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“Water always remembers”: Ecology and Being in Yvette Christiansë’s Literary Works

Zoe Naledi Neocosmos

Supervisor: Prof. Isabel Hofmeyr Co-supervisor: Dr. Charne Lavery

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of Masters of African Literature as an original work done by me. This work has not been submitted to any other university or examined for any other degree before. I further declare that the various materials used in the study have been duly acknowledged.

SIGNED: Zoe Naledi Neocosmos: Signature _____ Date _____
(Candidate)

Abstract

This thesis investigates two of Yvette Christiansë's literary works. *Unconfessed* (2006) and *Imprendehora* (2009) from the twin perspectives of slave histories and oceanic studies. Themes of ecology and the ocean have not been extensively explored in her works. Placing the sea as a point of critical perspective, this project explores how an oceanic imaginary functions within Christiansë's works. How might the sea, and related ecologies, extend modes of existence of the disfigured slave subject? Can qualities of the ocean help re-enchant a fractured world? Through close readings of the two works, the project explores the related themes of the ecological, the nonhuman and sacredness. The introduction sets out the aim and rationale of the project, followed by a literature review explaining the different strands of scholarship and theoretical work that have been used to create a scaffolding for my reading of Christiansë's work. The first chapter explores histories of Cape slavery and oceanic perspectives in Christiansë's works. The second chapter considers Joshua Bennett's 'more than human socialities', and Mel Y Chen's theory of 'animacy' as a route into investigating enslaved persons at sea and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. The third chapter deploys M. Jacqui Alexander's notion of 'the Sacred' and Harry Garuba's animist discourse as another route into Christiansë's texts. The Conclusion returns to theories of 'ocean materialities' as a tool in broadening modes of thinking about literature and slavery in South Africa.

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Introduction

Aim

Building on my Honours research report, I analyse Yvette Christiansë's work in relation to oceanic themes. Working with and against the South African slave archives, Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2006) and *Imprendehora* (2009) complicate the muted voice of the slave. Another important theme related in her work is that of the ocean. The presence of both the voice and the ocean in her literature is not a simple one. Making use of features of the sea, and being at sea as a method of reading, I plan to investigate ways of being at a time of human rights violations. Rooting what I find in the text, I explore whether the ocean re-enchants a fractured world. Put differently, the project explores the related themes of the ecological, the nonhuman and sacredness; and how Christiansë complicates these ideas by reading the sea as a trope, archive, and living presence.

Rationale

In pursuing this analysis of Christiansë's two literary works, this research seeks to extend the range of themes brought to bear on her work. As I explain below in more detail, themes of ecology and the ocean have not been extensively explored in her work. In pursing these themes, this research seeks to place Christiansë's writing in relation to broader themes of thinking about literature and slavery oceanically. Critic Hester Blum has noted that 'in its geophysical, historical and imaginative properties, the sea … provides a new epistemology – a new dimension – for thinking about surfaces, depths, and the extra-terrestrial dimensions of planetary resources and relations" (2013: 151), pointing to properties such as 'unboundedness', 'drift', and 'solvency' as qualities that, if taken seriously, open into radically different kinds of reading practices" (qtd. in Bystrom and Hofmeyr 2017: 152). I aim to explore how Christiansë's *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora* embody intricate imaginaries of the ocean, and might speak to qualities listed by Blum as innovative reading strategies.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Yvette Christiansë's literary works are important and have generated a body of scholarship. Christiansë focuses on the topic of slavery, which is evident in the two publications *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora*. While *Unconfessed* is a fictional narrative of the life of a female slave, *Imprendehora* is a poetic anthology. *Imprendehora* is titled after a slave ship, and

illustrates works of unfree labour with an uncertain setting, possibly St Helena but also in the eastern African islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Previous works on Yvette Christiansë

Barbara Boswell in the article "Conjuring up Her Wholeness: Post-Transitional Black South African Women's Poetry and Its Restorative Ethic", and Alexandra Negri in the essay "Re-signing History and Opening Up an Ethical Space of Disclosure: Yvette Christiansë's Wyschogrodian Ethics in *Unconfessed*" discuss Christiansë's work as slave narratives, specifically as a tool of rememory. Boswell particularly explores black women's poetry from the years 2003 to 2015, what critics have theorized as "post-transitional" in South African cultural production (2016: 9). Through this theorization, the scholar "traces the ways in which black women's poetry has expanded from modes of resistance in writing and orature to include four broad themes in contemporary articulation: gender justice, embodiment, diaspora, and rememorying history" (2016: 9). Boswell's focus incorporates *Imprendehora* and Christiansë's other poetic anthology, *Castaway*, whilst Negri concentrates on the mode of silence in the novel *Unconfessed*. Negri demonstrates the incompleteness of the protagonist Sila in the novel, alongside her disappearance within the records.

Other scholars make use of Christiansë's literary works to unpack further notions of rememory, alongside ways of reading the sea. Gabeba Baderoon is one such scholar. In her article "'This is Our Speech': Voice, Body and Poetic Form in Recent South African Writing", she investigates *Unconfessed* to show how "poetic strategies and registers can be used to write Black women's bodies into alternative modes of visibility" (2011: 213). Through analysing the novel, Baderoon observes how Christiansë presents innovative efforts to name subjectivities and experiences that have been erased by legacies of colonial and sexual violence. The tool of 'remembering' in the novel manifests mechanisms of language, where "in light of pervasive sexual violence, the bodies of slave women in *Unconfessed* speak in languages other than those imposed on them by their owners" (2011: 219). In "The African Oceans – Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture", Baderoon further points out forms of rememory, demonstrating how *Imprendehora* "works at recovering memories of slavery by reading images of the sea" (2009: 90). In doing so, the scholar questions how slave-made modernity becomes visible through the theme of the sea.

Additionally, through an inquiry of the ocean space, Meg Samuelson in two different articles theorizes *Imprendehora* and *Unconfessed*. In the first published in 2009, "'Lose Your

Mother, Kill Your Child': The Passage of Slavery and its Afterlife in Narratives by Yvette Christiansë and Saidiya Hartman", the scholar analyses the aquatic terrain of slave history where the ocean is both a space of "separation and connection of death and living" (2009: 42). Samuelson frames a noteworthy study of Christiansë's *Unconfessed* and Saidiya Hartman's biographical journey retracing the Atlantic slave route in *Lose Your Mother*. As Samuelson shows, both the literary works encode the sea as an archive in which the afterlife of slavery continues to surface. Finally, Samuelson's "Yvette Christiansë's Oceanic Genealogies and the Colonial Archive: *Castaway*s and Generations from Eastern Africa to the South Atlantic", traces tropes of the "dispersal and continuity" as a genealogical inquiry through oceanic spaces in and out of the colonial archive (2014: 27). In considering genealogy through oceanic spaces, the scholar unpacks Christiansë's representational practice of salvage and haunting, and acutely enquires into the origins of slavery and freedom.

This thesis is concerned with operations of the human experience, as expressed alongside naturalistic qualities in Christiansë's literary works, and serves as a contribution to the mentioned body of works through the themes of: the ecological, water and other nonhuman qualities at sea. Considering Nigri's and Boswell's inquiry into the author's complex use of rememory, how might we consider Christiansë's fictional use of water within these paradigms? My project works at relating to both these scholars by investing in the ocean, but not excluding other natural surroundings, and how the imagery functions within Christiansë's works on slavery. In accepting that the author's work does demonstrate intricacies of rememory, this project considers how Christiansë's use of the ecological might be a part of these workings of slave history in literature. A prominent theme in her work is that of the persistence of the ocean in slave life: "And then there were those of us who are called Mozbiekers. We all came in ships and we never got that rolling world out of our ears because on some days, one of us would stumble and the others knew the ocean was sending us a message" (Christiansë 2006: 165). As a quote from the novel *Unconfessed*, the author merges the history on slave ships with the de-humanizing history of slavery on land; and does so with the ocean as a central perspective. My project considers oceanic imaginaries as supplementary to Nigri and Boswell scholarship, and their regard of Christiansë's works as a function of rememory.

Thus, this project draws on similar themes explored by Baderoon, by reading images of the sea in a South African context, and expanding those readings as ways of uncovering subtleties of slave history. Baderoon tackles the ocean as more than a backdrop, and extends Nigri and Boswell's function of rememory. This project facilitates Baderoon's emphasis on

recovering memories of slavery by reading images of the sea, as a way to illustrate how Christiansë possibly navigates slave experiences. Baderoon investigates both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean as sites of inquiry in recent South African literature, and considers how both the oceans constitute "cosmology, memory, and desire, tracked in the movement, language, and culture of enslaved" (2009: 91). How might these qualities of the ocean, and its water, re-enchant a fractured world? And how might this approach to the sea be applied to recent South African literature like Christiansë's?

Furthermore, this project draws on the wrenching impact of slave voyages across the seas, similarly analysed by Samuelson in Christiansë's works. The space of the slave ship – as a vessel, the ocean, and ocean species – offer fascinating points of investigation of subjectivities and experiences that are muted by effects of colonial structures. Samuelson interrogates the "middle passage", as reference to the Atlantic slave route, and presents an inquiry into the oceanic spaces that serve the movement of slave bodies. As an author that focuses on the Indian Ocean, but also considers the Atlantic slave route, how is the literary representation of the sea during slave crossings offered by Christiansë? And how might the sea, from this point of view, contribute to complicated slave pasts? How does the author represent the passage of slavery through attributes of the ocean? This project draws from what Samuelson presents as the "passage of slavery", by which she suggests "Christiansë produces an evocative weave – out of Atlantic imageries (with their attention to the middle passage)" (2008: 42). Christiansë imbues a multiplicity of her narratives with complex perspectives of the ocean, as a tool of articulating "both the traumatic conditions of this voyage and the survivals of the passage" (2008: 42). As an example, the poem "Unspeakable" from the collection of poetry *Imprendehora* (2009), centres on the occurrences of a sexual assault on board a slave ship, whilst crossing the oceanic scape. The poem states:

> She said that, there, in the groaning
> of the vessel, he made her his vessel
> and she was cast upon the waves
> of a death that lowered the light
> (Christiansë 2009: 32)

Oceanic Perspectives

Literary and cultural works have emerged from the shores of oceanic conceptualisation; such ecological themes, which this project argues, can be found in Christiansë's works. As critic

Hester Blum notes "the sea should become central to critical conversations about global movements, relations, and histories" (2013: 151). By the same token, recent modes of 'reading the sea anew' stretch to shores of South African literature and art works – a notion explicitly explored by Baderoon. The creative labours of Yvette Christiansë, Koleka Putuma, and artist Berni Searle form part of a body of South African literature and art that encourage complex interactions with the sea. This project considers the value of engaging with Christiansë's literary works, as an approach were "the challenge is similarly to plunge into the water, not to overwrite the perspective of the amphibian but to come to think with, in, or even like the ocean" (Bystrom and Hofmeyr 2017: 3).

This project considers Christiansë's works in light of critical oceanic studies which theorizes the material qualities of the ocean, alongside human history. How might Christiansë's works be considered through oceanic ecologies? How does the author's work uncover human history beside ecological aspects? The wake of rising sea levels, and knowledge of anthropogenic climate change, offered a new awareness of the ocean, and oceanic imaginaries. The expansion of such environmental and ecological knowledge facilitated innovative ways of considering the sea in literature. In her essay "Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene", Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes "critical oceanic studies" to be both the mobility across oceanic surfaces and a way of theorizing oceanic submersion (2017: 32). DeLoughrey's approach opens up constructs of the ocean, its wildlife, water, and other nonhuman ecological qualities in literature, art and film. Such scholarship considers transnational human histories such as capital, empire and slavery, along with the "seaness of the seas" and in doing so, infers possible reshaping of "literary and cultural studies, as well as to connect with […] hybrid fields as green postcolonialism or environmental humanities and interdisciplinary discussions of the Anthropocene" (Bystrom and Hofmeyr 2017: 3). DeLoughrey builds on traditions of Caribbean literature and theory, and presents a submersion in sea waters as a means of recognising the materiality of human histories. Such traditions facilitate, for example, a "generation of thinking about race in transoceanic ways" (2017: 32). This project works at manifesting an oceanic reading such as DeLoughrey's in Christiansë's works, as literature which amalgamates slavery as a transoceanic human history, beside multispecies oceanic ecologies.

Furthermore, Christiansë's fictional works present the possibility of multispecies oceanic ecology, by interacting with the life of the enslaved at sea, and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. As a way of engaging with materialities of the ocean, in his article "'Beyond the Vomiting Dark' Toward a Black Hydropoetics" Joshua Bennett suggests a possibility of

participating with the ocean, and how it may assist in reconsidering Black Aesthetics. As he observes, the scholar seeks to "chart a black hydropoetics that does not require solid ground in order to make its claims or sustain its movement but, rather, relishes the freedom of the open water, dodges death at every turn, and makes hazy the division between person and nonperson so that a more robust ethical lexicon for black life might rise to the air" (2018: 105). Christiansë's literary works participate with slave histories, and complicate intricacies of multispecies oceanic ecology "mak[ing] hazy the division between person and nonperson". As a further reference from the poem "Unspeakable", the poet troubles existing human boundaries:

> She said, the flare of his curses
> cut a swathe across the ocean.
> And where she looked, there,
> on the scales of fish: glinting
> that made others weep. (Christiansë 2009: 32)

The poem facilities imaginative thought affiliated with multispecies through the line: "on the scale of fish, glinting that made others weep". The oceanic imaginary presents the fish in the image of "her", the victim. Here, the sea and its wildlife support a realm of imaginative thought facilitated with human history and sea ecology. In theorizing the materiality of the ocean, alongside human history – especially when relating to writers like Christiansë who explore ocean ecology themes (Bennett 2018: 103) – one begins to grapple with the nuanced experience of enslaved persons. Bennett depicts an intersection of black studies, animality and ecocritisim (2018: 105), thus enabling theorising of slave histories alongside oceanic imaginaries. The scholar considers "what the sea and its animal life worlds make possible for the black literary imagination and what they potentially, or necessarily foreclose" (2018:103) when relating to enslaved persons, the ocean, ocean wildlife and the vessel of the slave ship.

Water and Sacredness

As a mode of exploring Christiansë's works, this project analyses the ocean as a way of re-enchanting a fractured world. Forming part of this investigation will be M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred.* In line with Christiansë's literary works, Alexander formulates much of her scholarship on slavery around the ocean-scape. The scholar notes: "*Pedagogies* central metaphor is drawn from the enforced Atlantic Crossing of the millions of Africans that serviced from the fifteenth century through the twentieth the consolidation of British, French, Spanish, and Dutch

empires" (2005: 17), allowing for investigation of ecological facets present in the movement of slaves across seas. Parallel to Christiansë's account of slavery in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean, Alexander grapples with constructs of rememory, whereby the sea, its water and elements compliment central themes.

This project considers Alexander's mode of rememory, alongside Christiansë's literary works, as a formula for approaching the ocean in slave pasts in relation to ecological and elemental qualities. Alexander relates her scholarship to what, she describes formed her. The Caribbean scholar's theoretical background arises from anti-colonial, black feminist and queer movements, as a subject with heritage in slave-history. In troubling social structures, Alexander simultaneously tackles the histories of slaves at sea, noting: "Ocean will reveal the secrets that lie at the bottom of its silted deep. She requires no name before her. Not Pacific, not Atlantic, not Arctic, not Southern, not Indian. She is simply her watery translucent self, reaching without need of compass for her sisters whomever and wherever they are. She will call you by your ancient name, and you will answer because you will not have forgotten. Water always remembers" (2005: 310). The scholar presents different oceans, as spaces that accommodate histories. In the passage, Alexander works at removing the names of each sea route, as a mode of social deconstruction. The scholar personifies the ocean with the pronoun "she", obscuring binaries of rememorying the sea as a space of only human history or ecological history. This project works at synthesising Alexander's mode of theorising, with Christianse's literary works. Similarly, in complicating social hierarchies maintained at the time of slavery, Alexander invests in modes of social structures aligned to the ecological and elemental:

> …the idea that Sacred energies intervene in the daily lives of human beings; they surround, protect, push, strengthen, and bring a sense of purpose so that the individual is attuned to the Soul's purpose; they are present both everywhere, as in the Wind, and at specific moments, as in dreams; they mediate a process of interdependence, of mutual beingness, in which one becomes oneself in the process of becoming one with the Sacred; and they manifest their sacredness in nature as well as in their relationship with human beings, both of which take shape in a process of mutual embodiment. (2005: 328)

Complementing Christiansë's narrative, Alexander synthesises the sacred and how enslaved bodies are remembered. Alexander troubles these histories through investigating binaries of Western religions. As a way of uncovering the sacred, the scholar invests in elemental aspects such as: the wind and sacredness in nature. Likewise, *Unconfessed* troubles notions of confession, and depicts a protagonist that instead intimately converses with her dead son, the character Johannes and natural surroundings. The title of the novel refers to the protagonist's refusal to take part in both legal and religious confessions of infanticide for killing her son

Baro. Instead Sila tells her life story to the son she has killed. Sila imagines Baro visiting weekly, but it is unclear the exact manifestation of her son – whether he is a memory, spirit or both. Alexander troubles constructs of the sacred under Western binaries, in line with Christiansë. Alexander does this by mapping the challenges faced when considering spiritual dimensions, based on the nature of epistemological frameworks, and hierarchies of knowledge. Whilst living on Robben Island, Sila strictly refuses Christianity, as this would shatter her connection with Baro. The protagonist keeps "a deaf ear to the preacher" (2005: 284), and fosters her own knowledge "[she] knows life learns how to live with the dead" (2005: 285). Sila presents alternative belief systems, stemming from concepts that lie outside the colonial construct of her life in the Cape, and instead navigates a complex interaction with the sea and other ecological qualities of her surroundings:

> Somebody move this island, drink up the water between the land and this island so that I can run up it. I want this land to fold itself like a tablecloth so that I can get to that farm in one step. I want to step onto that farm and pick Pieter up. I want them to see me arrive and I want them to see my right hand as I hold it high. It will be all that they need to see. Ja. (Christiansë 2006: 325-326)

This passage demonstrates Sila's enactment of mutual embodiment (Alexander 2005: 910). The phrase "move this island, drink up the water between the land and this island" is the character's use of nature to assert what she yearns for and wants. The imagery in the narrative uses the sacred she perceives in nature. Sila acts along with the elemental. In the passage Sila's strength and assertion encompasses "[her] becom[ing] [her]self in the process of becoming one with the Sacred" (Alexander 2005: 328). Sila's use of 'quiet' against superiors of the Cape colony allows for complex introspection of the character's subjectivity in relation to her natural surroundings. With the help of the character Sila, Christiansë reveals an interwoven relationship between the human, nonhuman and more-than-human entities. This project works at investigating oceanic themes in Christiansë's works, and how Alexander's scholarship might compliment such paradigms (a topic I will divulge further in Chapter Three).

Methodology

The study will rely on a close reading of selected texts in Christiansë's literary works. Through analysing *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora*, this project works at reading the ocean anew. In presenting a close reading of Christiansë's two works, this project concurrently extends themes brought to bear on the author's creative labours involving southern African seas. Using the ocean as an axis to extend broader themes found in Christiansë's works, my project considers the following proposition: "The nature of this ocean – simultaneously roiling and hostile,

fecund and unbounded – suggests ways of redrawing the contours of the South and engaging both its troubled surfaces and its lively depths" (Lavery and Samuelson 2019: 37). This study works at uncovering similarities and disparities across Christiansë's literary works.

As a way of re-enchanting a fractured world, this study considers the ocean in Christiansë's two literary works to encourage imaginative thought attached to a history that has been erased by legacies of colonial violence. Christiansë explores illustrations of oceanic imaginaries as an innovative practice of displaying nameless subjects in history. Although we cannot know the extent of atrocities perpetrated at sea, Christiansë's *Imprendehora* "sift[s] through traces and fragments retrieved from the colonial archive in search of a freshly hewn language through which new worlds and subjects might emerge on the other side of rupture" (Samuelson 2014: 36). Titled after the Portuguese slave ship, *Imprendehora* tells the story of freed slaves (or 'liberated Africans' as they were known) who were forced into unfree labour and suffered under conditions akin to slavery across the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The 'Imprendehora' and other vessels housed African captives who were supposedly 'freed' after the prohibition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807. After an Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, slave subjects were forcibly reassigned into indentured labour and suffered violence cognate to slavery. These forms of harm were qualities inseparable from their oceanic journey. As a space of colonial oppression, the experiences of the indentured labour force manifested across the ocean. The project contributes to imaginative thought of a fragmented past in South African history, aligned to Christiansë's undertaking of these pasts.

Chapter Breakdown

The "Introduction" sets out the aim and rationale of the project and then leads to a literature review explaining the different strands of scholarship and theoretical work that have been used to create a scaffolding for my reading of Christiansë's work. Chapter One of this project, titled "Cape Slavery and the Ocean in Christiansë's Work", begins my discussion by taking into account the ocean, and its prevalence alongside the author's stories of the enslaved. Through a brief discussion of repressed histories in South African slavery, along with workings of the ocean in the context of the Cape; I offer illustrations from *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora* that demonstrate how Christiansë extends imaginaries of the ocean through Cape slave history. Furthermore, instead of imposing a narrative on historical figures, Christiansë borrows the minuscule existence of slave subjects within the Colonial Archive, in hope of imagining the voice of someone who could not write their own story. The chapter also considers Elizabeth

DeLoughrey's 'new oceanic imaginary', and Toni Morrison's rememory as mechanisms within Christiansë's revival of slave memories.

As illustrated by Christiansë, Chapter Two "The Nonhuman at Sea", unpacks material aspects of the ocean alongside human history. Through a consideration of Joshua Bennett's 'more than human socialities', and Mel Y Chen's theory of 'animacy'; I investigate enslaved persons at sea and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. The workings of animacy troubles what it means to be human, in relation to problematic constructs of 'liveliness', agency and freedom. Bennett and Chen complicate organisations of human and nonhuman life; enabling a consideration of the ocean space as not only an arena of violence, but also uncovering modalities of species crossing as a direct result. The chapter troubles hierarchies which are socially invented, and instead invests in alternative ways of being during times of severe human rights violation. Through an enquiry into what it means to be human in a modern world, Christiansë's literary works offer nuanced subjectivities of enslaved person's at sea. The space of the slave ship – the ocean, the elemental and other nonhuman ecological facets – are analysed in this chapter, as supplementary in interrogating human history. In beginning my analysis of the ecological, this chapter draws attention to *Imprendehora,* whilst also incorporating a brief discussion of a passage from *Unconfessed*.

Finally, Chapter Three "Sacred, Spirit and More-than-Human" places Christiansë in conversation with M. Jacqui Alexander, as a mode of analysing sacredness and alongside qualities of the sea. Through the means of integrating qualities of the human, nonhuman and more-than-human; I make use of M. Jacqui Alexander's notion of 'the Sacred' and Harry Garuba's animist discourse. With prominent focus on the character Sila, the chapter interrogates how the protagonist enters an interconnected relationship with the spiritual through workings of the ecological. In a way, the slave woman subtly navigates ways of being *within* qualities of nature, and *outside* of the oppressive colonial system. As a formula of approaching the ocean in slave pasts in relation to ecological and elemental qualities, Chapter Three considers Alexander's and Garuba's epistemological approach to ways of being through notions of the sacred and spirit. Furthermore, with a consideration of Kevin Quashie's 'quiet', the chapter investigates inner dimensions of existence. Making use of the theory of 'quiet', the chapter uncovers the experiences of a slave woman whose ability of expression is rendered almost impossible under the colonial regime. Undergoing physical violence, sexual violence, and multiplicities of dehumanization within the system of slavery, the character expresses modes of introspection woven with the presence of her natural surroundings. With the help of

‘quiet’, readers bear witness to circumstances when Sila’s life is not only marked by superiors of the Cape colony, but also alongside qualities of the environment around her. The chapter investigates ocean and ecological imaginaries in Christiansë’s *Unconfessed*, and briefly incorporates a reading of poetry from *Imprendehora.* As an ending chapter, the “Conclusion” of my thesis summarizes and reflects on issues that have been explored by preceding chapters.

Chapter One: Cape Slavery and the Ocean in Christiansë's Work

This chapter considers the workings of water imaginaries in relation to slave history in contemporary South Africa. Despite the extended scholarship over decades, Gabeba Baderoon notes the 'amnesia' shadowing South African relations to slavery; and that only in the "late twentieth and early twenty-first century" did work begin to "imagine the 'middle passages' about the Indian and Atlantic Oceans for enslaved people in South Africa" (2009: 94). Yvette Christiansë's literary works deal with slavery, working with and against South African slave archives. This project works at orientating the author's slave narratives to qualities of the sea. By reading images of the sea in a South African context, I wish to expand on ways of uncovering subtleties of slave history. Scholar Hester Blum argues that "in its geophysical, historical and imaginative properties, the sea [...] provides a new epistemology – a new dimension – for thinking about surfaces, depths, and the extra-terrestrial dimensions of planetary resources and relations" (qtd. Bystrom and Hofmeyr 2017: 3). This chapter aims to explore intricate imaginaries of the ocean located at the Cape that might speak to the qualities listed by Blum, and, in these terms, reimagine the ocean as a historical space.

The Cape and the Ocean

How might Christiansë's fictional representation of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans assist in historical portrayals of the colonial era? In a discussion of colonist's obsession with land, Baderoon explores "turning one's gaze to the two African oceans" (2009: 104-105), and how this perspective may recover narratives of slavery "otherwise erased from folk memory" and hidden by "picturesque portrayal[s] of the Cape" (2009: 89). Following Baderoon, this chapter works at reading images of the sea in a South African context, and expanding those readings as ways of uncovering subtleties of slave history. As a mode of considering the exclusionary nature of colonial history, I explore the ocean in Christiansë's corpus to encourage imaginative thought attached to pasts that have been erased by legacies of colonial violence. Christiansë presents readers with illustrations of the ocean as an innovative practice of displaying nameless subjects in history. I will begin with a brief discussion of repressed histories in South African slavery, along with workings of the ocean in the context of the Cape and lastly, I will explore imaginaries of water in relation to rememory.

As mentioned above, Christiansë's literary works have an affinity to narratives about slavery and engage with repressed histories as a way of imagining marginalisation in the past. Scholars such as Pumla Gqola, Yogita Goyal and James McCorkle discuss tropes of engaging

with repressed South African history. McCorkle unpacks Christiansë's *Unconfessed* in light of the "new slave narrative", and points out that this literary work "within a South African national narrative, reclaims a suppressed history and assists in establishing a foundational narrative as well as placing South African history within the contexts of the Black Atlantic" (2016: 19). The "new slave narrative" offers nuanced perspective of slave pasts that might not have been told, and stretches theories of the Black Atlantic to that of Cape slavery. The story of Sila van de Kaap, is one such narrative; and the story's existence makes us aware of complexities found in suppressed histories. *Unconfessed* imagines slave histories as a way of engaging with those marginalized and disenfranchised in the past. In an interview with *The Observer,* Christiansë describes her intentions when first compiling the novel:

> So, while researching a larger, scholarly project about the direct, first-person slave narratives of the Cape Colony, I came across some records of Sila van de Kaap. It is tempting to seize upon these traces of slave voices and treat them as evidence of resistance to slavery. But my fiction was born of another speculation: what if there had been a slave narrative, and what if it was not in a familiar form? How might one imagine the voice of a person who was not writing her own story?

The passage offers a description of Christiansë's thoughts and personal account when researching her novel. Instead of claiming 'slave voices' in the history of the Cape Colony, Christiansë works at borrowing the voices. With the intention to practise the production of slave pasts in a mode that is unfamiliar, the author highlights a need to claim alternative ways of thinking about enslaved persons in history. This mode subtly tackles complications found in the articulation of repressed histories. In departing from the author's approach to slave pasts, refined imaginaries are crucial; such as considering the ocean within repressed history of the Cape. How might the Indian and Atlantic seas of the Cape assist in imagining a slave narrative that is "not in a familiar form"? Considering the ocean and its water within Christiansë's novel, we find the lines:

> Or a green apple. Your mother loves to eat green apples dipped in salt. Then, you learn how to live in it. You learn how to be a fish and grow scales and fins and dive into that tide and swim far, far away (2006: 296)

As a mode of working against previously limited slave narratives, Christiansë places her literary production in the context of networks along the Indian Ocean World over three centuries. Gwyn Campbell, Pamila Gupta and Kerry Ward have carried out research on the Cape colony, and its function as a refreshment stop for the trade route to Asia. As Gwyn Campbell points out, more recently, scholars have become determined to analyse the complex history of the slave trade and slavery in the Indian Ocean World, both within Africa and in

relation to other parts of the world (x). These historians discuss the Cape in relation to ocean networks of the Dutch East India Company (also the VOC). Although the Indian Ocean has witnessed different slave trades stretching back 4,000 years (Hofmeyr 2007: 10); 1652 marked the year of the Cape's occupation by the VOC, and the beginning of race-based chattel slavery at the Cape. The VOC supported Jan van Riebeek's plan to supplement slavery as the labor system of the Cape, a system that was supported by Indian Ocean routes. Markus Nehl notes that over the duration of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thousands of women and men had been violently taken from a range of places in Africa and the Indian Ocean World; specifically from Madagascar, Mozambique, India and Indonesia. These persons were delivered to the Cape on Dutch, French, Portuguese and British ships (2016: 115). Slave subjects drove the necessity of the shipping routes in the East, and Southern seas, and under the occupation of the VOC, slaves were legally defined and treated as objects. These labour networks form part of transoceanic histories in which Christiansë places her narratives. The narratives fictionally uncover transoceanic spaces, and thus position the sea as an area of nuanced slave histories.

My analysis of Christiansë's literary works situates itself in the nature of Indian Ocean slavery, and the attributes of South-South movements. *Unconfessed*, as an example, gestures towards the east-south slave trade route. Following the narrative of a slave woman brought to the Cape from Mozambique, the novel allows for a consideration of Africa's Indian Ocean connections as a way of uncovering slave history. This perspective is not over-shadowed by Europe-Africa dichotomy, but instead focusses on the movement of a slave woman within African Ocean currents. Kerry Bystrom and Isabel Hofmeyr comment on the process of inquiry into "more southerly routes":

> how such routes are being recovered, represented, and theorized, how they enable different ways of seeing and writing the world, the global "inter-imperial" assemblages to which they point, and the ways of evading and challenging empire that connect across place and time. (2017: 2)

The scholars highlight possibilities tied to investigating Southern Oceans. Alternative and "different ways" of recovering pasts along "southerly routes" offers a perspective of the Cape Colony's slave past. In contrast to the dominant narratives of European conquest, Christiansë instead signals to a slave who is forcibly moved along the Indian Ocean World. Christiansë presents the narrative of a slave woman who moves along the maritime trading networks of south-east Africa to the Cape. Taken from her home in Mozambique as a child, and forced into slavery, Sila: "was still a little girl when she came out of the demon's belly and found herself

with the Neethling's" (2006: 15), and yet the character still clings to her identity from Mozambique, stating: "My name is Sila van Mozambiek" (2006: 19). The forced removal across east-south ocean circuits in Africa, mirror that of the 'middle passage'. The 'middle passage' is alluded as "the demon's belly", but is located as an Indian Ocean experience. Experiences of those enslaved at the Cape feeds into the locale's surrounding waters.

The ocean becomes a way in which histories of marginalized persons can be told. Maritime histories of the Indian Ocean World act as an integral part of Christiansë's novel, a mode by which the author articulates slave pasts that have been erased by legacies of colonial violence. An example of the sea existing within these previously supressed experiences reveals itself in the following phrase: "Baro, tell your sister they call this sea the Atlantic, but we call it the gate. That is what the birds have been calling it since before we were all born" (2006: 282). At the point of this description, Sila is navigating identifiable naturalistic qualities of the Cape. The character opts for a clarification of the Atlantic's name in relations to the locale's ecological features, presenting an image supported by birds. The knowledge of the ocean as "the gate" is expressed as wisdom that existed before "we were all born", and thus the imagery complicates pasts that have neglected because of colonial occupation.

Through imagery of the Cape, perceptions of Indian Ocean routes possess nuance, juxtaposing qualities of elemental and human life. Meg Samuelson makes note of the Cape's history during the fifteenth century, and the process of naming the coastal point. The name *Cape de Tormentoso,* translated to 'Cape of Storms' originates from 1488, when the Portuguese navigator Bartomenu Dias travelled past the Cape peninsula (Samuelson 2016: 524). As a description of his experience in passing through the rough seas, the name of the coast originates from the temperament of the waters. In naming the area 'Cape of Storms', Dias signals an event based on elemental qualities in South African history. Christiansë brings together the Cape's elemental history, with that of slave history at the Cape. Whilst imprisoned on Robben Island, the characters Sila and Lys look out across the ocean sea and reflect on the mainland. The characters identify the Cape as: "Cape of Tears, Cape of Death, Cape of Struggles" (Christiansë 2006: 66). Violence of the Cape Colony is linked to its naming history, and the geographical position of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meeting. In this manner, the "ocean here is understood from […] a 'planet perspective', as an element at once alien and profoundly entangled with human-life" (Bystrom and Hofmeyr 2017: 3). The author juxtaposes elemental qualities of the Cape's geographical positioning and offers it alongside marginalised experiences in South African history. The illustration extends imaginaries of the ocean through

history, intricately unsettling South Africa's relation to its slave past. The "Cape of Storms" thereby simultaneously illustrates danger because of the violent ocean waters, and because of the violence perpetuated by the Cape Colony.

Similarly, the author makes reference to horrors of slave pasts, against the picturesque landscape of the Cape. In the essay "'Heartsore': The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery", Christiansë notes cases of infanticide at the Cape Colony. Through an investigation into infanticide, the scholar points out at least five instances of slave women killing their children between 1819 and 1823. Along with Sila, another prominent figure within the Cape Colony Archive is Hester, who was sentenced to death in 1819 for attempting to kill herself and three children through drowning in the ocean. Christiansë states: "it is tempting to imagine the effects that women such as Sila, Hester, or Rosalyn might have had on the law […] yet Sila, like Hester, is present as a vanishing figure" ("Heartsore" 2009: 10). These characters in history are uncovered, and their 'echo' in the archive are told in the novel. Subtleties of their narrative are worked towards, as marginalised subjects of a "triple discursive imprisonment" ("Heartsore" 2009: 1) – as black female slaves. Christiansë briefly discloses Hester's death in the novel. In doing this, the character Sila reflects on the possibility of her own death, under the conditions of infanticide. The following passage presents Hester's tragic death:

> The sound of water. She can hear it and wishes so much to go down to the water and be washed right down, clean to the bone.
>
> A woman named Hester threw her children, then herself, into the water of Table Bay. Dragged out, she found herself, and one child saved. And then they tied a leather strap around her neck. One man took one end, another the other end and they pulled and pulled. That was how she was punished. And then they threw her into the sea. (Christiansë 2006: 40)

The passage forecloses a fictional look into Hester's execution, and the death of her children, within the setting of Table Bay in Cape Town. Descriptively, the "sound of water" resonates with the character Sila, as she envisions her death in the same manner as Hester. The materiality of the ocean becomes a quality of history, in that "[Sila]…wishes so much to go down to the water" and be a part of the same space in which Hester is. There is a commonality here, found in their pain, trauma and deaths. Having a shared experience of pain under the violence of the Cape Colony, Sila and Hester are placed alongside the imagery of the ocean, and its capacity to memorialize deaths during slavery. Coupled with Christiansë's illustration of 'Cape of Storms', the setting of Table Bay is made heavy with the history of slavery at the Cape. The author attaches afflictions of the slave women, to a contemporary identifier of Cape Town.

Thus, Christiansë works against "shadowing South African relations to slavery", by extending images of the ocean through history.

In considering the Indian Ocean region in relation to Christiansë's novel, this study recognises frameworks of the Atlantic slave world. In as much as "the study of slavery is still largely dominated by history of the Atlantic slave world" (Campbell 2003: ix), historians and literary critics have noted that universalism is perpetuated with the transatlantic slave model. An example here would be Ntongela Masilela's argument of the absence of Africa in Gilroy's discussion of the black Atlantic (qtd. in Hofmeyr 2007: 6). Some reasons for the suppression and 'amnesia' of slavery at the Cape has partly been linked to generalised modes of understanding the Indian Ocean World through frameworks of the Atlantic slave world. Be that as it may, this project takes into account Christiansë's literary corpus as narratives of the Indian Ocean World, and makes inquires along both the Atlantic slave trade, and in relation to critical oceanic studies of the South. With this intention, this project reflects that: "insofar as southern African literary studies [have] pursued transnational themes, these have generally been done in a framework of the black Atlantic. These approaches have produced work of value. We need to build on this legacy and at the same time extend it by thinking more about the Indian Ocean and its intersections with, but also its differences from, the black Atlantic" (Hofmeyr 2007: 4).

The Cape and Water Imaginaries

In commenting on the nuances of slave histories, Pumla Gqola points out: "South African imagination conceives of, constructs and interprets itself at a time of transition, and how slavery is evoked and remembered as part of negotiating current ways of being" (2010: 1). It is within these paradigms of conceptualizing "South African imagination", that I wish to investigate workings in *Imprendehora* and *Unconfessed*, and how slave pasts which are "evoked and remembered" might translate to the sea. In line with Gqola, Baderoon comments on how Christiansë "works at recovering memories of slavery by reading images of the sea" (2009: 90). I wish to investigate the author's approach to slave pasts in relation to the Cape's surrounding coast. Through a consideration of Morrison's 'rememory' and DeLoughrey's 'new oceanic imaginary', this chapter works at extending Baderoon's argument and by further inquiring into Christiansë's revival of slave memories, alongside images of the sea. In thinking about slave lives, how might imaginaries of water form part of a "multi-layered approach to the fragments" (Gqola 2010: 4) of South Africa's slave pasts that survived? What does the image of water in the Christiansë's works do to facilitate modes of imagination?

As previously discussed, Christiansë's literary works borrow voices to tell histories in slavery that might have otherwise never been told. In this way, the narratives make use of renowned African-American literary critic and novelist Toni Morrison's concept of 'rememory'. The author articulates workings of Morrison's theory, with the help of the description of stones. As similarly analysed by Samuelson, whilst living on Robben Island, Sila considers the construction of the Cape, and its creation in relation to the material of stones from her island prison. The character links her experience whilst being an imprisoned-slave-woman, to conditions of a possible future: "The stones we break loose from the island are bits of the future we give to that growing town across the water" (Christiansë 2006: 48). The line signals to Morrison's theory, manifesting ways in which the future of the Cape will remember the lives of enslaved persons. This project utilizes the author's use of workings of rememory to inquire into the aquatic terrain of slave history, that is to say "consider[ing] not only memories of crossing oceans, but what it is like to live next to them, from them, in art and literature of South Africa" (Baderoon 2009: 93). Christiansë expresses nuances of memories of slaves within environmental properties like the ocean and island.

Having extensively explored Morrison's oeuvre in her scholarly text *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics,* Christiansë engages with Morrison's non-fiction and fictional works to unpack notions of self-aware writing. *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics* engages with Morrison's works thematically and through this process, explains the term 'rememory' as:

> Indeed memory or 'rememory' is the gift that the living give, constantly, daily to the dead. Memory is the gift of a survivor and, as a gift, it is the medium of obligation … [to] those who have gone before and those who come after. (Christiansë 2013: 21)

The passage expresses Christiansë's approach to the concept 'rememory'. The 'gift that the living give', I would argue, makes reference to Morrison's 'literary archaeology'. Morrison explains rememory as a 'literary archaeology' that invites the creative writer or artist to "journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply 'in order to yield up a kind of a truth'" (Morrison 2019: 238). In this way, the process of imagination fictionally applied in Christiansë's works provides nuance to gaps in history, and speak to the concept of rememory. The author makes use of this mode of inquiry when researching the character Sila in the Cape archive. In an attempt to speak of a slave woman who killed her son, Christiansë states: "It is, in fact, where she 'remains,' not as a self-authorizing presence but as a trace, perhaps even an echo of a former self [....]" ("Heartsore" 2009: 2). The author's use of the character's 'remains' in the archival records, assists in the

fictional representation of Sila, as ways to make louder the 'echo' of the character's former self. How might Christiansë use of imaginaries of the ocean fictionally depict 'echoes' of slave experiences? I draw on Morrison's concept to investigate complexities in slave histories that might never have been told, especially those set at sea. With further reference of *Unconfessed,* the author traces the echoes of slave pasts. Whilst working on Robben Island, Sila and Mina break rocks that are sent to the mainland. This process leads Sila to reflect on social structures of the future:

> The gulls confuse me because, sometimes, the sound is also like old doors opening.
>
> I look up, put my hand to my eyes. The light flutters and shakes and the sound is not from the gulls at all. It is the sound of the stones moving against each other as the waves shift the island. The island is dragging against the water. The mainland is dragging against the stones that lie beneath it.
>
> *The whole world is moving away!*
>
> *But what does it move away from? Where does it move to?*
>
> (Christiansë 2006: 161-162)

The passage illustrates stones that are broken by prisoners from Robben Island and used to build roads and buildings for the mainland. Sila's description of gulls opening old doors possibly signals to a revision of the past, one where she is not subject to pain and trauma during the colonial regime. How narratives of slave subjectivity are remembered are brought about through the poetic illustration of the passage. The motion of the stones against the ocean waters, queries a shift in time and place; and enacts possible changes that could create a shift in the existence of the slave subject. Here, the site of the island on water acts as a fictional mode of imagination by which Sila's past is investigated. In order to consider imaginaries of the ocean, one might take into account the function of rememory, as a tool for interacting with slave histories through tropes of imagination. Within her scholarship, Morrison extensively invests in the workings of fiction, as encompassing imaginative thought, and assisting in ways of remembering. Through a discussion of slave-narratives, Morrison navigates the process of re-visiting experiences of the past, and expressing the moments in fiction. The scholar points out imagination in this process: "What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth. By 'image,' of course, I don't mean 'symbol'; I simply mean 'picture' and the feelings that accompany the picture" (2019: 238). When considering the ocean and qualities of the sea, what might its 'picture' in Christiansë's poetry undertake? The passage from *Unconfessed*

complicates this move to the past, as the shifting of the island on the ocean is not an easy one, but instead is "dragging against the water".

With attention to Christiansë's collection of poetry *Imprendehora*, the poet presents narratives of slave deaths that persist, whisper, beg and plead not to be forgotten; foregrounded with illustrations of, and from the sea. I choose the phrase 'not to be forgotten' here instead of 'remembered', with the impression that it shifts agency to the slave subjects. In the poem "To The Waves" the sea encourages a "dialogue [with regards to] relationships with the past" (Gqola 2010: 3). In thinking about the existence of slave lives alongside images of the sea, the poem reads:

> She said, do not
> leave me floating –
> fish on the dead surface.
> do not give me up –
> empty barrel bobbing. (Christiansë 2009: 33)

The first stanza presents an image of a slave, drifting on the sea. Unclear as to how exactly the subject became suspended in ocean's water, she requests: "do not give me up". The woman is simultaneously floating as a violated individual of slave history, and floating through the image of ocean currents. The subject persists in death. Furthermore, the phrase "fish on the dead surface" demands that we engage in nonhuman socialities at sea, as an imaginative project of considering slave pasts.

In a like manner, this chapter argues that ocean waters can contribute to modes of imaginative articulation that broadens a terrain of human experience. The article "Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene" by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, expands on other modes of imaginative processes, centring her discussion on the ocean. DeLoughrey makes note of literary thought which sketches "the rise of a new oceanic imaginary for the twenty first century, an imaginary catalyzed and informed by a global sea level rise that is our visible sign of climate change" (2017: 33). This oceanic mode of thought theorizes "the ocean in terms of the violent convergence of environment and history" (2017: 33). The scholar's theory of a 'new oceanic imaginary' sets up the ocean as space of human histories; and in the case of this project, histories of South African slavery. In this way, the sea holds narratives of slave pasts that would have otherwise not been known, and becomes a "stage for human history" (2017: 33). The poem's second stanza reads:

The waves took what they could –
a woman, the soles of her feet singing,
a man, the whites of eyes on fire, (Christiansë 2009: 33)

The passage illustrates the bodies of a man and woman floating on ocean waters. Images of sea waves are personified in the stanza, and in this way, the sea exhibits a sense of agency by taking "what they could" from the dead slaves. The ocean's waves perform as non-living actors, and in this manner the materiality of the sea is featured alongside human history. In this way, the poem articulates attributes of DeLoughrey's 'new oceanic imaginary', as the memories of the two nameless slaves are recovered through material qualities of the sea.

DeLoughrey makes note of literary thought which "create[s] an aesthetic that imaginatively populates the sea in an act of regional historiography and ancestral memory" (2017: 35). Similar to Morrison's concept of rememory, attributes of 'new oceanic imagineries' complicate historical placing. Rememory avails complexities in both slave experiences, and the placing of these experiences at sea. As explained above, "on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork" (Morrison 2019: 238), rememory incorporates the process of journeying to sites of history, and the reconstruction of experience in history. However, in the context of histories of the sea, there is no exact site, or record of the precise placing of violent atrocities. The vastness of the ocean space and movement of water are but some of the qualities that make it near impossible to identify the site of uncountable traumas that occurred along oceanic routes. DeLoughrey discusses modes of Caribbean writers localizing an event of history through "visible remnants of living" at sea (2017: 35). The connection I wish to make here is the different ways in which imaginaries, more specifically, ocean imaginaries, allow a placing of human history, that otherwise is assumed lost amongst water currents. In the case of the poem "To The Waves", the sea bears witness to the historical atrocities:

a girl who said nothing, who, face up,
folded waves around herself. The whole sea
sighing, turning like a sleeper who had missed her.

There, eyes, she said, you see?
You see how it is?
What little room there is now. (Christiansë 2009: 33)

In the last two stanzas of the poem, the poet presents the sea as a quality that overtly witnesses traumas in history. After illustrations of a dead woman and man in the previous passages, these stanzas uncover the death of a slave girl at sea. “The whole sea” demonstrates the ocean as a site – a site of bodies and a site in history. Furthermore, the final stanza explicitly offers a witness to the site of the girl’s death. In this way, it is as if imaginaries of slave history are revived through actions of the sea. And although the placing of violence during the colonial era are difficult to pin point, ‘rememory’ and ‘new oceanic imaginar[ies]’ allow for nuance of the apprehension of suppressed histories.

Chapter Two: The Nonhuman at Sea

Joshua Bennett in his article "'Beyond the Vomiting Dark' Toward a Black Hydropoetics" suggests the possibility of participating with the ocean, and how it may assist in reconsidering black aesthetic. The scholar enacts a dualistic practice by focusing on the life of the enslaved at sea, and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. The scholar "chart[s] a black hydropoetics that does not require solid ground in order to make its claims or sustain its movement but, rather, relishes the freedom of the open water, dodges death at every turn, and makes hazy the division between person and nonperson so that a more robust ethical lexicon for black life might rise to the air" (2018: 105). This chapter will present an oceanic reading in a similar vein, of poems from *Imprendehora,* along with a passage from the novel *Unconfessed,* discussing how Christiansë may "make hazy the division between person and nonperson". The author's poetry interacts with the experience of the indentured labour force in the Indian Ocean world, and in a way, her depiction of human history unveils what Bennett terms "more than human socialities". In thinking of the ocean as more than a backdrop or metaphor, especially alongside writers like Christiansë who have taken up ocean ecology, one begins to grapple with the nuanced experience of enslaved persons. This complex position expands a self-making of black subjects displaced from land, who instead undergo "a kind of life, or form of being without borders" (2018: 116). I work at reading the ocean in Christiansë's works, as ways in which the literature may relate to the sea communicating nuances of "more than human socialities", and animacy.

Animacy, in many ways, assists in uncovering qualities of agency, awareness, mobility and liveliness. Mel Y Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect,* considers problematic notions of 'liveliness', agency and freedom; and how these concepts are adjacent to divisions of the human and nonhuman. As a means of examining hazy margins of human and nonhuman, the scholar investigates "how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong', animates cultural life in important ways" (2012: 2). Chen develops animacy as not only a linguistic property, but also a racialised means of conceptual affective mediation between human and inhuman, animate and inanimate, human and animal. Why might we consider an enslaved person at sea as a 'wrong' animate? Humans, such as enslaved persons are sometimes made into, or conceptualized in terms of animals or objects. What happens when these persons enter a calculus of animacy? Chen investigates "the anima, animus, animal, and animate [as]… not vagaries or templatic zones of undifferentiated matter, but in fact work as complexly racialized and indeed humanized notions" (2012: 7).

Animacy troubles assumed binaries of a modern material world, and constructs perceived as 'given' qualities of a human subject. In this way, understandings of animacy may assist in uncovering "more than human socialities" in Christiansë's works. As a point of investigation, this chapter considers enslaved persons at sea – through the means of black literary imagination – in relation to multiple compositions of the nonhuman. To what ends can we consider enslaved persons at sea, and their proximity to nonhuman animals, through the working of animacy?

As discussed in the introduction, *Imprendehora* titled after the Portuguese slave ship, tells the story of freed slaves who were forced into unfree labour and suffered under conditions akin to slavery across the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Operating across both the Atlantic and Indian oceans, the vessel's name makes reference to a meeting of the two oceans at the Cape. The 'Imprendehora' and other ships housed African captives who were supposedly 'freed' after the prohibition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807. To demonstrate, the poem "The Lives We Lose" centres on the slave ship, and the vessel's name sake. Located in the first and longest section "Atlantic", the poem takes note of the vessel, as an object on the sea: "*Imprendehora!* The sun goes dancing/ as you pass by – so many trinkets/ where the ocean breaks and parts" (Christiansë 2009: 16). After an Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, slave subjects were forcibly reassigned into indentured labour and suffered violence cognate to slavery. These forms of harm were qualities inseparable from their oceanic journey; and the abuse speaks to perspectives of liveliness and agency; subsequently disclosed by functions of animacy. As a space of human history, the ocean facilitated structures of colonial oppression, retaining experiences of the indentured labour force. Participating with imaginaries of the sea and nonhuman objects like the slave ship, may assist in revealing intricacies of the violent history. Christiansë's collection of poetry presents intricate subjectivities of enslaved person's at sea, which possibly escape perceived perimeters of what is and what may be nonhuman.

The author's literary works complicate organizations of both human and nonhuman life. Bennet emphasises the dualistic practise of participating with the ocean and human history; through focusing on the life of the enslaved at sea, and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. Bennett "elucidate[s] a divergent approach to the work of thinking at the intersections of black studies, animality studies, and ecocriticism" (2018: 104). I would argue Christiansë's poetry depicts human history that engages with both black studies and animality studies, through an interaction with the experience of the indentured labour force in the Indian Ocean World. When turning our gaze to the history of the ocean, we find a violent proximity between the people who are called black, and the nonhuman animals that roam the waves (Bennett 2018: 103).

Assisted by poems from *Imprendehora*, I makes use of Chen's undertaking of animacy, whilst paying close attention to Bennett's "more than human socialities", to investigate obscured qualities of human and nonhuman life at sea.

Christiansë and Animacy

As mentioned above, in thinking of the ocean and its wild life as more than a backdrop or metaphor, specifically alongside writers like Christiansë who have taken up ocean ecology, one begins to grapple with the nuanced experience of enslaved persons. Alexander G Weheliye highlights concepts of animacy and black studies in *Habeas Viscus,* and synthesises these notions with racializing assemblages. The scholar states: "black studies illuminates the essential role that racializing assemblages play in the construction of modern selfhood, works toward the abolition of Man, and advocates the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human" (2005: 4). Through Christiansë's literary works, enslaved persons are put in close proximity to nonhuman animals and other commodities, presenting a complex position of self-making of subjects, alongside understanding of "what it means to be human". The author's journey through constructs of history via literary imagination enable discoveries of the capacities of nonhuman animals and their environment. An example here would be a passage from *Unconfessed.* At this point in the novel, the character Sila is singing a song to her dead son Baro. The song raises laughter in the child. Through a merging of the ocean, and its wildlife, the text reads:

> Seagulls pick today at the water's face, and the water's face dips away and will be still and the fish leap and dive behind the seagull's backs. You can hear their scales chink and clink, they chink and clink like charms. And they are charms on a woman's bracelet. I am the woman and I have a mind to go where the fish go in that deep down there where seagulls are not welcome.
>
> (Christiansë 2006: 222-223)

Presenting an image of water, seagulls and fish, the illustration confuses confines of what is human, elemental and animal. Although this specific image is not one of open water, its composition carefully depicts Christiansë's use of the ecological**.** The sea is presented with human anatomy, having both a face and a back – as the "seagull's pick today at the water's face", the ocean acts by reclining and "dips away". Aquatic animals interact with birds in the line: "fish leap and dive behind the seagull's backs". In depicting the ocean's waters with human body parts, and offering different ecological beings as if they are socializing, the author purposefully questions what it means to be a human. Simultaneously, scales of fish are merged with the existence of the slave woman Sila, through the imagery of an ornament indicated as

"[…] they are charms on a woman's bracelet. I am the woman". In thinking with Chen, the literary terrain offers changing understandings of the environment – not only around the enslaved, but with the enslaved persons. The scholar explains: "animacies makes critical links between popular knowledges of environmental entities (which often gather around a few select objects of heightened concern) and the larger socio-political environments in which they are seated" (2012: 10). In the above passage, binaries of nonhuman actors are troubled with the help of the ocean, its wildlife and enslaved persons. Through further investigation, the author directly refers to species crossing, and uncharted qualities of agency in the following passage:

> Ships that sail by at night leave only the sound of their creaking – wood that longs for forests. If you listen, when there is no storm, you can hear that creaking as if that ship is in the saddle of a horse that swims underneath the water, there in the down there, a horse that rides like the horses in the minister's book. Because surely that is one of the few things on which it tells the truth. (Christiansë 2006: 205)

The passage illustrates a point in the novel were social constructs perpetuated by the character Missus Minister are questioned, Sila instead navigates to multiple species and ecologies of land and sea. Enacting the qualities of the black literary imagination of enslaved persons, the sea, ocean wildlife and the slave ship creates a world in which the boundaries of human and nonhuman are troubled, demonstrated in the line "that creaking as if that ship is in the saddle of a horse that swims underneath the water". Here, demarcations of species are crossed. Comparable to Weheliye's theory of a socio-political process, Chen investigates the investment of certain bodies with humanness or animatedness over others. These differentiating qualities are not based on fixed assignment of animate values, but instead stem from a cognitive approach that "the world around us animates according to what we humans make of it" (Chen 2012: 8). If we consider the slave ship, as a type of world of its own, what forms of animacy are possible? The above passage illustrates an extensive process of animacy, in the sense that the horse holds the ship, and both figuratively travel under water: "there in the down there, a horse that rides like the horses in the minister's book". With the potential of being unsteady, animacy can be applied to the implications of political questions and recognition of different subject hierarchies (2012: 9). However, alongside colonial racial and gender classifications, enslavement at sea enables a possibility to engage with innovative nonhuman socialities. The extreme violence and brutality of slavery forces enslaved people into forms of awareness and alliance with the nonhuman world. Thus, in comparison to colonial demarcations, the spectrum of humanness within theories of animacy fosters other nonhuman socialities.

The Ship and Ocean

In considering the narrative presented by *Imprendehora*, and its reference to the historical slave ship, one begins to imagine the oceanic journey of enslaved people through the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. As a space of oppression, the experiences of the indentured labor force manifests across the sea, and the image of the ocean plane presents intricate narratives of unknown histories. Christiansë's poetry interacts with complex subjectivities of the enslaved, which is emphasised in the article "Yvette Christiansë's Oceanic Genealogies and the Colonial Archive: Castaways and Generations from Eastern Africa to the South Atlantic" by Meg Samuelson. The scholar describes the volume of poetry as "sift[ing] through traces and fragments retrieved from the colonial archive in search of a freshly hewn language through which new worlds and subjects might emerge on the other side of rupture" (Samuelson 2014: 36). Exploring workings of the ecological, elemental and those enslaved expand Samuelson's recognition of alternative worlds and existence during a time of human rights violations. To put matters differently, in order to speak of suffering, we need a different language and/or imaginaries through which new worlds open-up space for thought were 'no one is without a name'. In placing the ecological alongside human bodies, *Imprendehora* takes note of social structures that might prioritise 'animatedness' to some bodies over others. In this way, the collection of poetry's investment in the slave ship, the sea and ocean wildlife directs attention to the captive on board the ship, the disenfranchised subject and the enslaved person.

Christiansë works at presenting innovative ways to formulate subjectivities and experiences that have been erased by legacies of colonial and sexual violence. The collection of poetry is made up of different sections. The first – Atlantic – is composed of three segments: "Scraps", "Wind" and "Rust". As an inquiry into Indian Ocean diasporic memory, the two main sections in the collection are "Atlantic" and "Indian"; bringing two diasporic circuits into conversation. On the slave ship, enslaved women were quantified, as neither person nor woman, but instead "quantities of lesser or greater mass" (Hartman 2016: 167). In *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*; Hortense Spillers discusses these quantitative perimeters through theories of flesh. The scholar notes the movement of African slaves across water as "literally suspended in the oceanic", whereby "under these conditions, one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into 'account' as *quantities*" (Spillers 1987: 72). For Spillers, enslaved subjects are investigated through flesh, instead of gender, as qualities of gender annotate to assumed positions of the human, which slaves could distinctly not be. In this way, flesh provides a new mode of relation outside of assumed binaries of the

modern material world. In addition, I would argue, flesh contributes to concepts of nonhuman socialities.

The poem "Unspeakable" falls in the section "Scraps" and follows harrowing circumstances of a woman's raped onboard a slave ship. Christiansë's depiction of oceanic imaginaries serve as innovative illustrations that complicate constructs of the human and nonhuman during times of slavery, and thus complementing Spillers' notion of flesh. Although we cannot know the extent of atrocities perpetrated at sea, Christiansë's poem "Unspeakable" instead recounts the events of a female-slave-subject, alongside the imagery of the ecological:

> She said, the flare of his curses
> cut a swathe across the ocean.
> And where she looked, there,
> on the scales of fish: glinting
> that made others weep. (Christiansë 2009: 32)

As the first stanza of the poem "Unspeakable", the poet exemplifies the violence perpetrated on the slave ship and the enslaved subject's proximity to nonhuman life forms. The poem facilitates imaginative thought affiliated with multispecies through the line: "on the scales of fish, glinting that made others weep". In this way, the poem disrupts qualities of human flesh, with that of the scales of the fish. Through the experience of the sexual assault, the poet complicates Spiller's notion of flesh. Being a poem of rape, the illustration raises awareness to the mutilation of flesh and the body, and also expands these constructs through identification of the pronoun "she". The oceanic imaginary presents the fish in the image of "her", the victim. Here, the ocean and its wildlife support a realm of imaginative thought that facilitate multiple compositions of the nonhuman. Bennett suggests an approach to the slave ship, as "not only a site of unrelenting violence, but one in which species boundaries are crossed as a direct result" (2018: 105). In the case of the poem, perimeters between species are vague and so, the violence done onto "her" would make others weep, just as the glinting of the scales on fish would do the same. Both species embody violence in the poem.

Saidiya Hartman links labours of enslaved women on land, to that onboard slave ships. In the essay "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors", the scholar considers how the "role of gender and sexual differentiation in the constitution of labor are especially complex in the context of slavery" (Hartman 2016: 168). Narrated from a third person point of view, the victim in the poem describes the magnitude of her perpetrator's violence and

violent words as "cut[ting] a swathe across the ocean". The subject is unable to speak – signalling to the title of the poem – but her perpetrator's curses are loud and harming. The double meaning of the word "swathe", not only refers to the sea as space or area; but the term also resonates with the notion of crops and slave plantations. The poet's use of imagery navigates the suffering undergone during slavery between land and sea boundaries. The phrase signals a history of the land, which stretches to the sea, and thus the poet reveals a fluidity of pasts dominated by narratives of the terrestrial, to ones also approachable by the sea. The juxtaposition of terrestrial and aquatic scapes displays a turn "toward the sea in order to unsettle the sort of historical terracentrism that obscures the social and political possibilities of a wetter archive" (Bennett 2018: 105).

Through a discussion of the slave ship, the scholar Christina Sharpe makes reference to functions of "wake work". Locating the subject "in and as the ocean, the shipping industry and ports" (Sharpe 2016: 26) the scholar coordinates ways we insist on life, resistance and being through both time and space. To do this, Sharpe notes physical qualities of the ship and the sea: "wakes are also 'the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water' […]" (2016: 60). The scholar links movement of the vessel to social realities of humanness, and I would argue, 'animatedness'. Constructs of 'the wake' extend from the ship to its surrounding waters, and assist in imaginaries of slaves who jump or are thrown overboard. A person thrown overboard would have experienced a "bobbing motion [at] the wake" (Sharpe 2016: 40), and is transported by the wake for a distance across the sea. Christiansë's poem assists in envisioning the ship, the slave body in the ocean, and the sea waters. Constructs of 'wake work' extend to the second stanza of "Unspeakable", demonstrating modes in which the poet expresses forms of being, and the flexibility of humanness within the structure of slavery. The poem continues:

> She said that, there, in the groaning
> of the vessel, he made her his vessel
> and she was cast upon the waves
> of a death that lowered the light
> on all she knew. And all who knew her
> would not know her now.
> (Christiansë 2009: 32)

The second stanza of the poem continues to depict margins of dehumanization, along with the slave ship as space of entrapment. The entire ship, and the broader environment present scales of existence in the phrase "the groaning of the vessel, he made her his vessel". The victim is a captive on the slave ship as she is transported across the ocean; the slave woman becomes synonymous with the object that is her prison. This merging extends to imagery of the sea, in the line "she was cast upon on the waves". Nutrients of bodies cycle through the ocean as "the process of organisms eating organisms" (Sharpe 2016: 40). In this way, slave persons are cast to the sea, similar to the imagery of the poem; their atoms could be out in the ocean today (2016: 40). From this position, nobody really ages in sea waters. Particles of bodies recycle through the ocean – through waves, ocean wildlife consumption, and through time. Those who died *at* sea, enter *the* sea as uncharted qualities of mobility and agency, joining the ecology of the ocean. And as the poem states: "all who knew [the slave woman] would not know her now", but her components never-the-less exist and endure amongst nonhuman organisms. The poet demonstrates a consideration of "what the sea and its animal life worlds make possible for the black literary imagination and what they potentially, or necessarily, foreclose." (Bennett 2018: 103). Finally, the poem concludes with the following stanza:

> Ask her, as one who has become
> that fact on the horizon, did she hear
> what he said when he turned,
> his lip clasped at that place
> where her teeth were a reef
> plaguing the nuisance of hulls? (Christiansë 2009: 32)

The imagery of the "horizon" and "as one who becomes" speaks to deeper modes of history, and existence of slave persons. As noted above, the vessel of the slave ship is personified through the immolation of sounds of the subject's perpetrator. Intricately linking the violence of the rapist, and the violence of the ship results in the vessel being emblematic of multiple harms. The perpetrator's "lip clasped at that place" further signals to a prison or hold on the victim. And yet the captivity is disrupted in that "her teeth were a reef/ plaguing the nuisance of hulls". Similar to the fluidity of ocean waters, Christiansë places her narrative alongside the continuity of history, being and existence in that the slave woman endures outside the perimeters of the ship, specifically the reef. The perspective of the subject's captivity moves outward, shifting from the ship to her body as a jail, and to the waters of the sea as a stage of liveliness. Christiansë exhibits a subject who looks "outward from the confines of [multiple]

enclosures" (Bennett 2018: 111), whereby the ship and the subject's body are both objects of the sea, blurring borders of person and non-person, through qualities of ecology. Additionally, the poem "Abundance" acts as a memorial to slaves who drowned at sea, where statistical science and quantities in nature, enact a testimony of slave deaths. Bennett explains the account of dead slaves as possessing mathematical qualities. The scholar states: "a harrowing account of how it feels to navigate a world in which one is forced to live daily under the threat of violence that is not aberrational but algorithmic, built into the code of the contemporary social order" (2018: 111). As a poem that works alongside archival records of 'liberated' Africans, who were then forced into unfree labour, the imagery of the poem brings together a "code of the contemporary social order", as a tallying of violence woven into social and ecological constructs. The poem reads:

> *Seven slaves in a fit of despair one day last week seized a boat belonging to Capt. Goodwin and put off to sea, and not having been heard of since we supposed are drowned.*
>
> -St. Helena Registers, 1851

Two to hold the water still,
Two to leap, two to climb,
One to put his face at sea.

Oars, oarlocks.
The length of waves.
The length of waves.
How stern the water.

One man calls, wind to shore.
One man waves, a cranes wing.

One to grasp, one to tread,
One to sink, one to swim.

One to turn, belly up,
Singing to slake his thirst.
(Christiansë 2009: 15)

The epigraph in the poem quotes an article published in the "St. Helena Register" describing the circumstances of seven slaves who "in a fit of despair" escaped the island in a small boat (Baderoon 2009: 97). The poem conjures the story of what might have happened to the seven people, imagining precisely "what cannot be known from official records" (Baderoon 2009: 97). The numbers at the beginning of each line in the poem invents facts and statistics of a case that has little to work with. And so, in a world made bare by human rights violations, Christiansë advocates for aspects of the elemental and ecological, as features that were certain of the time. The "length of waves" takes note of a mathematical science of the ocean. Simultaneously, through the poem, readers hear the pained sound of the protagonist's breath, as they drown at sea: "One to grasp, one to tread". Chen uncovers animacies' interdisciplinary nature, whereby "*animacies* traverses a number of intersecting fields" (2012: 17). The arithmetic method of imagining the dead slave, along with the ecological and elemental properties enables the conceptualization of human experience.

Just like "Unspeakable", there is a haze between the margins of the human and nonhuman being in the poem, thus presenting how "a rigorous accounting of chattel slavery and its afterlives demands that we engage nonhuman sociality and that we recognize the work of Afrodiasporic ecopoetics – and black study more broadly – as species thinking, as ecological thought at the end of the world" (Bennett 2018: 111). Through both the poems, blackness changes how we consider the aquatic environment. In a multiplicity of ways Christiansë's poetry functions alongside black lives and the sea. Once the ocean moves past simply being a backdrop, and starts becoming a nuanced setting – not solely in relation or circumstantial to the mainland – then the sea and its wildlife are able to become characters of their own.

Finally, as a space of colonial oppression, the experiences of the indentured labour force manifests across the ocean, the sea becomes a space of juggling life and death. Considering differential animacies "becomes a particularly critical matter when 'life' versus 'death' binary oppositions fail to capture the affectively embodied ways that racialization of specific groups are differentially rendered" (Chen 2012: 10). This poem reflected workings of rememory in Chapter One, a further dimension is functions of animacy. Christiansë's poetry interacts with the indentured labour force as animate persons, and broadens fields of nonhuman life. The poem "To The Waves" demands that we engage with non-living actors:

She said, do not

leave me floating –
fish on the dead surface.
Do not give me up –
empty barrel bobbing.

The waves took what they could –
a woman, the soles of her feat singing,
a man, the whites of his eyes on fires (Christiansë 2009: 33)

As the first two stanzas of the poem, the poet presents non-living bodies as agents in the ocean. The unnamed actor asks: "leave me floating" and requests "Do not give me up", presenting a sense of agency after death. Unclear who the actor may be addressing, whether the sea or a sublime form, the stanza links an ecological plane with the possibility of an afterlife. Bennett notes the category between living and dying as "not a space of limbo so much as the fusion of both planes into something like a deathly persistence – a mode of existing outside human boundaries and protections and thus in closer, generative proximity to nonhuman life forms, or […]as low life" (2018: 107). Perimeters of animate actors are made unclear in the first stanza, between what may distinctly be the "she", the fish, the "dead surface" and the "empty barrel"; thus presenting possible existences outside human boundaries.

Furthermore, Christiansë depicts fluidities between life and death by complicating hierarchies of acts and actors. "The waves took what they could" presents a presumably inanimate and nonhuman quality of the sea being a source of causality. Chen describes: "Thinking through the fluidities of either 'life' or 'death' that seem to run across borders of animate and inanimate, and through orders of state preference that (in large part due to the commodifying and virtualizing and abstracting processes of capitalism) disregard common understandings of 'life' or 'liveliness'[…]without a fore-given attachment to a 'proper' or 'consistent' object" (2012: 17). An investment in the materiality of the ocean remaps attachment to a "consistent object", through the ability of the waves to act on the dead bodies of the enslaved persons. Thus, animacy complicates 'life' and 'nonlife' of the waves and human bodies. The last two stanza's of the poem further display these notions:

a girl who said nothing, who, face up,
folded waves around herself. The whole sea
sighting, turning like a sleeper who had missed her.

There, eyes, she said, you see?

You see how it is?

What little room there is now. (Christiansë 2009: 33)

The sea in the poem acts as a site of bodies, present alongside persons impacted by social death. "The whole sea sighing", produces an animate witness of slave history, mirroring how the poem serves as "an act of memory", imagining lives lived within the confines of the slave ships, lives "otherwise almost impossible to retrieve" (Baderoon 2009: 97). How might we then reconsider the 'insensate' matter of the bodies of slaves in history? How might these animates contribute to cultural life? Christiansë provides illustrations of oceanic imaginaries as an innovative practice of displaying nameless subjects in history, and their bodies in the open water. Thinking through terms of animacy helps theorise current anxieties about the production of humanness "particularly with regard to humanity's partners in definitional crime: animality (as its analogue or limit), nationality, race, security, environment, and sexuality" (Chen 2012: 3). The production of humanness in the poem works at struggling to define social being that connects the past and present. Thus, Christiansë displays how: "when we immerse ourselves within this archive, we find both otherworldly despair and fugitive possibility: uncharted, under common marronage made possible by the opacity of the oceanic realm" (Bennett 2018: 109).

To conclude, as astutely articulated by Fred Moten: "The history of Blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (2003: 1). The slaves presented in the poem demonstrate refusal to become property of another, and instead find release, by giving their flesh to the ocean. This is both a release and resistance, depicting "a social world in which any and all approaches to opposition are at play, including those that leverage the presence of nonhuman animal actors toward the end of stealing oneself away, refusing to become the property of another even if that choice ends in death" (Bennett 2018: 108). The concept of animacy allows for a mediation of different modes of the human, in which normative hierarchies are destabilized, and enabling questions of what it means to be human in a modern world. Christiansë suggests an approach to enslaved persons at sea as "not only a site of unrelenting violence, but one in which species boundaries are crossed as a direct result" (Bennett 2018: 105), and what possible modalities of the human might manifest as a result. Chen builds upon the tradition of feminist theory of Spillers, Hartman and Wynter who work at troubling and undoing stubborn binary systems that continue today. With literature similar to Christiansë's, one begins to dismantle binaries of the past and present, instituted by colonial

oppression, by considering enslaved persons at sea – through the means of black literary imagination – and in relation to multiple compositions of the nonhuman.

Chapter Three: Sacred, Spirit and More-than-Human

This chapter makes use of M. Jacqui Alexander's notion of 'the Sacred' and Harry Garuba's animist discourse, as modes of integrating qualities of the human, nonhuman and spiritual. As a tool of investigation, I will primarily frame my discussion by focusing on the literary constructs of the novel *Unconfessed.* In what I understand as existential notions, Alexander maps concepts of location of being, at the periphery of monolithic concepts of existence, i.e. Why have we come into this world? What are the reasons of our existence? More specifically: "What would taking the Sacred seriously mean for transnational feminism and related radical projects, beyond an institutionalized use value of theorizing marginalization?" (Alexander 2005: 326). I argue that the protagonist of the novel enters into an interconnected relationship of the spiritual, and in a way, navigates both introspective and environmental embodiment. These ontological notions frame my discussion, as aspects that might broaden theories of more-than-human temporalities of the ocean (DeLoughrey 2017: 33). To encapsulate the sacred and spirit as part of the sea and other natural environments, the chapter considers methods of reading the ecological, as ways it may manifest aspects of a phenomenal world. I will investigate imaginaries presented in the novel, centring on Sila's experience of ecological and elemental qualities whilst imprisoned on Robben Island. My discussion will also briefly incorporate a reading of poetry from *Imprendehora.*

M. Jacqui Alexander accounts for her scholarship by describing what formed her. The scholar's theoretical background emerged from anti-colonial, black feminist and queer movements. Growing up in the Caribbean, in Trinidad and Tobago, Alexander is part of the first generation of black youth who benefited from Nationalist Education, at a time of anticolonial struggle and movement for independence. In a period of political unrest, growing up in the 1960-70s, the scholar describes the time as "carrying the sense of possibility of another world", one which was influenced by structures of self-governance. In troubling social structures, Alexander approaches notions of the sacred and spirit, addressing "the spiritual [as] lived in the same locale in which hierarchies are socially invented and maintained" (2005: 310). Similar to approaches of Chen outlined in Chapter Two, this chapter is concerned with traditions of removing old terms of organising society, and troubling binary systems. Having grown in up the Caribbean, Alexander forms part of a literary tradition that has long understood the ocean as a material entity (DeLoughrey 2017: 33). In describing the qualities of her writing, Alexander states: "a set of conflictual convergences of my own migrancy, rendered more fragile under empire, and the genealogies of feminist, neo-colonial, and 'queer' politics that

are simultaneously transnational, all reside here" (2005: 8). How might notions of Alexander's Sacred be applied to the literary work *Unconfessed,* as a novel that troubles socially constructed hierarchies imposed under the structure of slavery at the Cape? Can workings of the ecological and elemental carry the sense of possibility found in a different world, and might we conceive this world as the sacred? Finally, can workings of the sacred help theorize a nuanced experience of marginalized persons?

The Sacred and Animist Representation

Christiansë re-enters the historical past of the character Sila by recasting in fictional form the Indian Ocean passage from south-east Africa to the Cape. The author's narrative reflects on the positioning of the Cape as the axis between Atlantic and Indian Ocean trade (Samuelson 2014: 38)**.** Similar attention to movement across ocean waters is reflected in Alexander's work who, like Christiansë, depicts the sea and the ecological domain as part of a slave experience. Both interdisciplinary and reflexive, *Pedagogies of Crossing* is titled after the enslaved labourers who were transported across the Atlantic to the U.S and the Caribbean. Manifesting spirits of those lost at sea, the chapter "Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible" remembers the violence endured by those enslaved whilst crossing the Atlantic. Alexander and Christiansë both grapple with constructs of rememory, which Alexander complicates by means of her research method. The scholar questions if rememory can sharpen itself in the context of disciplinary research, and whether the project of rememory is aligned with the Sacred. She explains:

> "Work – spiritual work – is the major preoccupation of [the] final chapter… [Alexander] wishes to examine how spiritual practitioners employ metaphysical systems to provide the moorings for their meanings and understanding of self… how they constitute or remember experience as Sacred and how that experience shapes their subjectivity" (2005: 295)

Wrestling with the theory of knowledge associated with the sacred, "Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible" is reflexive of the scholar's process of investigating the spirit Kitsimba, a spirit originally known as *Thisbe*. Alexander describes the process of uncovering Kitsimba as vulnerable. Not relying on knowledge derived from books, Alexander epistemologically questions knowledge of Kitsimba: "admitting that [she] did not even know how to begin to know" (2005: 294). Much of the implications of the troubles of sacred knowledge are a result of Western constructs of religion, and thus Kitsimba becomes a tool in uncovering where the Sacred resides and practices. Alexander's approach to sacred subjectivity might be useful in apprehensions of Christianity in *Unconfessed.*

Unconfessed troubles notions of confession, and depicts a protagonist who instead intimately converses with her dead son, and natural surroundings. The title of the novel refers to the protagonist's refusal to take part in both legal and religious confessions of infanticide, and instead Sila dictates her life's story to her dead son. In negating engagement with dominant society, the character "transcends straightforward resistance" (Baderoon 2011: 220). Sila grapples the presence of her son, Baro, visiting weekly, and the exact manifestation of the boy is unclear – whether he is a memory, spirit or both. Alexander troubles constructs of the sacred under Western binaries, in ways that parallel Christiansë's work. The scholar maps the challenges faced when considering spiritual dimensions, based on the nature of epistemological frameworks, and hierarchies of knowledge. We witness specific complications of these constructs during the death of Sila's other child, Debora. Whilst living on Robben Island, Debora passes away from malnutrition and illness. As an act of mourning, the character Lys offer's Sila "shells in a row" and "a small twig of fynbos there too" (Christiansë 2006: 281). Sila welcomes the tokens of nature warmly, and places the items on her child's grave. Comparatively, the character refuses to take part in the religious songs initiated by the Christian superior on the island. Missus Minister coordinates religious hymns at the child's funeral, and Sila insists that: "[Her] mouth was shut tight" (2006: 281). Furthermore, through Sila's reflection of her daughter's death, the character converses with Baro:

> Go now, be quick, go to your sister and call her by her name. And sing to her. […]
>
> Tell her the minister's father's house has many mansions and she is to stay away from each one of them. Woe to those who enter and are good, for there are more that are bad who have worn the robes of goodness.
>
> Tell her, you mother stood at her grave and kept a deaf ear to the preacher who makes walls between the living and the dead with his words. Tell her, I stood at her grave and saw it was small, too small, and that smallness was a wound in the earth. Tell her I kept my good ear to the wind for any sound of her […] Tell her your mother is resisting this invitation to give up all singing to a belief that death is all there is to death.
>
> Heart of wind! Heart of light! Things are breaking here!
>
> (Christiansë 2006: 284-285)

The passage demonstrates Sila's process of mourning Debora's death, in which she overtly rejects constructs of the bible, and instead finds solitude in workings of nature. The protagonist keeps "a deaf ear to the preacher" (2006: 284), and festers her own knowledge stating "I know life learns how to live with the dead" (2006: 285). She is opposed to demarcations instituted by Christian beliefs that enforce strict "walls between the living and the dead". Alternatively, the character keeps her "good ear to the wind", as an elemental quality she believes holds closer

manifestation to positions in death. Sila substitutes the rigid belief systems that stem from constructs which have oppressed her under the colonial regime of the Cape. Whilst living on Robben Island, the character demonstrates a strict refusal of Christianity, Sila does this because pursuing the structured religion would not only sever her connection with Baro, but also the potential peace Debora can experience in death. The passage presents "healing systems anchored in the idea of the constant manifestations of spiritual power" (Alexander 2005: 299), by which a slave-woman understands herself in relation to mourning her children. Christiansë illustrates spiritual work that functions *outside* of the oppressive colonial system; and *within* qualities of the natural world. The phrase "Heart of wind! Heart of light!" beckons to another world, which Sila's daughter might have joined in her time of death**.**

Similarly, in light of rendering hazy constructs of Christian belief, animist discourse counters ontological separations of human and nature. Through a discussion of animist thought, Harry Garuba draws from an African ontology as a way of uncovering the divine. Centring on research based in West Africa, the scholar destabilises Western ecological binaries of human and other-than-human (also the divine) forces. As a questioning of ecological paradigms, Garuba argues for an animist thought whereby the spiritual is embodied in the material. Furthermore, expanding an ontological discussion which facilitates workings of the natural world, animist thought "spiritualizes the object world" in which objects are conceived as "the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits" (2003: 267). Garuba develops animist thinking as not only a narrative strategy, but also as an umbrella term that incorporates religious consciousness and stretches notions within the phenomenal world: "nature and its objects are endowed with a spiritual life both simultaneous and coterminous with their natural properties" (2003: 267). How might Garuba's approach to animist thinking assist in integrating paradigms of the human, nonhuman and divine? The scholar investigates 'animist unconsciousness' and a 'continual re-enchantment of the world', as discourse that invests in the spirit as more-than-human conceptualization. Aligned to Alexander's investigation of the sacred, Garuba troubles social constructs, and invests in the condition of *being* in the world.

Unconfessed can be read in light of Garuba's animist discourse, facilitated with the help of a protagonist who demonstrates an interconnected relationship with her natural environment. The character gives elemental facets the opportunity to be responsive agents. In further reference to Debora's death, Sila commands:

> Heart of wind! Heart of rain! I will say, fill our sails. Let us follow that disappearing path and be done with this place, let us make a wake that will be wide and full with

> fleets of farewell and let that be all we leave behind. Let us drown sorrow, now. Let us put happiness into our mouths where there were curses. Let us wash our hair clean to the roots with one song whose one word is our great farewell! (Christiansë 2006: 284)

While still mourning her daughter's death, the character dictates an image of leaving the oppressive physical world she is part of, and in this way, Christiansë signals to aspects of spirit embedded in human relations. The passage does not make clear whether the departing journey will be from the physical realm to that of the spiritual, or leaving Robben Island and her death sentence. The ambiguity destabilizes codes on which world views are based (Garuba 2003: 263), and leans towards "changes in attitudes and practises occasioned by the increasingly secular rationalization of the world" (2003: 266). Sila directs sentiments of her desire to leave towards the elements, stating "Heart of wind! Heart of rain!". This choice of action gives agency to wind and rain, as properties that offer opportunity of liberty. Alexander describes the element of wind "[conveying] swiftness with which Spirits and ancestors can take possession of human beings and natural phenomena like the trees and animals" (2005: 302). Christiansë in this way, spiritualizes what would otherwise be perceived as the material. The passage encapsulates imaginaries of escape and removal from what is painful, and replaced with concepts of peace and contentment: "Let us drown sorrow, now. Let us put happiness into our mouths where there were curses. Let us wash our hair clean to the roots […]". Demonstrating ideas similar to those of Garuba's animist thought, the author delicately weaves together notions of the human, nonhuman and the divine, embodying the spiritual through qualities of the elemental.

Conditions of animist thought extend to Christiansë's poetry. The poet also presents imaginaries of wind alongside other ecological features, as a mode that renders the ontological separation of human and nonhuman uneasy. In *Imprendehora,* the first stanza of the poem "Noon" reads:

> for the record, that ocean's dancing edge
> Will be the balcony on which I stand,
> grandly, a chevron of leaves and weed
> plaited by the wind on my arm,
> an allegiance to the wind, a pledge
> against grills and locks, chains and
> the grinding mills of regal appetites. (Christiansë 2009: 73)

The poem is part of the section "Atlantic", and falls under the third subsection "Rust"; and demonstrates ecologies of the ocean amalgamating into what is the spirit. Imaginaries in the poem work at moving away from man-made confinements of slavery, and proceed to the ecological. Similar to the previous passage from *Unconfessed,* the subject of the poem finds a union with wind, and consequently signals to 'the spirit' as layered workings. The subject of the poem immerses themself in ecologies of the ocean, whereby the 'ocean's dancing edge' concurrently refers to the boundary of water currents surrounding slave ships; and the edge between land and sea at the coast. The environmental setting in the poem functions as a "balcony", which is generally a piece of architecture that dualistically serves to both encounter the outside of a building, and as a shelter from the elements. In this way, the illustration of a balcony operates as a stage in nature, were ecological, human and spirit intertwine At the twofold positioning, "leaves and weed[s]" are "plaited by the wind" on the subject's arm. Here, not only does the wind depict agency, but it functions alongside ecological by-products as leaves and weeds in the sea, as well as the human. The subject expresses "allegiance to this wind" and pledges against social constraints of the structure of slavery, an order illustrated by its "grills", "locks" and "chains". The poet indicates slavery's manufacturing and trade in the line "the grinding mills of regal appetites". Garuba notes opportunity to develop social frameworks into what is animist thought, pointing out that which "continually spirituali[zes] the object world, acknowledging and appropriating recent material developments and discoveries and animating them with a spirit" (2012: 7). The stanza reflects animist theories by prioritizing qualities of the divine found as the ocean – these structures of belief continue into the ending stanzas:

> Listen. A song of kings will have curdled
> and drowned, and only bland villanelles
> will be heard in the craws of gulls,
> those crying scribes of the waves. See?
>
> Will the sound of drums not cease?
> I am tired of memories that fall
> in great red curtains and trumpeting,
> *trumpeting announcements of still more lies.* (Christiansë 2009: 73)

Alexander similarly draws on the connection of divine properties within ocean ecologies. The experience represented in the stanzas are sensory and immersive, embodied through an ability

to “Listen”, and the suffering of drowning. Christiansë juxtaposes religious workings of “A song of kings”, alongside the sound of gulls and waves. Through animist representation, the subject has the ability to further condemn colonial structures, and knowledge retrieved from seabirds and the waves are given precedence – metaphorically expressing Alexander’s disruption of knowledge acquisition. As a whole, the poem strategically imputes a spiritual dimension to objects found in ocean ecology. This link is astutely described by Alexander as: “The Divine call to the Divine […] a practice of alignment with the Divine […] that broad expanse of Ocean, who lives both on sea and on land has pushed past modernity’s mode of reason […]come to accept, to cleanse, to bless, to remind us that in the same way the breaking of waves does not compromise the integrity of the Ocean, so too anything broken in our lives cannot compromise that cosmic flow to wholeness” (2005: 348).

The Sacred and Interior Life

In furthering the discussion of the spirit and sacred, in *Unconfessed* the protagonist Sila expresses workings of inner life, as a mode of navigating daily experiences under colonial powers. The character’s experience of life is one of relentless injustice and sexual violence. Under the history of colonialism, Christiansë takes up the character’s narrative as a meek survival in archival records: “[Sila] survives only in the fragmented records and palpable silences of criminal proceedings” (“Heartsore” 2009: 1). The individual’s history is moulded under the colony’s distribution of knowledge, and with the help of a poetic narrative, the novel fictionally allows the character to recount her life, in a setting where she is ‘quiet’. None of her story is heard by hierarchies in the colonial society, but instead manifest’s as internal dialogues with Baro.

In *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, Kevin Quashie offers a consideration of ‘quiet’ in black literary works, and how the notion can expand inner dimensions of existence, more specifically, how one might commonly perceive notions of blackness. In this way, quiet is not limited to motionlessness or vacancy of sound, but instead is a “metaphor for a full range of one’s inner life – one’s desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears” (2012: 6). With the help of the perspective of inner life, we anticipate the experiences of a slave-woman, and her undertaking of loss, vulnerability and agency. Quashie destabilizes the inclination to understand black subjectivity through the flattening and limiting lens of resistance and instead emphasises subtle notions of quiet, as a function that offers a fuller range of inner lives and their nuances. These notions function through the novel, as

internal dialogue between Sila and Baro, and sometimes Johannes. Christiansë makes readers privy to a broad terrain of the inner life and acquisition of the sacred. Slavery renders communication between slaves and slave-owners close to impossible, and it is within this void that Sila articulates contemplations of the world around her. Quashie demonstrates how "in humanity, quiet is inevitable, essential. It is a simple, beautiful part of what it means to be alive" (Quashie 2012: 9). I would argue that workings of 'quiet' assist in uncovering the sacred, as it is within Sila's 'quiet' that aspects of the sacred come into existence.

During Sila's performance of quiet, readers bear witness to daily experiences that shape the character from her childhood in Mozambique, to becoming a slave mother of many children, and leading to her imprisonment for infanticide. The ocean, and other environments, are ever present in the hardships of her life, and are diversified features. Whilst suffering continuous sexual violence under the ownership of Van der Wat, Sila remembers the ocean: "And she thought about the ocean and heard it rush through the chambers of her ears at night as Van der Wat sweated on her, and Jeptha and Talmag ground their teeth with rage in their hut" (Christiansë 2006: 28). The protagonist also envisions the sea as a space of freedom when being moved from Roeland Street stating: "Someone had just opened the prison gates and she glimpsed the town outside. If her legs were stronger, she could have run right out and up that Signal Hill with Meisie, and flown out across the ocean" (Christiansë 2006: 22). The scenes provide a self-consciousness of the character in relation to the sea, and the endurances are placed in relation to social circumstances of sexual violence and imprisonment.

An expression of social and public binaries are experienced by Sila, and formulated as introspections woven with the presence of natural surroundings. Quiet enables a shift of attention to what is the interior, that which is hard to see and hard to describe, whilst also undergoing the workings of a social world (Quashie 2012: 8). Sila's quiet experience of daily encounters during the protagonist's turbulent life contributes to her understanding of how to experience the sacred. Similarly, the ecological, elemental and overall natural surroundings form part of her grasp of the sacred within her daily experiences, linking to Alexander's discussion of ways in which lived experiences are woven into the sacred:

> Taken together, the practitioner's statements speak to an intimacy of a lived experience in which the Sacred is embodied. They are woven through five interrelated elements: the idea that Sacred energies intervene in the daily lives of human beings; they surround, protect, push, strengthen, and bring a sense of purpose so that the individual is attuned to the Soul's purpose; they are present both everywhere, as in the Wind, and the specific moments, as in dreams; they

> mediate a process of interdependence, of mutual beingness, in which one becomes oneself in the process of becoming one with the Sacred; and they manifest their sacredness in nature as well as in their relationships with human beings, both of which take shape in the process of mutual embodiment (Alexander 2005: 301)

Sila's character drives qualities mentioned in the above passage, as she navigates a mode of being, powered by nature. In the passage, Alexander describes the mutual embodiment of the Sacred, lived experiences and aspects of the natural world. The scholar describes these perimeters as an individual's self-making and becoming; existing outside of social norms and social hierarchies; in the sense that the interior can inform a way of being in the world that is not consumed by publicness but that is "expressive and dynamic nonetheless" (Quashie 2012: 52). In a way, at times of severe human rights violations, slave women like Sila can discover themselves through manifesting the sacred in nature. Most of the novel functions through modes of memories of Sila's life. These reflections encompass experiences of a marginalized subject, and it is within these difficult circumstances of the novel that the sacred has the potential to strengthen and give a sense of purpose (Alexander 2005: 301).

Understandings of her subjectivity through an interior lens is the expression of Sila's daily experiences. Circumstances in her life are not only marked by superiors of the colonial regime, but also shown with material qualities of the character's surrounding environment. Whilst under the watchful eye of the warden Pedder, Sila and other prisoners on the island collect stones and fish. The stones are used as material in building and maintaining homes at the Cape; and the fish is food for residents living on the island. Through a focus on these stones as building material, Christiansë includes the "buildings and streets of Cape Town in the archives of slave labour" (Olaussen 2012: 130). Pedder acts as a tyrant in the collection of stones broken from the island, to the point that he instructs a pregnant character, Louisa, to work the rocks. Although his actions are questioned, Pedder maintains his stance: "The lieutenant named Wall told Pedder it is not right to make a pregnant woman carry stones. Pedder said, woman? That is not a woman. These are animals" (Christiansë 2006: 294). The scene takes a toll on Sila as she tries to help Louisa. As a reaction to the tyrannical orders of Pedder, the protagonist manifests sacredness to the natural components around her. Under the oppressive and silencing nature of Pedder, Sila engages "the agency of inner life" (Quashie 2012: 56) by articulating an interconnectedness with fish:

> The men complain about the fishing. Today Pedder says, bring me fish. The men complain. Me, I complain. Today Pedder sends me and Lys to catch his fish. I have to

> shout at Catherina to stay far back from the water. The sea is dark. Lys rolls in the surf and I grab her. The men grab us and bring us to the beach.
>
> No fish for Pedder today. No food for us.
>
> Baro, go down to the fish. Sing to their pretty scales. Sing behind their eyes, in their gills. Tell them, your mother wants some peace and quiet. Tell them to go far away. Tell them, to go to the mainland and tell the big policeman that Pedder is a thief. Tell them to say Pedder steals fish and shells to sell to his friends on the mainland.
> It is time for Pedder to go. (Christiansë 2006: 295)

The grievous experience of Sila's life on Robben Island leads the character to align herself with nonhuman counterparts. The character experiences a space that does not support the wellbeing of her or her child, and she is almost engulfed by waves: "Lys rolls in the surf and I grab [Catherina]. The men grab us and bring us to the beach". Under the burdensome circumstances Sila indicates an intertwined relationship of her wellbeing, the environment and the spiritual. Baro is instructed to interact with the fish: "go down to the fish. Sing to their pretty scales. Sing behind their eyes, in their gills". The anatomy of the fish carry the sacred nature of the passage, as points of connection that nurture Sila's appreciation of ocean ecologies. Through Baro's link, she makes visible the lies, theft and injustices of the slave-holding society: "Tell them to say Pedder steals fish and shells to sell to his friends on the mainland". The interconnectedness of Sila, Baro and the fish reveal an interplay of "sacred energies interven[ing] in the daily lives of human beings" (Alexander 2005: 301). In line with Garuba, the fish possess a phenomenal dimension, and animist discourse in Christiansë's work counters social and environmental estrangement.

In a like manner, whilst reflecting on lived experiences at Van der Wat's estate, Sila remembers stealing honey and meat for Baro (Christiansë 2006: 50). The memory carries pain of an inability to provide for her child. Sila internalizes what happens in the world outside of her, illustrating how "trying to live through the self [she] inhabits in the face of the possibilities and trials the world presents" (Quashie 2012: 59). At one point, the character suggests claiming Robben Island for her son. The act of stealing is not a harmful one, but instead speaks to modes of inheritance. "In Search of My Mother's Garden", Alice Walker intricately unfolds links between inheritance from "wild" and "spiritual" mothers, at times of social oppression parallel to slavery. Walker uncovers the legacy of ancestry mothers, and explains how some women "without 'knowing' it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn't recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church […] never had any intention of giving [their spiritually] up" (Walker 2004: 406). The scholar and poet describes her mother, in light of spiritual women in the past, maintaining a garden as a daily part of life; and how her mother's work and devotion

in this way constituted Walker's own acquisition of knowledge and practises in life. The link I wish to make here concerns subtleties found in inheritance, and how the subtleties extend, in multidimensional modes, to aspects of sacredness and ecology.

At a time when ownership of physical property was forbidden, and intellectual growth was banned, women found ways to maintain lineages of possessing inheritance. Through a description of transferring ownership to her child, Sila points out: "I am giving [the island] to [Baro] because I have already worked enough to claim it for [him]. Three years in the town prison and fourteen more to look forward to, but I have already as good as paid them. So. There. Take it" (Christiansë 2006: 50). She makes use of what is attainable in nature, in a social world where she owns nothing. The character's lived experiences emerge as ecological imagery of sacred embodiment:

> Listen, if you go about this place, there are two things you must keep in mind. First, remember that the island will lead you. Here is how - the edge of the island is its own path. Second, remember too that the sea will always call you to its edge. And the edge becomes everything here. If you come to visit me when I am working in the quarry, you will find that something is pulling you, bothering you. You may try to swat it, but it is no fly. It is the water in your ear. From your first landing on this place, you will have water in your ear and that water longs to go back to its own kind. Those are the two things - the edge, the water. (Christiansë 2006: 50-51)

The passage is a list of criteria for Baro, and things his mother encourages him to consider when moving around Robben Island. The criteria mirror laws of nature, as sacred properties that stand in need of explanation. Through workings of the island and its surrounding waters, the material is given agency. The island leads and is its "own path", as both a natural and phenomenal force. From Cohen's notion of chronotopic networks of the sea, what is most noticeable about the island is its "tempered vision of nature, contrasting with the unleashed violence of nature in blue and white water" (2007: 659). Here, the sea is given the ability of persuasion "call[ing] you to its edge", as an imagery of the material's desire to return to open waters. This is what Sila is passing on to her son, a space that functions through phenomenal and natural laws. As an area governed by colonial rules, and where Sila is silenced and controlled as a slave subject with no authority over her sentencing, the character details an enchantment of the island that grants the space new meaning. The island is transformed from a prison on water, to a natural space of mysticism and sacred qualities. Enchanting the island presents "animist subjectivity" and it is "constructed on a relationship between the object world and a self that is mediated by meaning" (Garuba 2003: 279).

Finally, the character finds meaning and sustains a mode of existence through environmental imaginaries. Sila imagines possibilities through her conceptualization of the spirit in nature. Her children Carolina and Camies get taken away from Sila, and when reflecting on the painful memory, the character imagines herself being a different person during the incident – an individual of resistance and strength. The character complicates ways in which the disenfranchised position as a slave has moulded her: "I do not want to lose that me, the one I know I can be, that I am. And there is another Sila. I do not want to be her. It is her whose has changed so many times" (Christiansë 2006: 321). Although Sila could not save Carolina and Camies, she envisions saving her son Pieter:

> Somebody move this island, drink up the water between the land and this island so that I can run up it. I want this land to fold itself like a tablecloth so that I can get to that farm in one step. I want to step onto that farm and pick Pieter up. I want them to see me arrive and I want them to see my right hand as I hold it high. It will be all that they need to see. Ja. (Christiansë 2006: 325-326)

Ecological and environmental imaginaries in the passage allow Sila to picture herself in the capacity of rescuing her son. For Garuba, the animist unconscious operates "through a process that involves […] a continual re-enchantment of the world" (Garuba 2003: 265). Illustrations in the passage encourage re-enchantment, as Sila conceives of her surroundings shifting, moulding itself to her advantage. Moving the island, drinking up the water of the sea; and wanting the "land to fold itself like a tablecloth" are earthly shifts that reflect Sila's deep desire to reach Pieter. The character's yearning to be with her son is expressed with the mode of re-enchantment, as the action results in "rational and scientific [being] appropriated and transformed into the mystical and magical" (Garuba 2003: 267). Conceiving of the natural environment in this way permits the character to become more herself, with the ability to move landscapes in order to decide on the wellbeing of her son. Sila's imagined capabilities are figured with the gesture: "I want them to see my right hand as I hold it high"; and with the action, she conveys how "[she] becomes [her]self in the process of becoming one with the Sacred" (Alexander 2005: 301).

Conclusion

This project set out to examine themes of the ecological, the nonhuman and sacred qualities in Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora*. Within the works of Christiansë, the presence of the sea alongside enslaved subjects is not a simple one. In considering the ocean as more than a background figure or metaphor, ecological themes broaden modes of thinking about literature and slavery. In the essay "Of other seas: metaphors and materialities in maritime regions", Philip E. Steinberg encourages a more extensive appreciation of the ocean in literature, one which views maritime qualities of the seascape as a central point of analysis. A consideration of literature oceanically reveals a flexibility of the vast ocean as an ontological place, whereby "the ocean as a uniquely fluid and dynamic space" needs to be developed through an understanding "that views the ocean as continually being reconstituted by a variety of elements: the nonhuman and human, the biological and geographical, the historic and the contemporary" (2013: 157). This project takes into account Steinberg's theory, and approaches the above elements reforming across different sea dimensions. Put differently, in positioning the sea as a stage for human history, the project works at uncovering Cape slavery alongside qualities of the ecological within Christiansë's two literary works. As such, this conclusion draws a connection between 'ocean materialites' and *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora* as ways in which this project might afford thinking about South African literature in relation to oceanic studies.

Steinberg notes an incorporation of the sea as a "real, experienced social arena", that facilities a study "of works that emerge from the actual material encounters of the sea" (2013: 156). As demonstrated, this project explores *Unconfessed* and *Imprendehora* as South African literature which amalgamates slavery as a transoceanic human social construct with multispecies oceanic ecologies. Christiansë offers subtleties of slave memories, oriented from the Cape colonial regime, a structure that grew from southern sea networks. Slave subjects were co-erced into the shipping routes in the East, and Southern seas, and their experience within the ocean circuits facilitate the author's literary works. In thinking with the ocean, the project emphasises Christiansë's practise for alternative modes of undertaking repressed histories of enslaved persons, or as the author describes: narratives that are not in familiar form. Alternatively, this thesis also urges modes of working alongside fictional expressions of oppressed individuals who were not given rein over their own narratives. The sea enters as a dimension within these narratives, presented as an unfamiliar attribute which provides nuance

within silenced pasts. In this way, this project explores how Christiansë articulates the enslaved and their interactions with ocean ecologies.

Sharpe discusses the difficulties of undertaking scholarship on slavery. The scholar notes that those who teach, write, and think about slavery and its afterlives confront "myriad silences" and "ruptures". The rifts are evident in "time, space, history, ethics, research and method as we do our work. Again and again scholars of slavery face absence in the archives as we attempt to find 'agents buried beneath'" (Sharpe 2016: 12). From the position as a student of the topic of slavery, and working in admiration of Christiansë and Sharpe's scholarship, my difficulty was navigating power dynamics of being a researcher in the field of those enslaved. The process of interpreting the text, with the hope of being assertive, responsible and just about the subjects in history, was a point-of-view of which I was constantly aware of. The dualistic position of learning whilst also compiling this thesis, encouraged my desire to navigate delicate workings of the already harmed-slave-subject, parallel to subtleties of possibility. To put differently, Sharpe signals to a function of 'wake work' as a means in taking care of one another, a mode in which I attempted to communicate through this piece of work.

And so, with an intent to think and conceive of disfigured lives in history, this project operates alongside a call for a stretch in conceptualisation – beckoning for humanistic recognition that falls outside of social constructs in a modern material world. By doing so, this project manoeuvres the difficulties of conveying narratives that have not been told by or about the enslaved. NourbeSe Philp notes the responsibility of working within literature and slavery, stating: "I think," Philip says, "this is what *Zong!* is attempting: to find a form to bear this story which can't be told, which must be told, but through not telling" (qtd. in Saunders 2008: 72). My intent moves from Philip's stance, and in a like manner Sharpe's to emphasise thinking of and imagining revisions enacted on and by enslaved persons "across a series of relations in the ship, the hold, the wake, and the weather" (Sharpe 2016: 32). Material imaginaries in ecologies of the ocean enable nuanced apprehension of subjects in history, and in some way, bearing their story with an attention to concern.

With this intention, imaginaries attended to in this project work at disclosing the ocean, and how the space becomes a dynamic force in Christiansë's works – navigating modes of existence that work outside social constructs of the colonial era. DeLoughrey points out an approach of critical oceanic studies which "engages sea ontologies, figuring maritime space as multispecies and embodied place which the oceanic contours of the planet, including its

submarine creatures, are no longer outside of history" (2017: 42). Imaginaries in both of the author's works present complex species crossing at a time of Cape slavery. Through an interaction with the indentured labour force in the Indian Ocean World, *Imprendehora* illustrates a two-fold method of engaging with experiences of the subjects at sea, and multiple compositions of the nonhuman. The project extends perspectives of what may be and what may not human, at a time in history when the demarcations are already faulty. DeLoughrey's 'sea ontologies' offers an intersectional point of view from "ancestry, history, and non-Western knowledge systems" (2017: 36), drawing instability to social constructs of 'the human' under colonialism. The ocean becomes an axis in this theory, demonstrating mechanisms in arts and literature where social orders of the colonial structure are made murky.

It is *within* alternative epistemologies that possibilities come to light – possibility of better conveying narratives of disenfranchised subjects in history. In relating to illustrations of the ocean in literature, Blum notes: "think[ing] not just of the scene's nautical setting or conditions, but of the epistemological process by which forms of human or extra-human relation are dissolved and reconstituted in the fluid medium" (2013: 152). The scholar points out constructs of knowledge when considering forms of existence at sea, complementing both Alexander's theory of the sacred and Garuba's 'animist discourse'. Stemming from a discussion in recognition of environmental and ecological movements that evoke animist discourse, Garuba signals a need to reach for new conceptual vocabularies that transcend modernist episteme, however difficult the task may be (2013: 45). Through modes of the sacred, the character Sila, and her interconnected relation with the environment artfully deposits her own notions of knowledge. In thinking beyond conventional models of resistance, favouring a mutuality undertaken in nature between the slave-woman and nonhuman properties, the project furnishes an innovative hue within workings of South African literature.

Sharpe discusses ways of being in a contemporary world as a result of systems of slavery. The scholar articulates personal accounts as a means of connecting "the social forces […] to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery" (Sharpe 2016: 8). I believe investigations on conceptual frames of, and for living in the aftermaths of chattel slavery is a theme this thesis could have investigated in more detail. Such a project would involve developing a discussion on time and space – of slave history and contemporary South Africa in relation to movement of ocean waters. In line with ocean studies, the sea "becomes the object of our focus not because it is a space that facilitates movement – the space across

which things move – but because it is a space that is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* movement" (Steinberg 2013: 165). I believe undertaking complexities which examine a link between the continuities, and afterlives of slavery within contemporary constructs, in relations to the themes and subtleties of movement, could be developed in further research. Exploring slavery and its afterlives across land and sea could extend our understanding of its many, and ongoing ramifications.

When I started the journey of the project, my intention was to center my discussion on the sacredness of water. With an investment in water, and how the element might enchant a fractured world, my research expanded to broader themes of ecology. I enjoyed learning the multifaceted modes of nonhuman conceptualisation and the flexibility of workings of sacred and spirit appreciation. I hope this report will contribute to modes of drawing connections between South African literature and ocean, and in a way, assists Philip's inquiry into: "What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a 'liquid grave'?" (Philip 2008: 201).

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