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"It is life you must write about"

Fixity and Refraction in Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*

> The door, of course, is not on the continent but in the mind; not a physical place—though it is—but a space in the imagination.
> —Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

A discussion of the limits of articulability is at the core of *A Map to the Door of No Return*: the epigraph draws attention to the tension between saying the door is a physical place and asserting at the same time that its metaphysicality cannot discount its physicality. It is always both and neither one exclusively, but, *Map* shows, to understand the Door of No Return only in such terms limits the expansiveness and dynamism needed to recognize the depth of its nuance and imagine its complexity. The book engages with a range of issues that are centred around the legacy and logic of colonialism and the slave trade, the continuing impact of those violences, and the dangers of strict adherence to discrete identity categories, as opposed to the importance of coalition-building across difference. The multi-genre text ranges from short narratives to map imagery to discussions of historical events to theorizations of identity and of violence. As *Map*'s title suggests, each part of the text works to map the Door of No Return—the door through which African peoples were forced onto the ships that took them to the (so-called) "New World." Because the Door of No Return must be understood as more than a physical space—it is explicitly discussed as a spiritual and psychical place as well (1)—the map Brand makes must attend to a multiplicity of registers. This is a particularly difficult task, however, because the conventions of mapping are mired in colonial logics. These logics, as Katherine McKittrick describes them, are built on colonists' desire to "inhabit, map, and control what they considered an uninhabited (read: native-occupied) space" (95).

McKittrick explains the stakes of such a persistent desire: "These historical practices, of vanishing, classifying, objectifying, relocating, and exterminating subaltern communities, and desiring, rationally mapping, and exploiting the land and resources, are ongoing, firmly interlocked with a contemporary colonial agenda, which has material consequences" (95). Given this context, how does one map a physical-spiritual-psychical space like the Door of No Return in a way that is attentive to the dangers of reinscribing these violences?[1] *Map* seems to be an attempt to answer this question. Instead of becoming mired in the colonial logics that undergird mapping as it is dominantly performed—what Brand calls "cognitive schemas" (16)—*Map* refuses them both through its content and its structure in order to build an approach that does not serve colonial interests.

While the critics who have considered Brand's *Map* have discussed the complexity of its structure, their insights have focused on other elements of the text, and their remarks on its structure have therefore been brief.[2] Most critics discuss its non-linearity, as Marlene Goldman does, for example, when she points out that the book's structure "undermines any sense of a linear journey with a tangible origin and destination" (23). As others mention, this book is not strictly a narrative, and its paratextual elements are also unconventional: it does not have chapters or a table of contents, for example, despite the presence of breaks in the text as well as drastic changes in modality. I build on Diana Brydon's statement that *Map* "overflows the category of autobiography to remodel the private/public relations that constitute identities both personal and national and their formation through history" (110). She goes on to argue that "[f]or Brand, th[e] potential [to move beyond racism] lies in wrenching writing from the service of empire into the service of freedom" (117-18). Goldman expresses a similar sentiment when she explains that "[n]arratives, like maps, engage in tasks of spatial ordering, naming, dividing, and enclosing. The trick, for Brand, was to design a text that performs these tasks in ways that challenge rather than reinstall the maps that supported and continue to support oppressive institutions" (23). Finally, much of *Map*'s criticism locates the book's political work almost exclusively in its content and has tended to think about *Map* in terms of mobility.

While this work is convincing, there is much to be learned from carefully considering its form in relation to its content, especially with regard to how the book navigates moments of fixity. My work here aligns well with that of Brydon and Goldman in particular, but my focus will be on teasing out the intricacies and effects of *Map*'s structure. Katherine McKittrick is

helpful on this topic. She argues that Black[3] diaspora theories "hold place and placelessness in tension" in the Canadian context (106). This statement resonates with the epigraph, and both passages invite us to pay attention to textual moments that show this kind of tension. I suggest that we read them as demonstrating the epistemological and embodied effects of the history as well as the ongoing legacies of slavery and as challenging the limitations of dominant Western epistemologies.

The structure of *Map* immediately alludes to these tensions. Rather than adhering to a genre, *Map*'s structure is unconventional. If we consider the ways in which genres operate like other normalizing schema, we can see how genre structures what we can know.[4] I am interested in the ways that *Map* exceeds the norms of auto/biography because of the impossibility of adequately representing, or, perhaps more accurately, containing, the trauma and legacies of colonial history in a narrative. Bringing together the role and ideological work of mapping and the function of genre as it relates to mobility and fixity, this paper explores how *Map* troubles genre expectations. I examine how and why Brand draws the reader's attention to the refracting trauma of the history of slavery and shows it to be irreducible while exceeding epistemological categories. By refusing generic literary conventions, and by showing the limits of language and embodied effects of this legacy, *Map* ultimately unsettles the logics upon which these conventions are contingent.

One of the ways that the text radically disrupts conventional narratives is by showing that the space and people's relationship to it is not at all self-evident. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, McKittrick expands understandings of geography from the assumption that space "just is" and that "the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation" (xv) to include an understanding of how "material spaces and places underpin shifting and uneven (racial, sexual, economic) social relations" (xiii). McKittrick goes on to show the connection between particular identity categories and the spaces they occupy: "If *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful, commonsensical narratives, the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens spatial binaries" (xv, emphasis original). McKittrick rethinks the logics that underpin these naturalizing assumptions, arguing that the "simultaneous naturalization of bodies and places must be disclosed, and therefore called into question, if we want to think about alternative spatial practices and more humanly workable geographies" (xv). Brand begins by

complicating the idea of the Door of No Return, showing that it is more than a physical space, that it is not a space that is only historically significant, and that it operates on multiple registers. In making the complexity of experience visible and mapping how dominant Western practices came to be, *Map* fosters the development of a different kind of social relationality that is not based in colonial logics.

In a way that is similar to how McKittrick complicates the idea of space, Brand complicates genre because genre can operate as such a significant organizing structure. *Map*'s structure does not align obviously with any genres, but it is often identified as auto/biography or memoir—indeed, the cover of the 2001 edition labels it as an autobiography. As Joanne Saul warns, "genres are never innocent or naïve but rather are formal constructs implicated in the very processes of ideological production" (13). For the purposes of this paper, I follow Julie Rak's use of the generic term "auto/biography" to refer to the wide variety of texts that exist, such as life writing, memoirs, autogynography, and so on, all of which pose challenges to imagining auto/biography as a singular genre, and many of which resist generic boundaries (16).[5] In order to attend to such complexities, I will focus on *Map*'s auto/biographical features after a discussion of the nuances in some of the key theories in contemporary auto/biography studies.

Reading *Map* in terms of auto/biography studies—especially with regard to the field's feminist roots—is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the text's work. Auto/biography studies is premised on the value of writing that is often not considered "legitimate," and much of which tends to be written by women. This history suggests that one of the genre's key elements is its ability to challenge the colonial epistemologies that McKittrick discusses through a valuing of the "illegitimate" sites of knowledge production like memory and subjective experience; this genre, therefore, has the potential to challenge the kinds of dominant epistemologies that emphasize empirically knowable and decontextualized "facts." In their study of auto/biography, Jeanne Perreault and Marlene Kadar explain that "[a]ttending to each element of identity is impossible" because "analyzing the intersections [is] as complex as reiterating a human life," but despite this irreducible complexity, "the recognition of historical or cultural patterns made visible through gender or race or class practices invites readers and critics to grasp the ground as well as the figure upon it" (4). Saul elaborates further on auto/biography with her discussion of the biotext, which "challenges the focus on the unified subject of autobiography by stressing the community that the self

is rooted in" (20). As she says, "[r]ather than depicting in a unified manner a unified subject's progress from youth to maturity, these texts are broken, disrupted. Wholeness, unity, linearity are rejected in favour of a more fragmentary approach to piecing together the details of a life" (23). Because of this fragmentation, she suggests that biotexts are particularly apt places for discussing diasporic displacement: "[T]hey negotiate how the *there*, or some version of it, operates in the *here*. It is in the retelling of their pasts that their identities take on new meaning" (26, emphasis original). Biotexts, then, seem to further destabilize Enlightenment notions of knowledge and subjectivity, emphasize the subject's community over the subject's autonomous existence, have a more overtly creative element, and write a self into being and in relation to place. The complexity of *Map*'s structure fits well with the idea of the biotext, but even with the biotext's emphasis on fragmentation, there is also much that extends beyond it.

In general, *Map* has been referred to as an auto/biography or memoir without a close look at its relationship to the genre or how it exceeds this genre. *Map* includes the narration of significant moments in the experience of the narrator, such as the opening story of the narrator asking her grandfather about "what people we came from" and the pain that accompanies his inability to answer her (3). The text also addresses life writing explicitly: in the scene from which I take my paper's title when a university student asks the narrator, "[w]hen you start writing because it hurts so much, do you only write about racism?" (82). The narrator responds that "you don't write about racism, you write about life. It is life you must write about. It is life you must insist on" (82), though her response is not a direct quotation. Instead of focusing on writing a topic, the narrator contends, it is important to write a life—in all its complexity—and to let the issues that arise in that life, such as racism, emerge. Doing so allows for multiple factors to arise as they overlap and crosscut each other; as the text demonstrates, there are always multiple issues present in any given moment.

Even though this passage can be read as auto/biography, that we do not get a full view of the narrator's response pushes us outside of a strictly auto/biographical context and turns us to theorization. Instead of responding directly, the narrator explains the general principle that it is important to write a life. By grounding the question in a specific moment the way that using a direct quotation does without giving a direct quotation for the response, Brand removes the discussion from the specifics of that conversation. While not all auto/biography is comprised of direct quotations, to be sure,

this is one of many examples of *Map*'s move to theorization. In paraphrasing her response, the narrator invokes a more generalized discussion of the urgency both of deep, complex engagement with issues such as racism as well as the importance of the humanization and contextualization of the issues that becomes possible when it is "a life" that is written. One might imagine that this conversation goes on at some length with the student—the narrator explains that "[f]or [the student] the distinction is inadequate and unhelpful. He asks again, but I cannot satisfy him" (82)—but addressing the minutia of a specific instance is beside the point. This scene bridges the gap between the individual and the systemic: the text honours the importance of expressing painful individual experiences like racism while insisting on seeing these instances as far more than incidents that happen in specific moments between individuals, which resonates with Saul's discussion of the ways in which a biotext contextualizes a life. In moving from the individual to the systemic, the text employs the opportunities provided by life writing/first-person narration to share moments and then moves to a more omniscient narration style to further draw out the significance of those incidents by contextualizing them in terms of larger systems.

In addition to the political work the text does in the sections that we can read most clearly as auto/biography, other sections of *Map* take a variety of approaches to challenging the Enlightenment epistemologies that undergird systems like the slave trade. Considering these departures through Daniel Coleman's concept of "refraction" is helpful. When discussing what he calls "masculinities in migration," or what we might call diasporic narratives that focus on masculinity, Coleman explains that

> when men emigrate, they take a familiar, though not necessarily unified, set of masculine practices with them; when they immigrate, they encounter a second, less-familiar set of masculine practices. Migration thus involves a process of *cross-cultural refraction*. Just as the transition between elements makes the straight drinking-straw appear to bend in the glass of water, so, too, the transition from one culture to another produces distortions. (3, emphasis original)

Coleman is referring here to the inevitable shift in norms and codes when one moves to a different cultural/geographical place. But Coleman discusses men's experiences exclusively, and Brand's narrator is a Black woman. *Map* gets at this tension when the narrator discusses the regulation of bodies and suggests that the only bodies more regulated than Black bodies are women's bodies, leaving the reader to reflect on what that means for Black women (37).[6] Despite some obvious limitations, Coleman's ideas can help to elucidate

some of the fracturing in the text.[7] A similar notion of semi-recognizability in a dramatically different context is echoed in Salman Rushdie's discussion of the fractured mirror. When thinking about homelands, he argues, one is forced to "deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (11). As Coleman says, however, "[t]he opposition between cultures of origin and destination is not absolute" (4); thus, while the mirror and the straw—the semi-fractured objects—have split, they are still legible.

We can see refraction in a range of ways in the text's structure. The text is comprised of several dramatically different components that together support the mapping of the Door of No Return in a way that none of the components could do individually. The narrator's metatextual discussion of the book's contents, for example, demonstrates how the text questions the foundations of "legitimate" knowledge under this ideological system:

> So far I've collected these fragments. . . disparate and sometimes only related by sound or intuition, vision or aesthetic. I have not visited the Door of No Return, but by relying on random shards of history and unwritten memoir of descendants of those who passed through it, including me, I am constructing a map of the region, paying attention to faces, to the unknowable, to unintended acts of returning, to impressions of doorways. Any act of recollection is important, even looks of dismay and discomfort. Any wisp of a dream is evidence. (19)

In this section, Brand's unapologetic treatment of intuitive knowledge and memory as reliable sources of knowledge, in addition to her use of broken "shards" of unwritten history as opposed to neatly bound "whole" pieces of history, undermine received notions about what counts as "knowledge." Brand's use of the idea of "unwritten" histories, furthermore, suggests that decontextualized "objective" knowledge is not the only history because there is much that is unwritten. Moreover, the text questions the normalization of sources of knowledge—as both in the West and in the mind—to consider the relationship of the body to history: throughout the text, the narrator's subjectivity is imposed upon by history, and living with that history is both an intellectual and embodied experience, as I discuss further below. The text's refusal of dominant approaches to knowledge and history in these moments is related to its overall critique of Western knowledge systems. The multitude of elements collected in the book speak to the complexity of living in and with the history of the slave trade and demonstrate the limitations of thinking in the terms that most discussions of history and knowledge building naturalize.

These differences in approach to history and knowledge are made clearer through Brand's inclusion of quotations from colonial cartographers and

"explorers." At times, the quotations stand alone, providing context and inviting the reader to draw her own conclusions about the horrors described therein. In one case, Brand includes a portion of a letter by William Bosman, in which he impassively describes a large-scale revolt by slaves, saying "I have twice met with this Misfortune [*sic*]; and the first time proved very unlucky to me, I not in the least suspecting it" (24). He goes on to explain that the uprising was quelled by shooting one of the slaves in the head (24). Bosman positions the slaves as absurd when he explains that some of the slaves believe that the Europeans are kidnapping them in order to eat them, and they want to escape this fate. The narrator does not address this quotation explicitly; it is inserted to act as context for the rest of the text, indicating what kinds of discussions are happening at different points in history, and the reader is, thereby, invited to consider the legacies of these histories in the contemporary cultural moment. The narrator does not comment on the metaphors of consumption of humans that occur in the slave trade—that these "explorers" will definitely consume the slaves, even if they will not eat them. She does not note how shocking it is that Bosman—and, undoubtedly, many others—seem to think that they are the injured parties in the slave trade or that he frames a revolt as an inconvenient misfortune. At other moments, the narrator does reflect on these quotations, often leading to a theoretical discussion. In one instance, the narrator mentions Ludolf, a seventeenth-century German man who, in Charles Bricker's words, became the "founder of Ethiopian studies" (qtd. in Brand 18). Ludolf never went to Africa, but he still drew a map of it based on the reports of missionaries. The logical incongruity of mapping a place one has not been or of which one has no direct experience leads the narrator to reflect on the beliefs that must be in place for that to seem reasonable: "places and those who inhabit them are indeed fictions" (18), and she explains that these fictions have material effects for those who are fictionalized, leading to a kind of dissociation from the self (18-19). These sections of the text give the narrator the opportunity to ruminate on a problem without needing to arrive at a clear solution. Indeed, as the text suggests, there is no clear solution to address the issues it raises—they are far too complicated for simple responses; instead, the text models the process of thinking them through.

Map also moves away from a key element of auto/biography—memory—to emphasize the appeal of its antithesis, forgetting: "Forgetting is a crucial condition of living with any peace" (204). This peace, of course, is contingent upon a lulling closing of feeling and knowing, but the narrator genuinely

sees the appeal of it for people whose lives have been determined by so much violence, such as that of her grandfather.[8] Furthermore, if auto/biography and biotexts are about writing oneself in relation to a place, Brand's narrator resists that too. She takes up questions of place, and especially their "cognitive schemas," nations, but instead of writing herself into the place, the narrator offers a scathing critique of nations: she argues that "[t]oo much has been made of origins. And so if I reject this notion of origins I have also to reject its mirror, which is the sense of origins used by the powerless to contest power in a society" (69).[9] She insists, moreover, that "[w]hat we have to ask ourselves is, as everyone else in the nation should ask themselves also, nation predicated on what?" (68). In this passage, the narrator alludes at least in part to Canada's colonial history and the nation's predication upon wilful physical and cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples who live on this land, as well as to the ongoing colonization of the land and its effects on Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. She is concerned that complicity with this system—even if it is strategic—will only replicate it.

Rather than build community based on shared origins, which we might read as another kind of "place" that she troubles, the narrator emphasizes shared experience. The narrator in *Map* clearly understands herself as part of the Black diaspora, but rather than positioning herself only within even a varied diasporic community, however, she seeks out people who share experiences and feelings of displacement. That is, instead of valuing origins, the narrator recognizes her connection, for example, to the bus driver, her friend, and a Salish woman on a bus in Vancouver, because all of them share the trauma of having "no country" (220): "We all feign ignorance at the rupture in mind and body, in place, in time. We all feel it" (221). The text values communities based on shared experience, as opposed to shared identity categories, a point that Brydon, Goldman, and Maia Joseph all emphasize. As Joseph articulately puts it, "[i]n the act of querying her relation to others with obscured or unknown histories, Brand refuses to think and feel within divisive narratives of origin, and instead charts provisional alignment via the recognition of non-identical experiences of loss" (89). Goldman further argues that "the self-conscious references to story-telling, memory, and narration underscore that the community Brand has in mind is not predicated on an essentialized past" (26-27). Indeed, the narrator does not write herself into being and in a place the way life writing tends to do; she tries to write herself out of it. Or, rather, Brand's narrator writes herself into a place in that she makes a critique of the elements that

determine her existence, but she resists the logic of location by showing that writing oneself into a place and, therefore, into belonging in this way risks being complicit with the colonial nation. Under these historical and contemporary circumstances, *Map* shows some of the limitations conventional genres and understandings of place as they miss the complexity of the current cultural moment.

Map suggests that any meditation on these legacies is necessarily going to exceed narrative and genre. The excess that cannot be contained in narrative and genre is also evident on the level of language; the violence is inarticulable both because the Western cognitive schemas that favour more sterile, distanced histories cannot contain it and because it is so difficult to imagine the logic that would lead to this nearly unfathomable level of brutality and dehumanization.[10] The narrator thinks through this problem with articulation, for example, as she struggles to find words that are adequate to describe what happened to the enslaved:

> Leaving? To leave? Left? Language can be deceptive. The moment when they 'left' the Old World and entered the New. Forced to leave? To 'leave' one would have to have a destination in mind. Of course one could rush out of a door with no destination in mind, but 'to rush' or 'to leave' would suggest some self-possession; rushing would suggest a purpose, a purpose with some urgency, some reason. Their 'taking'? Taking, taking too might suggest a benevolence so, no, it was not taking. (21)

She goes on to ask

> What language would describe that loss of bearings or the sudden awful liability of one's own body? The hitting or the whipping or the driving, which was shocking, the dragging and the bruising it involved, the epidemic sickness with life which would become hereditary? And the antipathy which would shadow all subsequent events. (21)

As Brand demonstrates, language as we know it cannot convey the horrors and legacies of colonialism; there are no words that can express it.[11] The experience of being enslaved is, quite literally, incomprehensible and largely unspeakable, as are its legacies, such that it can only be conveyed in glimpses that can only ever express it partially.

Brand's narrator goes on to further challenge how knowledge is built under colonial logics by discussing the knowledge that is embodied. As McKittrick explains in her discussion of *Map*, "Brand illustrates the ways in which a specific time-space locality is unraveled by a sense of place that dislodges traditional geographic rules from [B]lack spatial experiences" (106);

in *Map*, nothing—not time, space, the body, or memory—is stable. Though she may not have directly lived through some of the history she discusses, the narrator is nevertheless familiar with the legacy of the slave trade and with the ways that history is written on the body. In *Map*, the narrator discusses the memories that determine her existence and the existences of other people in the Black diaspora, such as the ones that code Black bodies: "It is as if [the Black body's] first appearance through the Door of No Return, dressed in its new habit of captive and therefore slave, is embedded in all its subsequent and contemporary appearances" (37). And this sense of locatedness—the way in which stepping through the door operates physically and discursively—informs the text. The text's narrator, for example, is clearly located in specific places but is not ever fully there: her position in the diaspora means that she is perpetually "without destination": one of the "inherited traits of the Diaspora," she says, is that "I am simply where I am" (150). As Omisẹ̀eke Natasha Tinsley discusses, referring to *Erzulie's Skirt* and the queer Black Atlantic, a legacy of the slave trade is that people are "brutalized and feeling, connected to the past and separate from it, divided from other diasporic migrants and linked to them," and this history leads them to be "internally discontinuous" (203). The simultaneous dissociation from the body and almost hyper-embodiment that accompanies being overdetermined by history demonstrate the way that history is rooted in the body, rather than just in the mind.

History being written on the body is not the only embodied effect of the slave trade, however; as with the structure of the book and language itself, the narrator's body in *Map* is also to some extent permanently disjointed in ways that are similar to Tinsley's discussion. As M. NourbeSe Philip explains, "[t]he Atlantic trade in Africans severed Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas from their cultural roots" (15). This rootlessness is explored extensively in *Map* and is discussed in terms of the body and a separation of the self from the body. In order to recognize the "awful liability of one's own body" (21), there must be a disjointedness. When she states that her "body feels always in the middle of a journey" (87), the phrasing implies a detachment: the narrator does not say "*I* always feel in the middle of a journey." There are related moments in which the layers of trauma induce a loss of subjectivity altogether, as in the section in which the narrator explains that after the Grenadian coup "nothing is the same" and nothing is recognizable: "You find yourself at another base in another coming night waiting for an airplane to lift you out. *But there is no you*" (168, emphasis

mine). And this sense of self-alienation is also shown to be—in a very mundane way—central to existing in the colonies, though it is undoubtedly exponentially more alienating based on the subject's perceived distance from the Western ideal, as we see in the narrator's discussion of the radio's social function during her childhood: "The whole island pressed its ear against the radio, listening for itself" (15). Here, despite resistance to it that undoubtedly exists, Brand describes the hold that recognition from the colonial centre has on the population of an entire island; that this recognition brings them into existence further demonstrates a fractured relationship to the self.

The refraction throughout the book is countered, however, by significant moments of fixity. First and foremost is the fixity that the door itself imposes as it acts as a metaphor for the impact of colonialism.[12] To return to a moment I discuss above, in which the narrator of *Map* recalls her youthful desperation to know "what people we came from" and her distress that her grandfather cannot remember (3), she goes on to explain that "[a] small space opened in me" (4): "Having no name to call on was having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present. That fissure is represented in the Door of No Return" (5). At this point in the narrator's life, giving up the idea of origins is not an option: she explains that she "would have proceeded happily with a simple name" and "may have played with it for a few days and then stored it away" (4), but the fact of not knowing is devastating. While not having access to this information allows the narrator to express both the pain of that loss as well as to eventually become able to imagine possibilities such as an approach to relationality that emphasizes other sites of commonality, the small space that opened remains. As she states elsewhere, diasporic Black peoples are fixed by the door: "Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable space. That space is the measure of our ancestors' step through the door toward the ship. One is caught in the few feet in between" (20). During the Grenadian coup and in addition to the loss of subjectivity she experiences, there is also a fixity: she describes standing on a balcony with a friend, "spilling a glass of water forever" as they watch bodies fall from a cliff (166). This moment illustrates the trauma that will permanently determine their contexts and inflect their lives; to some extent, it is inescapable. She emphasizes this inescapability and the intimate impact of the event on her existence by saying that the "morning felt as close as family, as divine as origins" (158). At another moment, we hear about how the door is inscribed on her body: the Door of No Return "is on my mind. . . . The door is on my retina" (89). That is, the door is written on her body and

therefore determines her being to some extent, particularly her thoughts and what she sees. And though these statements defy conventional logic, they effectively communicate the extent of the impact of the door. It is important to note, however, that *Map* is not making the case that *identity* is fixed; rather the narrator maps out the permanent effect that traumatic events can have, but leaves room for further complexity.

Though these experiences are written on her body and have caused a refraction, the narrator is not affirming a victimization that suggests an endless subjection to the trauma. The narrator asks "[h]ow to describe this mix of utter, hopeless pain and elation leaning against this door?" (41) and points out that "[t]his dreary door. . . though its effects are unremitting, does not claim the human being unremittingly. All that emanates from it is not dread but also creativity" (42).[13] Here again, the book demonstrates that there are seeming oppositions happening at the same time. Instead of privileging one over the other, the text focuses on process; some of these moments are fixed, but others are refracted, and in writing a life, the narrator shows that the fracturing of the subject and her experience of fixity coexist.

Holding complexity in tension is at the core of *Map*. The door is both a fixed thing and the intersection of a range of discourses; it is both stable and permanently unstable. It operates on multiple ontological and epistemological registers. In order to better understand the depth of complexity of the legacy of slavery, this book is comprised of narrative, history, and investigation of the discourses and politics of mapping. And while these elements are identifiable, they are inextricably interwoven through the book's structure. Their degree of co-integration would have made breaks like chapter divisions difficult. To have used them would have implied that it was possible to separate these elements. Brand includes headings, but these do not suggest separation so much as cue the reader to prepare for a shift. The complexity of the component parts of the book are matched by how crucial it is to have them appear within and alongside each other.

The legacy of slavery is evident not only in *Map*'s content, but it is also visible in the fractal nature of the book's structure, the workings of language itself, and in the narrator's relationship to her body. As it acknowledges both destabilization and fixity, *Map* nevertheless does not suggest that we must be resigned to history. Instead, this text invites reflection before action by surveying the ground upon which we stand, insisting on facing the horrors of the legacy of the slave trade, and sitting with those horrors; the book identifies the effects of colonialism while also looking unapologetically

and unflinchingly at the weight of these histories. As McKittrick explains, Brand is both drawn to and repelled by mapping because she knows what accompanies it. For McKittrick, *Map* "invokes a different sense of place by presenting [B]lack diaspora geographies that are riddled with desire for place, the suspicion of desire for place, and experiential physical place(s)" (105). It is in this kind of complexity that *Map* sits and asks readers to sit; as the narrator explains, "a book asks us to embody, which at once takes us across borders of all kinds" (190). The disarticulated style of *Map* addresses the ways that trauma exceeds articulation and resists a (potentially) lulling narrativization.

A Map to the Door of No Return marks, echoes, refracts, and maps the traumas of colonialism. But most importantly, *Map* takes its readers through a thought process about the degree to which Western epistemologies must be re/dis/ordered as many of us work towards decolonization. Further, *Map* invites those of us invested in social change to strategize more effectively and to think dynamically about how to avoid getting caught up in differences of experience that, while important, can also impede collaborative work.[14] The tension between legibility and illegibility with regard to genre and narrative conventions, language, and the body as well as between refraction and fixity are part of the many dynamic features that *Map* exhibits, not all of which are commensurable. It is "a life" Brand writes, and lives are not only exceedingly complicated, but they also do not follow a single path or straightforward argument. This incommensurability is a necessary part of the text's project of challenging narrowing, simplifying, reductive logics in order to think expansively about how to live in the current cultural moment because changing the content of what we know is as urgent as changing the structure of how we know it.

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NOTES

1 As Edward Said, among others, shows, non-Western places and cultures become receptacles for the West's ideas of itself. It is worth noting, though, that Brand is coming at the issue of a place—the Door of No Return, in this case—in terms of both physical places and ideas from another angle. She maps out the ideas that led to the slave trade as well as its effects, and the Door of No Return becomes the dense site of meaning to which everything else is related.

2 Criticism of *Map* has tended to focus on Brand's use of mobility as an organizing structure to discuss her remapping of the nation and the text's engagement with archives. Diana Brydon reads *Map* alongside Lawrence Hill's *Black Berry, Sweet Juice*. She is interested in their reconfigurations of belonging in the Canadian nation in relation to diasporic cultural studies and uses the metaphor of a "detour" to describe how their texts work against current issues related to colonialism. Marlene Goldman reads Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* beside *Map* to discuss how these texts "challenge the legacy of the Enlightenment's obsession with quantification" by embracing what she calls "the aesthetics and politics of drifting" that counters the "unsavoury politics of belonging" (22, 24). Goldman draws on an interview between Brand and *Map*'s editor, Maya Mavjee, to bring in Brand's discussion of her goals with this project, particularly with regard to mapping. Her comments align well with criticism of the text, including mine. But, she also suggests, this is not ideal—there are limitations to this strategy. Maia Joseph's analysis of Brand's works—especially *Map*—responds to Goldman's discussion of drifting and deterritorialization by focusing on "landing" and "reterritorialization," in order to emphasize the ways that Brand rewrites "spaces within the Canadian nation" (76). She is convinced by Goldman's argument and sees her own argument as a complement to it. Erica L. Johnson focuses on the archives from which Brand draws materials for *Map*, suggesting that Brand's presentation of "the affinities and tensions between [personal memoir with larger historical and cultural concerns is] a key to the postcolonial aesthetic" (152); Johnson focuses on how Brand creates a "neo-archive" in that she "creates history in the face of its absence" (157). See also Krotz, Medovarski, Mezei, and Tinsley.

3 I capitalize "Black" in order to emphasize the humanity of Black people in the face of white supremacy and anti-Black racism. Due to the house style of this journal, I have left "West" capitalized. I want to note, though, the ways that doing so risks naturalizing its dominant position and investments in—to quote bell hooks—white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. With that said, I also recognize the limitations of both of these gestures.

4 For a discussion of the socio-political effects of genre, see John Frow.

5 For an extensive overview of the terms and trends in this field, particularly as they arise in the Canadian context, see Rak.

6 As Goldman says of the centrality of masculinity to Paul Gilroy's work in *The Black Atlantic*, we might read Brand as contributing a different perspective to the conversations that centre masculinities in diaspora studies (22).

7 Notably, Brand takes up a similar fractured metaphor in her discussion of the door: "For those of us today in the Diaspora this door exists as through a prism, distorted and shimmering. As through heat waves across a vast empty space we see this door appearing and disappearing. An absent presence" (21).

8 Several critics comment on this scene and read it, I would suggest, overly positively. If forgetting is positive, it is only so because it minimizes or disguises pain, not because it is an ideal situation.

9 David Chariandy has recently written on the complexities of Black Canadian literary studies, emphasizing "Roots," in which there is an emphasis on demonstrating the often-erased history of Black people in Canada, and "Routes," in which there is an emphasis on mobility and connections elsewhere, in Black Canadian literary studies. Notably, he points out that there is overlap between these two approaches and that they are imbricated in each other (541). He also discusses a third area of study that has always been a part of the others—that of "Post-Race"—in which, especially in the Canadian context, there is a sense that race is no longer a meaningful category, a notion that the previous two areas of thought have always fought against (542).

10 See the discussion of slaves as dehumanized extensions of slave owners' bodies (Brand 30-31).
11 For a discussion of the inarticulability of pain, see Elaine Scarry.
12 As Joseph points out, Jody Mason discusses the fixity of doors in *Map*, but she uses this fixity to discuss doors in *Thirsty*. As she says, doors are a "trope for fixed forms, such as slavery and capitalism, that limit our ability to understand how past and present experience interact" (784).
13 It is important to note that the narrator does not claim to represent anyone's thoughts but her own: "I don't want to suggest that my thoughts are typical of the Black Diaspora, only that they proceed from the experience" (92).
14 I am remaining intentionally vague about the decolonization process here. While I certainly recognize that there are widespread decolonization efforts that are ongoing and have been since colonization began, I also would not be prepared to say that it is happening in a concrete sense, as precisely the issues that *Map* raises are also ongoing and resisting those efforts. In short, I am acknowledging that social change is a complex and ongoing process over a long period of time, replete with victories and setbacks.

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