

## Caribbean in/securities

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### **Caribbean in/securities: an introduction**

This article serves as an introduction to a special issue on Caribbean in/securities. As well as offering an insight into the concept of in/securities, the article will provide a substantive analysis of Erna Brodber's novel 'Nothing's Mat' as a fractal narrative of gendered in/securities in the Caribbean.

### **Caribbean in/securities and creativity**

This collection of essays is the product of a Leverhulme-funded international, interdisciplinary network, entitled Caribbean In/securities and Creativity (CARISCC). The contributors have been working together over a three-year period to redefine security, by relocating its spatial centre from the US/Europe to the Caribbean. In so doing, the concept of in/security has developed, with three distinctive elements.

The first is that security and insecurity, though they appear to be global human concerns emblematic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century since the terrorist attacks on the twin towers in New York in 2001, are reconceived as deeply located and historically grounded. When the Caribbean becomes a spatial centre from which to look at security, the region's distinctive spatio-historical formation highlights a history of violent insecurity that goes back at least five hundred years. It begins with the shocking encounters and protracted brutality of genocide and enslavement, and, as we see in Dave Featherstone's essay in this volume on the repression of seamen's riots, continues through the transnational security regimes that characterised European colonialism. The region's status as a global 'crossroads' highlights how insecurity and security are produced over time through the ongoing, iterative friction of legal and illegal flows of people and goods across the region. At the same time, the region is

at the sharp end of centuries-old cycles of natural hazards, as well as accelerating global environmental destruction and climatic change. The Caribbean reveals that specifically located and historical configurations of security and insecurity are articulated across a range of different temporalities – sudden, chronic and geologic – and different spatialities – territorially bounded, transnationally networked, and globally pervasive<sup>1</sup>. Security and insecurity are therefore not fixed, either in their definition or in their form.

The second distinctive element is the concept of in/security, an orthography that has been developed to highlight that security and insecurity, far from being fixed binary states or goals, are constantly produced and reproduced in relation one to the other. This relationality entails a constant and diffuse agentic negotiation between security and insecurity, not least around defining and prioritising risks and vulnerabilities from a range of perspectives. Ronald Cummings' essay in this collection, for example, gives a welcome insight into the range of in/securities that Maroons have negotiated – livelihood and food in/securities for example - as they not only fled the plantation but also sustained a life beyond it. At the most extreme, one actor's security measure might actually be the source of another person's insecurity – see for example the security encounters around the Tivoli Incursion, described in Harriott and Jaffe's contribution to this collection. Negotiation is therefore not the preserve of security professionals but draws in a wide range of actors at a range of scales, those who manage nation-wide risk (for example, as we see in Susan Mains's essay in this volume, government officials involved in the politics of planning for the perceived security of tourists), and those who have to strategise daily to survive profound

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the effects of relocating a concern with in/security to the Caribbean, see Noxolo and Featherstone (2014) Co-producing Caribbean geographies of in/security, in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 39, 4, pp. 603-7

threats at the smallest scales, in the home and in the body (see my own contribution below)<sup>2</sup>. The negotiative agency that is central to in/security distinguishes it from precarity, as developed by Judith Butler, who explains that the precariat are made vulnerable due to processes of precarisation that are managed through governmentality: precarity is distributed as an effect of power. In/security focuses not on vulnerability to insecurity, but on the diverse modes of *agency* of those who negotiate *between* security and insecurity. As Kevon Rhiney's essay in this volume points out, insecurity, vulnerability and precarity are clearly linked, and the negotiative agency within in/security is obviously constrained by power and opportunity. Nonetheless, Anyaa Anim-Addo's essay demonstrates that without a focus on the everyday agency of a range of people – the mobile strategies of recently emancipated higglers for example, constrained as they might be – they disappear as agentic people from the historical records. Instead, the concept of in/security seeks to spotlight diffuse modes of negotiation around in/security<sup>3</sup>.

The third and final distinctive element, then, is played out most noticeably in this collection in the Susan Mains's contribution, and in my own analysis of Erna Brodber's 'Nothing's Mat' (below). In these essays, creative practice is recognised as a resource for examining specific modes of negotiative agency, for example discursive, corporeal and visual modes. Creative negotiation is at the heart of creative agency: the risk that the artwork will not go well or will not arrive at all is played out through negotiation with the possibilities and limits of a wide range of accessible media, whether words on a screen or page, ink on paper, the dancing body, or the sound of spoken words or music. Creative work is sometimes mimetic,

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the uneven spatial patterning of the negotiation of in/security, see Noxolo, P. (2017) In/security: global geographies of a troubled everyday, in *Geography*, 102, 1, pp. 5-9

<sup>3</sup> For more on the everyday negotiation of in/security, see Jef Huysmans (2009) 'Conclusion: Insecurity and the everyday', in Pat Noxolo and Jef Huysmans (eds.) *Community, Citizenship and the 'War on Terror': Security and Insecurity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

but I am not suggesting that it can take the place of the wide range of everyday negotiation of in/security; indeed this interdisciplinary collection deliberately brings together research using a range of methods (interviews, discursive and archival work) to explore in/security on a range of lived terrains. In the analysis that follows, creative practice offers accessible insights into how negotiative agency around a specific form and location of in/security actually takes place.

**Gendered in/securities: negotiations around sexual violence, through the fractal fabric of community in Erna Brodber's 'Nothing's Mat'**

We saw in the previous section that in/security is a concept that unfixes and locates articulations of security and insecurity, reconceives them as produced relationally, and draws on creative practice as an approach to understanding the negotiative agency highlighted by that relationality. In the rest of this essay, I think through gender in the Caribbean, and in particular gender-based violence, as a locus for the negotiation of in/security. Erna Brodber's novel 'Nothing's Mat' is read as a creative practice that articulates this negotiation through the concept of fractals. At the heart of the concept of the fractal is Benoit Mandelbrot's<sup>4</sup> observation that even natural shapes such as coastlines and clouds that seem completely irregular often resolve themselves into repeated patterns, or recursions, at a range of scales. Seen as a figure of recurring sexual abuse in families, as Brodber does, these recursions could easily become a wretched destiny, but I argue that

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<sup>4</sup> Benoit Mandelbrot, 'How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension', *Science*, 156, 1967, p. 636.; see also Ron Eglash, *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), pp. 4, 14. For a fuller exploration of fractal patterning in Caribbean literature, an early presentation of which I am very proud to say Erna Brodber discussed with me while she was writing 'Nothing's Mat', see Pat Noxolo (2016) A shape which represents an eternity of riddles: fractals and scale in the work of Wilson Harris, in *Cultural Geographies*, 23, 3, pp. 373-385; see also Alan Riach (1995) The Presence of Actual Angels: The Fractal Poetics of Wilson Harris, in *Callaloo*, 18, 1, pp. 33-44.

Brodber deploys the fractal to reimagine Caribbean gendered community as a variegated, patchwork<sup>5</sup> terrain upon which concepts of bio-culturally fixed and sometimes violent gender identities can be challenged and renegotiated with concepts of more fluid gender roles within family and community.

In working towards this analysis, it will be helpful to map out Caribbean gendered in/security as an active field in which a range of actors, including women in their everyday lives, creatively negotiate gendered violence in the region. Most publicly, 2017's 'Tambourine Army', and #lifeinleggings campaigns<sup>6</sup> are clear examples of how gender-based violence<sup>7</sup> is being contested politically. Focused on 'breaking the silence'<sup>8</sup> around the deaths and suffering of women in the region, these activists publicise women's and girls'

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<sup>5</sup> I use this metaphor loosely. An obvious comparison with Brodber's use of the sisal mat as a material metonym for fractal community would be with literary uses of African-American quilting, such as in Alice Walker's short story 'Everyday Use' (in Walker, A. (1973) *In Love and Trouble*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). However, in this short article I resist this potentially fertile comparison, precisely because I would not like Brodber's subtle, Caribbean-focused agendas to get subsumed within a critical discussion surrounding quilting and identity that became rather fraught and occasionally exclusionary over the years (for a helpful critical summary, see Sam Whitsitt, *In Spite of It All: A Reading of Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"*, in *African American Review*, 34, 3 (2000), pp. 443-459). In this small space the sisal mat can stand alone.

<sup>6</sup> See Kate Chappell (2017) *Tambourine Army hits back against sexual violence*, *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> March. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/jamaica-caribbean-tambourine-army-sexual-violence>. Last accessed: 22/12/17; see also *Lifeinleggings* Facebook page. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/officiallifeinleggings/> Last accessed: 22/12/17

<sup>7</sup> The large array of terms surrounding gender based violence (violence specifically routed through gendered identities) in the Caribbean testifies to the unnervingly wide range of forms that such violence takes: these include the more general Violence Against Women, the more specific intimate partner violence or sexual violence, and the sickeningly banal 'battering', 'rape' and 'abuse' that remain common in legal terminology (see for example Halimah DeShong, and Tonya Haynes (2016) *Intimate partner violence in the Caribbean: state activist and media responses*, in *Global Public Health*, 11, 1-2, pp. 82-94; and Stacy Ann Elvy (2015) *A postcolonial theory of spousal rape*, in *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law*, 22, pp. 89-167). As terms used to describe and address painful lived experience, none of these is without political implications. The present piece of writing mainly addresses sexual violence, both fictional and factual but always heavily gendered. I am aware of the necessary contestation surrounding all relevant terms, as well as the political importance of privileging lived experience, but I approach Erna Brodber's novel as a critical and creative construction of sexual violence within a political field where voice and representation are crucial to empowerment and justice: novels cannot stand in for lived experience, but they can play their part in articulating that experience (see Noxolo, P. (2014): *Towards an embodied securityscape: Brian Chikwava's 'Harare North' and the asylum seeking body as site of articulation*, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15, 3: 291-312 for a longer discussion of what novels can and cannot articulate in relation to embodied experience).

<sup>8</sup> See Sandra Reid, Rhoda Reddock, and Tisha Nickenig (2014) *Breaking the silence of child sexual abuse in the Caribbean: a community-based action research intervention model*, in *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 23, 3, pp. 256-277

everyday experience of having to defend themselves against sexual violence. In 2012, the United Nations (UN) Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR) asserted that the ‘silence’ that they are breaking is a combination of institutional marginalisation and familial complicity, alongside failures in policing and criminal justice systems, all of which mean that three of the ten highest per capita rates of recorded rape globally occur in the Caribbean, with low conviction rates, whilst there are shockingly high rates of child sexual abuse<sup>9</sup>. The public campaigns build on the pre-existing research of the many Caribbean academics who have voiced their concerns for decades about sexual violence in the region<sup>10</sup>.

In reconceiving sexual violence as gendered in/security, this paper joins these more high-profile political, public and academic voices in reconceiving gendered violence as fundamentally unfixed, and therefore as amenable to change. Far from being ineradicably cemented in bio-culturally embedded gendered identities that men police but for which they are not responsible<sup>11</sup>, this paper will argue that gendered violence in the Caribbean can be challenged by uncovering the ongoing relationship of these fixed identities with equally deeply embedded but much more flexible forms of gendered identity. Brodber’s novel ‘Nothing’s Mat’ is a creative practice that reveals this relationality. Gendered in/security

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2012) Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR). New York: UNDP, p. 26. With these globally comparative figures, it is worth noting that the report also claims that rates are highly varied across the region, and that in islands with relatively small populations, “minor increases in occurrence produce dramatic increases in per capita rates” (ibid., p. 25).

<sup>10</sup> See for example Patricia Mohamed (ed.) (2001) *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (Kingston: University of the West Indies).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Jones and Trotman’s critique of “the convergence of constructions of childhood, male privilege and gender inequality in the reproduction of child sexual abuse and cultures of silence and impunity”, in Adele Jones and Ena Trotman Jemmot (2016) *Status, privilege and gender inequality: cultures of male impunity and entitlement in the sexual abuse of children: perspectives from a Caribbean study*, in *International Social Work*, 59, 6, p. 846; see also Jennifer Holder-Dolly, and Valerie Youssef (2010) ‘You have no friends, you have to stand up for yourself’: men negotiating domestic abuse, in *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 4, pp. 1-23; Halimah DeShong (2015) *Policing femininity, affirming masculinity: relationship violence, control and spatial limitation*, in *Journal of Gender Studies*, 24, 1, pp. 85-103; Raquel Sukhu (2012) *Masculinity and men’s violence against known women in Trinidad – whose responsibility?* In *Men and Masculinities*, 16, 1, pp. 71-92; see also CHDR 2012

assumes, as Brodber does, that this relationality is always already ongoing, such that the false security of apparently stable but often destructive masculine and feminine roles that engender a community within which women are often under threat from sexual violence, is always already in relationship with more fluid and mobile gendered identities that enable men and women to produce more creative forms of community together.

The rest of the paper therefore focuses on Erna Brodber's 2015<sup>12</sup> novel, 'Nothing's Mat'. Erna Brodber is a Jamaican writer, one of relatively few in the post-independence generation of classic writers who stayed, rather than emigrated, resisting the pull of the metropolitan that Salkey wryly summed up in the phrase: 'emigrate or vegetate'<sup>13</sup>. Brodber began her career as a lecturer in sociology at the University of the West Indies, and is known for writing sociological and historical work on gender and family in the Caribbean<sup>14</sup>, as well as novels. Her experimental and innovative writing style (which she describes as 'head-hurting' fiction<sup>15</sup>) arises from a desire to speak about the Caribbean in its own terms and through its own linguistic and conceptual constructs. Brodber argues<sup>16</sup> that colonial and metropolitan theory has historically conceived of the Caribbean, particularly its family structures, in terms of 'fracture' and lack (in a repeated contrast to ideal-type Euro-American nuclear family patterns) rather than in their own terms. Her work often references the resultant frictions between Caribbean culture and the European foundations of academic disciplinary training in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> Erna Brodber (2015) *Nothing's Mat*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press

<sup>13</sup> Kate Quinn (2008) 'I will let down my bucket here': writers and the conditions of cultural production in post-independence Trinidad, in *Caribbean Literature after Independence: the Case of Earl Lovelace*. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, p. 21

<sup>14</sup> See for example Erna Brodber (2004) *Woodside*, Pear Tree Grove PO. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press

<sup>15</sup> Erna Brodber (2012) *Me and my head-hurting fiction*, in *Small Axe*, 16, 3, 39, pp. 119-125

<sup>16</sup> Erna Brodber (1982) *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* Cave Hill: University of the West Indies



For example *Nothing's Mat* (2014) is the story of a young woman whose academic study takes her to visit her own family in rural Jamaica – as she journeys into the past of her own family she learns to recognise the recursive (self-repeating) patterns of child-shifting practices, and begins to think about her family and community as ‘fractal’ rather than ‘fractured’<sup>17</sup>. Like the sisal mat that the character named Nothing has begun and the narrator continues, the narrative design reflects the fractal patterning of the family and community. The novel begins with the narrator at 30, unwell and feeling “like nothing”<sup>18</sup>, and moves further and further back into history, tracing the family background of ‘Nothing’, which the narrator is weaving into Nothing’s sisal mat. Eventually it reaches a central point of the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, which is described by one character as “the autoclaps”<sup>19</sup>, a history-ending apocalypse. At each historical moment, multiple stories of sexual violence are presented as a recurring pattern in the fabric of community. For example, when the narrator finds that one of the stories about why her grandmother is known as ‘Nothing’ highlights child sexual abuse. Her great-grandmother Clarise’s first sexual encounter with an adult man (a much older neighbour called Mass Eustace) happened when she was too young to understand its significance. Not understanding that she was pregnant, she gave birth on her own, in a latrine. Hearing strange noises her Aunt Maud (Clarise’s adopted mother) asked what was wrong and she said ‘Nothing’. The name stuck, resonating at first in the answer given to neighbours who heard the baby crying:

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Nothing’s Mat’, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *Nothing’s Mat*, p. 2

<sup>19</sup> *Nothing’s Mat*, p. 21. Apocalypse, or a large-scale disaster or collapse, is the usual sense of ‘autoclaps’ (see for example Ken Jones (2015) ‘Autocrats and autoclaps’, in the *Jamaica Observer*, March 14<sup>th</sup>, available at <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/Autocrats-and--autoclaps-18555688>, date last accessed 22/12/17), but see also Kei Miller (2016) *Augustown* (London: Orion), where an imagined dictionary offers a different etymology: “Noun. An unexpected, often unpleasant sequel to a matter that had been considered closed. In German, achterklap” (p. 159)

'Nothing's wrong'<sup>20</sup>. When it reaches the Morant Bay rebellion, the narrative works forward again temporally, back through the same incidents, re-telling them from a range of character perspectives and revealing new community connections, before spiralling through to a point after the moment where the book began, where the narrator's life has become a lot more hopeful through the exercise of weaving the fractal history of her family into the sisal mat. Indicating that the tail of the spiral narrative is part of a fractal pattern that will carry on into the future, the narrator recognises that her two adopted children: "won't know the nothingness that set me to completing Nothing's mat, because they understand more about ancestral spirits and energy than I knew at thirty. I do feel that I have accomplished something: I have set them off on the right path."<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that 'Nothing's Mat' works to replace the marginalising notion of Caribbean family and community as 'fractured' with a concept of community as 'fractal'. This concept brings a deeper understanding of the contingent and polymorphous households created by what Olive Senior calls 'child shifting'<sup>22</sup>: these are not nuclear families or ordered family trees somehow gone wrong. Brodber's narrator explains that fractal communities, in which people make complex, multiple connections one with another, generation after generation, in repeating patterns of seemingly ad hoc affinity and adoption, often simply because they care for each other: "We feel for each other and carry each other's pain and blessing so much so that if the designated one cannot or will not perform, we take on the task"<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> 'Nothing's Mat', p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Nothing's Mat p. 106

<sup>22</sup> See Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean*, London: James Currey; her discussion of the practice of 'child-shifting' has been recently summarised in Suzanne Scafe (2013) 'she found a way, left the child': 'child-shifting' as the plantation's affects and love's paradox in Donna Hemans' "River Woman", in *Feminist Review*, 104, 1, pp. 61-79

<sup>23</sup> 'Nothing's Mat', p. 103

Yet the fractal is not a necessarily redemptive move, particularly when combined with the kind of trauma that attends sexual violence repeated over generations. The sense that repetition can be a condemnation is acknowledged at Nothing's death, when the narrator notes Nothing's instruction when she began helping her with the mat, that "Your end is your beginning"<sup>24</sup>, referring to the way in which one strand connects with another to continue the spiral pattern. At Nothing's funeral, the narrator is suddenly apprehensive about assisting with her dressing for the coffin: "her feet and my hands, the end being the beginning. Was I really going to be lost in a recursion...?"<sup>25</sup>

Aunt Maud's piece of the story illustrates how trauma could be a recursive condemnation, within constructions of gendered identity as endlessly reproduced in fixed forms. In the violent aftermath of the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 Aunt Maud is violently raped by six men, led by a maroon who is complicit with the colonial authorities<sup>26</sup>. So violent is the rape that Aunt Maud has to self-medicalise using local herbs to address the wounding and infection that sets in, exacerbated by the fact that she then has to walk miles to avoid prosecution by the colonial authorities. The young girl, Clarise, who she effectively adopts in order to protect her from a similar experience, bears the brunt of the trauma that Aunt Maud carries with her. Terrified by any signs of the girl's emerging sexuality, Maud over-reacts to an interaction with a stranger, and chooses to settle in St Ann only because there

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<sup>24</sup> Nothing's Mat, p. 14

<sup>25</sup> Nothing's Mat, p. 39

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Bilby (2012) *Image and imagination: Re-visioning the Maroons in the Morant Bay Rebellion*, in *History and Memory*, 24, 2, pp. 41-72 has noted that Maroons are often seen in stark 'hero' or 'traitor' terms in relation to anti-slavery rebellions, including Morant Bay, and other historians have re-examined the evidence to advance more complex histories of the roles and motivations of Maroons in the Morant Bay rebellion – see for example Mimi Sheller (2011) *Hidden textures of race and historical memory: the rediscovery of photographs relating to Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865*, in *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 72, 2, pp. 560

are “too much man in Kingston”<sup>27</sup>. Where the combination of “man” and sexuality represent inevitable abuse for Maud, her only recourse is to keep Clarise away from men. Clarise resents Maud’s anger – silence and anger are part of Maud’s strategies of protection, but the combination of the two leave Clarise with few answers. However Clarise also recognises that sometimes Maud offers warmth and comfort: another of Maud’s silent strategies in the face of the threat of gendered violence is to stay awake all night to protect Clarise when they are sleeping rough in caves<sup>28</sup>. Yet Maud is ultimately not able to protect Clarise in St Ann, when Mass Eustace abuses her<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, Nothing’s life repeats the pattern, in her abusive relationship with Everard Turnbury, who “hit the girl and more, carried their business outside”<sup>30</sup>. Turnbury (caught in his own repeating raced and gendered cycle of drunkenness and violence<sup>31</sup>) spreads evil rumours about Nothing, on whom, nonetheless, Maud ensures he is unable to force himself sexually<sup>32</sup>. His rumours lead some in the community to begin to say that Nothing is called Nothing because “Nothing could be made in Nothing’s womb.”<sup>33</sup>

More than either redemptive or condemnatory, the fractal is re-imagined in Nothing’s Mat as a crafted terrain on which to negotiate gendered in/security as not just fixed but also fluid. The underlying fractal patterning that produces community is not just one of repeated sexual and gendered violence, the stories of which must not be silenced, but is also a pattern of multiple stories and understandings that weave into and through each other, to produce a strong but flexible and mobile representation of individual identities and the

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<sup>27</sup> Nothing’s Mat, p. 52

<sup>28</sup> Nothing’s Mat, p. 54

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 16

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 28

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 69

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 68

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 28

communities they engender. This polyphonic negotiation between fixed and fluid gendered identities is most clearly demonstrated in the elaboration of naming, where each person is “wrapped in several names”<sup>34</sup>, each with a story behind it. For example, as Nothing becomes an elder in the community, she becomes known as Cousin Nothing, shortened to Conut<sup>35</sup>, and as Miss Nothing<sup>36</sup> by people who show their respect by adding a pre-name, but also show different levels of intimacy. By the time the narrator comes to know Nothing, her family name has changed several times – from Walker (because her mother Clarise walked such a long way with Maud), to Reid (Miss Eustace’s name<sup>37</sup>), to Turnbury (for her first husband), and now was Tull (for her second husband). And there are several quite different stories around her being called Nothing or Conut in the first place – there is the story of her birth, given above; there is the story of how she was a very small baby, weighing almost nothing<sup>38</sup>; and there is the story that Conut might be short for Coconut, because she owns a coconut plantation<sup>39</sup>. Each of these stories is true: the multiplicity of stories all swirl around the name, layering it with meaning, and producing Nothing in multiple ways as a member of a flexible community that is constantly in process of being produced. The stories of her naming, each laced with bitter experiences of sexual violence and abandonment, as well as warm and affirming stories of adoption and connection<sup>40</sup>, are all part of the complex fractal fabric of a community that is always recursively being produced.

The labour of crafting Nothing’s mat materialises this fractal fabric, and highlights the agency, the everyday labour, of engendering community. The fronds have to be chopped

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 1

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.32

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 106

from the macca tree; then they have to be cut, beaten, and washed to make the strings of sisal. The sisal then has to be dried, combed and then twisted into strong cord. The cord is then twisted and sewn into circles. The narrator is taught this process by Nothing, and it is through the shared activity that they form their mutually enriching relationship – the narrator “was caught up in the activity”<sup>41</sup>. As they work the cords into a mat, Conut tells stories about the diverse ways in which their shared family connections became worked together. When the narrator is unable to fit the stories Conut tells into the academic grid she brought with her, she decides to go off grid and “focus on the never-ending circles that we were making that seemed like a mat of family”<sup>42</sup>. So when Nothing dies, the narrator continues the work from the first circular seed that they made together. She says: “In my mind I called this Miss Maud. Smaller ones in descending order were crafted and I gave them names.”<sup>43</sup> Each smaller circle that the narrator adds to the mat, each a recursion of the first, represents a family member, and she teaches this labour of crafting community to her own adopted children: “The children will find a way of expressing this, I know, even if it means finding another heaven-blessed plant, making it into strings, shaping these strings into circles within their own recursions and iterations”<sup>44</sup>. The ongoing recursive increase of the mat demonstrates that the capacity of community to recognise each of its members and to bind them together across the divides caused not only by sexual violence, but also by the ongoing legacies of colonisation, enslavement and discrimination, is not something that can be assumed to occur naturally. A community with the resources to negotiate gendered identities in order to challenge sexual violence is always already available but cannot be assumed: it has to be skilfully negotiated and brought into being.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 13-4

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 14

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 18

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 106

## Concluding remarks

This paper began by elaborating Caribbean in/security as located but unfixed, as relational, and as characterised by forms of negotiative agency that are amenable to exploration via creative practice. It has also argued that gendered in/security in the Caribbean is a locus of active negotiation between the false security of fixed but destructive gendered identities and more fluid identities that produce flexible communities that can challenge sexual violence. There is consensus in the literature on gendered violence that community is both complicit in silencing it and potentially powerful in recognising it. 'Nothing's Mat' is a creative work that re-imagines Caribbean community as fractal rather than fractured, conceiving its recursive patterns of voicing and story-telling as revelatory, not only of the fixed gendered identities that reproduce the recurring patterns of sexual violence that plague Caribbean community, but also of more fluid forms of gendered identity that might produce communities that can contest and challenge sexual violence. Such communities cannot be assumed but must be painstakingly produced through the labour of crafting more open communities every day. I suggested earlier that groups like the Tambourine Army and #lifeinleggings are doing this important work, by crafting recognition of gender-based violence: their work, and that of academics and other allies, is likely to ensure that the region will not, in the future, be "lost in a recursion"<sup>45</sup> of gendered violence.

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<sup>45</sup> Nothing's Mat, p. 39