Contending With Coloniality Through Speculation, Storytelling, And Sound Performance

David Chavannes

University of Pennsylvania

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Abstract
Coloniality can be understood in part as the construction and deployment of hierarchical notions of difference in order to eradicate all peoples and practices defined as different from the colonizing self, norm, community, nation, or race. It is a way of thinking, a way of being, and a way of relating with other life that was and remains central to European colonial projects in the Caribbean. It is a colonial legacy that continues to define social, political, and economic relations among humans and between human and other-than-human life in the region.

Coloniality also shapes the kinds of knowledge that count as knowledge in the contemporary academic industry, manifesting, among other ways, as a denigration of forms of knowledge that do not emerge from argument or that cannot be understood or fully expressed through argumentative prose.

In this dissertation, I use theories of marronage and erotic agency not to deconstruct a contemporary colonial space, but to craft a different world. Responding to the work of Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, N. K. Jemisin, Janelle Monáe, and Rebecca Sugar, I create narrative vignettes that speculate about how marronage and erotic agency, when enacted by colonized peoples, might support the work of decolonizing our thinking, being, and relating in the world. Through written fragments and sound recordings, I invite an emotional and multisensory engagement with the complexities of coloniality. Further, I chart the process that took me from proposing to completing this project, discussing what I was and was not able to achieve. By opening the dissertation-making process for scrutiny, I offer this project as a resource for anyone interested in making multimodal research that does not hinge on forms of knowledge derived from or expressed through arguments.

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CONTENDING WITH COLONIALITY THROUGH SPECULATION, STORYTELLING, AND SOUND PERFORMANCE

David Paul Chavannes

A DISSERTATION

in

Africana Studies and Music

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

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Supervisor of Dissertation

_____________________
Timothy Rommen, Davidson Kennedy Professor in the College, Professor of Music and Africana Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____________________
Herman Beavers, Professor of English and Africana Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____________________
Jim Sykes, Associate Professor of Music

Dissertation Committee:

Grace L. Sanders Johnson, Assistant Professor of Africana Studies

E. Patrick Johnson, Dean of the School of Communication and Annenberg University Professor, Northwestern University
CONTENDING WITH COLONIALITY THROUGH SPECULATION, STORYTELLING, AND SOUND PERFORMANCE

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David Paul Chavannes

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DEDICATION

To Margaret, my mother and my friend, who always looks out for me. Your love gave me life and helped to keep me alive.

To Amber Rose, my comrade and my homegirl. May this project be a wind at your back, propelling you across your own finish line.

To the colonized peoples of the regions now called the Americas. May we understand each other’s distinct yet interrelated histories more deeply, and work ever more closely to unlearn colonial thinking and living practices, return lands to the Indigenous peoples from whom they were stolen, and cultivate thinking and living practices grounded in empathy, equity, and compassion.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. E. Patrick Johnson: You have modeled for me a queer way of being in the academic industry, and I am honored that you were a part of this dissertation.

Grace: Is Grace, yes. I am so grateful for your compassion, your thoughtfulness, your absolute authenticity. Thinking this project through with you has been an utter delight.

Tim: What a gift our relationship has been. Thank you for your consistency, for being my reliable cheerleader through all the trials and triumphs of the last five years.

Andrew, my closest interlocutor: Your mind is a swirling galaxy and every now and again you let me coast through the stardust. Thank you not only for being a crucial thought partner, but for being my partner in life, for reminding me to care for my body and my spirit and for helping me to do so.

Nathaniel: Having you as an interlocutor made the world of “Longer than Rope” more believable. Thank you for the knowledge and care that you gave to this project.

Talie: Your voice brought Talawa to life! Thank you for weaving your exquisite art into the world of this project.
The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation at the University of Pennsylvania: I am deeply grateful for your recognition and support of this dissertation. I would not have been able to realize my vision for this work without your help.

To all of my loved ones who understood when I needed space to, in the middle of a pandemic, focus on this dissertation and on teaching high school history for the first time: thank you. Knowing that I could trust that you would still be there at the end of this journey helped me to endure.
ABSTRACT

CONTENDING WITH COLONIALITY THROUGH SPECULATION, STORYTELLING, AND SOUND PERFORMANCE

David Paul Chavannes
Timothy Rommen

Coloniality can be understood in part as the construction and deployment of hierarchical notions of difference in order to eradicate all peoples and practices defined as different from the colonizing self, norm, community, nation, or race. It is a way of thinking, a way of being, and a way of relating with other life that was and remains central to European colonial projects in the Caribbean. It is a colonial legacy that continues to define social, political, and economic relations among humans and between human and other-than-human life in the region.

Coloniality also shapes the kinds of knowledge that count as knowledge in the contemporary academic industry, manifesting, among other ways, as a denigration of forms of knowledge that do not emerge from argument or that cannot be understood or fully expressed through argumentative prose.

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emotional and multisensory engagement with the complexities of coloniality. Further, I chart the process that took me from proposing to completing this project, discussing what I was and was not able to achieve. By opening the dissertation-making process for scrutiny, I offer this project as a resource for anyone interested in making multimodal research that does not hinge on forms of knowledge derived from or expressed through arguments.
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4. “Heading Home” (3:54). Written, performed, and produced by David Chavannes.
PREFACE

“Contending with Coloniality through Speculation, Storytelling, and Sound Performance” is an experiment. As a dissertation, it is not oriented toward persuasion through argumentative prose. Rather, a fictional narrative, some written and musical fragments that animate that narrative, and the larger universe in which the narrative unfolds perform the heaviest intellectual labor. I have endeavored to facilitate an emotional, multisensory experience that, to riff on the words of a wise old medium from the hidden village of Emishi, invites you to perceive with senses unclouded by critique (Miyazaki 2000).

Over three decades ago, Barbara Christian contrasted this kind of theorizing against what she called “the Western form of abstract logic” (1987, 52). Christian grew up around women who played with language, telling stories, riddles, and proverbs that embodied incisive analyses of the power relations shaping their lives. Like Christian, I derive energy from this kind of theorizing, a life-giving energy that preserves my wit, ingenuity, and creativity as an African-descended person despite “the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity.”

Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley calls those who tell stories, riddles, and proverbs “other kinds of theorists,” and she urges academic researchers to listen to them more (2010, 28). I claim these theorists as kin, thinkers who employ poetry, speculation, and storytelling to “[dissolve] divides between theorizing and imagining” (Tinsley 2010, 28). In determining the form of this dissertation, I was particularly inspired by Samuel R. Delany (1993), Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2018), and E. Patrick Johnson (2019). The content of this dissertation responds directly to works by Octavia Butler (2000), N. K. Jemisin (2018), Ursula K. Le Guin (2014), Janelle Monáe (2018), and Rebecca Sugar (2020).
Why have I aligned my dissertation with these “other kinds of theorists”? Because there are things worth knowing that cannot be expressed in argumentative prose, things worth hearing that might most compellingly be expressed through a story or a song. Because making research does not have to be driven by a desire to convince someone of something; research can exist just to keep another’s company, to foster community and understanding, to lessen the threat posed by difference—real or perceived.

Companionship is the goal of my research. In my societies, too many humans reach too often and too easily for domination where empathy and compassion would promote wellness and healing. We might be refusing to accept when another is not swayed by our point of view, or helping to reproduce institutional practices that eradicate or marginalize all except a single prescribed way to be, think, do, or relate; no matter the scale, this impulse to dominate where we perceive difference is a powerful means of reproducing white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal settler colonial ways of being and thinking. Focusing on companionship over persuasion in my work models a different way of relating that I believe is necessary to stop the destruction of life—human and other-than-human—on the planet. Further, companionship makes room for feelings and sensations, for pleasure, in the process of making and encountering research. Academic conference presentations are alienating, academic prose arduous. It can be easier to keep another’s company, to be present with another person and their work, when your feelings and sensations are explicitly invited to the encounter, too, not just your ideas.

So, this dissertation offers an experience rather than a critique. You become an archival researcher, piecing together fragments of text and sound to make sense of a time and place that you cannot physically access. I invite you to engage your imagination,
immerse yourself in the world of this project, and see what you find, see how you feel, see what you feel like doing afterward. I hope that you feel inspired, or curious, or moved, or that you want to share with someone what you experienced, or that you immediately want to watch *Steven Universe* or read N. K. Jemisin.

You will encounter a short story, an unfinished letter, a historical research article, a government report, and four musical recordings, each of which builds the speculative world of this dissertation and is included in Part I. Accompanying this assemblage of texts and sounds are three essays that focus on the process of making this project: the dissertation proposal, my rationale for communicating research through sound and narrative, and a brief description of the process that led from the proposal to the final dissertation submission. These essays can be found in Part II.

By arranging these materials in this document, I have suggested an order in which you might engage with them. However, you may start with the text or the recording that most stimulates your interest.
Part I
LONGER THAN ROPE:
A SHORT STORY

1

The humid room embraces his shuddering body, familiar and dark. It smells of soap and old mops. Black tears are thick and bitter on his tongue and he can feel them darkening the thin cotton of his shirt. Theland gasps between quiet sobs, wincing at the dull tug of skin on his forearm as it peels, curling onto itself like shaved wood. How long has it been? He tries to measure time but keeps hearing the awful thud of his narrow body against the wall, feeling the tightness of his shirt as it crumpled inside the other boy’s fist, the cool air against his belly where it became exposed. The accident of heredity has made this his life, these cowering episodes in closets and storage rooms. He knows all the rooms like this in all the buildings of his city. They map his survival of the only place he’s ever known. Soon, his cascading fear meets a calming tide of grief. He grieves for his sad normal, for all the friends and the laughs he’ll never have.

He decides to escape to the woods again, and the thought slows his gasps. Where the dark tears are drying beneath his eyes and down his torso, he feels the skin tighten. In the black room, he gropes for the tender bit of his arm where the skin began to peel and finishes the job. He curses, angry and confused by his body’s bizarre reactions to stress. But then those slip away, too, and the grief washes in again. His head is throbbing when he stands, thrusts the dead skin into a pocket of his loose pants, and inches open the door, his satchel over his shoulder.
Satisfied that the coast is clear, he slinks from the closet, tugging the door quietly closed behind him. It’s much brighter in the hallway after the darkness of the last several minutes, but he knows as if by instinct the way to the trees. He’s halfway across the stony back yard of the Study before he has another conscious thought. Why can’t you just fight back? Aren’t you tired of running? The disappointment is familiar. He shakes the questions from his head because he simply refuses to cry anymore today. But his grief is only at low tide, and he knows it.

At a spot some ways into the copse, he sees the opening. The afternoon sun is breaking through the trees, casting a luxuriant pool of light upon the low grass and the moist, dark earth. He tosses his satchel aside and casts himself into the light, flat on his back. He can’t help the upward tug at the corners of his mouth as he closes his eyes and breathes the warm light into himself. After a while, he exhales a wistful snatch of tune. It’s a phrase he’s whittled intermittently over years, a high scoop and a light-footed descent. The simple pleasure of vocalizing lowers a shade over his pain. He delights in the vocal play, testing the outer limits of his range, warmed and revived by the light. The tune dies away, as it usually does, and he listens to the trees whisper around him. He parts his lips and tries to replicate the sound of the breeze. His attempt crumbles into soft laughter.

And then breaking through the intermittent susurration is a strange sound. His eyes snap open and he sits up, straining to hear. Did he just imagine it? He knows this feeling of affirmation. “Ren?” he calls out. But no one is there except the trees. He listens a bit longer, his heart thudding, wondering if she will emerge from a nearby bush. When he accepts that she won’t, and that the whole thing must have been an inexplicable
hallucination, he crawls over to a tree and sits against it. He fishes a small book from his satchel and begins to read.
Talawa grunts in frustration, their brow pressed against the gnarled trunk of a vast and
dying cousin. Months ago, panting and alone, they had stumbled upon the thick tower of
Elder’s trunk halfway up Cadmus Mountain. With closed eyes, they remember that meeting
now, the unknown destination of an unplanned flight from everything and everyone they’d
ever known. This was before they had taken a new name. This was the era of Ren, deficient
girlchild of Colette and Trece Peregrino. Talawa had never seen another being like Elder,
and they’d sunk to their knees to look up at the bare brown arms branching from the bumpy
trunk, frozen in a silent, solitary dance. The imposing figure was both like and unlike
Talawa: statuesque, but practically immobile, and possessing no eyes within those layers
of hard, dark skin; a woody mesh of long branches, supple and cream-colored, surrounding
the thick, decaying trunk like some prehistoric forcefield; a crown of dry branches that
must once have been magnificently green. Talawa had felt a jubilant wonder looking up at
this majestic form that must clearly have been kin to them. They’d sat beneath Elder’s
wide, bare crown, unsure of what to do except stay with this presence. At dawn, as sporadic
chirps turned to a bevy of birdcall, a low sound had poured from the towering form,
vibrating, it seemed to Talawa, their very bones. It was utterly foreign, but it was
comforting. After it passed, they had tried to make the sound themself. It was the first of
many lessons in Elder’s tongue.

Talawa snaps to attention at the distant call of the mine whistle. Even this far up
the mountain, they can hear the processing plant halting operations for the midday meal.
Talawa pictures the rivers of workers flooding the streets and pooling at the refectory
entrance, slipping through one by one. Does Elder feel the mine from here? Is that what happened to the others? Rotted shards of old trees shoot from the ground around them, a grove of death with Elder at its center, dying.

“I know how you feel,” Talawa murmurs, laying a palm against Elder. “At least a little.” They may not have known the others like them, as Elder clearly must have. But you don’t grow up a dendrophile among the humans of Albaton without making the excruciating acquaintance of loneliness. Talawa remembers the wigs and dresses, the medications and pruning, the taunts and cliques and insults. They remember the not-knowing, the growing conviction that a whole story, the story of the dendrophiles, was out there, was buried between scant mentions in the yellowing pages of their basic studies texts. And they couldn’t touch it, couldn’t find a shovel or a crude stick to scratch at the topsoil, while everyone else lounged in pretty wooden cabins or imposing palaces erected atop that compacted earth. To not know what no one else cares to know is an ache. Now, after some months on the run, the language Elder has been teaching Talawa is more than a choreography of tongue and teeth, breath and tissue. There’s something far less tangible about it, and Talawa has grown tired of not being able to grasp the ungraspable. It’s been several hours since Elder’s dawn utterance, and several hours still remain before dusk. This is the time to forage, to practice, to wander the mountain that has become their home.

But Talawa feels stuck. They knead the spot on their forehead now scored with Elder’s bark. Closing their eyes, they take a deep breath and try to hear again Elder’s high crackle, the sound for help, for connection. But the angry memories keep getting in the way. Again and again, their voice breaks against their memory of Elder’s model. It seems they’ve failed at this, too, like they failed to be the child Colette and Trece wanted, like
they failed to think through everything it would take to escape Albaton and endure. They will never have freedom, never find connection, never know happiness. They cry out, a long, grating peal that squeezes dark tears from their eyes and their chest and echoes across the forest. As their sobs spasm and their breath clogs their throat, they’re surprised to be thinking about another sad teenager, the closest thing they had to a friend, a boy named Theland.
Sun-warmed gravel crunched beneath his feet as Theland approached the front door. The walkway was lined with chunky white stones, a diffident border for an effusive garden. In the afternoon breeze, flowers in exuberant pink and white and yellow nodded on sturdy stems. He pictured his father’s sedulous fingers tending the leafy assembly that framed his comm’s front entrance. He must have been only seven or eight the last time he’d played a grubby second fiddle to Theo in the garden. Things were a little simpler then, a little easier.

He took a deep breath, expelling the memory along with it, and crunched forward. Turning the doorknob, he smiled as he anticipated the cool quiet of the interior. Colette and Trece would be out, Ren probably at the refectory, Roland at work, Theo off reading to little ones or fiddling somewhere. It was for this stillness, amid the gentle hum of birds and insects outside, that he almost daily inhaled lunch and raced with his stiff gait from the refectory’s clamoring pedantry to his comm. So, he couldn’t help the breathy moan that escaped from him when he entered the ample room to find Ren on the gray concrete floor of the sitting area, a dark wig abandoned next to her. She looked up at him and the dark stains beneath her eyes marked her gray-white skin. He regretted his audible frustration from a second ago.

“I’m sorry,” he said, wincing.

“For what,” her voice was hollow smoke. “It’s your comm.” He wanted to say something to comfort her, something about sharing, or privacy. But nothing came. She snatched the wig from the ground and began to stand.
“Wait,” he said, closing the door behind him. The quiet after the click of the bolt rang in his ear. Surprised that she actually stopped, he ducked under the strap of his satchel as he removed it from his shoulder and placed it on the ground. “Do you … want to talk?”

Her eyes rolled upward, settling on the long, narrow window at the center of the comm’s eastern wall. “No,” she muttered.

He watched her watching the sky outside. “Okay,” he said, lowering himself to the ground. “Do you want to hang out, maybe?”

Her eyes lanced him again, rage staining the glare beneath her bald head and broad brow. After what felt like five minutes, she whispered, “I’m not your friend.”

Theland wilted. “Okay.” He stood, and said with a shrug, “I’m sorry.”

He was already turning the doorknob to enter his bedroom when she said, “Why should I talk to you?” The words were scalding vapor. He turned to her, his hand still on the doorknob. “You think you know me? You think we’re the same because of … this?”

She raised her palms to the ceiling and looked down at her body.

“Look, it’s fine, alright? I said I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything by it.” He pushed the door open.

“You don’t know what it’s like. To live with them.” They looked at each other across the large room, he on one side of the dining area, she on the other side of the sitting area.

“What’s it like?” he whispered.

“This,” she spat, holding up the wig, throttling it. “This is what it’s like.” Black liquid spilled from her eyes again, darkened the bodice of her yellow dress. “There’s always something wrong.” She gagged on her anger, lowering the fist that clutched the
wig, her head falling limply forward. He heard his own sobs in hers, remembering the cruelty that defined the contours of his life on this island, the special callousness reserved for dendrophiles.

“You’re right,” he said, after a time. “I don’t know what that’s like.” He watched the shadows of leaves teeter across the bleached wood of the dining table. A large glassless frame cut in the wall let in the rustling air. “But I know about the prunings. And the doctors. And the assholes at the Study.”

She managed a wry scoff as she wiped the back of one hand across her cheek. “I guess you do.” They stood for a while in the quiet afternoon.

“Look, don’t tell my mom you saw me crying, okay?” she said.

“Okay.”
“The end.” Theo folds closed the island’s single shabby copy of *The Ugly Duckling* and looks around at the giddy smiles of little ones squirming on the ground before him.

“Let’s thank Uncle Theo for story time, everyone,” Ana warbles over Theo’s shoulder.

“Thank you, Uncle Theo,” the children chant.

“You’re very welcome,” Theo says, twinkling.

In the ensuing chaos, by far the most clamorous thirty minutes of any day at the Colonial Archive of Kaptra, the children’s basic studies mentor clucks instructions to organize their exodus. Ana places a graceful hand on Theo’s shoulder as she sighs a long, descending note.

“I don’t envy her,” she mutters through a corner of her mouth, watching Simone corral the little ones.

“Everyone’s first year’s awful,” Theo says, grimacing at Ana. He unfolds his long, limber body from the wooden chair and takes a deep breath. “You’re lucky the Archive’s closed for Founders Day.” He hands the book to her with a sassy glance.

“Yes, I am.” She threads through the thinning crowd of children to place the book on the desk behind the circulation counter. He waits for her by the door to her office, modest in every way except its lavish glass walls trimmed in thick black. The last of the children’s voices ping from concrete and tile and glass. He calls goodbye to Simone as she shuffles out the Archive’s glass doors and pulls a face. His laugh titters in the vaulted space.
“Bima?” Ana offers as she passes through the tasteful office door. He touches its long, narrow planks of polished cedar as he steps into the doorway behind her. She fishes an exquisite glass flask from a satchel hung next to an unobtrusive door, holding it out to him. The door is flush with the wall, both a vague pewter.

“No, thanks. I’m off to see Henry and we’ll probably eat. You know how bima ruins my appetite.” She’s already retrieved a slender ceramic mug from a desk drawer and she pops the cork stopper from the mouth of the flask. The mug is in the Evredite style, without a handle.

“Mm, but it’s so good, though,” she croons as the steaming liquid streams from flask to mug. The nutty smell is heady and envelops the room.

“I won’t lie, I’m jealous of your flask.”

“The perks of proximity, querido. You should know.” She raises a conspiratorial eyebrow. She’s not wrong; relative to most Kaptrans, he’s much closer to the Republic’s hidden workings upon islanders’ lives. But it’s power by association, which isn’t really power at all. Roland is the powerful one, the one with access. And even Roland can’t know that much. Getting a post in the colonies isn’t exactly the promotion he was expecting. No one is offering him glass vacuum flasks with imported cork stoppers.

“You’re drifting again,” she sings. “Viejo.”

“Sorry.” His smile is muted by closed lips. People trickle from the squat, sea-blue refectory in the distance. The space between the Archive and the refectory is a profusion of leaf and color, a play of sun and shadow. “Is it sad that I still miss the desert?”

“Not at all.” She takes an ungraceful sip. “Though I can’t say I relate.”

“I know. Us land-locked losers.”
“I didn’t say all that. There’s just nothing like being near the water. What can I say? I’m still a Talosi girl at heart.” The computer keyboard clacks beneath her manicured fingertips.

“I’m so ungrateful. I mean, look at all this,” he gestures out the black-trimmed window, wistful. “It’s paradise.”

The clacking stops. She turns soft brown eyes to him. “Look, everybody gets homesick, querido.”

“Even after fifteen years?”

“Even after fifteen years.” Children’s squeals call across the leafy expanse outside. “I have something I think will cheer you up.” She moves to the pewter door behind her desk. Instead of a knob, it has a lever beneath a vertical series of five mechanical push buttons. After five tinny clicks, she wrenches the door open. “We’re pretty low-tech here.” She holds an index finger up to him before disappearing behind the door. He creeps farther into the office so he can peek through the slight opening she’s left. The light is severe back there, and he glimpses towers of shelves lined with neatly labeled boxes and folders. She appears in the doorway, reaching behind the wall to flick a loud switch that extinguishes the light.

“Quite an operation you have back there,” he says.

“Quite.” She’s holding what looks like canvas stretched over a wooden frame in one hand. She pushes the door closed by leaning her back against it. It makes a sound like the sea gulping a huge rock. “Look. I just catalogued it yesterday.” She turns the frame to reveal a painting of a young, dark-skinned woman on a plain of desert scrub. In the
distance, a dusty mine claws the hillside. The young woman’s curious hazel eyes stare back at Theo as a rabbit shuffles toward the edge of the frame. “I know, right?” Ana says.

“Why is this not out there?” he inclines his head toward the circulation counter outside the office. The young woman still holds his gaze.

“Still not quite sure about that. It might have to do with the artist? I’m waiting on word from on high.”

“Hm.” The wind ripples the skirt of the woman’s mint-colored dress. So old-fashioned, like the women on their way to worship every Sunday, shuffling past the cottage where his father would sit watching him carve a bit of wood. Watch what you’re doing, boy.

“She kinda looks like you.”

“You think so?” He can’t look away. “She’s beautiful.” And for some reason he can’t understand, his eyes begin to fill with water. He remembers his father’s scowl, his sister’s deriding laughter, the lonely dunes where he fiddled.

“Oh, hell, I didn’t think it’d make you feel worse. I’m sorry.” She sets the painting on her desk.

“No, it’s … I’m fine.” He swipes a knuckle beneath his eye. “That thing shouldn’t be in Restricted.”

“Maybe so, maybe not.”

He sniffs. “I gotta go meet Henry. Thanks for this, really. No, I mean it. It’s nice to see home.”

“If you say so.” She wraps her arms around him then, and he places gentle palms along her spine.
“Thanks, Ana.”

“See you soon, querido.” They break apart. “Let’s make some olka cake for Founders Day.”

“Agreed.”

In the bright bustle outside, he turns left down the stony path toward home.
After his retreat to the forest, Theland is calmer. He hadn’t thought about Ren in a while, but immediately he had known the sound of her voice. Except, she hadn’t been there. He must just have imagined it. But he isn’t the hallucinating type. He steers clear of the rule herb that sometimes perfumes Theo’s clothes. His distaste for mind-altering substances binds him to Roland, a resemblance that now twists Theland’s mouth into a sardonic shape as he ambles toward his comm. Certainly, his fathers love him, but he doesn’t think he likes what love means to them. It’s in the little things they say. “Are you sure you want to wear that?” “Try not to sit that way, son.” “Did you let them catch you crying again?” He imagines finally spluttering the tart accusation that has blistered his tongue for almost a year: “I’m just a disappointment to you, aren’t I?” Of course, they would be the picture of dismay: “Never, son, we’re so proud of you.” Well, Theo would. Roland would probably just get angry. And yet, Theland can’t help his likeness to the man.

“Whatever,” he says aloud. The eight comms of his district squat with their behinds facing each other, a colorful perimeter enclosing the district farm’s neat rows. His comm is a ripe red through the waving stalks of maize, wider than the others. Tides of insect hisses crash and recede in the heat. Somewhere, the heavy wooden legs of a chair moan as they drag across concrete. Behind Theland, the forest whispers secrets to the breeze.

He needs to remove his tattered shirt, now stiff with dried tears. His fathers have expunged all brightness from his wardrobe; he ruined one too many garments with his tears’ bizarre darkness. “Nothing to be done but dress you in black from now on,” Theo had said, resigned. “Or you could stop crying so much,” Roland jabbed, not looking up
from the papers littering his desk. One of Roland’s many barbs that Theland still carries, like stones clogging his arteries. Well, at least they barely see each other these days. And thank goodness, at least he won’t see Roland now as he turns the knob at the comm’s rear entrance.

The door closes behind him, drawing a veil over the humming and buzzing and chirping and soughing outside. His ears welcome it. He hangs his satchel on the wooden knob by the door and has a thought that propels him toward Roland’s office. Theland has seen no other comm possessing this extra room, a wasteful private study. And for all his general curiosity, he’s rarely asked about the details of Roland’s work as a Congressional Envoy, the tasks that keep him speaking into a small device or writing for hours in that study. He’d regarded Roland’s work as a kind of unbridgeable river, dark and frothy. But now, insolence burning in his belly, he marches to Roland’s office and casts himself into the soft chair behind a desk of burnished bima wood.

The simple room is dominated by imposing shelves lining all but one of the walls. Is it even legal to hoard this much paper? The surface of the desk is empty except for a neat stack of cream-colored paper in a small wooden tray. Gold lettering on the spines of green books twinkles in the sunlight that peeks through the leaves outside the window behind him. There’s just the one publisher in the colonies. Theland recognizes the two curved strokes of its seal at the base of all the books on a shelf near the desk, an abstraction of a bird in a thin frame. Another seal adorns most of the other spines, but he doesn’t know it. *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Congress of the Republic of Makta. The Alba Colonies: Environment, Population, Culture, & Economy, by Roland Zant. Journal of Subtropical*
He tugs the binder from its place, and it’s filled with thick sheets of paper, each containing a pouch on either side that runs about a quarter of the way up the sheet. The first pouch holds two austere-looking documents: “Certificate of Birth” and “Contract of Adoption,” both bearing his name in black capital letters at the top and his fathers’ signatures scratched at the bottom. Why has he never seen these? Why has he never thought to ask? He scans the contract’s two sheets, each crawling with fine text on both sides.

The commissioner of the Colonial Department of Security is authorized to enter into Adoption Assistance Agreements pursuant to Congressional Statutes, section 14.92.

The Colonial Department of Security, (hereinafter “placing agency”), has certified Theland Brun Zant (hereinafter the “child”), who was born on or within 24 days of August 6, 2445 as eligible for state-funded Adoption Assistance. The following agreement has been entered into by and between the commissioner of the Colonial Department of Security (hereinafter “commissioner”), Roland Zant and Theodore Brun (hereinafter “adoptive parents”), and the placing agency for the purpose of facilitating the legal adoption of the child and to aid the adoptive family in providing proper care for the child.

This document is the initial Adoption Assistance Agreement. The adoptive parents agree that they intend to adopt the child named above and that they have signed this document prior to finalization of the adoption. The agreement is subject to the High Court granting the adoption petition and begins on the date that the adoption decree is issued.

**PROVISIONS OF AGREEMENT**

I. Confidentiality
The adoptive parents agree never to disclose, whether to the child or any other party, any detail of this agreement or the circumstances under which the child came into the possession of the placing agency, under penalty of banishment or incarceration in accordance with Congressional Statute 186.5.

II. Medical Care
The adoptive parents agree to all annual and/or semi-annual medical examinations, procedures, and interventions for purposes of colonial security, as determined by the commissioner or any Republican Congressional authority, under penalty of banishment or incarceration in accordance with Congressional Statute 179.3.

III. Rights and Entitlements
Theland is a stone swallowed by a dark river, plunging deeper and deeper. Outside, the trees are still whispering. He remembers Theo sitting with him in front of the comm, consoling him after his first basic anatomy class so long ago. “Not everyone has one of those, son, but that doesn’t make you any less of a boy.” He remembers the inexplicable growth on his chest that Roland had had a surgeon remove. “Sometimes, we have to prune our bodies to stay healthy.” In his slowing descent, watery scenes from his past begin to overlap, to make a cruel kind of sense.

He pushes past the dry paragraphs to the final page.

Report of Medical Examination
Colonial Department of Security

Full Name
Zant, Theland Brun

Physical Address
Pratt School
Vega, Victoria Province, Kaptra

Other Information
Gender: Male
Date of Birth: Approximately August 6, 2445
Place of Birth: Northwest Quadrant, Ania Province, Kaptra

Summary of Overall Findings:
The child was one of three infant dendrophiles living with no apparent parental supervision approximately 35 miles inland from Discovery Bay on the island Kaptra. He has spent one academic year at the Pratt School, during which time he has shown remarkable progress in the acquisition of languages and the performing arts. He has been found to have no Class A or Class B Conditions for Communicable Diseases, and no Class A or Class B Conditions for Physical or Mental Disorders With Associated Harmful Behavior. He did, however, twice attempt escape from the Pratt School, being found on the second occasion at the site where he was initially apprehended, though it had already been cleared for further settlement of Ania province. No next of kin could be located for the child.

Medical Examiner: S. Rellim
Date: August 1, 2448
He did, however, twice attempt escape from the Pratt School ... Why did he run away? Ania province is at least forty miles from Vega. He had made it all the way there, finding nothing. Was he alone? Why had he never thought of a time before Roland and Theo? Why was any of this knowledge kept from him? Suddenly, a blurry vision arrests his mind, thrashing in the grasp of a faceless figure, the deafening sound of metal eating wood. No next of kin.

Deep breath. He’s shuddering. There must be a reason for the secrecy. Deep breath. Maybe they would tell him if he asked. Maybe the colonies are too far away for the Republic to find out if they did. Maybe there isn’t really a way to enforce banishment or incarceration. His breaths are quick. Deep breath deep breath I won’t peel again today. His eyes flit around the room, unseeing. He wants to return the binder of mysteries to its crypt, but his shaking hands betray him and it falls to the floor, a tiny explosion of paper. He squats to try reassembling the thing, thinking now of his father’s rage. Roland’s handwriting calls from a page beneath another that’s facedown. He reaches for it, and in the retreating sunlight, reads: I cannot describe the anguish of knowing what cannot be known, and yet what desperately should be. I have failed you, my son, and I must live with that everyday. I am sorry. In time, the truth will dawn full and clear on his horizon; for now, it is a thing known at the bottom of a still pond. He begins to run, somewhere, anywhere, a passage of unclosed doors in his wake.
“So this is it?” Roland ran a hand through his sandy red hair. The hand came away damp with sweat, which he wiped against one trousered leg. He stood with Theo surveying the long, low building bifurcated by an odd cross-hatched gable, the rakes extending past each other. It would certainly be interesting to sketch.

“Keep an open mind, dear,” Theo said, hoisting braided hoop handles to lift his leather duffel bag from the rocky ground. He moved toward the front door, still managing to pull off his elegant saunter despite the bag’s weight and the little fiddle case’s handle in his other hand. Roland watched the flex and release of his behind, the subtle dance of hip and muscle. His long brown legs extended beneath tight shorts, peppered with little black hairs. His husband in close-fitted shorts was about the only thing Roland had to look forward to in this place.

“I’ll try.” It’s not like he couldn’t feel the world grow balmier as their seacraft neared Discovery Bay. But even so, he didn’t imagine the sun could be so angry. For a moment, he wondered again about what it must have been like back then. They said it had gotten hot enough to set whole cities ablaze, leaving a trail of dry death behind. He let another button of his shirt slip free of its slit. At least there was a nice breeze in Vega, but Albaton was something else.

Of course, Theo was already chatting it up with a short dark-haired woman who had come out of the building. Her pale skin was bright in the sunlight. Roland hauled his duffel bag over his shoulder and approached the laughing pair. He would return for the little red trunk of books and papers.
“Roland, this is Colette,” Theo said in French, turning that hazel gaze on him. The man was practically glowing in this place.

“Roland Zant,” he extended his hand, clammy anew, to the woman named Colette.

“A pleasure,” she said. Her soft hand was cool and delicate in his. “Colette Peregrino. Please come inside.” She turned and pushed through the door that had hung ajar. He couldn’t help the sigh that escaped from him as the interior, cool as the woman’s hand, enclosed his body. His eyes were still adjusting after the sun’s onslaught outside when she said with a chuckle, “It takes time to get used to it, no?”

The interior was one long room cinched in the middle by a sort of vestibule, which was formed between recessed entryways at the front and back of the building. Roland stood facing the back door having just entered the front. It was bizarre. To his left, a gathering of sturdy-looking wooden chairs; to his right, what he supposed was a kitchen and dining area, though there were no cooking implements to be found.

“Well, this is different,” Roland said, switching back to English unconsciously.

“Roland, come on,” Theo chided, but Roland was already moving toward a door that opened off the fake kitchen area.

“We are not used to it, either,” Colette said in her Evredite-accented English. “It has been almost four months. Trece is a little more used to the heat. He comes from desert folk,” she laughed.

“Is he Sakarno?” Theo sounded excited. Roland had dropped his bag and was poking around the small room next to the kitchen. It would do. Giving him his own study was the least Congress could’ve done after giving him this shit assignment. Through the
room’s small window, he watched a tiny bird trailed by a pair of long tail feathers hover before a hedge of little pink buds. Theo was calling to him.

“What?” he said, his eyes still following the uncanny deftness of the little bird as it flitted from bud to bud.

“Colette’s husband is Sakarno, too.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“I think I might know his folks.” Evidently sated, the bird jetted away. Roland headed back to his companions but stopped short before reaching them.

“Who is this?” He was looking at a small figure standing at the opposite end of the room, with short black hair like Colette’s but gray skin. Colette and Theo turned.

“This is Ren. Come here, darling,” Colette said. The figure did not move. “We are still training her,” she went on, a thin smile plastered over her impatience. “We had hoped for a younger one, but …”

“So, this is a dendrophile,” Theo said, squatting.

“Don’t be so provincial, Theo,” Roland said, striding over.

Unfazed, Theo went on, “Hello, Ren. I’m Theo.” He placed a slender hand on his chest. The figure watched him through the neat bangs hanging over her forehead. She must have stood no higher than three feet.

“Ren.” Colette’s voice was a cracked whip. The child lurched at the sound, slipping down into a tight ball on the ground. Roland stiffened in the silence. Was the child just shy or did Colette have something to do with this behavior? Was this just normal for a young dendrophile? What little information was available about them back in Monro was light on developmental details. He knew he would have to study them to write the Fact Sheet, and
the Colonial Archive was the hub of dendrophile knowledge for all the Republic and its colonies. But what might he learn by watching these two, the furious woman and her terrified child? And if it were going to be this intense every day, how exactly were they to live together?

“Roland, why don’t we bring your trunk in?” Still squatting, Theo turned to him and opened a path out of the awkwardness. Bless him.

“Excellent idea, please excuse us,” he patted Colette’s shoulder as he followed his husband out the front door.

“What the actual hell,” Theo breathed while they squatted on either side of the trunk.

“I know,” Roland said. He wiped sweat-plastered hair from his forehead. “Seems kind of suspicious.”

“I don’t know how to feel. That poor thing looked petrified.”

“I wonder about the husband. Ready?” Theo nodded, and they lifted the little red box, unreasonably heavy for its size. “Did you say you know his people?”

“Yeah.” The trunk strained their voices. “I mean, I know of them.” They lowered the trunk at the front door, straightening to relieve their arms and backs. “The Peregrinos. From District 4.”

Roland squatted again, hoisting the trunk to slide his fingers beneath it. “Come on.” Theo joined him and they backed through the open door, the trunk balanced between them. Colette and the little dendrophile were gone. They shuffled to the little study off the kitchen area and lowered the trunk. “I always forget how few people actually live in Sakarna,” he said after the trunk had been tucked into a corner of the room.
“Small-state charm, big-state energy.”

“Why don’t you show me some of that big-state energy,” Roland said, pulling his tittering husband toward him.
As night begins to drain the sky of its orange pink, Talawa decides to head back. They’ve spent long enough on the mountain now for wide leaves to sprout from their bare scalp and frame their gray-white face. Since the leaves, they haven’t been as hungry, and lying in the sun has felt electric. The leaves rustle as Talawa pads away from the river. Feeling their gentle weight, Talawa wonders why the leaves were never allowed to grow. They remember the monthly trips to the MedCenter, the cold liquid seeping into their scalp, the numbness there, and the infernal wigs Colette would make from her own dark locks. Breathing in the approaching night, Talawa smiles. Running away had its perks.

And the curiosity aroused by their body’s changes had been totally unexpected. Each dawn carried the potential for newness, a different thing to feel or see in themself. The leaves had terrified them at first, and they’d tried to tug the little shoots out by hand. But then they’d become curious. What would happen if they did nothing? What was happening inside them to provoke these growths, and was that a bad thing? What if they got out of their own body’s way? What would it yield? The leaves also brought them closer to Elder. Well, maybe it was just correlation, but it seemed to Talawa that their sense of Elder’s presence grew sharper, the communications conveying more meaning more clearly. Still not super clear, but definitely better than when they’d first stumbled up here and Elder’s voice had been nothing more than unintelligible vibration.

The hike has done them good today. The frustration from earlier ebbed away in the sun, and the gushing river is always a delight. They even thought they felt something, some presence, out among the trees a quarter of the way around the mountain. It’s different,
living out here. The world, the whole wide world and their body along with it, is teeming with energy. They still feel afraid sometimes, but life is becoming brighter, more vivid, a flower unfurling petal by brilliant petal. I was all closed up, they think. Opening feels nice. It also helps to have Elder as family.

They’re approaching Elder’s grove of hollow trunks, silhouetted against the darkening sky. Talawa wonders again what it must be like for Elder to have been surrounded by so much family and now be completely bereft, a radius of at least a couple hundred feet separating them from the nearest living trees. What happened? The question began months ago as a pebble, a quiet clacking in their thoughts. But now it crashes and clatters. Their thoughts stray again to Theland, closer than anyone who claimed Talawa as legal kin but never close enough to touch. They’d left him behind, as they’d left Ren. For the first time in months, they think about how he might be feeling, how he might have felt when they left in the lonely silence of night. The forest is calming around them, the dark sky bringing a quiet punctured only by chirping insects. The melody is simple, but it stings Talawa’s eyes. Theland had been just as lonely as they had. Was he hurting? Did they hurt him?

The wind is a little keener when they enter the grove of dead trees and kneel before Elder. They place a palm against Elder’s jagged trunk, preparing to greet them. But they’re distracted by the thought that maybe they could be someone who also hurts others. In a low voice, husky after a day of silence, they whisper, “I’m sorry, Theland.” And a strange feeling of the boy’s presence pervades their body. They look behind to see if he’s standing there. But no, that’s not it. Beside their remorse, a vague confusion, even fear, creeps in. They’ve never felt anything like this before, a clear sense of their own feelings alongside
feelings that aren’t theirs somehow, a tiny candle’s shuddering flame in a rainstorm. Maybe the other feelings mark another being. Could it be the boy, whose presence crawled over their skin a moment ago? Is that you, Theland? Without fully understanding why, they try greeting Theland in the way they’ve learned from Elder, a looking inward and listening outward, an exhale, a giving. I’m here, they think. Come find me.
A faint wind purrs against his face as Theo approaches Henry. The man sits before the tavern tuning a chestnut guitar.

“If it isn’t the queen of punctuality herself,” Henry says, clucking a contented chuckle.

“And as the queen, I owe you no explanations,” Theo bobs a sassy curtsy.

“It’s no skin off my nose, I promise.” The man inches off the chair, one hand at the guitar’s neck, to embrace Theo with the other arm. “Wasn’t doing much anyhow.”

“Well, I can see that.”

“Hey, watch it.”

Theo laughs, moving to lean against the wall beside Henry’s little chair. “You playing tonight?”

“Figured I would. 52 and August are planning something for the big show tomorrow. I’m too old for that shit.” The two men face the refectory, and beyond it, the little green hill on which the Archive perches. Foot traffic on the stony street is picking up as the afternoon wanes. “Never much cared for Founders Day, neither. So you found a island, big deal.” Theo watches the people go by, fellow Albatonians. After fifteen years, he guesses he’s become one. But it still feels strange to say, to imagine himself as part of a “we” that claims this place as home and identity. “You should share something, man,” Henry says, then bursts into an abrupt fit of wheezy coughing.

“You okay?” Theo turns to him, watching his wizened friend as the violent coughs jerk him around. Even through these paroxysms, Henry manages to wave Theo’s concern
away. It all ends with a gravelly hawk and a summary spit onto the stony earth. Theo’s face contorts with disgust, but it falls away as the man turns cloudy blue eyes on him.

“You okay? Haven’t heard a peep out of that fiddle for a moon and a half.”

Theo turns back to the hill, folds his arms. “You know, you really should cough into your elbow or your shirt or something,” he says, eyes trained on the feet that crunch by in the street, kicking up dust. That’s the thing about this city; there’s so much goddamned dust.

“I’m worried about you, man.” Theo can feel Henry’s gaze boring into him. “We all are.”

The tender note in his voice plucks a string hidden in a deep cavity of Theo’s mind, its thrumming making him suddenly teary. But he blinks the feeling away, lets the string tire itself out until it is still and dark inside him again. “I don’t know what to tell you, Henry.” The chair creaks a little as Henry turns away from him and leans back, still gripping the guitar by the neck, its body resting on the ground. Theo knows the old man cares for him, and he does wish there were something he could say to allay Henry’s concern. Hell, he wishes there weren’t even a reason for it in the first place. But how do you talk yourself into inspiration? By definition, the thing is elusive and temperamental. No amount of talking will bring a new song to his fingers, or an old song to his spirit. He either wants to play or he doesn’t.

“Alright, buddy.” Henry’s voice is leaden with resignation. “Guess I should give you this, then.” He leans the guitar against the tavern’s sea green wall, bending to lift the lid of his wooden guitar case and retrieve a small javiskin pouch.
Anticipation suddenly floods Theo’s body. Could this be the one? “You actually got some?”

“My guy told me some Southerner gave him a whole stalk for a basket of yellowfruit and a promise to read some pamphlet or other.” As the little pouch kisses his open palm, Theo barely registers the peculiar details of what his friend has said. Maybe this will be the one, maybe today will be the day when the sound of his muse’s laughter bubbles up from the dormant hole slowly expanding inside him, maybe now he can shake the enormous weight that, like some unmourned ghost, haunts him. He closes his fingers around the blessed package.

“Henry,” he’s almost screaming. “I could kiss you.”

“Didn’t take you for the loogie type, but to each their own.” Theo kicks a leg of the chair, audibly gagging.

“Goodbye, old man,” he says, pushing off from the tavern wall.

“Happy smokes,” the old man croaks.

The pouch is a ball of fire in his fist as he strides home. They say if you can ever get your hands on Southern herb, prepare for a wild ride. For that reason alone, he’s wanted to go south, to see the land called Pestra. Roland refuses to take him on his research trips there, and anyway, there aren’t very many these days. He imagines the perilous journey these bundles of leaves must have made, evading Republic checkpoints, surviving the daily storms that roil the Alba Sea. And in a little while, giving their life to him as sweet smoke. Not a bad way to go out, he thinks, bringing a little more sweetness, joy, inspiration to the world for an hour or two. It’s better than leaving the people you love with decades of grief.
He’s passing the millet fields when he spots a figure darting from his comm. With that run, it must be Theland. But why would he leave the door open? Maybe he’s late for something. He does love sunsets, so maybe he’s running to catch it from some special spot only he knows. Voices waft from nearby comms. Maybe Theland is angry again, or distraught. Maybe something has set him off, as more and more things seem to. Did I maybe forget something important to him? But he can’t think of anything he might have neglected. Maybe it’s just plain old teen angst, he concludes as he enters the front door and pulls it closed behind him.

But the door to Roland’s study is also wide open. This provokes a patter of anxiety in his belly. He crosses the large room quickly on his long legs and enters the study to find a binder open on the ground behind the desk, its innards splattered all around it. Oh no. He sees the Colonial Department of Security seals at the top of several pages. Oh no, oh fuck, oh no. He always knew it was a bad idea to keep this in the house. What could’ve brought Theland in here? He’s never done something like this. What will they do now? He and Roland will probably get thrown in prison for gross negligence or something, and then he’ll never see Theland again. Oh god, he’ll never see Theland again. Fear beats at his chest as he sits against the wall, eyes wide and unseeing.

“Shit.” The word is a shard of glass. He leaps to his feet and looks through the window, watches the receding figure of his dendrophile son as it’s swallowed by the trees. “Shit.”

“Well, what the hell happened here?”

He turns to look into the white face of his husband, then looks back through the window. Theland is still running far, far away, as if he’ll never stop.
Theland still hasn’t looked behind him. The city is an icy hand hovering at the back of his neck. He keeps running, then walking, then jogging. All he wants is to put as much distance as possible between him and that coldness, that threat of capture, of asphyxia. Cadmus Mountain, enormous even from here, swallowed the sunlight long ago. The wide plains between the mountain and the city are silver and susurrant under the night sky. He knows the road that snakes between Vega and Albaton is somewhere far to his left, but he keeps it there, keeps the city at his back, the mountain’s hulking shadow against the sky before him.

Finally, he slows to a walk. Then he stops. His heaving chest aches, and he slips to his knees. It’s as if his body has been waiting for the first inkling of inertia to collapse. He’s choking on tears, trembling. What am I going to do? As he begins turning his head, the shaking becomes violent. But still he dares himself, forces himself, to look behind. There is no twinkle of streetlights or comm lights there, just the thick forest, and then the flat grass. He should be relieved, and part of him is. But when was the last time he went this far from home? Home. What an idea. He remembers the examiner’s severe signature, scratched beneath the cold, clinical telling of his origins. *He did, however, twice attempt escape from the Pratt School.* Isn’t it funny, this rhyme of history in which he is again running from something, toward something, neither of them fully clear to him? He imagines the infant dendrophile *living with no apparent parental supervision*, alone in the night, running forty miles. What did you hope to find? You knew something, didn’t you? Tell me, please … He hadn’t talked about the Pratt School, hadn’t even thought about it
until he read that medical report. Nor had his fathers said anything. What did they know? He hadn’t associated them with the School, but maybe they had more in common than he’d thought.

He shifts from his knees to sit in the cool night grass. He’s never seen the forest look this dense, shadows upon shadows in the night. It’s strange how night sharpens every sound but completely warps your sense of perspective. Tears are cooling on his face. What am I going to do? His fathers’ comm, even the whole city of Albaton, is the absolute last place he wants to be right now. But where else can he go? Where did they say he was found? Discovery Bay? That wouldn’t make any sense, going there now. What’s there for him? Maybe he might just … stumble upon something, though. But what are the odds of that? And Discovery Bay is too far to even imagine reaching right now, with hunger stabbing his belly. An image of terrified sailors huddled on a beach swims into his mind, the first humans to discover this land. They were afraid, but they braved the elements and the hungry jungle, and mapped the eastern coast of what would become the great experiment called Kaptra. The hollow narrative is laughable now, in the lonely dark of his doubt. Whom can he call upon for courage if not the naval officers who first scouted this place without even the hazy directions Kaptrans have become famous for giving? He wishes he could conjure some single dendrophile, one other person on the island like him, who in those early days of being found by humans … did something. Something other than die. What am I going to do?

Something that isn’t the wind rustles the grass nearby. He’s heard about plains critters that eat people. He needs to keep moving. But where? He remembers the one other person he did know on the island like him, the long stretches when her shuttered face kept
him out, so they could only sit together in the quiet sun on the sloping comm roof; the time he came home bruised and crying and she sat with him; the first time they shared a meal at the same bench in the refectory. Where’d you go, Ren? He hasn’t had the conscious thought before, but it alights like a tiny twin-tailed bird upon his thoughts: he misses her. And in that instant, he feels her presence as he sits alone in a wide field of grass, and he hears her smoky voice, “I’m sorry, Theland.” He’s confused and afraid but also touched and comforted. He stands on wobbly legs, sure of where to go now but unsure of why. Moving toward the mountain, he imagines her gray-white face with the deep green eyes, and it says, “Come find me.”
“There’s no way we’re getting through this tonight.” Little creeks of blood stain Roland’s white skin in the moonlight that trickles through the leafy ceiling. Nearby, Theo is still trying to subdue the bramble that chokes all paths out of the forest.

“Was it always this wild in here?” Theo pants, looking over at Roland, who shrugs. “Can’t say the last time I’ve been through.” His project abandoned, he saunters toward Theo.

“Maybe we can borrow someone’s cutlass.”

“It’s already eight, Theo. What’ll we look like knocking on doors asking for a cutlass at this hour?”

“We shouldn’t have waited so long.”

“We didn’t have a plan.”

“We didn’t need one.” The words ring out in the quiet forest, but the little winged insects continue their intermittent chirping. “Why did we need a plan?” Theo almost whimpers. “He’s our son.”

“Alright,” Roland puts an arm around his husband. It’s been a while since he’s seen this much emotion from him. Theo used to be the sensitive one, while Roland had remained a sealed volume at the bottom of a wooden chest. But it seems the very thing he’s always dreaded has been happening, and he’s been too distracted, or absorbed in his own self-importance, to know it: Theo, who is categorically a better person, who is just about everything that’s good about Roland’s life, whose generosity had gently chipped away at
the childhood memories that calcified around his heart, is now being dulled by the blunt edge of Roland’s presence.

“We’ll find him,” he says, sketching circles across Theo’s back with his open palm. But will they? Time enough to figure out what to do if they do find him, but how in the world are they going to get through this forest? You think a settlement with a river at its back and a forest before it is protected, but you never imagine those borders might trap you inside. Then again, they don’t know if he fled the city. Theo had wanted to go ask neighbors, but Roland had been adamant about limiting the number of people who know; fewer people to have to explain things to, and fewer witnesses if CDS starts asking questions. But going it alone puts them at a huge disadvantage, and an even huger risk. Theo may have signed the contract as well, but Roland’s the Diplomat. It’ll be just what the Congressional peanut gallery wants, too. Loud-mouthed asshole gets demoted to colonial post and after a decade and a half of quaint, primitive domesticity manages to spill the state secret most important to his job. A satisfying comeuppance.

He shouldn’t have started that letter. Isn’t it safer to dictate that? Theo had said, looking down at the page on which he’d been scribbling one evening. But he hadn’t listened. There’s only one other playback device on the island, right? Theo’s voice returns to his ear, infuriatingly didactic. But of course, Theo was right. Where was Roland’s analytical mind back then? It really was disastrously stupid to have had those documents out like that. You got too cocky, thought the kid feared you enough. Now, he’s nowhere to be found and you need to present him for examination in the morning. And that’s on you, dumbass.
“We’ll fucking find him.” It’s more to comfort himself than Theo at this point. Because even though his thoughts are a cyclone of dead leaves pushed around by an angry wind, not one of them is helping him figure a way out of this.

“How?” The night siphons all the beautiful color from Theo’s eyes, but their wide anguish is still clear in the dark.

“Ren?”

Bleary with hunger, Theo doesn’t trust his vision. Sure, he’d been feeling … something, something drawing him to the mountain, something like what he’d felt on the closest of their days together back in Albaton. But that didn’t mean it was actually her, that didn’t mean this couldn’t just be the delirium of exhaustion. The weight of her presence presses against his skin. Her soft footfalls announce her approach. In the thick cloak of the dark, her hair seems curly and buoyant.

“I … go by Talawa now.” The husky words are fragrant blossoms, and scores of little birds begin trying to escape the cage of his body. From his crumpled spot on the downy mountain grass, her large eyes are dark stones in the gray of her face. Is it really her? Where has she been all this time? Here? How did she make it all the way out here? Why did she leave? Why didn’t she say goodbye? His mouth falls open but fatigue thickens his tongue. “You need to rest,” she says, leaning into him as his eyes flutter closed.

“I really think we should talk to Ana,” Theo says from the floor, his back pressed into a corner of Roland’s study. They’re still sweaty from their losing battle against the forest. He watches his husband’s face, cloudy and damp.
“No.” The tea green eyes staring into his own are sharp with fear. “I told you, we can’t trust anyone with this.”

“But we can trust her.” He means to reassure Roland, but after hearing his own words he isn’t sure he’s right. Ana is one of his closest friends in this place, but does she care enough for him to make herself an accomplice to a crime? Does she love him more than she fears her superiors? And what would they even say to her at this point? How could she actually help?

“Theo …” His name is exhaled as a breathy sigh, the way it sounds when the man he loves has nothing more to say to him. They sit in the lamplit study, staring at nothing, waiting.

Talawa leans against Elder, watching the bald-headed boy’s quiet breathing against the cushion of their lap. Did they really call Theland here? How would that even work? They’ll have to wait for dawn to introduce him to Elder. Maybe Elder will know what he needs. The bareness of their life on the mountain has become painfully obvious with the arrival of a guest. Nothing to bring him water in, nothing to rest his head on. Colette would be furious with their homemaking. The ludicrous thought triggers a ripple of laughter that spreads from their body to shake the unconscious boy. They still themself, but Theland begins to grasp at consciousness, expelling sporadic moans. Thanks, Colette.

“Strong enough to go get some water?” they ask him.

Through the intermittent flickering of his eyelids, he croaks: “I think so.” They ease him forward, and he groans.

“Are you hurt?”
“Mm-mm. Just … weak.”

“The river will do you good, I promise.” They stand after they trust that he can hold himself upright. For a beat, they hesitate, not ready for the intimacy of what they need to do to help him to his feet. It was different while he was unconscious and there was nothing soft for his head. But they lean down, tucking an arm under one of his and wrapping the other around his torso. “Ready?” His groan will have to do. They haul him up as gently as they can, but he isn’t deadweight in their arms. Still some strength in there. Good. “The river’s over there.” They angle their chin westward, through the grove of dead trees.

They hobble together, quiet and focused. First one foot, then the other. As they leave Elder’s barren perimeter, grass and leaves rustle and crunch beneath them. Theland’s canvas espadrilles are no louder than their own bare feet. They can hear the morning coming, the utter stillness as the forest holds its breath for dawn.

“You’ll get to meet Elder soon,” they say. The river’s chatter leads them. It’s in sight when he says,

“I think I already did?” It’s an odd thing to say. Why would he even know who they were talking about? Had he maybe been here before? Wouldn’t he have mentioned it? And they’ve been here for months without ever seeing him. Did he think they meant someone else?

“No, you don’t know Elder. They’re the one you were resting under.” They help Theland lower himself to the cool mossy ground by the river. He cups his hands and brings some water to his lips, his throat visibly working as the liquid enters his body. He sucks in a tunnel of air and turns wide eyes on them.

“So cold!”
“I know.” They smile. He drinks several more handfuls on his knees before lying on his side and rolling onto his back. He’s smiling, too.

“Yeah, I think … I think I saw them. While I was unconscious. I didn’t remember until you said Elder, and I just … kinda knew that was who you meant. Is that weird?” Something twangs inside Talawa. So, Elder came to him in a dream. He already knows more than they knew after an entire bemused week alone on the mountain. Of course he does. Things always seemed to come to him more easily. Well, basic studies things, at least. But then, it hadn’t really mattered, had it? He’d still been just another dendrophile.

Talawa grunts.

“Weird means something totally different to me now.”

From the bed where he’s sure neither he nor Theo has slept a wink all night, Roland watches wispy clouds skitter across the cadmium blue sky, chased by an orange light exploding at the horizon. For what seems like the first time in his entire adult life, he is without options. What a disgrace he will become to his family, his ancestors, the lineage his mother never grew tired of tracing back to the shadowy annals of the known past, the time called the Great Purge, and the leadership of a great people who outran the Apocalypse. He has always been the spindly, rotting stick propping up the ailing body of a political dynasty. And now, he will be kicked right out from under it to watch both his inheritance and his legacy crash into a heap of dead flesh and brittle bone. There is no other option.

“I’m turning myself in,” he rasps to the sky.
“I’m going with you,” comes Theo’s reply from behind him. He rolls over to face the man he has endangered with his obstinacy and hubris.

“I guess I can’t stop you, can I?”

Resignation is etched into the downturned corners of his husband’s magnificent mouth.

“No,” Theo says.

From the direction of the sea comes the bleating of a low horn. It snatches from his mouth the words he was about to speak. In its place, a quick dryness and a quicker beating in his chest.

“Oh no,” Theland says.

“What?” Talawa tenses.

“The horn,” he says. “It’s Founders Day.” Talawa doesn’t immediately seem to understand what he means, but his thoughts leave them behind. In the urgency of his pain and confusion, he just forgot. How could he have been so stupid? Now, they’ll definitely find him, and Talawa, too, who’s been thriving with new leafy hair and a mentor and a clear running river, and it’s his fault that they’ll find Talawa because he picked the worst day of the year to throw a fit.

“Oh,” Talawa’s voice draws his eyes. “It’s Founders Day,” they say, heavy with knowing.

“We gotta get out here, Ren—Talawa, sorry, we need to go, it’s not safe, they’ll find us.” He’s already frantic and on his feet, looking around for a direction in which to run.
“Wait, wait. Elder’s waking up.”

In the navy blue morning, pierced with stringy clouds like sunlit tendrils creeping from the east, Elder begins to vibrate. Theland is pulled from the immediacy of his panic by the sound’s strangeness.

“Follow me,” Talawa says, placing firm fingers around his wrist as they kneel before the huge, gnarled trunk. Theland sinks to the ground, watching his friend. Talawa closes their eyes and says, “See if you can find them, inside. And then, just … reach out.”

This is all a little much when CDS could be on the way to capture them right now. But Theland remembers his dream of Elder, a tight blanket around his shivering fear. They had called him by name, not the name of his fathers, but the other name, the one he hadn’t revealed to anyone, the one that had been on his lips when he awakened one morning, the one that had remained a faint scratching on a door somewhere inside himself. Elder had found that door, had seemed to open it. He closes his eyes. I don’t know how you know me … but, I want to know you. I want to know what happened. Can you help me?

Six is usually when they have to report on Founders Day, for the more perfunctory of the year’s two medical examinations. It had been somewhat of a nuisance to Theo since they adopted Theland, but nothing more, really. Dendrophile adoption was facilitated by the Colonial Department of Security, not the Department of Health; more bureaucracy just came with the territory, he’d thought. But as he dresses for what may be his last morning as a free man, Theo realizes he has never thought about why these check-ins happen on Founders Day. He doesn’t know the answer, can’t even hypothesize one.
Roland enters their small room. Wafting in after him is the musk of a fragrance gifted to him by his colleagues before he left for the colonies. You’re gonna need it in that sty, they’d laughed. Ironically, Roland had barely used it. In fact, now that Theo thinks about it, he’s only used it when attending these check-ins.

“I see you put your CDS fragrance on,” he says. Roland flashes him a hollow look. He’s distracted, I get it. Theo sits on their bed, the soft fabric of his trousers rustling. “Do you know why they even do this on Founders Day?”

Roland is pulling an arm through the long sleeve of a collared shirt, angelic in its whiteness. “I was thinking about that, too,” he says to the mirror propped against the wall. “I think I read that it was a convenience thing. The governor and her security detail come to town, extra muscle, I guess. I dunno.” As he watches his husband’s toned arms disappear into the shirt, watches the doughy belly insinuated behind the bright whiteness, he wonders if they will ever see each other again. Two decades is a long time to know someone, to be known as you grow and change and stay the same. He didn’t expect that they’d remain married forever, but he hadn’t expected their parting to be so abrupt either.

“I shouldn’t have pushed to adopt,” he says, and his eyes are already so full that the tears drip onto his navy linen trousers. After a beat, Roland’s arm is around him.

“I wanted it, too,” he says.

“But you said we should wait. Maybe if we’d waited … there wouldn’t have been any left, and things would’ve been simpler.” He can’t even remember why his desire for a dendrophile child had been so fervent. What could that Theo have needed so badly?
“It’s not your fault, love.” The endearment tightens his throat. It’s been so long since he’s heard that word, in that voice. “It’s mine. He found out because of me. It’s my responsibility, you didn’t know anything about it.”

“No, no, no, no, I am not lying to them.”

“You have to. Someone needs to be alive—be here when they find him.” Theo hasn’t thought this far ahead. What will happen to Theland? This isn’t just a runaway situation, he knows things, things he shouldn’t know. Will he even exist anymore once CDS finds him? Theo leans into the sturdy neck of his husband, the perfume thick in his nostrils.

“Wow.”

Talawa watches Theland settle on his sit bones. His eyes are the smooth red-brown of a kovanut’s outer skin, luminous in the brightening dawn.

“I know,” Talawa says. “I didn’t really get it, my first time.”

“It’s like …” He gazes up at Elder. “It’s like, they put something whole in your head, and you get it. Like, you understand it, but you have to …” He’s breathless. “You have to peel it back. Like it’s all there, but you have to peel back the layers to get to all of it.”

“You were always good at describing things.”

He looks at them, and in his face they see their own bewildered excitement on the day Elder first spoke inside them. The vibration was audible, but the meaning emanated from a quiet interior place. It was indeed like a kind of fruit, a thing placed and known that could not reveal itself to them all at once, a thing that called them to itself, that invited their
fumbling fingers to work away its skin, every fibrous nub sweetened with understanding. Now, they are more deft, and the process is quieter, more precise, the understanding less fragmented. But they remember the awe and confusion from before, the knowledge coming in crude chunks.

“So what are we gonna do?” he says, and the fond memory shatters, splinters falling away to reveal the urgent present.

“We can’t stay here,” they say, perceiving now what that will mean for them.

“But we have to do something. It’s … it’s not right, what they’re doing to Elder. What they did to the others.”

“I know.” An answer they’d sought for so long didn’t come until he’d arrived. Not knowing, they’d thought the damage had been done, Elder’s relatives had passed into a different plane of existence, Elder themself was simply awaiting their last exhalation. It hadn’t occurred to Talawa that the harm might be ongoing. It makes sense. Their own past continues to smart beneath the calming surface of their life on the mountain, surrounded by life but missing companionship, except from Elder. And in the aftermath of Elder’s revelation, revisiting it now, they begin to burn again, as they did on the day they ran away, only now the rage is hotter, encompassing a grove of strangled family they didn’t get the chance to know, and will never know if they and Theland don’t figure a way to intervene.

“Believe me, I know.”

“Did they say something about the South? I’m not sure.”

“That’s it,” Talawa says, turning from their anger for a moment to peel back another layer. “There are others.” They meet Theland’s eyes with their own.

“Other what?”
“Others like us. In the South.” Rage leaks into their anticipation as they understand anew just how much has been kept from them, the hope of finding relatives clouded by thoughts of Colette and Trece and basic studies classes and their peers and the archivist, the entire conspiracy to rob them of kinship, of wholeness.

“Really?”

Talawa nods. “That’s what Elder said.”

When Roland and Theo, hand in hand, leave their room for what may be the last time, Colette is sitting by the windowless opening cut into the western wall of the living area, looking out at the farm.

“Colette,” Roland says, edgy. The woman turns heavy eyes slowly toward them, her lips crumpling into a vague smile.

“You two are elegant today.” Her voice is almost not there, a weakness Roland has rarely witnessed in his commate. He’s eager to head out the door, but something in the woman’s presence tethers his feet to the ground. “Today might have been her last Founders Day, you know,” she says. “With her turning sixteen this year.”

He’d begun plunging toward a murky unknown when he and Theo braided their fingers together and stepped from their bedroom this morning. But the woman’s sadness threatens to fasten more weight to him, to speed his terrible descent. He doesn’t want her burden, doesn’t want to think about Ren, whose reasons for running away he hadn’t really considered, whose friendship with Theland he hadn’t really understood. He doesn’t want to think about the two of them in contact over the last several months, planning his escape. No, Theland ran off because he found those documents. It’s not because Roland was like
Colette, like the others at Congress Point, verdigris grown over their cold metal smiles, a jungle of thorny egos to hack through, something mysterious and reptilian slithering beneath every word. And whether Ren dies, Theland will live. He must live, or today’s sacrifice will be worthless. He will at least live another year, and then maybe a solution will have been found for the terrible, inexplicable softening of bones, the slow, aching rot that has hollowed the insides of countless dendrophiles for the last three decades, always before their twentieth year.

Colette’s brow furrows as she cranes forward slightly. “Where is Theland?”

Theland had hoped for … well, he isn’t sure what he’d hoped for, really. But this seems more intense than whatever that was. Talawa is trotting back from the river, tall and sure in their bare gray body, radiant in a crown of glossy leaves. He turns from them to survey the undulating earth at the base of Cadmus Mountain, and beyond it, the flat green tongue that extends into the misty blue sea, where they hope to find a close-lipped sailor to grant them passage farther south. It will be a journey like none he has ever taken.

In frayed swatches, images and sensations return to him: the cold scratch of a medical examiner’s signature beneath a colder summary of his beginnings; brutal truths from the pen of his repentant father; Ren’s voice arriving from nowhere to his lonely patch of sunlight in the forest; limbs constricted with terror at the sound of a scurrying plains critter in the black night; the bizarre communion with an ancient tree person, being seen, being felt, being placed in a family larger than his fathers’, in a time longer than Kaptra’s, and having been placed, the heavy, energizing duty to this family, to this time. All these stitch together a path down the mountain, but to move farther he must plunge and resurface
the threads of his past with his own force of will, the threads of the past he shares with Talawa, with this island. From tattered cloth that cannot change he must make new vestments to repair what can be repaired, and hold what cannot.

To the west, tiny and barely visible behind its forest ramparts, Albaton awakens beneath darkening clouds. Talawa’s hand is light on his shoulder.

“I guess we’ll just … ask the land to take care of us,” they say. The idea falls on his ear less strangely than it might have a few days ago, before the strange communications between him and Talawa, before the wondrous, inexplicable fellowship with Elder. Clearly, life is more than humanity, more than the boxes in which they live and the cages in which they lock others, more than their petty ambitions, more than the poison frequencies that pour from their devices and machines to disrupt an ancient practice of relation sustaining the island. Life is more than what humanity can perceive, and it falls to him and Talawa, both human and non-human, with a perception exceeding that of their human captors, to protect it.

“Yeah,” he says. “It’s done okay by you.”

Talawa’s smile brightens the green of their eyes until they glint. “It has.”

“You ready?” he asks.

“No.” The two laugh, then look out at the distant water again.

“I’m glad I found you.” It had been on a slow walk home from the evening meal at the refectory that he’d realized Ren would never return to the comm they shared. Theo had been with him, telling him what the other adults had kept from him, the Colonial Security search parties, how she had just seemed to disappear into thin air. “I’m still mad at you, but I’m glad I found you,” he says, a wry smile tugging at a corner of his mouth.
“I get it. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. I just …” A morning breeze rustles the leaves on their head. “It was selfish. All I could see was my own stuff.”

“Thanks. I understand, though. I basically did the same thing to Theo.”

“You really cared for him.”

“I did. I do.”

“Well, we’ll spare him when we bring our army back.” Their hoarse laugh still manages to sound melodious.

“Who said anything about an army?”

“I dunno. Could be nice to kick some ass. Just saying.”

He imagines metal weapons, crumpled bodies littering the stony streets. From a place deep in his memory comes the terrible sound of metal eating wood. He closes his eyes, shakes his head.

“Who knows what we’ll find down there,” he says.

The mountain has become boisterous with birdcalls. “Are you scared?” Talawa says.

“Yes.” He looks at them. “Aren’t you?”

“A little. Mostly excited, though. And glad we’ll be together.” Abruptly, he flings his arms around them, pulling them into a tight embrace, an intimacy they’ve never shared. He feels their stiff surprise melt as they lean into him.

“Me too,” he says.

They’re both wiping dark tears from their eyes when they separate.

“Alright, Theland Brun Zant,” Talawa says with mocking formality. “You ready?”
The sound of his name brings to his ear the murmuring echo of that other name, as Elder uttered it in his dream, as it scratched faintly on a door inside himself. With a thrill of nervous anticipation exploding within him, he decides to say it. “Actually, I … I want to try going by Tigo. Do you mind?”

He thinks the thing that softens Talawa’s face is pride. They smile and give a quick nod.

“Let’s go, then, Tigo,” they say. The two begin their southward trek down the mountain.
A LETTER IN THE HAND OF ROLAND ZANT

My dearest Theland,

Tired as it will sound to you, I have sought to protect you in everything that I’ve done. But I have also been a coward, and

Your world is a glass box, peopled only with others like you and perhaps a handful of idiot colonists. I have stood outside it for so many years, sought in vain to hold you through the solid partition that divides us. Hardly a surprise that you hate me by now, bereft of contact.

It isn’t for me to say who you should be, I understand that. And yet how can I not try to shape you, knowing all that I know about this cruel civilization that I have claimed as a proud heritage? My mother was a severe woman whose crowning achievement was the accident of descendancy, a traceable line to the earliest life that our people collectively remember, the Ninety-Nine who survived the Great Purge. I have never been a historian nor grasped the Perhaps knowing this about me might help you to understand the pride I have taken in my people, my civilization

I can honestly say that I love you, that I have loved you all these years, but that I have

Why am I saying all of this? Well, I can’t say that I fully understand. But I do understand the urgency of
I cannot describe the anguish of knowing what cannot be known, and yet what desperately should be. I have failed you and I must live with that every day. I am sorry.

Your people were killed, Theland. I killed them. Well, not I myself, personally, but people like me, people of importance seeking importance, people who see ourselves in everything and everyone. There was no crisis of neglect, no inadequate guardianship. Your ancestors were an obstacle, and you, the children, were a prize. I have known this to be fact for longer than I have known you. And yet knowing you, watching you among idiot colonists, has taught me the terrible fiction of it, too. The Republic has tied my tongue, but my heart, black as it is, will not let me remain so.

I
“IN THE SPIRIT OF REPUBLICAN COOPERATION”:
COLONIALISM AS COUNTER-RESISTANCE IN
REVOLUTIONARY MAKTA

Toria Jon, Alborada Institute for Advanced Study

When in 2397 a small Maktan seacraft landed on the southeastern coast of what would later be called Kaptra, the island was an unknown rock in an uncharted body of water. The Republic of Makta had hardly existed for long enough to begin teething before sending a crew of fourteen military officers and one closeted mystic on a Congressional Scouting mission. Why did the new republic seek more land so soon? This study argues that the Maktan Congress sought new territory unattached to the mainland because it sought an exhaust pipe through which to expel the factions opposing confederation.

Confederation and its Discontents

Confederation of a whole continent was no small undertaking. Hatched in 2382 among a cadre of self-styled federalists based primarily in the city-states of Makta and Actalos, the process inched across Temulta until it engulfed all five peoples in its inexorable centripetal force. Dénis’ chronicles of the movement’s infancy spanning several issues of this very publication portray federalism as a largely elite preoccupation.1 The reader curious about federalism’s roots would do well to familiarize themself with his work. Certainly, the

movement’s founders hailed from the ruling classes of their peoples, among them the future High Councilor Sherrod Brite from Makta and the Talosi future Leader of Congress Yesi Oriya. And certainly, their diplomatic efforts began among the governing representatives of each society’s divergent political structures. But confederation was not simply inflicted upon the peoples who united to form the Federal Republic of Makta. The movement garnered support, often vociferous, from a range of social actors. While a detailed description of their roles is unnecessary in the present study, as both Brite and Oriya have received unusually copious print coverage in a diverse assortment of publications, let it suffice to state that they made themselves into both fuel and fuel lines that powered a political revolution.

Not all Temultans saw wealth and power in confederation, however, and the movement applied pressure to existing fault lines that had cracked the continent’s political landscape in the preceding decades. The autonomous regions of Sakarna and Evred proved especially hostile theaters for the federalists. Sakarno principal, Ido Alameda, faced an angry throng of his citizens when he returned to Siko, the seat of his government, in September 2394. In a speech some weeks later, he admitted to “abdicating [his] responsibility to the Sakarno people” and “trampling the mandate given to me by them” when he journeyed to the Constitutional Convention in Haven, the Evredite port and seat of government, to ratify the new republic’s constitution. So angry were the Sakarno, in fact, that Alameda was forced to withdraw from the republic and restore the region’s autonomous status.

Resistance movements sprang to life across the continent, beginning as a motley coalition of anarchists, conspiracists, and citizens supporting the continued independence of Temulta’s peoples. From Makta and Actalos, the city-states at the heart of the federalist movement, came especially vigorous protests against centralization. Movement leaders alleged that a secretive intergovernmental organization was developing sonic weapons designed to impair targets’ hearing, speech, and even cognition, a project of which they wanted no part.3 Others argued for the preservation of separation among the five peoples, whose relationships with land, modes of political organization, and economic relations were “incompatible.”4 Clearly, tales of astronomical prosperity and utopian cooperation did not compel everyone at first. Nevertheless, by the end of 2394, a new republic had been formed. Boundaries between the new states largely followed the continent’s geography, and capitals were established at Monro (in the new state of Maktis), Réunion (in Fluvion), Alborada (in Actalos), and Haven (in Evred). Sakarna remains an autonomous region unclaimed by the republic.

Hannedge’s exemplary research identifies and analyzes well the economic and political incentives that sustained federalism.5 Her work stops just short of thinking through the relationship between federalism and colonialism, a relation worth examining given the close temporal proximity that they share in Temultan history. Building on the author’s previous work, this study now turns to the role of opposition movements in the calculations of a fledgling Congress considering the colonization of unknown lands.

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4 Dignité Fluvienne, “Statement Against the Mixing of the Peoples,” flyer, July 12, 2394, from the Republican Archive at Monro.
Neutralizing Anarchy

Andris Loren was an earth scientist for the Republic of Makta Military Topographic Command (MTC) between 2389 and 2397. For an unknown portion of his tenure with the MTC, he also became a member of an underground society referred to more often as syndicalists, and he was identified by anonymous sources within the society as a mystic. Little was understood of syndicalist philosophy at the time of Loren’s departure from the Republic, but the society’s representation in Congressional discourse was less than stellar. Tomá Granjero, Mercantilist Party Congressmember from Evred state, famously dismissed the movement as “armchair totalitarians cowering in robes and backrooms.” Granjero’s comment was a clear reference to the recent testimony of a man claiming to have been a “mystic syndicalist,” who renounced his affiliation with the movement at the February public affairs session in Fluvion state’s third district. The man alleged that fellow syndicalists, all male, donned white robes and chanted incantations in storage closets and attics, the only safe places for them to plan to overthrow the government. While this testimony would later be found largely unsubstantiated and unverifiable, it did make a splash among artists and comedians. Loren himself would later reference the teacup tempest in his journal, commenting one hungry evening a few days after landing on Kaptra, “If only I’d brought my white robes.”

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6 Enia Dun, “Scouting missing deserter was known as ‘mystic’ among local syndicalists,” Weekly Review, March 15, 2398.
8 Etienne Roux, “Man claims to have been syndicalist,” Fluvion Press Bureau, February 20, 2396.
9 See for example “Backroom Chatter,” illustration, Weekly Review, March 17, 2396.
10 Andris Loren, Journal of Andris Loren 2397–98, 103. The journal, now held at the Colonial Archive of Kaptra, details his final year in the Republican Military and his first several weeks as an early settler of Kaptra. The author expresses sincere gratitude to Head Archivist Ana Yaves for her assistance in procuring the document.
But the much-ridiculed claims of backroom gatherings did hold some water. No record exists prior to 2458 that connects Loren to the syndicalists. No reference to anything politically untoward can be found in the evaluations of Loren made by his superiors in the almost ten years of his service with the MTC. Indeed, few extant records connect anyone to the syndicalists, or to the broader anarchist movement. Members clearly practiced an extraordinary level of secrecy and circumspection. They may not have been wearing robes or chanting in literal backrooms, but they certainly were not holding public meetings or even generating paper trails. What little is known about them today can be attributed to a mere handful of sources. These include investigative reportage from the Monro press, and makeshift publications smuggled from the southernmost colonies, where it is argued by some that the mystic syndicalists have forged their own settlement.\footnote{See Ana Yaves, “The Temultan Obsession with Colonial Conspiracies,” Editorial, \textit{Weekly Review}, September 22, 2458.} For more information about mysticism in Temulta, the reader is invited to consult Linn’s study of the mystic revivals of the twenty-fourth century, and their study of mysticism’s origins in the early postpurgatual period.\footnote{See Alex Linn, “‘Fall afresh on me’: Modern-Day Mysticism in Actalos and Maktis,” \textit{Social Study} 19 (2459), 5–11; and “A Brief History of the Metaphysical,” \textit{Social Study} 18 (2458), 73–80.}

Actors like Loren became veritable stakes in the side of the Republican Congress during the republic’s early years. Mass demonstrations and public performance art were easy enough for lawmakers to ignore, as these acts are of necessity short-lived. However, Congress was compelled to respond when Maktisan food workers stopped laboring en masse, and when large Evredite farm collectives refused to trade with Maktis. Three days into the Evredite boycott, Federalist Party Leader of Congress Oriya declared that “The
people of Makta need a project, some thing to make in our own image.” She announced a national process in which any interested Maktan citizen could propose such a project, debating ideas at public affairs meetings in individual districts, choosing one idea to represent each district, then pitching each idea to Congress. The Congressmembers would in turn create a shortlist of seven ideas, on which all citizens would have the chance to vote. While Oriya made no mention of the opposition’s escalation, the timing of her announcement suggests that her call for a national project was an early attempt to solve the growing problem of the anti-confederation movement.

The winning idea, on which over 20 million citizens voted, came from the least populous district in the nation. Fluvion’s fourth district, nestled against the state’s border with Sakarna and home to some sixty residents, proposed a search for new land, to discover more of the world. That such an idea would emanate from the particular rural cultural milieu of District 4, let alone resonate so strongly throughout the nation, struck more than a few reporters as questionable. All doubts, however, were dismissed by Congressional spokespersons as conspiracies.

Journalistic challenges notwithstanding, the idea seemed to strike a chord among many of the nation’s peoples. Over the next two months, a flurry of conversation swept across the country, with Congressional debates and the Maktis press outlining the primary contours of the discussion. Benta Lyle’s editorials for the Weekly Review helped popularize colonization as an expression of the new nation’s political identity, arguing that Makta was a “mighty people” who were “capable of feeding and clothing the world.”

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13 Lyle, “Leader of Congress: Maktans ‘need a project,’” Weekly Review, October 27, 2396
14 See for example Oeste, “Some Talosi concerned about irregularities in ‘national project’ vote,” Talosi Times, January 10, 2397.
southern land, he said, would “carry the flag of collaboration” beyond Temulta’s shores, spreading the example of cooperation and fraternity that had forged the Maktan Republic. Leader Oriya claimed that discovering new land would be nothing less than a divine calling to be fruitful and multiply. “If we don’t find any land, we’ll know that we aren’t needed anywhere else.” Others expressed a sense of wonder at the possibility of other life beyond the shores of Temulta, a steadily intensifying curiosity about who and what was “out there.”

It was at this point that the opposition movement began to splinter into pro- and anti-colonial factions. After five weeks, the Evred-Maktis boycott faltered under the weight of a transforming public opinion. What had garnered sporadic support as a morally superior act of patriotism, even from sympathetic citizens outside the movement, now appeared as the ultimate act of isolationism in the face of a broader collective imagining. As Loren wrote, “Now we look like bad faith critics if we don’t come to the table and say something.” By the fourth quarter of 2396, transcripts of Congressional meetings reveal a near consensus around the threat that anarchists, syndicalists, and other resisters posed to the stability of the fragile nation. It would be Congressmember Maya Fleur, the Fluvienne representative at the time, who voiced the sentiment that hardened the division between pro- and anti-colonialists: a colony in the southern seas afforded the opportunity for “experiments in other forms of government, in the spirit of Republican cooperation.”

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17 See for example Syndicalist Union, “Statement of Support for National Expansion,” flyer, December 9, 2396, from the Republican Archive at Monro.
18 Loren, 81.
This idea, with its latent utopian promise, appealed to Loren. His writing grew increasingly focused on the possibility of finding and making a new way of life in a new place. Indeed, its combination of expansionism and adventure made colonialism broadly appealing to Maktans. The Scouting mission was ordered in 2397, and the resistance to confederation diminished to a quiet hum beneath the din of nationalist fervor upon the discovery of land in the South Seas.

**Conclusion**

News of Kaptra’s discovery skittered across the republic, and the question brought repeatedly before Congress was what the discovery would mean for everyday Maktans. For his part, Loren grew increasingly obsessed with the prophecies of someone he identified only as “the old woman.” He began to see her predictions fulfilled in many things that he encountered on the island. For instance, she had predicted the discovery of a green island with a lone mountain to the south of the mainland, which Loren saw confirmed when they arrived on Kaptra. She said the fruits on this island could be trusted not to poison a human, and so Loren incautiously consumed anything pulpy and hanging from trees. She did seem to be wrong about one thing, however: “The bugs aren’t nearly as bad as she said.”

The specter of the old woman raises important questions about the knowledge possessed by Temultans about the lands to the south. While prevailing evidence fails to support the theory, anthropologist Xes Uwlk maintains that the humans who left Cadmus
centuries ago to people the eastern coast of Temulta were not the only humans to survive the Great Purge. According to his theory, humans to the south of the mainland also survived and made their way north to people the continent’s western coast.\textsuperscript{21} This study is not the place to debate Dr. Uwlk, but if his theory is anywhere near the truth, it could be that the old woman of Loren’s journal came from or was related to these southern peoples, who must now only occupy the southwestern corner of Temulta because the rest of the continent has been populated by peoples known to the Maktan republic and its allies.

Prophecies and old women aside, the colonization of Kaptra and the Alba Islands clearly served several political ends within continental Makta. Facing a gathering wave of opposition to confederation, the federalists successfully pitched the idea that colonizing a territory for the first time as a unified nation would be an expression of national pride. Further, by offering the promise for experimentation in radical forms of social and political organization in any newly acquired territory, Congressmembers like Fleur successfully enticed away anarchists, anti-nationalists, pro-independence factions, and others seeking to disturb the political waters of the newly formed nation-state.

\textsuperscript{21} Xes Uwlk, “There May Have Been Others: An Alternate Theory of the Peopling of Temulta,” \textit{Archaeology and Anthropology} 49 (Third Quarter 2457), 80.
THE ALBA COLONIES:
ENVIRONMENT, POPULATION, CULTURE, AND ECONOMY

Roland J. Zant
Specialist in Maktan National Government
Congressional Envoy to the South Sea Colonies

July 3, 2448
Preface

The Republic of Makta acquired the island of Kaptra in 2397. The island was discovered by a Congressional Scouting mission. Over the next four years, Scouts discovered and mapped five other islands forming an archipelago in the South Sea: Kardra, Okura, Ostra, Mantra, and Pestra.

Between 2397 and 2408, a steady stream of Maktan citizens began immigrating to various islands, forming settlements along coasts or on the banks of wide rivers. In 2403, Congress enacted legislation granting Maktan citizenship to any person born in the colonies.

The South Sea islands are subject to Republican jurisdiction under the Territorial Amendment of the Maktan Constitution. Residents in the colonies can serve in the Republican Military and are subject to federal laws. However, ongoing debates over the last six years have focused on the degree to which the colonies should be incorporated into the Republic, or whether they should be incorporated at all. Statehood, commonwealth status, or independence have been proposed as options.

This report was commissioned as the first general overview of the population and environment of the colonies, to assist in the legislative process determining the colonies’ status. The author conducted ethnographic studies of the people and environment of the colonies to produce this report. The report is supplemented by findings from the most recent research available on the people and environment of the colonies. Most of this has been published in the past three decades, though in some cases, the most recent available research antedates the year 2417.

This report is not intended as a historical survey.
Climate, Geography, and Environment

The South Sea colonies form a chain of five semi-autonomous political units under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Makta: the islands of Kaptra, Kardra, Okura & Ostra, Mantra, and Pestra.

The colonies occupy a combined area of approximately 1.1 million square miles. Across the archipelago, a range of terrain types can be found: sandy deserts on Pestra, rugged mountain ranges on Kaptra and Kardra, a dormant volcano on Mantra, the 11,007-foot Cadmus Mountain on Kaptra and the 9,250-foot Mount Makt in northern Kardra. Research suggests all except Okura & Ostra have volcanic origins.

The archipelago generally experiences two seasons, wet and dry, though to varying degrees across regions of individual islands. Pestra’s climate is arid, with pronounced dry seasons and only sporadic rainfall during the wet season. Northern Kardra, Mantra, and Ostra, and southern Okura can be categorized as tropical monsoon climates. Rainfall can be intense and relentless during the wet season, while dry seasons tend to be milder, although southern Kardra and Mantra in particular experience more severe dry seasons. Northern Okura as well as most of Kaptra have tropical rainforest climates, with at least 2.5 inches of rainfall during every month of the year. Air temperatures are generally hot throughout the year, ranging from 75 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit between wet and dry seasons. In the mountainous regions of Kaptra and Kardra, however, temperatures can fall to 40 or 50 degrees Fahrenheit on wet season evenings.

Hurricanes visit the northern islands often during the latter periods of the wet season. Cold fronts and other climatic systems emanating from the Temulta sometimes affect the northernmost regions.
The warm South Sea surrounds the islands. Surface temperatures of the sea remain fairly constant throughout the year: from around 85 degrees Fahrenheit in the warmest periods to 75 degrees Fahrenheit in the coolest periods.

The islands possess very diverse ecosystems, ranging from cloud forests near the peak of Cadmus Mountain, to rainforests in northern Okura and most of Kaptra, to dry forests in southern Kardra, to cactus scrubs in Pestra, to mangroves in Okura and Ostra.

**Population**

Human settlement across the colonies has been uneven, with Kaptra and Kardra possessing the largest populations, much smaller settlements on Mantra and Okura and Ostra, and isolated communities amid the Pestran cactus scrubs.

At the time of contact in 2397, the islands were uninhabited except by dendrophiles, a species of humanoids living among the trees. Some researchers estimate the dendrophile population to have been approximately 4000 on Kaptra, but no systematic study of the population was conducted across the region at the time. It was found that dendrophiles could be taught human languages, leading Maktan settlers to adopt young dendrophiles. Several of these adoptees traveled to the Republic with their adoptive families, but the dendrophile population in continental Makta is estimated at under 200. Much remains unknown about dendrophile reproduction, though they appear to mature at a much slower rate than humans. See the section “A Note on the Dendrophiles” in this report for more information about this species.

The families of three Congressional Scouts who discovered the island founded Vega in 2397. A small northern settlement at the nexus of the Cadma and Black Rivers,
Vega grew to incorporate many Maktans emigrating from the Republic. Recent historical studies of immigration on Kaptra describe employment, adventure, and land as important factors pushing citizens from Temulta to the archipelago. Later that year, the island was incorporated as a part of the Republic and the capital moved to Albaton on the eastern banks of the White River.

**Demographics**

The total population throughout the colonies cannot be accurately assessed because of the isolation of certain communities on Mantra and Pestra. However, a census designed and conducted by the author in collaboration with the Colonial Department of Health (CDH) and the Colonial Department of Security (CDS) estimates the colonies’ total population at 56,701. The census was conducted in 2440.

Almost half of the population self-identify among the Cadmian ethnic group, who were the first emigrants from Maktis in the early years of the Republic. Cadmians have primarily settled the island of Kaptra. Talosi are a distant second, and have mostly settled Kardra. Other ethnic groups that comprise the population can be seen in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadmian</td>
<td>27,216</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluvien</td>
<td>5,103</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakarno</td>
<td>4,820</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talosi</td>
<td>18,711</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yente</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The colonies' official languages are English, Francais, and Español, and well over half of the total population speaks at least one of these languages. Table 2 below shows the number of speakers of each language, and the islands where they are spoken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Islands</th>
<th>No. of speakers</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Kaptra, Kardra</td>
<td>45,927</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Español</td>
<td>Kaptra, Kardra</td>
<td>38,556</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Españente</td>
<td>Mantra, Pestra</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francais</td>
<td>Kaptra, Kardra, Mantra</td>
<td>43,659</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglonederlands</td>
<td>Kaptra</td>
<td>23,073</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Health**

The CDH, headquartered in Kardra’s Abana Province, reports that in 2440, the life expectancy was 76.8 for males, 75.7 for females, and 60.2 for people of other genders. Life expectancy was highest among the Fluvien and the Yente, and lowest among the Cadmian. Most years of life were lost to mining and other accidents.

A network of MedCenters connects the provinces across each island, though none has been established in Pestra or in Okura and Ostra. Advanced surgical procedures are only conducted on Kardra, and the CDH reports possessing only two seacraft to cover inter-island medical transportation. Few procedures are conducted annually, as medical staff conserve scarce resources in the absence of a currency-based economy.

**Education**
In the colonies, education is overseen by the Colonial Archive in partnership with a network of Studies—approximately one per province—dotting the islands. The Republican Department of Education is not represented in the colonies, though the Congressional Envoy sits on the Study Board in an advisory capacity. Kaptra, Kardra, and Mantra each operate a single intermediate studies program and one or two basic studies programs. Okura and Ostra share a single basic studies program. Advanced study is unavailable in the colonies. The Republican Guidelines for Colonial Education advise that, at minimum, learners in basic studies complete their program of study fluent in two languages. With this exception, the colonies’ Study Board has free rein to design curricula.

Children are required to attend a basic studies program from the age of approximately seven (Year 1) to the age of approximately seventeen (Year 10). Alban curricula have tended to emphasize content and skills needed for the efficient managing of the human and environmental resources of each state.

Of Albans aged 20 and over, 90% completed a program of basic study, while 12% completed a program of intermediate study.
Government and Politics

The Alba islands are colonial possessions of the Republic of Makta. Persons born in the colonies have been Maktan citizens since 2403, and are permitted to travel freely to and from the Republic. They are not represented in Congress, nor can they vote for President. Each island is allowed to elect a Leader who acts as a liaison between colonials and Congress (through the Congressional Envoy). To date, only Kaptra and Kardra have elected Leaders.

While the Republic has divided each island into distinct provinces, islands have been allowed to develop their own governmental structures. Most are informal and intensely local. Kaptra, with its system of comms and districts, possesses the most developed political structure. In Kaptra, each district is autonomous, determining both intra- and inter-district policy without oversight or intervention by Congress or the Leader. Three to four districts constitute each of the cities of Albaton, Vega, and Cornwall. Drawing from the Republic model, a Provincial Council meets every two weeks to settle both civil and criminal grievances within each province. Councilors are elected every three years in Ania Province, and every two years in Victoria Province. In Kardra, the Provincial Council exercises greater control over the internal and external affairs of cities and districts, and no comm system exists. In another resemblance to the Republic, residents of Kaptran districts hold public affairs meetings once per month, during which local issues are debated and decisions are made collectively, based on a majority vote system.
**Economy**

Kaptra, with its comms and districts, has developed an economy based on collective ownership of land, the equipment and processes needed to extract resources from the land, and the systems by which extracted resources are converted into products and distributed to colonials who need them. Through a system of participatory economics, Kaptrans determine what needs to be mined, farmed, processed, produced, and distributed. No currency exists on the island, though especially in their port-based interactions with colonials from other islands, a market-based economy of bartering has developed. Comms grow food for their districts, but also contribute specific quantities and crops to the city refectories, where all colonials have meals.

Kardra is a market-based economy that uses the Republican kuentro as a currency, though bartering also abounds there. Informal bartering systems appear to dominate the other colonies’ economies.

**Infrastructure**

Colonial cities developed to support a largely ambulatory public, and few land vehicles exist on any island. This has become a formidable obstacle for the expansion of land-based trade in natural resources. However, each island that has met the population threshold has been granted a solar-powered seacraft, which Kaptrans and Kardrans have been able to use primarily for trading natural resources. The Kardran Leader has petitioned Congress for an electric rail system on the Republican model.
Electricity is generated from solar power systems affixed to buildings, but almost all colonial cities go without electricity for specific, predetermined hours of each day, usually during the evening.

A Note on the Dendrophiles

_Homo dendroides_, colloquially known as the dendrophile, is indigenous to the South Sea colonies. They are a curious species of tree-like hominids discovered by Congressional Scouts in 2397. A nearly extinct people, the dendrophiles survive largely as adoptees in Maktan cities, though some continue to live among colonials in Kaptra. Dendrophiles have only been found as far south as Kardra.

Botanists have shown that dendrophiles were first discovered with leaves growing from their scalps, chests, and/or upper arms. Dendrophile skeletons are made from cellulose and lignin, explaining their characteristic gait. In a series of studies, dendrophiles showed a severe dependence upon sunlight. It is believed that, like plants, they can convert light energy into sugars and other compounds for sustenance. Some dendrophiles do produce flowers, but few have been seen in the past decade. Based on the pioneering experiments of Dr. S. Rellim of the Pratt School, we know that viscous, dark tears are secreted from ducts in the eyes and across the chest when a dendrophile experiences high levels of stress.

Availability of dendrophile research subjects has become a significant hurdle in the advancement of scientific knowledge on _homo dendroides_. This is compounded by the little understood phenomenon of death by internal decay which all dendrophiles now seem to experience at some point between their fifteenth and twentieth years of life.
PART II
LANGA DAN RUOP:
QUEER FUGITIVITY IN A SPECULATIVE JAMAICA¹
(DISSERTATION PROPOSAL)

If you’re reading this, it’s already happened.

We started broadcasting because, after all this time, it still wasn’t safe to gather in public.

Uncle Sam sent a bunch of his nieces and nephews down to us to help. It was a humanitarian crisis, they said. Of course, we knew what time it was. They brought equipment and expertise. People took them and turned them, you know how people can get when haad laif ton yu ina jinal.² The Anointed, they call themselves. A rare coalition of Rastas and baldheads. And we became fodder and currency as they pieced together a national self. And then we became the sacrifice.

So, we started broadcasting because, after all this time, there wasn’t any time.

We needed something to connect us, to change us. It bubbled up from the past beneath us. Vibration.

But actually, I’m out of time. I don’t know if you’ll care about what’s enclosed here. I hope you do, but we won’t know either way. We were here whether or not this record survives us. And we lived.

Abstract

This research project is a work of critical speculative world-making, to borrow Alexis Lothian’s capacious phrase (Lothian 2018: 28). In it, I combine performance, sound, and prose to dwell in the constrictions of coloniality in Jamaica, and to imagine an otherwise of empathy and equity for us Jamaicans. I perform this through a speculative narrative set 200 years in the future. The narrative unfolds over a series of broadcasts from a queer pirate

¹ From the Jamaican proverb, “Taim langa dan ruop” (“Time [is] longer than rope”).
² “when hard life turns you into a trickster / con artist.”
radio station. The dissertation thus performs utopia (Muñoz 2009) by critically imagining crazy, classic (Monáe 2018), queer futures within a transnational Jamaica.

**Literature Review & Methodology**

*Analyzing a Postcolony*

Before the exciting work of speculating other futures for Jamaica, I must spend time with the island’s colonial histories, the legacies of which we continue to enact today. I must historicize the ways of being, thinking, and relating that I see largely shaping contemporary Jamaican social and political life. The concept of coloniality, to which I came through the work of Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011), is a useful rubric for this historicizing.

Mignolo defines coloniality as “the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today” (2011, 2). He uses the term specifically in relation to “European invasions of Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu, and Anahuac; the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean; and the massive trade of enslaved Africans” (ibid.). Central to these projects—dispossession and genocide, territorial expansion, enslavement—was an evolving system of knowledge premised upon the belief that “in terms of epistemology there is only one game in town” (xii). In other words, elite and elite-aspiring Europeans who sought adventure, wealth, and an ever-expanded territorial sovereignty, came to believe that there could only be one sustainable system of knowledge in the world: their own. As they “explored” and “discovered” other parts of the world and the people who inhabited these lands, Europeans created and refined notions of difference, criteria they used to distinguish themselves from the peoples they
encountered. Their notions of difference became quickly tied to evolving notions of race, taking on ontological dimensions. Sylvia Wynter observes that notions of race accompanied and buttressed the expansion of Western Europe into Africa and the Americas. Race came to displace “the earlier mortal/immortal, natural/supernatural, human/the ancestors, the gods/God distinction as the one on whose basis all human groups had millennially ‘grounded’ their descriptive statement/prescriptive statements of what it is to be human.” As part of the secularization of European political life, race made possible a new human/subhuman distinction that served as the West’s answer to “the Heideggerian question as to the who and the what we are” (Wynter 2003, 267; Mbe 2001, 10). The human/subhuman distinction became the life force of first colonial, then postcolonial, states in the Americas. Those of us who live today in the modern world are heirs to this legacy. We are within a “colonial matrix of power” grounded in racial and patriarchal knowledge, and we jostle for control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity (Mignolo 2011, 8).

I find theories of coloniality particularly generative because they help unearth and center what I’ve perceived beneath so many of the harmful social and political interactions I’ve experienced or observed: a desire not just to dominate, but to obliterate, to erase whoever and whatever we consider to be different from ourselves. Achille Mbembe locates this impulse at the heart of European ways of knowing and being: “The theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of ‘the stranger’ as flesh and body just like mine, the idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others, long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness” (2001, 2). Writing about European grammars of classification and domination in Africa, Mbembe goes on to say that “to differ from
something or somebody is not simply not to be like (in the sense of being non-identical or being-other); it is also not to be at all (non-being)” (2001, 4). How does this grammar of domination that renders difference a kind of non-being look, sound, and feel in Jamaica today? How might it look, sound, and feel to enact some other paradigm of relationality? If colonization was in part a process through which racialized human/subhuman distinctions became codified as colonial and later postcolonial state practice in Jamaica, what would it mean to decolonize Jamaican society, the Jamaican state? How could equitable and empathetic citizenship look, feel, and sound? To realize such a future, which aspects of our contemporary social and political relations would need to be reimagined, transformed? And how might we do this? These questions are admittedly vast in their scope. But I believe that creative work can help theorize responses to them, and I am emboldened by Tinsley’s call to “dissolv[e] divides between theorizing and imagining” (2010, 28). So, I use sound performance to imagine one moment in one possible journey toward a transforming future in which Jamaican citizenship comes to be enacted equitably and empathetically. I imagine this moment from the perspective of people whose disruptive genders, sexualities, and relationships mark them as queer on the island. As I do so, I think and make with other thinkers who have theorized citizenship, coloniality, freedom, embodiment and erotic agency, and speculation.

I think in particular with scholars who foreground the constitutive relationship between discourses and practices of race, gender, and sexuality on the one hand and processes of state formation and citizenship on the other. Thomas (2004) considers the complex relationship between racial identity and postcolonial state formation, examining the ways that discourses of racial mixing or creolization shape this relationship in Jamaica;
Khan (2004) considers similar dynamics in Trinidad, foregrounding religious identity. Hintzen (2001) shows how the nascent elite who came to power in the years leading to independence forged an “Afro-creole nationalism” (or what Thomas calls “creole multiracialism”) to appropriate rather than democratize the exploitative power of the colonial state. Other studies consider the ways that postcolonial Caribbean states have naturalized and enforced patriarchal gender relations (Robinson 2003) and heteronormative sexual relations (Alexander 1994) through the creation and interpretation of laws. Thomas (2011) shows how the economic precarity brought on by the emergence of neoliberalism can provoke anxieties within postcolonial societies, anxieties that often get expressed through attempts to regulate sexuality. Building on Hintzen’s work, Kamugisha (2007) theorizes the “coloniality of citizenship in the Anglophone Caribbean,” locating the roots of postcolonial Caribbean citizenship within histories of elite domination, of tourism, and of Caribbean states’ gendered and heteronormative gazes. This dissertation, then, imagines a different Jamaica in relation to these dynamics, an imagining made possible through play and speculation.

*Imagining an Otherwise*

While it is of paramount importance that we have theorists who engage with, deconstruct, and reconstruct now canonical cultural and gender theory, a real restructuring of postcolonial and sexuality studies will only take place when the academy listens to other kinds of theorists. In establishing space for Caribbean woman-loving theory in particular and global queer theories in general, we must search for foundations not only in the work of theorists like the créolistes or Sedgwick but also in the subversive and silenced ways of knowing gender and sexuality embedded in colonial subjects’ texts. It is by dialoguing with concepts of decolonization, queerness, and theory in this way that queer and postcolonial theory will not only come in different colors and genders but will also come to be decolonized; that we will see not only different flora planted here but also a different organization to the field. (Tinsley 2010, 28)
Much as I’d like to be proven wrong, I doubt that I’ll live to see a Jamaica in which I can safely wear pumphum shorts and nail polish on the road. From my vantage point, a Jamaica free of colonially, an empathetic Jamaica, a compassionate, equitable, democratic Jamaica, is impossible in my time. Rather than centering that impossibility, however, I take up Muñoz’s call to “nourish our sense of potentiality” as queer artists (2009, 111). Muñoz advocates a “critical modality of hope,” turning toward what he calls “utopian performativity” because utopia brings indeterminacy and hope to a world made to seem unchangeable and overdetermined. For Muñoz, “utopian performativity suggests another modality of doing and being that is in process, unfinished” (2009, 99). There’s a sense of anticipation in such a modality of doing and being. If utopia critiques the here and now, then to perform utopia is to imagine and strive to make a then and there that is otherwise. And yet, the utopia is in the imagining and striving, not in the completion of that then and there. It demands a hope that abandons teleology and certainty, even as it anticipates and tries to make an otherwise.

I’m therefore drawn to the act of speculation because, as Brown and Lothian (2012) remind us, to speculate “is also to play, to invent, to engage in the practice of imagining.” Through this play, invention, and imagination, we perform “crucial enactment[s] of the impossible” (ibid.). Lothian examines “the process by which cultural producers reconfigure their historical present in order to speculate about what a possible future might be like” (2018, 18, emphasis added). Her project points to the utility of queer scholarship not just for “envisioning and activating possibilities for living queer lives in the future,” but for “unpack[ing] the significance of sexual norms and deviations to cultural constructions of futurity itself” (ibid.). Where Alexander demonstrated the constitutive role
of sexuality in postcolonial state formation, I extend Lothian’s work to consider the ways sexuality comes to constitute postcolonial futurity itself; this relationship among sexuality, postcoloniality, and futurity is made sensible through speculative reproductive futurisms.

While this dissertation may not be an explicit work of reproductive futurism (the term is Edelman’s (2004)), in that it does not directly address the means by which new lives have come into being in Jamaica so that there can still be such a thing as “Jamaican society” 200 years from now, it does dramatize the felt, heard, and seen dimensions of life for those marked as “unproductive” (because non-reproductive) by the Jamaican state. I play in a time outside of time, outside of what Freeman (2010) calls “chromonormativity,” obviating the imperative to trace a straight line from 2019 to 2219, to explain *how* we got from one point to the other. The very impossibility and implausibility of utopia affords a mode of critique liberated from the burdens of empiricism, linearity, and realism. I find hope in this kind of play.

Hope, the “emotional modality … par excellence” that allows us to imagine having a future (Muñoz 2009, 98), invites me to *reconfigure my historical present* so that I might imagine a free, or freer, future for queer Jamaicans. My thinking and feeling about queerness is heavily influenced by Cohen, who theorizes “queer” as “a new political identity that is truly liberating, transformative, and inclusive of all those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality” (2005, 25). Her definition signals liberal, racial, economic, gendered, and sexual axes of oppression *against which* a queer political identity moves simultaneously. And she critiques liberal civil rights models of political action because such approaches refuse to recognize that “the creation and maintenance of exploited,
subservient, marginalized classes is a necessary part of ... the economic configuration” (2005, 27). She thus articulates an intersectional, leftist framework of queer politics that underscores the coloniality of citizenship in the United States.

Like in many North Atlantic societies, political discourse in the United States is dominated by liberal conceptions of identity, rights, and freedom (Haider 2018). Several political actors in Jamaica have increasingly adopted this discourse and its attendant political strategies in their work on behalf of same-sex desiring and gender non-conforming populations, falling prey—sometimes strategically, sometimes less critically—to what Massad (2007) has called “the Gay International.” From my vantage point, those of us Jamaicans who have appropriated North Atlantic political discourses and practices around sexual rights and freedoms could attend more fully to the specificities of postcolonial citizenship in the Anglophone Caribbean. In other words, what is distinct between the histories and contemporary realities of Jamaica and the United States, and how can we theorize and enact political paradigms that account for these crucial differences, even as we seek forms of solidarity across societal and experiential borders? The kinds of freedom I hope to dramatize in this dissertation do emerge from Cohen’s U.S.-based framework, but I build on the work of the researchers introduced in the previous section to more critically appropriate this framework, better situating it within Jamaica as a Caribbean postcolony. Within this model, I also nudge open a bit more room for feeling, relating, and desiring.

Accordingly, I turn to thinkers who have foregrounded embodiment in their theorizations of Caribbean freedom. Roberts theorizes freedom as and alongside marronage, drawing our attention to the space/period/state/process between unfreedom and
freedom while also refusing to think of either state as static or inert. “During marronage,” he argues, “agents struggle psychologically, socially, metaphysically, and politically to exit slavery, maintain freedom, and assert a lived social space while existing in a liminal position” (2015, 10). In his analysis, New World maroons, in and through their flights from plantations, carved out new states of existence within the body politic of colonial societies. Sheller seeks a theory of embodied freedom and erotic agency that can be applied to contemporary Caribbean contexts in which citizenship, sovereignty, and power are being restructured by national and transnational neocolonialisms. To find this, she looks to the “complex historical intersections and inter-embodiments of race, gender, and sexuality in the Caribbean region” (2012, 24–25). Allen and Gill think explicitly with Audre Lorde (1984), theorizing the erotic at the heart of Caribbean freedoms. Allen finds that people marked as “multiply subaltern” by postcolonial Caribbean states can create “intimate spaces of autonomy” (2011, 14), and they can find in these spaces “an erotic sense of attraction in which intimate connection and interexchange—intercourse, if you like—[can impel] each person to grow” (2011, 92). Gill foregrounds desire, theorizing a tripartite “interconnected infrastructure that gives substance to a new erotic”: political desire, sensual desire, and spiritual desire. By speaking of desire rather than sexuality, he makes room for ways of enacting queerness beyond the expression of same-sex desire or gender non-conformity. For Gill, the erotic “can be achieved only through fostering deep connections with others across a range of political, sexual, and spiritual desires,” but “once in touch with the erotic … one is not only less willing to accept feelings of powerlessness, despair, and depression, but also more inclined to pursue structural changes in society” (2018, 10–11).
In this section, I blend a discussion of “method” with the ongoing review of ideas I want to play with in this dissertation. There is no separate “methodology” section because it’s impossible for me to talk about the ways I want to make knowledge without talking about the ways I conceptualize knowledge. The fluidity and capaciousness of performance—as concept and practice—makes it a perfect hinge between “literature review” and “methodology,” between conceptualizations of knowledge and ways of making knowledge.

I’ve often wondered why universities make graduate students “defend” every major piece of work that we produce. I’ve wondered more specifically why defense is the frame for that process. I’ve learned the hard way that to call a gathering a defense implies it is a space for attacks. To call a gathering a defense forecloses any kind of exchange, unless an exchange of fire. I, and many of my friends and colleagues, have walked away from defenses feeling defeated, exhausted, gaslighted, insulted, incapable of saying anything of worth about anything.

Over time, it’s become clearer to me that there might be something about the way we make research in the North Atlantic academic industry that makes this kind of “defense” necessary. It seems to me that metaphors of war and conflict structure the dominant ways that we in this industry approach making and sharing knowledge. We live to argue, for this is how discourse is made, and, more importantly, this is how it looks to critique. When you present a paper at a conference, you argue. When you write an essay, you argue. And when you argue, you try to anticipate as many counter-arguments as possible so that your argument can “defend” itself. When you argue, you are at pains to cite other arguments,
for your argument cannot defend itself without the ramparts of genealogy, a lineage of arguments into which or alongside which or against which you position your own. To make scholarship, then, is to practice a form of critique through argumentation.

Well, I am making a queer place for myself. It became possible because it became necessary. I found room for it when I turned away from the imperative to argue. And to begin making it, I had to reorient my being, thinking, sounding, and making in this industry.

Hill Collins (2000) highlights the critical relationship among power, epistemology, and methods of research in the knowledge validation process. Epistemologies shape what she calls “interpretive contexts,” and whoever controls an interpretive context gets to define truth within that context. She thinks about the North Atlantic academic industry as an interpretive context shaped by a white supremacist patriarchal epistemology. And as expressions of such an epistemology, the research methods that emerged as the industry developed shaped the kinds of truth or knowledge that could be made within the industry. These methods made certain kinds of knowledge legible and rendered others unintelligible. Hill Collins asserts that these methods were positivist, and I infer from her work that we, as researchers in the industry today, are heirs to them. We make research in an interpretive context whose means for validating truth were shaped by white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal epistemologies, or as Johnson phrases it, “the white bourgeois elite intellectual traditions codified as ‘the academy’” (2006, 461). These ways of knowing and being in the world are our inheritance in this industry. So are the mechanisms through which our predecessors sought to control the kinds of knowledge produced within the industry, to control the kinds of knowledge that got to count as knowledge, to control truth.
So, these are our inheritance, but of course, not everyone makes research today in the way that Hill Collins decried twenty-odd years ago. The imperative to argue, though, seems to remain central to contemporary conceptualizations of knowledge in the industry. And inextricably linked with this imperative is the distinction between research “subject” and research “object.” My training as a graduate student has taught me that, in the process of research, you use a research method or methods to interpret a research object, or even to produce a research object as such. Of course, to use a method in this way, you have to imagine that research subject and research object can be clearly distinguished from each other. Or at least, you have to imagine that it is analytically productive to do so. But as Hill Collins shows, when you create the categories of “subject” and “object” and then distance one from the other, that distance makes it possible to approach research as a kind of pure intellectualism that renders emotions unnecessary and irrelevant. If feelings don’t really matter to you, then compassion may not need to be part of your professional ethics. An enduring legacy of positivism, then, is a neglect or marginalizing of the intimate relationship between how we know and how we live.

If, in this industry, we use methods to make knowledge, and if knowledge is argument, or at least, if we can only articulate knowledge in the form of arguments, then we start to see the limitations of disciplinary methods. How we conceive of knowledge shapes the kinds of knowledge we make, and the ways we make knowledge shape the form that that knowledge takes. For me, then, disciplinary and interdisciplinary research methods can only yield forms of knowledge that are inextricable from the imperative to argue. We have gained many insights from such forms of knowledge. But what I understand as a scholarly orientation invites a different relationship to knowledge, and thus
yields different kinds of knowledge. Like method, it is a way of making knowledge, but we can’t fully understand it within the frame of “method” because of how entangled the conception of “method” is with the practice of arguing.

I’m finding, then, a different way of making knowledge in my queer place, and I’m doing this by turning away from the linearity of argument to a spot on the side of the road where argument is no longer necessary. Three things have so far helped constitute this queer place by the roadside, which I am still learning to make: turning away from arguing, as I’ve been discussing; centering sensory experience in the process of making and encountering knowledge; and prioritizing relationality between those who make and those who encounter research.

Arguments are ends. They’re currency. Scholarship needs them, scholars need them, to survive as such. And methods help produce them. A scholarly orientation is less teleological. In other words, where a research method needs an object, an objective, to exist, an orientation requires no conclusion. A research method finds its meaning and its purpose in the quest for an answer, a conclusion, an intervention. An orientation is fueled simply by a desire to be with.

Methods make knowledge that makes sense, knowledge that is rational, while an orientation to scholarship prioritizes the sensory experiences of those who make research and those who encounter it. And such experiences may not quite “make sense.”

A scholarly orientation allows me to make a scholarship that invites you to be in the time and place where I am as I make research. It allows me to make a scholarship that makes room for the time and place where you are as you encounter this research. This kind of relationality is crucial for me. I have to make research that engages not just other people
like me—same-sex desiring, gender non-conforming, and/or queer Jamaicans—but that offers avenues of intellectual and emotional entry for as wide an audience as possible. These are ethical imperatives for me. They demand that I make research in a form that exceeds propositional prose, indeed, one that exceeds propositions themselves. I call the place that helps me make this research queer because it disrupts what I perceive as the academic industry’s argumentative norms. To think with Muñoz, this queer place makes possible a utopian scholarship of hope and indeterminacy in the face of a world and an industry made to seem unchangeable and overdetermined.

Yet propositional prose remains the primary medium through which researchers share their work, and the primary form of scholarship that wins researchers awards and promotions. Conquergood (2013) calls the idealization of propositional prose “textual fundamentalism,” and I find his term quite appropriate because of the obstinacy and rigidity that it implies. Jackson (2006) shows that this fundamentalism springs from a foundational division between “manual” and “intellectual” labor in the academic industry. She traces a genealogy of performance as a discipline in U.S. higher education, revealing how propositional prose became gradually associated with intellectualism while performance was associated with the industrial, the vocational, the manual. She casts the antagonism between art-making and research-making into relief, not just as foundational to the creation of the professoriate, but as a metric that continues to define and distribute forms of labor within the academic industry’s knowledge economy (2006, 81). Textual fundamentalism has become “part of an efficient infrastructure, a set of techniques that facilitates the incorporation of certain knowledges into the educational project of the modern university” (2006, 80, emphasis added).
Conquergood thinks performance can offer some “oppositional force” to this fundamentalism, and he calls for researchers to “deploy performance as a lever to decenter, not necessarily discard, the textualism that pervades dominant regimes of knowledge” (2013, 48). It matters that we do this because “performance is a more conceptually astute and inclusionary way of thinking about many subaltern cultural practices and intellectual-philosophical activities” (ibid.). This is precisely what draws me to performance as both concept and practice. It is already transforming my making and relating in this industry and beyond.

Performance, as Madison and Hamera phrase it, offers “ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” (2006, xii). By introducing elements like performers, scripts, and audiences into our frames for understanding our social relations, performance as concept enriches our analyses of these relations. Johnson observes that what frames a performance as performance … has as much to do with context as it does with the aesthetics of the event itself. In each context the “rules,” conventions, and expectations of the text, setting, performer, and audience vary, and in each context they contribute to our understanding of performance events. (2003, 11)

The North Atlantic academic industry, as an interpretive context in which performance events unfold, certainly has its rules, conventions, and expectations. We’ve been discussing some of them here. But I want to turn to what performance as practice, particularly sound performance, has afforded me as a researcher, and to show why this dissertation will therefore take the form I’m proposing here.

Over the past year, I’ve made sound projects that use juxtaposition and suggestion to invite sensory and affective engagements from those who encounter them. When I sit to
make a sound piece, I’m freed from the argumentative mode, and I can focus instead on what I’m feeling and how I’d like to invite you to feel when you encounter my work. I can turn away from citation, coherence, teleology, the imperative to convince. I can layer different authorial voices. I can play with the many shades of meaning of a word or phrase because a sound recording foregrounds inflection and timbre in ways that prose cannot for me. Playing in sound helped me to find juxtaposition and suggestion as creative modes through which to make research. Playing in sound has helped make possible the making of my queer place.

Sound performance has also afforded me new ways of thinking and making with historical archives. The piece “mel’s son” from my project elsewhere (Chavannes 2018b) is a good example of this. The script for the first voice in this piece, a voice like a news anchor on the radio, was taken directly from a front-page article in a Jamaican newspaper. The imprisonment, the police violence, the diplomatic intervention that the piece narrates, they all really happened in 1963. The man to whom these things happened was my mother’s uncle. And he was a gay man. I was struck by the complexity of his life, and of this episode in particular. I thought about how different the racial contexts of Britain (from which Uncle was returning after medical study), the United States, and Jamaica were. I thought about how it must have felt to taste the blunt baton of white American racism for the first time. I thought about how this must have felt to someone whose wealth and brownness had often protected him from the worst kinds of harm that many same-sex desiring, gender non-conforming, and poor people face in Jamaica. I thought about the fact of him being a gay man, being that way, and yet being so prominent, so important, to Jamaica. This gay man who was crucial in the development of Jamaica’s healthcare infrastructure, the island’s first
neurosurgeon. I made this piece in part to try and know Uncle differently, to leave a different kind of trace of his life other than that left by the Jamaican state and its media mouthpieces.

In other sound projects, I play more explicitly in the sonic spaces of Jamaican cultural forms. I approach Jamaican musical traditions as a historical archive comprised of song lyrics, melodies, instruments and techniques of instrumental performance, and rhythmic patterns. The musical traditions are aural and haptic practices, but folklorists and ethnomusicologists have helped to inscribe them into various media: sheet music, transcribed using a Western notational system; ethnographies and other descriptive and/or analytical prose; and sound and film recordings, including those of groups like the National Dance Theater Company, who often dance to live or recorded performances of traditional musics. These texts constitute another kind of historical archive. However, I came to these traditions not as texts, but as embodied practices. Growing up, I learned ring games, folk songs, and traditional dance forms both informally (on the playground, for example) and more formally (as part of extra-curricular performing arts activities). I only recall encountering a few folk songs as sheet music to learn on the recorder. Outside of that, the traditions came to me via the embodied practices of peers and seniors. As a result, I continue to interact with Jamaican folk traditions through an embodied practice, and I find that when I play in sound, I have the chance to play within this embodied archive of Jamaican traditional folk forms.

I get excited in this kind of play because it allows me to insert or inject or inscribe queer ways of being and relating where they may not be present in the historical record. For example, in my piece “chichibod” from bodies unfree (Chavannes 2018a), I draw upon
the tradition of doublespeak that guided the creation and performance of many work (and play) songs in postemancipation Jamaica. On the surface, “Chi Chi Bud Oh,” the folk song of which “chichibod” is a fairly straightforward rendition, is a call-and-response mento song in which a leader improvises descriptions of different birds and a group of singers responds consistently with the same phrase “som a dem a hala, som a baal” (“some of them holler, some cry out”). But Afro-Jamaicans, singing songs like “Chi Chi Bud Oh” under the watchful eye of exploitative authority figures, needed to use coded language to communicate with each other. In this song, different kinds of birds can stand in for different kinds of people about whom the leader could be warning. In my version, I change the lyrics to include my own cast of characters, figures that might appear one way on the surface but who simultaneously embody deeper and more complex meanings. There is the patkova, for example, taken from the proverb “Tuu patkova kyaa shot” (“Two potcovers can’t shut,” alluding to the ostensible untenability of same-sex relationships); or the big and likl fish, alluding to the derogatory use of “fish” to refer to gay men. In this piece, then, I engage in a practice of queer inscription. The folk song allows me to imagine same-sex desiring and otherwise non-conforming people as part of the historical milieu in which “Chi Chi Bud Oh” was created. By playing in the sonic spaces of cultural forms like mento, dancehall, and dub, and by juxtaposing these with archival traces like those from newspaper articles, I—in the fullness of my being—claim belonging within Jamaican collective identities. Because people like me are constantly and ritualistically disavowed by those empowered to police Jamaican belonging. In making this claim, I help others like me to claim belonging, too.
Tinsley theorizes queerness as a “praxis of resistance” and a “disruption” of “the violence of normative order” (2008, 199). Terms like “resistance” and “disruption” might conjure aggression, force, and conflict. But Tinsley is writing about kidnapped Africans sailing through the Middle Passage toward uncertain futures, and she finds something queer in the ways they resisted the commodification of their bodies by “feeling and feeling for their co-occupants on these ships” (2008, 192). With her formulation in mind, and in the wake of the physical and psychological trauma that attends professionalization into the academic industry, I therefore fashion a queer place to dwell. In this dwelling place, making place by the roadside affords a disorderly play that making sense risks interrupting. In this place, I can feel—for those who make commodities of ourselves and our ideas when we “go on the market”; for those whose practices and experiences I am expected to commodify for the enrichment of academic discourse; for myself. In this dwelling place, I can heal. In this place, juxtaposition and suggestion can be enough to help make knowledge. In this place, I practice song, as Stevenson describes it: a “[form] of address that seek[s] the company of an other rather than those that attempt to identify, situate, or render an other intelligible” (2014, 165).

Because it allows me to feel and feel for, to be with, to embrace not-knowing while making an otherwise, to make audible lives that my society would rather silence, the queer dwelling place I am making disrupts the norms that seek to define my place in the academic industry. To dwell here, to invite you to dwell here with me, is to step outside the immense pressure of disciplinarity that gushes like a broken hydrant into our overfull mouths, our waterlogged bellies. Though our relations are so often fractured by the desire to dominate
and by the imposition of domination, companionship, Stevenson reminds us, can remake us (2014, 154). I want to make a scholarship that invites your company.

**Outline**

Because the space of this project is one that I must forge piece by piece, its precise contours necessarily evade my grasp at this stage. But this is part of why the medium of radio is so exciting to me. It offers many creative possibilities: I can make news broadcasts, jingles and other kinds of advertisements for products or events, talk shows, original songs, and musical covers. I hope to use these sound objects to build and animate the speculative universe of a different Jamaica. Radio as a medium also allows me to pay homage to, and draw inspiration from, the energy of Jamaicans’ lively, contentious, and sometimes hilarious public discourses on love and relationships, religion and spirituality, or current affairs and politics. This was what I heard on the radio when I was growing up, and the medium continues to be a major site for social, religious, and political engagement across the island and throughout the diaspora.

The broadcast recordings you’ll hear emanate more specifically from a *pirate* radio station, adding urgency to the content. Pirate radio stations operate without official licenses. For me, operating a pirate radio station therefore necessitates a certain fugitivity. I imagine our small team of queer Jamaicans engaging, two hundred years from now, in a form of *marronage*. Following Roberts, I imagine them *in flight* between forms of freedom and unfreedom, in the space/period/state/process between these dynamic modes of relation. The radio broadcasts become a “lived social space” that they struggle to assert. When they call in to share poetry or memories, or when they write and record songs for each other,
they carve out new states of existence within the body politic of postcolonial Jamaica. The society is restless, undergoing fundamental transformations in structure and ethos. Communities like the one enacted over radio waves (and later uploaded to the internet) by queer Jamaicans are crucial in this process.

Bronfman recounts an episode from the 1930s in which a clandestine radio station in Santiago de Cuba became part of the resistance against the regime of Gerardo Machado. The station was able to “creat[e] an antigovernment listening public of supporters as it spoke from hidden recesses,” and was able to reach people unable to read or afford a newspaper (2016, 78). Part of what made the station operators successful was the “ephemeral nature of radio”: “broadcasts could be heard by anyone within range, but they left no trace” (ibid.). I’m intrigued by this ephemerality, and I want to imagine it as part of the fugitivity that our Jamaican radio operators practice. The political context I imagine is, as I’ve said, one of upheaval and uncertainty. That the government faces a crisis of legitimacy is not new in Jamaica’s history, but the ascendance of a fundamentalist faction calling themselves The Anointed presents a new threat not just to the elites’ political hegemony but also to the tenuous don’t-ask-don’t-tell existence maintained by those Jamaicans practicing non-normative ways of being and relating with each other.

This project will include many kinds of voices, and this poses a significant creative challenge for me. For example, there is the radio operator (or perhaps more than one), there are callers from across the island and the diaspora, there are musicians who perform in different styles, a DJ “spinning records.” Fortunately, I’ve already begun to play with ways to situate different speakers within the soundworld of a project. In *gates: a postcolonial fable* (Chavannes 2018c), I manipulate recorded sound with effects like reverb, panning,
delay, and pitch and timbral distortion to suggest different locations, both psychic and “physical,” internal and external to a character. As a performer, I play with different ways of speaking and singing, including different accents, affects, and languages. And I also invite collaborators to lend their voices to the project. While I might question the degree to which these manipulations were dramatically effective, that project did help me practice the kind of sonic situating that this dissertation will demand.

The DJ could perform a great deal of sonic labor, hosting shows, moderating calls, and announcing musical tracks to be played. I draw inspiration for the DJ from Janelle Monáe’s third major label release, *The Electric Lady* (2013). This album contains the fourth and fifth “suites” in Monáe’s speculative saga. The story unfolds in Metropolis, in which the state pursues a quasi-eugenicist project that polices intimate relations between androids and humans. Cindi Mayweather, played by Monáe, is heralded by the android resistance as a kind of renegade heroine, or as Monáe phrases it in an earlier suite, “an outlaw outrunning the law.” *The Electric Lady* is held together by three interludes, in which a radio DJ (DJ Crash-Crash) takes calls from listeners or broadcasts from a local business serving android populations. The interludes invite me to experience the album as a series of broadcasts from an underground radio station that mostly plays music by Mayweather, Metropolis’s public enemy number one. I imagine that the DJ on my pirate radio station might appear throughout this project similarly. They might field calls, broadcast from local underground events, interview members of the underground, and share reportage about the resistance. The DJ could also be the station operator. Either way, I will voice this character (I don’t
intend to voice them all), and I imagine them as a mixture of Quite Perry’s uptown prep with Shebada’s grassroots flamboyance.³

Among the more explicitly musical components of the project, I imagine covers of reggae and dancehall songs from my childhood. I’ve thought about recording covers that queer the heteropatriarchal politics of songs like I-Wayne’s “Can’t Satisfy Her” (2005), which narrates the life of a young woman who begins to engage in sex work because of a dangerous love of money. She becomes insatiable, eventually contracting a fatal disease that nevertheless fails to stop her from unceasingly seeking out sex. The song became a kind of slut-shaming anthem when it was first released, disavowing and pathologizing sex work without fully considering the reasons that women (and people of other genders, though this song specifies a woman) turn to this kind of labor in Jamaica. This song was huge when I was in high school. We would all dance to its infectious riddim, singing along with I-Wayne: “one man can’t satisfy her / shi need more wood for the fire” and “prostituting ain’t right, Striperella.” I-Wayne is a Rasta, and his music shows how strongly Rastafarian ways of being and relating, particularly around gender and sexuality, shape his worldview. This view tends to dominate the musical discourses of reggae and dancehall, though there have always been expressions of other ways of being and relating (especially from women artists like Ce’cile, Tanya Stephens, Jah9, and Ishawna). The discourses tend to center different conceptions of respectability, and many artists continue to use this idea to police gendered and sexual relations among Jamaicans. I want to meet those discourses

³ Quite Perry and Shebada are both Jamaican comedians. Their status as performers (Shebada having a longer career that began on the stage in roots plays, and Perry of a younger generation that came of age on Instagram) makes room for what reads to me as the obvious effeminacy of their gender presentation. I am fascinated by the space they have carved for themselves in Jamaican popular culture. This is precisely the kind of space I feel Nadia Ellis (2011) calls to our attention as she theorizes a “queer performance hermeneutic” in Jamaica, a way of “read[ing] queer sexuality in Jamaica as not just marginal and besieged but as expressive and resisting from the very center” (19).
where they are, and to play with them, turn them on their heads. What if, for example, “Can’t Satisfy Her” were narrated by the young woman who constantly “need more wood for the fire”? What might that shift of perspective reveal about her situation that I-Wayne’s omniscience cannot perceive?

And then there’s the role of magic. I like the idea of using a creative medium to make an abstraction tangible, resembling the way Roshani Chokshi (2015) treats “choice” in her short story, “The Vishakanya’s Choice.” Without committing to too-specific a form, I’ve played with the idea of making into a physical place the in-between space Roberts theorizes as marronage. I want the radio station to be a kind of virtual “lived social space,” but I also want to make a kind of physical space for them. Perhaps the station exists and broadcasts from another dimension; because of this, perhaps people can only pick up on the station’s frequency with a specific device. I don’t think I can really find this place until I start making this project. I also haven’t decided precisely how these recordings will have made it into your hands; figuring this out would also clarify the role that written prose would play in the dissertation. For now, where I feel the pressure to explain and argue, I want to turn instead to play and magic. After all, this project is about imagination, speculation, and play, not empiricism and realism.
SOUNDING IS A QUEER WAY TO KNOW

Have you ever wondered why universities make graduate students “defend” every major piece of work that we produce? I mean, have you ever wondered why “defense” is the frame for that process? I have. A lot. I’ve learned the hard way that when you call a gathering a “defense,” you imply it’s a space for attacks. When you call a gathering a defense, you actually foreclose any kind of exchange, unless it’s an exchange of fire.

Over time, it’s become clearer to me that there might be something about the way we make research in the North Atlantic academic industry that makes this kind of “defense” necessary. That word “defense” signals a metaphor of war or conflict, and it seems to me that this metaphor structures the dominant ways we approach making and sharing knowledge. As researchers, we argue, for this is how scholarly discourse is made, this is how it looks to critique, to theorize. When you present a paper at a conference, you argue. When you write an essay, you argue. And when you argue, you try to anticipate as many counterarguments as you can conjure so that your argument can “defend” itself. When you argue, you are at pains to erect ramparts of genealogy, lineages of arguments into which or alongside which or against which you position your own. To make research in this way, then, is to practice a form of critique through argumentation.

I make these observations to flag a couple areas of concern for me within the life and work of the North Atlantic academic industry: 1) the ways we conceptualize knowledge; 2) the ways we make knowledge; and 3) the forms that our knowledge takes. I’m also signaling that these three are all thick as thieves. Today, I want to share my perspective on each of these, and then share with you the queer place I’m making for
myself, a place in which I’m responding to the ethical and political difficulties that these concerns have raised for me.

So, what is knowledge? Depends on who you ask. Following Patricia Hill Collins (2000), we can think of every social collective as an “interpretive context” because the terms of membership in that collective depend on certain things meaning a particular thing. Hill Collins reminds us that whoever controls an interpretive context gets to define truth within that context. We make research in an interpretive context whose means for validating truth were shaped by white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal settler colonial epistemologies. And whether or not we want to acknowledge it, those of us alive and making research today have inherited these ways of knowing and being. We’ve also inherited the mechanisms through which our predecessors sought to control the kinds of knowledge produced within the industry, to control the kinds of knowledge that got to count as knowledge. We’ve inherited mechanisms like “defenses.”

In our interpretive context, knowledge predominantly takes the form of prose propositions aimed at persuading the reader of a particular truth. Researchers make these propositions, i.e. arguments, by distinguishing themselves as research “subjects” from their research “objects.” To produce academic discourse, one acts upon the other, using research methods. Of course, to approach research in this way, you have to imagine that research subject and research object can be clearly distinguished from each other. Or at least, you have to imagine that it’s analytically productive to do so. But that distance between “subject” and “object” makes it possible to approach research as a kind of pure intellectualism that renders emotions unnecessary and irrelevant. And if feelings don’t
really matter to you, then compassion may not need to be part of your professional ethics or your research practice. We’ve inherited the habit of neglecting or marginalizing the intimate relationship between how we know and how we live, how we treat others. Witnessing the violence that this inheritance facilitates is what helped drive me to the place from which I speak today.

Most of what gets validated as knowledge in our industry is knowledge that has to convince you of some truth through argument, knowledge that has to establish the truth-maker as some kind of authority, knowledge that is unconcerned with the ways the truth-maker treats others or relates to the truth-claims. And the truth-claims of this knowledge have to withstand attack in order to be deemed most persuasive. Hence, defense. Let me be clear: we have gained and continue to gain many, many insights from this approach. I’m not suggesting that we stop using arguments necessarily. The thing is, though: knowledge inseparable from the imperative to argue can slip very quickly into knowledge that seeks to dominate all other forms of knowledge. Many thinkers in the academic industry are beginning to talk about images, sounds, and movements as forms of knowledge in themselves. But the argumentative approaches that these thinkers take limit them to propositional prose. So, despite the talk about non-textual knowledge, text remains the primary medium through which most academic thinkers share knowledge. The industry certainly incentivizes the production of prose-work above anything else. So, in our interpretive context, propositional prose dominates any other form of knowledge.

Dwight Conquergood (2013) calls this idealization of propositional prose “textual fundamentalism.” Textual fundamentalism is one of what Shannon Jackson describes as “a
set of techniques that facilitates the incorporation of certain knowledges into the educational project of the modern university” (2006, 80, emphasis added).

But how could it look, feel, and sound for us to actually embrace non-texts as forms of knowledge in themselves? To imagine that non-texts don’t need translation into propositional prose in order to convey knowledge? For me, this means turning away from the linearity of argument to a spot on the side of the road where argument is no longer necessary. Here, I am making a queer place for myself. As I turn away from arguing, I focus on the sensory and emotional experiences that attend the process of making and encountering research. And I prioritize relationality between myself as a maker of research and those who encounter my work.

This shifting of priorities is a scholarly and ethical reorientation for me, and it demands ways of making knowledge that aren’t reducible to “methods”—because the concept of “method” is so bound up with the imperative to argue. As I see it, arguments are a currency that keeps researchers relevant and paid in our industry, and methods help produce them. But where a research method needs an object, an objective, to exist, my orientation requires no conclusions. My orientation is fueled simply by a desire to be with. It focuses on the sensory experiences of those who make and encounter research—and such experiences may not quite “make sense.” The fact is, I am having feelings as I make research, I am sensing as I think, and so are you when you encounter my work. What becomes possible when our shared capacity for sensing and feeling—rather than just for thinking and arguing—is what orients our research-making? How could it look, feel, and sound to have some other reason for making research other than trying to convince someone of something?
I want to share something with you.⁴

Playing and performing in sound helped me to find juxtaposition and suggestion as creative modes through which to make research. This kind of play frees me from the argumentative mode, letting me focus instead on what I’m feeling and on how you might be feeling when you encounter my work. I can turn away from citation and coherence and the imperative to convince. I can layer different authorial voices. I can play with the many shades of meaning of a word or phrase because a sound recording foregrounds inflection and timbre in ways that prose cannot for me.

Playing and performing in sound also affords me new ways of thinking and making with historical archives. The piece we’ve just listened to is a good example of this. It’s called “mel’s son,” and it’s from my project elsewhere (Chavannes 2018b). The script for the first voice in this piece, a voice like a news anchor on the radio, was taken directly from a front-page article in a Jamaican newspaper. The imprisonment, the police violence, the diplomatic intervention that the piece narrates, they all really happened in 1963. The man to whom these things happened was my mother’s uncle. And he was a gay man. I was struck by the complexity of his life, and of this episode. I thought about the differences among the racial contexts that Uncle occupied that year: Britain (from which he was returning after medical study), the United States, and Jamaica. I thought about how it must have felt to taste the blunt baton of white American racism for the first time. I thought about how this must have felt to someone whose wealth and brownness had often protected him from the worst kinds of harm that many same-sex desiring, gender non-conforming,

and poor people face in Jamaica. I thought about the fact of him being a gay man, being *that way*, and yet being so prominent, so important, to Jamaica. This gay man who was crucial in the development of Jamaica’s healthcare infrastructure, the island’s first neurosurgeon. I made this piece in part to try and know Uncle differently, to leave a different and perhaps more complicated trace of his life other than that left by the Jamaican state and its media mouthpieces.

In other sound projects, I play more explicitly with Jamaican *musical* forms. I approach Jamaican musical traditions as a historical archive comprised of song lyrics, melodies, instruments and techniques of instrumental performance, and rhythmic patterns. While this aural and haptic archive has been inscribed into various kinds of texts by researchers, I came to them as embodied practices and continue to interact with them as such. When I play and perform in sound, I get the chance to embody this living archive of Jamaican musical forms.

I get excited in this kind of play because it allows me to practice what Nadia Ellis (2011) calls a “queer performance hermeneutic,” i.e. it helps me to invoke or to realize the queer potentialities of this archive. By manipulating the melodies, lyrics, and rhythms of the archive, I’m able to imagine same-sex desiring and gender non-conforming people as part of the historical milieux in which the archive emerged and grew. Inspired by Ellis’s formulation, I’m performing queer sexualities in Jamaica’s history as not just marginal and besieged but as present, expressive, and playful. It’s a way of claiming membership within Jamaican collective identities. Because people like me are constantly and ritualistically disavowed by those empowered to police Jamaican belonging. In making this claim, I help
others like me to claim membership, too, and I’ve begun to forge bonds with other queer Jamaicans who’ve encountered my work online.

Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley theorizes queerness as a “praxis of resistance” and a “disruption” of “the violence of normative order” (2008, 199). Terms like “resistance” and “disruption” might conjure aggression, force, and conflict. But when Tinsley uses these words, she’s writing about kidnapped Africans sailing through the Middle Passage toward uncertain futures, and she finds something queer in the ways they resisted the commodification of their bodies by “feeling and feeling for their co-occupants on these ships” (2008, 192). With her formulation in mind, and in the wake of the physical and psychological trauma that attends professionalization into the academic industry, I therefore fashion a queer place to dwell. In this dwelling place, making place by the roadside affords a disorderly play that making sense risks interrupting. In this place, I can feel—feel for those who make commodities of ourselves and our ideas when we “go on the market”; feel for those whose practices and experiences I am expected to commodify for the enrichment of academic discourse; feel for myself. In this place, juxtaposition and suggestion can be enough to help make knowledge. In this place, I practice song, as Lisa Stevenson describes it: a “[form] of address that seek[s] the company of an other rather than … attempt to identify, situate, or render an other intelligible” (2014, 165).

Because it allows me to feel and feel for, to be with, to embrace not-knowing while making an otherwise, to make audible lives that my society would rather silence, the queer dwelling place I am making disrupts the norms that seek to define my place in the academic industry. To dwell here is to step outside the immense pressure of disciplinarity that gushes like a broken hydrant into our overfull mouths, our waterlogged bellies. Though our
relations are so often fractured by the desire to dominate and by the imposition of domination, as Stevenson reminds us, companionship can remake us (154). I want to make research that invites your company.
HOW I MADE THIS

Two broad concerns animated my thinking when I proposed this dissertation in March 2019. Focused on the problem of coloniality, I asked: how can people who practice queer or non-normative forms of desire, care, and kinship in Jamaica survive this colonial legacy that continues to define social, political, and economic relations among humans and between human and other-than-human life on the island? At the same time, I asked: what kinds of knowledge are smothered, discredited, or neglected in the industry because of the dominance of prose argumentation? How do the kinds of knowledge conveyed and embodied in storytelling and sound performance differ from those that emerge from, and are articulated through, prose argumentation? I proposed two sets of potential solutions to these two manifestations of coloniality. In the sphere of contemporary Jamaican citizenship, I proposed theories of marronage and erotic agency. In the sphere of knowledge production in the academic industry, I proposed practices of speculation and sound performance. In its current form, the dissertation remains focused on these two spheres and their proposed solutions. However, the story that I initially intended to tell has changed dramatically.

How is this project different?

When a humanities or social science researcher makes what one of my professors has called “the standard-issue dissertation,” they attempt to solve, or present new analyses of, a particular problem. Often, the problem with which they grapple is theoretical, in that the researcher is focused on developing and sharing with other researchers in their field an original way of thinking about the problem. They hope that other researchers will value
the way of thinking that they present in their dissertation, and later, their first published monograph. Or perhaps they write their dissertation for its promise of professional validation and advancement, or even purely for the intellectual thrill of it. It is likely that some combination of these motivates academic researchers to keep publishing research. The stakes of such work can be quite high, but the desired outcomes tend to prioritize the advancement of both the individual researcher’s career and the ongoing discussion about the theoretical problem documented across the pages of academic publications.

“Contending with Coloniality” resembles a standard-issue dissertation in its focus on understanding and solving a particular problem, and in its adaptation of models created by other thinkers to understand other problems. However, I was motivated to make this dissertation less by a desire to advance academic discourse than by a desire to help a wide range of colonized peoples decolonize our thinking, being, and relating in the world. The problem of coloniality can certainly be confronted as a theoretical one: how have researchers in humanities and social science fields theorized the notion of coloniality, and how can their theories be applied to the contexts of the contemporary Caribbean? For me, however, coloniality is primarily a material problem: how are the domination-based social and political relations that are invoked by the term “coloniality” impacting the material realities of people practicing queer or non-normative forms of desire, care, and kinship in contemporary Jamaica? How could it look, feel, and sound to transform those relations to be grounded in empathy and compassion? What conditions would make it possible to become such a society? How can I help to create those conditions?

In “Contending with Coloniality,” the tasks to which I give my cognitive and emotional labor are also different from the standard-issue dissertation. I create a world that
embodies particular theories of power and being, of marronage and erotic agency, rather than using those theories to analyze a world that already exists. Coming to the dissertation process from the back end, so to speak, I construct a world using theories and models rather than deconstructing one. This approach makes room for imagination and joy in the process of making and encountering research. Most importantly, however, this approach allows me to model solutions for material problems that we as colonized peoples face. I am not limited to just analyzing or critiquing those problems.

To state the ongoing decolonization of colonized peoples’ thinking, being, and relating as my primary motivation is not to imply that I am confident about having achieved it. I release this project into the world; the ways in which, and the degree to which, other people interact with it will ultimately determine its value. However, the motivation matters. Driven by this motivation, I created a multimodal project that does not hinge on forms of knowledge derived from or expressed through arguments. Quite materially, the motivation shaped the dissertation’s form.

The process

Doctoral study was a psychological minefield. As I floundered and stumbled, I clung to speculative literature, music, television series, and films. These creations offered me an escape from the utter meaninglessness of all the power games and antiquated rituals. Soon, I began to dream of how my own world could be different: what might happen if young human students became stewards of an ancient superhuman or other-than-human ability? How could it feel for humans to practice queer ways of desiring, caring for, and
relating with other humans in Jamaica without fear? The creative works that I imbibed began to nurture the storyteller in me.

I wanted to tell a superhero story without evoking the patriarchal individualism, competitiveness, and emotional repression that characterize dominant superhero narratives in United States popular culture. Rebecca Sugar and her team had done precisely this with the animated world of *Steven Universe*—using superhuman or other-than-human abilities as metaphors for the emotional complexities of relating with oneself and with other life. At the same time, I yearned for a Jamaica where a true collective reckoning with British colonialism was yielding new forms of social relation based in empathy and compassion rather than domination. It would take months after successfully proposing a dissertation focused on the latter idea before I realized that it might be possible to braid the two: a single project narrating a queer, feminist superhero tale, and dramatizing a decolonizing Jamaica of care and repair.

I needed several months to recover from the exhausting cruelty of my doctoral studies. So, I did not begin making this dissertation in earnest until late in the summer of 2019. Even as I began, I was still burdened by academic industry research standards. In my proposal, I had historicized and proposed turning away from the domination of argumentative prose. However, the coloniality of knowledge production in the industry continued to haunt me. I carried with me internalized notions of difference, hierarchies of knowledge that crushed story and song beneath the almighty heel of prose argumentation, a value system to which I had become entrained as a doctoral student. Weighted by the insecurity that these thoughts stimulated, I tried to structure a research-making process that resembled as closely as possible the model that had been idealized in my coursework: I
began with a literature review. I started by mapping several key areas in which to read: Indigenous theories of relation and personhood, technologies of energy, technologies of communication, botanical life worlds, philosophies of sound, Anthropocene theory and planetary thought. I assembled a growing list of titles to read. Then I realized that I never learned how to actually make a literature review. I read a book to help me to do that, and I tried following the steps that it outlined. I felt distracted, uninspired, unmotivated.

I was eking out two hours of dissertation work per day and spending the rest of my time avoiding the awful guilt of not working by watching television, playing video games, and reading speculative fiction. It took several conversations with my spouse and my advisor before I could allow my dissertation process to be guided by my own needs, rather than by the voice in my head that prattled on about the kind of work that would be worth a doctoral degree and the kind that would not. What I needed was meaning, joy, creativity, and inspiration; focusing on the work of imagining a different world, building it piece by piece, would begin to meet these needs.

Constructing a world demanded that I supplement my knowledge across a range of topics: radio transmission, electromagnetism, sound, solar and thermal energy; human, avian, and elephantine auditory anatomy, trees and their relational practices, the human nervous system; Western political ideologies and formations, including political parties, governmental structures, and legal systems based on liberalism, socialism, communism, mercantilism, and libertarianism; and the craft of fiction writing. An organic reading practice emerged, the kind that I had dreamed about when first applying to doctoral programs: my need determined the knowledge that I sought out, rather than a predetermined question (or syllabus) determining what I should need and know.
Along the way, I remembered and revisited the creations that had cared for me when I had been depressed and suicidal during coursework, works that had powerfully shaped my imagination and inspired me to create. I immersed myself within these speculative worlds that explicitly grapple with colonialism, erotic agency, marronage, and superhuman or other-than-human ability—worlds created by Octavia Butler (2000), N. K. Jemisin (2018), Ursula K. Le Guin (2014), Janelle Monáe (2018), and Rebecca Sugar (2020).

I spent an entire year making decisions about the forms of life, technology, and sociality in my world, about the perspectives through which reader-listeners would come to know the world, about the events that would drive the narrative and embody the theories that I wanted to dramatize. I made copious notes. I realized that I did not want to represent Jamaica in this project. Fictionalizing the narrative’s setting opened space for new magical possibilities and complexities, though the Caribbean does remain an important historical referent in the story. Once most of these decisions were made, it took about five months to write and record all the textual and sonic fragments that are presented in Part I of this document. I took up the theoretical contentions proposed by the creators mentioned above—especially Monáe’s Dirty Computer, Le Guin’s The Dispossessed, Jemisin’s The Broken Earth Trilogy, and the world of Sugar’s Steven Universe—and applied them to similar problems in my world.

It became both thrilling and frustrating to accept that it was not possible to dramatize solutions in this iteration of the world. The labor of knowing an entire world through the experiences of a handful of beings takes time to perform. Even though I know who the dendrophiles really are, what they call themselves, and how their societies model
decolonial options for those of us living in colonized lands today, I could not include that in this story. There is already enough to unpack here. Reader-listeners will have to stay tuned for Part 2, in which Tigo and Talawa learn more of their history and language, and become agents who help to transform their world.

Still, I hope that reader-listeners find substance and inspiration in this work. I have made this dissertation principally for other students of colonialism inside and outside of the academic industry, folks whose lands and kin have been colonized and who are critically interrogating the histories of that ongoing process. I have also made this dissertation for people like my parents and siblings, who enjoy a good story and enjoy reasoning through ideas in lively conversation. I hope that this project can also be useful to other academic researchers who perceive value in storytelling and performance as forms and methods of research.

Where coloniality translates difference into non-being (Mbembe 2001), plurality can become a decolonial option. In this dissertation, I assemble a range of textual and musical genres to construct the world of the Maktans and the dendrophiles, each affording different ways of knowing the world and the beings within it.

Where coloniality promotes a textual fundamentalism that beatifies ideas and belittles feelings, a good song can become a decolonial option. In this dissertation, I use sound performance to invite sensory and affective engagements from listeners, to make the experience of engaging with research a multisensory and emotional one.

Where coloniality prescribes a single way to interpret, ambiguity and opacity can become decolonial options. In this dissertation, I offer an archive of documents and sounds
so that reader-listeners can synthesize their own interpretations of what happened, why, and what needs to change. I made this project to spark conversation and connection among all those who encounter it, so that peeling back the layers of its meanings can become a collaborative practice.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Discography


Filmography


