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Electronic Fictions and Tourist Currents: Constructing the Island-Body in Kempadoo's *Tide Running*

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The end of European imperialism did not signal the death of its project of universalism. Nor did entry into the period of the so-called liberating “posts” neutralize the Manichean epistemologies of race, ethnic and geo-cultural difference on which colonialism operated and flourished. Edward Said reminds us in *Culture and Imperialism* that “the imperial past lives on” (20) in today’s global setting even as its liberties, flows, and multiplicities are celebrated. It is no longer news that the world has entered the new epoch of globalization. Yet, what we know about viruses may also be true of authoritarian regimes and prejudices: they mutate. Given their colonial history, small nation states and economies like those of the Caribbean are very familiar with the effects of internationalizing systems, and are beginning to recognize their vulnerable positioning in the current “global moment” that stands well-protected under the umbrella of Western capitalism, with all its post-modern relatives (post-nationalism, post-industrialism, consumerism, multiculturalism, trans-nationalism, universalism, and so on).

It would be an error to collapse the old and new internationalisms into a single frame. Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, for instance, make a crucial distinction between European imperialism and the post-modernization of the contemporary global economy that suggests two different modalities. Imperialism defines “the extension of the sovereignty of European nation-states beyond their own boundaries” to establish territorial domains of ownership and control (xii). Empire, on the other hand, “is a *decentred* and *deterritorialized* apparatus of rule” whose mode of surveillance is the creation of wealth towards “biopolitical production, [that is,] the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest in one another” (xii-iii).

Yet, whether one calls it empire, internationalism, or globalization, the current postmodern economic and cultural environment is Janus-faced in appearance and effect. The dismantling of Europe’s monolith modernity, the apparent democratization of the business of living characterized by the rise of independent state governance, the “free” flow of bodies and information, economic and cultural liberalization, and technological exchange are some of the gains that feed the ambivalence about the implications of globalization for the future of humanity. The continued exploitation or re-colonization of small nation states along North/South, West/East geo-political binaries demonstrate that the geographical and racial lines of colonialism have not been significantly altered (Hardt and Negri 43). The results of its operations are all too familiar, just the scale is more extensive and intensive: largely Western and North American capital production that facilitates the informational, technological, military, and ideological authority to keep the “Third World” in its place. Though a few new characters have joined the cast, the script is unfolding like the proverbial postmodern rerun, in which the nostalgia of the now postindustrial North/West for the Golden Age of an older modernity is fast becoming the nightmare of those who are the instruments of its reproduction.

This essay, which focuses on Oonya Kempadoo’s second novel, *Tide Running*, traces a circularity of effect evident in the postmodern phase of Empire relative to Caribbean, positioned as the region is, as primarily small, developing states and economies before this contemporary

Goliath. The novel, which develops the author's interest in regimes of power, youth experiences and sex/sexuality, falls short of the structural integrity, and even innocence of her first, *Buxton Spice*. However, its frank engagement with current Caribbean realities invites fresh debates on the old issues of political, economic and cultural sovereignty. Kempadoo's exploration of a postmodern culture marked by migratory movement, tourism, the impact of media technologies on issues of identity, gender performance, and sexuality, the simultaneous impact of international and local cultural forces on lived experience, even its experimental stylistic "untidiness," establish *Tide Running* as an important marker in the evolution of the West Indian novel. Indeed, it registers the emergence of a new generation of writers.

While the experiences of the region under the first and second phases of globalization are systematically different, I argue that these two moments, European imperialism and late capitalism's Empire, constitute a return to a phenomenon that may be described as disappearance. This trope of invisibility is multifaceted. In the context of post-modernity, invisibility transcends the specific erasures of colonial cultural indoctrination,¹ but retains some of its features. Rather than the loss of connections with ancestral motherlands through state-sanctioned cultural censorship and a Eurocentric education system, the contemporary character of disappearance describes the bombardment of consciousness by overwhelmingly North American media-simulated realities and subjectivities. Merle Hodge describes this phenomenon as the "'mental desertion' of our environment" (206), a condition that also evokes Kamau Brathwaite's "dissociation of sensibility" (36). In addition, there is the global tourism industry and its use-value reification of island landscapes/people into saleable products that service fantasy fulfilment.

In exploring the phenomenon of disappearance as a postmodern effect, Benedict Anderson's study of the sixteenth to eighteenth-century tendency towards "synchronic novelty" is useful. According to Anderson, colonial synchronic novelty operated by a logic of time suspension whereby New World space was correlated to Old World space "synchronically," so that both co-existed within "homogeneous, empty time," rather than "diachronically," since the latter would produce the undesirable effect of establishing the new as a successor to "something vanished" from which it derived its validation (187). Synchronicity enjoys privilege at the expense of the diachronic and, by extension, the particularity of the temporal and spatial; it is therefore understandable how colonial Barbados could be constructed as a "little England." The process of duplication or "cosmic clocking" (Anderson 194), it seems, worked on a fetish of homogeneity/sameness in the service of the Western need for permanence, that is, ontological/cultural/national superiority. The result was the desired mirage of transhistorical and even transcultural parings on which discourses of Western universalism at the time depended.

In the current context of globalization, "empty time" and "cosmic clocking" processes produce new "synchronic transoceanic parings" (Anderson 194), that are linked to the need to secure not extended national sovereignties but the primacy of the North/West capitalist ethos, along with its associated consumerist character and political ideology. In light of this, one can

understand the ascendancy of America as today's economic, political, cultural, and even moral global dictatorship. We are no longer dealing with a force of influence harnessed to linear or one-dimensional frames as in European imperialism. This is because a network of decentred and disjunctive dynamics intricately enmeshes contemporary cultural dynamics.

While the establishment of a uniform global culture and economy, which for many means Americanization, is a widespread concern, not all share this view or fear. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, has brought significant light to the complex workings of globalization and its impact on culture. He recognizes cultural homogenization, often synonymous with Nike, KFC, McDonald's, Coke, and MTV as an undesirable possibility. However, he argues that the threat of cultural sameness must be considered in light of the profoundly unpredictable and disjunctive interrelationship of numerous forces on the global landscape that involve the twin cultural processes of homogeneity and heterogeneity (328). As opposed to the centre-periphery model of cultural influence, Appadurai proposes a "chaos" paradigm in order to analyze the intricate workings of the postmodern imaginary. He argues that the function of the imagination in today's order has moved beyond, though not exclusive of, old modalities such as fantasy, escape, elitist leisure, and so on. Its new role in global culture, he defines as the "imagination as social practice," an organized "form of negotiation between sites of agency ('individuals') and globally defined fields of possibility" (327) in the business of image production and reception. For Appadurai, the fact that people occupy multiple imaginative spaces makes homogeneity too simplistic an argument, because individuals and communities can "contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them" (329). Further, individual nations may face even greater local fears of cultural absorption other than Americanization, for instance, the Sri Lankans concern with the Indianization of their culture (329). Closer to home, in Trinidad, one can perhaps add Tobago's resistance to Trinidadianization, and in some quarters, there are those who harbour a suspicion of "Afro-Trinis" who "try to Creolise Indians."²

These are undoubtedly legitimate concerns and the role local hegemonic forces play as agents of uniformity also need consideration. However, Appadurai's confidence in the effectiveness of native subversive strategies against dominant imaginary worlds is a logic that is not completely tenable. While his "homogenization and heterogenization" dyad of influence seeks to avoid the reduction of cultural debates to "either an argument about Americanization, or an argument about commoditization" (328), the homogenization dimension of his theory has greater meaning for Caribbean states. More than ever before, the region must deal with the socio-cultural implications of North American economic and cultural domination, as well as the social implications of indigenized global elements, for instance, metropolitan gangster cultures.

Kempadoo's *Tide Running* is a significant contribution to the debate about cultural indoctrination on several levels. The major conflict involves characters that manifest the pleasures and dangers of the contemporary citizen whose migrant, borderless citizenship very much resembles Kempadoo's own transnational identity. She was "born in England of Guyanese

parents ... brought up in Guyana ... lived in Europe, various islands in the Caribbean, and now lives in Grenada.”³ The author is herself familiar with the implications of living in a postmodern world of liberal flows, accelerated rates of cultural relations, informational and capital exchange, the privileging of mobility, temporality, and placelessness, sometimes at the cost of moral and ethical responsibility to the nation-state. The character Peter, for instance, is an English corporate lawyer married to a brown-skinned Caribbean (Trinidadian) woman Bella, who is an aspiring photographer. Together, with their mixed-race son, Oliver, they make Tobago their “holiday haven,” because it promises an alternative to Trinidad city life: “peace of mind, crime-free living and the blue Caribbean sea” (62). Therefore, Tobago is the typical tropical paradise, a fantasy island, not a “real” place. The island and the issues engaged in the text function primarily as a Caribbean prototype.

Central conflict in the novel is the friendship Bella and Peter develop with two Tobagonian brothers, Ossi and Cliff. The latter, Cliff is the twenty-year old with whom they form a casual sexual relationship that turns sour and ends in crime and punishment. A complex interaction of forces is set up among key locations where multiple “scapes” of cultural, economic, ideological, technological, and geo-political dimensions converge: the West/North and Trinidad, with Tobago at the text’s centre. The plot’s intricate tapestry of tensions gives confirmation to Appadurai’s contention that the “new global order has to be seen as a complex, overlap of disjunctive systems, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of clearly demarcated centres and margins” (328).

Tide Running invites consideration of the interplay between localized and international scenarios of geo-political and cultural conditioning. The text engages critically with the impact of consumer advertising on the population, so much so that Bella describes the cultural face of Tobago as shaped by imported brand-name products: Nike, Fila, Hilfiger, Adidas, FUBU, with Coca-cola and KFC as the preferred junk foods (125). There is a prominent foreign presence due to the tourist industry, the onslaught of largely American television programming and Hollywood movies. An additional source of influence is the popular pan-Caribbean dancehall or bad-boy music among the youth, with links to American ghetto/gangster rap, hip-hop, R&B, and other strains. The subtext of Tobago’s tense relations with Trinidad, resulting from the island’s disadvantaged political and economic position in the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago also features.

Kempadoo chooses a narrative technique that mirrors the text’s entanglement of issues and triadic love affair by splitting the first person narration between the two main characters, Cliff and Bella. While this allows the reader intimate access to their respective perspectives based on gender, class, race/colour and nationality (Trinidadian or Tobagonian) differences, the double-voiced style of narration also extends the text’s engagement with the fallacy of the so-called democratization of social life characteristic of postmodern culture. The levelling of fields that the author engineers by allowing access to the consciousness of both Cliff and Bella strategically works with the plot to undermine the performance of social equality, and the false

“politics of recognition” staged by the superficial meeting of worlds represented in the relationship between “native”/Cliff and “visitors”/Bella and Peter. At another level, Kempadoo is perhaps signalling an investment in the inherently elusive nature of subjectivity and the ambiguity of desire. As a result, moral relativity, rather than moral right, seems the governing law in both Cliff and Bella as individual thinking and feeling characters.

The primary point of entry to the activity of international and localized cultural dynamics and their impact on subjectivity construction and performance is the text’s treatment of the relations between the islands Trinidad and Tobago. Placing Tobago in the middle of a number of converging tensions invites critical reflection on the applicability of disjuncture and difference as counter-discursive interventions in today’s global cultural interactions. Streams of unequal strength converge. However, the stronger currents of globalization from the North, as well as a regional, pan-Caribbean disjuncture, overpower the weaker stream, that is, Trinidadianization or localized acculturation.

This is not to dismiss the hegemonic strategies of control exerted by Trinidad on the smaller Tobago economy and culture as a whole. For instance, the entrepreneurial arrogance of the Trinidadian businessman, Vaughn Jagdeo casts Tobagonians as ignorant and incompetent in financial matters. This is primarily because of their efforts to guard against Trinidadian infiltration of the business opportunities afforded by the tourist industry, and the threat of locals’ disenfranchisement from land ownership by the influx of wealthy foreigners and Trinidadians looking for holiday homes. In addition, class, race/colour prejudices held by Trinidadians, sustain the negative stereotyping of Tobagonians. The crude remarks of Bella’s Trinidadian friend, Small Clit (the name suggests her own sexualized construction), demonstrate her biased attitude to the local men. She perceives them to be unsophisticated and sex-starved, economically deprived and therefore potential criminals (122-23).

Apart from the assumed superiority displayed by visiting Trinidadians, three primary sources are responsible for the overriding effects of cultural conditioning on the youth. First, a constant tourist presence projects attractive images of pampered pleasure and economic power unavailable to locals. Second, alluring television simulations of metropolitan life and consumerism condition the tastes of youths. Third, popular music, especially the regional influence of dancehall and dub music emerging from Jamaica and adopted by other territories as a kind of pan-Caribbean youth identity model, contribute to patterns of physical and sexual aggression. A network of larger international and regional forces therefore affects Tobago’s threat of localized cultural absorption by Trinidad.

If the metonym “foreign” signifies the North/West, Trinidad, the economic and industrial, “big sister” of Tobago appears in the imaginary of Tobago’s young people as a mini version of an attractive, “other” geo-cultural space. A class of visiting Trinidadians, who reproduce the tourist persona, complete with designer clothes and other trappings of commercialized leisure, reinforce this image. These signs suggest that they possess the economic means to afford

“authentic” holidays to exotic destinations. The black “Trini” man with his “new short pants, new Reef sandals, walking puff-up, proud to be bareback” is therefore categorized as “foreign” (17). The phenomenon of the local tourist signals a departure from a strict racial construction of privilege, since monetary power, not just whiteness, ascends as the new signifier of a social position that can afford the lifestyle associated with travel. Trinidad, from this perspective, is merely a clone of the ideal North culture/geography and is, therefore, in a certain sense homogenized from outside by a larger global systemic in which the island is also enmeshed.

Contrary to Appadurai’s confidence in the ability of receptor cultures to contest dominant worlds, Kempadoo’s plot unearths the uneven interchange of cultural and economic forces that contribute to the steady weakening of local, indigenous trajectories of knowledge/power. While the young protagonists are critically aware that the tourists fall short of their “smooth-smooth and white” (15) TV versions, and the Trinidadians stimulate resentment in the unemployed locals for their ability to appropriate the “tourist” look, they symbolize an idealized, though unattainable, fantasy-country/citizen of desire. Throughout the plot’s development, a consistent interplay is evident between media-constructed gender identities and sexual fantasies, as well as lifestyle and class aspirations. Television programs transmit images of perfect bodies and lives. These stock the image-bank of young people. Electronic media-conditioning of sexual fantasies is manifested, for instance, in the way local men see Small Clit’s arrival at the airport through television re-runs of a Toni Braxton music-video that is constructed on the stereotype of the “Black Entertainment Princess,” symbol of desirable, female beauty. Ultimately, the rude reality of class differences abruptly shatters their fantasy of Small Clits’ attainability:

Visions of African Coca-Cola-bottle figures revolved in their eyeballs, curves with ball bearings for joints, firm flesh bouncing. Tall, neck long and straight, they didn’t even have to see her face before the close-up of chocolately-smooth full features smooched onto their screens. Eye-shadow-dark eyes flicking, mascara lashes on matt brown skin, glistening maroon lips parting. Till she cut the Toni Braxton video playing in their heads with a ice-water look and a long steups. (123-4)

The current instruments of social conditioning have clearly changed. Anderson notes that in the colonial dispensation, Europe’s practice of parallel imaging or self-duplication comprised a varied arsenal of technological innovations, economic and military power, bureaucratic and ideological control, intellectual and cultural sovereignty that were dependent on the role of “print-capitalism” to make this synchronicity possible (188-89). The new global culture also has its apparatuses of dissemination and control. These include the communication technologies of television, film, radio, cassettes, CD, DVD and computer that manipulate tastes and affect the collective imaginary through a virtual geography of images. These become life-forming scripts in the collective imaginary. In the world of *Tide Running*, for instance, the primary concern is with the way the attractively packaged dramatization of that modern lifestyle shapes the perception of a monotonous, uneventful local reality.

It is worth noting at this point that initial discourses on the problem of Caribbean representation and the formation of subjectivity focused on the role of the book in the “worlding” of the West; the corresponding displacement of the colonized sensibility manifested in the loss of place and self as distant metropolitan sites became privileged locations of reality and culture. Michael Dash, for instance, refers to a contradictory axis of association evident in a civilized/primitive, alternatively paradise/hell binary, originating in colonial texts and narratives of the region and repeated, even by the inhabitants of those very lands. These images constitute a recurrent “grammar of images and metaphors” (Dash 23, 25) relative to the construction of the New World. Indeed, as Derek Walcott recognized in the context of his own struggle with the “dead metaphors” of his colonial heritage, “climates are shaped by what we have read of them” (13).

The advent of Caribbean literature provided the stage for the re-appearance/construction of the island-body that would play a crucial role in mending the Caribbean’s dissociated imaginary. So that when George Lamming’s novel *In the Castle of my Skin* appeared in 1953, Kamau Brathwaite would respond: “everything was transformed. Here breathing to me from every pore of line and page was the Barbados I had lived” (37). However, in terms of writing and its role in decolonizing the Caribbean imaginary, Lamming himself has not neglected to remind us in *Coming Coming Home: Conversations II* that the “broad mass of our population had always been excluded from the culture of book reading” (17). This is so because the book seldom transcended the context of formal learning. It therefore failed to be a major influence in the formation of a native “inventory” from “within” (14). There is no similar gap with regard to television viewing where the domain of influence, unlike the book, is far more democratic.

In globalization’s second phase, propelled by the late capitalism of post-modernization, imported electronic simulations of reality heavily influence the Caribbean imaginary. Merle Hodge ironically links the advent of Trinidad and Tobago political independence from Britain and the arrival of the television to the island in 1962, as the beginning of a more intensified “vicious era of cultural penetration” by the controlling assault of Hollywood’s image-forming machinery and consumer advertising (205). Television has emerged as the main public text for reading life. It infiltrates the private sphere of the home in a way never before possible as the “official” communicator of consciousness and provider of the basic human need for information, narratives of life and fantasy.

A legitimate concern with the heavy diet of indiscriminate North American television programming and film productions consumed by the region is beginning to appear as a major theme in Caribbean literature. Earl Lovelace’s *Dragon Can’t Dance*, for instance, provides a significant early exploration of the impact of Hollywood Westerns on the bad-john, Fisheye. After leaving the cinema he would mimic the star gunmen, “walking kinda slow . . . , the fastest gun alive, his long hands stiff at his sides, his fingers ready to go for the guns he imagined holstered low on his hips” (51). Another example is Kendel Hippolyte’s poem “Bed Time Story,”⁴ which explores the implications of the barrage of television screen images that comprise

the narratives the children will take to bed. Sleep here represents the seduction of consciousness by “foreign” fictions. The saving possibility is represented by the lone child who returns to the silent living room perhaps for recollection, a posture that may nurture the ability to glean the blurred boundary between reality and simulation. Another possibility is that the silence may provide the space to distinguish the “here” as opposed to the “there” of the screen given that the notion of an “elsewhere” is fast becoming an anomaly in today’s global web of cross-confluences and borderless virtual spaces.

Kempadoo represents a similar scenario, but deepens the exploration of the psychic and social implications of an intense exposure to television’s narratives. In the cramped dwelling where Cliff lives with his two siblings, his niece Keisha, and largely absent working mother, the television is the chief organizer of time, providing entertainment, escape, fantasy, a sense of community, and education. The novel explores the impact of immersion in the world of consumer advertising, Oprah Winfrey talk shows, *Days of Our Lives*, *Bold and the Beautiful* soap operas, and *Baywatch* adventures. These programs and their relatives become the proto-narratives of an idealized Otherness. They function as key motivators of the re-performance of gendered castings of male heroism, female beauty, sexual desirability, and life-style versions of success and happiness. For Lynette, Oprah’s empowered, manicured T.V. persona is her ideal of black female perfection, while the soap operas provide images of domestic and marital bliss. These contradict her reality as an unemployed, single mother, and act as adjudicators of conscience, more powerful than the religion offered by the wayside preacher who is, ironically, a clone of the television evangelist persona complete with an Americanized accent.

The collapse between the landscapes of fiction and reality engenders the peculiarly postmodern condition of living in a world of signs that are “unmoored from their social signifiers” (Appadurai 327) that is similar to Jean Baudrillard’s analysis of Disneyland as a hyper-real world for which there is no correspondent reality (405-06). The social enactment of the imagination, therefore, necessarily produces various levels of mimicry that are symptomatic of the ability of simulated reality to make the immediate environment disappear by producing a “nostalgia for a present” (Appadurai 326) moment without the relevant memory, conditions, or even the environment of loss. The habits of the street thug Dobermann and Cliff’s sister Lynette are excellent examples of this predicament.

Dobermann’s re-enactment of the metropolitan, ghetto scenario based on clips of “gansta-rap videos” and movie scenes, including big city alleys, pursuing police cars and “yankee” accent, is so authentic that Cliff notes, he “can make you forget that is hours sometimes before you see a car pass down Plymouth road” (28). As Tomo’s henchman, he represents a growing breed of localized “gansterism” with its related links to violence and crime that includes illicit drug dealing, an attractive lifestyle for the dislocated, unemployed male youth for whom it provides social and monetary prestige, power and visibility in an otherwise opportunity-starved environment. In addition, there is Lynette’s attempt to validate her life with purchases of advertised “TV things” for Keisha that she can ill-afford. The buying of Ultra Pampers, Pringles,

even the Bounce and Fabric Softener, although she has no washing-machine (164), are signs of her seduction by the commodity fetishism or, what one might appropriately call, in this instance, the “thingifying” of culture supported by television advertising.

At the heart of Kempadoo’s contemporary Tobago are the social implications of the accelerated creation of cultural forms that need no link between image and environment. If language is the shaper and communicator of culture, then Lynette’s socialization of her daughter on its language, not merely its images, demonstrates the role of TV in the formation of subjectivity. She feels great pride, for instance, when Baby Keisha is able to “say half” a word in the TV talk” (164), which in essence amounts to an amplified, hyper-emotive Americanization of speech such as Opera’s programmed elocutions: “go *girl*, yeah, *awesome awesome*” (164), and so on. Further, the fact that Ossi and Cliff cannot on many occasions find the language to name the images on the screen with which they are consistently engaged manifests a split between language and experience; signs float around that are incomplete in structure since mental concepts/signifieds are disconnected from their associated signifiers. For instance, while looking at their favourite program *Baywatch*, Cliff cannot find the signifier “fuse” to name what he calls the “wick t’ing” of the burning dynamite he sees on the screen. Similarly, Ossi describes artificial respiration as “dat t’ing” when they “suck she mouth and press down on she chest” (32). The screen presents a world of visual images and behaviours for which the young adults have no language and experience. In the extreme, they reproduce or re-perform television’s simulated reality, but this represents a lived experience without depth of meaning and a loss of temporal reality. The condition described here is somewhat similar to Frederic Jameson’s “schizophrenic” language where free-floating signifiers are unmoored from their signifieds (25-28), a condition produced by the sign overload and emptying of an electronic age.

In the absence of a discriminating reading of those fictions, subjectivities are constructed on a pastiche of images and behaviors, with the distinction between the screen and the real becoming increasingly blurred. This is the chronic “mental desertion of environment” Hodge predicted (206). Yet, it is not simply the divided double-consciousness of the (ex-) colonized such as Naipaul’s mimic man, Ralph Singh, who inscribes the idea of England and India gleaned from books onto his Isabella landscape out of a sense that real centers, are elsewhere. Likewise, this doubling is not entirely the self-alienation of Lovelace’s bad-john Fisheye who mimics the cowboy heroes of Western movies. When one compares Fisheye and Ralph Singh to Kempadoo’s characters, Dobbermann and Cliff, an essential difference emerges. The awareness of role-playing is more evident in the former pair as they exhibit signs of a conscious double-ness manifested in their ability to discern performance from an essential sense of self. Ralph, for instance, is aware of his play-acting, which he freely confesses (40). Even the innately unreflective Fisheye admits to Aldrick while they are in prison that the rebellion was a mas’ they had played (186).

Kempadoo’s characters are different. Cliff demonstrates the ability to distinguish differences between television portrayals of life as perfect as opposed to the imperfect real, for

instance, on first observing Bella and Peter at their house he notices that “[t]hey look bright up like they on TV, ’cept neither one of them perfect-looking all over” (54). However, he does not possess the one-dimensionality of Fisheye’s cowboy mimicry. In the current situation, the hyper-reality of electronic simulations creates subjectivities that have moved beyond that flatness. The generation represented by Cliff, Ossi and Lynette feeds daily on television viewing. Audio-visual intensity and the capacity for intellectual, interactive and affective engagement with electronic narratives facilitate the consumption of virtual reality as the real. Therefore, when Ossi is viewing *Baywatch*, he can maintain the illusion that he is an aloof, superior consciousness, or omniscient participant in the action with the capacity to predict the outcome of the script, even though his immersion in it is more complete than he realizes. Similarly, Cliff literally enters the world of virtual reality when he goes to Bella and Peter’s “film-style house” (49). He notices that the décor and lighting “make you feel like you on TV. All the colours bright up” (51). The attraction is to the heightened representation of life in contrast to the mundane life in Plymuth. Real and simulated worlds merge as he sees his Nike shoes on the blue floor tiles seemingly altered. Further, the tiles duplicate the blue of the television screen so that the “film-style house” becomes a virtual other-space outside normative restrictions, where the double suspension of disbelief required by electronic imaging facilitates the free-play of the ungoverned imaginary. Peter, Bella and Cliff, therefore, live out their triangular, erotic fantasia in a kind of meta-social holding bay that operates according to its own rules.

The relationship of sex/sexuality to the electronic media is an important dimension of the novel’s critique of the social order, particularly in an era plagued by AIDS. This, however, is twinned with patterns of sexual behaviour engendered by the tourist industry’s demand for, and consumption of island bodies. In her study of male sex tourism in the Caribbean, Joan Phillips examines the interrelationship between male prostitution, the re-enactment of traditional fantasies about native/black sexual libido, and the social-economic gain valued by local men from their participation in the sex trade (186). In many ways, Cliff and his brother Ossi fit Phillips’ profile of the “beach boy” (186-89). Cliff, for instance, is young, unemployed, good-looking, attractively self-contained, and in touch with his natural environment. However, Kempadoo treats the affair with Bella and Peter as a kind of benign or masked sex tourism. Sexual experimentation as the leisure afforded the wealthy, rather than overt solicitation for sex, seems the motivation behind the couple’s seduction of Cliff. Additionally, Cliff is not an initiated sex-worker at the outset. He first appears as an innocent, not yet adept in the sexual games and exploits that his brother Ossi seems to have mastered. In this case, the plot traces his subtle entanglement in the orgies of the affluent.

While wealth produces its own patterns of sexual behaviour, Kempadoo delves into the complexity of the matter as a many-headed social, moral and long-term economic crisis when one factors in increased teen-aged pregnancy, the AIDS epidemic and devastation associated with it. Cliff, for instance, reveals that Ossi and himself were sexualized in their pre-adolescent years: “I was ten, Ossi was nine, when we ketch it for the first time—a piece’a t’ing from them

small girls” (20). It is significant that the language of sex is predatory and the female body is the object of a hunting game. Several influences therefore shape sexual practices and attitudes among the youth. Also important in this respect is the impact of the advertising and entertainment industries, including the pan-Caribbean popularity of dancehall and dub music from Jamaica, and the styles influenced by it. While this music is a source of youth identification and anti-establishment protest, the redeployment of the stereotypical sexualized black body by many of the popular songs is a cause for concern. Lyrics typified by Buju Banton’s “Champion” (112), Yellow Man’s “Them a Mad Over Me” (38), and the like encourage attractive hyper-masculine constructs that glorify aggression and sexual prowess at one level, and at another reify the female body as an object for pleasure control on the next. Further, the music weaves its own brand of fantasy with regard to love and sexual enjoyment that are unconnected to class and monetary realities, not to mention moral responsibility.

What is constant in all these trajectories is the exotic and sexual re-casting of the island/er. The utopian tourist fantasy translates to an epistemology and ontology of disappearance because, in the Western tourist’s imaginary, the country of desire/fantasy, whether as a past relived or a future longed for, is a script that normalizes the island’s present as a playground fixed in the configuration of an unreal country. A powerful parallel to this line of argument is Olive Senior’s poem, “Meditations on Yellow” (11-18), a clever, satirical monologue that traces the evolution of the capitalist ethos in the region. Senior evokes the color yellow as symbol of a historical continuum of plunder, enslavement, and servitude that marks the Caribbean’s relations with the developed world, beginning with the conquistadors’ misguided search for gold, then the sugar of the colonial plantation economy, and finally the trade in sunshine and sand of the contemporary tourist industry. Tourists are the “new” arrivals whose agenda is the consumption of exotica and erotica:

a new set of people
 arrive
 to lie bare-assed in the sun
 wanting gold on their bodies
 cane-rows in their hair
 with beads -even bells (15)

A litany of insatiable demands that are the visitors’ right as customers paying for a service follows the key word “wanting.” The islanders’ obligation is, therefore, to give as the providers of pleasure:

But still they want more
 want it strong
 want it long
 want it black

want it green
want it dread (15)

The imagery is obviously suggestive of the preference for local sex that companions the “authentic” holiday experience. The Western woman is presented as a consumer of the male body constructed as a racially stereotyped island “other,” suggested by the signifiers “black,” “green” and “dread” that evoke the beach-bum Rasta and his advertised virile masculinity.

The economic reality is that sunshine, ecology, and sex invite the contemporary flow of capital to much of the Caribbean and support a service-oriented labour system that perpetuates servitude and exoticism characteristic of the region’s original construction in the geo-political order as a Paradise regained. Both Kempadoo’s and Senior’s engagements with the historical cycle of exploitation intersect with Derek Walcott’s worrying reference to the “the shame of necessity” with which the Caribbean participates with the North/West in its reduction to destinations of pleasure and escape. The mandate of such economies is that visitors “must feel that they are inhabiting a succession of postcards” since “for tourists, sunshine cannot be serious” (12-13). Walcott’s caveat is an important one particularly as it is made in the context of his 1992 Nobel acceptance speech and therefore speaks to the coming of age of the New World and its cultural productions on the global stage. Apart from indicting regional politicians for their complicity in sustaining the Eden myth, Walcott invites consideration of the chasm between metropolitan appreciation of “Third World” art/culture and the persistence of a geo-political and economic positioning that is bound to the capitalist exploitation of island resources. Tourism being that,

high pitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile. (27)

Among other things, the current commercialization of culture that marks postmodern late capitalism and its insatiable commodity fetishism companions a revitalized interest in the cultural artefacts and “natural” geographies of the so-called “Third World.” By extension, there has been the tendency to homogenize difference. Marketing exotica is an industry with high stakes, as Paul Gilroy reminds us in relation to the current crossover demand in the entertainment industry for “blackness” and its mass promotion by New Age “cultural brokers” who specialize in the business of “marketing difference” (242). It would be naïve, however, to deduce that the heightened consumer appetite for difference suggests the emergence of more democratic cultural relations that signal the end of the “vicious cycle” of mastery engineered by colonialism’s disavowal of otherness/blackness, a re-ordering that Frantz Fanon so deeply desired (217). The enslavement of the Caribbean to selling itself to pleasure the North/West is a stark reminder of the historical “stasis” that imprisons the region, particularly in a global marketplace thirsty for a

return to primitivism and exoticism, symptomatic of the nostalgia for lost origins and naturalness.

Kempadoo pushes the discourse on sex tourism beyond the typical white/local (mostly black) nexus to engage appropriated or localized globalization tendencies of conditioning. In this regard, a notable difference is Bella's ethnicity. She is not the white tourist from the North seeking a two-week holiday romance. Rather, she is the mixed-race Caribbean woman from Trinidad, and is very much like Walcott's celebrated descendents of interracial marriages who make "it increasingly futile to trace genealogy" (16). Beyond race, and even national identification, Bella is the quintessential global persona who belongs nowhere and everywhere, a type who signifies the multicultural/creolized possibility transcending racial tensions in a world that is becoming more cosmopolitan. However, her superior economic status/class and her marriage to a Caucasian Englishman allow her to replicate the patterns of the white tourist cruising for local sex.

Peter is also interesting in this regard. He is the liberal "white man" consorting freely with locals. Yet, he re-enacts the "master" discourse that hyper-sexualizes and eroticizes blackness. This is particularly evident in his interest in the beautiful bodies and penis sizes of Cliff and Ossi. His fascination in this regard is apparently more out of sexual competitiveness than homoerotic desire. However, the partially voyeuristic role he adopts in the orgy episodes also reinforces the construction of the black body (male and female) as a site of pleasurable entertainment and consumption. It is never clear if he actually has sex with Cliff, but his obvious enjoyment in watching Bella and Cliff make love creates the necessary distance that establishes him as an external, superior consciousness set apart from the performance of "native" primitive passion.

Eroticism and its companion exotica are linked skillfully to the aesthetic also in the artwork of the character Hilda Schmitz, a German sculptor who possibly satirizes Louise Kimme.⁵ Hilda is a connoisseur of tropical beauty, "native" folk culture, and black bodies. Among her creative interests is producing sculptures in variations of Gypsy's "Little Black Boy". This racially constructed prototype that marries aesthetic pleasure to the reification of the body as sexual commodity and plaything, is reinforced further by her colorful carnivalesque creations on the same theme. The Trinidadian calypsonian, Gypsy, who perhaps innocently used the stereotype in his much criticized 1997 calypso, is another unhappy affirmation of the tenacious association of black masculinity with social degeneracy. Cliff, then, is the literal double of the androgynous "black dallie" (made by Hilda), and symbolically positioned in the bedroom of Peter and Bella, which makes their house something of a postmodern manifestation of Western capitalist "mastery," and Cliff, the contemporary "Nubian Nike" (58), that is, the completely commercialised exotic body.

With the island-body reduced to a mere product on the geo-cultural marketplace the condition Wilson Harris calls the "eclipse of sensibility" or the "eclipse of the person" first

produced by slavery capitalism and its fetish for objectification and possession repeats itself (154). However, in this age of full-blown consumerism, the operating principle is not completely the “ornamental stasis,” which Harris argues marked Europe’s anxiety with the possession of property, and was evidence of an ambivalent sovereignty afraid of loss and change (153-54). The notion of the “sovereign” in the postmodern dispensation is more purely the power to consume, that is, the facility to acquire and exploit the use-value of the goods of the world, and to discard and restock at will. It is this consumption principle that characterizes the relational dynamics in *Tide Running*. Like the financial transaction of prostitution, Hilda’s artistic and physical interest in the island-body is divorced from intimacy and personal responsibility, requirements that involve emotive and ethical engagement with the other’s larger life context. Although she barricades her house from plunder by local criminals, she keeps lovers like Ribs, whom she dismisses without a second thought when he descends into the decadence that she partly facilitates as a consumer of his type. Additionally, it is no surprise that she builds her boudoir, the space where consciousness is suspended in sleep, to deliberately preserve a purified, high-rise panorama of the landscape, reminiscent of a prime hotel-view of a tropical coastline, untarnished by the “crap” of poverty (97).

The title *Tide Running* is actually an inverted metaphor for a condition of stasis, the mirage of mobility, modernization, and freedom created, for instance, in Peter’s speeding car. The novel ends with the plot’s central tragedy: Cliff’s rapid decline into crime and a resulting jail sentence, the predictable route of many young men like himself. Told from Cliff’s perspective, the final chapter is marked by several images that suggest entrapment and the collapse of time: “Is a box they put me in,” “Close,” “Not moving.” “Is so me days go. Stop like the sky hinging over me,” “Not moving,” “The sea stop today” (199-201). These images of closure collectively constitute clips of Cliff’s moment of partial epiphany. They signal an end that is perhaps also a beginning as the demarcations of present, past and future dissolve. Time comes to a halt, unmoving like the sea its archetype, and the element that surrounds Cliff’s island/life.

The closing “A Breeding in You” performs a shocking reversal of the novel’s opening chapter “Sea Breathing” which is a rich, poetic representation of place that establishes Cliff’s consciousness of his island-space, sea and landscape. The syntax, “Sea Breathing,” suggests, in one instance, the personification of Cliff’s element and establishes an organic symbiosis between self and seascape. The title also evokes an almost amphibian transformation that Cliff undergoes. In fact, he demonstrates something of the spiritual possession of landscape on which George Lamming claims national consciousness rests.⁶ The sea, which is simultaneously mysterious and knowable, tangible and illusive, supportive and retributive, becomes the symbol of his existential awareness. It is the literal and metaphysical rhythm of his being and sign of his sense of belonging: “If I could’a never see it at all, nowhere round me, it go be like you lock me up. Drain something out’a me and leave a hole in me chest” (4). Conversely, the title of the closing chapter, “A Breeding in You,” negatively develops the Creole phonetic parallel suggested earlier in the word “breathing,” this time as “breeding,” a genetic or ontological make up. Images of

disconnection and alienation abound. Waves of a history of black/native/island non-presence are repeated and symbolized in Cliff's final incarceration in Her Majesty's Royal Gaol. Cliff cannot fully retrieve the gaol's history; he can only speculate that it was once a fort built by slaves. There he is treated brutally like "scraps." Far removed from his ancestral past, Cliff tentatively links the violent police officers, his present incarcerators, with the colonial "masters," those "[y]awsy, yellow-fever soldiers from foreign. From Peeta land?" (199). A line of exploitative continuity therefore connects the soldiers to Peter's "land" of origin, aligning him with the first internationalism, its economic, racial and cultural hegemony that held blackness in contempt, wishing to purge itself from the contact with "the bad blood of his race" (199) that neither enslavement nor incarceration could purge.

At this stage of the text, blackness comes full circle, so to speak, and is reconstructed as ontologically flawed, criminalized and perverted. This return to colonial race discourse recalls Lamming's exposure of the duplicity of the West's construction of the New World as a Paradise regained and the native as Noble Savage. Lamming argues that while the myth of the Noble Savage, and by extension the island as Paradise, became a "barometer by which the metropole [could] measure the delinquencies of its own civilization," the contrast was engaged with "a confidence . . . large enough to let it affirm any scale of ruin without feeling a loss of status" (*Coming Home* 5). According to Lamming, it was a fiction that was "quite dispensable at the slightest sign of resistance to White conversion" (*Coming Home* 5). The negative "grammar" of black otherness, it seems, is largely unchanged in the current systemic. With Cliff's fall from grace as the desirable, though different, local black boy, Bella and Peter quickly return to their sense of superiority, Peter by virtue of his wealth and whiteness, Bella by her class.

If movement and flow characterize contemporary culture, *Tide Running* unveils the static nature of the world order and the myth of equitable mobility. We are left with a sad case of the changing "same." Cliff's demise literally puts in gear a return to the past, or, more appropriately, a return to the future since time zones merge as the black holes of slave ships crossing the Atlantic are evoked in images of cramped cells and boxes that reek "a renk old smell, body-soak concrete," withholding "a shadow'a real pain left in you flesh" (200). Linearity or time's vertical axis is lost as colonial history intersects with the contemporary imprisonment of young black males. In other words, time is emptied, frozen, privileging the synchronic over the diachronic, similar to Anderson's notion of "cosmic clocking;" in this case to preserve the discourse of the "native"/space as non-presence and unreality. Akin to the postmodern experience of historical discontinuity where time is cut loose from any meaningful rapport with the past as signs are emptied of meaning, Cliff enters a kind of referential vacuum. His life experience is therefore in contradistinction to the strains from the Negro spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" woven randomly into his declining monologue. The incomplete verse "coming forth to carry me" surfaces arbitrarily and should evoke a past marked by the strong faith of ancestors desiring transcendence and freedom; but this history is lost to him, as signified by the missing word "home" (200).

That “home” is absent suggests his displacement on an island where he has no real power, presence or ownership. It also signifies the meaningless drift of a life unmoored from reality as the imaginary is constructed on the simulated worlds of metropolitan culture, symptomatic of the dislocated nature of a world in flow, without the stable contexts and historical continuities that produce real connections and belonging. The song’s meaning therefore disappears in a simulacrum of signs and replays like the movie, obviously Spike Lee’s *Get On the Bus* (1996), with which he is obsessed. Ironically, the film is about the journey of self-discovery and affirmation taken by a group of African American men on their way to Farrakhan’s Million Man March, staged on October 16th, 1995. Cliff is fixated on Leon, the young convict chained to his father in Lee’s movie. He engages interactively with the character, until he imaginatively writes his own version of the story.

Unlike Leon’s romanticised growth to enlightenment and freedom, Cliff’s re-write is based on another model of defiant “Star-boy” heroism imaged in the young criminals in the novel’s courtroom scene where the seriousness of crime and punishment is performed in gangster-style, “[j]ust like TV but you seeing it live and direc” (168). In other words, Cliff walks into the movie, altered by his version of the script. He becomes the actor/convict on the silver bus going, this time, back to the future of a predictable elimination that is both another ending and beginning of a fixed script. But there is a double irony inherent in Kempadoo’s reference to the movie. Lee’s popularity as a Black American filmmaker is notably embroiled in his financial connections to corporate brand-name advertising. He collaborated with DDB Needham, which is connected to consumer brands like Budweiser and McDonald’s, and through his Spike/DDB Company he directed commercials for Levis, Nike, AT&T, and so on. The film, *Get On the Bus*, for instance, enjoyed sponsorship from Anheuser-Busch, Budweiser owners (Gilroy, 242-43). Blackness has become a commodity targeted by advertising, film and music industries, and its image is constructed with the help of its own community in order to shape black consumer tastes for the benefit of multinational trading in consumer brands interested in international markets.

In the context of globalization, the questions for the receiver/participating countries, such as small nation states like those that make up the Caribbean, are again what version of modern humanity is being disseminated, whose narratives of truth are guiding the individual and collective imaginary, in whose image and likeness is the region being reformed and for whose benefit? Notwithstanding their good, mass media communication technologies, as the general Caribbean public is exposed to them currently, are disseminating fictions of “reality” to the young that contribute to new manifestations of the erasure of the native environment. With the replacement of the book by television and other transmitters of popular culture as the main cultural conditioners, the phenomenon of the disappearing island-body has been translated into the postmodern loss of the real.

Hardt and Negri argue that contemporary Western civilization has entered the postmodern informational economy as opposed to the industrial economy of modernization. This implies that television, film, and computer technology are major players in the creation of a new

anthropology of the human condition (289, 291), now being referred to as the Matrix generation. If modes of production have changed, then so too has labor moved from material to immaterial, that is, “affective labor” or “labor in the bodily mode” which involves the production and manipulation of affect through the manufacture of commodities that construct human subjectivities. The entertainment, communication and tourist industries are the main providers in this regard, creating either actual or virtual contexts of human contact that are fast becoming contemporary forms of community and vehicles for imaginative/sensory transcendence in their provision of experiences of “well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion”—in short sources of necessary otherness (292-3).

One cannot dispute the power of dissenting voices, individual and collective forms of resistance, local particularities, behavioral choices, even indigenizing cultural processes that contest the globalization of sensibilities. However, there is need to reinforce Appadurai’s own contention that a discourse of scale is essential for the consideration of the ability of small states to undermine the global cultural economy, which gets somewhat softened in his effort to engage the greater complexities of multiple flows of force and intersections in global cultural relations. Certainly, it is necessary to acknowledge the inadequacy of push and pull models of cultural exchange that fail to consider, not just the exercise of the right of difference, but as Appadurai argues the inevitable indigenization of imported elements of culture (328). Yet, there still remains the important issue of the power of small states to meaningfully contest the inventory of images and narratives currently shaping the global imaginary in this new age of the “informational colonization of being” (Hardt and Negri 34).

As with the decolonization movement, the need to develop strategies of response at every level of social life is urgent. It is necessary to study the effects, as well as the cultural habits of affiliation with, and resistance to, the new internationalizing tendencies and technologies, particularly as they relate to the Caribbean’s youth culture. Not to see this imperative as meaningful work is to accept the death sentence postmodernism has issued to nationhood and nationalism in the context of a deregulated, borderless world. If the postmodern maxims that there is no past to return to, no elsewhere to inhabit are true, then, at least the future can be consciously determined. Whatever the gains of the current order, time may prove that Empire’s celebrated “good in itself” is perhaps not so “good for itself,” to use Hardt and Negri’s reversal of the Hegelian construction (42-3). It would seem that the haunting aporia of not getting past the post of a stubborn modernity is the systemic obstacle against transformation and transcendence. So we return to the ironic twist of Kempadoo’s title, tide running, indeed.

Notes

¹ George Lamming's novel, *Season of Adventure* begins with a discussion between Powell and Crim in which Powell agonizes over the "lapse of memory" he suffers as a result of his disconnection from his ancestral past (16).

² Sat Maharaj, "It's a problem of culture," *The Trinidad Guardian*, 3 Sept. 2003: 26.

³ See the author's biographical information, *Buxton Spice* (London: Orion, 1998).

⁴ Kendel Hippolyte, *Birthright* (16-17).

⁵ Louise Kimme is a German sculptor who has been living in Tobago since 1979.

⁶ In a commentary on the nature of nationalism articulated by the character Mark who obviously operates as his mouthpiece on the issue in his novel *Of Age and Innocence*, Lamming notes that he roots nationalism "in what he calls a possession, not a material possession, but a spiritual possession of the landscape in which you live. A landscape in which you know the rhythm of the wind. A landscape in which you know the smell of the sea. A landscape in which you know the texture of the stone and rock." See "Nationalism and Nation" in *Conversations with George Lamming: Essays, Addresses, Interviews 1953-1990* (228-29).

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