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Gothic Ecologies:
World-Literature and Commodity Frontiers from the Plantation to the Present

by

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

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Declaration Statement

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.

Parts of this thesis have been published by the author as:

1. "A 'Violence Just Below the Skin': Atmospheric Terror and Racial Ecologies in Ben Okri's "In the City of Red Dust," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies for Literature and Environment*, 29, no. 1 (2022), pp 270–283.

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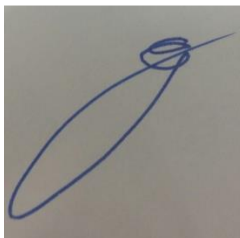

Esthie Hugo

Abstract

The commodity frontier has become increasingly central to understandings of what Jason W. Moore describes as the capitalist world-ecology (2015). Taking their cue from Moore, several materialist literary scholars (Deckard 2017; Oloff 2018, Campbell 2020; Niblett 2020; Vandertop 2020) have looked to the commodity frontier to map how its socioecological operations are registered in 'world-literature,' so named to illustrate how literary forms encode the social logic of world capitalism (WReC, 2015). This project aims to contribute to the fields of commodity frontier studies and world-literature by offering the frontier as the material basis from which gothic forms of narrativisation emerge. To do so, I bring together Moore's world-ecological perspective with Michael Niblett's notion of the commodity frontier as a narrative category (2020) and argue that the gothic might prove a particularly fitting mode through which to express the racialised and gendered oppressions and ecological devaluations engendered by the capitalist world-system. My specific interest is in comparing fiction and poetry from the 'long' twentieth century to the present in terms of the socioecological transformations through which the sugar, silver, gold, and oil frontiers have developed. I focus on the gothic aesthetics of a range of literary works from three '(semi)peripheral' sites from across the world-system: the Caribbean, Latin America, and West Africa. My analysis of these regions is divided into three chapters, each of which examines the socioecological particularities of the commodity frontier as these are mediated in the gothic vocabularies of (semi)peripheral world-literature from the specific locations of Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, Mexico, Martinique, and Nigeria. By focusing on the fictions of Eric Walrond, Marlon James, Pauline Melville, Silvia Moreno-Ģarcia, Aimé Césaire, and Ben Okri, I make the claim that the gothic mode contains within it a crucial means of concretising the historical and material realities of the frontier zone and its attendant enviro-social life-worlds. I offer this project as a feminist eco-materialist investigation into the myriad ways in which the conditions of the sugar, silver, gold, and oil frontiers contour world-literary formation, leading to the eruption of gothic modalities that provide the generative comparative grounds from which to better comprehend the life- and environment-making dynamics of the commodity frontier from the plantation through to the present.

Introduction

Thesis Overview

The aim of this thesis is to examine the gothic aesthetics of world-literature in light of new theories of world-ecology and the commodity frontier. In what follows, I outline the central theoretical concerns that provide the framework for this study, including its place in current world-literature debates, the relation between world-literature and the world-system, and the role played by the gothic and its various aesthetics in giving expression to capitalist commodification. I begin by exploring some of the central debates that have energised the field of gothic studies and world-literature since the turn of the century. I move, thereafter, to consider how these fields have been expanded to include contemporary theorisations of world-literature in relation to what Jason W. Moore terms "the capitalist world-ecology." Here, I situate my own understanding of the gothic and its aesthetics among current conceptions of the commodity frontier and its role in both capitalist and cultural development. In addressing questions of literary aesthetics alongside processes of frontier-formation and socioecological transformation, I offer the commodity frontier as the material basis from which gothic forms of narrativisation emerge. Drawing on Niblett's concept of the commodity frontier as a "narrative category," I conclude by making a claim for this study's intervention in the fields of frontier studies and world-literature, as well as the ecogothic and critical irrealism more broadly, by bringing together a materialist feminist analysis with the world-ecology perspective.

My specific interest is in comparing fiction and poetry from the twentieth century to the present in terms of the transformations through which the sugar, silver, gold, and oil frontiers have developed. I will focus on the gothic aesthetics of literary works from several '(semi)peripheral' sites from across the world-system: the Caribbean, Latin America, and West Africa. My aim is to present the socioecological particularities of these frontiers as providing the material conditions for the eruption of gothic aesthetics in a diversity of world-literary forms across a range of periods and regions. Drawing on Niblett's concept of the commodity frontier as a narrative category, I offer this project as a feminist eco-materialist investigation into the myriad ways in which the sugar, silver, gold, and oil frontiers influence world-literary formation, leading to the emergence of gothic literary vocabularies that provide the generative grounds from which to better comprehend the systemic links between gendered and racialised violence and the exploitation of natural resources from the plantation through to the present.

Capitalist Commodification, the Gothic, and Defetishisation

The gothic has long been viewed as a crucial cultural mode that captures the 'every-day' experience elicited by capitalist commodification.[1] "No space", writes Stephen Shapiro in his analysis of the gothic's 'world-system',

> is more haunted than the sphere of capitalist (factory) production, a veritable 'House of Terror', and no poltergeist is more effective than the workplace thumping that is often literalized with disfiguring industrial accidents.[2]

As Shapiro's example of the terrors of the industrial factory makes clear, his argument on the gothic's relationship to capitalist commodification pivots on Karl Marx's delineation of industrial capitalism in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Marx repeatedly deploys monstrous iconography in describing the process of capitalist manufacture. Not only does the factory machine "mutilate the worker" by "turning him into a fragment of himself," but the factory itself becomes "a mechanical monster" filled with "demonic power."[3] Like Shapiro, many critics have observed how Marx often makes use of gothic vocabularies to describe the transformative power of capitalism upon nineteenth century Europe's previously un-capitalised territories. In his gloss of "Marx's monsters," David McNally writes that "part of the genuine radicalism of Marx's critical theory resides in its insistence on tracking and naming the monsters of modernity."[4] As McNally points out, Marx provides readers in all three volumes of *Capital* with detailed narratives of what he terms "the monstrous outages of capital."[5] These 'monstrous outages' include the many examples Marx uses to describe the incursion of capitalism upon a previously non-capitalist lifeworld, such as

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[1] Much of this body of critique was set in motion after the publication of Jacques Derrida's seminal treatise *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a delineation of the impact of this study on materialist analyses of the gothic, see Fred Botting, "Dark Materialism: Gothic Objects, Commodities and Things," in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 240-259.

[2] Stephen Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania: Dracula's World-system and Gothic Periodicity," *Gothic Studies* 10, no.1 (2008), 29-47 (30).

[3] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1976 [1867]), pp. 503, 548 and 544.

[4] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 114.

[5] McNally, *Monsters of the Market,* p. 114.

> the factories in which 'Dante would have found the worst horrors in his Inferno surpassed'; unrelenting 'traffic in human flesh'; the turning of 'children's blood' into capital; the 'crippling of body and mind' of the workers; 'the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population' of the Americas; 'the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins' [and] 'the vampire' that 'will not let go while there remains a single muscle, sinew or drop of blood to be exploited'.[6]

In addition to McNally, several scholars of the gothic have noted the centrality of the discourse of monstrosity and the 'fairy-tale' to Marx's critique of capital. "Some of the most gruesomely archaic echoes of fairy-tale legend, myth, and folklore," observes Chris Baldick,

> crop up in the wholly unexpected environment of the modern factory system, stock exchange, and parliamentary chamber: ghosts, vampires, ghouls, werewolves, alchemists, and reanimated corpses [that] continue to haunt the bourgeois world.[7]

Crucial to both McNally and Baldick's analyses of Marx's 'monsters' is that they give expression to the *real-life* condition of capitalist commodification. As Baldick puts it, Marx frequently employs "mythological parallels more appropriate to the grimmer aspects of bourgeois achievement."[8] Through its turn to these 'grimmer' aspects of modern life, "Marx's *Capital* seeks to demonstrate that the real sources of capitalist prosperity do not lie in the open-air at all, and that to find them we have to delve into their gloomier secret depths."[9] McNally also sees the 'grim' figures that erupt from Marx's imagination as providing for the critique of modern bourgeois life, for these figures – such as vampires and zombies – "frequently dramatise the profound senses of corporeal vulnerability that pervade modern society, most manifestly when commodification invades new spheres of social life."[10] It is for this reason, in other words, that gothic forms "run across the history of global capitalism" because they shed light "on the troubled relations between human bodies and the operations of the capitalist economy".[11] In so doing, Marx's monsters provide for the study of "the monstrous forms of

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[6] McNally, p. 114.
[7] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1990), p. 125
[8] Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 125.
[9] Baldick, p. 126.
[10] McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, p. 2.
[11] Ibid.

every-day life in a capitalist world-system."[12]

Shapiro similarly claims that the production of life under commodity capitalism must be understood as engendering an innately gothic experience. "Marx claim[s]," writes Shapiro, "that the capitalist political economy continuously produces a grotesque anamorphosis."[13] For Shapiro, the 'anamorphosis' brought into being by the "wrench[ing] of the human subject from the security of a non-capitalist life-world" illustrates how "capitalist commodification produces an *intrinsically Gothic experience*."[14] Thus, Shapiro argues that Marx's use of gothic vocabularies is neither accidental nor a rhetorical turn of phrase. Baldick likewise observes how Marx's gothic representation of modern bourgeois society "is more than a decorative trick of style;" rather, "it follows from and reinforces certain major elements of Marx's understanding of capitalism and its place in history."[15] McNally argues, too, that Marx's gothic lexicon expresses the 'major elements' of his conceptualisation of capital, in particular in terms of the sense of the 'estrangement' it produces in modern societies, in which emergent capitalist relations are experienced as "strange and horrifying." [16]

For Shapiro, the 'strange and horrifying' effects that the gothic typically mediates are effects explicitly generated by the capitalist separation of the labourer from their means of production. According to him,

> Gothic effects occur as capitalism separates laborers from any means of production…that might sustain them outside of or in tension with a system that produces commodities only for their profit-generating potential.[17]

Thus, the gothic captures exploitative labour relations through its registration of one of capitalism's defining features – the alienation of the worker from their means of production. Chris Harman puts this slightly differently in his seminal 2009 treatise *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx*, in which he argues not so much for a general understanding of Marx's 'monsters,' but for the term "zombie capitalism" to describe the capitalist system as a whole.[18] Harman reformulates Marx's famous description of capital as

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[12] McNally, p. 2.
[13] Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania," p. 30.
[14] Shapiro, p. 30. My emphasis.
[15] Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 125.
[16] McNally, p. 2.
[17] Shapiro, p. 30.
[18] Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010).

"dead labour…ruling over the living"[19] to describe how capitalism functions in zombie-like terms:

> Marx referred to capitalism as the domination of the dead over the living, the past over the present. He described how the products of people's labour come to dominate their lives and the lives of those who follow them. I thought it was appropriate to use the term 'zombie capitalism' to describe the system as a whole.[20]

Hartman reaches towards a gothic vocabulary, then, to describe both the systemic operations of the capitalist economy and to pay tribute to Marx's own use of gothic terminologies throughout all three volumes of *Capital*. Taken together, Shapiro, McNally, Baldick, and Hartman's analyses illustrate how Marx's gothic aesthetics are "cultural phenomena endemic to capitalism, a part of the phenomenology of bourgeois life."[21]

But notable here is not merely the value of Marx's gothic terminologies to describe the reality of capitalist societies in general. For the gothic mode itself contains within it a powerful means of providing the basis for the emergence of *anti-capitalist* forms of critique.[22] McNally argues, for example, that Marx's monsters do more than simply give expression to the seemingly 'supernatural' world behind capital's "occult-generating surface."[23] Rather, Marx's monstrous terminology functions as "a theory [that sustains] radical commitments."[24] Fred Botting has likewise shown how Marx's gothic metaphors "push monstrosity to its limit to frame capital's exploitation of all bodies and values in terms of the utmost horror."[25] In so

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[19] Marx, *Capital Volume I*, p. 990.
[20] "Zombie Capitalism," *Socialist Worker*, 23 June 2003, https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/zombie-capitalism/ [accessed 12 August 2022].
[21] McNally, pg. 4.
[22] This is not to suggest that the gothic is *only* invested in this type of critical interrogation. Indeed, for critics like Tabish Khair, the gothic is synonymous with the colonial conquest and its attendant forms of racial and gendered othering. As Khair argues, the gothic has long been caught up in "the problematics of narrating the Other," and has thus played a central role in "approaches of the civilising or evangelising gentleman, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the 'school' that posited non-Europeans as basically unmitigated/lurking cannibals." See Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4. I consider the colonial history of the gothic at further length in my first chapter.
[23] James Penny, "Fetishism," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*, edited by Andrew Pendakis, Imre Szeman, and Jeff Diamanti (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), pp. 311-318 (p. 313).
[24] McNally, p. 114.
[25] Fred Botting, "Dark Materialism: Gothic Objects, Commodities and Things," in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 240-259 (p. 244).

doing, Marx's monstrous vocabulary "challenges acquiescence to prevailing bourgeois values, forms and (un)realities" by activating its "energies against imperatives of accumulation."[26] In other words, Marx's gothic lexicon is useful because it names capitalism's "horrors" and thus performs what McNally describes as "a counter-magic to the sorcery of capital."[27]

Recognisable in McNally's description of 'the sorcery of capital' is Marx's notion of the commodity fetish. "A commodity appears, at first sight," as Marx famously puts it, "a very trivial thing, and easily understood."[28] Yet, the commodity is anything but easily grasped, for "in reality, [it is] a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[29] By these 'metaphysical subtleties' Marx is referring to the commodity's "mystical character."[30] As he continues, a commodity is a mysterious thing because

> in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.[31]

The 'secret' of the commodity, then, describes its "apparent power," in James Penny's words, "to drape a veil of distraction over the products of human labor, dissimulating the social qualities inherent in their conditions of production."[32] Marx describes this process as follows:

> the existence of the things *quâ* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the *fantastic form* of a relation between things.[33]

Thus, the commodity becomes "endowed with a life of [its] own" for the process of 'social dissimulation' eliminates the traces of relations between producers by replacing these human

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[26] Botting, "Dark Materialism," p. 244.
[27] McNally, p. 114.
[28] Marx, *Capital, Vol I*, p. 163.
[29] Marx, p. 163.
[30] Ibid., p. 164.
[31] Marx, p. 166.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

relations with relations among *things*.[34] Through the concept of the commodity fetish, Marx was able to show how the world of capital was not, in fact, a world 'freed' from magic or myth – what he terms "the nonsensical pre-history of human society."[35] Rather, the capitalist system brings into being a world founded on 'fetishism', the name Marx uses to describe how the commodity "comes to hold a value beyond what it should be."[36]

In this sense, the fetishisation of commodities has considerable gothic resonance; as Botting observes, "numerous phantoms, spectres and monsters gather in the reality dominated by commodity-forms."[37] The gothic connotations of the commodity fetish have indeed been noted by a range of other scholars, who make use of a series of quintessentially gothic metaphors in describing the process by which the commodity comes to possess a power which does not arise from the use value of the commodity itself. "Viewed from the marketplaces' perspective," explains Shapiro,

> the commodity itself seems to generate profit rather than merely being the momentary container of the difference between the actual value of the laborer's work and the price she or he was paid for that labor. As the human creator now seems to be simply the bearer of a commodity's social energy, rather than its originator, the object appears autonomous and self-creating, like an awful, supernatural alien towering before its human meat-puppets.[38]

Shapiro illustrates, then, how the fetishisation of the commodity hinges on a seemingly 'supernatural' process of animating with power what is an essentially inanimate object; as he puts it, "a particularly *occult* transformation arises with the commodity fetish."[39] Meanwhile, Botting has illustrated how Marx's gothic figures "disturb the reality of the commodity form" because they "disclose both the dematerialisations activated by economic transformation and the frustrations attendant on any critical attempt to restore a rational and human sense of social reality."[40] As such, Botting suggests that Marx entangles his

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[34] Ibid., p. 165.
[35] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume III*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1976 [1867]), p. 809.
[36] Marx, *Capital Vol I,* p. 166.
[37] Botting, "Dark Materialism," p. 244.
[38] Shapiro, p. 30.
[39] Shapiro, p. 30. My italics.
[40] Botting, "Dark Materialism," p. 244.

> Gothic figures fully…in the work of commodification and fetish…in their difference and limits they mark the (ideological) 'reality' that circulates as an effect of the commerce of ghosts and spectres at the same time as they acknowledge the phantasmal character of lived, modern 'reality'.[41]

Thus, in an echo of Shapiro's analysis, Botting concludes that gothic figures enact the very processes of the commodity fetish itself, because they showcase "the fantasy form in which reality is lived."[42]

Like the fetishisation of commodities, which heralds the emergence of what Marx describes as an "enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world,"[43] capitalism as a system possesses an almost occult-like ability to hide from view the exploitative and violent operations upon which its success pivots. Marx notes this process himself when he argues that capitalism renders its violent exploitations discreet through processes of 'naturalisation' – what he terms capital's ability to present itself as "a natural state of affairs."[44] McNally puts this slightly differently when he describes capitalism as an insidious system that pivots on a process of invisibilisation. According to him, "the very insidiousness of the capitalist grotesque has to do with its invisibility," particularly in terms of the ways in which capitalist exploitation becomes normalised and naturalised via its colonisation of the essential fabric of everyday life.[45] "What is most striking about capitalist modernity", continues McNally, "is its elusive *everydayness*, its apparently seamless integration into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian existence."[46] The point here, then, is that much of capitalism's success has hinged on its ability to present itself as "a given existence," the result of which has been "the naturalization of the arbitrary power relations that structure this existence."[47] In other words, so naturalised has capitalism become, so apparently seamless in its integration "into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian existence" that we forget that its forms of life are historical and unique.[48]

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Marx, *Capital Volume III*, p. 809.
[44] Marx, *Capital Vol I*, p. 505.
[45] McNally, p. 114.
[46] Ibid, p. 115.
[47] Michael Niblett, "The Arc of the 'other America'," in *Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture*, ed. by Michael Niblett and Kerstin Oloff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 51-72 (p. 58).
[48] Niblett, "The Arc of the 'other America'," p. 58.

The hidden circ0uits of capital can, however, be recalled from the shadows. In particular, they can be exhumed with recourse to the very processes of 'fetishisation' upon which their naturalisation depends. While some scholars have critiqued the gothic for remaining "aligned with commodities and capitalist production,"[49] others have shown how the mode is often summoned as a vocabulary through which to *de-fetishisise* capitalist naturalisation. Indeed, what makes the gothic "especially compelling" for critics like McNally is the genre's ability to generate forms of estrangement "in an age in which capitalism has become as invisible as the air we breathe."[50] As McNally suggests, because gothic tales typically "insist that something not-quite-real is at work within global capitalism, some occult process of exploitation that conceals itself, these tales carry a defetishising charge."[51] The gothic can be aligned, then, with an anti-capitalist commitment, for its devices are often deployed to critique the 'monstrous outages' of the market system. McNally points out, for example, that his interest in analysing gothic figures like the zombie and the vampire is explicitly committed to "bring[ing] the monsters of the market out of [the] netherworld,"[52] a process that is mobilised through his study of gothic terminologies in a range of fictions from early modern England through to contemporary West Africa. Focusing on the estranging effects of this mode in a series of fictions from these diverse regions and historical periods, McNally shows how it is the gothic's "armoury of de-familiarising techniques" that enables us to fully comprehend capital's mysterious processes because the genre generates forms of visibilisation by making seen the unseen.[53] "For this reason," McNally concludes that gothic forms "can…carry a disruptive charge, offering a kind of grotesque realism that mimics the absurdity of capitalist modernity, the better to expose it."[54]

Thus, McNally illustrates how the gothic might be mobilised to a critical end by throwing into relief capitalism's "fantastic and mysterious processes."[55] Rebecca Duncan similarly contends that the gothic can be invested with "proto-critical potential" by emphasising how the genre's tropes of bodily violence might encode the "violent disorientation" brought into being by the primary mode of production and its successive regimes of accumulation. "In registering the violent experience of incorporation into a rising

[49] See Botting, "Dark Materialism," pp. 240-259
[50] McNally, p. 15.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., p. 3.
[53] Ibid., p. 6.
[54] Ibid., p. 7.
[55] Ibid., p. 5.

regime of capital," argues Duncan, "gothic forms enable the exposure of that system's caustic effects."[56] Taken as such, the gothic must be understood as not only a mode that gives expression to the lived condition of capitalist life in general, for authors who make use of this form often capitalise on its "*interrogative"* possibilities.[57] In this sense, the gothic and its aesthetics serve a dialectical function: they interrogate not only the initial inclusion of capital into previously under- or un-capitalized regions, but also moments of renewed or intensified capitalist modernisation.

The study of gothic aesthetics in a range of literatures from across the world and different historical periods therefore enables a form of analysis that insists on their concrete situations *vis-a-vis* capitalist modernity. Indeed, as McNally suggests, in order to fully comprehend the emergence of gothic tales from areas as diverse as early modern England and contemporary West Africa requires as much a study on monstrous figures themselves as "*the zones of experience that nurture and sustain them, that provide the blood and flesh off which they feed*."[58] Inspired by this premise, this project looks to the specific conditions engendered by the commodity frontier to argue that these conditions provide the concrete basis from which localised gothic aesthetics erupt. In so doing, I make a claim for a materialist analysis of gothic aesthetics by illustrating how the form cannot be extricated from the world-systemic conditions that provide the gothic with its life-giving – or, indeed, life-taking – energies.

World-System, World-Literature, and Combined and Uneven Development

If the gothic is committed to expressing and critiquing the realities of capitalist commodification, then it necessarily also forms part of the corpus of 'world-literature,' so termed to illustrate its registration of the social logic of the capitalist world-system. Formative to the world-literary category has been the work of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), who first coined the hyphenated term 'world-literature' in their 2015 treatise *Combined and Uneven Development: Toward a Radical Theory of World-Literature*. In this study, WReC suggests that world-literature takes as its substrate the social logic of capitalist modernity. This, then, is what provides the reasoning behind WReC's use of the hyphenation, for it marks

[56] Rebecca Duncan, "Gothic in the Capitalocene: World-Ecological Crisis, Decolonial Horror, and the South African Postcolony, in *Gothic in the Anthropocene: Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*, ed. by Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund and Johan Höglund, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), pp. 175-194 (p. 182).
[57] Duncan, "Gothic in the Capitalocene," p. 182.
[58] McNally, p. 3. My emphasis.

'world-literature' as the site of *world-systemic* literary critique. "Perhaps," WReC write, "we should begin to speak of 'world-literature' with a hyphen, derived from that of world-system."[59]

Much of what sparked WReC's development of the world-literary category had to do with what they describe as "a feeling that the disciplinary protocols and critical presuppositions of literary studies have entered into crisis."[60] WReC attributes this crisis to a range of different factors, from "the ongoing subordination of culture generally to the laws of the market" and "the apparently declining significance, relatively speaking, of literature itself as a cultural form" to "the steady assault on the autonomy of the humanities" within the university system as a whole.[61] Thus, world-literature has emerged, as Michael Niblett has noted, "as a key mode in arguments over the reinvention of the discipline," and one that seeks to intervene in comparative literary scholarship by identifying global capitalism as "a kind of master-process determining a whole host of destabilizing factors."[62]

While WReC's theory sparked much debate across the academy and the field of literary studies at large,[63] the concept of world literature has been a source of scholarly inquiry since the turn of the century. A large part of this attention was set in motion by the publication of Fredric Jameson's now-famous 1986 essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."[64] Indeed, WReC's references to the twentieth-first century assault on the autonomy of the Humanities reads starkly in light of the questions raised by Jameson in this essay. After all, much of what framed Jameson's desire to re-interrogate "the question of 'world literature" in the late 1980's was due to the "reinvention of cultural studies" that was taking place in the Humanities across American universities during the time.[65] Jameson's essay was also informed by the economic context in which he was writing – the era, as he puts it, of

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[59] The Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 8. At the time of this study's publication, the collective was made up of Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry, and Stephen Shapiro.
[60] WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development,* p. 1.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., pp. 5-6.
[63] See, in particular, the critiques of Barbara Harlow, Sarah Brouilette, David Thomas, Maria Elisa Cevasco, Joshua Clover, and David Damrosch, which are collected together in "First Responses," *Comparative Literature Studies* 53, no. 3 (2016). 505-534. For WReC's response to these critics, see "WReC's Reply," *Comparative Literature Studies* 53, no. 3 (2016), 535-55.
[64] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986), 65-88.
[65] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," p. 66.

'Multinational Capitalism.' Although Jameson acknowledges that the concept of 'world literature' is not new – dating back to as early as 1827, when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe famously coined the term *Weltliteratur* – he does suggest that the particular historical conditions of the late twentieth-century pose a renewed set of problems for literary comparativism. The reason for this, Jameson suggested, had as much to do with the transformations at work in the university sector "as to any very lucid awareness of the great outside world around us."[66] The-emergence of the question of 'world literature' in this context demanded what Jameson terms "a literary and cultural comparativism of a new type" and one explicitly based on a materialist understanding of literature and literary development.[67] This new comparative literary method that Jameson proposed was one focused not on "individual texts, which are formally and culturally very different to each other," but rather "on the *concrete situations* from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses."[68]

Jameson's essay was largely motivated by his desire to reframe the dominant literary canon in order to include within it non-canonical texts and non-western forms of writing. To do so would be to challenge questions of euro-centricity and 'first-worldism.' By including in the canon "cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories of those areas," his aim was "to convey a sense of the interest and value of these clearly neglected literatures for people formed by the values and stereotypes of a first-world culture."[69] The effect of doing so was not, however, to merely interrogate the limitations of the (first world) canon. It was also to place pressure upon and challenge the issue of "first-world cultural imperialism," for Jameson also showed how the uneven distribution and circulation of third world literatures corresponded to the unevenness and unequalness of the capitalist world-system. As Jameson puts it, Third World cultures and literatures

> are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization.[70]

[66] Jameson., p. 67.
[67] Ibid., p. 68.
[68] Ibid. My italics.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

Jameson's essay – along with Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) – has since been formative to WReC's development of the category of world-literature, particularly in terms of Jameson's understanding of modernity's simultaneity and singularity. As WReC show, the protocol of world-literature "commits [them] to arguing for a *single* world-literary system, rather than for world-literary *systems*."[71] This chimes directly with Jameson's conceptualisation of cultural formation; indeed, WReC explicitly argue that their theory of world-literary development is indebted to his concept of modernity as a singular and simultaneous phenomenon:

> [our theory] receives a powerful revisionary elaboration in the work of Fredric Jameson, where it appears as nothing less than a template for *any* consideration of modern culture, whether in the metropoles or at the peripheries of the world-system.[72]

Thus, like Jameson, WReC insist that literature and literary development "can only be conceptualised adequately in reference to world-wide capitalism."[73]

It is important to point out here that WReC's concept of world-literature also emerged as a corrective, and rejoinder, to the field of postcolonial studies, which has long been critiqued by scholars like Neil Lazarus and Benita Parry for its failure to situate colonialism in relation to capitalist imperialism. As Lazarus argues in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011),

> the term 'imperialism' has tended for the most part to be mobilised [in postcolonial studies] in description of a process of cultural and epistemological subjugation, whose material preconditions have been referred to only glancingly, if at all.[74]

Echoing Lazarus, Parry has for decades criticised postcolonial studies for "disengage[ing] colonialism from historical capitalism," the result of which has been to represent the postcolonial world "as a study of cultural events."[75] Parry's polemic, advanced in her 2004 study *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, rejected the methodological protocols of

[71] Ibid.
[72] WReC, p. 11
[73] Ibid.
[74] Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 17.
[75] Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

dominant forms of postcolonial critique "which subordinate the real to the cultural and the semiotic."[76] She advocated instead the need to

> take full account of both the cultural and the semiotic as social practices, as the negotiated processes within which subjectivities, cognition and consciousness are made and remade under determinate historical and political conditions.[77]

Thus, like Lazarus, Parry argued that the dominance of poststructuralist forms of analysis in postcolonial studies had the effect of producing a field "wholly neglectful of the political economy."[78] During the early part of the twenty-first century, the dominance of poststructuralism was manifested with particular discernibility in the texts that typically comprised the postcolonial canon, wherein modernist or postmodernist literatures were given precedence over realist or historical texts, and where the thematics of exile and diaspora were privileged "over the developments and realities in postindependence nation-states."[79]

WReC's concept of world-literature has also centered, then, on responding to the disavowal of materialist insights in postcolonial scholarship. To this end, the collective argues against popular postcolonial critiques of 'alternative modernities,' 'divergent modernities,' 'competing modernities,' and 'retroactive modernities' in favour of emphasising the capitalist world-system "as one but unequal."[80] "Here too," WReC continues,

> we follow Moretti…but also Fredric Jameson, whose argument for a 'singular modernity' is…to be vastly preferred over the various theorisations, especially in the field of postcolonial studies, of 'alternative modernities'.[81]

In place of postcolonial theorisations of modernity, which ostensibly pivot on the "'western' provenance of modernity," WReC make a claim for capitalist modernisation as a singular but unequal phenomenon.[82] The effect of this kind of argument has been to oppose postcolonial conceptions of modernity that postulate what Harry Harootunian describes as "the existence of an 'original' that was formulated in the 'West'", a form of analysis which ultimately suggests that "the form of appearance of 'modernity' elsewhere must be both belated and derivative – a

[76] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p. 5.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., p. 74.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., p. 14.
[81] Ibid., p. 8.
[82] Ibid., p. 14.

series of ‘copies’ and lesser inflections.”[83] In arguing against “this postcolonialist line of thought,” WReC offer capitalist modernity as the material basis for the development of world-literature.[84] In this sense, as Niblett contends in his gloss of WReC’s theory, “capitalist modernity is ‘both what world-literature indexes or is ‘about’ and what gives ‘world-literature’ its distinguishing characteristics.”[85]

This is not to suggest, however, that world-literature draws into its vortex all cultural forms in order to flatten out regional specificity or local inflection. As WReC explains, “far from implying that modernity therefore assumes the same form everywhere…this formulation in fact implies that it is *everywhere irreducibly specific*.”[86] Thus, world-literature takes as its foundation the idea that global capitalism comes to stand as a common reference point for all societies, while also emphasising that the social conditions of the world-system are “different in every instance for the simple reason that no two social instances are the same.”[87] The point, then, is that world-literature enables the comparison of literatures and other forms of cultural production that emerge out of very different contexts and time periods. “What is at issue here”, Lazarus and Rashmi Varma contend in their 2008 essay “Marxism and Postcolonial Studies,”

> is an attempt to *pluralise* modernity – to argue that because there are multiple determinate experiences of modernity, there is a need, correspondingly, to produce ‘site-based readings of modernity’.[88]

A world-systems approach therefore holds radical opportunity for comparative literary praxis because it allows for differing literatures and regions to be “reconstellated,” to borrow from Nicholas Brown, “in such a way as to make them both comprehensible within a single framework within which neither will look the same.”[89]

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[83] Harry Harootunian, 2000, p. 163. Cited in WReC, p. 14.
[84] WReC, p. 14.
[85] Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 6.
[86] WReC, p. 12.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Neil Lazarus and Rashmi Varma, ““Marxism and Postcolonial Studies,” in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism,* ed. by Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 309–331 (p. 324).
[89] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 2-3.

According to WReC, one central way of accounting for the specificity of lived experience under the world-literary paradigm is through analysis of the cultural implications of Leon (Lev) Trotsky's famous theory of combined and uneven development. This theory takes as its focus the ways in which earlier economic conditions, along with earlier "social relations, cultural practices and psychic dispositions" persist in capitalist or capitalising societies.[90] Trotsky's theory is based on his study of the conditions produced in early twentieth-century imperial Russia and China, contexts in which the imposition of capitalist class relations and forms of production led not to the decimation of older social and class relations, but to the forcible conjoining of newly-imposed modern and pre-existing forms, as traditional regional hierarchies developed alongside the acceleration of new modes of production.[91] The Russian case, in particular, led Trotsky to theorise the "planless, complex and combined character of development", one which he sees as occurring in ruptures and "leaps."[92] These ruptures mark *uneven development*, where developmental leaps are made at speeds historically unprecedented. The drawing together of "different stages"[93], on the other hand, is what he identifies as *combined development*, wherein dissociated social and class modalities merge to establish "a new developmental amalgam."[94] Thus, combined and uneven development – comprised of "leaps, ruptures, disparities, and unevenness, on the one hand, and fusion, interdependency, adaptations, and combination, on the other" – serves as "the contradictory forces", in Susan Dianne Brophy's words, "that electrify historical transformation."[95]

The crucial point raised by Trotsky's theory is that capitalism does not emerge or evolve in a linear or even way. As Brophy argues in her analysis of Trotsky's theory, "unevenness, exemplified by different levels of market penetration or industrial development, may be present in a single jurisdiction, while non-capitalist elements may combine with capitalist forces of production to varying degrees."[96] Likewise, WReC suggests that,

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[90] WReC, p. 10.
[91] Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution, 1932–33*, trans. by Max Eastman (London: Sphere Books, 1967), p. 432
[92] Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution 1932–33,* p. 5.
[93] Trotsky, p. 4.
[94] Ibid., p. 5.
[95] Susan Dianne Brophy, "The Explanatory Value of the Theory of Combined and Uneven Development," *Historical Materialism*, 26 February 2018, https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/explanatory-value-theory-uneven-and-combined-development [accessed 2 August 2022].
[96] Brophy, "The Explanatory Value of the Theory of Combined and Uneven Development," online.

> modernity is neither a chronological nor a geographical category. It is not something that only happens – or even that happens – in 'the west' and to which others can subsequently gain access…The idea of some sort of 'achieved' modernity, in which unevenness would have been superseded, harmonised, vanquished or ironed out is radically unhistorical.[97]

Drawing on Trotsky's theory, WReC read into world-literature a range of aesthetic formulations that register the combined and uneven experience of capitalism's incursion into zones hitherto un- or only partially capitalised. They analyse the novel form as particularly alive to this theoretical imperative because its "peculiar plasticity and hybridity…enable it to incorporate not only multiple literary levels, genres and modes, but also other non-literary and archaic cultural forms" that are "in essence, dialectical images of combined and unevenness requiring not just simple decoding but *creative application*."[98] It is this task of 'creative application' that I endeavor to undertake here by pursuing the comparative potential offered by the gothic literary registration of a range of regional commodity frontiers.

World-Ecology and the Commodity Frontier

While I locate my chosen texts within this corpus of world-literature and world-literary critique, I also aim to bring these analyses to bear on recent theories that have emphasised the ecological dimension of the world-system. If recent years have marked a notable upswing in debates on world-literature's relationship to global capitalism, then debates around the role played by world-literature's engagement with new theories of ecology have likewise become particularly salient. For many scholars who take a materialist approach to these issues, the most pressing question that concerns them is world-literature's ability to capture the operations of what Jason W. Moore terms the "capitalist world-ecology."[99] Moore's use of the hyphen here is, like WReC's, derived from world-systems analysis, for Moore similarly argues that the world-system represents "a distinct line of vision onto a singular world-historical process."[100] As Niblett has noted, "[Moore's] hyphenation of the phrase 'world ecology' is more than a

[97] WReC, p. 13.
[98] Ibid., p. 16.
[99] Jason W. Moore, "Environmental Crises and the Metabolic Rift in World-Historical Perspective," *Organization and Environment* 13, no, 2 (2000), 123-57.
[100] Moore, "Environmental Crises and the Metabolic Rift,", p. 125.

simple terminological maneuver; it is designed to illuminate a substantive *problematique*."[101] Moore writes in one of his earliest essays, for example, that

> The distinctiveness of capitalism as world-ecology...is not found simply in its large-scale transformations of nature. Rather, its distinctiveness might be best located in the ways that it progressively deepens the world-historical character of microlevel socioecologies in the interests of the ceaseless accumulation of capital, which generates geometrically rising pressures for ceaseless global expansion…With the rise of capitalism, local societies were not integrated only into a world capitalist system; more to the point, varied and heretofore largely isolated local and regional socioecological relations were incorporated into – and at the same moment became constituting agents of – a capitalist world-ecology. Local socioecologies were at once transformed by human labour power (itself a force of nature) and brought into sustained dialogue with each other…Hence, the hyphen becomes appropriate: We are talking not necessarily about the ecology of the world (although this is in fact the case today) but rather a *world-ecology*.[102]

Moore's theory of capitalism as world-ecology hinges on his amplification – and reconceptualisation – of world-systems analysis, in particular the theories put forward by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989) and Giovanni Arrighi (1990), to include what is now known as the 'world-ecology perspective.' This line of thinking takes a post-Cartesian approach to history by proposing that the division between Nature and Society is the result of the ways in which socioecological relations are structured and transformed by the world-system. Moore writes in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015):

> Capitalism's governing conceit is that it may do with Nature as it pleases…Nature is external and may be coded, quantified and rationalized to serve economic growth, social development or some other higher good.[103]

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[101] Michael Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," *Green Letters* 16, no 1 (2012), 15-20 (16).
[102] Jason W. Moore, "Capitalism as World Ecology: Braudel and Marx on Environmental History," *Organization and Environment* 16, no. 4 (2003), 431-58 (447).
[103] Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Vesro, 2015), p. 2.

This externalised 'Nature' is contrasted in Moore's world-ecology model with "nature with an emphatically lowercase *n*."[104] This 'nature' designates not a territory that lies beyond the bounds of Society – like 'Nature' – but the wider, all-encompassing matrix of relationships between human and extra-human agents that makes up what Moore thinks of as the "*oikeios*" or "web of life."[105] The *oikeios*, a concept Moore borrows from the Greek philosopher Theophrastus,

> is a relation that includes humans, and one through which human organization evolves, adapts, and transforms. Human organization is at once product and producer of the *oikeios*…In this spirit I understand capitalism as producer and product of the *oikeios*. Capitalism as world-ecology is therefore not the ecology of the world, but a patterned history of power, capital, and nature, dialectically joined.[106]

For Moore, then, 'nature and society' are not independent units (as the Cartesian Dualism implies) "which should be integrated into criticism"; rather they "must be conceptualized dialectically as an *oikeos*, as a web of life incorporating 'bundles' or 'relations' of both human and 'extra-human' nature."[107] As Sharae Deckard notes in her own interpretation of the capitalist world-ecology, "nature is not to be conceived dualistically as merely 'resource bin' or 'rubbish dump,' even if the dominant tendency of capitalist rhetoric has to been to imagine nature as either mine or sink, a source of seemingly 'free gifts' to be plundered for profit."[108] Instead, the world-ecology perspective proposes a holistic understanding of the

> plethora of ways human and biophysical natures are intertwined at every scale, from the microbiome to the body, to the city, to the world market, and the ways in which humans are actively engaged in but also constrained within manifold patterns of environment-making, from agriculture to cultural production to financialization.[109]

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[104] Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 5.
[105] Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 2
[106] Ibid., p. 14.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Sharae Deckard, "'The Land Was Wounded': War Ecologies, Commodity Frontiers, and Sri Lankan Literature," in *Ecocriticism of the Global South*, ed. by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran. (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 35-43 (p. 37).
[109] Deckard, "'The Land Was Wounded'", p. 38.

Thus, Moore reformulates capitalism as a world-ecology, joining the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of nature in dialectical unity. To this end, Moore argues that environmental history should be grasped not as the history of capitalism 'working' on Nature, but rather as a history of capitalism emerging *through* the periodic reorganisation of nature-society relations. Viewed through this organic whole, historical systems like capitalism must be understood as interconnected relations and activities between human and extra-human natures, which are "woven together in such a way as to instantiate definite law-like patterns of wealth, nature and power over a long time and large space."[110]

Much of Niblett's work has been informed by his combination of the word-ecology perspective with the materialist reconstruction of world-literature put forward by WReC.[111] "If the capitalist world-system is a world-ecology, and if world-literature is the capitalist world-system," Niblett writes, "then world-literature must simultaneously be the literature of the capitalist world-ecology."[112] Thus, Niblett expands WReC's theory to include the world-ecology by arguing that the

> differently specific ways in which natures are woven together within successive epochs are determined ultimately by the prevailing mode of production, itself constituted through a particular set of dialectical relations between human and extra-human natures…[Thus] the effectivity of the world-ecology will also necessarily be discernible in any modern literary work, since it too – in the form of the changing relationship between human and extra-human natures through which the modern world-system has developed – exists as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape.[113]

In order to fully grasp the development of capitalism as world-ecology and its implication for literary analysis we must turn, now, to the commodity frontier. The term 'commodity frontier' was first introduced by Moore in his 2003 article "'The Modern World System' as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism", in which he asks the following question: "What kind of world environmental history does The Modern World-System suggest?"[114] In answering this question, Moore makes the claim that the growth of the global capitalist economy was enabled through the expansion of vast frontiers of land, labour, food,

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[110] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology,* p. 7.
[111] Ibid, p. 10.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., p. 7 & p. 11.
[114] Moore, "Capitalism as World Ecology," p. 308.

energy, and raw materials over the past 500 years. Moore's understanding of historic capitalism is crucial here, for he conceptualises the world-system as having developed through a series of successive commodity frontiers that have, since the sixteenth century, spread across the world's geologically and climatically distinct ecosystems. The movement of these frontiers into zones previously un- or under-capitalised must be emphasised here, for their incursion into non-capitalised regions produces the radical reorganisation of lives and landscape in service to commodity production.[115]

What makes commodity frontiers so central to global capitalist development and expansion is their ability to create new territories in which reservoirs of food, energy, raw material and labour-power can be secured and mobilised in service to value accumulation. Commodity frontiers ease the pressure on rising profit rates and assist in reviving capital accumulation by "pumping vast streams of 'cheap' food, energy, raw materials, and labour-power into the world-economy."[116] It is for this reason that commodity frontiers are also marked by periodic cycles of boom and bust, for they rapidly exhaust the socioecological conditions upon which their productivity depends. Moore explains that,

> the extractive and agricultural character of frontier industrialization under conditions of ceaseless accumulation meant that not only was ecological exhaustion a fact of life in these areas, but that ecological exhaustion was a major impetus to further capitalist expansion and to the system's cyclical fluctuations.[117]

Socioecological transformation, serves, then, as the propelling force behind capitalist development because the exhaustion of land and labour leads to the formation of new commodity frontiers and therefore also capitalist expansion. "Moving restlessly across the globe" in search of new energy and labour reserves of to be plundered, commodity frontiers

> draw more of nature into the gravitational field of endless accumulation, deepening the world-historical character of local ecologies such that landscape transformations in one region, say, become, inextricable from the reorganization of flora and fauna elsewhere.[118]

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[115] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 44.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Jason W. Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy: Commodity Frontiers, Ecological Transformation, and Industrialization," *Review* 23 (2000), 409–433 (412), my emphasis.
[118] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 11.

As such, commodity frontiers provide a stark illustration of capitalism's continual need to find and secure regions that lie outside of its dominion. "Once a particular frontier is exhausted," argues Niblett, "new sites must be found in order to secure fresh streams of nature's bounty – hence the pivotal role of frontier movements in the geographical expansion of the world-system."[119]

Consider, as an example, the early modern Caribbean sugar frontier, which forms the focus in my first chapter. Moore argues that the sugar plantation is exemplary of the logics of the commodity frontier because it provides insight into the frontier's expansive and transformative power. Indeed, as Moore puts it, "few commodity frontiers have contained such an expansionary and environmentally transformative logic as sugar."[120] Not only did the success of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Caribbean sugar plantation pivot on a highly organised division of enslaved labour unknown to the rest of the world at the time,[121] but the ecological propensities of the sugar crop meant that environmental exhaustion was foundational to the plantation's existence. Soil exhaustion is most commonly cited when documenting the destructive impacts of sugar monoculture, but the latter's deleterious consequences for local environments are legion. According to Moore,

> ecological exhaustion at the point of production was complemented by an environmentally destructive multiplier effect which led to, *inter alia*, deforestation, massive soil erosion, siltation [and] climate change.[122]

It is for this reason that Moore views the plantation as offering the paradigmatic case of what Marx originally identified as the metabolic rift. Borrowing Marx's analysis of the metabolic rifts engendered by soil crisis caused by the loss of soil nutrients through the export of food (and fiber) to the cities,[123] Moore shows how the sugar frontier was an intensely transformative

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[119] Ibid., p. 44.
[120] Moore, "Sugar and Expansion," p. 413
[121] According to Sidney Mintz, sugar plantations in the Caribbean were "a synthesis of field and factory," making use of methods to ensure profitability and productivity that were "associated more with industry than with agriculture – at least in the sixteenth century." Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p 55.
[122] Moore, "Sugar and Expansion," p. 413.
[123] Marx's concept of metabolic rift took inspiration from German chemist Justus von Liebig, along with other agricultural chemists and agronomists in Germany, Britain, France, and the United States, who had warned of a soil crisis caused by "'the loss of soil nutrients…through the export of food and fibre to the cities. Rather than being returned to the soil, as in traditional agricultural production, these

historical structure "because sugar monoculture rapidly exhausted soil fertility through a process of highly unequal, and very rapid, ecological exchange."[124] "From this perspective," continues Moore, "the sugar frontier was the paradigmatic case of the 'metabolic rift' that characterized the change in nature-society relations once the transition to capitalism commenced:"

> With the creation of a world market and a trans-Atlantic division of labor in the sixteenth century, the localized ecological problems of the feudal era gave way to the globalizing problem of the metabolic rift under capitalism, whereby the products of the countryside (especially but not only in the peripheries) flowed into the cities, which were under no obligation to return the waste products to the point of production. Nutrients were pumped out of one ecosystem in the periphery and transferred to another in the core.[125]

In addition to the metabolic rifts inaugurated by the plantation, the sugar frontier tied together the ecologies and social formations of several geographically and geopolitically distinct regions. Sidney Mintz has famously shown how the Caribbean plantation was markedly global in orientation not only due to its industriousness, but also because its operations were thoroughly entangled with the reorganisation of work regimes in industrialising England. While sugar was first considered a luxury and therefore an aristocratic commodity, it quickly made its way into the eating habits of the working classes as a source of cheap caloric fuel. The addition of sugar to the diet of the working classes in the form of sweet tea would have the effect of transforming the diet of "the common people" to the extent that it would come to rely on "two articles imported from opposite sides of the earth."[126] Sugar also came to infiltrate and structure the diet of the middle classes; by the eighteenth century, sugar "acquired a more everyday, down-to earth character," serving as a sweetener of tea, coffee, chocolate, and alcoholic drinks, and as an ingredient of bakery and fruit desserts."[127] Thus, sugar "signaled"

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essential nutrients were being shipped hundreds or even thousands of miles away and ended up as waste polluting the cities." Ctd in Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," *Green Letters* 16, no 1 (2012), 15-20 (16). See also John Bellamy Foster, "Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature," *Monthly Review*, 1 December 2013, https://monthlyreview.org/2013/12/01/marx-rift-universal-metabolism-nature/ [accessed 1 October 2022].

[124] Moore, "Sugar and Expansion," pp. 413 – 414.

[125] Ibid., pp. 413 – 414.

[126] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 116.

[127] Mintz. p. 122.

what Mintz describes as "the linkages of the consumptive habits of every Englishman to the world outside England, and particularly the colonies of the empire."[128]

While sugar was (literally) feeding the British population and providing the basis for the nation's economic development, it was causing the mass immiseration of the enslaved labourers producing the commodity in the Caribbean. As Moore points out,

> this unequal ecological exchange would become particularly apparent when eighteenth century British workers consumed sugar products even as Caribbean slaves starved, mostly because so little real food was grown on many sugar islands and food imports fluctuated according to ecological and economic cycles.[129]

Thus, the history of the Caribbean sugar frontier foregrounds how unequal exchange pivots as much on social inequality as ecological degradation, while allowing, at the same time, "for a deeper understanding of the interrelations between deepening market integration, spatial expansion, and ecological degradation."[130] The sugar plantation illustrates, in other words, some of the key characteristics of the commodity frontier, particularly in terms of its inauguration of the development of the capitalist world-ecology "as a single, highly uneven, system."[131] In this sense, analysis of the frontier enables us to see how the experience of frontier-led socioecological change is "*simultaneously locally specific and world-historical*."[132] Mintz puts this slightly differently when he observes just how much how the history of Caribbean sugar frontier reveals about "the intimacy of the links between colony and metropolis, fashioned by capital."[133]

Sugar, of course, is merely one frontier among many. Others include rubber, cassava, cacao, cotton, water, oil, silver, limestone, coal, and gold. Significant for my purposes is that these frontiers have become increasingly central to the field of comparative literary studies. Indeed, recent years have witnessed a veritable explosion in critical writing on the literary dimensions of commodities and the commodity frontier. Many of these analyses examine the variations in the geopolitical location of commodity frontiers in order to consider how these local specificities might differently inflect literary production. Since the late 2000s, several literature scholars have begun to argue for the comparative study of commodity frontiers as a

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Moore, "Sugar and Expansion," p. 414.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 12. My emphasis.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Mintz. p. 116.

means of tracking how literary texts register the domination of local societies and regional landscape by specific commodities. “What happens”, asks Patricia Yaeger in a 2011 editorial for *PMLA*, “when we sort texts according to the energy sources that made them possible?”[134] Eschewing popular methodical approaches to literature (such as historical periodisation), this editorial instead focuses on the literary inscription of energy sources such as coal, wood, tallow, oil, and atomic power.

Since Yaeger’s proposal, several other scholars have risen to prominence for their interest in reading literature in relation to the commodity form. Oil, in particular, has garnered much attention over the last two decades as a form of legitimate literary inquiry.[135] The corpus of petro-fiction has, in turn, become formative to the emergence of the “energy humanities” a field of study that considers, in Claire Westall’s words, “culture’s role in establishing, maintaining and transforming resource and work/energy regimes.”[136] Alongside this burgeoning scholarship on literature and culture’s “imbrication with energy systems,”[137] other commodities have begun to capture the imagination of materialist literary scholars such as Michael Niblett, Sharae Deckard, Kerstin Oloff, Chris Campbell, Hannah Boast, and Caitlin Vandertop, who have taken as their focus a range of commodity frontiers in their literary critique, including sugar, cassava, limestone, coal, cacao, cascadura, and water, in order to theorise the relationship between transformations in world-ecology and cultural form.[138] These

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[134] Patricia Yaeger, “Editor’s Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources,” *PMLA* 126, no. 2 (2011), 305-326 (305).
[135] Key examples include *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, ed. by Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson and Imre Szeman (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), and *Oil Fictions: World Literature and Our Contemporary Petrosphere*, ed. by Stacey Balkan and Swaralipi Nandi (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), as well as Jennifer Wenzel, “Petro-magic-realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature,” *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006) 449-464.
[136] Claire Westall, “World-Literary Resources and Energetic Materialism.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 3 (2017), 265–276. (269).
[137] Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, “Introduction: On the Energy Humanities,” in *Energy Humanities: An Anthology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), pp. 1–13 (p. 3).
[138] See, among others, Sharae Deckard, “Cacao and Cascadura: Energetic Consumption and Production in World-Ecological Literature,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 3 (2017), 342-354; Kerstin Oloff, “Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic: Commodity Frontiers, ‘Cheap Nature’ and the Monstrous-Feminine,” in *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture: Transposition, Hybridization, Tropicalization*, ed. by Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 122-136; Chris Campbell, “Limestone and the Literary Imagination: a World-Ecological Comparison of John Cowper Powys and Kamau Brathwaite,” *The Powys Journal* 30 (2020), 62-91; Caitlin Vandertop, “Ghosts of the Plantation: Sugar, Narrative energetics and Gothic

scholars trace the progression and development of commodity frontiers in particular contexts through the study of regional literatures. In so doing, they map the progressive displacement of socioecological crisis across site-specific geographies as commodity frontiers are relocated and consequently come to inform or disrupt literary formation in regions previously unsubordinated to capitalist commodification.

Taken together, these analyses are testament to not only the burgeoning interest in world-literary studies on the commodity frontier, but also speak to the generative modes of literary analysis enabled by the frontier itself. In an echo of WReC's world-literary theory, Niblett argues that the commodity frontier provides "a baseline of universality for comparative analyses of cultural forms."[139] To make a claim for a comparative literary method premised on the commodity frontier is therefore to argue for a means of both tracking the influence of the frontier on world-literary forms, as well as to enable the comparison of literary responses to commodity frontiers in very different geopolitical contexts. The dual imperative offered by the commodity frontier is what animates much of this project's comparative method, for it enables the comparison of gothic aesthetics as employed in a diverse range of literatures across the '(semi)peripheral' arenas of the world-system.

It is important to pause here and note that the descriptor 'peripheral' in this context is understood not as "a value judgment or cultural hierarchy"[140] but as a *world-economic signifier* drawn from Immanuel Wallerstein's formulation of world-systems analysis. According to Wallerstein, the world is divided into three zones – core, semi-periphery, and periphery – that are defined according to their function within the capitalist world-economy.[141] Where core regions "define the traffic in goods and commodified labor-power to their advantage," peripheral regions "are violently seized for the natural resources of their terrain, strategic location, and the labor of their peoples."[142] The semi-periphery, on the other hand, "is comprised of areas which are in between the core and the periphery."[143] "Some of these areas,"

Ecologies in Fiji," *Green Letters* 24, no. 2 (2020), 1-14 ; Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and Hannah Boast, *Hydrofictions: Water, Power and Politics in Israeli and Palestinian Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

[139] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 12.

[140] Sharae Deckard, "Editorial," *Green Letters* 16, no. 1 (2012), 5-14 (8).

[141] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Semi-peripheral Countries and the Contemporary World Crisis," *Theory and Society* 3, no. 4 (1976), 461–483.

[142] Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 33.

[143] Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel,* p. 33.

writes Wallerstein, "have been core-areas of earlier versions of a given world-economy," while others "had been peripheral areas that were later promoted…as a result of the changing geopolitics of an expanding world-economy."[144] Thus, my use of the peripheral designation exists not to homogenise differences between peripheralised (postcolonial) regions nor to comment on their literary 'value'. Rather the peripheral descriptor highlights how these regions (and their cultures) exist in a "asymmetrical relationship", as Benita Parry puts it, "to the older imperialist centres which had pursued capitalism's unilateral intrusion into pre-capitalist worlds."[145]

Exploitation and Appropriation: The Commodity Frontier as a Narrative Category

In order to map out the comparative literary method I here employ, it is useful to recall Shapiro's analysis of the gothic's 'world-system.' As Shapiro notes in his analysis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the generic inscriptions of gothic narratives "tend to re-emerge in a swarm at certain discrete periods."[146] Pointing to the upswing of gothic tales during the "1780s/1990s, 1880s/1990s, 1950s, and most recently," Shapiro argues that gothic aesthetics have historically tended to sediment during two phases of long-wave capitalist accumulation:

> Gothic representational devices become recalled and revitalized in the synapses that both link and distinguish the dendrites of two time-spaces of capitalist development and its reformation of inter-regional trade-relations.[147]

Thus, "the oscillating pump of Gothic emissions reveals a more specific, albeit recurring, representational purpose *beyond* its application as a general thematic for describing capitalist-induced phenomenology," for the form also "reveals the specific tensions of their historical moment."[148] The gothic must be conceived, then, as a representational form that expresses more than simply the 'monstrous' forms of life lived under capitalism because it also illuminates the historical particularities and tensions that animate each moment of its periodic emergence.[149]

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[144] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (London, New York, and San Francisco: Academic Press, 1974), p. 349.
[145] Deckard and Rashmi Varma, "Against the Grain," p. 10.
[146] Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania", p. 35.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid, p. 35. My italics.
[149] Ibid, p. 35.

Niblett, too, has emphasised the inevitable interconnectedness of global economic ruptures with recourse to gothic literatures and figures. Yet, unlike Shapiro, Niblett suggests that it is the transformation of both economic structures and extra-human geographies that provides the necessary conditions for the periodic emergence of gothic narratives. As Niblett explains, "ecological revolutions…lurk behind those periodic moments when Gothic narratives tend to emerge in a swarm."[150] Niblett illustrates, then, how "Shapiro's argument can be extended by way of the world-ecological perspective, for which the transitions between capitalist development are simultaneously transitions between different ways of organising nature" because:

> the anamorphic and catachrestic features of Gothic texts register the feelings of rupture, strangeness, and irreality engendered by the scrambling of economic hierarchies, the coexistence of residual and emergent social formations, and the uneven transformation of human and extra-human geographies.[151]

The gothic therefore registers the felt experience of the convulsion unleashed by ecological transformations and "the often intensely uneven forms of combined and uneven development through which they unfold."[152] Moreover, as I elaborate below, the gothic also gives expression to what Niblett terms the commodity frontier's relation between "exploitation and appropriation, or paid labor and unpaid work/energy,"[153] for it likewise brings into focus the systemic links between gendered and racialised violence and the exploitation of natural resources attendant upon frontier-led expansion.

If the gothic gives expression to the manifold ruptures engendered by periodic environmental change, then it also gives shape to the racialised and gendered dynamics of the commodity frontier. Indeed, a handful of scholars have offered the gothic as a key mode through which to track the socioecological operations of the frontier zone. Crucial, here, however, is that these analyses have usefully drawn out the gendered and racialised repercussions of the ecological exhaustions produced by frontier formation. Kerstin Oloff has powerfully shown, for example, how the gothic trope of the monstrous feminine might be

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[150] Michael Niblett, "Demon Landscapes, Uneven Ecologies: Folk Spirits in Guyanese Fiction," *in Cultures of Uneven and Combined Development: from International Relations to World Literature*, ed. by James Christie and Nesrin Degirmencioglu (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 314-338 (p. 322).
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 46.

linked to "the concomitant environmental degradation of the commodity frontier."[154] Focusing on a series of US-led extractive frontiers in Marie Vieux Chauvet's Haitian novel *Amour, Colère, Folie* (1968), Oloff argues that the gothic serves the function of "revisibili[sing] the systemic links between gendered sexual violence, the exploitation of natural resources and unpaid or 'cheapened work'."[155] Thus, for Oloff, the gothic focalises how "gendered and racialized labor or environmental resources…are appropriated under capitalism in ways that are fundamentally unequal, violent, and orientated towards profit."[156] Niblett, too, sees in the gothic the potential to concretise "frontier-led plunder and its articulation of sexist violence."[157] He argues in a forthcoming article that contemporary Latin American women's gothic (and horror) writing provides a means of articulating how frontier-led expansion is "inextricable from sexist violence."[158] Niblett claims that the gothic vocabularies employed by Latin American women authors cannot be decoupled from

> the waves of dispossession accompanying the expansion of mining, energy, and agricultural frontiers into peasant and Indigenous territories [that] have impacted women and feminized bodies with particular severity.[159]

Oloff and Niblett show, then, how the development of the frontier and its accompanying environmental impacts emerge in tandem with gendered and racialised violence. Instructive for my purposes is that they do so by turning to "the Gothic mode," which, as Oloff puts it, serves "as a particularly compelling instance of 'world-literature' that registers in form and content the processes shaping the capitalist world-system" while also being "animated by...the processes of exploitation [and] appropriation."[160]

If the gothic registers and makes visible the links between the appropriation of racialised and gendered labour and environmental resources, then it also provides an evocative means of staging the twinned logics of the commodity frontier as theorised by Niblett's concept

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[154] Kerstin Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic: Commodity Frontiers, 'Cheap Nature' and the Monstrous-Feminine," in *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture: Transposition, Hybridization, Tropicalization*, ed. by Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 122-136 (p. 123).
[155] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," p. 123.
[156] Ibid., p. 124.
[157] Michael Niblett, "'They have always burned us': Femicide, Finance, and Neoextractivism in Latin America," *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* forthcoming.
[158] Niblett, "'They have always burned us'," forthcoming.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," pp. 123 & 125.

of the commodity frontier as a narrative category. Niblett's proposal of the commodity frontier as a narrative category has been central to expanding predominant analyses of the frontier as a "space[] on the outer edges of the global economy dedicated to the production of primary commodities."[161] Although Niblett does not deny that Moore's notion of the commodity frontier turns on a geographical placement, he does suggest that,

> by 'frontier' Moore does not mean a space or boundary between geographical or social formations in the first instance. Rather, the frontier names a set of relations or, more accurately, the relationship and constantly shifting borderline between different logics.[162]

Thus, Niblett highlights how the commodity frontier might rather come to name (or narrativise) the relation between "exploitation and appropriation, or paid labor and unpaid work/energy."[163] In fact, Niblett shows how Moore himself frequently draws on Marxist feminism and social reproduction theory (SRT) to illustrate the racist and patriarchal underbelly of the world-ecology. Moore suggests, for example, that "the history of capitalism flows through islands of commodity production, developing within oceans of unpaid work/energy."[164] Although Moore does not refer to this history in specifically gendered or racialised terms, he does highlight how capitalism "rests upon a series of devaluations."[165] As Moore puts it with recourse to Marxist value theory,

> On the one hand, capitalism lives and dies on the expanded reproduction of capital: value-in-motion. The substance of value is abstract social labour, or socially necessary labour-time. On the other hand, this production of value is particular – it *does not value everything*, only labour power in the circuit of capital – and therefore *rests upon a series of devaluations*. Plenty of work – the majority of work in the orbit of capitalism – does not register as valuable.[166]

Although Moore does not highlight the particular racial and patriarchal quality of capitalist 'devaluation,' Niblett accounts for this in far more explicit terms. For Niblett, the term frontier both refers to a specific space and names "the complex of relations between humans and the

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[161] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 43.
[162] Ibid., p. 46.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 54.
[165] Moore, p. 55.
[166] Cited in Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 54.

rest of nature through which the moving borderline between commodified labour and uncommodified labour is constituted."[167] Niblett illustrates, then, how capitalism is both racial and patriarchal in outcome and character because it

> has mobilized gendered and racialized hierarchies, in tandem with the denigration and reification of non-human nature, to ensure the devaluation of certain kinds of work…Patriarchal and colonialist-racist ideologies that position women and people of colour as belonging to the sphere of Nature (as a singular abstraction defined in opposition to Society) serve to justify the demarcation of these groups as less than human, all the better to depreciate or invisibilize their labour.[168]

The key point here is that the mobilisation of gendered and racialised hierarchies alongside the degradation of non-human nature "is crucial to the success of commodity frontiers" because these hierarchies "ensure that certain kinds of work can be treated as a 'free gift' to capital."[169]

Niblett's concept of the commodity frontier as a narrative category is indebted to a series of materialist feminist scholars, particularly Maria Mies and Nancy Fraser, who have long argued that capitalism rests on a series of gendered and ecological devaluations in order to accrue profit. I consider both Mies and Fraser's theories at length in my first and second chapters, but for now it suffices to say that capitalism is built on what Mies calls "nature, women and the colonies," which together comprise "the underground trilogy" of capitalist patriarchy.[170] Likewise, Fraser suggests that capitalism relies on a series of "background conditions" or "hidden abodes" that include the appropriation of women's labour and nature's energies. "Like women's labour," writes Fraser,

> nature is made into a free resource for capital, one whose value is both presupposed and disavowed. [Nature] is expropriated without compensation or replenishment and implicitly assumed to be infinite.[171]

Fraser argues, then, that a parallel case can be made about women's labour and natural or ecological background conditions. Like the appropriation of women's work, which provides

[167] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 48.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., p. 133.
[170] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 87.
[171] Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," *New Left Review* 86 (2014), 55-72 (63).

one of capitalism's key 'background conditions', "the capacity of nature to support life and renew itself constitutes *another background condition* for commodity production and capital accumulation."[172] To the 'hidden abode' of women's work we must therefore add another dimension – that of nature's energies because capitalism 'free-rides' as much on devalued women's labours as it does on natural resources.

Yet, the links between the capitalist drive for profit and gendered oppression are often occluded because of the historic divide that modern capitalism inaugurated between productive and reproductive labour. In contrast to waged productive labour, reproductive labour or social reproduction names "the forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds."[173] These types of provisioning "form capitalism's human subjects," for social reproduction sustains "them as embodied subjects, forming their habitus and the socio-ethical substance…in which they move."[174] Yet, as much as social reproduction – predominantly performed by women – remains crucial to the functioning of capitalist society, its social and economic importance is not accorded any real significance given that much of this activity "goes on outside the market, in households, neighbourhoods and a host of public institutions, including schools and childcare centres; and much of it, though not all, does not take the form of wage labour."[175]

Despite its devaluation, social reproduction is fundamental to the success of capital and capitalist societies. As Fraser contends,

> social-reproductive activity is *absolutely necessary* to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. Wage labour could not exist in the absence of housework, child-raising, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which help to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones…therefore, social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production.[176]

To make visible this 'hidden abode' is therefore to argue for social reproduction's centrality in spite of its historic relegation to outside of the productive wage relation. It is also to account for the conceptual gaps that have been predominant in world-systems thinking. Wilma

[172] Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode," p. 63. My italics.
[173] Ibid, 61.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

Dunaway observes in her critique of commodity chain analysis, for example, that "scholars have ignored the centrality of households and women to export production in all the contexts that I have explored over the past two decades."[177] "What all my research contexts have in common," Dunaway continues, "is that the nonwaged and unpaid labor of households was sucked into the world-economy in ways that commodity chain analysts typically *fail* to see."[178] What is needed, in other words, are accounts that provide for the "integration of households and women into research on globalized production processes."[179]

If Dunaway's critique usefully expands the corpus of world-systems thinking to include gendered (domestic) labour, then her call can also be extended to incorporate the structurally occluded links between gendered and racialised violence and resource extraction. Indeed, as Dunaway notes herself, "like women, the environment has received inadequate attention in world-systems analyses,"[180] a neglect that has led to the historic deficiency in world-systems thought of "the ecological aspects of women's lives."[181] The reason for this, as we have seen, has to do with the ways in which capital deliberately exploits sexist and racist ideologies around what constitutes 'women's work' in order to advance profit accumulation. Oloff explains:

> the links between resource extraction and gendered violence are…*structurally occluded*, since gendered female labor is assigned to the realm of (social and biological) reproduction… the 'private realm' is thus conceptually subordinated to the masculinized realm of 'work'.[182]

Thus, what is needed is a form of analysis that can identify the discreet linkages between women's labour, racialised violence, and capitalist devaluation, which, to borrow from Verónica Gago, serves as "example[s] of that which capital must subordinate, discredit, and

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[177] Wilma A Dunaway, "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation: Rescuing Women from the Periphery of World-System Thought," in *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century: Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. by Ramon Grosfoguel and Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez (London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 127- 46 (p. 128).
[178] Wilma A. Dunaway, "Through the Portal of the Household: Conceptualizing Women's Subsidies to Commodity Chains", in *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production*, ed. by Wilma A. Dunaway (Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 55-71 (p. 56).
[179] Dunaway, "Through the Portal," p. 56.
[180] Dunaway, "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation," p. 128.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," p. 135.

most of all *hide*."[183] It is precisely this imperative of making visible capital's gendered and racialised devaluations that animates this project's focus, for I aim to show how the gothic might provide a key means through which to see – and therefore understand – these relations anew.

In this sense, this project aligns itself with many of the critiques made by Oloff. In a feminist reworking of the vampiric metaphor famously employed by Marx to describe the general tendency of the capitalist to intensify the exploitation of the worker's life energies in order to extract more surplus-value,[184] Oloff writes that "capitalism…vampirically feeds on unpaid and undervalued labor, on gendered and racialized bodies and on extra-human natural resources."[185] Thus, Oloff shows how the accumulation of capital, the oppression of women and racialised peoples, and the degradation of nature are joined in dialectical unity. It is essential to emphasise here that Oloff turns to the *gothic* in order to showcase these linkages, for she argues that it is the gothic form, in particular, which allows for the examination of the hidden relations between "the violence against women and the violence of an increasingly unequal capitalist world-system that develops through the downgrading and exploitation of natural resources."[186]

Interestingly, Fraser, too, makes use of gothic iconographies to describes the patriarchal and racist nature of the world-system. Although Fraser has never described this process in outright 'gothic' terms, she has very recently offered the figure of the cannibal to express capitalism's propensity to feed off "every sphere of life".[187] In her most recent treatise, evocatively entitled *Cannibal Capitalism* (2022), Fraser argues that "capital is currently cannibalizing every sphere of life – guzzling wealth from nature, women, and racialized populations."[188] In this sense, Fraser's *Cannibal Capitalism* makes an important intervention not only in the field of Marxist feminist studies; her study also aligns itself with many of the critiques with which I opened this Introduction. Indeed, Fraser's deployment of the figure of the cannibal to illustrate capitalism's cannibalisation of 'every sphere of life' strongly recalls

[183] Verónica Gago, *Feminist International*: *How to Change Everything*, trans. by Liz Mason-Deese (London: Verso, 2020), p. 8.
[184] "Capital," Marx writes, is "dead-labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks." See Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, p. 505.
[185] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," p. 124.
[186] Ibid., p. 135.
[187] Nancy Fraser, "'Cannibal Capitalism' Is on Our Horizon," *Jacobin*, 9 October 2021, https://jacobin.com/2021/09/nancy-fraser-cannibal-capitalism-interview/ [accessed 30 September 2022].
[188] Fraser, "'Cannibal Capitalism' Is on Our Horizon," online.

both Marx's gothic descriptions in *Capital* as well as those offered by Shapiro, McNally, and Baldick. Like these scholars, Fraser sees in the monstrous iconography of the cannibal the potential to interrogate the 'gothic' reality of capitalism, while also illustrating how this figure might come to provide anti-capitalist critique. As she puts it, what is needed now is a form of analysis that "can recognize the rapaciousness of capital – and starve it to death."[189]

Like Oloff, then, Fraser insists on illustrating how the capitalist system cannot function without the unpaid or devalued work of women, racialised peoples, and nature's bounty by turning to the potentials encoded in the monstrous metaphor. Such analyses helpfully extend the field of gothic studies and world-system's analysis to include gothic mediations of the frontier's life-making capacities, which, as we have seen, include not only "the biophysical processes through which soil fertility is maintained or fossil fuels produced" but also "certain work performed by humans, such as the domestic labour (typically gendered feminine) required to reproduce the worker on a daily basis."[190] These scholars illustrate, then, how the logics of the frontier zone might come to include arenas that fall *outside* of sites of primary production like, for example, the home or household. This is the case with many of arguments that I make throughout this project, for I aim to illustrate how a study of the gothic can play a vital role in bringing frontier-led resource extraction into direct relation with gendered and racialised oppression. In so doing, I argue for a mode of literary analysis premised on a feminist eco-materialist understanding of the commodity frontier.

Ecogothic, Critical Irrealism, and Peripheral Aesthetics

If my analysis of the gothic is founded upon a materialist feminist understanding of frontier-led expansion, then it has implications not only for the field of world-literature and world-systems thought, but also for studies on the ecogothic and critical irrealism. Over the past decade, numerous new ecological approaches have been brought to bear on the gothic. These approaches have tended to take place, predominantly, under the category of the 'ecogothic,' a field of study that was set in motion in 2009 after the publication of Tom Hillard's seminal article "'Deep Into That Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature."[191] Hillard's essay took inspiration from Simon C. Estok's now-famous analysis of ecocriticism and ecophobia, first published in his article "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and

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[189] Ibid.

[190] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 46.

[191] Tom Hillard, "'Deep Into That Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, No. 4 (2009), 685-695.

Ecophobia."[192] In this paper, Estok describes ecophobia as "the contempt and hatred we feel for the agency of the natural environment."[193] As Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils note in their analysis of Estok's deployment of the 'ecophobic' term, overcoming ecophobia is central to Estok's building of "an ethical system that includes not only nonhuman animals but also 'nonsentient entities' – indeed, our entire natural ecology."[194] As Estok puts it himself, "the irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world is as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature and homophobia and racism and sexism."[195]

Taking up and elaborating on Estok's rendition of the pervasiveness of ecophobia in the late twenty-first century, Hillard notes how the "glut of Gothic tales" that have emerged since the late 2000s "indicate a fascination with the hostile and deadly aspects of the otherwise nurturing image of 'Mother Nature.'"[196] "Given the preponderance of such stories," Hillard remarks that it is "rather astonishing that eco-criticism – the one field of literary studies that takes representations of nature as its primary subject – has largely ignored them."[197] "This is particularly curious," explains Hillard, "because the recent increase in the popularity of…disaster and death-in-nature tales perfectly coincides with the development of ecocriticism as a discrete movement in literary criticism."[198] If Hillard's lamentations held true in 2009, then the recent surge in ecogothic criticism is testament to the way in which scholars of the gothic have taken up his challenge in the last decade. Since the publication of Hillard's essay, manifold critiques have emerged that emphasise the role played by the gothic in registering ecological concerns and landscapes.[199]

According to Andrew Smith and William Hughes, the ecogothic is committed to

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[192] Simon Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 2 (2009), 293-225.
[193] Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness," p. 207.
[194] Dawn Keetley and Wynn Sivils, "Introduction Approaches to the Ecogothic,", "in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).
[195] Estok, p. 207–8.
[196] Hillard, "'Deep Into That Darkness Peering',", p. 688.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Indeed, since the category of the ecgothic was introduced, it has led to the eruption of studies on a series of sub-genres of inquiry like "Tropical Gothic" (2016), "Plant-Horror" (2017)", "Eco-Horror (2019)" and, most recently, the "Racial Ecogothic" and "Non-Human Ecogothic" (2021). For a delineation of these sub-genres see Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Introduction Approaches to the Ecogothic," in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-20.

exploring “nature as a space of crisis which conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological” by registering fears and phobias around environmental and climate crisis in industrial societies.[200] As they put it, the ecogothic examines the “human need” to “continually assert some sort of control over the menacing problem of meaning that nature has embodied.”[201] The ecogothic inevitably intersects, then, with ecophobia,

> not only because ecophobic representations of nature will be infused, like the gothic, with fear and dread, but also because ecophobia is born out of the failure of humans to control their lives and their world.[202]

A large part of what has animated ecogothic analyses over the last few years therefore concerns gothic iconographies that elucidate what critics like David Del Principle see as “the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear.”[203] In so doing, ecogothic tales typically turn on representations of nature as “an avenging force – or even more monstrous, an alien entity utterly indifferent to the fate of humanity.”[204] Many other scholars have likewise suggested that ecogothic (and ecohorror) narratives often confront the reader with eco-phobic imagery by presenting readers with images of nature as “strik[ing] back against humans as punishment for environmental disruption.”[205] Thus, “rather than reduced to a backdrop unto which to project psyochosexual or cultural fears, nature itself becomes a character, often embodied in spirit-form.”[206]

Yet, as critics like Deckard have argued, the ecogothic – like the gothic more generally – can also “*be critically conscious*,”

> expressing eco-materialist critique of the alienation of nature in late capitalism, criticizing dualist myths that seek to separate notions of the human from nature rather than embracing humanity-in-nature, or summoning revenants of past

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[200] Andrew Smith and Hughes, “Introduction: defining the ecoGothic,” in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 1-14 (p. 11).
[201] Smith and Hughes, “Introduction: defining the ecoGothic,” p. 16.
[202] Keetley and Wynn Sivils, p. 3
[203] David Del Principle, “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century,” *Gothic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014), 1–8 (1).
[204] Smith and Hughes, p. 11.
[205] Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, “Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We’ll All be Dead.”’ *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21, no. 3 (2014), 509-512 (509).
[206] Sharae Deckard, “Ecogothic in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Twenty-First Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). My italics.

> ecological disasters in order to explore the complex causality of environmental catastrophes.[207]

Deckard's analysis usefully illuminates the ways in the ecogothic can be conceived in the terms demanded by Moore. As she puts it, "the social relations ecogothic embeds in its form must also be understood as socioecological: mediating the organization of a whole range of human and nonhuman relations within any given environment."[208] Thus, Deckard aligns herself with Oloff's interpretation of the gothic through the world-ecology perspective. Echoing Deckard, Oloff argues that

> the anxieties that the gothic mode registers…revolve around re-organizations of nature-society relations, which, under capitalism, require the radical rift between extra-human and human natures. Arguably, then, if the gothic constructs its monsters out of the disavowed processes of capitalism [then] gothic economies of signification *will necessarily be ecological*.[209]

If the ecogothic has become increasingly central to understanding the operations of the capitalist world-ecology, then the category of 'critical irrealism' has likewise risen to prominence for its capacity to interrogate socioecological change in the context of the commodity frontier. The term 'critical irrealism' was first introduced by Michael Löwy in his 2007 essay "The Current of Critical Irrealism: 'A Moonlit Enchanted Night'."[210] In this paper, Löwy laments both the rigidity and dominance of the mode of "critical *realism*" by arguing that this form has long been viewed "as the only acceptable form of art, and the only one that can have a critical edge in relation to contemporary social reality."[211] The attachment of the descriptor "critical" is noteworthy here. As Löwy explains, critical realism has for decades been advanced (by several critics and authors like Honoré de Balzac, Walter Scott, Leo Tolstoy and Thomas Mann) as a crucial mode that captures and critiques "the reality of bourgeois

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[207] Deckard, "Ecogothic in the Twenty-First Century," forthcoming,

[208] Ibid.

[209] Kerstin Oloff, The 'Monstrous Head' and the 'Mouth of Hell': The Gothic Ecologies of the 'Mexican Miracle,'" in *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art, Film, and Literature*, ed. by Mark Anderson & Zela Bora, Z. M. (London: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 79-98 (p. 80).

[210] Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: 'A moonlit enchanted night'," in *Adventures in Realism*, ed., by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 193-206.

[211] Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism," p. 193.

life."[212] Yet, "non-real works of art," argues Löwy, equally "contain a powerful critique of the social order."[213]

To this end, Löwy shows how 'critical irrealism' and critical realism are not necessarily opposed to each other, for critical irrealism marks "the absence of realism rather than an opposition to it."[214] As he argues with reference to Franz Kafka's writings, here the border between reality and 'irreality' is rendered unstable. "Kafka's writings," says Löwy, "do not follow the classical realist canon, because of their disquieting oneiric atmosphere: the author seems to erase – silently, discreetly, unnoticed – all distinction between dream and reality."[215] For Löwy, then, Kafka's irrealist aesthetics (as well as the broader Romantic tradition) are representative of much of the same "visionary power" that is typically accorded to critical realism in terms of an ability to critique the capitalist order. As he puts it,

> the critical viewpoints of [irrealist] works of art is often related to the dream of another, imaginary world, either idealised or terrifying, one opposed to the gray, prosaic, disenchanted reality of modern, meaning capitalist, society.[216]

Thus, "even when it takes the superficial form of a flight from reality, critical irrealism can contain a powerful implicit negative critique, challenging the philistine bourgeois order."[217]

Several literary scholars have since found in Löwy's critical irrealism a generative means of analysing the literary registration of the combined and uneven conditions that typically characterise the 'peripheral' arenas of the world-system by arguing that these conditions offer the material basis from which 'irrealist' literary aesthetics spring. Formative in this regard has been Benita Parry's coinage of the term 'peripheral irrealism' in her 2009 essay "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms."[218] Drawing on Wallerstein's analysis of the core, semi-periphery, and periphery, Parry argues for a comparative approach to interpreting a series of "stylistic particularities shared by literary and cultural forms from the periphery as arising from their concrete situations in capitalist modernity."[219] "I will regard the peripheries and semi-peripheries," writes Parry, "as all societies that have been co-opted or coerced into

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[212] Ibid. 193.
[213] Ibid., p. 194.
[214] Ibid.., p. 196.
[215] Ibid., 195-196.
[216] Ibid., p. 196.
[217] Ibid., p. 196.
[218] Benita Parry, "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms," *Ariel* 40, no. 1 (2009), 27–55.
[219] Parry, "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms," p. 30.

capitalism's world system, and therefore share paradoxical experiences of transformation."[220] According to Parry, these paradoxical experiences of transformation manifest in "irrealist tonalities," wherein the register of realism becomes defamiliarised through its juxtaposition with fantastical or oneiric elements.[221] Such admixtures, which Parry locates, for example, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*,

> can be seen as aesthetic forms that transcend their sources in the novel's social ground, becoming abstract significations of the incommensurable and the contradictory which are concurrent in the material and cultural worlds of a periphery.[222]

Taking his cue from Parry (and Löwy), Niblett has interpreted the aesthetics of 'irrealism' to show how the combined and uneven character of the commodity frontier is inextricable from its attendant processes of socioecological transformation in the peripheral arenas of the world-system. As Niblett puts it, "frontier zones exemplify in concentrated form the dynamics of combined unevenness analysed by WReC."[223] Yet, he also shows how the condition of combined unevenness is inextricable from the transformative effects of frontier-formation on both the human and extra-human world. "Typically," Niblett writes,

> commodity frontiers engender…the reorganization of lives and landscapes in service to commodity production. Existing socioecological unities are violently disaggregated and strange new configurations of human and extra-human geographies emerge in their wake.[224]

Because commodity frontiers are often marked (especially in their early phase) by rapid socioecological reorganisation, they generate an estrangement or disruption of everyday life, which in turn brings into being a kind of crisis in 'realist' representation. "In conditions such as these," as Niblett suggests, "in which the stabilized structures of everyday life are thoroughly

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[220] Here it is important to recognise that Parry carefully distinguishes between the "exorbitant impact" of imperialism on the Third World and its somewhat different articulation in Portugal or Eastern Europe. As she puts it, "such determinants inflected the singular accents of the modernisms in these locations, registering a consciousness of a violent imperialism that *we will not expect to find in Eastern Europe or Portugal*. See Parry, "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms," p. 29. My emphasis.
[221] Parry, "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms," p. 39.
[222] Parry, p. 39.
[223] Niblett, *Literature and Ecology*, p. 62.
[224] Ibid. p. 61.

estranged, the relative facticity of realist forms of an ideal-type will likely prove inadequate."[225]

The estrangement produced by the commodity frontier is therefore what also provides for the eruption of 'peripheral' irreal literary aesthetics, for these encode, in more direct ways, the frontier's disjunctive socioecology. To this end, Niblett argues that critical irrealism "would prove a peculiarly apt mode for encoding" both the combined unevenness and the ecological ruptures engendered by commodity frontiers in peripheralised locations, which have experienced the violence of capitalist incursion in particularly marked ways.[226] Indeed, Niblett suggests that the irrealist register functions as something of a mode 'par excellence' for capturing the literary dynamics of the frontier:

> I would suggest that we might look to 'irrealism' as an aesthetic mode better able to register the disjunctive transformation in life- and environment-making through which commodity frontiers develop.[227]

A large part of the above analyses hinge, then, on the capacity of irreal literary forms to stage the manifold realities of frontier-led change in peripheral regions of the world-system.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the gothic (or ecogothic) forms *part* of the irrealist mode. Indeed, Löwy himself places the gothic within his delineation of the cultural forms that typically make use of the irrealist register. "Irrealist works of art," he writes, "can take various forms: *gothic novels*, fairy tales, fantastic stories, oneiric narratives, utopian or dystopian novels, surrealist art, and many others."[228] Salient here, as we have seen, is that these forms are *critical* in orientation because they "contain a powerful critique of the social order."[229] Löwy's emphasis on the capacity of irrealism to contain critical potential returns us, then, to my earlier points about the gothic's ability to both concretise and critique capitalist regimes. As Duncan suggests,

> The Gothic not only *registers* the violent disorientation of world-ecological shifts from the perspective of those geopolitical spaces they most deeply affect but it is also a species of what the WReC follows Michael Löwy in calling 'irrealism:' a mode of fiction-making in which fantastic forms are *mobilized* precisely to critique

[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid. p. 62.
[227] Niblett, p. 61.
[228] Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism," p. 194. My italics.
[229] Ibid.

regimes of capital.[230]

A similar case is made for each of the narratives I analyse in this project, for the gothic and its vocabularies are understood here as localised responses to, and critiques of, a capitalist world-ecology shaped by the commodity frontier. Moreover, as we have seen, the gothic can play a vital role in expressing and interrogating what Niblett has termed the commodity frontier's dialectic between the exploitation of commodified labour and the appropriation of uncompensated labour and the energies of extra-human nature. In what follows, I show how the study of gothic aesthetics in peripheral literatures from the world-system might intervene not only in studies of world-literature and the commodity frontier but also in the field of the ecogothic, and gothic studies more broadly, by way of a materialist feminist perspective. To do so, I illustrate how the gothic form can help reveal how the socioecological relations of the frontier are bound up – inextricably – with questions of race, gender, and environmental degradation. This project aims, then, to make an intervention into the field of gothic studies and world-literature in several ways. First, by offering the commodity frontier as the material basis from which gothic aesthetics spring. Second, by arguing for an understanding of the commodity frontier that is as much premised on its ecological consequences as on its impact on gendered and racialised bodies. In so doing, this project posits the necessity of understanding commodity frontiers, as well as the gothic literary aesthetics with which they are imbricated, in terms of the capitalist logics of exploitation and appropriation. I suggest that the gothic qualities of these narratives speak as much to the political ecology of the commodity frontier and its shaping of human and extra-human relations as they open up a potential space from which to critique not only the frontier's hold over life but also the patriarchal and racial oppressions it sets in motion, and which continue to haunt contemporary environments.

Thesis Summary

I begin my analysis with the Caribbean sugar frontier. In Chapter One, I examine the history of the sugar frontier through comparison of two texts from the Caribbean region that make use of a gothic vocabulary to illuminate the capacity of sugar to deform, disrupt, and dominate all aspects of Caribbean socioecological life. I begin with an analysis of Eric Walrond's 1926 short story "The Vampire Bat" in order to illustrate how Walrond's turn to the gothic gives expression to rising fears of labour insurrection and the ongoing horrors of the colonial

[230] Duncan, "Gothic in the Capitalocene," p. 182. Italics in original.

plantation system in Barbados during the early twentieth century. While Walrond's story makes use of a series of gothic effects to situate a range of terrors and anxieties within the colonial plantation field, I contend that Marlon James' 2008 novel *The Book of Night Women* locates its primary 'horrors' in the plantation home. In so doing, I argue for a comparative mode of analysis that highlights the dialectic between sugar cash-cropping and black women's labour appropriation in both the context of the twentieth century and the contemporary era.

My second chapter builds on the arguments I make in my first chapter by investigating the gothic registration of the gold and silver frontiers of twentieth-century Guyana and present-day Mexico. Here, I place in dialogue two texts that deploy a range of gothic representational devices to look back to the colonial history of mineral mining in Guyana and Mexico, while also highlighting how mineral extraction might be framed as a history of the present, and one that is revitalised at key moments of world-systemic breakdown. I compare the gothic quality of Pauline Melville's 1998 short-story "Erzulie" with Silvia Moreno-Ģarcia's 2020 proto-typical gothic novel *Mexican Gothic*. Elaborating on my previous chapter's interest in analysing how the gothic might concretise the relation between the home and the field, I argue that both "Erzulie" and *Mexican Gothic* make use of gothic terminologies to express the linkages between mineral extraction and gendered violence in both the Caribbean during the twentieth century and in the present-day Mexican context.

In contrast to these first two chapters, my final chapter moves away from my previous focus on gendered labour appropriation and patriarchal violence. In this chapter, I look instead towards questions of racialised violence within urban geographies. I examine the evolving politics and aesthetics of racial toxicity by focusing on the mobilisation of what I term 'atmospheric terror' in the writings of Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and Nigerian author Ben Okri. I map the gothic aesthetic connections between Césaire's 1939 epic book-length poem *Notebook of a Return My Native Land* (*Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*) with Okri's 1988 short-story "In the City of Red Dust." By comparing the representation of Césaire's 'inert town' with Okri's 'red city,' I aim to illustrate how contemporary conditions of black bodily exposure to air-borne toxicity cannot be understood without recourse to the longer history of spatial enclosure and racial violence opened by colonial town-planning. I consider how Césaire and Okri, while working in different literary mediums and across different periods and regions, draw on a gothic aesthetics of suffocation to give shape to the racist history of toxic exposure, and, in the process, enable us to model a new analytic framework for understanding global environmental crisis as not only an ongoing colonial project but one that produces life and death unevenly.

The texts I have selected for study span a range of different regions and historic periods. In so doing, their study helps trace the historical passage and transformation of capitalism's world-ecology from the 'long' twentieth century through to the present. The selection of texts I consider have never been studied in comparison before, nor have many of them been read through the lens of the gothic. By presenting these texts as examples of (semi)peripheral world-literatures that make use of gothic aesthetics to express the condition of the commodity frontier, I offer their gothic aesthetics as holding powerful critical potential. It should be noted, however, that this project is not intended as an exhaustive study of gothic literature; rather, this project contributes to the study of world-literature through a specific grounding of gothic aesthetics in the context of the commodity frontier. It is my hope that this study will provide some of the groundwork needed for the expansion of both the fields of gothic studies and world-literature, while also highlighting the essential role that literature can play in making seen, and therefore also imagining alternatives to, the violent and oppressive systemic processes that continue to shape the past, and the present.

Chapter One
Terrors of the House and Field: Saccharine Gothic and Caribbean Plantation Literatures

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The black experience, written as a realist text, resembles a gothic narrative.
Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America*, 1997

Introduction

In his study of Caribbean literature, Michael Niblett has argued for the term "saccharine irrealism" to describe how the literary eruption of 'irrealist' tropes correspond to the historical ruptures triggered by the region's forcible incorporation into the global sugar economy.[1] Niblett's saccharine irrealism takes inspiration from Michael Löwy's concept of 'critical irrealism,' a term Löwy employs to name works of cultural production that "*do not* try to represent life as it really is."[2] Crucial, as we saw in this project's Introduction, to the irrealist register is that it designates "*an absence of realism*" rather than an outright opposition to classically 'realistic' modes of representation.[3] Thus, irrealism might refer to texts which take wholly 'fantastic' form, such as "gothic novels, fairy tales, oneiric narratives [and] utopian or dystopian novels;" equally, irrealism can refer to texts which include only elements of the supernatural or fantastical.[4] Drawing on Löwy, Niblett argues that saccharine irrealism names the stylistic tendencies that mark a textual response to "the hold exerted by sugar over many societies in the Caribbean…and the organization of nature around the demands of a single commodity."[5] Saccharine irrealism offers one way, in other words, of examining "the distinctive literary idioms" that are generated in Caribbean literatures under the socioecological auspices of the global sugar system.[6]

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[1] Michael Niblett, "Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and Peripheral Aesthetics," in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches,* ed. by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 268-287 (p. 269).
[2] Niblett, "Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and Peripheral Aesthetics," p. 269.
[3] Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: 'A moonlit enchanted night'," in *Adventures in Realism*, ed., by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 193-206 (p. 194). My emphasis.
[4] Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism'," p. 194.
[5] Niblett, "Oil on Sugar", p. 271.
[6] Ibid.

Niblett's concept of saccharine irrealism brings together Löwy's critical irrealism with remarks made by Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter about the crisis effected in the Caribbean by the arrival of the cane economy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[7] In her seminal 1971 essay "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," Wynter argues that the entrance of sugar as a single commodity crop triggered a new historical rupture that had a profound impact on the everyday life of plantation societies. As she famously puts it, sugar brought about changes of such world-historical magnitude that "we [in the Caribbean] are all, without exception still 'enchanted,' imprisoned, deformed and schizophrenic in its bewitched reality."[8] Wynter's point is that the introduction of sugar cash-cropping subjected local and indigenous foodways to the fluctuating values of the world market, creating conditions of uneven development whereby vast amounts of wealth accumulated alongside extreme human deprivation and ecological exhaustion.

Wynter sees the arrival of sugar in the Caribbean as leading to a fracture between two systems – those of the plot and the plantation. The plot, she argues, "accepts that crops should be sown only as food," while the plantation turns on capitalist logics of commodification that ultimately "impoverish the earth."[9] Wynter views the divide of the Caribbean environment into the plot and plantation system as in turn bringing into being a crisis that challenges previous modes of representation. Just as the literal plot of land becomes destabilised under its subordination to the logic of capitalist commodification via monocultural cash-cropping, so, too, does the *literary* plot become destabilised as Caribbean writers are confronted "with a set of forces too complex, externalised and intangible"[10] that previous modes of cultural production – like realism – become inadequate to their representation. Niblett's saccharine irrealism thus responds to Wynter's call for representational modes that might be more suited to capturing the 'plantation-induced bewitchment' to which she refers.

This chapter takes inspiration from Niblett's term but seeks to understand Caribbean plantation literatures through the critical prism provided by the gothic. The gothic, as we saw in this project's Introduction, has long been theorised as a literary genre particularly adequate to capturing the everyday experiences elicited by capitalist commodification For critics like

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[7] Niblett's argument also draws on Wenzel's coining of the term "petro-magic-realism". See Chapter Three for an analysis of Wenzel's seminal essay.
[8] Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (1971), 95-102, (95).
[9] Wynter, "Novel and History," p. 96.
[10] Caitlin Vandertop, "Ghosts of the plantation: sugar, narrative energetics and gothic ecologies in Fiji," *Green Letters* 24, no. 2 (2020), 1-14 (4).

Stephen Shapiro, the production of life under commodity capitalism must be understood as engendering an *innately gothic experience*.[11] Although Shapiro's argument pivots on Marx's delineation of industrial capitalism in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, understandings of the gothic as 'a mode of reality' can equally be applied to the lived experience of plantation societies. Indeed, Jamaican historian and sociologist Orlando Patterson has famously equated the condition of slavery with a form of 'social death'. As Patterson suggests, slavery relies on three constituent elements – violent compulsion, natal alienation, and generalised dishonour – which together result in a "state of exclusion" that Patterson names "social death."[12] Similar theorisations can be found in early abolitionist texts. In one of his earliest anti-slavery campaign documents, the British abolitionist Granville Sharp described slavery as a kind of "civil death" that denies the enslaved humanity to the extent that they appear "*as if…naturally dead.*"[13]

Deliberately drawing out the gothic associations of such descriptions, Maisha Webster has more recently emphasised how the plantation was a site of real-life horror for the enslaved. Much like Marx's description of the industrial factory as a 'House of Terror,' Webster's analysis hinges on the slave's lived experience of the plantation, which she argues lends itself to the kinds of macabre themes in which the gothic genre has long been invested. To this end, Webster suggests in *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (2012) that both enslaved and ex-slave narrators frequently made use of gothic devices to portray the realities of black life on the plantation. "The very life of the slave", writes Webster,

> is *inevitably a gothic experience*. The murders/suicides, rapes, entrapment and escape cycles, torture (brutal whippings), and familial secrets (illegitimate births) that make up numerous gothic plots constitute real, daily existence under slavery. Therefore, these writers have recourse to gothic ideological tropes, exercising them as rhetorical asides upon *an already gothic plot*.[14]

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[11] Stephen Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania: Dracula's World-system and Gothic Periodicity," *Gothic Studies* 10, no.1 (2008), 29-47 (30). My emphasis.

[12] Horace Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 55.

[13] Cited in Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 52.

[14] Maisha Webster, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 35. My italics.

It is for this reason that "slavery proves to be a fitting setting for any gothic novel because "the lives, struggles, and complexities of the beings suffering within the institution reinforces the gothic as a mode of reality."[15] Teresa Goddu similarly claims that "slavery haunts the American gothic," and that the same could be argued for gothic texts throughout the Americas.[16] Not only does the past remain ever-present, but the status of black life on the plantation has continued to make the genre relevant; as Goddu points out, "the black experience, written as a realist text, resembles a gothic narrative."[17]

Wester and Goddu's arguments about the gothic form's usefulness in theorising the everyday experience of plantation slavery offers one starting point for thinking about the gothic in light of the representational problems posed by sugar's commodification in the Caribbean. After all, Sidney Mintz has long posited the Caribbean plantation complex as the original site of capitalist development. Mintz's argument goes against common historical economic theories that locate capitalism's origins in Europe, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and therefore during the onset of the Industrial Revolution. "Most students of capitalism," Mintz observes, "believe that capitalism itself became a governing economic form in the late eighteenth century and not before."[18] "But the rise of capitalism," Mintz continues,

> involved the destruction of economic systems that preceded it – notably European Feudalism – and the creation of a system of world trade. It also involved the creation of the colonies, the establishment of experimental economic enterprises in various world areas, and the development of new forms of slave-based production in the New World, using imported slaves – perhaps Europe's single biggest external contribution to its own economic growth.[19]

The colonial plantation was central to the rise of the modern world-system not merely because of its role in accumulating the necessary wealth for the development of the European motherland; this was also because the plantation was a markedly *modern* enterprise in and of itself. As Mintz famously puts it, sugar plantations in the Caribbean were "a synthesis of field and factory," making use of methods to ensure profitability and productivity that were

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 3.

[17] Goddu, *Gothic America,* p. 131.

[18] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p 55.

[19] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 55.

"associated more with industry than with agriculture – at least in the sixteenth century."[20] We might reflect here on how Mintz's assertion about the plantation's modern character chimes with remarks made by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938). James writes in this treatise, for example, that,

> When three centuries ago the slaves came to the West Indies, they entered directly into the large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation, which was a *modem system*. It further required that the slaves live together in a social relation far closer than any proletariat of the time. The cane when reaped had to be rapidly transported to what was factory production. The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloth the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported. The Negroes, therefore, *from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life*.[21]

Mintz's and James' descriptions clearly recall Fredric Jameson's suggestion that one of the defining features of capitalist modernity is its combined unevenness. Jameson argues that modernity is marked by "the coexistence of realities from radically different moments in history."[22] According to Jameson, capitalist development is distinguished by "the peculiar overlap of future and past,"[23] where some of the latest modernising technologies combine with relatively archaic social modalities to produce sites in which capitalist structures are imposed upon pre-capitalist modes of production. This combined unevenness is therefore one of the most significant experiences and realities that capitalist modernisation brings into being.

Drawing on Jameson, many critics have emphasised how capitalist unevenness is especially discernible in peripheralised regions such as the Caribbean, which have been subjected to direct imperialist intervention. "In such situations," writes Niblett, "it is common for imperialism to deliberately retain or prop up pre-capitalist forms of social authority as a means of maintaining stability and order."[24] On the Caribbean plantation, where slave-based labour was employed alongside the latest sugar refining techniques, combined and uneven development occurred with particular violence and visibility. Thus,

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[20] Ibid., p. 47

[21] CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1991 [1938]), p. 392. My emphasis.

[22] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 307.

[23] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 312

[24] Michael Niblett, "Eric Walrond and the Proletarian Arts Movement," in *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage,* ed., by Louis J. Parascandola & Carl A. Wade (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012) pp. 128 – 146 (p. 131).

> The New World plantation system offers an obvious example of this kind of amalgam of the modern and the archaic. The large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation involved a unity of field and factory and the application of technical features in operations that predated the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, it was dependent upon slave labour and quasi-feudal relations of personal domination.[25]

Seen in this way, the plantation offers a crucial alternative perspective on the trajectory of capitalist development, for it illustrates how the world-system's origins lie not only in the Western European core but simultaneously in the Caribbean periphery. What such a repositioning achieves is the highlighting of the relational development of core and periphery, by illustrating how these relations do not emerge in isolation but *simultaneously*. Put slightly differently, analyses of the plantation's combined unevenness provide a window into a historical reality that assists in critiquing constructions of the Caribbean that marginalise the region's centrality to the development of the industrialised core. Indeed, as Mimi Sheller reminds us,

> although the Caribbean lies at the heart of the Western hemisphere, and was historically pivotal to the rise of European dominance, it has nevertheless been spatially and temporally eviscerated from the imaginary geographies of 'Western modernity'.[26]

The point here, then, is that while the Caribbean is traditionally positioned as a peripheralised location within the world-economy, the region's historical reality demands that we re-centre its history and experiences analytically in order to resist – in Sheller's words – its "evisceration" from studies on the development of capitalist globalisation.[27]

Yet, as Jason W. Moore argues, the Caribbean sugar frontier was exemplary of early capitalist expansion not only due to its combined unevenness but also because of the specific kinds of ecological transformations produced by the sugar crop itself. Like Mintz, James, and Niblett, Moore's analysis of capitalism's ecology hinges on the modern character of the plantation: "early modern plantation economies," he writes, "were amongst the most

[25] Niblett, "Eric Walrond", p. 131.
[26] Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 1.
[27] Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean,* p. 1.

technically and organizationally advanced in the capitalist world."[28] Thus, Moore shows how the sugar complex is "constitutive – and not simply derivative – of the rise of capitalism."[29] Crucial here is Moore's emphasis on the exhaustive ecological propensities of monocultural sugar production. "To say sugar," Moore observes, "is to say deforestation."[30] The reason for this is that the sugar plant, when cultivated by planters to suit large-scale monocultural levels of productivity, requires phenomenal expanses of land, such that it has been known to "destroy forests well beyond the plantation."[31] In addition to requiring huge amounts of land, sugar cash-cropping necessitates deforestation because the distillation of sugarcane relies on the heat provided by burning huge amounts of firewood, thereby inaugurating what Moore describes as the plantation's "tendency to exploit the forests beyond their capacity to renew themselves."[32] But the sugar planter's imperative of productivity and profit produced not only deforestation. As Kerstin Oloff shows, it also heralded legion "signs of environmental degradation," including soil erosion, the loss of biodiversity, flooding, aridification, and generalised climate change.[33]

The more pressing point here, however, is that the transformation, and exhaustion, of the Caribbean environment under the sugar frontier was not a result of but a *condition* for capitalist development and expansion. Moore's view is that capitalist development is propelled by a series of sequential ecological regimes, "each of which has been the result of an agricultural revolution [like the Caribbean sugar revolution] that drove down food prices and hence production costs."[34] It is essential to emphasise that each of these ecological (or agricultural) regimes both relies on – and produces – unsustainable conditions of expansion, a process that typically leads to the socioecological destruction of the frontier zone. In the context of the historical Caribbean plantation, some of the key reasons for the exhaustion of the early

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[28] Jason W. Moore, "Environmental Crises and the Metabolic Rift in World-Historical Perspective", *Organization and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2000): 123-58 (128).
[29] 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* 32, no. 4 (2009), 345-390 (349).
[30] Moore, "Madeira…Part I", p. 375.
[31] Shawn William Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 79.
[32] Moore, "Madeira…Part I", p. 376.
[33] Kerstin Oloff, "'Greening the zombie': Caribbean Gothic, World-Ecology and Socio-ecological Degradation," *Green Letters* 16 (2012), 31-45 (33).
[34] Jason W. Moore, "Madeira, Sugar, and the Conquest of Nature in the "First" Sixteenth Century, Part II: From Regional Crisis to Commodity Frontier, 1506—1530," *Review* 33, no. 1 (2010), 1-24 (2).

modern sugar frontier involved the simultaneous exhaustion of nature's energies (via deforestation and soil erosion) and human labour reserves (via the outlawing of embondaged human labour in the second half of the nineteenth century). As the example of Caribbean sugar illustrates, the frontier is rooted in the experience of the degradation of both labourers and environments; "the degradation of nature," as Moore succinctly puts it, "*is* the degradation of the worker."[35]

Further notable about Moore's frontier-theory is that each time conditions in the frontier falter, then a new ecological revolution is required in order to free up a new ecological surplus. However, the succeeding revolution cannot resolve the exhaustions of the previous regime; it merely resolves the conditions of the preceding one "by positing them on an expanded scale."[36] Once conditions in the frontier falter, in other words, then capital must locate new reserves of human labour and nonhuman nature to revitalise accumulation. It is for this reason that Moore places so much emphasis on the world-ecology as propelled by *successive* commodity frontiers:

> early capitalism, forged through successive commodity frontiers (sugar especially), was a structure of power committed to regional crisis as a way of life…regional socioecological crises were not merely resolved by commodity-centered frontier movements; they were also created by them.[37]

The increasing strain that regional socioecological degradation exerts on the frontier zone leads, then, to its relative exhaustion, which in turn "spurs on further capitalization in order to maintain the rate of exploitation."[38] Thus, the world-ecology hinges on cycles of degeneration and regeneration because the

> rising capitalization of nature creates a world-historical situation of rising production costs stemming from the degradation of the conditions of production. Rising socioecological exhaustion and rising capitalization are *two sides of the same coin*.[39]

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[35] Jason W. Moore, "The Modern World-System as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism," *Theory & Society* 32 no. 3 (2003): 307-77 (302).

[36] Michael Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," *Green Letters* 16 (2012), 1-18 (5).

[37] Moore, "Madeira…Part II," p. 14.

[38] Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," p. 2.

[39] Jason W. Moore, 'The End of the Road? Agricultural Revolutions in the Capitalist World-Ecology, 1450–2010," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10, no. 3 (2010), 389-413 (403).

Under these terms, it becomes clear that the sugar plantation is exemplary not merely of the temporal dislocations and juxtaposition of different modes of social life to which Jameson refers; it is also representative of what Niblett terms the "ecosystemic ruptures"[40] engendered in the Caribbean by imperialist capitalist incursion. Indeed, in an echo of the earlier arguments made about the 'monstrous' forms of everyday life engendered by capitalist commodification, Moore describes sugar as a "thirsty" crop that has historically served to "devour the forests, exhaust the soils and kill other crops and species…ultimately undermining its capacity to reproduce itself."[41]

Following Moore's analysis of sugar's 'world-ecology,' several literary scholars have sought to illustrate how the 'monstrous' operations of the plantation contour the written form. A key example is the Haitian zombie, the literary figuration of which has been read by critics like Oloff as a crucial figure for thinking about Caribbean gothic aesthetics in relation to world-ecological thought. Drawing on Moore's world-ecological paradigm, Oloff shows how the zombie – a hallmark of the gothic genre – "encode[s] radical transformations and subsequent degradations or exhaustions of extra-human environments and human labour."[42] Like Oloff, Caitlin Vandertop has argued that gothic figures like ghosts provide a language for "the depletive forces of the sugar plantation."[43] According to Vandertop, the prevalence of spectral gothic devices in plantation texts from Fiji is "fuelled by a real process of exhaustion," and one elicited by the forcible conversion of the Fijian landscape into a site suited to the complete production of unsustainable monocultural sugarcane, which Vandertop, taking her cue from Moore's proto-gothic descriptions, offers as a kind of "vampire-crop."[44]

Building on the insights of these scholars, this chapter argues for an eco-materialist analysis of the gothic in two Caribbean plantation texts: Eric Walrond's early twentieth-century short story "The Vampire Bat" (1926) and Marlon James' contemporary novel *The Book of Night Women* (2009). Both texts make use of a gothic vocabulary to illuminate the capacity of sugar to deform, disrupt, and dominate all aspects of Caribbean socioecological life. In Walrond's tale, his turn to the gothic gives expression to rising fears of labour insurrection and the ongoing horrors of the colonial plantation system in Barbados during the early 1900s. Set in the aftermath of legalised slavery and during the historic breakdown of the global sugar

[40] Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," p. 9.
[41] Moore, "Madeira…Part II," p. 376.
[42] Oloff, "'Greening' the Zombie", p. 42.
[43] Vandertop, "Ghosts of the Plantation,", p. 5.
[44] Vandertop, p. 6.

economy, the story makes use of a series of gothic effects to situate a range of terrors and anxieties within the colonial plantation field. James, meanwhile, sets his novel during the height of the sugar revolution: his narrative takes place in Jamaica during the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, the period when the British Empire was moving towards its peak as the dominant economic powerhouse over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century. In contrast to Walrond, James looks not to the field to locate his terrors, but to the home; in his novel, it is the plantation household that functions as the novel's central site of gothic horror.

Rather than explore the 'fantastic' components of these writings as forming part of a broader irrealist register, I want instead to think of Walrond's and James' fictions through their deliberate activation of the gothic and gothic aesthetics. To this end, we might more usefully speak of the stylistic commonalities in these narratives as 'saccharine gothic.' In contrast to Niblett's emphasis on the general stylistic tendencies that fall under the irrealist idiom, saccharine gothic provides more specificity to this chapter's theorisation of world-literary development, for it foregrounds explicitly how the historical ruptures triggered by the saccharine frontier inform the use of the gothic within these Caribbean texts. To do so, this chapter argues for an understanding of Caribbean plantation literatures that brings together the world-ecology perspective with analyses of gothic's 'world-system.' By comparing Walrond's representation of the plantation field with James' depiction of the plantation household, I argue for a mode of analysis that connects the production of gothic in these texts to two signal moments of ecological revolution within world-systemic periods of transition. The first of these periods concerns the breakdown of the Caribbean sugar economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century crucial to the era otherwise known as 'New Imperialism,' itself a consequence of the Great Depression of 1873-1896. Next, I turn to the ecological transformations produced by the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, which has been described as representing a new era of nature-society relations in capitalism.[45] Taking these periods as my focus, I read "The Vampire Bat" and *The Book of Night Women* comparatively in order to explore the gothic as a critical aesthetic form generated in the Caribbean by world-systemic moments of ecological rupture and revolution.

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[45] Jason W. Moore, "Wall Street Is a Way of Organizing Nature: An Interview with Jason Moore," *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action* 12 (2011), 39-54.

The Gothic, The Caribbean, and the Periodic Production of Terror

To be sure, James and Walrond are not the first to look to the gothic to tell sugar's horror stories. Indeed, as Vandertop has shown, "the gothic in particular has long been linked to representations of sugar – from *Jane Eyre* to the cannibalistic themes of abolition poetry."[46] While many critics have sought to frame the gothic's emergence within a Euro-American tradition, others have emphasised the linkages between the colony and the gothic's rise to prominence as its own literary category. For scholars like Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, the gothic is, in many ways, synonymous with the colonial situation. "From its earliest history in England and Europe," argues Paravisini-Gerbert, "[the gothic has been] fundamentally linked to colonial settings, characters and realities as frequent embodiments of the forbidding and frightening."[47] Commonly held fears and myths about the colonies became particularly prominent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when European gothic authors, or writers interested in the gothic genre, began to look to European-held territories for literary inspiration.

The British Caribbean, at the time synonymous with "non-white races, non-Christian belief systems and the moral evils of slavery," proved a particularly fertile landscape for the cultivation of the genre's interest in "exciting surprise and horror."[48] As Paravisini-Gerbert explains, European and English writers of the gothic would frequently turn to the Caribbean and its "vast source of frightening others" to supplement the "villainous antiheroes" that featured in early gothic literatures.[49] Thus, "with the inclusion of the colonial a new sort of darkness – of race, landscape, erotic desire and despair" enters the gothic genre at roughly the same time that Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764.[50] Through its construction as a repository of fear and fascination, the colonial Caribbean has therefore functioned as a necessary condition for gothic's development. Indeed, according to Paravisini-Gerbert, the gothic would not exist if not for the colony: "the colonized space [is] the locus necessary for the writing of Gothic literature."[51] Taken as such, many hallmark gothic texts, including Charlotte Smith's *The Story of Henrietta* (1800), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801),

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[46] Vandertop, p. 4.
[47] Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 229 – 257 (p. 229).
[48] Paravisini-Gerbert, "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic," p. 229.
[49] Ibid., p. 230.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., p. 233.

and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), reproduce the structural position of the Caribbean within the world-system, for these gothic novels metaphorically re-figure the region as a peripheral site of 'raw materials' to be extracted and shipped back to Europe for metropolitan consumption.

But the Caribbean has provided fertile ground not only for colonial permutations of the gothic; it has also laid the groundwork for post-colonial (re)inventions of the form. Focusing on the writings of Caribbean authors such as Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, Jean Rhys, and others, Paravisini-Gerbert shows how later forms of the gothic in Caribbean literatures take "the traditional motifs [of the genre] to a new realm of meaning."[52] Paravisini-Gerbert sees the reinvention of hallmark gothic tropes in Caribbean literatures as taking place from the twentieth century onward, when postcolonial Caribbean writers began to infuse their writings with regional folkloric figures, such as the zombie, and alternative knowledge systems, such as Obeah, in order to make the gothic form resonate with local idioms and cultural practices, as well as to inscribe their resistance against the institution of slavery and colonisation. My choice to focus on the gothic devices employed by James and Walrond is, thus, a pointed one. Placing James and Walrond's texts within this larger tradition of Caribbean gothic writing enables the analysis of their place within an existent body of literature that adapts 'traditional' gothic in order to carve a path to fresh understandings of the Caribbean condition during particular moments in history.

Mapping gothic's transformation and use from the twentieth century into the present moment does more, however, than illustrate how the gothic remains a crucial literary mode in the Caribbean. It also gives rise to fruitful comparisons, particularly when we view James' and Walrond's gothic through a historical materialist prism. Key here is the question of periodisation. Published in the aftermath of legalised slavery and yet preoccupied with the institution nonetheless, both James and Walrond suggest that the plantation system transgresses temporal boundaries. Both "The Vampire Bat" and *The Book of Night Women* were published, respectively, in the early decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, periods which mark new moments of rupture and restructuring in the global economy. By foregrounding the continual eruption of the plantation past into the present, the gothic devices employed in these texts can be understood as forming part of a much larger corpus of literature that emphasises the ways in which the plantation and its legacies can be seen at work in the contemporary moment.

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[52] Ibid., p. 245.

Indeed, in recent years, critics have offered the term 'The Plantationocene' as a way of conceptualising the current era otherwise nominated as the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, or the Chthulucene. Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing argue that the concept of the Plantationocene provides a language for illustrating how ecological crisis is rooted in our current logics of environmental modernisation, homogeneity, and control – logics that were originally developed on historical plantations.[53] The Plantationocene is meant to offer a corrective to the epistemological blinders embedded in Anthropocene scholarship, which, given its titular emphasis on the *Anthropos*, has been critiqued for "reproduc[ing] white supremacist claims to knowledge" by indicting "an undifferentiated humanity" for global environmental crisis.[54] In contrast to such homogenising visions, the Plantationocene decentres Eurocentric narratives of coal, steam, and the Industrial Revolution as the primary instigators of global environmental change, looking instead to the role played by "plantation ecologies and politics in shaping the present."[55]

Elaborating Tsing and Haraway's earlier ideas, Sophie Sapp Moore, Monique Allewaert, Pablo F. Gómez, and Gregg Mittman have emphasised the usefulness of the Plantationocene concept to

> remind [us] that environmental problems cannot be decoupled from histories of colonialism, capitalism, and racism that have made some human beings more vulnerable than others to warming temperatures, rising seas, toxic exposures, and land dispossession occurring across the globe.[56]

Indeed, for critics like as R.L Martins and Bill Robertson, the persistence of soil exhaustion as a result of the plantation model is a material corollary to the continued devastation of slavery and its shapeshifted afterlives.[57] Today, the soil nutrients of many old plantation regions are so depleted that they will take thousands of years to regenerate. Despite nearly two centuries having passed since the official abolition of legalised plantation slavery, the legacies of

[53] Donna Haraway et al, "Anthropologists are talking—About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2014), p. 535–564.
[54] Janae Davis et al, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises," *Geography Compass* 13, e12438 (2019), 1-15 (3).
[55] Davis et al, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?", p. 3.
[56] Sophie Sapp Moore et al, "Plantation Legacies," *Edge Effects*, 22 January 2019, https://edgeeffects.net/plantation-legacies-plantationocene/ [accessed 1 May 2021].
[57] R.L Martins and Bill Robertson, "How the Soil Remembers Plantation Slavery", *Edge Effects*, 28 March 2019, https://edgeeffects.net/soil-memory-plantationocene/ [accessed 2 May 2021].

sugarcane monoculture remain. Mosquito-borne diseases, the destruction of forests, water pollution, the loss of biodiversity, and the erosion of soils are just some examples of how the contemporary Caribbean environment "holds the memory of the Middle Passage."[58] Yet, as Moore et al. remind us, the legacies of the plantation include not only these dire ecological consequences; slavery's 'afterlife' is manifested, too, in the social hierarchies and "patterns of thought and economic structures, [which] continue to shape the distribution of capital and the differentiated treatment of human life to this day."[59]

Certainly, both James and Walrond's gothic aesthetics can be read in light of the temporal continuities put forward by the thought-figure of the Plantationocene. That is to say, both "The Vampire Bat" and *The Book of Night Women* can be understood as employing gothic terminologies to illustrate, much like the Plantationocene itself, the various ways in which the environmental, economic, and social lives of the plantation persist *beyond* the era of legalised slavery, through the twentieth century and into the contemporary moment. However, another and equally generative way of theorising the periodic eruption of the gothic in these texts is through a world-systems understanding of literary form. After all, as noted in my Introduction, the gothic has a tendency to emerge during particular moments of global economic transition. According to Shapiro, the generic inscriptions of gothic narratives "tend to re-emerge in a swarm at certain discrete periods."[60] The periodicity of the gothic illuminates how the gothic provides for an understanding of literature's ability to respond to economic change, for the clustering of gothic narratives at certain historic periods gives expression to the particular tensions that animate each moment of their periodic emergence.[61]

Extending Shapiro's formulations on the gothic's periodicity to include questions of world-ecology, Niblett has emphasised how global economic ruptures correspond to the introduction (and destruction) of ecological regimes. In so doing, Niblett has shown how it is the transformation of both extra-human geographies and economic hierarchies that provides the necessary conditions for the periodic emergence of gothic narratives.[62] It is with this in mind that I now turn to Walrond's "The Vampire Bat" and consider this story's gothic aesthetics in light of the Barbadian sugar crisis and the era known as the 'New Imperialism', itself a response to a crisis effected in the world-system by the Great Depression of 1873-1896.

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[58] Martins and Robertson, "How the Soil Remembers," online.
[59] Moore et al., "Plantation Legacies," online.
[60] Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania", p. 35.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Niblett, "Demon Landscapes," See Introduction, p. 28.

“The Vampire Bat” and the Plantation Field as Fallen Eden

Walrond’s story charts the tale of protagonist Bellon Prout, one of Barbados’ “few plantation owners.”[63] Prout returns to his family plantation, named Waterford, after a stint fighting in the Second Boer War. A sense of gothic unease is created from the beginning of the tale, for the island is home to supernatural forces that seem hostile to Prout’s presence. Not only is Prout’s horse uneasy and obstreperous, but when he stops for a drink of rum at Mother Cragwell’s inn, “a Ba’bajan creole,”[64] she foretells of a local labour uprising set to take place that evening on the Waterford estate. Cragwell’s warning comes to Prout in the language of local Caribbean folklore, when she tells him that a “fire hag” will “gwine down the gully to-night.”[65] Dismissing Cragwell’s warnings as superstitious “tommyrot,”[66] Prout proceeds to make his way to the plantation. During this journey, he discovers an abandoned black baby lying in the plantation field. Reluctantly, Prout picks up the infant and takes it with him to his cabin. The story’s climax takes place when Prout is discovered dead the next morning, his blood drained through a perforation in his forehead. The cabin is otherwise empty; the baby is nowhere to be found.

Prout’s return to Waterford is meant to herald the reinstatement of order in the colony, yet he arrives in Barbados to find his empire in ruin. A tropical storm has devastated the island, stripping the family plantation, “once a star on the pinnacle of wooded earth,”[67] of its colonial majesty. Described as “a garden of lustrous desolation,” the family’s sugar mill is barely recognisable amid the “weedy growth [which] overspread it,”[68] capturing how the environment has begun to ‘take over’ and render invisible the family’s previously thriving industry. It is through the narrative consciousness of Prout, therefore, that we encounter the plantation as something of a paradise lost. The narrative’s use of hallmark gothic devices like ruination and decay here serve to render the plantation a sort of depraved Eden – a once-lush garden gone to seed. Through Prout’s consciousness, Walrond slyly inverts ideological frameworks that were used to justify the colonial appropriation of land. By providing the reader with access into Prout’s mind, we are able to recognise the mythical constructions of the Caribbean as a *terra nullius* awaiting human intervention, an ideological category that has been popular in colonial travel writing since the early modern period. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and

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[63] Eric Walrond, “The Vampire Bat,” in *Tropic Death* (Liveright Press, 2003 [1926]), p. 145-160 (p. 145).

[64] Walrond, “The Vampire Bat,” p. 145.

[65] Walrond, p. 149.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., p. 145.

[68] Ibid.

George Handley note, "one finds ample testimonies from Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Fernandez de Oviedo likening the Antilles to the Greek 'Blessed Isles' and the earthly Paradise."[69]

Such constructions, which ostensibly "inscribe an ideal natural landscape that is devoid of human history and labour," were central to the plantation system and its understanding of nature.[70] Carolyn Merchant has noted, for example, how the conquest of the 'New World' was built upon "a recovery narrative" that shaped European formulations of nature and progress.[71] This narrative hinged upon "the long, slow process of returning humans to the Garden of Eden through labour in the earth."[72] As Sharae Deckard has shown in *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden* (2010), the concept of 'paradise' that developed during the colonial endeavour took inspiration from Enlightenment logic "rooted in the pastoral image of bountiful nature ordered and working for Europeans."[73] Like the botanical gardens found in the industrialised European cores, which "represented ornamentation, cultivation and design," the Caribbean landscape – in particular the plantation colony – was an "artificial, rational, product of human mastery."[74] According to scholars like Merchant, the "paradise myth" served as the origin story of capitalist expansion, for it harnessed Christian ideas of 'salvation' to reinforce the capitalist drive for profit. As Niblett explains in his own analysis of Merchant's formulation of the colonial 'recovery' narrative,

> Christian ideas of redemption become reinforcing of capitalist drives to convert supposedly barren areas into hives of productivity, this productivity redeeming the land by 'recovering it as Eden.'[75]

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[69] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and George Handley, eds. "Introduction," in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 1-30, (p. 11).
[70] Lorna Burns, "Landscape and Genre in the Caribbean Canon: Creolizing the Poetics of Place and Paradise," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 17, No. 1 (2008), 20-41 (20).
[71] Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. by William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), pp. 132-59 (p.133).
[72] Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," p. 133.
[73] Sharae Deckard, *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden* (New York & London: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.
[74] Deckard, *Paradise Discourse,* p. 8.
[75] Michael Niblett, "The Arc of the 'Other America': Landscape, Nature, and Region in Eric Walrond's Tropic Death," in *Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture,* ed. by Michael Niblett and Kerstin Oloff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 50-72 (p. 57).

Deckard puts this slightly differently when she writes that "Europeans were not drunk on the myth of paradise…but rather, the myth of paradise concealed their lust for wealth."[76] It was via its construction as "an ideal realm, beyond the rules of humanity and reality," in other words, that the "Caribbean could be subjected to ruthless exploitation."[77]

Given its historical signposts – its gesture to the end of the Second Boer War, for example – Walrond's clearly sets his tale at the turn of the twentieth century, a few decades prior to the publication of *Tropic Death*, the name of the collection in which "The Vampire Bat" appears. Worth noting here is that the tale's historical setting confirms Shapiro's theory about the gothic's tendency to emerge during moments of economic crisis and transition. After all, as Shapiro notes, some of the most significant forms of gothic literature, such as Bram Stoker's hallmark gothic novel *Dracula* (1897), were published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is precisely this period – "the 1880s/1890s" – that Shapiro takes as his focus in order to argue that Stoker's novel serves as a meditation on the South African origins of the Anglo-German tensions that animate *Dracula*'s pages. While the novel stages its action in Transylvania and England, it ultimately registers the battle between Germany and Britain over access to South Africa's gold reserves. Shapiro writes, for example, that,

> By *Dracula*'s publication in 1897 precious metals are very much on the imperial agenda. The unexpected 1886 discovery of gold in Witwatersrand was seen as the best means for helping Britain reinstall its fading hegemony as the chief organizer of the capital influx that would lift the world economy out of the late nineteenth century's Great Depression…The discovery first of diamonds in the 1870s reawakened…the British desire to possess these lucrative mines [and] lead to the second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) immediately in the wake of *Dracula*'s publication. The tensions for control over international markets also drew England into competition with other imperial Europeans, mainly Germany.[78]

Thus, Shapiro refuses to isolate the conditions that give rise to Dracula's gothic effects in the European region. Rather he shows how "the immediate context of Anglo-German tensions for Dracula" involves the "inter-imperial antagonisms" produced by the need for competing the declining imperial powers (such as Britain and Germany) to secure or revitalise their economic

[76] Deckard, *Paradise Discourse,* p. 10.
[77] Deckard, p. 8.

[78] Shapiro, p. 41.

hegemony through "exogamous sources of remonetization," in this case, through the extraction of South African gold and diamonds.[79]

Walrond's gothic rendering of the plantation field can be understood in ways that correspond to the world-systems approach taken by Shapiro. For, like Shapiro's analysis of *Dracula*'s broader context, the Caribbean moment captured in Walrond's tale cannot be thought of in isolation. The story's gothic undertones cannot be fully understood, in other words, without recourse to the Caribbean's inseparability from the broader context of global systemic crisis. As I have already suggested, the larger context for the story is the Long Depression and the era of 'new imperialism' triggered by this crisis in the world-economy. Eric Hobsbawm has observed that imperialism was one of the central ways out of the "business troubles" effected by the global breakdown in agrarian prices during this period.[80] New rounds of imperialist plunder were sparked during this time with the aim of reviving stagnancy in capitalist accumulation; this was an era whose "essential features", according to David Harvey, "involved the carving up of the globe into distinctive terrains for colonial possession or exclusionary influence."[81] Yet, as Hannah Holleman has noted, the era of 'new imperialism' set in motion not only the partition of Africa and "the accelerated seizure of indigenous lands;" it also generated "a global socioecological crisis of soil erosion beginning in the 1870's and lasting through the early decades of the twentieth century,"[82] – the precise period in which Walrond's tale takes place. Such was the scale of soil degradation across the colonial world, "and the international recognition of it," that some have described the soil erosions of the early twentieth century period as posing "the first global environmental problem."[83]

Soil erosion was, however, one of many crises taking place in the colonial world during this time; it was also during this period that the global demand for sugar began to fall. In contrast to other 'sugar islands', Barbados only experienced the full impact of the collapse in global sugar prices towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1884, for the first time since emancipation, Barbadian planters "expressed their inability to cope with market trends, and confidence in the industry declined rapidly."[84] One key cause of the crisis in sugar price was

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 45.

[81] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 46

[82] Hannah Holleman, "De-naturalizing ecological disaster: colonialism, racism and the global Dust Bowl of the 1930s," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44, no. 1 (2017), 234-260 (234).

[83] Holleman, "De-naturalizing ecological disaster," p. 236.

[84] Hilary Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), p. 195.

"the expanding national sugar beet production in North America and Western Europe that eroded the important reexport market from Great Britain for refined Caribbean sugar."[85] Sugar beet is a fleshy taproot that could be grown in temperate climates and provides a form of sucrose indistinguishable from sugarcane. Its discovery, coupled with the realisation that sugar production would no longer need to be confined to the 'New World,' brought about one of the worst economic crises in Barbadian history. "By 1899", writes Andrea Stuart, "Barbados had become a place to leave:"

> The heyday of sugar had passed, eclipsed in popularity by the highly subsidised sugar beet produced in Europe. And Barbados, the most esteemed and ancient of the British colonies, was in a desperate state. Across the islands, living standards had deteriorated: wages had plummeted and jobs disappeared. Food shortages and meat prices rose, malnourishment was pervasive and infant mortality soared.[86]

Walrond's tale provides a window, then, into precisely these social and environmental dynamics, yet it also shows how these transformations were not site-specific. Rather, the story continually situates the embeddedness of the Barbadian condition within a global pattern of socioecological crisis. Seen in this way, the tale captures how the island's sugar crisis was one dramatic regional manifestation of the global transformations in socioecological relations occurring during the turn of the twentieth century. Walrond's gothic representation of the Prout family's ruinous plantation cannot be understood, then, without taking account of the Barbadian condition within this broader moment of global ecological decline because, as Lee Wengraf reminds us, "capitalism is an interconnected global system, and a crisis in one section reverberates elsewhere."[87] In this sense, Walrond's depiction of the landscape as leached of life gives expression to both the global economic moment in which the story is set and the particularities of the Barbadian condition under the waning of British imperial power as it retreats from its Caribbean colonies – now degraded after centuries of plantation monoculture – and expands to unleash its imperialist offensives against regions of the world like South Africa. In fact, Prout's return to the ruined plantation after his involvement in the Boer War

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[85] Franklin W. Knight, "The Struggle of the British Caribbean Sugar Industry, 1900–2013," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 48, no. 1/2 (2014), 149–165 (149).

[86] Andrea Stuart, *Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), p. 327.

[87] Lee Wengraf, *Extracting Profit: Imperialism, Neoliberalism, and the New Scramble for Africa* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), p. 109.

can be seen as a literary (re)staging of the consequences of rapid colonial and imperial expansion from which the Barbadian issue of ecological degradation actually stems.

The inextricability of the Barbadian sugar crisis from this period of systemic transition and international soil erosion is further advanced in the narrative through Walrond's continual highlighting of the inherent links between the plantation's degradations and the imperialist logic of global capital. Prout's consciousness is crucial here because Walrond's sardonic depiction of his protagonist enables the reader to apprehend the essential logics of capital in its imperial form. Despite his status as a worthy and true Man of Empire, it is Prout's imperial ideology that ultimately renders him at risk of predation. Indeed, it is his inability to recognise the very real warnings in Mother Cragwell's folkloric discourse that leads to his eventual demise. Employing the language of Obeah spiritualism, Cragwell warns Prout against continuing toward the gully ahead because the cane fields are on fire, the result of a recent act of arson by Prout's workers. Cragwell tells him that the incineration is the work of 'fire hags' or *soucouyants* – Obeah vampires who present as aged women during the day but who shed their skin during the night and take to the sky as fire balls to hunt and subsequently suck the blood of the unwitting (usually male) victims.[88] Cragwell's evocation of the soucouyant is a clear forewarning of his impending attack, yet Prout only takes Cragwell seriously when the taste of the rum in his mouth is supplanted by the smell of smoke in his nostrils:

> the balls of fire subsided, but he was deep in the marl gully and unable to trace the origin of the pink hazes bursting on the sky's crest. The wind, however, was a pure carrier of smell, and the tainted odor of burnt cane filled the road.[89]

It is the material reality of labour revolt, raised through the stench of the burning cane, which finally drives the threat of insurgency home. Here, then, Walrond renders the plantation field as a site of unease and terror for the agent of empire – a space in which imperial fables of 'paradise' are violently overturned.

Such a rendering clearly plays on the phobic anxieties of colonial gothic imaginaries that typically portrayed the Caribbean as "a backdrop to terror"[90] in order to capture the anxiety induced in the colonial official by his loss of power over both the land *and* the body of the

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[88] Gérard Besson, *Folklore & Legends of Trinidad and Tobago* (Trinidad & Tobago: Paria Publishing Company, 1989).
[89] Walrond, p. 156.
[90] Paravisini-Gerbert, p. 233.

plantation worker. As is well-known, formal emancipation did not herald the end of the plantation system's history of coerced labour. While the practice of slavery was officially abolished by Britain in 1834, the Caribbean planter elite continued to retain power over the plantation worker by employing new forms of enforced labour, such as debt peonage and contract labour.[91] According to Christine Barrow, although

> the idea that the continuing crises of plantation sugar culminating in emancipation completed the downfall of the planter class may have held true for some Caribbean territories…in Barbados it survived virtually intact [and] it was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that their position became somewhat uncertain.[92]

Yet, the ongoing hegemony of the plantocracy did not go unchallenged. In post-emancipation Barbados, labour rebellions were a frequent part of the boom-and-bust cycles of the island's sugar economy. Henderson Carter observes in *Labour Pains* (2012), for instance, that some of the most sustained labour revolts occurred during the late nineteenth century, including the year of Walrond's birth, when the Bowmanston Riot of 1898 took place.[93] This riot, like many of the others that both followed and preceded it, was a response to a crisis in international sugar prices. "When the price of sugar dropped plantation owners would lower wages and lay off workers, the vast majority of whom did not have options for other employment."[94] In retaliation, workers often turned to precisely the kinds of rebellion portrayed in Walrond's story: setting fire to fields, stealing food, damaging property, and sometimes even murdering plantation owners and overseers.[95] We can suggest, then, that the anxiety induced in plantation owners like Prout is as much a fear of a loss in economic profit caused by the collapse in sugar prices as it is of the consequences of a breakdown in the island's longstanding racial hierarchies. Walrond's inversion of the paradise myth is, in other words, both a depiction of the ecological transformations caused by sugar cash-cropping and a reflection of the upheaval and, indeed, *reversal* of the plantation's social hierarchies of white domination and control.

[91] Stephen Topic & Allen Wells, *Global Markets Transformed, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
[92] Christine Barrow, "Ownership and Control of Resources in Barbados: 1834 to the Present," *Social and Economic Studies* 32, no. 3 (1983), 83-120 (87).
[93] Henderson Carter, *Labour Pains: Resistance and Protest in Barbados, 1838-1904*. (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2012).
[94] Stephen Park, "Haunting the Plantation: The Global Southern Gothic in Eric Walrond's Tropic Death," *The Southern Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2012), 70-90 (82).
[95] Carter, *Labour Pains*, p. 144.

But Walrond's gothic rendering of the field does more than simply give expression to the anxieties induced in plantation owners like Prout by the labour rebellions of the post-emancipation period. The text's imagining of the plantation also serves to illustrate how its ruination is entirely socially produced. The "dead thick marl"[96] beneath Prout's feet, which has resulted from the exhaustion of the soil under centuries of monocultural cash-cropping, intensifies the suffering of Prout's workers, who, in their desperation, turn to acts of arson to express their deprivation. The emphasis on Prout's imperial perception of the landscape as fallen Eden thus underscores the social dimension of the plantation by foregrounding how it is produced and organised by the economic imperatives of the white colonial elite at the expense of the black worker. After all, Prout's workers are impoverished not by a shortfall in the harvest but by a breakdown in commodity prices. Walrond's use of the gothic assists, then, in making visible how the 'paradise myth' enabled and justified imperial praxis and discourse. The story's gothic effects – such as ruination and decay – here eschew the idealising gaze of the coloniser, and in so doing, invert the imperial reconfiguration of the landscape into a pastoral 'haven' brought under the power of human intervention.

The gothic, then, is a carefully chosen ingredient in the visualisation of the plantation field as an *artificial paradise*, a depiction that usefully refuses the naturalisation of the plantation's material and ideological frameworks, and the socioecological devastations that these occasion. In fact, it is only once the wealth of the sugar system has been *withdrawn* that the devastating effects of the plantation can be thrown into light; once capital evacuates the region, the very structures it once erected are exposed. It is in this moment of economic transition *away* from sugar, therefore, that the gothic finds its most potent manifestation and unleashes its most proto-critical potential. In this sense, Walrond's use of the gothic chimes with Shapiro's suggestion that gothic tales express the terror of capitalist systematicity most powerfully "in the *transition* between two phases of capitalist development, for during these conjunctural moments, capitalism's most gruesome nature is revealed."[97]

Of the many readings that have been produced on "The Vampire Bat" since its publication, most have emphasised how the story functions primarily as a tale of labour revenge. Such critiques have tended to coalesce around Walrond's representation of the black baby that Prout finds in the plantation field. Pointing to the child's vampiric representation, Louis J. Parascandola argues that the story allegorises a "warning to the colonizers of the West

[96] Walrond, p. 145.

[97] Shapiro, p. 44. My emphasis.

Indies" by subverting the dominant narrative of colonialism.[98] For Parascandola, the tale succeeds in subverting narratives of white settlers 'draining' the resources of the colony by providing the reader with an image of the British body turned into a parasitised host. Stephen Park has likewise suggested that Prout's exsanguination at the hands of the vampiric baby captures the omnipresent fear of labour insurgence in the aftermath of emancipation, and that his turn to the gothic figure of the vampire situates the story within a Global Southern Gothic tradition. "The persistent landscape of violence," Park writes,

> is typical of the Global South, where the colonial situation is inescapable. It is this aspect of Walrond's gothic tropes that we should understand as the mark of a Global Southern Gothic, a body of literature in which labor resistance and violence 'lurk' beneath every plotline.[99]

In a related vein, Louise Walsh has noted how Walrond's "The Vampire Bat" reverses the trajectory of Stoker's classic vampire narrative: "rather than a 'primitive' force invading the seat of empire, a 'pillar of the Crown' is imported into the colony; rather than being vanquished, the vampire successfully enacts vengeance."[100]

To be sure, the story's title undoubtedly suggests its alignment with the vengeful themes often found in gothic vampire tales. Yet the baby that Prout finds in the field is not, in fact, a vampire but something else altogether. This is not to suggest that the child's vampiric associations are not made clear: Prout's equation of the child's arms to "bird-like claws [which] dug deeper into [his] shirt,"[101] undoubtedly elaborates its connection to the vampire bat from which the tale takes its title. Yet, as Walsh notes, unlike the soucouyant, vampiric babies have "no established basis in Caribbean folklore."[102] "The closest folkloric simulacrum", Walsh continues,

> is the figure of the 'bolom,' which is most commonly described as a ghost (or perhaps zombie) and which in the literature of the Caribbean is frequently ascribed origins in the act of abortion or infanticide. However, Walrond's vampiric baby departs from the bolom in that it appears to be living and to have been abandoned

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[98] Louis J. Parascandola, "Introduction," in "*Winds Can Wake Up the Dead": An Eric Walrond Reader,* ed. by Louis J. Parascandola (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 1-35 (p. 28).
[99] Park, "Haunting the Plantation", p. 85.
[100] Louise Walsh, "Dracula and Tropic Death: Imagined Maps, Transnational Communities." *Caribbean Quarterly* 64, no. 3-4 (2018), 521-543 (531).
[101] Walrond, p. 158.
[102] Walsh, "Dracula and Tropic Death," p. 538.

> rather than aborted or murdered. Walrond, in fact, seems to have birthed a new monster of his own.[103]

Given its apparent 'newness,' Walsh argues that Walrond's monster "represents both degeneration and regeneration, mortality and immortality, the future and the past."[104]

But, what interests me in particular is Walsh's emphasis on the child's *regenerative* associations because it establishes something of a new gothic figuration in the Caribbean literary canon. Indeed, if Walrond's vampiric creature marks a kind of watershed in Caribbean literature, then it might be productively thought of in light of Shapiro's critique of the gothic's world-system, for it ultimately indexes the energies emerging from the cross-over between two phases in capitalism's long durée. As Shapiro explains, it is in "the transition between two phases of capitalist development" that "Gothic artifacts and performances often emit a *set of category crisis codifications*."[105] The inevitable social upheaval produced at the beginning of each new phase is, in other words, what "produce[s] 'invented traditions'," where the monsters generated by gothic literatures "*seem* to be nativist, folk traditions, but are *actually new constructions* that register globalising conditions in local seeming idioms."[106] Read with Shapiro, it becomes clear that the child in fact expresses both the exhaustions produced by a breakdown in Barbados' sugar regime and an encroaching sense of the emergence of a new ecological order or revolution. In particular, the instability of the child's monstrous status – is it a *bolom* or vampire, a traditional folkloric figure or something new altogether? – speaks to the ways in which the story looks to stage the transition between the dying of one ecological regime and the emergence of another order of accumulation. Put another way, Walrond's vampiric invention simultaneously recalls Wynter's call for representational modes that give shape to the plantation's particular "structures of feeling"[107] and Moore's observation that ecological revolutions not only dissolve pre-existing environmental regimes but also mark the transition to new phases of accumulation, and the eventual initiation of a new ecological regime.[108]

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[103] Walsh, p. 538.
[104] Ibid., p. 538.
[105] Shapiro, p. 35. My italics.
[106] Ibid., p. 32. My italics.
[107] I borrow this seminal phrase from Raymond Williams. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).
[108] Moore, "Madeira…Part II."

Britain's declining power and the anticipation of a potential new order is further advanced in the tale through its expulsion of Prout from the colony. Indeed, if Prout's death signals the eventual departure of empire, then it also anticipates emergent forms of anti-colonial resistance, such as The Barbadian Labour Movement of 1934-39, which contributed to the island's eventual independence in 1966. Thus, as much as the tale registers a changing global order of imperial accumulation, it also signals the possibility of a *post*colonial Barbadian future that might evade or even counter the exhaustive patterns of the Caribbean plantation. Nowhere is the anticipation of the postcolonial moment more powerfully raised than in the tale's conclusion, which significantly shifts the narrative voice from Prout to an unnamed mixed race servant girl who find his body the next morning:

> Coming up the hill, the mulatto *obeah* girl who tidied the overseer's hut felt deeply exultant. For she was strangely conscious of the fact – by the crystal glow of the sun, perhaps – that a vampire bat, with its blood-sucking passion, has passed there in the night.[109]

Gestured to here, then, is a literary evocation of a future – metaphorically evoked through the image of the rising dawn – which might be free from the plantation's codes of white domination over the black body, in particular the body of the black woman. In this sense, although the story could easily be understood as a tale of 'subaltern vengeance' (as it has thus far predominantly been), it also acts as a literary homage to local women's forms of resistance to the ongoing hegemony of the plantocracy in the post-emancipation period. This is made especially clear at the tale's end, but also throughout the story, via Walrond's frequent allusions to black women's use of Afro-Caribbean spiritualities (like Obeah) to subvert the patriarchal control over the plantation field. In this sense, Walrond's story reflects poignantly on the conditions that have shaped its particular historical moment, while also summoning up the spectres of an as yet-unrealised future. Reading from the twenty-first century, however, we know that Walrond's anticipation of a postcolonial world liberated from the plantation's legacies will sadly remain unfulfilled. For, even as "The Vampire Bat" looks to the possibilities of a future emancipated from both the environmental degradations of the plantation and the social hierarchies of the plantocracy, it is ultimately haunted by the cruel irony of the decades that follow. By the 1940's, sugar would re-emerge as the island's leading cash-crop; its resurgence powerfully

[109] Walrond, p. 160.

captured in the first Barbados Development plan of 1946, which dictated that "in the long run, *everything brings us back to sugar.*"[110]

House and Field; Home and Frontier

If Walrond's "The Vampire Bat" only begins to register the contours of unfolding global change, then James' *The Book of Night Women* renders the convulsions of world-systemic transition in particularly explicit ways. Set in Jamaica during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the narrative charts the efforts made by a group of enslaved women – the so-called 'night women' – to resist the system of plantation slavery. In contrast to Walrond's tale, which turns on a moment of relative ecological exhaustion, James' novel takes as its focus the heady days of Jamaica's saccharine revolution. Like Walrond, however, James sees in the gothic the potential to express the manifold socioecological transformations that unfolded in Jamaica as a result of its forcible conversion into the world's leading sugar producer during the second half of the 1700s.

Walrond's gothic aesthetics elucidate the socioecological transformations generated by the Barbadian sugar crisis in the post-emancipation period, while James's use of the gothic – in particular his espousal of the language of corporeal horror – works to furnish a literary critique of the brutal and bloody history of the Jamaican slave institution. To this end, James makes no bones about the terrors and traumas of plantation slavery by offering readers frequent, often horrifying, descriptions of the abuse enacted upon the bodies of his enslaved characters. James' narrative centres on Lilith, a young woman who works in the plantation household. The insights James offers us into Lilith's consciousness mark another contrast with Walrond's tale; in place of the voice of the white male coloniser, James provides us with the first-person perspective of a mixed-race, enslaved woman who works in the plantation home. In so doing, *The Book of Night Women* reflects poignantly on the dynamics of the plantation as these inform the conditions and power dynamics of the domestic sphere. Indeed, it is in its depiction of the *home* that the novel unleashes some of its most potent critiques of the sugar frontier.

Through its focus on, and critique of, the plantation household, the novel invites interpretations of the sugar plantation that usefully broaden our understandings of the commodity frontier. Particularly instructive here has been the recent work of Rebecca Duncan, who has noted how current conceptions of the commodity frontier can be extended to include

[110] Ctd in Barrow, "Ownership and Control,", p. 100. My emphasis.

spheres that fall *outside* of sites of primary commodity production.[111] Duncan's argument pivots on what she terms "fictions from the data frontier," which "emblematise an emerging planetary geography, where conditions hitherto associated with peripheralized zones of the world-ecology are increasingly being generalised to populations everywhere."[112] Drawing on Moore's world-ecology theory, Duncan makes the point that the increasing prevalence of twenty-first century data extraction functions as a crucial *new* commodity frontier, and one that "heralds not only a transition in capitalist history, but also a radical expansion of the *domain of capital itself*."[113]

Such interpretations clearly complicate and expand earlier formulations of the commodity frontier, which, as we saw in my Introduction, have generally hinged on the idea that frontiers are "[geographical] spaces on the outer edges of the global economy dedicated to the production of primary commodities."[114] Echoing Duncan, Niblett has sought to understand the commodity frontier not merely as "specific kind of space",[115] as Moore puts it in one of his earliest essays, but also as "a narrative category."[116] It is "far better," contends Niblett, "to grasp the term as a narrative category by way of which the logistics of frontier-making can be illuminated through the description of their movements as these manifest in specific historical situations."[117] We will consider Niblett's term more fully below, but for now it suffices to say that my analysis of *The Book of Night Women* is likewise committed to extending understandings of the commodity frontier's limitations and possibilities. Indeed, crucial to my reading of the novel's use of the gothic is that it opens up new and generative ways of conceiving the sugar frontier by locating the operations of the plantation not merely in the field, but in the very heart of the home.

Before examining the novel's gothic rendition of the household in detail, I want to outline the contemporary conditions from which the text both emerges and with which it engages. Curdella Forbes has argued, for example, that James's "use of an aesthetics of horror

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[111] Rebecca Duncan, "Fiction from the Data Frontier," *Interventions,* forthcoming.
[112] Duncan, forthcoming.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 46.
[115] Jason W Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy," *Review* 23 (2000), 409–433 (412).
[116] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology*, p. 52
[117] Ibid.

resonates…in post-9/11 futures and the larger crisis of the postcolonial state."[118] In particular, Forbes sees the novel's investment in "horror poetics" as rooted in "the recent, real-life horror-stories of the detention, deportation, and sexual and verbal violation of Jamaican women at Caribbean Community ports of entry (CARICOM)."[119] Thus, Forbes argues that *The Book of Night Women*,

> despite its slave-era setting, brings into ken not only the abuse suffered by black women in that era but also the also the slippages between imaginings of the black Caribbean, and more so the black Jamaican female, as historically strong maternal-economic forager and historically dangerous sexual-economic purveyor… imaginings [that] were played out in the quarrels that arose from those border control events.[120]

Many of the text's gothic aesthetics, which resonate with the fears the genre typically mediates – of, for example, the monstrous feminine, racial others, and the power of non-human nature – speak, then, to more contemporary realities. These realities include not only post-9/11 "border control events"[121] to which Forbes refers, but also the reorganisation of socioecological relations attendant on the new rounds of plunder that were released in response to the 2006-2008 global financial crisis. As many have observed, attempts to offset the "impending energy crisis" and "avoid US and global vulnerability to disruption" included the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.[122] In addition to the intensification of extractive resource exploitation, exemplified by the opening of the Persian Gulf to the world economy at the turn of the century, the global financial crisis also resulted in a marked increase in gendered violence across the world. "It is now a well-documented fact," writes Tithi Bhattacharya, "that the financial crisis caused a rise in gendered violence:"

> In the UK, domestic violence rose 35 percent in 2010. In Ireland there was a 21 percent rise in 2008 of the number of women who accessed domestic violence services compared to 2007, the number rose even further in 2009, up 43 percent

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[118] Curdella Forbes, "Bodies of Horror in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* and Clovis Brown's Cartoons," *Small Axe* 54 (2017), 1-16 (3).
[119] Forbes, "Bodies of Horror," p. 2.
[120] Ibid.
[121] These events took place between 2010 and 2014 and took the form of numerous allegations of rape and sexual violation brought forward by Jamaican women against Barbadian border officials, as well as a more widespread anxiety over Jamaican women's entry into Barbados in order to engage in so-called "marriages of convenience." See Forbes, "Bodies of Horror," p. 2.
[122] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 5.

> from 2007 figures. In the United States, according to a 2011 private survey, 80 percent of shelters nationwide reported an increase in domestic violence cases for the third year in a row; 73 percent of these cases were attributed to 'financial issues' including job loss.[123]

While Bhattacharya makes no mention of any Caribbean nations in her analysis, contemporary Jamaica has been characterised by increased levels of gender-based crime since its neoliberalisation in 1977, when the country signed its first Standby Agreement with the International Monetary Fund.[124] Jamaica has been marked, since the 1980's, by an upswing in general violence, from gang-related crime through to drug and human trafficking. "From the mid-1980's onwards," as Michelle Munroe and Damion Blake explain, "a new wave of violence and insecurity evolved in Jamaica…This new wave coincided with the Jamaican state's market liberalisation and state retreat in social welfare policies and programmes."[125] Although violence in neoliberal Jamaica has undoubtedly been on the rise in general over the last four decades, recent statistics confirm that none experience this as palpably as the nation's women and girls. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Jamaica is presently one of the most unsafe spaces for women in the world: "three of the top ten countries with the highest incidence of rape are the Bahamas, Jamaica and Barbados."[126] In addition to their vulnerability to high incidence of rape and other forms of sexual violation, "nearly a third of women in the region have suffered domestic abuse."[127] When framed by such conditions, we might suggest that James' turn to the history of plantation slavery – in particular, his narrativisation of slavery as experienced by a group of black women in the home – speaks directly to the current resurgence of gendered violence set in motion in Jamaica, and across the world, in the wake of the global financial crash, itself a result of the international breakdown in the neoliberal regime of accumulation.

As numerous scholars have noted, the roots of the current intensification in femicide and other forms of gendered oppression lie in the global neoliberalisation of the economy that

[123] Tithi Bhattacharya, "Explaining Gender Violence in the Neoliberal Era," *International Socialist Review* 91 (2013-2014), https://isreview.org/issue/91/explaining-gender-violence-neoliberal-era/ [accessed 15 May 2021].
[124] Michelle Munroe and Damion Blake, "Governance and Disorder: neoliberalism and violent change in Jamaica," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2017), 580–603.
[125] Munroe and Blake, "Governance and Disorder," p. 590.
[126] Rebekah Kebede, "A #lifeinleggings: Caribbean women's movement fights sex assaults, harassment," *Reuters*, 10 March 2017, A #lifeinleggings: Caribbean women's movement fights sex assaults, harassment | Reuters [accessed 23 June 2022].
[127] Kebede, "A #lifeinleggings," online.

began in the 1970s and became hegemonic in the years between the economic crisis of 1973–1974 and the 2000s breakdown in the world-system. According to Neil Davidson, the neoliberal regime was established in the United States and was later imposed on the transnational economic institutions that it controlled. "In the developed world," observes Davidson,

> the need to compete with the US compelled other states to try to adopt the organizational forms which seemed to have given that economy its advantage; in the Global South states accepted conditions which restructured their economies in neoliberal ways in order to obtain access to loans and aid.[128]

Thus, the core capitalist powers, the United States in particular, released what Niblett describes as "a new imperialist offensive against peripheral regions as a means of reviving economic stagnation."[129] Most of these attempts to jump-start the economy pivoted on the policies of extra-national institutions such the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which forced nations to cut governmental spending and instead pursue export-led growth through the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Structural adjustment policies involved a classic neoliberal cocktail of free-market policies, including privatisation, fiscal austerity, free trade, and deregulation. In so doing, national economies across the world became systematically dismantled in favour of a new global mode of capitalist accumulation predicated on renewed US imperial hegemony, the revamping of the exploitation of extractive resources, and the socio-economic violence perpetuated by the World Bank and the IMF.

To fully understand the gendered outcomes of the neoliberal turn, it is essential to recall the various ways through which 'women's work' has been historically constructed under capitalism. Recent years have witnessed a remarkable outpouring of critical interest in the work of social reproduction – the term used by various materialist feminist scholars to describe

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[128] Neil Davidson, "The Neoliberal Era in Britain: Historical Developments and Current Perspectives," *International Socialism* 139 (2013), https://isj.org.uk/the-neoliberal-era-in-britain-historical-developments-and-current-perspectives/ [accessed 14 July 2021]

[129] Michael Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms: Water-Spirits, World-Ecology, and Neoliberalism," in *Marxism, Postcolonial Theory and the Future of Critique: Critical Engagements with Benita Parry*, ed. by Sharae Deckard and Rashmi Varma (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 78-95 (p. 84).

> housework, childraising, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities [that] help produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and understandings.[130]

Social reproduction refers, in other words, to the labour undertaken by women (and men) in order to "procure and access the means of subsistence, both material and psychical, in order to face another day of work."[131] While there is nothing innately 'gendered' about social reproduction itself, historically the burden of this kind of work has been borne by women, whose labour in the home has been ideologically constructed as a function of their biology and their supposed "'biologic proclivities' towards kinship creation, motherhood, and so forth"[132] As Nancy Fraser explains, the naturalisation of 'women's work' is what led to the historic "split between 'productive' waged work and unwaged 'reproductive' labour," a historical form of separation that has underpinned women's subordination since the early capitalist period.[133]

One of capitalism's defining features is therefore also what feminist scholars like Maria Mies term "the gendered division of labour" and the relegation of social reproduction to the 'private' domestic domain.[134] Such divisions have resulted in the ideological divide between production and social reproduction, where the latter is understood as lying outside the ambit of the formal economy because it, unlike the former, is not generally waged. This divide is therefore also what produces the appropriation and subsequent exploitation of women's social reproduction without paid recompense. Yet, despite its devaluation, social reproduction is "central to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism itself."[135] The point here, then, is that without this mass of unpaid work, predominantly performed by women, capitalist societies would not be able to produce new waged workers for the market. "Paradoxically," Fraser argues, "the capitalist economy is dependent on the very same processes of social reproduction whose value [it] disavows."[136] Silvia Federici puts this slightly differently when she writes in her famous 1975 essay "Wages

[130] Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," *New Left Review* 86 (2014), 55-72 (63).
[131] Bhattacharya, "Explaining Gender Violence," online.
[132] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 45.
[133] Fraser, "Behind Marx's Abode," p. 61.
[134] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale.*
[135] Fraser, p. 61.
[136] Ibid.

Against Housework" that "we must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women."[137]

Although the arguments of these feminist critics generally insist on placing the household at the heart of the nineteenth century industrial labour market, others have sought to look further back to understand the perpetuation of black women's oppression under the capitalist world-system. To this end, critics like Saidiya Hartman has argued for the centrality of the plantation home in analyses of the history of capitalist slavery. For Hartman, the plantation home is crucial in fully understanding the inextricabilities between racial capitalism and the gendered 'afterlife' of the slave institution. As she sees it, "the continuities between slavery and freedom were underwritten by black women's domestic labor" because

> the domestic space, as much as the field, defined their experience of enslavement and the particular vulnerabilities of the captive body; and it *continued* to define the very narrow horizon and limited opportunities available to black women in the first decades of the 20th century.[138]

Is it essential, then, that we account for the plantation household's role in enforcing black women's oppression in the context of legalised slavery and in terms of its role in perpetuating the gendered oppressions of the colonial slave system into the post-slavery era. One way in which James attempts to account for slavery's gendered afterlife is through his use of Caribbean dialect and dialogue, which "is couched in an imagined eighteenth-century slave vernacular layered with contemporary Jamaican Creole, particularly the versions associated with the working class and the urban s*ketel*."[139] This "amalgam," according to Forbes, serves as one example of James's many attempts to make "a genealogical link between the slave ancestor and the contemporary female."[140]

Yet it is also James's use of the *horror genre* that allows for this kind of interrogation between the slaving past and the postcolonial present. As Forbes contends, it is both James's focus on "the horror of slavery" and his use of the horror genre more generally that enables his novel to investigate the ongoing gendered oppressions of "the postcolonial Caribbean state" and cast a searchlight on contemporary Jamaican gendered relations as products "of slave

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[137] Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).
[138] Saidiya, Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016), 166-173 (170).
[139] Forbes, "Bodies of Horror," p. 6.
[140] Ibid.

women's experience, specifically of a sexual history and economy based on women's sexualized bodies and their psychic and material responses."[141] Thus, the novel's "horror poetics" position

> women and the female body in the discourse of history in ways that allow contemplation of the ambivalent image of women in contemporary Jamaica but does so by opening a window on women's sexual experience on the slave plantation.[142]

By bringing "the unspeakable contents of the slave woman's experience" into representation in ways that "cause intense unease," James makes his novel into a "horror text" and one which explicitly scrutinises what Forbes describes as "realities that are skirted or whispered about…and deemed 'unspeakable'."[143] A large part of this process of rendering 'unspoken realities' heard or seen is made possible through James' emphasis on the horrors that take place in the plantation home – capitalism's so-called "hidden abode."[144] In so doing, James fully engages not only with the history of embondaged women's struggles under the sugar system but also aligns his novel with a much larger body of work that has been committed to showcasing the plantation home as one of patriarchal capitalism's central tools of oppression.

According to Thavolia Glymph, the plantation household has often been neglected in studies of capitalist slavery.[145] "Violence and power in the great house, the female side of domination, have not received nearly commensurate attention" to studies on field-hand slavery because most historians of slavery have tended to take account "of violence against slaves in the cotton, rice, sugar and tobacco fields."[146] The reason for this is that slavery's violence was more discernible in these 'public' spaces: "here," argues Glymph, "it is easier to 'see' because it took place in a public arena where cash crops were produced and came typically from the hands of men – masters, overseers, and slave drivers."[147] However, as Hartmann reminds us, it is vital to take the conditions of the (plantation) household seriously if we are to fully apprehend slavery's operations and forms of control, in both their past and present permutations.

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[141] Forbes, "Bodies of Horror," p. 2.
[142] Forbes, "Bodies of Horror," p. 2.
[143] Ibid., p. 4.
[144] Fraser, "Behind Marx's Abode," p. 61.
[145] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[146] Glymph, *Out of the House*, p. 2
[147] Ibid.

Moreover, studies of the *commodity frontier* also remain incomplete without accounting for the frontier's dialectic between the exploitation of commodified labour and the appropriation of uncompensated labour and the energies of extra-human nature. Indeed, as Niblett points out, the category of the commodity frontier might be most productively employed to narrativise precisely these relations. "The frontier," he writes,

> names a set of relations or, more accurately, the relationship and constantly shifting borderline between different logics. These logics are those of exploitation and appropriation, or paid labour and unpaid work/energy… Such un- or de-valued work includes the life-making capacities of extra-human nature – the biophysical processes through which soil fertility is maintained or fossil fuels produced, for example – as well as certain work performed by humans, such as the domestic labour (typically gendered feminine) required to reproduce the worker on a daily basis.[148]

Even so, world-systems thought has often ignored the role of gendered labour appropriation in "explanations of the emergence of a capitalist labor force."[149] Wilma Dunaway observes in her critique of commodity chain analysis, for example, that "scholars have ignored the centrality of households and women to export production in all the contexts that I have explored over the past two decades."[150] "What all my research contexts have in common," Dunaway continues, "is that the nonwaged and unpaid labor of households was sucked into the world-economy in ways that commodity chain analysts typically *fail* to see."[151] What is needed, in other words, are accounts that provide for the "integration of households and women into research on globalized production processes."[152]

Particularly helpful for my purposes, however, is that Dunaway calls not merely for a more comprehensive account of the home in the development of capitalism, its codes of labour exploitation, and the gendered and racialised disparities that ensue from its social organisations.

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[148] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology,* p. 46. My italics.
[149] Wilma A Dunaway, "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation: Rescuing Women from the Periphery of World-System Thought," in *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century: Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. by Ramon Grosfoguel and Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez (London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 127- 46 (p. 128).
[150] Wilma A Dunaway, "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation," p. 128.
[151] Wilma A. Dunaway, ed., "Through the Portal of the Household: Conceptualizing Women's Subsidies to Commodity Chains", in *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production* (Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 55-71 (p. 56).
[152] Dunaway, "Through the Portal," p. 56.

Rather, Dunaway's call resonates with the analysis offered by Niblett above, for she likewise argues for a holistic account of capitalism's manifold under- and de-valued forms of labour and biophysical energies by suggesting that "like women, the environment has received inadequate attention in world-systems analyses,"[153] a neglect that has led to the historic deficiency in world-systems analysis of "the ecological aspects of women's lives."[154] Dunaway reminds us, then, that no analysis of world-systemic crisis, and indeed commodity frontiers, can be complete if we lose sight of the structural imbrication of environmental appropriation with gendered and racialised oppression. Drawing on Dunaway and others, my analysis of *The Book of Night Women* explores the ways in which James' gothic rendition of the plantation home might give expression to the dialectical relation between the plantation home and the sugar field. In so doing, I suggest that the novel's use of the gothic offers a crucial means through which we might 'crack open' and fully see the inextricable (and often invisible) nexus that exists between world-systemic crisis, environmental degradation, and violence against black women in both the context of plantation slavery and in the contemporary era.

***The Book of Night Women* and The Plantation House (of Horror)**

Lilith's encounter with the "Great House" takes place relatively early in the novel. She is brought to the plantation home by Homer, the head houseslave, in an effort to shield her from the drudgery and brutality of field-hand labour. This effort seems, at least at first, to be successful. Lilith initially imagines the household to be a sanctuary from the violence inflicted upon the field slaves, who she hears every morning as they are marched to labour in the field:

> Before sunrise she hear them – one, two, three hundred foot hitting the ground and rumbling like slow thunder. They used to wake her and scare her so much she thought they was a militia marching to hell.[155]

In contrast to the pounding of these marching feet, Lilith hears the laughter of the house slaves:

> More laughing again. Laughing was a strange sound to Lilith. Something that strike her as a house [slave] thing…Lilith listen for the day to change. The noise of the kitchen as they make breakfast. The quiet when they gone to the dining room to serve the massa and mistress. The noise when they come back and the smell of lunch cooking. The quiet when they gone to serve and the mumbling, laughing and

[153] Dunaway, "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation," p. 128.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), p. 17

> quiet cussing that come with them eating they own lunch upstairs. Maybe house-slave life was everything Lilith think.[156]

Legible in Lilith's descriptions of the plantation household is the historic construction of the home as a site apart – and therefore 'free' – from the productive forces of the market. As we have seen, modern capitalism set in place the historic separation between the workplace and the home. This divide also inaugurated the polarisation of the private and the public. "The private/public divide," writes Susan Boyd,

> has long informed dominant Western ways of knowing and being [and] denotes the ideological division of life into apparently opposing sphere of public and private activities, and public and private responsibilities.[157]

The bourgeois construction of the household as 'private' was essential to the operations of the plantation home. Such constructions pivoted, in particular, on transforming white plantation mistresses into "Angels of the House" – that is, into chaste, Christian, and maternal guardians of their family's happiness and success, creating what Mies calls "housewifization" as the flip side of colonisation.[158] Indeed, while the figure of the Angel in the House emerged in industrialising Europe, it quickly made its way to the colonies as increasing numbers of European women moved to the prosperous plantations of the 'New World'.[159]

The formulation of the plantation home as 'private' was a façade, however. Hilary Beckles has shown how, despite its historic construction as the sphere of feminine seclusion, the plantation household did not exert a "gendered politic that softened the evil and harshness of black women's enslavement."[160] Instead plantation mistresses, as elite members of the plantocracy,

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[156] James, *The Book of Night Women,* p. 26.
[157] Susan B. Boyd, "Challenging the Public/Private Divide: An Overview," in *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy*, ed. by Susan B. Boyd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 3-36 (p. 8).
[158] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale.*
[159] Nancy Legraca, *Rewriting Womanhood: Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887–1903* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2009).
[160] Beckles, *Centering Woman*, p. 36.

> used their class power to support the patriarchal pro-slavery argument that black females were not 'women' in the way that they were, and certainly not feminine in the way that they wished to be.[161]

Thus, the "dramatic intimacy" of black and white women in the home remained "filled with mutual antagonism, cruelty and violence."[162]

Reflecting how "gender counted for little"[163] in Jamaica during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, James locates some of the novel's most harrowing forms of cruelty in the figure of Miss Isobel, a white creole. When we first encounter her, Isobel is at pains to perform her feminine virtuousness and rejection of what she terms "the island way."[164] When she first arrives at the Montpelier manor, for example, she descends her carriage clothed in voluminous skirts and ribbons that showcase both her awareness of French fashion and her femininity:

> The lady emerged wearing a wide blue bonnet with a cream bow tie under her chin. Some of her hair tumble out and it curly and yellow. Her dress match her hat, blue with short sleeve and cut low in the front to show her bosom. The dress tie right above her waist with a cream ribbon and spread loose like brandy bottle. Montpelier never see nothing looking so lovely since Jack Wilkins' daddy come back from a trip with three peacock.[165]

It is not only Isobel's fashionable dress and supposed 'loveliness' that renders her a site of extreme virtuousness. It is she who injects into the Great House a new sense of domestic order borrowed from nineteenth century European conceptions of feminine obligation. "Why, it's my duty as a lady to help,"[166] Isobel says of her assistance in planning the annual New Year's Eve Ball. Yet, it turns out that a large part of her duties 'a lady' includes bringing Lilith under her control, whose sexuality and beauty Isobel views as posing a threat to the white family unit. As she viciously remarks to Lilith,

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[161] Beckles, p. 38.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 33.
[164] James, p. 77.
[165] Ibid., p. 76.
[166] Ibid., p. 77.

> you darkies have your ways of bewitching our men. I have already accepted that when I marry, I will have to share whatever hangs below his belt. How can a lady compete with your bestial ways?[167]

In Isobel Lilith finds no equality by virtue of their gender and shared 'femaleness'. After Lilith spills a pail of soup during the aforementioned ball, her punishment is to be gang-raped by a group of slave-drivers and then beaten daily and publicly over a three-week period. Lilith's public torture is simultaneously horrifying for its bodily violence and libidinous undertones:

> Massa Humphrey sitting on the terrace with Miss Isobel. The two negroes carry Lilith to the cotton tree. She struggling and she bawling and she screaming. Work stop and all the negroes gather to watch…One or two [slave] smile when they see Lilith back smooth for the last time. The tall negro swing and the whip lash Lilith straight cross her back. Lilith scream so hard that she cough. The negro lash her again. Lilith struggling 'gainst the rope and her legs swing wild like hanging man. Some people watch her face, some watch her breast, and some watch her arse and pussy.[168]

While we are led to believe that the voyeuristic – and deeply sexualised – aspect of her whipping is the brainchild of Humphrey Wilson, the owner of the Montpelier estate, it is later revealed that it was upon Isobel's instructions – "Isobel thinks the slave has not been disciplined enough"[169] – that the torture of Lilith's body is openly staged and expressly made to titillate. Despite Isobel's attempts at performing her distance from the brutality of the sugar field, she remains imbricated in the bloody nexus of the plantation and its attendant forms of 'masculine' violence. Indeed, Lilith's torture is shown to be a direct product of not only Isobel's cruelty but of the plantation home's codes of order and control. After all, Lilith's crime is merely spilling some soup and therefore has had no effect on the growing or harvesting of the sugar crop. Nonetheless, she is subjected, via Isobel, to the kind of torture that she imagined would be reserved for only the most recalcitrant of field-hand slaves. Lilith learns, then, that the plantation household relies on forms of discipline and violence that both parallel and exceed the brutalities of the field. Thus are fulfilled the many warnings that Homer gives Lilith to "never be happy to be a house slave."[170]

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[167] Ibid., p. 239.
[168] Ibid., pp. 135-136.
[169] James, p. 133.
[170] James, p. 50.

Isobel's involvement in perpetuating the violent lifecycle of the sugar economy is further aggravated by the fact that she is a *creole* and is therefore as much a product of its system as Lilith is. Accordingly, Isobel's use of high English frequently slips into local slave dialect, particularly when she has been drinking. "Lilith hear Miss Isobel chat like [slave] all the time, but never on purpose…Miss Isobel opening her white lips so that a black voice come out."[171] In this verbal eruption we encounter a further example of Isobel's inability to maintain her difference from the plantation economy; as she tells Lilith, "You forget that I grow up here too."[172] Becoming a part of the plantation's domestic economy is likewise unavailable to her, however, because of her creole status, which renders her an unpopular choice for marriage into the European plantocracy. Unable to assimilate fully into the house or field, Isobel's psyche begins to disintegrate: "Miss Isobel look like she falling apart."[173] Henceforth she, too, becomes something of a 'night woman', spending her evenings riding her horse through the sugarcane fields in Humphrey's clothing. As she is literally drawn closer to the sugar crop, she troubles gender conventions and becomes less and less recognisable, as the plantation takes over her once neatly constructed feminine appearance and reforms her into something much more 'improper', much more nightmarish. Like Lilith, she starts to take on monstrous form; "you and I", Isobel confesses, "are colonial creatures…we're cut from a more blunt cloth."[174] No longer wanting "to be no woman no more," Isobel transforms instead into "a witch…a hellion…a degenerate."[175] Yet, her eschewal of her femininity and "true womanness"[176] does little to save her in the end. By the end of the novel, Isobel is subjected to the same fate to which she originally condemned Lilith when she is gang-raped by several slave-drivers in the Montpelier manor, which offers her no sanctuary from the violence taking place outside in the field. Both women come, then, to share the same fate, remaining unable "to help nobody" – not even themselves – "out of white man power."[177]

Thus, even as Lilith (and indeed, Isobel) imagines the home to be free from the plantation's 'public' arena – the space where cash crops are actually produced – she soon learns that the divide between the domestic domain and sugar frontier is a false one. The novel draws a parallel, then, between the painful repercussions of field-hand labour and the devastating (and

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[171] Ibid., pp. 239 – 240.
[172] Ibid., p. 238.
[173] Ibid., p. 214.
[174] Ibid., p. 236.
[175] Ibid., p. 139.
[176] Ibid., p. 182.
[177] Ibid., p. 250.

intimate) violence of domestic labour, which together give expression to what Niblett describes as "the commodity frontier's twinned logic of exploitation and appropriation."[178] In addition to being brought under the vicious control of Isobel, Lilith is pulled into an exhausting regime of domestic duties and frequently subjected to the planter's sexual predations. For Lilith, and many of the novel's other female characters, the domestic space literally becomes a gothic enclosure fraught with peril. Her lesson here, then, is that the internal operations of the home are merely an extension of those which structure the outside world. Thus, the house remains regulated by the masculine power of the plantation field – by "a loud man voice", as Lilith puts it, "a voice that have the sound of the field."[179] James once more shows how the lines of division between the market and the household do not hold when describing the enslaved and carceral landscape of Jamaica's sugar frontier. The battle of the 'night women' against slavery is, therefore, as much one of resisting the plantation's codes of profit accumulation as one of insurgence against the patriarchal domination over the domestic domain.

The novel's nightmarish rendition of the plantation home offers a reminder, then, of not only the sugar frontier's relation between appropriation and exploitation, but also returns us to my earlier gestures to the broader capitalist dialectic between production and social reproduction. As Bhattacharya explains, the separation of the home and work are conditions of modern capitalism. Yet, despite their physical and ideological separation, social reproduction and production are *dialectical opposites* of the same historical process:

> for the two separate spaces – spaces of production of value (point of production) and spaces for reproduction of labor power – while they may be separate in a strictly spatial sense are actually united in both the theoretical and operational senses. They are particular historical forms of appearance in which capitalism as a process posits itself.[180]

The devaluation of women's domestic labour is therefore a direct product of capital's processes of 'naturalisation' because the construction of the household as outside the ambit of the formal economy has vitally assisted in the naturalisation of capitalism's unequal gendered power relations. The novel's preoccupation with the forms of horror that take place within the

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[178] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology,* p. 46.
[179] James, p. 31.
[180] Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. by Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), pp. 1-20 (p. 9).

plantation household's four walls plays a central role, then, in refusing the naturalisation and subsequent obscuration of the patriarchal oppressions enabled by sugar monoculturalism. Indeed, much of the novel's action centres on the struggle of women against the patriarchal control attendant upon, and integral to, the process of sugar cash-cropping. As capital penetrates and restructures Jamaica's ecological landscape via sugar monoculturalism, so, too, does it transform the household into a gothic site of terror, triggering forms of feminine resistance against (monocultural) capitalism's intimate bodily invasions.

To furnish his women characters with an armoury of dissent, James borrows from a series of different folkloric traditions. Take, for example, James' representation of Lilith. As her name suggests, Lilith is modelled upon the ancient Sumerian and Jewish myth that tells the tale of the first wife of Adam. According to this story, Lilith was made from the same clay as Adam, which marked her as his equal. Yet, conflict arose between the couple as Adam sought to exercise dominance over Lilith, who fled the Garden of Eden to gain her independence.[181] Lilith is believed to live among "ruins, the desert or in the ocean's depths", where she conspires to "invade homes and, with her wings, bring them and their residents ruin and destruction."[182] In the Mesopotamian tradition, she is described "as a blood-sucking vampire", while Jewish folklore suggests that her "favorite bodily fluid is usually men's semen, from which she begets demons."[183]

As much as James' depiction of Lilith clearly advances an affiliation with the Jewish and Mesopotamian tradition, it also explicitly draws on Caribbean mythology. Like Walrond, James similarly looks to the figure of the soucouyant for gothic inspiration. Soucouyants, as we have already seen, are generally inscribed in Caribbean folklore as old women with the ability to shed their skins and take on the form of fireballs in order to hunt and vampirically prey on their (male) victims. According to Gérard Besson, when a soucouyant is caught punishment involves dropping her into a "drum of boiling tar" or rubbing the soucouyant's empty casing with salt to make her reapplication impossible and cause a sensation that "burns like fire."[184] Besson's descriptions of the soucouyant's epidermal punishment clearly echo

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[181] Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, "The Temptation of Legitimacy: Lilith's Adoption and Adaption in Contemporary Feminist Spirituality and Their Meanings," *Modern Judaism* 39, no. 2 (2009), 125-143.
[182] Shapiro, "Temptation of Legitimacy," p. 133.
[183] Shapiro, p. 133.
[184] Besson, *Folklore & Legends,* p. 31.

theorisations offered by Hortense J. Spillers on what she terms slavery's "high crime against the flesh."[185] As Spillers puts it in her seminal essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987),

> before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography…If we think of the flesh as primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness.[186]

Spillers here relies on the distinction between what she describes as "the body" and "the flesh",[187] a distinction which "creates a way to sort through the imposition of meaning onto captive bodies."[188] In contrast to the body, which refers to "the sphere of liberated subject positions which can control the way meaning is extracted and imposed on it,"[189] the flesh, when brutalised and marked by the violence of slavery, provides the central means through which African captives were turned from human beings into "speaking commodities".[190] Like Spillers, James continually foregrounds the plantation system's instruments of whipping as apparatuses that violently mark the flesh of his women characters and render them dehumanised via his invocation of the soucouyant. Lilith is confronted with the full horror of this epidermal violence – what Spillers terms slavery's brutal "hieroglyphics of the flesh"[191] – when she sees Homer washing one morning: "Homer back look like a washboard with big thick scars running across, from her neck and shoulder right down to the middle of her arse. Lilith think she seeing an animal."[192] James' illustrates, then, how the slave institution relies on a project of epidermal violence through which a human body can be reduced to the position of 'non-human,' for it is through this process of brutalisation upon the flesh that the slave comes to be treated as a 'speaking commodity' to be exploited and abused in the name of the planter's drive for profit.

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[185] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 64-81 (67).
[186] Spillers, "Mama's Baby," p. 67.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Roberto Montero, "Love in the Flesh, Toni Morrison and Hortense Spillers 30 years after *Beloved* and Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Alpenglow: Binghamton University Undergraduate Journal of Research and Creative Activity* 4, no, 1 (2018), https://orb.binghamton.edu/alpenglowjournal/vol4/iss1/4 [accessed 15 August 2021].
[189] Montero, "Love in the Flesh," online.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Spillers, p. 67.
[192] James, p, 28.

But James' use of the soucouyant myth also foregrounds Lilith's, and the other night women's, rebellious spirits. Indeed, for critics like Meredith Gadsby, the mythical soucouyant functions as more than a victim of masculine violence, because she also acts as

> a symbol of female sexual identity and independence [that is] constantly punished (via the poisoning of her skin with salt or pepper) for challenging patriarchal control of women's bodies.[193]

In a reversal of the act of poisoning to which the soucouyant is traditionally subjected, Lilith hears "a spirit fly up in her head" and tell her to place her menstrual blood in the drink of the Irish overseer, Robert Quinn, in an effort to bring him under her control:

> Collect it, collect it quick, she say. When that hour come, that hour in the month, the time of womanness. Collect it in a jar and when nobody looking, mix it in him dark tea or peas soup. As soon as he drink it, he bound to love you and forsake all other. He goin' love you till love turn him into fool.[194]

This scene is one of many that showcases the influence of (Afro)-Caribbean spiritualities upon enslaved societies, and the history of Obeah as a central tool of feminist insurgence on the plantation. Obeah, as Janelle Rodrigues has shown, "is the term used for a range of syncretic African-derived religious and cultural beliefs and ritual practices that manipulate spiritual energy in order to effect material change."[195] This practice developed across Caribbean plantations from the modification of existing religious and cultural knowledges that slaves inherited from the African continent and brought with them to the Caribbean via the Middle Passage. As Rodrigues observes, Obeah served as both "a repository of lost African cultures" and a response to the enslaved's "capture, bondage and exile."[196] In the novel, the power of the Obeah is crystallised in the figure of Homer, the head house slave and leader of the night women's rebellion. Indeed, we later learn that the plantation mistress's fits of fancy and unexplained rages have resulted from the herbs Homer has been placing in her morning cup of tea. As Homer tells Lilith, "Me been friggin' up the mistress mind with me tea for years now.

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[193] Meredith Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 66.
[194] James, p. 176.
[195] Janelle Rodrigues, *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature: Moving through the Margins* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), p. 1.
[196] Rodrigues, *Narratives of Obeah,* p. 1.

She soon mad as raas…She think this tea goin' cool her nerves but it goin' do more than that."[197] Thus, even as James looks to gothic figures like the soucouyant to express the horrors done to the bodies of his enslaved women, he also pays homage to the histories of feminine resistance via his inclusion of Obeah.

It is not only Obeah that produces the possibility for the night women's insurgency. In addition to making use of Caribbean spiritualities to disrupt the patriarchal habitat of the plantation, the night women also employ literal forms of violence in response to a system of absolute brutality. The novel opens, significantly, with the violent scene of Lilith's birth, which inserts both the reader and Lilith herself unrelentingly into the horrors of slavery. This James achieves by activating the bloody associations of the colour red:

> People think blood red, but blood dont got no colour. Not when blood wash the floor she lying on as she scream for that [baby] to come, the lone baby of 1785. Not when the baby wash in crimson and squealing like it just depart heaven to come to hell, another place of red.[198]

These lines mark not only the reader's first experience of the novel's unflinching use of the language of gothic horror, but also emphasise the brutal nexus of the plantation – a space in which "every day in a slave's life", as the narrator describes it, "is a day that colour red."[199] Lilith and the other night women's only hope of insurrection, then, is to resort to equally violent forms of protest. In a particularly horrifying scene, Lilith is forced to masturbate Mr Roger, Isobel's father and the owner of Montpelier's neighbouring plantation. In retaliation, Lilith delivers on the bloody promises of her vampiric namesakes: she burns down the plantation house and kills Isobel's entire family in the process.

Yet, even as James foregrounds the revolt of the night women against slavery, he never allows his characters any real possibility of redemption or escape from the plantation system. Instead, the narrative is continually at pains to emphasise the futility of redemption by invoking the metaphor of an inescapable circle. Many of the novel's chapters begin with the oft-repeated refrain "every slave walk in a circle,"[200] followed by an elaboration of the plantation cycle in which each figure is caught. Upon its first evocation, this phrase is followed by the lines "a

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[197] James, p. 291.
[198] Ibid, p. 13.
[199] James, p. 13.
[200] Ibid., p. 34.

circle like the sun, a circle like the moon, a circle like bad tiding that seem gone but always, always come back."[201] Later, these lines are revised to evoke the image of a cul-de-sac:

> a road set before the negro…he walking round and round and always come back to the where he leave first. No matter where he walk, the road take him right back to the chain, the branding iron, the cat-o-nine or the noose.[202]

This critique of Lilith's inability to 'break free' from the shackles of the plantation system is not only manifested at the level of the novel's content. This also takes place at the level of form in terms of James' reworking of the tradition of the American slave narrative. The slave narrative, popularised in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, typically chronicles an individual's development and ultimate redemption by employing the double register of a young, naïve writer who develops into a mature subject. "Following the prefatory details," writes Lynn Orilla Scott,

> the slave narrator goes on to describe the precarious and dehumanizing aspects of slavery…A critical turning point describes the slave's desperate awakening in which he determines to be a slave no longer. Following this determination, he plans and eventually executes his escape.[203]

The form of the slave narrative is based on the spiritual autobiography, which follows a three-part structure depicting a person's enslavement to sin, harrowing conversion experience, and subsequent state of spiritual rebirth.[204] This journey is re-written in the slave narrative in terms of the slave's passage from physical enslavement, to harrowing escape experience, to ultimate freedom, binding emancipation tightly to the process of religious conversion. *The Book of Night Women* significantly departs from this trajectory, for the novel offers its characters no real deliverance from slavery's terrors. Indeed, although much of the action of the novel pivots on the night women's planned rebellion, this ultimately fails at the novel's bloody climax. James makes use of the register of gothic horror, then, to restructure the slave narrative and eschew its generic expectations, particularly in terms of its redemptive trajectory.

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[201] Ibid., p. 34.
[202] James, p. 101.
[203] Lynn Orilla Scott, "Autobiography: Slave Narratives," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (2017), https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-658 [accessed 29 January 2022].
[204] Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a* Tradition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

Further notable in this regard is that the novel does the double work of responding to genre history because the presence of the gothic in the text also offers a rejoinder to common critiques of the slave narrative as allowing for the enaction of 'white empathy.' Robin Winks has criticised the slave narrative for providing an exploitative opportunity for the exorcism of white colonial guilt by making the slave's testimony into "a spectacle for entertainment purposes."[205] Winks' critique turns on the graphic nature of the genre, which, as many have noted, frequently occupies itself "with presenting the bodily and social horrors of the institution, and make no amends for frequent, detailed descriptions of abuse."[206] For Winks, it is the slave narrative's investment in emphasising slavery's corporeal torments that leads the form to invite voyeuristic behaviour. In this sense, the genre reinforces the voyeurism of the slave system itself by turning the emancipated writer back into an object of viewing, in much the same way as the body of the enslaved subject is placed on display in the slave market and on the slave block. Thus, Winks describes the slave narrative as "pious pornography…fit for Nice Nellies to read precisely because they dealt with black, not white man."[207]

Certainly, James' unapologetic turn to the gothic language of bodily violence can be seen as a means of expelling from the slave narrative any possibility of this sentimental sanitisation. But his use of the gothic speaks particularly powerfully, I think, to my earlier mention of the new waves of gendered and racialised violence that were opened by the neoliberal turn. As I noted, scholars have increasingly argued that the onset of the neoliberal regime set in motion an upswing in gendered violence across the world. The reason for this is that neoliberalism catalysed new systems of fiscal austerity that rapidly stripped public infrastructure, "from health care and education to community services and public transit…in a manner similar to how in many parts of the world the land was stripped for the new emerging extractive industries."[208] For women, this cutting back on public expenditure had significantly brutal effects. As Davidson explains, the neoliberal attack on social provisioning reconfigured previous state-provided services in such a way that the care of children or family members "increasingly…passed from the state to the family – which generally mean[t] *the female members of the family*."[209]

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[205] Robin W. Winks, "Introduction," in *Four Fugitive Slave Narratives*, ed.by Robin Winks (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. v-vii (p. vi).
[206] Webster, *African American Gothic*, p. 220.
[207] Winks, "Introduction," p. vii.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Davidson, "The Neoliberal Era in Britain," online. My italics.

Melinda Cooper has usefully placed the family household at the heart of the neoliberal agenda by illustrating how neoliberal policy sought to return the family to 'its natural role' via the harnessing of conservative ideologies around the family and the role played by women as both 'home-makers' and 'care-givers:' "What neoliberals proposed in response to the financial crisis," Cooper writes, "was the strategic reinvention of [the] tradition of private family responsibility, using the combined instruments of welfare reform, changes to taxation, and monetary policy.[210] Thus, it was by building on sexist and patriarchal notions of what constitutes 'women's work' that neoliberal policies legitimised themselves through the rhetoric of 'tradition' and 'traditional family values' (emblematised particularly strongly by conservative figures such as Margaret Thatcher).[211] The neoliberal regime of accumulation had the effect, in other words, of relieving the state of its responsibilities toward social provisioning because it enabled social service to shapeshift from a governmental requirement into a '*woman's duty*.' This refiguration has meant that women have become primed as scapegoats for governmental failure; when support services break down as result of neoliberal cost-cutting, responsibility is laid not at the feet of the state but upon the shoulders of women.

While Cooper's focus is on the neoliberalisation of the United Kingdom, Jacqui Alexander has powerfully critiqued the gendered outcomes of neoliberalism with reference to the Caribbean context. "In Trinidad, Tobago, and the Bahamas," observes Alexander,

> the most significant retrenchment with the adoption of SAP has taken place in those sectors which have been historically coded as 'women's work': health, clinic and hospital service, caring for the sick and elderly, social services and education. As women continue their work in the home and their work in the private or public service sector, they work, in addition, to care for the sick and elderly, and to continue the education of their children without state subsidies. The state relies upon and operates within these dominant constructions of a servile femininity, perennially willing and able to serve, a femininity that can automatically fill the gaps left by the state.[212]

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[210] Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), p. 21.

[211] Indeed, Cooper suggests that British neoliberalism was ultimately a project of "new social conservativism" that attempted to revive the economy via a return to England's 'Old Poor Law' of 1601, which stipulated that it was the responsibility of the family to support the poor and unemployed. See Cooper, *Family Values,* p. 21.

[212] Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," *Feminist Review* 48 (1994), 5-23 (19).

Alexander's sentiments, written in 1994, are echoed by Bhattacharya in 2014. As Bhattacharya puts it precisely two decades after Alexander's critique, "there is [still] a sexist expectation that it is women who will take care of the home…It is women who are expected to be responsible for providing for the family within the home and *hence also responsible for any lack of provisioning*.[213] Thus, the neoliberal regime, while hollowing the home "out of all subsistence resources," did not put an end to the need for the material provisioning typically found in the household.[214] "Today," continues Bhattacharya,

> material provisioning for the human laboring body within the home remains, laced with the ideological expectation that women ought to be providing for such a need in the form of food, water, and care. The real material need for food and shelter combined with the highly ideological expectation that women are responsible for meeting that need within the home [is what] provide[s] the conditions of possibility of gendered violence.[215]

Bhattacharya highlights the periodic reinvention of the household, then, as a key instrument for the distribution (and withdrawal) of wealth and income by illustrating how the recent resurgence of global gendered violence emerges as corollary to the neoliberal evacuation of state services and protections. Indeed, she shows how femicide and other forms of "gender crimes" are some of the direct outcomes of neoliberal socioeconomic processes. [216]

If the gothic typically registers a world made 'strange' by the penetration of capitalist modes and structures, then the novel's emphatically graphic discourse of bodily horror can be said to mediate the specifically gendered violence of neoliberal incursion as this is released upon the domestic domain. In this sense, we might suggest that the novel's unrepentant use of corporeal horror acts as a kind of metonym for neoliberalism's intensification of racialised and gendered oppression in the interests of reviving capital accumulation. By making use of the language of bodily horror, and by locating these horrors within the *home*, the novel illuminates how the household's four walls function as the very boundaries around which neoliberal power coheres. As such, the novel invites readings of the contemporary Jamaican condition that refuse to understand the state purely within the boundaries of the nation, pointing instead to its intimate imbrication in global conditions of systemic crisis. Yet, the novel loses none of its site-specificity, for even as it continually foregrounds the globality of the condition of violent

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[213] Bhattacharya, "Explaining Gender Violence," online. My italics.
[214] Bhattacharya, online.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.

domestic patriarchy, it also illustrates how Jamaica, as a peripheralised location, experiences these effects particularly powerfully. Indeed, by situating the terrors done to his black women characters within a specifically Jamaican history of slavery, James locates the contemporary surge of world-wide gendered violence within the long spiral of the patriarchal oppression enabled by, and attendant upon, the white patriarchal order of the colonial plantation. Thus, the novel's reach is wide and encompassing – drawing together past and present, field and home, production and reproduction, local and global – to capture how these multiple conditions operate simultaneously and with intimate interconnectedness.

Seen in this light, the novel opens up ways of not only understanding how the Jamaican experience is influenced by world-systemic conditions, but also how the house and field function as dialectical opposites to the same historic process. In this sense, James' focus on domestic slavery also has significant ecological implications, for it is by situating these systemic violences in the *plantation* home that the novel usefully draws together the structural nexus of gender oppression, capitalist accumulation, and ecological degradation. By centring the full horror of the sugar frontier within the household, capitalism's 'hidden abode,' the novel articulates a powerfully feminist critique of the inextricability of the social violence of patriarchy and the environmental destructions of capitalist plantation monoculture. In so doing, the novel's gothic rendition of the household offers one central way of unveiling the historical causes for the contemporary relations between capitalist crisis, environmental degradation, and gendered violence as these continue to haunt the contemporary era.

Conclusion: Gothic and the Ecological Uncanny

Many have noted how the gothic as a genre tends towards a "final framing sanctuary," wherein "gothic villains, and the evil associated with them, are likely to be quashed by the end of the fiction, or at least quietened as a sense of order (even if only temporarily) is restored."[217] Yet, as we have seen, the gothic effects and devices deployed in Walrond's and James' texts serve to neither redeem the violence that has come before nor expel the monstrous in order to reassert order. As I noted in my analysis of "The Vampire Bat," Walrond concludes his tale by summoning up the spectres of an as yet-unrealised future. This future pivoted on Walrond's relocation of the narrative voice from Prout – a white male imperial official – to a mixed-race servant girl. This final image, I argued, served to anticipate the inauguration of a postcolonial

[217] Laura Hubner, *Fairytale and Gothic Horror: Uncanny Transformations in Film* (London: Palgrave, 2008) p. 43.

Barbados free as much from the plantation's ecological devastations as from its patriarchal forms of domination and control. Yet these hopes ultimately remained unfulfilled given the reincarnation of sugar as the island's leading commodity export in the decade after Walrond's short story was published. This revival, I suggested, was tied not only to the resurgence of King Sugar's economic dominance, but also to the persistence of pre-existing Barbadian social hierarchies and elite rule derived from the plantocracy's colonial order.

A similar interpretation is possible, I think, when we read "The Vampire Bat" alongside *The Book of Night Women*, for James' novel likewise concludes by reflecting on the plantation's cyclical future. Indeed, as we learn at the novel's end, its narrator is Lilith's daughter, Lovey, born of her affair with Robert Quinn. From Lilith, Lovey has learned to read and write; *The Book of Night Women* is the product of these endeavours. James highlights how Lovey's act of writing is one explicitly associated with the soucouyant's ability to shed its epidermal casing and take on new form. "Any [slave] woman," Lovey tells us,

> can become a black woman in secret. This is why we dark, cause in the night we disappear and become spirit. Skin gone and we become whatever we wish. We become who we be. In the dark with no skin I can write. And what write in darkness is free as free can be, even if it never come to light and go free for real.[218]

Like Lilith, then, Lovey has similarly become something of a soucouyant. However, in contrast to Lilith, who must turn to literal violence to protest her subjection to the plantation system, Lovey makes use of the written word, using it to pay homage to the lives of the night women, whose histories and acts of rebellion may otherwise have gone unspoken and unheard. Yet, even as the novel foregrounds the insurgence associated with the soucouyant – and the act of writing as revolutionary – the question of generational inheritance is also raised, for Lovey's inheritance of the soucouyant association ultimately summons up an image of a future in which the past is perpetually reprised. As Lovey puts it herself, the "free" she experiences through writing remains framed in metaphorical terms: "And what write in darkness is free as free can be, even if it never come to light and go free for real."[219] Ultimately, then, James proffers history as an inescapable circle in which gendered and racialised violence persists from the plantation to the present. In this sense, James' conclusion finds a powerful echo in Walrond's story, for both texts hinge on sugar's haunting return.

[218] James, p. 327.
[219] Ibid.

I would like to conclude, therefore, with one final point on the gothic and the role played by this form in illuminating the projections of the plantation across space and time. If both texts cannot imagine a future outside of sugar's socioecological legacies, then their use of the gothic has less in common with the form's interest in offering a final framing sanctuary and more to do with the gothic's relationship to the uncanny. The gothic has been regularly presented as bound up with making legible "the return of the repressed," the phrase used by Sigmund Freud to define "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[220] As is well known, Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* serves as a means of understanding the Oedipal conflict involved in human infancy, particularly the contradictory feelings evoked in the minds of adult males by female genitals, which represent "the first home of individual human life in the mother's womb."[221]

Drawing on this formulation, several scholars of the gothic have sought to illustrate how the genre functions as a kind of psychological family drama that "refigure[s] Freud's notion of Oedipal conflict".[222] According to Jerrold E. Hogle,

> in some way, the Gothic is usually about some 'son' both wanting to kill and striving to be the 'father' and thus feeling guilty and fearful about what he most desires, all of which applies as well to Gothic *heroines*, who seek both to appease and free themselves from the excesses of male and patriarchal dominance.[223]

Certainly, it is possible to apply these readings to both texts, particularly *The Book of Night Women* in terms of its domestic setting and the patriarchal terrors that typically take place therein. The same could be said of "The Vampire Bat"; indeed, Robert Bone has argued that much of the stories that comprise *Tropic Death* dramatise "the Freudian mother-son relationship."[224]

But such readings, I think, discount the materialist formulations that gothic provides in these texts. Indeed, if the gothic typically turns on the return of the past, then its devices, as

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[220] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Standard Edition*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955 [1919]) p. 17.
[221] Rob Giblett, *Environmental Humanities and the Uncanny: Ecoculture, Literature and Religion* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), p. 1.
[222] Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction: the Gothic in Western Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-20 (p. 5).
[223] Hogle, "Introduction," p. 5.
[224] Robert Bone, *Downhome: Origins of the Afro-American Short-Story* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 178

implemented by James and Walrond, elucidate a different relation to the uncanny, and one that is very much ecological in its outlook. That is to say, if James and Walrond make use of the gothic to invoke the continual return of the past, then these returns are premised on illustrating the plantation's various socioecological oppressions and violences in order to foreground how these extend beyond the era of slavery and formal emancipation and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We might suggest, then, that what underlies the presence of the gothic in each text is an 'ecological uncanny' that works to critique the various socioecological endurances of the plantation. Thus, unlike the Freudian association of the return of the repressed, the gothic visions James and Walrond offer us of the plantation's haunting return are profoundly materialist in orientation. In this sense, the focus that these texts provide on the plantation's inevitable reincarnation reinforces my earlier points about the gothic as a *mode of reality*. Like the gothic itself, which so often turns on the continual rupturing of the present by the past, "The Vampire Bat" and *The Book of Night Women* remind us that the plantation – and the very real horrors it inaugurated – are both fundamental and continuous.

Chapter Two

"Women, Nature, and the Colonies": Mining Capitalist Patriarchy's Underground

Introduction

"While seemingly separate in their New World development, the silver economy and the sugar and slave trades rose as linked sectors of a burgeoning world economy."[1] So writes John Tutino in *The Mexican Heartland* (2017), in which he makes the claim that the sugar and silver frontiers are necessarily intertwined because of their shared role in enabling global capitalist expansion. Silver and sugar, Tutino continues,

> are linked at a key junction: to purchase bound Africans, Europeans had to deliver printed cotton cloth made in India. And the price of Indian cottons was paid mostly in American silver. Like sugar…the silver economy rose after 1550 to mobilize profit-seeking Europeans, bound Africans, and scarce Amerindians in a new economy that transformed lives across the Americas and drove unprecedented global integrations.[2]

Echoing Tutino, Jason W. Moore has similarly argued that silver has been as essential as sugar to the expansion and development of the world-system. According to Moore, "in the Americas during the early modern period, the two most significant generators of value were silver and sugar."[3] While Moore's focus on sugar's relationship to modernisation and the frontier-led expansion of the capitalist world-economy is highlighted throughout his earliest writings, he places equal emphasis on silver's indelible association with the process of frontier-making and the origins of capitalist modernity. In fact, it is to *both* silver and sugar that Moore looks in one of his first attempts to define the commodity frontier. "Commodity frontiers," writes Moore,

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[1] John Tutino, *The Mexican Heartland: How Communities Shaped Capitalism, A Nation, and World History, 1500-2000* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press. 2019), p. 33.

[2] Tutino, *The Mexican Heartland,* pp. 33 & 34.

[3] Jason W. Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy: Commodity Frontiers, Ecological Transformation, and Industrialization," *Review* 23 (2000), 409–433 (413), my emphasis.

> were profoundly transformative of land and labor because they were often highly industrial. In particular, sugar production and refining, and *silver mining* were among the most industrial activities of the early modern world-economy.[4]

Like the plantation, then, the silver mine marked one of the most industrially advanced forms of early modern enterprise. Not only did the success of both frontiers pivot on highly organised and specialised forms of labour, but both also provided a stark illustration of the ecological exhaustions that typically underpin frontier formation and capitalist expansion. As Moore observes:

> the extractive and agricultural character of frontier industrialization under conditions of ceaseless accumulation meant that not only was ecological exhaustion a fact of life in these areas, but that ecological exhaustion was a major impetus to further capitalist expansion and to the system's cyclical fluctuations.[5]

Much has been written on the development of the myth of what Martin Gitlitz terms "Silverado" in Latin America during the period of capitalist modernisation.[6] Of this body of scholarship, the most famous is undoubtedly Eduardo Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America* (1973). In this treatise, Galeano argues that during the Spanish discovery of silver in the sixteenth century "wealth flowed like water," eclipsing any of the previous levels of wealth accumulated by gold mining.[7] By the nineteenth century, Latin America's silver frontier achieved gigantic proportions, flowing out of the local economy and into the coffers of the Spanish Crown, stimulating a global trade that linked Spain, Europe, the Islamic World, South Asia, and China. Thus, as Galeano famously puts it, Latin America is "the region of open veins" – an apt metaphor for illustrating how this part of the world has historically served as a site where "the whole of nature has been transmuted into capital and accumulated in distant centers of power".[8] As Galeano continues, "*everything*" in this region has been subsumed into "the universal gearbox of capitalism…the soil, its fruits and its mineral-rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and to consume, natural resources and human resources."[9]

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[4] Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion," p. 414.

[5] Moore, p. 412.

[6] Martin Gitlitz, *Living in Silverado: Secret Jews in the Silver Mining Towns of Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019).

[7] Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. by Cedric Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), p. 22

[8] Galeano*, The Open Veins,* p. 2.

[9] Galeano, p. 2.

Many have illustrated the devastating repercussions of the Latin American silver frontier on local peoples and environments. In Mexico, the perilous livelihood faced by silver miners was noted from as early as the 1700s. Writing of the experience of these labourers in 1761, Francisco Javier de Gamboa describes how

> they suffer infinitely, the miserable smelters during this hour of immense fatigue, because the furnace is the mouth of Hell…the smoke…poisonous…this evil being so necessary, yet so terrible for those who toil at this work, so important for the Republic.[10]

Meanwhile, silver extraction's environmental impacts were already clear by the sixteenth century. In one of the world's earliest scientific texts, *De Re Metallica* (1558), Georg Agricola lamented how "the fields are devastated…woods and groves are cut down…then are exterminated the beasts and birds…when the ores are washed, the water which has been used poisons the brooks and streams".[11] Today, the legacies of the Mexican silver frontier include not only many of the country's mining 'ghost' towns, which attract scores of tourists every year, but also the honeycombed landscape and the deforestation of huge swathes of rainforest. Alongside these ecological depredations, the social legacies of centuries of silver extraction include the

> sharp internal divisions between wealthy small elites (usually white, European, or Westernized) who have profited from export and the larger mass of impoverished peoples (indigenous, black, or mestizo) who have suffered from the appropriation of their lands and labor.[12]

The points made by these critics about the central role played by 'New World' silver in the development of the modern world-system did not go unnoticed by some of the earliest critics of capitalism's emergence as the dominant mode of production. In his meditation on primitive accumulation, Marx foregrounds two key moments and processes, unfolding respectively in Europe and the colonised world. Marx writes in *Capital Vol I* that primitive accumulation, the

[10] Ctd in Saul Guerrero, *Silver by Fire, Silver by Mercury: A Chemical History of Silver Refining in New Spain and Mexico, 16th to 19th Centuries* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), p. 316.
[11] Georg Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, trans. by Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover (London: The Mining Magazine ([1556] 1912).
[12] Sharae Deckard, "Latin America in the World-Ecology: Origins and Crisis," in *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art, Film, and Literature*, ed. By Mark Anderson, Zelia M. Bora Anderson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 3-20 (p. 3).

process he uses to name capital's genesis, involved the simultaneous enclosure of the commons in Europe and the inauguration of imperial processes of accumulation. As Marx famously argues, primitive accumulation is marked by a moment of *separation*: of the expropriation of European peasants and small holders from their communal land. "Primitive accumulation," he writes, "is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production."[13]

Yet, if original or primitive accumulation[14] hinged on this historical moment of separation – of the worker from the (common) land – then it also involved the rifts produced by the colonial conquest. In other words, the flipside of the process of "divorcing of the producer from the means of production"[15] was the mass plunder of the colonies. Marx continues:

> the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.[16]

These, then, are "the idyllic proceedings," as Marx ironically describes them, "of the chief momenta of primitive accumulation."[17] Capitalism's violent beginnings lie, therefore, as much in enclosures of the commons in Europe as it does in the relations of dispossession and violence enabled by the conquest of the colonial world. Many of these relations, as we have seen, were also set into motion by the sixteenth and seventeenth century silver regime, which like the Caribbean plantation, marked the New World's enforced incorporation into the world-economy.

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[13] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1976 [1867]). p. 874-5

[14] While Marx's original German term "ursprüngliche Akkumulation" is usually translated as "primitive accumulation", original or primary better captures Marx's meaning. The translator of this volume implies this himself when he says: "[I] have preferred 'primitive accumulation' to 'original accumulation' as the phrase has become established by now as part of the English language." I will be using the two terms interchangeably. See "Translator's Note," in *Karl Marx, Capital Vol I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1976 [1867]), p. 714.

[15] Marx, p. 875.

[16] Ibid., p 915.

[17] Ibid.

Drawing on Marx's theory of original accumulation, Eli Jelly-Schapiro has recently argued that "capitalist modernity [was] born in the moment of extraction."[18] Like Marx, Jelly-Schapiro suggests that the early modern extraction of Latin American's precious minerals marked the process of the expansion of capital's domination over life – the very process, in other words, of original accumulation itself. Jelly-Schapiro shows how the surplus derived from mineral mining in the Americas enabled "the expanded reproduction of industrial capital within the metropole," thereby catalysing the ascendence of exchange value and setting in motion the process and relation of imperial accumulation.[19] As Jelly-Schapiro points out, "the mining of precious metals crystallizes the ascendance of exchange value, and helps to catalyze the expansionary reproduction of capital on a global scale."[20] It is crucial to note here, then, that the process of original accumulation is one of constant repetition and planetary reverberation. To analyse sites of extraction requires a holistic understanding, in other words, of not only the intertwined history of the 'core' and 'periphery' produced by the world-system's development, but also of the deeper and enduring history of original accumulation.

Many scholars have emphasised how original accumulation functions as a continuing process by highlighting "the reenactment, in the present, of putatively primordial modes of depredation."[21] Rosa Luxemburg has famously argued that capital's survival depends on its capacity to locate spaces of accumulation that lie outside of its domination. Luxemburg writes in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) that world-capitalism is defined by two aspects. The first of these concerns the wage relation and the other colonial dispossession. "One aspect [of capital accumulation]," writes Luxemburg,

> concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced – the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light, accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and the wage laborer.[22]

The other aspect of this process "concerns the relations between capitalism and the noncapitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international

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[18] Eli Jelly-Schapiro, "Extractive Modernity at Large: The Contemporary Novel of Primitive Accumulation," *Interventions: the International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2021), 1-19 (2).
[19] Jelly-Schapiro, "Extractive Modernity at Large," p. 2
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*. trans. Schwarzschild (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, [1913] 2015), p. 452.

stage."[23] These relations take as their "predominant methods colonial policy…and war", for here, "force, fraud, oppression [and] looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process."[24] Elaborating on Luxemburg's analysis, David Harvey has more recently argued for an understanding of original accumulation as not originary but *ongoing* through his formulation of accumulation by dispossession in *The New Imperialism* (2005). For Harvey, capitalist accumulation is likewise divided into two components: zones of expanded capitalist reproduction and zones of what he calls "accumulation by dispossession."[25] Harvey updates Luxemburg's model, however, by looking to the post-1973 period, for he claims that, in the contemporary moment, "accumulation by dispossession" has become the "dominant form of accumulation relative to expanded reproduction."[26] Thus, accumulation by dispossession is "the primary contradiction to be confronted" under the present-day neoliberal world order.[27]

These arguments find a clear resonance with the analysis I offered in my previous chapter on the plantation and its haunting legacy. As I noted, such has been the impact of the Caribbean sugar frontier's socioecological legacies on the contemporary era that an entire field of study has emerged around the concept of the Plantationocene, the name critics have offered to capture how the various social and environmental conditions initiated by the plantation inform the workings of the present.[28] Like the arguments put forward by these critics, recent analyses of the history of original accumulation have illuminated how the "time-space of extraction is [both] diffuse and perpetually reprised."[29] These readings pivot on the idea that extraction is an "extant phenomenon" that brings into concrete shape the continuity between "original and latter-day forms of dispossession."[30] In an echo of the readings of socioecological endurances offered by the Plantationocene thought-figure, Jelly-Schapiro argues that historical instances of dispossession that characterise extractive regimes must be understood as "continuing to shape social and ecological aspects in the present."[31]

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[23] Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital,* p. 453.
[24] Luxemburg, p. 453.
[25] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
[26] Harvey, *The New Imperialism,* p. 153.
[27] Harvey, p. 177.
[28] Donna Haraway et al, "Anthropologists are talking—About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2014), p. 535–564.
[29] Jelly-Schapiro, "Extractive Modernity at Large," p. 2
[30] Ibid., p. 4.
[31] Ibid.

Inspired by this premise, this chapter is interested in investigating how gothic effects and vocabularies, as manifested in texts from the Caribbean and Latin American region, might play a central a role in expressing extraction as an *ongoing process*. After all, as we have seen, the gothic has long proven to be a particularly fitting mode of representation for capturing the perpetuation of the past into the present. To this end, my analysis takes the form of a comparison between Pauline Melville's 1998 short-story "Erzulie" and Silvia Moreno-Ģarcia's 2020 novel *Mexican Gothic*. Melville's tale is set in 1990's Guyana and concerns a real-life mining disaster that took place in 1995 in the Middle Essequibo region, when a tailing pond owned by a Canadian-run gold mine collapsed and released 400 million gallons of cyanide effluent into the Omai river. In order to narrativise the horrifying impacts of this mining catastrophe, Melville draws from a series of images adapted from local Caribbean folklore, many of which find their most potent manifestation in the violent and vengeful 'Erzulie,' a female serial killer modelled upon the Afro-Caribbean water divinity known as the 'water-wumma.' Here it is important to note that while Melville's "Erzulie" chimes with the themes often found in gothic literatures (like murderous and vengeful women), her tale is not a classic 'gothic' story. Thus, it is important to emphasise that I do not seek to offer Melville's story as an example of a classic gothic tale. Rather, I read "Erzulie" as making use of a range of gothic *effects* to showcase the manifold socioecological outcomes of gold extraction in Guyana during the mid-twentieth century.

In contrast to "Erzulie," Moreno-Ģarcia's *Mexican Gothic* is very much working within a hallmark gothic tradition. The novel's action takes place in a large decaying mansion that lies within a forested region of El Triunfo, a formerly thriving mining town located in Baja California Sur, one of Mexico's key silver mining areas. In this decaying manor live the Doyles, a once-rich English family who moved to Mexico in the nineteenth century after the breakdown of the English silver trade caused them to relocate their industry into the uncapitalised territories of Mexico's mountains. *Mexican Gothic* centres on an archaic colonial order desperately trying to cling to power, and also quite literally to *life*, in a world structured by silver's exhaustion. Like "Erzulie," then, *Mexican Gothic* looks to the socioecological transformations produced by the mining frontier for narrative inspiration. Yet, if Melville's "Erzulie" merely assumes a gothic 'quality' that can be read in relation to more general gothic tropes and Caribbean cosmologies, then *Mexican Gothic* explicitly embraces the gothic mode. Nowhere is the influence of traditional gothic literatures clearer than in the novel's turn to the trope of the haunted and decaying home. The action of Moreno-Ģarcia's story is set in motion when the novel's protagonist, Noemí, receives a letter from her cousin Catalina detailing her

belief that she is losing her mind and imploring Noemí to rescue her from the sinister walls of the Doyle manor, where she is residing with her new husband and his other family members. Thus, the novel draws on a range of gothic tropes – including haunted houses, 'mad' women, and repressed family secrets – to index the socioecological impacts brought into being by processes of mineral extraction, specifically here the inauguration and subsequent breakdown of Mexico's colonial silver frontier.

Both texts make use of the gothic and its various tropes, therefore, to give shape to the manifold outcomes of mineral extraction as these inform their respective contexts and historical moments of engagement and emergence. They look to the gothic mode and gothic terminologies, in other words, to figure twentieth- and twenty-first-century regimes of mineral extraction within the long spiral of extraction in the Americas that was central to the process of original accumulation. As Kerstin Oloff argues with specific reference to the Mexican context, the process of original accumulation has here often been reprised:

> Infrastructural advances like the nineteenth-century railroad boom, which enabled the reopening of silver mines on the North Central plateau by foreign investors, made the region accessible to renewed waves of primitive accumulation.[32]

By using gothic representational devices to look back to a much longer history of mineral mining in Guyana and Mexico, both Melville's and Moreno-Garcia's writings highlight extraction as a *history of the present*, and one that is revitalised at key moments of world-systemic breakdown. In the case of Melville's "Erzulie," the story's gothic effects mediate the restructuring of socioecological relations opened in Guyana in the late neoliberal period, a period "*made strange*", in Michael Niblett's words, "by the renewed penetration of capitalist modes and structures" in the region.[33] Meanwhile, *Mexican Gothic* is concerned with the more immediate conditions produced in the contemporary Mexican context by what critics like Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra have termed "neoextractivism,"[34] a new order of

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[32] Kerstin Oloff, "The 'Monstrous Head' and the 'Mouth of Hell': The Gothic Ecologies of the 'Mexican Miracle'", in *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art, Film, and Literature*, ed by Mark Anderson and Zelia M. Bora (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 79-98 (p. 82).

[33] Michael Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms: Water-Spirits, World-Ecology, and Neoliberalism," in *Marxism, Postcolonial Theory and the Future of Critique: Critical Engagements with Benita Parry*, ed. by Sharae Deckard and Rashmi Varma (London: Routledge, 2020). pp. 80-95 (p. 80). My emphasis.

[34] Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra, "A Critique of the Extractive Operations of Capital: Toward an Expanded Concept of Extractivism," *Rethinking Marxism* 29, no. 4 (2017), 574-591.

accumulation that extends the region's historic subjection to resource extraction while also generating new modes of dispossession across the Latin American world, including renewed violence against peasant and Indigenous peoples.[35]

Equally crucial to both texts is the linkages that each draw, via gothic aesthetics, between processes of mineral extraction and gendered violence. Thus, as much as I am interested in investigating the role played by gothic forms in concretising the ways in which capitalist modernity "is founded and reproduced," as Jelly-Schapiro argues, "in the moment of extraction,"[36] I also want to attend to the gaps in his analysis. For, as much as Jelly-Schapiro's point about the global propagation of extraction is crucial, it neglects the gendered oppressions upon which original accumulation was built. After all, Silvia Federici has famously shown how the profits made from the violent dispossession of women's bodies cannot be decoupled from original accumulation. As Federici argues in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), in order for the capitalist mode of production to become dominant, alternative social and economic modes of existence first had to be suppressed. One central way of ensuring the repression of pre-existing sources of subsistence was through the defeat of the European peasantry by "facilitating its expulsion from the lands it once held in common."[37] Responding to a blind spot in Marx's formulation of the enclosure of the European commons, Federici emphasises how this process hinged on the violent enclosure of women's bodies. Enter here the early modern history of the European witch-hunts, which functioned not only as an attack on "women's resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal," but also served to construct "a new patriarchal order where women's bodies, their labour, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under the control of the state and transformed into economic resources."[38]

Like Federici, Maria Mies has emphasised how the "whole fury of the witch-hunt was not just a result of the decaying old order in its confrontation with new capitalist forces, or even a manifestation of timeless male sadism."[39] Rather, it was a "reaction of the new male-dominated classes against the rebellion of women."[40] The point that both Mies and Federici

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[35] Verónica Gago, *Feminist International*: *How to Change Everything*, trans. by Liz Mason-Deese (London: Verso, 2020), p. 97.
[36] Jelly-Schapiro, "Extractive Modernity at Large," p. 15.
[37] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), p. 63.
[38] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 170.
[39] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 81.
[40] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation,* p. 81.

make, then, is that original accumulation was forged in this moment of patriarchal violence and domination; both argue that the burning of women as 'witches' was directly connected to the emergence of modern patriarchal capitalist society. Mies points out, for example, that

> The blood-money of the witch-hunt was used for the private enrichment of bankrupt princes, of lawyers, doctors, judges and professors but also for such public affairs as financing wars, building up a bureaucracy, infrastructural measures, and finally the new absolute state.[41]

The profits made by the European witch-trials therefore enabled the accumulation of profit required to catalyse the eruption of modern society in ways that paralleled the processes of plunder that characterised the colonial conquest. This "blood-money," Mies continues, "fed the original process of capital accumulation, perhaps not to the same extent as the plunder and robbery of the colonies, but certainly to a much greater extent than is known today."[42]

Several critics have taken up Mies and Federici's points and brought them to bear on the contemporary Latin American context. Niblett, for example, has recently observed how

> the enclosure of common lands [and] the enclosure of women's bodies, their subjugation to the biological and social reproduction of the workforce, was a pivotal moment in the process of primitive accumulation.[43]

In his investigations into a new wave of gothic, noir, and horror fiction by women writers from the Latin American region, Niblett argues for a mode of literary analysis that highlights the connections between the contemporary extractive economy and the "war on women," while also taking account of the long history of extractive imperialism and patriarchal violence waged in the process of original accumulation.[44] Thus, in contrast to Jelly-Schapiro, Niblett crucially places the current waves of "sexist violence" taking place across Latin America at the centre of arguments that aim to highlight original accumulation as "an ongoing process…fundamental to reviving accumulation at moments of crisis via both the appropriation of uncommodified life and labour."[45]

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[41] Mies, p. 87.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Michael Niblett, "'They have always burned us': Femicide, Finance, and Neoextractivism in Latin America," *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* forthcoming.
[44] Niblett, "'They have always burned us'," forthcoming.
[45] Ibid.

Echoing Niblett, Rashmi Varma has argued for an understanding of extraction as "both a project and a process that is bolstering new forms of imperialism on a world scale."[46] In her 2021 article "Extracting Indigeneity," Varma usefully explains how extraction "is not built on a currency of exchange;" rather, its currencies are "accumulation and dispossession."[47] In this sense, processes of mineral extraction mirror the appropriation of women's labour under capitalism. After all, as we have seen in both my previous chapter and Introduction, the extraction of nature's energies is dialectically entangled with women's labour appropriation. Like the theft of women's work, which provides one of capitalism's key 'background conditions', "the capacity of nature to support life and renew itself constitutes *another background condition* for commodity production and capital accumulation."[48] Thus, both social reproduction and nature's resources are revealed as conditions of possibility for capital accumulation.

Yet the history of gendered labour dispossession and patriarchal violence is not always given due consideration in analyses of resource extraction processes. Indeed, Varma emphasises how new forms of imperialist plunder taking place across the globe require an analytical lens that some conceptualisations of extraction (like Jelly-Schapiro's) tend to foreclose. What is now required, argues Varma, is that critics espouse "a materialist conceptualization of the materially submerged or the ideologically invisibilised" because "global regimes of extraction…rely on conditions of invisibility."[49] What is needed, in other words, is an analytic perspective committed to visibilising that which regimes of extraction frequently render occluded and unseen. In what follows, I take inspiration from Varma's call for closer attention to be paid to the role played by cultural forms in "making visible and resistant that which extractivism seeks to exploit for profit."[50]

Although Varma's analysis highlights the ways in which extraction exploits the marginalisation of India's Adivasi society, others have illustrated how extraction relies on unseen gendered oppressions. As Oloff contends,

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[46] Rashmi Varma, "Extracting Indigeneity: Revaluing the Work of World Literature in These Times," in The Work of World Literature, ed. by Francesco Giusti and Benjamin Lewis Robinson, *Cultural Inquiry*, 19 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2021), pp. 127–47 (p. 127).
[47] Varma, "Extracting Indigeneity," p. 137.
[48] Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode," p. 63. My italics.
[49] Varma, "Extracting Indigeneity," p. 131.
[50] Varma, p. 131.

> the links between resource extraction and gendered violence…are…*structurally occluded*, since gendered female labor is assigned to the realm of (social and biological) reproduction… the 'private realm' is thus conceptually subordinated to the masculinized realm of 'work'.[51]

What is needed, then, is a form of analysis that "can identify feminized labor," to borrow from Verónica Gago, "as an example of that which capital must subordinate, discredit, and most of all *hide*."[52] To trace the modes of connection between gendered violence and mineral extraction is therefore "to produce meaning" because it renders visible what Gago describes as "the machinery of exploitation and extraction of value that involves increasing thresholds of violence, which have a differential (and therefore strategic) impact on feminized bodies."[53] If capitalism has been successful in hiding 'women's work' through its historic divide between productive and reproductive labour and between the 'private' and the 'public', then I suggest that the gothic – through its continual investment in bringing to the surface that which is hidden from view – might prove a particularly powerful mode through which to reveal the invisibilised aspects of mineral extraction's increasing thresholds of gendered violence.

I aim here, therefore, to consider how the gothic quality of "Erzulie" might be compared with *Mexican Gothic* in order to showcase how these texts situate ongoing processes of resource extraction within a long and violent historical vortex of gendered violence and patriarchal domination. To do so, I locate each text within a particular historical moment of gold and silver extraction. Melville's story, I suggest, turns to a series of gothic effects to shine a light on the rearticulation of colonial culture and the persistent centrality of the gold mining industry – underwritten by patriarchal dominance – in the context of 1990's neoliberalised Guyana. By contrast, I read *Mexican Gothic* as forming part of a new surge of gothic, noir, and horror fiction by women writers from the Latin American region since the late 2000s. Taking my cue from emergent critiques of 'neoextractivism,' I read the novel as a gothic meditation on the contemporary condition of renewed gendered violence and revitalised rounds of resource extraction taking place in globalised present-day Mexico. While I argue that these texts make use of a gothic lexicon to render perceptible the 'hidden' patriarchal oppressions that capitalist regimes of extraction both produce and depend upon, I also illustrate how these

[51] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," p. 135.
[52] Gago, *Feminist International*, p. 8.
[53] Ibid.

literary works look to imagine forms of feminist dissent against the corporeal violences of the gold and silver frontiers.

Mining the Form: Latin American Gothic and the Aesthetics of Extraction

Recent years have witnessed a groundswell of criticism interested in examining the relation between literature and extraction. Matthew S. Henry has offered the term "extractive fictions" to "describe literature and other cultural forms that render visible the socioecological impacts of extractive capitalism and problematize extraction as a cultural practice."[54] Meanwhile, Ashley Dawson and Alok Amatya have shown how

> literature and media of the twenty-first century explore new subjective realities that derive from struggles against extractivist worldviews, which are imposed by the historical processes of colonial and neocolonial hegemony.[55]

For these critics, to read literature "in an age of extraction" is therefore to trace "aesthetic responses to the social or psychological realities of those who cope with myriad forms of extractivist violence, both gradual and sudden."[56] Indeed, such has been the surge in scholarly interest in this field that the journal *Textual Practice* dedicated an entire special issue to "Writing Extractivism" in 2021. As Justin Parks argues in the introduction to this special issue, "literature has been fundamental in rendering visible our relationship with the extractivist modes that all too often remain concealed from view even as they determine the contours of our lives."[57] As such, this corpus of criticism on 'extractive fictions' is testament both to "literature's ability to reveal fundamental linkages between resources, geographic and political entities, and iterations of capital across space and time,"[58] and to the significance of this burgeoning field to world-literary studies in general.

Particularly useful for my purposes, however, is that Parks also points out that many of these 'extractive fictions' tend to make use of non-realist aesthetics in their critiques of

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[54] Matthew Henry, "Extractive Fictions and Postextraction Futurisms: Energy and Environmental Injustice in Appalachia," *Environmental Humanities* 11, no. 2 (2019), 402-26 (204).

[55] Alok Amatya and Ashley Dawson, "Literature in an Age of Extraction: An Introduction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 66, no. 1 (2020), 1–19 (12).

[56] Amatya and Dawson, "Literature in an Age of Extraction," p. 12.

[57] Justin Parks, "The poetics of Extractivism and the Politics of Visibility," *Textual Practice* 35, no. 3 (2021), 353-362 (356). My emphasis.

[58] Parks, "The poetics of Extractivism and the Politics of Visibility," p. 359

extractive regimes. "An important aspect of literary representations of extractivism," observes Parks,

> has been their tendency to *embrace the fantastic and the speculative*, to imagine alternate realms of experience in which history has taken a different course, or reality itself assumes a different guise.[59]

Despite Parks' remarks on the capacity of literature to mediate the experience of extraction through the 'fantastical' or 'speculative', little attention has been paid to the relations between gothic literatures and extractive frontiers. Indeed, as Sharae Deckard has recently noted, "criticism of extractive fictions and their ecologies has predominantly concentrated on *literary realist forms*."[60] Yet, the mine's gothic representation appears across legion literatures from as early as the 1880s. In one of the earliest fictional renderings of the nineteenth-century French coal mine, Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), the pit is described as "an evil beast" that draws into its monstrous maw the bodies of its mine workers.[61] In Zola's novel, the process of coal refinement is frequently equated with the violent consumption of labouring bodies: "the Voreux continued to crunch, breathing with heavier and slower perspiration, troubled by its painful digestion of human flesh."[62] A painful and early death is the outcome for many of the workers who toil in this mine: several members of the narrator's family, we are told, died in the pit, which, like a vampire, "drank [their] blood and swallowed [their] bones."[63]

The devouring pit likewise features across the pages of twentieth-century proletarian writing. A case in point is Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash* (1929), which narrativises the events surrounding the 1926 General Strike in Britain. Echoing Zola, Wilkinson renders the coal-pit in terms of its consumptive monstrosity:

> Coal dust and the mud of the mines saturated the whole place. The coalpit was the only thing in each village that mattered, the only part of life on which capital and care and brains were expended. Human beings were usually fed into its mouth at eight-hourly intervals, and just as regularly coughed up again.[64]

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[59] Parks, pp. 358-359. My italics.
[60] Sharae Deckard, "Extractive Gothic," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Globalgothic*, ed. by Rebecca Duncan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2023), forthcoming. My emphasis.
[61] Émile Zola, *Germinal*, trans, by Havelock Ellis (London: Vintage Classics, 1885), p. 11
[62] Zola, *Germinal*, p. 13.
[63] Ibid, p. 11.
[64] Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, [1929] 2004) p. 146.

A further example can be found in Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy* (2006), a key text from the tradition of proletarian writing from South Wales. This novel similarly looks to figure the mine with recourse to monstrous iconography. Its narrator, Len, describes the pit as an "inhuman monster" that spits out the "mangled bodies" of its workers:

> The pit became an ogre to him. He likened it to some inhuman monster that fed on men and spewed up mangled bodies to be buried in the graveyard. He conjured the hill and the pit as common enemies of the people, working in connivance to destroy them.[65]

Invoked in these descriptions are many of the hallmarks of the gothic genre – the monstrous and vampiric, in particular – yet few critics have explicitly read literary representations of the mine is these terms. For example, in his analysis of *Clash* and *Cwmardy*, Niblett refers to Wilkinson and Jones' representations of the mine as "phantasmagoric" and therefore representative of the 'fantastic' tendencies that mark attempts by proletarian writers to render the coal frontier in 'irreal' terms.[66] According to Niblett, "the portrait of the pit as cannibalistic monster introduces an element of the irreal" into these fictions and thus marks "the limits of a particular kind of realist representation when [writers are] faced with the complex reality of commodity frontiers."[67]

While few have noted how writers have sought to consciously link the consumptive processes of the mine with gothic forms of representation, a handful of scholars have recently begun to illustrate how the gothic mode might give expression to regimes of extraction and extractive frontiers. Of this emergent body of critique, Deckard's forthcoming work on "extractive gothic" is particularly informative. In a nod to the genre's longstanding interest in 'what lies beneath the surface,' Deckard argues that gothic narratives of extraction typically hinge "on the terrifying consequences of delving too deep."[68] She suggests that the investment that gothic fiction traditionally showcases in what 'lies buried underground' is necessarily also associated with critiquing past and present processes of extraction and the commodity frontiers upon which they depend. Although Deckard acknowledges that gothic literatures form part of the broader 'irrealist' register, she does point out the particular capacity of gothic tropes and

[65] Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006).
[66] Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 169.
[67] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology,* p. 169
[68] Deckard, "Extractive Gothic," forthcoming.

devices to "register the global intensification of new modes of mineral and energy extractivism."[69] As Deckard explains,

> it is equally productive to examine the temporalities, tropes, and narrative energetics of the irrealist genre of extraction gothic, particularly its telaesthesic capacity to telescope time and space and its capacity to 'mine' earlier gothic registrations to represent nested regimes of extraction characterized by the periodic exhaustion and relocation of commodity frontiers.[70]

Extractive gothic takes inspiration, in other words, from the tropes of the broader gothic tradition in order to make them resonate with "the extractive logic of the capitalist world-ecology."[71] To do so, extractive gothic frequently turns on "tropes of drills and dredges, its plots often hinging on the consequences…of unearthing monsters or excavating horrifying substances that pollute or infect the topside."[72] These tropes of the perilous drill (or indeed, the devouring mine) supplement traditional gothic settings that often take the form of "subterranean or subaqueous terrains."[73] As such, Deckard's extractive gothic names gothic forms of representation that explicitly seek to utilise existent gothic terminologies to critique processes of mineral (and energy) extraction. Her analysis is broad and expansive, ranging from literary texts through to cinema, graphic novels, and video games. Not only does Deckard focus on a diversity of historical periods – the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – but she also considers 'texts' from regions as diverse as the Caribbean, the United States, the Pacific, and the United Arab Emirates.[74]

Other examples of readings that focus on the gothic's ability to critique processes of resource extraction include the work of Kerstin Oloff, who has long been committed to showcasing the gothic as a key mode of critique employed in world-literatures from across

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Of the works of gothic cultural production that Deckard uses as examples, only one is taken from the Caribbean region. This pertains, interestingly, to Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*, the same collection on which I drew in my previous chapter. Her reading focuses on another of Walrond's short stories, "The Palm Porch", which considers the socio-ecological impacts of the US construction of the Panama Canal Zone during 1904 and 1914. In his evocation of the canal's construction, Walrond reaches toward a series of gothic images such as ghosts, monsters, and buried 'things', which clearly resonate with the personification of the pit and its cannibalistic consumption of the mine worker in *Germinal*, *Clash*, and *Cwmardy*.

Latin America. In her reading of Marie Vieux Chauvet's *Amour, Colère, Folie* (1968), Oloff argues that the text "exploits gothic imagery" to describe the "socioecological degradations [of] US extractivism."[75] Through the novel's use of gothic effects, "*Amour*"

> emphasizes the ways in which both the late thirties and the Duvalier régime are still shaped by the US occupation, which had created a highly militarized society and cemented Haiti's position as a resource extraction zone, forced to provide 'cheap' extra-human resources and migrant labor-power.[76]

Thus, both Deckard and Oloff illustrate how the gothic might give shape to extractive frontiers. To do so, as Deckard observes, gothic texts, "particularly in peripheral or (post)colonial settings," make use of "motifs of draining, sucking, pulverizing, pillaging" to dramatise how their contexts are often "characterized by exhaustion." [77] These motifs therefore

> express the extractive logic of the capitalist world-ecology itself, which extends core-periphery divisions by extracting massive volumes of 'raw', barely processed materials from peripheries for export according to the demand of capitalist cores.[78]

Such analyses helpfully extend the corpus of Latin American gothic writing to include gothic mediations of the socioecological impacts of regional resource extraction. Not only does Oloff insist on visibilising the history of extraction in Latin America – the region of 'open veins' – but her analysis also complicates and expands interpretations of Latin American writing that have been viewed through the dominant discourse of magical realism. After all, as Inés Ordiz and Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno observe, while "Latin American Gothic fiction has remained a marginalized form compared to fantastic [and] magical realist fiction", many "representations of the Gothic mode exist in this region of the world,"[79] including the writings of authors such as Carlos Fuentes, Felisberto Hernández, Rosario Ferré, Alejandra Pizarnik, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Julio Cortázar, Octavio Paz, Horacio Quiroga, Silvina Ocampo, and Vicente Huidobro. Many of these fictions, according to Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez, often rely on the revival of

[75] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic", p. 124.
[76] Oloff, p. 125.
[77] Deckard, "Extractive Gothic," forthcoming.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Inés Ordiz and Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno, "Introduction: Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Persistence of the Gothic," in *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Inés Ordiz and Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno (Routledge: New York & London, 2018), pp. 1-12 (p. 1 & p. 7).

> Gothic images and themes, while at the same time employing images and imaginaries that are related to the colonial and postcolonial relationship of Europe and the United States with Latin America (and vice versa), ideas that situate extreme otherness and monstrosity in the southern part of the continent.[80]

Several critics have shown how 'monstrous' imaginaries have been associated with the New World since the conquest period.[81] Mimi Sheller has focused on the figure of the cannibal to illustrate how "the colonial exploitation of Latin America led directly to contemporary forms of consumption of the region and its products."[82] Meanwhile, in her gloss on the "Monstrous Caribbean," Persephone Braham argues that both the Caribbean and Latin American regions have long been synonymous with monstrous figures, ranging from cannibals and amazons through to sirens and zombies.[83] Braham argues that Latin American and Caribbean gothic writing allows for the mapping of these regions' transformation from the colonial period through to the postcolonial moment. As she sees it, these literatures illustrate the endurance, and malleability, of the monstrous metaphor in past and present Caribbean and Latin American contexts:

> Amazons, cannibals, sirens and other monsters have become enduring symbols of national and regional character. Embodying exoticism, hybridity, and excess, monsters sustained the ongoing conceptualization of the unknown that was a prerequisite to conquest and colonization; after independence, monsters became metaphors for a series of problems ranging from indigenous and African slavery to dictatorship and postcolonial identity.[84]

The corpus of Caribbean and Latin American gothic writing can be read, then, as deliberately playing on these 'monstrous' colonial iconographies; that is, these literatures can be understood as consciously 'cannibalising' the monstrous tropes of European gothic conventions to

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[80] Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez, "Semillas de maldad. Early Latin American Gothic," *Studies in Gothic Fiction* 3, no. 2 (2014), 13-23 (14).
[81] Persephone Braham, "The Monstrous Caribbean," in *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Mittman and Peter Dendle (New York: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 17–48 (p. 17).
[82] Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (Routledge: London and New York, 2003), p. 172).
[83] Braham, "The Monstrous Caribbean," pp. 17-48.
[84] Braham, p. 17.

showcase “the Americas in relation to their history of colonialism.”[85] Yet, as Oloff points out, the monstrous might also be read as a literary trope that expresses the extractive logic of imperialism and the capitalist world order. “This monstrous proliferation,” says Oloff, “can [also] be linked to the gradual emergence of the world-system through the horrors of genocide, the slave trade, plantation slavery and through the extraction of raw materials from the Americas.”[86]

In what follows, I read Melville’s “Erzulie” as likewise turning to gothic effects to locate the late 1990’s neoliberal period within a long history of regional resource imperialism in the Caribbean. Yet I also consider how Melville’s gothic imageries provide a language for bringing patriarchal violence into direct relation with the extraction of gold in Guyana. Her use of the gothic and its various devices, I suggest, plays a vital role in making legible the many erasures that occur at the nexus of what Mies terms “nature, women and the colonies,” which together comprise “the underground trilogy” of capitalist patriarchy.[87] Indeed, as Oloff reminds us, the gothic can play precisely this function of visibilising patriarchal capitalism’s hidden underground trilogy of oppression. As she puts it, “the Gothic mode registers, and is animated by, not only the processes of [resource] exploitation but also those of [gendered labour] appropriation.”[88] Thus, the gothic might serve as a crucial means through which to render seen the often-occluded relations “between the violence against women and the violence of an increasingly unequal capitalist world-system that develops through the downgrading and exploitation of natural resources.”[89] As I argue below, the gothic not only offers a significant representational mode for expressing the socioecological devastations of Guyana’s twentieth century gold frontier, but also furnishes the key to understanding the wider economic forces that animate Melville’s use of this form in the first place.

“Erzulie”, the Ecogothic, and the Incursion of the Outside into the Inside

As noted earlier, “Erzulie” takes inspiration from a real-life mining disaster that occurred along the north coast of Guyana in August of 1995. The disaster was attributed to the Omai Gold Mining Corporation and its Canadian parent companies, Cambior and Golden Star, whose

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[85] Justin D. Edwards and Sandra Guardini Vasconcelos, “Introduction: Tropicalizing Gothic,” in *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture: The Americas*, ed. by Justin D. Edwards and Sandra Guardini Vasconcelos (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-12 (p. 10).

[86] Oloff, “Marie Vieux Chauvet’s World-Gothic”, p. 124.

[87] Mies, p. 87.

[88] Oloff, “Marie Vieux Chauvet’s World-Gothic”, p. 125.

[89] Ibid. p. 134

tailings pond failed and subsequently spilled millions of "mine tailings containing cyanide, heavy metals, and other pollutants into the Essequibo River."[90] Such was the impact of the spill that it became the "worst environmental disaster in Guyana and one of the most devastating in recent South American history."[91] Thousands of local Guyanese people who relied on the river for drinking water, bathing, and fishing lost their livelihoods, while the ecosystem experienced significant damage. Not only did the "cyanide-laced discharge kill off the Omai River," but there were also reports of "dead fish and hogs on the Essequibo, as well as complaints from those living along its banks of skin rashes and blistering."[92] Despite nearly three decades having passed since this moment, the culprits, including Cambior and Golden Star, have yet to be brought to task. Today, none of the affected riverine communities have managed to secure compensation for the damage done to their home and livelihoods.[93]

Interestingly, in her attempt to portray this horrifying historical occurrence, Melville begins her story not at the actual site of the disaster – the Omai mine – but in the household of two of her main characters, Rita and Armand Jenkins, a Canadian couple who relocate to Guyana from Canada when Armand takes over the operation of the Omai Mining Corporation. In fact, for a story interested in rendering the manifold devastations wrought by gold extraction through gothic terminologies, "Erzulie" opens with a surprisingly comic domestic scene. The tale begins when Rita awakes one morning to find a "a fright of frogs" in her toilet-bowl.[94] "I want to leave", Rita tells Armand, after "her broad behind" makes contact with the amphibians.[95] Rita's plea that she "want[s] to get out of here"[96] – here being Georgetown, Guyana's capital – is ironic. While neither Rita, nor the reader, are aware of it as yet, the frogs have arrived in the Jenkins' cistern as a result of having to flee from "an unauthorised discharge of cyanide" that had earlier been released from the Omai mine into their riverine home. [97] Rita's plea, "I want to leave," thus reverses the exact process by which the frogs have come to be in the toilet bowl in the first place. Their relocation into the toilet is, after all, not a 'choice' but a result of an enforced exodus produced by the mine's effluent. Indeed, as we later learn, many

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[90] "Cambior: Globalization's Public Enemy Number One," *Mines and Communities*, 15 June 2003, http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=723 [accessed 1 July 2022].
[91] "Cambior: Globalization's Public Enemy Number One," online.
[92] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 135.
[93] "Cambior: Globalization's Public Enemy Number One," online.
[94] Pauline Melville, "Erzulie," in *The Migration of Ghosts* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), pp. 135 – 167 (p. 135).
[95] Melville, "Erzulie," p. 135.
[96] Melville, p. 135.
[97] Ibid., p. 156.

of these spills – and the disastrous ecological impacts they have caused – are a direct result of the mine's mismanagement by Armand, Rita's husband.

As much as the image of the frogs' arrival in the Jenkins' home is here rendered in comic terms, there is also something disturbing about the story's opening scene. For the frogs' relocation to the toilet, and the disgust they elicit in Rita, simultaneously evokes a kind of gothic 'seeping in' – an invocation, in other words, of the incursion of the outside into the inside. Indeed, multiple meanings can be ascribed to the frogs' 'un-homing'. On the one hand, their relocation from the Essequibo River to the Jenkins' toilet gives concrete shape to the tributary's pollution by the Omai mine and its deleterious consequences on local ecosystems; frogs, after all, are typically used as bioindicators in pollution studies. In this sense, the story's staging of the contamination of Rita's toilet-bowl – the ultimate site of bodily purification – functions in classically 'ecogothic' terms. As Andrew Smith and Willian Hughes have argued, the ecogothic typically turns on "humans encountering monstrous versions of nature."[98] In ecogothic narratives, "nature becomes an avenging force – or even more monstrous, an alien entity utterly indifferent to the fate of humanity."[99] Many other scholars have likewise suggested that ecogothic (and ecohorror) narratives often confront the reader with eco-phobic imagery by presenting readers with images of nature as "strik[ing] back against humans as punishment for environmental disruption."[100]

Certainly, it is possible to consider the story's opening scene in this ecogothic light – that is as "retooling the 'revenge trope'," to borrow from Deckard, "to imagine insurgent environments."[101] Viewed as such, the frogs' infiltration of the Jenkins' home functions as a means of confronting its inhabitants with that which they have sought to repress, this being Armand's direct involvement – via his mismanagement of the mine – in the tributary's pollution. The penetration of the frogs into the Jenkins' bathroom functions, in other words, as an ecological refiguration of the return of the repressed, one of the gothic's hallmark devices. Yet equally crucial, it seems to me, is that if the story turns on the tropes of the ecogothic to portray the ecological outcomes of the Omai mining catastrophe, then these same tropes are significantly extended by Melville's decision to begin her tale not with the mine, but with the

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[98] Andrew Smith and William Hughes, "Introduction: defining the ecoGothic," in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 1-14 (p. 11).
[99] Smith and Hughes, "Introduction," p. 11.
[100] Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, "Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All be Dead."' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21, no. 3 (2014), 509-512 (509).
[101] Deckard, "Extractive Gothic," forthcoming.

household. As such, the intrusion of the frogs into the Jenkin's bathroom also stages how 'unruly' forms of externalised nature come to disrupt the home; like the skin of the toads that so repulse Rita, the household's four walls are here rendered permeable. The story's opening scene therefore also lays bare the material and ideological structures working to maintain the home as a site removed from 'nature'.

In fact, the contamination of Rita's home by the frogs also marks the beginning of her loss of control over the orderliness of the domestic domain. In addition to her horror at the amphibians, Rita is also caught up in the news of a reign of terror taking place in the region. "And then there's that awful Shallow-Grave case," grumbles Rita, "shuddering as she put her feet on the sofa."[102] As Rita explains, these victims – the number of which "nobody knew the total count"[103] – are the products of a series of murders by Erzulie, a female serial killer dubbed 'Shallow-Grave' by the media because of her modus operandi: she buries the bodies of her male victims in shallow graves along the banks of the Essequibo River. The story introduces us to Erzulie after she has been caught and held captive in one of Georgetown's prisons. Like Rita, her mute housekeeper Margot becomes obsessed with Erzulie. Margot, it turns out, personally knows Erzulie; they met when Margot was serving a month-long stint in the same prison "for trying to sell some cans of paint that turned out to have been stolen."[104]

While incarcerated, Margot becomes Erzulie's devoted servant after becoming convinced that she is the incarnation of a "water-mumma,"[105] a water-spirit common to Afro-Caribbean folklore and who goes by various names, including "the watermamma, Liba-Mama, Watra-Mama, fairmaid, the rubba missis, mama dlo, or manman dlo."[106] This figure, as critics like Henry Drewal have argued, is "often portrayed with the head and torso of a woman and the tail of a fish."[107] Her origins are debated, but critics have suggested that she

[102] Melville, "Erzulie," p. 139.
[103] Melville, p. 130.
[104] Ibid, p. 143.
[105] Ibid. p. 148.
[106] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 80.
[107] Henry Drewal, "Beauteous Beast: The Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa," in *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Mittman and Peter Dendle (New York: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 77-101 (p. 78).

> has developed from a local water goddess within a wider pantheon of gods connected with various societies, into an almost standard, pan-African deity with an autonomous cult, part of a mainly urban and popular folk culture.[108]

In addition to her colourful 'fish-tail', the water-mumma is often portrayed as a "snake charmer."[109] She is also associated with healing and fertility: "she aids in concerns related to procreation – infertility, impotence and infant mortality."[110]

Despite her incarnation as water-mumma never being made explicit in the story, Erzulie's association with this water-spirit is continually alluded to. Like the Caribbean divinity, she is frequently connected to singing and healing: "she sang more often and some miracle cleared Margot's ears of the buffeting winds that normally blew [in the prison]."[111] Erzulie is also shown to have power over snakes:

> through a window…she spotted a snake undulating swiftly across the courtyard in the direction of the special cells…When [the warden] opened up Shallow-Grave's cell, she was greeted by the sight of Shallow-Grave sitting upright in a pink shortie nightie…Shallow-Grave, still crooning, was caressing the brown-and-yellow paw-paw snake as it twined and wreathed around her neck.[112]

Erzulie's connection with this water-spirt is further manifested when she breaks out of prison when one of her fellow inmates begins a "Winti Dance" – "something she remembered her Surinamese grandmother teaching her."[113] Like snakes, healing, and singing, the Winti Dance is linked to the water-mumma figure; according to Alex van Stipriaan, the Winti Dance is a Surinamese religious ritual whose origins are also associated with water-spirit worship.[114]

Although the Winti Dance is crucial in Erzulie's prison-break, it later turns out that her escape had been of Margot's making. "It had been Margot's brainwave," we are told, "to organise Shallow-Grave's escape…And it was her brilliant idea to secrete Shallow-Grave in

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[108] Alex van Stipriaan, "Creolization and the Lessons of a Watergoddess in the Black Atlantic," in *Multiculturalism/Power and Ethnicities in Africa*, ed. by Antoniónio Custódio Gonçalves (Porto: Centro de Estudos Africanos, 2002), pp 83-103 (p. 93).
[109] Drewal, "Beauteous Beast," p. 79.
[110] Henry Drewal, "Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas," *African Arts* 41, no. 2 (2008), 60-83 (61).
[111] Melville, p. 147.
[112] Melville., p. 148.
[113] Ibid., p. 152.
[114] van Stipriaan, "Creolization and the Lessons of a Watergoddess," pp. 89-93.

one of the many unused rooms in Main Street, where the Jenkins rented their apartment."[115] In an echo of the unwelcome arrival of the frogs in Rita's toilet, Margot sneaks Erzulie into the Jenkins' attic. In this sense, Margot's secreting of Erzulie in the attic suggests a kind of reworking of the gothic trope of the 'madwoman' in the attic, a trope originally popularised by Charlotte Brontë's classic gothic novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) and later revised by Jean Rhys in her seminal Caribbean novella *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in their analysis of Brontë's text, Rochester's 'mad' wife Bertha represents the opposite of nineteenth century standards of docile femininity, most powerfully emblematised in Brontë's protagonist, the submissive and repressive Jane. For these critics, the 'mad' Bertha functions as "Jane's truest and darkest double" because she is the embodiment of "the ferocious secret self that Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead."[116] When Jane finally comes face to face with Bertha, she is therefore confronted not merely with the secret that Rochester has been keeping from her (that he is already married), but also with her own repressed "sexuality [and] with her own imprisoned hunger, rebellion, and rage."[117] Thus, the gothic figure of the 'madwoman' suggests a "rebellious feminism" mobilised against the repressions engendered by nineteenth century patriarchal society – repressions that, like Jane, "every woman must meet and overcome."[118]

As is well known, Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as a retelling of *Jane Eyre* in order to give to Brontë's Bertha the consciousness and context that she is denied in the original tale. To do so, Rhys draws out Bertha's West Indian origins by locating her birth in Jamaica and by renaming her Antoinette. In Rhys' re-imagining of *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette is a victim of not merely patriarchy but specifically British imperialism. Judie Newman points out, for example, that "when Jean Rhys sets out to vindicate the 'madwoman' she emphasises her role as the legacy of imperialism concealed in the heart of every English gentleman's castle."[119] Thus, while Brontë's Bertha is never given voice in the original story, Rhys gives Antoinette a history that provides the background needed in order to fully comprehend her eventual decline and transformation into the 'mad' and rageful Bertha by suggesting that Antoinette's identity

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[115] Melville, p. 155.
[116] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020 [1979]), p. 351.
[117] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* p. 351
[118] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 351.
[119] Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 14.

becomes erased as much “by the politics of imperialism [as] patriarchy.”[120]

The association of the gothic figure of the ‘madwoman’ with rage and rebellion against imperial domination is particularly evocative here, for what is reformulated in “Erzulie” is a kind of re-enactment of the unruliness that both Rhys’ Antoinette and Brontë’s Bertha represents. Indeed, we might note here that Brontë’s Bertha has many things in common with Melville’s Erzulie. Not only do both women break free from their respective prisons, but both also represent what Gilbert and Gubar term “the free, uninhibited, often-criminal self.”[121] Erzulie’s associations with feminist rebellion also evokes a connection with Rhys’ protagonist; like Rhys’ Antoinette, Erzulie is the embodiment of rage and vengeance against male domination in the context of resource imperialism. After all, Erzulie is not only a serial killer, but all of her victims are men. Many of these men are responsible, crucially, for implementing and upholding strategies of resource imperialism in Guyana. Erzulie’s first victim, for example, is a sailor based on a “Filipino ship…bringing, amongst other cargoes, some of the cyanide compounds necessary for the mining company at Omai.”[122]

Moreover, in an echo of Bertha’s imprisonment in Rochester’s attic, which heralds the arrival of a feminine volatility in his orderly mansion, it is also Erzulie’s arrival in the Jenkins’ loft that announces the disruption of the home’s domestic order, as Margot quickly begins to reorientate her domestic duties towards her devotion to Erzulie. Whilst in the attic, Margot brings to Erzulie all sorts of treasures stolen from the Jenkins’ house, including soaps, perfumes, and even one of Rita’s crystal necklaces. Margot’s work, normally positioned toward the upkeep of the Jenkins’s home, therefore becomes shunned in favour of her worship of Erzulie. This significantly disrupts the orderliness of the Jenkins’ household, though Rita is too privileged in her wealth to notice how her home is slowly being hollowed out of its belongings:

> in the organised maelstrom of the house, no one really noticed the vanishing articles, or if they did, they relied on the fact that whatever vanished usually re-appeared later, that there was a floating sequence of possessions, a dance of articles and possessions around the house.[123]

[120] Newman, *The Ballistic Bard*, p. 16.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Melville, p. 139.
[123] Melville, p. 156.

Thus, the arrival of Erzulie disrupts “the organised maelstrom of the house”.[124] Not only does this disruption recall the longstanding gothic trope of the ‘madwoman’ in the attic, but it also parallels the disruption of the Essequibo River’s lifeworld by the Omai mine’s spill, which, in the story, is raised through the enforced exodus of the frogs out of their riverine home and into the Jenkins’ toilet bowl.

It is by locating Erzulie within the Jenkins’s home, then, that Melville is also able to shed light on the structural imbrication of gendered labour appropriation with the forms of environmental dispossession engendered by capitalist processes of mineral extraction. After all, Rita’s assumption that her missing possessions will simply ‘re-appear’ through the labour of her housekeeper directly recalls the sexist assumptions around women’s ‘servile femininity,’ a femininity that will ‘automatically’ fulfil the various duties required to maintain the domestic domain. As we have seen, this assumption parallels capital’s treatment of nature’s resources, for, like the assumption that women’s work can be ‘freely’ appropriated, capital accumulation is built on a ‘free-riding’ on nature. Mies succinctly summarises this process and puts it in starkly environmental terms when she writes that “women’s labour is considered a natural resource, freely available like air and water.”[125] Read with Mies, we might suggest that Melville’s story usefully stages the relation between two elements that ‘appear’ as separate; like nature’s expropriation without compensation, and the assumption around its innate capacity to renew and support life, Rita assumes that Margot will simply ‘step in’ to maintain the home’s domestic order.

Rita’s presumptuous treatment of Margot also highlights how women’s subordinate positions under capitalism are further inflected by race and class because it is Margot’s position as a poor woman of colour that allows for her labour to be appropriated in ways that mirror capital’s appropriation of nature’s bounty. Pablo Mukherjee has noted, for example, that modern racism is the product of the metabolic rift brought into being by capitalist colonialism, which “formulated the dualism that placed human beings outside nature and that reproduced the difference between humans and non-humans as inferiority.”[126] In other words, capitalist colonialism ensured that some human beings are relegated to the sphere of ‘nature,’ allowing for the systematic devaluation of their lives and labour. As such, Melville also expresses the racist imprint of capitalism’s nature-society dualism, for the positioning of Margot’s labour as

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[124] Melville, p. 157.
[125] Mies, p. 110.
[126] Pablo Upamanyu Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2010), p. 55.

a 'free' or undervalued resource to be freely appropriated by Rita highlights the racist intertwining of imperial discourses on 'nature' and 'race'. This illustrates how the production of "the alterity of 'nature' and the colonial subject," in the words of Oloff, "were intimately intertwined on an ideological level."[127]

As such, Margot's devotion to Erzulie – in particular, her secreting of Erzulie in the Jenkins' home – becomes emblematic of the manifold transformations engendered in the household by the Omai mining spill. Particularly noteworthy here is that the water-mumma has frequently been thought to act as a harbinger of transformation in capitalist nature-society relations given her disruption of the externalisation of nature produced by capitalist ideology. The water-mumma figure stands in contradiction to the capitalist binary of nature/society because she encodes an interconnectivity between human and extra-human nature that is typically denied by capitalist ideology. It is precisely this interconnectivity that lends to the water-mumma an anti-capitalist orientation. Indeed, as Niblett argues, this divinity

> combines various orders of existence – human, reptile, fish – [and thus] stands in opposition to the reification and externalisation of extra-human nature upon which capitalism is predicated.[128]

Crucial, then, is that Erzulie's association with the water-mumma suggests a further infiltration of the home by 'external' extra-human nature that also renders the 'secluded' and 'internal' terms of the household unstable. In fact, the longer Erzulie spends in the Jenkins' home the more fish-like she becomes. Not only does Margot ensure that Erulzie remains cool at all times, but she marvels at Erzulie's "black, wiry hair, which spread like bladder-wrack seaweed in profusion on the pillow."[129] Margot is also enraptured by Erzulie's "private parts that amazed her with their resemblance to a great purple sea anemone."[130]

It also while in the Jenkins' home that Erzulie's health begins to deteriorate. During their time in the attic, Margot and Erzulie overhear Armand's various business transactions, all of which are aimed at both expanding his mining operations and denying the deleterious impacts of gold extraction on the local environment. "Of course I care about the environment honey," Armand tells his daughter during a phone call,

[127] Kerstin Oloff, "'Greening' the Zombie: Caribbean Gothic, World-Ecology and Socio-Ecological Degradation," *Green Letters* 16 (2012), 31-45 (55).
[128] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 88.
[129] Melville, p. 154.
[130] Ibid.

> and then they heard him hang up and laugh with a colleague, 'Hell if only she knew. I daren't tell her I'm flying off to the Brazilian border on Thursday to inspect the possibility of a new site near Kato where we'll cause twice as much damage.'[131]

It is after Armand receives another phone call detailing the full horror of the Omai mine's leakage that Erzulie begins to fall seriously ill. "The day after they heard Armand on the telephone [Erzulie's] hair lost its healthy spring and her body broke out in a riot of sores that gathered in groups."[132] Thus does the home become a site of deep malaise and destruction for Erzulie. In this sense, the welts and sores that form across Erzulie's skin echo the role played by the frogs' incursion into the Jenkins' bathroom, for her illness likewise brings into concrete shape the deleterious consequences of gold mining that Armand has sought to repress. Indeed, as we later learn, a large portion of Armand's vocation as the Omai mine's manager involves not merely expanding his mining enterprise but also *hiding* from the public the mine's "many leakages:"

> Armand argued on the phone that, as much as he'd like to, he could not keep such a massive disaster from the government of Guyana. He had tried that ploy earlier in the year, withholding news of an unauthorised discharge of cyanide for six days.[133]

The connection that "Erzulie" makes between the home and extra-human nature allows, then, for the building of a plane of intelligibility that links the 'secluded' domestic domain with the 'outside' world of gold extraction. In particular, the story brings together the domestic and extra-human realm in order to showcase how both sites become subjected to the depredations enabled by forms of male control, here raised through the figure of Armand and his mismanagement of the mine, which, as he admits himself, has caused such significant environmental damage that "he could not keep such a massive disaster from the government of Guyana"[134] Thus, resource extraction and patriarchy here make common cause. Put slightly differently, the story shows how ecological forms of domination and dispossession both mirror – and emerge in tandem with – patriarchal order and control.

[131] Melville, p. 158.
[132] Ibid., p. 158.
[133] Ibid. pp. 159-160.
[134] Ibid., p. 159.

"Erzulie" demonstrates, therefore, how the Omai mining disaster transforms both Guyana's environment and its social world. Margot herself notices these changes when she describes walking through the streets of Georgetown, the transformations of which cause her to see "as if for the first time, the situation in which life had placed her:"

> She saw streets of tumbling, ramshackle houses, hutches, sheds, slum dwellings tucked together with criss-cross pieces of fencing, and she felt as though she herself had become as dry and sucked of moisture as the sun-bleached grey timbers…when she chanced to catch a sight of it, her face looked grey, the colour of old lava. The greyness was all around her and everything inside her too seemed to have crumbled into grey dust. Her shoes had more or less disintegrated, peeling open like old blackened banana skins in their unequal battle against paved roads, stones, rains, mud, sun and dust. Every alley had its own stench of frying food, of fly-infested garbage, stagnant pools and rotting planks. She felt like a ghost in her own city. A jumbie.[135]

For Niblett, this scene is emblematic of the "economic crisis of the mid-1970s, which left the country's infrastructure close to collapse."[136] Like most former colonies, Guyana was made subject to the depredations of structural adjustment in the 1970s, "when a severe economic downturn forced the government of Forbes Burnham to seek financial assistance from the IMF."[137] While Linden Forbes Burnham, Guyana's then-president, "resisted the call to open the country to foreign capital,"[138] his successor Desmond Hoyte eventually caved in to "heavy pressure from the international development agencies to liberalize the economy"[139] through the promotion of "non-traditional exports, specifically gold and timber."[140] In 1986, Hoyte began this process of economic liberalisation, which saw the significant expansion "of logging and mining concerns."[141] This process of expansion pivoted, in particular, on the Omai Mining operation, which was launched in 1991 following the discovery of a major gold basin in the middle Essequibo region. The mine was "intended as the highlight of Guyana's IMF-promoted Economic Recovery Programme,"[142] yet it did little to restructure – or indeed *reverse* – the

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[135] Melville, pp. 142-143.
[136] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 86.
[137] Niblett, p. 84
[138] Ibid.
[139] Marcus Colchester, *Guyana, Fragile Frontier: Loggers, Miners, and Forest Peoples* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1997), p 2.
[140] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 84.
[141] Niblett, "Peripheral Irrealisms," p. 84.
[142] Ibid, p. 85.

country's economic troubles. As Niblett shows, the mine instead became emblematic of "the specific violence of neoliberal ecological revolution and its ratcheting up of exploitation in the interests of reviving capital accumulation."[143]

Such is the level of 'strangeness' produced by the neoliberal renewal of gold extraction in "Erzulie" that these transformations have come to estrange Margot from both herself and the city. Note, for example, that Margot describes herself in *ghost-like terms*: "She felt like a ghost in her own city. A jumbie."[144] The jumbie (or jumbee) is the name given to various spirits, ghosts or demons in Caribbean folklore, and is typically associated with all malevolent entities.[145] In Melville's story, the jumbie mediates multiple conditions, ranging from the 'strangeness' and horrors produced by neoliberal restructuring in the region, while also proffering, in its ghostliness, the long history of resource imperialism in Guyana and its haunting of the present moment. Melville's use of the jumbie figure enables us, then, to think these past and present moments of resource extraction together within a larger framework, for it reminds us that the Omai mine is merely the latest iteration in the long history of extractive imperialism in Guyana that includes the historical depredations produced by the early modern sugar frontier and, later, the development of the nineteenth century bauxite sector, which is presently being revitalised by the Guyanese government and marketed as its latest and best export product.[146] Melville's scene therefore captures, via its turn to the ghostly image of the jumbie, how Guyana's governmental attempts to revive capital accumulation have ensured the ongoing reformulation of previous forms of economic (neo)imperialism through the implementation of new IMF-backed extractive strategies, which, in the story, are most powerfully raised through its portrayal of both the multinational Omai mine and its deleterious consequences on local forms of life. Thus, as Niblett argues, "Erzulie" functions as an 'irreal' mediation of neoliberal extractive policy in 1990's Guyana, for the story captures "the sense of a world made strange by the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and the ongoing cannibalization of human and extra-human natures."[147]

Niblett's analysis of Melville's story includes the murderous actions taken by Erzulie herself. Eschewing analyses of the water-mumma as a figure of healing and 'cultural mixing'

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Melville, p. 143.

[145] "The Jumbees of Guyana," *Exemplore,* n.d https://exemplore.com/paranormal/Jumbies-of-Guyana [accessed 24 July 2022].

[146] "Guyana's Bauxite is the Best in the World," *Department of Public Information*, 21 February 2020, https://dpi.gov.gy/guyanas-bauxite-is-the-best-in-the-world/ [accessed 30 August 2022].

[147] Niblett. p. 86

in favour of interpretations of her "capacity for violence,"[148] Niblett argues that "Erzulie's killings mirror the violence of this socioecological asset stripping."[149] Thus, for Niblett, the violent murders Erzulie commits "offer a mimetic image of the peculiarly 'cannibalistic' form of accumulation by dispossession pursued by neoliberalism."[150] To be sure, Melville's portrayal of Erzulie certainly invites these interpretations. But significant also to Melville's portrayal of these killings is that it subverts the common trajectory of fictional representations of the (male) serial killer. After all, as we have seen, not only is Erzulie a woman but all of her victims are men. The point here, then, is that if Erzulie's killings symbolically express the socioecological dispossessions enabled by Guyana's gold frontier, then these must be understood in specifically gendered terms. Put slightly differently, if Erzulie's killings are representative of renewed neoliberal processes of socioecological asset stripping, then these processes cannot be decoupled from the patriarchal oppressions upon which gold mining depends. Drewal has argued, for example, that the water-mumma is as much a figure of 'intermixing' as one that "asserts female agency in generally male-dominated societies."[151] Indeed, we might here recall Erzulie's association with the gothic trope of the 'madwoman,' which is frequently interpreted as a symbol of "feminist rebelliousness" against both patriarchal domination and British imperialism.[152] Viewed in this way, Melville's story brings together hallmark gothic tropes with Caribbean cosmologies like the water-mumma, which allow as much for the portrayal of local Guyanese specificity as they signal the emergence of local forms of feminist insurrection against foreign forms of control, which, when underwritten by patriarchal domination, enable the further domination over both local women's bodies and the region's precious minerals.

Here, then, we are returned to my earlier points about the structurally occluded nexus that exists between women, nature, and extractive capitalism, for the "rebounding" violence to which Niblett refers is as much a narrativisation of neoliberal accumulation by dispossession as it is a portrayal of feminist insurgency against the patriarchal violence produced in Guyana by this same world-systemic process. "Metabolic rifts," as Oloff reminds us, "have historically been gendered: under patriarchal capitalism, women are affected differently and more

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[148] Ibid., p. 83.
[149] Ibid., p. 84.
[150] Ibid., p. 88.
[151] Drewal, "Beauteous Beast," p. 79.
[152] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* p. 351. See also Newman, *The Ballistic Bard*, p. 16.

devastatingly than men."[153] Oloff's argument certainly holds true when we consider Guyana's social transformation under its subordination to neoliberal economic policy in the mid-1970s. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges Guyana has faced over the last three decades has been in countering domestic violence, especially sexual violence.[154] In 1993, Guyana implemented the Domestic Violence Act, a form of legislation meant to provide the legislative framework required for handling the country's high cases of domestic abuse. The passing of this piece of legislation was an attempt to manage Guyana's rising levels of femicide and other forms of sexualised violence. From 1970 to 1992, Guyana's Gender-Related Development Index, a global index that measures levels of inequality between men and women, "fell 20 ranks."[155] Thus, despite the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in 1993, Guyana continued to witness rising levels of gendered violence and femicide during the years in which neoliberalism rose to global hegemony.[156]

Erzulie's killing spree can be said, then, to act as a violent act of insurgency against the horrors of these levels of femicide in Guyana during the mid-1990's, a period which cannot be decoupled from Guyana's gold frontier. Nowhere is this imbrication of gendered oppression and mineral extraction more powerfully highlighted than in the final of Erzulie's killings, which is not only significant for its violence but also because it involves the murder of Armand, the man responsible for the Omai mining disaster. Particularly telling in this regard is that this murder takes place in the waters of the Essequibo River:

> Shallow-Grave waded forward and put her hands around Armand's neck. She pulled at the weighty body until it faced upwards, still with the head under water, and squeezed with her two massive thumbs down on the windpipe, holding the head under until there were no more bubbles.[157]

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[153] Oloff, "The 'Monstrous Head," p. 89.
[154] "Gender-based violence in Guyana," *Guyana Times International*, 30 September 2016, https://www.guyanatimesinternational.com/gender-based-violence-in-guyana/ [accessed 12 June 2022].
[155] "Women, Gender and Development," *National Development Strategy*, 17 April 1996, http://www.guyana.org/NDS/chap21.htm#1contents_A [accessed 6 July 2022].
[156] Guyana has yet to bring under these levels of gendered violence under control. Today, more than half of Guyanese women and girls have experienced some form of violence at the hands of men. See "55 per cent Guyanese women exposed to violence – Minister Persaud," *Department of Public Information*, 30 November 2021, https://dpi.gov.gy/55-per-cent-guyanese-women-exposed-to-violence-minister-persaud/ [accessed 13 August 2022].
[157] Melville, p. 165.

Here, then, Armand is made subject to the very processes of socioecological violence that he has been responsible for maintaining via his role as manager of the Omai mine. Through her murderous actions, Erzulie becomes a kind of ecogothic embodiment of nature as 'avenging force,' illustrating how Armand becomes subordinated to the violence of the river – and Erzulie herself – in ways that parallel the ecological devastations unleashed into the tributary by the mine's effluent. As such, Erzulie's murder of Armand embodies the links between neoliberalisation, violence against women, and the ecological fallout from Guyana's gold frontier. The story shows, in other words, how the invasion, enclosure, and degradation of the Essequibo region has inevitably gone hand in hand with rising gendered violence, which, in the tale, can only be allayed through equally violent forms of feminist protest. Put another way, Erzulie's violence stages how the struggle against patriarchal domination can only be made visible – and therefore also possible – *by force*.

The story also usefully stages the ways in which Guyana's subjection to gold extraction hinges as much on physical violence as on ideological forms of domination. After all, as Wendy Brown has observed, the oppressions of 'the hidden abode' include not only the very real horrors women experience at the hands of men, but also the ideological violences of "language, the psyche, sexuality, aesthetics, reason, and thought itself."[158] While Melville explicitly raises the devastating impacts of neoliberalised Guyana's economic reliance on gold extraction, she also shows how processes of ecological extraction underpin the ideological outlook of her elite male protagonists like Armand, whose entire vocation is built on the invisibilisation of the disastrous effects of gold mining in the region. Indeed, as we have seen, the tailing pond's full collapse is only the latest iteration of a series of leakages that Armand had previously managed to hide from the public's view. Armand, then, is not only the site in which capitalist extractive ideologies cohere; he is also responsible for their *obscuration*. In other words, Armand's secreting of the processes that sustain profit accumulation acts a way of sealing a pact of complicity with extreme forms of degradation and patriarchal domination. Thus, Melville's tale sets up a series of connections that processes of extraction typically render discreet: between literal and ideological violence; as well as between the socioecological devastation and the perpetuation of unequal gendered relations. In Armand's attempts to hide the mine's spill we can therefore recognise the historical, political, and economic function of capitalist 'naturalisation' and the proliferating oppressions that its extractive forms set into motion.

[158] Wendy Brown, "Feminist Theory and the Frankfurt School: An Introduction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006), 1-5 (3).

But particularly significant here is that these discrete relations between patriarchy, mineral extraction, and gendered violence are only made visible in the moment when they can no longer be kept from view, for it is only in the moment of collapse – or indeed disaster – that this nexus becomes perceptible. If, as Niblett has argued, the mine serves as the story's central symbol for the socio-environmental revolutions attendant on the renewed rounds of plunder released in Guyana via the global neoliberal turn, then the *breakdown* of the mine's tailings pond must be understood as simultaneously marking a disruption of the enviro-social violences that enable gold extraction in the first place. In fact, the seeping of the poisonous effluent from the mine might be read as a kind of symbolic presage of the 'seeping out' of the pluralised violences that undergird gold mining processes. As Armand comes to learn at the end of the story, such is the scale and impact of the mining disaster that his previous attempts at concealing its failings are no longer tenable: while "it was possible to conceal most mishaps and leakages at the mine site from the public and the authorities…this news would be impossible to hide."[159]

Thus, it is only once the mine fails that gold extraction can be shown to be the site where multiple forms of violence converge. These forms of violence, I have argued, concern what Mies terms "women, nature and the colonies" – the invisible trinity that comprises what she describes as "the underground of capitalist patriarchy."[160] Here, too, the text's critical flourish is indelibly associated with the gothic, for it is the story's *gothic* quality that serves to de-fetishise the obscuration of this trinity. After all, as noted in my Introduction, gothic forms of narrativisation are typically orientated towards the process of capitalist de-fetishisation:

> in their insistence that something not-quite-real is at work within global capitalism, some occult process of exploitation that conceals itself, [gothic] tales carry a *defetishising charge*.[161]

Much like Armand's failure to "conceal the leakages at the mine,"[162] Melville's gothic effects become the vehicle for the surfacing of multiple hidden relations: between resource extraction and patriarchal domination, between racialised labour appropriation and the externalisation of

[159] Melville, p. 159.
[160] Mies, p. 77.
[161] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 15
[162] Melville, p. 159.

nature, as well between the endurance and expansion of extractive activities in Guyana from the imperial period through to the twentieth century.

Ghost Towns and Gothic Mansions: Silver's Uncanny Revival in *Mexican Gothic*

Recent years have witnessed a marked upswing in gothic writing from Latin America. Such has been the proliferation of works of gothic literature since the late 2000s that critics have argued that "gothic [has] become Latin America's go-to-genre."[163] "From the Andes to the Amazon, to the urban sprawl of some of the world's biggest cities," writes one such critic, "a ghoulish shadow has been cast over Latin America."[164] For Mat Youkee, this wave of gothic writing marks a significant contrast to earlier forms of Latin American fictions that focused on the magical realism register, most powerfully emblematised by Gabriel García Márquez's canonical novel *A Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). "Now," contends Youkee,

> a new generation of writers are taking a much darker tone. They take their inspiration from the dictatorships and terrorism of the late 20th century, the poverty and violence of the region's modern cities and the most sinister elements of the region's rich but neglected folklore.[165]

While Youkee notes how many writers are turning to the tropes of the gothic to capture a continent "gripped by a deep malaise,"[166] particularly notable about this upswing in contemporary Latin America gothic writing is that much of it has been produced by women. Indeed, of the texts mentioned by Youkee, several are written by women (or feminised) authors, including *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed* (2009) by Argentinian author Mariana Enríquez and *Fever Dream* (2017) by Samantha Schweblin, also Argentinian. Alongside these names we must place Fernanda Melchor, Selva Almada, Mónica Ojeda, Agustina Bazterrica, and, of course, Silvia Morena-Ģarcia, whose *Mexican Gothic* forms the focus here.

Much of this emergent corpus of writing showcases the role played by the gothic in giving expression to fears around the dissolution of the family unit and the unsafe conditions that women currently experience in the Latin American region. Several of the above authors

[163] Mat Youkee, "Gothic becomes Latin America's go-to genre as writers turn to the dark side," *The Guardian*, 31 October 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/oct/31/latin-american-literature-gothic-genre-books [accessed 8 June 2022].
[164] Youkee, "Gothic becomes Latin America's go-to genre," online.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

have described their conscious use of gothic, and other speculative terminologies, to comment on the rising prevalence of gendered violence in their respective countries. In an interview on her genre-bending novel *Hurricane Season* (2017), Fernanda Melchor describes how she

> wanted to create a novel that played with the rules of detective fiction. But at the same time, I wanted to talk about the deep realities of Mexico and Veracruz, especially the huge problem we have with femicide and family disintegration.[167]

Melchor's investment in making legible these conditions via experimental aesthetics is echoed by the Ecuadorian writer Monica Ojeda, who describes her 2018 horror novel *Jawbone* as being influenced by the violence of the city of Guayaquil. "Growing up in this city," says Ojeda,

> the violence that affected me was everyday violence…of not being able to go out for fear of being raped or killed. Of having to accompany my friends to clandestine abortion clinics, of not getting taxis for fear of being kidnapped, of not drinking for fear of having something in my drink.[168]

Gothic (and horror) writing provides both an outlet, then, for these women's fears, while also allowing for their critique of the "daily terror"[169] that they, and many other women and feminised peoples, experience across present-day Latin America.

In this respect, Morena-Ḉarcia's *Mexican Gothic* is no exception. Indeed, in a recent interview with *Vox*, Morena-Ḉarcia makes clear her interest in working within an existing gothic tradition to think through questions of gendered violence and white supremacy in the contemporary Mexican context:

> I wanted to do something that was in genre because I like *Jane Eyre* kinds of tales, in which a young woman goes to a distant location, meets some dude, and then there's some kind of mystery to unravel.[170]

Yet, even as she is inspired by classic gothic novels like *Jane Eyre*, Morena-Ḉarcia also emphasises how she aimed to retool longstanding gothic conventions to critique colonial

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[167] Max Pearl, "Fernanda Melchor Writes Tragic Machismo," *The Vulture*, 2 May 2022, https://www.vulture.com/article/fernanda-melchor-paradais-profile.html [accessed 4 July 2022],

[168] Cited in Youkee, online.

[169] Youkee, online.

[170] Constance Grady, "Why white supremacy is a cult, according to novelist Silvia Moreno-Ḉarcia," *Vox*, 6 November 2022, https://www.vox.com/culture/21551859/silvia-Moreno-Ḉarcia-interview-mexican-gothic [accessed 1 August 2022].

depictions of racialised 'Others'. "One thing that happens with gothic novels," says Morena-Çarcia,

> is the idea of the evil Other. That's quite clear if you read Walpole or Radcliffe. It's often an evil Italian or Spaniard… Catholicism is mixed with that. It's like these exotic evil Catholic people that are coming to pervert us.[171]

Deliberately eschewing these 'perverse' depictions, *Mexican Gothic* hinges on the reframing of Mexican people, particularly Mexican women. "I wanted to write something that reflected some of the people that I knew," she says, "I was inspired by a great-aunt that I had [who was] very 'modern' in her time."[172] Further key to the novel is its reformulation of the gothic trope of the "lord of the manor", typically "an Anglo-Saxon Protestant upstanding male white person," which Morena-Çarcia wanted "to toy around with…and poke at" in order to comment on contemporary conditions of white supremacy, which she describes as "like a horrible, dangerous cult, and like an infection."[173]

Thus, as much as *Mexican Gothic* works within a very clear gothic tradition, the novel also exploits many of the genre's colonial-era tropes in order to make them resonate with present-day concerns around white patriarchal domination within the Mexican context. In this sense, the novel emphasises how gothic tropes can be used critically, enabling the visibilisation and denaturalisation of colonial ideology and patriarchal praxis. Interestingly, while Morena-Çarcia does not mention it in her interview, her novel is very much committed to critiquing white patriarchal control in the historical context of Mexico's silver frontier. This commitment is showcased particularly powerfully in the novel via its turn to the gothic trope of the decaying Doyle mansion, which lies, tellingly, in a forested region of El Triunfo , a formerly thriving mining town whose "riches," as the novel's protagonist Noemí describes it, "had once been given by silver."[174] Capturing the exhaustion of the colonial silver frontier, the home of the English Doyle family has now fallen into disrepair. "The house," complains Noemí when she first arrives at the mansion,

[171] Grady, "Why white supremacy is a cult," online.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Silvia Moreno-Çarcia, *Mexican Gothic* (London: Jo Fletcher Books, 2020), p. 15.

> loomed over [her] like a great quiet gargoyle…it seemed so tired, slats missing from a couple of shutters, the ebony porch groaning as they made their way up the steps to the door, which came complete with a knocker shaped like a fist dangling from a circle.[175]

Here, then, Morena-Ģarcia makes use of the gothic's hallmark device of ruination to illustrate how the mansion's inhabitants have fallen upon hard times. In this, Morena-Ģarcia's representation of both the Doyle manor, named High Place, and the town of El Triunfo is particularly salient because both sites are rendered in ecogothic terms that elucidate their ominousness. Ecogothic thrives here in the images of fetidity and ecological exhaustion that Moreno-Ģarcia uses to describe both the decaying manor and the town, which "had the musty air of a place that had withered away."[176]

In her fictional rendering of the Doyle mansion, Morena-Garcia draws on a series of ecogothic devices that evoke extra-human nature as ominously animated. Noemí frequently complains that the surrounding forest seems to close in around her: "the trees grew close together, and it was dark under their branches…even the trees seemed lugubrious."[177] If the forest seems portentous then this is nothing compared to the mansion, which is equally possessed by sinister environmental forces that "threatened to swallow the place whole."[178] An unidentified fungus covers nearly every inch of the manor's walls, making it look "as if the forest had tiptoed into the house…and left a part of itself inside."[179] In a gesture to the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic gothic tale *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), Noemí becomes obsessed with the golden mould that grows on her bedroom walls, frequently running her hands over them to "make sure there was nothing strange lurking behind the wallpaper."[180] Such is the ominousness of this fungus that Noemí also fears its bodily incursion:

> *Mushrooms*, she thought, finally recognising the bulbous shapes, and as she walked toward the wall, intrigued and at once attracted by the glow, she brushed her hands against these forms. The golden bulbs seemed to turn into smoke, bursting, rising falling like dust on the floor. Her hands were coated in this dust.

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[175] Moreno-Ģarcia, *Mexican Gothic*, p. 21.
[176] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 20 & 17.
[177] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 19.
[178] Ibid., p. 41.
[179] Ibid., p. 155.
[180] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 57.

> She attempted to clean it off…but the dust clung to her palms [and] went under her nails.[181]

Thus, the Doyle manor is rendered in ecogothic images that stage the incursion of extra-human nature not only into the domestic domain but also into the bodies of the women who inhabit its ruinous walls.

While the novel frequently draws on ecogothic tropes to depict the mansion's 'infection' by extra-human fungal forces, equally crucial to its gothic tone is the continued emphasis that Morena-Ģarcia places on an archaic colonial modality desperately attempting to cling to power in a context structured by silver's exhaustion. This is not only manifested in the novel's turn to the dust-ridden mining town of El Triunfo but also in its construction of the Doyle family. The Doyles symbolise an antiquated white colonial order unwilling to transform and assimilate into Mexican ways of life, which Morena-Ģarcia renders with particular potency via her portrayal of the aging Doyle patriarch, Howard. Echoing the construction of white male figures in colonial-era gothic novels like *Jane Eyre*, Howard is the epitome of colonial Englishness and its attendant racisms and sexisms. When Noemí first meets Howard, for example, he comments that her skin is "much darker" than her cousin's, and he even questions her on her "thoughts on the intermingling of superior and inferior types."[182] Howard's racist ideologies also converge with sexist stereotypes: "a woman's function," he tells Noemí, "is to preserve the family line."[183]

Thus, Noemí's arrival in the Doyle household marks both a kind of 'going back in time' and a strange form of dislocation. Not only does Howard retain colonial-era ideologies around race and gender, but he also refuses to leave the crumbling confines of his Victorian manor, which feels "like a little piece of England."[184] The desperation of Howard to remain tied to England and English life is further manifested by his ownership of the mine that he procured in the nineteenth century after the breakdown of the English gold and silver trade, which caused him to relocate his silver industry from Britain and into the uncapitalised territories of Mexico's mountains. The Doyle mine was once "managed by Spaniards until Mexico's independence and left alone for many decades."[185] However, Howard saw in the mine's abandonment an opportunity, for here, too, he hoped to recreate a little piece of English life for himself. As

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[181] Ibid., p. 55.
[182] Ibid., p. 30.
[183] Ibid., p. 75.
[184] Ibid., p. 18.
[185] Ibid., p. 41.

Howard's niece informs Noemí, "while nobody believed that much silver could be extracted…my uncle thought differently. He brought modern English machines and a large English crew to do the work."[186] The mine that the family procured once made them rich, but that was before the Revolution, which put an end to their formerly thriving industry.

In this sense, *Mexican Gothic* serves as much to critique colonial-era ideologies as it does to lay bare the colonial capitalist history of silver mining in the Mexican region, for the Doyle's live in a world clearly signposted by the silver frontier's exhaustions. Invoking the desperation of the Doyles to retain power over their collapsing mining industry, the family now clings to life in the dust of a once-rich region now transformed into a gothic locale of decay. Noemí remarks that "it was clear that El Triunfo was not in any guidebooks:"

> The houses were colorful, yes, but the color was peeling from most of the walls, some of the doors had been defaced, half of the flowers were wilting, and the town showed few signs of activity…Yet the Doyle's lingered in this land, when many others had long gone…Like the old car that had picked Noemí up, the town clung to dregs of splendor.[187]

The Doyle's desperate claim to Englishness speaks not only to their unwillingness to assimilate into twentieth-century Mexican society, but also to the specific British history of Mexican silver extraction during the country's post-independence period. As is well-known, silver has formed the backbone of the Mexican economy since the 1500s. By the mid-sixteenth century, according to Kendal Brown, "Spanish settlers had found the rich Mexican and Andean silver districts."[188] Henceforth, silver mining "would undergird the social and economic structure of these two regions for the remainder of the colonial period."[189] Yet silver would also come to structure the country's economy after Mexico's independence from Spanish rule in 1836. "By the end of the colonial period," continues Brown, "the production of silver would overshadow even the boom that had made New Spain the main source of colonial revenues."[190] The era of Mexican independence brought an influx of foreign capital into the region, especially from Great Britain:

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., p. 17-18.
[188] Ibid. p. 6.
[189] Kendall W Brown, *A History of Mining in Latin America: From the Colonial Era to the Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), p. 6.
[190] Brown, *A History of Mining in Latin America,* p. 20.

> The ink had barely dried on the new constitutions of Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico when British investors, in a speculative mania, created in 1824–1825 at least forty-six stock companies to exploit the new opportunities in Latin America…The British were confident that their capital and technology would turn the fabled silver mines into a bonanza.[191]

In the novel, the historic incursion of British investors in Mexico is staged via its representation of Howard's obsessive importation of English machines and English crews to revitalise the mine that he procured from the Spanish settlers. Yet, like these historic Britons, Howard comes to learn that his attempts to resuscitate the Doyle fortune through Mexican silver would ultimately prove futile. "High Place was once a beacon", we are told, "a shining jewel of a house, the mine produced so much silver that we could afford to cram armoires with silks and velvet and fill out cups with the finest wines. It is not so anymore."[192] Portrayed here is the historic reality faced by many British investors like Howard, who "rushed to exploit the newly independent Mexican mines but had little success:"

> Most British investors, such as the Anglo-Mexican Mining Association and the United Mexican Mining Company…struggled to generate any profits. As a result, the speculative bubble soon burst in London before many could make serious attempts to resurrect the Mexican mines.[193]

Like all commodity frontiers, then, each of silver's historic booms would be followed by a bust. This cyclical process of boom and bust is explicitly referenced in the novel by Noemí, when she describes how

> many formerly thriving mining sites that had extracted silver and gold during the Colonia interrupted their operations once the war of Independence broke out. Later on, the French and English were welcomed during the tranquil Porfiriato, their pockets growing fat with minerals. But the Revolution ended this second boom.[194]

In the context of *Mexican Gothic*, the end of this "second boom" refers to the fallout that arose from the policies of General Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico as president from 1876 to 1911. Díaz's reign was characterised by a regime of foreign investment and authoritarian rule. Indeed,

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[191] Ibid, pp. 93-94.
[192] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 54.
[193] Brown, p. 96.
[194] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 17.

Neomi's description of "the tranquil Porfiriato" can only be assumed to be ironic (or referring to the 'peace' ensured by the Porfiriato militia), for Díaz's dictatorship was one of the most repressive in Mexican history. Jason Ruiz has shown, for example, that

> despite the undeniable fact that Mexico became more stable and prosperous under Díaz's rule…Díaz's tactics became increasingly authoritarian and contradictory as the regime became untenable, especially after the economic crisis of 1907.[195]

Díaz's governing policies centred on two classic features of "Porfirian Mexico", namely "the integration of previously isolated areas into the export economy and the political penetration of peripheral regions by the central government."[196] Diaz's economic vision revolved, in particular, around the country's dependence on an export-orientated economy, which he argued would modernise Mexico to the extent that the nation would be taken "from poverty to a palace."[197] Mineral extraction, especially copper, was quickly revitalised to this end, as the country's precious metals soon became the backbone of its export industry. Central to this export boom was the "flow of foreign US investment", which Diaz argued was "vital for Mexico's economic development."[198]

During the Porfiriato, Mexico underwent rapid but highly unequal growth. In particular, the Diaz regime both expanded and eventually entrenched the colonial *hacienda* system, as ownership of the land "became concentrated in the hands of the country's elite."[199] By the end of Diaz's presidential period, in 1910, "just three thousand wealthy families owned fully half of Mexico's land, and seventeen of those families controlled one-fifth of the country" while "three-quarters of Diaz's subjects worked as farmhands."[200] Reflecting the inequities of the Porfiriato era, these farmhands were "caught in a brutal system of debt peonage that closely resembled slavery, despite the fact that the president was quick to boast that slavery had never been legal in the Republic of Mexico."[201] These social imbalances would eventually lead to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, for behind the country's apparent 'prosperity' political

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[195] Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Politics of Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), p. 65.
[196] Ian Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), p. 17.
[197] Ruiz*, Americans in the Treasure House*, p. 71.
[198] Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt,* p. 20.
[199] Ruiz, 65.
[200] Ibid., p. 66.
[201] Ibid.

dissent would build in response to deteriorating working conditions, the repression of worker's unions by the Diaz militia, and the highly unequal distribution of wealth in the country. By 1906, this burgeoning dissent would explode into full unrest as a political crisis over Diaz's presidential successor merged with the dissatisfactions of the populace. On the first of June 1906, over three thousand miners from the Cananea Copper mines catalysed the mining sector's biggest strike in twentieth century Mexican history. Such was the impact of the Cananea Strike that many have suggested that it "helped destabilise the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and unleash the entire Mexican Revolution."[202] In the novel, it is precisely this Revolution that leads to the breakdown of Doyle's mining business: "Your stupid Revolution," Howard complains to Noemí, "robbed us of our fortune."[203]

Yet, even as the novel places much emphasis on the centrality of the Revolution to Mexican history and the role played by this movement in resisting the perpetuation of colonial-era social hierarchies during the Porfiriato period, it also asks us to pay attention to the effects of *ongoing* ecological revolutions and the emergence of new commodity frontiers in the country. Crucial here is the novel's 1950s setting, which provides us with a central means of understanding its particular Mexican gothic aesthetic. As Oloff has observed with particular reference to the Mexican context, while nature-society relations have "undergone cyclical, radical transformations" in the country since the colonial conquest, the inauguration of the 'Green Revolution' era would have a particularly transformative effect on Mexico from 1940 until 1968. During this time, "the export boom associated with World War II and the heyday of import substitution industrialization in Mexico" would contribute to large-scale changes in the country.[204] The transformations produced by the so-called 'Mexican Miracle' included the initiation of agricultural technologies in the early 1940's, which were financed by the Rockefeller Foundation's Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP). This program drastically altered local ecologies and oversaw the urbanisation of Mexican cities at unprecedented rates, largely "due to mass migration from rural areas."[205] Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer have shown how the Green Revolution seriously displaced the country's "traditional centre of gravity, which had been the countryside, to the cities."[206] As they put it,

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[202] Brown, *A History of Mining in Latin America*, p. 152
[203] Moreno-Garcia, p. 237.
[204] Oloff, "Monstrous Head," p. 82.
[205] Ibid., p. 83.
[206] Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910–1989,* trans. by Luis Alberto Fierro (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 162.

> The ranks of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and the middle class grew, and cities, which were their natural environment, expanded. The incipient Mexican bourgeoisie – industrialists, business people, and bankers – made their primacy firmer and eventually accepted foreign partners again. So much so that by the 1960s the Mexican industrial dependence on foreign capital and technology became, as in the Porfiriato, quite evident.[207]

The point here, then, is that rapid industrialisation and urban expansion led to the hollowing out of the rural countryside, as the MAP reversed the gains that had been achieved under the political leadership of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who oversaw the "large redistribution of land to the country's peasantry and agrarian communities."[208]

Under the conservative leadership of Cárdenas successor, General Ávila Camacho, Mexico's economy became thoroughly entangled with the Rockefeller Foundation's MAP, which pivoted on the scientific modification of basic food crops. The Rockefeller Foundation's programme turned, in particular, on "capital-intensive chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds," which, while ostensibly meant to provide the 'solution' to Mexican poverty, in actuality destroyed longstanding sustainable agricultural practices like crop rotation, as well as small-scale and communal farming.[209] Capturing the wasted rural spaces produced by the 'Mexican Miracle,' Noemí describes how

> there were many hamlets like El Triunfo where one could peek at the fine chapels built when money and people were plentiful; places where the earth would never again spill wealth from its womb.[210]

These exhaustions, then, are what provide Morena-Garcia's novel its entry into both the gothic and the context in which she sets her tale, for the ruinous town of El Triunfo powerfully evokes the manifold socioecological catastrophes of the 1950's period, while also gesturing to the historic exhaustion of British silver mining in the region, which the Mexican Agricultural Program would eventually come to supersede.

In fact, Morena-Garcia's invention of the strange fungus that infiltrates High Place can be said to mediate some of these very conditions, particularly when we read the novel alongside, and in conversation with, the 'weird' new realities brought into being by the Green

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207 Camín and Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution,* p. 162.
208 Ibid., p. 160.
209 Oloff, "Monstrous Head," p. 83.
210 Moreno-Garcia, p. 18.

Revolution. This is particularly significant in terms of the MAP's emphasis on pursuing agricultural growth through the growing and propagating of hybrid seeds, for the fungus that focalises the disruption of the Doyle home and its enjoining surrounds acts as a kind of metonym for the Frankenstein-like transformation of the non-human world effected by the arrival of the MAP in Mexico during the mid-twentieth century period. Indeed, Moreno-Ģarcia's rendition of the fungus speaks quite poignantly to the process of plant hybridisation upon which the MAP programme was built. Telling here is that Moreno-Ģarcia's portrayal of the fungus draws on both an existing fungal phenomenon while simultaneously reinventing it for the renewed purpose of bodily control and soil fertilisation. In her fictional rendering of this fungal infection, Moreno-Ģarcia takes inspiration from the real-life phenomenon of a fungal pathogen named *Massospora cicandina*. In order to bloom, this fungus periodically infects the bodies of cicadas, eventually exploding its pores through their abdomens. These infected cicadas then mate with each other, spreading the fungal infection through both the air and bodily contact. The novel's fungus works similarly: it infects the bodies of the Doyle family and eventually drives them mad. It also attacks the bodies of their labourers and eventually kills them. The bodies of these dead workers are then used as the necessary "mulch" required to ensure the ongoing propagation of the fungal pathogen: "they needed to die", Howard gleefully explains, "you must make the soil fertile."[211]

As such, the wholesale colonisation of the Doyle family, as well as their lands and labourers, by the fungus offers one way of symbolically staging the deleterious consequences of the Green Revolution in Mexico, which resulted in the near-complete monoculturalisation of the local landscape by genetically modified seeds, particularly wheat and corn. As numerous critics have pointed out, the outcomes of these new varietals were far more negative than positive. While proponents of MAP have been keen to showcase how the programme expanded yields, and that hunger and malnutrition dropped significantly as a result,[212] others have emphasised how "the Green Revolution represented the loss or displacement of indigenous agricultural patterns."[213] Alongside the loss of local sustainability practices, the MAP ensured the abandonment of many farms by small farmers, "who could not keep pace with the modern

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[211]Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 236.

[212] Barbara Shubinski, "The Rockefeller Foundation's Mexican Agriculture Program, 1943-1965," *ReSource*, 4 January 2022, https://resource.rockarch.org/story/the-rockefeller-foundations-mexican-agriculture-program-1943-1965/ [accessed 31 August 2022].

[213] Lise Sedrez, "Environmental History of Modern Latin America," in *A Companion to Latin American History*, ed. by Thomas H. Holloway (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), pp. 443-460 (p. 450).

agribusinesses", and thus moved either to the cities or became seasonal rural workers.[214] Such processes are given form in the novel through the deteriorating and unsustainable effects that the fungus produces upon its hosts, who ultimately cannot survive its incursion without continually displacing its effects by finding further hosts and soils in which to cultivate the fungus anew. Each of these processes, as the novel makes clear, are merely repetitions that progressively displace crisis upon new body-territories, thereby deepening the metabolic rifts originally identified by Marx, wherein local ecologies are exhausted as their nutrients and products are exported overseas without the return of minerals to the soil in order to ensure its sustainability.

If Moreno-Ģarcia's invented fungus can be said to express the 'strangeness' of latter-day rifts in Mexico's nature-society relations, then her turn to the abandoned town of El Triunfo for gothic motivation resonates with more contemporary conditions. Indeed, the novel's preoccupation with this once-rich mining town is particularly poignant given the Mexican government's current interest in turning many of its 'ghost' towns into new sites of value accumulation. Many former mining towns have now become some of Mexico's main tourist attractions. In 2010, the Mexican government declared Sombrerete, an abandoned mining town in the northwest of the Mexican state of Zacatecas, a Cultural Heritage of Humanity site. Like El Triunfo , this town was "one of the principal veins of silver in the region [and] attracted the arrival of visitors from different corners of the world and investments from wealthy families who, without thinking twice, moved to this growing city."[215] In an uncanny refiguration of the thousands of the visitors who arrived in the city during the 1800s in the hopes of profiting from its "splendor and riches," Sombrerete now attracts thousands of tourists every year, which, as one government official puts it, "have breathed new life into this Mexican municipality."[216] The attempts to revive international interest in Mexican silver, have not, however, been exclusive to the tourist industry. Indeed, the novel's interest in the Mexican ghost-town not only comments on the return of the Mexican government to the old mining town to jump start capital accumulation; it also serves to critique Mexico's desperate attempt to regenerate its economy through the revival of silver as its leading commodity export. Today, Mexico has

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[214] Sedrez, "Environmental History of Modern Latin America," p. 450.

[215] "Sombrerete," *Visit Mexico*, n.d. https://www.visitmexico.com/en/zacatecas/sombrerete [accessed 7 July 2022].

[216] "Sombrerete: the Mexican mining town that became a Cultural Heritage site," *Mexican Tourism*, n.d. https://www.efe.com/efe/english/eventos/sombrerete-the-mexican-mining-town-that-became-a-cultural-heritage-site/50000272-3248182 [accessed 8 July 2022].

returned itself to its historic position as the world's largest producer and exporter of silver. Despite increasing strike action, and despite the manifold negative impacts of silver extraction on the environment, the silver mining industry is expected to grow by 3.3 percent and be valued at by US$17.8 billion by 2022.[217]

This process of attempting to continually resurrect what is ostensibly an unsustainable system is raised throughout the novel. Indeed, such is the all-consuming potential of the fungus that infiltrates High Place that it is not only Noemi who fears its bodily invasion. Howard is so consumed by the fungus that he exists in a state of gothic zombification: "he was a corpse afflicted by the ravages of putrefaction, but he *lived*. His chest rose and dipped and he breathed."[218] Like many of the gothic imageries deployed in the novel, Moreno-Ģarcia's use of the trope of zombification is here also used critically, for Howard's zombification via the fungal infiltration serves as a means of expressing the ways in which the degradations engendered by silver extraction accumulate and ultimately render continued extraction impossible. Dramatising capital's need to instantiate new extractive regimes to revive value accumulation, Howard's body deteriorates, forcing him to possess a new male body every few years. The novel's use of the gothic metaphor of zombification and the persistent living-dead state it engenders provides a way, then, of understanding Moore's earlier points about the silver frontier's exhaustive propensities, which produce what he terms the "impetus for further capitalist expansion and…the system's cyclical fluctuations."[219]

Howard's survival does not only depend on the literal consumption of the bodies of his male family members, however. It also involves the consumption of the bodies of his Mexican mine workers. "People were happy when the mine reopened," a local woman tells Noemí,

> It meant work for the locals, and folks came from other parts of Hidalgo for the chance at a job too. When there's a mine, there's money, the town grows. But right away folks complained. The work was tough, but Mr Doyle was tougher. The Mexican mining crews, he had no mercy on them.[220]

Here, the novel once more raises the realities of the commodity frontier by explicitly registering the ecological dynamics of the silver frontier and its twinned logics of exhaustion in terms of

[217] Bruna Alves, "Mine production of silver in Mexico from 2012 to 2021," *Statistica*, 28 April 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/755358/mexico-silver-production/ [accessed 14 July 2022].
[218] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 203.
[219] Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion," p. 414.
[220] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 126.

both land (via the increasing difficulty of extracting silver) and labour (via Howard's overexploitation of his workers). But Howard's workers, it turns out, were not only literally worked to death. Many also died from an unnamed epidemic: "then there came a sickness. It hit the workers at the house first and then the miners, but soon enough they were all heaving and feverish…a great deal of the miners dropped dead."[221]

Alluded to in these descriptions are the hazardous effects of silver mining, particularly mercury poisoning. During the early years of the colonial conquest, silver refiners in Mexico developed 'the amalgamation process,' "a cheap, simple method of refining large quantities of low-grade silver ore" that involves the use of mercury because this metal is the only substance known to combine with precious metals without altering their chemical nature.[222] The amalgamation process would prove central to silver refinement throughout Mexico's colonial history. As Saul Guerrero puts it, "silver mining depended entirely on mercury. No mercury meant no silver. No silver meant that the motive force was removed from the economy of the colonies."[223] Historical accounts record some of the effects of the process from as early as 1626, when a priest named Pedro de Oñate observed how "we have seen…how terrible are the effects of mercury…many are poisoned by mercury and we see those effects among those whom we give last rites."[224]

In the novel, the historic subjection of the mine worker to the hazards of silver mining is given expression through the fungal epidemic that the Doyle's bring into being. As we come to learn, the disease the miners suffered was a direct result of the fungus that spreads outward from Howard's body: "most people who come into contact with this fungus die. That's what happened to the workers in the mine. It killed them, some faster than others."[225] Thus, the novel reformulates the hazardous historic conditions of colonial silver mining through further ecogothic terminologies in order to illustrate the wholesale transformative effects of silver on both its social and environmental worlds. The fungus stages, in other words, the social hazards that silver mining produces upon the body of the worker, while also providing a vocabulary for expressing the ways in which silver extraction devastates the landscape: "mining has always been our trade," says Howard, "and it all began with silver."[226] Indeed, so entrenched are the

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[221] Ibid.
[222] Guerrero, *Silver by Fire, Silver by Mercury,* p. 104.
[223] Guerrero, p. 150.
[224] Cited in D. A. Brading and Harry E. Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining: Mexico and Peru," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (1972), 545–579.
[225] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 212.
[226] Ibid., p. 244.

Doyle's in silver's exhaustive lifecycle that *everything* they touch turns to rot. Not only is the house literally falling apart, but "nothing grows" outside in the garden except "death itself."[227] Thus do the Doyle's – and Howard in particular – become the site in which all of the exhaustive propensities of the silver frontier cohere, including labour exhaustion, ecological destruction, and even new forms of disease.

The novel's portrayal of Howard's impact on the region through silver extraction therefore showcases a very real history of the colonial enterprise and its transformative effects upon Mexico's socioecological landscape. As *Mexican Gothic* makes clear, Howard's entire lifecycle is built on a process of voracious consumption, a process that is most powerfully crystalised in the figure of the ouroboros, which serves as the Doyle family crest. The ouroboros, the mythical figure of the snake that eats its own tale, mythologically captures the family's longstanding practice of incest, while also illustrating how the Doyle's are entirely caught up in silver's exhaustive appetite. "This house," Noemí laments,

> was built atop bones. And no one noticed such an atrocity, rows and rows of people streaming into the house, into the mine, and never leaving. Never to be mourned, never to be found. The serpent does not just devour its tail, it devours everything around it, voracious, its appetite never quenched.[228]

Yet, if the novel's ecogothic terminologies work to critique the various enviro-socio legacies of silver extraction in Mexico, it is equally at pains to illustrate how resistant the country is to break free from the shackles of the extractive economy and the forms of bodily dispossession that extractive processes of accumulation occasion. This ongoing process of silver's bodily depredations is continually advanced through the novel's many references to the processes that undergird Howard's immortality, which not only depend on the possession of his male family members, but which equally require the bodies of the Doyle *women*. "For generations", Howard gleefully comments, "the bloodline has been kept separated…no outsiders."[229] Here again racist and sexist ideologies cohere, for Howard wishes to avoid the contamination of his white bloodline not only by avoiding contact with racial 'others' but also by marrying and procreating with his granddaughters and nieces. The manifold horrors of silver extraction are extended, then, to include the violent consumption of women's bodies by white patriarchal figures like Howard, whose very life cannot be decoupled from silver's own consumptive

[227] Ibid., p. 124.
[228] Ibid., p. 244.
[229] Ibid., p. 213.

cycle. Indeed, as Noemí, succinctly puts it, "at silver's rotten core there was the corpse of a woman."[230] The battle for control over Mexican silver is as much predicated, in other words, on ownership over the country's minerals as it is on the control of the bodies of its women. In this sense, Howard's possession of the Doyle women illustrates how "the victimization of women," to borrow from Rita Segato,

> supplies the platform upon which patriarchal power settles its pact and displays its sovereignty [because] the whole edifice of power…depend[s] on the constantly renewed destruction of women's bodies.[231]

The novel's deployment of the gothic trope of incest therefore invites multiple interpretations, giving expression to both Howard's inextricable imbrication in the *long durée* of colonial land relations as well to as the more recent waves of 'neoextraction' taking place in Mexico. As Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra observe, the whole of Latin America is currently under the siege of

> renewed extractive activities primarily linked to nonrenewable resources – from megamining to agribusiness, including hydrocarbon reserves, the forest frontier, and fishing [which] have returned Latin American economies to their classical role as the providers of raw materials.[232]

The key point that these critics make it that these forms of neoextractivism, "premised on a new and broadened emphasis on extractivist policy for the control, extraction, exploitation, and commercialization of nature,"[233] have in turn reinvigorated older forms of patriarchal domination and violence. "The prevalence of violence against women, lesbians [and] trans people," writes Gago, "is key to understanding a line of interconnected violence, one that has to do with the ways exploitation and extraction are reconfigured today."[234] Gago's point about

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[230] Ibid., p. 218.

[231] Rita Laura Segato, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center: Discipline, Territoriality, and Cruelty in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (2016), 615-625 (620)

[232] Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra, "A Critique of the Extractive Operations of Capital: Toward an Expanded Concept of Extractivism," *Rethinking Marxism* 29, no. 4 (2017), 574-591 (576).

[233] Mina Lorena Navarro Trujillo, "Struggles in Defense of Life within the Context of Dispossession and Capitalist Violence in Mexico," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2021), 130-149 (133).

[234] Verónica Gago, *Feminist International*: *How to Change Everything*, trans. by Liz Mason-Deese (London: Verso, 2020), p. 56.

the connection between contemporary gendered violence and present-day extraction processes are echoed by the anonymous writers of the 2013 "Feminist Manifesto Against Mega-Mining and the Colonial Patriarchal Extractivist Model" in Latin America, who declare that

> The deepening of extractivist policies does nothing more than reinforce the historical oppression of women. This form of labour exploitation relegates women to two 'destinies': to precarious and overexploited work and/or to the role of 'family caregivers,' undertaking invisible work.[235]

Thus, these signatories illustrate how the current doubling down on resource extraction in Latin America converges around relations both ideological and material. The recent intensification of extractivist policies in the region provides the basis, in other words, from which older forms of patriarchal oppression become retooled, as women become relegated, once more, to the realm of undervalued work through precarious unemployment or to invisible (and therefore unpaid) work via sexist ideological expectations that construct women as primary care givers and 'homemakers.'

Indeed, as many scholars have noted, gender relations in Mexico have worsened substantially since the 1994 inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the *maquiladorisation* of the economy. Of the half a million Mexican workers that labour in Mexico's export-producing factories*, two thirds* are women, many of them single women who head their households.[236] In addition to being subjected to extreme wage exploitation at the hands of Mexico's US-run *maquiladora* sector, many of these same women are regularly exposed to violence in their homes. Like Guyana, Mexico is currently home to some of the highest numbers of intimate partner violence and femicide in the world. So high have levels of femicide and domestic violence been in the contemporary Mexican context that one of its most populous cities – the border town of Ciudad Juárez – is now referred to as a "femicide machine."[237] It is within this context that *Mexican Gothic*'s 'family drama' and its invocation of the patriarchal horrors that take place within the Doyle household must be understood. For, what the novel ultimately illustrates are the ways in which the neoliberalisation of Mexico's

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[235] Cited in Niblett, "'They have always burned us'," forthcoming.
[236] "Mexico's Maquiladoras: Abuses Against Women Workers," *Human Rights Watch*, 17 August 1996, https://www.hrw.org/news/1996/08/17/mexicos-maquiladoras-abuses-against-women-workers [accessed 30 August 2022].
[237] Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, trans. by Michael Parker-Stainback (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012).

economy and the relaunching of silver as its leading commodity export have become inextricable from the country's growing levels of gendered violence. Thus, the novel brings together the points made by Gago and Mezzadra with those made by the signatories of "Feminist Manifesto Against Mega-Mining" by showing how neoextractivism has both returned Mexico "to its classic role as the provider of raw materials,"[238] while also "reinforcing the historical oppression of women."[239]

As such, even as *Mexican Gothic* looks back to and signals the return of the repressed of an early colonial history of silver mining and its attendant socioecological exhaustions, it speaks, too, to the contemporary reinvigoration of original accumulation in Mexico via new extractive policies, which, in the novel, provides the logic behind Howard's patriarchal 'feeding' off the Doyle women's bodies. In this sense, if Howard acts as the novel's central locus of silver's voracious appetite, then he also stages how, under contemporary conditions of neoextraction, new territories of enclosure must be found in order to commercialise arenas that are not already fully incorporated into the logic of value. To guarantee the sustenance of his life, Howard must draw into his violent vortex *more* life by making use of the Doyle women's fertility. The novel illustrates, therefore, how patriarchal capitalism is required to seek and repeat processes of dispossession at ever larger scales by creating new frontiers of exploitation in order to revive value accumulation and ensure the expanded reproduction of capital. The novel asks us to pay attention, in this way, to what Mina Lorena Navarro Trujillo terms "the violent content of the patriarchal metabolism of capital,"[240] because it shows how the expansion of the extractive frontier emerges alongside, and in tandem with, the patriarchal domination over, and exploitation of, women's bodies and their reproductive rights.

Read with Navarro Trujillo, Howard's incestuous practice returns us to my earlier points about the emphasis the novel places on the effects of new ecological revolutions and commodity frontiers in present-day Mexico. For the novel also shines a light on the renewed forms of patriarchal domination that have arisen from the intensification of extraction in Mexico (and across Latin America) over the last two decades. These conditions can be seen powerfully at work in both the feudal-like qualities of Howard himself, which mediate what Segato has recently termed the "pedagogy of cruelty" and the new forms of "lordship" that

[238] Gago and Mezzadra, "A Critique of the Extractive Operations of Capital," p. 576.
[239] Cited in Niblett, "'They have always burned us'," forthcoming.
[240] Mina Lorena Navarro Trujillo, "Notes for a Critical and Ecological View of Patriarchal Capitalism in the Web of Life," *Capital & Class* 45, no. 1 (2021), 21–32 (20).

have come to structure Latin America's socioecological relations under the recent intensification of extractive policy in the region. According to Segato,

> the re-primarization of production, mega-mining, and extractivist agriculture are the absolute counterpart of the absolutist regime of the market and the fusion of political power with ownership, resulting in extreme aggression towards human beings and their environment.[241]

Under these terms, Howard functions to reference more than simply the manifold horrors attendant on the traditional gothic "lord of the manor".[242] He also gives concrete shape to the more recent forms of neoextraction that have inaugurated the "ascendency of a world of ownership or indeed *lordship*"[243] throughout contemporary Latin America and, indeed, the whole of the patriarchal capitalist world. After all, Marx describes capitalism in peculiarly patriarchal terms when he writes that capital is like "a lord, at once aristocratic and barbarous."[244] Thus, the novel summons both colonial and contemporary conditions of women's vulnerability through its gothic discourse, which usefully brings together patriarchal domination with silver extraction, illustrating how processes of renewed original accumulation pivot not only on colonial pre-conditions but also on new forms of masculine violence implicated in the more recent conflicts associated with Mexico's present-day transition to the commodities consensus.

Conclusion: Melville and Morena-Ģarcia's World-Gothic

Morena-Ģarcia's gothic aesthetics can be said, then, to be markedly *worldly* in orientation. Like Melville's "Erzulie," *Mexican Gothic* ultimately insists on locating gendered violence within a larger world-systemic context of mineral extraction. In this sense, both "Erzulie" and *Mexican Gothic* showcase their affiliation with what Oloff terms 'world-gothic' – so hyphenated to capture the genre's registration of the processes that undergird the operations of the world-economy. "I understand the Gothic *mode* and Gothic *effects*", writes Oloff, "rather than only the Gothic *genre*, as a particularly compelling instance of world-literature that registers in form and content the processes shaping the capitalist world-system."[245] Under these

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[241] Segato, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center," p. 622.
[242] Grady, "Why white supremacy is a cult," online.
[243] Segato, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center," p. 622.
[244] Marx, *Capital Vol I*, p. 322.
[245] Oloff, "Marie Vieux Chauvet's World-Gothic," p. 123-124.

world-systemic terms, gothic tropes must be understood as decidedly global in orientation, for they are often “mobilised”, as Rebecca Duncan has noted, “to critique regimes of capital.”[246] Crucial however, is that world-gothic also retains a commitment to contextual specificity: its “figures of violence…encode and make concrete”, continues Duncan, “the disorientating *local* experience of world-systemic shifts”.[247] Thus, the gothic – or ‘world-gothic’ – possesses what Duncan describes as “proto-critical potential: in registering the violent experience of incorporation into a rising regime of capital…gothic forms enable an exposure of that system’s caustic effects.”[248]

Both *Mexican Gothic* and “Erzulie” are similarly predicated on the terms elucidated by the ‘world-gothic’ mode, for each make visible, through their gothic terminologies, the forces that both produce and maintain capitalist power. If, as I argued in my previous chapter, Caribbean plantation literatures make use of gothic aesthetics to reinforce the genre as “a mode of reality,”[249] then these fictions advance the gothic as a mode of *visibilisation*. By illustrating the nexus between (neo)extraction and gendered violence, these texts not only locate this vortex of systemic violence within the Guyanese and Mexican contexts, but they also mark a feminist refusal of the patriarchal oppressions that undergird the extractive economy as a whole. Particularly telling here is that *Mexican Gothic*, like “Erzulie,” similarly ends with a chronicle of feminist dissent that foregrounds women’s acts of resistance against the patriarchal oppression occasioned by extractive processes. In an echo of Erzulie’s final murder, *Mexican Gothic* foregrounds women’s insurrection via the spectacular act of killing: “Noemí raised the gun and shot Howard twice…Howard began to convulse and shriek…his body rippling violently, wracked with such violence that even the bed shook.”[250] Like Erzulie’s murder of Armand, Noemí’s final act of violence against Howard stages how the struggle against patriarchal domination can only be gained through a visibility fought for through equally violent processes. In this sense, both texts make a claim not so much for violence itself as a form of insurgency, but rather for the process of visibility that violence makes possible. Put slightly differently, these texts illustrate how capital itself makes use of force or annihilation

[246] Rebecca Duncan, “Gothic in the Capitalocene: World-Ecological Crisis, Decolonial Horror, and the South African Postcolony, in *Gothic in the Anthropocene: Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*, ed. by Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund and Johan Höglund, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), pp. 175-194 (p. 182).
[247] Duncan, “Gothic in the Capitalocene,” p. 182.
[248] Ibid.
[249] See Chapter One.
[250] Moreno-Ģarcia, p. 246.

when it encounters blockages to further expansion, a process that women themselves must deploy in order to find alternative bases of existence in a world structured by capitalist exploitation and extraction. Seen in this way, while *Mexican Gothic* and "Erzulie" make use of gothic forms of corporeal violence to imagine feminist futures, they also showcase how such forms of insurrection are only made possible once the patriarchal nature of resource extraction is thrown into light. As such, both texts reveal the persistence of gendered violence and ecological dispossession as the central mechanisms that enable the expansion of patriarchal capital accumulation not only in Mexico and Guyana but throughout the world.

Chapter Three

"for all the breathing of the world": Racial Violence and Atmospheric Terror in Césaire and Okri

. . . let us return to that atmosphere of violence, that violence which is just below the skin.

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 1961

Introduction

Thus far, we have considered the gothic mode as providing a key lens through which to understand the socioenvironmental dynamics of a series of commodity frontiers, from sugar in Jamaica and Barbados through to gold in Guyana and silver in Mexico. Much of my reading of these frontiers has pivoted on a range of texts from the Caribbean and Latin American regions that showcase the dialectic between the plantation field and plantation home, as well as between the household and the mine. In many of these cases, I have shown the home as central to the socioecological dynamics of these commodity frontiers, arguing that it is the gothic representation of the domestic sphere as a 'house of horror' in these fictions that allows for the consideration of the appropriation of women's labour in the domestic unit as dialectically linked to, imbricated in, and facilitated by capital's devaluation of 'nature'. In this sense, I have followed in the wake of a series of scholars who have long emphasised the centrality of the trope of enclosure and claustrophobia to gothic representational forms. As critics like Jack Morgan have observed, gothic tales glean much of their terror from their *claustrophobic spatial settings*, in locations such "as closed-off cellars, chambers and attics, which bespeak abandonment and unlife."[1] Similarly, in his influential introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (1992), Chris Baldick writes that gothic fictions typically attain their "Gothic effect" through a combination of "a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space…to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration."[2]

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[1] Jack Morgan, "Toward an Organic Theory of the Gothic: Conceptualizing Horror," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 1 (1998), 59–80 (73)

[2] Chris Baldick, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. x-xxi (p. xix).

Many feminist scholars of the gothic have taken up the points offered by Baldick and Morgan to illustrate how gothic literatures deploy the tropes of enclosure and entrapment to express the patriarchal domination of the domestic sphere. According to Dianne Wallace and Andrew Smith, the "Female Gothic" has often taken the form of "a politically subversive genre [that] articulates women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures."[3] Thus, the Female Gothic "offer[s] a coded expression of fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body."[4] Several of the readings I offered in my previous chapters have mirrored these feminist interpretations. Yet, while I have analysed the home as a gothic site of patriarchal domination and control, I have done so in order to argue for an interrogation of commodity frontiers as including spheres that fall *outside* of sites of primary commodity production. Thus, my arguments have pivoted on my analysis of the gothic construction of the domestic unit in Caribbean and Latin American word-literary texts, which, I have suggested, allows for the mapping of a series of frequently occluded links: between sugar monoculture and gendered labour appropriation, as well as between the mining of minerals and patriarchal violence.

In this chapter, I want to return to this sense of claustrophobia and enclosure that is central to the gothic mode. However, I want to shift my focus from gendered oppression (and indeed, the home) towards questions of racialised violence within urban geographies. To this end, I seek to understand how the gothic tropes of claustrophobia and entrapment may be made to resonate with contemporary concerns around racialised bodies and their exposure to high levels of urban atmospheric pollution – what I am here terming 'atmospheric terror.' In this, I take inspiration from Frantz Fanon's phrase "let us return to that atmosphere of violence, that violence which is just below the skin,"[5] which serves as this chapter's epigraph. In his meditation on the production of black life under colonial town-planning, Fanon describes the condition of the colonised as one of constant violence. "In the colonial settler-town," writes Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), "the native discovers that violence is *in the atmosphere*."[6] As Fanon shows, the violence of colonisation permeates the everyday to the extent that the colonised live in an atmosphere of "doomsday:"

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[3] Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, "Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic," in *The Female Gothic: New Directions,* ed by Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

[4] Wallace and Smith, "Introduction," p. 2.

[5] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Classics, 2001 [1961]), p. 55.

[6] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 55. My emphasis.

> The type of background from whence the natives comes…are chiefly the bloodthirsty and pitiless atmosphere [and] the generalization of inhuman practices [which create] the firm impression that people have of being caught up in a veritable Apocalypse.[7]

Thus, to "return to that atmosphere of violence" is to return to the myriad violences imposed by the settler both on the colonial city through infrastructural policy and upon the native's skin through practices of 'inhuman' violence – forms of domination that are so extreme that they herald a feeling within the colonised of 'apocalypse'. It is also, as I am using the phrase, to return to Fanon's descriptions of an earlier history of colonial violence and breathlessness in order to understand present-day experiences of racialised exposure to airborne toxicity within the (post)colonial city. Although Fanon was not explicitly referring to a 'literal' atmosphere of violence (his is more of a symbolic turn of phrase), we can take from his description a figurative line that helps centre questions of power and control in contemporary conditions of breath and breath-taking. After all, the matter of breathing, of who gets to breathe and who gets to breathe *what*, cannot be understood without taking seriously relations of social inequality. Thus, I aim to bring Fanon's description of colonial violence as 'in the atmosphere' to bear on remarks made by Raymond Bryant, who powerfully argues that "unequal power relations are as likely to be inscribed in the '*air*' as [they] are embedded in the land."[8]

Both Bryant and Fanon's phrases read starkly in light of recent global events. As I write, the world is only just emerging from a protracted lockdown period that resulted from a new airborne virus named Covid-19.[9] This virus spreads through the air via coughing and sneezing, attacking the respiratory system, causing inflammation, and making it difficult to breathe. To curb its spread, countries across the world implemented various stay-at-home-measures in the early part of 2020, proffering confinement and isolation as necessary precautions against contamination. In these lockdown measures we might recognise the 'claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space' that Baldick sees as forming a crucial part of the gothic mode. Yet, these recent forms of confinement and isolation also force us to reconsider the gothic's older

[7] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 215.

[8] Raymond Bryant, "Power, knowledge and political ecology in the third world," *Progress in Physical Geography: Earth and Environment* 22, no. 1 (1998), 79–94 (81).

[9] While some counties are lifting lockdown, others are returning to it. As of June 2022, China has reimplemented lockdown measures against the rising cases of the new Omicron variant. See David Stanway and Ryan Woo, "China COVID jitters flare up as parts of Shanghai resume lockdown," *Reuters*, 19 June 2020, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghais-minhang-district-announces-new-lockdown-2022-06-09/ [accessed 12 July 2022].

terminologies of terror, particularly as they pertain to space. How, then, do we read the gothic under these new conditions, when the meaning of terror once again becomes reconfigured; no longer located in the enclosure of space but in the very air we breathe?[10] Such events force us to consider how the gothic form reconfigured might give expression to a world suffocated and suffocating; radically reframed, in other words, by the terrors of an atmosphere.

The pandemic has unfolded across various fault lines, particularly in terms of racial inequality. Evidence shows that Covid-19 has more severely affected people of colour across the globe.[11] In the United States, the phrase "I Can't Breathe", which memorialises the dying words of Eric Gardner, Byron Williams, and George Floyd, has become both an anthem of dissent against the American state's deadly toll on black lives, and a slogan that captures the racial inequalities that have structured the racialised experience of the pandemic.[12] Both the deaths of these black men and the pandemic itself have revitalised interest in Fanon, who makes use of not only an apocalyptic terminology to describe the condition of colonisation, but also takes asphyxiation as the cause of revolt in Indochina during its French occupation. Fanon writes toward the end of *Black Skin/White Masks* (1952) that,

> it is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, *becoming impossible for him to breathe*.[13]

As critics like Arthur Rose have pointed out, Fanon's description of the inability of the Indo-Chinese to breathe under French colonisation has since become formative to the thinking of a

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[10] To be sure, this is not to suggest that the governmental lockdown measures did not exacerbate fears around domestic violence. Indeed, much work has been done on showcasing how domestic isolation led to rising levels of intimate partner violence. See Sai Balasubramania, "An Unacceptable Crisis: Incidents of Domestic Violence Have Nearly Doubled During the Coronavirus Pandemic, *Forbes*, 18 August 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/saibala/2020/08/18/an-unacceptable-crisis-domestic-violence-has-skyrocketed-nearly-2x-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/?sh=7d06dad16070 [accessed 12 July 2022].

[11] For a delineation of the racial disparities of Covid-19, see Robert Booth and Caelainn Barr, "Black people four times more likely to die from Covid-19, ONS finds," 7 May 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/07/black-people-four-times-more-likely-to-die-from-covid-19-ons-finds (accessed 17 July 2020).

[12] Mike Baker let al., "Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe.'", *New York Times*, 29 June 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-police-arrest.html [accessed 21 July 2020].

[13] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]), p. 226. My emphasis.

series of black activists and scholars, who have reconfigured his descriptions of colonial strangulation to make them resonate with the postcolonial, contemporary context. "With this heightened attentiveness to breath in Black Life," explains Rose, "it is perhaps unsurprising that more attention [is being] paid to Frantz Fanon's descriptions of postcolonial breathlessness."[14]

Like Rose, Jean-Thomas Tremblay has shown how Fanon's writings have become increasingly central to expressing collective black oppression, "while also commenting critically and reflexively upon the conditions behind it."[15] Indeed, many African-American activists have taken inspiration from Fanon's description of colonialisation as eliciting a form of "combat breathing" in the colonised to illustrate how this condition remains relevant today. To this end, they have showcased how the contemporary phrase "I Can't Breathe" gives new meaning to Fanon's urgent descriptions, in *A Dying Colonialism* (1965), of the ways in which colonised subjects are forced to live in a "narrow world strewn with prohibitions," where conditions of being "hemmed in" and "smothered" give way to the act of living as a form of "combat breathing."[16] By drawing on Fanon's notion of combat breathing, these African-American activists have showcased how the repetition of breath required for life becomes a continual site of struggle, making breathing itself part of the fight to maintain life in the suffocating conditions of a contemporary racist world.[17]

Although the anthem "I Can't Breathe" is predominantly associated with the United States, the proliferation of Covid-19 has similarly exposed how global crisis is shouldered disproportionately by black bodies in other parts of the globe. In 2010, a young six-year-old in south-east London named Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah woke up from a coughing fit that she could not control. She had asthma but her symptoms were much more severe than those typically associated with this condition. Ella died three years later, in 2013, after another severe asthma attack. Southwark Coroner's Court eventually found that Ella died from a series of respiratory attacks caused by her exposure to "excessive" levels of pollution.[18] In his commentary on the

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[14] Arthur Rose, "Combat Breathing in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*," in *Reading Breath in Literature*, ed. by Arthur Rose et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 113-135 (p. 114).
[15] Jean-Thomas Tremblay, cited in Rose, "Combat Breathing," p. 114.
[16] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994 [1965]), p. 128.
[17] See Nigel C Gibson, "Combat breathing: The spirit of rebellion in the US," *New Frame,* 5 June 2020, https://www.newframe.com/combat-breathing-the-spirit-of-rebellion-in-the-usa/ [accessed 16 September 2022].
[18] "Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah: Air pollution a factor in girl's death, inquest finds," BBC News, 16 December 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55330945 [accessed 12 July 2022].

case, coroner Philip Barlow described how Ella's home in Lewisham, one of London's most impoverished neighbourhoods, had for years been exposed to levels of nitrogen dioxide that exceeded World Health Organisation and European Union guidelines.[19] In 2020, ten years after her first asthma attack (and also the very year that marked the start of global lockdown), Ella became the first person in the world to have air pollution listed as her cause of death.[20]

Anxieties related to rising levels of air pollution are not, however, exclusive to the Northern metropoles. Today, African civilians regularly describe air quality in urban Africa through fears of asphyxiation. "People in South Africa's major cities," reports a local journalist, "are starting to know for a fact that the air they breathe is toxic and is making them sick."[21] In Johannesburg, the centre of South Africa's gold mining sector, the air quality is so poor that it has been described in an uncanny echo of Fanon's invocation of the 'apocalyptic' atmosphere of colonisation: "in Johannesburg,", writes this same journalist, "the air is bad enough to be dubbed 'airpocalypse.'"[22] Meanwhile, in Niger, also known as the 'Uranium Capital of Africa,' locals deploy a markedly *gothic* lexicon to describe the contamination of land, water, and air by the region's rising levels of radioactive dust. "Have you seen the soil in the country?", asks a local mining worker from Arlit, an industrial town in north-central Niger, "it is dry and lifeless…There is something evil in the dust."[23]

But air (and soil) pollution are not the only outcomes of the mining process, for so, too, is lung disease. As is well known, gold miners frequently contract silicosis, an incurable lung illness caused by the inhaling of dust from gold-bearing rocks. Such has been the severity of cases of silicosis in South Africa that recent years have witnessed one of the country's biggest legal settlements against the racialised bodily depredations engendered by gold extraction. In 2018, a group of gold miners secured a $400 pay out as compensation for lung disease caused by gold mining. Capturing the endurance of colonial and apartheid South Africa's reliance on migrant labour for mineral extraction, the claim not only dates back to 1965; it also includes

[19] "Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah," online.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Sipho Kings, "Breath, death and data: The air in our cities is killing us," *Mail & Guardian*, 28 June 2019, https://mg.co.za/article/2019-06-28-00-breath-death-and-data-the-air-in-our-cities-is-killing-us/ [accessed 17 July 2020].
[22] Kings, "Breath, death and data," online.
[23] Abhijit Mohanty, "Extracting a radioactive disaster in Niger," *Down To Earth*, 5 March 2019, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/health-in-africa/extracting-a-radioactive-disaster-in-niger-63451 [accessed 1 July 2020].

thousands of claimants, the majority of whom are black.[24]

Despite most of these cases having risen to prominence in the last few years, the racialised experience of deathly atmospheric exposure is not a new issue. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has long argued that air pollution is the world's most severe environmental health concern.[25] Recognising that nine out of 10 people worldwide breathe air containing levels of pollutants that exceed WHO guideline limits, the organisation has implemented a series of air-quality programmes across Europe, the Western Pacific, and the Americas, which recommend "threshold limits for key air pollutants that pose health risks and provide a reference for setting air pollution targets at regional and national levels to improve air quality."[26] Despite the WHO acknowledging that the effects of pollution are intensified by poverty, no air-quality programme currently exists for sub-Saharan Africa, in spite of the fact that pollution-related deaths have increased in the region by nearly 60 percent over the last two decades.[27]

In her study of aluminium smelting in twentieth century North Carolina, Pavithra Vasudevan argues for the espousal of the term "racial ecologies" to describe the unevenness of such geographic zones, in which black corporeal vulnerability is experienced through the "slow violence"[28] of poisoned air, water, and land, which recomposes black bodies "through intimate relations with…non-human species and inorganic matter."[29] Vasudevan's formulation of racial ecologies is premised upon what Christina Sharpe describes as "monstrous intimacies" – intimate violences inherited from slavery that continue to shape black subjectivities into the present.[30] Borrowing Sharpe's formulation of post-slavery subjectivity, Vasudevan argues that the logics of racial ecologies are expressed in the "everyday corporeal negotiations [that black

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[24] Jason Burke, "Multimillion-dollar compensation deal for South African miners," *The Guardian*, 26 July 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/26/multimillion-dollar-compensation-deal-for-south-african-miners [accessed 3 October 2022].
[25] "Air Pollution", *World Health Organisation*, n.d, https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution (accessed 1 July 2020).
[26] "Air Quality Guidelines", *World Health Organisation*, n.d, https://www.who.int/airpollution/publications/aqg2005/en/ (accessed 1 July 2020).
[27] Priyom Bose, "How Africa is Tackling Pollution (Plastic/Emissions)", *AzoCleanTech*, 25 September 2019, https://www.azocleantech.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=977 [accessed 12 June 2021].
[28] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[29] Pavithra Vasudevan, "An Intimate Inventory of Race and Waste," *Antipode* (2019), 1–21 (4).
[30] Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

communities experience] with waste materials,"[31] leading to "a transgenerational inheritance that manifests in chronic illness and premature death."[32] Like the bodily violences of the colonial slave system, which resulted in "Black bodies serv[ing] as both lifesource and toxic sink,"[33] the materiality of toxic exposure in contemporary black communities substantiates arguments made by Saidiya Hartman about the continuities between field and factory in the post-slavery era.[34] Borrowing Hartman's insights into how slavery 'lives on' through racial capitalism, Vasudevan shows how afterlives of the forcible use of black labour in sugarcane and cotton production become embedded in racial ecologies that intertwine race, waste, and extra-human natures in new and disturbing ways, as the "ghostly agents" of black corporeal toxicity supplement slavery's "ball and chain."[35]

Vasudevan's analysis was published recently (in 2019), yet the conditions to which she refers have been under discussion from as early as the 1970s. As Malcom Ferdinand observes in an interview with *La Monde*,

> since the 1970s, African-American researchers have noted that toxic waste has been disposed of near areas inhabited by black communities. They have named this practice of exposing racial minorities to environmental dangers 'environmental racism.'[36]

Such analyses form part of an emergent field of ecocritical thought that seeks to account for the place of race and empire in current understandings of pollution, and other forms of environmental disaster, as colonial in orientation.[37] In his analysis of air pollution in contemporary urban India, D. Asher Ghertner has noted how the postcolonial present – what he terms India's "postcolonial atmosphere" – is shaped by "a set of environmental sensibilities

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[31] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography", *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002), 15–24

[32] Vasudevan, "An Intimate Inventory", p. 11.

[33] Ibid., p. 11.

[34] Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016), 166–173.

[35] Vasudevan, p. 17.

[36] Cited in Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux, "Colonialism: the Hidden Cause of Our Environmental Crisis," *World Crunch*, 14 February 2020, https://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/colonialism-the-hidden-cause-of-our-environmental-crisis [accessed 28 June 2022].

[37] See Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021).

and dispositions" from the colonial period that significantly "impair public health today."[38] Thus, for Ghertner, to read for "air's coloniality" means seeing "the atmospheric afterlives of imperialism" because these afterlives shape the unequal access that many poor and lower-caste present-day Indians experience in procuring health assistance for, and protection from, growing air pollution and pollution-related illness in the country's urban areas.[39]

Ghertner's insights parallel Farhana Sultana's observations in "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality" (2023). As Sultana puts it in this forthcoming article, environmental disaster is colonial in orientation because

> the disproportionate burden of climate change is falling on formerly colonized and brutalized racialized communities in the developing world. We are still colonized, but this time through climate change.[40]

Sultana draws our attention, then, to the unevenness that characterises the "racial ecologies" to which Vasudevan refers. She also shows how climate change and environmental disaster reproduce forms of colonial violence into the contemporary era because, for racialised communities, "the coloniality of climate seeps through everyday life" as well as "across space and time."[41] Climate change is marked, then, by what Ferdinand terms "a double fracture" that is both colonial and environmental in form and outcome.[42]

Focusing on the uneven experience of global environmental crisis, this chapter is interested in mapping new directions in the gothic through analysis of world-literary texts in which the site of gothic terror becomes reconfigured and located in atmospheric racism. To do so, I chart the evolving politics and aesthetics of racial toxicity by focusing on the mobilisation of atmospheric terror in the writings of Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and Nigerian author Ben Okri. In particular, I am here interested in drawing out the aesthetic connections of claustrophobia and suffocation between Césaire's 1939 epic book-length poem *Notebook of a*

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[38] D. Asher Ghertner, "Postcolonial Atmospheres: Air's Coloniality and the Climate of Enclosure," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 5 (2021),1483-1502 (1496).
[39] Ghertner, "Postcolonial Atmospheres," p. 1497.
[40] Farhana Sultana, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality, *Political Geography*, forthcoming.
[41] Sultana, "The Unbearable Heaviness," forthcoming.
[42] Cited in Kodjo-Grandvaux, Colonialism: the Hidden Cause of Our Environmental Crisis," online.

Return My Native Land (*Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*)[43] with Okri's 1988 short-story "In the City of Red Dust." Césaire's *Notebook of a Return the Native Land* (hereafter *Notebook*) traces the return of the poem's speaker to the Martinican city of Fort-de-France after he has been away in Europe. Upon his return, the poem's narrator sees in the town a devastating inertia and a loss of conscientisation in the colonised. The "inert town"[44] and the inability of its people to express themselves represent the real condition of French colonisation, which makes impossible any form of redemption, for the suffocating conditions of colonial Fort-de-France render mute the voice of the multitude. Okri's "In the City of Red Dust", meanwhile, centres on the story of two friends, Emokhai and Marjomi, who, like Césaire's 'inert' multitude, exist in a state of deprivation and atrophy. While Césaire's city is caught in the stranglehold of 1940s French Vichy-ruled fascism, the city in Okri's story is shackled to the Nigerian state's reliance on oil to grow the postcolonial economy. In Okri's story, ongoing forms of (neo)colonialism and racial violence are produced in the unnamed 'red city' through the predation of the late twentieth-century global petroleum market.

In contrast, then, to my previous chapters, here I focus neither on the mine or field, nor on the household or domestic unit. Rather, I look to *Notebook* and "In the City of Red Dust" to foreground the oppressive infrastructures and air-borne violences that obtain within the (post)colonial city's suffocating walls. It is important to point out here that my focus on the city does not suggest a move away from the commodity frontier. Indeed, it is worth emphasising that the city (much like the home) is, in fact, an expression of the frontier. This is particularly true in the case of Caribbean metropoles. According to the Cuban novelist and critic Antonia Benitez-Rojo, "cities such as Kingston, Bridgetown, Georgetown, Cayenne

[43] Césaire's poem was originally published in 1939, although this edition is relatively less well-known than the revised 1947 and 1956 editions. These latter revisions typically provide the basis for the dominant English translations. The original 1939 text was only translated relatively late, in 2001. This edition is the one I am using, which was translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. The reason for this is that Eshleman and Smith's version includes an opening scene that is left out of the latter translations, and one which I find particularly instructive for the analysis that follows. Subsequent translations of the poem, such as A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman's 2013 version, leave out this opening scene, as do earlier translations, such as Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard's 1995 version. See *The Original 1939 Notebook of A Return to the Native Land: Bilingual Edition*, trans. by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013) as well as Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1995).

[44] Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return the Native Land,* trans. by Clayton Eshleman & Annette Smith (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001 [1939]), p. 3.

[and] Fort-de-France…had been built as Plantation ports."[45] These metropoles served, in other words, as extensions of the region's colonial sugar frontier since "the Plantation continued to exist and the region's cities still showed the marks of their recent slaveholding past."[46] The function of the city of Fort-de-France as plantation-appendage is captured particularly powerfully by Patrick Chamoiseau in his 1992 novel *Texaco*, in which the city is described as a space in which "all the sorrows of the great plantations came to a head:"

> All of that lonely blood, that godless pain, that work-like-an-ox against the floods of the wet season [. . .] ended up here in boucauts, in barrels, in parcels, to follow the sea routes inside a ship's hold after the magical unction of some fat account books.[47]

If Caribbean metropoles like Fort-de-France reproduced the material and ideological frameworks of the plantation through their built environments, then Nigerian cities were likewise constructed upon the commodity frontiers of palm oil, cocoa, groundnuts, and rubber. After all, Lagos and Port Harcourt had historically served as two of the most central port cities out of which human cargo was exported during the Atlantic slave trade. During the colonial era, these same slave-ports were reprocessed by the British protectorate largely for the purpose of exporting raw materials, particularly palm oil, which "acquired the distinction of being the export commodity to Britain that replaced its traffic in slaves."[48] Palm oil would undergird British Nigeria's rapid urban growth until the sector was eventually eclipsed by petroleum in the late 1970s. Thus, like Martinique, whose infrastructure and spatial organisation are the products of the demands of its colonial sugar plantations, many port-cities in contemporary Nigeria still retain the imprint of colonial-era urban infrastructure built to suit the demands of the primary commodity export economy.[49] Read together, Okri and Césaire's texts allow, then, for the interrogation of the commodity frontier from a slightly different angle, for they illustrate the perpetuation and reformulation of colonial forms of racialised violence premised upon the

[45] Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. by James E. Maraniss (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 66.
[46] Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island,* p. 67.
[47] Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 100.
[48] Janice Henderson and Daphne J. Osborne, "The Oil Palm in All Our Lives: How This Came About," *Endeavour* 24, no. 2 (2000), 63-68 (63).
[49] Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

commodity form, while also capturing how "the chokehold of colonisation"[50] is carried forward into the postcolonial city through contemporary iterations of environmental racism.

Cities, Jonathan Silver reminds us, have become increasingly central to understanding the politics of suffocation and its unequal racialised proliferation.[51] As the devastating death of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah shows, it is in cities that the effects of pollution-related illnesses and deaths are especially marked, particularly for racialised and poor populations. Yet, as Silver points out in his study of air pollution in sub-Saharan Africa cities, nowhere are these effects more palpable than in postcolonial urban centres. In "these arenas," says Silver,

> climate change draws together analytically and concretely new socioecological processes as a distinct, violent, and new phase of urbanization within the *longue durée* of racial capitalism and coloniality.[52]

In thinking about the (neo)colonialism of this global condition, Silver pushes us to consider how climate change cannot be understood "as a series of dramatic events;" rather it forms part of a long history in which violence is "disproportionately centred on the black body."[53] Thus, if "climate change is socioecological violence,"[54] then racialised postcolonial subjects feel its effects more powerfully and painfully than those living within nations that have not been subject to direct imperial domination.

In what follows, I bring together Fanon's descriptions of infrastructural violence and combat breathing with recent analyses that have emphasised colonialism as a set of contemporary and evolving socioecological relations. By comparing the representation of Césaire's 'inert town' with Okri's 'red city,' I aim to illustrate how present-day conditions of black bodily exposure to air-borne toxicity cannot be understood without recourse to the longer history of spatial enclosure and racial violence opened by colonial town-planning. To do so, I consider how these authors, while working in different literary mediums and across different periods and regions, draw on a gothic aesthetics of suffocation to give shape to the racist history

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[50] Gamal Abdel-Shehid and Zahir Kolia, "In Light of the Master: Re-reading Césaire and Fanon," *The CLR James Journal* 23 no. 1–2 (2017), 175–192 (177).

[51] Jonathan Silver, "Suffocating Cities: Climate Change as Social-Ecological Violence," in *Urban Political Ecology in the Anthropo-obscene*, ed, by Henrik Ernstson and Erik Swyngedouw (Arlington: Routledge, 2019), pp. 129-147 (p. 136).

[52] Silver, "Suffocating Cities," p. 136.

[53] Silver, p. 143.

[54] Ibid.

of toxic exposure, and, in the process, enable us to model a new analytic framework for understanding global environmental crisis as not only an ongoing colonial project but one that produces life and death unevenly.

A World of Confinement and Compartments: Reading Césaire with Fanon

Gothic aesthetics are everywhere in *Notebook*, though few scholars, if any, have described Césaire's poem in such terms. Rather, many have emphasised how Césaire's poetics are strongly influenced by French surrealism. Reflecting the centrality of this movement to the invention of his own voice and poetics, Césaire has himself described how "Surrealism provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for."[55] Although Césaire clearly emphasises the influence of surrealism on his own poetic style, others have argued that Césaire's writings also shaped the movement itself. Robin D.G Kelley has noted, for example, how both Césaire and his wife Suzanne were indebted to the surrealists for the development of their literary style and politics while simultaneously making their own mark upon surrealism through their marrying of modernism, African thought, and Marxism with surrealist devices and ideologies.[56] "Theirs," Kelley suggests,

> was a vision of freedom that drew on Modernism and a deep appreciation for pre-colonial African modes of thought and practice; it drew on Surrealism as the strategy of revolution of the mind and Marxism as revolution of the productive forces. It was an effort to carve out a position independent of all of these forces, a kind of wedding of Negritude, Marxism, and surrealism, and their collective efforts would have a profound impact on international surrealism.[57]

Yet Césaire makes use of gothic images throughout *Notebook*. To be sure, this is not to discount Césaire's use of the surrealist register; rather, we might think of his gothic vocabularies as forming part of this broader mode interested in the critique of rational thought, the celebration of the imagination, as well as magic and the occult.[58] After all, as scholars like Neil Matheson

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[55] See "aimé césaire: poetry, surrealism and négritude," *The Dalí,* n.d., https://thedali.org/exhibit/aime-cesaire-poetry-surrealism-and-negritude/ [accessed 10 August 2022].

[56] Robin D.G Kelley, "A Poetics of AntiColonialism," *Monthly Review* 51, no. 6 (1999), https://monthlyreview.org/1999/11/01/a-poetics-of-anticolonialism/ [accessed 13 September 2022].

[57] Kelley, "A Poetics of AntiColonialism," online.

[58] Gražina Subelytė, "Kurt Seligmann, Surrealism and the Occult," in *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics*, ed. by Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou, Daniel Zamani (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 151-170.

point out, "the surrealists discovered much on violence and evil within the Gothic that chimed with their own concerns."[59] Michael Löwy, too, draws our attention to the influence of gothic literature on the surrealist movement: "the surrealists," he writes, "shared a fascination with the Gothic novel."[60] Thus, there exists

> a strong affinity between surrealism and the gothic, where the gothic novel – the *roman noir* – is itself bathed in moonlight, pervaded by mystery, and permeated by the aura of nightlife and dream.[61]

In his description of the French colonisation of Fort-de-France, Césaire draws on a series of surreal devices that not only include the oneiric or 'dream-like', but which also evoke gothic images such as zombified bodies, ghostly apparitions, and devouring demons. In *Notebook*, the colonised are described as "ghosts [that] rise blue from alchemy from a forest of hunted beasts",[62] while the colonial state is like "a devil" that produces the death of the Antillean people "without sense or pity."[63] The poverty generated in the city by French colonisation is frequently equated in the poem with gothic forms of rot and immiseration. "Former times mak[e] me aware", says Césaire's speaker, "of my present poverty…a poverty rotting under the sun."[64] Staging the uneven development produced in Fort-de-France by colonial infrastructure, the city's French officials live in "arrogant houses", while the Antilleans must subsist in "cruel little house[s] whose demands panic the ends of [their] mouths."[65] Not only is the town riddled with "putrefaction"[66] and "the exacerbated stench of corruption,"[67] but it is also rendered in gothic vocabularies that stress its stagnation: "this inert town," laments the speaker, is "sinisterly stranded…in the mud of this bay."[68] Fort-de-France is caught, then, under a deep malaise and paralysis brought about by the "monstrous sodomies"[69] and "cannibalistic

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[59] Neil Matheson, *Surrealism and the Gothic: Castles of the Interior* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 3.
[60] Michael Löwy, "'The speaking flame': the Romantic connection," in *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, ed. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 81-92 (p. 85).
[61] Matheson, *Surrealism and the Gothic,* p. 3.
[62] Césaire, *Notebook*, p. 16.
[63] Ibid., p. 11 & 17.
[64] Ibid., p. 8 & 2.
[65] Ibid., p. 13.
[66] Ibid., p. 23.
[67] Ibid., p. 7.
[68] Ibid. p. 3.
[69] Ibid., p. 7.

cruelties"[70] of its colonial order, whose "greeds…hysterias [and] perversions" determine what the speaker describes as the city's "compass of suffering."[71]

If the poem is rife with gothic images of disease, misery, monsters, and cannibals, then its gothic aesthetics also include Césaire's turn to the aesthetics of confinement to showcase the city as a site of colonial enclosure. During Césaire's time of writing and living in Fort-de-France, Martinique was occupied by the fascist and racist Vichy regime, a proxy for the Nazi-controlled French government. "In the Caribbean," writes H. Adlai Murdoch,

> the colonies of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana were under the control of the Vichy regime from September 1940 to July 1943, a period characterized by scarcity and restrictions on civil liberties, and with this grim leadership personified by its leader, Admiral Georges Robert.[72]

Historically, fascism emerged as a reaction against socialism and the left, in particular against the threat from the Italian communist revolution that took place during the early part of the twentieth century.[73] Attempts by the Vichy regime to combat socialism in World War II France included

> an authoritarian vision for the future of France that severely curtailed democratic Republican liberties, effaced political pluralism and looked to build an ethnically homogenized nation in the sense that white, Christian French would be at the head of a racial hierarchy.[74]

While nearly all of 1940s France underwent a turn towards the ideology of "masculine and martial values of order, hierarchy and discipline,"[75] French fascism would be most powerfully experienced in its colonies, in particular by its colonised black populations, which were violently subjected to "Vichy's conception of racial hierarchy within the overseas empire."[76] According to Martin Thomas,

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[70] Ibid., p. 37.
[71] Ibid., p. 49.
[72] H. Adlai Murdoch, "The Language(s) of Martinican Identity: Resistance to Vichy in the Novels of Raphaël Confiant," *L'Esprit Créateur* 47, No. 1 (2007), 68-83 (69).
[73] Chris Millington, *A History of Fascism in France: From the First World War to the National Front* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), p. 4.
[74] Millington, *A History of Fascism in France,* pp. 10 – 11.
[75] Millington, p. 11.
[76] Martin Thomas, "The Vichy Government and French Colonial Prisoners of War, 1940-1944, *French Historical Studies* 25, No, 4 (2002), 657-692 (658).

> The Vichy regime adopted a racialist worldview, as its existence was predicated first on coexistence, then on collaboration, with the Nazi racial order…parti colonial imperialists and liberal colonial reformers applied the social Darwinian concept of a 'struggle for life' among races to justify French colonial rule. The parti colonial imperialists explicitly championed the superiority of French racial stock.[77]

Thus, Vichy-imposed racially determined policies were particularly painfully felt by its black subjects. In colonial Martinique, the Vichy regime oversaw the implementation of "discriminatory government policies that coupled with the economic hardship of wartime", thereby "instil[ing] a regime of fear and deprivation" across the island.[78] These effects, in the words of Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, "raised the spectre of a return to slavery in the Antilles," because the French occupation of Martinique ensured the "systematic dismantling of the modest gains in political rights that the island's Black population had made since the abolition of slavery."[79]

These, then, are bleak realities that afford us entry into *Notebook*'s gothic vocabularies, which symbolically express the renewed rounds of racialised oppression and discipline that French fascism set in motion in Martinique during "the époque Robert."[80] It is important to point out here that Martinique also functioned during this time as a literal site of entrapment and isolation. As Murdock continues, "while there were varied consequences of this series of events in the French colonies…the island of Martinique was uniquely isolated during this time."[81] Not only was "any semblance of Caribbean calm completely disrupted and replaced by feelings of fear and displacement by French fascism but Martinique itself was also isolated by a blockade."[82] "On the 28th of June 1940,"

> the Governor General of Trinidad and the British West Indies met with Admiral Robert to request British control of the Antilles. Rebuffed by Robert, the British thereafter instituted a naval blockade against Martinique as part of their efforts to keep the French navy from falling into German hands.[83]

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77 Thomas, "The Vichy Government, p. 658.

78 Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, "World War II and the Rise of Feminism in Martinique," *French Colonial History* 20 (2021) 99-118 (99).

79 Joseph-Gabriel, "World War II and the Rise of Feminism in Martinique," p. 100.

80 Murdock, p. 70

81 Ibid., p. 69.

82 Ibid.

83 Kristen Stromberg Childers, "The Second World War as a Watershed in the French Caribbean," *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 4 (2012), 409-430 (415).

Like the renewed oppressions advanced by the Vichy regime, the British naval encirclement of the Antilles had a devastating impact on its black population, who suffered both extreme "privations during the war,"[84] and "quotidian racism" at the hands of "French sailors who were on extended shore leave at the time due to the Allied blockade of the island."[85] In this sense, the poem's turn to a gothic lexicon can be said to mediate not only the feelings of 'disruption', 'fear' and 'privations' circulating in Martinique during this time; it also gives expression to the wholesale isolation of the island itself.

The poem opens, significantly, at "the end of day break,"[86] metaphorically signalling the illumination of Fort-de-France's spatial isolation to the poem's speaker. Particularly evocative in this sense is the confrontation with which the poem opens, which details the 'beating back' by the speaker of a colonial official who attempts to deny him access to the city:

> Beat it, I said to him, you cop, you lousy pig, beat it.
> I detest the flunkies of order and the cock-chafers of hope.
> Beat it, evil grigri, you bedbug of a petty monk.[87]

These lines directly reference the everyday racism experienced by the Antilleans from French sailors docked on the island, and thus illustrate how Césaire's aesthetics of enclosure also capture and refer to the real-life isolation of Martinique under French fascism. As such, Césaire's controlled and racist city supplements the tropes of confinement common to the gothic genre, for Fort-de-France's literal isolation gives new meaning to traditional gothic locations such as "the castle, the convent [and] the underground passage"[88] which typically express desertion or remoteness.[89]

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[84] Childers, "The Second World War as a Watershed in the French Caribbean," p. 415.
[85] Joseph-Gabriel, p. 100.
[86] Césaire, p. 2.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Matheson, *Surrealism and the Gothic*, p. 2.
[89] It should be noted, however, that for leading proponents of créolité, particularly for authors like Confiant Raphaël, the terror of the blockade in fact opened something of an opportunity for renewed anti-colonial forms of resistance and identity. As H. Adlai Murdock argues, "conditions in the francophone islands resembled a state of siege, a material and symbolic conjoining of the forces of colonization and occupation. This doubled political presence would mark, in a sense, the first stirrings of a nascent Martinican creole identity grounded in independence and resistance." See H. Adlai Murdoch, "The Language(s) of Martinican Identity: Resistance to Vichy in the Novels of Raphaël Confiant," *L'Esprit Créateur* 47, No. 1 (2007), 68-83 (72). Kara M. Rabbit likewise suggests that "World War II Martinique, in particular, politically and economically isolated by an American

But like surrealism, which has long been seen as "pledging allegiance" with "anti-colonial activities" and as "contributing to a plethora of anti-colonial movements across the Global South,"[90] Césaire's gothic tropes of entrapment also elucidate and make possible a critique of the violent forms of urban spatial planning enforced by Martinique's French occupation. In this, the speaker's encounter with the French navy official outside the city is particularly significant, since it reminds him that Fort-de-France is a city caught under the omniscient eye of the coloniser – "this town," says the speaker, is "surveyed night and day by a cursed venereal sun."[91] Not only do these opening lines directly refer to the obsessive surveillance and control that characterised the ideologies of the French extreme right, but they also recall Fanon's critique of the role played by colonial officials in enforcing urban segregation. "If we examine closely this system of compartments," writes Fanon,

> we will be able to reveal the lines of force it implies…The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression.[92]

As the opening lines of *Notebook* make clear, the colonial segregation of urban space also "heralds an irreconcilable conflict between colonizer and colonized."[93] Gesturing to Fanon's insistence that "no conciliation is possible"[94] between the native and the settler under infrastructural segregation, Césaire's poem opens by staging the combat that takes place between a French navy official and the poem's speaker.[95]

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blockade of its Vichy government, witnessed a contrasting cultural experience of cross-fertilization and new growth. This period marked the beginning of a new Martinican literature, whose content was – far from exotic – the complex reality and history of this space its writers inhabited." Kara M. Rabbit, "Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature," *The French Review* 79, no. 3 (2006), 538-548 (539).

[90] Natalya Lusty, "Introduction: Surrealism's Critical Legacy," in *Surrealism*, ed. by Natalya Lusty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 1-28 (p. 26).

[91] Césaire, p. 2.

[92] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 37.

[93] Stefan Kipfer, "Fanon and Space: Colonization, Urbanization, and Liberation from the Colonial to the Global City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007) 701– 26 (709).

[94] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 39

[95] As mentioned earlier, this scene is left out of the original, but included in the translation which I am using. This scene, I would argue, is absolutely central to understanding the connections that obtain not only between the city and the role played by its colonial officials in enforcing urban segregation, but also between Fanon and Césaire's writings more generally.

Many critics have noted the connections and influences that obtain between Fanon and Césaire's writings. "Césaire's ethical sensibility concerning freedom and transformation," write Gamal Abdel-Shehid and Zahir Kolia "had a major role in shaping Fanon's thought."[96] As is well known, Césaire was Fanon's teacher in the Lycée and "the first one to introduce Fanon to something other than seeing one's self as French."[97] Illustrating the influence of his teacher on his critique of the French colonisation of Algeria, Fanon frequently cites Césaire in his writings when he makes a claim for the conscientisation of the 'natives.' "Political education," writes Fanon, "means opening the natives' minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence; as Césaire said, it is 'to invent souls'."[98] Thus, "Fanon's devotion to Césaire is evident in Fanon's work" to the extent that "Fanon is often rewriting Césaire's work in other places."[99] Although many have focused on the influence of Césaire's philosophical writings on Fanon's own, and indeed on the discrepancies between the two in terms of their disagreements on the politics of the Négritude movement and Césaire's eventual espousal of departmentalism,[100] less attention has been paid to the connections that Fanon makes between racial violence and colonial infrastructure and those which animate the confining aesthetics of Césaire's poem. In fact, only a handful of scholars have noted how Césaire's frequent descriptions in *Notebook* of Fort-de-France as "inert" and "toppled from its common sense"[101] directly recall Fanon's writings in the first chapter of *Wretched*, in which he describes colonisation as a process of producing paralysis and stagnation in the colonised. Fanon's descriptions of the body of the native as "bogged down in fruitless inertia"[102] refer, as Abdel-Shehid and Kolia note, "to the stupor-like condition of the colonised under the chokehold of colonialism."[103]

As these critics suggest, Fanon's analysis of colonisation pivots on the asphyxiating processes – or to use Fanon's phrase, 'atmospheres' – enabled by colonial urban planning. Fanon famously argues that colonialism manifests as Manichaean spatial demarcation:

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[96] Gamal Abdel-Shehid and Zahir Kolia, "In Light of the Master: Re-reading Césaire and Fanon," *The CLR James Journal* 23 no. 1–2 (2017), 175–192 (175).
[97] Abdel-Shehid and Kolia, "In Light of the Master," p. 177.
[98] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 197.
[99] Abdel-Shehid and Kolia, p. 177.
[100] See Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, trans. by Nadia Benabid (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).
[101] Césaire, p. 3.
[102] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 109.
[103] Abdel-Shehid and Kolia, p. 179.

> The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity… they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.[104]

Urbanisation or city-planning, then, is no passive or neutral process; indeed, as Césaire puts it, "*no one colonizes innocently*."[105] This is not, however, to suggest that Fanon's and Césaire's contexts are analogous. Fanon, after all, was referring specifically to French-occupied Algeria, whose colonisation took a different shape to that of Martinique, even as both regions were simultaneously subjected to French rule. It is important to point out, then, that I am not making a claim for a homogenisation of the differences between the Caribbean and Africa under French occupation. Indeed, the intrusion of colonial forces into existing settlements in north Africa was markedly different to the Caribbean's colonisation, which involved not only the near-wholesale elimination of its indigenous peoples, but which also resulted in the creation of settlements dominated by white settlers and imported enslaved and indentured populations.

In light of these differences, it is remarkable that so much of what Fanon says about Algeria's colonisation and its urban infrastructures resonates not only with the colonial world in general, but particularly with colonial cities like Fort-de-France. We might reflect, for example, on Fanon's more general points about colonial infrastructure as a political procedure of enforcing segregation and subsequent 'immobilisation' in the colonised. As Fanon insists,

> to get an idea of the rigor with which the immobilizing of the native city, or the autochthonous population, is organized, one must have in one's hand the plans according to which a colonial city has been laid out.[106]

Fanon points out, then, how colonial city-planning produces both infrastructural *and* social divisions. Indeed, while Fanon famously describes French-occupied Algeria as "a world cut in two [and] divided into compartments," he also emphasises how the colonial city is "inhabited by two different species."[107] "This approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical layout," Fanon continues, "mark[s] out the lines on which the colonized society is organized."[108] The point Fanon makes, therefore, is that the infrastructural segregations

[104] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 38.
[105] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1972]), p. 39.
[106] Fanon, *Wretched,* p. 52.
[107] Ibid., p. 38.
[108] Ibid.

enabled by colonial processes of urbanisation are as formative to the production of the divisions between 'settler' and 'native' as they are to the production of racial difference itself.

The spatial terminology of French colonisation is central to Fanon's discussion of everyday racism in *Black Skin/White Masks*. For Fanon, the division produced by colonisation between black and white, settler and native, is a form of "everyday separation" whereby both coloniser and colonised are "walled in" by their skin.[109] "The white man," says Fanon, "is sealed in his whiteness and the black man in his blackness."[110] Fanon views the condition of colonisation, then, as a form of epidermal confinement, and one that replicates colonial infrastructural segregation. The skin of the native here becomes the site in which the infrastructural inequities of the colonial city-space are replicated, as these divisions are re-inscribed through the social hierarchies of black and white; settler and native; coloniser and colonised. Thus, the racialisation of space serves as the dialectical other of race-making. This makes anonymity impossible for the black subject, for the process of producing race is achieved by putting "Black bodies in space."[111] This process renders it impossible for the black subject "to escape bodily confinement" in much the same way that the black subject's claim and access to the city is controlled by the segregations and surveillances produced by colonial infrastructure.[112]

The confining violence of the colonial city is central to *Notebook.* Indeed, as we have seen, much of the poem's gothic 'atmosphere' centres on metaphors that illuminate the choking conditions of Fort-de-France under the French authoritarian regime, whose "crepuscular surroundings" produce what the speaker describes as a "disparate stranding."[113] Mirroring the "sprawled flat" image of the city itself, "life" here is rendered "prostrate."[114] Like Fanon's emphasis on the strangulation of colonial urbanisation as producing the subject of race, Césaire's poem expresses the condition of colonisation as a form of spatial demarcation and racial violence. The speaker frequently evokes the city in terms that emphasise its infrastructural segregation and the colonial state's power of incarceration. In this, the return of the speaker to the 'native land' is essential, for his time away from the city enables him to comprehend these demarcations anew and therefore allows him to recognise how its spatial

[109] Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks,* p. 12.
[110] Ibid., p. 9.
[111] Kipfer, "Fanon and Space," p. 709.
[112] Kipfer, p. 709.
[113] Césaire, p. 2.
[114] Césaire, p. 13.

organisation is produced through surveillance and the force of external imposition. Here again we must return to Fanon, who explains how colonial cities

> are *deliberately caught in the conqueror's vise*…The colonizers have not settled in the midst of the natives. They have surrounded the native city; they have laid siege to it. Every exit…opens on enemy territory.[115]

Such forms of colonial confinement are expressed in Césaire's poem when his speaker enters the city and sees how the town is "winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross."[116] These geometric lines, which cut the city into a series of smaller units (or indeed, compartments), produce the ability of the coloniser to survey the town and render impossible the anonymity of the speaker's arrival in the city. They also lend to Fort-de-France its sense of atrophy and inertia, for its "sprawled-flat" character further underscores its docility:

> this town sprawled-flat, toppled from its common sense, inert,
> indocile to its fate, mute, vexed no matter what,
> incapable of growing with the juice of this earth,
> self-conscious, clipped, reduced[117]

The paralysis produced by colonial spatial planning is irreducible from the 'muteness' it engenders in the Antilleans, who seem 'zombified' – as though they are "liv[ing] in a dream."[118] Césaire uses the term "squalling throng" to describe these locals, who are made silent in ways that echo the urban atrophy produced by the "weight" of Fort-de-France's geometric segregations:

> this squalling throng so astonishingly
> detoured from its cry as this town has been
> from its movement, from its meaning
> not even worried, detoured from its true cry[119]

Thus, the city's layout becomes what Miguel Gualdrón Ramírez describes as "an ally of the oppressor," for the poem makes clear the complicity of colonial spatial organisation in the

[115] Fanon, *Wretched,* p. 52. My Italics.
[116] Césaire, p. 2.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., p. 11.
[119] Ibid., p. 4.

production of "the people's muteness and inert character."[120] Vital, in other words, to Césaire's portrayal of the 'mute throng' is the infrastructural construction of Fort-de-France itself. Césaire shows how infrastructural violence produces the alienation of the colonised both from the city and from themselves. Insurgence against the coloniser is therefore made impossible because the production of spatial segregation simultaneously produces a loss of conscientisation in the colonised. Recalling Fanon's formulation of the native town as "a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire,"[121] Césaire's speaker laments how "this town fits me to a t/ And my soul is lying down/Lying down like this town in its refuse and mud."[122]

In place of the cry of insurrection against colonisation, "the real cry" of the multitude becomes "detoured" from "revolt"[123] towards the expression of their deprivation. Like the city, which "crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with/a stature of protest,"[124] the locals are described as a "squalling throng astonishingly detoured from its cry" in ways that parallel how the city has been disconnected "from its movement."[125] As the speaker continues, the cry of the masses has become a "cry of hunger, of poverty...of consumption [and] famines."[126] Thus, the inertia of the city and the muteness of the multitude come together to curtail the act of insurrection: mirroring the city, which lies "indocile to its fate," the masses are a "throng that does not know how to throng."[127] Like Fanon, then, Césaire sees infrastructural violence as inextricable from the process of racialisation, for he shows how the infrastructural inequities of the colonial metropole are replicated in the process of black bodily confinement and its attendant denials of freedom through mass impoverishment and other forms of atrophy – what the speaker terms "the awful futility of our raison d'être."[128]

In this, the poem's turn to the poetics of paralysis is particularly striking because it illustrates how "in the colonial world, spatial relations are characterized by a peculiar form of

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[120] Miguel Gualdrón Ramírez, "To 'stay where you are' as a decolonial gesture: Glissant's philosophy of Antillean space in the context of Césaire and Fanon," in *Memory, Migration and (De)Colonisation in the Caribbean and Beyond,* ed. by Jack Webb et al (London: University of London Press, 2019), pp. 133–51 (p. 138).
[121] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 39.
[122] Césaire, p. 36.
[123] Ibid., p. 12.
[124] Ibid., p. 12.
[125] Ibid., p. 2.
[126] Ibid., p. 5.
[127] Ibid., p. 4.
[128] Ibid., p. 3.

stasis."[129] Recognisable in Césaire's quasi-gothic descriptions of the Antilleans' 'zombification', in other words, are many of Fanon's points about the stagnation produced in the colonised by colonial spatial relations. As Fanon puts it, the colonial world is

> a *motionless*, Manicheistic world, a world of statues…the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge; a world which is sure of itself…this is the colonial world. The native is a being hemmed in…The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. [130]

In *Notebook*, these statues are supplemented by the watchful eyes of Fort-de-France, which is "surveyed night and day by a cursed venereal sun."[131] Such forms of surveillance produce in its people a statue-like immobility that not only marks the curtailment of the speaker's movement but also brings into being an impasse in the quest for a postcolonial future, for the "voice" of insurrection "gets lost in the swamp of hunger."[132]

Thus, the poem comes to act as an urgent paean for the reanimation of its inert people through the giving of voice to the "unvoiced"[133] masses. Eschewing the stifled cry that characterises the first section of the poem, the second half of *Notebook* marks the cry's full release. Now, "screams erupt from the mute earth" and the "gagged" mouth of the mass opens and begins "to tell…sing…howl."[134] "Suddenly now," continues the speaker,

> strength and life assail me like a bull and
> the water of life overwhelms the papilla of the morne,
> now all the veins and veinlets are bustling with new blood
> and the enormous breathing lung of cyclones and the fire
> horded in volcanoes and the gigantic seismic pulse
> which now beats the measure of a living body
> in my firm conflagration[135]

In contrast to the speaker's earlier emphasis on the city's poverty and atrophy, he begins to celebrate the ferocity and animated character of the Martinican landscape, illustrating how the

[129] Kipfer, p. 710.
[130] Fanon, *Wretched,* p. 51-52. My emphasis.
[131] Césaire, p. 2.
[132] Ibid., p. 6.
[133] Ibid., p. 12.
[134] Ibid., p. 21.
[135] Ibid., p. 50.

"enormous breathing lung" of the cyclone comes to supplant and render alive "the restrained conflagration of the morne."[136] Henceforth, the speaker provides the reader with numerous celebrations of Martinique's local flora and fauna, which return to him the pride that had been previously foreclosed:

> But what strange pride suddenly illuminates me!
> let the hummingbird come
> let the sparrow hawk come
> the breach in the horizon
> the cynocephalus
> let the lotus bearer of the world come
> the pearly upheaval of dolphins cracking the shell of the sea
> let a plunge of islands come[137]

Thus, the Antillean landscape provides Césaire's speaker with an impetus towards the un-muting of the multitude. In this sense, the poem works within a broader tradition of Caribbean writing and thought that has looked to the irruptive power of the Caribbean landscape as signalling the possibility of breaking free from the historical yoke of slavery and colonisation. Indeed, much of what is described by Césaire in the above extract can be seen at work in the writings of Édouard Glissant, whose theories on Caribbean consciousness have long been shown to be strongly influenced by Césaire.[138]

In *Le discours antillais* (1981), Glissant refuses the balkanisation of the Caribbean by US imperialism by asserting that "the Caribbean sea is not a lake of the United States. It is the estuary of the Americas."[139] Glissant reiterates this point later in *Poetics of Relation* (1997),

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[136] Ibid., p. 5.

[137] Ibid., p. 31.

[138] Glissant is often thought to have been one of Césaire's pupils. Yet, unlike Fanon, Glissant was not directly taught by Césaire. Rather, Glissant "was a disciple and fellow countryman of the poet Aimé Césaire, who founded the Negritude movement to promote an African culture free of all colonial influences.". See "Édouard Glissant Martinican author," *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edouard-Glissant [accessed 19 September 2022]. It is also worth pointing out that, like Fanon, Glissant was critical of Césaire's eventual political policies. See Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[139] Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais*. Cited in Michael Niblett, "The Arc of the 'Other America': Landscape, Nature, and Region in Eric Walrond's Tropic Death," in *Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture,* ed. by Michael Niblett and Kerstin Oloff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 50-72 (p. 52). The phrase quoted here is

when he refuses the characterisation of the Caribbean sea as the "American Mediterranean" by emphasising the regional specificity of this body of water, which "encompasses the Caribbean and its surrounding rimlands, from the Carolinas down to the Guyanas."[140] Gesturing to the "distinctive typography" of the Caribbean region, as well as offering it as a site of "cultural crossing,"[141] Glissant writes that the Caribbean sea

> has always been a place of encounter and connivance, and at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent. Compared to the Mediterranean, which is an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates...the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc.[142]

Thus, Glissant highlights the specificities elicited by the sea in this region of the world, which provide as much for the rejection of external American interference as it does for the formulation of a Caribbean consciousness premised on the particularities of the Caribbean natural world and its unique typographies.

Like Glissant, then, Césaire's delineation of the Antillean landscape provides the impetus from which anti-colonial forms of resistance spring. In this sense, the poem can be said to anticipate latter forms of Caribbean writing predicated on the black subject's reappropriation of the extra-human world. After all, the Caribbean landscape, as Guyanese author and critic Wilson Harris explains, has long served "as source of both cultural and linguistic regeneration" for postcolonial writers from this region.[143] "Where the human animal understands his genius," continues Harris,

> he roots it in the creature, in the forest, in the trees, in other words in the language which we *are* and which we acquired, not only from our mother's lips but also from the sound of the rain falling, from the sigh of the leaves, from the music of the earth as we pressed on it, that crackled under our feet. All those sounds are threaded into language of the imagination that incarnates or realizes itself through diverse cradles into the birth and the mystery of creativity.[144]

Niblett's own translation of the original French, "Lar mer des Antilles n'est pas le lac des Etats-Unis. C'est l'estuaire des Amériques".

[140] Niblett, "The Arc of the 'Other America'," p. 52.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 33.

[143] Wilson Harris, *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks*, ed by Alan Riach and Mark Williams (Liege: Liege Language and Literature, 1992), p. 78.

[144] Harris, *The Radical Imagination,* p. 78.

Thus, like Harris and Glissant, Césaire sees in the local landscape an opportunity for the realisation of a language and form of imagination rooted in Caribbean regional specificity. As such, Cesaire's celebration of the Antilles can be said to 'set the stage' for later forms of postcolonial Caribbean writing predicated on the specificity of the region's environment.

Crucial here is Césaire's emphasis on the *vocalisation* that this process makes possible. Reflecting how the process of voicing is directly linked to the embedding of the Antilleans into the Martinican landscape, Césaire frequently illustrates how the natural world provides a source of language and inspiration for the muted multitude:

> Mulish reason you will not stop me from casting on the waters
> at the mercy of the currents of my thirst
> your form, deformed islands,
> your end, my defiance.
> Annulose islands, single beautiful hull
>
> And I caress you with my oceanic hands. And I turn you
> around with the tradewinds of my speech.
> And I lick you with my seaweed tongues.[145]

Hereafter the speaker's previous use of the I pronoun comes to include the collective 'we': "*We* would tell. Would sing. Would howl/Full voice, ample voice."[146] But these celebratory gestures toward the Caribbean archipelago do not merely unravel the speaker's tongue and make him able to "tremble with the collective"[147]. They also reconfigure the historical saturation of the region by what Harris terms "the traumas of conquest."[148] Indeed, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey has observed, postcolonial Caribbean writing has long been inflected by a 'poetics of landscape,' which has served to recuperate the "continuous" ruptures produced between "human relationships to place" by the colonial conquest and its subsequent transformation of Caribbean land.[149] Given this history, "imagining a new relation to the place beyond colonial violence," continues DeLoughrey, "has been vital to the growth of national literatures in the

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[145] Césaire, p. 48.
[146] Ibid., p. 22.
[147] Ibid., p. 38.
[148] Wilson Harris, *The Whole Armour (*London: Faber & Faber. Harris 1968), p. 8.
[149] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Ecocriticism: The Politics of Place," in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. By Michael A. Bucknor, Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 265-275 (p. 265).

Caribbean."[150]

While Deloughrey is referring specifically to the poetics of place as showcased in a range of postcolonial Caribbean literatures, the central tenet of her argument holds true in the case of Césaire's poem. Indeed, if the (re)imagination of landscape and extra-human nature has been central to the production of *national literatures* in the postcolonial Caribbean region, then *Notebook* showcases how the landscape is central to the emergence of the *national movement* against the French colonisation of Martinique. In this sense, the poem's claim for conscientisation of the colonised is not so much premised on a claim to the city *per se*. Rather, what animates the poem's process of insurrection, and thus the release of its 'cry,' is the unique quality of the Caribbean archipelago, in particular, its eruptive and volatile character, which stands in direct opposition to the city and its colonial inhabitants' paralysis and 'zombification'. It is the landscape of the Antilles, then, that provides the inspiration for the un-muting and re-animation of 'the natives of the land,' and, in so doing, catalyses the beginnings of insurrection against the chokehold of colonisation itself.

"Combat Breathing": *Notebook* and the Cry of Négritude

Countless critics have noted how Césaire's *Notebook* functions as a celebration of Négritude. Négritude names an early twentieth century black consciousness movement that aimed to reinvigorate pride in black African identity, and thus served as a means of countering the 'inferior' status accorded to the black subject via the colonial imaginary of African 'barbarity'. According to Reiland Rabaka,

> Instead of Africa being a source of embarrassment, the burgeoning Négritude Movement, much like the radicals of the Harlem and Haitian Renaissances before them, looked to Africa as a source of inspiration and civilization.[151]

The concept of Négritude provided a way, in other words, to oppose the assimilation of black subjects into colonial ways of being, particularly French forms of identity and belonging. "All through the Négritude theorists' young lives", continues Rabaka, "they had primarily thought of themselves as 'French,'" but this changed with their exposure to the politics and poetry of the New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance, which launched the "discovery of

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[150] DeLoughrey, "Ecocriticism: The Politics of Place," p. 266.

[151] Reiland Rabaka, T*he Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 152.

themselves as African or noir.[152] Thus, "the assertion of Black pride by members of the Négritude movement was attended by a cry against assimilation," because assimilation, "while theoretically based on a belief in universal equality…still assumed the superiority of European culture and civilization over that of Africa (or assumed that Africa had no history or culture)."[153]

Césaire is considered by many as the founding father of Négritude, along with other black Francophones like French Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas and Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor. In fact, not only is the rise of this movement often attributed to Césaire, but the term 'Négritude' was originally coined by Césaire in *Notebook.*[154] According to Césaire, Négritude names the "simple recognition of the fact that one is black, the acceptance of this fact and of our destiny as blacks, of our history and culture."[155] While Négritude centres on the shared theme of black African self-determination and black pride, is it important to point out that it is not a homogeneous movement. This is especially true in terms of the differing views taken by the Négritude theorists on the reappropriation of the black Francophone's African origins. Rabaka notes, for example, that the multiplicity of this movement necessitates the naming of different forms of Négritude; thus, to speak of "Césairean Négritude" is to illustrate the differences that pertain to other forms of Francophone black consciousness such as "Damasian Négritude," Fanonion Négritude," and "Senghorian Négritude."[156]

Césaire is known for espousing a particular form of Négritude grounded in the solidarity of the black African world. As Césaire describes it, Négritude marks "the reappropriation of ourselves by ourselves."[157] This is a process that necessitates what Césaire envisions as the black subject's return to their African origins via

> going back to the birth of humanity...back to the banks of the Niger [and] into Ethiopia [for this enables] the deepening of our past by ourselves, of re-rooting ourselves in a history, a geography, a culture, all interpreted not as a

[152] Rabaka *The Negritude Movement*, p. 155.

[153] "The Negritude Literary Movement," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/art/Negritude [accessed 18 July 2022].

[154] "The Negritude Literary Movement," online.

[155] "A Brief Guide to Negritude," in *Poets.Org*, 23 May 2004, https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-negritude [accessed 17 July 2022].

[156] Rabaka *The Negritude Movement*, p. 155.

[157] Césaire, *Discours sur la Négritude*. Cited in Keith Louis Walker, "Anténor Firmin, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire: In Search of Africa and Ourselves," *L'Esprit Créateur* 56, no. 1 (2016), 129–144 (136).

> backwardlooking accent on the past, but as a reactivation of the past in order to overtake it.[158]

Césairean Négritude calls, then, for the black subject to "unapologetically embrace re-Africanization" in order to re-associate both Antillean geographical landscapes and cultures with African histories and cultural forms, a process that Césaire terms "Africanité and Antillanité."[159]

In *Notebook*, Césaire's commitment to showcasing the Antillean subject's African heritage is advanced through his many references to the Middle Passage and the interconnections that the slave trade opened between the African continent and the Americas:

> And my non-fence island,
> its brave audacity standing at the stern of this polynesia, before it,
> Guadeloupe, split in two down its dorsal line and equal in poverty to us,
> Haiti where Négritude rose for the first time and stated
> that it believed in its humanity and the funny tail of Florida
> where the strangulation of a [black man] is being completed,
> and Africa gigantically caterpillaring up to the Hispanic foot of Europe,
> its nakedness where death scythes widely.[160]

Césaire here offers us a vision of a historical black cultural identity that stretches across the colonial world. Recognisable in these lines is Césaire's claim for the valorisation of (pan) African identity by showcasing the simultaneous submission of the African continent to French colonisers alongside Caribbean regions like Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Martinique. But these regions share not merely a history of French colonialisation and racial slavery; they are also bound by a shared legacy of insurrection. Indeed, as the above lines illustrate, it is Haiti that Césaire cites as the birthplace of Négritude, thus referencing the Haitian revolution and its revolutionary figurehead, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the only successful slave revolt in modern history. Indeed, Césaire's speaker later becomes modelled upon L'Ouverture, who as CLR James puts it, was a man famously "wedded to the masses."[161] This is echoed in Césaire's

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[158] Césaire, *Discours sur la Négritude*. Cited in Walker, "Anténor Firmin, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire," p. 136.
[159] Cited in Walker, "Anténor Firmin, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire," p. 127.
[160] Césaire, p. 19. 0
[161] James writes that, "If the army was the instrument of Toussaint's power, the masses were its foundation and his power grew with his influence over them". See CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1991 [1938]), p. 151.

portrayal of his speaker, who similarly begins to speak to, and on behalf of, the 'natives of the land' by the poem's conclusion.

Césaire again cites the necessity of revolutionary legacies through the image of his speaker standing on the deck of the slave ship, which reverses the capture and entombment of the black body in the slave hold:

> unexpectedly standing
> standing in the hold
> standing in the cabins
> standing on the deck
> standing in the wind
> standing under the sun
> standing in the blood
>   standing
>   and
>   free[162]

Here the speaker's connection to the African continent once more comes to the fore, for this standing position provides him with a line of vision that enables him to see across the Atlantic and thus also the connection between Africa and the broader Caribbean. Négritude requires, then, that the speaker both accept his blackness, as well as the legacy of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, for only then can he 'stand' and 'be free.' These legacies become the bedrock in which Césaire's grounds his speaker's developing black consciousness, for he now begins to see in this history a source of identity rooted in both the legacy of slavery and in historical revolutionary figures such as L'Ouverture. Self-determination requires, in other words, the acceptance of the black subject's historical (African) origins, which for Césaire, means first accepting these histories, for only then can his speaker reappropriate the expulsion of subjecthood that was central to the Middle Passage's process of reducing the black body to "a simple sum of its parts."[163]

Négritude also provides another way for the speaker to un-mute and de-pacify the colonised, for it gives to the masses "a voice that drills the night",[164] and thereby marks the

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[162] Césaire, p. 54.
[163] Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 43.
[164] Césaire, p. 50.

disruption of their previous voicelessness. Here, too, the process of vocalisation is grounded in a valorisation of blackness:

> I accept ... I accept ... totally, without reservation ...
> my race that no ablution of hyssop mixed with lilies could purify
> my race pitted with blemishes
> my race ripe grapes for drunken fee[165]

But Césaire's Négritude also foregrounds the forms of celebration to which I earlier referred. That is to say, he continually highlights the claim of the black subject to the local landscape by equating the masses' cry of revolt to the eruptive quality of Martinique's volcanic terrain:

> on this very fragile earth thickness exceeded
> in a humiliating way by its grandiose future --
> the volcanoes will explode, the naked water will
> bear away the ripe sun stains and nothing will
> be left but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds --
> the beach of dreams and the insane awakenings.[166]

As we have seen, Césaire's imagining of the development of a black Caribbean identity as taking inspiration from the eruptive landscape can be said to pave the way for latter forms of Caribbean writing committed to "a close connection between geography and cultural production."[167] Particularly significant to these literary mappings of the Caribbean landscape is the figure of the hurricane. As Sharae Deckard explains "The hurricane is almost over-determined in Caribbean literature as a figure signifying a social ecology…between humans and extra-human Caribbean nature whose particularity European poetics cannot capture."[168] Illustrating the hurricane's significance to the formation of non-European literary aesthetics, Gabriel García Márquez has famously argued that the prevalence of tropical storms in the Caribbean influenced his writing style, particularly his espousal of the 'magical real' register. "I believe," remarks Márquez,

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[165] Ibid., p. 46.
[166] Ibid., p. 3.
[167] Denise de Caires Narain, "Landscape and Poetic Identity in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry," *Ariel* 38, no. 2-3 (2007), 41-64 (42).
[168] Sharae Deckard, "The Political Ecology of Storms in Caribbean Literature," in *The Caribbean: aesthetics, world-ecology, politics*, ed. by Chris Campbell and Michael Niblett (Liverpool:Liverpool university Press, 2019), pp. 25-35.

> that the Caribbean showed me how to see reality in another way, to accept supernatural elements as something that forms part of our daily life…The human syntheses and contrasts in the Caribbean are not seen anywhere else in the world. I know all its islands…whose houses are destroyed by hurricanes.[169]

It is the specificity of the Caribbean landscape – and its particular ecological volatility – that gives rise, then, to modes of representation such as magical realism, which do not follow the prescribed logics of 'realist' or European cultural conventions.

Echoing Márquez, Kamau Braithwaite has famously made use of the hurricane to argue that the steady rhythms of the pentameter cannot give voice to the volatile geography of the Caribbean. As he puts it in *History of the Voice* (1984), "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters."[170] Like these writers, Césaire's poetics of landscape marks a commitment to the "rhythm of environmental experience,"[171] and one that is integral to the formation of Caribbean poetics. But Césaire's poetics also speak to the source of his Négritude, for while his poetic turn to the 'insane awakenings' of the volcanic archipelago likewise marks a literary anticipation of the "meteorological pulse"[172] that circulates through (post)colonial Caribbean literatures, it also facilitates the development of black consciousness itself. Thus, the poem becomes a means of fashioning a black Caribbean consciousness rooted in what Glissant would later term "a poetics of landscape."[173]

The emergence of Négritude also allows for the reformulation of the city's 'zombification'. As the poem progresses, Négritude becomes the absolute opposite of Fort-de-France's stone-like paralysis:

> My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against
> the clamor of the day
> my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's
> dead eye
> my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
> it takes root in the red flesh of the soil
> it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky
> it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience[174]

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[169] Cited in Deckard, "Political Ecology of Storms," pg. 28.
[170] Cited in Deckard, pg. 28.
[171] Deckard, p. 28.
[172] Ibid., p. 27.
[173] Édouard Glissant, *Introduction á une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
[174] Césaire, p. 41.

Freedom through Négritude thus comes from a claim to blackness that is based not only on an African heritage but also on a rejection of the city's colonial stasis in favour of the fervent quality of the Caribbean soil and sky. Here again, then, Césaire bridges the gap between the Caribbean self and the African past, while also re-affirming the specificity of the Antillean natural world as a site of literary imagination and insurrection. Indeed, as Césaire remarked in a 1977 interview, "mine is a telluric poetry: I am marked indisputably by the natural environment of Martinique."[175]

Yet, if Césaire's *Notebook* marks his allegiance to the particularity of the Martinican natural world, he also shows how the cry of Négritude is irreducible from the black subject's claim to *breath*. We have already seen how the poem makes frequent use of a gothic aesthetics of suffocation to describe French-occupied Fort-de-France and its consequent production of the confining paralysis on the colonised. Note, then, how these aesthetics are reassembled to illustrate how the speaker describes the cry of Négritude, here invoked through the metaphor of a sea crossing that enables him to "*invent his lungs*":

> There still remains one sea to cross
> oh still one sea to cross
>   that I may invent my lungs[176]

Négritude is a process which here parallels the breath taken by the "enormous lungs of cyclones,"[177] for it enables the speaker to reinvent his lungs in order to breath in (and out). It is in "the tepidity of [the] throat" that the cry of Négritude "ripens,"[178] for "we," says the speaker, "are [now] mumblers of words."[179] To claim Négritude is therefore not only to speak or become 'un-muted'; it is also to *claim a right to breath* and, in so doing, feel "the measure of a living body."[180] The cry of Négritude assumes a living, breathing intensity. Thus, its anti-colonial gestures involve the disruption of pervasive forms of "strangulation"[181] produced in the black subject by the inert colonised city. Négritude, in other words, is both the cry of revolt

[175] As cited in "Uncategorised," *Law Development Conflict*, n.d., https://lawdevelopmentconflict.com/category/uncategorized/ [accessed 12 July 2022].
[176] Césaire, p. 55.
[177] Ibid., p. 50.
[178] Ibid., p. 28.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid., p. 50.
[181] Ibid., p. 19.

and the "fraternal locus for all the breathing of the world."[182] Indeed, we might note here that Césaire's turn to the trope of breathing to contest the stranglehold of colonialism is not exclusive to *Notebook*; one of his lesser-known collections of poetry, first published in 1948, is entitled "*Soleil cou coupé*" – *Solar Throat Slashed*.[183]

In situating the process of breath-taking within systemic colonial conditions, my reading of Césaire is again anticipated by Fanon. In particular, my analysis draws on Fanon's formulation of the fight against colonisation as a form of 'combat breathing.' In fact, while Fanon and Césaire famously disagreed on the subject of Négritude (particularly in terms of what Fanon saw as the tendency of Négritude to essentialise black identity),[184] their invocations of the metaphor of asphyxiation to describe colonisation are startlingly in accord. In this, the emphasis that both Césaire and Fanon place on the process of insurrection as a fight for breath is especially crucial. Thus far, we have considered how Fanon's descriptions of colonial confinement find their release in Césaire's gothic aesthetics of entrapment, stasis, and surveillance. But equally significant to Fanon's mediations on colonial violence is its production of asphyxiation. As Fanon argues, the colonial city is not merely "*a world without spaciousness*,"[185] it is a world in which the native "lives in the atmosphere of doomsday".[186] In the atmosphere of colonisation, says Fanon, "the native perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness but as omnipresent death and the absence of any hope for the future."[187] Here, daily life becomes simply impossible because the colonised live in a "narrow world strewn with prohibitions", where conditions of being "hemmed in" and "smothered" give way to the act of living as a form of "combat breathing".[188] Like Fanon, then, Césaire shows how the continual repetition of breath required for life becomes a site of struggle, making breathing itself part of the fight to embrace life, voice, and therefore also conscientisation, in the asphyxiating city.

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182 Ibid., p. 41.

183 Aimé Césaire, *Soleil cou coupé* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

184 See Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, trans. by Nadia Benabid (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

185 Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 39.

186 Ibid., p. 81.

187 Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994 [1965]), 128.

188 Ibid., p. 39.

Nowhere is this battle for breath more powerfully inscribed than in the concluding lines of the poem, which centre on both the image of the unfurling of the tongue and on the refusal of the suffocation engendered by the act of drowning:

> and the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown
> it is there I will now fish the malevolent tongue of the night
> in its motionless veerition![189]

We might reflect here on Césaire's use of the neologism 'veerition,' which has been variously interpreted and translated as 'flick' or 'swirl.' These interpretations, as James Clifford points out in his analysis of Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith's translation, do not do full justice to the meaning of the word originally coined by Césaire himself, which was based "on a Latin verb, 'verri,' meaning 'to sweep,' 'to scrape a surface,' and ultimately 'to scan'."[190] Read in this way, this final line returns us not only to the quest for breath that characterises Césaire anti-colonial politics; it also speaks to the poetics of landscape found throughout the poem that pay tribute to the eruptive landscape of the Caribbean as breaking through the stasis imposed by the colonial ordering of space. Under these terms, combat breathing emerges as more than simply a generalised response to colonial rule; it is also a form of insurrection. In this sense, Césaire's cry for breath is as much an expression of black corporeal vulnerability as one of black bodily resilience rooted in the materiality of the Caribbean natural world. Thus, to release the cry of Négritude is to disrupt both the spatial schisms and inertias produced by colonial town-planning via the celebration of the Caribbean archipelago and to develop an understanding of freedom that simultaneously emerges from and refuses the chokehold of the colonial city.

Blood and Oil: Vampirism, Petroleum, and Postcolonial Predation in Okri

Many critics have noted the centrality of breath and asphyxiation to Fanon's writings. Indeed, recent years have witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in Fanon in order to showcase how his critique of colonialism can be made to resonate with contemporary conceptualisations of environmental racism. Romy Opperman has argued, for example, that although "it would be difficult to claim that Fanon was an environmentalist…commentators have found evidence of

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[189] Césaire, p. 57.

[190] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 177.

a sorely needed socioecological approach to racism and colonization in his work."[191] Of these commentators, Jennifer Wenzel's 'return' to Fanon has been particularly instructive. In "Reading Nature, Reading Fanon," (2016) Wenzel argues that "nature and natural resources are fundamental to Fanon's analysis of the historical processes that turned decolonization into continuing underdevelopment."[192] Not only is 'nature' formative to Fanon's critique of colonisation, but his concept of "national liberation entails reclaiming control over human and natural resources."[193]

In his description of European modernisation, Fanon reformulates Marx's notion of the metabolic rift in order to make it resonate with the colonial context. "This 'European opulence'," Fanon writes, "is literally scandalous,"

> for it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves and it comes directly from the soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world…Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories…The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too…Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries…From all these continents…there has flowed out for centuries toward that same Europe diamonds and oil, silk and cotton, wood and exotic products.[194]

Fanon shows, then, how the pillage of the colonies made possible the development of European modernity. In particular, as Wenzel notes, he draws "a link between captive labor and expropriated natural resources" by illustrating how these act as "twinned objects of colonial exploitation."[195] In Fanon's writings we thus find a powerful rendition of colonialism's socioecological relations, which provide an understanding of colonisation as a dual process of devaluation – of land and labour. These socioecological devaluations are what have enabled the development of European modernisation: "Europe," says Fanon, "is literally the creation of the Third World."[196] Colonialism's simultaneous degradation of land and labour are what

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[191] Romy Opperman, "A Permanent Struggle Against an Omnipresent Death: Revisiting Environmental Racism with Frantz Fanon," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 1 (2019), 57-80 (58).
[192] Jennifer Wenzel, "Reading Fanon, Reading Nature," in *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say*, ed. by Anna Bernard, Ziad Elmarsafy, and Stuart Murray (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 185-201 (p. 187).
[193] Wenzel, "Reading Fanon, Reading Nature," p. 187.
[194] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. Cited in Wenzel, Reading Fanon, Reading Nature," p. 188.
[195] Wenzel, p. 187.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. Cited in Wenzel, "Reading Fanon, Reading Nature," p. 188.

produce a structural inequality, in other words. By "mak[ing] Africa pay for the development of the First World,"[197] European colonisation ensured the underdevelopment of the very centres it relied on for its riches. Capturing the inextricable linkages that historical colonisation created between the extraction of human labour and extra-human natural resources, Fanon suggests that the fate of the colonised subject and the colonised environment form part of the same milieu:

> cutting railroads through the bush, draining swamps, and ignoring the political and economic existence of the native population are in fact *one and the same thing*…Colonization has succeeded only once nature has been brought under control.[198]

For Wenzel, it is precisely this critique that lends Fanon's theories a contemporary resonance. According to her, "Fanon's condemnation of centuries of underdevelopment remains timely in an age of resource wars and climate change."[199] Wenzel's argument hinges on Fanon's description of decolonisation, which, as she points out, reads starkly today. The reason for this is that Fanon calls for a reimagination of socioecological relations that resonate with contemporary questions around renewable energy and even "the inventory of a new nature and a new kind of economy."[200] Indeed, as Fanon puts it in his reflections on what might constitute the process of decolonisation,

> perhaps it is necessary to begin everything all over again: to change the nature of the country's exports, and not simply their destination, to re-examine the soil and mineral resources, the rivers, and – why not? – the sun's productivity.[201]

Drawing on the above, Wenzel shows how Fanon's anti-colonial visions not only provide for the understanding of nature "beyond the narrow colonial imperative of providing raw materials to create European wealth";[202] they also warrant the positioning of Fanon in contemporary ecocritical thinking. To "listen again, to Fanon," is to therefore to illustrate how Fanon "makes his geographic concern an environmental concern"[203] and one that provides ways of

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[197] Wenzel, p. 189.
[198] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 250. Italics mine.
[199] Wenzel. p. 189.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Fanon, *Wretched*. Cited in Wenzel, p. 189.
[202] Wenzel, p. 198.
[203] Ibid.

comprehending contemporary ecological crisis through the anti-colonial forms of critique provided by his writings.[204]

Like Wenzel, several other scholars have found ways of making Fanon's theories resonate with present-day environmental issues. Opperman, for instance, has powerfully shown how Fanon's critique of colonisation allows for the analysis of

> racist environments [that] prompts us to ask ecological questions that explore modes of inhabiting the world and to approach racism in terms of complex webs of human and more-than-human entanglements.[205]

As Opperman shows, Fanon emphasises "the relations of dependency that not only bind Black and white, but life to its milieu."[206] By this, Opperman is referring to the connections that Fanon draws "between both settler and colonised and those which shape the human and more-than-human world,"[207] connections which allow for the mapping of the ways in which racist environments are ordered by mechanisms of captivity that constrict and curtail the capacity of both black subjects and extra-human natures to contest the colonial orders of extraction and exploitation that continue to structure the world today.[208]

Alongside these critics, others have found renewed meanings in Fanon's description of colonialism as a form of 'combat breathing'. Much of this wave of criticism focused on the (neo)colonial character of breath-taking has emerged as a result of recent global events, particularly in response to the murders of black citizens like Floyd, Gardner, and Williams that took place in the United States between 2014 and 2020. This emerging corpus of 'Fanonian eco-critique' espouses Fanon's view on the chokehold of colonialism to showcase how present-day forms of environmental crisis and racial oppression function as re-iterations of colonial

[204] Indeed, we might note how Fanon's injunction 'to begin everything all over again' chimes with calls made by now-famous climate change activist Greta Thunberg, who recently proclaimed that "The climate crisis is not just about the environment. It is a crisis of human rights, of justice, and of political will. Colonial, racist, and patriarchal systems of oppression have created and fueled it. We need to dismantle them all." See Greta Thunberg, "Why we strike again." Cited in Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux, Colonialism: the Hidden Cause of Our Environmental Crisis," *World Crunch*, 14 February 2020, https://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/colonialism-the-hidden-cause-of-our-environmental-crisis [accessed 28 June 2022].

[205] Opperman, "A Permanent Struggle," p. 58.

[206] Ibid., p. 74.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid.

violence. In Opperman's words, Fanon's theories "allows us to see racism as an *atmospheric force* that shapes the relations of individual and milieu."[209]

Fanon's 'breath-work' has also increasingly come to provide the basis for new forms of literary critique. Arthur Rose, for example, has argued for a means of "reading breath" in postcolonial literatures though an espousal of Fanon's notion of 'combat breathing' or breathlessness. "The task…that faces us in discussing the image of breathlessness in postcolonial literature and thought," writes Rose,

> is not…simply the immediate appearance of exacerbated breathlessness and its resolution. We must also consider how systems of breathlessness come to operate in more covert, insidious ways.[210]

Thus, breath functions in postcolonial literatures not merely "as a vehicle for metaphor;" it also becomes the material site in which new forms of oppression manifest.[211] By focusing on the asthmatic protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), Rose argues that the novel enables the mapping of a connection between Fanon's concept of "breathlessness and an absence of freedom."[212] For Rose, Rushdie's portrayal of respiratory illness and breathlessness expresses the colonial quality of "breath-related postcolonial policies" because the novel illustrates how the "unhealthy body" of the postcolonial subject "is precisely what indicates the ill health of the [postcolonial] state."[213] Rose suggests, then, that

> when we read for breath…we are not simply reading symptoms of the deformations of colonialism; we are reading its effects as they are imprinted on vulnerable bodies under postcolonial conditions.[214]

Building on Rose's analysis, which usefully showcases how Fanon's aesthetics of breathing might bridge the connections between the health of the body and that of the state, I consider how Okri makes use of the gothic aesthetics of asphyxiation to give expression to oil extraction and its atmospheric afterlives in postcolonial Nigeria. In so doing, I trace a line of connection

[209] Ibid., p. 58. My italics.
[210] Rose, "Combat Breathing," p. 118.
[211] Arthur Rose, "Introduction: Reading Breath in Literature," in *Reading Breath in Literature*, ed. by Arthur Rose, et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1-16 (p. 9).
[212] Rose, "Combat Breathing," p. 117.
[213] Rose. p. 119.
[214] Ibid., p. 121.

between Césaire's and Okri's gothic representations of the city in order to illustrate the debilitating effects of oil extraction upon Okri's protagonists. I aim here, however, to not merely compare Okri and Césaire's gothic aesthetics of choking confinement, for I illustrate how Oki's portrayal of the postcolonial condition of suffocation in "In the City of Red Dust" cannot be understood without the visions of colonial violence offered in Césaire's *Notebook*. In what follows, I read Okri's gothic register as a vital form of representation that provides a way of capturing the persistence of the colonial past in the postcolonial city and thus one that engenders a formative means of emphasising the (neo)colonialist character of global conditions like climate change and ecological disaster.

If Césaire's gothic aesthetics of suffocation are only nascent in *Notebook*, then the trope of asphyxiation is rendered in particularly powerful terms in Okri's short story. This tale charts the travails of two friends and ghetto-dwellers, Emokhai and Marjomi, in an unnamed Nigerian metropole during the day on which the country's military governor celebrates his fiftieth birthday. The story is set during the annual Harmattan period, when great winds carry vast amounts of mineral dust from the Sahara Desert towards the Gulf of Guinea from November to March every year. While a common yearly occurrence throughout West Africa, the Harmattan haze in Okri's story brings with it more than the usual seasonal discomfort "of dry skins and chapped lips".[215] Instead, the narrative is replete with images of decay and asphyxia caused by an unusually "massive cloud of red dust" that hangs over the city, coating in red sediment "all natural life", from "the cockroaches, the cats, the dogs [and] the leaves of the stunted orange tree", through to "the zinc rooftops" of the houses where Emokhai lives.[216]

In this sense, Okri's dust-cloud can be said to supplement the atmosphere of claustrophobia that is often characteristic of the gothic mode. Yet the city's asphyxiating atmosphere also recalls the choking conditions produced in Césaire's speaker by colonial town planning. Okri's story likewise shows how the dust-cloud – and indeed, the city itself – re-formulates his protagonists in paralysing terms that render them unable to breathe. Emokhai explicitly refers to the asphyxiating conditions of colonial infrastructure in the unnamed red city when he and Marjomi pass the many statues that frame the metropolis and pay tribute to its imperial legacies:

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[215] Adam Voiland, "Choking on Saharan Dust," *Nasa Earth Observatory*, 2 February 2016, https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/144970/choking-on-saharan-dust [accessed 3 July 2020]

[216] Ben Okri, "In the City of Red Dust," in *Stars of the New Curfew* (London: Vintage, 1999 [1988]), pp. 37-79 (p. 74 & 61).

> They passed the High Court, with its bronze statues of the old Empire. They went down roads with ancient statues, symbols of authority, disintegrating beneath the sun and under the onslaught of the sand and wind.[217]

These statues clearly reference Fanon's descriptions of the colonial world as "a world of statues…the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge,"[218] and thus illustrate the continued haunting of the postcolonial present by Nigeria's history of British colonisation. But particularly evocative, I think, is that these statues also elucidate a different kind of haunting through the emphasis that Okri places on the dust that settles not only upon these statues, but which also comes to infiltrate and transform Emokhai's own body. Looking out at a city "obscured in dust, plaster and smoke", Emokhai sees "the patterns of an empire stifled in history."[219] Emokhai literally breathes in the dust of empire as he passes "an area which used to be a market where slaves were sold a hundred years before," feeling "his nose and lungs getting clogged from the dust and air."[220] Walking through this cloud, Emokhai's body becomes recomposed and remade in the ghostly image of the dust which chokes him; he emerges from the dust "whittled…a shade more invisible" than before.[221]

In this ghostly spectre, Okri proffers the ongoing history of (neo)colonialism in Nigeria via his invocation of the suffocating confines of the postcolonial city, as the very air Emokhai breathes becomes as debilitating as the colonial urban demarcations that give to Césaire's city its 'inert' and paralysing character. Okri thus invokes a set of contemporary conditions that enable us to trace a line of connection between his postcolonial poetics of suffocation and Césaire's aesthetics of colonial confinement. By making concrete ongoing forms of (neo)colonisation in urban Nigeria through a gothic discourse of suffocation, the story speaks as much to colonial as postcolonial issues. Indeed, as the violence of empire becomes diffused and expanded to permeate the everyday, Emokhai, in an uncanny invocation of the dying words of Floyd, Gardner, and Williams, describes walking through a city so hazardous that he feels as though "he [can't] breathe."[222] Thus, while Okri's tale undoubtedly invites interpretation through Fanon's earlier evocations of the choking conditions of colonial infrastructure, it also brings into focus more recent concerns around questions of environmental racism and the

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[217] Okri, "In the City of Red Dust," p. 42.
[218] Fanon, *Wretched,* p. 51-52.
[219] Okri, p. 61.
[220] Ibid., p. 42.
[221] Ibid., p. 47.
[222] Okri, p. 41.

disproportionate burden carried by black bodies under conditions of contemporary ecological crisis, particularly as these pertain to oil and its atmospheric afterlives.

Although no reason is provided for the Harmattan season's abnormal size, we can surmise that the formation of Okri's dust cloud is in some way connected to the country's near-complete reliance on the extraction of oil to grow the postcolonial economy. As is well known, Nigeria's political economy has been shaped by the petroleum sector throughout its postcolonial history. "Nigeria," writes Michael Watts, "is an archetypical petrostate, the eleventh largest producer and the eighth largest exporter of crude oil in the world."[223] While the African continent as a whole "accounts for roughly 10 percent of world oil output and 9.3 percent of known reserves," Nigeria remains the leading African exporter of crude oil.[224] According to recent estimates, Nigeria's petroleum industry "accounts for nine percent" of the country's Gross Domestic Product and for almost "90 percent of all export value."[225] The country currently operates 18 oil pipelines and averages a production of more than a million barrels of crude a day.[226] This makes Nigeria "the jewel in the African oil crown."[227]

"Historically," argue Atei Mark Okorobia and Stephen Temegha Olali, "crude oil exploration and production in Nigeria began when the nation was still under British colonialism."[228] Oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956, when the drills of Shell Petroleum Development Company, then known as Shell d'Arcy, an affiliate of Shell-BP, struck an oil field in Itokopiri, "a land jointly owned by the Otabagi and Otuogidi communities in the Oloibiri clan of the present Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State."[229] Shell's success

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[223] Michael Watts, "Oil Frontiers: The Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico," in *Oil Culture*, ed. by Ross Barret and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p 197.
[224] Michael Watts, "Empire of Oil: Capitalist Dispossession and the Scramble for Africa," *Monthly Review*, 1 September 2006, https://monthlyreview.org/2006/09/01/empire-of-oil-capitalist-dispossession-and-the-scramble-for-africa/ [accessed 13 July 2022].
[225] Doris Dokua Sasu, "Oil industry in Nigeria - statistics & facts," *Statistica*, 5 April 2022, https://www.statista.com/topics/6914/oil-industry-in-nigeria/#topicHeader__wrapper [accessed 13 July 2022].
[226] Sasu, "Oil industry in Nigeria - statistics & facts," online.
[227] Michael Watts, "Empire of Oil: Capitalist Dispossession and the Scramble for Africa," *Monthly Review*, 1 September 2006, https://monthlyreview.org/2006/09/01/empire-of-oil-capitalist-dispossession-and-the-scramble-for-africa/ [accessed 13 July 2022].
[228] Atei Mark Okorobia and Stephen Temegha Olali, "The Historical Trajectory of Crude Oil Exploration and Production in Nigeria, 1930-2015," in *The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas Activities in the Nigerian Aquatic Ecosystem*, ed. by Prince E. Ndimele (London: Elsevier, 2019), pp. 17-31 (p. 18).
[229] Okorobia and Olali, "The Historical Trajectory," p. 19.

in striking commercial quantities of oil marked the beginning of the Nigerian "Oil Rush."[230] What is striking about this occurrence is that the Nigerian oil sector was created during its independence years. Indeed, as Okorobia and Olali point out,

> unlike other industries established by the British to exploit Nigeria's natural resources (such as precious minerals), whose production saw marked decline after their departure, the petroleum industry continued to develop, attracting greater and greater attention.[231]

Such was the influx of international interest in Nigerian oil during this period that the country's independence would become inextricably tied to oil. By 1965, five years into its postcolonial era, "the petroleum sector had not only grown tremendously; it had also become the dominant foreign income earner in the Nigerian economy."[232]

Nigeria's present-day status as a leading 'oil giant' cannot be understood without taking seriously the 1970's incursion of US-led neoliberal policy across the African continent. Lee Wengraf has observed, for example, that Africa was made subject to neoliberal structural adjustment in the 1970's, when "the World Bank and IMF mandated a shift away from industrialization toward economies based solely on the export of raw materials and agricultural products."[233] In the case of Nigeria, its shift to oil exportation began in earnest in the late twentieth century as a result of the global economic recession, which "posed new challenges to US strategic interests, in particular with regard to control over a key resource: Middle Eastern oil."[234] The economic recession marked a critical shift of the US away from the Middle East towards Nigerian oil reserves, a process that was set in motion by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), who quadrupled the price of oil in 1973-1974, and thereby inaugurated "a major transfer of money capital to oil exporters."[235] As the Nigerian environmentalist Nnimmo Bassey argues with reference to this moment,

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[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., p. 21.
[233] Lee Wengraf, *Extracting Profit: Imperialism, Neoliberalism, and the New Scramble for Africa* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), p. 152.
[234] Wengraf, *Extracting Profit,* p. 79.
[235] Michael Watts, "State, Oil, and Accumulation: from Boom to Crisis," *Environmental and Planning D: Society and Space* 2 (1984), 403-428 (403).

> things began to change from 1970 when US oil production began to dip. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countriesh…had come into existence and in 1973 deliberately began engineering oil supplies and pricing, driving up oil prices by about 70 per cent, hitting the unprecedented level of more than $5 per barrel. By 1981 oil prices were close to $40 per barrel, setting off alarm bells to the North. This upsurge in oil prices pushed the North to embark on serious investment in alternative energy sources.[236]

The American quest for alternative supplies of petroleum would crystalise particularly powerfully in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, which holds the majority of its oil reserves. "With 48 oil fields and 93 natural gas fields," writes Fedilis Allen, "the Delta region's reserves are estimated at 34.5 billion barrels of oil and 94 trillion cubic feet of gas."[237] So high are the Delta's mineral reserves that scholars have used the phrase "where vultures feast"[238] to describe both the region's abundancy in oil and the huge levels of foreign-led oil extraction that have taken place in the Delta since Nigeria fell prey to the "oil bonanza of the 1970s."[239]

The lure of "petro-dollars"[240] would prove particularly disastrous for postcolonial Nigeria, whose oil boom coincided with the end of its civil war. "The sharp increase in the volume of crude oil production along with the corresponding rise in crude oil prices," observe Okorobia and Olali, "brought a sudden boost to Nigeria's foreign income base, giving her leaders the false impression that the nation had arrived."[241] Thus, "the easy petro-dollars Nigeria earned" through oil exportation gave the country's postcolonial government "a false sense of affluence and power."[242] Indeed, the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, infamously remarked in 1974 that "the challenge before Nigeria is no longer the scarcity of funds, but how to manage the abundance that is available."[243] Yet, while ostensibly controlled by the Nigerian state, the country's oil reserves would once more fall under the control of external forces because economic liberalisation allowed for the reclaiming of Africa's minerals by a series of multinational organisations, particularly foreign-owned oil giants like Shell-BP,

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[236] Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa* (Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu Books & Pambazuka Press, 2012), pp. 49–50.
[237] Fedilis Allen, "The Enemy Within: Oil in the Niger Delta," *World Policy Journal* 29, no. 4 (2012), 46-53 (47).
[238] Ike Okonta and Douglas Oronto, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (London & New York: Verso, 2003).
[239] Watts, "State, Oil, and Accumulation: from Boom to Crisis" p. 404.
[240] Okorobia and Olali, "The Historical Trajectory," p. 24
[241] Okorobia and Olali, p. 24
[242] Ibid.
[243] Cited in Okorobia and Olali, "The Historical Trajectory," p. 25.

Gulf, Mobil and Ashland. The battle of these multinationals over access to Nigeria's petroleum has led to the development of what Jeff D. Colgan terms "petro-aggression," a phrase he employs to describe how "petrostates [like Nigeria] show a remarkable propensity for instigating international conflict."[244]

The historic process of petroleum drilling in Nigeria has not only led to conflicts between the nation-state and the multinational organisations that extract the country's natural resources, however. It has also caused intense tension between local governance and its peoples. Reflecting the intimate entanglement of the postcolonial Nigerian government with foreign oil investors, community agitation in the Niger Delta is today directed against both the corruptive Nigerian state as well as the global oil companies who retain access to the country's oil fields. As Femi Aborisade points out, today "community agitation…is mobilised against these multinational oil companies, on the one hand, and against the Nigerian state on the other."[245] The forces underlying Nigeria's present-day condition, then "are far from reducible to problems of "corruption" and "governance."[246] Rather, they are rooted in the historic relationships of exploitation enabled by the capitalist system and subsequent neoliberal policies based solely on the export of raw materials. Such conditions provide the background to understanding just how much the claim for oil development as a basis for socio-economic change has not only failed in Nigeria, but also illustrate how oil capital is in fact "fuelling social, environmental, and political conditions for a permanent state of unrest."[247] Indeed, as Allen observes in his study of contemporary Nigeria, the country's current government retains much of the same belief that characterised its petro-boom period – namely, the idea that oil will ensure the country's prosperity even if this comes at the expense of both its environment and its citizens. "The government," argues Allen, "is telling Nigerians to believe that it is their best friend. Successive federal regimes have seen the oil industry as the lifeline of the nation's economy, neglecting its impact on the people of the Niger Delta and their environment."[248] Thus, "the oil industry is the enemy within."[249]

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[244] Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 16.
[245] Femi Aborisade, "Petro-capitalism, Neoliberalism, Labour and Community Mobilization in Nigeria," *Labour, Capital and Society* 43 no. 1 (2010), 1-33 (11).
[246] Wengraf, p. 152.
[247] Allen, "The Enemy Within," p. 47.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.

In Okri's tale, the corruptive power of oil is expressed through the city's high levels of social inequality and immiseration. Roaming the streets in search of work and food, Emokhai and Marjomi notice how the city's uneven development produces wealth for some and poverty for others. The street where Emokhai lives is covered in rotting "garbage heaps", while the city's wealthy live on "clean avenues...sealed behind barbed wire fences [and] named after rich men, governors, and freedom fighters."[250] As Okri makes clear, under oil capital, older forms of colonial-produced social hierarchies between settler and native, white and black, become uncannily reframed, illustrating, to borrow from Mike Davis, how "the boom in exports all too frequently benefits only a tiny stratum."[251] Indeed, so unequal have economic and social relations become in Nigeria that "80 percent of the nation's oil wealth is concentrated in the hands of 1 percent of the population."[252] Reflecting how the surge in commodity prices and foreign investment in Nigeria reformulated its colonial-era social hierarchies, the figure of Okri's military dictator is embellished with "gold necklaces from secret societies and multinational concerns," while Marjomi and Emokhai live in a state of absolute poverty and immiseration that parallels the "inertia" engendered in Césaire's multitude by the "stranded" and "dust-ridden" city.[253]

Recalling Césaire's lamentations of the immobility produced in the colonised by colonial infrastructure, Okri frequently evokes the city of his protagonists through images of dust, heat, and pollution that give to the story its oppressive atmosphere. Almost everything seems stagnant in Okri's 'red city'. Not only does the ochre dust "stiffen the clothes on the lines"[254] outside Emokhai's home, but the city's water reserves congeal with pollution: "Emokhai went and stood beneath the shade of a stall, in front of which was a stagnant gutter. He stared at the empty Coke cans and newspaper pages that floated with the algae."[255] Like this stagnant stream, the city's inhabitants are similarly described in terms that stage their quasi-zombification; they seem dazed, wandering the streets with "bewildered"[256] looks on their faces. Moreover, while the city's inhabitants exist in a state of atrophy, above them the skies roil with the threat of military action. Marjomi and Emokhai pace the city's streets as military planes circle the sky. The thousands of fighter planes, which make Emokhai feel "as if he were

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[250] Okri, p. 39.
[251] Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 164.
[252] Wengraf, *Extracting Profit,* p. 45
[253] Césaire, p. 2.
[254] Okri, p. 60.
[255] Okri, p. 42.
[256] Ibid.

under invasion, as if a new war had been declared,"[257] emblematise how, under the city's extreme inequities, order can only be maintained under threat of military force. In addition to signifying the country's military occupation, these planes release large reams of paper stamped with the portrait of Nigeria's military dictator, "a soldier who had reputedly saved the city during a siege in the war."[258] These papers are meant to remind the city's citizens of the governor's birthday celebration, yet they simply exacerbate the city's high levels of existing pollution. Watching as this "cascade of confetti…pirouetted towards the ground," Emokhai laments that the "formless" rubbish dump near to where he lives merely "grows bigger each day."[259]

Many critics have read Okri's narrative, which employs a series of gothic images and devices adapted from African folklore, as mediating the predative neocolonial logics of the global petroleum market. For Elleke Boehmer, the gothic elements of the story, in particular Okri's use of the vampire figure, "acts as a powerful reminder of the vampire-like (post)colonial economy that the friends inhabit, in which the state feeds upon the blood of its citizens."[260] In Okri's tale, the vampiric process of oil extraction is given form via his turn to the Yoruba myth of the *obayifo*.[261] This myth is based on Ashanti vampire lore, which suggests that the *obayifo* is a witch that preys on children and crops by draining their "life-energy."[262]

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[257] Ibid., p. 41.
[258] Ibid., p. 48.
[259] Ibid., p. 48.
[260] Ellekhe Boehmer, "Foreword: Empire's Vampires", in *Transnational and Postcolonial Vampires: Dark Blood*, eds. Tabish Khair and Johan Höglund (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), ix-xxi (p ix).
[261] An interesting point of comparison here would be the figure of the *bolom* in Walrond's "The Vampire Bat." Like Walrond's vampiric child, Okri's *obayifo* is harnessed to express the reality of regional resource extraction. However, while Okri's vampiric creature is meant to evoke the exsanguinating character of oil drilling (of literally drawing 'blood' from the earth) and its attendant forms of labour exploitation, Walrond's 'vampire bat' serves to highlight the manifold human and extra-human exhaustions produced in Barbados by the colonial sugar regime. A further point of difference is that Walrond's bolom-like figure is something of an invention and therefore quite 'new' despite its association with Caribbean folklore. It is for this reason that I argue in Chapter 2 that Walrond's vampiric baby serves a dual purpose: to foreground both the deleterious effects of sugar economy and to stage the transition between the dying of one ecological regime and the emergence of another order of accumulation (see pg 68). My reading of the *obayifo* compliments this interpretation in that I understand Okri's use of Ashanti vampire myth as similarly mobilised to express more than one regional reality: specifically, the predative logics of British colonisation in Nigeria and the perpetuation of these logics in postcolonial Nigeria as they are relayed through global oil extraction.
[262] Theresa Bane, *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), p. 111.

Drawing on the Yoruba belief in this creature's "insatiable appetite"[263] for both human and extra-human energies, Okri manifests oil extraction through the corporeal practice of bloodletting. Broke, hungry and unable "to make money honestly," Emokhai and Marjomi survive by selling their blood to a local hospital in exchange for a pitiful two naira per pint – less, they complain, "than what a prostitute gets."[264] Here again we might note the connections between Césaire's and Okri's gothic vocabularies, for Okri's aesthetics of vampirism clearly resonate with Césaire's description of Fort-de-France. Identifiable in Okri's unnamed 'red city', in other words, are many of the gothic images used by Césaire to evoke colonial Fort-de-France as a "red land, sanguineous, consanguineous land."[265]

If it is the literal bloodshed of slavery and colonisation that gives to Césaire's city its consanguine character, then it is the postcolonial economic structures of oil extraction that bring about a systemic form of vampirism in Okri's tale. Marjomi, prized for his "expensive…high-grade blood," sells so regularly that he exists in a state of near zombification. The hospital's nurses complain that his body is "like a skeleton with dried skin," and when he walks, he does so "muttering to himself, stumbling forward."[266] As it literally exhausts his lifeblood, the exsanguination also results in Marjomi being overcome by a seemingly supernatural stupor. While his blood is being drawn, Marjomi feels "that he has fallen into a dream," his eyes become "liverish" with "a tortured light" as "a strange, demented energy tak[es] over his movements."[267] Barely alive, and suggestively 'possessed' by the extractive economy, Marjomi and Emokhai stagger through the city in a state of gothic zombification. Okri's blood-metaphors clearly find an echo in Marx's seminal description of the relation of the capitalist to the worker, which he famously equates to a process of exsanguination. "Capital," Marx writes, is "dead-labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks."[268] Although Marx makes use of the vampire to describe the general tendency of the capitalist to intensify the exploitation of the worker's life energies in order to extract more surplus-value, Okri's vampiric metaphor is explicitly brought

[263] Bane, *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology,* p. 111.
[264] Okri, p. 49 & 46.
[265] Césaire, p. 20.
[266] Okri, pp. 42 – 46.
[267] Ibid., p. 45
[268] Marx, Karl, *Capital Volume I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1976 [1867]), p. 505.

to bear on the process of postcolonial oil extraction. After all, as Jon Lee Anderson succinctly puts it, "*oil and blood are ubiquitous*."[269]

Toxic and Intoxicating: Oil's Asphyxiating Afterlife

But the 'shock' of oil in Nigeria has not only resulted in forms of governance that reproduce social and political violence. It has also led to the emergence of "occult economies," in which "bewitched accumulation" is generated through what David McNally describes as a discourse of "market-monstrosity."[270] According to McNally, Okri's writings provide a crucial entry point into understanding the relations between 'fantastic' narratives and capitalist predation. Pointing to the increased circulation in urban Africa of "tales of enrichment via cannibalism, vampirism and extraordinary interactions between the living and the dead," McNally suggests that Okri turns to the "fantastic genre" to provide a vessel for "the systematic assaults on bodily and psychic integrity that define the economic infrastructure of modernity."[271] McNally argues that Okri's fiction disturbs "the naturalisation of capitalism" through the 'fantastic' mode. McNally shows, then, how Okri's writings function as more than mere "expressions of traditional values in opposition to the forces of modern capitalism."[272] Rather, they offer "a kind of grotesque realism that mimics the absurdity of capitalist modernity."[273] McNally thus sees in Okri's fantastical aesthetics a counter-hegemonic disruption that grows out of an experience of "social life in the age of globalising capitalism,"[274] which, in Okri's story, is framed via an unevenness that is inflected specifically by a Yoruba cosmology.

Oil, however, has a propensity to create 'fantastical' conditions in and of itself. Scores of scholars have noted that oil is a kind of 'fairy-tale' substance that brings into being a kind of 'fairy-tale' world. As the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski famously puts it,

> 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

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[269] Jon Lee Anderson, "Oil and Blood," *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2000, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2000/08/14/oil-and-blood [accessed 20 July 2022]. My emphasis.

[270] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[271] McNally, *Monsters of the Market,* p. 6.

[272] McNally, p. 7.

[273] Ibid.

[274] Ibid., 185.

> produced though lucky accident…In this sense, oil is a fairy-tale and like every fairly-tale a bit of a lie.[275]

Drawing on Kapuscinski, Wenzel coined the influential concept of "petro-magic-realism" to describe how Nigerian fiction mediates precisely this 'magical' condition.[276] As Wenzel shows in her 2006 article "Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature," "the height of Nigeria's publishing boom" took place during the 1970s, a period of 'excess' when "oil replaced labor as the basis of the national development."[277] Expanding on the excesses produced by the oil boom, Wenzel argues that Nigerian literature is both produced and constrained "by cultural and material contests of natural resources."[278] Thus, the fantastical quality of Nigerian writing both emerges from, and gives expression to, what Wenzel describes as the 'magic' of petroleum.

Further crucial to oil is that it is both intoxicating and *toxic*. "The product," observes Patricia Widener,

> has the capacity to be both toxic and intoxicating, usurping standard community protections and ecological reason…both the product and the process [of extraction] upend what people think of themselves and their political system.[279]

Captured in Widener's dual description of oil is the emphasis that Kapuscinski places on the deceits engendered by petroleum. For the huge profits produced by oil extraction also herald a multitude of "troubles," including waste, corruption, the falling apart of public services and the inauguration of massive levels of debt.[280] Thus oil is not merely 'magical' but evil in its magical propensities; it is, as Juan Pablo Perez Alfonso describes it, "the devil's excrement."[281] While Alfonso is here referring specifically to manifold depredations produced in 1960s Venezuela by the petroleum sector, in Nigeria the 1970s oil boom similarly exposed the dark flipside of

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[275] Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs*. Cited in Michael Watts, "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics* 9, no, 1 (2004), 50-80 (51).
[276] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature," *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006) 449-464 (451).
[277] Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism," p. 451.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Patricia Widener, *Toxic and Intoxicating Oil: Discovery, Resistance, and Justice in Aotearoa New Zealand* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), p. 5.
[280] Michael Watts, "Resource curse? governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics* 9, no. 4 (2004), 50-80 (61).
[281] Cited in Watts, "Resource curse?," p. 61.

'petro-magic,' which generated in the country its own forms of disorder – what Watts terms "its own unique form of anarchy and chaos."[282]

As we have seen, oil-produced corruption is evident throughout Okri's tale. The country's high levels of governmental money-leaching are continually evoked through Okri's frequent allusions to the massive discrepancies between the city's rich and poor. Oil's corruptive propensities are further staged via Okri's portrayal of his beastly dictator, which strongly recalls the 'devilish' quality of oil to which Alfonso refers. Indeed, not only does the governor have a "bulging face" but he looks "a bit like a warthog."[283] The dictator's devilish resonance is later reiterated when he enters his shiny limousine and appears to transform into a monstrous beast:

> The governor's limousine was in the middle of the convoy. And when his car drove past the people couldn't see him. They could not see what he has transformed into, what secret physical corruptions crept over his features or what his monstrosities were.[284]

Thus, wealth produced by oil – here evoked via the flashy limousine – corrupts absolutely, for alongside enormous prosperity develops the deepening of poverty. Further showcased here is the capacity of oil wealth to obscure the violent transactions between human bodies and capital. As Okri puts it, "the people *could not see* what he transformed into".[285] In fact, the blacked-out windows of the governor's limousine might even be said to reference popular descriptions of oil as 'the black gold', whose profits, while ostensibly 'huge', have not been seen in actuality by the Nigerian people. Rather, the direct opposite has occurred. "Deep inequality, oppression and immiseration," writes Wengraf, "have persisted in Nigeria despite the African boom."[286] Or, to borrow from Watts, Okri's scene illustrates how "development and oil wealth is a cruel joke."[287]

Okri's tale is not set, however, during the 'height' of Nigeria's oil revolution; rather, it takes place in the aftermath of the global 1980s oil crash. Referring specifically to this moment, a journalist writing for the *New Yorker* remarked in 1981 that "an oil glut had arrived," marking

[282] Watts, "Resource curse?," p. 61.
[283] Okri, p. 55.
[284] Okri, p. 56.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Wengraf, p. 48.
[287] Watts, "Empire of Oil," online.

a rapid decrease in global demands for oil.[288] "For the first time in many years," continues this journalist, "corporate strategists do not have to automatically assume that oil prices will be rising by at least the inflation rate and probably by much more."[289] Indeed, such was the impact of the oil glut that the global price of oil fell nearly 70 percent between November 1985 and March 1986. In Nigeria, the collapse of oil prices had particularly powerful consequences given the country's near-complete dependence on oil revenue, which made the Nigerian economy highly susceptible to market volatility. The global crash in oil prices converged in the country with a military coup that saw the overthrowing of the Shagari civilian regime by Major General Buhari. Under the leadership of Buhari, "inflation soared [and] there was large scale unemployment, massive debt and widespread corruption."[290] Thus, as Watts observes, "what began as a boom and untempered ambition in the 1970 ended with a bust in 1985."[291]

Written in the aftermath of Nigeria's 1980s oil crash, Okri's text is shaped by a need both to make sense of the wreckage of a once hopeful future, and to come to terms with the legacy of faltering development and the political instability cemented by the 'intoxication' of oil wealth. In this, Okri's metaphor of vampiric corporeal predation is particularly instructive, for it responds to this dual imperative by making legible the devasting effects of the postcolonial petrostate through its figuring of oil as "blood circulating through the national body."[292] Okri draws an explicit comparison between the medicalised bloodletting of Emokhai and Marjomi, which takes place at the tellingly-named "Queen Mary Hospital,"[293] and the predatory methods of accumulation that continue to structure the postcolonial state through foreign oil extraction. Just as the hospital appropriates the life-energies of Emokhai and Marjomi, so, too, does the global oil economy draw on both the life-energies of African labour power and the energies of its natural resources through its extraction of oil from the literal 'veins' of the earth. The seemingly 'fantastic' operations of foreign oil investment – which obscures the transactions between human bodies, ecology, and capital – are powerfully captured, then, in Okri's espousal of the vampire figure of the *obayifo,* which feeds not only

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[288] "How the Oil Glut is Changing Business," *The New Yorker,* 21 June 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/06/21/business/how-the-oil-glut-is-changing-business.html?pagewanted=all
[289] "How the Oil Glut is Changing Business," online.
[290] Watts, "Resource curse?," p. 60.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 201.
[293] Okri, p. 45.

on human life, but also on *crops*; who is sustained, in other words, on both human and extra-human prey. Indeed, the *obayifo* is feared not merely for its predation on human bodies but also for causing famine: "it also attacks crops, sucking out the sap and vital juices, thereby causing terrible blights."[294] As such, Okri's vampirism also encodes the colonial quality of socioecological violence and the inextricability of human and extra-human resource extraction in the context of the global oil economy.

While Okri clearly highlights the mechanics of oil-predation through the metaphor of vampirism and the black bodily vulnerability that this produces, his narrative places equal emphasis on the effects of oil extraction through its inclusion of the blood-red colour of the dust that covers and consumes all who inhabit the city. The story makes use of the gothic mode, therefore, to figure both the systemic extraction of labour and land and the *aftereffects* of this process of capitalisation. Indeed, as many critics have noted, some of the most devasting effects of oil extraction concern its waste products and pollutants. Since the onset of its petro-regime, Nigeria has been home to some of the worst cases of oil pollution in the world.[295] It is due to these spills, the total number of which remains unknown, that "the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has the reputation of being one of the most polluted places on earth."[296] Such was the impact of oil extraction and petroleum spillage on his homeland of Ogoniland during the late 1980's and early 1990's that the Nigerian author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa created the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Reflecting how the country's dependence on oil extraction emerged in tandem with the brutality of the Nigerian military state, Saro-Wiwa, along with other members of the MOSOP movement, was sentenced to death in 1995. While the Nigerian government justified his execution by arguing that Saro-Wiwa sought to incite 'violence and unrest' in the Nigerian populace, it is now an undisputed fact that he was murdered for his involvement in protesting the devastating social and environmental impact of oil spillage in the Delta during this time.[297]

But oil spills are not the only hazards produced by the oil economy. As Bassey observes in *To Cook A Continent* (2012), gas flares have attracted the attention of the world as one the most visible assaults on the Niger Delta over the last two decades. "Globally," Bassey writes,

[294] Matthew Bunson, *The Vampire Encyclopedia* (New York: Gramercy, 2000), p. 502.
[295] Bassey, p. 4
[296] Ibid.
[297] "Ken Saro-Wiwa: Nigerian Author and Activist, *Britannica*, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ken-Saro-Wiwa [accessed 15 July 2022].

> gas flares pump about 400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere annually. Here in Nigeria, the climate is brazenly assaulted both in the short-term by gas flaring and over the long term because of the CO2 emissions from this filthy practice. In the hierarchy of gas flares infamy, Nigeria is second only to Russia.[298]

The flaring of petro-associated gas remains commonplace in oil-producing Nigeria, despite governmental promises to ban the practice since 1984.[299] Gas flaring, in which the natural gas associated with petroleum extraction is burned off into the atmosphere, significantly impacts air-quality. Pollutants released by gas flaring are carried far from the actual sites of extraction into the city, where rising levels of air-borne toxins have been linked to cancer and lung damage, as well as reproductive and neurological problems.[300] Under these terms, Okri's gothic aesthetics can be said to provide a language for the expression of not only the literal processes of oil extraction, which, in the story, is given form through his use of the figure of the vampire. The story's gothic vocabulary also foregrounds the devasting aftereffects that attend the search for and claiming of raw materials through Okri's use of the zombie metaphor.

Here, then, we must return to Okri's zombie-like description of Marjomi's 'possession' by the extractive economy, for Marjomi's zombification explicitly inscribes the multiple forms of toxicity produced by oil extraction and its debilitating effects on black bodies. In other words, Marjomi's zombification registers both the processes of literal oil extraction and their toxic afterlives, particularly in terms of its mediation of the corporeal toxicities engendered by oil extraction. After all, oil's afterlives include not only poor air-quality, but a range of neurological problems. As such, Marjomi's zombie-like stupor and "demented energy"[301] speaks quite directly to the neurological effects produced by gas-flaring, the symptoms of which include headache, dizziness, weakness, and loss of coordination.[302] Okri's gothic portrayal of the oil economy's possession of Marjomi's body and its subsequent 'zombification' can be said, then, to draw into sharp focus how black corporealities become

[298] Bassey, p. 2

[299] Leonore Schick, Paul Myles, Okonta Emeka Okelum, "Gas flaring continues scorching Niger Delta", *Deutsche Welle*, 14 November 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/gas-flaring-continues-scorching-niger-delta/a-46088235 [accessed 7 July 2022].

[300] Godson Rowland Ana, "Air Pollution in the Niger Delta Area: Scope, Challenges and Remedies," *IntechOpen*, 26 September 2011, https://www.intechopen.com/books/the-impact-of-air-pollution-on-health-economy-environment-and-agricultural-sources/air-pollution-in-the-niger-delta-area-scope-challenges-and-remedies [accessed 10 July 2022].

[301] Okri, p. 45.

[302] "Gas Flaring in Nigeria: An Environmental Health Nightmare, *Friends of the Earth*, n.d., https://foe.org/blog/2009-05-gas-flaring-in-nigeria/ [accessed 20 September 2022].

reformulated through their exposure to both the 'intoxification' of oil itself and its toxic aftereffects. Thus, while Okri's turn to a 'fantastical' lexicon stylistically mediates the Nigerian state's 'enchantment' with the global oil market, the *gothic* aesthetics of the story, in particular its invocation of the suffocating and zombified body, can equally be read as giving fictional meaning to the material realities of racialised toxic exposure.

By shifting our focus from the actual time and site of extraction to the "monstrous intimacies"[303] effected by the corporeal interaction of race and waste, Okri's tale allows us to look more closely at the living residues to which extractive industries give rise. In the process, his narrative opens up ways of viewing socioecological violence as an ongoing colonial condition by encoding into his tale what Opperman terms "the temporally diffuse violence of an atmosphere."[304] Invoking colonial and contemporary conditions of racial vulnerability through gothic bodily suffocation, Okri calls up the horrifying afterlives of human-made matter, in the double sense of humans made into matter and matter made by (certain) humans. Such visions of black corporeal debility return us to the cumulative weight of what Fanon saw as the colonised subject's "permanent struggle against omnipresent death …and the absence of any hope for the future."[305] In Okri's tale, the omnipresence of toxicity gives potent expression to the unliveable life of the postcolonial city, in which the terms of a racist world continue to be lived "as a suffocating and inescapable atmosphere – as necessary sustenance, even as it sickens and depletes."[306]

Conclusion: Breath's Revolt

If Césaire's *Notebook* anticipates or inspires postcolonial Caribbean literatures, then it can also be said that Césaire paves the way, so to speak, for the development of Okri's gothic aesthetics of asphyxiation. Far more important however, is that Césaire's gothic vocabulary – born in the moment of high colonisation – enables the tracing of ongoing conditions of racialised oppression from the colonial period into the postcolonial present. But both Césaire and Okri's gothic aesthetics do more than capture the continuation of the present-day chokehold over black life through the development of environmental forms of racism. Indeed, like Césaire, whose poem ultimately turns on the urgency of the cry of revolution, Okri's story also ends with a turn towards possible forms of insurrection and emancipation. Echoing Césaire's 'cry' against

303 Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies.*
304 Opperman, "A Permanent Struggle", p. 69.
305 Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism,* p. 38.
306 Opperman, p. 74.

the confining logics of the colonial city, Okri's narrative highlights the devastating effects of atmospheric toxicity upon black bodies and environments, but places equal emphasis on the forms of endurance that emerge under these lived conditions. Salient here is that Okri's tale concludes with a poignant reflection on the relations of care that structure the friendship between Marjomi and Emokhai. As the story draws to a close, Emokhai searches the polluted "red city" for Marjomi, eventually finding him asleep in his makeshift dwelling.[307] Marvelling "at the gentle ferocity of his spirit," Emokhai watches over his slumbering friend, careful to maintain the peace he finds in sleep, noticing how his face is "completely devoid of its [previous] tortured expressions".[308]

Here, then, the act of caring becomes framed in terms that emphasise the resilience that remains even in the absence of obvious agency. While Emokhai and Marjomi dwell in the 'intimate monstrosities' produced by oil capitalism, this lived condition also inspires a commitment to forms of caring rooted in the shared materiality of suffering. When Marjomi awakes, Okri concludes his story with a final scene in which the friends smoke dope stolen from "the governor's secret farms."[309] The story ends, then, with this final act of defiance, in which the act of breathing – the narrative's key source of traumatic wounding and pain – is reconfigured into a practice of insurgence that takes the form of social bonding and pleasure. Thus, while both Césaire and Okri showcase the manifold oppressions that engender the (neo)colonial infrastructures of global crisis and its racist circulation, they also speak to the continued urgency of revolt. In so doing, these texts provide us with gothic visions that not only emphasise a lived experience of racial violence, but which also exceed its choking and debilitating terms.

[307] Okri, p. 76.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid., p. 79.

Conclusion

This project has taken the form of an investigation into the relation between gothic aesthetics and world-ecology through an analysis of the commodity frontier. Throughout the preceding chapters, I have offered the commodity frontier as the material basis upon which gothic forms of narrativisation feed. I have done so by arguing that the gothic aesthetics in literatures from Nigeria, the Caribbean and Latin America erupt from, and give expression to, the socio-environmental transformations produced by a range of commodity frontiers in the (semi)peripheral arenas of the world-system, including sugar, silver, and gold, as well as oil and its toxic atmospheric afterlives. By centering my analysis on a series of gothic literary responses to these commodity frontiers, I have sought to make the claim that the form contains within it a crucial means of concretising the realities of the frontier zone and its attendant enviro-social life-worlds. In so doing, I have offered this project as a feminist eco-materialist investigation into the myriad ways in which the socioecological instantiations of the sugar, silver, gold and oil frontiers have come to act upon the written form, leading to the emergence of gothic modalities and vocabularies that provide fruitful grounds from which to better comprehend the life- and environment-making dynamics of the commodity frontier in terms of its twinned logics of exploitation and appropriation.

In this sense, I have expanded upon Michael Niblett's analysis of the formation of literary production in relation to the transformative character of the commodity frontier. Much of the fictions that Niblett focuses on in his analysis of the literary registration of the commodity frontier do not subscribe to conventionally 'realist' modes of representation. Indeed, Niblett argues that the commodity frontier often produces 'irreal' or 'phantasmagoric' stylistics, for these aesthetics provide a means for writers to "look beyond reality's reified forms of appearance."[1] Niblett's analysis strongly recalls Sylvia Wynter's argument regarding the social and literary significance of the plot and the plantation in the Caribbean. As I noted in my first chapter, Wynter views the divide of the Caribbean environment into the plot and plantation system as in turn bringing into being a crisis that challenges previous modes of representation. Mirroring how the literal plot of land becomes destabilised under its subordination to the logic of sugar cash-cropping, the *literary* plot likewise becomes destabilised as Caribbean writers

[1] Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 169.

are confronted “with a set of forces [so] complex, externalised and intangible” that previous modes of cultural production – like realism – become inadequate to their representation. [2]

Wynter’s point about the plantation’s transformative effect on Caribbean literary development speaks to the more general questions that have energised this study. As I have pointed out throughout this project, the gothic has long proven a particularly fitting mode for the expression of a world transformed by capitalist commodification. Much of the critical study that has been done on the gothic’s ability to encode capitalist transformation has pivoted on the form’s registration of the invasion of market relations into new, previously uncapitalised spheres of life. For critics like Stephen Shapiro, the gothic mediates, in particular, the process by which capitalism “separates laborers from any means of production…that might sustain them outside of or in tension with a system that produces commodities only for their profit-generating potential.”[3] Thus, the gothic captures exploitative labour relations through its registration of one of capitalism’s defining features – the alienation of the worker from their means of production. Yet, others have shown how capitalism as a system ‘free-rides’ on a series of devaluations that do not include direct processes of labour exploitation. These devaluations include what Nancy Fraser terms capitalism’s ‘background conditions’ or ‘hidden abodes’, which together illustrate how capitalism feeds as much on nature’s energies as it does on women’s work and racialised bodies.[4]

It was this latter point that framed this study’s central intervention into the fields of both gothic studies and world-literature. Rendering these ‘hidden abodes’ visible necessitated that I bring together a materialist feminist framework with the world-ecology perspective. In so doing, I aimed to place at the center of my analysis questions which world-systems thinking has yet to adequately take into consideration. As I noted in my Introduction, for critics like Wilma Dunaway, world-systems thought has tended not only to ignore “the centrality of households and women…in globalized production processes”[5] but also “the ecological aspects

[2] Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (1971), 95-102, (95).
[3] Stephen Shapiro, “Transvaal, Transylvania: Dracula’s World-system and Gothic Periodicity,” *Gothic Studies* 10, no.1 (2008), 29-47 (30).
[4] Nancy Fraser, “Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 86 (2014), 55-72 (63).
[5] Wilma A Dunaway, “Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation: Rescuing Women from the Periphery of World-System Thought,” in *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century: Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. by Ramon Grosfoguel and Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez (London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 127- 46 (p. 128).

of women's lives."[6] In order to attend to this gap in world-system's scholarship, I have investigated how the gothic might index what Maria Mies terms patriarchal capitalism's "hidden underground," a trilogy of oppression and violence comprised of "nature, women, and the colonies."[7] Building on Niblett's concept of the commodity frontier as a narrative category, I have illustrated how the capitalist world-ecology cannot be fully understood without taking account of its manifold structural oppressions. Key to this argument was my study on the gothic and its various aesthetics, which, following critics like Kerstin Oloff, I argued served not only as a crucial example of world-literature but also as a particularly powerful mode through which to render visible the commodity frontier's twinned logics of exploitation and appropriation. By arguing that the specific gendered and racialised conditions of frontier-led expansion provide the concrete basis from which gothic forms of narrativisation emerge, I made a claim for a feminist eco-materialist analysis of gothic aesthetics as mediated in a range of regional literatures from West Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

In my first chapter, I explored the relation between the plantation home and the sugar field through comparison between Eric Walrond's "The Vampire Bat" and Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women*. By comparing these two plantation texts, I showed how the process of sugar cash-cropping is as formative to the production of enslaved labour as it is to gendered appropriation. The gothic, I suggested, provided a central means of expressing these relations, for it registered not only the very real horrors of the plantation system, but also enabled the comparison of the sugar field – the site of primary commodity production – with that of the home. This analysis enabled me to illustrate how the commodity frontier might come to include sites which do not fall within the direct sphere of production, and thus contributed to Niblett's formulations of the frontier as not merely a geographical location but also a category that narrativises the relations between domestic labour, gendered and racialised violence, and monocultural cash-cropping.

Echoing my first chapter's interest in investigating the relation between patriarchal violence and frontier-formation, my second chapter explored how the writings of Pauline Melville and Silvia Moreno-Garcia might be compared in order to interrogate how the mining of precious minerals both relies on, and reproduces, patriarchal control. In highlighting how

[6] Wilma A. Dunaway, "Through the Portal of the Household: Conceptualizing Women's Subsidies to Commodity Chains", in *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production*, ed. by Wilma A. Dunaway (Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 55-71 (p. 56).
[7] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 87.

these texts showcase mineral extraction as a history of the present, I argued that both "Erzulie" and *Mexican Gothic* make use of gothic terminologies to express the linkages between mineral extraction, patriarchal domination, and gendered violence in both the Caribbean during the twentieth century and in the present-day Mexican context.

My final chapter aimed to make a new intervention in studies on the gothic by offering the form as encoding the systemic nature of environmental racism and the racialised experience of infrastructural violence and atmospheric pollution. Focusing on Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* and Ben Okri's "In the City of Red Dust," I compared how Césaire's earlier renditions of the suffocating confines of colonial infrastructure allow for the interrogation of how racialised vulnerability to atmospheric toxicity is carried forward into the postcolonial city. In so doing, I illustrated how the study of Césaire's and Okri's gothic aesthetics allow for the understanding of contemporary conditions of black bodily exposure to air-borne toxicity in light of a much longer history of spatial enclosure and racial violence opened by colonial town-planning.

While much of my analysis has taken the form of rendering visible the occluded links between resource extraction and gendered and racialised violence, it has also pivoted on highlighting how the gothic might encode more than merely an interrogative possibility. Indeed, many of the texts I have considered have looked to the gothic to imagine alternatives to the oppressive structures attendant upon frontier formation. In this sense, the critical 'work' of the gothic can be said to perform a double function, illustrating, on the one hand, how the commodity frontier acts as a "force internal to literary form,"[8] while, on the other, providing for the imaginative ground in which to cultivate alternatives to its socioecological antagonisms. The gothic mode, as it is advanced in the texts that comprise this study, all reach toward an aesthetic vocabulary that might make possible liberation against what Niblett terms "the frontier-led brutalization of lives, labour and land."[9] This is the case in a qualified sense for Walrond and James, but certainly holds fully true for Melville, Moreno-Ģarcia, Césaire and Okri, whose gothic aesthetics are as much mobilised to critique systemic gendered and racialised violence in the context of frontier-led expansion as they are to envision possible forms of emancipation from the world-systemic oppressions that the frontier both relies upon and sets into motion. Such a commitment to the gothic's emancipatory possibilities was particularly evident in my third chapter, which showed how Césaire and Okri employed a range

[8] Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology,* p. 5.
[9] Ibid., p. 251.

of gothic effects to map the racialised nature of global ecological crisis, while also paying tribute to emancipatory black corporealities that exceeded the choking terms of the (post)colonial city. As a means of concluding, I would like, therefore, to consider some future directions that this project might take. Many of these directions, as I elaborate below, hinge on some personal reflections that I have made while living and working in the city of Johannesburg, a South African metropolis entirely built on the colonial gold frontier, and which contains within it many of the same conditions that animate Césaire and Okri's toxic and asphyxiating cities.

Gothic Cities of Gold: A (Personal) View from Johannesburg, South Africa

"Resource extraction," writes Bettina Engels, "has for the last two decades been one of the fastest growing economic sectors all over the world and particularly in the Global South."[10] Although extraction is undoubtedly on the rise across the Global South as a whole, few countries have seen mining activity on the scale at which it occurs in South Africa's Gauteng Region.[11] "Johannesburg and its surrounding areas," observe Guy Trangos and Kerry Bobbins, "are the sites of the largest and deepest gold resources in the world, a natural asset that has enabled the city-region to become South Africa's foremost economic engine."[12] Indeed, if it were not for gold, Johannesburg would not exist. Gold extraction has provided the backbone of the city's rapid growth since the nineteenth century, when a large gold basin was located in 1885 along a rocky outcrop called the Witwatersrand ('the ridge of white waters') that extends in an east-west direction across the central Gauteng City-Region, also known as the 'Rand.'[13] At the time, this gold deposit was the largest in the world, and would thus come to attract scores of prospectors from all over the globe keen to capitalise on South Africa's mineral reserves. "The investing public of Germany, France and England was electrified", wrote the economist Donald Gilbert in 1933, "by the glowing prospects painted by the promoters, and rushed to provide the necessary capital to exploit the new Eldorado."[14] Within a simple matter of months,

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[10] Bettina Engels, "Gold is not for Eating: Conflicts Related to Gold Mining in Burkina Faso," *The Journal of the Commodity Frontiers Initiative* 1 (2020), 1-6 (1).

[11] Guy Trangos and Kerry Bobbins, "Gold Mining Exploits and The Legacies of Johannesburg's Mining Landscapes," *Scenario Journal* (2015), https://scenariojournal.com/article/gold-mining-exploits/ [accessed 4 August 2022].

[12] Trangos and Bobbins, "Gold Mining Exploits," online.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Donald Wood Gilbert, "The Economic Effects of the Gold Discoveries upon South Africa: 1886–1910," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 47, no, 4 (1933), 553-597 (555).

colonial gold mining transformed "the farmlands and open grass plains that fell along the Rand into a bustling mining town," leading to the development of what would eventually become known as the city of Johannesburg. Thanks to the profits made by gold extraction, Johannesburg is presently South Africa's largest metropole and one of Africa's leading economic engines. Such has been the centrality of gold to Johannesburg that locals frequently refer to the city as '*eGoli*' – the Zulu word for 'The Place of Gold.'

Historically, mining on the Rand not only extracted significant wealth from the ground; it also entrenched deep economic and racial divides across South Africa. As is well known, South Africa's economy has for centuries relied on a cheap black labour force, which, in the context of the nineteenth century gold frontier, "led to a new set of socially extractive and highly destructive forces for South Africa that manifested in the infamous migrant labour system."[15] Under the migrant labour system, black workers were recruited to gold mines located far from their rural homes and communities. Once these workers arrived at the mines, they were trapped in both highly "exploitative contracts and working conditions that dramatically limited their freedoms."[16] The mine hostel and compound formed key elements of this system and remained so for over 125 years. Indeed, the need for cheap black labour, inaugurated by the colonial gold mining sector, was the seed that spawned the systems of segregation and apartheid. Even in the contemporary, post-apartheid moment, the legacies of the migrant labour system remain. As Peter Delius observes, the development of the migrant labour system

> had deeply destructive consequences for family life, as well as for peer group forms of socialisation. To this day, this toxic and intractable legacy remains a major impediment to positive processes of social and economic change in South Africa.[17]

Now living in Johannesburg, I see the ghosts of this history everywhere. Gold's afterlife is not only manifested in the city's devastating levels of impoverishment and unemployment, but also in the material formations of Johannesburg itself. On my way to work, I pass countless street signs that signal the centrality of the gold frontier to the city: 'nugget avenue,' 'gold street,'

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[15] Trangos and Bobbins, "Gold Mining Exploits," online.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Peter Delius, "Migrant labour in South Africa (1800-2014)," *Oxford research encyclopaedia of African history: Economic and social history, Southern Africa*, 2017, https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory [accessed 4 August 2022].

'prospector's road.' My partner even goes to meet a local businessman in The Rand Club, a "timeless South African icon" located in the heart of the city's financial district and established in 1887 by gold proprietor and imperialist Cecil John Rhodes.[18] I write this Conclusion from my office in Johannesburg's University of the Witwatersrand, and out of my window I see a city cloaked in mineral dust. This dust comes from the hundreds of mine dumps that lie on the outskirts of the metropole, which, now abandoned, provide Johannesburg with both its scarred landscape and "its distinctive skyline."[19] As a local journalist writes, "Johannesburg's mine dumps look strangely beautiful from a distance. Lustrously yellow in the sun, blazing red at dusk."[20]

Yet, there is nothing beautiful about these dumps up close. For many of the communities who live in the shadow of these hills, the mine deposits remind them of South Africa's colonial history of migrant labour and the apartheid-era urban segregations it brought into being, which ensured the enforced removal of black residents from the city by placing them in huge townships on Johannesburg's peripheries. In addition to the legacy of urban segregation and black labour exploitation that these hills symbolise, the 'mine belt' provides locals with little more than hopelessness, illness, and death. This is because many of the people who live here, the majority of whom are black and poor, have died or become ill from a series of respiratory diseases caused by the inhaling of toxic residues produced by decades of gold mining, which contain "traces of everything from copper and lead to cyanide and arsenic."[21] In the local clinic, doctors confirm that "respiratory cases such as tuberculosis and asthma are ubiquitous across all age groups. Rashes and skins diseases are commonplace, too."[22]

The influx of illness in these communities is largely attributed to the periodic releasing of uranium compounds produced by the recent re-mining of the city's historic mine tailings, a process that has become very popular in Johannesburg over the last decade. Today, many of Johannesburg's abandoned mine deposits are being re-churned in the desperate hopes of rediscovering gold that may have gone unnoticed during the first round of extraction. Capturing how "present-day mining activities along the Rand reprocesses mine waste to extract further

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[18] "Rand Club Heritage", *The Rand Club*, https://www.randclub.co.za/about-randclub/rand-club-heritage/ [accessed 12 August 2022].
[19] Oliver Balch, "Radioactive City: how Johannesburg's townships are paying for its mining past," *The Guardian*, 6 July 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/06/radioactive-city-how-johannesburgs-townships-are-paying-for-its-mining-past [accessed 3 August 2022].
[20] Balch, "Radioactive City," online.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

profits from the now-expired mining industry in order to revise sites of extraction,"[23] the South African government established the Ezulwini Project in 2008. This project aims to re-commission and re-mine a historic underground gold mining operation located about 40 kilometers south-west of Johannesburg.[24] Driving out of the city to visit my father in the Free State, I pass many of Ezulwini's workers, who can be seen scampering across the mine heaps, sifting through the dregs of once-rich ores in an effort to harvest fragments of gold that might remain in these waste deposits.

But even if these left-over gold deposits provide a mediocre lifeline for the city's poor, this is nothing when compared to re-mining's destructive consequences on both human and extra-human geographies. The issue with re-mining is that it releases uranium compounds produced from older mining processes. "In the past," writes a local environmentalist, "uranium was merely a waste product and therefore dumped without being recovered. Those tailing disposal facilities therefore have a relatively high uranium concentration today."[25] Due to the re-mining process, Johannesburg has come to be known as both "*eGoli*" and "Radioactive City."[26] Despite the insistence from many of the multinational companies who facilitate the re-mining process that "gold mining is now known for its sustainability and not for biodiversity loss or sweeping environmental destruction," Johannesburg is the most radioactive city in the world.[27] Without proper management, ore-bearing uranium seeps from the mine tailings and into surrounding streams and wetlands. Such are the high levels of radioactive waste in Johannesburg's groundwater that the city procures the majority of its drinking water from the neighboring country of Lesotho nearly 400 kilometers away; this despite Johannesburg having some of the largest reserves of groundwater in the world.

Many of these conditions are captured by South African author Lauren Beukes' now-famous gothic novel *Zoo City* (2010). Staging just how ubiquitous Johannesburg's gold deposits are in the everyday lives of the Johannesburg's inhabitants, Beukes opens her novel

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[23] Trangos and Bobbins, "Gold Mining Exploits," online.
[24] "Ezulwini Uranium and Gold Mine, Gauteng," *Mining Technology*, 6 October 2008, https://www.mining-technology.com/projects/ezulwini/#:~:text=The%20Ezulwini%20project%20involves%20the%20re-commissioning%20of%20an,currently%20operating%20on%20a%20care%20and%20maintenance%20basis [accessed 2 August 2022].
[25] Balch, "Radioactive City," online.
[26] "Gold Tailings & The Environment," *PanAfrican Resources*, 3 December 2022, https://www.panafricanresources.com/2020/12/03/gold-tailings-retreatment-offers-an-environmental-solution/ [accessed 1 August 2022].
[27] "Gold Tailings & The Environment," online.

with a scene in which her protagonist, a young black woman named Zinzi, is awoken by "morning light the sulphur colour of the mine dumps that seep across Johannesburg's skyline."[28] Like this opening scene, which heralds the quotidian experience of Johannesburg's historic gold sector upon the city's subjects, Zinzi's occupation is similarly tied to the history of regional resource extraction. Her vocation is to find a range of objects lost by Johannesburg's inhabitants, a job which often takes her into the abandoned mines that lie "deep under the city."[29] For critics like Jessica Dickson, Beukes' rendition of Johannesburg's mine tunnels "provide the city with a depth of character that contrasts to the street-level impression of Johannesburg."[30] To be sure, the novel undoubtedly plays with the contrasts between the city's surface and its hidden underground. But what is crucial to Beukes' portrayal of Johannesburg's subterrain arenas is that these render the city in markedly unfamiliar terms. Indeed, Zinzi's move from Johannesburg's city-surface to its underground mines is shown to be significantly disorientating. "This is all unfamiliar," says Zinzi,

> the tunnels are a scramble of pitch-black termite holes, some of them narrowing away to nothing, like whoever was digging them got bored and wandered off. The original gold diggings maybe, when Johannesburg was still just a bunch of hairy prospectors scrabbling in the dirt.[31]

In this sense, the novel's rendition of Johannesburg's underground mines does more than simply provide the city with 'a depth of character', for these tunnels also bring to the surface a repressed history that disorientates Zinzi, and thus forces her to reflect on the ecological erasures created by the city's colonial mining origins. Moreover, if Beukes' tunnels serve as a site of repressed history, then they equally elucidate something of Johannesburg's gothic quality. After all, as we have seen, the gothic has typically turned on what lies buried beneath the surface. As Allan Lloyd-Smith contends, the gothic is "about the return of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secrets that subvert or corrode the present."[32] Gesturing to its inspiration by the gothic form's investment in excavating what is buried underground, Beukes' novel is replete with images of the land constantly giving away beneath Zinzi's feet, fissuring, letting things emerge, or be unearthed.

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[28] Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2010), p. 1.
[29] Beukes, *Zoo City*, p. 9.
[30] Jessica Dickson, "Reading the (Zoo) City: The Social Realities and Science Fiction of Johannesburg," *The Johannesburg Salon* 7 (2014), 67-78 (74).
[31] Beukes, p. 188.
[32] Alan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 1.

In addition to referencing the instability of these historical holes in the ground – which, it should be noted, periodically collapse across the city – the novel also gestures to the recent emergence of Johannesburg's re-mining operations through other gothic vocabularies. Like my own encounter with these abandoned heaps that lie on Johannesburg's outskirts, Zinzi one day drives "out south to where the last of the mine dumps are – sulphur-coloured hills, laid waste by the ravages of weather and reprocessing."[33] Staging the present-day reality of the re-mining process in gothic terms of cannibalisation, Zinzi describes how these "ugly valleys have been gouged out and trucked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time round."[34] Given this process of re-sifting through once-rich ores, Zinzi wonders if "maybe it's appropriate that *eGoli*, the place of gold, is self-cannibalizing."[35] In Beukes' novel we therefore encounter a gothic rendition of Johannesburg that cannot be understood without the city's historic gold frontier. The presence of the gothic in the novel provides a stark illustration of the ways in which mining capital has transformed both Johannesburg's society and its environmental landscape, to the extent that the city itself becomes a kind of monstrous cannibalistic force that literally eats its own foundations.

But the novel captures not only the transformative impact of the gold frontier on Johannesburg's contemporary lifeworld. It also marks the eruption of new South African literary imaginaries that attempt to express the haunting of the city by its extractive history through gothic forms of representation. Indeed, if Beukes' *Zoo City* exploits gothic imageries to stage the process of gold re-mining via a discourse of cannibalisation, then the contemporary reframing of Johannesburg as 'Radioactive City' likewise provides a crucial way of understanding the novel's investment in the gothic form. The radioactive qualities of Johannesburg are amplified in the novel at the levels of both form and style, for here, too, the narrative's gothic quality is inextricably tied to the presence of gold and its radioactive afterlives. "Stepping out in public," Zinzi tells us,

> is like walking into a tangle of cat's cradles, like someone dished out balls of string at a lunatic asylum and instructed the inmates to tie everything to something else. On some people, the lost strings are like cobwebs, inconsequential wisps that might blow away at any moment. On others it's like they're dragging electric cables.

[33] Beukes, p. 255.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

> Finding something is all about figuring out which string to pull on…threads that unspool and run deep into the city, deep under the city.[36]

Like Zinzi's ability to find lost things, which generates an electric pulse that connects her to the bowels of the city, it is the crackling, electric quality of Johannesburg that gives to the narrative not merely its gothic content but also its gothic *form*. If the gothic typically turns on 'the return of the past' and 'buried secrets' then its association here with particle emission emphasises the radioactive afterlives of gold extraction via the real-life process of re-mining, which, as Beukes shows, is itself inextricable from South Africa's colonial history of resource extraction. In the novel, then, Johannesburg becomes not merely the site in which gothic forms of representation become reframed and located in a local South African context; rather the city comes to function as a gothic site in and of itself. Put slightly differently, Johannesburg's every-day conditions, produced by both old and new forms of resource extraction, provide Beukes with more than merely a form of 'gothic inspiration.' For the novel also highlights how the gothic remains 'a mode of reality' by encoding and making possible the visibilisation of the transformative power of gold extraction and its toxic afterlives upon the city's landscape and subjects.

Much of what I have described above clearly resonates with the analysis I offered in my third chapter, which pivoted on Césaire and Okri's literacy renditions of the debilitating atmospheric conditions of colonial Martinique and postcolonial Nigeria. My examination of the South African context – and South African gothic literatures – thus suggests a significant departure from this project's predominant focus on the literatures of the Caribbean and Latin American regions. How, then, do we read for atmospheric and environmental racism in other regions of the world, specifically in contexts like South Africa, or, indeed, the African continent more broadly? If the gothic has provided fertile ground from which to analyse socioecological transformation in the Caribbean and Latin American contexts, is there a case to be made for an African gothic aesthetic that might equally mediate the monstrous intimacies of colonialism's toxic afterlives? Such questions might construct a generative basis for future studies that illustrate the centrality of the African continent and African literatures to commodity frontier analysis. Indeed, the inclusion of African narratives that deploy gothic iconographies into these corpuses of study has far-reaching implications for both the fields of frontier studies and gothic literature, as well as for studies on air and other climate related forms of pollution, given that

[36] Beukes, p. 6-8.

Africa – and particularly South Africa – is currently home to some of the highest levels of air pollution and atmospheric toxicity in the world.[37] If the gothic, as advanced throughout this project, serves as an aesthetic response to the pressures of socioecological change, then might African gothic aesthetics also encode these rising levels of toxicity and their attendant intimate bodily invasions? If so, then an interrogation into African literary responses to corporeal toxicity and illness might lay the groundwork for this project's future direction, and one which points – much like this present study – to the continued role that literature can play in not only critiquing the socially unequal and ecologically imperilled world which we currently inhabit, but also in offering us visions which might nurture the critical resources required for remaking it.

[37] "Cities With The Worst Air Quality In Africa," *World Atlas,* n.d. https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/cities-with-the-worst-air-quality-in-africa.html#:~:text=Cities%20With%20The%20Worst%20Air%20Quality%201%20Nigeria,South%20Africans%20every%20year.%20...%203%20Tunisia%20 [accessed 3 October 2022].

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