

RE-IMAGINING THE CARIBBEAN GARDEN

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JAMAICA KINCAID'S MY GARDEN (BOOK),
OLIVE SENIOR'S GARDENING IN THE TROPICS,
AND DIONNE BRAND'S IN ANOTHER PLACE, NOT HERE.

By

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ABSTRACT

European territorial expansion was based on the commodification and exploitation of non-European peoples and environments. Colonial domination was naturalized by a discourse that denigrated or erased the culture of colonized people. Plantation agriculture and scientific botanical gardens were deeply implicated in maintaining economic, political and cultural control in the colonies. In My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Dionne Brand, respectively, re-imagine the Caribbean garden not as a site of subjugation, but as a space from which to reclaim their bodies, their landscape, and their culture. They form a collaborative relationship with the Caribbean nature to recuperate the (re)productive power of their bodies and establish their economic independence from colonial and neo-colonial oppressors. Through their particular, often secret understanding of the nature of this region, the Caribbean gardeners are able to form authentic connections to this landscape and recover a sense of belonging to place. The gardeners in these texts also use their knowledge of the Caribbean environment to challenge the discursive control of the colonizer. By gardening, and writing about gardening, Kincaid, Senior and Brand mount a creative resistance to the artificial division between nature and culture on which the colonial project is founded. Their texts recreate the Caribbean landscape according to their lived experiences, and the gardens created by

these writers become texts that oppose the objectification and containment of the Caribbean people and environment in the language of the colonial discourse. Through their labours in the garden, Kincaid, Senior and Brand recover their creative agency and affirm their identity as Caribbean women.

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INTRODUCTION

Alfred W. Crosby writes that “we need to look at history not as only politics or religion or economics, but as biology” (xiv). Following his lead, I would like to examine the critical representation of nature, particularly gardens, and colonialism in three post-colonial texts: Jamaica Kincaid’s My Garden Book, Olive Senior’s Gardening in the Tropics, and Dionne Brand’s In Another Place, Not Here. These three women writers from the Caribbean return to the garden to create texts that destabilize the colonial discourse that authored the dispossession, dislocation and subjugation of colonized people. In the first of three chapters, I examine the way in which the women gardeners in these texts align themselves with nature to recover control of their bodies, and achieve economic and creative power through their labours in kitchen and market gardens. In the second chapter, I show that Kincaid, Senior and Brand counter the discursive control of the Caribbean landscape and peoples by colonial and neo-colonial rulers, using local knowledge and traditional practices. By establishing a sense of belonging, they are able to reclaim the land and maintain a sense of self. Finally, in the third chapter, I discuss the connections between gardening and writing as acts of creative resistance to cultural erasure under colonialism. Kincaid, Senior and Brand experiment with form and content, in their gardens and in their writings, to re-establish links to place, to affirm their identity as Caribbean women, and to create a space from which to articulate their history.

Kincaid, Senior, and Brand were born in Antigua, Jamaica, and Trinidad, respectively (Nurse D3; Clarke 257, 261). All three writers now live in North America; Brand and Senior call Canada home (Clarke 257,261), while Kincaid gardens in the U.S. (Nurse D3). As descendants of slaves brought to the Caribbean to work on sugar plantations, and living in countries that continue to benefit from the exploitation of the Caribbean people and environment, these women comprehend the link between nature and conquest. This connection can be understood in two significant ways, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In his discussion of this relationship, Crosby stresses the importance of the biological aspect of the European demographic takeover of regions in the temperate zone, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Uruguay (29). He argues that colonization of these lands was not solely dependent on European military might, but was facilitated predominantly by the European animals, plants and pathogens that worked in conjunction with the colonizer (32, 40, 41). This “symbiosis between European colonists, their animals, and plants” allowed the colonists to advance in the wake of the destruction caused by these organisms (40, 41). According to Crosby, ecological imperialism was a militaristic takeover of the aboriginal peoples of these lands who were “victims of accidental biological warfare” (xi). Smallpox, tuberculosis and venereal diseases were the “first strike force of the white immigrants” (36). These “aggressive and opportunistic” organisms were more effective than technology, economics or religion, Crosby argues, in killing or displacing the native peoples of these lands, and allowing for biological expansion by Europeans (41). While nature might have been a forceful accomplice in the colonization of non-European

worlds, the human colonizers are by no means exempt from responsibility. Tom Griffiths warns that while this focus on nature is important, it should not overlook the political, economic and cultural realities that fuelled the colonial project (2, 3). “Ecological imperialism,” he writes, “was sometimes a purposeful partnership and sometimes accidental; it was often both conscious and unconscious” (2). By whatever means this alliance was made, it was indispensable for achieving the human goal of taking possession of non-European lands.

The form of this physical conquest of space was determined by eighteenth-century European views of nature that were based on the idea that man had the right of property due to his ability to cultivate and use land (Ashcroft 180). Since “wealth derives from [such] human transformation of the environment” (Sweet 401), nature becomes a commodity whose value is determined by its ability to contribute to the colonial market. Timothy Sweet discusses this relationship between economy and ecology in the context of sixteenth-century promotional literature arguing for English expansion into the New World. He suggests, “Promising new possibilities for commodity in the most general sense, the American environment invited the English to develop a new mode of political economy, one that theorized economics in terms of environmental capacity in a way that the then-dominant mode, agrarianism, had not yet done” (400). The New World environment was an unlimited source of wealth that had to be possessed and exploited. The natural resources of New World could nourish the English economy, while absorbing England’s “excess” of products and people (Sweet 401, 412). In this sense, as Sweet writes, for the early promoters of colonization the New World was “both empty and full”

(405). These territories were replete with natural riches, but they were still “waste” lands because they were believed to be uncultivated lands (Sweet 403, 405). The conversion of the wild colonial landscape into productive gardens was meant to justify European dominance in the New World. Cultivation was a mark of “civilization,” with the boundary of the garden separating the colonizer from unknown and “savage” environments and people (Ashcroft 180). This ability to impose order on nature was considered by the colonizers to be “the distinctive characteristic of the Christian,” an indication of his right to rule the undisciplined colonial landscape and its inhabitants (MacKenzie 216, 217). Colonial interaction with the New World environment involved taming nature so that it could be brought under control and pressed into the service of the colonial economy.

The colonizing potential of plants was translated into economic power in the form of plantations in the New World. Native and European plants were grown in the colonies both for local consumption and for export (Crosby 66, 67). Plantation agriculture was established in the Americas and the Caribbean, and was an essential part of colonial trade. This form of colonial gardening, as John MacKenzie notes, was detrimental to the environment, for “[v]ast tracts of pre-colonial nature were overwhelmed as sugar, coffee, tea, indigo, the opium poppy, cinchona, jute, sisal, tobacco and rubber marched across the landscape” (219). Like the European diseases and invasive plants and animals that opened up the New World for colonization, plantations also devastated those who were forced to labour in them. The New World landscape, the native, and later the African body were commodities indispensable for colonial commerce. Over almost 400 years, 10

million people were brought as slaves from Africa to grow “sugar, tobacco, rice, indigo, cotton, and coffee” (Crosby 89). These cultivated plants were an intrinsic part of the conquest of new territories. As MacKenzie, echoing Crosby’s words, suggests, they functioned as “the shock troops of economic and natural historical warfare” (219).

For the colonizer, the plantation was an ordered, and more importantly, productive garden, a testament to his ingenuity and a justification of his power over the people and places under his rule. For the slaves toiling in the fields, their feelings of dislocation caused by their forced removal from their native place, was compounded by a foreign landscape that was implicated in their subjugation. Significantly, however, both the New World landscape and its inhabitants – Indigenous peoples and the African slaves who replaced them – were on the same side of the divide between civilization and wilderness. These colonized people were relegated to the realm of nature, which had to be dominated by the colonizer who was armed with a superior culture. Anne McClintock identifies a trope that she terms “anachronistic space” as being prevalent in colonial discourse (30). She argues that this concept was used to imagine colonized people as being outside of human, in other words, European history, as “exist[ing] in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of *human* agency – the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive’” (emphasis added 30). Their culture was denied or denigrated, and like the environment with which they were identified, colonized people become “the passive background in [colonial,] historical narratives” (Griffiths 2). In order to assuage the threat posed by unknown environments, the colonizer feminized the territories he encountered

(McClintock 22-24). This connection was used to expedite the conquest and plunder of non-European worlds. In their works, Kincaid, Senior and Brand parlay this imposed association with nature into an authentic bond with the place to which their ancestors were forcefully brought. Rather than dominating the land, the gardeners in these texts employ traditional farming methods that are based on the collaborative interaction with nature. According to Deane Curtin, agriculture has historically been the domain of women, who respect and utilize the particular characteristics of the local environment in their form of gardening (63, 65). Drawing on the diversity and cycles of nature (Curtin 65), the gardeners in these texts establish an empowering relationship that allows them to affirm their creative potential and to recover a sense of wholeness.

The colonial domination of land was accompanied, even facilitated by a discursive conquest of space. Military technology was assisted by “technolog[ies] of knowledge” in effecting the takeover of, and most importantly, maintaining control over new territories (McClintock 27). Colonial discourse attempted “to convert the uncolonized ‘space’ into colonized ‘place,’” and therefore, to own it, through language (Ashcroft 74). McClintock argues that colonial cartography claimed to “capture the truth about a place in pure, scientific form, operating under the guise of scientific exactitude and promising to retrieve and reproduce nature exactly as it is” (27, 28). Map-making was an assertion by the colonizer of knowledge of, and therefore power over that place. Brought within the boundaries of European experience in this way, the colonized space could be reordered and re-presented according to a worldview that naturalized the colonizer’s authority over the landscapes and peoples of the colonies. To validate this

claim, the presence of earlier inhabitants and their involvement with the land had to be denied. Colonizers imagined the non-European world as empty space, as virginal land (McClintock 30) waiting to be conquered. McClintock associates this performance of “discovery” with the ritual of baptism (29). She argues that in both cases, “western men publicly disavow the creative agency of others (the colonized/women) and arrogate to themselves the power of origins” (29). The act of discovery, like the act of baptism, concludes with a ceremonial christening. Marked with a European name, the land is appropriated into European history. This “strategy of naming,” according to McClintock, “expresses a desire for a single origin alongside a desire to control the issue of that origin” (28, 29). By erasing any evidence of native presence in a place, and then by re-naming that place, the European imperialists could claim exclusive rights to the non-European world. The story of that world would now begin with the moment of European discovery, and its significance and meaning would be dependent on its relationship to the centre of the empire to which it has been annexed.

This ideological control of new territories hinged on discounting the connection between colonized people and their native, or as in the case of African slaves, their adopted places. Only the colonizer could have a true understanding of these territories, one based on scientific observation and measurement, rather than intimate experience with the land. The apparently objective science of Europe became an instrument in legitimating the colonial project. Mary Louis Pratt argues that the emergence of the field of natural history during the second part of the eighteenth century was a powerful agent in the colonization of the biology of non-European landscapes. Interestingly, this “new

knowledge-building project” was spurred on by the invention of a system of naming the natural world (Pratt 24). In 1735, the naturalist Carl Linnaeus created “a descriptive system designed to classify all the plants on the earth, known and unknown” (Pratt 24). Visual scrutiny was enough to translate the unknown, and even threatening, into the familiar language of science, neutralizing its power (Pratt 25). According to Pratt, this was even more effective than map-making in allowing the colonizer to assert his authority over the places and people he encountered (33). She contends that “natural history’s naming is more directly transformative. It extracts all the things of the world and redeploys them into a new knowledge formation whose value lies precisely in its difference from the chaotic original. Here the naming, the representing, and the claiming are all one; the naming brings the reality of order into being” (33). Significantly, this was a European order that was used to construct, to make sense of the world. Here was another “technology of knowledge,” being used this time by the naturalist, to exert ideological, and therefore, political control over non-European places and peoples. This “totalizing, classificatory project” (Pratt 28) devalued the importance of the particular experiences of Indigenous peoples, and their understanding of local landscapes (Pratt 31). The imposition of European authority repeatedly required the erasure of indigenous history, culture and knowledge. Stripped of these European markers of humanity, colonized people could also be assimilated into a hierarchical classificatory system that confirmed the supremacy of Europeans (Pratt 32).

The impetus to order nature according to the rules of Western science was made material in the form of botanical gardens. The students of Linnaeus became important

participants in the colonial project as they travelled the world capturing foreign landscapes one specimen at a time (Pratt 25, 27). Threatening non-European environments could be taken apart piece by piece and made familiar by incorporating them into structured systems of classification. This in situ dissection was not enough to assert European authority over new landscapes. Because the European is always the latecomer, “[d]iscovery,” as McClintock notes, “is a *retrospective* act” (29). It is an act that has significance only when the object of discovery can be taken home and reconstructed in language as, for example, “a name on a map” or a name in a naturalist’s notebook (Pratt qtd. in McClintock 29, 30; Pratt 25). The display of flora and fauna brought back to Europe also was an important part of reproducing the unknown in a form that confirmed Europe’s power over its colonies. These “botanical discoveries” (Linnaeus qtd. in Pratt 27) were collected in botanical gardens such as the Kew Gardens in England, where the empire was available for public consumption (Pratt 25; Ritvo 374). Such gardens were important in changing the way the people at home imagined their relationship to the world outside of Europe. The garden was not only a cultivated plot, a space painstakingly retrieved from wild nature; as Harriet Ritvo points out, the botanical garden was a space within which frightening, dangerous, exotic nature could be safely contained (368). Ordered and tamed inside walled gardens, colonial landscapes could be represented as being brought under the physical and ideological control of the imperial centre (Ritvo 375).

Botanical gardens, like plantations, were designed to create a separation between the European colonizer and non-European landscapes, and to establish his dominion over

the nature and the people of those territories. The scientific garden was an important part of Europe's colonial expansion. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, for example, was envisioned as

the center of a network of subsidiary gardens at home and in the colonies that would 'aid the mother-country in every thing that is useful in the vegetable kingdom,' relating to 'medicine, commerce, agriculture, horticulture, and many valuable branches of manufacture,' as well as providing botanical information on 'points connected with the founding of new colonies.' (qtd. in Ritvo 373, 374)

The botanical garden would be a source of knowledge about colonial environments, knowledge that would be used to exploit and conquer those territories. While colonial military or political control can be overthrown, the effects of this "botanical imperialism" (Ritvo 374) are persistent, subtle, and much more devastating. It not only formed the basis of the economic power of the Europeans in colonies, but also is deeply implicated in facilitating their cultural control over the people who were subsumed into a European narrative. Kincaid, Senior and Brand write against this psychological oppression by returning to the gardens that were the sites of subjugation. The gardeners in these texts use their bodies to engage with their environment in a way that allows them to move beyond unequal power relations and to recover their agency. To counter the physical and cultural dislocation that is their inheritance, these writers propose to re-imagine their world in a way that acknowledges their active participation and historical presence in the Caribbean, and celebrates the value of indigenous or local knowledge and experience. Their aim is not to replace colonial exploitation of the landscape and people with a neo-colonial romanticization of native nature and culture. Instead, Kincaid, Senior, and

Brand, taking cues from the biological history of the Caribbean, integrate their pre-colonial past and their colonial experience into a narrative that finds strength in creolization, and which upsets the totalizing order of the colonial discourse. In examining My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, I would like to show that Kincaid, Senior and Brand reclaim their bodies and their environments, and translate this tangible victory into economic, cultural and political power.

CHAPTER ONE: EARTHBOUND BODIES

Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior, and Dionne Brand turn towards the earth, to the garden, to examine their relationship to their native Caribbean. Drawing strength from the nature of this region, strong female voices emerge in My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, challenging their dispossession and subjugation under colonialism, and the neocolonial legacy it engendered in the Caribbean. Colonial discourse confined women to the natural world, and used this association to objectify and dominate both women and the environment. This connection has been a recurring theme in works from the Caribbean, as writers attempt to explore specifically, the physical and psychological effects of European rule on the people now living in this region. “Caribbean literature,” as Seodial Deena notes, “depicts the colonizer as the white male who exploits the land and the woman, and destroys or threatens to destroy the relationship between the woman and the landscape” (370). Even as colonized women and nature become commodities necessary for the economic and political strength of the empire, the value of the Indigenous or African body and the Caribbean environment is denied, and ultimately, they are destroyed. Kincaid, Brand and Senior, and their characters, are women who collaborate with their environment to reclaim the Caribbean body, to affirm its creative powers, and to strive against its erasure.

In Gardening in the Tropics, Olive Senior writes about a Caribbean island, indirectly identified as Jamaica, to re-evaluate the relationship of both Indigenous people and the African slaves who replaced them to the land, and their ability to survive in a post-colonial landscape. Contrary to the ideas propagated by colonial literature, Senior's poetry reveals that the people of the Caribbean had an intimate connection with and understanding of their environment, and significantly, a long tradition of farming. The jungle was a garden, claims the native speaker in the poem "Seeing the Light" (93). Yuca and maize were cultivated to feed the people who lived in small clearings that accommodated huts and paths (93). The darkness of these gardens symbolizes a non-violent, non-exploitative way of interacting with the environment, where the gardeners "made the tiniest scratch / on Mother Earth," and "never took more than [they] needed" (93). The colonizer could see only an impenetrable "green (and dark) terrain" (93) that teemed with hidden danger and potential profits. The presence of indigenous gardens, "symbol[s] of civilization" and of culture, challenges the colonial discourse which imagined non-European worlds as savage wastelands in order to justify their conquest (Ritvo 368).

Senior populates the pre-colonial and modern gardens in her poems with "strong Amazon / women" who not only tend the earth, but are willing to endanger their bodies to protect it (95). The unnatural Amazon woman was a popular trope in European texts during the period of colonial expansion (Brown 157). Figures such as these were used to mark the margins of the known, European world. Anne McClintock notes, "As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically

feminized borders and boundaries. Female figures were planted like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact” (24). A feminized world could be imagined to pose little resistance to conquest, and naturalized the authority of the colonizer over these territories (McClintock 23, 24). This was a means of depicting, and therefore, capturing and controlling the unknown. However, the female body that is used by the imperial male to facilitate the European transition into non-European worlds becomes a source of great uneasiness, because of this very ability to simultaneously occupy, and access, these two spaces. McClintock argues that while “the feminizing of the land appears to be no more than a familiar symptom of male megalomania, it also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss” (24). The boundary separating civilization and savage wilderness becomes permeable, threatening the integrity of the colonizer’s world. The trope of the Amazon woman also reveals the ambivalence inherent in such constructions. Sighted on the edge of the known world (Brown 157), they are part of what McClintock describes as “a long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment” (22). She writes, “For centuries, the uncertain continents – Africa, the Americas, Asia – were figured in European lore as libidinally eroticized,” home to “monstrous sexuality” (22). This assertion of difference between Europe and unexplored territories is a tactic designed to diffuse the threat posed by the unknown, but which ultimately exposes the colonizer’s intense fear and uncertainty. Depicted as being “warlike,” the Amazon women have the physical power and ferocious nature to resist the colonizer’s claim to their land (Brown 157). By trading in the precious metals they have in their possession, these “wealthy” women establish their economic

power (Brown 157, 159). Furthermore, by maintaining control over their bodies and sexuality, determining with whom and when they have intercourse, they have the potential to emasculate the colonizer (Brown 160). Senior uses the contradictions that are part of the trope of the Amazon to counter the colonial and post-colonial capitalist attempts to objectify, control and negate the female body and the landscape of the Caribbean.

By juxtaposing the savage Amazon and the civilized garden, Senior confounds artificial boundaries. Traditionally, European women were confined to “rural, cultivated nature,” to “civilized gardens” (Norwood qtd. in Plevin 441). This assignment to a tamed and controlled environment becomes a way of containing women within the organizing rules of society. The Amazon woman, by inhabiting the wilderness, transgresses the boundaries of the garden, and thus, represents a figure of subversion, of rebellion. However, by taking up the role of gardener, she also perpetuates order and civility. Senior’s Amazon women destabilize the distinctions between wild and tame, between jungle and garden, between the savage native and civilized colonizer, distinctions which are needed to maintain colonial power. Although the narrator in “Amazon Women” calls the stories of “the missionary Brett and Sir Walter / Raleigh” sensational gossip fulfilling an appetite for the exotic, she does not entirely dismiss them (95, 96). Instead, Senior’s poem retells the story of the Amazon Toeyza, but this time calls attention to the violence instigated by men (96). In order to punish his adulterous wife, Toeyza’s husband, “a chief at that,” according to Senior’s version, “skinned and hung the lover up / in the women’s hut as a lesson / to faithless wives” (96). For Senior, “set[ting] the record / straight” does

not mean erasing the old narrative, but scrutinizing it more closely to expose the ways in which it functions to subjugate the female body, and nature, in the Caribbean (95). Senior also uses the trope of the Amazon woman to recover instances of resistance to colonial domination and erasure. The Amazon women, the speaker suggests, were “women who kept the gardens going” when “the warriors went away / - to war or voyages” (95). The women, therefore, were gardeners who were forced to use “arms to defend the territory” in the absence of men (95). Even Toeyza was “gather[ing] cassava for a feast” when her lover was murdered (96). As gardeners, these women have creative agency. They have the power to order, cultivate and use their environment, albeit in a different form, a prerogative the colonizer tried to withhold for himself. Secondly, their role as gardeners differs from the passive position inside the garden, or on its borders that the imperial male assigned to them. In fact, gardening in the tropics requires that these women take on the active task of fighting to protect their land.

Gardening is also a way for women to maintain their physical and mental health in the face of a debilitating colonial legacy. In “Hurricane Story, 1944,” Senior describes the struggles of a couple who choose to deal with subjugation under colonialism in different ways. The man covers himself with the accoutrements of civility as he tries to be a part of the “white-collar class” (24). In imitation of his employer, he dresses his Caribbean body in European clothes in an effort to win the respect of and acceptance into the small circle of people who rule his island. The speaker in the poem writes that this disguise required that her father “put on / his bicycle clips / his straw boater,” and have his “pens lined up in pocket” (24). Not only did he alter his appearance by having his

“hair slicked down,” but also his language, making sure to keep his “vowels well oiled” (24). In order to be “a gentleman in good employment,” an “assistant,” and therefore, useful to the white employers, he had to deny the blackness of his body and deny his voice (24, 25). The fragile identity that he constructs for himself becomes “unstuck,” along with “the roof the fields the job,” when a hurricane moves through the island. The employer has taken precautions against such a disaster, and therefore, is unaffected (26). The speaker’s father, however, dependent on the European ruling class for his employment and his sense of self-worth, cannot overcome this setback. The colonizer’s contempt for the black man creates feelings of self-loathing in the colonized person. Unable to accept himself, and unable to be accepted as a white man, he experiences a paralyzing fragmentation of his identity. Kincaid writes that the desire to be like the colonizers becomes so great that colonized people mimic the Europeans “almost to the point of sickness; they come to believe that your [the colonizers’] way is their way and would die before they give it up” (141). The man in Senior’s poem succumbs to a despair that leads to him to commit violence against himself and his family (27). In order to save herself and her family, his wife turns to the soil. Her work in the garden ensures that her children have food, shelter, and education (26).

By becoming a gardener, the woman in Senior’s poem is returning to a domain that historically has belonged to women, and which has been a source of physical, and significantly, political and spiritual strength to them. In her discussion of the Green Revolution, Deane Curtin examines the way in which modern development programs adversely affect indigenous agricultural practices, especially women’s agriculture. As

Curtin notes, women have always been the farmers in traditional societies, and largely responsible for producing the food supply to sustain their communities (60, 63). The colonial project, an earlier Western development program designed to make the non-European world an ordered and productive garden, usurped the power of these indigenous women gardeners. Not only did they lose their right and connection to place, but as they became subsumed with the landscape into a colonial economy, these women also lost their political independence. Women were also in charge of the family seed supply and determining which seeds would be planted (Curtin 65). As “plant breed[ers]” (Curtin 65) and food growers, women had important reproductive and productive roles to play in their communities. Under colonial rule, however, they were denied this agency, and instead became objects, tools to be manipulated and used in the service of the empire. Carolyn Merchant discusses the changing perceptions and roles of women and nature in European society in her significant work, The Death of Nature. Her examination of the changes produced by the Scientific Revolution during the time of vigorous colonial expansion is particularly relevant to this discussion. Merchant writes:

The new economic and scientific order emerging in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe would be of lasting significance for both nature and women, for at its ideological core were the concepts of passivity and control in the spheres of production and reproduction. Disorderly female nature would soon submit to the controls of the experimental method and technological advance, and middle- and upper-class women would gradually lose their roles as active partners in economic life, becoming passive dependents in both production and reproduction. (149)

These attitudes informed the way in which the colonizers interacted with the nature and peoples of the regions they conquered. The construction of the Amazon figure, for

example, involves stripping the indigenous female body of its generative power. The Amazons are reputed to “amputate or cauterize a breast in order better to use the bow” (Brown 160). Their aberrant sexuality produces female offspring who are just as unnatural as they are, or male children whom the Amazons cast away or even murder (Brown 160). The women gardeners in My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here strive to counter the “passive” and “dependent” position they find themselves in under colonialism. Toiling in the garden, they recuperate control over their bodies and their role as active participants in their own history.

The woman in Senior’s “Hurricane Story, 1944” is “dark” and “plain,” and “don’t come from nowhere” (24, 25). As a black woman in colonial Jamaica, she has no place to call her own, and she automatically lacks beauty and worth. Her husband and his mother believe that only by aping the colonizer, by winning a role in his world, could the Caribbean man find success and “glory” (24). While her husband flies away on his bicycle from the place “where his navel-string was buried” and from “his barefoot country brothers,” the woman “turn[s] back to the soil” (24, 25). In her garden, she finds a small place to call home, and from which to resist the erasure of her body and her spirit. Here, her “dark” and “plain” body is a source of abundance; her belly nurtures a child, while her hands grow “skellion tomatiss pumpkin melon / which thrived ... / from her constant labouring” (25). Most importantly, she is in control of the products of the labours of that body. She sells the fruit that she harvests at the market in order earn money to feed, house, and educate her children (25, 26). This resourcefulness saves her family after a hurricane destroys their home, and indirectly, her husband (26). Her garden

allows the woman to maintain her independence from the colonial economy, and therefore, unlike her husband, she remains unaffected by the loss of “white-collar” jobs (24). She harvests “planks / and twisted corrugated zinc” from “nearby fields” to fix her roof, and continues to “pick caterpillars / off tomatos and melon” and to care for her children (26). Cultivating her own garden, this woman escapes being consumed as a passive commodity within the colonial discourse. Instead, she celebrates the vitality of her body, its (re)productive powers, and its ability to nourish her spirit.

The woman with whom Brand’s Elizete is abandoned, Mirelda Josefena, also finds solace and strength in her “market garden” (28). This woman turns to the garden to soothe the “discomfort” and “affliction” that she has inherited from her ancestor Adela (19). Brought to the Caribbean as a slave, Adela experienced a devastating sense of loss. Lost in this new place, and unable to return home, she became filled with a rage that caused her to deny the land of her captivity, and her presence there. In order to escape her enslavement, she had to imagine the erasure of the Caribbean landscape, and significantly, of her body. Refusing to give any part of herself to this “Nowhere” place, although “[s]he spill and spill” eight children, “she mothered not a one” (19). In fact, “[s]he only see their face as bad luck and grudge them the milk from her breast. She eat paw-paw seed until it make them sick in she womb. The charm she tried to use against each one was left half done in them so, till all of she generations have a way so that nothing is right with them neither”(19). Consumed by this need to deny her oppressive environment, Adela ultimately forgets herself. Attempting to end the misery of a body that has suffered only subjugation, Mirelda Josefena also makes herself barren. She

“[t]ied up her womb in brackish water. Drink cassava tea from the first day. Starch it stiff” (31, 32). In her market garden, however, this woman becomes a creative force, and her barrenness turns into abundance. Her “hands had luck, anything grew under them” (30). It was rumored that “she had money in her mattress,” and that “her brassière overflowed with money not breasts” (30). In the garden, the misfortune that Adela feared is banished, and the work of Mirelda Josefena’s body yields economic power. Her wealth brings her Elizete, a child who looks exactly like Adela. The labour of the woman’s hands recovers the life-giving energies of the womb and the breasts that history exploited and exhausted. The bountiful garden allows the woman to feed and rear Elizete who receives the story of Adela and ensures that it survives erasure.

The kitchen garden of the woman in “Hurricane Story, 1944” and the market garden of Elizete’s caretaker draw on the tradition of slave provision gardens. These gardens were plots allotted to slaves, on islands such as Jamaica, on the edges of the colonizers’ plantations (Tobin 164, 165). Labouring in these lands on the margins, the slaves found a way to threaten the absolute authority of the plantocracy. The product of these gardens saved the lives of the slaves by supplementing the meager diet that was provided to them by their owners (Tobin 165). By being able to supply their own food, the slaves were also able to obtain some amount of freedom from their masters who attempted to dominate them by controlling their access to food (Tobin 166). This limited power over their bodies also allowed the slaves to realize the productive potential of those enslaved bodies. The surplus harvests of these gardens were taken to Sunday markets, where the slaves were able to “sell and exchange [them] for other commodities

such as cloth, tobacco, jewelry, crockery, and metalware” (Tobin 169, 170). In this way, slaves who worked on provision gardens could achieve a degree of economic power and independence from the plantation owners. Furthermore, this shadow or parallel economy allowed the slaves to participate in it actively as suppliers and customers, rather than as passive commodities. Eventually, as the slaves “became by the end of the eighteenth century the major suppliers of food for local, island-wide, inter-island markets that fed whites as well as creoles and Africans,” they could also challenge their assigned role in the colonial economy (Tobin 169). The colonizers had always been dependent on the labour of slaves to sustain the empire, but as gardeners rather than plantation workers, the slaves could claim ownership of their bodies, and of the products of those bodies, and determine their value independently of the colonizer. Functioning outside the authority of the colonizer, the women who toil in their gardens in the texts of Senior and Brand can also claim for themselves the land that they cultivate. Beth Fowkes Tobin concurs that “[w]hile slaves did not legally own their provision grounds, they developed customary rights to the land and owned the production of their labor” (165). Therefore, this brand of gardening allows colonized people to challenge their enslavement in colonial gardens in many ways.

This experience in the garden and the marketplace, Tobin argues, helped slaves “to make the successful transition from slave to peasant economy” after emancipation (173), achieving the independence they needed to turn away from their colonizers’ plantations (Young qtd. in Tobin 169). While the father is unable to find employment in the colonial economy after the hurricane of 1944, his wife’s participation in the markets

of the Caribbean people helps to pay for their family's needs (Senior 27). The straw boater he used to wear is usurped by his wife, "jauntily" sitting on her "head-tie as she strode off to market one day" (27). Importantly, she does not throw the hat away, or give it special significance, but wears it along with her traditional headdress. This woman incorporates both her Afro-Caribbean *and* her colonial heritage into her history, to create a new way of coping with the difficulties of living as a colonized person in Jamaica. In the garden, she discovers a sense of pride and self-worth, and here, her silence, for she was a woman "who hardly ever spoke," turns into song (25). Indeed, colonial writers describe these Sunday markets as sites of noisy activity (Tobin 172). Instead of subservience and silence, the slaves are noted to exhibit a "freedom of spirit and vitality" that is a source of discomfort to the plantocrats (Tobin 172). The provision gardens and the Sunday markets become "problematic site[s]" (Tobin 172) that directly challenge the colonizer's control over the bodies of the Caribbean people.

Knowledge of the properties of the flora of the Caribbean also gives women command over the reproductive capabilities of their bodies. Kincaid remembers "a bush called whitehead bush" in her native Antigua (119). This plant, she continues, "was an important ingredient in the potions my mother and her friends made for their abortions" (119). Another such homemade medicine was "six sixty-six and maiden-blush tea" (138). It "is taken on an empty stomach, and it is used for all sorts of ailments, including abortions" (138). The paste concocted from the fruit of the "cancanberry bush," her mother tells Kincaid, was used to coat the mouth of children who had thrush (137). Mothers who "could not afford to see doctors" could cure the disease themselves (137).

This traditional knowledge, this “medicinal folklore” (137) allowed women to function independently of European, male physicians who claimed complete authority over female bodies. This shift in power had its roots in the changes underway in Europe during the time of colonial expansion. Carolyn Merchant writes, “In seventeenth-century England, ... [i]n the sphere of reproduction, women midwives were losing their monopoly over assisting at childbirth to male doctors. Simultaneously, the female’s passive role in biological generation was being reasserted by physicians and natural philosophers” (150, 151). Women’s reproductive power was contained “by reducing them to vessels and machines – mere bearers – without creative agency” (McClintock 29). By turning to the secret science available in nature, women could continue to act as mothers and healers, and retain control of their sexuality and reproductive functions without the dominating interference of imperial doctors. Interestingly, Kincaid links the female body and the Antiguan yard under “the category called Household Management” (119, 120). Under colonial rule, both women and nature are objectified and subjugated, and the products of their labours are consumed as part of the colonial economy. Women are stripped of any rights to their children and to the crops that they are forced to harvest in the plantations. According to Kincaid, the whitehead bush was used not only to induce abortions, but it was also “cut down and tie[d] in bunches to make a broom for sweeping our yard” (119). Nature thus provides women with the tools they require to carry out and to affirm the constructive “management” of their bodies and their local environments, and furthermore, to literally and figuratively clear a productive space that they can call their own.

In aligning themselves with the nature of the Caribbean, the women in the three texts being examined find a sense of identity, of wholeness, and the strength to defy their oppressors. Like the husband in "Hurricane Story, 1944," the "fine young couple" in Senior's poem "Hurricane Story, 1951" turn away from their "piece of ground" in the Caribbean only to find displacement and distress (34, 35). After a hurricane devastates their island, Margaret and Delbert believe that "farming can't take us too far" (35). Margaret decides to leave for England to study nursing, hoping to return successfully clothed in her white Matron's uniform (34). Delbert goes to America and becomes "a farm worker" toiling in a foreign field (35). In their absence, the abandoned fruit of the trees in their garden "turned black from blight" (35). This decay parallels that of the couple's son. Neglected by his parents, he loses his ability to hear and to speak, and he remains nameless and lost, unable to articulate his identity. His mother too forgets "her rightful name," and accepts the label of Otherness assigned to her (39, 40). In England, she is not "Ma," not a mother who has been the originator of life, but is simply "Miss Black," a submissive Caribbean body (40). When she finally hears her son call her "Ma," she begins to shake off the feelings of despair and immobility that threaten to drown her (39, 41). In speaking the words "son / in Aenon Town, Jamaica," in claiming her creative role as mother, and connection to place, she is able for a fleeting moment to hold onto a disintegrating identity (41). Senior's "Immovable Tenant," on the other hand, uses her association with nature to mount an effective resistance against the takeover of her place by foreign interests. She warns:

Strangers might occupy my house and land

from time to time, but from this redoubt,
I always repossess it, inch by inch.
With the help of the steadfast tropical

sun, wind, and rain, with the help of the
termites, the ants, the wood lice, and
the worms, I always reclaim. (104)

Patiently she bides her time, knowing that nature cannot be held back by artificial boundaries, and will slowly, secretly advance and assert its presence and power in the face of destruction. This understanding of and connection to place feeds this old woman's "rebellious pride," and her voice becomes more effective than "protests," "a bomb or two," and "petitions" in challenging the exploitation of the Caribbean by Western business (101, 103). "She's constantly undermining" the intentions of the foreign developer, by "screaming / at his tenants and everyone within / hearing" (102). Like the nature of the Caribbean, which has been bought and exploited first by European colonizers, and now by Western capitalism, the woman has "experienced / nothing but upheaval and a succession / of husbands" who have abandoned her after profiting from her (99). However, her abused and dispossessed body becomes a figure of dread that unsettles the "tourists and investors" (102):

she wraps her head in red, puts on
her mourning garments and stalks the
streets disguised as the dread Warner

Woman calling out 'Fire! Blood! Repent!' (102).

She walks fiercely in the footsteps of her Amazon ancestors,

noble women
like Nanny the Maroon queen mother
or the fair Anacaona, Taino
chieftainess (Senior 97).

Forming an alliance with their local environment, these women acquire not only a strong sense of place, of belonging, but also a strong sense of self. Nature provides them with the resources they require to construct a unique identity outside a dominant discourse that denigrates and stifles them. In celebrating the body as a source of creativity and activity, they affirm their self-worth and maintain the integrity of their identity as Caribbean women.

For Senior, Kincaid and Brand, “turn[ing] back to the muck” (Senior 27) does not mean returning to a pre-colonial time of imagined innocence and perfection. Such a desire for a mythical past would only reinforce the racist ideas that constituted the colonial discourse. Indigenous peoples of the non-European world were imagined as permanently inhabiting a prehistoric past, and therefore, as being primitive, undeveloped and uncivilized (McClintock 30). They were imagined as lacking culture, or possessing only a rudimentary culture, and according to the system of binaries that support colonial authority, native peoples were placed in the category of nature, where they could be denied their very humanity. Kincaid, Senior and Brand advocate “turning back” only in order to go forward. The garden is a way of achieving a bodily bond, a new connection with a place from which, or to which, the Caribbean people have been displaced, a place in which the descendants of African slaves know only subjugation and death. Plantation agriculture embodies the view of the colonizer, like that of the modern developmentalist whom Curtin discusses, that “one is either dominant over nature or subject to it, either master or slave” (71). Dissatisfied with these limiting categories, these three writers believe in forming an empowering collaborative relationship with the nature of the

Caribbean. In this way, gardening can become a subversive act by which the gardener is able to procure real economic, political, and cultural power.

To garden in the Caribbean is “to acknowledge this rooting / in the soil” (Senior 26). These three writers and their characters bury their hands in the earth to plant themselves in the places to which their ancestors were forcibly brought. Unlike the European colonizers who cultivated the New World in order to dig up and take away its treasures, the Caribbean gardeners in these three texts try to achieve a union with their environment that nourishes not only the body, but also a battered spirit. The woman who took in *Elizete* could find peace only in her market garden. “Whenever her hand wasn’t in solid soil mashing it up and kneading it down her temper rose and her head ached” (34). The ache of her body caused by a brutal history could be soothed by the productive labour of her hands. “All that temper, all that disagreeableness, kneading and tamping and burrowing, it was the smell like burnt bread and green crushed leaves that quieted her” (34, 35). Adela, and later Verlia, on the other hand, try to break out of the confinement of this body, of the weight of their history, by denying both. The need to forget, however, only ends in the disintegration of identity and of life. Adela “didn’t catch sheself until it was she true name slipping away” (22). And “[w]hen she name gone from her,” Adela “climb the silk cotton tree up there and fly all the way back to Africa” (23). Verlia too flies away to “some place so old there’s no memory of it” (246). As she leaps over the cliff into the sea, “she is weightless,” and “[h]er body has fallen away” (246, 247). Only death can give Adela and Verlia the kind of release that they require, and return them to an imagined time and place before their debilitating displacement

from home. Elizete and her caretaker find connection and wholeness not in flight, but in establishing a firm footing in the Caribbean earth. During her fatal leap, at last Verlia's "body is cool, cool in the air" (247). It becomes a fading "electric current, the sign of lightening left after lightening, a faultless arc to the deep turquoise deep" (247). Mirelda Josefena finds this serenity in the sustaining vitality of the garden. "She pushed her hands in for the cool feel of earth, for the black feel of it to surge in her arms and to quiet her" (34). Her body becomes a part of the land, as "[s]he did her planting not standing up but sitting down, solid and spread out," simultaneously rooted and soaring (34). With "the dasheen root, the yam root between her legs and both arms plunged in the soil," she impregnates it with her sweat, with her sorrow, creating life-giving fruit (34). While Mirelda Josefena affirms the power of her body in the garden, and finds strength in her material connection with the earth, Verlia's body and her identity begin to disintegrate without this grounding in place. On the day of her death, Elizete "sensed Verl's body there thinning itself distant, shedding attachment, washing itself in self-hatred, blaming itself, forgetting her" (113). Falling apart in Canada, Elizete also finds a way "to centre herself" by remembering the landscape of the Caribbean (234). "She had placed the bedding just so to look at the wood of the desk so it wasn't the desk, and the window so it wasn't this window," so that she would be reminded of home on waking (234). Elizete thinks that "[p]erhaps she could collect herself lying under a window, wood in her vision" (235). Her first thoughts include Adela and Elizete's own daily chores, such as "getting water, weeding the provisions that needed weeding and leaving the weeds for medicine, of driving goats from the weeds" (234, 235). Reciting the names of flowers of

the Caribbean, Elizete creates a garden, “a place to sit down to sort her head out” (232, 235). Elizete, Mirelda Josefena and the other women in these three texts empty the misery of the body into the soil in exchange for a calming silence. Their work in the garden regenerates the fragmented physical and spiritual self. Significantly, within the earth’s womb, the pain of these women is transformed and is reborn as a bountiful harvest that allows these women to feed and nurture their families, to achieve economic independence, and to attain a fulfilling sense of dignity and pride.

In depending on nature’s ability to renew, to remake endlessly, the women gardening in these works by Kincaid, Senior and Brand practice typically traditional farming methods. This “traditional agriculture [is] a type of agriculture that is labor-intensive, diverse, small-scale, and responsive to the cycles of nature” (Curtin 63). Curtin argues that “women’s cyclical practices reveal a sense of what is appropriate to and sustainable in a particular place” (70). As a result of this understanding of and respect for local environments, Curtin believes that “Third World women’s agriculture” adopts a way of gardening or farming that is collaborative (70). Such an attitude contrasts starkly with that of European colonizers, and modern developmentalists, who desired to forcibly turn the nature of the New World into contained and infinitely exploitable gardens (Curtin 70). This conception of nature as an inanimate commodity, rather than a living body had its origins in a rapidly changing and increasingly imperialistic Europe in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries (Merchant xvi, xviii). As the “cosmos ceased to be viewed as an organism and became instead a machine” (Merchant xvi), the European male’s relationship to nature and women was dramatically modified. Merchant writes:

“The ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother links women’s history with the history of the environment and ecological change. The female earth was central to the organic cosmology that was undermined by the Scientific Revolution and the rise of a market-oriented culture in early modern Europe” (xvi). By imagining nature “as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature” (Merchant 193). Nature was thus stripped of its agency, and importantly, of its control over humanity. The generative powers of the female were lost in this scheme that constructed the earth as the passive recipient of man’s will. In a mechanical universe, man could extricate himself from its hold, shifting relations of power so that he could exert authority over his environment. As Merchant notes, “A new concept of the self as a rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body began to replace the concept of the self as an integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to the cosmos and society” (214). The women gardening in the tropics re-establish an organic connection with their environment, not to control it, but to draw on the regenerative power of nature’s cyclical processes to challenge the subjugation of their bodies under colonial or neo-colonial rule.

The European colonizers armed with science saw no need to comply with nature’s cycles, and unraveled this way of keeping time into a linear narrative of cultural progress. The non-European world and its inhabitants were reconstructed in terms of this history. In order to be a part of a people that had the power to make history, rather than be subjected to it, colonized people sometimes resorted to aping the colonizers. In Senior’s “Hurricane Story, 1944,” the father of the narrator adopts the dress, the mannerisms and

the technology of his European employer. Perched on a bicycle, he is able to ride fast enough to distance himself from his people and the place where he was born (24). This European machine, however, cannot sustain him or his family when he no longer has a place within that gentlemanly circle. Confused by this abandonment, and unable or unwilling to be a part of his own community, this man suffers a tragic breakdown. Verlia also wants to be “away from the earth-bound stillness of her own small town,” a place where she would be able to “separat[e] her own being from its everyday pull” (159, 160). She tries to remove herself from the control of the intangible mysteries that haunt her Caribbean world. Verlia believes that people “do not have to wait for God to send rain here, [in Toronto], or money, or punishment. Unsettled spirits do not roam the roads ... Here they could not find her – not her family and not the spirits” (153, 154). Afraid of being buried under the weight of a painful history, of not being able to be the master of her own fate, Verlia leaves behind her home and her people. In Canada, “she could be new” (160), separate, and independent. She exchanges her difficulties in being part of a complex, living, and therefore, suffering world, for a “city gouging on the raw raw science of streetcars, skyscrapers, no family, no grief” (160). The cold predictability of technology, the controllability of a mechanical life provides Verlia with temporary relief from overwhelming feelings and memories. Even when she finally returns to the Caribbean, she is unable to form a meaningful connection with this place. Verlia admits her thoughts in her journal: “All this fear for a place I should know. I feel very nervous here. I never got to know this place because I spent so much time running from my family” (206). Ultimately, she comes to believe that there is only one way out of the

confusion that plagues her. Verlia needs to destroy the “hopeless” body (98). For her, satiating the flesh is associated with “stifling,” “solidifying,” and “dying in acceptance” of a limited existence (97, 148, 149). Verlia “wants to liquefy, to make fluid, grow into her Black self” (149). Growing into the Black self means outgrowing the Black body.

While Verlia leapt to her death, Elizete “hit the ground, tunnelling dust, rolling the yellow-white rock face, gravel in her mouth, and dust, her body, solid, her whole weight resting on her chest, hitting the ground, solid” (245). “[S]he always hit solid ground” (246). Although Elizete’s body has been subjected to terrible brutality, it is always supported, nourished by her ties to the Caribbean landscape. She is “beaten down and bruised, ... pounded between [her] legs, ... raped, ... blooded, ... tired” and scarred (15, 16, 54). Yet, Elizete knows that the body has power, that “[a] woman can be a bridge, limber and living, breathless” providing “a way to cross over” from a life of suffering (16). She makes this observation about Verlia; however, Elizete is the one who becomes a bridge for Abena. Elizete’s voice bringing to life the nature of the Caribbean allows Abena to deal with her own inheritance – a history of a mother, of a people whose subjugation under colonial rule engendered crippling feelings of self-hatred. Elizete accompanies Abena safely across this abyss into self-awareness and self-acceptance. Working in the sugar plantations, Elizete’s body is forced to be a tool, a machine to be manipulated to ensure the profit and power of the landowners. Her hand is a machete that represents “hardship” and enslavement (202). It is a weapon, “splitting the armour of cane, the sweet juice rushing to the wound of the stem” (203). The “arc of a cutlass in a woman’s hand” becomes the “the arc of a woman’s arm” (202, 203). Elizete’s body,

however, resists this disconnection from place, this domination, and in its repeated bending and rising forms the arc of a bridge leading to safety, forms an endless circle, mimicking nature's cycles. In curving downwards into the cane, and rising upwards towards the sky, Elizete performs a "gesture [that] tak[es] up all the sky, slic[es] through blue and white and then the green stalk and the black earth" (203). Her body takes in the world within its arc, and in turn, restores the body's place within an empowering organic world. Watching Elizete working in the cane fields, Verlia observes,

Anyone who did that all day, passed through everything that made up the world, whose body anchored it, arc after arc after arc, who was tied to the compulsion of its swing, who became the whirl of it, blue, white air, green stroke, black dust, black metal, black flesh, anyone with such a memory would know more, be more than she. (203)

Elizete's grounding in nature gives her a sense of wholeness, of understanding, and of power that Verlia, who is perpetually separating herself from the Caribbean landscape, cannot achieve. The arc that Verlia draws in the sky is temporary, a flash of light that leads to a "chasm" and to "disappearance" (16, 247). "[S]olid and permanent" (201), Elizete completes the circle, bringing the arc to rest firmly in the nurturing earth. This "earthbound" woman and the others toiling in the plantations, Verlia observes, become "caught up in their own arc of metal and dust and flesh until they were a blur, whirring, seeming to change the air around them" (202, 203). Imitating nature, becoming a part of the earth, these labouring bodies acquire the power to transform their world.

In asserting their participation in nature's cycles, the gardeners in the texts being examined counter the linear, progressive narrative of the colonizers. Kincaid, Brand and Senior realize that this history moves towards the predetermined and self-justifying telos

of European conquest. According to this narrative, the story of these writers begins with the enslavement of their ancestors by Europeans. Non-European peoples and landscapes are subsumed as a footnote to a European story. Kincaid questions the validity of this history, and discusses its effects on colonized people. "My history," Kincaid writes, "begins like this: In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World" (153). This discovery of the New World is accompanied by erasure, for Columbus does not acknowledge "[t]hat it is new only to him, that it had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before he became aware of it" (Kincaid 154). This pre-colonial culture and landscape disappear forever as history hurtles forward. By presenting an alternative way of measuring time, these writers attempt to prevent this permanent destruction. Imagining history as cyclical allows for the possibility of rebirth of peoples and environments that would otherwise remain hidden or forgotten. "Gardening in the Tropics," Senior's narrator in "Brief Lives" often digs up bones of "disappeared ones" (83). She reburies the skeleton she finds in her kitchen garden "so he can carry on / growing" (83). The "old and vegetating / bones" of a banana farmer lie in the depleted soil of a plantation turned blue by the overuse of chemicals (Senior 84). Killed by political turmoil, or economic hardship, the sufferings of victims of corrupt neo-colonial governments engender new growth. Accidentally cutting her foot while working in the sugar plantation, Elizete finds "blood blooming in the stalks of cane" (Brand 3). Navel strings and bodies of those murdered by landowners "churn ... up in the soil" and become "manure for the cane," helping to "make the cane fat and juicy" (Brand 14, 15). Blood and bones refuse to remain buried, refuse permanent erasure, and become the source of life. Bitter pain

becomes a part of the food grown in these gardens, and a part of the bodies of those who consume this harvest. Senior writes that although the Lord of the Earth may “send affliction,” he “also hold[s] the power to heal” (125, 126). The cyclical processes of nature transform death into life, and ensure that the memory of those who have been silenced endures. The keepers of kitchen or market gardens literally feed on this history and use it to recuperate their own voices, and to challenge their oppressors.

The women gardeners in Kincaid’s My Garden (Book), in Senior’s Gardening in the Tropics, and in Brand’s In Another Place, Not Here re-establish their connection to place through the garden. Unlike colonial plantation agriculture, the farming methods used by these women respect nature and its cycles. This ecological pacifism does not imply, however, that these gardeners are passive bodies bereft of agency (Curtin 72). In fact, Curtin argues that “pacifism is a form of resistance” (72). Their collaborative form of gardening challenges the colonial and neo-colonial exploitation and domination of Caribbean landscapes and peoples. Their labours allow these gardeners to recuperate their role as productive members of their communities. Through their kitchen and market gardens, they maintain their economic independence and affirm the creative potential of their bodies. By forming an organic connection with nature, by participating in nature’s cyclical processes, they are able to destabilize the European narrative that perceives both colonized landscapes and peoples as machines whose value depends on the contribution they make to the economic and political power of the colonizer. Gardening in the tropics is also a way for these women to come to terms with their history and to find a space from which to combat the denigration and erasure of their culture and identity.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING A “ROOTING IN THE SOIL”

The authors of My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here are preoccupied with the search for a sense of belonging to their native Caribbean. Through their gardens, Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Dionne Brand attempt to affirm their connection to the Caribbean, and counter the effects of a history of displacement and dispossession. The European takeover of the New World involved the erasure of its Indigenous inhabitants and their culture. Maintaining discursive control of these territories required the denigration of local, in other words, non-European experience and knowledge. The relationship of African newcomers to the new environment was characterized by subjugation, as their bodies were forced to bow submissively in plantations to ransack the earth for the colonizer's use. Existing as machines used to drive the colonial economy, the slaves were denied the right to the product of their labours and to the land which they cultivated. They were restricted to being commodities in an alien environment. Kincaid, Senior and Brand, like other Caribbean writers, realize “the importance of belonging to a place” to maintaining the integrity of their identity (Deena 367). The authors and the characters in their texts resist the consequences of dislocation and objectification by redefining their relationship to this landscape through their particular, traditional, and often secret understanding of the nature of the Caribbean. By interacting with their environment in a non-exploitative

manner, these gardeners challenge the legitimacy of colonial and neo-colonial authority, and reclaim their land and their sense of self.

Gardening in her home in Vermont, Kincaid remembers the landscape and the people of her native Antigua. Her account of the flowers filling her American garden overflows with descriptions, and significantly, names. *Wisteria floribunda*, *Rosa* ‘Alchymist,’ *Lonicera*, *Lycoris squamigera*, and *Anemone pulsatilla* are familiar words on her tongue. The Antiguan landscape, however, is empty of such designations. Kincaid admits that she does “not know the names of the plants in the place I am from (Antigua)” (119). This statement, however, is not completely true, for Kincaid “can identify the hibiscus,” “a bush called whitehead bush,” the “chinaberry” or “cancanberry bush,” and the leaves of the “six sixty-six” plant (119, 137, 138). However, these are common, not “proper name[s]” (119); they are not the scientific Latin names used to mark and classify nature. To correct this problem, Kincaid visits a garden in Jamaica in search of West Indian flowers with names, but is sadly disappointed. For, “along with the salvia the garden had in it only roses and a single anemic-looking yellow lupine” (121). Kincaid recognizes the salvia from having seen them in gardens in North America (119); the roses have “attained symbolic or iconic status as quintessentially English” (Tiffin 60); and the “temperate zone” lupine seems suspiciously foreign (Kincaid 120). Only flowers that have been accepted as worthy of a place in gardens outside of the Caribbean, or are a part of the places outside the Caribbean are included in this display of flowers in Jamaica. Kincaid’s dilemma illustrates the damaging effects of a colonial history that promoted the disparagement of the nature and the inhabitants of the New World. The value of plants

and people were determined according to their contribution to the economic and political power of the imperial centres. Furthermore, in constructing the colonizers as the natural rulers of the non-European world, European culture and significantly, European nature were presented in the colonial discourse as being the standard by which the colonies would be measured. Through “reprojected representations of [colonized] environments and that of England,” Helen Tiffin notes, “the local is (implicitly or explicitly) denigrated against an ideal or normative imperial centre” (60). Botanical gardens, in the colonies and at home, were crucial in maintaining these “reprojected representations”. Plant and animal samples collected by naturalists in new colonial territories were incorporated into a European order and displayed in these gardens. Kincaid complains that the botanical garden in Antigua did not include any indigenous plants, but was full of specimens from other tropical colonies of the British Empire (120). This exclusion suggests that the local environment held nothing of importance, nothing that could be of aesthetic or scientific interest. “The botanical garden,” Kincaid writes, “reinforced for me how powerful were the people who had conquered me; they could bring to me the botany of the world they owned” (120). In these scientific gardens, this show of authority was linked to, and reinforced, notions of cultural superiority, and depended on the dismissal of all things local.

Kincaid connects this ignorance of names of the plants of Antigua to the “ignorance of the botany of the place [she is] from (and [is] of)” (120). With these words, Kincaid acquiesces that names represent the conjunction of knowledge and power over the thing named. Unfamiliar with the scientific, even many common names of the plants

of Antigua, Kincaid feels unfamiliar with the character of the place she is from, with her own identity as an Antiguan. The colonial project used this powerful link between naming and knowing to launch an effective ideological takeover of new territories. Anne McClintock argues that during colonial expansion, making maps and marking them with European names became a way of identifying, and therefore, possessing places (27-30). Mary Louise Pratt suggests that the systematic naming of the world by naturalists had a similar, but “more directly transformative” effect on the way the nature of colonized environments was perceived (33). The Latin name designating the genus and species of the plant according to Linneaus’ classification system automatically placed it within an order created by Western science and which was claimed to tame nature’s chaos (Pratt 25, 33). As Kincaid’s situation shows, both of these strategies of naming estranged colonized people from their environment, disrupting the way they understood themselves and their place in the world. To repair this rift, Kincaid, Brand and Senior claim for themselves the right to name the Caribbean landscape, and reconstruct this place according to their particular knowledge of it.

Kincaid accepts the scientific names of plants reluctantly. She writes, “For a long time I resisted using the proper names of the things that lay before me” (160).

Uncomfortable with the erasure and conquest encoded in the Latin names “assigned to [plants] by an agreed-on group of botanists,” Kincaid preferred the common names of plants “assigned to them by people for whom these plants have value” (160). The chinaberry, for example, is given its name by Antiguan children who were fascinated by “its transparent, glassy look” that was reminiscent of rarely seen fragile “china

dinnerware” (137). The smallness of this fruit also captures their imagination and it is dubbed “baby tomato ... to show that it was not real, a baby anything was not a real thing” (137). These names retain the magical quality that the children associate with this berry, and which is associated with childhood itself. Similarly, the Mexican cocoxochitl named for its ability to cure urinary-tract disorders loses its important role in native culture as it is transformed into the dahlia (118). Named for Andreas Dahl, who hybridized this flower (Kincaid 119), it now commemorates this naturalist’s scientific achievement, while the plant’s intrinsic properties are ignored and forgotten. Rather than repeat the naturalists’ compulsion for categorical, absolute definitions by replacing one set of names with another, Kincaid includes both common and proper names in her garden. “The aster ‘Little Carlow’” and “the buddleia ‘Pink Charm’ grow here, along with *Phlox paniculata* and *Lobelia siphilitica* (14, 22). In accepting these Latin names in her garden, Kincaid accepts the “entangled,” complicated history that is her inheritance (Tiffin 62), and simultaneously challenges the colonial need for a single, unified, European vision of the world.

In Brand’s novel, In Another Place, Not Here, Elizete is heir to a world without names, and therefore, a world without history. Like Kincaid, she is unaware of the names of the plants in the place where she grows up (17), however, not because they were replaced with European names, but because her ancestors could not call this place, to which they were exiled, home. Elizete is raised by a woman whose “great-great-great-ma,” Adela, was brought to Grenada as a slave (18). According to Elizete’s caretaker’s story, when Adela realized that she could not escape from this place, she refused to

acknowledge it (21). Unable to return home and unable to accept this alien environment that “don’t look like any other place,” Adela slowly disappeared from the world (21). Elizete, however, takes command of the imperial, “male prerogative of naming” (McClintock 26). By naming this “*ancestrally* alien” environment (Tiffin 61), Elizete makes it familiar, and claims it for herself. Unlike the European colonizers, Elizete does not use this “technology of knowledge” to gain possession of the Caribbean landscape in the interest of territorial expansion, or of establishing economic, cultural or political control over this space. The names she invents for the things in the world around are based on her experience with or within this environment, and she uses them to cultivate a sense of belonging to the Caribbean. Adela only “call[s] it Nowhere,” disallowing the landscape that imprisons her any other name (21). In fact, “[s]he say nothing here have no name. She never name none of her children, nor the man she had was to sleep with and she never answer to the name that they give she which was Adela” (18). By un-naming this new place, she tries to deny its existence, and significantly, its power over her. She rejects all that has come out of the dislocating experience of slavery – her new identity, her relationships, and her children – as a way of preventing them from taking hold of her, from erasing her memory of her free self and her true home. Determined not to be a part of this landscape, “none of the things she look at she take note of or remember or pass on” (19). This habit, however, ultimately leads to Adela’s own erasure. For, “[s]he insist so much [this place] is nowhere she gone blind with not seeing. Cause sheself blindness, yes. A caul draw over her eyes” (19). In repeatedly practising forgetting, she fails to remember, until finally, she forgets herself: “Adela forget she true

true name and she tongue before she leave this earth" (20). Her vehement renunciation of everything here, in the Caribbean, leaves Adela with nothing and nowhere to which to anchor herself. "When she name gone from her, ... Adela walk out of Nowhere and gone to where nobody know" (23). Without the sustaining connection to place, Adela's identity disintegrates, and she falls silent and disappears. Instead of ensuring that the history of her people, and the memory of Africa and of enslavement survive, Adela leaves behind a legacy of absence and ignorance. Interestingly, Adela's refusal to name the Caribbean environment is similar to the colonizer's compulsion to christen all that he saw, for both acts cause the disconnection, and eventual erasure, of the native and/or the African peoples of this region. Europeans marked the territories that they encountered with new names as proof of their entitlement to these lands. In this way, they were able to supplant the indigenous or colonized inhabitants' historical ties to and involvement with these places. Imperial labels also represented the colonizer's domination of the landscape. Derived from European culture or science, these names subsumed the non-European world into an artificial order that was constructed by the colonizer, and which supported his authority over nature. Adela is also guilty of supporting such unequal power relations, as she tries to maintain her separation from the Caribbean environment. Refusing to be affected by this place, she decides to negate it by ignoring it. Although she gains momentary advantage, ultimately, she brings about the erasure of her own body and spirit.

Unlike Adela, Elizete is uncomfortable with this constant omission, and cannot follow her example (23). Elizete remarks, "I used to try to make my mind as empty as

Adela' but I never like it because it make me feel lonely and blind and sorrowful and take me away from myself" (20). Instead, Elizete fills the landscape, and her mind, with lists of names for flora and fauna. On behalf of Adela, Elizete undertakes the powerful act of naming her environment and brings it to life. Where Adela saw emptiness, Elizete finds "pull and throw bush, make haste weed, jump up and kiss me flowers, waste of time plant, red berry poison, beach tree poison, draw blood leaf, stinging leaf bush, Jack Spaniard tree, wait in the road come night time bird" (20). She knows that "the names of things would make this place beautiful" (23). Like Verlia later, Adela "never learn to take the world as it is. She never want to make do with what there was" (23). Both of these women yearn for an earlier place, an earlier time that, ultimately, can only be reclaimed in death. Their refusal to come to terms with their painful history and to make peace with the Caribbean present leaves them unable to move forward into the future. Elizete's acceptance of her place and all that it represents is not a passive act, but an alternative way of seeing the world. She forms a connection with the Caribbean landscape, and finds abundance where Adela, like her European oppressors, saw barrenness (24). Elizete admits, "in my eyes everything full of fullness, everything yielding, the milk of yams, dasheen bursting blue flesh" (24). Although "[s]ometimes the green overwhelm [Elizete] too," although sometimes the Caribbean nature seems to confine her (24), she also knows that it can be nurturing and protective (24). Naming is a way for Elizete to celebrate the Caribbean landscape, to acknowledge its complexities, and to reconcile herself to them, so that she can avoid the fate Adela chose for herself. Elizete explains, "Where [Adela] see nowhere I must see everything. Where [Adela] leave all that emptiness I must fill it

up” (24), in order to survive with the history and the place that have been forced on her. She must make an authentic connection to the Caribbean in order to ensure that she and her story endure here.

The names that Elizete creates convey the specific characteristics of the animals and plants they denote. Birds are called “only by cocoa, only by cane, scissors’ tail, fire throat, wait for death” (24). Plants are called “[t]ear up cloth flowers, stinking fruit tree, draw blood bush” (23). More than simply noting an observation made with a distant, disinterested gaze, the names refer to the interactions between plants and birds, and even Elizete and her culture. They require her active participation in the nature that she is labelling. “Tear up cloth flower” or “draw blood bush,” for example, seem to commemorate a specific event in the life of Elizete. These names are starkly different from the scientific names that the European naturalists used to catalogue plants.

Linnaeus’ system of classification categorized plants

according to the characteristics of their reproductive parts. Twenty-four (and later twenty-six) basic configurations of stamens, pistils, and so forth were identified and laid out according to the letters of the alphabet ... Four added visual parameters completed the taxonomy: number, form, position, and relative size. All the plants on the earth, Linnaeus claimed, could be incorporated into this single system of distinctions, including any as yet unknown to Europeans. (24, 25)

Measurements and language were used to force nature into static positions within a predetermined order. Using this apparently objective method, the colonial project imposed a European vision on the nature and people of the colonies, one that viewed them as objects, as specimens to be known and owned. “[A] specimen,” as Kincaid complains, “is so unfamiliar, so unwarm, so ungardenlike” (182), so impersonal. Mary

Louise Pratt notes, “Natural history extracted specimens not only from their organic or ecological relations with each other, but also from their places in other peoples’ economies, histories, social and symbolic systems” (31). Elizete’s system of naming rejects this stifling order in favour of difference and variety. She challenges the control of nature by the colonizer, by presenting an alternative way of imagining the world. Her names reflect the interconnectedness of a vibrant, living, changing, organic world. In this way, Elizete makes herself a part of a landscape that is historically unfamiliar, even threatening, to counteract the demoralizing sense of dislocation that she has inherited. This connection allows Elizete to claim this place as her own, and to find a sense of identity as a Caribbean person.

Naming also allows Elizete to recuperate the history that had been denied to her under colonial rule. In “dreaming up names all the time for Adela’ things,” she also “dream[s] Adela’ shape” (23). She continues, “I say to myself that if I say these names for Adela it might bring back she memory of herself and she true name. And perhaps I also would not feel lonely for something I don’t remember” (24). By reconstructing the landscape as Adela might have seen it, Elizete attempts to bring back to life this woman who had disappeared without a trace. Remembering Adela restores the break in Elizete’s lineage that occurred as a result of the displacement of her people from Africa, and their enslavement and decimation in the New World. Elizete, herself, is able to pass on this history and her own new experiences in the Caribbean, through the names she generates. They embody her particular perspective of this landscape; they are signs of her presence, and more importantly, of her connection to and interaction with the Caribbean

environment. Rather than present only data, obvious information about the thing named, Elizete's names capture a specific moment and preserve her unique memory of a plant or a bird or a stone. This is Elizete's way of countering the dislocation and fragmentation of identity suffered by African slaves in the New World. She realizes, this "place [is] beautiful but at the same time you think how a place like this make so much unhappiness" (25). However, she adds, "I make myself determined to love this and never to leave" (25). Instead of succumbing to this unhappiness, like Adela or Verlia, Elizete resolves to make this place home and to resist a second displacement. In assuming for herself the power to name, Elizete becomes an active participant in her own story, and undermines the colonizer's hold on her environment and her people.

The authors of My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, all discuss the importance of names in the discursive construction of place. Like the Indigenous name for the dahlia, *cocoxochitl*, (Kincaid 118), Elizete's names reveal her intimate knowledge of her environment. Her understanding of this landscape is based on personal experience and her history as a colonized person. This insight into the Caribbean and its contents challenges the legitimacy of the colonial narrative of and authority over these territories. The gardener in Senior's "Advice and Devices" possesses the secret to growing a plentiful garden (109). Her "wisdom" engenders produce that is the envy of others "who rely on / the plan of the government man / with the book" and use "fertilizer and spray" to feed and weed their fields (111). Rather than using chemicals, which only damage the land and the quality of the fruit grown there (109, 111), the speaker uses non-aggressive farming methods that allow her

to have a “garden [that] can bear / so, year after year without / wearing thin” (111).

Instead of trying to control or change it, she collaborates with nature, yielding to its processes and complexities. Sensitive to the importance of nature’s cycles, this woman advises others to be aware of the right times and seasons for gardening. “For instance,” she notes,

certain crops will only grow
if planted the first night of the
full moon, others should be
planted when the moon is waning. (111)

She stresses the interconnectedness of all the elements that make up the living network of nature. In this scheme, humanity is not simply a separate controlling entity, but an important part of the natural world. Growing pumpkin, for example, this gardener tells her audience, requires the planter to invest herself, her body and her spirit, in the earth:

once you put the seeds in the
ground and water, you must stay
at your yard, lie down and rest
-unless you want your pumpkin
to grow worthless and run around
with no time to settle down and
bear. (111)

The farmer, then, has a responsibility to the plant being cultivated. It is not enough to throw seeds into the soil, and to let fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides care for them.

The gardener must physically and mentally become a part of the garden. The presence of the fertile body of a pregnant woman, for example, can “make the / fruits set and grow full, like / how she’s showing,” but the “plants won’t thrive / if you’re quarrelsome” (111). For they are as dependent on the gardener’s connection with the land and dedication to its care, as much as the material conditions of the earth for their

nourishment. The woman in this poem creates “a real / harmony” with the birds in her garden and sings, she explains, to

keep the crops
happy, treat them right, so

they’ll put out their best
for me to take to the agricultural
fair (112).

Her harmonious association with nature teaches this gardener to treat nature as a living entity, deserving of respect and reverence. She is careful “to ask pardon to dig, with a / sprinkling of rum for Mother Earth’s / sake” before she begins her work in the garden (109). Furthermore, practicing subsistence farming techniques, this woman harvests what the earth is willing to yield, unlike colonial and neo-colonial plantation agriculturists who imagine land as a commodity that must be manipulated to maximize its output, regardless of the cost to nature. The colonizer’s authority in conquered territories was justified by his ability to physically and ideologically order and control this world, so that it could be exploited to feed his territorial, economic, and political ambitions. Colonized people challenge this absolute dominion, however, by re-organizing their environment and their place in it, according to their own understanding of nature. In envisioning themselves as a significant part of an empowering natural world, they are able to find a way to survive under conditions that might otherwise have caused their physical and spiritual negation, unsettling the colonizer’s comfortable rule over the colonies.

As Senior’s narrator in “Advice and Devices” notes, “Gardening in the Tropics can be / quite a struggle if you don’t / know what you are doing” (109). This gardener’s success comes from her alliance with, and significantly, her privileged knowledge of the

local environment, a knowledge that threatens the power of colonial and neo-colonial landowners. In her discussion of slave gardens in the West Indies, Beth Fowkes Tobin recognizes “the skill, knowledge, and enterprise of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans who created the bounty of the provision grounds and the marketplace” (164). “Africans and their descendants,” Tobin writes, “knew techniques for raising African plants, and they also mastered growing Amerindian plants such as cassava, corn, and sweet potatoes” (172). Their gardens eventually became the predominant source of food not only for colonized people in the Caribbean, but also their European rulers (Tobin 169). This dependence on the expertise of slaves for their survival in the colonies was a cause of great discomfort for the colonizers. In addition to posing a threat to their continued presence on the islands, the adeptness and abilities of the slaves “challenged planters’ notions about their own superiority as well as prevailing plantocratic beliefs about Africans and their mental and moral capabilities” (Tobin 173). In order to contain this defiance, the colonizers attempted to ignore or dismiss the significance of the skills and knowledge of their slaves. Tobin argues that the “trope of nature’s bounty without human labor” is used in colonial writing to deny the slaves’ efforts and their active participation in creating abundant gardens (170). Furthermore, descriptions of these gardens exclude details about the agricultural practices of the slaves (Tobin 171). This omission of the “slaves’ mastery of tropical agronomy,” Tobin suggests, “can be explained as an unwillingness to admit that slaves possessed valuable knowledge about the African and American plants and that Europeans lacked this expertise” (171). However, in deliberately discounting the slaves’ understanding of the Caribbean environment and

traditional farming practices, the colonizer betrays a profound anxiety about the threat they pose to his reign in the colonies.

The slaves' empowering connection to the nature of the Caribbean compounds the colonizer's fears about an unknown and frightening environment, which refuses to be contained within the boundaries that he has created. The colonial attitudes toward nature took form in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, when European scientists began to believe that "[h]uman dominion over nature ... was to be achieved through the experimental 'disclosure of nature's secrets'" (Merchant 164, 165, 188). Francis Bacon, for example, affected the "transformation of the earth as a nurturing mother and womb of life into a source of secrets to be extracted for economic advance" (Merchant 165). Knowing nature's secrets would allow European colonizers to take possession of foreign landscapes and their resources, and to dissipate the dangers that lay hidden in these unfamiliar environments. For these imperialists, as for modern developers, "[g]ardening in the [t]ropics ... means / letting in light" (Senior 93). The earth had to be made visible so that it could be owned. Therefore, they "set it alight, ... disemboweled it, ... [and] forcefully / established marks of [their] presence all over it"(Senior 94). Nature, however, resists this forced unveiling, and harbours mysteries that disturb the complacency of the colonizer. Indeed, nature provides colonized people with "recipes and devices" to resist those who trespass in their lands (Senior 109, 110). Senior's gardener in "Advice and Devices" knows the ways to protect oneself from those who "harm your garden or / steal your crop" (109). She suggests that in addition to "plant[ing] at the four corners / Overlook Bean to be your eyes" in the garden, one should also

be sure
 to burn wangla (but not to excess).
 With the ashes, mix a trace of the
 dirt from [the offenders'] footstep with powdered
 hummingbird wings (for they never

stop beating) and Oil of Compellance
 with six fresh leaves of what
 some call bizzie-lizzie and we call
 impatiens. Wrap up in cowitch,
 tie with chaini wis, and bury
 at the four corners under the fence
 at the exact commencement of the
 new moon. (110)

Secret names and secret knowledge have the power to undermine the authority of the colonial or neo-colonial presence in the gardens of the Caribbean people. The speaker in Senior's poem "Pawpaw" has learned from "[a]n ol'lady" that the pawpaw tree must not be "planted / too near the house" (76). For,

that tree will sap your strength
 waste your muscle
 draw you down
 to skin and bone.
 To nutten. (76)

Death is hidden in an inviting fruit. Similarly, the poisonous Madam Fate "pos[es] / as innocent / star-flower" (Senior 66). The inhabitants of this landscape are privy to information that can destroy their oppressors, who see nature as successfully humbled under their will. The colonizer is unaware that even the "symbol / of hospitality" of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean, the pineapple, which he has claimed for himself, holds

retribution
 incarnate
 in that sweet

flesh. (Senior 64)

“[P]ineal eyes / watch and / wait” (Senior 65); unseen, they reverse the gaze of the colonizer. “Plants are deceptive,” writes Senior (61). Although, commodified, exploited and denigrated, the nature of colonized territories has powers that cannot be recognized and neutralized by the colonizer. They continue to “breed ... / and twine” putting into effect their own “sinister not to say imperialistic / grand design” (Senior 61). They wait patiently to take over the spaces cleared by colonial cultivation, for “[t]he world is full of shoots bent on conquest, / invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces” (Senior 61). Knowledge of the weaponry of nature, its “burrs,” “nuts,” “seeds,” “flowers,” and fruits (Senior 61), allows the people of the Caribbean to mount a resistance to the European technological and ideological warfare that has forced their subjugation and dispossession.

Senior, Brand and Kincaid attempt to root themselves in the Caribbean through the gardens they create. Claiming the right to name their environment allows the characters in their works to establish a connection to place. The colonial “strategy of naming” is a way for the imperial male to represent himself as the origin of the lands he discovers, and as such, the owner of these territories (McClintock 28, 29). Therefore, in this case, naming is an aggressive technique of possession. The gardeners in the texts of Senior, Brand and Kincaid, however, use this act to mark the Caribbean landscape so that they can claim it as their home in being owned by it, in belonging to it. As descendants of African slaves, these characters, like their authors, have inherited a sense of alienation and abandonment in the New World. Brand notes:

They had been taken. Plain. Hard. Rough. Swept up from thinking of the corn to be shucked, the rains coming or no rain coming at all for the

season, that patch of high grass to clear. The mist gathering at their feet. The steam of baking. Poised over a well, the bag lowered, they had been plucked, or, caught in the misfortune of a wedding or a war, sold. (41)

Forcibly removed from their homes and their way of life, and transported as commodities to places like the Caribbean, these people lost their sense of self and of their place in the world. Not only are their ties to place disrupted, but also familial connections are destroyed as a result of their enslavement. As Mirelda Josefena, the woman who cares for Elizete, tells her, “Nobody have no mother nobody have no father” (37). Abandoned as a child by her family, Elizete has no memory of her mother. “Impermanence” and ignorance of her ancestry is Elizete’s inheritance (65). “She is a stray child ... wandering as strays wander,” unable to rest anywhere for long (38). She does not know who she is, or where she comes from (31). However, for Elizete, the site of her uprooting becomes the place where she finds stability and history. She first appears in front of the house of the woman she is given to, tied by a “rope round the samaan tree” (29). To comfort herself as she stands there, lost and alone under this tree, Elizete claims it as her mother. “A samaan is a tree with majesty,” explains Elizete, “and I think of this samaan as my mother” (17). The rest of her childhood is spent under the protective branches of this tree. “It was wide and high and the light between what it leave of the sky was soft and it look like a woman with hands in the air” (17). Elizete remembers, “She wave from far and the sun pass through she, and she was my keeper. Until the woman I was given to come home from the field the samaan was my mother. I wait there whole day under the tree and I play in the dirt” (17). Through her connection to the samaan tree, Elizete is able to plant

herself in the earth of this new place. The absence of a biological mother is filled by the discovery of an ecological origin.

Under this tree, Elizete also finds family, and a sense of identity. The woman with the market garden gives this girl who appears in front of her house, the story of Adela, which is the painful narrative of all Africans enslaved in the Caribbean. As a child, Kincaid also recovers her lost history in the British botanical garden in Antigua. This garden is characterized by the lack of indigeneity. The plants are not originally from Antigua (120), and neither are Kincaid and her father who spent afternoons there together. Like the foreign specimens here, Kincaid's ancestors were transplanted to Antigua under the agency of a British Empire intent on expanding and maintaining its power in the New World. Under the rubber tree from "the mysterious Far East" (145), Kincaid finds a sense of identity as an Antiguan. Although she does not share a biological connection to the man she thinks of as her father, through the stories of his own ancestry that he gives to Kincaid, he becomes the parent from which she originated. From him she learns about "important things," knowledge that "contributed to [her] becoming a writer," and helped her to find a Caribbean voice (147). Like many of the characters in the texts being examined, Kincaid's father also has lost his ties to his parents. His mother migrated to England, while his father left to work on the construction of the Panama Canal. In recounting his memories to his daughter, he too reconnects the broken links in his lineage, recuperating and passing on his history. He allows himself to accept this history of abandonment and dispossession, by transforming it into a narrative that allows the colonized people of the Caribbean to be active participants. "The Panama Canal," writes

Kincaid, “has attached to it also the shameful qualities of imperialism and unjustified aggression, but all this, claim and counterclaim, was of no importance to my father, the idea and reality; ‘Panama Canal’ he understood, it rolled off his tongue as if he had a rightful and just claim to it” (148). He claims for himself the product of the labours of his father, his creative contribution to the world. This is more than a desire to possess; it is an attempt to recover agency and control over one’s own history. In this way, “while speaking to his daughter he had removed himself, magically, from being a mere subject in this drama of possessing” (148). By sharing these narratives, and making them their own histories, Kincaid, and Elizete find a way to counter the dislocation and historical erasure that they experience under a colonial legacy.

Brand’s Adela refuses to acknowledge the place where she arrives as a slave, and thus forfeits the opportunity to affirm her creative powers, through gardening or naming as Mirelda Josefena and Elizete do later, and to affirm her presence in history. Verlia also suffers destruction as she attempts to escape her Caribbean world. Interestingly, Verlia “dug her initials into the samaan tree in the school yard,” violently and possessively marking the tree with her name (133). She does not form a familial connection with the tree as Elizete does; she cannot find a productive, empowering way to become a part of the landscape that disconcerts her. For Verlia and Adela, the Caribbean remains an alien place, an awful reminder of suffering and death. “They were not interested in belonging. It could not suffice ... They saw with the bloodful clarity of rage” (Brand 43). To alleviate this consuming anger, Brand, Kincaid and Senior reformulate their relationship to the Caribbean. Rather than replace their colonial experience with pre-colonial

memories, these gardeners include both histories in their gardens. Instead of imitating the system of binaries that the colonizer used to maintain his control in the colonies, these writers opt to breakdown such distinctions, to find an alternative way of interacting with the Caribbean environment. The displaced rubber tree, for example, a symbol of colonial power, becomes incorporated into an Antiguan story as the site where Kincaid and her father recuperated from their physical and spiritual ailments. Kincaid writes,

When first seen by any of us (and by us, I mean not only my immediate family but the people of my small island), it was a curiosity; eventually we accepted its presence in our midst, even as we accepted our own presence in our midst, for we, too were not native to the place we were in. (145)

This acceptance of the alien avoids the colonial “chauvinist exclusion,” which is accompanied by the “worship of biological purity” (Lowenthal 235), and creates what Tiffin calls “genuine indigeniety” (sic 62). Kincaid and Elizete also claim the Caribbean as their home through their active involvement in the complex history and landscape of the Caribbean, by forming connections that are not limited to biology or blood, for “here blood was long and not anything that ran only in the vein” (Brand 39). In this way, they find a sense of belonging that was not “squared off by a fence, a post, or a gate” (Brand 39). This is a belonging that is unlike that which was claimed by the colonizers “who measured origins speaking of a great patriarch and property marked out by violence, a rope, some iron; who measured time in the future only and who discarded memory like useless news” (Brand 42, 43). Elizete does not forcefully assume ownership of the samaan tree, or the yard in which it grows. On the contrary, she imagines herself as part of the interconnected experiences of the nature and the people of the Caribbean. For in the Caribbean, “[h]ere, there was no belonging that was singular, no need to store up

lineage or count it; all this blood was washed thick and thin, rinsed and rinsed and rubbed and licked and stained; all this blood gashed and running like rain, lathered and drenched and sprinkled and beat upon clay beds and cane grass” (Brand 39). The suffering of individuals has intermingled to form a communal narrative that has become a material part of the Caribbean landscape, transforming it into a place for its inhabitants to call their own. Seodial Deena writes, “Indigenous Amerindians relate sacredly to the earth as their mother and God; Africans and Indians – emerging from slavery and indentureship, respectively – use the land and environment to fashion a new culture and belief, and at the same time their culture and belief shape the landscape” (371, 372). This creative exchange allows the descendants of African slaves to achieve “genuine indigeneity” in the Caribbean.

Through “technologies of knowledge,” such as the maps of explorers, and the naturalists’ systems of classification, the non-European world was made visible and known, in order to facilitate its possession and plunder by colonial powers. Kincaid, Senior and Brand challenge the order created by the colonizer in the Caribbean, by presenting an alternate way of imagining this landscape. They use the typically colonial strategy of naming, and their traditional knowledge of this environment to question the exploitation of the nature and the people of their native islands. Their understanding of the secrets of Caribbean nature allows them celebrate the variety and significance of local botany, and to reclaim this land for themselves. Unlike the colonial and neo-colonial landowners, the gardeners in these texts attempt to interact with and become a part of this landscape. By this means, they attempt to bring about their indigenization in this

unfamiliar place, in order to counter the profound sense of loss of stability and identity that they experience as descendants of slaves in the New World. Acceptance of this place that has caused their dislocation and death does not imply compliance or defeat. These writers use their firm grounding in Caribbean soil to defend themselves against physical and spiritual fragmentation.

CHAPTER THREE: GARDEN BOOKS

Gardening is an act of resistance for Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Dionne Brand. Through their writing, they create gardens which function as texts that allow them to reclaim their culture and to contest the colonial domination of the Caribbean. The people of conquered territories were imagined by the colonizers to be without history, without culture, and therefore, without humanity. This relegation of non-European peoples to the realm of nature was used to justify their subjugation under colonial rule. In My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, Kincaid, Senior, and Brand, respectively, use the language and textual forms that emerge from the cultural activity of the people of the Caribbean to write living, changing descriptions of this landscape that challenge its objectification and domination. Similarly, the gardens in these works become subjective maps that are made from the interaction between people and their environment, and which defy the physical and discursive boundaries and order imposed by the language of colonial discourse. In inventing gardens that embody the memories, knowledge and history of the Caribbean people, Kincaid, Senior and Brand also question the separation between nature and culture on which the colonial project is founded.

In My Garden (Book), Gardening in the Tropics, and In Another Place, Not Here, Kincaid, Senior, and Brand, respectively, examine the damaging effects of a colonial

history on the physical and spiritual identity of the descendants of African slaves in the Caribbean. In this sense, they are typical of Caribbean writers who “[w]hether writing from England, the United States, Canada, or the Caribbean,” as Seodial Deena notes, “use the rich, tropical landscape of the Caribbean as setting and the socio-political and historical struggles as major themes” (367). Indeed, these struggles cannot be extricated from the writing about or from the Caribbean, for the presence of these writers in this landscape is the result of European imperial ambitions. The very act of writing challenges a colonial discourse that would deny them creative agency. Selwyn R. Cudjoe argues that in the Caribbean, artistic activity is inevitably a political activity. In Resistance and Caribbean Literature, he writes that

daily violence – be it political (the attempt to impose foreign control over the people), economic (the attempt to exact the largest amount of labor at the lowest cost) or cultural (the attempt to foster a foreign way of life) – has led to resistance, a necessary and permanent condition in Caribbean culture. Any literary consciousness rising from this cultural/socioeconomic/political milieu must of necessity be violent and political. Political vision becomes the basic literary structure and aesthetic sensibility in Caribbean literature. (72)

This violence against the inhabitants of the Caribbean, which Cudjoe describes, involves their dehumanization as commodities in a colonial economy, and as a people without culture. The writing from this region, therefore, is preoccupied with celebrating the history, the experiences, the arts, and local knowledge of the Caribbean people. “In the Caribbean, then,” Cudjoe writes, “resistance is synonymous with the cultural reaffirmation of the people” (66). Resistance is the struggle to reclaim their culture; it is “the struggle of the masses to retain their way of life within terms that they understand, which constitute the conditions that they thought desirable in order to function as creative

and liberated people” (Cudjoe 66). Taking up this fight, Kincaid, Brand and Senior strive to re-establish the traditional mode of living with/in nature in their writing about gardens, and use this alliance to recover their productive capabilities and to achieve political independence.

In writing about gardens, Kincaid, Senior and Brand complement the subversive activity undertaken in the garden by contesting the colonial claim that the Caribbean people lack a significant culture. Written texts were essential in “perpetuating European cultural assumptions and Eurocentric notions of civilization, as well as the view of writing as the vehicle of authority and truth” in the colonies (Ashcroft 166). This emphasis on the written word designated as inferior the oral tradition, which was used to articulate the culture of the Caribbean (Ashcroft 165, 166). Kincaid, Senior and Brand not only usurp the exclusive control of the written form of cultural expression from the colonizer, but by using structures and subject matter that reflect the particular history and character of the Caribbean, they question the power and validity of colonial texts.

In her novel In Another Place, Not Here, Brand uses nation language, the “culturally specific forms of Caribbean English” that are “based on an oral tradition” (Ashcroft 148, 149). Brand recreates the Caribbean landscape in a language that has risen out of the interaction of the languages of African slaves and English colonizers in a specifically Caribbean setting (Ashcroft 148). A local language is used to describe the Caribbean and release it from colonial domination. In this novel, Verlia observes the way in which language is used to reclaim place in post-colonial Grenada:

All the names of places here are as old as slavery ... The meanings underneath are meanings I don't know ... but I can hear in the way people

say them, the driver on the transport calling them out 'Choiselle! Talk fast, talk fast!' and the old women passengers, 'Morne Diablo, darling, let me down there.' 'Saint Michel sweet boy, take a dollar.' 'You in a hurry or what? Look drop me by Petit Homme eh!' I've never said the name of place like this, dropping darling and sweet boy and eh after them. You would have to know a place for that (Brand 211).

Names that represent the subjugation of the Caribbean people and environment are appropriated into a local narrative through their inclusion in daily conversation. The alien environment to which slaves were brought is made familiar through this exchange of words between people. It is such a "communal" language (Ashcroft 149) that Brand reproduces in written form in her novel to celebrate the culture of the Caribbean. This language is "a lived, dynamic and changing phenomenon" (Ashcroft 149) that challenges the static writing of colonial texts that are intent on divesting colonized space of this vitality, facilitating its objectification, and subsequent exploitation. This space is commodified through the kind of language used in colonial cartography, for example, which attempts to contain it "as a measurable, abstract concept independent of any particular place or region" (Ashcroft 178). The Caribbean people create a new language, which develops from their experiences in this landscape, that they use to make the Caribbean their own. By placing it within a historical and social context, this language is able to upset the colonizer's discursive control of this place. Senior uses poetry similarly, to depict the complexities of the Caribbean, imagining it as living and organic. Her catalogue of plants in the section entitled "Nature Studies" is unlike the scientific descriptions made by colonial naturalists, which were filled with Latin labels and were based on disinterested observations, and meant to reproduce nature exactly. Senior's poems are founded on subjective experience, and require the creative participation of the

reader, require a dialogue between the writer and reader to interpret the words and to imagine the plants that they depict. Here, language does not classify and fix nature within a static order, but attempts to show the futility of the colonial impulse to know and to own nature, which in Senior's poems remains a mystery. Knowledge of a place cannot be forcefully obtained or imposed through maps or other written texts, but is that which is shared between the people who are intimately bound to that place.

The commodification and subjugation of the Caribbean landscape and people by the language of colonial discourse is resisted in the writings of Kincaid, Senior and Brand. Their gardens also become alternative texts that are made in collaboration with nature, made of nature, to bring to life the Caribbean environment and challenge its domination and objectification by colonial and neo-colonial oppressors. In My Garden (Book), Kincaid complements her writing by creating a garden that allows her to question colonial ideology and reclaim her identity as an Antiguan. The beginning of her gardening career in Vermont coincides with her reading about the colonization of Mexico, and the accompanying changes that occur in that landscape as a result of being marked with European names. Therefore, for Kincaid, the garden and conquest are intricately linked. Furthermore, as she writes, "the garden for me is so bound up with words about the garden, with words themselves, that any set idea of the garden, any set picture, is a provocation to me" (7). She rejects the colonial obsession with containing conquered landscapes within a totalizing order that was deemed the definitive representation of nature. To impose this order on the nature of these territories, they first had to be made empty. Such an imagined "blankness," Kincaid writes, is "like the

blankness of paradise; paradise emerges from chaos and chaos is not history, chaos is the opposite of the legitimate order of things" (155). "Paradise," she continues, "is the thing just met when all the troublesome details have been vanquished" (155). Everything that could challenge the colonizer's domination of these places, including their Indigenous inhabitants and their claims to these lands, must be erased, banished from this perfect European paradise. Rejecting such gardens contained by language, Kincaid makes a garden based on a vague image in her "mind's eye" (7). Using flower beds of "the most peculiar ungardenlike shapes," she creates a garden that "resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it" (7, 8). This is an inexact map, a personal map, based not on scientific measurement or observation, but on Kincaid's memories of Antigua and the Caribbean. Kincaid's map of flowers remembers the Caribbean people and places that have been excluded from colonial texts and gardens. Kincaid writes, "the garden is for me an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)" (8). In remembering the history of the Caribbean, Kincaid re-introduces those troublesome details that the colonizer left out of the New World garden.

"Memory," Kincaid writes, "is a gardener's real palette; memory as it summons up the past, memory as it shapes the present, memory as it dictates the future" (218, 219). Her childhood memories of Antigua are embodied in flowers, which become the subjective set of colours with which Kincaid creates her art. The *Lycoris squamigera* growing in her garden reminds Kincaid of "a headmaster's strap first thing on a school

morning, before it had met the palm of a hand or a buttocks (not bare buttocks, they were shielded by khaki)” (16). Other plants are reminders of other kinds of pain – particularly, the psychological pain of a black child living in a world where all things British are accepted as the ideal by which all things Antiguan are measured. A “small, soft, yellow-fleshed watermelon” grown in her garden brings to mind the feelings of inadequacy she had as a girl (57). She writes:

I was suddenly reminded of the pictures of small girls I used to see in a magazine for girls when I was a small girl myself: they were always at a birthday party, and the colors of their hair and of the clothes they wore and of the light in the room were all some variation of this shade, the golden shade of the watermelon that I had grown. I would wish then to be a girl like that, with hair like that, in a room like that – and the despair I felt then that such a thing would never be true” (57).

This entire world is infused with a happiness to which only European girls are entitled. Kincaid includes this fruit in her garden as part of her history as a Caribbean person, exchanging self-loathing for self-acceptance. The portulaca also triggers vivid memories of trips with her caretaker to a house in front of which these flowers grew. Kincaid remembers, “I used to dance up and down around them, pretending that I was a little girl from somewhere else” (94). The doubts of childhood are brought into the garden, along with pleasant memories of brown sugar eaten on the way home. Kincaid recovers her own complex history and that of Antigua and the Caribbean in this garden, which functions as a map, leading her home.

Where her ancestor, Adela, saw barrenness, Elizete creates an abundant garden full of names, based on her particular experience of the Grenadian landscape, to recover her ancestry. When Adela arrives in the New World,

[a]ll her maps fade from her head, washing off from zinnia to pale ink, the paper of ways, that she stitch and stick with saliva and breath, rinse as the sky in June come watery; the blue of Guinea, her mark for horizon, was out; the red dirt under cart, all the weight and balance and measure, at which point she had ordered the species in grains of sand, thinned to brown; the brocade heft of clouds, the wonderful degrees of light, all that done vanish. (22)

Made with her own body and the colors and elements of the landscapes through which she passes, these maps store Adela's memory of Africa, her enslavement, and her arrival. Her deliberate forgetting of this cartography causes the erasure of her history, of her sense of self. Therefore, Elizete invents new maps in an attempt to recuperate this loss, allowing her to reclaim the narrative, the culture of the Caribbean, and her own identity as a Caribbean person. The maps that Kincaid and Elizete fashion out of nature repair the torn connection between these women and the Caribbean. Their work in the garden allows them to create a text that physically and emotionally binds them to place.

In Brand's In Another Place, Not Here, on the day of the revolution in Grenada, Verlia hears "the sound of bees and cicadas singing tautly tighten[ing] the air, as if they were drawing a map of the place, as if they were the only ones left to do it" (117). This map is made in the air by the bodies of insects that are intimately familiar with the landscape. They

suspended the island, mapping the few hills, the dried rivers of the dry season, the white river stones, the soft memory of the people who lived here, the desire of rain when it came to wash rickety houses away, or the desire of sun to parch old people's lips, children's throats, the hot need of hillsides to incline so desperately, to inspire weakness in the knees, the cold-blooded heat of noons melting people into houses and under beds. (117)

The bees and cicadas' memory and knowledge of this place is made material in their bodies, by their bodies, which create a map that intertwines the emotional and physical realities of people and of the landscape. As in the garden texts created by Kincaid and Elizete, the environment and the inhabitants of this island take three-dimensional form in a living map that stresses the interconnectedness of life. No names violently erase details to provide a razed landscape on which the colonizer can enact his narrative of conquest. The alternating desires of the rain and the sun, the cycles of nature, not the imperial desire for progress and possession, form the basis of this enduring cartography. The cicadas and bees hover overhead "holding these few things, waiting to set them down again, the simple geography of dirt and water, intact, the way only they knew it, holding the name of the place in their voices, screaming so that the war would pass, interminably pass" (117). Technologies of violence and of knowledge cannot achieve the understanding of this place that comes from belonging to it, from being an organic part of it.

Like their writings about the garden, the garden maps Kincaid, Senior and Brand make are only approximations of the places they wish to chart. Based on these writers' interaction with the nature of the Caribbean, made of nature itself, they are constantly changing. Kincaid's map of the Caribbean is not complete, nor will it ever be (7,8). She admits, "I shall never have the garden I have in my mind, but that for me is the joy of it" (220). Colonial writings, maps and gardens attempted to dominate the landscapes of conquered territories by reducing them to single specimens that were then assigned a permanent position within static hierarchies. Thus, the world was imagined by the

colonizer to be a unified whole with a predetermined order that naturalized his authority. Like Kincaid, for whom “the world is cracked, unwhole, not pure, accidental” (124), Brand and Senior create gardens and texts that refuse to be contained within prescribed rules or boundaries. In Kincaid’s garden, her *Wisteria floribunda* with blue flowers refuses to bloom when it should (11). Her wisteria with white flowers “does not bloom at all, it only throws out long, twining stems, mixing itself up with the canes of the *Rosa* ‘Alchemist,’ which is growing not too nearby, mixing itself up with a honeysuckle (*Lonicera*) and even going far away to twin itself around a red rose (*Rosa* ‘Henry Kelsy’)” (11). Animals that do not belong in a garden breach its borders. A fox challenges her monopoly of this land (18); a rabbit disturbs her with his unexpected appearances (19); and a woodpecker drills holes in her house, which is being devoured by insects (25). “Gardening in the Tropics,” writes Senior in her poem “The Knot Garden,” “you’ll find things that don’t / belong together often intertwine / all mixed up in this amazing fecundity” (86). Any attempt by neo-colonial leaders to suppress or partition society along class lines fails. The people of the Caribbean take cues from the rebellious nature of the Caribbean, which refuses “to separate out flowers / from weeds, woods from trees,” allowing plants to “propagate underground, by / division” (86). Kincaid thrives on the disorderliness of her garden, happy to relinquish control to nature, to be possessed by it. She admits:

Oh, how I like the rush of things, the thickness of things, everything condensed as it is happening, long after it has happened, so that any attempt to understand it will become like an unraveling of a large piece of cloth that had been laid flat and framed and placed as a hanging on a wall and, even then, expected to stand for something. (24)

Trying to sort out the chaos of nature into knowable parts would mean having to destroy the connections between these parts. Genuine, or complete understanding of this landscape includes accepting that which cannot be made visible, and celebrating the layers of life that constitute this network. Gardening for these writers involves filling in the blank spaces created on the Caribbean landscape by the erasure of the uncontainable complexity of its nature, and of the participation and presence of its inhabitants. These writers draw strength from the indomitable spirit of the Caribbean environment, and challenge colonial and neo-colonial attempts to constrain the Caribbean people within boundaries.

European control in the colonies depended on the imposition and maintenance of physical and ideological borders. Plantations and botanical gardens were “civilized” spaces within which “wild” nature was tamed by colonial military and scientific technologies. Discursive control of these territories required the denigration or erasure of the culture of colonized people and their relegation to the realm of nature, in order to justify their domination by European imperialists. Kincaid, Senior and Brand question this artificial separation between nature and culture in their texts and their gardens. Indeed, the garden tended by Kincaid in Vermont, the kitchen and market gardens described in the works of Senior and Brand, and even the uncultivated nature of the Caribbean become texts that preserve the culture of the Caribbean. In their use of dialogic language and form in their texts, both books and gardens, these writers envision a collaborative relationship between the inhabitants of these islands and their environment that challenges the exploitation of nature within colonial gardens. They imagine

themselves as being part of an empowering network of life that provides them with the tools and the knowledge to affirm their creative power and political independence from their colonial or neo-colonial oppressors.

Not only are these colonial boundaries made permeable and mutable by Kincaid, Senior and Brand, but these writers also challenge the content of colonial gardens. According to Harriet Ritvo, “no matter what its shape or content, the garden was still constructed as a place of repose and retreat; anything presenting a threat, whether to physical security or, as in the case of ... liminal plants, to taxonomical equanimity, would have been out of place” (371). Kincaid, Senior and Brand, however, introduce Caribbean biological and cultural elements that disturb the complacency of the colonizer. Kincaid argues that “the world cannot be left out of the garden” (82). Therefore, she includes her personal history in her garden, and in her writings about this garden in Vermont, by forming untraditional flower beds containing plants that remind of her Antiguan history. Even more disconcertingly, rather than limit herself to writing only descriptions about the plants she cultivates, Kincaid “introduce[s] race and politics into the garden” (“Sowers” 41). In addition to discussing the troubling relationship between gardening and colonial conquest, Kincaid does not exclude from her text incidents where hatred unabashedly enters the garden, disturbing her own enjoyment of it. She remembers the mother of her friend who despises the “nigger colors” of the Asiatic lilies in her daughter’s garden (66), and the man who comes to rebuild the stone wall in her garden, bringing with him prejudice and bulbs of “small, white, star-shaped” flowers (68). Despite her own dislike for the colours of the lilies, Kincaid vows to love them, but discards the white flowers

given to her by the builder. In Kincaid's garden, flowers are not specimens from which she can remain emotionally detached. They are an important part of the way she perceives and interacts with the world. Therefore, their place in her life constantly changes during her "ongoing conversation with [her] garden" ("Sowers" 44), and her anxious struggles in the world. Kincaid's garden, therefore, lacks the objective certainty of colonial botanical gardens, for example, and "has only series of doubts upon series of doubts" (15). However, Kincaid is unfazed by this inability to find peace in her garden. She writes, "How agitated I am when I am in the garden, and how happy I am to be so agitated" (14). This satisfaction with agitation suggests a suspicion of the rest and repose that requires that nature be stripped of its vitality, its generative force, and become an object to be possessed and manipulated by the gardener.

In the Caribbean, race and politics are a material part of the landscape. For example, "the skulls of *desaparecidos* / - the disappeared ones" are buried in volcanoes (Senior 83). The kitchen gardener in Senior's "Brief Lives" sometimes digs up the bones of victims of political strife (83). In her poem "My Father's Blue Plantation," the "old and vegetating / bones" of the banana farmer, whose lungs turned as blue as the leaves of the plants that he sprayed with chemicals, lie in the ruined garden (84). The remains of these victims of neo-colonial turmoil, and a destructive colonial legacy, like the bones of the indigenous people of the Caribbean "will remain as testament to this effort to bring / light" (Senior 93). Gardening in the tropics, therefore, is necessarily an act of remembering, of recovering the history of those who have been violently silenced. This creative activity functions like writing from the Caribbean, which "virtually becomes a

process in which man is injected into his past world, and acts to come to grips with that past reality before he can come to terms with his present” (Cudjoe, *Resistance* 69). In the garden, this process also takes physical form. The body of the gardener is plunged into the soil, unearthing the remains of humans, animals and plants that are then used to engender new growth, which in turn bears witness to that past.

The gardeners in the texts being examined include in their plots crops that reflect the traditional knowledge and agriculture of their ancestors. The woman who labours in her kitchen garden in Senior’s “Hurricane Story, 1944” grows “skellion tomatitis pumpkin melon,” which ensure her family’s survival (25). During the “Hurricane Story, 1903,” the speaker’s grandparents last through the storm on a simple diet which includes cassava, “[c]orn drying in the husk / ... hung from the rafters,” and “afu yam / and sweet potato ripen[ing] (safe from / breeze-blow) underground” (19). These vegetables were also harvested in slave provision grounds in the Caribbean. These plots included “plantains, pulses (legumes), and greens” (Tobin 165). Travellers in the Caribbean have noted that “not only indigenous Amerindian plants such as cassava, potato, corn, pumpkin, calaloo, and cacao, but also ... plants from Africa such as yam, millet, plantain, okra, and watermelon as well as Mediterranean and Near Eastern plants such as lime, citron, orange, and coffee” were grown in these gardens (Tobin 167). The cultivation and sale of this produce garnered slaves economic, political and cultural freedom from their oppressors. These crops represent independence and ingenuity, while those which the slaves were forced to tend in colonial plantations, represent enslavement and destruction. Plantation agriculture was only concerned with “extracting commodities to be exported,”

and completely disregarded “[l]ocal livelihood and ecology” (Lowenthal 230). David Lowenthal writes, “Emphasis on such aims outlasted formal decolonization. Even when merged with the University of the West Indies in the 1960s, Trinidad’s Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture continued to concentrate on export commodities – sugar, cotton, coffee, cacao, banana. Peasant crops and livestock were all but ignored” (230). A history of the denigration of Caribbean ecology and local farming methods promotes this persisting adherence to destructive colonial agricultural practices. Kenneth Kiple notes that “the continued preemption of land for sugar at the expense of food crops, will place impossible pressure on local resources and dictate the need for more and more imported food that the common people simply cannot afford” (186). This form of gardening, which is based on the violent subjugation of both nature and people, can only engender dependence and death. The content and form of the market and kitchen gardens described in the texts of Senior and Brand are based on a traditional understanding of the environment of the Caribbean, which respects and collaborates with nature to produce harvests that sustain both the gardener and the garden. As such, the crops grown in these plots embody the cultural history of the Caribbean people. Furthermore, Deane Curtin explains that in traditional agriculture, the seeds planted in farms were chosen by women from a stock preserved by their family (65). The process of selection, which is based on the ability of the seeds to survive the growing season (Curtin 65), transforms this stock over time, so that the genetics of the seeds eventually come to encode the characteristics of the local environment. They retain the memory of environmental hardship and abundance, and form a connection between this history and that of the people of this

landscape. A garden whose content consists of plants grown from these seeds reinforces the gardener's connection to his local landscape, and preserves the knowledge and experience of the gardener and her community. The seeds and their fruit ensure the survival of the interconnected histories of these people and their environment.

Senior begins Gardening in the Tropics, with a poem that exemplifies this link between nature and culture, challenging the European colonizer's divisions. The words of the poems give rise to the form of the gourd, and gourd contains the words within its shape. This "hollowed dried / calabash humble took-took" contains ancient stories about the Caribbean people (vii). It is not only the source of the life and death, but it also "ordered divination, ritual / sounds, incantations" (vii). From this fruit came biological and cultural birth, life and the knowledge required to order and to articulate the narrative of that life. Unlike the enclosures created by colonizers who wanted to partition and dominate the landscapes they entered, the "magical enclosure" of the gourd derives its power from the interaction between the creative and destructive forces of the cosmos (vii). The gourd exemplifies the wholeness of the universe. This is not an order based on divisions, such as those that characterize the plantations and botanical gardens of imperial Europe. The order of the gourd emphasizes the connections between the nature and culture, between the material and spiritual worlds. It is an order that accommodates diversity, impurity and the crossing of boundaries, and provides the creative force for those who "rattle [their] stones, [their] / beads or [their] bones in [its] dried-out container" to be heard (vii). This "simple" fruit (vii) represents the nature of the Caribbean on whose power Kincaid, Brand and Senior draw to recover their cultural

heritage and create a map to the future, in defiance of the authorities that attempt to denigrate and destroy them. The seeds, the fruits and vegetables that are grown in West Indian garden plots using subsistence farming methods represent the intersection of the natural and cultural history of the Caribbean people. Their names are “words – yam, cassava, callaloo – that belong to ancient practices and old stories, some African, some Amerindian, and some creole, words that speak of the strength to survive and the power to resist terrible oppression” (Tobin 174).

The absence of West Indian flowers in the garden in Kingston, Jamaica and of Antiguan plants in the local botanical garden (Kincaid 120) illustrate the ways in which the botany of the Caribbean was denigrated under colonial rule. In order to establish the supremacy of Europe, and to justify the subjugation of the Caribbean, the local environment was deemed to be without value. When it was included in colonial gardens, Caribbean nature was reconstructed as a commodity or unraveled into specimens, whose significance depended on their place within the colonial economy or ideology. In addition to an “ignorance of the botany of the place I am from (and am of)” (Kincaid 120), Kincaid admits an ignorance of West Indian literature (Cudjoe, *Interview* 220). She explains that her Antiguan education “was very ‘Empire,’ only involved civilization up to the British Empire” (Cudjoe, *Interview* 217, 218). Kincaid understood as a child, “Everything seemed divine and good only if it was English” (Cudjoe, *Interview* 217). In the texts of Empire, the Caribbean person, like Caribbean nature, was reduced to a body that was valued as a commodity, or placed, like other specimens from the Non-European world, in a scientific and cultural hierarchy ordered and controlled by the colonizer. Even

when Caribbean writers began to address their dehumanization and absence through their own literature, they were forced to struggle against repeated dismissal of their creative endeavours. “[F]ocusing on neglected subjects like ordinary people, landscape, and environment,” Deena writes, “Caribbean literature was viewed as cheap and low-class” (366). Kincaid, Senior and Brand continue this fight against cultural denigration, filling their writings with stories of people from the Caribbean whose relationship with the local environment helps them to recover control of their bodies and to maintain the integrity of their Caribbean identity. These writers construct “garden books” – books that recreate the West Indian landscape, and gardens that becomes texts, which record the historical narratives of the Caribbean people. The plants that are grown in the garden are part of the language of this text. Both writing and gardening are activities intended to recuperate the creative agency and the culture of the Caribbean author or gardener.

Like the resistance literature of the Caribbean, the Caribbean gardens in the works of Kincaid, Senior and Brand consist of ordinary gardeners tending everyday plants. Their unacknowledged value is celebrated by the writers and gardeners, who contest the colonial disparagement of their culture and their landscape. For Senior, the Caribbean is filled with

sights that strain your
credulity – like those strong
Amazon women striding daily across
our lands carrying bundles of wood
on their heads and babies strapped
to their breasts and calabashes of
water in both hands. (97)

These ordinary women perform extraordinary tasks daily, inspiring respect and affirming their power and identity. The lowly vegetables grown in the gardens of the hurricane survivors in Senior's work allow the gardeners to weather the disaster and to care for their families. As noted earlier, gardening, like writing, is a creative act that allows the artist to recover and deal with a painful past in order to transform it into an empowering present and future. In making the Caribbean her subject matter, the writer/gardener attempts to form an authentic connection to this place through her art. The difference between these two modes is that in the garden, intellectual *and* physical action is possible. In opposition to cultural exclusion, for example, Kincaid designs a garden that will rectify this erasure through its form, which is a personalized map of the Caribbean, and its content, which includes Kincaid's childhood memories of Antigua, and the history of the Caribbean. Significantly, the physical labour exerted in the garden allows the gardener to recuperate the productive potential of her body. As Kincaid notes, "When they [Antiguans] (we) were brought to this island from Africa a few hundred years ago, it was not for their pottery-making skills or for their way with a loom; it was for the free labor they could provide in the fields" (139). The African slave was valued as a manipulable machine. By nourishing the soil with its blood and sweat, the commodified body is able to engender life in the garden, which in its turn, sustains the gardener. Elizete's caretaker in Brand's novel finds peace only while working in the garden: "Come evenings when she had to rise up, pull her hands from the soil, slow her sweat, the woman they'd left her with would be miserable and throwing words for Elizete and the spirits" (35). "Throwing words," Brand explains, "was asking for answers ... It was

summoning the spirits, getting on their nerves. Until they pushed through her own lips and let her words bite her. Until her head ached with the ring of stone, the jingle of old iron” (34). Gardening allows this woman to quieten the memories of a painful past, to calm the destructive anger. In the garden, she is able to realize her body as more than flesh, more than suffering, to find a self-affirming response to her questions. Evaluating the merits of using batik art to discuss significant issues that affect the Caribbean, a reviewer comments, “our experience in the West Indies and our ‘local’ color needs a medium which is as much part of our experience as the subject matter” (Belgrave 322). Interestingly, the garden provides artists with such a medium, one that is an intrinsic part of life in the Caribbean. Furthermore, in this case, the medium is also the subject matter. The garden allows the gardener to physically reclaim that small piece of land and to reorganize its form and content, directly challenging the colonizer’s exploitative use of the colonized environment. However, it is important not to privilege one artistic mode over another. Gardening and writing are importantly and necessarily linked activities. “World and language,” Cudjoe writes in Resistance and Caribbean Literature, “are outer poles of the same reality. The world is cognized only through language, and language bridges the gap between noumenon (essence) and phenomenon (the manifestation of essence)” (68). Therefore, writing about the garden is essential for articulating the mystery that is the powerful connection between humans and their environment.

Converting the body’s enslavement into creative freedom is important to the integrity of the identity of the colonized person. In Brand’s In Another Place, Not Here, Verlia’s uncle loses his sense of self-worth, becoming submissive and apologetic, when

he no longer has an artistic outlet, when he “stop[s] carving ebony heads, like his, varnishing and polishing Ibo cheekbones in the cast of his own, bending over in seriousness” (149). “When ... he stop[s] beating copper into masks he knew he remembered could speak, sweating over the stone and hammer, days on end,” he “says we will keep our Blackness a secret” (149). The ebony heads and copper masks reflect the beauty and power of his Afro-Caribbean body. His artistic silence amounts to self-censure and erasure. The Caribbean gardener’s labours similarly recuperate the vitality and productive energy not only of the earth, but also of the body. Like the realm of nature to which she is assigned, the colonized person is objectified and exploited. Kincaid, Senior and Brand use this association to invent living texts based on their creative interaction with the nature of the Caribbean. These texts, both books and gardens, challenge the artificial division between nature and culture, and celebrate the culture of the Caribbean. The writers fill their garden books with anecdotes, social and political commentary, and memories that form a historical narrative of this region. By transforming her body from a source of labour to a source of creativity, Kincaid and the other gardeners in the works of Senior and Brand are able to resist the erasure of the history of the Caribbean people.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have examined the representation of Caribbean nature in Jamaica Kincaid's My Garden (Book), Olive Senior's Gardening in the Tropics, and Dionne Brand's In Another Place, Not Here. These expatriate writers attempt to find a connection to their native place through their relationship to the Caribbean environment. Their intention is not to replace colonial or neo-colonial control of the West Indian landscape with their own form of domination, or to recover an imagined pre-colonial unspoiled paradise. Kincaid, Senior and Brand imagine the gardens that they create to be spaces within which they are able to come to terms with a colonial history of dislocation and dehumanization, in order to reclaim their bodies, to reclaim their culture, and to establish a sense of belonging to the Caribbean landscape. Through their gardens, and writings, they contest the boundaries and categories imposed by European colonizers to take physical and discursive control of the Caribbean people and environment. The effects of this discourse are so profound, that it continues to exert an influence over Caribbean society. Neo-colonial plantations have taken over the exploitation of the nature and the inhabitants of this region, and damaging fears of the inadequacy of the Caribbean body and culture persist. Escaping from this place, these writers understand, does not necessarily allow the Caribbean person to escape a debilitating sense of inferiority. Indeed, Kenneth Kiple notes:

Unfortunately this emigration has reinforced the feeling that the Islands are not a good place to live and that the only way to get ahead is to get out. Moreover it has increased the black's poor image of himself, at times reinforced 'delusions of whiteness' among the expatriates, and thus proved destructive of both racial and national identity. (186)

Kincaid, Senior and Brand strive to assuage this belief in the insignificance of the Caribbean identity and prevent its subsequent fragmentation. They celebrate the power and the vitality of the Caribbean nature and people by making them an essential part of their garden books.

The colonizer imagined the New World as being a waste land inhabited by people without history or agency, existing in what Anne McClintock has termed "anachronistic space" (30). Kincaid, Senior and Brand challenge this designation through their writing about gardens. They create books and gardens that use form and content that reflect, and are derived from, the particular characteristics of the Caribbean, and which challenge the separation between nature and culture that was constructed by European colonizers. These gardeners include their knowledge of the special properties of plants, understanding of the secrets of nature, and traditional farming methods in their gardens, and contest the notion that they are a people without culture. By working to produce a harvest that not only sustains them physically, but also allows them to procure economic independence, Caribbean gardeners affirm their creative agency. They also challenge the physical boundaries imposed by the colonizer by practicing mixed farming, introducing traditional crops into the garden, and celebrating its permeable and mutable borders. Their collaboration with the nature of their native place helps these gardeners to form a physical and cultural connection to the Caribbean.

My discussion has focussed on the relationship between women and their Caribbean environment, and the importance of this relationship to challenging oppressive authorities and maintaining a sense of identity. Seodial Deena recognizes the frequent appearance in Caribbean literature of “the concept of the strong mother figure” who “represents the symbol of origin, roots, and the land” (369, 370). According to Deena, she also “bears the responsibility of the family because the father is either dead or away from the home. In most cases an extra-marital relationship keeps him away from home, and in other cases he escapes into drunkenness” (369). Indeed, many of the male characters in the texts examined in this work are unable or unwilling to care for their families. In Brand’s novel, for example, Isaiah abuses Elizete, before eventually descending into madness. The father in Senior’s “Hurricane Story, 1944” spends his wife’s earnings on alcohol, and becomes violent towards her. In “Hurricane Story, 1951,” another poem by Senior, Delbert abandons his wife and son, for a second family. However, although Kincaid’s father is having an affair, he is the one who introduces his daughter to her Caribbean heritage, influencing her future interest in articulating this story. To obtain a clearer understanding of the significance of the environment to Caribbean society, it would be important to explore the (dis)connections between Caribbean men, and the nature and gardens of this region. Do men relate differently to their environment than women, who were traditionally farmers? How do such interactions affect their relationships with women, and with their children? Their (in)ability to form ties with their landscape may affect the way in which Caribbean men deal with their subjugation under colonial and neo-colonial rule.

Another avenue for further exploration is the use of nature in obeah, as a form of resistance against oppression. In her poem to “Osanyin: God of Herbalism,” Senior asks for

one leaf for sorcery
one leaf for prophecy
one leaf for healing
one leaf for the pot (117).

Not only does nature provide Caribbean gardeners with food and medicine, but it also allows them to alter their world, or participate in “another reality,” beyond the reach of science (Cudjoe *Interview* 229). To destroy the plantation owner who had caused her enslavement, Brand’s Adela “draw a circle in the ground and sprinkle one stone in it that was her eye and spit the man name, with blood from biting she mouth, into the centre (18). The gardener in Senior’s poem “Advice and Devices” knows ways to use the products of nature to protect her garden against trespassers. Imagining a spiritual realm that exists outside the comprehension and, therefore, control of those who have subjugated the material world, might be a way for colonized people to maintain their psychological independence and translate it into physical freedom.

It is also important to beware of the commodification of the association between women and nature by a tourism industry that provides the exotic and the wild to Western consumers (Lewis 73). The relationship that exists between Caribbean women and their environment may be construed as natural because of a shared innocence or primitiveness, stripping them of the creativity, knowledge and agency required to survive in the Caribbean landscape. “Romantic primitivism” that imagines “indigenes as incapable of harm,” David Lowenthal writes, “is as dehumanizing as earlier notions that they could do

no good” (234). Finally, it is necessary to consider the effects of modern conservation programs in the Caribbean and other Third World places. Do they take into account the way in which the inhabitants of these regions interact with their environment, or do they disrupt these connections by imposing a Western vision on the landscape? Examining these and other such questions would allow for the extension of the discussion begun in this work, and unearth other ways for tropical gardeners to create a space from which to articulate their history, and a place to call their own.

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