of Tochito's lover Marulalia in *Guachimanes*, considers the rocker-arms of the oil rigs in relation to his own body: 'in his chest beat an ingenuous heart, to the same beat as the rocker-arms which drink the black juice from the ground from which they have stolen it'.²⁵⁰ Small, select snapshots such as these demonstrate to the reader the overwhelmingly invasive presence of the oil-architecture, which looms over the landscape of each novel, but also comes to be embodied and internalised within the characters themselves.

The oil-infrastructures possess a simultaneously destructive and hypnotic command over both extra-human landscapes and human minds. In *Oficina No 1* Otero Silva describes the strange, mysterious 'birth of a drill [...] a steel skeleton that began to weave its way upwards, and around whose stark architecture spun the life of everyone from the moment that they planted its talons of cement in the earth'.²⁵¹ The language chosen here evokes both a reptilian, prehistoric sinuosity, but also an immovable permanence which seems organic in nature (through references to 'skeleton(s), talons' and so on) and becomes hypnotically compelling to the workers. With the 'birth' of the new drill and the construction of new oil towers in *Oficina No 1*, workers flood in:

From Zulia came drillers and American mechanics, as well as two or three criollo workers [who were] experienced in the construction of oil towers. Already the first of these towers was erected among the strong winds. Teams of men took turns incessantly, night and day, at the foot of its metallic beams or climbed like monkeys to the highest crossbeams.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ 'En su marcha lenta se miró ahora con fijos ojos el constant cabecear de los balancines incansables chupando, chupando, chupando'. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 40.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁵⁰ 'El viejo mira hacia el horizonte enrejado por las cabrias, mientras late en su pecho un corazón ingenuo al mismo compás de los balancines que chupan el zumo negro del suelo que le arrebataron.' Ibid., p. 32.

²⁵¹ 'A cincuenta pasos de la posada de las hermanas Maleta [...] nació una cabria. Era un esqueleto de acero que comenzó a tejerse hacia lo alto y alrededor de cuya descarnada arquitectura giró la vida de todos desde el momento mismo en que se plantaron en tierra sus talons de cemento'. Otero Silva, *Oficina No 1*, p. 65.

²⁵² 'Del Zulia llegaron perforadores y mecánicos americanos, además de dos o tres obreros criollos avezados en la edificación de torres petroleras. Ya la primera de esas torres se alzaba entre los ventarrones. Los equipos de hombres se turnaban incesantemente, noche y día, al pie de sus vigas metálicas o trepados como simios a los travesaños más altos'. Otero Silva, *Oficina No 1*, p. 65.

Bracho Montiel also describes oil towers in similar, oddly organic terms in *Guachimanes*, as possessing ‘stems of steel whose foliage they called rigs,’ part of a new petro-ecosystem which displaces and distorts the natural Venezuelan landscape.²⁵³ As the passages above make clear, all of this oil infrastructure seems to take on the qualities of agency, sentience and intelligence in both novels while the workers under the gaze of the infrastructure become reduced to objects or animals – a purposeful form of Marx’s original descriptions of extreme commodity fetishism which inverts the characters’ (and readers) relation to inanimate ‘things’.²⁵⁴ The oil platforms, drills, towers and rigs come to shape characters behaviours and mindsets, affecting the ways in which they conduct their own forms of life-making, as their day-to-day routines (both the workday and their own personal, leisure time) comes to revolve primarily around the functioning of the camp’s oil infrastructure and the production of profit from extractive enterprises.

However, the more pressing reality that underpins both novels concerns the *determinants* for these inequalities. As has been made clear, both Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva attempt to cognitively map the connections between the local, everyday reality of the oil camps and of the two systemic determinants of these inequalities. The first, on the national level, is the Gómez regime and its promotion of the doctrine of modernisation/westernisation-through-oil. The second is the international finance markets and the machinations of anonymous but highly powerful individuals and groups, such as the shareholders at the head of North-American oil companies. In other words, while the violent exploitation of certain kinds of bodies (and extra-human natures) engaged in the physical labour of extraction is direct and clear, the authors’ larger agenda is to link this bodily domination to the more abstract pressures and violence of finance capital, and indirectly to make clear that the petro-capitalist world-system is one which has both local and global pressure points (textual evidence for this point is ample, and will be introduced later in this chapter). At the local level, it is the government of Juan Vicente Gómez which is responsible for the exploitation of human and extra-human natures on the oil frontier; the nation’s first dictator from 1908 to 1955, Gómez’s regime was inextricably linked to the oil-commodity and the riches it provided.

²⁵³ ‘Nacieron tallos de acero a cuyo ramaje llamaron cabria [...]’. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 33.

²⁵⁴ The idea of commodity fetishism briefly discussed here is based on Marx’s original conception, analysis and discussion of commodity fetishism in *Capital*.

El Primer Guachimán: Juan Vicente Gómez's Petro-Soaked Politics

For Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva, the oil-camps of 1920s and 1930s Venezuela are intense expressions of the nation's petroleum-driven-modernisation. These oil frontiers are specific sites or geographical nodes, where the violence of the petro-capitalist system is enacted most nakedly and brutally upon peripheral populations. It is clear in both novels that a part of the responsibility for the exhaustion and exploitation of human and extra-human natures in Venezuela's oil camps lies, on the national level, with the nation's dictator, Juan Vicente Gómez.

As Ignacio Cabrujas notes, Gómez was the nation's first 'magician' who used oil in order to 'fashion political life into a dazzling spectacle of national progress through tricks of prestidigitation'.²⁵⁵ Gómez became head of state as a result of his military and political skills, but it was only by becoming the ruler of an oil nation that he was able to 'stabilise and consolidate his power'.²⁵⁶ Facing economic chaos after the overthrow of Cipriano Castro in 1908, Gómez, described by Galeano as 'the carnival king of [...] concessions,' sought to restore order by inviting foreign capital to invest with the guarantee of labour peace and flexible business conditions.²⁵⁷ He did more than attract investments – he reciprocated by 'maintaining the most liberal oil policy in all of Latin America'.²⁵⁸ By maintaining this 'exceptionally advantageous investment climate' for foreign (mainly North-American) oil companies, the companies (and the U.S government) in turn assisted in the maintenance of political and economic conditions in Venezuela that 'helped consolidate his dictatorial rule and turned him into one of America's wealthiest men'.²⁵⁹ Stephen Rabe points out, for example, that on 'multiple occasions the U.S. moved to strengthen Gómez's regime by deploying navy ships to Venezuelan waters, sharing intelligence on dissidents and dispatching dignitaries to

²⁵⁵ Ignacio Cabrujas, quoted in Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 77.

²⁵⁷ Galeano, *Open Veins*, p. 168.

²⁵⁸ William M. Sullivan, Brian S. McBeth and Brian Stuart, *Petroleum in Venezuela: A Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), p. 258.

²⁵⁹ Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 68.

visit the dictator'.²⁶⁰ Gómez's dealings with foreign oil companies²⁶¹ and the resources that the government received from the export of oil throughout the 1920-30s provided the 'symbolic power and revenues' needed to 'expand the state, limit the power of regional elites and harness political opponents'.²⁶² Western oil corporations and the president of Venezuela 'conditioned' one another, as Coronil writes, and as such 'defined the social landscape in which Venezuelans began to recognize the elusive presence of oil and fashion their political identity as citizens of an oil nation'.²⁶³ Of course, Gómez himself was none too concerned about either his citizens or the social landscape (and while the oil flowed, certainly not the ecological landscape!) of the country. As Galeano scathingly writes in *Open Veins*:

While the black geysers spouted on all sides, Gómez took petroleum shares from his bursting pockets to reward his friends, relations, and courtiers, the doctor who looked after his prostate, the generals who served as his bodyguards, the poets who sang his praises, and the archbishop who gave him a special dispensation to eat meat on Good Friday. The great powers covered Gómez's breast with gleaming decorations: the automobiles invading the world's highways needed food. The dictator's favorites sold concessions to Shell or Standard Oil or Gulf; the traffic in influence and bribes provoked speculation and set mouths watering for subsoil. Native communities were robbed of their lands and many farm families lost their holdings in one way or another.²⁶⁴

The massive levels of crude exported out of Venezuela for sale on the international market allowed Gómez to finance several public works ventures within the country which did have some benefit for (middle-class, urban) Venezuelan citizens. For example, oil wealth paid for an extensive new highway system which connected more parts of Venezuela than ever before. More automobiles were produced, and there was more radio-broadcasting and a wider production and distribution of newspapers and magazines.²⁶⁵ Petroleum revenues paid off the

²⁶⁰ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Road to OPEC: The United States and Venezuela, 1917-1976* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), (pp. 11-37), p. 11.

²⁶¹ Shell and later Standard Oil, as well as other firms, invested heavily throughout the 1920s and Gómez, whose government remained propped up by their support for the duration of his rule, preserved unrestrictive conditions and guaranteed social peace for the entire duration of his rule, allowing them free rein to extract and export petroleum. By the late 1930s, Standard Oil and Shell had come to control 85% of oil extraction in Venezuela (50% and 35% respectively).

²⁶² Tinker Salas, 'Oil and Politics: An Enduring Relation,' *The Enduring Legacy*, pp. 205-237 (p. 207).

²⁶³ Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 68.

²⁶⁴ Galeano, *Open Veins*, p. 168.

²⁶⁵ Ewell, *Venezuela: A Century of Change*, pp. 61-2.

country's entire foreign debt in 1930, as well as most of the national debt, and successfully financed the state during the global economic depression. Gómez promoted the building of railway and port facilities and was also responsible for the construction of many new public buildings. The coming of the oil industry created widespread employment and meant that commerce prospered as a result of the industry's foreign imports and domestic purchases. But the regime remained highly oppressive even as it oversaw huge wealth generation. Gómez outlawed all other political parties, muzzled the press and strove to dissolve all opposition through an elaborate spy organisation. Paid informers in the army, bureaucracy, Foreign Service and in the streets enabled Gómez to hunt down his antagonists. Critics were silenced by frequent arrests and incarceration, opponents were tortured, while the regime's propaganda machine depicted Gómez in an unflaggingly positive light abroad and at home.

From the early days of Gómez's rule, he recognised that the U.S., Dutch and British oil companies were better had as allies than enemies. In 1918 he allowed them to 'draft the kind of petroleum legislation under which they wished to operate and then decreed it the law of the land'.²⁶⁶ This attitude meant that over the next decade, the presence of vast oil deposits in numerous locations transformed Venezuela from an insignificant oil producer at the end of the First World War to the world's second largest producer and a leading exporter by 1928. As a result of a private system of commerce, a close connection developed between the growth of the oil industry and Gómez's personal fortunes. The government was highly biased towards the needs and demands of foreign companies and finance capitalists, often giving these groups preferential treatment over Venezuelan workers. Very little was done to improve the situation of poor rural Venezuelans, whose living standards were terribly low. Meanwhile, the oil companies, while they did of course hire and accommodate their native and migrant workers, had little regard for their health and safety in the early days of the industry, and equally little regard for the needs of the local community, whose environments were seized and polluted by the companies' extractive activities.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Lieuwen, *Venezuela, 2nd Ed.* p. 48.

²⁶⁷ In 1925, for example, L. Calivani, the Technical Inspector of Mines, reported that since Lake Maracaibo was contaminated with oil, the company should supply the lakeshore communities with fresh drinking water. In another incident, a drilling rig was placed next door to the house of Clementina Romeros, and the lady was evicted when the drilling flooded her house with oil.

B. S. McBeth, 'National and Local Effects of the Oil Industry', *Juan Vicente Gómez and the Oil Companies in Venezuela, 1908-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 109-157 (p. 142).

For Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva, the Gómez regime and its rhetoric of modernisation, its subservience to foreign corporations and exploitation of Venezuelan land and labour power, is inextricably linked to neo-colonialism and to the history of uneven development both in Venezuela and across the world-system. For both writers, Gómez is a primary agent of oil imperialism, the ultimate embodiment of all of the repressive forces active in Venezuelan oil camps and the figure at the helm of Venezuela's exploitation. While *Guachimanes* and *Oficina No 1* register the supposed success of the oil boom in Venezuela through descriptions of frenzied extractive activity in the oil frontier, they also recognise that in the government's attempt to modernise Venezuela, the disjoint between the 'oil ontologies' of core nations and the material realities of oil in Venezuela is explicitly revealed.²⁶⁸ As we will see, it is Bracho Montiel's protagonist, Tochito, who identifies the numerous figures that collaborate with and work under the Gómez regime in order to facilitate North-American and elite Venezuelan interests – they are, in Tochito's words “‘guachimanes todos!’”²⁶⁹ The figure of the guachimán (or camp watchman) is here usefully extended to become a critique of all figures in the local Venezuelan contexts of the pueblo and the nation who contribute to what Bracho Montiel's characters call 'la tragedia nacional' of Venezuelan entanglement in the neo-colonial matrix of power.²⁷⁰ It is the specific contours of this entanglement in terms of the way the oil industry in Venezuela is inflected by, and itself inflects, older colonial dynamics, hierarchies of power and domination, that I turn to next.

The Coloniality of Oil

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano's original concept of the 'coloniality of power' seeks to account for what Ramon Grosfoguel calls the 'entangled and mutually constitutive relations between the international division of labour, global racial/ethnic hierarchy and hegemonic Eurocentric epistemologies in the modern/colonial world system'.²⁷¹ The concept of coloniality refers to the fact that although colonial administrations and institutions have been almost entirely dissolved, non-European peoples continue to live under Euro-American

²⁶⁸ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 4, p. 806.

²⁶⁹ Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 60.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁷¹ Ramon Grosfoguel, 'World-System Analysis and Post-Colonial Studies: A Call for a Dialogue from the 'Coloniality of Power' Approach,' in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. by Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 95-104 (p. 95).

hegemony, exploitation and domination; there is a 'crucial structuring process' at play in the modern/colonial world-system, that 'articulates peripheral locations into the international division of labour'.²⁷²

Quijano explains that in the constitution of the Americas, 'social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities [...] Race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification' and the concept of race was a way of 'granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by conquest'.²⁷³ The 'indios' (a derogatory term for the indigenous peoples of the Americas, translated as 'Indians')²⁷⁴ and (later) the transplanted Africans were deemed to be primitive, homogenous peoples while Europeans were designated as the 'moderns of humanity and its history'.²⁷⁵ The creation of a racialised hierarchy of work and pay (with whites paid a wage and indigenous labourers or African slaves unwaged) meant that 'all forms of labour control' could then 'revolve around capital-salary relations and the world market' with the indigenous and enslaved forced to engage in unpaid labour.²⁷⁶ The racist distribution of labour was utilised in numerous locations and countries during the expansion of a European, colonialist-capitalist world-system; today it is still the (semi-)peripheral nations (and regions) that suffer most severely from the unequal international division of labour, which remains heavily racialised. Many economies of the

²⁷² Grosfoguel, *The Postcolonial and the Global*, p. 95.

²⁷³ Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Social Classification', in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 181-224 (pp. 181-183).

²⁷⁴ The history of the term 'indio' is an important one. Historically used to collectively define the various, heterogenous indigenous populations of Mexico, South and Central America, 'indio' or American Indian, was at the centre of one of the first debates about nature and the limits of humanity.

See Marisa Belausteguigoitia, 'From Indigenismo to Zapatismo: Scenarios of Construction of the Indigenous Subject' in *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories*, ed. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Marisa Belausteguigoitia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 23-26; María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, 'Indigenismo as Nationalism: From Liberal to Revolutionary Era,' in *Critical Terms*, pp. 37-44.

²⁷⁵ 'The Eurocentric perspective of power' Quijano goes on to write 'was based in two myths: firstly, the idea of history of human civilisation as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe and secondly, the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans were natural/racial differences'. The coloniality of power codified a relationship of binaries: East/West, primitive/civilised, magic-mythic/scientific, irrational/rational, traditional/modern, with race always as the basic category of differentiation.' Quijano, *Coloniality at Large*, pp. 190-191.

²⁷⁶ Quijano goes on to note that 'control of global commercial traffic by dominant groups headquartered in the Atlantic zones propelled in these places a new process of urbanisation based on expansion of commercial traffic between them, and consequently, the formation of regional markets increasingly integrated and monetised due to the flow of precious materials originating in the Americas. Western Europe became a new geo-cultural identity emerged as the central site for control of the world market [...] other regions and populations were colonised and incorporated into the new world market under European dominion remained under non-waged relations of labour'. Ibid., p. 183, 186.

expanded Caribbean remain vulnerable to impersonal, exterior economic forces over which they have little control. To put it succinctly, a coloniality of labour-relations has ‘continued to determine the social geography of capitalism’ ever since the continent’s initial colonisation.²⁷⁷ Quijano’s theorisation of the ‘coloniality of power’ is remarkable in its identification of the historical relationship between race, labour and capital that continues into the contemporary period. However, it is also useful in its understanding of the hegemony of European epistemologies and the processes of ‘re-identification’ pressed upon indigenous peoples, resulting in a multifaceted colonisation of indigenous practices of life-making/knowledge production.²⁷⁸ The concept of the ‘colonality of power’ and the strands of thought which make up this idea, including the consideration of the racialised division of labour and the creation/imposition of European epistemologies, is productive when thinking through the specific forms taken by petro-capitalism in the expanded Caribbean. For the purposes of this chapter, it is also instructive in helping the literary critic understand the ways in which the oil industry in Venezuela retains elements of colonial power relations, and the ways in which this reality is disseminated in specific Venezuelan literatures.

The ‘coloniality of power’ is helpful when applied to the global oil economy in two main ways. Firstly, the concept of ‘coloniality’ allows for the expression of the fact that current, contemporary capitalist economic modes and structures are inflected by the ideological legacies of colonialism. These include the orientation of peripheral economies around a single resource such as oil and the racialisation of labour, which in turn sustains the ideological hierarchies of superiority/inferiority, European-(North-American)/non-European. The international division of labour and unequal accrual of profit and resources across the

²⁷⁷ Kingsbury, *Fueling Culture*, p. 370.

²⁷⁸ Domination through re-identification was a process by which colonised peoples were made to naturalise the European cultural imaginary as the only way of relating to nature, the social world and their own subjectivity, in an attempt to change the dominated populations into images of the ‘new European man’. The epistemologies produced by European hegemony generated the notion that the indios of the Americas and the black enslaved peoples of Africa were primitive and homogeneous while Europeans were naturally superior and modern. Crucially, this meant that Europe was the exclusive producer of modernity and so any modernisation in other societies equated to Europeanisation. European culture then became a ‘seduction’ since it gave access to power; as Santiago Castro-Gómez notes, ‘cultural Europeanisation turned into an aspiration [...] it became a means of participating in colonial power’.

Anibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality of power, eurocentrism, and social classification’ in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 190.

See also: Santiago Castro-Gómez, ‘(Post) Coloniality for Dummies: Latin American Perspectives on Modernity, Coloniality and the Geo-Politics of Knowledge,’ in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 259–285 (pp. 281–82).

social geography of the (petro-capitalist) world-system means that vulnerable, peripheral populations remain locked into the neo-colonial matrix of power, in which who is modern and developing is decided crucially by who produces and gets to use oil. Oil has, as Donald Kingsbury pithily puts it, come to ‘determine the social geography of capitalism’ and now underlies ‘all forms of subjectivity, culture and knowledge production’.²⁷⁹ Moreover, the ways in which the oil-commodity ‘distributes costs and benefits and the degree to which a relation to oil is seen as positive or negative’ is unevenly patterned across the core and peripheries of the world-system.²⁸⁰ Secondly, when Quijano’s concept is viewed through the lens of the oil economy, it expresses the notion that the specific ideologies that have become attached to the oil-commodity are associated with core, or ‘Western,’ nations. These notions of oil as the vehicle of progress, the vehicle which allows for modernisation (read: ‘Westernisation’) continues to propagate older (colonial) ideas of ‘Western’ civilisations as the original flag-bearers of modernity and their citizens as the ‘moderns’ of the world-system.

In 1982, Eric Wolf argued that the logic of coloniality meant that many colonised peoples have been subjected to the state of ‘peoples without history’.²⁸¹ This idea finds its material realisation in the context of the Venezuelan oil frontier, where for a long time the notion existed of a backwards, primitive Venezuela populated by indigenous (and equally primitive) agricultural labourers which in the 1920s was transformed — or rather, given an existence — by the arrival of European and North-American oil companies, whereupon the nation began a process of modernisation through its introduction to and interaction with ‘Western’ methods of oil extraction, as well as the oil-commodity itself, which was of course ripe with ideological connotations and associations, stereotypes and assumptions.²⁸² ‘The

²⁷⁹ Kingsbury, *Fueling Culture*, p. 370.

²⁸⁰ For example, ‘when citizens of the global North raise alarms over oil,’ Kingsbury writes, ‘they tend to worry that convenience, freedom and wealth of oil-driven industrialisation have poisoned the planet and so should not be expanded elsewhere. These concerns reinforce the modern/colonial hierarchy under the guise of eco-consciousness, dividing the world into “good” (or at least piously guilty) and “bad” (irresponsible, short-sighted, polluting) countries. In this “post-petroleum” developmentalism, the North remains the agent of Enlightenment and the South the ill-disciplined pupil’.

Ibid., 370.

²⁸¹ Eric R. Wolf, 1982. *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1982), p. 10. See also: ‘On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Heritage in Latin American Heritage Politics and Nostalgia between Coloniality and Indigeneity’ in *Entangled Heritages: Postcolonial Perspectives on the Uses of the Past in Latin America*, ed. by Olaf Kaltmeier and Mario Rufer (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 17).

²⁸² Despite the national myth of ethnic heritage (that of ‘café con leche’, or coffee with milk, symbolizing the mixing of Spanish, indigenous and African blood) the majority of poor Venezuelans have always been black or mestizo (of mixed race), while the upper classes are generally whiter and more European looking. See also, with

notion of a backward Venezuela is rooted in the idea that the discovery of oil was synonymous with progress and modernisation' writes Tinker Salas – but not only this, for the success of the Venezuelan oil industry was, at least in the early years, associated with the extractive capabilities of oil companies of the core nations, without whom oil extraction in Venezuela was regarded as unachievable.²⁸³

As a consequence, the oil industry became an instrument of modernity in Venezuela. Many of the oil workers who were employed by the foreign oil transnationals, as well the middle classes of Venezuela's large cities, developed a vision of a modern Venezuelan nation rooted in the social and political values promoted by the industry — a psychological 're-identification' of the type discussed by Quijano. This meant that whole swathes of Venezuelans, from all social backgrounds, came to associate oil with luxurious, 'westernised' lifestyles, as well with as narratives of individual, entrepreneurial self-betterment and an increase in status through access to oil's byproducts. Under these conditions, the oil camp became a crucial location of 'social engineering and cultural hegemony'; gradually the values that were propagated by the industry and formed in the camps seeped down to influence the 'common sense' beliefs of a large part of the population.²⁸⁴ The oil camp was, in other words, a particularly crucial pressure point in the wider context of the petro-capitalist world-system, a location pregnant with national significance and the centre of numerous fantasises of 'modernity' and the glamour of petro-progress. It was, so to speak, the 'frontier of the frontier' and so a collective site in which particularly intense modalities of subject formation and hierarchical domination – components of the colonality of oil's presence – were played out, as well as a series of myths regarding the importance of the industry to the Venezuelan nation and society. As Miguel Tinker Salas notes, oil 'not only determined the character of the Venezuelan economy but also created a false image of the nation, a national consensus premised on the illusion of prosperity. The portrayal of a prosperous oil economy transforming the nation obscured the fact that a significant portion of the Venezuelan

regards to ethnicity and class in Venezuela, Winthrop Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Angelina Eltz-Pollak, *La negritud en Venezuela* (Caracas: Lagoven, 1991); Richard Graham, *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Miguel Saignes Acosta, 'Los descendientes de africanos y la formación de la nacionalidad en Venezuela', *Anuario* 3 (1956).

²⁸³ Tinker Salas, 'A Tropical Mediterranean: Lake Maracaibo at the Turn of the Century,' *The Enduring Legacy*, (pp. 15-39), p. 15.

²⁸⁴ Tinker Salas, 'Introduction,' *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 5.

population existed on the margins of the oil economy'.²⁸⁵ This marginalised 'portion of the population' included, of course, the oil-workers themselves. Tinker-Salas goes on to write that 'the early industry was characterised by tangled and discordant class and racial antagonisms' antagonisms rooted in oil's coloniality.²⁸⁶ Inevitably, it also resulted in the exploitation of labour in the camps, which themselves being highly stratified and racialised, further propagated the coloniality of oil.²⁸⁷

In *Guachimanes* and *Oficina No 1*, the fact of oil's coloniality resonates most vividly in the representations of the novels' lower class of workers, comprised mainly of people of colour. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, oil companies such as Caribbean, VOC, Lago and Standard used the islands of Trinidad, Aruba and Curaçao as 'staging areas' for their extractive operations.²⁸⁸ As a result, people came to work in the oil camps from various islands from the archipelago, including Trinidad, Grenada and Curaçao, and from much further afield: Mexicans, Chinese and Middle Eastern workers all laboured in the camps, alongside indigenous Venezuelans. The racism faced by both the immigrant and Venezuelan workers became commonplace in the camps. For example, it was commonly assumed by the oil-companies that the native Venezuelan population were primitive tools of labour. Cultural output of the time:

[...] erroneously assumed that locals lacked any skills and in the early phase provided only brute force. This perspective portrayed the migrant worker as a repository of backward cultural practices, Christian values deformed by fetishism and witchcraft, and only rudimentary concepts of nation, family and society: besides serving as an employer, it was suggested, the oil company had to bear the extra "burden" of stripping away these purported negative traits.²⁸⁹

The process was portrayed as an 'epic struggle between two cultures: one primitive, rustic and untamed and the other modern, cosmopolitan, university-trained and refined. For foreign oil companies and the emerging middle class, this portrayal underscored the backwardness of the

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸⁶ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 4, p. 806.

²⁸⁷ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, pp. 6–8.

²⁸⁸ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 108.

²⁸⁹ Tinker Salas, 'La Ruta Petrolera: Learning to Live with Oil', *The Enduring Legacy*, pp. 73–107 (pp. 77–78).

country and the transformative role of oil for the nation and its institutions'.²⁹⁰ This neo-colonial notion of the primitive nature of the indigenous Venezuelan body in the oil-field is roundly critiqued by Otero Silva and Bracho Montiel, primarily through the themes of work and death, where the poor body of colour specifically (not only the Venezuelan labourer but the Afro-Caribbean migrant as well) is dispensable and works in the most precarious, dangerous conditions. It is a stark reminder of Quijano's 'coloniality of power,' where enslaved Africans and indigenous labourers were regarded in similarly racist terms across the expanded Caribbean.

It is Bracho Montiel's primary protagonist, Tochito García, who perhaps best assists the reader in understanding the coloniality of oil on the frontier of modernity. Significantly, the reader first meets Tochito while he is being forced to pay several *multas* (fines) to the colonel for a myriad of insignificant reasons. He is later dismissed from his job for getting into a fight with a U.S. worker (who, incidentally, is not fired) and he is then placed on the company blacklist by the colonel. It is made clear by Bracho Montiel that the blacklist is a form of worker control, a way of condemning the 'rogue' black and brown bodies who rail against their occupation of the most precarious labour positions in the camps. While Bracho Montiel's protagonist can only grasp the hopelessness of his own individual situation, the novel reflects on the significance of racialised, exploitative regulations of the Venezuelan oil-camp within the wider, systemic context. The narrative voice of the text bridges the gap between local and national, hinting at the international functioning of the world-system as one which, being dominated by capitalist relations of production and multinational corporations, requires relations of coloniality in order to produce profit for shareholders.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, pp. 78-9

²⁹¹ Now he was on the blacklist, that list [which is] manufactured by the oil companies [in order] to take a census of the population's dignity, because in it they note down all the names of those who [...] raised their voice louder than the drills, higher than the skyscrapers of Wall Street. It is an ignominious list, in which they mix [the names of] the harmful promiscuity of miserable petty thieves, prisoners of authentic crimes, with those of Venezuelans who did not have a sufficient capacity for submissiveness [...] the blacklist is the threat of eternal ostracism for the worker; an ostracism suffered inside the nation's own borders, yet completely estranged from it, because never again will a worker return to earn his bread in the biggest industry of his fatherland [...] even in the moments in which he works in the furthest region, in the most remote camp – [because they] will immediately go through all of the copies of the famous list, in all of the widest and largest oil-zones. The famous contradictions of imperialism don't exist when this list [...] and the tremendous sanctions that it implies are drafted [...] the list is precise for Anglo-Dutch and Americans, because the grip that it possesses has only one name: imperialism, and nothing more.'

To put it succinctly, the blacklist is a symbol of neo-colonial inequality, aimed primarily at the ‘poor Venezuelans’ even as it is justified as the great equaliser of labour. Nevertheless, the blacklist is only used to terrorise Venezuelan and Afro-Caribbean workers, never the arrivals from the United States. It is part of the physical and symbolic violence enacted upon workers of colour in the oil-camps, a reflection of the coloniality of oil’s effects on the frontier, where colonial systems of punishment and discipline are re-created in a contemporary petro-context and the unevenness of development inherent in the functioning of the world-system manifests itself most clearly and ruthlessly.²⁹² A neo-colonial regulation, the blacklist reflects the larger machinations of the oil-companies and of the distant ‘Anglo-Dutch and American’ shareholders, to whom the ‘contradictions of imperialism’ do not apply. For these shareholders, traders and capitalists, theirs is the reified perspective of the master (versus the slave), structurally unseeing of the workings of the world-system and the racialised division of labour. The blacklist, as Tochito notes, is always ‘justified by the secretary of the civil authorities, those trouble makers and pseudo-intellectuals’ in order to disgrace workers and drive them to poverty as punishment for their disobedience.²⁹³

However, it is the figure of the *guachimán* who most explicitly embodies the dynamics of oil’s coloniality as it is presented by Otero Silva and Bracho Montiel. In Bracho Montiel’s novel, for example, the oil-camp watchman is a potent symbol of racial and social

‘Ya estaba en la lista negra, en esa lista fabricada por las empresas petroleras para censar la población de la dignidad, porque en ella anotan todos aquellos nombres de quienes [...] alzaron la voz más alta que las cabrias, más alta que los rascacielos de Wall Street. Es una lista ignominiosa, donde mezclan en injuriosa promiscuidad los nombres de ladronzuelos miserables, de los reos de delito autentico, con los de aquellos venezolanos que no tuvieron suficiente capacidad de sumisión [...] Pero la lista negra es como una amenaza de ostracismo eterno para el trabajador; ostracismo sufrido dentro de las propias fronteras de la nación, pero complete extrañamiento, porque nunca más podrá volver a ganar el pan un obrero en la máxima industria de su propia patria, debido a que la lista negra está siempre en los archivos de todas las empresas, y aquel que ingresa en ella – aun cuando sea en momentos en que trabaja la más apartada region, en el más remote campamento – pasará inmediatamente a todas las copias de la famosa lista, a lo ancho y largo de todas las zonas petroleras. Para confeccionar esta lista y aplicar la tremenda sanción que ella implica, no existen las famosas contradicciones del imperialismo [...] la lista es exacta para anglo-holandeses y yanquis, porque el puño que la aplica tiene un solo nombre: imperialismo, y nada más.’

Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 41.

²⁹² Not coincidentally, the blacklist as a threat used against workers of colour is emphasised also in Ramón Díaz Sánchez’s *Mene* (published in 1936). *Mene*, commonly regarded as Venezuela’s first ‘great oil novel,’ tells the story of a Trinidadian worker, Enguerran Narcissus Philibert, who suffers from a stomach ailment and accidentally uses a ‘white only’ bathroom, is reprimanded by his boss and loses his job. He is placed on the blacklist, and eventually through despair at the knowledge that he will now never be able to find work within other local oil-camps, commits suicide.

²⁹³ ‘[...] el secretario de la jefatura civil, picapleitos y pseudo-intelectual [...]’. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 41.

divisions. Hired and trained by the foreign oil companies — who did not trust the local police force with their oil equipment or the safety of their North-American workers — the guachimanes were heavily-armed guards that ‘operated as the de facto law throughout the oil fields’.²⁹⁴ They ‘controlled access to company installations, production sites and residential camps’; their presence at the ‘guard station at the entrance of a fenced housing camp, refinery, tank farm or other installation marked the entry to the foreign oil company’s property’.²⁹⁵ In general, foreigners who worked in the oil camps viewed the guachimanes as guardians of their residences who allowed Venezuelans in to work but kept out ‘undesirables.’ Their policing of the U.S. living quarters symbolically maintained the reality of the strict social divisions and hierarchies in the oil-camps, the separation of the North-American worker and his family from the ‘socially backward’ Venezuelans and Afro-Caribbean workers.

In Bracho Montiel’s novel, the watchmen are ‘the defensive sentry of foreign interests and very often the executors of violence decreed by [these interests] although to defend these interests and to fulfil these orders they had to fire against their fellow countrymen, there was no one better than that miserable, servile salaried agent who could represent on a global scale the thousands of accessories and accomplices of the national tragedy’.²⁹⁶ They are vampirical forces, who ‘[...] slept in the day, and left’ in the evenings to do their rounds ‘with a stopwatch hanging from them like a schoolbag and the gun on their belt’.²⁹⁷ The mention of a ‘stopwatch’ makes an explicit connection to the new temporal dictates of the camps (that is, standardised, abstract clock-time) and the guachimanes’ maintenance of working hours and camp order (by violence, if necessary, as the ‘gun on their belt’ suggests) necessary to the extraction of surplus-value under the capitalist mode of production. Their thoughts are likened to the blackness of oil, indicating their possible lack of moral values and their desire for financial gain, yet Bracho Montiel suggests that they too are zombie-like victims of the dictator whom they serve:

They, the first victims of the machine, slaves of the clock that enforces their vigilance and denounces the defeats won by sleep, wander alone through the

²⁹⁴ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, p. 122.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

²⁹⁶ [...] el watchman, al centinela defensor de los intereses extranjeros y muchas veces ejecutor de las violencias ordenadas por ellos, aun cuando para defender esos intereses y para cumplir esas órdenes tuviera que disparar contra el compatriota, nadie mejor que aquel triste agente asalariado y servil podía representar globalmente a los miles de encubridores y cómplices de la tragedia nacional.’ Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 60.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

streets pondering ideas dark as the night, as the hoist, as oil. They whistle forgotten corridos of Apure, old songs from the Trujillo mountain range, gaitas of the Maracaibeno Saladillo; they whistle and advance like bullets! The Company pays for their insomnia, buys their silence and bribes them for their complicity. The colonel rewards their influence, subsidizes their co-operation, negotiates their crimes. The night knows of their work!²⁹⁸

Their singing of folk songs infers the existence of a different, rural social order to that represented by the oil camps and the industrial technologies they are hired to protect, suggesting the local-global contrast between the poorer rural lifestyles of native Venezuelans and the infiltration of North-American corporations in the camps. This fact in of itself subsequently hints at the unevenness of development in the nation and in the world-system at large. Ultimately, the watchmen are also exploited by the Company, loyal due to financial incentives yet wielding a relative measure of power in their role as oppressive tools of the oil-industry and agents of the Venezuelan dictatorship.

It is not only in work, discipline and the hierarchical systems of social control, but also in death that the coloniality of oil on the frontier of modernity is highlighted by the two authors examined here. When, for example, in *Oficina No 1* Francis J. Taylor (a North-American senior overseer) becomes seriously ill, he is taken to hospital as a matter of urgency, whisked away 'that same afternoon in an imposing black automobile, reclined amongst cushions' after having been carefully and quickly attended to by a doctor.²⁹⁹ Meanwhile, when a Venezuelan worker is taken seriously ill the authorities in the oil camps refuse to transport him by car to a hospital because it would be a 'waste of gas'.³⁰⁰ Similarly, in *Guachimanes*, Tochito reminisces to his lover, Marulalia, about a fellow worker, Manuel Corredor, who 'lost his life' when:

²⁹⁸ 'Los guachimánes que duermen de día, asalen ahora con reloj de control colgado como bulto de escolar y el arma al cinto. Primeras víctimas de la máquina, esclavos del reloj que imponen sus vigilas y denuncia la derrotas ganadas por el sueño, vagan por los caminos solitarios rumiando ideas oscuras como la noche, como la cabria, como el petróleo. ¡Silban olvidados corridos del Apure, canciones viejas de la sierra trujillana, gaitas del Saladillo marabino; silban y avanzan como las balas! La compañía paga sus insomnios, compra sus silencios, y soborna sus complicidades. El colonel [...] gratifica sus influencias, subvenciona su cooperación, negocia con sus delitos. ¡La noche sabe de sus obras!' Ibid., p. 12.

²⁹⁹ 'Y se lo llevó esa misma tarde en un pesado automóvil negro, reclinado entre almohadones, a una velocidad de carro de bueyes que mortigaba los saltos en los baches.' Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 72.

³⁰⁰ Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 74.

[...] a gas cylinder had exploded [...] Corredor received all of that discharge and the ground encrusted itself beneath his skin, peppering him, and he, deformed and emitting shrieks, was transferred to the dispensary [...] Doctor Otati was called. The doctor could not arrive immediately because he was having breakfast, and when he arrived to see him later, he wrinkled his forehead and plainly dictated: "This man's condition is grave. He must be taken to Maracaibo." If they had been dealing with with a foreigner, a citizen of North America, the company would have utilised their fastest motorboat; but he was only a native of Venezuela and it was not sensible to use the vehicle reserved for the company's urgent cases. They hurried the departure of one of the everyday service boats and two long hours passed during the voyage; afterwards they delayed another hour between the disembarkation and the journey in the hired car to take him from the pier to the company hospital in Maracaibo. Afterwards [...] they had to bury his body because nothing more would ever be known of Corredor. He was another swallowed by the subsoil!³⁰¹

Both scenes are moments of irony in which the reader witnesses the continuity of colonial forms of discourse with regards to the question of which bodies are important enough to save and which are expendable. Indeed, it is in death and in the processes of dying that oil's coloniality is most starkly witnessed by the reader.

In another instance in *Oficina No 1*, the Venezuelan worker Gabino, described by Montiel as 'the Indian [...] a melancholy, strapping young man'³⁰² contracts syphilis from a prostitute and despairingly commits suicide due to his fear of the consequences; his wife Crucita is due to arrive in the camps 'with their two sad little Indians' and he is certain to bring shame upon his family through the betrayal of his spouse and the contraction of a sexually transmitted disease.³⁰³ 'The great difficulty emerge[s] at the hour of his burial' when

³⁰¹ '[...] la bombona de gas había hecho explosion [...] Corredor recibió toda aquella descarga ya la tierra se incrustó bajo su piel, acribillándole, deformado y dando alaridos [...] llamaron al doctor Otati. El medico no pudo acudir inmediatamente porque estaba desayunándose, y cuando llegó a verle más tarde, arrugó el entrecejo y dictaminó a secas: 'Este hombre esta grave. Hay que llevarle a Maracaibo.' Si se hubiera tratado de un extranjero, de un cízten de Norteamérica, la compañía habría utilizado la más rápida gasolinera; pero era solo un native de Venezuela y no era prudente ocupar el vehículo reservado a casos urgentes de la empresa. Apresuraron la salida de una de las lanchas del servicio habitual y transcurrieron dos horas largas durante el viaje; después tardaron una hora más entre el desembarque y el transporte en un automóvil de alquiler para llevarle del muelle a Maracaibo al hospital de la compañía. Después [...] debieron enterrar su cadaver, porque de Corredor no se había sabido más nada. ¡Fue otro que se tragó el subsuelo!'

Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, pp. 43-44.

³⁰² '(Fue la Greta Garbo, sin embargo, que la enfermó) al indio Gabino, un mocetón medio triste [...]' Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 57.

³⁰³ 'Y ahora Crucita iba a venir con sus dos indiecitos tristes, montados los tres en el mismo burro, y él no encontraría palabras para contarle lo que había pasado.' Ibid., p. 58.

the American overseer, Reynolds, refuses to bury Gabino in the cemetery. When this decree is met with worker resistance, the commissioner Nemesio Arismendi appears with his revolver on show and declares: “Not in the cemetery. The cemetery is situated on Company lands and I, as a representative of the Company, will not permit that a man who has committed suicide is to be buried here next to the others who have died by the design of God’s will.” When the workers protest, he states that: “Well, there is nothing to be done. That cemetery is not yours but the Company’s. And I, as the authority, I am here to create respect for the propriety and rights of each individual. And as the authority I resolve that you will bury that body in another place”³⁰⁴. His words make clear that the Venezuelan labourers do not own the ground in which their corpses are buried, because it is Company land, and veils his prejudice against Venezuelans with a thinly concealed religiosity. Vignettes such as these serve to powerfully illustrate the fact that the lives of indigenous Venezuelan or Afro-Caribbean workers are regarded with scant importance. Unlike the U.S. workers, they are given little autonomy in life and offered meagre respect in death.³⁰⁵

At one critical moment, the stark imbalance in material living conditions, labour roles and differential treatment is registered by the colonel, who considers if he can accept the fact of the parallel realities that run alongside each other in the oil-camps. He wonders whether he could ‘ponder on what was here in these houses of those who gave blood and sweat for the biggest industry of the country? Could he feel on his face the insult that denoted this asphalted frontier of the highway, which put to the right the wellbeing and the luxury’ of the

³⁰⁴ ‘La dificultad grave asumió a la hora del entierro [...] “Y fue preciso que interviniera entonces el comisario Nemesio Arismendi, con el revolver muy visible en la parte delantera de la faja: “En el cementerio no. El cementerio está situado en terrenos de la Compañía y yo, como representante de la Compañía, no permitiré que se entierre a un suicida junto a otros que han muerto por designio de la voluntad de Dios [...] Pues no hay nada que hacer. Ese cementario no es de ustedes sino de la Compañía. Y yo, como autoridad, estoy aquí para hacer respetar la propiedad y los derechos de cada uno. Y como autoridad resuelvo que entierren ese muerto en otra parte”’. Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, pp. 59-61.

³⁰⁵ In yet another example, at the beginning of *Oficina No 1*, an explosion takes the lives of two Venezuelan workers, whose deaths are effortlessly brushed off by the overseer, Mr Taylor, who by the next day: ‘[...] had totally regained his aplomb and thought no more of the two dead men.’ He commands his juniors to “look for two workers to fill the positions of yesterday’s dismissed men” – the use of the word ‘dismissed’ encapsulates the sense of Taylor’s insouciance with regards to the death of his workers. (‘Mister Taylor había recobrado totalmente su aplomo y no pensaba más en los dos hombres muertos [...] “Búsquese does peones para que ocupen los puestos de los despedidos de ayer”’).

Or the example of Clímaco Guevara, who ‘remained paralytic for the rest of his existence’ after falling, unsecured by safety harnesses or any other kind of restraint, from the top of an oil tower near the end of *Oficina No 1*. Guevara is another Venezuelan worker toiling at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, his life of little value to the Company, maimed for life and left without any kind of compensation after a horrific accident which would have been treated very differently had it happened to a white North-American worker (and indeed, would in all probability not have happened at all). ‘Lo importante era que no entregó el alma como todos creían, aunque quedó paralítico para el resto de su existencia’. Ibid., p20, p. 37.

Americans ‘and to the left hunger and rags?’ Of course, for the colonel, slavishly loyal to the interests of the oil company due to the status and small privileges that his elevated position offers him, the answer is of course not, ¡Claro que no!³⁰⁶ The colonel’s identification with the racist ideologies and corporate interests of the company reflect the coloniality of petro-power at work in the novel, as well as the corruption of Venezuelan authority figures who facilitate such profound socio-economic inequalities.

The fact of oil’s coloniality is also reflected in the attitudes of North-American characters from various rungs of the labour hierarchy towards Venezuelan and black workers in both novels. Colonial epistemologies persist in the prejudices made explicit by both Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva: the character of the North-American overseer Reynolds in *Oficina No 1*, for example, is described as possessing a strong, racist dislike of Venezuelans. ‘Reynolds did not find anything to like among those noisy mestizos [...] the inherent disrespect of the natives particularly irritated Reynolds, the inevitable product of their unrestrained mishmash of races’.³⁰⁷ The framing of his attitude in explicitly colonial language is a re-iteration by the author that not only was the coloniality of oil an economic and social reality in 1920s and 1930s Venezuela, but it was also an epistemological one, rooted in ideas about who was human and sub-human.³⁰⁸

Meanwhile, the U.S. workers who come to Venezuela, despite not possessing the same level of wealth as the accionistas (shareholders) at the highest echelons of the oil-companies, still come from fairly affluent lives and are able to escape back into them, to ‘return to civilisation’ as Harry Rolfe puts it, whenever they please.³⁰⁹ They are never subject to ‘high bribes and low salaries’ (under which Venezuelan workers are forced to labour), nor to the

³⁰⁶ ¿Podía él [...] meditar en que eran aquellas las casas de quienes daban sangre y sudor para la más grande industria del país? ¿Podía sentir sobre su rostro la injuria que significaba aquella frontera asfaltada de la carretera, poniendo a la derecha el bienestar y el lujo, y a la izquierda hambre y andrajos? ¡Claro que no! Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 50.

³⁰⁷ ‘[...] Pero Reynolds no se encontraba nada a gusto entre aquellos mestizos bullangueros [...] A Reynolds le chocaba particularmente el natural irrespetuoso de los nativos, fruto inevitable de la descabellada mescolanza de razas.’ Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, pp. 41-2.

³⁰⁸ In addition to this, for North-American labourers in the novel, working in the oil camps with Venezuelans is a temporary, frequently undesirable, means of money-making; the people and culture of Venezuela are both alien and primitive. When the oil is found, the Americans will return back to their life-worlds in the global North and for many of the white US workers in *Oficina No 1*, leaving Venezuela and Latin America is their primary motive for finding oil – as Charles Reynolds tells Francis J. Taylor, “‘The truth is that I wait with impatience for the appearance of your petroleum, Taylor. I have the immense desire to return as soon as possible to the civilised world’”. (“La verdad es que espero con impaciencia la aparición de tu petróleo, Taylor. Tengo inmensas ganas de retornar cuanto antes al mundo civilizado”). Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 41.

³⁰⁹ Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 32.

types of discrimination suffered by native labourers.³¹⁰ Their very reasons for coming to work in the oil camps indicate the comparative privilege which they possess.³¹¹ The privileged social positions of these workers (their living quarters, their type of work and so on) are regarded with contempt and fury by the Venezuelans. Bracho Montiel's protagonist, for example, considers the way in which the oil companies 'had created [a] painful inferiority complex [which] spread through class differences, through the politics of domination by the powerful over the defenseless, [by the] the exploitation of man by man [...] In the worker's heart there fermented a hatred against blonde hair, against rosy faces, against the khaki that created the uniform of and dressed all of those invincible men'.³¹²

Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva's works both draw attention to the hierarchical systems of labour relations and social inequalities on the oil frontiers, and most of the lived experiences described in the novels are specifically *male* experiences. However, there is also an examination of the gendered experience of this exploitation, most visibly through the characterisation of the prostitute. These female figures appear sporadically, most particularly in

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

³¹¹ Let us take two examples from Otero Silva's characterization of these U.S. workers. Charles Reynolds, one of the North-American labourers of *Oficina No. 1*, is described as having '[come from] from a family of good lineage in the city of New Orleans [...] if he had come here working in an oil camp so remote and so destitute he had done it exclusively due to his determination to demonstrate to his father that he was not just a 'social parasite,' not a 'rich kid' as the old man used to slyly call him during after-dinner conversation, but instead a man who knew how to value himself. Charles Reynolds joined an oil company to put an end to, in any way possible, the unbearable sarcastic remarks of his father'. ['Charles Reynolds pertenecía a una familia linajuda de la ciudad de Nueva Orleans y si se hallaba trabajando en un campo petrolero tan remoto y tan desvalido se debía exclusivamente a su empeño en demostrarle a su padre que él no era un "parásito social", ni un "hijo de rico" como solía llamarlo el Viejo socarronamente en sus charlas de sobremesa, sino un hombre que sabía valerse por sí mismo. Charles Reynolds se alistó en una compañía petrolera para ponerle fin de algún modo a las insoportables ironías paternas'] [p. 50]]. Francis J Taylor, another U.S. worker, had, meanwhile, 'been working for the Company since he left the University of Oklahoma with the qualification of geologist in a stylishly written diploma certificate' - a privilege that precious few Venezuelan workers would have had experienced (Otero Silva 37). He worked 'first in Asia Minor, then in Mexico', always receiving 'satisfactory references that slowly accumulated in the central office in Pittsburgh' regarding his work in the camps (37-8). [Francis J. Taylor había trabajado para la Compañía desde que salió de la Universidad de Oklahoma con el título de geólogo en un diploma caligrafiado [...] La Compañía lo enviaron primero al Asia Minor, luego a México. De todas partes llegaron informes satisfactorios que acumularon lentamente en la oficina central de Pittsburgh'] [pp. 37-8]].

As these two examples demonstrate, there is a clearly demarcated set of material privileges enjoyed by the white North-American workers that simply do not form part of the quotidian material realities of Venezuelan or Afro-Caribbean labourers. This fact is matched by specific structures of feeling, embodied in small yet telling vignettes in both novels, in which the North-American workers designate black and Venezuelan workers as inferior, consistently retaining a level of material privilege and a sense of psychological and moral superiority above that of their Venezuelan counterparts.

³¹² '[...] habían planteado integro el doloroso complejo de inferioridad sembrado por la diferencia de clases, por la política del dominio de los poderosos sobre los indefensos, por la explotación del hombre por el hombre [...] en el fondo del obrero fermentaba el odio hacia el pelo rubio, hacia el rostro rozagante, hacia el kaki - que uniformaba en el vestir a todos aquellos hombres invencibles [...]'. Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 50.

Oficina No 1, and despite the piecemeal encounters between sex-workers and labourers, the vignettes through which these women's lives are narrated are replete with meaning. The descriptions of the prostitutes who work in the oil-camps highlight the libidinal, highly eroticized qualities of oil extraction, of the masculinist enterprise of penetrating a (feminised) soil, labouring in order to reach a highly anticipated climax which sends the much-coveted black gold spurting up into the atmosphere. The exhausted, abused bodies of the sex-workers – such as 'Greta Garbo, whose real name no-one knew, a bony, haggard blonde' in *Oficina No. 1* – contain obvious parallels to the equally wearied bodies of the male labourers, but more importantly, they draw attention to the ways in which petro-capitalism on the Venezuelan oil frontier commodifies different types of bodies in multiplicitious and specific ways.

Deemed unchristian and morally repugnant by the labourer (and 'closer to nature,' primitive and backwards by the U.S. labourers and their wives, in line with dominant cultural discourses) prostitutes such as Garbo are nevertheless useful for sensual gratification. In one memorable vignette for example, Charles Reynolds, who has suffered from more than five months of 'sexual abstinence,' sits by his balcony one hot, tropical night 'smoking his pipe and thinking about acts that are incompatible with his puritanical principles'.³¹³ When approached by Greta Garbo he flinches away; '[...] that a man of rigorous moral precepts, educated with clarity of the most indubitable doctrine, would have a roll in the hay with the first stray prostitute that he ran into outdoors!' Of Greta Garbo he ponders: 'from what gloomy den will this woman emerge? What repugnant sores will corrode her soul and body? How many abominable sins will she have committed and how many other beings will she force to commit the same sins?'³¹⁴ Nevertheless, when she begins to flirt with him, coming close to whisper seductively in his ear, he immediately caves, all morality promptly thrown to the wind: 'He kissed her on her eager mouth. Later he went to bed with her'.³¹⁵

The bodies of women of colour on the oil-frontier are subject to a two-pronged

³¹³ '[...] mister Charles Reynolds, que llevaba encima más de cinco meses de abstinencia sexual y tal vez por ese motivo no había logrado dormir aquella noche cálida sino ver gotear las horas desde su cama de campaña, con las manos cruzadas [...] fumando su pipa y pensando en actos incompatibles con sus principios puritanos'. Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 100.

³¹⁴ 'Que un hombre de rigurosos preceptos morales, educado a la claridad de la más indobegable doctrina, se fuese a revolcar con la primera prostituta realenga que lo tropezara en un descampado. ¿De qué tenebroso cubril habrá salido esa mujer? ¿Qué llagas repugnantes le corroerán el alma y el cuerpo? ¿Cuántos abominables pecados habrá cometido y cuantos habrá obligado a cometer a otros seres?' Ibid., p. 101.

³¹⁵ 'Entonces Charles Teynolds dejó caer la linterna y la besó en la boca ávida. Después se fue a dormir con ella'. Ibid., p. 101.

exploitation: not only are they considered primitive (even more so than the men), but they are either rejected for the (paid) work they do, in the case of prostitution, or if the work is unpaid, it is normalised and naturalized as such, an unspoken expectation that is specifically and invariably gendered. If, as Moore argues, commodity frontiers are successful to the degree that they mobilise vast streams of unpaid work to help cheapen the costs of the paid labour through which they operate, then the prostitutes and female characters of the two novels are the ones who engage specifically in unpaid labour, which serves to entertain and nurture the bored and frustrated male workers of the camps. Highlighting the fetishistic tendencies of capitalist exchange, Venezuelan and West Indian women are subject to almost constant objectification, hyper-sexualisation and are often treated as objects to be gambled over and won for a night. The depiction of Rosa Candela by Otero Silva symbolises this hyper-objectification of women in the camps. She ‘was a young girl who had arrived that same morning from Puerto La Cruz’ and possessed a natural sexuality, what Otero Silva calls an ‘indecorous joy and innate shamelessness’ that is matched with a voluptuous body, scantily clothed in a sequined dress when she makes her first appearance in the camp. Her very appearance causes the camp workers to catcall aggressively and stare lewdly at her as she passes by.³¹⁶ She is presented to the men by the bar’s proprietor, La Cubana, provocatively dressed and very much on show as she sits in the bar ‘in front of the lustful gawks of seventy men’ who shout after her –“Let’s have her take her clothes off to see the rest of her!”³¹⁷ La Cubana holds a raffle with Rosa as the winning prize; “Whoever wins the raffle will be the lover of Rosa Candela for the whole week, until Monday morning, with room, bed and food on the house. You have the right to do with her what you wish, make her sweep the room, make her sing the national anthem [...] whatever you wish” (to which the men shout “I’ll give her what she deserves!’ I’ll eat her raw!” and so on).³¹⁸ The ‘hideous’ man who wins her in the raffle does not leave her time to ‘resign herself to her fate’ but ‘grab[s] her by the arm with his

³¹⁶ Rosa Candela era una muchacha que había llegado esa misma mañana, de Puerto La Cruz. No tenía mucho tiempo en el oficio, no obstante su indecoroso contoneo y su innata desvergüenza. Hacía alarde de sus senos redondos y duros, como también de sus magníficas nalgas de mulata, aunque no era mulata sino blanca y con los ojos castaños. Cuando apareció por vez primera en el patio, metida en un traje de lentejuelas tan ceñido que estaba a punto de rasgarse y tan descotado que casi se le veían los pezones, un rugido estalló en cuatro mesas diferentes. “¡Qué me suelten ese novillo!” “¡Aquí estoy yo, mamacita!” Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 173.

³¹⁷ ‘Rosa Candela se deslizó por entre las mesas [...] de frente a los bufidos rijosos de sesenta hombres [...] “¡Qué se quite la ropa para ver si está completa!” Ibid., p. 173.

³¹⁸ “El que se gane la rifa será el amo de Rosa Candela por todo el *güiquén*, hasta el lunes por la mañana, con cuarto, cama y comidas pagadas por la casa. Tiene derecho a hacer con ella lo que le parezca, ponerla a barrer el cuarto, mandarla a cantar el himno nacional, meterle a monja, lo que le parezca”. “¡Yo me la como cruda! ¡Yo le doy lo que se merece!” Ibid., p. 173.

rough, leathery fingers, as if she really [is] an object that belong[s] to him.’³¹⁹ This particular vignette displays the particular vulnerability of the female body in the oil-camp, which is treated as a rare commodity to be bartered over, snatched at and used for the purposes of sexual fulfilment and entertainment. The female body is especially significant in this setting as it comes to represent the peculiar, extractivist logic of the commodity frontier, where extra-human and human natures are appropriated, worked to the bone and thus exhausted. The female body, of course, can be aligned with extra-human natures in the sense that both of these resources are taken with the assumption that they are cheap, in both senses of the word.

To briefly summarise, then, it is evident that both writers employ a narrative discourse which is intended to forefront the coloniality of oil in the camps, consistently and persuasively, at the level of content. However, as we will see in the next section, in registering the oil-commodity’s ‘rhythms of accumulation and underdevelopment’ on both local and world-systemic platforms, they also disrupt conventional narrative modalities and formal principles throughout their work.³²⁰ These disruptions are essential precisely because they seek to make clear the coeval realities of the petro-capitalist world-system: that is, the local exploitation in one node of the world-system, which ensures the enrichment of another.

Representing the Petro-Capitalist World-System

In *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, Roberto Schwarz reflects on the discrepancy between social reality and literary form with reference to his native Brazil.³²¹ His analysis of the clash between nineteenth century Brazilian social reality and the Brazilian novel’s adherence to European cultural ideologies and literary orthodoxies is relevant to a discussion of twentieth century Venezuelan literary form, its registration of petro-capitalism, and the fact of the ‘misplacement’ of certain core oil ontologies in Venezuelan life.

Schwarz reflects on the fact that Brazilians ‘constantly experience the artificial, inauthentic and imitative nature of [their] cultural life’.³²² One of the most important reasons for the sense of cultural imitation (that Schwarz deems inherent in Brazilian society) is the

³¹⁹ ‘Sin embargo, [Rosa Candela] tuvo que resignarse a su destino. Ya Ruperto Longa la había agarrado del brazo con sus dedos de cuero curtido, como si se tratara realmente de un objeto que le perteneciera [...]’ Ibid., p. 175.

³²⁰ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 14–15.

³²¹ Schwarz, ‘Nationalism by Elimination,’ *Misplaced Ideas*, pp. 1–17.

³²² Ibid., p. 1.

importation of European socio-political ideas in the nineteenth century, alongside the existence of slavery in Brazil, both before and after national Independence. The fact that Brazil's slave society sat alongside European principles of liberalism (e.g. ideologies regarding labour, the class divisions of bourgeoisie and proletariat, universalism, equality before the law and so on) resulted, as Schwarz argues, in a fundamental 'disparity', an obvious 'incompatibility' between these ideals and the lived experiences of Brazilian peoples.³²³ After Brazilian independence, the 'socio-economic structure created by colonial exploitation' remained largely unchanged and so it was 'thus inevitable that modern forms of civilisation entailing freedom and citizenship, which arrived together with the wave of political emancipation, should have appeared foreign and artificial'.³²⁴ In independent Brazilian society, the two systems (slavery on the one hand and the middle-class embrace of European liberal ideas) were forced to lock horns and to co-exist, but as Schwarz elaborates, 'in this confrontation, the two principles were not of equal strength: in the sphere of reasoning, principles the European bourgeoisie had developed against arbitrariness and slavery were eagerly adopted; while in practice, sustained by the realities of social life, favor continually reasserted itself, with all the feelings and notions that went with it'.³²⁵ As a consequence, 'in Brazil, ideas were off-center in relation to European usage' due to both Brazil's 'economic dependency and the intellectual hegemony of Europe'.³²⁶ 'In the process of reproducing its social order' Schwarz continues, 'Brazil unceasingly affirms and reaffirms European ideas, always improperly': as a result, the nineteenth century Brazilian novel, by describing local Brazilian life using the European model (and European liberal ideologies) 'unwittingly replays [the] central incongruity in Brazilian intellectual life' which is then reflected in the national literature.³²⁷ (Schwarz also goes on to cite Russian literature as a useful example to clarify his argument).³²⁸ Brazilian authors cannot deny the mismatch between the European novel form

³²³ Schwarz, 'Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Brazil,' *Misplaced Ideas*, pp. 20-40 (pp. 34-35).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³²⁶ Schwarz, 'The Importing of the Novel to Brazil and its Contradictions in the work of Alencar,' pp. 41-69 (p. 48).

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

³²⁸ As Schwarz elucidates:

Perhaps this is comparable to what happened in Russian literature. Faced with the latter, even the greatest novels of the French realism seem naive. And why? In spite of their claims to universality, the psychology of rational egoism and the ethics of Enlightenment appeared in the Russian Empire

and Brazilian social reality, and must find a way of suturing this tear, of acknowledging this misplacement critically and consciously.

The importation of European liberal ideas and novelistic form, both fundamentally misplaced in the local Brazilian context, is a useful conceptual springboard when examining the importation of a certain set of petrocultural beliefs and ideologies to Venezuela, as well as the difficulties experienced by received narrative conventions when attempting to describe the brutal inequalities and corruption of the oil-frontier. The petroculture of the global North – which depicts oil and its innumerable by-products as cheaply and readily accessible to the masses, a resource which creates widespread wealth and personal liberty – when imported to nations of the global South, are, in the Schwarzian sense, profoundly misplaced. In other words, oil-as-wealth/wealth-through-oil, which gives the appearance of a developed reality in core nations, is not manifested in the same way in nations such as Venezuela. The misplacement of Western ‘oil ontologies’ in peripheral nations of the expanded Caribbean is reflected in literatures of the region, because the manifestations of oil’s modernising, liberating tendencies which are prevalent in the core nations cannot be actualised in the same way on, say, the Venezuelan oil-frontier or across Venezuelan society.³²⁹ The fact of oil’s coloniality in Venezuela undercuts the triumphal narratives of core nations which declare oil to be the harbinger of modernity, equality, progress and opportunity. The Venezuelan author in turn must recognise the social realities that the oil industry brings as being connected to Venezuela’s position in the world-system and, in Schwarz’s terms, turn this mismatch into formal principles which manifests an authentically Venezuelan social reality, rather than merely importing and unsuccessfully imitating the oil ontologies of the core nations.

as a “foreign” ideology, and therefore, a localized and relative one. Sustained by its historical backwardness, Russia forced the bourgeois novel to face a more complex reality. The comic figure of the Westernizer, Francophile or Germanophile (frequently under an allegorical or ridiculous name), the ideologies of progress, of liberalism, of reason, all these were ways of bringing into the foreground the modernization that came with Capital. These enlightened men proved themselves to be lunatics, thieves, opportunists, men cruel, vain and parasitical. The system of ambiguities growing out of the local use of bourgeois ideas—one of the keys to the Russian novel—is not unlike the one we described for Brazil. The social reasons for this similarity are clear. In Russia, too, modernization would lose itself in the infinite extent of territory and of social inertia, and would clash with serfdom or its vestiges—a clash many felt as a national shame, although it gave others the standard by which to measure the madness of the individualism and progressomania that the Occident imposed and imposes on the world. The extreme form of this confrontation, in which progress is a disaster and backwardness a shame, is one of the springs of Russian literature.

Ibid., pp. 47–8.

³²⁹ Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 806.

Oficina No 1 and *Guachimanes* seek to represent both the local reality of bodily exploitation, but also the way in which this exploitation connects to the world-system, the larger pressures of finance capital and the interests of shareholders located in cities of core nations. This struggle is represented in the content of the novels but is also registered at the level of form. Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva utilise narrative disruption and multiplicitous viewpoints to express not only the general instability of the oil frontier but also the difficulty faced by the traditional novel form in its representation of the oil-commodity. Their texts also demonstrate the connections between the Venezuelan peripheral frontier and other sites in the petro-capitalist world-system. The use of a large, riotous and colourful cast of different characters in both novels, all of whose voices and performances clamour for space, creates a sense of disruption in the traditional novel form's singular stable lifeworld, but it is the depiction of this multiplicity of clashing lifeworlds that allows the reader a true glimpse into the chaotic, unequal social realities of the oil-frontier and of the shadowy, interconnected, systemic forces of finance capital that lie behind it.

Literary and cultural critic Raymond Williams has explained that a stable, assured narrative might be seen to be the product of a stabilised lifeworld – what he calls ‘some kind of knowable community’.³³⁰ If we work from Williams's premise, it is evident that Otero Silva and Bracho Montiel's narrations of Venezuelan life on the oil-frontier, and the very form of their novels are unstable, the product of lifeworlds which are subject to constant disruption. Both authors use their characters as mouthpieces to verbalise the exploitative nature of the petro-capitalist world system and the underlying coloniality of oil. Raymond Williams's concept of ‘structures of feeling’ is helpful in analysing the presentation of Tochito in *Guachimanes* and his inability to adequately verbalise his sense of alienation and understanding of his own exploitation. As Stephen Shapiro explains:

[...] Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling [assists us in describing] the mediated representation of experience within moments of historical transformation. [...] Under conditions of dislocation, a (collective) subject has difficulty narrating her or his experience, given that existing codes of representation cannot adequately enunciate ongoing change because traditional forms of communication were fashioned to convey a now-fading lifeworld and these subjects have not yet constituted the institutional apparatuses that produce

³³⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London, 1958).

communicative forms that may inscribe the presence of new social relations. In response to this discursive gap, Williams used structures of feeling to describe the “articulation of an area of experience which lies beyond” currently available semantic figurations. As groups experience the whirlwind of change that is difficult to describe, they often resort to and reside within “certain [dominant] modes, conventions of expression” that are only “approximations or substitutions for their own structure of feeling.” This indirect ventriloquism can be discerned by disruptions within a text’s chosen generic form, especially regarding the narrative voice, where an unevenness of perspective indicates the presence of a disjunction between a new lived experience and its formal articulation.³³¹

The scene which perhaps summarises the connections between local, national and systemic forces using ‘disruptions within the text’s generic form’ most vividly is that of Tochito’s torture. After having been brutalised at the hands of the guachimanes near the end of Bracho Montiel’s novel for a crime he did not commit, the novel’s protagonist lies in his prison cell in a state of painful delirium.³³² There, he makes the beginnings of a connection between the repressive authority figures that he encounters in his day-to-day life – the guachimanes, oil-company bosses and overseers – and the repressive nature of the Gómez regime. Initially, the reader is presented with his agonised, infuriated thoughts, but the particular way in which he articulates his exploitation and that of the Venezuelan people more generally is then revealed to be beyond his specific cultural competence:

Like unexpected lights in the night of his mind’s journey, there appear[ed] surprising assessments – “It is not only the guachimán who guards and keeps a watchful eye on the exploited camps” he thought. “It is this whole group of men of various categories; it is the whole practice of selling the homeland whose leader is the president of the Republic. Gómez is the principal guachimán!” Of course he could not formulate his opinion in such a distinct manner, but he said to himself:

³³¹ Stephen Shapiro, ‘Method and Misperception, the Paradigm Problem of the Early American Novel’, *The Culture and Commerce: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 28.

³³² A poor Venezuelan man working in the oil camp who garners the dislike of the colonel, Tochito is framed for a petty crime — apparently stealing the iron supports of a chicken coop, wrapped in newspaper, which the colonel has an acquaintance place on Tochito’s porch in order to frame him. The colonel later has Tochito taken to the ‘central office’ of the oil camps for an ‘inquiry’ where the worker is fruitlessly, mockingly questioned — “‘Stop being stupid, Tochito. I told the truth, that I haven’t done anything to you. How many supports have you stolen and where have you kept them?’” (“‘Déjate de zoquetadas, Tochito. Decí la verdá, que yo no te hago nada. ¿Cuántos paralelos te habéis robado y donde los tenéis?’”) — and then incessantly beaten and tortured by the colonel’s henchmen, until they extract from him a false statement of guilt, and he is left in the ‘dungeon’ of the central office, exhausted and abused, (where) his ‘body shook as if electrocuted’ (‘Allá, en el calabozo, trepidaba el cuerpo de Tochito como electrizado’). Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, pp. 54–56.

“The colonel and the president are the guachimanes, and the judge and the lawyer, and the engineer and the doctor. Yes, all of them are guachimanes! Guachimanes that also watch over the wells that spill the petroleum that they rob from us! Guachimanes, guachimanes all of them! The old man Gómez is the foremost guachimán!”³³³

This is a key moment of slippage in the narration, wherein the novel takes over the work of articulating the relationship between Tochito’s immediate experience of brutality and inequality, his own familiar sets of cultural codes and reference points, North-American imperialism and the systemic workings of the petro-capitalist world-system. Working within the Williamsian framework of structures of feeling, the novel in this instance is ventriloquising through the character of Tochito what Bracho Montiel is himself attempting to do in his work. That is, to seek out an adequate form to express the reality of Venezuela’s experience of oil imperialism on scales of the local, the national and the world-systemic. The form of the novel attempts, then, to respond to the disjuncture between ‘Western’ ideological narratives of oil-as-success and the material realities of petro-capitalism in Venezuela.

In another memorable instant, the North-American worker Tony Roberts (who, unlike most of the other U.S. workers, is sympathetic to Venezuelans, even marrying a Venezuelan woman, much to the horror of the other workers wives) tells a friend in *Oficina No 1*:

“They have already removed from this part of the desert millions and millions of dollars. So many millions that you, my beloved friend Secundino Silva, would die from fright if Tony were to tell you the exact figure. The shareholders of the Company, who have never seen this desert, not even in photographs, they have bought yachts, palaces, car parts, collections of porcelain plates, and necklaces of shining beads for their chorus girls; they have been many times to Hawaii, to celebrate Easter in Seville and to the roulettes of Montecarlo; they have imported masseurs, pedicurists and French chefs. Meanwhile, the children of the workers who extract the oil eat dirt next to their shacks”.³³⁴

³³³ Como inesperadas luces en la noche de su camino mental, fueron apareciendo sorprendentes apreciaciones. “No es solo el guachimán quién vigila y cela los campos explotados,” pensaba. “Es todo este grupo de hombres de distintas categorías; es todo este ejército de vende-patrias que tiene por jefe al president de la República. ¡Es Gómez el primer guachimán!”

Claro que él no podía formular su juicio en tan explícita forma, pero se decía a sí mismo:

“Guachimán ese r coroner y er president, y er juez y er abogado, y er ingeniero y er médico. ¡Si, guachimanes todos! ¡Guachimanes que también vigilan los pozos de donde sale el petróleo que nos roban! ¡Guachimanes, guachimanes son todos! ¡Er viejo Gómez ese er primel guachimán!” Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 60.

³³⁴ Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 245.

Here again, the novel gestures outwards, from the worker exploitation on the Venezuelan oil-frontier to the larger machinations of the petro-capitalist world-system, making clear the connections between the oppression in the oil-camps with the wealth and excess in the core nations. By explicitly articulating the connection between the two modalities of lived experience, the novel stages the need to criticise and examine the inherently imperialistic tendencies of capitalism.

Characters such as Tony are crucial when ventriloquising authorial concerns regarding the systemic connections and inequalities that run the breadth of the petro-capitalist world-system. Tony's drunken comments explicitly reveal the nature of the Venezuelan oil-frontier as a particularly violent pressure point of the petro-capitalist world-system, at once distant from but inextricably connected to its other constituent parts. Tony, like certain other characters, comprehends the corruption of the Venezuelan government and the uneven wealth distribution of oil profits in Venezuela, an 'unevenness of perspective' not shared by other U.S. workers in Otero Silva's novel. After the death of Taylor, for example, Tony begins to question the logic and motives of the Company, seeing a hollowness behind the enterprise of oil extraction for ordinary workers, North-American and Venezuelan alike, even as he recognises the inequalities that exist between these two groups in the camp itself.

Otero Silva turns his character into a mouthpiece in order to articulate the necessity of understanding the systematicity of oil imperialism, as well as cognitively mapping the social totality of the petro-capitalist system and the connections that are created between the oilfields of Venezuela and the 'actions of the Company' in locations far removed from the global South. Tony's emphasis here on the exhaustion of labouring bodies, the 'skinned hands and tired backs' of the workers engaged in the physical labour of extraction is also important, implicitly contrasted with the absent and distant bodies of the Company stockholders. The above passage is also an apt reminder of the Marxist argument that primitive accumulation – or accumulation by dispossession – tends to go hand in hand with finance capital. By depicting the exhaustion of bodies in the Venezuelan commodity frontier and linking it to the distant yet highly influential bodies who control the instruments of credit and debt, while collecting oil-profit in the core nations, Tony is voicing the need to develop a totalising, systemic viewpoint which connects various geographical sites of the petro-capitalist world-system as united and inextricable from one another.

The message is repeated even more forcefully in another instance in *Oficina No 1*, when the North-Americans drink together in the bar of the brothel and cabaret run by La Cubana. Tony Roberts's drunken outpouring again highlights the inequality between the North-American/ Venezuelan workers who toil in the camps and the wealthy, distant shareholders of the oil companies:

“[...] we work in a petroleum company but very infrequently do we ask ourselves: what type of thing is a petroleum company? Because the Company is not [...] the indigenous workers who receive their salary and shoot out to squander it on expensive whisky, the most expensive that they can find, or to leave it in the shawls of gamblers, or in the night on the tables of prostitutes. Nor are we ourselves the Company, the American drillers, nor the geologists, nor the engineers. Not even Francis J. Taylor who found the oil, nor the manager George W. Thompson, nor the president who is in Maracaibo to whom the people look at with dread, and genuflect as if he were truly the Company dressed in cashmere [...] What type of thing is the oil company? [...] A bald man with palm trees printed on his shirt who spends the winters in Miami, in a hotel with a beach; a fat and feathered woman who has a gorgeous apartment in New York, on Fifth Avenue; a little old man who has travelled around the whole world in a wheelchair, pushed around by all of his heirs. They are the Company [...] and every month [when] they receive their dividends, they buy a racehorse or a painting by a French artist, and the rest they deposit in Chase National Bank [...] the last chemical transformation of petroleum, that converts the refined oil into dividends, is the most interesting and most curious part of the oil industry”, insisted Tony Roberts, slightly drunk.³³⁵

Here the reader is presented with Otero Silva's understanding of the difficulty of how to represent the 'last chemical transformation of petroleum' into finance capital and the

³³⁵ “‘Ya tú ves como una compañía petrolera sirve para fundar ciudades,’” dijo Harry Rolfe por decir algo. Con lo cual le tocó la tecla más sensible a Tony Roberts quien, por otra parte, había bebido aquella noche lo necesario para ponerse a filosofar: “Nosotros trabajamos en una compañía petrolera pero muy pocas veces nos preguntamos: ¿qué cosa es una compañía petrolera? Porque la Compañía no son, como usted bien lo sabe, mi querido amigo Harry Rolfe, los obreros nativos que cobran su salario y salen disparados a despilfarrarlo en whisky caro, el más caro que encuentren, o a dejarlo en las cobijas de los tahures o en las mesas de noche de las prostitutas. No tampoco somos la Compañía nosotros, los perfadores americanos, ni los geólogos, ni los ingenieros. Ni siquiera Francis J. Taylor que encontró el petróleo, ni el gerente George W. Thompson, ni el presidente que está en Maracaibo y la gente lo mira con temor y le hace genuflexiones como si él fuera realmente la Compañía vestida de casimir [...] ¿Qué cosa es una compañía petrolera? [...] Un calvo con palmeras estampadas en la camisa que pasa los inviernos en Miami, en un hotel con playa; una señora gorda y emplumada que tiene un apartamento precioso en Nueva York, on Fifth Avenue; un viejito que ha recorrido el mundo entero en silla de ruedas, empujado por todos sus herederos. Esos con la Compañía, mi querido amigo Harry Rolfe, y todos los meses reciben sus dividendos, se compran un caballo de carrera o un cuadro de un pintor francés, y el resto lo depositan en el Chase National Bank [...] la última transformación química del petróleo, aquella que convierte en aceite refinado en dividendos, es la parte más interesante y más curiosa de la industria petrolera” insistía Tony Roberts un poco borracho.” Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 125.

circulation of this abstract, fictitious capital across the globe. Again, ‘ventriloquism’ is employed within the novel-form to highlight the connections between the local and the global experience of oil’s coloniality. This technique suggests a move towards a more authentically Venezuelan text which strives to integrate a systemic perspective into its own peripheral experience, as part of a formal principle, or at least to internalise this perspective. Tony’s comments vividly highlight the fact that these dividends are not used to power a local productive economy; instead, the labour of humans and the extraction of oil fuels the lifestyles of rentier capitalists in nation-states of the global North.

Despite the neo-colonial inequalities faced by workers of colour in the novels, there are moments of labour agitation, activity and solidarity. Both Bracho Montiel and Otero Silva, having recognised and registered the coloniality of oil throughout their two texts and having remained loyal to the literary reproduction of an authentically Venezuelan social reality, also search for a suitable literary form which can deal with the political action of the Venezuelan and Afro-Caribbean workers. In the final scenes of Bracho Montiel’s novel, where the enraged Tochito leads the people of his pueblo to march in the streets, and in the scene where Otero Silva’s North-American overseers defuse a potentially revolutionary moment following the death of Gómez, both novels mediate the search for an adequate form of collective action to resist oil imperialism and a narrative form suited to a clear articulation of this situation.

Bracho Montiel’s depiction of this worker solidarity in *Guachimanes* emerges in the form of a potent, bloodthirsty rage against the authorities, unleashed in a march led by Tochito. The workers of the pueblo come together ‘unstoppable and overwhelming against the tyranny’ of the American oil authorities, whose Venezuelan counterparts, such as the colonel, are forced to flee: ‘the security recruits abandoned their weapons; the colonel and his henchmen disappeared; and the next day they opened the jail-cells of Tochito, of don España and Trino Paz’.³³⁶ Tochito, thus released, ‘did not know how to say what he wished to [say], except for [the] one word – “liberty!” He did not know how to communicate to the masses the feeling of vindication except for four letters – “hate!” And he raved to the village that he could not think about anything except what he felt: liberty, revenge, hate!’³³⁷ He leads his

³³⁶ ‘El pueblo se agrupó incontenible y avasallador contra la tiranía; los reclutas abandonaron las armas; el coronel y sus esbirros desaparecieron; y al día siguiente se abrió el calabozo de Tochito, el de don España y el de Trino Paz.’ Bracho Montiel, *Guachimanes*, p. 65.

³³⁷ ‘[Tochito] no supo decir lo que deseaba sino con una palabra: “¡libertad!”. No supo comunicar a la masa el sentimiento de reivindicación sino con cuatro letras: “¡Odio!” Y deliró aquel pueblo que no podía pensar sino que sentía: ¡libertad, venganza, odio!’ Ibid., p. 65.

‘pilgrims of hate’ in a procession to the town’s square, carrying the Venezuelan flag, ‘uprooted from the flagpole of the civil headquarters’ of the oil camp.³³⁸ Tochito, once the oppressed obrero left jobless and without dignity, now becomes ‘transfigured [...] his mulatto skin appeared bright, like new bronze. His eyes were appendages of the flame’ in this moment of triumphant, restorative justice as he leads the mass of villagers and workers who burn the bodies of the authorities and guachimanes which they find in the camp.³³⁹ They seek to overthrow the hierarchy of labour under which they have been oppressed for so long and the novel concludes on this victorious, vengeful note.

Oficina No 1, meanwhile, represents the same event, but the potential moment of liberation that comes with the death of the dictator ultimately amounts to little. ‘One quiet noon, without wind, under a blue sky speckled with little sheep-like clouds’ a van full of young revolutionaries ‘with distorted faces, dressed in dark cashmere, with a three-day beard’ arrive in the oil-camps.³⁴⁰ They bring the news of the dictator’s death (“¡Se murió general Gómez!”), the fact that ‘the people are rising up in all parts’ of Venezuela and that there is ‘in Caracas a slaughtering’ of the oppressors occurring.³⁴¹ The later arrival of three cars from Ciudad Bolívar ‘crammed full of men, with tricolour flags and of shouts of “Long live democracy! Down with spies!”’ heralds a moment of upheaval for the authorities and potential triumph for the workers. The men in the vehicles are ‘port workers, undergraduate students, two or three bearded men that had just been rescued from prison, a young priest or seminarian that seemed a little embarrassed to have shared in that adventure,’ but apart from the latter individual, all of them are full of gleeful enthusiasm:

[...] One of the students, lanky and unkempt, with a black fringe that fell over both eyes which he had to brush aside to see the spectators, climbed to the drill-platform and addressed the people: “He has died, the tyrant that cruelly oppressed our homeland and the people have flooded into the streets and the countryside of Venezuela, resolved to reconquer forever their liberty and their rights [...]” The scattered group listened in silence, attentive, including Taylor, Reynolds and the other Americans. “The hour of justice has come. The houses of the gómeistas

³³⁸ ‘Peregrinos del odio echaron a andar hacia el sitio trágico; gritaban vivas y muertas y seguían a Tochito, portador de la bandera patria arrancada del asta de la jefatura’. Ibid., p. 65.

³³⁹ ‘Tochito se transfiguraba frente a la luz tremenda y su pil de mulato se ponía brillante, como bronce nuevo. Sus ojos fueron apéndices de la llama’. Ibid., p. 69.

³⁴⁰ ‘Un quieto mediodía sin viento, bajo un cielo azul moteado de nubecitas ovejunas [...] dos hombres de rostro descompuesto, vestidos de Casimir oscuro, con una barba de tres días’. Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, p. 68.

³⁴¹ “[...] Se murió el general Gómez y la gente se está levantando en todas partes. Parece que en Caracas hay una matazón”. Ibid., p. 69.

have been looted by the infuriated masses. The prisoners have been liberated by the hands of the people [...].³⁴²

Here the novel enacts a moment of potential liberation for the workers, which corresponds to a shift in narrative perspective from that of an individual consciousness to the representation of a multitude of voices and the enactment of collective political action. When the revolutionaries demand to know the location of the commissioner of the oil camp – “he must be punished!” they cry out – the North-Americans step in to manipulate the situation.³⁴³ The brisk defusal of the movement by Taylor not only allegorises the coloniality of petro-power but also reinstates the formal organization of the narrative around an individual consciousness, thwarting both political collectivity for the characters and the possibility of an alternative literary representation. Otero Silva demonstrates the possibility of anti-imperialist resistance,

³⁴² ‘Al anochecer llegaron tres camiones de Ciudad Bolívar [...] abarrotados de hombres, de banderas tricolores y de gritos: “¡Viva la democracia! ¡Abajo los espías!” [...] Eran obreros del puerto, estudiantes de bachillerato, dos o tres hombres barbudos que acababan de ser rescatados de la cárcel, una cura joven o seminarista que parecía un poco avergonzado de haberse comprometido en aquella aventura. Uno de los estudiantes, larguirucho y despeinado, con un fleco negro que le caía sobre ambos ojos y tenía que apartarlo a manotazos para mirar al auditorio, se trepó a la platáforma del taladro y arengó a la gente: “Ha muerto el tirano que oprimía cruelmente a nuestra patria y el pueblo se ha lanzado a las calles y a los campos de Venezuela resuelto a reconquistar para siempre su libertad y sus derechos [...]” El group desparramado escuchaba en silencio, atentemente, inclusive Taylor, Reynolds y los otros Americanos. “Ha llegado la hora de la justicia. Las casas de los gomecistas han sido saqueadas por las masas enfurecidas. Los presos han sido libertados por las manos del pueblo [...] Dónde está el comisario de este lugar? ¡Hay que sancionarlo!” Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, pp. 69-71.

³⁴³ ‘Then Mr Taylor ascended the drill’s platform, took his place by the side of the student and spoke with a measured, courteous tone [...] “The commission have been the only politicians that there has been in this place” (and he raised his hand towards the crossed irons of the tower). “The others are groups of technicians, geologists and workers, Venezuelans and foreigners that are carrying out industrial labour, which is completely separate from politics. Nevertheless, it is as you proclaim, that the country will conquer legality and democracy with the motive of General Gómez’s death, the Company will take great pleasure to be present at that transformation” [...] Afterwards he offered them gasoline for their three cars, free of charge, on behalf of the Company. And provisions, for the journey: hams, cans of sardines, boxes of biscuits, also gifts from the Company. In the middle of so much of this kindness, he did not conceal his desire to see them continue their journey. He said goodbye to them with a wide smile and maintained his place in the centre of the ring of workers and women, contemplating the cloud of dust of the cars and the flutter of flags, until their shouts died down in the distance: “Long live democracy! Down with the spies!”

‘Entonces míster Taylor subió a la plataforma del taladro, tomó sitio al lado del estudiante y habló con un tono mesurado y cortés [...] “El comisario ha huído, señores. El comisario era el único político que había en este lugar, en este sitio de trabajo” (y alzó la mano hacia los hierros cruzados de la torre). “Los demás somos un grupo de técnicos, geólogos y obreros, venezolanos y extranjeros, que estamos realizando una labor industrial, totalmente apartada de la política. Sin embargo, si es como ustedes proclaman, que el país va a conquistar la legalidad y la democracia con motivo de la muerte del general Gómez, la Compañía se complacerá mucho en presenciar esa transformación” [...] Después les ofreció gasolina para los tres camiones, gratuitamente, en nombre de la Compañía. Y provisiones para el camino: jamones, latas de sardinas, cajas de galletas, también obsequio de la Compañía. En medio de tanta gentileza no ocultaba sus deseos de verlos continuar el viaje. Los despidió con una ancha sonrisa y se mantuvo en el centro del corro de obreros y mujeres, contemplando la polvareda de los camiones y el tremolar de las banderas, hasta que se apagaron los gritos en la lejanía: “¡Viva la democracia! ¡Abajo los espías!” Otero Silva, *Oficina No. 1*, pp. 69-71.

yet the attempt falls short – perhaps due to a sense of inevitability that populations of peripheral nations have a slim chance of success in both local demonstrations and transnational movements. The moment of hope and potential working-class victory symbolised by the death of the dictator is undermined by the systemic, transnational structures of oil imperialism. These powerful manifestations of (petro) coloniality ensure that its structures of oppression persist into the moment of apparent liberation. The continuous attempts by systemic powers to maintain hierarchical orders of domination is, as Quijano infers, precisely what coloniality signifies; despite the end of institutional colonialism, old systems of racialised, imperialist domination in peripheral (particularly resource-rich) nation-states persists. Oil, as both authors suggest, is merely the most *recent* resource-based iteration of a much older structural system of dominance.

I

PRODUCERS

Chapter Two

Trinidad: Black Gold, Black Power and Petro-Magic

1962-1982

“Well, boy, soon small-island people can’t afford to live in they own home. Is either you working in service – servitude for imported millionaires, building luxury villas for them – can’t pay yuh bills ‘cause yuh pay is shit, or yuh sell yuh piece’a heritage for U.S. dollars and get de hell out’a there. Is colonialism all over again, yuh understand? But dis time the owner not responsible for de slave. Whereas, long ago, the owner had to feed, clothe, give house and land, make sure they don’t get too sick – or else is his loss and fire in he skin. Now the government self, the blasted politicians, only selling out every last piece’a crown land, and is every man for theyself [...] even though Trinidad have oil and t’ings looking good here – the TT dollar is shit! When they convert that minimum wage – and ours is lower, and they ain’ even getting that – when they convert it, they can’t send home shit. You see that CSME farce? Trinidad making up they own rules ‘cause we don’t really want nobody here, specially small-island people. If is foreign companies like BP and Shell and t’ing – well, that’s a different matter. “Singapore of the Caribbean’ my ass.”

~ Oonya Kempadoo.³⁴⁴

Oil, the Future Emperor

I now move from the mainland of the expanded Caribbean to the twin-island nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago, which lies approximately six miles off the northeastern coast of Venezuela. My specific interest is in the larger, more prosperous island of Trinidad and its status as a (relatively) major oil producer, refiner, and exporter in the expanded Caribbean.

³⁴⁴ Oonya Kempadoo, *All Decent Animals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), pp. 25-26.

This chapter examines the entanglement of petro-politics, ethnic tensions³⁴⁵ and labour unrest from the time of Trinidad's independence in 1962, through the 1973 oil boom and the subsequent 'good oil years' of the mid to late 1970s, to the beginning of the 1982 recession.³⁴⁶ Over the course of this twenty-year period, oil saturated not only Trinidad's economic infrastructure, but also the cultural politics of life on the island. While it is relatively rare to find a Trinidadian novel that explicitly mediates the connection between the 1973 boom and its uproarious consequences, the three novels examined here attempt in different ways to deal with the turbulence of 1973 and the aftermath of the 'good oil years'. *Is Just a Movie* by Earl Lovelace (2012), *Guerrillas* by V. S. Naipaul (1975) and *A Casual Brutality* by Neil Bissoondath (1988) are lenses by which to view the presence of petroleum in Trinidadian politics, economics and civic life during this period, particularly in the aftermath of the OPEC oil embargo.³⁴⁷ Notably, Lovelace's text also looks forward to the 2000 hydrocarbon boom – the subject of conversation in the passage from Oonya Kempadoo's *All Decent Animals* (2013) cited as the epigraph to this chapter – and in so doing suggests the continuities between the socio-economic fallout from the two boom periods.

In his autobiography, *Inward Hunger*, Eric Williams summarised the situation of Trinidad in 1911 (which was the year of his birth): 'cocoa the reigning queen, sugar the ex-king, oil the future emperor'.³⁴⁸ Williams's personifications of these three commodities suggest the power they have wielded historically over Trinidadian society. As Keith Sandiford explains, the influence of cocoa, sugar and oil has been so total in Trinidad that they can be

³⁴⁵ While nations such as Barbados, Jamaica and Haiti have always had majority African populations since the time of enslavement, it is significant that the population of enslaved Africans in Trinidad at the time of emancipation in 1834 (approximately 21,000) was far less than other Caribbean colonies. Indeed, as Daniel Miller notes, Trinidad has been the home of diverse populations ever since the time of slavery: the immigration of around 144,000 South Asian indentured labourers between 1845 and 1917, the sparse presence of indigenous Arawak and Carib tribes, the migration of South American peons, as well as the population of African communities, descendants of the enslaved, has created a very distinctly Trinidadian sense of creolisation and heterogeneity in the country, a factor which would be significant for future political development post-independence. Daniel Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Berg, 1997), p. 21.

³⁴⁶ While nations such as Barbados, Jamaica and Haiti have always had majority African populations since the time of enslavement, it is significant that the population of enslaved Africans in Trinidad at the time of emancipation in 1834 (approximately 21,000) was far less than other Caribbean colonies. Indeed, as Daniel Miller notes, Trinidad has been the home of diverse populations ever since the time of slavery: the immigration of around 144,000 South Asian indentured labourers between 1845 and 1917, the sparse presence of indigenous Arawak and Carib tribes, the migration of South American peons, as well as the population of African communities, descendants of the enslaved, has created a very distinctly Trinidadian sense of creolisation and heterogeneity in the country, a factor which would be significant for future political development post-independence. Daniel Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Berg, 1997), p. 21.

³⁴⁷ Earl Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011); Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (London: Deutsch, 1975); Neil Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality* (London: Minerva, 1989).

³⁴⁸ Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 13.

seen not merely as material commodities and sources of capitalist profit, but rather as ‘complex signifying systems, visceral forces in the historical formation’ of the nation, whose signs ‘permeate the entire body politic of producers and consumers’.³⁴⁹ Any analysis which considers the development of Trinidad’s politics, society and economy must contend with the significant role played by these commodities in their shaping of historical events.

In the early eighteenth century, Trinidad’s economy was primarily agricultural. The major export crops (sugar and cocoa) ‘account[ed] for the bulk of the colony’s revenues and employ[ed] most of its labour force’.³⁵⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, sugar’s economic influence had begun to dwindle while cocoa witnessed a meteoric rise from 1879–1928, after which its production became of minimal significance, particularly following the economic crash of the 1930s.³⁵¹ However, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, it was ‘Emperor Oil’ that became the most powerful commodity in Trinidad’s economy, ever since the U.S. company Merrimac drilled its first productive oil-well at La Brea in 1857.³⁵² Nevertheless, Trinidad only became a significant oil-producer after 1904, when the British started to take a much greater interest in the island’s oil reserves due to the fuel demands of their vast navy.³⁵³ By 1939, production had risen steadily to twenty million barrels a year and oil companies had started to move inland to areas such as Palo Seco, Sipania and Fyzabad, despite the frequent and disruptive periods of active labour unrest, strikes and worker demonstrations that occurred throughout the 1930s.³⁵⁴ By the 1940s, oil had come to

³⁴⁹ Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 32.

³⁵⁰ Bridget Brereton, ‘Oil and the Twentieth Century Economy, 1900–62’, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783–1962* (Port of Spain: Heinemann Educational Books (Caribbean) Ltd., 1981), pp. 199–222 (p. 199).

³⁵¹ Vernon C. Mulchansingh, ‘The Oil Industry in the Economy of Trinidad’, *Caribbean Studies Vol. 11, No. 1* (April 1971), 73–95 (p. 73).

³⁵² Mulchansingh, *Caribbean Studies Vol. 11, No. 1* (p. 74).

³⁵³ In 1908, while the world’s largest oil producing nations (of the time) produced 28 million tonnes of oil the British Empire produced only 0.5 million tonnes. In 1910, when Churchill announced that the British Admiralty had decided to adopt the oil fuel as a substitute for coal for the British navy, huge orders were immediately placed for Trinidadian oil. As Vernon Mulchansingh points out, in that year alone, some thirty oil companies were floated for the purpose of oil-exploration on the island. From the time of the drilling of the first oil well in 1857 to the 1970s, some 170 companies were formed for the exploitation of oil in Trinidad.

Ibid., pp 66–7.

³⁵⁴ The reduced earnings of oil-workers coincided with inflation from 1929–37. The cost of living rose dramatically during this period, while wages were not adjusted in an industry that was known to create wealth: this, and the fact that the average oil worker was earning less in 1936 than in the 1920s due to the reduction of working hours after 1929 (to reduce costs), alongside objectionable racial discrimination of workers, fuelled the fire of their grievances. This eventually led to the strike at Forest Reserve in 1937, where attempts to arrest the leader of the striking workers, T. U. Butler, led to island-wide riots and strikes. The most important result of the 1937 riots was the sowing of the seeds of an organised trade union movement. These seeds would germinate

dominate Trinidad's economy, accounting for 80% of the island's exports.³⁵⁵ In this period too, crude oil was first imported for refining. With the country's refining capacity well exceeding its capacities for local production, international oil corporations found Trinidad to be a lucrative spot for refining and trans-shipping imported crude.

In 1956 the local (albeit British owned) oil company Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd. was taken over by Texaco for U.S. \$176,000,000, ushering in a period of intensive development on both land and sea.³⁵⁶ This entry of one of the big 'oil majors' into Trinidad led to the rapid expansion of the island's refining sector and had immense economic consequences. As James Millette points out:

The coming of the oil giant was to mark a decisive shift, not only towards big capital investment, but towards big United States investment in the country. It was the most significant step in the establishment of U.S. hegemonic control of the country's economy even before British overlordship was terminated by the winning of independence [...] Immediately, Texaco upgraded the throughput capacity of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery from 75,000 to 124,000 barrels per day; and plans were laid for further expansion to 250,000 barrels, thereby making it one of the largest refineries under U.S. control operating outside (the) continental U.S.A.³⁵⁷

By the time of the 1973 boom, virtually all indigenous oil in Trinidad was produced by foreign transnationals: Texaco 50%, Shell 21% and BP 27%.³⁵⁸ However, Texaco's acquisition of Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd. also marked the beginning of a unique period of the entanglement of petroleum and politics, coinciding as it did with the victory of the People's National Movement (PNM) in the 1956 general election. Founded in 1955 and consisting mainly of

dramatically in 1946-7, years which again witnessed considerable labour unrest, caused by rising prices, unemployment and low wages. As Bridget Brereton writes, by the late 1940s 'trade unionism on modern lines was well established in Trinidad and the labour movement would play an important role in politics of the post-war period' of 1946-62. Despite the injustices and struggles of the 1930s, the period was a time of hope and promise for many workers, and the creation of trade unions a significant one in the hopes of overthrowing the colonial British regime.

Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, pp. 181, 190.

³⁵⁵ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 211.

³⁵⁶ Selwyn Ryan, 'The Struggle for Black Power in the Caribbean', in *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*, ed. by Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart (Trinidad: University of the West Indies Press, 1995), pp. 25-89 (p. 66).

³⁵⁷ James Millette, 'Towards the Black Power Revolt of 1970', in *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*, eds. by Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart (Trinidad: University of the West Indies Press, 1995), p. 67.

³⁵⁸ Mulchansingh, *Caribbean Studies Vol. 11, No. 1*, p. 78.

black middle-class professionals, the PNM would take the country to independence in 1962 under the leadership of Eric Williams. Coming to power at the same time as oil production in Trinidad intensified, Williams' time in government would be profoundly shaped by the island's petroleum industry and the demands of foreign transnationals. From the outset, the PNM endorsed the Texaco acquisition, earning the contempt of the Caribbean National Labour Party, who 'accused the PNM of having come under the domination of U.S. interests, branding them the "Petroleum National Movement"'.³⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the formation of the predominantly Indian DLP in 1957 heightened long-standing racial tensions between the island's two biggest ethnic communities, tensions which would mount throughout the sixties and explode in the seventies, exacerbated by the use of oil as a racialising political tool and Williams' biased use of the patronage system.³⁶⁰

"Black Was Never More Beautiful": Oil, Ethnicity and Trinidad's "Revolutionary Mood"

'Black was never more beautiful,' Williams proclaimed in his Independence Day message of 1974, a pronouncement tellingly made from the site of Shell's operations in Point Fortin. This too on the day that the government had purchased Shell Trinidad Ltd.'s oil refinery and other assets.³⁶¹ Williams' speech, as Michael Niblett notes, pointedly used the Black Power slogan to render 'oil the means through which to unite the twin discourses of

³⁵⁹ Ryan, *The Black Power Revolution 1970*, p. 133.

³⁶⁰ As Percy Hintzen outlines, three types of patronage were utilised by the PNM during the boom: 'direct generalised patronage' was the first, typically distributed through 'allocation of jobs, services, facilities, loans and housing to individuals on a massive scale'. The beneficiaries of these allocations were primarily black, urban lower-classes who were 'bought off' by the PNM in this way throughout the 'good oil years.' After 1970 and the near collapse of the regime, this form of patronage was formalised. 'Indirect patronage', meanwhile, 'exploited the position of the state as a major employer to provide more jobs to its supporters'. After 1970, direct state-led job creation for the black working-classes became central in the PNM's policy-making. Finally, 'elite patronage' was 'based on the use of state authority and jurisdiction to provide individuals with access to business contracts, or to opportunities for graft, corruption and illicit financial gains, all involving huge sums of money'. Percy Hintzen, 'Maintaining Control of the State: Strategies for Regime Survival in Guyana and Trinidad', *The Costs of Regime Survival* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), pp. 58-116 (p. 63).

³⁶¹ Eric Williams, *Forged From the Love of Liberty: Selected Speeches of Dr Eric Williams*, compiled by Paul Sutton (Trinidad: Longman Caribbean, 1981).

economic and cultural nationalism'.³⁶² In the PNM's eyes, petroleum would allow for the rebirth of the nation. Indeed, the purchase of Shell's holdings in 1974 was intended to showcase the PNM's determination to halt foreign domination of the Trinidadian economy, to unite the peoples of the country against the humiliation of their colonial past and to propel them towards an industrialised, (petro) modern and progressive future. 'Sugar divides, oil unites', Williams declared, emphasising the importance of the oil-commodity to the notion of racial unity as well as economic prosperity.³⁶³ Discussing the Point Lisas complex built by the PNM in these years with regards to the Prime Minister's connection between oil and ethnicity, Graham Holton notes that:

Williams saw petroleum-based industrialization as the quickest way to remove the stigma of slavery, indentured labour and colonialism derived from its sugar industry. It was not by accident that Williams chose the Point Lisas estate, an old sugar plantation covering 672 hectares on the south-west coast of Trinidad. Point Lisas was to symbolize the creation of a new Trinidad that had overcome its woeful colonial past. The new industrialization was to bring racial harmony [...] an industrialized Trinidad would be a wealthy, modern nation without ethnic and class conflict.³⁶⁴

As Niblett observes, the Trinidadian state and its citizens were 'presented as having entered a new era of independence, one in which oil functioned as the (black) face of the island, the signifier of its sovereignty and progress'.³⁶⁵ However, William's 'emphasis on the racially-integrative' and 'supposedly equalising role of the new industrialisation was viewed by some as obscuring the PNM's complicity in maintaining ethnic divisions in Trinidad'.³⁶⁶ Ever since independence in 1962, Williams repeatedly connected Afro-Trinidadian identity to 'black gold,' the vehicle of national prosperity and harbinger of modernity. The connection made between the black middle classes and oil was intended to be a clarion call announcing Trinidad's new birth as a free nation, heralding a future of technological progress and

³⁶² Michael Niblett, "'Black Was Never More Beautiful": Ecology, Culture and the Oil Boom in Trinidad', *Journal of West Indian Literature* Vol. 24, Issue 2 (2016), 27-46 (p. 2).

³⁶³ Williams, *Forged from the Love of Liberty*.

³⁶⁴ Graham Holton, 'An Unprofitable Enterprise', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* Vol 1, Issues 1-2 (1995), 99-118 (p. 102).

³⁶⁵ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 28.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

employment opportunities with oil as the central resource, the nation's guiding light. However, as Selwyn Ryan points out, 'the PNM was bemused and enchanted with the political dimensions of independence [yet] made little effort to confer on the masses the economic and social benefits which they expected to derive from independence. Instead the PNM elected to view the masses as cannon fodder in the electoral game'.³⁶⁷ In the 1960s, the government's propaganda centred on the sowing of petro-based industrialisation and the reaping of socio-economic benefits was focused on middle- and working-class Afro-Trinidadian populations (even though the latter received little in the way of real economic change or support). Consequently, it served to exclude other non-black communities. As Percy Hintzen elaborates, the PNM 'depended for its mass support upon the racial mobilization of lower-class black people. To survive it had to allocate resources in ways that proved most beneficial to the middle- and upper-class sectors of society while engaging in a system of racial patronage directed at the black lower-class population. This meant that spending on agriculture had to be neglected', a point to which I will return momentarily.³⁶⁸ For his part, Williams stated that people of African or part-African descent were the most important community in Trinidad, the 'core Trinidadians' and that the 'Creole culture associated with that group designated the people who would and should inherit the political kingdom when the colonialists left'.³⁶⁹ As Brereton points out, post-independence, the 'Afro-Creole narrative as expressed by Williams was extremely nationalist: moreover, the message was that all other ethnic groups were part of the new nation and must suppress their new cultures in the interests of nation building'.³⁷⁰

The island's second largest ethnic community, the Trinidadians of South-Asian (mainly Indian) descent, felt this exclusion deeply and bitterly. The long history of black exploitation on colonial-era plantations had stigmatised the sugar industry among many middle-class Afro-Trinidadians. Since the era of post-slave-trade indentured labour, agriculture – particularly

³⁶⁷ Ryan, *The Black Power Revolution 1970*, pp. 68-9.

³⁶⁸ Hintzen, 'Political and Economic Costs of Regime Survival', *The Costs of Regime Survival*, p. 176.

³⁶⁹ He applied this academic theory to his politics with great assiduity. The PNM rose to power utilising quite aggressive discourses of ethnic polarisation, which created a climate of intense political bitterness (climaxing in the tensions of the 1958 and 1961 elections), playing on the cultural divisions and social differences between Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian populations. Their victory in 1956 had immediately heightened racial tensions as the 'black population began to think in terms of their 'right to govern' and both the PNM and DLP had used race as the major strategy of party politics since the late fifties. Brereton, 'Free at Last? 1950-1962', *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 239.

³⁷⁰ Bridget Brereton, "'All ah we is not one": Historical and Ethnic Narratives in Pluralist Trinidad,' *The Global South, Vol. 4, No 2* (2010), 218-238 (p. 221), Project MUSE, DOI: muse.jhu.edu/article/424482 [accessed 12 December 2017].

small cane farms – had become associated with the Indian community. The PNM’s reiteration of an earlier association of certain commodities with certain communities in the 1960s – Indo-Trinidadians with sugar and Afro-Trinidadians with oil – meant that the Indian community regarded the PNM’s rhetoric and emphasis on black Trinidadians as inherently exclusionary. The PNM’s active neglect of agriculture in favour of petro-based industry throughout the 1960s was seen by many Indian rural labourers to be an act of government favouritism towards urban black supporters.³⁷¹ Black and Indian communities, as a result, became increasingly socially and politically polarised. Heightened ethnic tensions, overdetermined by oil, created an explosive situation which boiled over during the Black Power riots of the 1970s, and oil-based industrialisation came to be quite the opposite of the symbol of racial harmony that the PNM had intended it to be.

The early 1970s also witnessed the deterioration of the previous decade’s economic crisis in Trinidad, when the country’s GDP had registered 0% growth and petroleum production had experienced a decline in real growth of 11.5% over its 1968 figure.³⁷² The worsening economic conditions led to unemployment levels reaching 15%, disproportionately affecting working-class black communities in economically depressed urban areas.³⁷³ The lack of fulfilment of promises made on the cusp of independence stoked feelings of frustration among poor black Trinidadians, who experienced ‘a keen sense of discrimination, poverty and dispossession, exacerbated by a feeling of betrayal’ of black people by black leaders.³⁷⁴ Indeed, despite the colossal wealth it generated, the pre-boom oil economy had done little for the majority of the population. Oil had in fact created more problems than it had solved. For one,

³⁷¹ ‘The failure to put in place a strong system of support for agriculture was reflected in the sector’s economic performance – in the post-war years for instance, the sugar industry’s output declined significantly as a percentage of overall GDP, falling from 17.8% to 5.9% between 1952 and 1970. During the boom years, this would drop further to 2.3%, while oil in the same period grew from 22% to 42%’. Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 7.

³⁷² Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, p. 80.

³⁷³ Employment in oil rose from 15,000 in 1944 to 19,000 in 1954 and then began to decline to 14,000 in 1964. Moreover, the rising unemployment present in the country was to a growing extent a young one – 31% of unemployed were between 15-19, and 25% of those between the ages of 20-24 were unemployed. In 1963, close to 15% of the labour force had no jobs and had little prospects for finding any, and an additional 16% were underemployed: this was directly linked to oil, for while oil and oil related activity accounted in the early 1960s for almost 25% of the country’s GDP, it employed only 5% of the work force. The production rates of the small oil labour force that was employed were high because of the large investment in capital equipment and the salaries paid that were significantly higher than those paid by other major industrial sectors. Oil disbursed \$22 million worth of wages in 1949 and \$100 million in 1962, but employed only about 5% of the 1965 labour force. Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 217.

³⁷⁴ Ryan, *The Black Power Revolution 1970*, p. 68.

the capital-intensive nature of the industry meant that it created relatively few jobs. As Terry Lynn Karl and Yahia Said point out:

Oil is capital intensive in all stages of its production cycle — it requires large and long term financial outlays and very little labour, and thus perpetuates the delinking between wealth and work [...] only a small workforce is needed to produce and export oil, which means that it is not necessary to secure the consent of large domestic constituencies to maintain production. Furthermore, oil is an enclave activity with very little positive spill-over effect on the rest of the economy. Not only is it delinked from labour, but it is also not connected to most other industrial and agricultural activities. As a result, oil compounds stand out from the surrounding country as enclaves with high concentrations of wealth, jobs and foreigners.³⁷⁵

From 1964–68 levels of employment declined and underemployment increased even while production of crude increased from 50 million barrels (1964) to 67 million (1968). In addition to this, the island's economy began to manifest symptoms of what economists have termed Dutch disease. This is a phenomenon whereby 'new discoveries or favorable price changes in one sector of the economy' such as oil 'cause distress in other sectors' such as agriculture and manufacturing.³⁷⁶ One of the symptoms of Dutch Disease is the tendency for oil windfalls to lead to a rise in real exchange rates, which results in 'higher costs and reduced competitiveness for domestically produced goods and services, effectively "crowding out" previously productive sectors'.³⁷⁷ In other words, oil booms more often than not erode the productive base of national economies, so that even during a boom-period, with its financial gains and increases in revenue, the national economy of the oil-exporting country in question continues to be hollowed out. Such was the case in Trinidad throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Due to the difficulties facing the Trinidadian economy, poverty swelled amongst the rural and urban working classes. As a consequence, 'between the general election of 1966 and the outbreak of the Black Power revolt in 1970, the politics of Trinidad underwent a radicalisation more profound than anything that had occurred since 1937'.³⁷⁸ The search that

³⁷⁵ Terry Lynn Karl and Yahia Said, *Oil Wars*, ed. by Terry Lynn Karl, Yahia Said and Mary Kaldor (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 13–14.

³⁷⁶ Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 5.

³⁷⁷ Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*, p. 5.

³⁷⁸ Ryan, *The Black Power Revolution, 1970*, p. 79.

was undertaken by the working peoples of Trinidad to find political organisations independent of the biased incompetence of the PNM manifested itself in numerous instances of worker unrest, demonstrations and protests, but also resulted in the formation of numerous extra-parliamentary organisations.³⁷⁹ The New World Group (NWG) were one such organisation, who drew from a range of anti-establishment, socialist and black-nationalist perspectives.³⁸⁰ Through the formation of these groups, a new type of radical, grassroots activism appeared on the island's political landscape in the late sixties and early seventies, distrustful of orthodox governmental proceedings. Organisations such as the NWG took their inspiration from the international spirit of justice which prevailed at the time, which became a backdrop for local unrest and action in Trinidad from 1968 onwards in particular.³⁸¹ When these alternative extra-parliamentary groups, such as the NWG, fragmented into various other movements – Tapia, the Workers Educational Association, the United Revolutionary Organisation, Young Power, the National Freedom Movement, and the National Joint Action Committee (or NJAC) — the stage was set for a period of civil unrest which would very nearly topple the PNM government. Ethnic tensions, heightened by the hollow promises of the PNM's oil-

³⁷⁹ In February 1963, the Oilfield Workers Trade Union struck against BP and in April of the same year, the government set up the aforementioned Commission of Inquiry, and another into what it deemed subversive activity in the country. In 1965, labour unrest unsettled the government again; after a decline in the rate of annual growth (from 10% to 3.5% in one year), Trinidad was in economic crisis. When East Indian sugar workers called a strike which escalated into widespread violence, the result was the complete shutdown of the industry. Encouraged and supported by radical trade unionists, industrial unrest spread to every other sector of the economy and threatened the fragile political order that existed between the PNM and labour.

³⁸⁰ The New World Group offered an alternative set of proposals to the PNM, including nationalisation of the island's petroleum, bauxite and sugar industries, as well as the rational and equitable development of resources for the benefit of the region and its communities, rather than the enrichment of foreign plunderers who siphoned off Trinidad's resource-wealth into the coffers of transnational corporations, which by this time had acquired a widespread notoriety amongst the masses. It was understood that development as it stood was facing backwards, that the 'patterns were still colonial in character, relying mainly on trade with North Atlantic countries and neglecting the potential for intra-Caribbean trade'. Ryan, *The Black Power Revolution 1970*, p. 84.

³⁸¹ What Brian Meeks calls the 'Trinidadian interpretation of the revolutionary spirit' of this year emerged out of a variety of events. The decolonisation movement in countries of the global South, for example, inspired new verve in the liberatory movements of the African diaspora. The Cuban Revolution and the uprising of Latin American peasantry, such as in Colombia and Nicaragua, the intensification of the national liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies and perhaps most critically the struggle for civil rights in the USA, with the Black Power movement, headed by leaders such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, whose determination and charisma placed an impetus for action on Afro-Caribbean populations to create change and end discrimination, all affected the public mood in Trinidad. The Vietnam War, with the prolonged and effective resistance to US forces, such as the 1968 Tet Offensive and the concurrent peace movement in the US, was another source of inspiration for the fight against white Western imperialism.

Brian Meeks, 'NUFF at the Cusp of an Idea: Grassroots Guerrillas and the Politics of the Seventies in Trinidad and Tobago', *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), pp. 49-72 (p. 71).

based industrialisation policies, led to an eruption of dissent and the beginnings of Trinidad's Black Power movement.

It was in February of 1970 that this unrest began, after nearly a decade of socio-economic stagnation. The first Black Power movement that occurred at a Carnival celebration would lead to a series of events that, as they unfolded, shook Trinidad to its foundations. They were made all the more worrying (from the perspective of the government) by the army mutiny that ran alongside them, as well as the numerous incidents of worker strikes and the militant action taken by the armed revolutionary group NUFF (the National Union of Freedom Fighters) from 1968 throughout the '70s.³⁸² By 21 April 1970, the government had announced a state of emergency and arrested fifteen Black Power leaders.

Incidentally, in November of the same year, the PNM arranged a special convention to approve the Chaguaramas Declaration, which sketched out numerous ideological changes and a 'major re-statement of the party's role in, as Williams himself put it, "helping the West Indian people to acquire economic as well as political power [...] to make their own culture, to participate fully in both the political and economic process, and to become true men instead of what one critic has savagely called us, mimic men"'.³⁸³ Williams declared that "the word 'revolution' has always held terrors for the privileged groups in the Caribbean [...] [the] PNM must continue to be revolutionary [...] in fact, the beginning of the Decade of the Seventies finds the Caribbean in a revolutionary mood".³⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it was clear that the government's attempts to unify the country with the promise of oil-based industrialisation had not succeeded, and that any kind of meaningful socio-economic reform had not reached those in most pressing need of it. In September 1973, at his wits' end, Eric Williams announced his

³⁸² On 26 February, NJAC led a march in Port of Spain demonstrating against racism in Trinidad. On 4 March they renamed Woodford Square the People's Parliament and led a 10,000 strong march from Port of Spain to Shanty Town on the eastern edge. Several more demonstrations were organised in the coming months and the movement swelled to 500,000 on 6 April when a young demonstrator, Basil Davis, was shot and killed by police. By 21 April, the crisis had come to a head and power was slipping from the government's grip: on April 13, the Deputy Prime Minister A. N. R. Robinson announced his resignation from the parliamentary cabinet in a speech highly critical of the party's economic policies, given to the Seamen and Waterfront Workers trade union. On 18 April, sugar workers went on strike at Brechin Castle and OWTU, TIWU and NJAC planned action to display their solidarity; rumours of a general strike percolated through the nation. On 21 April, the rapid sequence of events that were taking place were made more urgent by the army's rebellion against the government; half of the island's army of eight hundred officers mutinied and joined the demonstrators. Without control of the military and most of the enlisted soldiers, the PNM's ability to survive the crisis was jeopardised.

Kirk Peter Meighoo, 'Politics in the Independence Period, 1962-81: "Right Back to 1956"', *Politics in a Half Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago, 1925-2001* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), pp. 62-106 (p. 71).

³⁸³ Meighoo, *Politics in a Half Made Society*, p. 72.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

decision to resign as Prime Minister at the PNM's Annual Convention. What came next would take the entire nation, but most particularly the government and Williams himself, by surprise.

The 1973 Oil Boom — “Capitalism Gone Mad”

Speaking in terms of the world-system as a whole, the 1970s were a tumultuous decade, overdetermined by oil and political upheaval. 1973 in particular was crucial because it heralded, as Gerry Canavan puts it, a ‘striking moment of transition’ for North-American hegemony: ‘1973 was the year of Watergate, the withdrawal from Vietnam, the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system [...] among other notable benchmarks of limit— but first and foremost, 1973 [was] the year of the oil shock, the year the reality of capitalism’s dependence on a finite, nonrenewable energy was made inescapably clear and painfully immediate’.³⁸⁵

After the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo against the U.S. following the latter’s decision to re-supply the Israeli military. Arab OPEC members also extended the embargo to other countries that supported Israel. The embargo both banned petroleum exports to the targeted nations and introduced cuts in oil production. By using their institutional capacities to set oil prices and by nationalising domestic petroleum production, OPEC countries gained sovereignty over their most valuable resource. Oil prices rocketed overnight, from \$3 to \$10 a barrel, allowing the OPEC countries to exert ‘putative postcolonial power as crucial petro-states’, for a time, at least.³⁸⁶

In Trinidad, the rise in prices led to windfall profits and increased revenue for the state.³⁸⁷ It also meant ‘an increased willingness on the part of oil companies to ensure that the PNM

³⁸⁵ Canavan, *Oil Culture*, p. 342.

³⁸⁶ As Macdonald notes, ‘their attempt to wrest oil-spigot control from existing world-energy hegemonies was successful to a degree, but eventually became compromised by a deadly mix of neoliberal petro-capitalism and U.S. energy imperialism alongside postcolonial regional warfare and internecine cultural struggles between conservative and modernizing forces, and ethnic pre-eminence versus political centralization.’ Graeme Macdonald, “‘Monstrous Transformer’: Petrofiction and World Literature,’ *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol 53, Issue 3 (2017), 289-302 DOI: <[10.1080/17449855.2017.1337680](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337680)>

³⁸⁷ From close to US \$3 p/b at the beginning of 1973, the world market price of Trinidadian crude rose by January 1974 to over \$14 p/b. The industry’s direct contribution to total tax revenues, excluding the Unemployment Levy, shot up 70% as compared with a previous high of 35% in 1968. Increased petroleum taxes

remain in power [...]. [T]his implied giving in to demands by the country's leaders for greater control of the industry [...] which became a source of state capitalization through joint venture arrangements'.³⁸⁸ By December 1973, Williams had reversed his decision to resign in anticipation of the resultant riches. In a self-conscious parody of the calypso 'If the Priest Could Play,' by Cypher, he stated that the boom 'made of the local scene a different ball game [...] if the Sheik could play, who is me'.³⁸⁹ Williams, self-appointed sheik of the new oil riches, would go on to use this windfall from the boom to alleviate the political tensions that had bubbled over in the late sixties and early seventies, and to neutralise dissent from groups such as NUFF, the Black Power activists, trade unions and their furious, mobilised workers. The state now 'sought to construct a national identity in energy' as petroleum's significance started to change.³⁹⁰ Oil was no longer only entangled in politics but became (as Michael Watts puts it with reference to the coeval oil boom in Nigeria) 'an idiom for doing politics'.³⁹¹ The oil boom went a long way in saving the languishing legitimacy of the PNM government, and with the sudden influx of oil dollars, the PNM was able to reify its narrative of a development that would propel Trinidad away from its colonial past and towards a progressive, modernized future.

The 1973 oil boom created what Andrew Apter has called, in reference to the Nigerian context, a 'spectacle of opulence'.³⁹² (Apter's useful phrase is borrowed in turn from

led to an increase of 160% in government revenues between 1973-4, in a budget which leapt from TT\$1,229.4 million to TT\$4450 million (Hintzen 141-2). Oil companies alone contributed TT\$881.5 million to the budget compared with \$TT120 million in 1973: an increase of \$TT769 million. Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, pp. 141-2.

³⁸⁸ Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, p. 142.

³⁸⁹ Louis Regis, *The Political Calypso* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1999), p. 103.

³⁹⁰ Haydn Furlonge and Mark Kaiser, 'Overview of Natural Gas Sector Developments', *International Journal of Energy Sector Management* 4.4 (2010), 535-554 (p. 539).

³⁹¹ Michael Watts, 'Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *Geopolitics* Vol. 9, Issue 1 (2004), 50-80 (p. 76).

³⁹² In the same decade, Nigeria experienced a similar type of profound socio-economic change thanks to the 1973 boom. As in Trinidad, the translation of oil money into spectacular edifices and social services gave form to otherwise incomprehensible amounts of money (for example, \$9.1 billion was the annual income from petroleum exports in 1976). The scale of the infrastructure and social programmes created with the influx of petro-dollars reflected, as Sarah L. Lincoln puts it 'the sublime hyperbole of money counted in the billions, the skyscrapers sprouting overnight from the earth offering an objective correlative for the dizzying wealth that was apparently being conjured alchemically from thin air (or, rather, from the earth itself)'. In Nigeria, what Apter has called the 'magic of Nigeria's nascent modernity' which saw the state turn magician, was initially experienced as a magical social reality, as infrastructure and social policies were transformed by petro dollars. However, as Lincoln writes, 'this spectacle of wealth and modernity, the set of visual images through which the oil boom and its marvelous effects were mediated, must be understood as profoundly ideological. That is, as both a fetishistic misrecognition of the social and ecological relations on which the wealth was founded, and a political project in which

Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle', which he discusses in his 1967 treatise).³⁹³ The phrase, and much of Apter's discussion, can be productively applied to the Trinidadian context too, where a similar extravaganza of petro-modern development was being paraded before the nation's eyes.³⁹⁴ As Fernando Coronil explains in his study of the Venezuelan petro-state, such an illusion of petro-powered development in peripheral nations is rooted in a 'social dominance of rent circulation over the production of value'.³⁹⁵ In Trinidad, oil rents and revenues were utilised to construct spectacular infrastructural projects which were intended to put on display a distinct kind of Trinidadian modernity, steeped in oil and its multitudinous ideological associations. While there was at first economic growth due to the windfall revenues that led to a stunning increase in the government's wealth, the lack of a productive and stable base during the years of the oil boom, and the hollowing out of the economy even as oil-money poured in, underscores why the opulence of oil-wealth was a temporary spectacle rather than a long-term, productive, sustainable reality. In the context of Nigeria, Apter writes that the entire nation was 'reborn as a society of the spectacle, with oil money serving as its dominant form of value. But the source of this value was fundamentally different from those of full-fledged capitalist systems.' As Apter outlines, it was based not on:

[...] the accumulation of surplus value but on the circulation of a specific form of excess— one of oil rents and revenues that underwrote the importation of staples and luxury goods, as well as various white elephant projects that produced only negative returns, with national credibility ratified by signs of material development masquerading as its substance, purveying a "seeing-is-believing" ontology that disguised the absence of a productive base.³⁹⁶

legitimacy and authority were entirely constituted on the basis of illusion and display, the spectacle of sovereignty without any reference to an underwriting content'.

Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, p. 8.

Sarah L. Lincoln, "'Petro-Magic Realism': Ben Okri's Inflationary Modernism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 250-263 (p. 251).

³⁹³ Debord identified the spectacle as a new phase of capitalism defined by the hyperproduction of commodities and of the signs of commodified value. As Barrett and Worden note, 'Debord's spectacle [is] an useful model for thinking through the deep ties between oil capitalism and cultural representation [...] the global oil economy is at root a spectacular system, built on and sustained by proliferating cultural significations. This symbolic imperative arises in part from the peculiar physical properties of oil, which more than any other commodity demands the unceasing generation of imaginative interpretations of its value (the sort of mystifying signs that constitute the spectacle in Debord's account)'.

Barrett and Worden, *Oil Cultures*, p. xxiii.

³⁹⁴ Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 2.

³⁹⁵ Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 10.

³⁹⁶ Apter, *Pan African Nation*, p. 14.

A coeval reality was unfolding in Trinidad, with oil coming to serve as the nation's 'dominant form of value' and powering a similar spectacle of development.³⁹⁷ In Nigeria, 'oil money transformed the landscape into images of national renewal, with new highways, cities, buildings and processing plants [...] all of which produced the spectacle of development'.³⁹⁸ The 'tangible signs of progress and abundance ratified the new prosperity with visible evidence [...], producing a national dramaturgy of appearances and representations that beckoned towards modernity and brought it into being'.³⁹⁹ With the construction of infrastructural projects such as Point Lisas and ISCOTT, Trinidadian landscapes were being similarly transformed. The influx of petro-dollars encouraged the government to re-organise the nation's economy, with oil revenues used to create resource intensive export industries and projects. For example, there was an important development programme created by the PNM, which was propelled and facilitated by the oil-boom, which had as its centrepiece the Point Lisas industrial complex, which was located in Trinidad's oil belt at an estimated cost of US \$5 billion. Joint projects between transnationals and the government organised the production of liquefied natural gas for export, the construction of an iron and steel plant, an aluminium smelter and several petrochemical and fertiliser plants.⁴⁰⁰ The transnationals involved were international in scope, reflecting the truly globalized nature of the oil-commodity: they included the North-American Amoco, W. R. Grace, Tesoro Petroleum and Texaco; Hoechst and Kaiser Aluminium of Germany and Mitsui Chemicals of Japan. The oil boom also happened to coincide with the discovery of huge natural gas reserves, meaning that the new energy intensive sectors were generally favoured over others.⁴⁰¹ Along with the Point Lisas complex, the spectacle of oil-based opulence was made manifest in other industrial infrastructures, such as the Iron and Steel Company of Trinidad and Tobago (ISCOTT), the construction of which was begun in 1977 and was deemed part of Trinidad's new foray into the world of petro-modernity. The Point Lisas complex and the construction of the ISCOTT were constituted as 'spectacular embodiments' of national progress, but also were presented as

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁰⁰ Williams's choice of location for the Point Lisas estate was an old sugar plantation covering 672 hectares on the southwestern coast. This meaningful geographical symbolism was entirely orchestrated; Point Lisas symbolised the overcoming of Trinidad's colonial past and heralded a new era of ethnic harmony, atop a plantation where sugar capitalism had overdetermined racial divisions.

⁴⁰¹ Clive Yolande Thomas, 'Oil Boom and Bust: Trinidad and Tobago', *The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1988), pp. 279-294 (p. 283).

embodying the hopes of the nation's citizens 'responding to their longing to inhabit a new, petro-modern form of citizenship'.⁴⁰² With the economic takeoff of 1973, the island became in many ways a 'society of the spectacle' gathering around the warm glow of the oil boom's wealth. In the words of Daniel Miller, Trinidad's citizens 'experienced [the boom] as something on a par with a tropical storm which, with hindsight, passed over the country leaving an astonishing trail of detritus in its wake'.⁴⁰³

Oil money was also spent on massive social projects. As Daniel Miller elaborates, after some 'initial caution, the money was used for across the board subsidies, for maintaining and creating employment and for risky large scale industrial development'.⁴⁰⁴ The development of electricity generation, the construction of roads and ports, water systems and housing facilities were all facilitated by the oil boom and improved the lives of many urban Afro-Trinidadian communities. However, in accordance with the symptoms of Dutch Disease, other productive sectors declined significantly, the most dramatic fiscal descent being that of agriculture. Petro-politics became fused with ethnic politics, for 'the priorities of the government [were] seen as closely related to political or ethnic considerations, favouring the development of an African public sector while ignoring an Indian dominated rural sector'.⁴⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the oil money flowed in and with the dramatic increase in oil prices also came the greater control of the oil industry by the government. In 1972, the government held shares in 35 companies, with a book value of TT\$82 million. By 1983, the value of its portfolio had risen to TT\$ 2,000 million.

For urban populations, the material standard of living certainly rose, relative to pre-boom decades. As Niblett writes, 'Williams's oil-soaked discourse of national progress appeared to have [for a time] become reality. Petroleum [...] now shaped the reproduction of everyday life in Trinidad more deeply than before'.⁴⁰⁶ Average weekly earnings rose 22.8% between 1971 and 1980. Unemployment had fallen from approximately 15.4% in 1973 to 9.9% in 1980, the lowest in Trinidad and Tobago's history. Among the middle-classes and even the working-classes, the influx of petro-dollars meant the possibility of extravagant commodity-consumption and the (temporary) spectacle of a personal opulence, channeled

⁴⁰² Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 31.

⁴⁰³ Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 204.

⁴⁰⁴ Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 26.

⁴⁰⁵ Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 26.

⁴⁰⁶ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 35.

through the purchase of various consumer goods. The rapid increase in state revenues created a culture of conspicuous consumption unlike anything the country had ever seen. The consumer revolution that followed the 1973 boom was so frenzied that it seemed, as the calypsonian Mighty Sparrow put it in his famous 1983 song, that ‘here in Trinidad, capitalism gone mad.’ The total value of imports (allowing for inflation) during the decade leapt from TT\$684.9 million to TT\$2380.4 million.⁴⁰⁷ More and more consumer durables appeared on the market, enabling what Huber has called (in the context of petroculture in the postwar U.S.) a completely ‘new set of lived practices and visions of the good life’.⁴⁰⁸

Of the three novelists considered in this chapter, it is perhaps Bissoondath who registers this frenzy of conspicuous consumption most explicitly in *A Casual Brutality*. The local supermarket, for example, is loaded with foreign produce:

[...] canned Japanese fish, British biscuits, Danish cookies [...] California whites, French reds, Portugese roses [all a result of] the oil money, so easily acquired, flowing to the island not from effort but as a consequence of distant events [and which] had given Casaquemadans cosmopolitan tastes [...] crystal was imported from Italy, glassware from Germany, leather goods from Brazil. The roads became clogged with Fords and Chryslers, Mercedes Benzes and Rolls-Royces, Toyotas and Hondas [...] fortunes soared [...] and in the midst of all of this, as the electric can-openers buzzed and the microwave ovens hummed, as supply helicopters clattered to and from the off-shore oil rigs and laden container ships lined up off the Lopez City docks, sugar — long the mainstay of the Casaquemadan economy, the crop that lent the island value in the first place — tumbled casually into agricultural ignominy. Oil climbed in importance from third place, after sugar and tourism, to first.⁴⁰⁹

As the extract above evidences, petroleum, having shaped politics and economics throughout the sixties, now came to shape social life and culture in new, addictive and influential ways. With the increase in wages came an increase in rampant and aspirational consumerism. The number of televisions owned trebled over the decade, for example. With electricity more widely available throughout the island, ‘refrigerators, stereos, televisions and video recorders became universal possessions’.⁴¹⁰ However, the ultimate symbol of petro-based consumption

⁴⁰⁷ Meighoo, *Politics in a Half Made Society*, p. 80.

⁴⁰⁸ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. 305.

⁴⁰⁹ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 76.

⁴¹⁰ Steven Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 138.

during this decade was the automobile. The number of cars in Trinidad increased by 65% between 1974 and 1980. Cars had always been markers of status prior to the boom, but as they became more widely available they came to ‘symbolise the era as one of new possibilities for many people’ and ‘came to dominate the Trinidadian self-image.’⁴¹¹ In Trinidad, the car became the ‘artefact which outweigh[ed] even clothing in its ability to incorporate and express the individual’.⁴¹²

Of course, there is a longstanding association between automobiles and the technologies, velocities and personal liberties associated with ‘Western’ modernity. As John Urry and Mimi Sheller point out in their article ‘The City and the Car,’ the culture of auto-mobility is the dominant culture, the one which ‘sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life’.⁴¹³ Of course, the ‘good life’ is often equated to ‘Western’ life, that is, Western lifestyles and habits, which become the benchmark for progress. Cars, they note, were the ‘quintessential manufactured object’ of Western capitalism in the 1970s (and indeed, the car remains this quintessential manufactured object even today).⁴¹⁴ The car is perhaps the most important piece of machinery which represents what Huber calls ‘life as capital’.⁴¹⁵ In Trinidad, the car became a potent symbol of petro-powered modernity, autonomy and progress. More importantly, the popularity of the car on the island as the ‘vehicle for expressive identity dovetailed neatly with the governmental narrative of Trinidad’s identity into the age of petro-modern citizenship’.⁴¹⁶

Nevertheless, as the 1982 bust was to prove, the period of economic boom did not provide long-term solutions to Trinidad’s underlying problems. ‘The regime’s largesse’ in the seventies ‘did little to solve the structural weaknesses plaguing the island’s economy [...] in many instances, the infusion of oil money merely exacerbated the problems associated with the PNM’s rule’.⁴¹⁷ For example, the oil rents that were used by the PNM to invest in high-risk, capital-intensive infrastructural projects, were ultimately hollow in value. Windfall revenues from oil made the nation overly dependent on the resource as the primary source of export earnings and foreign exchange. By forcing up the value of the Trinidadian dollar, oil

⁴¹¹ Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 237.

⁴¹² Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 237.

⁴¹³ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, ‘The City and the Car’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol 24, Issue 4 (December 2000), 737-757 (p. 737).

⁴¹⁴ Sheller and Urry, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, p. 737.

⁴¹⁵ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. xiv, p. 73.

⁴¹⁶ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 35.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

exports made other domestically produced goods and services less competitive. As a result, there was an excess of oil wealth, in the form of rents and revenues, but the productive economy lagged behind. In a brief statement which nevertheless took accurate stock of the situation, the Trinidad's Central Statistical Office deemed the state of affairs in 1975 as being that of 'growth without development'.⁴¹⁸ Again, a comparison can be made with the Nigerian oil economy in the same period. As Apter writes, since 'oil replaced labour as the basis of national development' in Nigeria, it produced a 'deficit of value and an excess of wealth, or a paradoxical profit as loss'.⁴¹⁹ The structures of oil-based development promoted by the state were only signifiers of development, lacking a signified and creating a sense of unreality in the context of everyday life.⁴²⁰ Because oil profits were not sustainably incorporated into the Nigerian economy, 'underlying the appearance of instant development [...] there was a negative dialectic of internal consumption that expanded the state at its own expense by pumping money into the public sector while privatizing public office and resources – partly along ethnic lines – and by absorbing organized assaults on its position'.⁴²¹ In the Trinidadian context, corruption and the PNM's biased use of the patronage system chipped away at the integrity of democratic political structures and eventually at the fabric of social and civic life itself.⁴²² Despite engendering short-term wealth, the spectacular edifice of the oil economy created what Apter calls 'both (an) illusion of growth and a specific phenomenology of national development that gave rise to an empire of signs'.⁴²³ In Trinidad, the signs of progress seemed to promise a better future, but oil-based development was ultimately hollow.⁴²⁴

The 1973 oil boom was a 'spectacular edifice built on images of petroleum-based progress and prosperity'.⁴²⁵ But these 'signs' of progress contained no real substance; despite being undeniably dramatic, and making Trinidad relatively wealthy for a decade or so, the oil-

⁴¹⁸ Taimoon Stewart, *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*, p. 374.

⁴¹⁹ Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, p. 201.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴²² Despite the threads of similarity drawn between Nigeria and Trinidad in this chapter, it must also be emphasised that the two contexts are significantly different: the Nigerian context also contains its specificities, e.g. of population, petro-regimes and the violence that resulted from the fusion of oil and politics. It is important to note the heterogeneity of the Nigerian context as well as its similarities to the Trinidadian situation.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴²⁴ Moreover, much oil revenue was misspent – one prominent symbol of this was the DEWD scheme, or the Development and Environmental Works Divisions. This series of public works programmes was intended to provide temporary employment, funded by revenues derived from energy-sector rents. The scheme became well-known for its 'lax supervision of the casual labour employed and was seen as creating a tradition of taking money for little work', as Miller notes. Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*, p. 26.

⁴²⁵ Apter, *The Pan African Nation*, p. 44.

based ‘spectacle of opulence’ did not succeed in forging genuine change, despite the PNM’s oil-soaked narratives which promised sustainable economic prosperity and racial unity.⁴²⁶ The ‘spectacle of opulence’ in 1970s Trinidad intensified class and ethnic divisions, hollowed out democracy and did not lead to sustainable socio-economic reforms in the long term.

Reading ‘Petro-Magical Realism’ in Trinidad Literature

Much cultural production about Trinidad revolves around the ‘idea that Trinidadian people inhabit a social reality underwritten by fantasy’.⁴²⁷ Indeed, this concept has been commonly cited with regards to the whole region; as Gabriel García Márquez once put it, ‘Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination.’⁴²⁸

The 1973 oil boom certainly created a fantastic social reality that could only have been dreamt up by a wild imagination, with the construction of spectacular new infrastructures and monuments in Trinidad, all built with the astonishing influx of petro-dollars. As we have seen, this transformation of everyday life imbued everyday existence with a sense of the magical and miraculous. The petro-powered ‘spectacle of opulence’ in this period of Trinidadian history can be usefully connected to the larger phenomenon of what Michael Watts has called ‘petro-magic,’ a paraphrasing of Fernando Coronil’s extensive discussion of the magical aspects of the Venezuelan petro-state.⁴²⁹ In Venezuela, the state bought legitimacy due to its status as the

⁴²⁶ The governmental treasury overflowed with money as the price of oil continued to rise. From 1970–80, the prices per barrel of oil rose over 22 times to \$28.70. Government revenues rose accordingly, almost twenty times, to \$6,226.4 million Trinidadian dollars. The net official foreign reserves expanded from its low point in 1973 to nearly 100 times that level in 1980, from TT\$67.1 million to TT\$6,336.7 million. With these developments, real GDP rose by over two thirds during this period at a rate of 5.3% per annum from TT\$1, 643.7 million in 1970 to TT\$2748.4 million in 1980. In the 1978 Budget, presented in December 1977, Williams declared that ‘the Trinidad and Tobago government is a billionaire!’ By 1980, government expenditure had risen from 13.1% (in 1970) to 21.1% in 1980. Meighoo, *Politics in a Half Made Society*, p. 87.

⁴²⁷ Lucy Evans, *Communities in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Short Stories* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 188.

⁴²⁸ Gabriel García Márquez with Peter Stone, ‘Gabriel García Márquez, The Art of Fiction No. 69’, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez> [Date accessed: 14/12/2020].

⁴²⁹ Coronil propounded the idea that ‘in terms of imagining the nation and producing the state, oil was magical’. He stated that the Venezuelan nation possessed two ‘bodies’: firstly, ‘a political body made up of its citizens’ and secondly ‘a natural body made up of its rich subsoil’. Petro-magic, then, was the specific form ‘the metabolism between society and nature’ took in the Venezuelan petrostate: ‘by condensing within itself the multiple powers dispersed throughout the nation’s two bodies, the state appeared as a single agent endowed with the magical power to remake the nation’. Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 4, p. 8.

distributor of oil incomes. The Gómez regime functioned through displays of what Coronil calls authoritative and ‘magical performance[s]’. This meant that the dictator ruled the country ‘through the marvels of [the] power’ (of oil wealth) rather than ‘convinc[ing] through the power of reason’ and democratic practices.⁴³⁰ Ignacio Cabrujas explains that the manner in which the Venezuelan state came to view itself as a ‘magnanimous sorcerer’ is representative of general political tendencies when faced with the consequences of oil booms. This is because the oil-commodity has the ‘power to awaken fantasies [and] enable[s] state leaders to fashion political life into a dazzling spectacle of national progress through tricks of prestidigitation’.⁴³¹ Oil, Coronil writes, ‘harbors fetishistic qualities: it is the bearer of meanings, hopes, expectations of unimaginable powers’ and as such, ‘the mythos of oil and oil wealth has been central to the history of modern industrial capitalism’.⁴³² In peripheral producer states such as Trinidad, the longstanding social reality of unevenly patterned wealth distribution was profoundly heightened by the arrival of the boom.

The concept of petro-magic, then, expresses the promises of the oil-commodity, that is, of miraculous long-term wealth with very little work involved, in a relatively short space of time. As the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński explains in relation to Iran:

Oil creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free [...] The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident, through a kiss of fortune and not by sweat, anguish, hard work [...] In this sense oil is a fairy tale and like every fairy tale a bit of a lie. Oil fills us with such arrogance that we begin believing we can easily overcome such unyielding obstacles as time.⁴³³

Oil is, as Kapuściński goes on to write, is ‘a filthy, foul-smelling liquid that squirts up obligingly into the air and falls back to earth as a rustling shower of money’ but in peripheral states, also ‘falls back’ as violence.⁴³⁴ This, as Jennifer Wenzel explains, is part of the illusion of

⁴³⁰ Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 5.

⁴³¹ Cabrujas, quoted in Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 2.

⁴³² Ibid., p. 251.

⁴³³ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*, trans. William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 35.

⁴³⁴ Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*, p. 35.

petro-magic, for it is ‘one of the forms that petro-violence takes; its illusions of sweet surplus can, for a time, mask the harm that petroleum extraction does to humans and nonhuman nature, turning each into instruments of violence against the other’.⁴³⁵ As Wenzel writes, ‘oil promises wealth without work, progress without the passage of time: the narrative mode appropriate to petro-promise is not the incremental, developmentalist progress narrative of modernisation, but rather the fairy tale of instant transformation at the wave of a magic wand, in which every dream of infrastructure comes true’.⁴³⁶ Petro-magical realities spread across countries such as Trinidad and Nigeria in the wake of the 1973 boom, and cultural production struggled to critically represent the sudden, miraculous influx of petro-dollars. Petroleum moulds narratives of development and particularly in post-colonial settings, heightens the sense of what Shake Keane has called ‘the sense of the unreality of colonial life’.⁴³⁷

In the Trinidadian context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the depiction of the oil economy’s volatility and paradoxes posed formal difficulties for some of the novel forms examined here. As Michael Niblett points out, the latter ‘tends to struggle when confronted by the topsy-turvy logic of the boom era.’ The problem he adds, ‘may have much to do with the implications for narrative of oil’s “magical” capacity to produce something out of nothing’.⁴³⁸ This is because oil, as Wenzel explains, is a *deus ex machina* of sorts, ‘a miraculous agent, external to a historical narrative, whose arrival makes possible what is otherwise impossible within the narrative’s own terms. That is to say, there is something almost antinarrative about the ontology of oil, if narrative is understood as the working out of cause and effect and oil is understood to produce something out of nothing [...] oil hijacks the imagination’.⁴³⁹

Wenzel has proposed the rubric of ‘petro-magic-realism’ as a means to analyse the kinds of literary modalities and devices deployed by authors in an effort to capture the particular political ecologies of oil and its effects on society.⁴⁴⁰ Petro-magic-realism ‘combines magical

⁴³⁵ Jennifer Wenzel, ‘Petro-Magic-Realism Revisited: Unimagining and Reimagining the Niger Delta’, in *Oil Cultures*, eds. by Daniel Worden, Ross Barrett and Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 211–225 (p. 215).

⁴³⁶ Wenzel, *Oil Cultures*, p. 212.

⁴³⁷ Philip Nanton, ‘Shake Keane’s “Nonsense”: An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture’, *Small Axe* 7, 2 (2003), 71–92 (p. 76).

⁴³⁸ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 39.

⁴³⁹ Wenzel, *Oil Cultures*, p. 212.

⁴⁴⁰ Wenzel’s initial area of study, with regards to ‘petro-magic-realism’ was Nigeria and the work of Ben Okri. In her essay ‘Petro-Magic-Realism: Towards a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature,’ Wenzel argues for the

transmogrifications and fantastic landscapes with the monstrous- but- mundane violence of oil extraction, the state violence that supports it, and the environmental harm it causes [...] [it] makes visible the all-too-real effects of petro-magic— read here as a mode of violence that mystifies through the seductions of petro-promise. Petro-magic-realism, in other words, can reveal the secrets behind petromagic’s tricks’.⁴⁴¹ Indeed, the ‘literary mode of petro-magic-realism can help to puncture more than a few of the illusions associated with oil, not least the geographic foreclosures of the imagination associated with the “resource curse”’.⁴⁴² This ‘piercing’ of the illusions of petro-magic are mediated on numerous levels in the work of Earl Lovelace in particular. As we will see, Naipaul, and to a lesser extent Bissoondath, are relatively less capable of productively engaging with the spectacular edifice of the 1970s Trinidadian oil economy on any truly critical level. But Lovelace’s *Is Just A Movie* not only registers the impact of the boom and the spectacle of petro-modernity, it also recognises and analyses the hollowness of this spectacle and its negative socio-economic reverberations. In contrast, Naipaul and Bissoondath fail to truly grasp either the cultural impact of the boom or to pierce the illusion of the ‘opulent spectacle’ of Trinidadian petro-modernity. It is to these differing literary registrations of Trinidad’s oil-based industrialisation, the hollowness of the ‘spectacle of opulence’ and each author’s engagement (or lack of) with forms of petro-magic-realism to which I now turn.

At one level or another, Naipaul, Bissoondath and Lovelace all register in their novels the consequences, be they magical or detrimental, of the 1973 oil boom. The most strikingly obvious trope shared in all three texts is the depiction of the automobile, that supposedly

usefulness of ‘petro-magic-realism’ with regards to the Nigerian context and selected works of Ben Okri. She questions how literary critics might, through the lens of political ecology:

[...] historicise the signifying work that commodities do, and how literary production in Nigeria is itself constrained by cultural and material contests over natural resources. If the publishing industry, like the palm or petroleum industries, exerts different kinds of pressures within and outside Nigeria as it circulates commodities, then *a concept of petro-magic-realism offers a way of understanding the relationships between the fantastic and material elements of these stories, linking formal, intertextual, sociological, and economic questions about literature to questions of political ecology* [...] the rubric (of) petro-magic-realism reveals how Okri imagines the pressures of a particular political ecology within a particular literary idiom. *If petro-magic offers the illusion of wealth without work, Okri’s petro-magic-realism paradoxically pierces such illusions, grounding its vision in a recognisably devastated, if also recognisably fantastic, landscape* (emphases mine 250, 257).

Jennifer Wenzel, ‘Petro-magic-realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature,’ *Postcolonial Studies*, 9:4 (2006), 449–464 (p. 250, 257).

⁴⁴¹ Wenzel, *Oil Cultures*, p. 217.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 214.

perfect embodiment of petro-progress which expresses an idealised, prosperous individual identity against a backdrop of oil-based modernity. Descriptions of the car in the three texts register not only the proliferation of oil-fuelled personal wealth (and hence the spectacle of individual development) among certain swathes of the populace, but also explicitly depict oil-inflected-landscapes.

In Naipaul's *Guerrillas*, the depiction of the automobile is perhaps the most puzzling, presented as it is in the context of a novel that makes no explicit reference to the oil boom.⁴⁴³ This may be because Naipaul wrote on the cusp of the boom and so could not predict its effects; yet it is striking that he does not mention the oil economy at all in *Guerrillas*, instead displacing it entirely and replacing it with references to bauxite. The novel itself, meanwhile, consists of a bitterly cynical analysis of Trinidadian society in the early 1970s, outlining the 'Black Power Killings' and other, related political events such as the PNM's struggle against NUFF and the presence of foreigners (tourists and employees of transnational companies alike) in the country. Naipaul's lack of reference to the oil economy is deeply problematic, especially given the fact that in his companion essay to the novel, he talks about the oil economy in quite some detail. This companion piece, entitled 'Michael X and The Black Power Killings in Trinidad,' demonstrates his cognizance of the oil-boom's importance.⁴⁴⁴ He writes, for instance, that 'Trinidad in 1971 was his [Malik's] perfect setting. Trinidad, with its oil economy, was rich, with a standard of living equalled in South America only by Venezuela and Argentina'.⁴⁴⁵ Yet, he avoids an engagement with the resource in his fictional work. The essay acknowledges the oil economy's ultimate hollowness in its reference to, amongst other things, the fact that petro-dollars were 'magically cycled' through a generally unproductive, undiversified national economy, and the way in which political events were triggered (in part) by the consequences of a conflictive national dependence on the oil industry.⁴⁴⁶ It is these consequences that are examined in *Guerrillas*, through the (again, problematic) perspectives of

⁴⁴³ Of course, it is true that literature which makes no explicit reference to oil is still doused in the stuff. Whether Naipaul wanted it or not, his novel is still a piece of petrofiction – after all, much petrofiction does not contain explicit reference to oil. However, the puzzle lies in the fact that he is aware of the importance of petroleum to Trinidad's economy at this time, but avoids mentioning it for specific reasons, which I will consider in a later section of this chapter.

⁴⁴⁴ V. S. Naipaul, 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad', in *The Writer and the World*, ed. by Pankaj Mishra (London: Picador, 2003), p. 48.

⁴⁴⁵ Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 48.

⁴⁴⁶ Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 48, p. 55.

Naipaul's primary characters, Jane and Roche (respectively English and white South-African), and Jimmy Ahmed.

In the opening passages of *Guerrillas*, as Jane and Roche drive down to the 'hot city at the foot of the hills,' there is no obvious mention of oil, yet it drips from every line of Naipaul's prose in his descriptions of auto-mobility and deindustrialised city-scapes.⁴⁴⁷ The nation's capital, Port-of-Spain, is a city that seems to be rotting around its petro-modern infrastructure in *Guerrillas*, a sacrifice zone of global capitalism made blurry by the haze of pink bauxite dust, while the surrounding countryside, symbolic of the island's history as a colonial commodity frontier, is denuded and lifeless. The history of colonial commodity extraction and the current reality of petro-capitalism shapes the ecology, society and politics of the island, allowing the reader to trace the various resource-based iterations of capitalism's ecological regime in the text. What Niblett calls the 'ecological unconscious' of the novel registers both the problematic petro-modernity of the present and the damaging history of the sugar plantations, yet there is no explicit mention of either.⁴⁴⁸

Traffic was heavy in this area of factories. But the land still showed its recent pastoral history. Here and there, among the big sheds and the modern buildings in unrendered concrete [...] were still fields, remnants of the big estates [...] sometimes there was a single rusting car in a sunken field, as though having run off the road, it had simply been abandoned; sometimes there were heaps of junked vehicles [...] Sometimes there were rows of red brick pillars [...] it was what remained of an industrial park, one of the failed projects of the earliest days of independence. Tax holidays had been offered to foreign investors; many had come for the holidays and then moved on elsewhere.⁴⁴⁹

Naipaul describes a city suffering from lopsided development or what he himself calls 'consumer squalor' thanks to the unevenly distributed effects of the oil-economy in a peripheral nation: the description may be read as 'an oblique critique of the political ecology of Trinidad's oil frontier'.⁴⁵⁰ This sentiment is echoed in his 'Michael X' essay, where he does acknowledge petroleum's damaging role in the construction of a hollow developmentalism:

⁴⁴⁷ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁹ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 17.

⁴⁵⁰ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 10.

Agricultural land is steadily invaded; the hillsides are scratched higher and higher with houses and squatters' shacks and show more brown every year; open spaces, both within the city and outside it, are filled in. The built-up areas choke; the highways are clogged with motorcars; the railway system has been abandoned. Black carrion corbeaux guard the entrance to Port of Spain; and over much of the eastern end of the city, where green hills have been quarried by illegal immigrants from the other islands into dusty red shanty towns, there now hangs the reek of the city's new rubbish dump, burning in the mangrove that once sheltered the red ibis. It is a consumer squalor. It is not supported by agriculture, which declines, or by industry, which, where it exists, is rudimentary, protected and inflationary. It is supported by what the visitor seldom sees: oil, drilled in the sea to the north and the southeast, and inland in the south [...] Trinidad's urban northwest is a great parasitic suburb, through which money is yet magically cycled. Much of the population is superfluous and they know it. Unemployment is high but labor is perennially short. The physical squalor, the sense of a land being pillaged rather than built up, generates great tensions; cynicism is like a disease.⁴⁵¹

As Jane and Roche drive their own car through the city and countryside of the novel, they perceive both as run-down, lacklustre. 'The high woods' and countryside that 'gradually gave way to secondary bush: overgrown old cocoa estates and coffee estates' are reminders of the nation's colonial past, of the historical succession of commodity frontiers in Trinidad, but the city is one that is clearly steeped in the realities of a the petro-modern present and future.⁴⁵² The advertising boards that are 'put up by Amal, the American bauxite company' are a reminder of the constant presence of foreign domination.⁴⁵³ The predominance of junked vehicles, 'charred verges [and] sunken fields'⁴⁵⁴ rotting factories, pollution, overpopulation and a generalized sensory discomfort 'serves as something of a riposte to Eric Williams's contemporaneous celebration of the country's bright new petro-powered future [...]. [T]he suggestion [in *Guerrillas*] is that Trinidad's incipient course of oil-led development will prove hollow and unsustainable'.⁴⁵⁵ The dream of modernisation in Trinidad has resulted in petro-capitalism's co-optation of extra-human natures, the ruination of which suggests the 'decay' of this 'dream of modernity'.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵¹ Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 55.

⁴⁵² Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 5.

⁴⁵³ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁵ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, pp. 36-7.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

The functioning car in *Guerrillas* is just as potent a symbol and vivid a reminder of the decay of the dream of modernity as the 'junked' one. Naipaul's presentation of the landscape, for example, is constantly shaped by the automobile. Niblett points out that 'landscape flashes by in sequences of distinct snapshots to produce a linear, serialised image of the cityscape, one mediated throughout by the windows of the car' highlighting 'not only Jane and Roche's alienation from an increasingly reified lifeworld, but also how the demands of petrolic life have fundamentally shaped environments and human sensoria'.⁴⁵⁷ The car shapes the characters' perceptions and is also a marker of certain types of fundamental mobility privilege, as it helps Jane and Roche to separate themselves, both physically and psychologically, from Trinidadian society. The car is their means of private, independent mobility, which allows them to witness the spectacle of development (and the Black Power riots, in the second half of the novel), in Trinidad from a distance, without ever having to actually engage in the quotidian life of Trinidadian society. This form of mobility privilege is also connected to other material advantages in their occupation of space. They are, most notably, able to live 'far above' the city itself, in the elite, suburban space of the Ridge.⁴⁵⁸ To 'go up to the Ridge was to go up to a more temperate air; it was to lose the feel of the city and see it as part of a larger view of sea and mangrove and great plain'.⁴⁵⁹ In other words, to go up to the Ridge allows Jane and Roche to escape the human poverty and inequality on the streets and to imagine themselves in a generalised, unproblematic Caribbean island paradise which exists only for their repose and pleasure.

As well as amplifying the privileges of some of the city's inhabitants, the car also indelibly alters the landscape of Naipaul's city. Port-of-Spain 'no longer had a centre [...] with the coming of the motor-car, in numbers, the hills had been opened up and developed as self-contained suburbs' for the rich, 'with their own shopping and entertainment plazas; and the peasants who had cultivated and impoverished the hillsides had sold out and moved down to the flat land'.⁴⁶⁰ Oil-powered mobilities enable the maintenance of certain lifeworlds and create specific forms of spatial politics that allow wealthy middle classes (like Jane and Roche, but also the local middle-class) to remain both physically and psychologically distant from the masses. Oil, then, powers a kind of social politics and concretises middle-class alienation from

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 36-7.

⁴⁵⁸ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 25.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁶⁰ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 24.

the working classes, while simultaneously encouraging consumer capitalism (in the purchase of its refined products and byproducts). While Jane and Roche are of course not native to the island, their bourgeois lifestyle is also a reminder of the PNM's cultivation of a similarly privileged middle-class constituency which was encouraged to develop both a class- and national-cultural-consciousness disconnected from the working classes and the rural communities of the island. The division of communities through distinct class boundaries was created, as has been discussed above, by particular sets of socio-economic relations and forms of domination. These divisions were also, as we have seen, shaped and reinforced by the PNM's discourse. However, the latter was itself indebted to the power of oil revenues and rents, which created new categories of conspicuous consumption and heightened social divisions between those who could acquire these material possessions and those who could not.

The automobile's connection to a certain cultural politics of life and the production of particular kinds of subjectivities, particularly what Sheller calls 'gendered and racialised mobilities,' is perhaps best illustrated by the character of Jane.⁴⁶¹ As Sheller explains, 'racialised mobility regimes' (in the States, where her study is based, but the concept can still be usefully applied to the expanded Caribbean) are part of a pattern of generalised urbanisation and suburbanisation. These include the 'unequal investment in highway and automobile infrastructure at the expense of public transit, privileging white suburban mobility over other forms of mobility'.⁴⁶² Meanwhile, the literature of gendered mobilities is succinctly explained by feminist historian of space, Dolores Hayden: 'if the simple male journey of home to job is the one planned for' by transport planners, then the 'complex female journey from home to day care to job is the one ignored'.⁴⁶³ Dominant transportation systems are planned around the

⁴⁶¹ Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (Brooklyn and London: Verso, 2018), p. 70.

⁴⁶² Sheller explains that there is a 'long history in the U.S.A of racial and class discrimination in mobility rights and freedoms, which carried over into the era of automobility and were built into racially segregated cities and suburbs.' The 1950s Federal Housing Authority subsidies are one example of this, where the subsidies for 'suburban home ownership' contributed to 'white flight from the de-industrialising cities of the post-war era.' Another example is the 'urban renewal policies of the 1960s-70s that created ghettos of public housing projects with limited means of transport access in contrast to the white suburbs mainly accessible by car.' Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, p. 70.

⁴⁶³ Sociologist Judy Wajcman's findings are also usefully referenced by Sheller – Wajcman found that 'women have traditionally moved in different rhythms to men for various reasons to do with childcare, employment and social routines.' There are, as Sheller points out, 'major distinctions in white, black, Asian and Latinas patterns of mobilities, due to racially segmented job market and systemic racial discrimination. Many non-white domestic

‘white, male, able-bodied, individual, middle-class rush hour commuter’ thereby ‘marginalis[ing] or discount[ing] womens transportational needs’.⁴⁶⁴ Jane’s status as a white, female foreigner is significant: her whiteness gives her a such a distinct privilege in Trinidad that means that she can travel like the white, middle-class, *male* commuter described above by Sheller. In a way (and for a time, at least, before her murder) and because of her whiteness, she is able to occupy a specifically andocentric automobility. Her status as a foreigner is representative of the foreign oil majors that have come to occupy the country; like Jane, these TNCs forge profitable connections and networks, completely bypassing ordinary Trinidadians. Jane’s privilege can be usefully compared to what Sheller calls the ‘transport poverty’ of other characters, such as Bryant.⁴⁶⁵ The latter, a young Afro-Trinidadian man who becomes Jimmy Ahmed’s lover, is described by Naipaul as one of the ‘slum boys spawned by the city, casually conceived, and after the backyard drama and ritual of their birth gradually abandoned’.⁴⁶⁶ As Sheller explains, the term ‘transport poverty’ denotes a ‘combination of the inability to meet the cost of transport, lack of access to (motorized) transport, lack of access to key life activities due to a lack of transport, and exposure to transport externalities’.⁴⁶⁷ In *Guerrillas*, there is a striking illustration of Sheller’s concept when Bryant leaves Ahmed’s farming commune (Thrushcross Grange) one evening to the realisation that ‘it wouldn’t be easy to get a taxi’.⁴⁶⁸ This can be compared to Jane, who is depicted as endlessly stepping into or out of chauffeured cars, privileged enough to be simply ‘amused by absurd motor cars and her position in them’.⁴⁶⁹ She is perhaps most alive when in a car, otherwise being described as generally vapid, ‘spoil’ and ‘inexperienced’.⁴⁷⁰ When she steps into Jimmy Ahmed’s ‘big American car,’ for example, ‘excitement [grows] on her’ as the car provides her with a means of viewing the world in a heightened, eroticised way. As Naipaul writes, while in the car she was:

service workers, hotel workers and building cleaners, for example, must travel to and from work after dark or before dawn, on inadequate and slow public transit, suffering greater exposure to potential crime.’ Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, p. 70.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁶⁶ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 27.

⁴⁶⁷ Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, p. 71.

⁴⁶⁸ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 28.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

[...] studying [...] things as though she had never seen them before, taking them in detail by detail: and now, as they began to race along the highway, past the shacks on the hillside and the long red avenues of the redevelopment project [...] as they raced, the hot air and the noise of the motor-car, the sense of speed, were the things she was surrendering to: the little delirium [...] became the adventure; this was what she wanted to stay close to and be contained within, this dizzying mood, of which, curiously, his presence formed no part: the exaltation produced by the heat, the drive that was moving to climax, and that vision of decay piled on decay, putrefaction on putrefaction.⁴⁷¹

Jane's reaction to being in the car recalls Sheller's work on 'automotive emotions.' She explains that 'pleasure, fear, frustration, euphoria, pain, envy: emotional responses to cars and feelings about driving are crucial to the personal investments people have in buying, driving, and dwelling with cars'.⁴⁷² The 'affective dimensions' of 'car cultures' centre around the 'aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving, as well as patterns of kinship, sociability, habitation and work' that human beings associate with the automobile.⁴⁷³ These automotive emotions themselves are part of the imported petroculture ideologies of the core (which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter's focus on auto-mobility in Puerto Rico). The automobile in this instance is a source of sexualised yet corrupted energy, which produces in Jane a more aroused reaction than the actual act of intercourse with a Trinidadian man. As Jack Katz has observed, we should understand 'driving (and passengering) as both profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences' in which the 'identity of the car and the person kinaesthetically intertwine'.⁴⁷⁴ Human bodies physically respond to the kinaesthetic of driving, and it is significant in this instance that Jane has a physical response of arousal while sat within that powerful symbol of masculinist modernity, the 'big American' automobile, yet feels little pleasure in her sexual interactions with Ahmed. As Sheller puts it, 'whether phallic or feminised, the car materialises personality and takes part in the ego-formation of the owner or driver as competent, powerful, able and sexually desirable'.⁴⁷⁵ From a petrocultural perspective too, Jane's interest in, and arousal at, the car and its movement (as opposed to its owner, whose 'presence formed no part' of the 'climax' she reaches on the drive) emphasises the fact

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁷² Mimi Sheller, 'Automotive Emotions: Feeling the Car', in *Sage Journals: Theory, History and Society Vol 21, Issue 4-5* (2004), 221-242 (p. 221).

⁴⁷³ Sheller, *Sage Journals*, p. 221.

⁴⁷⁴ Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 33.

⁴⁷⁵ Sheller, *Sage Journals*, p. 223.

that Jane stands in as a figure for foreign petro-capitalist interests. Her libidinal investment in Trinidad's human and extra-human natures centres around extracting pleasure from oil-based mobilities, such as the car, and from enjoying the privilege of her petrotopian existence on the Ridge, rather than from any meaningful engagement with Trinidadians themselves.

A Casual Brutality is similarly textured by the presence of the automobile and petrolic landscapes. Bissoondath's Indo-Trinidadian protagonist, Raj, is presented to the reader in the opening pages of the novel against a backdrop which is crafted by petroleum yet still steeped in sugar. About to catch an aeroplane, the reader first encounters Raj stationed in his car in 'a parking lot, unusually empty, the few cars widely dispersed [...] at the wire fence, from here a fading, ashen mesh; and beyond it, marking the far edge of the narrow asphalt roads that girds the airport grounds, a mass of sugar cane black against the deepening evening sky [...] the thin, tangy brine of invisible gasoline fumes hover here at the unbarred entrance to the terminal'.⁴⁷⁶ Like Jane and Roche, the protagonists of Bissoondath's novel — Raj and his family, for the most part — move around the island using the car as their primary means of transport. Their automobility allows them to travel in safety and privacy, disconnected and distanced from the surrounding landscapes, whether these be oil-soaked, bustling and urbanised — 'We drove slowly down the main street, past the old Shell gas station now nationalised into the Casaquemada Petroleum Company, its sign bright and colourful, its concrete paving black with spilled oil and ingrained grease' — or rural and denuded, such as the 'Roosevelt Field' in which 'most [...] buildings had been torn down [...] a piecemeal dismantling, boards and beams, windows and wiring, all carted away and added to countless houses around the island'.⁴⁷⁷ In Bissoondath's depictions of the city, as in Naipaul's, oil saturates the landscape: 'the tarmac and airstrip though, had retained a usefulness; the whine of aircraft taking off in search of patrolling enemy submarines [...] had been replaced by the whine of racing cars, Hondas and Toyotas with enhanced engines, and bodies plastered in oil-company stickers'.⁴⁷⁸ The car is also a space in which intimate moments play out — the arguments between Raj and (his Canadian wife) Jan, the conversation between Raj and Madera (the former school-friend turned hybrid of policeman and soldier), the drive to discover that Jan and the couple's son, Rohan, have been shot when resisting arrest and Raj's attempts to recover from the news as he sits in the private, protective cocoon of his

⁴⁷⁶ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 133, p. 136.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

automobile. The automobile, then, embodies numerous imported oil-ideologies in the context of the novel: the proliferation and display of personal wealth, the privilege and freedom afforded by individualised mobility and the importance of being able to transport members of one's own nuclear family network without having to interface with the world around oneself.

Ultimately, the increase in car ownership during the boom (and what the car embodied for Trinidadians in this period) represents the desirability of a petro-modern life. As Bissoondath writes 'everybody in Casaquemada owned a car, or wanted one. Cars didn't depreciate here, they appreciated; they had become an investment'.⁴⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Bissoondath's representation of the automobile suggests the Schwarzian 'misplacement' of core discourses of automobility in a peripheral, ex-colonial nation such as Trinidad. While the 'double lanes' of the 'highway [...] were fresh from the legacy of oil money' it is a questionable legacy for both human and extra-human natures of the island. 'The oil boom had brought with it a tripling of the number of cars on the roads, had turned what had once been a snaking twenty-minute drive into a sixty-minute marathon of stops and starts, fumes and heat, and nerves frayed by the incontinent horns of impatient drivers'.⁴⁸⁰

Earl Lovelace's *Is Just a Movie* shares a significant similarity with the work of Naipaul and Bissoondath; Lovelace also mediates the 'misplaced' petrolic lifestyles ferociously craved by the novel's characters through tropes and characterizations that illustrate Trinidad's troubled relationship with petro-modernity. Tracing the adventures of, amongst others, King Kala, the self-described 'poet of the revolution' and young Sonnyboy Apparicio, Lovelace depicts the characters' struggles and victories during and after the 1970 'Black Power demonstrations, that our most illustrious historian had christened the February Revolution'.⁴⁸¹ Like Naipaul and Bissoondath's novels, the landscape of Lovelace's Trinidad is a crucible of colonial history and petro-modernity; the first job that Sonnyboy gets, for example, is 'on the Carabon cocoa estate'.⁴⁸² For the island's iconic Carnival celebrations, meanwhile, 'visitors' and tourists 'from every part of the globe' are 'taken to see [...] the Point Lisas industrial estate, the oil refinery' — the monument which, as Lovelace makes clear, represents Trinidadian modernity and the nation's worthiness of a position on the global stage, yet is symbolic of the unevenly

⁴⁷⁹ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 324.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁸¹ Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie*, p. 4, p. 7.

⁴⁸² Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 52.

distributed oil-wealth in the decade of the boom.⁴⁸³ The foreign visitors who come to Point Lisas are gifted with ‘miniature steelpan’ by the ‘contestants from the Miss Cascadu beauty pageant’ and who respond to the welcoming speeches with the condescending reply: ‘We are [...] happy to know the success your society so wonderfully demonstrates is an achievement whose foundation is your stable labour force and your educated elite [...] laid by us in an earlier time.’⁴⁸⁴ But, as King Kala asks, ‘what about the ordinary people who resisted the colonial pressure, whose resistance gave a sense of self [...] the stick-fighters and the masquerade players, the dragon and jab molassie [...] if we accept the contribution of Columbus, Drake and the coloniser’s systems and governors with laying down the foundations of society, how can we ignore the input of people who have made the society so much more than the plantations they had in mind?’⁴⁸⁵

Like Naipaul, Lovelace makes it clear that the automobile, while intended to better the lives of working-class Trinidadians, is a problematic object, both materially and ideologically. In core countries of the world-system, the car has become a crucial symbol of petro-modernity’s supposedly universalised successes – a powerful emblem of the neoliberal privatisation of space as well as of petro-development. However, the importation of both the automobile and the cultural signifiers that surround it are misplaced in the Trinidadian context, with the island lacking the social infrastructures and material conditions to successfully accommodate and make manifest epistemologies of liberating petromobility. This reality is depicted through the fact that in *Is Just A Movie*, Sonnyboy’s car quite literally does not function as it should. He possesses an ‘old car, that had passed through many hands,’ but which, tellingly, is a ‘demonstration of Sonnyboy’s ambition’ and the centrepiece of numerous plans for financial betterment and personal liberty: ‘Sweetie-Mary and his grandmother would manage the vegetable store and he would pay down on the car and run it as a taxi [...] of course they had other plans for the car. On weekends they would be able to go to the beach [...] for Carnival they could go to a fête, to calypso without having to worry how they were going to get back’ and so on.⁴⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the car, supposed symbol of petro-modern progress, is a comically unmaintainable failure: ‘I don’t think it ever again make a complete trip to any destination without breaking down, and the people of Cascadu get accustomed to

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 323.

⁴⁸⁴ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 323.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 325.

⁴⁸⁶ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, pp. 127-30.

seeing it on the side of the road with its bonnet open and Sonnyboy beside it'.⁴⁸⁷ Sonnyboy's car, functionally near-useless, nevertheless remains for him a symbol of his search for prosperity, image and status, which the reader understands as hopeless, for 'his experience of scouring the region to find car parts brought him into contact with fellow sufferers like himself who held onto nearly useless machines as symbols of their place in the world'.⁴⁸⁸ Eventually, the car is discovered by Sonnyboy stripped of its parts. 'Freddie,' his mechanic, 'it turned out, had been plundering his car to service other needy vehicles'.⁴⁸⁹ The car embodies the hollowness of the spectacle of development in 1970s Trinidad: while it allows Sonnyboy to indulge in fantasies of personal freedom and privatised mobility, it adds little of material value to his life, yet it is the manifestation of an imported set of petro-ideologies that Sonnyboy cannot shake off. Both Naipaul and Lovelace in particular use the automobile as a symbol of the ways in which petroleum has changed perceptions of self-image and of interactions with the external world. However, their depictions of the car also contain within them a cynical nod to the PNM's narratives of Trinidadian entry into a petro-modern era of citizenship and national rebirth. All three authors seem to agree that it is a narrative which ultimately failed to either unite the masses or to successfully herald a new age of sustainable industrialisation.

“The Colour o’ the Yankee Dollar”: The PNM’s Petro-Politics

Economists have repeatedly pointed out that oil booms have a detrimental effect on both national economies and governmental apparatuses in peripheral nation-states. Percy Hintzen, for example, notes that in the context of the Trinidadian boom, the regime was able, 'through authoritative decision-making, to employ the state as an instrument for reallocating the phenomenally expanded oil income into politically strategic sectors of the domestic economy'.⁴⁹⁰ As a result, with its 'tremendously increased revenue, the regime was able to sustain and expand [a] system of patronage' which was geared towards gaining the support of working-class Afro-Trinidadians while simultaneously fulfilling the 'accumulative claims of the

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 133–4.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁹⁰ Hintzen, *The Costs of Regime Survival*, p. 143.

country's middle and upper classes'.⁴⁹¹ This uneven system of patronage meant that fragile democratic structures were made increasingly hollow and old ethnic disagreements further deteriorated.

For all their diverging perspectives and varying biases, Bissoondath, Lovelace and Naipaul are cognizant of the fact of governmental corruption (particularly the PNM's practice of selective patronage and the buying off of votes), as well as the neglect of poor communities. Consequently, critiques of the PNM's social policies, be they direct or subtle, are woven throughout all three texts. Bissoondath's character Grappler, for example, denounces the 'men who had led us into independence, black, Indian and white, men with bigger dreams than we knew' who were 'brilliant people, people of education. But people who saw in politics the soundest refuge of the scoundrel'.⁴⁹² Grappler tells Raj that "'our intellectuals have failed us, Raj. They've been so busy looking backwards, so busy shouting the simple politics of blame [...] that they forgot to prepare us for our chance'".⁴⁹³ For Bissoondath, the incompetence and inattention of the PNM government in the seventies is directly linked to the presence of and the misuse of oil revenues. Grappler goes on to declare that, when the chance to nationalize and become wealthy came:

"[...] when that chance came thanks to the Arabs, when through pure luck oil became like liquid gold flowing into our coffers, we blew it. We stole it, we gave it away in bribes, we squandered it on useless projects, we exchanged it for imported everything. Even with all the developmental expertise available here or abroad, we acted like a nouveau-riche nation. Economics as buying spree. All the money did was sharpen our evils. It did nothing to soothe them. It meant little more than theft on a grander scale [...] our leaders taught us how to blame, but not how to help ourselves. They gave us the psychology of the victim. So that when the money came we practised the politics of greed. We acted like those who had ruled us before. As they exploited us, so we exploited each other. As they raped our land, so we raped our land. As they took, so we took. We had absorbed the attitudes of the coloniser, and we mimicked the worst in him."⁴⁹⁴

Grappler's reference to 'economics as buying spree' usefully summarises the decade of speculative and consumer frenzy. The squandering of petro-dollars on 'useless projects' and

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p.143.

⁴⁹² Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 198.

⁴⁹³ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 200.

⁴⁹⁴ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, pp. 200-201.

‘imported everything’ echoes Apter’s words on the hollowness of the spectacle that was the oil-economy, which made Trinidad overly reliant on a single commodity and on imported luxuries, with insufficient attention paid to meaningful, sustainable social policies or economic diversification. Bissoondath’s criticism of the PNM quite explicitly constructs the party leaders as colonial impersonators. This is again evidenced in the conversation between Raj and his house-help Wayne:

“[...] Is time black people have power in this country—”
“But Wayne, the government’s black, the prime minister’s black.”
“The old man? Kind o’, I suppose. The others, yeah, sure, but only on the outside.”
“And inside? They’re white?”
“No, boss. Green. The colour o’ the Yankee dollar. They not interested in helpin’ people, just in buyin’ them. Like the last time, after the riots twelve years ago, they build house for the people in the shantytown, but in truth nothing change if you look at it. The people still unemploy, they still diggin’ in the rubbish dump day and night, the chil’ren still runnin’ around barefoot and not eatin’ enough”.⁴⁹⁵

In other words, governmental concerns for the nation’s poor and vulnerable, the starving and unemployed, are overwritten by the state’s desire for the accumulation of petro-dollars. While Bissoondath’s Indo-Trinidadian characters do not really grasp the breadth of the problem, residing as they do in a relatively privileged middle-class, white-collar bubble, black working-class characters such as Wayne acknowledge the fact that oil-wealth has hollowed out state structures; while the PNM works to create a façade of developmental progress, poverty on the island continues to run rife. The expansion of meaningful social services has been neglected in favour of ostentatious infrastructures which display the island’s new petro-powered modernity and allow for the accumulation of oil-wealth for the few. In other words, the government, which proclaims the birth of a new, sovereign Trinidadian nation, continues to pander to the crippling interests of the ‘Yankee dollar.’

Grappler’s criticism is also reminiscent of William R. Lux’s discussion of the ‘Afro-Saxon [...] the educated [...] English gentleman of colour who imitates European models

⁴⁹⁵ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 306–7.

established in the nineteenth century [...] who subscribes to the unspoken but unacknowledged philosophy of the European colonialist'.⁴⁹⁶ Grappler, and by extension Bissoondath, criticise Williams for being an 'Afro-Saxon' himself, with his support for foreign transnational corporations and his lack of support for the African and Indian working classes. This notion of the government mimicking colonialists is also echoed by Naipaul; as Jimmy Ahmed writes in a letter to an acquaintance 'the situation is desperate, Roy, the people here have been betrayed too often, it's always a case of black skin white masks'.⁴⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Williams retains an aura of mystery and influence in the country as a proverbial, yet problematic, great man of history; as Bissoondath's characters state, "'So the old man still pulls all the strings' [...] 'He goin' to pull the strings even when he dead'".⁴⁹⁸ While the three authors roundly criticise the PNM's general policies of prioritising big business, they also (understandably) seem to place much of the blame for the unsustainable 'good years' of the seventies and the aftermath of a profoundly damaging 'bust' period in the eighties at the feet of Williams himself.⁴⁹⁹

In *Is Just A Movie*, it is the death of Franklyn, a young, gifted, innocent black teenager, that contains the kernel of Lovelace's most scathing criticism of the PNM and of Williams's leadership. While Williams makes a pledge to the people of Cascadu to "'ensure that every rural community be given electricity, a fire brigade be set up in every town with hydrants and standpipes and a twenty four hour water service [...] come hell or high water we are not going to leave you without water nor in the dark again,'" it is noted by the townspeople that 'the PM had said nothing about Franklyn's death'.⁵⁰⁰ While grand proclamations of socio-economic improvement are declared magnanimously to the populace, the death of youngsters at the hands of the police are shunned. Aunt Magenta's grief magnifies this criticism of prime ministerial priorities: 'sometimes I would find her in the kitchen, talking to the absent Franklyn, asking him how he could do this thing [...] or asking the

⁴⁹⁶ William R. Lux, 'Black Power in the Caribbean', *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol.3, No. 2 (December 1972), 207-225 (p. 215).

⁴⁹⁷ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 82.

⁴⁹⁸ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 337.

⁴⁹⁹ The lack of faith in the PNM is such that alternative parties and groups are formed, such as the 'Hard Wuck' party in *Is Just A Movie*, who advocate a multi-ethnic, inclusive Trinidadian identity and an appreciation of Trinidadian nature: the Party message consists of telling the people 'the need to educate themselves, to accept yourself just as you are, your sacred spaces, to move from being just workers in the place to becoming guardians of the space', reinstating the importance of steelband, the 'vocabulary and symbolism which our education had ignored' even 'renaming the seasons' to give it all 'a new importance.'

Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie*, p. 143.

⁵⁰⁰ Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie*, pp. 124-5.

Prime Minister to explain the reason for the killing of her son who was a good boy, who was only standing up for the same freedoms that you preaching'.⁵⁰¹ Aside from Williams, other PNM politicians are similarly problematic in their ethics, ambitions and priorities: Evrol, for example, who was 'plucked [...] from the ashes of the revolt' after the 'Black Power rebellion was put down' and 'made a government senator' remains 'silent on the killing of Franklyn' and as King Kala states 'in the twenty-one years in the National Party as Evrol moved from backbencher to cabinet minister, I did not hear him once address the subject' of the boy's murder.⁵⁰²

'A Place That Was Nowhere': Violent Evasions, Failed Revolutions

Earl Lovelace's *Is Just A Movie* highlights not only the hollowness of the oil economy in 1970s Trinidad, but also seeks out a *different* way of organising society, indirectly acknowledging the inherent unsustainability of the boom and its heightening of existing political corruption. However, the narrative consciousnesses of both *Guerrillas* and *A Casual Brutality* struggle to successfully and productively register the spectacle of transformation in Trinidadian society as a result of oil-based industrialisation, while also constantly hesitating to properly come to terms with the exploitative consequences of the oil industry's invasive practices.

For both Naipaul and Bissoondath, the colonial past of Trinidad is a wound from which the nation has not yet recovered, and perhaps from which it will never recover; it is a wound that continues to overdetermine the present. Motivated by this belief, both Bissoondath and Naipaul appear pessimistic about the nation's ability to move forward. Naipaul in particular displays a conviction that the colonial system 'responsible for the exploitation and terror in the Caribbean has left too deep a wound on the body and the psyche of the colonized nation to allow for recovery'.⁵⁰³ In Naipaul's opinion (or at least as it can be deduced from his work), this colonial system has left a legacy of failed revolutionaries

⁵⁰¹ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 95.

⁵⁰² Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 288.

⁵⁰³ Lizabeth Parasvini-Gerbert, 'Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 229-257 (p. 248).

and inadequate leaders concerned with posturing and imitation rather than political change. In *Guerrillas*, as Michael Neill notes, ‘matching Naipaul’s indignation at the destructive legacy of imperialism, [there] is a deepening despair at the seemingly irremediable confusion left in its wake’.⁵⁰⁴ However, Neil is of the opinion that this results in ‘[...] a critique of imperialism even more radical than [others]: for it wants us to contemplate the possibility of organic societies damaged beyond repair, of a world incapable, in any imaginable future, of putting itself together again’.⁵⁰⁵ Naipaul’s other works also reflect this belief. In *A House for Mr Biswas*, for example, the eponymous protagonist rides his bicycle through the streets of his village, which is described as being ‘a place that was nowhere, a dot on the map of the island, which was a dot on the map of the world’.⁵⁰⁶ We see the same kind of hopelessness manifested in *Guerrillas*, channelled through Ahmed’s fruitless attempts at revolution and empty posturing, and even in the protests in Port-of-Spain’s streets. As Roche points out, there are no guerrillas, only gangs. The ‘revolution’ is, as Jimmy puts it, everyone fighting ‘his own little war’: “‘They don’t know who they fighting’” says Harry de Tunja, “‘or who they fighting for. Everybody down there is a leader now. I hear there isn’t even a government’”.⁵⁰⁷ As Neil points out in a review of the novel, ‘the most despairing feature of this consummation of protest politics, as Naipaul presents it, is that, for all their apocalyptic fantasies, its enraged do not really believe that the world can be turned upside down: this revolt is simply a new and more desperate version of the ingrown dialectic of slave and master’.⁵⁰⁸ Harry’s words corroborate Neil’s point: “‘All this talk of independence,’” he says to Jane and Roche, “‘but they [the protestors] don’t really believe that times have changed. They still feel they’re just taking a chance, and that when the show is over somebody is going to go down there and start dishing out licks [...] They would go crazy if somebody tell them that this time nobody might be going down to dish out licks and pick upon the pieces’”.⁵⁰⁹ Jimmy Ahmed, meanwhile, declares that “‘to destroy the world is the only course of action that is now open to sane men’”.⁵¹⁰ However, as Neill points out, ‘the reality offers only a pathetic impoverishment of this grandiose mania, as the politician, Meredith, implies: “If those people

⁵⁰⁴ Michael Neill, ‘Guerrillas and Gangs: Frantz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul’, in *Ariel: A Review of National English Literature Vol. 13, No 4* (1982), 21–62 (p. 44).

⁵⁰⁵ Neill, *Ariel*, p. 44.

⁵⁰⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 247.

⁵⁰⁷ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 185.

⁵⁰⁸ Neill, *Ariel*, p. 44.

⁵⁰⁹ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 189.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

down on the beach were a little saner, don't you think they would burn this place down twice a year" [...] Part of [Meredith's] point, a terrifying insight into the powerlessness and irrelevance of an abandoned people, is that it would make no difference if they did. The true source of power lies elsewhere, out of reach, manifesting itself only in the helicopters of an "external police" which descend from the sky to "dish out licks".⁵¹¹ The North-American helicopters which arrive to quell the unrest on the streets of Trinidad's capital city represent this 'true source of power' and moreover, a 'hideous type of security', for 'they guarantee that this world has not been entirely discarded, that the town (at least for as long as the bauxite company needs it) will be rebuilt'.⁵¹² The reality, displaced by Naipaul's novel but evident nevertheless, is that the helicopters which arrive to put down disturbance help to protect the interests of the foreign oil industries, for as long as the island is useful (that is, economically productive) to them. This 'nowhere' place, filled with capricious, posturing revolutionaries and an abandoned population, is at the mercy of more powerful nations. Of course, Naipaul evades the reason for the volatility of the period, not least the oil boom and its consequences, thereby rendering a highly problematic representation of the period's socio-economic realities.

Signal instances in *Guerrillas* come close to engaging with the erraticism and paradoxical nature of the oil economy, but rather than making any productive or explicit incursion into the 'spectacle of opulence' created by oil in the 1970s, Naipaul chooses instead to strike a note of melancholic cynicism regarding the Afro-Trinidadian population of the novel (that is, when he is not focused on the lives of his wealthy white protagonists). His belief in the arrested nature of Trinidadian societal development, the imitative psyche of Afro-Trinidadians and their inability to escape a cycle of clownish revolutionaries is displayed through characters such as Jimmy Ahmed, whose significance I will turn to momentarily. Of course, Naipaul *does* understand that the mechanics of the oil-economy in Trinidad is the real reason for the nation's short-lived successes in the 1970s and problems in the 1980s (as pieces such as the 'Michael X' essay demonstrate), but he chooses to view Trinidad's problems as existential and ethnic rather than the result of petro-inflected class politics or imperialist economic domination of the country by oil majors.

The fact that Naipaul sees Trinidad as an inherent failure, lacking in any kind of forward momentum and incapable of producing anything more than failed revolutionaries and

⁵¹¹ Neill, *Ariel*, p. 32.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

incompetent leaders, lends strength to his commitment to a particular notion of Trinidad, and to a specific depiction of Afro-Trinidadians (and also of the Black Power movement in the nation). His writing reflects this commitment—as has been observed, the oil economy’s exploitative, unsustainable nature is actively repressed in *Guerrillas*, and the text instead focuses on the existential problems of said failed revolutionaries and incompetent governance, without ever considering the reasons for the attempted revolutions led by individuals such as Ahmed and the PNM’s shortcomings in government. Naipaul’s intentional displacement of the oil-economy also means that the text’s narrative consciousness remains alienated from the lives of its working-class Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, who are the most affected by the boom-and-bust nature of the oil industry. Instead, it retains a problematic focus on white, middle-class characters. The white protagonist, Roche, is an example of this tendency: he is described as the ‘white revolutionary and torture hero of South Africa’ who now works for the ‘old imperialist firm Sablich’s, great slave traders in the old days, they now pretend that black is beautiful’ is on the island to help dispossessed Trinidadians.⁵¹³ He is regarded in London as what Hilton Kramer, in a review of the novel, has dubbed ‘something of a Third World hero.’⁵¹⁴ Jane, meanwhile, Roche’s English partner, is described best by Naipaul himself: ‘[...] she was without memory [...] without consistency or even without coherence. She knew only what she was and what she had been born to; to this knowledge she was tethered; it was her stability, enabling her to adventure in security. Adventuring, she was indifferent, perhaps blind, to the contradiction between what she said and what she was so secure of being; and this indifference or blindness, this absence of the sense of the absurd, was part of her unassailability’.⁵¹⁵ Jane’s detachedness, or as Naipaul puts it, her ‘casual nihilism,’ coupled with her arrogance and her wealth, produces a selfish, careless nonchalant character who as Paul Theroux comments ‘is habituated to using people for her own drama’, the epitome, in other words, of white bourgeoisie privilege.⁵¹⁶ Her entire personality is constructed out of precisely this sense of privilege and superiority: ‘Jane thought about how lucky she was to be able to decide to leave [...] she was privileged, it was the big idea, the one that overrode all the

⁵¹³ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 36.

⁵¹⁴ Hilton Kramer, ‘Naipaul’s *Guerrillas* and Oates’s *Assassins*’ in *Commentary Magazine*, March 1976, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/naipauls-guerrillas-and-oates-assassins/> [Date accessed: 12/03/2020].

⁵¹⁵ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 37.

⁵¹⁶ Paul Theroux, ‘*Guerrillas*,’ in *The New York Times Books Review*, November 16, 1976 <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/06/07/specials/naipaul-guerrillas.html> [Date accessed: 14/03/2020].

scattered, unrelated ideas deposited in her soul as she had adventured in life'.⁵¹⁷ The character constantly self-soothes by reminding herself of her own sense of importance, an importance derived from her being English and having the privilege of England to return to in perfect safety: whenever she needed to, Naipaul writes, she 'would return to London, to that society which she had given up [...] she would be safe in London, but she would always be safe in the midst of decay'.⁵¹⁸

She views the island as little more than peripheral and pathetic: '[...] a place at the end of the world [...] a place that had exhausted its possibilities'.⁵¹⁹ The fact that Western visitors come to this 'end of the world' to escape the 'real one' emphasises Naipaul's belief that the island is not only incapable of its own recuperation, but also forgotten and insignificant, a site where the fallout of colonialism has come to rot. Kramer writes in his review of the novel that:

[...] Jane is one of [Naipaul's] most terrifying creations, and not because there is anything especially grotesque or unusual in her character, but precisely because she is in so many essentials a familiar figure—indeed, a fixture—of the liberal culture we all know. With [...] her easy espousal of apocalyptic ideas dimly understood, confidently asserted, yet never in any degree seriously attached to a sense of her own destiny, she is the perfect incarnation of a mode of smart, mindless political promiscuity that Naipaul [...] does not hesitate to equate with her reptilian appetite for sexual conquest. In mind and body alike, she is without conscience or commitment, a moral cipher, capable of making a striking, if superficial, impression in her protected London world, where her facile comments "suggested knowledge, alertness, a degree of political concern," but now, in the harsher political climate of the island, where there is no longer any room for error, she is quickly revealed as a sinister, destructive force.⁵²⁰

She remains utterly out of touch with Trinidadian reality upon her arrival to the island, and instead is completely preoccupied with the privilege of her class and with England. Her use of phrases such as 'colonial police' when speaking to Roche highlight her anachronistic perspectives and colonial delusions, which, as Naipaul writes, 'suggested someone for whom the organisation of the world was still simple, who still lived in a vanished age or within the

⁵¹⁷ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 50.

⁵¹⁸ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 50.

⁵¹⁹ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 82.

⁵²⁰ Kramer, *Commentary Magazine*.

assumptions of a vanished age; her critical obsession with England and her class showed her still to think that England was of paramount importance'.⁵²¹ She maintains this cool blasé attitude towards the turbulence and danger around her throughout the novel, for 'it was what [Roche] had taught her, what she had picked up from him and incorporated, as words, as a passing attitude, into the chaos of words and attitudes she possessed: words that she might shed at any time, as easily as she had picked them up, and forget she had ever spoken them'.⁵²² She is the representation of the wealthy white Westerner who comes to take a break in 'Caribbean paradise' as a repose from the 'real world'. More to the point, Jane, in her extraction of pleasure from oil-based mobilities and infrastructures, stands in as a representation of the oil majors. She seeks to evade meaningful contact with Trinidadian people, takes pleasure in petro-powered infrastructures, and uses her status as 'Westerner' as a byword for not only her rather imperialist superiority, but also as an assumption that her being white, female and wealthy will keep her safe.

However, this presumption proves to be her downfall. Jimmy's statement to Jane, shortly before her rape and murder, is suggestive of his fury at her ability to leave without a care to an equally privileged, comfortable, careless life in England (akin to the one she has in the Ridge), while he has been unmasked as a political fraud and has no access to the kind of secure exit that Jane takes for granted. "So you're leaving us Jane. That was why you came. Because you're leaving. Do you have a nice house in London? [...] Suppose it burns down while you're away? [...] You'll just build another?"⁵²³ As Kramer correctly observes, like Gale Benson, upon whom Jane's character is based, '[Jane] took, on her journey away from home, the assumptions, however little acknowledged, not only of her class and race and the rich countries to which she belonged, but also of her ultimate security'.⁵²⁴ Incidentally, Naipaul's description of Jane dovetails neatly with Bissoondath's characterisation of Jan — Raj's Canadian wife — as another implicit criticism of the hypocrisies and the privilege of white Westerners, who suffer unforeseen consequences when they enter into the turbulence of Trinidadian petro-politics and guerrilla violence. Like Jane and Roche, both she and Raj speak repeatedly of their ability and desire to leave the island — "We can go back any time,

⁵²¹ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 91.

⁵²² Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 91.

⁵²³ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 246.

⁵²⁴ Kramer, *Commentary Magazine*

right?” she asks Raj – and to return to the wealthier first world.⁵²⁵ Yet by the end of the novel, Jan, like Jane, has become victim to the island’s events, another ritual sacrifice, shot by the soldiers who come to arrest her during the Black Power demonstrations.

Nevertheless, it is the character of Jimmy Ahmed which most explicitly embodies Naipaul’s opinion of the Afro-Trinidadian population in general as being capable of little more than masquerading as revolutionaries and politicians, incompetent in the face of the country’s true problems. The character is based on the Black Power activist Michael de Freitas, who later renamed himself variously Michael X and Michael Abdul Malik, and who after fourteen years of activism in London returned to Trinidad in the hopes of becoming a Black Power leader on the island. Naipaul’s description of Jimmy Ahmed reflects his disdain for de Freitas. He is presented as ‘a pseudo-visionary touted as a black leader in London’ who ‘returns to his colonized island home in order to form a farming commune and repeat slogans he himself knows to be pointless’.⁵²⁶ Half African, half Chinese, Ahmed’s deportation from London for being a Black Power leader does not lead to the success he first envisions for himself in Trinidad, where he finds no following. He dreams of becoming a ‘hero [...] the feared and respected protagonist of a ground-shaking revolt whose exploits would resound in the England he has left behind’.⁵²⁷ Ahmed is a fraudulent character in many ways, depicted by Naipaul as vomiting forth half-digested, imported ideologies of revolution. His organisation of a black commune and planned revolt is emblematic of his ineffectual attempts at heroism and self-determination; the revolt’s failure (as well its descent into the murder of Jane) is representative of a larger national failure. Black Power in Trinidad, Naipaul suggests, is hollow, little more than play-acting and without valid cause. Naipaul tellingly writes in ‘Michael X’ that:

Malik’s career proves how much of Black Power – away from its United States source – is jargon, how much a sentimental hoax. In a place like Trinidad, racial redemption is as irrelevant for the Negro as for everybody else. It obscures the problems of a small independent country with a lopsided economy, the problems of a fully ‘consumer’ society that is yet technologically untrained and without the intellectual means to comprehend the deficiency [...] it is, in the end, a deep corruption: a wish to be granted a dispensation from the pains of development, an

⁵²⁵ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 340.

⁵²⁶ Parasvini-Gerbert, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, p. 248.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

almost religious conviction that oppression can be turned into an asset, race into money.⁵²⁸

However, despite Naipaul's repression of oil in *Guerrillas*, the resource manages to seep in indirectly. The way in which the PNM's petro-politics hollowed out Trinidad's democratic system is figured through Ahmed's own writing. He writes what Michael Niblett pithily calls 'degraded, auto-hagiographic versions of Gothic romances [...] whimsical, lacking internal necessity and overdetermined by his personal neuroses,' which echo his empty, posturing politics.⁵²⁹ As Niblett notes, '[the] hollowing out of narrative-making in Jimmy's fiction encodes the hollowing out of nation-making in Trinidad'.⁵³⁰ Like his imitative prose, his political ambitions are equally hollow: a popular revolt organised by Ahmed, for example, showcases Naipaul's belief that all such attempts are little more than pointless gestures made by fraudulent and incompetent revolutionaries. For Naipaul, the island and its inhabitants are 'incapable of transcending the legacy of colonisation' with revolts such as that led by Ahmed resulting in hollow moments of brutality and a 'deepening of the exploitative norms left by the legacy of colonialism'.⁵³¹

Ahmed seems to be Naipaul's embodiment of Trinidad's national defeat, and its inability to overcome its past or to truly move forward. If we understand the character in this way, then Ahmed's 'ultimate defeat' at the end of the novel – his planned revolt becomes an act of bitter fury, as kills Jane, the object of his lust and vengeance – points to what Parasvini-Gerbert deems a deep-set 'colonial despair'.⁵³² The revolt's failure also 'confirm(s) the ultimate powerlessness and irrelevance of the [...] islands of the Caribbean' when their citizens attempt to overcome the legacies of history and the realities of national corruption.⁵³³ Trinidad's Black Power movement is, according to Naipaul, irrelevant, and the nation itself is insignificant, if it can be said to be embodied in the Trinidadian protagonist of *Guerrillas*. Indeed, every one of Ahmed's gestures — from his attempts at love-making with Jane to his efforts at revolt — lack significance, and reflect Naipaul's deep scepticism regarding Trinidad's ability to recuperate

⁵²⁸ Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 70.

⁵²⁹ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 41.

⁵³⁰ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 40.

⁵³¹ Ibid, p. 40.

⁵³² Parasvini-Gerbert, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, p. 250.

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 248.

from a colonial past or to become a nation with something meaningful to offer on the world stage.

Naipaul's narrative consciousness, meanwhile, tries to remain determinedly detached and forensic. It is imperative that *Guerrillas* maintains this critical distance in order to examine Trinidadian society in a clinical manner. If the text were to become caught up in the events unfolding on the streets of Trinidad, it would then have to acknowledge the role of the national oil economy in the creation of Trinidad's problems in the 1970s, rather than being able to conclude (as it does) that these problems are the fault of (particularly Afro-) Trinidadians themselves. Naipaul attempts to clinically examine the revolutionary events of 1970 and its aftermath through the prism of characters such as Jane and Roche, and to critique what he sees as the existential problems of Trinidadian society through the character of Ahmed. Yet, he cannot afford to discuss the way in which the oil-economy exploited the nation's most vulnerable, for to do this would mean that he would have to come to terms with the justice demanded by Afro-Trinidadian peoples, issues of socio-economic and racial inequality, and his own position within the maze of these issues. Naipaul's stylistic approach to his narration of 1970s Trinidadian society embodies a social distancing of sorts, but this distance also encodes a fear of its own collapse. 'The narrative's distance from Trinidad, in the sense that it takes Trinidadian society as an object to be dissected, is replicated formally in its objectification of the representational dilemma through Jimmy's "novel" and not within itself'.⁵³⁴ Since it evades any meaningful characterisation of working-class Afro-Trinidadians and due to its use of a critically distant narrative consciousness, *Guerrillas* finds no resolution or respite to the hollowness of oil-based industrialisation and the empty promises of the PNM, nor does it even succeed in its attempts to maintain both stylistic technique and distanced social relations.

⁵³⁴ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 41.

‘All the Power to All the People’: Fighting Petro-Politics with Black Power

In Naipaul’s novel, the only signs of the political upheaval of the late sixties and early seventies are related to the reader in distant and impersonal terms, part of a generalised backdrop that the author clearly wants to avoid critiquing or even examining in too much detail. Graffiti on the ‘walls [...] scrawled, and sometimes carefully marked, with old election slogans, racial slogans’ and increased security measures are the only hints given to the reader of the growing tensions between the establishment, the NUFF guerrilla movement and the Black Power demonstrators.⁵³⁵ It is telling too that these events are narrated from the perspective of non-Trinidadians. ‘Police cars patrolled the hillside suburbs’ such as the Ridge and ‘sometimes at night and in the early morning there was the sound of gunfire [...] the newspapers, the radio and the television spoke of guerrillas’.⁵³⁶ Even when the protests begin, Naipaul is reluctant to bridge the gap between his middle-class characters and the working-class Trinidadians on the streets. It is the radio which relates to the characters and the reader that Port of Spain is ‘still tense after two days of rioting [...] the causes of the disturbance are still not clear [...] it seems [...] likely [...] that the disturbances were sparked off by radical youth groups protesting against unemployment and what they see as the continued foreign domination of the country’.⁵³⁷ The protagonists of Naipaul’s novel, distant in all senses of the word from the uneasy socio-economic realities and profound material inequalities of the island (for a time, at least, until Jane’s death), only hear about these events through their acquaintance Harry de Tunja, a wealthy Trinidadian. It is Harry who tells Jane “‘they’re burning a few liquor shops, they take out another procession this morning [...] it’s bad, girl. They say the police cracking up. Guys taking off their uniforms and running away’”.⁵³⁸ Jane and Roche view the demonstrations from a safe distance from high up in the Ridge, the lack of noise being a metaphor for their complete detachment from events: “Just after noon [Jane] saw the first fire in the city below [...] Explosions, but the sound didn’t carry up to the Ridge.

⁵³⁵ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 100.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

⁵³⁸ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, pp. 182-6.

From the Ridge the sunlit city continued to be silent'.⁵³⁹ In *A Casual Brutality*, NUFF guerrilla fighters and the Black Power protestors are presented in a similar fashion: as violent, radical youth, with the imperative being that the protagonists stay away from the political upheaval: 'Grappler said "Don't go into work today. They're going to declare a state of emergency"'.⁵⁴⁰ The 'young men of Freedom Park had taken to the streets. Buildings had been incinerated, a fireman killed by a grenade tossed into a firetruck. The government had called out the army to a Lopez City in flames, its streets a battleground'.⁵⁴¹ Bissoondath's take on the politics of the time is certainly somewhat more sympathetic than Naipaul's, yet like Naipaul's protagonists, Bissoondath's characters remain distant from the movement, suggesting an implicit bias in authorial perspective.

Out of all three novels, it is Lovelace's which evidences the most attentive registration of (and resistance to) the PNM's petro-politics (as well as the connected issue of North-American cultural and economic imperialism). Not only does *Is Just A Movie* consider the importance of movements such as Black Power, it explicitly and imaginatively registers the unreality of the oil economy in 1970s Trinidad. Lovelace captures the unreality of the oil-economy in the very style of his writing, drawing on elements of petro-magic-realism to draw the reader's attention to the unsustainability of the oil-boom. As Michael Niblett puts it, the Lovelacian sentence is 'characterized by its distinctive combination of Faulknerian modernism and the rhythms of calypso and steelband, it is a spiraling, voluble, unruly instrument. The way in which Lovelace's writing explodes outwards with a centrifugal force, spilling from one theme or incident to the next, recalls Trinidad's economic extroversion [...] the volatility caused by the island's dependency on the fluctuating fortunes of the oil frontier' and the 'movements of a society organized around the arbitrary and capricious dynamics of patronage'.⁵⁴² Using this 'riotous, creolised linguistic register', Lovelace is able to productively examine the socio-economic consequences of the boom and simultaneously search for a new way of organising Trinidadian society.⁵⁴³ He does the latter by explicitly rejecting the government's petro-politics and instead presenting Black Power as an alternative means for social organisation. The novel, in both form and style, enacts a search for an authentic, united

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

⁵⁴⁰ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 261.

⁵⁴¹ Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, p. 261.

⁵⁴² Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 41.

⁵⁴³ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 41.

Trinidadian self (a search which, Lovelace suggests, finds its solution in Black Power's sense of collective unity and its social vision), in contrast to the divisive politics, fantastical unrealities and unevenly distributed financial gains of the oil-boom. As Niblett notes, 'this search entails a rejection of the empty promises of Williams' petromodern citizenship, inextricable from the hollowing out of Trinidad's productive economy and its continued domination by imperialist oil interests. Instead, what is sought is a substance or skill in the form of autonomously organized modes of life- and environmentmaking that would allow the Trinidadian "self" to realize itself fully'.⁵⁴⁴ Black Power is, for Lovelace, a utopian dream for radical change. Of course, the realization of this dream is certainly complicated by the oil-commodity's transformation of social life.

Part of this transformation is based in the increasing consumer reification of society. Lovelace employs a magical-realist approach in order to represent this facet of the oil-boom's consequences. In the novel, a 'criminologist' is hired whose 'research shows that 93% of those committing crimes were people who wanted the impossible [...] the state and private enterprise needed to join together to rid the people of unrealistic and stifling dreams'.⁵⁴⁵ A system is created where 'you could sell your dreams [...] with Dream stations in supermarkets and drug stores and advertisements running on radio, in the papers and on TV, the game captured the imagination of the population who at every turn were encouraged to exchange for money what were said to be old useless dreams that had no chance of being realised'.⁵⁴⁶ The dreams of the poor are quite literally sold for profit, with 'long lines of people waiting to sell their dreams.' The depiction of this system contains within it an obvious criticism of the betrayal of the working classes of Trinidad and their exploitation at the hands of the state and of big business, as well as the commodification of the very dreams that the people have, in a society obsessed with aspirationalist consumerism. By using this literary narrative of the 'selling of the people's dreams', Lovelace is able to reflect on the increasing commodification of subjectivities, and the idea of oil-powered progress as one which ultimately betrays the material and mental ambitions of Trinidad's working class, whose dreams for self-development are never truly realised during and after the boom. This use of oil-boom money to promote a consumer culture (which temporarily assuages working-class anger at the PNM) in turn nullifies the dreams and ambitions of the Black Power movement. 'Dreams gone,

⁵⁴⁴ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 42.

⁵⁴⁵ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, pp. 314-5.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 316-7.

development take over now' sings the Mighty Sparrow in the novel, while widespread protest remains scarce: 'our novelist John de John [...] the only protestor [...] [had] a placard around his neck on which was written the words of the poet Martin Carter — "I do not sleep to dream, I dream to change the world"''.⁵⁴⁷ Despite the inculcation of the population into this capitalist system of exchanging their hopes and dreams for money, 'the selling of dreams did not stop the sacrificial slaughter of young men, nor the crimes of passion among the older folk'.⁵⁴⁸ Lovelace is clearly critiquing a system of exploitation and capital gain, supported by the government and facilitated by foreign corporations, in a magical-realist analogy which highlights the betrayal of the poor by the rich.

Unlike Naipaul and Bissoondath, Lovelace pays close and sustained attention to instances of cultural and economic domination engineered by foreign interests and criticizes the effects of this socio-economic domination on Trinidad's most vulnerable labouring populations. His vignettes illustrate to the reader precisely why a break away from the petro-powered, racially divided and profit-driven paradigm of 1970s Trinidad is vitally necessary. Moments of interaction between the novel's principal characters and agents of North-American cultural imperialism allegorise the activities of foreign transnational interests in Trinidadian society. For example, the scene in which U.S. filmmakers come to the island looking to recruit local talent to act in a film mediates the exploitation of black bodies by foreign capitalists. Lovelace constructs this moment in order to emphasise the commercialisation of culture (and commodification of bodies) in Trinidad. 'A fella from America come down here to Trinidad, say he making movies in the island [...] local talent wedded to foreign technology, the set of shit you hear already'.⁵⁴⁹ When the time to shoot the 'jungle picture' comes, the 'role' the U.S. film-makers give 'the locals [...] is a role to die [...] the rest of the people, they bring from America. They is the stars, the ones that have lines to speak, lives to live in the movie'.⁵⁵⁰ The black body, in other words, must remain silent, peripheral and obedient, in on-screen fiction and in off-screen labour. For King Kala, the reality depicted by the scene is irrevocably skewed and profoundly unjust:

There is a certain give-and-take, reasonableness [King Kala reflects] like in a fiction, rooted in the idea that life gives everybody a chance, that leaves everybody

⁵⁴⁷ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 317.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 317.

⁵⁴⁹ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 21.

⁵⁵⁰ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 23.

satisfied, whether you are the one shot or the one doing the shooting. The shooter must miss a few times, since it is quite fatal when he connects. But here, in this movie, the fellars who shooting, they not missing at all. The only people who they is missing is the fellars from the States: the stars.⁵⁵¹

While the white actors from the States are allowed to have a degree of artistic expression in the scene, the Trinidadians are expected to fall like flies, 'like natives in a Tarzan picture'.⁵⁵² It is this sense of injustice that holds King Kala back from 'dying' as the production team want him to. 'They shoot again and I start to fall. I have to fall. But something holding me back. My conscience, my pride. Something is not right'.⁵⁵³ The fact that the U.S. production team treats their Trinidadian actors as insignificant is telling of North-American attitudes to Trinidad as an economically profitable yet peripheral nation. King Kala and Sonnyboy, who orchestrates an 'extravagant and magnificent dying' that irritates the director, both recognise the symbolism of the scene with regards to the national context and the allegorical fact that 'the quality of our dying is an embarrassment to them. We dying too slow. We wasting too much of the Whitepeople time'.⁵⁵⁴ While Errol tells them, "it is just a movie," he too recognises the dynamic of power and vulnerability, played out on the set but reflective of larger, unequal world-systemic relations between the Caribbean and the United States, between all peripheral and core nations: 'you had to listen past the chuckle in his laughter to the subtle agony bubbling in his voice, the sadness, the grief, the truth, the tears of a capped-down rage'.⁵⁵⁵

This moment illustrates the cultural and economic imperialism of the U.S. as well as the epistemologies of who is important and who is peripheral, on both an inter-personal and world-systemic level. Lovelace's message is one of resistance to the socio-economic domination of foreign powers. His belief in the possibility of a revolutionary resistance which will unify working-class people (Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians alike) against the exploitative domination of a foreign-owned oil-industry, and a vastly divided, materialistic yet highly unequal society, is fully embodied in the Black Power movement.

⁵⁵¹ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 24.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁵⁵ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 29.

Black Power not only enacts a break with the ‘dominant, petro-inflected social logic’ propagated by the PNM, but it contains elements of hope in its message, hope for the reorganisation of society under more equitable terms, for the people, by the people.⁵⁵⁶ Black Power is a movement which embodies hope in its break from the oil-economy and in its unification of Indian and black citizens. *Is Just a Movie*’s style and content continuously rehearses and affirms this resistant social logic, unlike the more pessimistic, evasive and defeatist tones taken by Bissoondath and particularly Naipaul. Lovelace recognises that it is movements like Black Power, not petro-politics, which will unite the people. Against the hollowness of the oil economy (its exacerbation of ethnic tensions, its hollowing out of democratic structures through clientelism and patronage, as well as the unsustainability of its windfall profits), *Is Just A Movie* holds onto the possibility of a different kind of social logic – one of racial unity, self-determination, no foreign interference and of socio-economic equality. Moreover, unlike Naipaul’s narrative, which is incapable of descending into the mass politics unfolding on the streets of Port of Spain and instead is entirely focused on the middle-class characters tucked away in the hills above the city, Lovelace’s novelistic perspective remains with the working class Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, on the streets, in the shanty towns and meeting halls of Port of Spain.

The reader is introduced to the Black Power rebellion of 1970 retrospectively in *Is Just A Movie*. We find the novel’s characters, such as King Kala and Sonnyboy, in turmoil just after the state of emergency has successfully shut down the nation. The revolutionaries are ‘in political detention [...] exchang[ing] stories of themselves [...] present[ing] insights from Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Walter Rodney of the violence rooted in the colonial situation’.⁵⁵⁷ After ‘the state of emergency was declared [...] the heroes made their triumphant surrender [...] then they disappeared’.⁵⁵⁸ The reader meets these heroes after the months of protest, having returned to their ordinary civilian lives, which are complicated by isolation and poverty. ‘I look in the listening crowd for regulars from ’70, men who had talked revolution, who had raised their fists and shouted Power. One is selling snow-cone, another have in his hands a book of lottery tickets for sale, and one is sitting on a bench by himself [...] about him the exhausted look of a routed combatant glad to embrace the

⁵⁵⁶ Niblett, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, p. 30.

⁵⁵⁷ Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie*, p. 73.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

chastening rebuke of his defeat'.⁵⁵⁹ It is as King Kala laments: 'Black Power was done; the shouting of power hadn't brought the old house down [...] the revolution was over'.⁵⁶⁰ The novel, then, delineates the Black Power movement as a failed opportunity, one in which calypso singers like King Kala, as well as artists and social critics, are abandoned, ignored and rejected. Jazzy, King Kala's tent manager, tells him "[...] because, King, the revolution, the rebellion, it finish, it done. And, those songs you singing, the people [...] paying their money, they have the say. You have to give to them the songs they want".⁵⁶¹ Yet, a seed of hope remains in the enormity of what was, for a time, achieved: 'for just a moment, we in Black Power had parted the silence that curtained the biggest issues in this land - the dignity of Blackpeople, opportunity, equality, what was to be done, how to go on'.⁵⁶²

As well as allowing for Trinidadian self-determination and a symbolic and economic break from the unsustainable booms and busts of the oil-economy, Black Power is also a way of overcoming the racial prejudices and divisions stoked by the PNM in the years before the 1973 boom. Lovelace presents the reader with a culturally and racially divided society, where the PNM's political narratives regarding race and oil have resulted in the creation of ever deeper furrows of distrust and uncertainty among Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. Various instances suggest this division. For example, the vignette of the preparations for a Black Power demonstration in Cascadu, where Manick, 'the only Indian present' at the pre-demonstration meeting is given the 'placard on race relations [...] Africans and Indians Unite'.⁵⁶³ He instead demands the 'red flag [...] the principal symbol of the Black struggle [...] because if he was one of the fellars, one of us, if we were in this together, how come he wasn't allowed to carry the red flag? And if he couldn't carry the red flag, what was his position in this demonstration?'⁵⁶⁴ Despite his compatriots' uncertainty, Manick, in his enthusiasm for racial unity and a national Trinidadian identity, is the vessel for Lovelace's hope of a racially integrative society. His participation suggests how Black Power can bring together both Indians and Africans, if both sides are willing to work together towards the common goal of liberation and equality. He 'prepared a speech' arguing that 'since Emancipation had not liberated the society, they (the Indians) now needed to come together with Africans to work

⁵⁵⁹ Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie*, p. 14.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁶³ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 161.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

for its liberation'.⁵⁶⁵ Like the 1970 Black Power movement, however, Manick's attempts at racial unity remain unheeded and he loses heart as a result, after much expenditure of significant personal effort. Eventually, Lovelace tells us, Manick 'did not appear at the demonstration [...] I did not see him at any of the other rallies either'.⁵⁶⁶ Manick's brother-in-law Doon, meanwhile, embodies the racial and cultural prejudices of Indians towards Africans: "They spit you out like a plum seed [...] that is what you get from them" he says in one instance, referring to the Afro-Trinidadian organisers of the demonstration.⁵⁶⁷ Unlike Manick, Doon embodies and embraces the racial bitterness of the era, which is so inextricably tied to political divisions. He is a 'strong supporter of Mr Bissoon and the Democratic party [...]. He had erected in his yard a cluster of jhandis [...] his radio was always on the station playing Indian music, at a volume not only to allow him to hear, but for all around to know that he was listening'.⁵⁶⁸ He proclaims that "what we need is an Indian Prime Minister to give Indians the self-confidence to make us feel part of this nation".⁵⁶⁹ By emphasizing the polarisation in the ideologies of the two brothers, Lovelace presents to his readership the way Black Power *should* envision itself, as a unity of Indian and African communities, fighting for the self-determination of a specifically Trinidadian identity, separate from the exploitative nature of the oil economy, rather than falling back on prejudices and stereotypes. Despite the influx of wealth from oil rents and revenues in Trinidad, the oil-boom (and the dreams that oil-wealth creates and amplifies in the population) do not stop incidences of crime, poverty or suffering. Lovelace's intended message here hits home hard; the nation's oil-economy and all the problems that it brings, has exacerbated the material inequalities of Trinidadian society, without offering productive, sustainable means for the most vulnerable citizens to realise their dreams or hopes. Black Power, on the other hand, although a suppressed movement in the 1970s, offers genuine hope for the impoverished masses. Politico-social organisation and racial unity, Lovelace seems to suggest, is the only way for Trinidadian society to truly progress. As the example of Puerto Rico will show, the presence of petro-powered infrastructures and the 'misplacement' of petro-ideologies does not always bring uniform progress. Instead, it often

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁶⁸ Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*, p. 165.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

heightens the ‘natural catastrophe[s]’ and ‘human traged[ies],’ that (as García Márquez reminds us in the preliminary epigraph) ‘are part of [Caribbean people’s] everyday li[ves].’

II

DEPENDENTS

Chapter Three

Puerto Rico: Petro-Mobilities, Energy Coloniality and Climate- Change Dystopias

1940–1980

It is hard to imagine an energy system more vulnerable to climate change amplified shocks than Puerto Rico's. The island receives an astonishing 98% of its electricity from fossil fuels. But since it has no domestic supply of oil, gas or coal, all of these fuels are imported by ship. They are then transported to a handful of hulking power plants by truck and pipeline. Next, the electricity those plants generate is transmitted across huge distances through above-ground wires and an underwater cable that connects the island of Vieques to the main island [...] resulting in energy prices that are nearly twice the U.S. average.

~ Naomi Klein.⁵⁷⁰

Having gone through the twentieth century – and entered the twenty-first century – under direct U.S. rule, Puerto Rico stands out [...]. After being one of the few colonies of a fundamentally non-colonial imperialism, it remains, most observers would argue, a colony, long after most colonies in the world have moved onto either political independence or formal political integration with their metropolis.

~ Cesar J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabé.⁵⁷¹

La Lucha Sigue: Puerto Rico and the Fight against Petro-Capitalism

Naomi Klein's words in the epigraph to this chapter (taken from the introduction to her book *Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*) acknowledge the

⁵⁷⁰ Naomi Klein, *Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), p. 6.

⁵⁷¹ César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 2.

entanglement of Puerto Rico in several complicated, interconnected dynamics. These include its colonial relationship to the U.S.; the related issue of its position as an energy dependent in the matrix of North-America's hydrocarbon hegemony; its vulnerable socio-spatial location in the wider global network of the contemporary petro-capitalist system; and its particular geographical and ecological vulnerability to the 'amplified shocks' of climate change. This chapter, then, seeks to unpick the connections between what Catalina M. de Onis has called Puerto Rico's 'energy coloniality', its relationship to North-American petro-politics and imperial dictates, as well as the cultural registration of these two realities in literature from both the Puerto Rican diaspora and island communities from the 1940s to the 1980s.⁵⁷² I examine the relationship between ways of life-making that depend on petroleum in relation to the overarching issue of energy coloniality in the Puerto Rican context. The importation of a certain North-American oil-based cultural politics of life, the corollary to the island's energy dependency, manifests itself in specific ways in Puerto Rico, channelled through objects such as the car and the aeroplane. In addition, there exist mirrored processes of proletarianisation of the Puerto Rican working class both on and off the island. These processes are linked, as we will see, to the industrialisation strategies that were employed by the Puerto Rican government in the 1940s. The chapter concludes by examining the impact of Hurricane María and the importance of engaging in what Junot Díaz has called the act of 'ruin reading'.⁵⁷³ Reading the ruins of (un)natural disasters such as María means analysing the socio-economic histories that preceded these crises, in order to better understand how to move forward in an era of economic and ecological catastrophe, as well as how to understand a future of hydrocarbon-based climate change.

In a study of the economic, political and cultural penetration of petro-capitalism across the expanded Caribbean, Puerto Rico – the Big Island, as it is often called – and its archipelago of smaller islands (Culebra, Mona and Vieques) is a vital location which merits consideration. Firstly, Puerto Rico is an ecological weathervane. Its situation denotes the potentially dystopian futures engendered by the continued use of fossil fuels within heavily

⁵⁷² de Onis designates energy coloniality as a 'system and discourse that marks certain places and people as disposable by importing and exporting logics and materials to dominate various energy forms, ranging from humans to hydrocarbons'.

Catalina M. de Onis, 'Energy Colonialism Powers the Ongoing Unnatural Disaster in Puerto Rico', <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2018.00002/full>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

⁵⁷³ Junot Díaz, 'Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal', *Boston Review* (May/June 2011).

<<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

carbonised economies. Of course, in peripheral sites of the world-system, such as Puerto Rico (and, as we will see in the next chapter, Haiti), these kinds of potential, imminent dystopian futures (replete with tsunamis, hurricanes, famine and flood) are already ongoing realities. The study of Puerto Rico in energy democracy scholarship, but also in the energy humanities, is crucial because:

[...] the archipelago's energy challenges and its related, disproportionate experiences with environmental degradation and climate disruption make Puerto Rico an apt location for examining the precarity and consequences of carbon based economies. Detailed study of Puerto Rico's energy exigencies helps make the need to transition justly and sustainably from high carbon to low carbon energy sources feel pressing and vital. In other words, critically engaging Puerto Rico's frontline experiences brings an urgency to the imperative of keeping fossil fuels in the ground and unsettles pervasive complacency by those currently privileged enough to look the other way.⁵⁷⁴

Another essential component of the island's importance to any study of Caribbean oil-culture (even though Puerto Rico does not produce its own oil) is its imbrication within the North-American petro-empire's imperialist ambitions. Puerto Rico's colonial status is inextricably connected to the fact of its dependency on the mainland, for both the importation of fossil fuels but also for 85% of its biological energy sources (its food supply, in other words). The Puerto Rican archipelago has long been the site of North-American imperialist intrusion and socio-economic experimentation, from its colonisation by the U.S. in 1898 to its current status as an unincorporated territory. Throughout this relationship, the archipelago has 'continuously served as a living laboratory for prototypes that would later be exported around the globe'.⁵⁷⁵ The U.S.'s exploitation of Borinquen (the Taíno word used by many Puerto Ricans to refer to the island)⁵⁷⁶ has ranged from the sterilisation of more than one third of

⁵⁷⁴ de Onis, 'Energy Colonialism', <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2018.00002/full>>.

⁵⁷⁵ Klein, *The Battle for Paradise*, p. 25.

⁵⁷⁶ The indigenous peoples of the island called it 'Borikén' (also spelled 'Boriquén' and 'Borinquen'), and today Puerto Ricans affectionately refer to their homeland in this way. The word 'Borinquen' is also the root of Puerto Rican's expression of their own nationality; in place of stating 'soy puertorriqueño', or 'I am Puerto Rican', many would instead say 'soy boricua' or 'soy boriqueño/a.' The widespread use of 'boricua' suggests Puerto Rican people's national and cultural affinity with their pre-Hispanic roots.

Puerto Rican women in the sixties in an effort to control population, to the testing of dangerous drugs and the use of Vieques as a ‘testing ground for everything from Agent Orange to depleted uranium to napalm’.⁵⁷⁷ Throughout its history, the island and its people have been ‘exploited as a sacrifice zone for empire building [...] corporate greed and toxic energy projects’.⁵⁷⁸ Some economists have also made the case that it was Puerto Rico which invented the ‘whole model of the special economic zone’.⁵⁷⁹ This ‘intense penetration of American capital, commodities, laws [...] customs’ (and the violence caused by economic and ecological trauma in Puerto Rico) is thoroughly entangled with the cultural, social, ecological and political ways of life-making which are engendered by oil and its multiple uses.⁵⁸⁰ Of course, Puerto Rico’s energy dependency relates to the U.S.’s own special relationship with oil, which is worth examining in a little more detail before we turn to la Borinquen bella herself.

Petrotopias, Dependency and Inequality

As Peter Hitchcock writes, the oil dependency of the U.S. is ‘not just an economic attachment but [...] a kind of cognitive compulsion that mightily prohibits alternatives to its utility as a commodity and as an array of cultural signifiers’.⁵⁸¹ In the aftermath of World War Two, oil came to power vast swathes of social life in the States, fundamentally transforming patterns of (auto) mobility, suburbanisation and commodity consumption. As Matthew Huber writes in *Lifeblood*, oil became a powerful component of U.S. material reality and culture throughout the twentieth century not ‘only because of the material geographies of mobility it [made] possible but because its combustion also accompanie[d] deeply felt visions of freedom

⁵⁷⁷ Klein, *Battle for Paradise*, pp. 25–6.

⁵⁷⁸ R. D. Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993), p. 13.

⁵⁷⁹ ‘In the fifties and sixties, well before the free-trade era swept the globe, U.S. manufacturers took advantage of Puerto Rico’s low-wage workforce and special tax exemptions to relocate light manufacturing to the island, effectively road-testing the model of offshored labor and maquiladora-style factories while still technically staying within U.S. borders’.

Klein, *The Battle for Paradise*, p. 26.

⁵⁸⁰ Jorge Duany, ‘Nation and Migration: Rethinking Puerto Rican Identity in a Transnational Context’, in *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, ed. by Frances Negrón-Muntaner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 51–63 (p. 51).

⁵⁸¹ Hitchcock, *New Formations*, p. 82.

and individualism.⁵⁸² He explains that with the widespread use of fossil fuels came a ‘material transformation of social reproduction centred on the spatiality of single family homeownership and automobility’ that powered the ‘real subsumption of life under capital’.⁵⁸³

This meant that with the ‘extension of the productive forces of capital – large scale industry powered by fossil fuels – to the reproductive forces of everyday life, a specific stratum of American workers could now, live, think and feel an individuated sense of power over the geographies of everyday practices’.⁵⁸⁴ This feeling was magnified when the ‘geographies of everyday practices’ themselves were significantly expanded. For example, from 1945–55, both suburban housing and automobile registrations saw a colossal increase in the U.S., the latter doubling from 26 million to 52 million, a 62% increase on a per-capita basis, with another 65% increase between 1955 and 1975.⁵⁸⁵ Petro-powered automobility, the creation of an idealised privatised home-life centred around the nuclear-family unit, and the expansion of varieties of refined petroleum products enabled a way of life that came to be understood and imagined ‘as a product of entrepreneurial energies and choices’ rather than the product of economic systems, inequalities, social and cultural capital et. cetera.⁵⁸⁶ These choices became the ‘foundation of entrepreneurial life, where life was imagined as what you made of it but without petroleum your individual ability to make anything would vanish’.⁵⁸⁷ Oil and its byproducts also created the notion of being in control of individuated spaces whether this be the space of the home or the car, or even of one’s own body. This compounded the generalised sense of being in control of a certain formation of entrepreneurial life which was based in individual choices and efforts.

Today, the oil-commodity continues to act as a ‘cognitive compulsion’ in a nation which is home to less than 5% of the global population, yet where 22% of global petroleum consumption occurs, more than all the BRIC countries combined. Despite the oil shocks of the 1970s and the debates over peak oil, problems of scarcity, and the environmental damage wrought by carbon-dependent economies, the U.S. continues to paint itself as what Stephanie LeMenager has called a ‘petrotopia,’ a term which describes the idealised, romanticised landscape of ‘modern infrastructures’ (highways, suburbs, malls and so on) that supposedly

⁵⁸² Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. xi.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p. xv.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p. xv.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁸⁶ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. 73.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 77–8.

make life better (faster, more convenient, and more technologically advanced) in the States.⁵⁸⁸ There has developed not only the notion (encouraged by governments and corporations) that petrotopias are the ‘ideal end state’ but also that there is an inalienable right for all North-Americans to use copious amounts of oil within the paradigm of this petrotopian existence. Indeed, an oil-guzzling lifestyle has come to represent ‘American-ness’ in many ways. As Huber points out, ‘cheap gasoline has become a basic aspect of everyday survival in an era of eroding economic security’ for North-American families and communities.⁵⁸⁹

However, behind this façade of progressive, modern petrotopian life lies the repression of certain communities, areas, and, indeed, even nation-states, which cannot partake of petrotopian existence in the same way; ‘petrotopias’ are not actually constructed for these communities. This underbelly of repression includes the externalised violence committed by the U.S. in the form of imperialist interventions into foreign oil-producing countries such as Iraq.⁵⁹⁰ Importantly, though, it also includes the repression of (and the violence done to) certain demographics within North-America’s own internal borders. By replacing and displacing local communities, new petrotopian spaces are created which ‘function in the service of capital’ and, naturally, in the service of specific, selective demographics.⁵⁹¹ This relentless creation of petrotopian spaces includes, for example, the violence enacted on South Bronx neighbourhoods flattened to be replaced by freeway developments, or the erosion of the wetlands below New Orleans to build canals and dams. To these examples we can add the liminal one of Puerto Rico, which has experienced what LeMenager calls the ‘repressed consequences’ and ‘irreversible damage’ caused by the relentless production of petrotopian spaces at the expense of the nation’s non-white, working class communities and natural landscapes.⁵⁹² Puerto Rico allows us to understand the consequences of petro-imperialism both within U.S. geopolitical borders. The consequences of oil use in Puerto Rico, and the nature of this oil-use (based as it is on an energy dependency on the mainland), have come to

⁵⁸⁸ Stephanie LeMenager, ‘The Aesthetics of Petroleum’, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 12.

⁵⁸⁹ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. xv.

⁵⁹⁰ To quote Michael Watts with regards to Iraq: ‘Paul Wolfowitz’s confession to the Asian Security Summit in Singapore in June, 2003 [was] that the Iraq War was driven not by the fiction of weapons of mass destruction but by “the simple fact” that “the country swims on a sea of oil”’. Michael Watts, ‘Violent Environments: Petroleum Conflict and the Political Ecology of Rule in the Niger Delta’ in *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development and Social Movements*, eds. by Richard Peet and Michael Watts (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), pp. 250–272 (p. 250).

⁵⁹¹ LeMenager, *Living Oil*, p. 12.

⁵⁹² LeMenager, *Living Oil*, p. 12.

profoundly shape a certain cultural politics of life — ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving that mould individuals and communities — both on the island and in the mainland diaspora.

Industrialisation by Invitation: Understanding Operation Bootstrap

1940 was a watershed year in Puerto Rican history. It marked the beginning of a quarter of a century of one-party domination, as well as the start of a decade in which the nation's industrialising drive began to overpower its agricultural output. From 1940, the Partido Popular Democrático (the PPD, formed in 1938), under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín, would oversee sweeping changes in Puerto Rican society, with an economic strategy that was clearly delineated from the outset. The Industrial Development Company (Fomento), the island's development agency, was created in 1942. While there was initial disagreement regarding the goals of Fomento's policies, the PPD explicitly favoured industrial incentives that would attract foreign investors.⁵⁹³ From 1942 onwards, up until the mid 1960s, the industrialisation of Puerto Rico became the focus of the PPD. This industrialisation was a process that 'depend[ed] on U.S. markets, inputs, technology, financing and ownership', and as such, led to a nearly complete integration with the mainland's economic institutions and manufacturing methods.⁵⁹⁴ This, in short, was the beginning of the nation's imbrication in energy coloniality.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, this economic reshuffling of Puerto Rican society, which began with the industrialisation processes of Operation Bootstrap, took place in a very specific global context, that of the long post-World War Two period of expansion in global capitalism, which was based on oil's consolidation as the primary energy source that powered the world economy. As Ayala and Bernabé write, 'the reorganization of the world economy during the post-war boom included the semi-industrialisation of some underdeveloped and raw-material producing areas as well as considerable migration from less to more developed areas'.⁵⁹⁶ As they rightly point out, Puerto Rico was a 'visible participant' in these trends.

⁵⁹³ Robert W. Anderson, 'Puerto Rico since 1940', in *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol. 7*, ed. By Leslie Bethnell (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 579-598 (p. 585).

⁵⁹⁴ James L. Dietz, 'Operation Bootstrap and Economic Change in Puerto Rico', in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present, A Student Reader*, ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1993), pp. 421-433 (p. 421).

⁵⁹⁵ Dietz, *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 421.

⁵⁹⁶ Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 179.

Against this global backdrop of petroleum-powered postwar recovery and economic boom, Muñoz Marín and his party, succumbing to market pressures, launched Operation Bootstrap (or as it is more optimistically called in Spanish, Operación Manos a la Obra, or Operation Hands to Work) in 1947.

Bootstrap was the name given to a series of economic growth programmes and projects that were intended to transform Puerto Rico from the ‘poorhouse of the Caribbean to a showcase of democracy’.⁵⁹⁷ All of its programmes were informed by the North-American ambition of demonstrating to peripheral nations the benefits of industrialisation via capitalist means, as opposed to the much-feared Communist practices of the Soviets. Through Bootstrap’s initiatives, state-owned firms were privatised, with production processes centred on the export of commodities and financial incentives, such as tax breaks, provided to U.S. companies who ‘set up shop’ on the island.⁵⁹⁸ As part of the Truman Doctrine, policy makers from around the world were brought to Puerto Rico to witness the ‘miracle’ of economic prosperity that was taking place. These investors and policy makers were invited to implement similar programmes and policies in their own home countries, to begin what came to be known as ‘industrialisation by invitation’. Elaborating on the backdrop of Cold War politics against which Operation Bootstrap took place, Ramon Grosfoguel explains that:

Puerto Ricans on the island served as a geopolitical showcase of capitalism vis-à-vis the Soviet model represented by Cuba. Puerto Rico’s model of development [...] was showcased around the world by the U.S. as a way of gaining [...] symbolic capital [by following] the U.S. model of development.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 179.

⁵⁹⁸ As Juan Ruis Toro elaborates:

Operation Bootstrap was fundamentally about modernizing the Puerto Rican economy; because the government understood that this would only be possible through foreign investment, much of it involved providing tax exemptions to American corporations who set up shop in Puerto Rico. These corporations were then able to capitalize on the lower costs of labor on the island, which further improved their bottom line and made doing business in Puerto Rico even more attractive. Thus, the strategy depended on foreign capital, technology, and entrepreneurial resources, which completely integrated Puerto Rico’s economy with that of the United States. The relationship between the two included unlimited access to the market of goods, labor, and capital.

Juan Ruis Toro, <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-12-strategies-for-economic-developmen/puerto-ricos-operation-bootstrap/#_ftn5> [accessed 17 June 2018].

⁵⁹⁹ Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (California: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 137-8.

In many ways, Operation Bootstrap paved the way for the island's current situation of energy coloniality. The 'rush to industrialisation through attraction of external investments under direct government stimulus and incentives' led to the establishment of around 170 factories by 1952 and 2,246 by 1963, most of which were smaller, labour intensive subsidiaries of North-American firms.⁶⁰⁰ These firms were attracted to the island through a combination of incentives that included 'exemption from insular and federal taxes, low wages and open access to the U.S. market'.⁶⁰¹ By the 1950s, Puerto Rico had some of the highest growth rates in the world, and thanks to the vast expansion of plants and factories across the country, an increased reliance on imported hydrocarbons, particularly petroleum. U.S. transnational corporations took advantage of an extremely advantageous 'combination of duty-free trade, low wages, and tax loopholes,' as well as 'free' access to the island's natural resources.⁶⁰² By the early 1950s, business seemed to be booming.

Operation Bootstrap occurred in two main stages. The first was a labour intensive, 'sweatshop' phase, which began in 1947; the second, a petrocultural, capital-intensive phase beginning in the early 1950s, which sought to employ a semi-skilled and skilled labour force.⁶⁰³ The first capital-intensive projects were based in the petrochemical sector and included Caribe Nitrogen, Gulf Caribbean and the Commonwealth Oil Refining Co. (CORCO), all in operation by 1956. From 1952 to 1958, the eight new firms in this industry invested \$78.4 million in Puerto Rico. The petroleum-centred initiatives of Operation Bootstrap made apparent economic sense. In other words, 'since all energy sources were externally supplied, construction of oil refineries would permit the capturing of at least a portion of the value added in the production process, thus contributing to local job and income creation'.⁶⁰⁴ Other capital-intensive firms included machinery, chemical and metal industries.⁶⁰⁵ Despite the rapid economic growth that took place during Operation Bootstrap, the material effects that had

⁶⁰⁰ Anderson, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. 7, p. 592.

⁶⁰¹ Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 179.

⁶⁰² Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 179.

⁶⁰³ At this time, most firms coming from the States were highly labour intensive with relatively low capital requirements. For example, in 1949, the production of textiles and clothing accounted for 13.7% of all manufacturing firms; in 1954 it was 19.5%; 1967 19.9%. Referring to this phase of Operation Bootstrap as a 'sweatshop phase' is no exaggeration; in 1950, the average hourly wage in manufacturing was 28% of the U.S. wage.

⁶⁰⁴ Dietz, *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 426.

⁶⁰⁵ In 1982, chemical and related products accounted for 32.1% gross output of all industry, but they created only 10.1% of employment in manufacturing, pointing to the intensely capital-intensive nature of the industry. Dietz, *Caribbean Freedom*, pp. 426-427.

been hoped for – the creation of more employment and the improvement of wages – did not come close to fulfilling expectations. By 1979, for example, shortly before the complete closure of its refinery operations in 1982, CORCO employed only 1,450 workers.⁶⁰⁶ Economic development had not succeeded in reducing unemployment in any significant way, particularly in the second, capital-intensive phase. Official unemployment rates were as much as 12% in the early sixties and rose still higher in the seventies, with the 1983 rate at a record 23.4%. Unofficial estimates of unemployment were even higher.⁶⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the share of net income paid to the owners of capital was 75% across the capital-intensive industries, with workers receiving only 25%.⁶⁰⁸

Moreover, while Fomento-promoted firms dominated the Puerto Rican manufacturing sector, little effort was made to create links with the island's local economy. Capital-intensive sectors came to resemble the export-enclave textile and apparel industries which had dominated the earlier phases of Operation Bootstrap. The programme ensured that any kind of self-sustaining island economy was impossible, due to the increased dependency on the federal U.S. government for investment funds. Ayala and Bernabé emphasise this point when they write that while 'Muñoz Marín's chosen strategy modernised the Puerto Rican polity and economy' it did not fundamentally change its colonial nature.⁶⁰⁹ While material standards of life improved for many Puerto Ricans,⁶¹⁰ it was wealthy North-American investors and corporations (particularly the pharmaceutical and petroleum transnationals) who truly saw significant increases in their fortunes, thanks to the loopholes and tax incentives of Operation Bootstrap. Indeed, the period can be described as one of 'petrochemical colonialism' where vulnerable communities were targeted and '[...] exploited not by slave owners but by the petrochemical industry as the new master and overseer'.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 426.

⁶⁰⁷ As James Dietz points out, for example, from 1947 to 1961, Fomento firms employed an average of 70 workers and by the late sixties, employment per firm had declined to just 33.3 people per firm. In the San Juan area Fomento firms were providing jobs to only one of every thirty-nine inhabitants in the mid 1960s, and only 28.7% of jobs promised by promoted firms came to fruition; among the petrochemical firms, this percentage was even lower. Ibid., p. 428.

⁶⁰⁸ Dietz, *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 427.

⁶⁰⁹ Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, pp. 152-3.

⁶¹⁰ Ayala and Bernabé note that the 'average weekly salary in manufacturing increased from \$18 for men and \$12 for women in 1953 to \$44 and \$37 respectively in 1963. Not only were wages higher for those able to secure jobs, but new government water, electricity, housing, road, basic health and education services improved living conditions of even the poorest Puerto Ricans. Life expectancy, to take one index, increased from 46 to 69 between 1940 and 1960'.

Ibid., pp. 180-1.

⁶¹¹ Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism*, p. 13.

The 1973–1975 global recession (caused in part by the 1973 OPEC oil crisis and the fall of the Bretton Woods system) meant that during the 1970s, the world-capitalist economy entered a period of slow growth. In Puerto Rico, the economy lost much of its vigour. Wide-scale closure of industrial plants revealed the short-term, precarious nature of the jobs that had been created, as well as their environmental and economic costs. Across the Latin American continent (and in the Caribbean archipelago too), neoliberal measures of the 1970s included the liberalisation of flows of trade and capital, the widespread privatisation of state assets, rampant deregulation and labour reforms, which in Puerto Rico’s case, laid the groundwork for later initiatives such as the 2016 Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). Throughout all of these economic and political changes, Puerto Rico has continued to rely heavily on fossil fuels⁶¹² while the ‘imbalances of its colonial, dependent economic structure’ have remained resolutely in place.⁶¹³

Petroleum, Proletarianisation and Migration

Operation Bootstrap irreversibly transformed ways of life-making in Puerto Rico. However, it also changed ways of lifemaking away from la Borinquen. The PPD encouraged migration to the mainland, and as such, Bootstrap propelled a mass migration to the United States that was unprecedented in the island’s history, for reasons that will be discussed momentarily. The government’s stimulus for people to migrate to the U.S. was not incidental. Ayala and Bernabé explain, ‘[...] the migration of the lower strata [of the Puerto Rican population] was stimulated [...] as a way of cleaning the island of the unemployed and shanty towns. This policy paved the way for the first mass airway migration in world history [...] since the Puerto Rican showcase was the island rather than the migrants, the U.S. channelled

⁶¹²In 2015, The Puerto Rico Energy Commission stated that its energy use consisted of 48% petroleum, 32% natural gas, 18% coal, and 2% renewables (energia.pr.gov, 2016). As de Onis points out, ‘local governors have maintained heavy reliance on these energy imports, including by privatizing public services and selling them to the fossil fuel industry.’ This practice of privatisation has been continually utilised by the nation’s governments and runs across various public services. As Massol-Deyá points out, for example, ‘in the mid-1990s, the administration of Governor Pedro Rosselló – father of the current governor – began privatizing Puerto Rican services like telecomm[unication]s, water, education and electricity. Thirty percent of the island’s power generation was sold to private coal and gas interests, among them the now defunct energy company Enron’ (Massol-Deyá, 2018, para. 7).

⁶¹³ Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 180.

its resources to the island. Those who migrated ended up in the urban ghettos of the metropole and had one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S.⁶¹⁴

In his article 'Oil in the American Imaginary,' Peter Hitchcock discusses Munif's *Cities of Salt*, writing that 'Munif explores how oil proletarianises – it embodies both extraction from Nature and the value-extraction from labour which is integral to capitalist accumulation.'⁶¹⁵ There is no question that the processes of oil-based industrialisation via Operation Bootstrap on the island and the increase in levels of migration off it have had a proletarianising effect on Puerto Rico's working class communities. They have become, as Galeano puts it, a 'subproletariat which piles up in the most sordid slums'.⁶¹⁶ As Kelvin Santiago-Valles elaborates, the Puerto Rican 'subaltern majorities, both on the island and in the internal colonies in the U.S. [were] a colonised labor force'.⁶¹⁷ They were 'the product of [a] process of dispossession, continuous displacement and complex subjectification [...] that characterize[d] [...] modern-imperial and post-modern global capitalism'.⁶¹⁸ It was this 'colonised labor force' that, having bought their air tickets in anticipation of better wages and a more comfortable life on the mainland, became enmeshed in a specific dynamic of coloniality in North-America.⁶¹⁹ With a significant reduction in the cost of airfares in the late

⁶¹⁴ Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (California: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 137–8.

⁶¹⁵ Hitchcock, *New Formations*, p. 85.

⁶¹⁶ Galeano, *Open Veins*, p. 71.

⁶¹⁷ Kelvin Santiago-Valles, quoted in *El autonomismo puertorriqueño: su transformación ideológica (1895-1914): la prensa en el análisis social: La Democracia de Puerto Rico*, Mariano Negrón-Portillo (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1981), pp. 174–5 (p. 174).

⁶¹⁸ Santiago-Valles, *El autonomismo puertorriqueño*, pp. 174–5

⁶¹⁹ Reactions to the arrival of Puerto Ricans in the States during the 1940s and 1950s was shaped by the 'culture of poverty' theory, which was elaborated on by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis in the 1940s, then enthusiastically and wholeheartedly taken up by both a sensationalist press and conservative politicians across the U.S. The idea that the Puerto Ricans who 'invaded' North American cities were a problem community, poor because of inadequate single mother households, promiscuous attitudes to sex and lax child-rearing rather than systemic issues of labour and the housing market meant that the culture of poverty approach became 'a powerful set of images whose meanings moved and whose political effects ran the gamut from radical to liberal to conservative' from the 1940s to the 1990s (Briggs). The petro-mobilities that had allowed for the transportation of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. had also meant that once on the mainland, Puerto Rican communities were objectified as 'other,' and proletarianised in the nations factories and sweatshops, as well as becoming the new model 'problem family unit' of the period. These communities experiences of discrimination and oppression was also enmeshed with a struggle over the control for and use of energy resources. By the 1950s, Puerto Ricans became an expendable labour force, in ready and cheap supply. Levels of economic and political interest in the boricua migration altered dramatically from the 1940s to the 1950s (Ramón Sánchez). The Mayor's Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs was terminated in the fifties, for example, and the New York City Housing Authority went from seeking out Puerto Rican tenants, in the early 1950s, to creating a quota system to keep Puerto Ricans out of public housing. Puerto Ricans came to have some of the worst socio-economic conditions in the States; new migrants often lived in dilapidated, overcrowded housing, lacked institutional educational support and had poor

forties and early fifties, the bulk of migrants came from unskilled and low-income sectors, the majority being males from rural, inland areas. In this way, working-class Puerto Ricans both on the island and the mainland became displaced and alienated. For the latter, this alienation occurred through the transformation of Puerto Rican working classes into ‘problem communities’ in the States. For the former it was the fact of exploitative and unsustainable work regimes which formed the backbone of Operation Bootstrap’s industrialising vision. Migration to the States acted as a safety valve, preventing unemployment rates from rising in the 1950s and 1960s as a large sector of the island’s proletariat were relocated, relieving some of the pressure on Muñoz Marín’s government to place the working classes into jobs on the island. The limited job provision provided by capital-intensive industries (petroleum-based industries in particular) was directly connected to the PPD’s emphasis on highly subsidised air transportation, cheaper air tickets and the construction of new airports. It is important to comprehend the influence of petrocultural logics here, which suffused the industrialising initiatives of Operation Bootstrap and fuelled the ‘great migration’ of Puerto Ricans in the 1950s and 1960s from island to mainland. Indeed, the two phenomena of this transformative period in Puerto Rican history went hand in hand.

In their discussion of world-literatures from peripheral regions of the world-system, the Warwick Research Collective write that it is in (peripheral) locations (such as Puerto Rico) that the ‘pressures of combined and uneven development find their most pronounced or profound registration, including in the sphere of culture, where new forms are likely to emerge, oriented (and uniquely responsive) to these pressures, which constitute their final determinants’.⁶²⁰ The clash between local content and imported form is a phenomenon we have witnessed most vividly in the literature of Venezuela, but Puerto Rican literature’s

medical services. By 1960, more than 50% of Puerto Ricans in New York were incorporated as low wage labour and only claimed equal rights through the civil rights struggles of the 1960s (Grosfoguel). As Grosfoguel points out, ‘Puerto Rican migrants unskilled working class backgrounds [were] combined with a negative sociopolitical mode of incorporation to produce a ‘massive incorporation to the secondary labor market and later, with deindustrialisation, a massive marginalisation from the labor market. Today, they have one of the worst socioeconomic profiles of all ethnic groups in the U.S. Puerto Ricans have one of the highest unemployment rates, lowest labor force participation rates and highest poverty rates among Caribbean groups in the U.S.’ (Grosfoguel).

Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 170.

José Ramón Sánchez, *Boricua Power: A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 175.

Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 141.

⁶²⁰ Stephen Shapiro et. al., *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 62.

registration of the pressures of the uneven development of the world-system possesses a very important specificity, given the admixture of U.S. imperialism and oil dependency under which the country struggles. From the 1940s onwards, one mode of referentiality used by numerous Puerto Rican writers to get a foothold on the ‘hyperobject’ of oil’s multi-scalar assemblages has been petro-mobilities.⁶²¹

The short story and novel discussed in this chapter – Luis Rafael Sánchez’s *La Guagua Aérea* (published in 1994) and *La Guaracha del Macho Camacho* (published in 2001) – both utilise the plane and the car respectively not only as material actualisations of petroleum’s political and economic dominance, but also as instruments which frame certain kinds of cultural politics of life in Puerto Rico.⁶²² The plane and car are foci around which Rafael Sánchez considers and questions the micro/macroc cosmic struggles that Puerto Ricans face with regards to the colonial relationship with the U.S. and, more indirectly, to the issue of energy coloniality. Both the aeroplane and automobile are amongst some of the most visible and powerful symbols of oil’s cultural effects in Puerto Rico.

I will begin by examining the petro-powered object and emblem of the aeroplane. At the most fundamental level, the aeroplane is a petro-powered object of mass-mobility which facilitated the widespread migration of Puerto Ricans to the States, where the settlement of diasporic communities led to the restructuring of national identities and the development of new ways to be Puerto Rican (from the designations of Nuyorican in the 1950s to the more recent AmeRican).⁶²³ This was even as Puerto Rican communities on the mainland continued to be dehumanised, objectified and subjected to widespread structural inequalities within the North-American system of socio-economic governance. The automobile, meanwhile,

⁶²¹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 1.

⁶²² Luis Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1994), pp. 11–22; Luis Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho’s Beat: A Novel*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001).

⁶²³ There is a wealth of literature surrounding the history (as well as sociological studies, Neorican literature etc.) of Puerto Rican migration to the United States.

See, as a brief introduction: Manuel Montalvo-Alers, *The Puerto Rican Migrants of New York City: A Study of Anomie* (New York: AMS Press, 1985); Ricardo Campos, *National Culture and Migration: Perspectives from the Puerto Rican Working Class* (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1978); Lucrecia Montañez Casanio, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review, 1979); Haroldo Alfonso Dilla, *Realidad socioeconómica y tendencias políticas en la comunidad puertorriqueña en Estados Unidos* (La Habana: Centro de Estudios sobre América, 1981); David Lagmanovich, *Los viajeros de la ciudad: cómo viven los puertorriqueños en Nueva York* (La Plata: Universidad de la Plata, 1961); Oscar Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture: Background for La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1968); Manuel Denis Maldonado, *Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos: Emigración y colonialismo* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1976); Carlos Santos Méndez, *Los inmigrantes puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos* (Ponce: Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico, 1971); Virginia Korrol Sánchez, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City 1917–1948* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983).

continues to shape what Huber calls the ‘socio-spatial patterns of suburban life’ on the island.⁶²⁴ Car ownership, and the ideologies that are embodied by the automobile, naturalise discourses of individuality and fuel specific forms of social reproduction and cultural logics. The next two sections of this chapter, then, examine literary registrations of both the plane and the car by Boricua authors, as well as their place in Puerto Rican petroculture.

The Aeroplane: 1940–1960

Juan Manuel García Passalacqua writes of Puerto Ricans that ‘if there is one quality that characterises us as a people, it is our imperative to commute, our transient nature’.⁶²⁵ Since the 1940s, more than 1.6 million Puerto Ricans have relocated abroad. This process of transnationalism,⁶²⁶ which was most prolific from the 1940s to the 1960s, has led to changing notions of what defines an ‘authentic’ Puerto Rican identity. Culturally speaking, the Puerto Rican nation can no longer be confined to just the island archipelago, but also constitutes the boricua communities who have settled on the mainland. Fifty years of constant migration between the U.S. and the Big Island has meant that Puerto Rico has become una nación en vaivén, or a nation on the move. It is specifically this vaivén (the act of coming and going, backwards and forwards) that has come to define Puerto Ricans. This has meant that the island itself, the ‘national fatherland,’ has become an ‘oscillating nation’ as Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini puts it, or a ‘floating nation’ as Rafael Sánchez interprets it in *La Guagua Aérea*.⁶²⁷ Some cultural critics, meanwhile, refer to Puerto Rico as a ‘commuter nation.’ All of these designations signify the specific nature of boricua migration, which, ‘contrary to other population movements [...] entails a restless movement between multiple places of origin and

⁶²⁴ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. xx.

⁶²⁵ Juan Manuel García Passalacqua, ‘The Puerto Ricans: Migrants or Commuters?’ in *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration*, ed. by Carlos Antonio Torre, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, Williamo Burgos (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994), pp. 103–114 (p. 103).

⁶²⁶ Briefly defined by Jorge Duany as the ‘maintenance of social, economic and political ties across national borders’ wherein a ‘growing diversity of migrants origins/destinations undermines ideological premises of traditional discourses of the nation based on equation among territory, birthplace, citizenship, language, culture and identity. *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, p. 51.

⁶²⁷ Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, ‘Foreword: Back and Forward’, in *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration*, eds. by Carlos Antonio Torre, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, Williamo Burgos (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994), pp. 29–54 (p. 54).

destination'.⁶²⁸ Transnational migration has profoundly 'eroded exclusive territorial and linguistic boundaries' of the nation, creating new forms of identity-politics, where the deployment of cultural nationalism ensures that mainland-residing Puerto Ricans assert their affinity to Boriquen, 'stressing their broad kinship, cultural and emotional ties to an ancestral homeland' while simultaneously building lives in the U.S.⁶²⁹ As García Passalacqua puts it, the Puerto Rican people are 'one with two abodes'.⁶³⁰ Hugo Rodríguez-Vecchini, in the foreword to *The Commuter Nation*, adds that:

What makes Puerto Rican migration radically different from the mobility of other U.S. citizens, including other Hispanic U.S. citizens, is the qualification that "Puerto Rican" exerts on the notion of migration itself. Puerto Rican migration [...] exceeds both semantic forms of migration and includes among other referential terms: "moving," "traveling," "visiting," "commuting," and [...] "going back and forth" [...] Puerto Ricans travel back and forth irrespective of season, by the wings of daily "commuter" flights (some 3,000 Puerto Ricans fly to and from Puerto Rico daily). [...] The notion of [...] Puerto Ricanness no longer depends on the place of birth or residence. Puerto Ricanness is an "ontological" sense of identity.⁶³¹

Needless to say, the formation of la nación en vaivén would not have been possible without widespread access to air transportation in the 1940s, the decade in which migration to the mainland began to steadily increase.⁶³² From 1945–1965 in particular, air transportation completely transformed the nature of Puerto Rican migration and with it, notions of boricua identity and nationalism.

After 1947, the PPD took a more active approach in their management of migration, making air transportation cheaper, safer and more reliable. This fact, coupled with the rising unemployment levels on the island and increasing levels of urbanisation led to an increase in the number of people willing to migrate.⁶³³ 'Air transportation became an indispensable tool in

⁶²⁸ Duany, *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, p. 55.

⁶²⁹ Duany, *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, pp. 58–60.

⁶³⁰ García Passalacqua, *The Commuter Nation*, p. 105.

⁶³¹ Rodríguez Vecchini, *The Commuter Nation*, pp. 53–4.

⁶³² That is not to say that Puerto Rican migration to the States did not occur before the 1940s; in 1910, forty five years after the North-American invasion of the country, 500 individuals migrated to the mainland, in perhaps the first instance of mass Puerto Rican migration.

⁶³³ As Edgardo Meléndez writes, there was a 'bottleneck in transportation before 1945, when transportation out of the island was limited due to the war and a highly restricted air transportation system. After the war, surplus

the movement of Puerto Ricans to the U.S., the most efficient and effective means to achieve mass migration'.⁶³⁴ The aeroplane became not only a symbol of petro-powered mobility and modernisation, but became a site of transculturation, a location where creolised cultural identities were negotiated, deciphered and commingled. It seemed to many writers of the time that Puerto Rican identity was, in fact, best located and even understood in the air. The aeroplane, then, became a hyphen between the *here* of the island and the *there* of the mainland, a means of articulating and configuring new ways of being Puerto Rican. To put it another way, petro-mobility became inextricably connected to new configurations of national identity.

From the early 1950s, Puerto Rican literature began to register the waves of air migration from the island to the U.S. (to New York City in particular). 'As a response to historical realities, new literary tropes materialised' in Boricua writing, most noticeably the airport and the airplane, while round trip tickets became commonplace literary motifs and 'characterisation centred on the contradictions, ambiguities, clashes, ruptures, silences and gaps of identity produced in air migration'.⁶³⁵ Both the socio-spatial sites of aeroplane and airport were registered in literary production as locations of flux, where identity was forged in an interstitial space between departure and arrival. 'After air migration,' Sandoval Sánchez notes, Puerto Rican 'identities are at a threshold located between departure and arrival, between one flight and the other, between here and there'.⁶³⁶ In the 1950s and 1960s, a wealth of literature that revolved around the aeroplane began to emerge: notable works included Rene Marques's *La Carretera*, Jose Luis Gonzalez's *Paisa*, Guillermo Cotto-Thomas's *Tropico en Manhattan*, Emilio Díaz Valeacaels's *Harlem todos los Días*, Jaime Carrero's poem 'Jet Neorriqueño' were all among the prodigious output of the writers that José L. Torres calls the 'sojourners'.⁶³⁷ It was Carrero's poem, published in 1964, that first brought into the mass cultural consciousness the metaphor of the aeroplane and looked ahead to Rafael Luis Sánchez's 'flying bus'

airplanes and pilots allowed the nonscheduled airlines to expand. This, coupled with the entry of major airlines and lower airfares meant that the number of people leaving the island by air increased dramatically. Edgardo Meléndez, *Sponsored Migration: The State and Puerto Rican Postwar Migration to the United States* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2017), pp. 98-120 (p. 110).

⁶³⁴ Meléndez, *The State and Puerto Rican Postwar Migration*, pp. 96-7.

⁶³⁵ Alberto Sandoval Sánchez, 'Puerto Rican Identity Up in the Air: Air Migration, its Cultural Representations and me 'cruzando el charco'', in *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism*, eds. by Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 189-208 (p. 192).

⁶³⁶ Sandoval Sánchez, *Puerto Rican Jam*, p. 194.

⁶³⁷ José. L. Torres quoted in Sandoval Sánchez, *Puerto Rican Jam*, p. 194.

metaphor. Carrero's work transforms the aeroplane into a liminal space of being, where his Puerto Rican protagonists are *entre dos aguas*, 'juggling languages and straddling identities'.⁶³⁸ The plane becomes the in-between space, the 'hyphen between being here and there, *allá* and *acá*' and Carrero 'captures a series of conversations that articulate and constitute the formation of a new Puerto Rican subjectivity in process, the so-called Nuyorican'.⁶³⁹ As Sandoval Sánchez points out, it is this poem that should be considered an 'embryonic literary construction' for the 'dominant cultural paradigm for air migration and identity' which is exemplified in Luis Rafael Sánchez's short story 'La Guagua Aérea' ('The Airbus').

Published in 1994, 'La Guagua Aérea' describes a colourful plane journey from Puerto Rico to New York City, illustrating the multitudinous manifestations of Puerto Rican identity in the betwixt and between phase of air travel. As Rodríguez-Vecchini puts it, the story is an attempt to 'represent, within the confines of an airplane microcosm, the living culture of Puerto Rican migrants'.⁶⁴⁰ Rafael Sánchez presents the strong sense of national unity shared by the characters, emphasized by the social distinction made between the mulatto passengers in economy class and the first class Puerto Ricans, the latter of whom are described as 'contriv[ing] to be "uniformly white"'.⁶⁴¹ Another thread which connects the passengers in economy class is the 'seditious' and widely shared laughter which is provoked by the commotion caused when a pair of native crabs (*jueyes*) are accidentally set loose, terrifying the 'blonde all-American stewardess'. When the passengers understand the cause of the commotion, laughter breaks loose amongst all of the Puerto Ricans: only the crew 'seem immune to the infectious laughter, immune to the jibes that the blonde stewardess's dread deserves'.⁶⁴² However, the 'gentío mestizo' (mestizo crowd) are also united by less frivolous realities. Aware of their non-whiteness and of their working-class status in the States, they discuss amongst themselves their individual experiences of being a migrant and person of colour on the mainland. They verbalize to each other their understanding of the socio-economic inequalities they face in the U.S. by the very nature of their being categorized as 'other,' but also the multiple ways in which each of them enacts their own personal version of

⁶³⁸ Sandoval Sánchez, *Puerto Rican Jam*, p. 194.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁶⁴⁰ Rodríguez-Vecchini, *The Commuter Nation*, p. 63.

⁶⁴¹ Rodríguez-Vecchini, *The Commuter Nation*, p. 64.

'[...] la tripulación, uniformemente gringa esta noche'. Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 16.

⁶⁴² 'Sólo la tripulación [...] parece inmune a la risa, inmune a la plaga de la risa, inmune a las burlas que merece el pavor de la azafata rubia'. Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 12.

a Puerto Rican identity when they are away from their 'Borinquen querida' (beloved Puerto Rico). Rafael Sánchez describes both the sense of unity shared in their being puertorriqueño, as well as the sense of individual fragmentation and disillusionment as their journey towards New York brings them closer to the reality of being subaltern minorities in a metropolitan city of the core.

The site of the aeroplane allows for a specific and important examination of these moments of disillusionment and fragmentation, as well as a voicing of personal insecurities, lived experiences of micro-aggressions and injustices, which in the 'in-between' space of the plane take on a new meaning as the characters travel from the old to the new, not only in terms of geographical spaces but also in terms of versions of themselves. As they share stories, their sense of 'intranquilidad' or restlessness grows:

The restlessness encourages patriotic speech and annexationist counter-interrogations, racial jokes [...] and their noisy reception, the winks of horny womanizers and the flirtation of randy man-eaters [...] The restlessness inflates the retelling of the humiliations suffered by Puerto Ricans in the crosstown and the elevator, the fucking job and the liberal university, the Jewish junkería. Nevertheless, [they are] humiliations told with eloquence, [with] effortless self-love and character. In short, the restlessness extends a line, invisible but clear, between the side of the gringos and the side of the puertorriqueños.⁶⁴³

They share not only their experiences of discrimination on the mainland, but also the generalised confusion faced by all migrants when arriving in a new land. They find solace in their collectivity, affirmed through the telling of stories which are infused with a sense of national identity, and indeed, of unmistakable pride for their homeland. The stories with which they regale one another are defined by their Puerto-Ricanness:

[...] by a rice-and-beans style, anecdotes with a jíbaro protagonist who didn't speak meekly. Anecdotes of Puerto Ricans to whom unemployment, hunger and the desire to eat visited all together in a day. Disgraced anecdotes of Puerto Ricans, colonised to the core, who asked forgiveness for the mistake of being

⁶⁴³ 'La intranquilidad azuza el discurso patriótico y el contrainterrogatorio anexionista, los chistes de color a escoger y su recepción ruidosa, las guiñadas de los lanzados mujeriegos y los coquetes de las lanzadas hombrerías [...] La intranquilidad la engorda el recuento de las humillaciones sufridas por los puertorriqueños en el *crosstown* y el *elevator*, el *fucking job* y la universidad liberal, la *junkería* del judío [...] La intranquilidad, en fin, tiende una raya, invisible pero sensible, entre el bando de los gringos y el bando de los puertorriqueños'. Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 13.

Puerto Rican [...] anecdotes that glimmer, like sparks, in Puerto Rican Spanish. A language vast and coarse, exhilaratingly corrupt [...] anecdotes by the thousands, of boricuas that travel, every day, between the discredited Elysian that New York has come to be and the inhabitable Eden that Puerto Rico has become.⁶⁴⁴

Such is the sense of a united goodwill onboard that the author wryly notes that ‘the airplane doesn’t need gasoline tonight since the good vibes provide the fuel’.⁶⁴⁵ The ‘cordalidad’ shared by the passengers in economy class is ‘loquacious,’ ‘noisy’ and ‘overfamiliar’, suggesting a real sense of national and cultural affinity and companionship.⁶⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the attitudes of the passengers in first class infer a very different set of loyalties, embodied by their choice to speak English instead of Spanish and their desire to prove their separation from the ‘gentío mestizo’ to the American passengers on board. Instead of camaraderie, the first class passengers take ‘sips of Californian champagne’ and in between sips, ‘rationalise, for the benefit of their neighbouring Yankee in the next seat [that] – “They are my people but [...] wish they learn soon how to behave”. [They] pronounce a statement, almost a testament, between superficially reading some repetitive newspaper [...] “they will never make it because they are trash”’.⁶⁴⁷ Upper-class Puerto Ricans, in other words, are not only acutely aware of the class divisions that (in their eyes) make them superior to their fellow countrymen but seek the approval of North-American elites by distancing themselves from (and looking down their nose on) working-class boricuas. Nevertheless, the majority of Puerto Ricans – those who do not have the luxury of wealth to smooth their arrival into the States, who eulogise and romanticise the United States but yearn and ache for the familiarities and rhythms of home – must contend with mixed emotions. They suffer from a homesickness and a simultaneous

⁶⁴⁴ ‘[...] anécdotas telurizadas por el estilo arroz y habichuelas. Anécdotas protagonizadas por un jíbaro que no habla dócil. Anécdotas de puertorriqueños a quienes visitaron un día, juntamente, el desempleo, el hambre y las ganas de comer. Anécdotas desgraciadas de puertorriqueños, colonizados hasta el meollo, que se disculpan por el error de ser puertorriqueño [...] Anécdotas que chispean, como centellas, en el idioma español puertorriqueño. Idioma vasto y basto, vivificantemente corrupto [...] anécdotas, por millar, de boricuas que viajan, a diario, entre el eliseo desacreditado que ha pasado a ser Nueva York y el éden inhabitable que se ha vuelto Puerto Rico.’ Ibid., *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁵ ‘[...] la guagua aérea no requiere gasolina esta noche pues las vibraciones positivas proveen el combustible.’ Ibid., *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁶ ‘Quede claro que la cordalidad dicharachera y ruidosa, confianzuda y que efervesce, se consagra en la cabina económica’. Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁴⁷ ‘[...] los puertorriqueños guarecidos en la *First-class*. Quienes racionalizan, entre sorbo y sorbo de champaña californiana, para consumo del vecino yanqui de asiento – *They are my people but. Wish they learn soon how to behave*. Quienes pronuncian un *statement* cuasi testamentario entre la lectura superficial de alguna revista ídem – *They will never make it because they are trash*’. Ibid., *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 17.

eagerness to escape the island. They ‘suffocate in Puerto Rico and breathe in New York [...] [they] hurt and worry about living away from the fatherland [...] [they] wanted to be here but have to be there. [They] become the slaves of unnecessary explanations’.⁶⁴⁸ With ‘so much going and coming, they informalise the airplane trip and reduce it to a simple little coming-and-going over the moving ocean. That what matters is to quickly return, to New York. That what matters is to quickly go back to Puerto Rico [...] Arrivals and returns that concelebrate the emotional applause at [the] airbus’s landing in the promised land. But which one is the Promised Land? That [one] of the burning ground? Or this [one] of the cold season?’⁶⁴⁹ The question emphasizes the confusion felt by boricua migrants with regards to the notion of a homeland, and suggests the processes of transculturation, when both North-America and la Boriquen become home, neither one perfect, yet both sanctified for different reasons. In addition to this, places like New York become, for Puerto Ricans, part of Puerto Rico itself, highlighting the fact that Puerto Rican identity is no longer solely located on the island. The narrator of Rafael Sánchez’s story asks the passenger in the seat next to him, “‘Where are you from?’ [...] ‘Puerto Rico’ [she replies] [...] ‘But, from which town in Puerto Rico?’” With an air ‘so natural that it [is] frightening, [her] smile triumphant [...] the woman in the seat adjacent replie[s] to me, “from New York”’.⁶⁵⁰

The conclusion made by Rafael Sánchez, then, is that the result of the transient, fragmented state of being depicted in ‘La Guagua Aérea’ is a ‘splitness, doubleness, confusion, a flux of geographical territories and psychological spaces’.⁶⁵¹ Puerto Ricans ride ‘reality’s current, levelling and dazzling in its pursuit of a new space, furiously conquered. It is a course of a nation afloat between two ports where the contraband is hope’.⁶⁵² Not only, then, is boricua identity forged in both San Juan and New York, but also within the aeroplane itself,

⁶⁴⁸ Puertorriqueños que se asfixian en Puerto Rico y respiran en Nueva York [...] Puertorriqueños a los que duele y preocupa vivir fuera de la patria. Puertorriqueños que querrían estar allá pero tienen que estar acá. Y se esclavizan a las explanaciones innecesarias’. Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁴⁹ Puertorriqueños que, de tanto ir y venir, informalizan el viaje en la guagua aérea y lo reducen a una trillita sencillona sobre el móvil océano. Que lo que importa es llegar, pronto, a Nueva York. Que lo que importa es regresar, pronto, a Puerto Rico. Llegadas y regresos que concelebra el aplauso emotivo prosiguiendo al aterrizaje de la guagua aérea en la tierra prometida. Mas, ¿cúal es la tierra prometida? ¿Aquella del *ardiente suelo*? ¿Esta de la *fría estación*? Ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁵⁰ “¿De dónde es usted?” [...] “De Puerto Rico” [...] “Pero, ¿de qué pueblo de Puerto Rico?” Con una naturalidad que asusta, equivalente la sonrisa a la más triunfal de las marchas, la vecina de asiento me contesta – “De Nueva York”’. Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁵¹ Sandoval Sánchez, *Puerto Rican Jam*, p. 196.

⁶⁵² Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea*, p. 22.

where identities ‘intersect, overlap and multiply’.⁶⁵³ The sociospatial location of the aeroplane allows Rafael Sánchez to consider the issues of Puerto Rican migration and identity politics in a setting which exemplifies the transitory, floating, hybrid processes of boricua transculturation. The aeroplane, in other words, becomes the border site or zone where new ways of being are negotiated. As Ramón E. Soto-Crespo adds, two important messages are conveyed in Rafael Sánchez’s conclusion. Firstly, there is the understanding that New York is a town within a ‘post-insular Puerto Rico’. Secondly, that the Puerto Rican identity has become a more all-encompassing one; there exists the very real possibility of being born and raised in the States and simultaneously being an islander.⁶⁵⁴

Evidently then, the aeroplane has played an important part in shaping of Puerto Rican mass migration and identity-politics.⁶⁵⁵ The only other oil-based mode of transportation which has had an equally powerful effect on boricua identities and ways of life-making in Puerto Rico is, of course, the car.

The Automobile: 1960–1980

In his novelistic homage to the capital of Puerto Rico, *San Juan, Ciudad Soñada* (*San Juan: Memoir of a City*, 2005), Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá mourns the loss of familiar Puerto Rican landscapes in his beloved San Juan. It is a loss, as Rodríguez Juliá insinuates, precipitated by the shift from an agricultural economy to one based on manufacturing and tourism. ‘All the landscapes of my childhood have disappeared,’ he laments, remembering the old countryside road from Aguas Buenas to Caguas. ‘It was one of the most beautiful on the island, shadowed from one town to the other by a dense canopy of flame trees and jacarandas’. He concludes

⁶⁵³ Sandoval Sánchez, *Puerto Rican Jam*, p. 196.

⁶⁵⁴ Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 6.

⁶⁵⁵ Of course, there are many boricua writers who have written about the experiences of Puerto Rican migrants when in the United States – unfortunately, this thesis is not able to consider their work in relation to its axial themes. The following works, however, are a good place to begin: Pedro Juan Soto, *Spiks* (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1973); Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967); Piri Thomas, *Stories from el barrio* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); Pedro Juan Soto, *Ardiente suelo, fría estación* (México: Ediciones Huracán, 1977).

that ‘the wound on my childhood’s landscape sends shivers down my spine’.⁶⁵⁶ Rodríguez Juliá’s elegiac words to the city of his childhood are a reminder of the huge changes that have turned ‘Antillean geographies into unrecognizable landscapes, bringing some of the islands dangerously close to their carrying capacity’.⁶⁵⁷ In Puerto Rico, the transformation of the environment from agricultural ‘paisaje’ (landscape) to one of petro-modern, industrialised urbanity (an emulation of North-American urban petrotopias, in other words), has been particularly noticeable.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico witnessed the emergence of a specific kind of dominant cultural discourse, one that romanticised the island’s landscape and invested it with a multitude of nationalist sentiments. These sentiments included a distinct pride in the jíbaro community (the jíbaro is the Puerto Rican subsistence farmer-peasant who traditionally dwelled in the rural interior of the island) and the idealisation of a bygone, supposedly simpler time when the island’s natural beauty was relatively untouched and life continued in a more traditional manner.⁶⁵⁸ As part of this cultural discourse, paisajismo, or depictions of the ‘pictorial beauty of the island’s lush landscape,’ became synonymous with what María Acosta Cruz calls the idea of the ‘dream nation’.⁶⁵⁹ This dream nation was an ideal based on a love of the land and the tradition of the jíbaro, but one that was itself propagated by the island’s monied classes, among them criollo landowners. In other words, this vision of paisajismo was itself the product of class-specific forms of life- and environment-making, a romanticised construct created by rich landowners who themselves were part of a legacy of the historical oppression of poorer Puerto Rican farmers. To say the least, this idealisation was self-evidently a problematic one. During the twentieth century, as Puerto Rico’s landscape was reorganised in line with the demands of Operation Bootstrap, the discourse of paisajismo began to change. ‘Nature’s beauty morphed into imagery and allegories of its despoiling, what

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Todo el paisaje de mi infancia ha desaparecido’ [...] ‘una de las más hermosas del país, con sombra de pueblo a pueblo a causa de su tupido dosel de flamboyanes y jacarandas’ [...] ‘la herida en mi paisaje infantil estremece’. Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, *San Juan, ciudad soñada*, trans. by Lisabeth Parasvini-Gebert (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 3.

⁶⁵⁷ Lisabeth Parasvini-Gebert, ‘Caribbean Utopias and Dystopias: The Emergence of the Environmental Writer and Artist’, in *The Natural World in Latin American Literatures: Ecocritical Essays on Twentieth Century Writings*, ed. by Adrian Taylor Kane (New York: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2010), pp. 113-135 (p. 113).

⁶⁵⁸ José Pedreira, quoted in Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico: The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 74.

⁶⁵⁹ María Acosta Cruz, *Dream Nation: Puerto Rican Culture and the Fictions of Independence* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014), p. 111.

Ana Lydia Vega terms “ecocide”.⁶⁶⁰ This discourse of despoliation was mobilised, in part, as a form of opposition to increasing North-Americanisation, which was considered responsible for the destruction of pre-existing, ‘traditionally’ boricua landscapes. The nineteenth-century imagery of pure, lush landscapes was replaced with urban scenes of traffic jams, fast-food chains and highways. Thus, ‘newer stories and symbols for the nation respond to the land’s overdevelopment and [its] morph[ing] into the evil twin for the Lush Land: the Blighted Land and its allegories of dystopia’.⁶⁶¹ As Acosta Cruz explains, for Puerto Rican writers, there exists a ‘disillusionment’ that comes from the disparity between the idyll of the imagined lush countryside of the past, and the real island of the twentieth century, which is dominated by the imitative infrastructures of North-American petrotopia.⁶⁶²

One of the most influential and widespread infrastructures on the island is the car-road assemblage, which has come to dominate natural Puerto Rican landscapes. As Ana Lydia Vega writes in *Mirada de Doble Filo*, ‘the jams crucify one’s patience. The car horns drill into one’s head. The curves invite one to go over a sheer drop. The antics of the drivers stop one’s breath [...] the landscape, precisely the landscape is absent’.⁶⁶³ The transformation of space and subjectivities in Puerto Rico through the reorganization of the island around the automobile has been a primary concern of numerous boricua authors.

Ever since its invasion of the island in 1898, the U.S. has sought to refashion Puerto Rico in accordance with its own imperial interests and needs. Constant attempts have been made to reconstruct Puerto Rican identity and to break down or rein in the island’s strong sense of cultural nationalism. Strategies such as the prohibition of independentista sentiment in the 1930s or the implementation of English as a compulsory language requirement at all levels of the education system have been strongly resisted by the island’s inhabitants. Of all these strategies, it is perhaps the practice of energy coloniality and the creation of energy privilege (which designates the differentials in an individual’s or community’s abilities to access spaces and resources)⁶⁶⁴ which have been most effective in importing a North-American cultural

⁶⁶⁰ Acosta Cruz, *Dream Nation*, p. 111.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁶⁶² Acosta Cruz, *Dream Nation*, p. 120.

⁶⁶³ Ana Lydia Vega, *Mirada de Doble Filo* (Río Piedras: La Editorial Cultural, 2008), p. 36.

⁶⁶⁴ As De Onis writes, energy privilege embodies the reality that ‘some groups can access spaces and resources, which are protected from the kinds of ecological harm that other groups are forced to contend with every day.’ Grounding her work in the concept of Parks and Pellowes, de Onis goes on to elaborate that the concept of energy privilege stems from that of energy coloniality, as some ‘individuals and communities thrive at the

politics of life into Puerto Rico. The automobile is a potent symbol of these strategies and a key material vector in the transformation of ways and means of life-making on the island.

At this juncture, I want to take a moment to consider the car itself — the ultimate symbol of oil's capacity to shape privatised space and embody ideologies of freedom — in a little more detail before considering the ways in which it has shaped Puerto Rican life specifically, as well as the way it is registered in boricua literature. As was outlined in the previous chapter, the automobile is what John Urry and Mimi Sheller call the 'quintessential manufactured object' of Western capitalism.⁶⁶⁵ An essential piece of quotidian machinery, the car symbolises and embodies the 'dominant culture that sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life'.⁶⁶⁶ The automobile's creation of a cultural politics of life based on an 'individuated sense of freedom and power over space in comfort' has become, as Matthew Huber writes:

[...] constitutive of American conceptions of freedom, the open road and the crafting of what Cotton Seiler calls "autonomous objects" even as the social relations of production that made the production of the car possible were underemphasised in favor of the individual's own entrepreneurial capacities which were constructed as the real force, behind the power of the automobile and the oil that fueled it. In other words, then, the automobile stands as perhaps one of the most forceful symbols of the individual's work ethic and life choices [...] an increasing expression of life as capital, life as a series of investment choices and debt financing to make a life for yourself.⁶⁶⁷

But the car (and car cultures) embody more than a series of investment choices and economic decisions; the automobile also creates in humans a variety of 'aesthetic, emotional and sensory

expense of others. While environmental privilege includes and exceeds consideration of power differentials and power generation derived from both high and low carbon resources, energy privilege focuses on this dual power dynamic. Emphasising different energies allows for foregrounding the complexities of energy sources, infrastructure, markets, labor, impacts and discourses. Furthermore, the term calls attention to how economically privileged (usually) white individuals do not have to expend the same amount of energy fighting injustices compared to communities facing environmental racism and poverty' (540). De Onis, 'Energy Colonialism.'

⁶⁶⁵ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'The City and the Car', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol 24, Issue 4 (December 2000), 737-757 (p. 737).

⁶⁶⁶ Huber, *Lifeblood*, p. 74.

⁶⁶⁷ Huber, *Lifeblood*, pp. 74-6.

responses'.⁶⁶⁸ The 'dominant culture of automobility'⁶⁶⁹ is embedded in a deeply normalised, habitualised context of 'affective and embodied relations between people, machines and spaces of mobility, in which emotions and the senses play a key part'.⁶⁷⁰ The many emotional responses that human beings have towards the physical object of the car (and towards the act of driving) are essential in the personal investments made in the purchase and use of cars. The feelings generated around the object of the car and its relation to social relationships, have been called 'automotive emotions,' by Mimi Sheller. 'Automotive emotions,' an obvious product of petro-capitalist ways of life-making, are 'powerful indicators of the emotional currents and [the] submerged moral economies of car cultures'.⁶⁷¹ These emotions range from the positive to the negative, from the sensations of pleasure-seeking, exhilaration and satisfaction, to deep anxiety, frustration, horror and terror.⁶⁷² These various feelings contribute to the overwhelming dominance of contemporary car culture in most human societies, a culture which is of course reinforced by advertising, mass media, and so on.⁶⁷³ The ideologies embodied by the car and by the act of driving create, in other words, structures of feeling which are constantly strengthened and reaffirmed by our inhabitation of various 'petrotopian' paradigms, particularly in the core nations.⁶⁷⁴ Nowhere is this 'petrotopian' paradigm more

⁶⁶⁸ Mimi Sheller, 'Automotive Emotions: Feeling the Car', in *Sage Journals: Theory, History and Society Vol 21, Issue 4-5* (2004), 221-242 (p. 221).

⁶⁶⁹ John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

⁶⁷⁰ Sheller, *Sage Journals*, pp. 221.

⁶⁷¹ Sheller, *Sage Journals*, p. 222, p. 224.

⁶⁷² As Daniel Miller puts it, there is a 'highly visceral relationship between the bodies of people and the bodies of cars that forces us to acknowledge the humanity of the car in the first place'. Cars have become essential not only to the 'privatisation' and 'industrialisation' of consumer society, but also what Paul Gilroy calls the 'emotionalisation' of society, due in no small part to the emotions that come with the perceived freedom of automobility, and which have changed the way in which human beings experience the world with all their senses.

Daniel Miller, 'Driven Societies', in *Car Cultures*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 24.

Paul Gilroy, 'Driving while Black', in *Car Cultures*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 97.

⁶⁷³ See also: Ruth Brandon, *Auto Mobile: How the Car Changed Life* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2002); Michael Bull, 'Soundscapes of the Car: A Critical Ethnography of Automobile Habitation', in *Car Cultures*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of Our Desires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁶⁷⁴ As Sheller puts it, 'we not only feel the car but we feel through the car and with the car. In those terms it has contributed to changing how car-users judge feeling, and what feelings people expect to have as they move through the world and sense their own movement'. Cars and car cultures also shape the emotional investments people have in their relationships, whether this be between the car and the owner, or wider social relationships with family, friends and spouses. This serves to create 'affective contexts' that materialise in specific types of vehicle, home, neighbourhood, and city. Cars have become, in contemporary petro-culture, 'members of families, repositories for treasured offspring and devices for demonstrating love, practicing care and performing gender'. Not only do they embody economic choices, visions of entrepreneurial lifestyles and mobile

obvious than in the States. North–America’s invisible oil-based infrastructure (derricks, refineries and oilfields) have led to the creation of a multitude of ‘petrotopias’ that are part and parcel of everyday life. U.S. petroculture and oil-dependency has fashioned what LeMenager calls a ‘monstrous reproduction of itself in its own image’ which results in ‘freeways, pollution, feverish automobility and human sprawl’ in every city of the nation, all the while keeping the true source of its petroleum dependency under wraps.⁶⁷⁵ This monstrous reproduction, constantly rebuilt and re-enacted within the nation’s borders, is then imitated across the world-system, thanks to the fact of the U.S.’s cultural hegemony. In peripheral locations such as Puerto Rico, it is not so easy to conceal petroleum dependencies when oil-based infrastructures form part of a larger system of historical uneven development and contemporary coloniality. Moreover, these petrotopian assemblages are perhaps most explicitly dualised at the peripheries of the petro-capitalist world-system. As Graeme Macdonald elucidates, these petrotopias act as both ‘deathworld and dreamworld’ in peripheral nations.⁶⁷⁶

Puerto Rico, like many peripheral nations of the world-system, imitates North–American petrotopian ways of life-making. In particular, the physical infrastructure of the car-road assemblage, part of the wider petrotopian patterns on the island, has drastically altered the social reproduction of life. It has also shaped Puerto Ricans’ very ideas of what defines them as a nation and what constitutes ‘the good life.’ Alongside the phenomenon of nuclear-family suburban households, the automobile embodies ideas about entrepreneurial ways of life-making, including notions of individual freedom and socio-economic progress as a result of the ‘correct’ choices and hard graft. The island’s capital, San Juan, possesses an underused, underfunded and geographically inefficient public transit system, which only 5% of the total island population have access to. Perhaps in part because of this, Puerto Rico possesses a staggeringly high car-use rate, despite the island’s small size. Indeed, a topographical map of the country displays to the viewer an ‘astonishing density of roads’ – in one statistical

privatisation, but they also ‘bring into being non-conscious forms of cognition and embodied dispositions which link human and machine in a deeply emotive bond’. Sheller, *Sage Journals*, p. 231, p. 237.

⁶⁷⁵ LeMenager, *Living Oil*, p. 75.

⁶⁷⁶ Macdonald, ‘Improbability Drives: The Energy of SF’, *Strange Horizons* (2016)

<<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf/#:~:text=Strange%20Horions%20%2D%20Improbability%20Drives%3A%20The%20Energy%20of%20SF%20By%20Graeme%20Macdonald&text=The%20following%20essay%20is%20the,major%20essays%20in%20SF%20criticism.&text=It%20explores%20the%20dependence%20of,responding%20to%20changing%20energy%20paradigms.>> [accessed 10 June 2019].

comparison that put visual value to data, it was shown that ‘Puerto Rico now has 25,647km of road [...] if all the roads in Puerto Rico were placed in a straight line one could get to Australia, China or India and still have more than 14,000 km left over’.⁶⁷⁷ As well as being a determinant of specific ‘automotive emotions’ and constructing a certain politics of life, the automobile is a key cog in the larger mechanics of energy coloniality on the island. This is partly due to the essential fact that Puerto Rican car-owners are dependent on imported petroleum for fuel, and dependent on the imported object of the car itself to power specific ways of life-making.

The car, then, is a fundamental part of the wider cultural politics of life in Puerto Rico which renders many boricuas more Americanised than their diasporic compatriots. Ramon Grosfoguel explains that ‘many middle-class Spanish speaking Puerto Ricans on the island are more assimilated to American “white” middle-class practices with their suburban houses, cable television, racist representations of Puerto Rican identity and mass consumption [...] than many non Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the U.S. living segregated in urban ghettos’.⁶⁷⁸ As in the U.S., the Puerto Rican metropolis has been converted, through processes of industrialisation and neoliberalisation, into an ‘autopolis’.⁶⁷⁹ This in turn has facilitated, to quote Hitchcock, a ‘cognitive compulsion,’ wherein car-ownership is considered to be an act of common sense and lauded as a symbol of upward mobility.⁶⁸⁰ In ‘Driving While Black’, Paul Gilroy describes the car as ‘the ur commodity:’ as such, he writes, the car not only helps us to ‘periodize our encounters with capitalism as it moves into and leaves its industrial phase, [it] also politicize[s] and moralize[s] everyday life in unprecedented configurations’.⁶⁸¹ In Puerto Rico, narratives featuring the car-road assemblage are often flavoured by the island’s paradoxical situation of energy coloniality and Americanised automobile-culture.

Luis Rafael Sánchez’s *La Guaracha Del Macho Camacho* (*Macho Camacho’s Beat*, published in 1976 and in English in 1980), has emerged as one of the nation’s quintessential oil novels. The narrative centres on a ‘traffic jam nation that cannot move forward despite – in

⁶⁷⁷ Acosta Cruz, *The Dream Nation*, p. 122.

⁶⁷⁸ Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (California: University of California Press, 2013), p. 142.

⁶⁷⁹ Zack Furness quoted in Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (Brooklyn and London: Verso, 2018), p. 54.

⁶⁸⁰ Hitchcock, *New Formations*, p. 82.

⁶⁸¹ Paul Gilroy, *Car Cultures*, p. 89.

fact ironically, because of – the many roads laid out over the landscape’.⁶⁸² The novel appeared at a moment of economic crisis in Puerto Rico as the Bootstrap model of development that had been pioneered since the war was beginning to unravel. *Macho Camacho’s Beat* underlines to the reader the cultural importance of oil (and indeed, hydrocarbons more generally) to Puerto Rican society, and the way this cultural dependency is underpinned by North-American imperialism.⁶⁸³ The text has been regarded as symptomatic of the crisis of Operation Bootstrap and what Cruz-Malavé calls (Bootstrap’s) ‘heteronormative tropes of narrating the nation’.⁶⁸⁴ Rafael Sánchez depicts a country plagued by (amongst others) three new ‘national traits: a calcified class system, a corrupt government and a stomach-turning culture of trashy mass-media’ as Gregory Rabassa writes in the preface to the novel.⁶⁸⁵ A fourth trait, we might add, that is wholly entwined with the other three, is a complete dependency on oil and its byproducts. As Kerstin Oloff explains, ‘while [it was] profoundly and completely reshaped by oil-powered U.S. imperialism, Puerto Rico never had any direct access to oil production, and oil’s impact was largely mediated through industrialization, electrification, de-ruralization, automobilization, and consumerism. While Sánchez’s text features no oil derricks, oil suffuses the entire island, its infrastructure, and its culture’.⁶⁸⁶ Rafael Sánchez examines not only the range of automotive emotions engendered by the car, and what this means in a Puerto Rican context; he also uses the car to reflect on the nation’s energy dependency and its imbrication in neo-colonial relations with the U.S. Showcasing a lifeworld predicated on offshore energy sources, Rafael Sánchez illustrates to the reader both the cultural politics of life created by oil dependency in a peripheral context, and the structures of feeling that result from this manner of life-making, across the class spectrum.

Two of the most significant and intertwined themes of *Macho Camacho’s Beat* are the depiction of the automobile as a fetishised, hyper-sexualised entity (that becomes a subject according to Marx’s logics of commodity fetishism) and the simultaneous depiction of the

⁶⁸² Gregory Rabassa, ‘Introduction’, in *Macho Camacho’s Beat*, Luis Rafael Sánchez, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), p. x.

⁶⁸³ Kerstin Oloff, ‘From “Section 936” to “Junk”: Neoliberalism, Ecology and Puerto Rican Literature’, in *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, ed. by Stephen Shapiro and Sharae Deckard (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 69–91 (p. 73).

⁶⁸⁴ Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, ‘Towards an Art of Transvestism: Colonialism and Homosexuality in Puerto Rican Literature’, in *Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, ed. by Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 13–165. (p. 139).

⁶⁸⁵ Gregory Rabassa, ‘Introduction’, in *Macho Camacho’s Beat*, Luis Rafael Sánchez, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), p. x.

⁶⁸⁶ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 73.

female body (particularly the dark-skinned, working-class Puerto Rican female) as a dehumanised and commodified object. It is to this dynamic of what Cecily Devereux calls the ‘petrocultural feminine’ that I turn to next.

Cars, Bodies and Commodities

There runs throughout twentieth century petroculture (and particularly U.S. petroculture) what Devereux calls a ‘familiar [...] impulse to represent both cars as women and women as cars and thus, equally and interchangeably, as commodities’.⁶⁸⁷ Both cars and women are, as Jean Baudrillard puts it, ‘objects [...] to be bought’. Indeed, as Baudrillard goes on to write, all objects, ‘cars included, become women in order to be bought,’ this in of itself being a normalised ‘function of the cultural system’ in which we all exist.⁶⁸⁸

The patriarchal impulse to represent women as cars and cars as women delineates both as not only objects, but critically objects which are ‘constituted from, sustained by, and dependent on oil industries’.⁶⁸⁹ As Devereux goes on to write, this does not mean simply the ‘repeated association of women with cars (as is the case in so many car advertisements and in masculinist car culture), but also of the equal constitution of both as [petrocultural] *products*, catered to satisfy the desires of a specifically male consumer. Mass media and advertising in particular have created a ‘foundational symbolic interchangeability between women and cars’.⁶⁹⁰ Moreover, this interchangeability emphasises how petroculture has been fundamental in propelling the ‘[...] representation and performance of femininity in the twenty-first century’.⁶⁹¹

In this regard, petroculture maintains what Devereux calls ‘a symbolic economy,’ one which depends on women not having the ‘capacity to be self-propelling or self-determining: not to be driving but to be driven, not to be subject but object’.⁶⁹² Moreover, ‘through an

⁶⁸⁷ Cecily Devereux, ‘Made ~~for~~ Mankind: Cars, Cosmetics and the Petrocultural Feminine’, in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, ed. by Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman and Adam Carlson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), pp. 162–186 (p. 163).

⁶⁸⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (New York: Verso 1996), p. 69.

⁶⁸⁹ Devereux, *Petrocultures*, p. 163.

⁶⁹⁰ Devereux, *Petrocultures*, p. 163.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., p. 163.

⁶⁹² Ibid., p. 164.

obfuscatory exchange of value, they – like cars – are not or cannot be “automobile”’.⁶⁹³ It follows, then, that ‘if the business of selling cars depends on the constitution of an idea of femininity that is symbolically aligned with cars and thus rendered immobile, subordinate, and infinitely exchangeable (the petrocultural feminine), then the business of constituting masculinity in this cultural system arguably depends on the affirmation of car culture’s representations’.⁶⁹⁴ If we recall again the words of Gilroy, who deemed the car to be the ‘ur commodity’⁶⁹⁵ of capitalism, then we can understand the car as possessive of a dual referentiality: ‘not only to itself but to the women and the traffic in women it represents, and [it is] therefore a crucial index of the operation of the “cultural system” as a whole’.⁶⁹⁶

Macho Camacho’s Beat repeatedly utilises this petrocultural impulse — that is, the connections between cars and women and the ‘auto-immobility’ (to borrow Devereux’s phrase) of working-class, dark-skinned Puerto Rican women under the gaze of automobile-owning, mobile upper-class Puerto Rican men.⁶⁹⁷ Rafael Sánchez depicts the manner in which the automobile has, as Carol Sanger puts it, ‘come to serve women — as drivers, as passengers, as purchasers — less well than men’.⁶⁹⁸ The automobile and the Puerto Rican female become interchangeable, sexualised commodities throughout the text, and both exist in order to serve and satisfy the male gaze and appetite. Take, for example, the Old Man, one of the novel’s elite protagonists, who has a mistress named The Mother (whose self-description as a ‘sweet dark girl of my native land’ is indicative of her ethnicity, which marks her out in the eyes of Puerto Rico’s elites as socially inferior).⁶⁹⁹ Notably, the Mother is not only dark-skinned, but also of a lower class than Graciela (the Old Man’s aristocratic, neurotic wife) and this palpable power dynamic in their socio-sexual relations is repeatedly referenced by Rafael Sánchez. As Sanger notes, ‘the car has reinforced women’s subordinated status in ways that make the subordination seem ordinary, even logical’. There are two ‘predictable, but subtle mechanisms’ that normalise this reinforcement: the first ‘permits’ women to drive but does so by ‘increasing [their] domestic obligations’ and as such makes the car ‘an extension of the

⁶⁹³ Ibid., p. 164–5.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁹⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Car Cultures*, p. 89.

⁶⁹⁶ Devereux, *Petrocultures*, p. 165.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁹⁸ Carol Sanger, ‘Girls and the Getaway: Cars, Culture, and the Predicament of Gendered Space’, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 144 (1995–96), pp. 705–7 (p. 705).

⁶⁹⁹ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho’s Beat*, p. 8.

domestic space of the home and the job of the maternal caregiver'.⁷⁰⁰ The second mechanism is one which the reader observes in the opening scenes of *Macho Camacho's Beat*, where the relationship between women and cars is explicitly sexualised in the dalliances between the Old Man and the Mother. The car becomes a space and index for 'the sexual subordination of women [...] an extension of the home, a location for sexual danger'.⁷⁰¹ The Mother's description of the sexual act emphasises the fact of her sexual vulnerability and gendered subordination. She relates to the reader that 'after we do what we do, laboris fornicato, he climbs into his car and nice as you please he goes off in his car of cars: the superlative refers to a Mercedes-Benz with all the grillwork and novelties of the moment with the outstanding additive of a front seat that tilts back until its on the same level as the back seat: an emergency bed for emergency coitus'.⁷⁰² While he 'goes off in his car' after the act, the Mother bemoans the fact that she is the one who has to 'get on the bus, and not him [...] who's got to put up with the pawing [...] on the bus and not him [...] who has to get home at all hours and not him'.⁷⁰³ She shrugs off this instance of what Mimi Sheller calls gendered 'inequal mobilities' with the perceived advantage of her female sexuality.⁷⁰⁴ 'I've got fucking to spare,' she boasts to the reader. 'I've got more than enough types who want to grab me as soon as I hit the street. I've got enough studs who want to mount me for myself [...] if I set out accepting lifts I wouldn't know what it was like to ride the bus for the rest of my days'.⁷⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the reader is cognizant of the combination of unequal power-dynamics and gendered transport poverty at work in the encounter, all of which renders the Mother socio-economically immobile. The car becomes a sexualised space of privatised freedom (for the Old Man) where the body of his mistress can be utilised for a quick, taboo sexual encounter. The Mother, meanwhile, becomes further entrenched in her position of immobility by these encounters. The Old Man's hasty tumbles with the Mother epitomise the social gulf between the classes; after he ensures that his sexual needs (important enough to be deemed an 'emergency') have been satisfied, the automobile enables him to return to his 'real life,' to his upper-class nuclear family and to all the material accoutrements of his wealthy lifestyle. However, for the Mother,

⁷⁰⁰ Sanger, *University of Pennsylvania Press Law Review*, p. 705.

⁷⁰¹ Devereux, *Petrocultures*, p. 165.

⁷⁰² Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 7.

⁷⁰³ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁰⁴ Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 55.

⁷⁰⁵ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 9.

the car embodies a space of sexual exchange, an exchange which highlights her complete lack of social mobility.

The presentation of women and cars as interchangeable, sexualised commodities that exist to pleasure the male gaze is a theme that runs throughout Rafael Sánchez's text, alongside his critique of other aspects of contemporary Puerto Rican life. These critiques are most powerfully voiced through Sánchez's depictions of his highly flawed protagonists. Senator Vicente Reinosa, for example, is (as Gregory Rabassa notes) the exemplification of the 'crooked Politician: venal, selfish and shallow, but holding power all the same. He is the striver moving up through the bourgeoisie as his ilk comes to dominate so many aspects of life on the island. He also represents those who will sell out Puerto Rico to the Americans'.⁷⁰⁶ He is one of many guilty parties in the inexorable 'Yankeefication of the island's culture and manners'.⁷⁰⁷ The author uses repetitive slogans for him throughout *Macho Camacho's Beat*, in a Homeric style ('Vince is a prince, no accident, clean rinse,' 'Vince is a prince and his ideas convince,' 'Vince is a prince for the poor long since').⁷⁰⁸ The catchphrases are based on hollow political slogans, which are starkly contrasted to his lewd behaviour. For example, in one vignette, the reader encounters Reinosa stuck in a traffic jam, where he ogles the 'magnificent Olympian asses of some magnificent females who form a pretty pair fucking around on top of a blue Mustang'.⁷⁰⁹ They are 'scatterbrained people the little females, dancing about in the hope that two nervy dudes would organize some fun and games for them [...] One chasing the other, leaping across car tops, lifting up their skirts, giving off sweat at the joints, challenging the sun, playing, dancing, shouting, making flags with their asses as rags' while Reinosa '[...] feels a heighdy-ho between his legs' even as he is 'contented with [his] task of meeting the mistress of the moment'.⁷¹⁰ Here again, the car and the attractive female body become conjoined objects of desire under the male gaze. The hyper-sexualised relationship between women and cars (as Devereux puts it, 'women = cars = pussy') in advertising and popular culture (a trope that Rafael Sánchez borrows in this scene) reinforces women's subordinated status, emphasising the sense of male automobility and female immobility. As Devereux outlines:

⁷⁰⁶ Rabassa, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. v.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p. v.

⁷⁰⁸ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 18, 20, 23.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁷¹⁰ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 124.

Across the web, in magazines, on television, in music videos, women's bodies are represented alongside, with, and as cars. These images are so pervasive and so familiar that they have arguably been internalized in North America as "ordinary" – at least, as "ordinary" as cars themselves. While "ordinary," however, these images of women and cars are far from neutral, functionalized as they are as affirmation of a contractual relationship between a male buyer and his prospective automobile: what is promised is his automobility and his control over both "objects." As they are represented in so much advertising, women in their not-going-anywhere bodywear (bikinis, heels), invoked, literally, as hood adornment, attached to cars synecdochally but constellated with them as "objects" in relation to the male buyer, signify their own immobility while affirming an ideology of femininity subordinated in the making of masculinity.⁷¹¹

While stuck in the traffic jam, Reinosa fantasises about having sex with 'great big women like the Amazons of California [...] [with] hundreds of hairy, cavernous sexes' while waiting in the 'abundance of heat and many, very many guarachomaniac drivers and passengers'.⁷¹² Reinosa's lewd and bizarre fantasises highlight the misogyny and patriarchal tendencies of the Puerto Rican governing elite. Reinosa is not the only high-ranking official whose sexual proclivities suggest an uneasy power dynamic in terms of class and race: while he admits that 'colored females heat me up: the worst kept secret' is 'in the Senate: Senator Guzmán, peer of a pair of motels, with jibes and jabber accuses him of black-woman trade'.⁷¹³

Reinosa (like his peers, it is strongly inferred) is a corrupt and insatiable playboy and womaniser, for with 'his neatly hidden love affairs and mistresses he could form a stable: how many fillies: puffing up his cheeks like the fabled frog'.⁷¹⁴ The reader witnesses him in another instance attempting to seduce a minor in his car, a schoolgirl 'who must be round about fifteen when she gets home and washes the pound of makeup down the drain'.⁷¹⁵ While he feels a momentary 'shame that wraps around his soul like a strip of crepe paper' at the encounter, Reinosa nevertheless enjoys the role he plays, that of a 'fine and refined [...] gentleman' engaged in a 'game of cat and mouse'.⁷¹⁶ Rafael Sánchez makes it evident that the commodification and hyper-sexualisation of working-class, black or mixed-race (and

⁷¹¹ Devereux, *Petrocultures*, p. 167.

⁷¹² Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 21, p. 23.

⁷¹³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷¹⁵ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 77.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 76–7.

underage) Puerto Rican girls and women is a widespread problem. The connections between automobility and sexuality — whether this be the vignettes of sexual encounters had in the male-dominated space of the car, or images of scantily clad, ‘immobile’ women writhing on automobiles — emphasise both the commodification of automobiles and women, but most importantly the lack of agency possessed by these women, who become objects of desire under a controlling, lustful male gaze. However, the connections between automobility and *las puertorriqueñas trabajadoras* (working class Puerto Rican women) may also be read as an allegorical examination — a potentially problematic one, nevertheless — of Puerto Rico’s position (that is to say, its coloniality, and more specifically its energy coloniality) vis-à-vis the U.S. The women of the text allegorise Puerto Rico’s own subordinated, objectified status in relation to the States, as well as the country’s dependency on North-American energy systems. Of course, this interchangeable relationship (of women as cars) works both ways in the text. Cars also become women; they become objects of affection or desire, coddled and anthropomorphised.

Reinosa’s son, Benny, is what Gregory Rabassa calls a ‘superficial cipher,’ an embodiment of Puerto Rico’s hyper-privileged elites, who exist within the upper echelons of a deeply divided society.⁷¹⁷ Benny’s fixation with the ‘ferruled Ferrari’ that he is given on his eighteenth birthday exemplifies the interchangeable relation between cars and women in the symbolic economy of Puerto Rican petroculture. His reaction to the gift is to immediately ‘swoon’; being given a car is a ‘frenum to frenzy’ — a sexual, orgasmic, romantic reaction which seems rather disproportionate to being given a vehicle as a birthday present.⁷¹⁸ His father informs both Benny and the reader that ‘the important thing is for him to have his car or his jalopy or his heap or his shell on four wheels [...] no teenager can get along without the friendship of his car’ while Benny himself ‘confesses to the Ferrari: you’re the only one who understands me, only you and me’.⁷¹⁹ Energy privilege amongst the upper classes has created a disturbing material and psychological dependency on the car, to the extent that automobile ownership comes to replace social relations. Benny’s relationship with the car is a bizarrely romantic, lustful one, which dovetails with the idea of cars as inherently feminised and sexualised within the social paradigms of petroculture. The reader repeatedly witnesses Benny

⁷¹⁷ Rabassa, *Macho Camacho’s Beat*, p. v.

⁷¹⁸ Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho’s Beat*, pp. 52-3.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153, p. 206.

devoting disproportionate amounts of time and attention to the car, lavishing on it the tenderness and affection that he does not bother to offer his female lovers.⁷²⁰ The connections between automobility, lust (both the lust for speed and sexual desire) and the pleasure of physical sensation are made explicit by Rafael Sánchez in Benny's bond with his car. The object of the car is not only feminised but comes to stand in for a woman. This not only exemplifies the arguments put forward by critics such as Devereux (car = woman = pussy), but highlights the nature of Benny's commodity fetishism, which is entangled with a libidinal attachment to an imported ideology from the North-American petrocultural paradigm, which has become commonplace on the island.⁷²¹ Benny's autoerotic fixation is a displaced expression of a wholehearted investment in a particular cultural politics of life shaped by North-American influence. Characters such as Benny, who embody the Puerto Rican elite's imitation of U.S. petrotopian lifestyles, are Rafael Sánchez's vessel by which to critique the real-life bourgeoisie of Puerto Rican society. Benny's erotic fixation on his Ferrari, then, calls attention to the ways in which U.S. imperialism manifests as energy colonialism, mediated through a local elite, who fetishise the objects which symbolize and embody petrotopian lifestyles of the global North. It is this kind of fetishisation which, the author seems to suggest, maintains Puerto Rico's energy dependency on the U.S., but also propagates a set of patriarchal cultural norms which equate cars to women and women to cars, a toxic admixture of misogyny and commercial exchange that serves both the male gaze and male interest.

However, there is another important link to be made here between Benny's erotic

⁷²⁰ He 'spends his mornings in the meticulous polishing of his Ferrari. A detailed care with attent attention to the fenders, the windshields, the horns, the hubcaps, the hood: attent attention with ammonia for the chrome, wax for the body, vacuum cleaner for the seats,' spends lunchtime eating next to his car because as he explains, 'I like my Ferrari to see me eat, what I mean is that I like to offer spoonfuls of food to my Ferrari' and then 'spends his afternoons taking the Ferrari from San Juan to Caguas and from Caguas to San Juan'. Ibid. p. 107.

⁷²¹ Benny's treatment of the Ferrari verges on objectophilia, or even religious worship: 'at night after a warm shower and saudade for the Ferrari' he ponders that 'it's probably thinking about me just the way I'm thinking about it. After the bye-bye he bids the carport where the Ferrari is alone and waiting, Benny heads for his room, after walking around the Ferrari four times, giving it looks that could be translated as have a good night's sleep, looks that are sighs, honey-sweet with tender words, cooing and assorted whorey terms. At night, after the above-mentioned ritual, Benny gets into bed, pulls up the covers, and says: ugly, Catholic and sentimental: Our Ferrari which art in the carport, hallowed be Thy Name, I mean thy kingdom of motor and chassis. And man, forgive us the sin of driving like you were a tortoise, amen'. Even his masturbation uses the automobile as a reference point, a mildly disturbing textual detail which suggests the extent of his hyper-fetishisation of the car (and suggests his violent tendencies or desires when having sex with real women): '[...] his hand attains the automotive speed denied the Ferrari: Ferrari all chrome, Ferrari all wax, Ferrari all nickel, Ferrari all intercepted by Benny's confused kisses, Ferrari pierced, Ferrari penetrated by Benny's desire, the gas tank torn by Benny's desire, by Benny's officiant, Ferrari gorged by Benny's semen.' Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, pp. 151-3.

fixation, imitation of the coloniser, and energy coloniality. In his book, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Dominique O. Mannomi writes of his '[...] central idea [...] that the confrontation of "civilized" and "primitive" men creates a special situation—the colonial situation—and brings about the emergence of a mass of illusions and misunderstandings that only a psychological analysis can place and define'.⁷²² In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon elucidates some of these 'illusions and misunderstandings,' by considering the notion of colonial imitation and identification with the colonizer. Fanon writes that the 'Antillean' child begins to identify with the 'white man who carries truth to all savages,' due to the ingestion of the socio-cultural norms that surround him. This, Fanon writes, is the phenomenon of '[...] identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude [...] Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallisation of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white'.⁷²³ Projection through representation ensures that the Antillean has the same collective unconscious as the European, because the cultural unconscious is the consequence of the 'unreflected imposition of a culture', and so the Antillean himself becomes 'negrophobic'. This 'Negrophobia' is centred on the belief, replayed countless times in white culture, that 'the black man is the symbol of Evil.' However, Fanon also points out that fearful fantasies of black men's supposedly heightened sexual powers, forged by the white world, mean that the 'Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state)'⁷²⁴ and embodies the white world's belief that black men are sexually superior.⁷²⁵ As a result, Fanon writes:

When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action

⁷²² Dominique O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (New York, Praeger, 1964), p. 40

⁷²³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 109–162 (p. 114).

⁷²⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* p. 136.

⁷²⁵ Fanon elucidates on these cultural connotations: '[...] the torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black—whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness. It would be astonishing, if the trouble were taken to bring them all together, to see the vast number of expressions that make the black man the equivalent of sin. In Europe, whether concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side of the character. As long as one cannot understand this fact, one is doomed to talk in circles about the "black problem." Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and, on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical, heavenly light. A magnificent blond child—how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy, and above all how much hope! There is no comparison with a magnificent black child: literally, such a thing is unwonted. Just the same, I shall not go back into the stories of black angels. In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro.' Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 145–46.

takes place [...] the black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behaviour will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem [...] This esteem is clothed by white fantasises, including the fantasy of sexual power attributed to black men by the white collective unconscious.

Fanon then goes on to explain that:

The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with this man who is “different from himself,” he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify The Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires.⁷²⁶

The crucial point here is that European notions of the black subject as Other also become internalised by the subject himself, a crucial and insidious element of the identification complex that results from physical and psychological colonisation. Fanon’s discussion of the black male subject’s psychosexual identification with the coloniser is a useful idea that can be productively applied to Rafael Sánchez’s text. Benny’s erotic fixation with the car is a consequence of what Fanon calls the ‘unreflected imposition of a culture,’ (that is, of U.S. petroculture in Puerto Rico). The car, a fetishised, sexualised object, is the embodiment of this petroculture and so Benny’s eroticised obsession with it becomes a reproduction of North-American attitudes to automobility. The car, a potent symbol of energy colonialism in Puerto Rico, becomes a simultaneous symbol of the imposition of a petrocultural set of expectations and ways of life-making, while Benny, the non-white Other, embodies the colonial notion of the sexually voracious non-white male. Benny’s ‘reidentification’ with U.S. petroculture, which has become a universalised cultural norm, leads him to construct a kind of psychosexual identification with the coloniser’s (petro-)culture that is mediated through the automobile. Benny’s relationship to his car expresses his desire to identify with what Fanon calls a ‘white collective unconscious’.⁷²⁷ Benny’s desire to emulate North-American

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

⁷²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 131.

petrotopian life, so out of touch with the island's situation of energy dependency and widespread poverty, also highlights the class divisions at work in the novel. Rafael Sánchez makes clear that there is a deep rift between the elites and the working-classes in Puerto Rican society, and it is the latter that suffer under the illusions produced by the oil-economy and the petro-ideologies imported to Puerto Rico by a universalised North-American petroculture. In *Macho Camacho's Beat*, the socio-economic chasm between rich and poor in the novel means that contact between the upper and lower classes is, as Rabassa puts it, 'illegitimate'; there is no acknowledgement between either class of the other as individuals. The counterpart of upper-class Benny is El Nene (the Child), the son of the Mother, who represents the popular classes.⁷²⁸ Both of these families, the upper-class and the low, parody the trope of la gran familia puertorriqueña (the Great Puerto Rican Family).⁷²⁹ In *Macho Camacho's Beat*, Rafael Sánchez not only illustrates what Kerstin Oloff calls the 'racialized hetero-patriarchal exclusions and biases' of the gran familia but also shows this hegemonic trope to be 'deeply embedded in uneven petro-modernity'.⁷³⁰ It is not only in the character of Reinosá that we witness this culture of uneven social relations that are framed by the symbolic economy of petroculture, but also in characters such as El Nene and Benny, who each embody (respectively speaking) the inequalities of Puerto Rican society and the elites absorption in

⁷²⁸ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 75; Antonio S. Pedreira, *Insularismo: ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña*, ed. by Mercedes López-Baralt (San Juan: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2001); Rafael Sánchez, *Macho Camacho's Beat*, p. 64.

See also: Marisel Moreno, *Family Matters: Puerto Rican Women Authors on the Island and the Mainland* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012); Edgardo Montijo Pérez, 'El nene como chivo expiatorio: identidad de clase en *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*', In *Al lomo de tigre: homenaje a Luis Rafael Sánchez*, ed. by William Mejías López (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2015).

⁷²⁹ *La gran familia* was a cultural myth of the idealised Puerto Rican family, created in the nineteenth century and later mobilised by the *generación de la treinta* (the Generation of the Thirties) as a 'symbolic defence against Americanization' (35). It was then 'revived in national discourse during the boom years' (29). The cultural myth of *la gran familia* emphasised the congenial coexistence of different groups under a unified nation, a romanticisation of Spanish rule, and, as Marisel Moreno puts it, the 'authority of a benevolent father figure who depended on the submissiveness of others to maintain his control.' Frances Aparicio adds that the paternalistic leader of the *gran familia* emerged during times of crisis, as a buffer against the imperialist presence of the States, and allowed for bourgeois Puerto Rican authors to invoke an idealised past that 'never truly materialised, by locating social harmony and convivencia within a specific historical time and space' (that is, in Ponce, the haciendas and pre 1898) (6). The myth of *la gran familia* is characterised by Hispanophilia, racism, androcentrism, homophobia and xenophobia and became a cornerstone of Puerto Rican culture throughout the twentieth century, leading to the exclusion of minorities and women (and in the last few decades of the century, the myth has been weaponised to exclude diasporic communities from the national imaginary). However, was in the 1970s that this metanarrative first came to be scrutinised 'as marginalized segments of the population, such as women and homosexual authors, began to question its assumptions and to challenge the paternalistic canon' (78). Marisel Moreno, 'Family Matters: Revisiting *La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña* in the works of Rosario Ferré and Judith Ortíz Cofer', *Centro Journal*, Vol. 22, No 2 (2010), 75-105; Frances Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 6.

⁷³⁰ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism and the Culture of Discontent*, pp. 73-4.

North-American petroculture, and the ensuing sense of alienation from the local, lived realities of Puerto Rico. This alienation, and its destructive potency, is violently illustrated in the novel's climactic encounter between El Nene and Benny.

El Nene is the counterpoint to Benny, in all senses of the word. He is described by Rafael Sánchez as being severely mentally impaired, or as Rabassa puts it in the preface, a 'cretin.' As Luis Felipe Díaz points out, El Nene may be read as a reflection on the condition of Puerto Rican socio-economic reality within the paradigms of petro-modernity.⁷³¹ Juan Gelpí has read the character of El Nene within the context of Rafael Sánchez's references to Antonio S. Pedreira's famous (and problematic) essay 'Insularismo,' published in 1934. 'Insularismo' analysed cultural and socio-economic imperialism in Puerto Rico by utilizing a series of metaphors which revolved around that of sickness, cultural immaturity, miscegenation, and the influence of Borinquen's extra-human natures. Gelpí argues that we can read 'Insularismo' as 'an account of a sick country-child', and Puerto Rico as a childlike 'sick body'.⁷³² In his essay, Pedreira mourned the transformation of the island, as it became increasingly de-ruralised, urbanized and dependent on North-American food imports. El Nene, then, 'literalises Pedreira's metaphors' of the sick, infantilized body, but updates his vision to that of a contemporary petro-based context. El Nene embodies the rift between Puerto Rican nature and society in the contemporary petro-modern economy, while parodying Pedreira's vision of an immature Puerto Rico through the character's infantilized and often repulsive behaviours. His bodily excretions, for example, 'bind together anxieties around [the deterioration of] landscapes, industrialization, and food-getting' in the Puerto Rican context, as Kerstin Oloff explains. All of these issues are the consequence of the island's imbrication in petro-modernity. Indeed, if read in this way, Rafael Sánchez's characterization of El Nene – and the cast of socially divided characters that surround him – suggests to the reader that Puerto Rico, in its emulation of U.S. lifestyles, exists in a petro-dystopian lifeworld, exploited and marginalized by the mainland which it nevertheless seeks to emulate. This point is emphasized when El Nene becomes the victim of the novel's events, run over by Benny's Ferrari in the final scene. misplaced and destructive in Puerto Rico. If El Nene embodies the rift between Puerto Rican nature and society, as well as the class divisions

⁷³¹ Luis Felipe Díaz, *De charcas, espejos, infants y velorios en la literature puertorriqueña*, 3rd ed. (San Juan: Isla Negra, 2013), p. 140

⁷³² Juan Gelpí, *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico*, 2nd edition (San Juan: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005) pp. 64-5 (65).

within that society, in a petromodern context, then his killing by the son of a local elite epitomises not only the rift between the classes, but the extent to which U.S. petroculture in Puerto Rico (the progeny of North-American oil-imperialism) is destroying more traditional Puerto Rican ways of life-making. El Nene's death at the hands of Benny is also an act which encodes the ways in which the imported, 'misplaced' dream of petrotopia is a lie. Rafael Sánchez instead alludes to a petro-dystopian existence, where innocents are thoughtlessly murdered and the dream of development is (as it was in Trinidad) a lie sold to the masses. This dream of petrotopian development exists as a reality only for the local elite whose total desocialisation from their native land is premised on their personal, offshore energy dependencies and their mimicry of U.S. energy-guzzling lifestyles, both of which are completely unaligned with the lives of the majority of the island's inhabitants and with the material realities of everyday life in Puerto Rico. Of course, Benny and Reinosa are not the only characters who depict this reality; the women of the novel, particularly Reinosa's wife, Graciela, are also exemplary examples of this detachment from a local reality and an attachment to the lifestyles premised upon offshore energy sources.

It can be concluded that the material object of the car acts as a centrepiece for examinations of race, class, gender and petrodependency in Puerto Rico. Of course, the central metaphor of Rafael Sánchez's text is that of the traffic jam, which represents the fact that Puerto Rico is locked into a specific pattern of economic dependency, underdevelopment and dysfunction, as a result of the domination of U.S. capital. The novel's repeated return to the metaphor of the traffic jam encodes the unreality of the oil economy in Puerto Rico. On the one hand, the dominance of oil has created the desire for North-American style petrotopias and ways of living, and on the other the temporality of industrialising processes such as Bootstrap have created precarious jobs and a dependency on imported commodities, as well more generalised underdevelopment. The traffic jam, then, depicts a Puerto Rico that quite literally cannot move forward due to its energy dependency and neo-colonial relationship with the United States.

El Futuro Cancela'o: Hurricane María and the Myth of the Future

The ongoing deterioration of Caribbean environments has led to the 'sense of an ending' for many of the region's citizens. There exists, as Parasvini-Gebert puts it, the 'apocalyptic dread of a potential ecological disaster that can erase the islands, their peoples, and cultures from the geographies of the *mare nostrum*'.⁷³³ Puerto Rico's position as an energy dependent within the petro-capitalist world-system, a vulnerable peripheral node in the wider network of North-American empire, and an ecologically precarious island nation vulnerable to the vagaries of intensifying climate change, means that this apocalyptic dread is a lived reality for its inhabitants.

However, it was on the 20 September 2017 that the plight of Puerto Rico's energy dependency, its neocolonial position vis-a-vis the States, and its ecological vulnerability were all thrown into the international spotlight, and the 'sense of an ending' became, for a time, a very visceral reality. Hurricane María, which resulted in thousands of deaths and at least \$90 billion in damages, ripped across Puerto Rico, having already ravaged the islands of Dominica and St Croix. The hurricane destroyed houses, flooded streets, ravaged infrastructure and left 80% of the island's inhabitants without clean water, sufficient food or safe homes for more than a month after the incident.

As Yarimar Bonilla points out, Puerto Rico has 'a poverty rate nearly double that of Mississippi, failing infrastructure that has been neglected for more than a decade and a public sector that has been increasingly dismantled in response to the (\$73 billion) debt crisis'.⁷³⁴ This debt crisis (which, in 2017, was \$123 billion) has led to a programme of severe austerity policies since 2009. As Bonilla writes, due to all of these factors, 'the island was already in a state of emergency long before the storm hit'.⁷³⁵ Austerity policies had devoured the island before María 'deepen[ed] the rot of an economic model built on transferring public money to private hands [...] Public and private indebtedness, generalized corruption [...] expanding

⁷³³ Parasvini-Gebert, *The Natural World in Latin American Literatures*, p. 114.

⁷³⁴ Yarimar Bonilla, 'Why would anyone in Puerto Rico want a hurricane? Because someone will get rich', *Washington Post*, 22 September 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-puerto-rican-hurricanes-devastate-many-and-enrich-a-few/2017/09/22/78e7500c9e66-11e7-9083-fbfdddf6804c2_story.html?utm_term=.1d964d9dd9cf [accessed 16 May 2019].

⁷³⁵ Yarimar Bonilla, 'Why would anyone in Puerto Rico want a hurricane? Because someone will get rich', *Washington Post*, 22 September 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-puerto-rican-hurricanes-devastate-many-and-enrich-a-few/2017/09/22/78e7500c9e66-11e7-9083-fbfdddf6804c2_story.html?utm_term=.1d964d9dd9cf [accessed 16 May 2019].

inequality and poverty [all of which] pointed towards the continuing incapacity of the Puerto Rican economy to serve the needs of its citizens'.⁷³⁶ Instead of a system which served the needs of its people, there had existed a system that 'socialis[ed] and privatis[ed] benefits' for the very richest members of Puerto Rican society. In 2016, the situation was worsened when Barack Obama signed the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Stability Act (PROMESA).⁷³⁷

The association between what Naomi Klein has famously called 'disaster capitalism'⁷³⁸ and Puerto Rico's situation was not widely considered by non-Puerto Ricans until María.⁷³⁹ The hurricane showed to the world 'the brutal consequences of energy colonialism and an extractivist economy' in Puerto Rico, while it accelerated the 'already launched collision of Puerto Rico's entwined economies, energy and environmental crises'.⁷⁴⁰ Simply put, the fact of energy coloniality and the country's long-term underdevelopment, but also the very lack of value placed on Puerto Rican people, of their 'relative worth and ultimate disposability',

⁷³⁶ Yarimar Bonilla, 'Why would anyone in Puerto Rico want a hurricane? Because someone will get rich', *Washington Post*, 22 September 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-puerto-rican-hurricanes-devastate-many-and-enrich-a-few/2017/09/22/78e7500c9e66-11e7-9083-fbfdddf6804c2_story.html?utm_term=.1d964d9dd9cf [accessed 16 May 2019]

⁷³⁷ PROMESA established a financial oversight board to restructure debt and expedite procedures for approving infrastructure projects (intended to combat the national government's debt crisis). The U.S. Congress established a FCB (Fiscal Control Board) to oversee the debt restriction. Their austerity plan for 2017–26 has carved deep into the nation's public service budget, with cuts to health care, pensions and education in order to repay creditors of the Board. In other words, the FCB has stripped the Puerto Rican government of all fiscal sovereignty, while simultaneously reducing public spending on the island's citizens. In 2017, Barry Sheppard wrote in *Green Left Weekly* that by 2014, when 'the island's debt to U.S. financial lenders hit U.S. \$73 billion, vulture capitalists bought the debt cheaply, demanded it be paid in full and this law created an un-elected seven-person financial board with sweeping powers over the island's economy'. The differences between the Fiscal Control Board and the conservative national governing bodies was minimal, but facilitated the continuation of budget-balancing and shareholders profit-making. By 2017, when María hit, austerity measures had reduced public employment by more than 25%, and it took the local government a full week to realise that it did not possess enough personnel to deal with the hurricane's aftermath. A total blackout struck the island for days, with no clean drinking water accessible and the diesel required to keep electrical generators going in hospitals, petrol stations, supermarkets and so on was not distributed in a timely manner, cutting off access to gas and food for most of the country. The government's deals with U.S. based private companies, such as Whitefish Energy and Cobra, to restore the ruined energy grids caused controversy. Politicians and their allies appeared to be utilising shock tactics to reduce community resistance to push forward a neoliberal, free-market agenda which served to gag any alternative approaches, particularly locally produced, sustainable, renewable energy initiatives.

⁷³⁸ de Onis summarises Klein's theory succinctly. 'According to Klein's (2007) [...] thesis, this form of exploitation involves the hasty reconfiguration of societies struggling with devastation and distress, caused by sudden disturbances in daily life. In these situations, politicians and corporate allies mobilise the "shock doctrine", a neoliberal strategy driven by free-market ideology, to exploit the public's emotional and psychological vulnerabilities. This doctrine advances and often fast tracks, controversial, corrupt and undemocratic political agendas/policies'. ('Fueling and delinking').

⁷³⁹ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007).

⁷⁴⁰ De Onis, 'Energy Colonialism Powers the Ongoing Unnatural Disaster in Puerto Rico', *Frontiers in Communication* (29 January 2018) < <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2018.00002> > [accessed 10 May 2019].

became glaringly obvious in the aftermath of María.⁷⁴¹ Official and governmental responses to every aspect of the crisis were painfully slow and neglectful, meaning that local communities more often than not had to self-organise and support one another without the immediate support or assistance of local or mainland authorities. Organisations such as PREPA (Puerto Rico's public power utility, the Puerto Rican Electric Power Authority) faced significant challenges when they attempted to restore electricity to the island post María, and this issue has proven to be an ongoing one.⁷⁴² As de Onis points out, despite local government and power authority officials 'insisting that electricity would be restored three months after the storm, portions of Puerto Rico will likely remain without power until May 2018 or later'.⁷⁴³

María placed all these pre-existing inequalities under a magnifying glass. Indeed, the hurricane can be approached through Junot Díaz's concept of 'ruin reading,' wherein natural disasters in peripheral locations can be analysed to reveal the histories of socio-economic inequity that more often than not preface them.⁷⁴⁴ María was not only a natural disaster, but an apocalypse that signalled the underlying economic and ecological crises that had long been at work in Puerto Rican society. In his article 'Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal,' Díaz reminds his readers of the words of Roethke, who writes that, 'in a dark time, the eye begins to see'.⁷⁴⁵ If this is the case, Díaz argues, apocalypses such as María are moments of darkness

⁷⁴¹ Klein points out that no governmental body has made any concerted effort to count the dead after Maria: 'as if Puerto Rican lives are of so little consequence that there is no need to document their mass extinguishment'. Klein, *Battle for Paradise*, p. 24, p. 29.

⁷⁴² Despite spending \$3.2 billion, federal efforts to improve the electricity grid have not been successful. José F. Ortiz, chief executive of PREPA, admitted in 2018 that the grid was weaker than before the hurricane hit. Indeed, he and others responsible for getting the lights back on in Puerto Rico, have stated that there was simply not the time, finances, or legal leeway to make significant improvements to the grid. As Carlos D. Torres (a retired vice president at Consolidated Edison, a large utility in New York) put it, there wasn't the "time to design it, get the right material and build it." Torres was deployed to Puerto Rico by the Edison Electric Institute, then appointed by Gov. Ricardo Rosselló as coordinator for storm restoration. The primary concerns, Torres states, were to restore power, to carry out the work safely and leave the grid stable even if antiquated. To "have made major improvements would have cost billions more," he added, and "the Stafford Act just doesn't allow that." The Stafford Act, which limited Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds to restore disaster damaged installations to their pre-hurricane state, left the grid antiquated and in the essentially same shape as it was before María struck. Added to inadequate federal efforts at rebuilding is the injustice of temporality: it took eleven whole months after the hurricane hit to restore power to the island (to put this in a little context: the time taken to restore power to customers after hurricane Harvey struck the U.S. Gulf Coast and Irma battered Florida was several days and a week respectively). Tim Johnson, 'The lights are back on, but after \$3.2B will Puerto Rico's grid survive another storm?' *Miami Herald* <<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article217480370.html>> [accessed 13 May 2019]

⁷⁴³ De Onis, *Frontiers in Communication*.

⁷⁴⁴ Díaz, 'Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal', *Boston Review*, 1 May 2011 <<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>> [accessed 14 May 2019]

⁷⁴⁵ Díaz, 'Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal', *Boston Review*, 1 May 2011 <<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>> [accessed 14 May 2019]

that give to us the light of understanding. María was an apocalypse that shed a revelatory light onto the past, present and future of Puerto Rico. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out, María's 'catastrophic nature' is 'directly entangled with other scales of catastrophe,' not only the contemporary catastrophes of the unpayable debt which 'strengthens the colonial condition of Puerto Rico' but also this condition of coloniality itself. 'To be sure,' Maldonado-Torres goes on to write:

[...] this colonial condition itself can be understood as a catastrophe [...] But the entanglement between Puerto Rico and colonialism did not start in 1898 [the year of the U.S. invasion]. It goes back to the period of 'discovery' and conquest of the New World and to the long sixteenth century, which is at the heart of the formation and constitution of the modern Western world [...] the story of Puerto Rico cannot be told without reference to Western modern catastrophe and coloniality.⁷⁴⁶

The catastrophe of European, and later North-American colonisation is (as we will see with regards to Haiti) one which underpins all contemporary disasters in the region. 'To think about Hurricane María as a catastrophe' requires us to carefully peel apart the various temporal layers and meanings of the word in the context of the expanded Caribbean.⁷⁴⁷ Moments of catastrophe such as the 2017 hurricane cannot be separated from catastrophe of modernity/coloniality and the history of European domination. In a more contemporary context, however, it also exposed North-American domination, in its revelation of the waves of austerity and debt crises which had flooded the nation in the previous decade, the island's extreme reliance on the U.S. for energy and food, the ongoing colonial dilemma that had been facilitated by legislature and programmes such as the Jones Act, Operation Bootstrap and PROMESA.⁷⁴⁸ María also exposed the precarious, uncertain and unstable future of the island. It led many Puerto Ricans to ask themselves precisely where this future was going to take them: in the direction of further neoliberal policies, or towards grassroots resistance and the

⁷⁴⁶ Nelson Maldonado Torres, 'Afterword,' in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, eds. by Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBron (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), pp. 332-340 (pp. 336-337).

⁷⁴⁷ Maldonado Torres, *Aftershocks of Disaster*, p. 340.

⁷⁴⁸ As Maldonado Torres writes, 'Hurricane María [...] exposed the vulgarity of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States. Listening to Donald Trump's inaccurate comparisons between Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane María or his complaints that Puerto Rico was throwing the U.S. budget "out of whack," and watching him throw paper towels to Puerto Ricans in need could not but recall Cornel West's warning that a Trump presidency would be a "neofascist catastrophe.'" Ibid., p. 337.

re-building of a broken economic structure from the ground up?

Italian philosopher Franco Berardi wrote that the twentieth century was one that ‘trusted in the future’.⁷⁴⁹ The optimistic ‘myth of the future’, as Berardi calls it, was one rooted in the processes of a universally beneficial expansion of capitalist enterprise, and of the subsequent production and distribution of knowledge based on the growth of the free-market and the use of technology. This led to a generalised faith, a feeling, that the future would be better than the present. It was a faith based in a belief in the progress and the benevolence of the free market, which would be left to its own devices to flourish and create profit. This idea itself was, as Berardi puts it, ‘[an] ideological translation of the reality of economic growth’: in other words, the myth of the future was a myth rooted in modern capitalism, of the expansion of both the economy and of knowledge production, which would benefit everyone.⁷⁵⁰ This idea of the future being one of natural progression is, as Berardi points out, ‘[...] not a natural idea, but the imaginary effect of the peculiarity of the bourgeois production model’.⁷⁵¹ The future was a concept that was essential ‘in the ideology and energy of the twentieth century, and in many ways is mixed with the idea of utopia’.⁷⁵² However, in the last three decades, this utopian vision has been replaced with distinctly dystopian imagination, an ever-increasing consciousness and awareness that the future is not going to be ‘better,’ or at least is not going to equate solely to financial and intellectual progress, but it is more likely to bring economic and ecological exhaustion.⁷⁵³ ‘The future, the very idea of the future, now bears an opposite sign’ to that of the metaphors of economic and epistemological progress; ‘the future becomes a threat when the collective imagination becomes incapable of seeing alternatives to trends leading to devastation, increased poverty and violence. This is precisely our current situation, because capitalism has become a system of techno-economic automatisms that politics cannot evade’.⁷⁵⁴ While core nations of the world-system are finally beginning to feel the urgency of climate change’s consequences, it is these very nations that have ‘created the problem, and [have] founded [their] wealth on the devastation of the common environment. The

⁷⁴⁹ Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. by Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn, trans. by Arianna Bove et. al. (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), p. 33.

⁷⁵⁰ Berardi, *After the Future*, pp. 33–4.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid. p. 34.

⁷⁵² Ibid. p. 33.

⁷⁵³ ‘The future that my generation was expecting,’ Berardi poignantly writes, ‘was based on the unspoken confidence that human beings will never again be treated as Jews were treated during their German nightmare. This assumption is proving to be misleading’. Ibid. p. 36.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 94.

dispossessed don't fear climactic hell in the way the Western population does, because they are already living in hell'.⁷⁵⁵

Berardi's words describe perfectly the situation in which not only Puerto Rico, but also the expanded Caribbean as a whole, finds itself. It is peripheral locations such as these which are perhaps best placed to resist the 'myth of the future'. Catastrophes such as María make clear that the idea of future-as-progress is grossly misplaced, given the current economic-political paradigms and pressing ecological realities. Rather, dependency on fossil fuels will lead to a future cancelled rather than created for the most ecologically, economically and socially vulnerable populations of the world (but also, we are coming to understand, for the citizens of the core nations as well). The 'myth of the future' presents to us landscapes of climate-change-induced petro-dystopias, rather than the expanding petrotopias which make life easier and more convenient for more and more people.

Puerto Ricans are all too aware of the potentiality of ecological dystopian futures premised on the continuation of carbon economies. In recent years, this awareness has become increasingly registered by and manifested in the island's literary production. Since 2006, what Oloff pithily calls the 'aesthetics of socio-ecological degradation' has become increasingly noticeable in Puerto Rican writing, 'making itself felt through what one might call the monstrous turn'.⁷⁵⁶ Literary registrations of apocalyptic, dystopian futures range from zombie texts (by writers such as Pedro Cabiya, John Torres, Angel Rivera, and Josué Montijo), sf and cyberpunk narratives (by writers including Rafael Acevedo, Alexandra Pagán Vélez, and José Santos) to Gothic-inspired works (by writers such as Ana María Fuster Lavín and Marta Ponte Alsina). These texts consider the future of Puerto Rico in a neoliberal, petro-capitalist world-system, where both slow and rapid ecological apocalypses become normalised, landscapes disfigured and peripheral communities displaced. They show us worlds not too different from our own, speculations, forecasts and suggestions of what is to come. The zombie trend in particular has become emblematic of dystopian, apocalyptic futures in Puerto Rican literatures which resist the neoliberal 'myth of the future' described by Berardi. Josué Montijo's *El Killer* (2007) is one notable text in the recent upsurge of zombie literature which depicts a dystopian near-future to its readership.⁷⁵⁷ The text narrates the life and death of a serial killer and student called Juan B. Aybar, who sets out to kill San Juan's drug addicts, disgustedly referring to them

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 114.

⁷⁵⁶ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 79.

⁷⁵⁷ Josué Montijo, *El Killer* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2007).

as urban zombies and the ‘living dead.’ In *El Killer*, Montijo ‘employs the zombie register as a distancing device to de-humanize the homeless people he kills, implicitly aligning himself with the zombie-slayers who, in global Anglophone film, are usually attacked by cannibal zombies—a scenario that provides an ideological justification for militarization and violence [...] The novel thus offers a critical translation of the neoliberal disdain for those the system expels into a murderous imperative’.⁷⁵⁸ As we will see in the next chapter (which considers apocalyptic futures through the trope of the zombie figure), Montijo’s interpretation of the original Haitian figure of the zombie is highly ironic, the former being an embodiment of resistance against enslavement and the victory of the Haitian Revolution. Through Juan’s internalisation of neoliberal doctrine, the text enacts a critique of the global unevennesses of the petro-capitalist world-system and the ‘intensification of the aesthetics of socio-ecological degradation.’⁷⁵⁹

Other boricua texts which employ the zombie trope to express concern regarding eco-dystopian futures include Rafael Acevedo’s *Al otro lado del muro hay carne fresca* (*On the other side of the wall there is fresh meat*), published in 2014.⁷⁶⁰ Set in the 2040s, Acevedo’s dystopian, cyber-punk novel considers the horror of future food inequality. The plot is based on the abduction of one Senator Macarán (who has investments in tourism, the food industry and the pharmaceutical industry) by an eco-terrorist group. Alimentary access to ‘fresh meat’ is limited to those who reside on the right side of the wall, but in *Al Otro Lado*, Puerto Rico lies in the prohibition zone, where meat is produced artificially, and the bioreactors engineered to produce artificial food may be adding human flesh into the mix. As such, within the novel, ‘profound alimentary inequality is thinly masked through the prevalence of fast foods, a situation described by the narrator in terms evocative of the zombie apocalypse’.⁷⁶¹ As Acevedo’s narrator informs the reader at one point, ‘I decide to run to the hamburger stand. Actually, they are some sort of croquettes, with wheat gluten, soya milk and a fifth of meat from the bioreactors. The place is open 24 hours. Serving the community of vagabonds and hungry drug addicts of zombie island’.⁷⁶² Puerto Rican food dependency is, of course, part of its overall energy dependency and in Acevedo’s novel, alimentary inequality becomes a key

⁷⁵⁸ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 79.

⁷⁵⁹ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 85.

⁷⁶⁰ Rafael Acevedo, *Al otro lado del muro hay carne fresca* (San Juan: Secta de los perros, 2014).

⁷⁶¹ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 84.

⁷⁶² Acevedo, *Al otro lado del muro hay carne fresca*, p. 34.

part of a world-system which is shaped by the dictates of multinational capital and hydrocarbon dependency.⁷⁶³ The characters of this world become ‘increasingly mired in an all-encompassing socio-ecological crisis [which is] evoked through references to intense forms of political and economic subjection and advanced environmental degradation that manifests itself through acid rain, rising sea levels and polluted landscapes’.⁷⁶⁴ These fictional worlds are not so different from our own. Late capitalism, with its cannibalising tendencies, continues to widen the chasm between rich and poor, humans and nature, with devastating economic and ecological consequences for the most vulnerable populations of the world-system. Puerto Rico’s struggle against the disastrous inclinations of late capitalism rages on.

The words of two Puerto Rican journalists, Ian J. Seda-Irizarry and Heriberto Martínez-Otero are an apt note on which to end this chapter, especially because their words contain echoes of Berardi and his discussion of the ‘myth of the future’. ‘There still seems to be no end in sight to the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico,’ they write that:

[...] while the local and federal government celebrate their ‘efficient response’ [to María] the death toll keeps rising. At the same time, the vultures of finance have again swooped in, offering additional loans to the beleaguered island while more and more of its citizens contemplate joining the emigration wave. Further privatization is also afoot [...] What will come out of this crisis is difficult to predict. Political pressure from the diaspora, internal political struggles and the actions of other countries will all play a role in shaping the post-María future. Nevertheless, one thing is for certain. Puerto Rico and its people are now entering uncharted terrain. The future is up for grabs.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶³As Colón Reyes notes, the island is part of an alimentary ‘global economy of unequal distribution of food and of its large-scale industrial production’. As such, the island has become, as Oloff puts it, an ‘instrument of subjection’ while the North-American economy has (in general) made significant economic gains from its exportation of foodstuffs to the island. Funds from assistance programmes in Puerto Rico ‘are spent mostly on imports from the United States’ (Ayala and Bernabé). This dependency has been intensified by the generalised trend that has taken place throughout the twentieth century of ‘agricultural surpluses from subsidized large-scale mechanized farming industries (in the United States and E.U.) [being] dumped as cheap food on peripheralized countries, creating a damaging food dependency and destroying local economies’ (Oloff). This food dependency and domination is an essential part of capitalism’s ecological regime (and one of the Four Cheaps, as Moore notes). It functions through the reorganisation of extra-human natures and the individual bodies of working-class people.

Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, pp. 84–5; Ayala and Bernabé, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 33; Linda I. Colón Reyes, ‘Sobrevivencia, pobreza y “mantengo”: La política asistencialista estadounidense en Puerto Rico: el PAN y el TANF’ (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2011), p. 47.

⁷⁶⁴ Oloff, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, p. 85.

⁷⁶⁵ Ian J. Seda-Irizarry and Heriberto Martínez-Otero, ‘Puerto Rico’s Not-So-Natural Disaster’, *Jacobin Magazine*, October 2017 <<https://jacobinmag.com/2017/10/puerto-rico-natural-disaster-hurricane-maria/>> [accessed 10 May 2019].

III

CARIBBEAN FUTURES

Chapter Four

Haiti: Apocalypse, Petro-Dystopia and sf 1980-2015

I'm not entirely sure Oscar would have liked this designation. Fukú story. He was a hardcore sci-fi and fantasy man, believed that that was the kind of story we were all living in. He'd ask: What's more sci-fi than Santo Domingo? What's more fantasy than the Antilles?

~ Junot Díaz.⁷⁶⁶

Armageddon been in effect, go get a late pass. Step!

~ Public Enemy.⁷⁶⁷

Reading the Ruins

When on 12 January 2010, an earthquake registering 7.0 on the Richter scale struck Haiti, its epicentre a mere fifteen miles from Port-au-Prince, the residents of Haiti's capital city exclaimed that it was the *fin du monde*, or the end of the world.⁷⁶⁸ Estimates of the casualties vary, from anywhere between 100,000 to 300,000, with hundreds of thousands more injured and many more unable to access critical medical care in the aftermath of the disaster. The Red Cross estimated that, in total, three million Haitians were affected by the

⁷⁶⁶ Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 110.

⁷⁶⁷ Public Enemy, 'Countdown to Armageddon', *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (Def Jam, Columbia, June 28, 1988).

⁷⁶⁸ Martin Munro, 'Tropical Apocalypse: Globalisation and the Caribbean End Times', in *Caribbean Globalisations, 1492 to the Present Day*, eds. by Eva Sansavior and Richard Scholar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 247.

quake and the fifty two seismic aftershocks that followed it.⁷⁶⁹ The earthquake has since been considered one of the most catastrophic incidents in contemporary Caribbean history, and it fell ‘with swift ferocity upon the Caribbean nation-state least able (in straightforwardly infrastructural terms) to cope with such an eventuality’.⁷⁷⁰ Eighty percent of Port-au-Prince was flattened, as well as the nearby arrondissement of Léogâne. The tremors laid waste to around eighty percent of schools and sixty percent of government buildings located in Port-au-Prince, but also sixty percent of the schools in Haiti’s South and West departments.⁷⁷¹ The earthquake left over 1.5 million people homeless. These individuals were then forced to live in internally displaced peoples camps, suffering from both the psychological trauma left by the goudougoudou (the name given to the earthquake by Haitians), and the material devastation it wrought upon their communities. In October of the same year, the situation was worsened by an outbreak of cholera brought into Haiti by Nepalese MINUSTAH (the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti) workers. The cholera outbreak infected over 800,000 and killed 9,000 Haitians. As Beverly Bell notes, for Haiti, ‘the geographic catastrophe was natural. The magnitude of death and injury was not’.⁷⁷² Many earthquakes have registered higher than 7.0 on the Richter scale but resulted in much fewer casualties. Chile, for example, was hit by an 8.8 earthquake six weeks after the Haitian hurricane, but the death toll (723 souls) was significantly lower. As Bell notes, ‘the astronomical destruction in Haiti came down to politics and economics’.⁷⁷³ Indeed, the 2010 earthquake formed one part of a much longer chronology

⁷⁶⁹ ‘Red Cross: 3M Haitians Affected by Quake’, *CBS News*, January 13, 2010

<<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/red-cross-3m-haitians-affected-by-quake/>> [Accessed 25 January 2020].

⁷⁷⁰ ‘The Visual Life of Catastrophic History: A Small Axe Project Statement’, *Small Axe*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 2011), 133–36 (p. 134) DOI: <muse.jhu.edu/article/426763> [Accessed 10 January 2020].

⁷⁷¹ Kasia Mika, ‘12 January 2010: From Hazard to Disaster’, *Disasters, Vulnerabilities and Narratives: Rewriting Haiti’s Future* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 3.

⁷⁷² Beverly Bell, ‘Pearl of the Antilles: The Political Economy of Peril’, *Fault Lines: Views across Haiti’s Divide* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 27.

⁷⁷³ Bell, *Fault Lines*, p. 27.

of seismic activity well-documented in the island of Hispaniola's history.⁷⁷⁴ The fact is, then, that the destructiveness of the quake lies less in geological factors than in man-made ones.⁷⁷⁵

The earthquake, and the admixture of politics and economics that preceded (and laid the foundations for) its devastation, is in many ways like Hurricane María in Puerto Rico. As Kasia Mika writes, the 2010 quake spectacularly 'underscored and revealed previous societal, ecological and political fault lines' in Haitian society.⁷⁷⁶ As we have seen, the same can be said for María. Travesties such as María and the goudougoudou are, as Maldonado-Torres has pointed out in the Puerto Rican context, catastrophic moments in a much longer apocalyptic regional history. Before examining the various temporalities of the violence of this apocalyptic Caribbean history, it is worth revisiting Junot Díaz's meditations on apocalypse, briefly touched on at the end of the previous chapter. Díaz's discussion of James Berger's definition and explanation of the word is especially useful and worth quoting in full:

Apocalypse comes to us from the Greek *apocalypsis*, meaning to uncover and unveil. Now, as James Berger reminds us in *After the End*, apocalypse has three meanings. First, it is the actual imagined end of the world, whether in *Revelations* or in Hollywood blockbusters. Second, it comprises the catastrophes, personal or historical, that are said to resemble that imagined final ending—the Chernobyl meltdown or the Holocaust or the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan that killed thousands and critically damaged a nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Finally, it is a disruptive event that provokes revelation. The apocalyptic event, Berger explains, in order to be truly apocalyptic, must in its

⁷⁷⁴ The Enriquillo fault line in southern Hispaniola forms a 'continuous geomorphic lineament' with the Plantain Garden fault in eastern Jamaica and the history of human settlement on the island indicates that towns had frequently been constructed close to these fault lines. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries earthquakes in Haiti were well documented. The first reported severe earthquake in the north of the island, for example, was on the 2 December 1562 and the first in what is now modern-day Haiti was in 1701, followed by two major earthquakes in 1751 and another in 1770. The only significant earthquake between the late eighteenth century and the 2010 tragedy was in April 1860. The 2010 earthquake is considered to be a 're-rupture of the 1701 earthquake source zone and may herald a new period of seismic activity along the Enriquillo fault system'.

Martin Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 4–5.

⁷⁷⁵ For example, International Monetary Fund standby agreements in the 1980s and 1990s meant that the government lowered tariffs on food imports, and consequently the capital flooded with hundreds of thousands of farmers who had struggled to compete with low priced U.S. commodities. They were part of a marginalised population, a rural poor utterly disregarded by the government, 'an unbroken legacy from slavery times'. By 2010, Bell points out, 'a city meant for 200,000 to 250,000 was home to two or three million. More than eight in ten lived in shantytowns, in overcrowded housing of substandard materials perched on steep hillsides and ravines and on former marshlands infilled with garbage.' She writes that 'an unknowable number of deaths' on the 10 January 2010 'were caused by the collapse of those inadequate houses in those precarious locales'. Bell, *Fault Lines*, pp. 27–8.

⁷⁷⁶ Mika, *Vulnerabilities and Narratives*, p. 8.

disruptive moment clarify and illuminate “the true nature of what has been brought to end.” It must be revelatory. “The apocalypse, then,” per Berger, “is the End, or resembles the end, or explains the end.” Apocalypses of the first, second, and third kinds. The Haiti earthquake was certainly an apocalypse of the second kind, and to those who perished it may even have been an apocalypse of the first kind, but what interests me here is how the Haiti earthquake was also an apocalypse of the third kind, a revelation.⁷⁷⁷

It is to these notions of ‘apocalypse,’ ‘revelation’ and ‘catastrophe’ that I want to turn to, words which take on added significance in the Haitian (and wider Caribbean) context. As Martin Munro points out, ‘when one turns to Haiti, one is almost compelled to switch from the tragic or the catastrophic to the apocalyptic’.⁷⁷⁸ Haiti’s apocalyptic history registers its own specific set of meanings and paradoxes, ‘notably in the sense that the apocalypse has endured for centuries’ in Haiti, and that ‘the end times have no apparent end’.⁷⁷⁹ In the present day too, Haiti faces severe difficulties: as Parasvini-Gebert puts it, ‘Haiti is at the very edge of an environmental collapse that threatens its viability as a nation’.⁷⁸⁰

As I have demonstrated throughout this study, the violence of capitalism’s economic and ecological projects has been executed with a particular brutality over the course of hundreds of years in the expanded Caribbean, irrevocably shaping the region’s societies and environments since the first catastrophe of Europe’s arrival on Hispaniola’s shores. One consequence of the most recent iteration of the system’s economic/ecological project – hydrocarbon-driven climate change – now plays a significant hand in deciding the Caribbean’s fortunes. The region acts as a bellwether for the climate crises that are becoming increasingly prevalent across the world-system, but which have the greatest socio-ecological cost in peripheral locations. In other words, the expanded Caribbean region offers a particularly intense and visible manifestation of what is fast becoming a global crisis. This crisis manifests itself in numerous ways: mass deforestation, species extinction, greenhouse gas emission, ozone layer depletion, rising sea levels, resource depletion, exhaustion of the water table, the

⁷⁷⁷ Díaz, ‘Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal’, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁸ Munro, *Caribbean Globalisations*, p. 263.

⁷⁷⁹ Munro notes that ‘while tragedy and catastrophe are not quite synonymous with each other or with apocalypse, it is not too far a critical and conceptual leap to see these turns toward tragic and catastrophic interpretations as essentially connected to, or as critical stages that anticipate, the apocalyptic criticism that one finds, most prominently, in Haitian thought and culture more broadly’. Munro, *Caribbean Globalisations*, p. 254.

⁷⁸⁰ Parasvini-Gebert, *The Natural World in American Literatures*, p. 115.

ecological consequences of animal agriculture and the transportation industries, toxification and global food crises, to name but a few. Each of these elements is part of a larger tapestry of ‘slow violence’—slow in the sense that it has been unfolding across the globe for the past century, even though some of the above are indeed ‘fast’ moments of ecological violence.

The important concept of ‘slow violence,’ famously coined by Rob Nixon, is worth briefly outlining. As Nixon explains in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, slow violence is ‘delayed destruction [...] dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all’.⁷⁸¹ Customarily, violence is considered to be an ‘event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility’.⁷⁸² Nixon’s point is that we need to conceive of different types of violence which are neither ‘spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive,’ which have more slow-moving but equally ‘calamitous repercussions’ that unfold across multiple temporal levels. This also means understanding the many challenges presented to us by the ‘relative invisibility’ of slow violence.⁷⁸³ The phenomenon of hydrocarbon-driven climate change and its concomitant, ‘slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes [for example], present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively’.⁷⁸⁴ These slow-moving catastrophes (rising sea levels, for example, or ozone layer depletion) are examples of ‘slow violence’ that result in the ‘staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties’ of both human and extra-human natures, and the violence of which is compounded by the more immediate, instantaneous and spectacular incidences of natural disasters such as María and the goudougoudou.⁷⁸⁵ In the twenty-first century, the multifaceted catastrophe of hydrocarbon-based climate-change (supplemented by a long history of capitalist interventions into and exploitation of extra-human nature) has begun to create the feeling that life as we know it may soon come to an end, particularly in (semi-) peripheral nations, but increasingly, in the core as well. As the authors of the visual art project ‘Visual Life of Catastrophic History’ (undertaken in 2011 by

⁷⁸¹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2.

⁷⁸² Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 2.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁷⁸⁵ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, pp. 2-3.

the *Small Axe* journal) put it, we are *all* suffering from the ‘social and psychic trauma that comes with living with the paralyzing *futurelessness* of catastrophe’.⁷⁸⁶ These traumas include:

[...] the unleashing of wars without end by emperor-like sovereigns; the personal and social perils brought about by systemic financial collapse [...] the terrible spectacle of vulnerable people in fear and flight of the total power of men and gods all create a pervasive haunting sense, with [...] global reach and significance, that we are living in a perpetual state of emergency, not only in the midst of seemingly uncontrollable disaster but also in a constant *expectation* of disaster.⁷⁸⁷

In these ways and many others, the contemporary, globalised world is becoming ever more apocalyptic. In his magisterial critical work, *Living in the End Times*, Slavoj Žižek writes of the apocalyptic breakdown of the contemporary world, heralded by the prominence of what he calls the ‘four riders of the apocalypse’. These are, as he outlines, the ‘[...] ecological crisis; the consequences of the biogenetic revolution; imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property, forthcoming struggles over raw materials); and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions’.⁷⁸⁸ Martin Munro adopts Žižek’s ‘four riders’ approach to consider the ‘four riders of the Caribbean apocalypse’. ‘While Žižek envisions a globalized world on the threshold of an apocalyptic collapse,’ Munro writes, ‘one might say that the Caribbean was born out of the apocalypse, and that its subsequent history has turned in further apocalyptic cycles, in which nature and human agency conspire to create a quite particular experience of time and place’.⁷⁸⁹ The birth of the modern Caribbean was brought about in conditions that both recall and modify Žižek’s characterization of the ‘four riders of the apocalypse’. The ‘four riders’ of Caribbean apocalypse are, as Martin argues: ecological devastation and crisis; slavery; social divisions and exclusions, based on colonial racial hierarchies; and the ‘crisis of criminality’ as Martin calls it, ‘which pervades virtually every society in the region’.⁷⁹⁰ The fourth ‘rider’, Martin notes, is due to the fact that ‘there exists in many places a potent and dangerous mix of social and economic division, unemployment, low salaries, limited access to education, weak state institutions, corrupt and ineffectual policing,

⁷⁸⁶ ‘A Visual Life’, *Small Axe*, p. 134, emphasis theirs.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 133–4.

⁷⁸⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2011), p. x.

⁷⁸⁹ Munro, *Caribbean Globalisations*, pp. 248–253.

⁷⁹⁰ Munro, *Caribbean Globalisations*, pp. 248–253.

and other factors that have combined to make the Caribbean the site of a crisis that touches every level of society'.⁷⁹¹ To this admixture can be added external difficulties, such as the global financial crisis, the rising cost of food, and the region's susceptibility to natural disasters. The result, Martin points out, is that the Caribbean is in 'a particularly precarious situation [there is the] sense that the region stands at the edge of an apocalyptic abyss that is deeper and more longstanding than the one envisioned by Žižek for the Western world'.⁷⁹² Yet, this current apocalyptic reality is also one which mirrors processes and narratives that have, as Martin Munro puts it, 'long informed Caribbean thought and lived experience, and that these latter may be read as a foreshadowing of the wider world's own movement into apocalyptic understandings of the present time'.⁷⁹³ The reverberations of what Bajan poet Kamau Brathwaite has called the original, 'ongoing catastrophe,' of colonization and slavery continue into the present day in the cultural discourses, social norms and material circumstances that shape the region.⁷⁹⁴ This catastrophic history and its legacies are now entangled with the disastrous fact of the contemporary world-economy's unquenchable thirst for and dependency on fossil fuels.⁷⁹⁵ It is this global hydrocarbon dependency that is, as we know, primarily responsible for climate change and global warming. Since the discovery of the first gushers and the exuberant age of bountiful cheap gasoline, oil has been associated with optimistic, progressive visions of modernity. Yet, over time, it has become 'increasingly unable to shake off its dark underside as a catastrophic figure signifying conflict, pollution and volatility'.⁷⁹⁶ The early age of oil symbolised prosperity, freedom and potential. Yet, at the same time it was indirectly 'aligned with and hard to disentangle from the very baseline contradictions of modernity itself, embodying all its shocks and radical unevennesses'.⁷⁹⁷ This 'mutually reinforcing' energy matrix, with its highly uneven admixture of what Frederic Buell calls 'exuberance and dread,' continues to permeate the entire contemporary world-system.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 248-253.

⁷⁹² Ibid., pp. 248-253.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., p. 247.

⁷⁹⁴ Kamau Brathwaite and Joyelle McSweeney, 'Poetics, Revelations and Catastrophes: An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite', *Rain Taxi Online Edition* (2005), < <https://www.raintaxi.com/poetics-revelations-and-catastrophes-an-interview-with-kamau-brathwaite/>> [Accessed 20 January 2020] (para. 6).

⁷⁹⁵ Brathwaite and McSweeney, *Rain Taxi online ed.*

⁷⁹⁶ Macdonald, 'Improbability Drives: The Energy of SF,' *Paradoxa 26: SF Now* (2014), reprinted (2016) at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf/>> (accessed 28 May 2020] (para. 6 of 43).

⁷⁹⁷ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26/Strange Horizons*.

⁷⁹⁸ Frederick Buell, 'A Short History of Oil Cultures: Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance', *Journal of American Studies* 46.2 (2012): 273-93 (p. 293).

More and more, we are seeing these ecological ‘shocks’ of late petro-capitalism affecting the peripheral nations of the world-system in highly disproportionate (‘radically uneven’) ways. The long-buried dread that the oil-commodity has always held for humanity is finally coming up for air, and the ‘paralysing futurelessness’ of a life without oil (or without enough oil), or a life where oil-dependency has annihilated the environment upon which we all depend, are potential dystopian futures with which we all must come to terms with.

Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer’s concept of the Anthropocene is one concept or theory that attempts to name the geological period that humanity entered in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries (or in 1492, depending on the perspective taken). The term is intended to embody humanity’s vast influence over natural processes in the last three hundred (or more) years.⁷⁹⁹ In his article ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses,’ Dipesh Chakrabarty defines the Anthropocene as ‘the new geological epoch when humans exist as a geological force’ and have become the ‘main determinant of the environment of the planet’.⁸⁰⁰ However, the Anthropocene’s underlying premise, of a homogenised humanity that is collectively responsible for climate-change and its accompanying apocalypses, has been widely criticised on multiple fronts. Jason W. Moore, for example, debates both the temporal beginnings of the Anthropocene and its designation of ‘humans’ as an undefined whole. He asserts that, firstly, humans’ capacity to effect geological change began in the fifteenth century with the ‘discovery’ and colonisation of the Americas, rather than with the nineteenth century’s English Industrial Revolution (as many proponents of the Anthropocene suggest). Secondly, the shouldering of the responsibility for the current climate apocalypse by the entirety of humanity is, to say the least, erroneous. The responsibility lies, Moore argues, with a specific class fraction that (particularly in the contemporary period) has become globally dispersed. It is specific inhabitants of core regions and nations which have both contributed to and benefitted the most from the carbon-driven despoliation of the biosphere. Consequently, Moore introduces the concept of the ‘Capitalocene,’ which ‘argues for situating the rise of

⁷⁹⁹ Stoermer and Crutzen write that ‘for the past three centuries, [the] effects of humans on the global environment have escalated. Because of these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, [the] global climate may depart significantly from natural behavior for many millennia to come [...] it seems appropriate to assign the term “Anthropocene” to the present human-dominated geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene – the warm period of the past ten to twelve millennia. The Anthropocene could have been said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watts’ design of the steam engine in 1784. Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The “Anthropocene,”” *IGBP Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (2000), 17–18 (p. 17).

⁸⁰⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009), 197–222 (p. 207).

capitalism, historically and geographically, within the web of life. This is capitalism not just as economic system but as a situated and multi species world-ecology of capital, power and reproduction' that began from 1450, not the 1800s.⁸⁰¹

Other critics have usefully built on this initial conceptualisation of capitalogenic climate change. Françoise Vergès, for example, discusses the concept of a specifically racialised Capitalocene, building on and adding ecological inflections to the groundbreaking work of Cedric J. Robinson.⁸⁰² As has been demonstrated throughout this study, capitalism has always depended on the mobilisation of racial hierarchies, racist violence and the exploitation of black and brown bodies for its development. As Vergès elaborates, this pattern continues in contemporary moments of ecological crisis, and it is inhabitants of peripheral nations and regions who are the prime victims of the Capitalocene's ecological consequences. The concept of the racial Capitalocene is one that conjoins ideas of race, capitalism, imperialism and gender to understand the ways in which race is a crucial factor in 'destructive environmental policies,' in the 'Western conception of nature as "cheap" and in the global reorganisation of a cheap, racialised, disposable workforce'.⁸⁰³ In other words, any history of the environment, of environmental change (and in the contemporary era, any narrative regarding climate change) must register the histories of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racial capitalism. Vergès contends that the 'reconfiguration of the world that followed the colonisation of the Americas and the Caribbean' meant that nature was 'transformed into a cheap resource, as endlessly renewable as the bonded workforce,' that were transformed into cheap objects of nature by European capitalism.⁸⁰⁴ It is capitalism's exploitation of the Americas and the Caribbean which constituted the first modern/colonial system which 'mobilised the work of commodified human beings and uncommodified extra-human nature in order to advance labour productivity within commodity production'.⁸⁰⁵ If, therefore, the 'ongoing catastrophe' of the expanded Caribbean began with its violent incorporation into the modern/colonial world-economy, then this 'original catastrophe' was also the beginning of

⁸⁰¹ Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene, Part I: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis,' *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (2007), 1-37 (pp. 15-16).

⁸⁰² See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁸⁰³ Françoise Vergès, 'Racial Capitalocene', in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London and New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 72-83, reprinted at <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>> [Accessed 10 January 2020] (p. 6).

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁰⁵ Vergès, *Futures of Black Radicalism*, p. 28.

the racial Capitalocene. As Braithwaite writes, ‘the enormity of slavery and the Middle Passage’ is embedded beneath the rubble of present-day natural disasters.⁸⁰⁶ Indeed, as the writers of the ‘Visual Life of Catastrophic History’ note, the Caribbean is a ‘measureless scene of catastrophe’ because its history was, from the beginning, ‘inaugurated in catastrophe’.⁸⁰⁷ The remnants of this ‘inauguration’ can be witnessed throughout the region, in the ‘economies driven by external imperatives; [the] societies structured in dominance with tiny rapacious elites at one end, impoverished masses at the other; and cynical, unresponsive governments given to authoritarian rule and corruption’.⁸⁰⁸

The nation of Haiti has been forged from the apocalypse of Spanish extermination of the Taíno as well as the transshipment and enslavement of African peoples. Subjected to a particularly long, brutal history of exploitation after its Revolution, Haiti is ‘the *limit*-instance of a hard experience familiar to *all*’ of the region.⁸⁰⁹ Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls Haiti the ‘the longest neo-colonial experiment in the history of the West’, a nation which has behind it a long history of ecological despoliation and socio-political corruption.⁸¹⁰ As a result of this history, Haiti is, in the twenty-first century, profoundly susceptible to the climactic extremes generated by the world’s contemporary fossil fuel dependency.⁸¹¹ The poverty and deprivation in which many Haitians live has become, in the West, synonymous with the nation itself: by the time of the 2010 earthquake, there existed a pervasive popular image of Haiti, as a place of ‘debilitating poverty, horror, hopelessness and incompetence’.⁸¹² The oft-repeated phrase attached to the country, ‘the poorest in the Western hemisphere’ (and its people repeatedly hailed as ‘resilient’ and ‘resistant’) has meant

⁸⁰⁶ Braithwaite and McSweeney, *Rain Taxi online ed.*

⁸⁰⁷ ‘A Visual Life’, *Small Axe*, p. 134.

⁸⁰⁸ ‘A Visual Life’, *Small Axe*, p. 134.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 134. Emphases are the authors own.

⁸¹⁰ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, ‘The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean and the World’, *Cimarrón: New Perspectives on the Caribbean, Vol 2, No. 3* (1990), 3–12 (p. 5).

⁸¹¹ The history of ecological devastation in Haiti, ever since colonial times, has meant that the ruination of the Haitian landscape has become one of the country’s most severe problems. In 2006, Haiti’s forest coverage was below 1.5% of the national territory and the loss of topsoil – ‘as much a non-renewable resource as oil’, Wes Jackson reminds us, as it takes 10,000 years to reform – has meant that large sections of Haitian land are permanently unproductive. This has exacerbated already serious levels of food insecurity. Without forests, 6,000 hectares of arable land erode every year, making Haiti even more vulnerable to hurricane-induced mudslides that destroy infrastructure and communities.

Wes Jackson, ‘Fertility and the Age of Soils’, The Land Institute (1 December 2000)

<<http://www.landinstitute.org/vnews/display.v/ART/2000/12/01/3aa90b0d9>> [Accessed 10 December 2018]

⁸¹² Juliana Svistova and Loretta Pyles, *Production of Disaster and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Haiti: Disaster Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 25.

that it is viewed as in need of ‘security, new technologies, expertise and development’.⁸¹³ This deeply rooted and indeed historically constructed perception of Haiti as a ‘perpetual disaster’ site has been carefully carved out by foreign governments, media, invading nations, and non-governmental organisations in order to justify all manner of external intervention.⁸¹⁴ In the aftermath of the earthquake, media and NGO discourses repeatedly designated the disaster setting in uniform language: as ‘horrific,’ ‘chaotic,’ ‘dangerous,’ and a ‘catastrophic crisis’ that required prompt Western humanitarian restitution. As Grano and Zagacki note, the global North’s invocation of ‘polluted’ images of countries such as Haiti (which are in need of ‘purifying’ discourses and actions) is common when disasters in the developing world or victims of colour are discussed in Western media and government.⁸¹⁵ These kinds of ‘surface frames’ which appeared in the aftermath of the quake fortify what the cognitive linguist George Lakoff calls ‘deep frames’ – deeply ingrained discourses, associations and values that designate the global South as ‘unsafe,’ and in doing so, sustain racist, colonialist narratives of tropicity and savagery, particularly in reference to African-heritage nations.⁸¹⁶ These purificatory narratives, which refer to Haiti as an apocalyptic zone in need of salvation or subjugation, have been perpetuated ever since the Haitian Revolution, repeated by individuals as varied as Napoleon, the soldiers of the 1915 U.S. occupation and the NGOs who came to ‘save’ Haitians after the 2010 earthquake. Ever since its Revolution, Haiti has been regarded as an ‘orphaned country in need of external adult guidance’.⁸¹⁷ While the assessment of Haiti and the wider region having been inaugurated in the catastrophe of the European colonial enterprise and African enslavement is an accurate reading, the frequent Western assessment of an ‘apocalyptic Haiti’ in need of intervention or salvation is an imperialist and neo-colonial one. It is important, therefore, to separate the neo-colonial rhetoric from the recognition that Haiti, like other Caribbean regions, continues to be impacted by the legacies of its colonial history and the projects of ‘ecocide and genocide’ undertaken by Euro-North-American

⁸¹³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸¹⁵ D. A. Grano and K. S. Zagacki, ‘Cleansing the superdome: The paradox of purity and post-Katrina guilt’, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (2011), 201–223 (p. 201).

⁸¹⁶ George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004). See also Gregory Bankoff, ‘Rendering the World Unsafe: “Vulnerability” as Western discourse’, *Disasters*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2001) 19–35.

⁸¹⁷ Michael J. Dash, ‘Rising from the Ruins: Haiti in 200 Years’, in *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010*, ed. by Martin Munro (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 63–67 (pp. 63–4).

conquerors.⁸¹⁸

Haitian-Canadian author Myriam J. A. Chancy notes that ‘the modern discourse of apocalypse’ as it is used in Western cultures ‘serves to denigrate as well as constrict aspirations of Third World inhabitants’.⁸¹⁹ This is due to the fact that it seeks to ‘predict the outcome of the struggle between good and evil from within a Judeo-Christian frame or predict the “logos of the farthest or last things”’ and so is unable to ‘divorce its unitary vision of the world from its racialization’ of it.⁸²⁰ Those deemed inferior ‘because of the combined factors of their racial, ethnic, geographical or economic categorizations are either understood to embody or perpetuate the cataclysmic evil fatalists brace themselves against, or are discounted as actors in the world altogether’.⁸²¹ Instead of being regarded as active, independent beings, they become helpless objects devoid of agency. In the ‘disenfranchisement of the Third World from global affairs through apocalyptic rhetoric, the First World absolves itself of responsibility with that “othered” global community’ and so ‘fails to see the evidence before it, that is, for the Third World and its inhabitants the apocalypse is already underway’.⁸²² Chancy writes that countries such as Haiti and other Caribbean islands survive by ‘dying,’ by ‘supplying [...] the First World with [their] lifeblood’ and so, the climactic apocalypse that the global North supposes to be imminent is in fact that which it has already inflicted on the global South.⁸²³

However, this is not to say that one should succumb to apocalyptic visions of Haiti (and the wider Caribbean) as nothing but a series of historical and ongoing crises, whether the crisis be colonisation or natural disaster. As Kasia Mika points out, ‘rather than just demonstrating the relevance of disaster studies, such images and reports should push us, the scholars in the field, to rethink and reformulate the coordinates and ambitions for our inquiry towards futures that are less disastrous and [...] more just’.⁸²⁴ The core’s vision of a collective descent into an apocalyptic future risks, as Mika notes, ‘further normalis[ing] Haiti within paradigms of disaster that reproduce vulnerability and marginalisation on the national and international stage’ and so ‘detracts from questions of justice, agency and responsibility;

⁸¹⁸ Munro, *Haiti Rising*, p. 3.

⁸¹⁹ Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 137.

⁸²⁰ Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, p. 137.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁸²³ Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, p. 138.

⁸²⁴ Kasia Mika, *Disasters, Vulnerabilities and Narratives: Rewriting Haiti’s Future* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 6.

undermining the importance of the struggle towards disaster free futures'.⁸²⁵ What is required instead, she goes on to write, is a process of thinking and writing about Haiti as something other than 'a disaster space, always in the extreme'.⁸²⁶ The history and heterogeneity of lived experiences in Haiti need to be properly acknowledged, rather than the country being written off in popular discourse as an already doomed apocalyptic disaster zone that will only continue to deteriorate, politically, economically and ecologically, in the face of global climate change and at the peripheries of the global economy. It is important to understand *why* and *how* the history of socio-ecological exploitation in the region has shaped its current situation, but to avoid reducing the region to a site of unsalvageable disaster. While there is certainly a history of apocalyptic events in Haiti, precipitated by the history of slavery and the ongoing reality of capitalist exploitation, this is not to say that there exists nothing but apocalypse, poverty and suffering in Haiti. The point is that the rapacious exploitation of the country demonstrates the inherent need for profit margins and resource grabs that characterizes the ecological regime of capitalism, even as it sheds its scales and metamorphoses from one phase to the next.

I keep Mika's words in mind while examining literary registrations of apocalypse in Haiti, which themselves are underwritten by an ongoing crisis in petro-modernity and late capitalism. I consider the nation as the authors of *Small Axe* do, as the 'limit-instance' of a wider Caribbean phenomenon, where the historical apocalypses of enslavement and the commodity-frontier-complex meet the present climate catastrophes engendered by global dependence on the oil-commodity (and the coloniality of power which is inherently woven into this dependency).⁸²⁷ I examine the amalgamation of the historical and contemporary catastrophes in Haiti into what I deem a *compound crisis* of colonial history and petro-modernity. The literary vehicle I use to examine this compound crisis or compound catastrophe is the genre of sf, particularly Afrofuturism. Sf (science or speculative fiction) is well equipped to register both the historical violence of colonialism and the contemporary violence created by the workings of the global oil-economy in the Caribbean region. This is partly due to its employment of specific tropes and devices, and its unique thematic concerns: for example, its ability to depict specific types of space-time compression (time travel, for example); its focus on post-apocalyptic worlds and dystopian governments (which can reflect the corruption and injustices of our own era); and its interest in bodily modifications and

⁸²⁵ Mika, *Disasters, Vulnerabilities and Narratives*, p. 16.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸²⁷ 'Visual Life', *Small Axe*, p. 134.

hyper-futuristic technologies. Sf is a genre which can simultaneously communicate the legacies of the colonial violence enacted upon the Caribbean's human and extra-human natures, alongside the current disasters that continue to unfold across the region under the contemporary petro-capitalist system. For many scholars and authors, sf is a productive genre that allows for an imaginative critique of the effects of the multiple, layered disasters that affect Haiti and the wider region, be it the Middle Passage or the 2010 earthquake.⁸²⁸

The three works examined in this chapter — 'Monstro' by Junot Díaz, 'The Blue Hill' by Rodney Saint-Éloi and *Tentacle* by Rita Indiana — all grapple with the compound crises encountered in Haiti but also in the expanded Caribbean more generally.⁸²⁹ The sf conventions and modes mobilized by all three authors allow each of them to stage these compound crises in particularly noteworthy ways. They all trace the legacies of colonialism *and* simultaneously depict the dystopian nature of future Caribbean worlds thrown into apocalyptic upheaval by hydrocarbon-driven climate change and the breakdown of politico-economic systems. In other words, each author works within the sf genre to produce works that register both the region's catastrophic history and the possibility of a catastrophic future, made precarious by our present dependency on hydrocarbons and capitalism's cannibalising tendencies.

⁸²⁸ However, the Haitian novel in particular has always chronicled the nation's history of ecological catastrophe. Works such as Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (*Masters of the Dew*, published in 1944), to Pierre Clitandre's *Cathédrale du mois d'août* (*The Cathedral of the August Heat*, 1979) have emphasized the extent of ecological devastation in Haiti, focusing on factors such as desertification, unrelenting deforestation and the exploitation of the Haitian peasantry, who (in Clitandre's text) are viewed as a commodity (Moore's 'cheap labour') to be locally exploited or shipped abroad to work for cheap. Others, such as Jacques-Stephen Alexis's *Les Arbres musiciens* (*The Musician Trees*, 1957), have written about the Haitian forestry, endowing it with a mythical quality, as a warning against deforestation. Marie Chauvet, meanwhile, in the short story 'Amour' (from *Amour, Colère et Folie, Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy*, 1968), writes about the history of deforestation in Haiti (particularly during the nineteen-year long U.S. occupation) and the ecological revolution produced by this deforestation by Haitians themselves.

⁸²⁹ 'Monstro,' Junot Díaz, *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

Rodney Saint-Éloi, 'The Blue Hill', in *Haiti Noir*, ed. by Edwidge Danticat (New York: Akashic Books, 2011). Rita Indiana, *Tentacle*, trans. by Achy Objeas (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2018).

Oil, Literary Genre and Caribbean Apocalypse: Afrofuturist Understandings of the ‘Ongoing Catastrophe’ in the Era of Late Petro-Capitalism

In his essay ‘About 5,750 Words,’ Samuel Delany writes that science or speculative fiction may be best conceived of as ‘offering a significant distortion of the present’ or as ‘a utopian project for imagining alternative social realities’, rather than merely predicting the future.⁸³⁰ Paul Kincaid’s 2003 essay ‘On the Origin of Genre,’ meanwhile, proposes that it is not possible to ‘extract a unique, common thread that binds together all science fiction texts, nor identify a unique common origin for the genre’.⁸³¹ Mark Sinker, in his 1992 essay ‘Loving the Alien,’ further expounds on ways to understand the complexities of the genre when he explains that ‘the advantage of science fiction as a point of cultural departure is that it allows for a series of worst-case futures – of hells on earth and being in them – which are woven into every kind of everyday present reality’.⁸³² Writing more specifically on Black sf (but also Black music, and Black American culture in general) Sinker notes that its triumph lies in the fact that, ‘forcibly stripped by the Middle Passage and Slavery Days of any direct connection with African mother culture, it has nonetheless survived; by syncretism, by bricolage, by a day-to-day programme of appropriation and adaptation as resourcefully broad-minded as any in history’.⁸³³ Within the very fact of Black people’s survival lies the central premise of Afro-centred sf (Afrofuturism): that the worst-case scenario is a historical one, and that Black people not only survived, but created new ways of life-making from the horrors of colonization and slavery. Or as Sinker puts it, ‘the central fact in Black Science Fiction – self-consciously so named or not – is an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened, that (in Public Enemy’s phrase) “Armageddon been in effect”’.⁸³⁴ Afrofuturist writers connect

⁸³⁰ Samuel Delany, ‘About 5, 750 Words’, in *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*, ed. by Robert Latham (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 104-116 (p. 105).

⁸³¹ Paul Kincaid, ‘On the Origin of Genre’, *Extrapolation* 44 (Winter 2003), 409-19 (p. 415).

⁸³² Mark Sinker, ‘Loving the Alien’, *The Wire*, Issue 96 (February 1992) http://web.archive.org/web/20060209100352/http://www.thewire.co.uk/archive/essays/black_science_fiction.html [Accessed 1 February 2020].

⁸³³ Mark Sinker, ‘Loving the Alien’, *The Wire*, Issue 96 (February 1992) http://web.archive.org/web/20060209100352/http://www.thewire.co.uk/archive/essays/black_science_fiction.html [Accessed 1 February 2020].

⁸³⁴ Mark Sinker, ‘Loving the Alien’, *The Wire*, Issue 96 (February 1992) http://web.archive.org/web/20060209100352/http://www.thewire.co.uk/archive/essays/black_science_fiction.html [Accessed 1 February 2020].

colonial histories with the potential futures of black subjects. The crucial contribution of Afrofuturist work lies in its understanding that, as Kodwo Eshun puts it, ‘Afrodiasporic subjects live the estrangement that science fiction writers envision’.⁸³⁵ As Eshun explains, Afrofuturism ‘uses extraterrestriality as a hyperbolic trope to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities [...] The conventions of science fiction, marginalised within literature yet central to modern thought, can function as allegories for the systemic experience of post-slavery black subjects in the twentieth century’.⁸³⁶ Writers within the genre ‘stage a series of enigmatic returns to the constitutive trauma of slavery’ by recasting science fiction ‘in the light of Afrodiasporic history’.⁸³⁷ Slavery was the apocalypse that equates to the common sf trope of an alien abduction. ‘The ships landed long ago,’ Sinker notes. ‘They already laid waste whole societies, abducted and genetically altered swathes of citizenry, imposed without surcease their values’.⁸³⁸ Sinker’s analysis of Afrofuturist sf can be productively applied to the Caribbean context. Caribbean history shares these elements of African-American history, since it contains the narratives and experiences of ‘hells of earth’ and ‘ways of being in them,’ the ‘worst-case’ situations which have already happened. As Toni Morrison points out, the African peoples who experienced ‘theft, capture, abduction, mutilation and slavery’ were the very first moderns. They experienced real conditions of ‘existential homelessness, alienation, dislocation, and dehumanisation that philosophers like Nietzsche would later define as quintessentially modern. Instead of ‘civilising’ African subjects, the forced dislocation and commodification that constituted the Middle Passage meant that modernity was rendered forever suspect’.⁸³⁹ The condition of profound alienation experienced by these individuals’ parallels (and indeed, acts as a direct reference point for, in Afrofuturist works) the kind of alienation which sf writers depict using various genre devices.

Afrofuturism seamlessly weaves together an understanding of both historical colonialist exploitation and contemporary petro-capitalism. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it functions,

⁸³⁵ Kodwo Eshun, ‘Further Considerations on Afro-futurism’, in *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*, ed. by Robert Latham (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 458–470 (p. 466).

⁸³⁶ Eshun, *Science Fiction Criticism*, p. 467.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p. 467.

⁸³⁸ Sinker, *The Wire*, http://web.archive.org/web/20060209100352/http://www.thewire.co.uk/archive/essays/black_science_fiction.html [Accessed 1 February 2020].

⁸³⁹ Toni Morrison quoted in Paul Gilroy, ‘Living Memory: A Meeting with Toni Morrison’, in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpents Tail, 1994).

as Eshun expounds, as a ‘programme for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection’.⁸⁴⁰ That is to say that it allows for the consideration of possible futures and alternate realities through the prism of Afrocentric cultures, allowing for a commingling of the future, past and present. As Françoise Vergès points out, the ‘politics of the possible’ rests, in part, on the ‘freedom to dream other pasts and imagine other futures than those suggested by the racial Capitalocene’.⁸⁴¹ It is apt to remember here the words of Oscar, the protagonist of Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, whose question in the epigraph to this chapter, ‘what’s more sci-fi than Santo Domingo? What’s more fantasy than the Antilles?’ sums up perfectly the relationship between this particular modality of the sf genre and of Caribbean history.⁸⁴²

Sf’s ability to register the historical apocalypses of Caribbean history and the contemporary catastrophes of petro-modernity is crucial for the purposes of this chapter. However, I am also interested in the genre because sf and its many sub-genres, including Afrofuturism, supply us with a multitude of expressions of energy consciousness. The genre is acutely attuned to the energy sources which power its lifeworlds, even if these sources are not explicitly mentioned in individual works. Due to what Graeme Macdonald calls its inherent ‘demands of altered and intensified spatiality and geography,’ sf texts are more likely to be aware of the energy sources and demands which act as the power sources of their imagined contexts.⁸⁴³ By this logic, sf’s energy consciousness allows us to not only comprehend the nature of our oil addiction, but also to understand ‘the manner in which we have continually sought to occlude or sublimate the monstrous nature of our petromodern fantasy in order to drive an increasingly unsustainable petrolic life ever onwards’.⁸⁴⁴

The history of hydrocarbons has been, in many ways, consonant with the transmutations and evolutions of sf as a genre. For the last hundred years or so, oil has been critical in influencing our everyday expectations, subjectivities and our organisation of time and space. Indeed, it continues to do this, but ironically enough, we understand that the

⁸⁴⁰ Eshun, *Science Fiction Criticism*, p. 301.

⁸⁴¹ Vergès, ‘Racial Capitalocene’, in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London and New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 72–83, reprinted at <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>> [Accessed 10 January 2020]

⁸⁴² Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, p. 110.

⁸⁴³ Macdonald, ‘Improbability Drives: The Energy of SF,’ *Paradoxa 26: SF Now* (2014), reprinted (2016) at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf/>> [accessed 28 May 2020]

⁸⁴⁴ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf/>>

resource is one that is all-powerful but constantly diminishing. As Graeme Macdonald pithily puts it, oil is a 'fundamental energy form with radical finitude; an unprecedented powerful enabler with an inherent weakness in its definitive endpoints and its problematic external costs'.⁸⁴⁵ The vision of a paralysingly futureless post-oil world preoccupies many post-apocalyptic fictional works. Such texts act as 'collapse narratives' which convey to the reader 'entropic worlds of diminishing and unevenly distributed energy returns' and resource wars.⁸⁴⁶ Indeed, sf speaks to an overall energy consciousness, challenging the reader with the presentation of 'images and scenes of the limits, logic and credences of our present mode of unsustainability,' sometimes by offering up unsustainable scenes of the future, but also presenting images of radically sustainable future worlds.⁸⁴⁷ The genre also tends to register the 'fantastic disaster of powerful (and often mysterious, as yet inconceivable) energy resources'.⁸⁴⁸ Oil might not be explicitly present in individual works, but what Macdonald calls its 'spectral presence' can be read in a great many sf texts, 'either in energy substitutes or interpretive extrapolations'.⁸⁴⁹ The 'almost unthinkable' entity of petroleum stands in for a 'cognitive mapping' of the contemporary world-system, can be usefully synthesized in sf.⁸⁵⁰ Steven Shavero notes that sf's status as a 'psycho- socio- technological cartography' means that it is the ideal literary 'focusing device' to help in the cognitive mapping of hyperobjects such as oil.⁸⁵¹ Sf's usefulness can be clearly evidenced, as Gerry Canavan puts it:

[...] in sciencefictional treatments of oil and oil capitalism. Oil- as- hyperobject delimits our ability to both understand our historical past and imagine our possible futures, becoming the secret subtext of any number of futurological imaginings— and as the worldhistorical scarcity of oil has grown more and more obvious, the glittering technoutopias of Golden Age science fiction become increasingly replaced by their psychic opposites: apocalyptic, post- peak oil horrors of deprivation and ruin.⁸⁵²

⁸⁴⁵ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf>>

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf>>

⁸⁵⁰ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf>>

⁸⁵¹ Steven Shavero, 'Hyperbolic Futures: Speculative Finance and Speculative Fiction', *Cascadia Subduction Zone* 1, no. 2 (April 2011), p. 4.

⁸⁵² Gerry Canavan, 'Retrofutures and Petrofutures: Oil, Scarcity, Limit', in *Oil Culture*, eds. by Ross Barrett, Daniel Worden and Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 331-349 (p. 332).

By registering a generalised energy consciousness, whether this is of ‘technoutopia’ or ‘post peak-oil horror’, sf does another important job when it comes to petrocultural work. It also manifests Frederic Buell’s understanding of oil as the resource which embodies both ‘exuberance’ and ‘dread’.⁸⁵³ Now-infamous apocalyptic climactic events, such as the Deepwater Horizon and Ixtoc I oil spills, have made manifest the spectacular violence of the world’s oil-obsession. As a result of these incidents and many others, the world has now reached the stage where oil is ‘bound up with the kind of sublimated dread and monstrosity that mid twentieth-century fictions of the atomic threat demonstrated’.⁸⁵⁴ However, it is only by meditating on the ‘horror of oil’s banality’ as well as the spectacularity of its catastrophes that we can ‘begin to register its everyday use as a central substance in the environmental fantasy that is late capitalism. In this sense, oil, stored, circulated, and safely contained in vast quantities around the world’s petro-systems, is always already immaterial and uncontainable. It is irreplaceably evaporating, slow-violent – and unseen’.⁸⁵⁵ Sf is often quick to pick up on this notion of hydrocarbon energies as uncontainable, unseen and fantastical. However, partly because oil is *so* uncontainable and unseen, it can be registered as alien and threatening, a mystical force which emerges from primitive subterranean depths. As we will see, sf registers the exuberance of hydrocarbon energy’s possibilities in the future, but also concomitantly the dread of their finitude and provenance. Works within the genre depict both utopian futures of balanced, untotoxic and ecologically balanced modes of life-making, but also, at the other end of the speculative spectrum, total system collapse.

⁸⁵³ Buell notes that ‘fossil- fuel culture can be, in short, described as an “age of exuberance”— an age that is also, given the dwindling finitude of the resources it increasingly makes social life dependent on, haunted by catastrophe.’

Frederic Buell, ‘A Short History of Oil Cultures; or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance’, in *Oil Culture*, eds. by Ross Barrett, Daniel Worden and Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 69–88 (p. 71).

⁸⁵⁴ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf>>

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

Reading Caribbean Eco-Apocalypse i): the Petro-Zombie

‘The Caribbean,’ as Parasvini-Gebert points out, ‘shares Haiti’s history of colonial exploitation and subordinate economic development [...]’ and as a result of this fact, ‘the ghost of Haiti haunts the Caribbean imaginary. Its ecological disintegration has become the focal point for meditations on the region’s environmental options’.⁸⁵⁶ The ghost of Haiti certainly does haunt the Caribbean imaginary, as Parasvini-Gebert pithily states, but I am interested here in a less ethereal type of monster.

As has been made clear, the ‘ongoing catastrophe’ of the expanded Caribbean’s imbrication into European colonial capitalism and the apocalyptic reverberations of this in the present sit alongside the variety of contemporary natural catastrophes in the region. Haiti, with its history of devastating ecological despoliation and socio-economic exploitation, represents in many ways elements or realities of a more expansive, regional Caribbean experience. As such, it is an important location from which to examine capitalism’s ecological regime and the effects of oil, the newest commodity hegemon in the region’s long history of commodity extraction. At this juncture, then, I want to focus on this compound catastrophe of the Caribbean’s past, present and future, from a specifically Haitian perspective, that of the zombie. Emerging from the history of the Haitian Vodou religion, the zombie figure powerfully embodies the exploitation of human and non-human natures in the Caribbean. In Haiti, those who betrayed the maroon community were transformed into zombies through the use of strong poisons and then made to work as slaves, in order to pay off the debts they owned to the maroon society whose code of secrecy (or the breaking of another societal code, such as theft) they had breached.⁸⁵⁷ However, as Fabienne Viala notes, zombism is intrinsically

⁸⁵⁶ Parasvini-Gebert, *The Natural World in American Literatures*, p. 115.

⁸⁵⁷ See Fabienne Viala’s chapter ‘Columbus, the Scapegoat and the Zombie: Performance and tales of the National Memory in Haiti’, in *The Post Columbus Syndrome* for more detail regarding the creation of a zombie in the historical maroon communities of Haiti. Viala explains that in the Haitian religion Vodoun, the zombie is the ‘the mortal remains of somebody who, after he died of unnatural causes rises up from his tomb thanks to a magical ritual performed by the bokor to steal his soul. The bokor practices black magic [...] [he] performs a wicked ritual that allows him to still the purest part of the soul. After being awoken from death, the dead body is rebaptized with a new name, and since he has lost all trace of willpower and self-decision, he is resocialized in another place to work as a slave. From the Haitian point of view, the zombie is a dead-alive person. In fact, no death happened but the appearance of death was given to the body thanks to the use of a strong poison [...] that makes the temperature of the body go down, creates cyanosis of the skin, and slows the heart beat until its total

connected to being Haitian; ‘historically, becoming Haitian meant becoming a zombie on the plantation’.⁸⁵⁸ Indeed, the Haitian poet René Depestre wrote that ‘the history of colonisation is the process of man’s general zombification and the quest for a revitalising salt capable of restoring to man the use of his imagination and culture’.⁸⁵⁹ In modern-day Haiti, the Vodoun process of zombification is still performed through a tripartite narration which is ‘charged with historical symbolism’ which dates back to the trauma of enslavement. ‘The time before the grave, in the grave, and after the grave, are temporal markers that metaphorically commemorate the story of the transshipment of slaves, from their departure from Africa to their arrival in Haiti’.⁸⁶⁰ The very creation of a zombie is then, traditionally, a remembrance of the multiple traumas suffered by the enslaved in their transshipment from Africa to the Caribbean and then their fight for survival on the Haitian plantation.

Clearly, then, the zombie figure symbolises the violence of industrial capitalism committed against the enslaved, from a specifically Haitian perspective. However, the zombie can be (and has been) cognitively extended to speak to the more generalised experience of worker alienation under a capitalist system of relations. As we have seen, historical capitalism has evolved through a series of metabolic rifts which, as Kerstin Oloff puts it, have as their ‘ideological complement the nature-society dichotomy. [...] These [metabolic] rifts refer to the increasing alienation of the majority of the population from the means of production –

disappearance, creating a perfect mimesis of death. After three days in the grave, if the poison has not killed the victim [...] the person awakes—in a very damaged state due to the effects of the drug and to the experience of being buried alive, most frequently aphasic and with amnesia. With a new name, the zombie is sent to work as a slave to clear his debt to society. Indeed, capturing the soul of a man is not normally meant to be an act of evil magic, performed out of malevolence, but instead it should be the result of a fair sentence. Zombie making was meant to be a punishment, decided upon by the community, after one of its members is denounced for threatening one of his counterpart’s or family member’s integrity, willpower, and/or personal possessions [...]. Fabienne Viala, *The Post Columbus Syndrome: Identities, Cultural Nationalism and Commemorations in the Caribbean* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 205-227 (p. 214).

⁸⁵⁸ Viala, *The Post Columbus Syndrome*, p. 215.

⁸⁵⁹ René Depestre, *The Festival of the Greasy Pole*, trans. by Carrol F. Coates (Charlottesville, VAF and London: Caraf Books, University Press of Virginia, 1979, 1990), p. 121.

⁸⁶⁰ ‘Before the passage, the men and women who eventually became working bodies for the French planters were slaves captured, sold, and kept as cattle, before the arrival of the slave ship, by African communities such as the Efik on the slave coast. The buried-alive phase corresponds to the Middle Passage. Those who recover their faculties after having been zombified describe it as a journey that gives the feeling of floating, with a complete awareness of the noise and voices around one and a deep sense of consciousness, an experience of fear and frustration, but with a total incapacity to move or to open one’s eyes. The raising up is the moment when, upon arrival, the slave is given a new name, his master’s or the plantation’s, and is turned into a working body with no willpower’. Viala, *The Post Columbus Syndrome*, p. 214.

most fundamentally, land and body'.⁸⁶¹ The figure of the zombie, then, is a useful trope through which to consider the alienation of human and extra-human natures as a result of such metabolic rifts, partly because it embodies, as David McNally puts it, 'recurrent anxieties about corporeal dismemberment in societies where the commodification of human labour [...] is becoming widespread'.⁸⁶² Indeed, Marxist readings of the zombie have long understood the figure to represent alienated workforces all over the world. However, it is important to understand that the zombie, in all its permutations, is also a powerfully ecological figure. With its roots in the original catastrophe of black enslavement in Haiti and the historical socio-ecological apocalypse of sugar capitalism, the zombie figure embodies not only capitalism's exploitation of human beings, but also the reduction of diverse Caribbean natures to agricultural monocultures, as well as the forced separation of enslaved Africans from the soil and from the development of independent and fruitful livelihoods. The zombie's 'representational logic continue[s] [then] to be grounded visually in representations of the socio-ecological relations of the world-system'.⁸⁶³ As we will see, zombie-aesthetics encode both the hegemony and breakdown of petro-modernity in the last two centuries. The zombie of sugar capitalism was a 'beast of burden,' lacking autonomous will and thus forced to work for a master, and as such registered Haiti's imbrication in the global market and the separation of enslaved Haitians from the land.⁸⁶⁴ However, oil is the commodity which has become the 'dominant energy vector through which capitalism has remade itself since the turn of the twentieth century'.⁸⁶⁵ Indeed, if the zombie is a figure driven by what Stephen Shaviro calls the 'inner logic' of capitalism⁸⁶⁶ as it moves through numerous cycles and permutations, then the figure of the petro-zombie is able to 'gesture towards processes and sets of relations that are completely and unevenly remade by the emergence' of the oil-commodity.⁸⁶⁷ The petro-

⁸⁶¹ Kerstin Oloff, 'Zombies, Gender and World Ecology: Gothic Narrative in the work of Ana Lydia Vega and May Montero', in *The Caribbean: Aesthetics, World Ecology, Politics*, eds. by Chris Campbell and Michael Niblett (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), pp. 46–62 (p. 46).

⁸⁶² David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), p. 4.

⁸⁶³ Kerstin Oloff, 'From Sugar to Oil: The Ecology of George A. Romero's Night of the Living Dead,' *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (2017), 316–328 (p. 318). DOI: <[10.1080/17449855.2017.1337677](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337677)> [Accessed 12 December 2019].

⁸⁶⁴ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo* (London: Deutsch, 1972).

⁸⁶⁵ Niblett, 'Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and Peripheral Aesthetics', in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities*, eds. by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and Anthony Carrigan, 268–285 (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 268–285 (p. 285).

⁸⁶⁶ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 63.

⁸⁶⁷ Oloff, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 317.

zombie in particular bears witness to both the ecological transformations engineered by global capitalism and new zombification effects under novel energy regimes. Nevertheless, while the petro-zombie is a specific figure which encodes contemporary capitalist logics, its older relative, the sugar-zombie, exists alongside it. As Oloff explains:

The 'older' saccharine zombies live on within many Caribbean novels – from Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico and elsewhere – in which they continue to register the legacies of colonialism. The multiplicity of zombie figures is made thinkable by a world-system that is profoundly uneven, one in which the spectacular benefits/liberties made possible by oil, and other energy sources, are only unevenly accessible. As a figure that has crossed from a location on the periphery of the world-system to its new centre in the early twentieth century, it is one that – perhaps like no other – is inscribed with local and global inequalities. Both the older and newer figure speak centrally to the metabolic rifts through which the world-system developed, but unlike the sugar zombie, the petro-zombie gestures towards representing the non-representable, towards the multi-faceted and terminal crisis of capitalist world-ecology.⁸⁶⁸

As Oloff goes on to write:

[...] while the zombie was deracinated from its original context and emptied of its spiritual dimension, while it has changed dramatically over time and through its displacements [...] it continues to be a figure that encodes the degradation of workers and land under capitalism [...] the zombie is a key figure for thinking about Caribbean aesthetics in relation to the world ecology since it encode[s] radical transformations and subsequent degradations/exhaustions of extra-human environments and human labour.⁸⁶⁹

The figure of the petro-zombie is, of course, also an inherent symbol of slavery in the Caribbean, of Braithwaite's 'ongoing catastrophe' and all the horror and resilience that was birthed from it. It is, in other words, the embodiment of the region's compound crises.

⁸⁶⁸ Oloff, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 325.

⁸⁶⁹ Oloff, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, p. 322.

‘Monstro’: ¿Diablo, haitiano, que te pasó?

Haiti is, as the authors of *Small Axe* remind us, a ‘limit instance’ of the wider Caribbean’s compound crisis. In Haiti, as in other ex-colonies in the global South, the history of ‘slow violence’ has had profoundly damaging socio-ecological costs. As Nixon points out, the ‘casualties of slow violence—human and environmental—are the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted’ (and indeed, while there are many casualties in the global North, it is in the global South where the vast majority of these ‘unseen’, impoverished people are dramatically and noticeably concentrated).⁸⁷⁰ The Haitian people (and the land upon which they live) are key examples of such casualties. They are ‘disposable people,’ ‘dispensable citizens’ to borrow the words of Kevin Bale and Annu Jalais respectively.⁸⁷¹ Meanwhile, Dominican author Junot Díaz writes that it is ‘no accident of history that the island that gave us the plantation big bang that put our world on the road to this moment in the capitalist project would also be the first to warn us of this zombie stage of capitalism where entire nations are being rendered through economic alchemy into not-quite alive’. Díaz argues that the ecological devastation being wreaked upon the planet as a result of our contemporary fossil capital dependency means that the logical conclusion is ‘the transformation of our planet into a Haiti’ for:

Haiti [...] is not only the most visible victim of our civilization – Haiti is also a sign of what is to come. The nation is a symbol of [a] new rapacious stage of capitalism [...] a cannibal stage where, in order to power the explosion of the super-rich and ultra-rich, middle classes are being forced to fail, working classes are being re-proletarianized and the poorest are being pushed beyond the grim limits of subsistence, into a kind of sepulchral half-life, perfect targets for any “natural disaster” that just happens to wander by.⁸⁷²

⁸⁷⁰ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 13.

⁸⁷¹ Kevin Bale, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Annu Jalais, *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarban* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 11.

See also: Mike Davis, *Planet of the Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006)

⁸⁷² Díaz, ‘Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal’ <<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>>

Díaz's short story 'Monstro' (first published in *The New Yorker* in 2012) draws together the threads of slavery's apocalyptic legacies and the destructive unravelling of the 'ongoing catastrophe' (and 'environmental fantasy' as Macdonald puts it) that is late petro-capitalism.⁸⁷³ The world to which the reader is introduced is one dominated by 'hyper-capitalism,' as Díaz's unnamed narrator puts it, in which catastrophic climate change, perpetuated by petro-modernity's gradual but visible breakdown, has already begun to take effect. It soon becomes clear that this deterioration is occurring, in the text, alongside generalised political instability and onslaughts of disease across the island of Hispaniola. Thus located in a recognisable, yet dystopian, near-future, 'Monstro,' narrates the arrival of a disease in Haiti that leads to the zombification of its 'viktim's'. This disease, and the socio-ecological crises that accompany it, tip an already precarious Haitian society into catastrophe.

Familiar forms of petro-modernity saturate the text's lifeworld (systems of transportation, weapons of war-making, media propaganda, beauty products and standards, and so on). The narrative, while being set in Santo Domingo from the perspective of Díaz's unnamed narrator, discusses the outbreak of the zombifying virus in Haiti. The 'infection' introduced at the beginning of the narrative, which the Dominicans call 'La Negrura [...] The Darkness,' first manifests itself in Haiti, 'on a small boy in the relocation camps outside Port-au-Prince, in the hottest March in recorded history'.⁸⁷⁴ The backdrop to this first instance of contagion is that of imminent ecological apocalypse and economic breakdown—of 'Droughts [...] and the General Economic Collapse' as Díaz's narrator puts it.⁸⁷⁵

The unravelling of capitalism's world-ecology in the text first manifests itself in climatic changes, sudden and severe temperature shifts across the island. 'Everybody blamed the heat. Blamed the Calientazo. Shit, a hundred days over 105 degrees F. in our region alone, the planet cooking like a chimi and down to its last five trees [...] all sorts of bizarre outbreaks already in play: diseases no one had names for, zoonotics by the pound'.⁸⁷⁶ These upward fluctuations in temperature signal a shift towards an increasingly precarious ecological lifeworld. Caribbean marine ecology, for example, is extinct: 'coral reefs' are 'adios on the

⁸⁷³ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁷⁴ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁶ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

ocean floor, but [...] alive and well on the arms and backs and heads of the infected'.⁸⁷⁷ As Díaz's narrator informs the reader, infectious diseases have been running rampant for some time in this dystopian lifeworld. The protagonist's mother, for example, had been:

[...] bitten by a rupture virus that tore through half her organs before the doctors got savvy to it. No chance she was going to be taken care of back North. Not with what the cheapest nurses charged. So she rented out the Brooklyn house to a bunch of Mexos, took that loot and came home [...] Say what you want, but family on the Island was still more reliable for the heavy shit, like, say, dying, than family in the North. Medicine was cheaper, too, with the flying territory in Haina, its Chinese factories pumping out pharma like it was romo, growing organ sheets by the mile, and for somebody as sick as my mother, with only rental income to live off, being there was what made sense.⁸⁷⁸

Despite this onslaught of diseases, it is made clear in the passage above that the unequal distribution of social benefits (employment and health care, for example) continues – business-as-usual in a late neoliberal paradigm – alongside the uneven exposure of different social groups to disease and economic precarity. The U.S. private medical system continues to be as unaffordable as ever and the reference to the mass production of petro-based pharmaceuticals in Haina (often referred to as the Chernobyl of the Dominican Republic) echoes the similarities of Díaz's invented society to our own, further emphasising the ecological vulnerabilities and economic inequalities of late, crisis-ridden neoliberal capitalism. Against this bleak backdrop, the arrival of 'La Negrura' is initially considered to be 'the joke of the year [...] At first, Negroes thought it *funny*. A disease that could make a Haitian blacker? [...] Everybody in our sector accusing everybody else of having it. You couldn't display a blemish or catch some sun on the street without the jokes starting. Someone would point to a spot on your arm and say, ¿Diablo, haitiano, que te pasó?'"⁸⁷⁹ The naming of the virus 'La Negrura' does two things: it self-consciously racialises the disease and it explicitly, mockingly derides blackness. These two factors belie a serious point made by Díaz with regards to the racism and hostility faced by Haitians, from both their neighbours and the wider world since

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁷⁹ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

the Revolution. Racist ideologies produced from the plantation system have led to the internalisation of race differences in Haiti and in the D.R. This ‘colour complex’ has since produced terms such as blanqueamiento (‘racial whitening’) which in both nations of Hispaniola have enabled the creation of race and class-based hierarchies, which exist to this day amongst both the ruling elites and ordinary people. Juxtaposed with the term blanqueamiento, then, is negrura. ‘Monstro’ seeks to dislodge these traditional concepts, harnessing the term ‘blackness’ in order to destabilise its meaning. This is partly done through ironic humour which mocks blackness as a condition. However, behind this sardonic playfulness is the obvious fact that ‘blackness’ is not a condition at all, but that the internalisation of plantation racism has made it so, indelibly marking peoples of African descent as inferior. It is an attitude that has persevered into the contemporary day, suggested in ‘Monstro’ in the narrator’s characteristically slangy, casual asides: ‘My tíos were like, Someone needs to drop a bomb on those people, and even though I was one of the pro-Haitian domos, at the time I was thinking it might have been a mercy.’⁸⁸⁰ Even in moments of crises indicative of the societal unravelling of capitalism’s world-ecology, racist hierarchies and ideologies are swiftly mobilized and reverted to, with poor, black bodies almost instinctually dehumanised and designated as disposable populations.

As Sarah Quesada points out, La Negrura is ‘both racially selective and racial in and of itself’.⁸⁸¹ The disease is not only racial in that it makes a Haitian ‘blacker’ but also preys on economic vulnerability, which is, of course, inextricably connected to race. As Díaz writes, la Negrura ‘didn’t cause too much panic because it seemed to hit only the sickest of the sick, viktimis who had nine kinds of ill already in them.’ Indeed, the story makes an important point about the invisibility of those that Bale calls ‘disposable people’.⁸⁸² Díaz’s narrator attempts to draw the reader into a racist complicity when he asks that as long as it is only the poorest ‘Haitian types [...] getting fucked up [...] who fucking care[s], right?’⁸⁸³ This description of La Negrura, read in the current context of 2020, has unmistakable connections to the global

⁸⁸⁰ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁸¹ Sarah Quesada, ‘A Planetary Warning? The Multilayered Caribbean Zombie in ‘Monstro’, in *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, ed. by Minica Hanna, Jennifer Harford Vargas and José David Saldivar (London: Duke University Press, 2016) pp. 191–314 (p. 294).

⁸⁸² Kevin Bale, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁸⁸³ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

COVID-19 pandemic and the class- and race-based inequalities that the coronavirus has thrown into stark relief.⁸⁸⁴

As Díaz's protagonist puts it, for a short period there is 'a huge rah-rah, but when the experts determined that it wasn't communicable in the standard ways, and that normal immune systems appeared to be at no kind of risk, the renminbi and the attention and the savvy went elsewhere. And since it was just poor Haitian types getting fucked up — no real margin in that. Once the initial bulla died down, only a couple of underfunded teams stayed on [...] for six, seven months it was just a horrible Haitian disease'.⁸⁸⁵ The point made here by Díaz connects to Nixon's work, particularly his statement that it is the global poor, those most 'lacking [in] resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence, whether it be social or environmental [...] their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives'.⁸⁸⁶ In the story, these poor 'Haitian types' are initially ignored in 'Monstro', even as they become the 'principal casualties' of the disease. The outbreak, which begins with 'a couple of hundred new infections each month in the

⁸⁸⁴ In 'Monstro,' it is impoverished people of colour who are at highest risk of death when they contract the virus; a reality starkly mirrored during the Covid-19 pandemic of early 2020 (where it has been demonstrated, in the U.K. context that the death-rate amongst black African and Pakistani people is two and a half times higher than that of the white English population, and amongst Afro-Caribbean communities the death rate is 1.7 times higher than for white Britons). This disproportionality has much to do with the higher levels of economic precarity experienced by black and minority ethnic (BAME) populations in the United Kingdom, as well as the fact that (for example) one third of working-age black Africans work in key worker roles and are thus more likely to contract the virus (this is 50% more than the white British population). In the U.S. too, black people have died at almost three times the rate of whites. 'Across the country,' as journalist Ed Pilkington writes, 'African Americans have died at a rate of 50.3 per 100,000 people, compared with 20.7 for whites, 22.9 for Latinos and 22.7 for Asian Americans.' He notes that the racial disparities in the US death figures became apparent relatively early on in the pandemic, particularly in large cities where black neighborhoods were hit much harder than wealthier white areas. When New York City produced its first racial breakdown of Covid-19 deaths in April it showed that Latino and black New Yorkers, especially in the outer boroughs including Queens and the Bronx, were experiencing death rates that were at least twice those of whites and Asians.' Across the world-system too, it is the poor populations in peripheral nations who suffer disproportionately under anti-virus restrictions — those living in the slums of Mumbai or Lagos, the favelas of São Paulo or the barrios of Mexico City, Caracas or Bogotá do not have the privilege of social distancing. For impoverished peoples in third world nations, who rely on the informal economy and who live hand-to-mouth each day, the policy of lockdown is impossible to maintain, for it means stay at home to starve.

Haroon Siddique, 'British BAME Covid-19 death rate 'more than twice that of whites'', *Guardian*, 1 May 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/01/british-bame-covid-19-death-rate-more-than-twice-that-of-whites>> [Accessed 1 May 2020]

Ed Pilkington, 'Black Americans dying of Covid-19 at three times the rate of white people', *Guardian*, 20 May 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/black-americans-death-rate-covid-19-coronavirus>> <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/black-americans-death-rate-covid-19-coronavirus>> [Accessed 20 May 2020]

⁸⁸⁵ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁸⁶ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 4.

camps and around Port-au-Prince' receives little recognition from the government or local authorities.⁸⁸⁷ The sick Haitians are the same impoverished citizens who have been inadequately housed in 'relocation camps' in Haiti and who, in the Dominican Republic, suffer the consequences of a racist immigration policy, 'deported over a freckle,' as Díaz puts it.⁸⁸⁸ The point which Díaz seeks to drive home is one which has been made by Vandana Shiva earlier in this work. Late neoliberal capitalism and petro-modernity have created 'new kinds of subaltern, redundant, structurally unemployed, immiserated communities who are completely ignored in this latest petro-powered phase of capitalist relations. These populations have nothing to gain from what petro-capitalist civilisations have to offer and they are the hardest hit by ecological catastrophes'.⁸⁸⁹ As Díaz himself writes in his article for the *Boston Review*, '[...] in the old days a zombie was a figure whose life and work had been captured by magical means. Old zombies were expected to work around the clock with no relief. The new zombie cannot expect work of any kind; it just waits around to die'.⁸⁹⁰ In the current petro-capitalist moment, the zombie of Díaz's story represents a new kind of absolute surplus population, who receive very little of the benefits of petro-capitalism, are disproportionately affected by its ecological consequences, and are cast off by the economic system, which is unable to fully exploit their cheap labour (as it did in its earlier phases) thanks to the downturn in the global economy post-2000. However, as Nixon notes, 'if the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it has also intensified resistance, whether through isolated site-specific struggles or through activism that has reached across national boundaries in an effort to build translocal alliances'.⁸⁹¹ What Nixon calls a 'resurgent environmentalism of the poor' can be read in the zombie uprising which ensues in 'Monstro,' as will soon become clear.⁸⁹²

Understanding all that the zombie represents, Díaz employs the figure of this monster in order to chart a history of the racial Capitalocene. As Quesada remarks, Díaz is able to trace how 'slave based economic structures developed into a neo-liberal notion of the free market' through the zombie figure, at once very traditionally Haitian but also re-incarnated for the age

⁸⁸⁷ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012
 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁸⁸ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012
 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁸⁸⁹ Shiva, *Soil Not Oil*, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹⁰ Díaz, 'Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal' <<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>>

⁸⁹¹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 4.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

of oil.⁸⁹³ Understanding that the climate crisis is already racialised, Díaz is able to conjoin within the figure of his zombie the history of the slave trade and its racialised regimes of labour to the contemporary uses of black people as Cheap Labour, both commodified and easily dispensable. The language of ‘Monstro’ effectively and repeatedly plays on the social ecology of the zombie in multiple time frames. For example, Díaz’s reference to the ‘coral reefs’ on the bodies of the infected is a nod to the slaves who were thrown overboard during the Middle Passage and became part of the ocean floor.⁸⁹⁴ While acknowledging this aspect of slavery, of the connection between the bodies of the enslaved and their landscapes, Díaz’s zombies are at the same time a part of the environmental deterioration which is a fallout from petro-modernity’s gradual and toxic unravelling. As such, the zombie in ‘Monstro’ embodies not only the problem of environmental despoliation, but also the cancerous toxification of bodies in areas where petro-chemical production and hydrocarbon extraction take place. This concept — that is, the toxification of bodies exposed to harmful chemicals, bodies which reflect the processes of oil extraction and production — is not merely a fictional sf trope, but is connected to the wider issue of environmental racism.⁸⁹⁵ In her article ‘Lessons from Love Island,’ Alice Mah describes what has come to be known as Louisiana’s Cancer Alley:

⁸⁹³ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 298.

⁸⁹⁴ This relationship between enslaved Africans and the sea has been studied and discussed at length, and is part of what Édouard Glissant has called the ‘language of landscape’ that exists in Caribbean writing. Beverley Omerod writes that ‘history waits, latent in Caribbean nature, which is filled with sorrowful reminders of slavery and repression’ as the Caribbean and Atlantic are, quite literally. Benítez-Rojo, meanwhile, expounds on the specific nature of the Caribbean sea, defining Caribbean peoples as ‘aquatic’ rather than terrestrial, communities who live in a ‘sinuous culture [...] a culture of the meta-archipelago, a chaos that returns [...] a continual flow of paradoxes’ which is marine in its currents, flows and tidal ebbs of continual transformation. Édouard Glissant too considers ‘the image of submarine roots’ which ‘makes the Caribbean sea [the] [...] the fertile repository of New World poetics [...] it should not be seen as a tropical Mediterranean, not an inland, centralising body of water but one that explodes outwards, thereby dissolving all systems of centring or totalising thought’. Numerous authors and artists have explored the notion of underwater zombies and of enslaved peoples who have fused with the ocean environment to become part of an ecology of slavery. Derek Walcott’s ‘The Sea is History,’ Italian director Lucio Fulci’s film ‘Zombie Flesh Eaters,’ and the underwater sculptures of Jason deCaires Taylor are examples of this in popular culture.

Beverley Omerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 1-16 (p. 2); Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 146; Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p. 11.

⁸⁹⁵ For a more thorough discussion of the issue of environmental racism, which this thesis unfortunately does not have the space to expound upon, see Dorceta E. Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution and Residential Mobility* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: Critical America Series, 2000); David Naguib Pellow, ‘Environmental Racism: Inequality in a Toxic World’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, ed. by Mary Romero and Eric Margolis (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), pp. 147-164; Gordon Walker, *Environmental Justice: Concepts, Evidence and Politics* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2011); Dora Ramírez-Dhoore, ‘Dissecting Environmental Racism’, in *The Natural World in Latin American Literatures: Ecocritical Essays on Twentieth Century Writings*, ed. by Adrian Taylor Kane (London: McFarland and co., Ltd Publishers, 2010); for environmental racism in a

[...] an eighty-five mile petrochemical corridor of more than 150 petrochemical factories along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Many researchers and activists have noted the sad and almost unbelievable story of the transformation of the region, from slave plantations to petrochemical plants, where poor, rural African-Americans, descended from slaves, continue to live and work in conditions that are dehumanizing and that endanger their lives. Several environmental campaigns have been launched against these injustices, particularly in relation to environmental racism.⁸⁹⁶

Real-life examples of the consequences of industrial output on human bodies, such as Cancer Alley and the Love Canal of New York, illustrate the fact that the physical infrastructures of petro-chemical and oil extraction are, more often than not, sited in working-class communities of colour, whether in peripheral zones of the core or in the global peripheries.⁸⁹⁷ As Vergès notes, ‘race is the single most important factor in determining where toxic waste facilities are sited in the U.S., and that the siting of these facilities in communities of color is the intentional result of local, state and federal land-use policies’ as well as discriminatory practices in housing patterns.⁸⁹⁸ Indeed, Devon Peña points out with regards to the U.S.

specifically North-American context, see Paula McClain, *Can We All Get Along? Racial and Ethnic Minorities in American Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 2018); Daniel Faber, *The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Environmental Justice Movements in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998). Of course, the seminal work on ‘toxic discourse’ in the context of environmental racism was done by Rachel Carson and Lawrence Buell. See their respective groundbreaking works: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁸⁹⁶ Alice Mah, ‘Lessons from Love Canal: Toxic Expertise and Environmental Justice’, *Open Democracy*, 7 August 2013 </https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/lessons-from-love-canal-toxic-expertise-and-environmental-justice/“ https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/lessons-from-love-canal-toxic-expertise-and-environmental-justice/> [Accessed 1 January 2020].

⁸⁹⁷ The bulk of Mah’s article examines the social consequences of toxic pollution from over 20,000 tonnes of chemical waste that was dumped in the Love Canal municipality of New York, and then ‘discovered buried beneath an elementary school in the working class residential community of LaSalle in Niagara Falls, New York’. Mah notes that ‘the health effects for the residents were staggering, with high incidences of cancer, miscarriages, rare diseases, and birth defects. It was the first US state of emergency to be declared over a human-made disaster, and it was a sobering lesson about the effects of toxic pollution.’ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Vergès, ‘Racial Capitalocene’, in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London and New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 72-83, reprinted at <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>> [Accessed 10 January 2020].

As Foster and Cole write, ‘environmental outcomes are instead a manifestation of racially discriminatory practices that continue to exist in our society. The inequitable distribution of environmental hazards, particularly commercial waste facilities, can be traced historically to the patterns of residential segregation and its resulting structural inequalities. Spatial segregation and isolation are key features of racial inequality in our society. Racial segregation, in turn, shapes how groups are viewed and what type of resources they get. This spatial inequality creates a vicious, self-perpetuating circle of causation, resulting in uniquely disadvantaged communities.’

context that ‘three of every four toxic waste sites in the United States’ are ‘located in low income communities of color’.⁸⁹⁹ Of course, when we consider not only peripheral regions of the core, but peripheral nations themselves, the reality of environmental racism becomes even clearer. From Bhopal to the Niger Delta, it is poor bodies of colour that suffer the unequal consequences of the disproportionate and unequal distribution of environmental hazards. From ‘garbage dumps, air pollution, lead poisoning, toxic waste production and disposal, pesticide poisoning, noise pollution, occupational hazards, and rat bites’ to the location of petro-based toxic waste facilities, factories and radioactive waste, it is poor and non-white communities which bear the brunt of exposure.⁹⁰⁰

Díaz is undoubtedly cognizant of the reality of environmental racism; *Monstro* depicts to the reader zombies which encode both the exposure of communities to industrial toxicity and socio-economic marginalization at the peripheries of the world economy. However, as the illness progresses, the ‘viktims’ do not die, as might be expected, but instead seem to mutate: their symptoms include ‘black rotting rugose masses fruiting out of bodies,’ a ‘low body temperature’ which changes to ‘radiant blue’ (a common hospital code signifying a dead patient), ‘lingering on and on’.⁹⁰¹ Instead of dying, they begin ‘roaming about the camp at odd hours’ ‘never sleeping’ beginning a chorus of orchestrated ‘shrieks’ and collective silences.⁹⁰² Díaz’s descriptions of their toxic, diseased bodies is reminiscent of victims from nuclear or industrial disasters – Chernobyl or Bhopal victims, for example – with the reference to the ‘rugose masses’ that erupt from oozing, toxified bodies. This zombification of segments of the Haitian population (and within this, the blending of various tropes, from marine extinction to petrochemical exposure) is the tipping point at which they ironically cease to be disposable

Sheila R. Foster and Luke W. Cole, ‘Environmental Racism: Beyond the Distributive Paradigm’, in *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* ((New York: Critical America Series, 2000), pp. 54–79 (p. 66). For more on racial segregation in the U.S., see Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993); Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of how our Government Segregated America* (New York and London: Liveright, 2018); David Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice: How Ghettos Happen, Why Ghettos Happen* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

⁸⁹⁹ Devon G. Peña, ‘Identity, Place and Communities of Resistance’, in *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*, eds. by Julian Agyeman, Robert D. Bullard, and Bob Evans (London: Earthscan Publications, 2003), pp. 146–67 (p. 141).

⁹⁰⁰ Foster and Cole, *From the Ground Up*, p. 54.

As Foster and Cole note, ‘in studies that looked at distribution of these [environmental] hazards by income and race, race was most often found to be the better predictor of exposure to environmental dangers. Later studies have in large part confirmed these conclusions.’ Foster and Cole, *From the Ground Up*, p. 55.

⁹⁰¹ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020].

⁹⁰² Ibid.

communities living on the brink of society. Instead, the zombified Haitians gain agency and power through their collectivity. At first the compulsive gathering of the zombies seems to be '[...] nothing, nothing at all.' Then, as Díaz's narrator recollects, '[...] some real eerie plep started happening.' As the virus escalates:

Doctors began reporting a curious change in the behavior of infected patients: they wanted to be together, in close proximity, all the time. They no longer tolerated being separated from other infected, started coming together in the main quarantine zone, just outside Champ de Mars, the largest of the relocation camps. All the vikims seemed to succumb to this ingathering compulsion. Some went because they claimed they felt "safer" in the quarantine zone; others just picked up and left without a word to anyone, trekked halfway across the country as though following a homing beacon. Once vikims got it in their heads to go, no dissuading them. Left family, friends, children behind. Walked out on wedding days, on swell business. Once they were in the zone, nothing could get them to leave. When authorities tried to distribute the infected vikims across a number of centers, they either wouldn't go or made their way quickly back to the main zone.

As Sarah Quesada explains, their need to be in close proximity all the time is not dissimilar to the 'gatherings of slaves in the palenques during the plantation era'.⁹⁰³ The 'vikims' compulsion 'to return' to the 'quarantine zone' is a reminder of the 'slaves anguish at [...] the inability to return to the African west coast. In 'Monstro,' instead of seeking a homeland the infected pursue their developed family, similar to that of the slaves forming a community in the New World'.⁹⁰⁴

As the infection progresses, the violence escalates. Eventually, in Díaz's own inimitable words, 'a lockdown was initiated and a team of W.H.O docs attempted to enter the infected hospital in the quarantine zone. Nine went in but nobody came out [...] and that more or less was when shit went Rwanda'.⁹⁰⁵ The explosion of violence on the part of the infected population is broadcast on Dominican news.⁹⁰⁶ 'It took two weeks, two fucking weeks, for the

⁹⁰³ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 307.

⁹⁰⁴ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 307.

⁹⁰⁵ Díaz, 'Monstro' *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹⁰⁶ As Díaz's narrator tells us:

enormity of the situation to dawn on the Great Powers,’ until U.S. troops are gathered and a ‘battle force was ordered into the affected areas’ with the whole of Haiti ‘placed under quarantine’.⁹⁰⁷ The ‘Joint Chiefs of Staff’ assemble and ‘within hours a bomber wing scrambled out of Southern Command in Puerto Rico’ (implying that the bombers are acting on U.S. orders, given Puerto Rico’s status as U.S. territory), ‘[...] loaded with enough liquid asskick to keep all of Port-au-Prince burning red-hot for a week’.⁹⁰⁸ The ‘Detonation Event’ results in what is presumably a nuclear warhead being dropped onto Haiti, turning ‘the entire world white’ for ‘three full seconds’ and triggering ‘a quake that was felt all across the Island’, burning out ‘the optic nerve in Dr. DeGraff’s right eye’ (in a moment which contains biblically apocalyptic overtones) when the character ‘chanced one final glance at her birth city just as the ordnance was sailing down’.⁹⁰⁹ While the dropping of a bomb to level Haiti is imaginary, this notion of a contemporary, wholly destructive catastrophe echoes the earthquake of 2010 in the ruin, panic and damage it produced. The fact that the bombing ‘turned the entire world white’ is significant. Here Díaz inverts Eurocentric notions of whiteness and blackness. In this instance, whiteness as the counter-point of its binary other is produced by such intense illumination that it does not in fact produce clarity. It is literally blinding, burning out DeGraff’s eye, and figuratively, as it obstructs views of reality as she tries to peer back to catch a glimpse of the blast. Whiteness or light equals occlusion and blindness, whereas darkness or blackness is associated with revelation and truth.⁹¹⁰ This point is emphasised by Díaz’s own words; the author stated in his 2011 article on the Haitian earthquake that ‘apocalypse is a darkness that gives us light’ (as the 2010 earthquake did in

All the relocation camps near the quarantine zone were consumed in what can only be described as a straight massacre. An outbreak of homicidal violence, according to the initial reports. People who had never lifted a finger in anger their whole lives — children, viejos, aid workers, mothers of nine — grabbed knives, machetes, sticks, pots, pans, pipes, hammers, and started attacking their neighbours, their friends, their pastors, their children, their husbands, their infirm relatives, complete strangers. Berserk murderous rage [...] they just kept coming and coming [...] stopped only when they were killed [...] Nearly two hundred thousand Haitians fled the violence, leaving the Possessed, as they became known, fully in control of the twenty-two camps in the vicinity of the quarantine zone.

Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹⁰⁷ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹⁰⁸ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹⁰⁹ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012.

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹¹⁰ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 302.

Haiti insofar as it revealed the systemic exploitation and underdevelopment to which the country has been subjected). Thus, darkness is purposefully recoded to subvert older racist ideologies. Of course, this dynamic is also seen in the dichotomy of *el blanquamiento* and *la negrura*; Díaz reverses normative, Eurocentric logics of colour binaries, introducing a new concept of colour and race that aims to set the Americas free of the burden of the coloniality of power which has proved so historically damaging.

The end of ‘Monstro,’ then, paints a truly apocalyptic vision for the reader, where the ‘viktims’ turn entirely monstrous. In doing so, they become liberated (at least, for a time) from a society in which they have been, for so long, so entirely oppressed. Their turn to cannibalism is described by Díaz’s protagonist with disbelief. ‘Initially, no one believed the hysterical evacuees. Forty-foot-tall cannibal motherfuckers running loose on the Island? Negro, please. Until a set of soon-to-be iconic Polaroids made it out on one clipper showing what later came to be called a Class 2 in the process of putting a slender broken girl in its mouth. Beneath the photo someone had scrawled: Numbers 11:18. *Who shall give us flesh to eat?*’⁹¹¹ Sarah Quesada points out that the cannibalism of Díaz’s zombies encourages a reading of the petro-zombie alongside the memory of the original Carib populations who were wiped out during European colonisation but have been fittingly avenged by this contemporary surplus-population-turned-zombie.⁹¹² By the end of ‘Monstro,’ the situation in Haiti has escalated to the point of irreparable catastrophe. The breakdown of technology, the use of a nuclear weapon and the onslaught of the cannibal zombies have all become part of a symbolic apocalypse marking the end of a certain kind of normalised (petro-inflected) modernity. Simultaneously, Haiti has become (once again in its long history) a security threat:

Nothing was working except for old diesel burners and the archaic motos with no points or capacitors. People were trying out different explanations. An earthquake. A nuke. A Carrington event. The Coming of the Lord. Reports arriving over the failing fatlines claimed that Port-au-Prince had been destroyed, that Haiti had been destroyed, that thirteen million screaming Haitian refugees were threatening the borders, that Dominican military units had been authorized to meet the *invaders* – the term the gov was now using – with ultimate force.⁹¹³

⁹¹¹ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

⁹¹² Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 309.

⁹¹³ Díaz, ‘Monstro’ *The New Yorker*, 28 May 2012

<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>> [Accessed 12 January 2020]

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault writes that ‘far from a Rabelesian carnivalesque freak, and more in the sense of “out of normalcy”, a monster is a development of something beyond our comprehension’ which may point to a deeper message’.⁹¹⁴ Foucault notes that ‘monsters characteristically wish to remain in existence,’ adjusting to environmental fluctuations, emerging with the occurrence of ‘natural revolutions’ such as the dramatic ‘Calientazo’ staged in ‘Monstro’, an environment in which the zombies adapt and eventually flourish.⁹¹⁵ According to Foucault, while the monster is feared for its ‘knotting together’ it is also ‘a solid expanse’ or ‘merely the fragmentary result of a much more tightly knit, much finer continuity’.⁹¹⁶ In other words, the zombie figure is a more evolved prototype of human beings, designed to outlast them thanks to its ability to form kin. As Quesada elucidates ‘far from abnormal, fearsome creatures, they are the ideal artefact to teach humanity a lesson: just as memory is necessary to avoid the calamities endured in our past, in a sense, monsters are also essential as a warning for the future to urge a stubbornly delusional society from further damaging the planet, monsters signal caution’.⁹¹⁷ Díaz’s zombies, then, are both symbols and reminders to a society which cannot face the fact of its own devastation.

‘The Blue Hill’ — Pito nou lèd nou la:

In 2011, Haitian author Rodney Saint-Éloi’s short story ‘The Blue Hill’ was published in the *Haiti Noir* anthology, one of many Haitian literary responses to the earthquake. Saint-Éloi’s story demonstrates the challenges of writing in the aftermath of catastrophe. The surrealist, allegorical form of the story allows for the exploration of social realities that might otherwise be obscured by an orthodox realist narrative. Yet the text contains numerous silences and evasions that suggest the difficulties faced by literature in its attempts to register disastrous moments such as the 2010 earthquake, where, in many ways, language fails entirely. Saint-Éloi’s reliance on sf tropes, particularly his vivid, disturbing depiction of ecological apocalypse and rampant disease enables the exploration of themes which (as in ‘Monstro’)

⁹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), pp. 156–59 (p. 156).

⁹¹⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 156.

⁹¹⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 157.

⁹¹⁷ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 312.

reflect back to the reader the nature of petro-modernity's breakdown in the twenty-first century, and the cannibalising tendencies of late capitalism.

The eponymous 'blue hill' of the story is a toxic waste dump, an 'open gash in the earth that poisons everything and will, eventually, eat up the legs of children and rot the roots of plants, cause the dogs, the flies and the fish to disappear'.⁹¹⁸ The 'reeking blue toxic trash' is received by Haiti from an unnamed neighbouring country which 'has an overload of chemical refuse and needs to find generous neighbours who can house it for them. So far from God indeed. Proximity is sometimes a curse'.⁹¹⁹ There is a strong suggestion in the phrase, 'So far from God indeed' that this neighbouring country is the U.S. The words echo that of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, who said of his own country, 'Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos' (Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the U.S.). In return for the 'so-called favor' of housing the toxic waste and 'under the pretext of us being the twin city of God-knows-where,' the city's wealthy citizens, the 'military, the ministers and the honourable members of government' as well as the elite of this un-named neighbouring country, make 'tons of money'.⁹²⁰ The beginning of the narrative, with its presentation of ecological despoliation, national corruption and international imperialism, acts as an explicit criticism of the capitalist practices of using peripheral nations as a literal dumping ground, in a system that simultaneously fouls the land, displaces and damages native communities, and oppresses the working-classes while rewarding the international (and local) capitalist classes.

The ship that comes to deliver the waste puts the 'wharf' and soon the rest of the city, 'under military watch'.⁹²¹ It is 'full of guards with the faces of unleashed and trained dogs eager to stuff themselves with nigger meat'.⁹²² 'You could see battle dress, golden flashers, and a thousand boots of the Special Forces. On their heads were green berets and on their clean-shaven faces were plastered a kind of cynical seriousness, a conquering look of *What do I care about petty local squabbles?*'⁹²³ The reference to the Special Forces 'invasion'⁹²³ explicitly echoes the history of the U.S.'s violent and brutally racist occupation of Haiti from 1915–

⁹¹⁸ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 302.

⁹¹⁹ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 302.

⁹²⁰ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 302.

⁹²¹ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 303.

⁹²² Ibid., p. 303.

⁹²³ Ibid., p. 303.

1934.⁹²⁴ The U.S. troops arrive to ensure the unobstructed dumping of waste into the dump site but at the same time, take the opportunity to make their presence known. ‘The chemical trash-dumping troops went around every street, every neighbourhood, showing off their machine guns at every window. They imposed a curfew without warning. It was just a matter of military strategy, letting people know that they had taken over the city. So every mouth stayed quiet. Local men were rounded up and forced to work day and night for a whole week to burrow everything into the blue hill’.⁹²⁵ The people’s acquiescence to the military policing of their communities and acceptance of the despoliation of their environment (a zombification of sorts) results in the outbreak of a ‘blue disease’ as the U.S. troops bring in ever increasing quantities of noxious waste. This quiet acquiescence soon becomes actualised in the form of illness. ‘Soon, many residents became covered with blue pustules, large blue stinking marks. Lacerations invaded bodies. Slashes marked their faces. Gashes on their bellies’.⁹²⁶ ‘Doctors couldn’t give a name to that blue body-and-mind disease which was spreading as quickly as mad grass. They say it’s a matter of national security, and that’s why it’s not being mentioned in the papers or on the radio’.⁹²⁷ The spread of the ‘blue fever madness’ turns the entire town into ‘blue-hill-digging zombies’ who either are forced to actively participate in their own exploitation or hide away in their homes to avoid the onslaught.⁹²⁸ Of course, the connection

⁹²⁴ In the nineteen-year-long North-American occupation of Haiti by North-America, fifteen thousand Haitians were killed, Edwidge Danticat reminds us. The violence against Haitians was quotidian and brutal. The NAACP executive secretary, Herbert J. Seligman wrote in the weekly progressive newspaper, on the 10 July 1920, of the situation in Haiti:

Military camps have been built throughout the island. The property of natives has been taken for military use. Haitians carrying a gun were for a time shot on sight. Machine guns have been turned on crowds of unarmed natives, and United States Marines have, by accounts which several of them gave me in casual conversation, not troubled to investigate how many were killed or wounded.

Edwidge Danticat, ‘The Long Legacy of Occupation in Haiti’, *The New Yorker*, 28 July 2015 <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/haiti-us-occupation-hundred-year-anniversary>> [Accessed 10 January 2020]. Seligman quoted in David Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 133.

For further detail regarding the racism of U.S Marines, the atrocities committed against Haitian civilians and the tactics of fear used by the Americans in their attempt to intimidate and brutalise the Haitian people, see: Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Leon D. Pamphile, *Contrary Destinies: A Century of America’s Occupation, Deoccupation and Reoccupation of Haiti* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015); Hans Schmidt, *The United States’ Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

⁹²⁵ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 303.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., p. 303.

⁹²⁷ Ibid., p. 303.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., p. 306.

made between the toxic waste and the “invaders” who intend to use Haitian land for its disposal, all the while intimidating and subjugating the Haitian people, is a strong suggestion of the zombifying influence of imperialist, foreign occupations and capitalist class oppression in peripheral nations. It is this fact which is arguably the central theme of the story, with the zombification of the Haitian people coming to represent the catastrophic consequences of foreign occupation in peripheral nation-states, where impoverished populations become increasingly victimised and displaced by invading forces of the global north.

Saint-Éloi’s description of the disease, moreover, seems to be in conversation with the zombie outbreak of ‘Monstro’. Like Díaz, Saint-Éloi uses the trope of zombification as a form of social critique. The rapid onset of infection that causes physical deformities in great swathes of the Haitian population contains within it a commentary on the impoverished, 242ocalizes242242d communities who are either used exploitatively as a labour force in the despoliation of their own environments, or who are increasingly 242ocalizes242242d by foreign occupation and economic policies. The disease’s increasing grip over Haitian society, and the zombie-like behaviour of ever-larger segments of the population, signals an increasing helplessness in the face of environmental disaster. In Díaz’s text, the zombie trope becomes the ‘operating principle for reading [the] resistance’ of impoverished peripheral communities within the context of a decolonial project.⁹²⁹ In ‘Blue Hill,’ they function as embodiments of a totally disenfranchised and alienated global poor, who are both completely exploited and entirely helpless. While both ‘sets’ of zombies (those of ‘Monstro’ and of ‘Blue Hill’) stand testament to the slow violence which disproportionately affects the most impoverished communities of peripheral nations (and peripheral regions of the core nations), ‘The Blue Hill’s’ zombies, unlike ‘Monstro’s’ do not return to seek revenge on the system that has exploited them and their land. Rather, their zombification is part of their total despair and acceptance of the end.

Saint-Éloi’s protagonist, a local policeman called ‘Detective Simidor’ is one of the few who ‘refused to accept the curfew’ imposed by the arrival of the North-Americans, and the breakout of the ‘blue disease,’ even though he feels himself suffering the consequences of the infectious outbreak.⁹³⁰ ‘Even though his massive, muscular physique hadn’t been affected, he immediately began to feel his mind slipping. For one thing, he could not remember any

⁹²⁹ Quesada, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, p. 303.

⁹³⁰ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 306.

specific moments from his past. Had he always been a bachelor locked up in a one-room house by the blue hill? Did he have a wife, children, who somehow never made it home? Was he a brother? An uncle? A nephew?⁹³¹ Despite his internal turmoil, Simidor 243ocalizes243 the exploitation of Haitian land and labour power by foreign powers and understands that the passivity of the people is to be their downfall. ‘He hadn’t slept since the blue invasion began. All he could think about was what he knew had once been a city – his city? – and the blue hill. How can the city defend itself, he wondered, when the people have barricaded themselves inside their homes, become accomplices of their own confinement, while peeking from behind their windows at the invading blue trash army?’⁹³² ‘Our cowardice is our suicide, he wanted to say. Our silence is our coffin’.⁹³³ He 243ocalizes243 the zombification of the people under the crises precipitated by the post-2000 breakdown of neoliberalism, the continuation of Haiti’s oppression by the U.S., and more than anything the need for sustainable, grassroots action. ‘The ground was soiled and [...] everything had been contaminated [...] they would have to yell to be heard [...] they would have to move heaven and earth to shed light onto the graveyard the country has become. Life on your knees is no life at all, he would say. Pito nou lèd nou la’.⁹³⁴ Simidor 243ocalizes243 that after centuries of oppression, the leading emotion of the people is despair: ‘despair is the only certainty here [...] Despair sticks to your skin; it’s your sweat, and the air you breathe. Despair is second nature from which everyone draws the joy of laughter and resilience together [...] but doom, like a valiant soldier, always comes hounding’.⁹³⁵

Saint-Éloi’s mingling of a surrealist form and use of sf tropes creates a powerful critique of the precipice on which Haiti stands, both ecologically and socially. Simidor 243ocalizes the apocalypse through which Haiti (and as Chancy reminds us, many nations of the global South) endure with his visions of mythical catastrophes. Despite their Biblical and fantastical overtones, these visions contain echoes of modern catastrophes such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that also took place in 2010. ‘Dragons now routinely walk on the sea’ he tells his community. ‘They unwrap their wings, their mouths of fire. In the mythical world from which these invaders and their blue trash have come, giant creatures swallow entire schools of

⁹³¹ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 304.

⁹³² Ibid., p. 304.

⁹³³ Ibid., p. 304.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., p. 304.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., p. 305.

flying fish and set ablaze incandescent beams that wipe shores clean. Millions of gallons of oil spew out of the core of the earth, from deep beneath the sea. A sign of the times: the end of the world is striding in'.⁹³⁶ If read through a petrocultural lens, moreover, the disease that the Haitian population of 'Blue Hill' experience may be linked to diseases caused by exposure to petroleum products and refining processes. All of these ideas contribute to the fact that underlies the text, of the crisis through which Haitians (and other populations of the global South) are living is one specifically related to the environmental crises of petro-capitalism. This particular iteration of capitalism, even as it destroys the planetary biosphere, seeks to uphold the underdevelopment of peripheral nations and the enriching of core nations (and regions), as extra-human nature continues to unravel.

Simidor understands that the 'end of the world' is synonymous with the irreversible and ecologically catastrophic consequences of climate change. 'Apocalypse, Apocalypse, he would tell them [...] the sky will sweep down on us like a vulture'.⁹³⁷ 'Lying there dying from the blue fog that is killing everyone', Simidor invokes Ogoun: 'Ogoun, he sings, we inhabit an isolated, pristine, gentle island with vegetation that escapes human comprehension. Rare species with names of flowers and trees that nobody knew existed. Before the blue hill, you could rest her in peace. We had named this place Ozanana, the new Promised Land [...] but what unites us now is the catastrophe of the blue hill'.⁹³⁸ The protagonist's singing contains Saint-Éloi's urgent call to the reader to recognize both the natural beauty of Haiti and the damage inflicted upon human and extra-human natures by foreign invasion and occupation. 'Simidor wishes he could tell his compatriots to pay attention, for the last days seem to be coming nearer. Write down the spectacle of the last hour, he would say, record all the details [...] describe everything you feel. We will at least have the elegance to bear witness. Our words will have served as brevaries for the castaways if any of them survive'.⁹³⁹ His apocalyptic supplications contain within them the awareness of the necessity of testimony in the face of catastrophe. Indeed, as Mark Anderson notes, 'localized interpretations must be wrought' in the face of disaster for testimony to have any real meaning; in this way, disaster narratives not only organize facts into a 'coherent, meaningful explanation of catastrophic experience but [...] also factualise their version of events through the careful use of documentary and

⁹³⁶ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 306.

⁹³⁷ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 305.

⁹³⁸ Ibid., p. 308.

⁹³⁹ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 308.

testimonial modes of discourse'.⁹⁴⁰ Simidor understands the value of bearing witness to catastrophe and, even as he is engulfed in his delirium, 'in his mind [...] starts to play a barbaric opera, a funereal song that pierces the air with all the wrenching cries of those dying around him'.⁹⁴¹ 'The agony of the earth is beginning today', he senses; the foreign invaders signal the beginning of the apocalypse and Simidor has a strong sense of imminent catastrophe, of the end times:

Down, down, tongues of the men of this country! Simidor's delirium shouts. The beast with a thousand horns has overtaken me. Is that really his goddamned mouth of fire? Is it the Apocalypse? The coffin is swaying over the crowd like a tongue. The army has risen on the waters. The stench of blood and mud on the faces of the dying. The images loop by, immense, worse than in the nightmares of the darkest days [...] Simidor rubs his eyes, turns to the other side of the bed and switches on the light for the last time. Is it day or night? The alarm clock says 4:53pm.⁹⁴²

In this passage, Saint-Éloi narrates his protagonist's overwhelming delirium and visions of Apocalypse, utilizing mythical, Biblical imagery to convey the hugeness of this sense of ending. Like other Haitian authors, he grapples with the enormity of finding 'a mode in which to write of an event the scale and magnitude of which seem to render most established literary modes redundant'.⁹⁴³ Using an 'allegorical, apocalyptic surrealism' Saint-Éloise is able to showcase the inequality of pre-earthquake conditions in Haiti, but across the world-system, and of petro-capitalism's cannibalising tendencies, particularly in peripheral locations where populations and extra-human natures are viewed as disposable.⁹⁴⁴

This blend of sf tropes – dystopian outbreaks of disease, the use of the zombie figure (which encode both Haitian history and the breakdown of petro-modernity) and the use of mythical imagery – creates a powerful and particular style in which Saint-Éloi stops just short of the earthquake's actual arrival. The power of the narrative lies in its awareness of this ongoing sense of catastrophe, and to stop just before the strike of the quake further underscores the

⁹⁴⁰ Mark D. Anderson, *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 7-8.

⁹⁴¹ Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 309.

⁹⁴² Saint-Éloi, *Haiti Noir*, p. 309.

⁹⁴³ Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line*, p. 80.

⁹⁴⁴ Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line*, p. 80.

‘long road to ruination,’ as Díaz puts it, which Haiti endured even before the 2010 disaster.⁹⁴⁵ ‘The Blue Hill,’ is a narrative which understands the ‘ongoing catastrophe’ of the Haitian past and peers forward, asking the question of: ‘What is to come? Does the apocalyptic moment mark a permanent, fatal end for the country, or will time recommence and a new and different epoch gradually take shape? The story seems to wish for the end, to embrace it in a sense, but it stops short of contemplating the future, unable [but also] most likely anxious and afraid to begin to consider what will come next’.⁹⁴⁶

Reading Caribbean Eco-Apocalypse ii): Acid Rain and Epidemics

As Martin Munro notes in the passage quoted above, Saint-Éloi’s narrative ‘stops short of contemplating the future’ – that is, the narrative stops short of registering the earthquake and its devastating aftermath. The earthquake struck at 4.53pm in Haiti, so it is significant that Saint-Éloi’s narrative terminates precisely at that moment.

In this section, I focus on *Tentacle* (*La Mucama de Omicunlé*, 2015) by Dominican author Rita Indiana, which like Saint-Éloi’s text, meditates on an explicitly dystopian image of the future. It charts a post-apocalyptic pan-Caribbean lifeworld (and the energy sources upon which this lifeworld is premised) while making connections between various incidents and periods from the timeline of the Caribbean’s ‘ongoing catastrophe’. Indiana traverses the history and consequences of European colonisation and transatlantic slavery; the region’s particular vulnerability to climatic disasters in the twenty-first century; and the aftermath of petro-modernity’s breakdown in a post-disaster context — all of which are, as Indiana makes clear, intimately connected to one another. The ‘future of acid rains and epidemics’ portrayed in the novel is one where catastrophes (be they political or ecological) have become routine.⁹⁴⁷ As in ‘Monstro,’ the catastrophe Indiana depicts is directly linked to (indeed, it is the aftermath of) the ongoing climate apocalypse faced by humanity in the twenty-first century. The lifeworld of *Tentacle* is one where Caribbean ecology has been irreparably ravaged, but where neoliberalism, having recovered from the crises of the early twenty-first century, continues as

⁹⁴⁵ Díaz, ‘Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal’, <<http://bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>> [Accessed 10 January 2020]

⁹⁴⁶ Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line*, p. 83.

⁹⁴⁷ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 128.

the dominant economic system. Like Díaz, Indiana presents to her reader the continuation of twenty-first century problems, which manage to persist into a profoundly dystopian future. *Tentacle* is particularly useful, then, for its presentation of the multiple catastrophes of Caribbean history due to the fact that the narrative shapeshifts around three time zones – post-apocalyptic Santo Domingo in 2027 to 2037, the seventeenth century Spanish Main and the early 2000s.

Indiana's tripartite narrative begins with the depiction of a post-apocalyptic Hispaniola and the introduction of young transgender protagonist, Acilde Figueroa. Acilde works as a rent-boy, impersonating a teenage male and offering sexual services to rich businessmen in order to pay her way into culinary school. One of her customers, Eric, customarily rapes her but then offers her a different job opportunity to that of sex work. In this way, the reader first meets Acilde in her roles as the 'mucama' (or maid) in the house of Esther Escudero, Omicunlé, an elderly Santería priestess, who has connections to the nation's current despotic president, Said Bona. The novel then goes on to sidestep linear temporality by depicting its second protagonist, Argenis, as living in the early 2000s. This second time frame is the one to which Acilde travels to in order to supposedly save the future by changing the decision of the president to store nuclear weapons. Having travelled through time, Acilde is able to take up two avatars. One is that of Giorgio Menicucci, an Italian philanthropist who with his wife Linda, establishes and funds a marine biology laboratory focused on the preservation of coral reefs and the protection of the island from future tidal waves. The other avatar is that of Roque, a seventeenth century leader of a band of pirates. By creating these three temporal universes, Indiana makes clear the connections between Hispaniola's colonial history, its twenty-first century present, and the consequences of eco-apocalypse in a specifically Caribbean context, devoid of speculative hope but infused with ecological symbolism. This seamless, rapid temporal leapfrogging allows for a wider consideration of Hispaniola's past and future: a 'science-fiction inspired survey' of Haitian and Dominican history connected to a speculation on what 'what it might mean to survive and adapt in the future'.⁹⁴⁸

In the novel's first few pages, the reader is introduced to a potent admixture of futuristic cyborg technology, ecological apocalypse and violent (but to a certain extent, familiar) immigration policies in a dystopian Santo Domingo. While 'engaging in the day's

⁹⁴⁸ Sam Ginsberg, 'Tentacle, Rita Indiana', *Full Stop*, <https://www.full-stop.net/2019/05/21/reviews/sam-ginsburg/tentacle-rita-indiana/> [Date accessed: 13/7/2020]

first tasks' Acilde listens to the doorbell ring in Esther's home. 'Bringing her thumb and index finger together, Acilde positions her eye and activates the security camera that faces the street, where she sees one of the many Haitians who've crossed the border, fleeing from the quarantine declared on the other half of the island'.⁹⁴⁹ Esther's personal 'security mechanism' recognises the 'virus in the black man' and subsequently 'releases a lethal gas'.⁹⁵⁰ This gas succeeds in both killing him instantly 'and simultaneously informing the neighbours' so that they can avoid the noxious area until the body has been disposed of by 'automatic collectors' which 'patrol the streets and avenues' to collect the corpses for disintegration.⁹⁵¹ As Indiana's protagonist then calmly cleans Escudero's windows, 'she sees a collector across the street hunt down another illegal, a woman who tries to hide behind a dumpster, unsuccessfully. The machine picks her up with its mechanised arm and deposits her in its main container [...] a few blocks up, two other collectors work ceaselessly' in the extraction and extermination of virus-ridden Haitians.⁹⁵² The singling out of Haitians as the victims of extermination and exclusion is enabled by means of a mechanised, government sponsored 'clean-up' programme, which utilises robots and cyborg enhancement technology. When Acilde 'touches her left wrist with her right thumb to activate the PriceSpy [...] the app tells her the brand and price of the robots in her field of vision. The brand is Zhengli, and there's a translation, *To clean up*, which appears below, next to the news and images'.⁹⁵³ China's communist government have donated the collectors 'to help ease the terrible circumstances affecting the islands of the Caribbean after the March 19 disaster'.⁹⁵⁴ The cyborg technologies in Acilde's body, such as the augmented reality application PriceSpy, which ascribes prices to people and objects in view, 'both facilitates and homogenises capitalist consumption, as it does not recognise informal markets'.⁹⁵⁵ The Zhengli robots, meanwhile, part of a new wave of technological innovation, embody the automatising of a state violence which is rooted in colonial racisms and notions of racial purification. The targeting of Haitian immigrants by the Zhengli is a clear reference to (and indeed, continuation of) the historical racism suffered by Haitians throughout colonial history, as well as the more contemporary racist violence in Dominican

⁹⁴⁹ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 9.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁵² Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁹⁵³ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹⁵⁵ Sam Ginsberg, 'Tentacle, Rita Indiana', *Full Stop*, <https://www.full-stop.net/2019/05/21/reviews/sam-ginsburg/tentacle-rita-indiana/> REFERENCE PROPERLY

history (such as the 1937 Parsley Massacre, the recent waves of deportation in the twentieth century, and the stripping of nationality from Dominicans of Haitian descent).⁹⁵⁶ In other words, this opening passage of *Tentacle* is an explicit reminder of the racisms which have defined Caribbean history and societies since the European conquest, evolving and shape-shifting under different governments but eventually traceable back to the first catastrophe of European colonisation and its creation of racial hierarchies. The escalation of immigration policies in Indiana's post-apocalypse Dominican Republic to rid the country of pestilential Haitian 'aliens' is clearly also in conversation with 'Monstro.' As Ellen Jones points out in a review of the two works, Díaz and Indiana both 'imagine a future in which climate change has entrenched existing inequalities and prejudices to such a degree that certain people are no longer recognized as human'.⁹⁵⁷

The reader comes to understand that in the lifeworld of the novel, a 2024 'tidal wave' had scattered Venezuelan biological weapons stored off the coast of Hispaniola and caused the beginnings of an unprecedented ecological crisis.⁹⁵⁸ After President Bona 'agreed to warehouse Venezuelan biological weapons in Ocoa, the 2024 seaquake had done away with the base where they'd been kept and dispersed their contents into the Caribbean sea. Entire species had vanished in a matter of weeks. The environmental crisis had spread into the Atlantic' and the Caribbean sea had become a 'dark and putrid stew'.⁹⁵⁹ This was one of 'three disasters (that) had finished off practically every living thing under the sea'.⁹⁶⁰ As a result of these disasters, Caribbean marine ecology and the regions littorals have become uninhabitable, unlike the island's beaches in the twenty-first century which had 'coasts full of coral, fish and anemones'.⁹⁶¹ Now marine creatures are a 'luxury coveted by wealthy collectors' such as the 'live sea anemone', an 'illegal and very valuable specimen' that Esther secretly cares for and

Amnesty International, for example, noted that between August 2015 and May 2016, more than 40,000 Haitians (including several hundred unaccompanied children) were deported from the D.R. to Haiti.

'Haiti/Dominican Republic: Reckless deportations leaving thousands in limbo',

<<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/06/haiti-dominican-republic-reckless-deportations-leaving-thousands-in-limbo/>> Amnesty International [Date accessed: 7/7/2020]

Ellen Jones, "Little Book with Big Ambitions: Rita Indiana's "Tentacle", Los Angeles Review of Books, December 13, 2018.

<<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/little-book-with-big-ambitions-rita-indianas-tentacle>> [Date Accessed: 17/08/2020].

⁹⁵⁸ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 82-3.

⁹⁶⁰ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 15.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 20.

that Acilde and her friend Morla decide to steal at the beginning of the text.⁹⁶² The significance of this magical sea anemone is multifaceted. The creature represents the connection between Afro-Caribbean/indigenous cultures and Caribbean ecologies. In the dystopian lifeworld of *Tentacle*, where Caribbean aquatic life is close to extinction, the anemone is a peculiar rarity. However, the commodification of the anemone by wealthy collectors is also representative of capitalism's inherent tendency to assign fiscal value to extra-human natures, even in times of its own socio-ecological unravelling and of climatic catastrophe.

The proposed solution for the regeneration of this dystopian lifeworld is time travel. To be more specific, Acilde transforms into a man, with the help of her customer Eric, Escuerdo's magical anemone and the gender-changing Rainbow Brite injection, thus fulfilling the first part of Esther's Santería prophecy. Acilde is transfigured into 'Olokun's legitimate son [...] the one who knew what lies at the bottom of the sea', who would travel through time to prevent the eco-apocalypse of Acilde's own present by convincing a younger Bona not to purchase the nuclear weapons of the future's eco-apocalypse, thus averting the ecological disasters visited upon the island.⁹⁶³ Indiana's use of the magical anemone, which allows Acilde to travel through time, to create avatars and to access spiritual realms is significant. The anemone is not only a symbol of the significance of the sea to Afro-Caribbean religions but also of the connections between ecology and the project to create a sustainable future on the island. Acilde arrives in the early 2000s and is welcomed by the family of Ananí, a woman whose family were 'descended from caciques and behiques' of the island's original Taíno inhabitants.⁹⁶⁴ Ananí's indigenous family regard the land as the 'Great Lord' where 'the most precious and sacred creature on the island dwelled, the portal to the land of the beginning, through which the men of the water would come, the big heads, whenever they were needed'.⁹⁶⁵

While *Tentacle* addresses in explicit terms a crisis of twenty-first century petro-modernity, and the eco-dystopia that is a result of our own, current, ongoing climate apocalypse, the text does not make direct references to oil extraction or petro-capitalism. However, the 'weird' and sf intertexts utilised by Indiana, especially those of H.P. Lovecraft,

⁹⁶² Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁶³ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 50.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

⁹⁶⁵ Indiana, *Tentacle*, p. 75.

allow for a more direct connection to be made between the horrors of the twenty-first century's petro-modernity and the eco-apocalypses of the future. Graeme Macdonald usefully explains that the 'problematic uncontainability of deep underground powers' has long been a part of the history of sf's 'energy imaginary'.⁹⁶⁶ Our twenty-first century dread surrounding petroleum's finitude allows for a re-reading of sf works from a specifically petrocultural perspective. If we consider environmental catastrophes such as Ixtoc I, Deepwater, Exxon Valdez, or the tar sands, then the 'unearthed monster narrative' or the 'beast from the depths trope' becomes ripe with ecocritical potential.⁹⁶⁷ Indeed, during the dawn of the Century of Oil, particularly in its first fifty years, there arose a multitude of narratives which utilised these tropes, either in the vein of petro-exuberance or petro-dread. If read through a petrocultural lens, stories such as Lovecraft's 'At the Mountains of Madness,' (1931) and 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928), become narratives about carbon-dread and a profound anxiety regarding mysterious, powerful subterranean forces.⁹⁶⁸ For example, in the conclusion of 'Mountains,' an amorphous underground force (which has previously consumed an older civilisation) is revealed to the reader. As Macdonald reminds us:

['Mountains'] relies upon a technological fix to advance its plot: a new form of drilling technique borne by state-of-the-art equipment allows the exploration team to bore through ground ice in hostile conditions. This is resoundingly familiar in an age of fracking and unconventional energy, where technological advances reflecting Lovecraft's fantasy allow energy companies to push back the projected limits of peak oil, ushering in an age where oil and gas will endure for some time yet. The consequences, of course, are seemingly unspeakable, and confront the limits of the knowable in the context of global warming's prospects.⁹⁶⁹

This amorphous subterranean force is made all the more terrifying because of the uncertainty surrounding it; all we know is that it will come from the ground up. 'Mountains' becomes a

⁹⁶⁶ Macdonald, *Paradoxa 26: SF Now*, reprinted at <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/improbability-drives-the-energy-of-sf>>

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁸ H. P. Lovecraft, 'At the Mountains of Madness,' 'The Call of Cthulhu', *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft* (New York: Quarto Publishing, 2014), pp. 776-865, pp. 381-408.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid.

reading, then, of the ‘discovery — and surfacing of the horror-bringing subterranean source of a death substance’.⁹⁷⁰ ‘The Call of Cthulhu,’ meanwhile, resounds with similar petro-dread regarding the unknowability of the terrifying, inhuman and unfathomable underground forces. The underwater, ‘nightmare corpse-city’ of R’lyeh, within which the ‘great priest’ Cthulhu and his ‘hordes, [lie] hidden in green slimy vaults,’ is partially discovered by a band of sailors.⁹⁷¹ The narrator relates that ‘only a single mountain-top, the hideous monolith-crowned citadel whereon great Cthulhu was buried, actually emerged from the waters’ but that ‘when I think of the extent of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith’.⁹⁷² The thing that emerges from the carved door of the monolith, ‘the green, sticky spawn of the stars’ as Lovecraft describes it, ‘lumber[s] slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeeze[s] its gelatinous green immensity [...] into the tainted outside air of that poison city of madness’.⁹⁷³ After ‘viginillions of years,’ the narrator tells us, ‘great Cthulhu [is] loose again, and ravening for delight’.⁹⁷⁴ While the sailors flee from the spot of R’lyeh’s discovery, and the ‘monstrously carved portal’ from which the creature emerges sinks again beneath the ocean, the story ends on a note of terrified dread at the subterranean forces that have been unleashed. Lovecraft calls them the ‘Great Ones,’ who had ‘seeped down from the dark stars’ at a time when the ‘sun was young’, and now may rise again from the depths of land and sea.⁹⁷⁵ ‘Who knows the end?’ the narrator states. ‘What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men’.⁹⁷⁶

Cthulhu, and his manifestation as a ‘gelatinous’, slobbering ‘immensity’, explicitly embodies Lovecraft’s petro-dread, fusing together a fear of subterranean forces and the imminent arrival of a new type of capitalist world-system. Lovecraft’s anxiety is characterized, as China Miéville notes, by ‘above all, [a] horror of inferior races, miscegenation, and cultural decline [fears which are] expressed in his protean, fecund, seeping monsters’.⁹⁷⁷ The story of

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁷¹ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, pp. 403–6.

⁹⁷² Ibid., p. 405.

⁹⁷³ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, p. 405.

⁹⁷⁴ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, pp. 403–6.

⁹⁷⁵ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, p. 403, p. 407.

⁹⁷⁶ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, p. 407.

⁹⁷⁷ Lovecraft, like other weird fiction writers of his time, is responding in his works to capitalist modernity’s burgeoning period of crisis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the heart of which is World War One) where, as Miéville puts it, ‘a period of crisis in which its cruder nostrums of progressive bourgeois

Cthulhu is paradigmatic of many of Lovecraft's works which use monstrous creatures to delineate a profound anxiety about the transition to an increasingly globalized, oil-dominated world-economy and its cultural consequences. Indeed, As Vivian Joseph writes, many of Lovecraft's monsters 'come from the depths of time, deep space, deep holes in the ground or from the deep sea' and if read from a petrocultural perspective, symbolise the writer's own trepidation about the new age of oil, about gelatinous substances that ooze out of the ground or from under the sea, and what this might mean for the harmonious, uninterrupted development of 'Western' societies. Nor is Lovecraft's anxiety an anachronism; as Macdonald reminds us, 'almost every petrofiction, even the most exuberant early "gusher" tales of epic discovery, register concomitant worry that this is a short-lived boon and an environmentally destructive substance'.⁹⁷⁸

I include this analysis here because *Tentacle* repeatedly uses tales such as 'The Call of Cthulhu' as key intertexts, re-working the carbon-dread of these stories to allude to the hydrocarbon basis of the twenty-first century's ecological crisis. Lovecraft's work, infused with petro-dread regarding unknowable geological forces, stands on the cusp of the emergent years of the Century of Oil, while Indiana's text bookends the end of the century and witnesses its socio-ecological unravelling. There are particularly strong connections between 'Cthulhu' (the story and the eponymous monster itself) and *Tentacle*; the image of the tentacle (as in the 'pulpy, tentacled head' of Cthulhu, for example, or Kassogtha, the writhing mass of tentacles that is both Cthulhu's sister and mate) is classically Lovecraftian.⁹⁷⁹ As Miéville points out, Lovecraft's monsters embody a break with 'folkloric traditions' — instead of presenting the reader with, say, werewolves, zombies, vampires, ghosts or ghouls, Lovecraft's monsters are 'agglomerations of bubbles, barrels, cones and corpses, patchwork from cephalopods, insects, crustaceans and other fauna notable precisely for their absence from the traditional Western monstrous'.⁹⁸⁰ The tentacle, a 'limb-type [notably] absent from European folklore and the

rationality are shattered'. Thus, Weird fiction of the early twentieth century, attempts to unpack the War, which Miéville calls the 'black box' or the crux of Weird fiction of the period. Thus, 'in its malevolent Real, and protean new monsters, inconceivable and formless (though possessing meticulously itemized surplus specificity of form), Weird does not so much articulate the crisis as that the crisis cannot be articulated'.⁹⁷⁷ The resultant anxiety about what is to come is channelled through the various monsters of the Lovecraftian universe, who come to embody and encode racist and classist concerns, as well as energy anxieties.

⁹⁷⁸ Vivian Joseph, 'From Depths of Terror to Depths of Wonder: The Sublime in Lovecraft's Call of Cthulhu and Cameron's The Abyss', in *Beasts of the Deep: Sea Creatures and Popular Culture*, eds. by John Hackett and Sean Harrington (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), pp. 42-56 (p. 45).

⁹⁷⁹ Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, p. 385.

⁹⁸⁰ China Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds. by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009), pp. 510-16 (p. 513).

traditional Gothic' crops up repeatedly in Lovecraft's writing — Indiana's reference to a tentacle in the (English) title of her novel, then, alludes to a Lovecraftian influence.⁹⁸¹

However, tropes such as the anemone in Indiana's novel are, as Kerstin Oloff and Sharae Deckard point out, a 'refashion[ing] of the tentacled monsters [that] haunt the Old Weird from ecophobic visions into positive symbols of biodiversity and symbiosis. In particular, Cthulhu is replaced by the *Condylactis gigantea*, otherwise known as the Caribbean Giant Anemone, and used to figure the anxieties of looming global environmental catastrophe'.⁹⁸²

Another Lovecraftian element drawn upon in *Tentacle* is the repeated one of the sea, or rather of being underwater. Lovecraft's monsters, as Vivian Joseph points out above, come from various depths, be they oceanic or subterranean: Indiana draws on this trope of mysterious depths but blends it with Caribbean history, alluding not only to early twentieth century 'petro-dread' but also the history of slavery (of the sea as the graveyard of enslaved Africans who were thrown overboard or committed suicide by drowning). Oloff and Deckard point out that 'representations of marine trauma have increasingly emphasized the intersections between this colonial history and the degradation of the oceans through pollution and warming temperatures. The past decade of Caribbean fiction has produced a noticeable efflorescence of such texts, often in gothic, sf, and Weird modes.'⁹⁸³ Indiana's work is part of the 'noticeable efflorescence' of new modes of Caribbean writing, and may be categorised as part of emerging trend of 'Caribbean Weird' work that 'offers a mode both for diagnosing current ills and understanding their roots in the long afterlives of colonialism, as well as for grasping newly emergent realities.'⁹⁸⁴

Indiana's deliberate and self-conscious allusions to Lovecraft are a way of re-working his texts, and the important element of dread that saturates so many of his works. When considered through a petrocultural lens, this fear of mysterious subterranean forces can be read as an acute and all-pervasive anxiety regarding the approaching age of oil. When one considers too the charges of racism levelled against Lovecraft, as well as the evidence of such in his work, this anxiety becomes a highly problematic and questionable one, as Miéville suggests. In 'The Call of Cthulhu,' for example, the ancient worship of the monster continues in the so-

⁹⁸¹ Miéville, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p. 512.

⁹⁸² For a discussion of the 'Old Weird,' see Oloff and Deckard.

Kerstin Oloff and Sharae Deckard, 'The One Who Comes from the Sea': Marine crisis and the New Oceanic Weird in Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*, *Humanities*, 9 (3), 19 August 2020 (pp. 1-14), p. 9.

⁹⁸³ Oloff and Deckard, *Humanities*, p. 2

⁹⁸⁴ Oloff and Deckard, *Humanities*, p. 2.

called ‘evil’ rites that take place in ‘primitive’ Afro-descendant cultures: ‘Voodoo orgies multiply in Hayti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings’.⁹⁸⁵ Lovecraft’s stories contain, as this one example suggests, ‘a racism so obsessive it is a hallucinogen’.⁹⁸⁶ As Oloff and Deckard note, in Lovecraft’s version of the Oceanic Weird, racist phantasmagoria is intertwined with marine ecophobia, pulsating with revulsion for the alterity of both nonhuman life and non-European civilization’.⁹⁸⁷

By referencing Lovecraft, whose work reflects and encodes such numerous racist, classist and environmental anxieties and prejudices, Indiana makes an explicit link between colonialism and climate change. That is to say, that she emphasises the notion of a racial Capitalocene and the compound crises which affect the pan-Caribbean region. By re-mobilising Lovecraftian petro-dread, Lovecraftian ‘racist phantasmagoria[s]’ and ‘marine ecophobia[s]’, *Tentacle* is able to register not only the undercurrent of oil in the text, but also the damage done by hydrocarbon-driven capitalism as it rapidly unravels, and the way in which this particular unravelling disproportionately affects Caribbean ecologies and communities, both of which continue to deal with the legacies of imperialism and colonialism – and now, the climate-change triggered by the ecological emergencies of late neoliberal capitalism. The text critiques the racial, sexual and gendered human oppression as well as ecocide that follows in the long wake of colonialism’s ‘ongoing catastrophe’ whilst situating this compound crisis (of oppression and ecocide) in the specific context of petro-modernity’s unravelling. As Oloff and Deckard note:

In Indiana’s revision of the Oceanic Weird [...] capitalism [...] is the true source of horror, the extinguisher of life of all kinds. Despite the pessimism of its plot, [Tentacle] offers a powerful condensation of a counter-hegemonic Oceanic ontology, expressed through its invocation of the Taínoan “men of the water” who come to us from the origins of time, precursors of a non-capitalist worldview that resists extinction. Hope is invested in the conception of water as sacred, rather than a source of commodification [...] So too is hope incarnated in the multi-species symbiosis of the trans boy crowned with a living anemone, symbolising the necessary interdependence of human and sea animals in any sustainable future, even if this prospect is foreclosed by Acilde’s own individual actions. As such, the utopian trace in Indiana’s novel lies in its intimation that prospects for radical

⁹⁸⁵ Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, p. 385.

⁹⁸⁶ Miéville, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p. 512.

⁹⁸⁷ Oloff and Deckard, *Humanities*, p. 4.

transformation lie in finding alternative, non-capitalist, ways of viewing the marine world, in restoring the numinosity of the oceans and revaluing all forms of life.⁹⁸⁸

Oloff and Deckard are quite right in their observation of the cynicism and pessimism of the speculative future shown to the reader in *Tentacle*. Nevertheless, the text's kernel of hope lies in humanity discovering a symbiosis between themselves and extra-human nature in all its forms. Acilde, in her avatar as Giorgio, fails to do this, by refusing to actualise Escudero's original prophecy. Instead, Acilde chooses to bask in her transformation into a middle-class white male, preferring the accoutrements of a materialistic, luxurious lifestyle to altering Caribbean history and ensuring the safety of the region's marine environment. Indiana's ending is, in this sense, profoundly dystopian, and seems to be a warning to the reader to avoid taking the same route as Giorgio. Instead, *Tentacle* calls for us to recognise the nature of the 'ongoing catastrophe' that capitalism has created in the expanded Caribbean ever since 1492, to understand the compound crises of the region's colonised past and a dystopian future, and to begin by adopting a holistic vision of the world, more akin to animist Taíno belief-systems, than those of the contemporary Cartesian binary and capitalism's separatist, appropriative view of 'nature'.⁹⁸⁹

⁹⁸⁸ Oloff and Deckard, *Humanities*, p. 12.

⁹⁸⁹ José Oliver notes that the Taíno perspective is one '[...] grounded on the continuity of relationships between all things, natural and cultural. In this view, the transformation of form is crucial to the interactions between beings, each assuming a form appropriate to the relationships in which it is engaged'.

José R. Oliver, *Caciques and Cemí Idols: The Web Spun by Taíno Rulers between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 133.

CONCLUSION

Nobody talking 'bout pipeline. Dem white people know the futile prospects fuh dat kind of digging in Guyana mud. This is real oil frontier. Destiny coming fuh we first; den black, Indian, Amerindian, and everybody else really going Unity this time; and finally, Prosperity will come. Oil going to do what we postcolonial mimics and relics can't do weself. Is rich we going be, rich, and everybody know oil money cure all evils. We sure that in we Guyana, oil will mek post- and neocolonial foreign capital dependency evaporate overnight, not expand. Petrostate resource curse is fuh people who cyah plan ahead and outsmart dem white people. Oil ent wuk in Trinidad, freeing them out of every island in the Caribbean from the vagaries of hurricane tourism watch? Watch national wealth distribution success in Angola! Tings really looking good in Venezuela.

~ Aliyah Khan.⁹⁹⁰

In 2015, North-America's largest oil company, Exxon Mobil, and its international partners Hess and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), discovered significant quantities of crude oil about 150 miles off the coast of Guyana. Since then, Exxon has undertaken one of the largest underwater geological surveys in the industry's history and, as a result, 'has landed a remarkable string of sixteen world-class discoveries. In 2019 alone, Exxon took credit for five of the six biggest oil finds, all in Guyanese waters'.⁹⁹¹ Exxon's plan for 2020 has been to mine crude from the seven new deepwater wells, with a goal of extracting 120,000 barrels a day. Deep-water surveys estimate Guyanese oil-reserves to be at around two billion barrels: this makes the country one of the few truly important, global oil provinces of the twenty-first century, along with Brazil, Uganda, India and Ghana. Regionally too, the find is significant. While the projected reserves of two billion barrels of Guyanese oil 'pales in comparison to neighbouring Venezuela [it] surpasses the reserves of Trinidad and Tobago,' which for 110 years, has been the expanded Caribbean's biggest oil producer.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹⁰ Aliyah Khan, 'El Dorado, City of Black Gold', *Pre: Caribbean Writing*, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

⁹⁹¹ Anatoly Kurmanaev and Clifford Kraus, 'A Small Country, An Oil Giant and their Shared Fortune', *The New York Times*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/world/americas/guyana-oil-exxon-elections.html> [Accessed 18/11/2020].

⁹⁹² Anthony T. Bryan, 'Guyana, one of South America's poorest countries, struck oil. Will it go boom or bust?' *The Conversation*, 1 November 2017. <https://theconversation.com/guyana-one-of-south-america's-poorest-countries-struck-oil-will-it-go-boom-or-bust86108> [Accessed 18/11/2020].

The first Guyanese petroleum laws were written in the 1980s, and as Aliyah Khan puts it, ‘for years we struggling to find oil to save we from sugar.’⁹⁹³ Under the terms of an older deal made in 1999, Exxon gave the Guyanese government an \$18 million signing bonus (a miniscule amount, relatively speaking) after the 2015 find. The money disappeared until 2017, when the story became common knowledge through a media leak and sparked public outrage. Meanwhile, in 2016, Exxon aggressively negotiated a deal for the Stabroek oil block license with inexperienced Guyanese officials. The resulting deal left Guyana short of up to U.S. \$55 billion.

I offer a brief explanation of these two incidents to help illustrate the fact that petro-extractive processes and corporate negotiations, such as the two briefly described above, continue the long history of commodity frontier exploitation in the country since the time of Dutch and British colonisation. Gold, timber, sugar and bauxite, all part of Guyana’s rich natural reserves, have been extracted and funneled away to other nations throughout the country’s history. The difference now, as Khan points out, is that with oil, ‘the whole [...] process [is] potentially independent from Guyana and Guyanese labor from start to almost-finish. It only lef’ fuh Exxon get a rich country fuh buy’.⁹⁹⁴ Guyana’s older industries have all waned in recent times. Timber, for example, has been sold off to China, Malaysia and Korea. By 1993, eighty percent of Guyana’s state forests (7.1 million hectares) had been leased out to mostly foreign concessionaires. As Khan points out, ‘the great trees of the living Earth’s Amazon lungs will fall to legal and illegal logging ‘til all gone. But logging in Guyana is not a new thing. No kind of exploitation of land is new here. The Great Gates of the lock of Liverpool, its wharves, piers, and jetties, are built of Guyana greenheart.’⁹⁹⁵ Sugar, too, is a bygone industry, with rapidly falling production levels and facilities ‘cripple[d] by labor strikes’. In 2017, only 140,000 metric tonnes of sugar were produced, the lowest figure in twenty-seven years, and in the year following this, the then-President, David Granger, retired four of the last large producing estates: Skeldon, Rose Hall, Enmore, and Wales. Only Albion, Blairmont, and Uitvlugt are left. Let us fast forward to February 2020, when Guyana sold its first cargo of crude oil. At that

⁹⁹³ Aliyah Khan, ‘El Dorado, City of Black Gold’, Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

⁹⁹⁴ Aliyah Khan, ‘El Dorado, City of Black Gold’, Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

⁹⁹⁵ Aliyah Khan, ‘El Dorado, City of Black Gold’, Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

time, it was estimated that by the middle of 2020, offshore oil production in Guyana could rise to 400,000 barrels a day, with the nation set to receive a 2% royalty on gross earnings and 50% of oil proceeds – relatively low by international standards, but for a small country where nearly 40% of the population lives in poverty, the results were set to be spectacular. At the 2019 market price of \$50 per barrel, the country was expected to net \$1 million a day in oil earnings. Gross annual oil revenues of approximately \$13 billion were predicted by the mid-2020s, which averaged out to about \$17,000 per inhabitant. The I.M.F. predicted that the Guyanese economy would grow by 53% in 2020. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has set these predictions back significantly, creating a slump in global oil prices and a glut of crude on international markets. However, political forecasts predict that ‘the [Guyanese] economy is likely to outperform anyway despite the political noise [...] Exxon has [estimated that] Guyana will produce at least 750,000 barrels of oil a day by 2025, from zero just a few months ago [in January 2020]’.⁹⁹⁶ If by 2025, offshore wells produce 750,000 barrels a day, the size of the economy is expected to triple, from U.S. \$3.4 billion to \$13 billion.

There has been much conversation in political, academic, and journalistic circles about whether or not Guyana can circumvent the fabled ‘resource curse,’ as well as whether the country can manage the difficulties of a sudden influx of dizzying oil-wealth, and how exactly this wealth will be equitably distributed. One recommendation has been for Guyana to join a sovereign wealth fund, following the models of Norway, Alaska, and Saudi Arabia. The nation has already joined several international coalitions, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the New Petroleum Producers Group, both of which offer voluntary guidance and transparency requirements to ‘help countries manage their commodity wealth soundly’.⁹⁹⁷ Of course, behind the crunching of numbers, endless discussions of the resource curse, and the predictions for economic success, lie a set of actualities which are resoundingly similar to many of those examined in this study. Emperor Oil’s arrival in Guyana, after all, has been accompanied by many familiar bedfellows: the spectre of environmental despoliation; the possibility of heightened ethnic divisions between the country’s two largest ethnic groups (Afro-Guyanese, who make up 29.3% of the population, and Indo-Guyanese, who make up

⁹⁹⁶ The World Economy May be Crashing, but Guyana is Still Seen Growing, *Bloomberg*, 14 April 2020, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-14/world-economy-may-be-crashing-but-guyana-still-seen-growing-53>> [Date accessed: 3/12/2020].

⁹⁹⁷ Jennapher Lunde Seefeldt, ‘Guyana hopes oil will bring wealth – not corruption and crisis’, *The Conversation*, 21 February 2019, <https://theconversation.com/guyana-hopes-oil-will-bring-wealth-not-corruption-and-crisis-108958> [Accessed 18/11/2020].

39.8%); the use of oil income as a political slush fund and the potential for governmental corruption (David Granger's coalition party, the APNU-AFC, was accused in March 2020 of electoral fraud, declaring victory before all of the nation's votes had been counted); an influx of foreign workers and expertise (with relatively few new jobs created for Guyanese people themselves as a consequence); and the buying off of public votes, as political powers use real or anticipated economic windfalls to fund social programmes in order to placate impoverished sections of the citizenry. In other words, Exxon Mobil's, Hess's and CNOOC's incursion into Guyana has dubious consequences for the country's ecology, economy and society. It is ironic, too, that Guyana, now arguably one of the most important petro-frontiers of the Americas, suffers disproportionately from the consequences of hydrocarbon-fuelled climate change. Georgetown, the nation's capital, and the coastal regions where most Guyanese people live, are six feet below sea level, 'still dependent on a drainage system of kokers (sluices), dams, and sea walls built by the Dutch'.⁹⁹⁸ Uncontrollable flooding has always been a problem since the time of colonisation and remains a pressing issue. Khan writes that 'big flooding happen recent in 2005, 2006, every other year, and 2019. But before, 1855 was the year of the Kingston Great Flood that wash away the Governor own Camp House and every plantation from Thomas Lands to Ogle. 1886 and 1887 was plenty bad too. In 1934 rain fall for 11 hours and drown Georgetown residents like rats in the wards. And don't talk when rain come with high tide. Don't talk when dem rich country mek ocean level rise'.⁹⁹⁹ NDIA, the underfunded Guyana National Drainage and Irrigation Authority 'that suppose to keep Guyana from drowning, outmatch by floods of biblical proportions'.¹⁰⁰⁰ Alongside the fragility of extra-human natures in Guyana, and the nation's vulnerability to the vagaries of climate change, exist the difficulties encountered by the human population. The average monthly income in Guyana is \$385 U.S.D. The population remains a mere 800,000, in a land of 83,000 square miles. There is, then, much empty land, which the oil companies see as ripe with potential, and which the Guyanese people recognise is ripe for foreign exploitation. Political crises mix with corruption, ecological precarity (such as the gradual increase in the number of hurricanes¹⁰⁰¹),

⁹⁹⁸ Aliyah Khan, 'El Dorado, City of Black Gold', Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

⁹⁹⁹ Aliyah Khan, 'El Dorado, City of Black Gold', Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020].

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰¹ Guyanese hurricane season, which lasts from June to November, has in 2020 been predicted to have 'above-normal activity' with the probability of at least one major hurricane (Category 3-5) in the Caribbean holding at

poverty and now, the coronavirus: ‘Guyana simultaneously mire in three thing: same old racialized election fraud and international condemnation of it, bad-bad oil market crash, plus God help we, this next planetary scourge of COVID-19’.¹⁰⁰² It is improbable that Guyana’s political, economic and ecological problems will be solved by the arrival of the oil majors. The discovery of oil in Guyanese waters is, then, to put it succinctly, the most recent iteration of petro-capitalism in the expanded Caribbean, complete with its dubious relations of patronage, debilitating effects on the country’s ecology, and detrimental long-term consequences for the economy.

Nor is Guyana alone. In July 2020, discoveries of oil were made off the coast of Suriname. Colombian oil-production is regaining its momentum: in June 2020, Canadian company Parex Resources announced that after the difficulties created by COVID-19, it would be reactivating its exploration and development programme, spending up to U.S.\$85 million in the second half of 2020.¹⁰⁰³ Meanwhile, in a 2019 press release by United Oil and Gas (UOG), the company announced estimates of 229 million barrels of oil which they deemed recoverable off the coast of Jamaica. UOG stated that ‘there is compelling evidence that all the elements required for a working petroleum system are present’ on the island, although the plan for the extraction of crude from offshore sites had yet to be confirmed by September 2020.¹⁰⁰⁴

It is self-evident that the expanded Caribbean region is an important player in the twenty-first century’s petro-capitalist system. However, as has been demonstrated, geopolitically speaking it remains peripheral, subject to the whims and dictates of the Euro-American core, the latter’s governments, and corporations. As discussed in the introduction to this study, the region has long been imbricated in (and important for) capitalist networks of

58% (the usual average is 42%), and off the entire continental U.S. coastline at 69% (the usual average is 52%). The number of ‘named storms’ is predicted to be 16, hurricanes 8, and major hurricanes 4. All of these numbers are well above the average for the last century. Philip J. Klotzbach, Michael M. Bell, and Jhordanne Jones. “Extended Range Forecast of Atlantic Seasonal Hurricane Activity and Landfall Strike Probability for 2020.” Department of Atmospheric Science, Colorado State University, April 2, 2020. <https://tropical.colostate.edu>. pp. 1–2 [Accessed 23/11/2020]

¹⁰⁰² Aliyah Khan, ‘El Dorado, City of Black Gold’, Pree: Caribbean Writing, <https://preelit.com/category/aliyah-khan/> [Accessed 23/11/2020]

¹⁰⁰³ Matthew Smith, ‘Colombia’s Oil Industry is Showing Signs of Recovery,’ 7 September 2020, *Oilprice.com*, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Colombias-Oil-Industry-Is-Showing- Signs-Of-Recovery.html> [Date Accessed: 20/12/2020]

¹⁰⁰⁴ ‘United Oil to Decide on Drilling in Jamaica by December,’ *Jamaica Gleaner*, July 3, 2020, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/business/20200703/united-oil-decide-drilling-jamaica-september> [Date accessed: 3/12/2020].

resource extraction and monetary exchange: oil is merely one (albeit hugely significant) commodity in a long history of regional commodity-frontiers. The nations of the 'expanded Caribbean' are united by their individual, historical experiences of commodity frontier exploitation and the contribution of this phenomenon to the rise of the modern/colonial world-system. This history lies like a sedimentary layer beneath the more recent (petro-) commodity-frontier-complexes in the region. It is precisely the layering of this older colonial history and more recent neo-colonial petro-experiences that makes the expanded Caribbean such an important one in oil-studies. Studying oil and its cultures in the region forces an understanding of much more than just the resource's material and social influence. It helps us criticise and be cognizant of the history of commodity frontiers that shaped (and continue to shape) the archipelago and rimlands, and the ways in which the expanded Caribbean's oil-frontiers continue and develop older patterns of exploitation. Moreover, while other peripheral countries have been given much scholarly attention by the energy humanities, the expanded Caribbean has only recently been examined and considered through a petrocultural lens. Even less scholarly attention has been paid to a specifically comparative and regional study of Caribbean petrofiction from across the archipelago and the rimlands of the southern continent. This thesis, then, has sought to build on relatively new academic work. The study utilises a tripartite disciplinary framework of eco-criticism, petrocultural studies, and Caribbean Studies. Two main concepts underpin this work and are borne out of two of the three aspects of the aforementioned framework: I will briefly outline these concepts, as well as sketching out the larger ambitions of this study, before considering the possible avenues for an expansion of the themes that I have explored here.

The first concept stems from the ecocritical concerns of the thesis and is that of capitalism as an inherently ecological regime. Part of this premise is the understanding that petro-capitalism, as well as being an ecological regime like the previous iterations of capitalism that came before it, is a relatively new phenomenon which disproportionately affects (semi-)peripheral regions and nation-states of the world-system. As critics such as Moore explain, capitalism's ecological regime utilises Cheap Natures and Cheap Labour in order to create wealth, while simultaneously compartmentalising society and nature, in order to more effectively exploit the latter. As I emphasised in the introduction, this socially constructed Cartesian binary (of Society/Nature) is an illogical and indeed dangerous one, but its creation serves the purposes of profit accumulation. In peripheral regions and nation-states of the world-system, human

and extra-human natures are exploited with particular brutality, partly because human beings from the periphery have long been seen as ‘closer to nature,’ a convenient ideology which allows for their labour to be more cheaply appropriated. As we have seen, capitalism has expanded to become a hegemonic world-system (by large) through its exploitation of (semi-)peripheral commodity frontiers, whose resources are funnelled back into nations of the core for their enrichment and development, while the latter regions/nations remain relatively underdeveloped by comparison. As Stephen Shapiro and Sharae Deckard point out, the ‘driving force’ of this particular type of world-system, or global economy, has always been the endless accumulation of capital. It is a system which since its emergence, has been ‘hierarchically striated by an axial division of labour in which there is a core-periphery tension, such that there is some form of unequal exchange [...] that is spatial’.¹⁰⁰⁵ In the Caribbean and the rimlands of the Latin American continent, commodity frontiers have been exploited since the sixteenth century through the use of non-white workers, whether enslaved or unwaged. Since this time, the dissemination of racist ideologies has influenced ‘Western’ understandings of Caribbean human and extra-human natures, and the designation of Caribbean peoples and natures as sub-human and available for exploitation has facilitated the extraction of Cheap Nature and the appropriation of Cheap Labour in the region. Oil is only the most recent commodity in the region’s long history of commodity frontiership. Nevertheless, given oil’s global importance as a source of cheap and abundant hydrocarbon energy, and all the cultural significations that surround the resource, it is one that has created its own hypnotic (and often illusory) set of meanings as it has powered the material expansion of twentieth-century capitalist relations. Under a petro-capitalist world-system, cheap oil is vital in multiple ways. As Jason Moore and Raj Patel remind us, it enacts a ‘triple duty [...] It is not only its own industry and force for scaling production in other industries but also provides a substitute for labour power and serves to keep that labour power affordable and productive’.¹⁰⁰⁶ Moreover, oil, like other forms of hydrocarbon energy, is a form of cheap nature: as such, when energy is made cheap, this is a way of ‘amplifying – and in some cases substituting for – cheap work and care’.¹⁰⁰⁷ In other words, a focus on oil also recentres questions of labour and work, demanding a consideration of how metabolic energy (human labour-power) is connected to hydrocarbon energy. If we

¹⁰⁰⁵ Stephen Shapiro and Sharae Deckard, *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, eds. by Stephen Shapiro and Sharae Deckard (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 7.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Moore and Patel, *A History of the World*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

consider the way in which systems of hydrocarbon and metabolic energy are mobilised, we can understand capitalism as a set of relations through which the capacity to do work by human and extra-human natures is transformed into value, with certain types of metabolic work — done by both human and extra-human natures — more valued and recognised than others.

In this thesis, I have sought to understand the ways in which petro-capitalism's exploitation of human and extra-human natures in the expanded Caribbean has multitudinous consequences for humans, their societies, and the ecologies upon which these societies depend. In each chapter, I have situated my literary analysis in a historical context, in order to better understand the events and circumstances that influenced the writers whose works I have examined. I have posed several key questions throughout the work that I have then sought to answer: how does the newest iteration of global capitalist relations – the phenomenon called petro-capitalism – manifest itself, culturally, ecologically and socially throughout the archipelago and South American rimlands? What is the importance of understanding capitalism, and then petro-capitalism, as a specifically ecological regime, and why is it so important to mine the rich seam of Caribbean literature for references to petro-capitalism and oil-culture? How do petro-capitalism's cultural consequences affect the Caribbean? How does the importation of oil- ideologies affect the Caribbean's human and extra- human natures? How are the responses of Caribbean writers flavoured by their unique national experiences, yet connected by a unity-in-diversity that stems from a set of historical common experiences? How does the oil commodity situate itself in a region which possesses a long history of commodity-frontiers, and how do modern oil industries and corporations continue older patterns of socio-economic and ecological exploitation in the region? How do gender, class and race intersect in Caribbean petrofiction? What lies in the future for an area that is ravaged by the effects of hydrocarbon-based climate change, and how is cultural production in the expanded Caribbean responding to the vagaries of this climate-change?

In answering these questions, my study has focused on several key threads within the aforementioned three-part framework. The persistent presence of the colonality of oil in its various guises is one important thread taken up by the thesis. By undergoing a comparative analysis of Caribbean literature, I was able to identify the reappearance of oil's colonality across the archipelago and South American rimlands, in varying guises. The first chapter's examination of Venezuela's burgeoning oil industry, for example, revealed the colonality of oil functioning on the forefront of modernity, in the country's oil-camps, where it manifested

as gendered, racialised and ecological exploitation, overseen by transnational oil companies and facilitated by local regimes. In the Trinidadian context, the coloniality of oil reappeared in a political guise, fuelling dubious systems of patronage and heightening ethnic tensions. In Puerto Rico, the coloniality of oil was refigured as what Catalina M. de Onis has called ‘energy coloniality’. The remoulding of colonial capitalist exploitation into contemporary (petro-) neo-colonial relationships is indicative of what Pablo Mukherjee calls the ‘rhythm of over-accumulation and underdevelopment’.¹⁰⁰⁸ This key tendency of historical capitalist relations, where wealth is drawn out of the commodity frontiers of the world-systems (semi-) peripheries and funnelled into core regions of core nations is a ‘rhythm’ that is reproduced in the dynamics of the global oil-economy. ‘Petrotopias’ of core nations are centres of commerce, technology and leisure, well-nourished by a plentiful supply of petroleum and its byproducts, while peripheral regions and nations become ‘sacrifice zones’ which are exploited until exhausted, in order to facilitate the creation of the former oil-utopias. Connected to this is the persistent problem of misplaced ‘oil ontologies’ in these peripheral regions and nation-states. The specific socio-cultural ideologies that surround petroleum in the West usually pertain to oil as the creator of immediate and astounding wealth which then improves life for everyone. By adapting Roberto Schwarz’s theorisations of the ‘misplacement’ of ‘western’ notions of libertarian ideals to Brazil, the thesis examined the ways in which these ‘oil ontologies’, when transported to peripheral nations, become transformed. In locations such as Trinidad and Puerto Rico, Western oil ontologies become distorted due to the mismatch between local forms of lifemaking, lack of oil-infrastructure and material inequality. Connected to the fact of the ‘misplacement’ of western ‘oil ontologies’ is the problem of how to critique and resist these notions of oil’s life-changing properties. The thesis used the novel and short story as the primary critical vehicles by which to examine registrations of and resistance to the coloniality of oil and the misplacement of petro-ideologies from the global North. Literary forms such as the novel struggle to contend with oil’s dualistic nature; it is a resource that is extracted from a specific locality, but one which upon extraction, becomes immediately globalised, in its transportation, refinement and its conversion to stocks and shares on the trading floors of the world’s ‘great’ cities. The thesis registered the fact that in order to begin mapping the complexities of the oil-economy, the tool of world-literature (literature of the capitalist world-system, as it is identified by the Warwick Research Collective) is perhaps

¹⁰⁰⁸ Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 65.

the most productive, since it possesses a muscular ability to connect both the 'local' and the 'global' as elements of a singular, unified world-economy, and that the literature which is the product of this global economy is irrevocably marked by its experience with global (petro) capitalism. By applying the tripartite disciplinary framework mentioned above in order to examine the manifestation of issues such as oil's coloniality in a pan-Caribbean context, I was able to demonstrate the need of a critical intervention on the part of the energy humanities into the field of Caribbean petrofiction. Caribbean writers demonstrate a profound awareness not only of the material consequences of petro-capitalism's incursion into the region, but they also understand the peculiar ideological associations and neo-colonial patterns of exploitation engendered by the oil commodity, as well as the magical realities that it creates for a short period of time. Associations, patterns and magical realities which, as I have shown, are all the more relevant for study in the energy humanities precisely because of the history of energy regimes that have shaped global capitalism and its incursion into the region.

Future work would develop the framework utilised here in the context of a larger comparative study of the coloniality of oil and petro-capitalism as ecological regime in contemporary Caribbean literature and culture. That is to say that it would outline a more detailed transnational perspective. Such work would begin with more detailed attention given to the theoretical premises of capitalism as ecological regime and the coloniality of oil as an inherent phenomenon in petro-capitalist incursions into (semi-)peripheral regions and nation-states. Such work would incorporate Martinique, Guyanese, Colombian, Brazilian, Surinamese, Curaçaoan, Jamaican and Aruban petrofiction, greatly broadening the geographical parameters of study to construct a more ambitious comparative examination of petrofiction and petroculture in the expanded Caribbean, working multilingually where feasible. I am also interested in speculative fiction's capacity to imagine alternative futures and lifeworlds. An extended piece of academic work could productively examine the presence of energy regimes in Caribbean sf texts, but also analyse speculative narratives of Caribbean lifeworlds post-oil. This endeavour would be particularly worthwhile given the veritable explosion of sf work that is currently emerging from the Caribbean, with work by writers such as Nalo Hopkinson, Tobias S. Buckell, Tiphonie Yanique, R.S.A. Garcia and Pedro Cabiya. Another point of particular interest with regards to dystopian Caribbean futures would be climate-change literature, or 'cli-fi' which like speculative fiction, revolves around an axis of speculative futurities, but pertains specifically to the problem of hydrocarbon climate-change, a

theme of obvious and pressing concern in the Caribbean context.

I have spent some time in this thesis, specifically in Chapter One, examining the ways in which hydrocarbon-based energy regimes lead to the exploitation of metabolic energy (that is, human labour, and of some bodies more than others). Future work would take up this critical vehicle, recentring and addressing questions of labour and energy, as well as using these questions to think more deeply about petro-capitalism as a set of relations through which the capacity to do work is transformed into value. Oftentimes, petrofiction concretises the presence of oil in infrastructures but, as has been observed, the presence of petroleum is layered atop other kinds of energies. These energies include metabolic energy, as in the section on Venezuela and the energies produced via older commodity frontiers (sugar, timber, coffee, et. cetera). These other commodities embody a link between metabolic or bodily energies and infrastructural energies. A question to ask when reading Caribbean petrofiction in a more extensive study, then, is how these different energies – oil, human labour, and the older energy-sources of the colonial Caribbean – produce and reflect on the others. How can we use the oil-commodity as an axis by which to focus and expand on the production of other types of energy particular to the expanded Caribbean region? How has Caribbean ecology been affected by the admixture of these different energies, and how has regional literature addressed this? How are different bodies and different natures affected? Which energies are more exploited than others? Such a study would inevitably also incorporate questions and considerations of energy justice, environmental justice, and environmental racism.

In this thesis, I have offered several analytical, comparative readings on specific works of Caribbean fiction, working within a tripartite disciplinary framework to foreground the presence of petro-capitalism in these texts. I have examined Caribbean writer's registrations of and resistance to the newest commodity hegemon of the contemporary capitalist world-system, considering the ways in which authors of the region acknowledge socio-ecological damage done by the extractive processes and cultural ideologies associated with the oil-commodity. Needless to say, this study is an addition to the existing scholarship on Caribbean literature. However, I hope that it is also a valuable and innovative contribution to the emerging field of Caribbean petrofiction, as well as a clarion call to conjoin the energy humanities and Caribbean fiction with critical force and vigour, to productively read and energetically resist the ecological vagaries of petro-capitalism. Kurt Vonnegut may well have been right: there is much to apologise for, roaring drunk as we have all been on petroleum.

However, there is much more *work*, both intellectual and practical, that needs to be done to begin truly rectifying the damaging and wide-ranging consequences of this addiction, because the day will surely come where, as Wole Soyinka writes, we will all wake up and ‘wish we’d never smelt the fumes of petroleum’.

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