

Call them Isobar: Memory, Mythmaking, and the Black Diaspora in Canisia Lubrin's

*Voodoo Hypothesis*

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at the work of Canisia Lubin in the context of national identity and intergenerational memory. Using Christina Sharpe's theory of "wake work" as a starting point, the paper analyses the ways in which Lubin's poetry situates blackness in a Canadian and colonial context. Lubin uses memory and myth as a means of re-imagining Black existence outside of white supremacist, hegemonic ideologies, and, in doing so, draws attention to the ways that dominant conceptions of identity perpetuate racism and stifle kinship in diasporic communities. This paper shows how memory, in Lubin's poetry, becomes a means of forming an intergenerational and transnational understanding of a collective past.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In his 2015 work *Between the World and Me*, an epistolary exploration of Blackness in the United States directed to his teenaged son, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes: “remember that you and I are brothers, are the children of trans-Atlantic rape. Remember the broader consciousness that comes with that. Remember that this consciousness can never ultimately be racial; it must be cosmic” (128). Though it addresses the situation of Blackness and diaspora in a specifically American context, Coates’ writing poignantly articulates the connection between those who are Black in diaspora, a connection that spans familial and topographical lines; it is, as he writes, “cosmic” in its scope. Canisia Lubrin’s debut poetry collection, *Voodoo Hypothesis*, is an exploration of the consciousness to which Coates is referring: throughout, she explores the ways in which Black diasporic identity transcends temporal lines, the ways in which it works on this “cosmic” level. In an interview on CBC’s *The Next Chapter*, Canisia Lubrin classifies *Voodoo Hypothesis* as an exercise in working memory into different landscapes; of repeatedly setting fire to the existing notions of Blackness and “see[ing] what comes out of the ash of it” (Lubrin, *Next Chapter*, 2018). As with Coates’ reflections for his son, intergenerational memory is, for Lubrin, an integral tool of resistance, identity, survival, and kinship; a tool that she uses to consolidate and propagate the atemporal existences of the Black diaspora. In other words, she uses intergenerational memory to explore the varied means of existing in diaspora and to help bolster the voices of those whose stories are integral to the ongoing resistance to white supremacy.

As Christina Sharpe has noted, Black identity is constructed by both the past and the present; the past that continues to interrupt and shape the present and that is often

erased by non-Black people in dominant (white supremacist) perceptions of the present (5-9). The term diaspora, here, is used for its “ability to offer new ways of thinking about and articulating difference within and across nation-states” (Davis 2). Diaspora implies a distinctive and politicized borderlessness that is essential to Lubrin’s work in *Voodoo Hypothesis*. Because of the implied ties to ethnic identity, the term also allows those who are diasporic to transcend temporal borders, as it indicates a search for a sense of belonging in an intergenerational context. Those in the diaspora are not linked through national ties but through cultural and generational ties that extend past the constraints of linear time. Diasporic belonging is a form of belonging that, according to Rinaldo Walcott, shapes the realities of Black people living in the present and making their presence felt “in a time or moment that can never be synchronous” (*Rhetorics*, 4). Without a synchronous form of understanding the world, those who exist in diaspora remain connected through their shared consciousness, much like what Coates described in *Between the World and Me*. A Canadian poet originally from St. Lucia, Lubrin’s interest in diasporic belonging speaks to her experience living in and moving between the colonized spaces of St. Lucia and Canada. In the titular poem which opens *Voodoo Hypothesis*, amongst descriptions of a voyage of curiosity and exploration of new worlds, we encounter the lines “But why / should I unravel over all this remembering?” (Lubrin 2). These lines cut through the narrative of the poem and shift the focus from the exploration of a new world to the incorporation of intergenerational memory. These lines – with their emphasis on memory and the work that is remembering – make immediately apparent that the subject’s current existence is dependent on knowledge of the past. In Lubrin’s poems, Black identity is cumulative; it is comprised of joys and traumas and

myths from generations, all of which are stored in the collective memory of the Black diaspora.

Originally from St. Lucia, Canisia Lubrin came to Canada and studied poetry, moving from a country continuously shaped by its colonization to a country in which colonization is insidious and ongoing.<sup>1</sup> Lubrin's voice attends to the ways in which Blackness is perceived and received in a Canadian context and joins a rich literature punctuated by the plurality of the Black experience. A number of Black Canadian writers — Dionne Brand, George Elliot Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, and David Chariandy among them — have not only spoken about the experience of being Black in Canada, but more specifically about what it means to be Black in an assumed “post-racial” nation-state. Since the official adoption of multiculturalism in the 1970s,<sup>2</sup> Canada has marketed itself as a country devoid of racism, especially in opposition to the United States (Darden 13). The fact that Canada has so thoroughly adopted this identity is especially relevant for those looking to immigrate to Canada, as “Canada, possibly above all other national sites of the African diaspora, has for centuries been *imagined* as a site beyond the evils of racism specifically directed toward Blacks” (Chariandy 542). However, despite Canada's official branding as a nation built on diversity, and the nation's oft-assumed deviation from the explicit racism of the United States — that is to say, the pervasive idea that Canada provides the same opportunities as the so-called American dream without the added requirement of assimilation — pernicious forms of racism remain in this settler-

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<sup>1</sup> St. Lucia's history is one of repeated and violent colonization by both the French and English, contributing heavily to the national identity and culture of the island. Canada, however, is a settler-colonial nation that continues to violently erase the heritage, culture, and land rights of Indigenous peoples.

<sup>2</sup> While the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was announced in 1988, the policy was announced by PM Pierre Trudeau in 1971 as a potential solution to the ongoing debate about bilingualism in Canada (Bolaria 229).

colonial state. It can and has been argued that Canada's branding as a multicultural nation serves as a means of further alienating racialized and immigrant populations, delegitimizing critiques and favouring performative gestures of tolerance over racial and social justice<sup>3</sup> (Chariandy, 540). Paul Gilroy's work is useful to illustrate my point here. Gilroy's work is centred on the idea that race is a means of objectifying racialized citizens; it becomes a tool that purposefully pushes racialized bodies to the periphery in a way that is naturalized and reproduced by every nationally-sanctioned structure. He writes, "'race' differences are displayed in culture which is reproduced in educational institutions and, above all, in family life" (43). In other words, assumed racial differences are acted out and reified through institutions of the state, up to and including the nuclear family. In replicating those institutions, the differences between racialized people and white Canadians are exacerbated rather than downplayed. In Canada this means that, regardless of both citizenship status and generational roots, those in racialized bodies are inevitably excluded from the ideologies of citizenship and national identity as such. Exacerbated by the fact that Canada specifically "encourage[s] freedom of groups and individuals without simultaneously laying down cultural expectations," any attempt of diasporic communities to consolidate their own identity with that of white Canadians is rejected by both the state and the white majority (Mensah). Immigrant and racialized populations are forced to assimilate to an extant community that is tacitly understood to hold whiteness at its centre while maintaining a sense of cultural identity only insofar as it is palatable, consumable, and accessible to those white populations. This is one insipid

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<sup>3</sup> See also: Robyn Maynard's *The Colour Line*, Darden and Teixeira's *The African Diaspora in Canada*, Rinaldo Walcott's "Rhetorics of Blackness, Rhetorics of Belonging," or Whitney French's collection *Black Writers Matter*, among other works.

way that white supremacy functions at a national level, especially in settler-colonial nations. The reality of the expectation of assimilation puts immigrant populations in a place of precarity — that is to say, they remain on the outskirts and are only marginally accepted — regardless of citizenship status, as there is no universal understanding of “acceptable” assimilation. Take, by way of example, the work of Derek Walcott, a prolific Black writer and poet originally from St. Lucia. In a poem referenced in Lubrin’s collection called “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott writes about the consistent struggle of consolidating the past with the present, of imagining a promised homeland that does not exist, and finding home in a place that has been endlessly colonized: “centuries of history have to be shucked; but there is no history, only the history of emotion” (Walcott 5). Walcott is referring to the affectual history that is so often erased by the state in favour of the white, colonial narratives that are institutionally taught and almost universally known: the soft history of shared trauma, memory, and feeling that must be uncovered. St. Lucia’s history necessitates that its culture is one bred of Creolization, the process in which elements of separate cultures are amalgamated in a way that creates a new or reclaimed cultural identity, a process dependant on memory (Voicu 997-8). For Lubrin, also an immigrant to Canada from St. Lucia, identity must be tied both to the Creolized culture of St. Lucia and the reality of living and writing in Canada. As the histories of both St. Lucia and Canada are navigated through poetics, Lubrin has the ability to bring the diasporic identities and affects into a clearer focus.

While it is impossible to fully catalogue diverse experiences, a through-line in writing about Black identity in Canada is belonging (Walcott, *Rhetorics*, 4). Many Black Canadians write about the politics and affectual implications of belonging, as well as the



ways in which a sense of national belonging is limited or prohibited by the multivalenced sense of Black diasporic identity, especially as conceived by those who gained citizenship after or because of the transatlantic slave trade (see Walcott, Maynard, Brand, Davis, Gilroy). According to Mensah and Williams, identity as a social category varies along two axes: content, which “points to how a group constitutes and identifies itself,” and contestation, which refers to “the level of internal and external dis/agreement over the content of the shared identity.” At any point, those who are diasporic navigate these axes of identity alongside their relationship to a national identity that has been set for them while also being kept from them. Belonging, then, for contemporary Black diasporas, is imbricated in the politics of citizenship. For example, Gilroy maintains that racism, which is an essential component of white supremacy and therefore Western nationalism, “rests on the ability to contain Blacks in the present” (12). As such, racism depends on the erasure of the atemporality of Black diasporic communities and without a deep sense of affectual historicity and generational modes of memory and community-building, Western nationalism is effective at cutting off Black communities from a sense of belonging or collective identity that they may have in the very present that holds them. It is this erasure that is being resisted in Lubrin’s writing.

Along with a number of other Black scholars and thinkers, Lubrin, through her poetry, is working through senses of belonging or collective identity. What Christina Sharpe proposes in her idea of wake work, a concept that I have already mentioned briefly and will expand upon in the coming paragraphs, is to find ways to usefully disrupt the linear sense of time and navigate the present through an established understanding of the past, of roots and the routes that have shaped them, however muddled. Lubrin’s

poetry engages in this work of disruption by tracing the “roots and routes,” as Paul Gilroy calls them, of language, of physical place and landscape, and of memory and its affectual wake (Chariandy 541). Walcott’s signposts relate to Lubrin’s own identity and one of the ways that she conceptualizes it, which I will focus on here, is through the lens of Creolization and belonging, especially in that mapping and place-making play a significant role in this process.

After establishing the ways in which temporality contribute to the diasporic sense of belonging, I will turn to Lubrin’s own work. *Voodoo Hypothesis* explores how the collective past ruptures not only the present, but also the future of the Black diaspora. In hypothesizing these ruptures, Lubrin creates a mythology that expands across temporal, generational, and topographical lines. Significantly, memory in *Voodoo Hypothesis* refers not simply to a recollection of specific events, but to a “metahistorical category denoting a stance toward and within contests about the public representation of collective pasts” (Palmié 367). This is to say that memory does not simply refer to the act of remembering on an individual level, but rather indicates a cumulative and shared narrative that impacts the translation and interpretation of all events, both historical and present. In other words, in the context of Black diasporas, and, as I will go on to explore, in Lubrin’s poetry, memory is a means of forming an intergenerational and transnational understanding of a collective past, and of a form of myth making. Memory is also the main tool that is used in Christina Sharpe’s notion of wake work, described as “a theory and praxis of being Black in diaspora” (19). Indeed, Lubrin uses a quotation from Sharpe’s *In The Wake* as an addition to her collection, thus flagging the centrality of this line of thinking in her own poetics and intentions. Sharpe writes of the experience of living in the wake of trans-

Atlantic slavery, where “the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (9). Using a number of different definitions of the term “wake” – the path left by a ship ploughing through water, or the process of becoming “woke,” are some examples – Sharpe explores the ways that trans-Atlantic slavery has touched and continues to fracture the lives of Black people living in diaspora, including through colonization, casual racism, gun violence, and police brutality, among other things. More specifically, Sharpe turns to

...images, poetry, and literature that take up the wake as a way toward understanding how slavery’s continued unfolding is constitutive of the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, and material dimensions of Black non/being as well as Black aesthetic and other modes of deformation and interruption. (20)

Sharpe uses Black art as a means of understanding the varied meanings of diaspora and to understand the affectual responses of those who are living in the wake of slavery.

It is with Sharpe’s understanding of Black art in mind that I turn to Lubrin’s work; I will suggest that her poetics contribute heavily to the understanding of this unfolding, and to the understanding of “Black non/being.” Wake work, then, is the work that is done by Black people and for Black people that allows for them to reckon with, cope with, and fight against white supremacy. Sharpe also writes about the orthographies of the wake and the idea that they require “new modes of writing, new modes of making-sensible” (113). That is to say, modes of making sense outside of the prescribed discourse, a discourse that is permeated by White modes of thinking and creating. Rinaldo Walcott, too, writes about finding the grammar of Blackness, how “remaking

language is the way to come to terms with the past in the present” (*Black Like Who*, 48-9). I suggest that Lubrin is creating new modes of writing within the intergenerational memory of her diasporic community with *Voodoo Hypothesis* that reject white supremacist modes of writing and dichotomous understandings of the present through the incorporation of Creole, reclaimed language, and through the manipulation of syntax through her poems’ structures. The use of poetic structure, too, contributes to a manipulation of language that allows the words and sounds to take on new meaning.

## Chapter 2 - Frameworks

Lubrin's poetry joins a vast body of work that explores the meaning of living in Diaspora. Sharpe's idea of wake-work is deeply rooted in "forms of Black expressive culture," as it is through these mediums that work is performed and a sense of identity is built. Sharpe, in her own work, focuses on pieces

that do not seek to explain or resolve the question of this exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of Blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity. (14)

It is important to note the distinction between resolution – a new mode of relating, a sense of futurity, the idea of an alternative – and resolution that involves assimilation and inclusion. What Sharpe, and, I argue, Lubrin, are trying to do is find a way to create a sense of futurity without working within the boundaries provided by the state, patriarchy, and white supremacy. I use the word "trying" deliberately, as Lubrin's work is an exercise in way-finding, a process of creating that necessarily implies rendering and destruction.

Though *Voodoo Hypothesis* is very much a collection, the poems seem to take different routes in the same body of water. They present as a collection of hypotheses, a set of potential alternatives to the current white supremacist modes of thinking. The voodoo tradition is an important one to unpack, especially considering how the process of Creolization impacts Lubrin's work. For the purpose of this work, Keith Cartwright's writing on voodoo and creole religious practices is helpful. He writes, "Afro-creole cultures have forged repertoires of polyrhythmic consciousness based in a creolizing

aesthetics of assemblage,” noting, too, that voodoo and surrounding religious practices emphasize “a gap in Western scholarship that has distinguished rationality from more dubious forms of knowledge, and signals grounding in Book religions and their canonical base” (158-9). His use of “polyrhythmic,” here, helps to underscore the multi-varied and layered aspect of voodoo as a culture and religion: a product of Creolization, voodoo takes multiple forms depending on culture and place, and incorporates the traditions of diasporic peoples while maintaining a sense of consistency and history. *Voodoo Hypothesis*, then, accentuates this tradition and form of knowledge in combination with the implication inherent in the word hypothesis. Lubrin is, through her writing, imagining alternatives to white supremacy within the tradition of those who have written before her and the cultures in which she has grown.

In order to better understand the work that Lubrin is doing with her poetry, I will first outline some additional theoretical frameworks, focusing on the ways in which place-making and myth-making contribute to the process of Creolization that Lubrin enacts in her poetry. For place-making, Keith Basso’s framework helps to map the ways in which existing place and imagined place function in *Voodoo Hypothesis*. I use Basso’s framework specifically because the language helps to explain the process of creation that Lubrin is engaging in. Though the framework that Basso created was originally used in Indigenous contexts, it is based on an understanding of the connection between language and identity, a connection I would like to emphasize in this argument. Place-making, according to Basso, is a way of reconfiguring historical understandings of place as it relates to consciousness and social relations. It involves taking the stories, mythology, and affect to create a synthesized narrative that lays claim to place without the use of

state-sanctioned methods. Using this framework, I will think through how Lubrin constructs or re-constructs place in her poetry, emphasizing the ways in which this construction lends itself to a greater explanation of her own ideas relating to diasporic conceptions of identity. In other words, Lubrin both imagines new landscapes and re-imagines stolen landscapes in order to produce identity through the inherent mythology of place for diasporic communities, bringing a perspective that is otherwise lost in the dominant post-racial discourse. For example, the final few stanzas of the poem “Give Us Fire or The Black Prometheus” read:

And even then we know that light-clung  
horizon paused by its motley  
ventriloquist is still foresight

That all the forests of Europe  
have left their clutches  
of disconsolate earth  
and with afros flaming through centuries

still walk  
into the seas. (Lubrin 27).

Here, Lubrin re-claims landscapes that have been colonized without erasing the complicated and varied histories of said landscapes. The forests of Europe become a place of freedom and transformation in Lubrin’s lines, as the borders between the forest and the sea are blurred alongside the temporal borders of centuries. In a place where

Blackness is consistently erased, Lubrin brings it back in, acknowledging the afros “flaming through centuries” that seemingly allow for these blurred boundaries between past, present and future. These lines contribute to the mythos of a given place by proposing alternative histories, by de-centring whiteness and the white gaze while still acknowledging its existence and effect.

The poetry of *Voodoo Hypothesis* explores different means of making place, reclaiming place, and using physical spaces and landscapes in order to track the way place has influenced diasporic identity. Basso’s work on language and place describes the ways in which places are necessarily “informed by local bodies of knowledge,” specifically noting how conceptions of any one place can vary depending on the perspective of those who live there (xv-xvi). In other words, one place can be conceptualized in a number of different ways by different cohabitating communities sharing space. He describes the process of recognizing and mythologizing places and landscapes as “place-making,” which, for Basso, is “a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history... a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities” (7). By building a history centred around place, which is separate from historiographies that rely on national borders and identities, communities can create a sense of identity that relies not on what has been imposed upon them through the structures of patriarchy, white supremacy, and colonization, but on their own self-conceptions and experience.

This is not to say that national borders are not an important aspect of place-making and cultural identity. The way colonial narratives have been imposed via national borders and nationalist historical rhetoric undoubtedly influences the ways in which the



work of place-making is done, and there is evidence of this effect in Lubrin's work especially. While place-making as a process is recurrent throughout *Voodoo Hypothesis*, Lubrin experiments with new ways to create and locate place rather than taking a consistent approach. This is to say that rather than proposing one mode of change or divergence from white supremacy, Lubrin experiments with different possibilities, testing the hypothesis. The opening and titular poem, "Voodoo Hypothesis," begins, fittingly, with the line "Before sight, we imagine" (Lubrin 1). Imagination, here in the opening poem, is a means of envisioning an existence that no longer requires the work that Sharpe describes as wake work. Before sight it is *imagination* that allows the consistent process of rendering and reconstituting that is integral to Lubrin's process of reckoning her own identity with intergenerational memory and knowledge. In "Voodoo Hypothesis," this imagination takes the form of interplanetary travel, as the poem details the journey of Curiosity as she moves from Earth to Mars, contemplating both the futurity of her people and the past from which they came. "While they go out in search / of God / we stay in and become god, / become: Curiosity" (Lubrin 1). The process of becoming here refers to the process of creating identity through myth and through the diaspora rather than through things that are outside of diasporic memory, such as religious or national identities. Lubrin appropriates the language of Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, throughout the collection in order to both signify these different means of reckoning with the self and to incorporate the memory of Colonialism more thoroughly into her imaginative work. Here, god becomes Curiosity, exploration, and most importantly, futurity, signifying that identity is both fluid and cumulative, rather than something constructed through artificial markers that exist outside of the self.

Given that *Voodoo Hypothesis* is a work that is cumulative and referential, part of an extended body of knowledge amassed and written about by Black creatives. The poem “Aftershocks,” in which Lubrin writes of “false pentameters / Credo on our Cupid’s bow / of wild continent,” is dedicated to Dionne Brand and her work, and Brand’s influence is clear throughout *Voodoo Hypothesis*. Though she does not use the terminology of “place-making,” Brand, in *Map to the Door of No Return*, speaks on how language has the capacity to make place and maintain borders. In doing so, Brand challenges the dominant ideology of a specific place or associated identity through repeated terminology. The words that she chooses are laden with associations to hegemonic ideologies that then become emphasized and underscored through repetition. In other words, Brand’s repetition creates and perpetuates the newly created or Creolized mythology of place while simultaneously challenging dominant ideologies. Brand dissects a news article from 1998 that replicates the colonial language that was used when the land that is now Canada and the United States of America was stolen: “hundreds of years after the making of its neo-origins these Canadians and Americans who police these fresh borders, materially as well as intellectually, play and dwell in the same language of their conquest” (*Map*, 67). Brand’s observations are an important addition to Basso’s conceptualization of place-making. Though Basso also emphasizes the necessity of language in the process of building worlds, he does not specifically address the ways in which the West violently others those who attempt to create space for alternative formations of place. The replication of this language is insidious and deliberately pseudo-inclusive so as to dismiss those who find themselves outside of the identities that are created by the national ideology. What Lubrin does with her poetry is a similar process,

though with a slightly more broad purpose. Once again, from *Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand writes, “language is not communication but reinvention” (50). Like Brand, Lubrin uses language as reinvention, both in that she reinvents and reclaims places or processes that have been stolen and in that she reclaims and repurposes words that have historically been used to cause harm. Her poetry transmogrifies the trauma of trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism to consolidate history with an identity based on futurity. Both poets contribute to a tradition of Black poetics that incorporates a distinctly generational practice of writing and narration.

Inherent in Lubrin’s place-making and reclaiming are myths of place and generational memory. Myth is a large part of Lubrin’s work, both in that she seems to use poetry, at least in this case, as a means of drawing together different and seemingly disparate aspects of diasporic culture to form a mythology that is dependent on memory without relying on the memories of any one individual. This process is inherent to place-making in that the affectual and physical world-building that Lubrin engages within the poetry necessarily takes into account what has happened to a people in this place, how people have come to this place, their relationship with the place, and how colonialism affects the place. The confluence of these observations results in a form of myth-making, and while it is not the only way that Lubrin creates a new canon of mythology, the intersection between place-making and myth-making is important to understanding the work that Lubrin does.

The poem “Children of the Archipelago” is built around the idea of this combination of place and myth, focusing on the way that place shapes identity while also including both intergenerational memory and personal memory to create a tentative

mythology. The poem documents the return of the children of the archipelago, those who were “nursed out of miracles and half-sunken / in an island house that schools / uneven mercies” (Lubrin 15). The second stanza speaks of the assumed reasons for gathering on the island on which they grew up, of re-living childhood memories and “learn again the primal dance / of our bodies on pom d’amou trees like the souring / lessons of staying meek,” but ends with an interruption that shifts the focus from reminiscence to a deeper sort of memory: “What bittersweet voodoo // we revive...” “Something slipped by current from the Nile welcomes us back” (15). Here, we see the explicit connection between memory and water: currents are depicted as something other than a force of nature, something that is able to track the journey of a people both physically and conceptually. Following currents can, quite literally, track the journey of the enslaved as they were forced to leave on ships, but currents, in this case, also refer to the continual pull of cultural memory, the flow of knowledge that exists almost magically between people of a shared identity. The children are called back to this place via the current, and they “roil to re-remember” – to remember not only the place they knew as children, but also the more abstract concept of place that has been built by them and those before them.

Now I will return, momentarily, to “Voodoo Hypothesis” the poem. While the collection *Voodoo Hypothesis* uses place-making in different capacities, place-making in the opening poem refers not to rebuilding a place that has been stolen but to conceptualizing Black futurity in a tangible sense through the exploration of entirely new landscapes. The lines “Did you not land with your rocket behind / you, hope beyond hope on the tip of your rope” (Lubrin 1) connote, through the repetition of the word hope and with the image of the rocket “behind,” a sense of potentiality that comes along with

building a new place that is separate from the wake of the past but remains entirely dependent upon learning from and re-working through memory, through what is already known. The following lines emphasize the importance of memory and of recognizing intergenerational knowledge transfer: “But I am here to / confirm or deny, the millions of small / things that seven minutes of success were hinged upon / when I was little more than idea and research” (Lubrin 1). Here, the speaker acknowledges the role that memory plays in the construction of both their identity and their future. The millions of small things that came before them has both built them and allowed them to move forward in a way that is conducive to the success of their mission, to build a new place that honours the knowledge transfer of collective memory without bringing the pain and hardships of that memory along. The speaker refers to the “millions of small things” as a “Paraclete,” a spiritual advocate or teacher. Memory is the foundation of identity and a guiding force throughout Lubrin’s collection, and “Voodoo Hypothesis” serves as an apposite introduction to that.

The speaker in this poem is exploring new territory but cannot entirely divorce the landscape of Mars from the landscapes they have known: “Before me screams planes like Mojave Desert, Wakiki, Nagasaki, / nothing too strange to keep Curiosity off course” (Lubrin 2). In forging ahead, they refer back to where they have been, naming according to the places that have already been made and what they remember of them: “never mind that we named your heights and depths / from orbit” (Lubrin 2). Notably, naming is an act of claiming ownership, of claiming land and space that is uncolonized and untainted by the wake. Lubrin plays around with the concept of naming throughout *Voodoo Hypothesis* the collection, an idea that I will revisit later in this paper, showing how it

can, at times, be an act of violence or an act of reclamation; here, in this poem, it is both. Those that named the heights and depths of Mars from orbit were attempting to claim ownership, but the subject that is now exploring its surface is attempting to reclaim something for themselves – to reconcile with something that was taken from them. “Ah, yes,” the following stanza begins, “we’ve come back home” (Lubrin 2).

“Voodoo Hypothesis” is also a testament to enduring, to adapting to new situations despite the oppression and pain of living in a white supremacist world. Despite the pain of remembering, despite the fact “that we won’t know the depth of our homeward seas,” “Curiosity will keep on until the organic secrets / of that Martian puzzle become as household to us / as carbon” (Lubrin 2). The speaker of the poem assures the reader that the work will continue to be done, building on the memory of that has amassed amid migration and enslavement and continued oppression, searching for new ways to exist that incorporate the reality of the past rather than moving away from it; re-imagining the collective affectual response to trauma as well as to joy. In part that futurity of assurance is signaled through Lubrin’s choice of pronouns. The collective “we” is used throughout “Voodoo Hypothesis”, and in several subsequent poems in the collection, to signify the communal implications of Curiosity’s exploration. “Perhaps there’ll be no one left to give / a damn about the death of our privates,” shows that a war is being fought and all in the diaspora are members in its infantry (Lubrin 3). “We wake and die through / the crowns and thorns and craned chapters” – here, Lubrin combines religious imagery with that language of wake work, invoking a sense of spirituality that is unique to those in the diaspora and explicitly paying homage to the chapters of history and myth that were written and experienced before the time of her writing. The poem

ends with a letter to an unidentified “you,” assuring them that what they said about the landscape is true, and urging them to “set sail for home, / because we will all wear the consequences of this choice” (Lubrin 3). Much like in the first lines of the poem, when the “we” is urged to imagine, the collective is drawn in through this seemingly personal letter, and the actions of one influence the identity and history of the many. That “Voodoo Hypothesis” opens the book grounds the entire collection in the discourse of belonging – the poetry is always reaching beyond itself toward the Black Diaspora.

Within the schema of place-making, Lubrin separates her notions of place into the affectual and the tangible. In other words, she measures and conceptualizes place in an affectual way using the language of cartography and mathematics in order to both legitimize the affectual response and to redefine the divides between place, identity, and myth. Her use of maps throughout the linguistic and visual aspects of her collection translates affectual response into a reproducible and relatable experience that connects those existing in diaspora in a more traditionally conceivable way. For example, the call in “Lacking the Wind’s Higher Reasoning” to “redraw the atlases” (45) or the “maps of speechless centuries” mentioned in “Of One’s Unknown Body” (Lubrin 37). In combination with the image of the Mongrel, an image used a number of times in Lubrin’s collection and an embodied product of Creolization, mapping becomes a way to conceptualize cumulative experience. The use of the term mongrel is expressly tied to Creolization and the idea of renewal of old things – to quote Derek Walcott, “pastoralists of the African revival should know that what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using old names anew” (*Twilight* 9). He refers to himself as a mongrel, a product of this process of Creolization, an image that Lubrin

uses in her poetry as well to signify her own associations with the process. Neil ten Kortenaar's explanation of Kamau Brathwaite's work and relationship to Creolization is helpful here. ten Kortenaar explains that Brathwaite "has defined creolization as the process of interculturalization whereby Europe and Africa 'set up a symbolic relationship with each other; so that the conquerors are conquered and the colonized colonize.'" Here, Brathwaite maintains that Creolization depends both on the interaction between Eurocentric and African modes of thinking while also greatly depending upon each of them existing as a separate entity. Rather than creating a new, independent culture with attributes from both, both must continue to exist and be considered separately while an evolving and mutable understanding of Creolization is formed.

The Mongrel is an animate vehicle for place-making – the cumulative identity translates into place, into history, and into myth. Myth in that the alternative histories are narrativized in such a way that they lie between the spaces of history and story, and in that the collective memory that contributes to the process allows the narratives to become more fluid. In "The Mongrel," Lubrin writes

If from above, the Mongrel's Creole maps  
mathless, a late-life scar that carts its wounded  
head on the surface of a jaundiced stream, she – feral  
with remembrance, her black-rock heart must hide  
pressure-cooked islands, stormed space where  
Einstein's quadrangle bones scurry to mount Nèg maron. (5)

The Mongrel, in this instance, is using language – Creole – to map space in a way that is "mathless," that does not depend on the tools and logistics of topographic systems but



instead relies on the affective and imaginative power of language as a means of communication and rationality. Here, the map acts as a “late-life scar,” a mark that bears the memory of pain and struggle but that is also evidence of reparation. The scar, in this instance, mirrors the consistent imagery of rendering and rebirth that permeates *Voodoo Hypothesis*: a process that consistently births new modes of relating without ignoring or erasing the wounds or experiences of the past. The Mongrel’s map acts as an affectual scar that exists on the identity of the diaspora – a product of intergenerational memory and trauma that has been healed but is necessarily not forgotten. The affectual scar is itself a means of mapping place – the word conjures imagery of tissue forming and healing around a wound: layered, rough, and altering the landscape of the skin. Lubrin uses this image to consolidate place-making and affectual modes of remembering thereby emphasizing the liminal space between what is quantifiable and what is imagined.

### Chapter 3 – Transmogrification

Another way in which Lubrin reifies Creolization and the culture that is borne of it is through replication, mutation, or mimicry. In “Epistle to the Ghost Gathering,” she writes: “Even loss can love what we mimic / in tanglewood, found summers in us – ” (Lubrin 83). The word “mimic,” here, is one that is loaded with potential implications. To mimic is “to imitate or copy... for the purposes of ridicule or satire, or to entertain” (oed). In this sense, the mimicry could be one of mockery, like the way in which slaves would mimic their masters as a form of both subversion and entertainment. To mimic is also “to imitate or copy minutely, uncritically, or servilely, usually so as to emulate or aspire to parity with” (oed). In this case, mimicry could come from a sense of reverence, perhaps a replication of cultural behaviours or beliefs only imagined after the divide that was trans-Atlantic slavery. Mimicry then becomes the only way that those in diaspora can explore home, can return to a place that they have yet to visit, except, as Dionne Brand puts it, “in the collective imagination” (Brand 90). To mimic is also “to imitate (an action or attribute) so as to pass it off as one’s own” (oed), and Creolization demands that this attribution takes place. Lubrin acknowledges that diasporic culture is necessarily one that borrows and integrates attributes from past generations, past homes, imagined landscapes.

In analysing the work of Caribbean novelist Jean Rhys, Cristina-Georgina Voicu writes of Creolization as a function of imitation that is separate from the common metaphors of “conversation” and “borrowing,” positing that “magical mimesis on the colonial frontier points to a basic empowering effect to the imitation function – either through the production of similes by mimicry or by contiguity and contact (a ‘creole continuum’) – by which a copy partakes the power of the original” (999). Creolization,

then, is a form of mimicry that both transmogrifies the culture in question and subverts the culture of what is commonly referred to as the “centre.” Creolization is not a process of collage, one that takes aspects from different cultures and amasses them to create something new. Rather, Creolization refers to a process of repurposing cultural practices to fit into an existing collective memory while borrowing from dominant and imposed cultures in a way that subverts colonial and white supremacist notions of identity. This is especially important in the Caribbean, in which “identity is relational with respect to a large community, which can localize the individual in its history and territory” (Voicu 1002). The relational sense of identity with respect to Creolization can be related back to the languages and dialects of the West Indies and of those in the Black Diaspora, including African American Vernacular English in the United States.

Language becomes a means of expressing memory and identity most explicitly in “Our Mapless Season,” wherein maplessness is equated with a sort of helplessness, as the subject of the poem is stripped of their language – and therefore their identity – and ultimately caged. The poem describes life after the disruption and before what is conceived as diaspora. As previously mentioned, Christina Sharpe advocates for “new modes of writing, new modes of making-sensible” when writing in the wake of transatlantic slavery. Similarly, Rinaldo Walcott writes on the importance of altering language and grammar when performing what he calls “writing Blackness,” a form of myth-making in itself:

the project of articulating Canadian blackness is difficult not because of the small number of us trying to take the tentative steps toward writing it, but rather because of the ways in which so many of us are nearly always

preoccupied with elsewhere and seldom with here. It seems then that a tempered arrogance might be a necessary element of any grammar that is used to construct a language for writing blackness in Canada. (Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 27)

Dionne Brand asserts that “language is not communication but reinvention,” alluding to the ways in which language has the ability to shape our thought processes and therefore our consciousness (50). In this work, Lubrin is using language to capture and to reinvent the effect and affect of being stripped of one’s language, an attempt to erase one’s identity.

“Our Mapless Season” begins with the lines “I too am redacted, unsuitable reptilian, // shell of speech I have forgotten, / unless ravines can drown / each sound they cup from my throat” (Lubrin 12). Lubrin explicitly equates the censure of language with the censure of self, as the subject has been redacted and become a “shell of speech,” unsure of whether that speech will be returned to them. The image that Lubrin conjures here is physical, the captors literally stealing the words from the subject’s mouth, as the subject hopes that water will preserve the language as though it is something tangible, something that can be hidden and returned through the currents once drowned. This also reiterates the idea of being borne of water or being part of the landscape: Lubrin continuously suggests that land and myth are at the apex of diasporic identity, with bodies of water as the main metaphor for rebirth and generational memory.

The poem goes on to speak about “leeching questions, what mischief starves in *whys*” – lines that bring curiosity back into the poetry alongside the idea of the pain incurred by both answered and unanswered questions: “Why – because too much is the

way / of knowing the chrysalis before / it crumples in the sun” (Lubrin 12). The chrysalis is a site of transformation, and, much like the references to rebirth that are found throughout the collection, here represents the transformation of Black identity. The formation of identity and collective memory is built upon with each new transformation, whether that transformation is positive or not. In this case, “too much is the way / of knowing the chrysalis before” – the pain of knowing, or the pain of remembering, is too much since the willing transformation has been destroyed. Lubrin continues to use natural metaphor in the first part of the poem to conjure an affect of mournfulness in the face of remembering or understanding. She combines the ideas of personal and collective memory, taking the experience of the individual and allowing it to become part of generational memory through the natural landscapes and the syntax of her language: “Mud-formed mirror of this sea-formed / rotunda reminds too much / of this face and will, like my mother’s // elusive redraft, blood-knot / in the spilling / generations’ menses –” (Lubrin 12).

The final stanza of the poem, appearing on a separate page, asks why, “even with twelve litany of litanies,” they, the disruptors, would “choose you / and sell you / and stamp you / and keep you – brief / and name you / and slit you down to kin / and name you / and call you / and breed you, bar you / and breed you, room you / and jail you, jail you and cage you” (Lubrin 13). The implied twelve litanies are followed by, or replaced by, twelve acts of violence that serve to strip the subject of their identity and their dignity. Only one act is repeated – to name. While all of the other actions are physical, naming is, quite literally, an act of stripping one’s identity and laying claim to their sense of self. Naming and mapping are both means of laying claim to place. Through mapping out a

landscape, one has power over how it is seen and interpreted, over what of that landscape will be remembered or mythologized as history. The names of places, roads, and landmarks found on maps tell the story of that place, but only from the perspective of those who have chosen the names. The two are completely intertwined. The naming and mapping of place is almost especially relevant in the context of Canadian literature, as the Canadian national identity is so dependent on land and landscape – in each part of Canada, the history and the local culture is formed within and around the topography and elemental reality of that place. Naming, too, is of extreme importance in terms of national identity. Canada continues to name towns, buildings, and roads after celebrated colonizers, but is also careful to retain some Indigenous or French names in order to maintain the idea that ours is a nation built on celebrated differences. Naming not only connotes ownership, it also produces visibility, in both the present and historical sense. Rinaldo Walcott writes extensively on the ways in which Blackness is rendered both invisible and hyper-visible in Canada through the practices of naming and re-naming, resulting in what he calls “in-betweenness” (Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 48). In-betweenness, according to Walcott, is not only produced by Canada’s naming practices, but is also “something black folks have chosen through their multiple diasporic and international political identifications” (Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 48). In other words, while naming is something that is done by the state in order to produce a sense of un-belonging in those who do not fit the narrative of Canadian identity, it can also be used as a tool to interrupt that narrative through re-naming, especially doing so in a way that incorporates multifaceted accounts of history, myth, and culture. To name something is to claim ownership over it in a way that is systemic and violent in a more insidious way. Because

of Lubrin's focus on identity and collective consciousness, naming becomes an important aspect of both mythmaking and place-making, as the naming of a place or person has the ability to conjure images of that place. The language that is used in the process of naming can also help to tell stories: family names or names passed through generations can map the history of a family or a people. The act of re-naming has the power to erase history or subvert an on-going narrative, and in the case of this poem, is one of the many violences of slavery.

## Chapter 4 – Conclusion

Mapping, too, is something that Lubrin addresses frequently, and she especially shows interest in places that cannot be mapped, liminal spaces that are sites of meaning. Pilar Cuder Domínguez writes of the sea as a “point of dislocation where all ancestral connection to Africa are cut off by the erasing waters of the middle passage” (91). The ocean is a site of meaning that is inherently mapless, a liminal space in itself. Lubrin’s use of liminal space in order to transcend temporal and topographical lines can be traced and understood through her own use of ocean imagery. The sea is a site that contains memory and the associated affects for Lubrin that heavily combines the narratives of making place and making myth. As one of the most oft-repeated images or metaphors in the collection, the sea is clearly a space of varied and complex meaning and of great importance in Lubrin’s work and to the Black diaspora. While not necessarily explicitly tied to the process of Creolization in this collection, the myths that are borne from Lubrin’s imagery of the sea are a result of the process of incorporation and reinvigoration that characterizes Creolization as a process. In Sharpe’s introduction to *In the Wake*, she writes about the connections between capital, slavery, and the sea and their roles in “understanding how slavery’s continued unfolding is constitutive of the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, and material dimensions of Black non/being as well as Black aesthetic and other modes of deformation and interruption” (20). Sharpe marks the ocean as both a place of disruption and a place of interruption – disruption, in that it was via the ocean that African people were taken away from their lives and their homes, some being taken to new lives as slaves, and many dying or being murdered along the way; interruption because it is through those same paths and currents that the history and



memory of the diaspora is traceable. Brand, too, uses the ocean as a means of mapping the memory of the diaspora and the fissures inherent within that memory. She describes this sense of forgotten history, this separation between home and identity facilitated by the ocean, as “a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being... also a physical rupture, a rupture of geography” (Brand, *Map*, 5). For Lubrin, the sea functions as an aspect of mapping out both memory and place and exists both as an entity in itself and as an aspect of the Black body in the Americas. In “Children of the Archipelago” Lubrin writes of the “seaward inchoate in our iris’ dents,” turning the journey across the Atlantic into a physical map across the eyes of those who have made the journey and those who have come after them, a genetic marker that spans generations (16). In the following poem, “The Frankenstein Universe,” she writes

What is it like if day  
floods the boughs closed to the high life, if lesser valves filled  
  
with sea grit opened at the dawn of flesh  
through to what birthed the BBQ (Lubrin 19)

Here, the sea is positioned as that which has created the diaspora, grit that has been rendered to become a people with a shared beginning and a shared identity, while also marking the death of many lives, homes, and traditions.

“On Being at the Dawn of Remembrance” begins with a reference to the diaspora as those borne of the sea, a metaphor commonly established in Lubrin’s work: “Who else of this wisped sea is / -- tired of the ghost dance, / real, dreamlike too,” (Lubrin 39). Lubrin’s use of “ghost dance,” here, is dense with implicit meaning. Most literally, the

ghost dance refers to the labour of remembering that is not only referenced throughout the work but is present in the poetry as such. The ghost dance is the performance and the writing of the poetry, the presentation of the many hypotheses that constitute the collection and the effort Lubrin is enacting. The ghost dance also conjures images of bodies – or that which is not embodied – the ethereal presence or invisibility that is Blackness in diaspora. Dionne Brand speaks of this phenomenon through the slur “spook,” a word she says “speaks to the psychological arrangements of the describer entering the sign... I am, we are, in the Diaspora, bodies occupied, emptied and occupied” (Brand 94). With this in mind, Lubrin’s “ghost dance” signifies the invisibility of both the Black identity and the labour it takes to create it, as it is in a constant state of flux and creation, a product of remembering.

This is reiterated in the following line, “about the work of imagination,” which is “an end by woe, illness, exit or post – / traumatic trees, uprooting” (Lubrin 39). Much like the sea acts as a site of disruption, imagination becomes an act of uprooting – a word that startles, connotes a violent interference or unrest. Uprooting also calls to roots – roots that are mostly unknown, that must be remembered imaginatively in order to exist within the collective memory and its expressions. The word signifies both a search for roots and an upset that instigates that search – the “woe, illness, exit or post” (Lubrin 39). The poem also makes a direct link to the importance and power of language as it pertains to those of “this wisped sea” who are “—not afraid to climb the fence / and leave a short sentence stuck / to the hands” (Lubrin 39). Language is one of the ways in which culture is explored and reified, especially for those of the Caribbean whose Creole identity and tongue are constant indicators of their past and present and, often, both evidence of and

the source of their marginalization. This poem is one of the instances in which Lubrin integrates creole words into her poetry, words that she describes here as a “sordid tongue” (Lubrin 39). The word “sordid,” here, may refer to Lubrin’s own relationship with the language or the reputation attached to the use of creole – likely a confluence of both. Lubrin intentionally portrays the scene along the axes of content and contestation, incorporating a presumably internal sense of identity and the theoretical or potential outside perception of that identity. “So the grandmother still sits wide-legged / on a flat stone up the dogged path to her shack / where all can bleed if she begs in a sordid tongue. // Bwilé, bwilé, bwilé – she knows to sing, that burn,” (Lubrin 39). The sordid tongue is something that allows others to bleed, to partake in a communal form of remembering that involves the release of and sharing of affect.

The poem also deals with the idea of identity and nationhood, noting the conflict between the problematic ideal of nation-as-identity and the diasporic notion of communal and generational identity. “Give the post-prison child a break / for all the will and strength put up in ten fingers, / gripped on air, on any living thing, really: they who // entered 1866 and did not leave the same” (Lubrin 39). “Entered 1866” refers to the year that the United States passed the Civil Rights Act, granting all those who are born in the United States citizenship, including African-Americans (Shawhan 2). This line, presumably, refers to the attempted assimilation of African-American’s into the American identity based on the idea that citizenship is what builds a national community. The second half of the line, “and did not leave the same,” not only challenges the idea behind this attempt at assimilation, but also incorporates the event into the collective memory onto which Lubrin is building. “They who // entered 1866” are the same as those

of “this wisped sea,” and though they did not leave the same, they leave changed by the event, their memory and identity altered by the event and its surrounding mythos. This is how Lubrin approaches myth-making in her hypotheses: the myths and stories of history are refuted, re-worked, or confronted to undermine the dominant narrative and to explore the way that diaspora is transformed with each additional event or change.

To return, once again, to the ocean, the penultimate poem of the collection, “Epistle to the Ghost Gathering,” begins with the lines “Dregs have formed us / molten inside” (Lubrin 83). Water is not only the birth of the people but also the birth of their motivation, their fire. In “The Frankenstein Universe,” the sea is the point of disruption, the rupture of both quality of being and of geography that leads to the formation of a new but cumulative sense of identity, one that incorporates both life before the ocean and what was birthed after; a universe sewn together made up of renewed, living, and grieving parts. In “Epistle to the Ghost Gathering,” the stanza continues: “Here, a road, the core / this earth, a single-celled fire / a break in the vein: no exact archipelago / to dream what sealed its original shape” (Lubrin 83). The association of the core of the earth and the “molten inside” conflates the identity of “us” with the vague parameters of the archipelago. Not only is the sea, implied by the mention of an archipelago, the birth of the Diaspora as a people, but also of the diasporic, and therefore borderless, sense of place that Lubrin is creating in her poetry. Once again, the sea becomes a place of disruption, “a break in the vein,” a new and inexact place. Lubrin continues along the vein of place-making that is fuelled by memory, identity, and the sea: “This may not have been the only home / reshaped by our before-selves – / Scarlet alphabets breaking the chains / of this age” (83). The home has been birthed and shaped by the sea and re-shaped by the

past, the before that has been disrupted. This is conceptualized through language, “Scarlet alphabets” that allow for the conceptualization of an archipelago that is both home and not home.

The sea is also a place of loss. In “Bastian Plane,” the poem that closes the first section, the penultimate stanza reads “if you must set the fleets / back now to tax – we, lightning gods, / my mother and history, slipped / like bad Toledo sugar into tea and sea / risen to cloud” (Lubrin 22). “Bad Toledo sugar” clearly references sugar, but it also the bodies that produce it, referencing those who were forced across the Atlantic only to be exploited, to be worked to death. The phrase references, too, the bodies of those who were thrown into the ocean along the journey, considered cargo rather than human beings, and those who committed suicide during the journey. The sea, then, becomes a place of extreme and complicated loss: the loss of life and the loss of freedom. Lubrin attempts to incorporate loss into her proposed futurity in a way that honours the tragedy and the necessity of loss. She mourns those who are victims of slavery and colonialism while proposing a narrative of rebirth through Creolization and reclamation.

Lubrin uses the landscape of the sea and the archipelago to form an origin story of sorts, a myth that combines the disruption and loss that shaped and birthed the Black diaspora as it has come to be. In “Unofficial Biography of the Sea,” she takes the natural landscape of the ocean surrounding St. Lucia and combines it with the folklore, religion, and culture of the island, combining the consciousness of its’ people with the surrounding sea in a way that maps how culture is spread and Creolization occurs. The poem begins with what can be assumed to be the formation of the island:

with fires turned to mountains in the sea

last children cuddled in the cold,  
with hummingbirds cresting walls of volcanoes  
with geese still breathless and astray  
with albatross humped down to seabed and core,  
so the mermaids enact melodramas;  
island rocking gently  
at the bottom of the Atlantic – (Lubrin 67)

In this first stanza, Lubrin combines the topography of the island with the animal, human, and mythological – the birds and the children and the mermaids are all existing both at the creation of the island and in perpetuity – integrated into the landscape, as necessary to its formation as the volcanoes and the seabed. With these images – a combination of description and implication – Lubrin contributes to an existing mythology.

The following stanza in “Unofficially Biography” begins with the word “still,” a word that is, notably, also repeated throughout Dionne Brand’s poem “Return” from her collection *No Language is Neutral*. In Brand’s poem, the word “still” is repeated to invoke a timelessness as well as a sense of disbelief:

so the road, that stretch of sand and  
pitch struggling up, glimpses sea, village, earth  
bare-footed hot, women worried, still the faces,  
masked in sweat and sweetness, still the eyes  
watery, ancient, still the hard, distinct, brittle smell of  
slavery (Brand, *Language*, 7).

The “brittle smell of / slavery” persists despite the landscape, despite the culture, despite the passage of time. Similarly, Lubrin begins the second stanza of “Unofficial Biography of the Sea” with “still, the lost children sprayed / unto New World” (Lubrin 67). The children sprayed, dispersed, despite the perpetual formation of the island, despite its culture and landscape and the ecosystem of nature and myth that surrounds it. In this line, the spraying refers not necessarily to something physical, but rather to the idea that they are saturated with the knowledge and customs of the New World, a world built on colonialism and white supremacist ideals. Lubrin’s words echo those of Brand to mirror her affect, the enduring grief that comes with loss beyond one’s control. The children are lost to the New World and their connection to the island is severed, their potentiality as it stands is interrupted by the spraying, by the journey away from and across the sea.

Ta-Nehisi Coates spoke of the relationship between those in diaspora as “cosmic,” something beyond complete understanding that transcends the social, temporal, and cultural limitations. The Black diaspora is connected through points of trauma, history, and memory, regardless of nationality or state affiliation, and Black people living in Canada are no exception. Canisia Lubrin’s *Voodoo Hypothesis* is largely devoted to the work of remembering, exploring what it means to form memories in the collective. The work that she has done with her poetry is work that is necessarily ongoing, work that evolves and expands over and beyond linear time. The final poem in the collection, “Epistle to the Ghost Gathering,” reads, like *Voodoo Hypothesis*’ titular poem, like a letter to those who are immersed in the wake. In it, Lubrin writes:

What can we say of ten thousand years  
Without the crushing levy of the soil

With the water of earth's first drop still in us

Mores of that creature taking names

Choosing to fight our urge for flight

Our brilliance indistinguishable from magic (Lubrin 86)

The definition of “wake” is expanded upon in this stanza, though the word itself is not mentioned. Lubrin writes of ten thousand years of history, but extends the idea of intergenerational memory as something that has accumulated since “earth’s first drop” of water that remains within the minds and bodies of those in diaspora. She mentions, too, the “mores” of the colonizers and the ways in which they have imprinted onto the cultures of the colonized. As with many parts of the collection, the work and pain of memory is interwoven with a sense of hopefulness, optimism, and futurity, based on the idea that intergenerational memory and the kinship that comes along with it are part of what creates a sustainable and “brilliant” identity. Much like the “cosmic” connection that Coates’ describes, the connections made through memory are what make those in diaspora “indistinguishable from magic.”



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