

# Primates and Plantation Futures: Unsettling Science and Consent on St. Kitts

by

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## DISSERTATION

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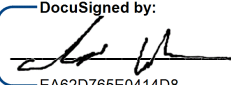
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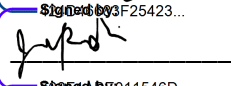
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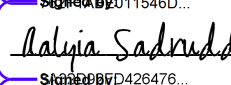
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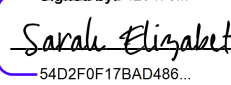
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## Dedication

Political philosopher Malcom Ferdinand (2021) writes,

If human beings make their declarations, fight wars, conquer, and are conquered, they are not alone when it all happens. Through their existence, through their activities, non-humans are also agents in the world who reveal themselves “as obstacles,” says Latour, “scandals, as what suspends mastery, as what gets in the way of domination.” (226)

Ferdinand calls for “decolonial interspecies alliances” wherein people and animals may form “politically strong alliances” through which they “can oppose the Plantationocene and its slaveries” (227). In line with anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando’s (2022) call to think with a conception of more-than-human others that includes the more-than-natural and the supernatural, we can consider Ferdinand’s call for sympraxis with decolonial interspecies alliances to include not only animals, but also spirits and deities as co-conspirators in resistance and renewal.

Aisha Beliso-De Jesús, in her ethnography of Caribbean and trans-Atlantic religious and spiritual practices, *Electric Santería* (2015), offers the concept of co-presence to describe multiplicitous spiritual beings and energetic forces that are in constant interaction with spiritual and religious practitioners. In exploring the dynamic mediations and politics of affect and embodiment as they transform the rules and traditions of Santería and other Afro-Caribbean religious and spiritual practices, Beliso-De Jesus theorizes that co-presences are not single entities but rather a collection of different energies and beings that coexist and move in, on, and around practitioners’ body-worlds. These forces, which include the spirits of deceased family members, ancestral spirits, and Orishas — the energies of nature and ancestry — are held in tension and mobilized simultaneously around people. Among the many entities that Santería channels, racial trauma and struggle are also co-presences, in that historical projects of racialization and counter-colonial assertions of Black and Caribbean religious power have shaped modern mediations surrounding Santería and its practice. In this dissertation, I will argue

that non-consent is also a persistent co-presence, moving through the past and present, and being transmitted between human and animal bodies, thriving in spaces of desensitization where violence is normalized as part of everyday life.

Beliso-De Jesus's ethnography is focused on sensory and embodied experience. co-presences are sensed through physical and emotional manifestations, like shivers, tingles, chills, and premonitions. They are also tied to practitioners' corporeal experiences, like movement, travel, and sensuality. For Santeria's practitioners, these energies and spirits are a fundamental part of their being in the world, constantly present with them. These spiritual forces also travel and interact through modern technologies and media, such as videos and websites. To think with co-presences, one must think through an ontology where the spiritual and the material, the past and the present, the local and the transnational are not separate but are in constant, embodied, and energetic entanglement.

There are spirits, deities, and co-presences who bring consent, communication, and respect. Peitho is the Greek goddess of persuasion, seduction, and charming speech, often considered the goddess of affirmative consent. She was considered a consort to Aphrodite, embodying the energies of verbal and emotional negotiation and mutual agreement — separating desire from force. In Roman tradition, she was known in Latin as Suada, a handmaiden of Venus. Other co-presences, deities, myths, and spirits exist elsewhere in the world who embody or advocate for consent. In Hindu tradition, there is a goddess named Rati, the chief consort of the god of love, Kamadeva. Rati represents the pleasurable, harmonious, and consensual aspects of sexual union. Oshun is the Yoruba Orisha of love, fertility, and sensuality. Oshun is associated with the conscious act of opening oneself and the principles of consent, consensual partnership, and the power of choice. As a water deity, she governs emotional connection and the reciprocity

of human connection. Pachamama, the Inca Mother Earth goddess, is revered across multiple Indigenous belief systems in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Argentina.

Pachamama represents the concept of seeking permission and maintaining reciprocity with nature. She is viewed as a nurturing yet potent goddess who demands human respect and causes disasters, such as earthquakes, when disrespected or when ecological balance is disrupted.

Early in my time on St. Kitts, I often asked the question, “What am I doing here?” It was not that I did not come with research questions, personal concerns, and years of coursework and preparation. Rather, I wondered about the broader significance of my presence and my research. About what its effects would be on the island and on the world. I have settled on the goal of this dissertation, and the book that may come from it, too, may be born as co-presences of consent, communication, and respect.

## **Invocation**

May we honor the ancestors and relatives, human, animal, plant, Earth, spirit, deity, and others who have suffered from non-consent. May we honor their suffering and hold space for it. May we work together to create worlds in which consent is sought. May we respect refusal. May we appreciate permission. May we let go of fantasies of mastery over self and other. May we accept our imperfection. May we still seek reciprocity, even in imperfection. May we value the moments of clarity that exist in a vast ocean of incommunicability. May we call for justice for those who have suffered from non-consent. May we call for clarity and growth for those who have enacted non-consent. May we forgive. May we learn. May we cultivate the energies of consent, communication, and respect.

**Primates and Plantation Futures:  
Unsettling Science and Consent on St. Kitts**

**Bri Matusovsky**

**ABSTRACT**

On the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, people and invasive green monkeys both suffer from food insecurity, a phenomenon locally known as “the monkey problem.” This dissertation argues that the monkey problem is sustained by the persistent logics of the former plantation economy and mismatched sensorial attunements between those who experience the daily discontents of the island and those who govern it from positions of transnational power. I utilize an eco-horror framework to analyze the monkey problem as an uncanny affective infrastructure that shifts my interlocutors' subjective experiences into a stressful site of anxiety, vigilance, and frustration. Central to this work is the development of the framework “affective consent.” Diverging from Joseph Fischel’s (2019) proposition to “screw consent” due to its inherent ableist and anthropocentric limitations, I delineate affective consent as an alternative descriptive category to capture the non-verbal mediations of agreement and refusal enacted in imperfect conditions by beings – both human and animal – who are currently excluded from Western models of informed and affirmative consent. In farms and research laboratories (“monkey farms”), I observed people already attuned to the mediations of affective consent in caring for and about monkeys. At the same time, the processes of sedation and desensitization normalize cycles of non-consent that haunt the grounds of former sugar plantations. To investigate these dynamics, I conducted 16 months of ethnographic observations, archival research at local newspapers and government archives, and semi-structured interviews with farmers, trappers, scientists, veterinarians, government officials, and tourists. Using a critical multi-species ethnographic methodology, I

analyzed the human-animal interface across various sites, including farms, research laboratories, and ecotourism destinations. This approach emphasizes attention to affect – nonverbal and multi-temporal sensory modes – to track how historical trauma and contemporary power dynamics coalesce in the present moment. In exploring unsettling science and consent on St. Kitts, this dissertation makes three distinct contributions to anthropology, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and related fields. First, in conducting discourse analysis of descriptions and stories of the monkey problem in research, news stories, science, and my interlocutors’ accounts, I contend that mismatched sensorial attunements – different capacities to see and understand the world – lead to disagreements and conflicts about the nature of the monkey problem. Second, I argue that environmental racism is sustained through the persistent logics of the former plantation economy, which continue to affect everyday life. Third, I assert that only by attending to the non-consents of people and animals who are silenced by unequal power relations, in the past and present, can we move away from reproducing plantation logics and embrace queer feminist and decolonial visions for the future, including food sovereignty.

**Keywords** | multi-species ethnography, affect, Caribbean, consent, St. Kitts, environment

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# **Introduction: Monkey Visions**

## **Prelude: The Decision to Stay**

On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1989, Hurricane Hugo swept across the Caribbean. The cyclone inflicted widespread destruction across St. Kitts. Power across the island was shut off for days, and roads were flooded. The government of St. Kitts and Nevis reported that about 20 percent of the island's population was left homeless after Hugo (National Hurricane Center, 1989). Water supplies were contaminated, food shortages were severe, and electrical power went out around the island.

The Behavioral Science Foundation, referred to colloquially as “BSF,” is the oldest primate research institution on the island of St. Kitts. It was founded in 1971 on the land of the Estridge Estate, a former slave-holding sugar monocrop plantation. The facility houses green monkeys (*Chlorocebus Sabaeus*) in large social enclosures – caged areas with ropes, swings, tree branches, and other haptic materials to keep monkeys engaged. Today, the facility largely uses chain-link fencing to create these enclosures. At the time of the hurricane, the staff at BSF were still experimenting with various enclosure materials, including wood.

These enclosures were blown apart by Hurricane Hugo. The staff expected to find that many of their monkeys would have escaped. On the morning of September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1989, when the staff at BSF returned to the Estridge Estate, they found a majority of their monkeys waiting nearby. In conversation with me, Dr. Roberta Palmour, a research scientist at BSF, suggested that the monkeys were reluctant to flee because they had grown accustomed to being cared for by people, and were waiting to be fed.

For many animal rights activists, research like that at BSF is considered cruel and violent, prompting activist responses. In the early 2000s, for instance, a series of violent attacks by animal rights activists targeted University of California scientists who were conducting research on primates (Gordon 2009). Dr. Palmour left UC Los Angeles in 1982 following such protests. She was drawn to McGill University by her former colleague Dr. Frank Ervin, the founder of BSF, with the promise of greater autonomy over her research agendas. With encouragement from Dr. Ervin, who would later become her partner, she also began conducting research in St. Kitts.

Animal rights activists frame research monkeys as involuntary subjects, unable to consent and ultimately forced to live in inhumane conditions and to be subjected to invasive and sometimes painful scientific research (ARFF 2019; Primatefreedom 2005). But, if the animals desired to leave the facility, the aftermath of this hurricane would have been a prime opportunity to do so. The fact that these monkeys chose to stay prompts inquiries about the agency of animals whose rights and treatment are negotiated in relation to captivity, violence, and research. Many people assume that animals cannot give consent, and yet animal rights activists' claims that these animals are involuntary research subjects are predicated on the belief that they can consent, and can experience research as non-consensual. Animal industries grounded on exploitation also claim that animals consent to participate in research, agriculture, or entertainment; the facade of consent in these contexts becomes a tool for defending the exploitation of animals rather than for protecting them (Blattner et al. 2022; Palmer et al. 2023). If, as animal rights activists claim, research monkeys have been made into involuntary research subjects, then how can we interpret their behaviors? How might we understand their

unwillingness to leave? Was this behavior indicative of consent? How might we think about the notion of consent in a way that is sensitive to animals' affect?

When I visited BSF in 2024, there were several monkeys outside of the cages. They would sit atop enclosures, eating wild fruit. They were habituated to the presence of humans – when I approached them, they did not react at all. These monkeys were escapees. Such escapees, researcher Dr. Sean Ervin explained to me, often did not venture far. They continued living on the edges of the facility's property. Dr. Ervin theorized that this occurs due to resource scarcity in the wild. When escapees left the facility to seek food in the wild, they encountered troops of wild monkeys already competing for territory and food with other troops. Existing troops of monkeys would be unlikely to accept an outsider and could even react violently. Beyond food insecurity and combative troops of monkeys, escapees could face numerous other antagonistic forces ranging from cars to hostile farmers, confrontational dogs, and unfriendly mongooses. These factors culminated in the continued restriction of autonomy for these escapees – not caged, but not quite free either. They lived in the peripheries of the laboratory.

The monkeys' decisions are limited by broader conditions within and outside their lives in the laboratory. To escape from the laboratory, where they were caged but well fed and cared for, meant entering a resource-scarce wilderness with different discontents. Neither entirely an act of consent nor refusal, monkeys' decisions to stay or to leave were both limited and limiting. These animals live in an environment where the very possibilities for consent and refusal have been made restricted. Animal lives cannot be fully understood if observed and described only on anthropocentric timescales. Scholars researching multi-species entanglements have recently turned to affect to make sense of the confluences of these more-than-human, and sometimes unknowable, forces.

Today, affect theory is a prominent analytical lens used in anthropology and critical theory to investigate the felt, unconscious dimensions of our daily lives and political realities. Affect theory explains how bodily sensations and unconscious reactions shape human experiences – affect is the physiological, the preconscious, and the body’s impersonal capacity to act on and be acted upon by others, bridging interiority and exteriority (Hemmings 2005; Kosofsky Sedgwick 2020 [2003]; Massumi 1995; Spinoza 1994). Scholars of multi-species entanglements have expanded upon affect to include non-human modes of being (Despret 2008, Friese 2025, Giraud and Hollin 2016, Porcher 2017, Salazar Parreñas 2018). As I explore in detail in Chapter 3, these authors offer a definition of affect as the confluence of short encounters, instinctive reactions, transient ethnographic contacts, varying lifespans, and longer timelines, such as climate change and extinction. All these timelines coalesce and form the conditions of the present moment. Affect can include behaviors and non-linguistic communication, such as territorial negotiation among monkeys through violent encounters involving scratching or biting.

The rising rates of inter-monkey violence are a result of the growing population of invasive green monkeys on St. Kitts. The increasing frequency of encounters between humans and monkeys, and the related food insecurity experienced by both, combine to create what is now known on St. Kitts as “the monkey problem.” The monkey problem forms an infrastructure of affects on St. Kitts: a set of social, physical, and spatial systems that shape, channel, and manage affects. Green monkeys disrupt the farming projects of largely Black Kittitian farmers by foraging for crops. For farmers, the need for intervention, such as culling or sterilizing monkeys, is urgent (Dore 2018; Dore et al. 2018). However, other parties, including foreign scientific regulatory bodies and transnational investors, have conflicting agendas. The monkey problem is

currently considered an unsolvable ethical, economic, cultural, and social issue that garners significant local and international attention (Gallagher 2022).

In every affective encounter, there is the coalescing of both knowable and ineffable circumstances that extend beyond us and through us. A major knowable component of the affective infrastructure of the monkey problem is food insecurity, experienced by both monkeys and people on St. Kitts who compete for limited space and natural resources (Dore 2019; Gallagher & Stephen 2024; Saiyed et al. 2025). Farmers experience the monkeys' foraging behaviors as the non-consensual stealing of their crops. However, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis has been cautioned from enacting possible interventions, such as the culling and sterilization of monkeys, by tourist business owners who threaten to revoke their business if the monkeys are harmed. Though food insecurity is an experience shared by humans and monkeys, international stakeholders' particular version of an ethical commitment not to harm monkeys is at odds with the food insecurity and suffering experienced by Kittitians and green monkeys. In Chapter 2, I argue that it is this sensorial mismatch – in which those with the greatest understanding of local conditions have the least say over which forms of intervention are adopted – that perpetuates the monkey problem. Historical and contemporary flows of power converge to create the unique conditions of the monkey problem, which is then sustained as an infrastructure of affects on St. Kitts.

In this dissertation, I argue that we must unsettle concepts of consent to understand the monkey problem. The microcosm of monkeys' impact on St. Kitts is shaped by the broader social, historical, and environmental conditions of the island, including the animosity that builds between competing troops of monkeys and people with monkeys. This building animosity is the focus of Chapters 1 and 2. The negotiation of (non-)consent and violence between people and

monkeys, and between different groups of people, is an innate challenge to life within the monkey problem.

The history of the monkey research facilities on St. Kitts and the scientific research they currently conduct, the focus of Chapters 3-5, are interwoven with these dynamics. Unsettling science refers to the troubling use of the guise of objective scientific authority to perpetuate particular subjective opinions about monkeys, certain people, and the monkey problem as facts. For example, I contend that technical jargon – descriptions of rigor and animal welfare in scientific experimentation and environmental intervention – is used to reproduce culturally informed beliefs that certain people and animals are problems under the guise of objective scientific knowledge. Affect theory conceives of short visceral encounters as inseparable from broader historical and contemporary conditions. Local circumstances produce affect, so the possibilities for consent, refusal, and science are contingent on the present circumstances.

“Unsettling science and consent on St. Kitts” is a double entendre. In its first form, unsettling is a verb, meaning “to agitate” or “to rethink.” “Unsettling science and consent” is a verb phrase that refers to the ways in which this ethnography, in seeking to make sense of the monkey problem, unsettles or troubles certain conceptions of science and consent. Unsettling is also an adjective, meaning to cause worry or anxiety, or to disturb composure. In its descriptive form, “unsettling science and consent” describes how the experiences of people and other beings with science and consent in the monkey problem are uneasy, disturbing, or disquieting. In exploring unsettling science and consent on St. Kitts, I make three distinct contributions to anthropology, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and related fields. First, in conducting discourse analysis of descriptions and stories of the monkey problem in research, news stories, science, my interlocutors’ stories, I contend that mismatched sensorial attunements – different

capacities to see and understand the world – lead to disagreements and conflicts about the nature of the monkey problem. Second, I argue that environmental racism is sustained through the persistent logics of the former plantation economy, which continue to affect everyday life in different forms. Third, I assert that only by attending to the non-consents of people and animals who are silenced by unequal power relations, in the past and present, can we move away from reproducing plantation logics and embrace queer feminist and decolonial visions for the future, including food sovereignty.

To attend to the normalization of non-consent in daily life, I argue that we must unsettle existing conceptions of consent. Existing frameworks for consent – informed consent and affirmative consent – are both important and insufficient for understanding the mediations of consent and refusal that I observed in the monkey problem of St. Kitts. Unsettling consent opens conversations about rethinking how consent is mobilized in other settings. Affirmative consent was first created in 1991 at Antioch College. It was designed to combat sexual assault by establishing that consent must be active, conscious, and ongoing, shifting the legal standard from "no means no" to requiring a clear and voluntary agreement for every sexual act. Informed consent, developed after World War II, was a reprieve for a lengthy history of people not being informed about their participation in research. Both informed and affirmative consent are thought of as only applying to some humans – they are ableist, anthropocentric frameworks that privilege a select few as able to offer consent. These frameworks are important but insufficient, as they fail to account for the mediations among people and other beings, including monkeys, deemed unable to participate in informed or affirmative consent.

I believe that consent has, in both vernacular and legal contexts, become overgeneralized to mean a verbal or written contractual agreement. Disaggregating and considering both the

contractual and affective elements of consent can facilitate more specific conversations about consent. Multiple groups of my interlocutors – farmers, trappers, research staff, veterinarians, primatologists, and scientists – have cultivated attunement to monkeys’ ways of expressing consent and refusal through behaviors through their daily engagements with monkeys. These forms of expression do not fall under the categories of informed or affirmative consent, but they are interpretable as forms of affect. In Chapter 3, I introduce the concept of affective consent. Affective consent describes how beings who cannot access ideals of informed consent or affirmative consent navigate the mediations of consent and refusal. The framework of affective consent describes how monkeys and people ultimately navigate decisions and moments of encounter that may necessitate non-ideal decisions on unexpected timelines and which lie on the peripheries of clearly defined borders, policies, and other boundaries. In every instance of nonverbal expression and interpretation, affect carries the significance of converging timelines and potentially ineffable circumstances.

Informed consent and affirmative consent, along with related concepts such as assent, dissent, and consent by proxy, evolved primarily through United States and United Kingdom legal cases, activism, and government regulations, though the relevant ethical frameworks were later heavily shaped by international responses to human and animal rights abuses. These relatively recent concepts are culturally and historically specific frameworks that are grounded in particular epistemologies and worldviews. These ethical frameworks are insufficient to describe the mediations of consent and refusal on St. Kitts that I observed there, where daily life is informed by diverse Caribbean and locally specific epistemologies, and are insufficient in many other settings as well. These ethical frameworks assume particular Western hierarchical understandings of animal agency, predicated on intelligence, and of relationships with animals,

predicated on ownership and care, which differ on St. Kitts. For example, whereas Western scientific classification predominantly conceives of monkeys as closer to humans in terms of intelligence and similarity than other animals, which informs perceptions of their utility as animal research subjects, a majority of my interlocutors viewed green monkeys through the lens of the monkey problem – as invasive pests. Both of these conceptions are anthropocentric – they categorize green monkeys based on different versions of a relationship to humans. In this dissertation, I also seek to think with monkeys as agential and conscious beings whose desires may differ from those of people, even as the lives of people and monkeys inform the becoming of one another. Although I observed and understood some of the monkeys’ behaviors, I am not a trained primatologist or veterinary technician. I relied on the veterinarians, technicians, and researchers whom I shadowed and interviewed to help me notice, interpret, and understand monkeys’ behaviors and desires.

Ultimately, I argue that affective (non-)consent is not limited to non-human animals. Affective consent occurs in relations where verbal communication may not be possible, such as care-taking relationships between humans and non-human animals, or between children, disabled people, and elders. For many marginalized peoples around the world, the desire for safety has necessitated quiet or even silent encounters in which affirmative consent becomes impossible (Smilges, 2022; Quashie, 2012). The histories of non-consent enacted by European colonizers in the Caribbean are just one example of these uneven situations wherein peoples’ access to consent was, or is, limited. Racialized cis-hetero patriarchy dispossesses queer, trans, and other marginalized people from the possibility of verbal consent by rejecting their existence and silencing their voices. In these contexts, only affective consent may be possible when affirmative and informed consent are rendered impossible. Because conditions in which people cannot

access ideals of informed or affirmative consent persist in this world, it is important to investigate the challenges of recognizing (non-)consent.

Even as people actively seek to define and advance increasingly sensitive models of consent, certain fundamental assumptions about the human and the animal pervade these ethical frameworks. Contemporary definitions of consent center the able-bodied, neurotypical human as the primary being capable of consent. Scientists, animal caretakers, farmers, trappers, and tourist agents, I observed, are already attuned to affect – to negotiations of consent and refusal with and between monkeys, as part of their jobs. Analysis of affect can help identify and explain when and how people and animals express refusal, and how and why others succeed or fail to interpret and respect these expressions, ultimately resulting in affective (non-)consent. For example, thinking with affective consent can clarify the mechanisms by which non-consent is reproduced in instances where, as in human sexual violence, someone argues that “their body language was telling me yes.” In this instance, the analytic of affective (non-)consent creates an opening for inquiry into how and *why* people misinterpret affective communication, ultimately resulting in non-consent. Kittitian farmers and animal caretakers, like research technicians, can only interpret monkeys’ affect after substantial training, education, or lived experience. This attunement was learned and could be improved, but was always imperfect. Investigating the misinterpretation of affect, whether caused by a lack of training or education, personal attitudes, or by hetero cis-patriarchal conditioning, can allow for reparative opportunities such as continuing education to be conceived in new ways. Paying attention to both the contractual and affective elements of consent may elucidate how and why non-consent remains pervasive in both human and animal worlds, despite activism, regulation, and ethical frameworks that seek to intervene.

Consent is an unruly boundary, prone to slippage, friction, and disagreement. To rethink consent across the registers of research in both science and social science, and across interpersonal modes including non-sexual care, for both humans and animals, is to propose new ways of seeing animals, science, and research. I define and delineate an alternative descriptive category — the affective form of consent — to make sense of consent and non-consent as experienced in multi-species settings and other circumstances where existing frameworks remain insufficient. I rethink consent through a more-than-human perspective, drawing on affect theory, to reframe the monkey problem of St. Kitts as a problem of uneven access to consent, thereby making visible how different beings' refusals are treated unequally. Affective consent is challenging to interpret, and even in the best-case scenarios, it is predicated on trial and error. Rather than perfection, the pursuit of affective consent through trial and error, as it is already being enacted in daily life, deserves greater attention and theorization. Affective consent, and its challenges, must be recognized to move conversations about consent forward. In this way, examining consent through a more-than-human lens may also improve understandings of consent in human contexts.

In animal welfare law and policy, it is currently assumed that animals cannot consent. Yet I witnessed numerous instances of animals consenting, refusing, and experiencing non-consent. The concept of consent is limited when we think of it as a phenomenon that can only exist between (some) humans. The assumption that animals cannot consent normalizes non-consent as part of how we treat non-human others. In unsettling science and consent on St. Kitts, I also reframe the monkey problem, beyond a quantifiable measure of crop loss or food insecurity, as a complex infrastructure of affects within which both Kittitian people's and green monkeys' choices become constrained.

## Locally Situated Visions

On February 11th, 2026, my friend, interlocutor, and research collaborator Dr. Leighton Naraine passed away. Leighton was a professor at Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College (CFBC), the local community college on St. Kitts, and most recently served as a Research Manager and CFBC's Director of Employee and Program Development. Leighton was one of my key interlocutors, research supporters, and a kind friend. Through his writing on agricultural models and farming practices, Leighton worked towards a decolonial vision of the future, envisioning food sovereignty for St. Kitts and all Caribbean islands. Leighton was a crucial supporter of my research and connected me to many of my interlocutors and research participants. He was also, at times, critical of my writing-in-progress.

When I first shared my doctoral research proposal with Leighton, he cautioned me, "It's great that you're looking to research the monkey problem. We can always use more research. But what we really need is interventions — we really need somebody who will do something about this mess." Alongside his academic pursuits, Leighton was also a farmer — he owned and managed a plot of land, and employed multiple Guyanese migrant farm workers who lived on his property. Leighton himself was born and raised in Guyana. He pursued higher education primarily in the greater Los Angeles area of California before relocating to St. Kitts and Nevis, where he served as one of the founders of the nation's post-colonial government ministry system.

As a farmer himself, Leighton understood the monkey problem primarily as crop loss caused by monkeys, which contributed to the food insecurity experienced by people on St. Kitts. Leighton also understood that food insecurity was directly tied to a lack of food sovereignty due to St. Kitts's reliance on the United States and other larger countries for the import of produce. Leighton envisioned a decolonial future in which St. Kitts could produce enough food to feed its

people and, through food sovereignty, be emancipated from an ongoing relationship predicated on importing crops and other goods from the United States Empire.

I was not equipped to meet Leighton's call to action. As a primarily qualitative researcher and ethnographer, and a doctoral student, I did not have the funds, expertise, or program management background needed to spearhead an intervention. Leighton's personal favorite proposed intervention was a monkey sterilization campaign, though other stakeholders hold different views on this topic. However, that conversation with Leighton and his call to action helped me formulate one of my central research questions: why has no one solved the monkey problem?

I learned during my literature review that there was more than sufficient research documenting the problem of crop loss caused by monkeys' foraging behavior. Over the last 15 years, ethnoprimate research by Dr. Kerry Dore, Dr. Sana Saiyed, and their collaborators at CABI (Center for Agriculture and Bioscience International) has documented crop loss, estimated monkey population levels, and explored locals' attitudes towards green monkeys on St. Kitts. Dr. Dore, working with local government entities on St. Kitts, has published a proposed mitigation strategy grounded in a combination of sterilization and culling, along with economic support measures to address food insecurity (Dore & Daigneault 2025). Research by Veterinarian Dr. Christa Gallagher (2022) and collaborators at the Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine (RUSVM) on St. Kitts has advocated for cross-sectoral policy to address the monkey problem and its widespread effects, including food insecurity and economic precarity among farmers. Interlocutors of mine from the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Facility (SKBRF) and the Behavioral Science Foundation (BSF), two research centers on St. Kitts that

conduct various forms of experimentation on captive green monkeys, recall that they have been advocating for interventions to address the monkey problem since the 1980s.

So, if there is sufficient research documenting the problem, and there are sufficient proposed solutions to the problem, why doesn't somebody, anybody, do something? I posit that this question is, in itself, the actual monkey problem — a situation characterized by building animosity, continually delayed resolution, and disagreement about the very nature of reality.

Most of my interlocutors who were Kittitian locals – people who have been living on St. Kitts for many years and are not Kittitian by descent – define the monkey problem as too many monkeys, or the overpopulation of an invasive species. A majority of my interlocutors who were farmers or agricultural workers define the monkey problem as crop loss – the non-consensual foraging of their crops by monkeys – and the resulting food insecurity they experience. Some farmers may note with empathy that the monkeys themselves are also experiencing food insecurity. Dr. Kerry Dore (2018) and Dr. Sana Saiyed (2024), primatologists who have extensively researched the monkey problem of St. Kitts, write that the monkey problem is a human-animal conflict, an example of a human-non-human primate interface that is representative of many such conflicts around the world caused by populations of primates deemed too little (endangered, and in need of conservation) or too high (invasive, and in need of sterilization or culling). This dissertation offers a different definition. I posit that it is impossible to understand the monkey problem without exploring the intertwined problems of racism and speciesism, the afterlives of slavery, and the legacies of colonial experimentation in the Caribbean. By colonial experimentation, I mean the ways in which the Caribbean, starting with European colonization, was made into a laboratory for Western exploitation – simultaneously mythologized as a paradise and host to genocide, slavery, exploitation, and the unsustainable extraction of resources. The contemporary

moment in which the monkey problem occurs is also a plantation future playing out — the aftereffects of centuries of sugar monocrop plantation farming. The monkey problem is a moment troubled by postcolonial discontents related to the transition away from that sugar-plantation economy towards new and other modes of living, being, and relating to self, land, and non-human others.

To understand the monkey problem, I believe we must unsettle current conceptions of science and consent as they are mobilized in transnational scientific discourse and regulation, and as they interface with everyday life on St. Kitts. To unsettle consent in science is to wrestle with the persistent and unyielding problem of ongoing gendered sexual harassment and assault that occurs between scientists and others participating in science, research, and academia. To unsettle science is also to engage with the hierarchical and uneven distributions of power and wealth that continue to shape the conditions under which both academic and applied research and science are conducted, and the uneven distributions of who benefits from them. In its descriptive form, unsettling science – unsettling as in inducing anxiety, causing worry, or disturbing composure – connects (1) affective consent, or the process through which scientists, veterinarians, and animal care technicians interpret animals' affect in spite of significant uncertainty, (2) how people navigates the mediations of uneven power dynamics, food insecurity, and gendered sexual harassment and non-consent in the conditions of the monkey problem at various settings including scientific facilities and farms, and (3) how my interlocutors questioned whether the scientific facilities on St. Kitts were haunted by ghosts, or jumbies. Unsettling science in the monkey problem occurs within ongoing local and transnational debates about experimentation on captive primates and intervention on wild animals – sites of ethical contention that remain unresolved.

Kittitian farmers are generally unable to own their own land, yet primarily white and South Asian foreign investors, largely physically absent from the island, increasingly own significant portions of St Kitts. Land ownership is one of the ways in which different groups of people on St. Kitts are unevenly affected by the monkey problem, beyond the literal presence of monkeys or crop loss. Farmers, who rent land from the government that can be taken from them at any time, are not guaranteed that the time, money, or energy they invest into their land will be sustained in future years. This lack of access to sustained housing and farmland makes it challenging to build the infrastructure needed for successful farming operations. The negative consequences of food insecurity are forms of environmental racism — they are unevenly distributed along lines of race and class. The population of Saint Kitts and Nevis is estimated to be 92.5% Black, 3% mixed race, 2.1% white, and 1.5% people of East Indian descent.

St. Kitts is a microcosm of global flows of power and capital, which intersect at the poaching, sterilization, killing, experimentation on, and exportation of monkeys. Different stakeholders in the monkey problem significantly disagree about which interventions and approaches are ethical and acceptable. Ultimately, there is no single correct answer. This continued disagreement is part of what defines the monkey problem. In this dissertation, I hold that these unsolvable ethical debates are themselves ways of making meaning in the present, or, as Caribbean poet and scholar Edouard Glissant (1989) calls it, diversion. Diversion is a crucial resistance strategy for the survival of Caribbean peoples. Rather than confrontation, diversion is about finding indirect ways to regain agency in the face of histories of slavery and colonial rupture. Kittitians direct attention to the monkey problem as a form of diversion and as a means of engaging with ineffable history through the everyday.

Glissant's concept of diversion is particularly useful for making sense of how people navigate these complex circumstances. Writing about the history of his homeland, Martinique, and the broader Caribbean, Glissant describes the practice of diversion as a strategy adopted in the face of the violence of colonization, in which the causes of violence are often ineffable or not fully knowable to those experiencing them. The dynamics of colonial violence were obscured because so much of what is at play manifests as unknowable social currents, historical and present. Put differently, colonial domination of the Caribbean was concealed in the structures of power that affected everyday violence, which were unknowable by those experiencing their effects. Diversion is an attitude, and the reaction to this deception and obscurity — a trickster strategy in the face of the “psychic trauma” of racist colonial violence. Glissant writes,

Diversion leads nowhere when the original trickster strategy does not encounter any real potential for development. (We cannot underestimate the universal malaise that drives Europeans, dissatisfied with their world, toward those ‘warm lands’ that are deserted by unemployment as well as subjected to intolerable pressures of survival, to seek in the Other's World a temporary respite.) Ultimately, Caribbean intellectuals have exploited this need for a trickster strategy to find another place: that is, in these circumstances, to link a possible solution of the insoluble to the resolution other peoples have achieved (23).

Glissant describes diversion as a way of being that exists in response to the psychic violences of colonialism. He believes that it also pervades the work of Caribbean literature. I interpret Glissant to mean that Caribbean peoples find meaning in the shifting relations of the present, rather than those of the past, which is rendered unknowable and ineffable by the violence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial domination. Diversion enables the creation of meaning through the shifting worlds of the present, rather than through engagement with the past. “The strategy of diversion,” writes Glissant, “can therefore lead somewhere when the obstacle for which the detour was made tends to develop into concrete ‘possibilities’” (22).

The monkey problem is one of the unsolvable problems and irreversible violence enacted upon the lands and ecologies of the Caribbean. For Kittitians, the monkeys are an unavoidable reminder of this violence and the historical circumstances that brought both the Kittitian people and the monkeys to the island. People do not necessarily actively associate these histories with their daily experience of the monkey problem. However, the monkey problem exemplifies the unknowable, unsolvable problems that Glissant writes about.

The monkeys themselves are trickster figures that continually disrupt human attempts to control their natural surroundings. There is no resolution in sight. Yet, even as the monkey problem remains unsolvable, it is a navigable reality that Caribbean peoples have learned to live with. The conflicts surrounding the monkey problem, as well as the various calls for intervention, mitigation, and liberation in relation to it, are themselves ways of making meaning in the present, or what Glissant calls diversion. Diversion describes the process by which historical violence is processed, not through a sort of historicizing or elimination, nor necessarily through solving or not solving contemporary problems, but through the very act of engagement with issues of the present. It is not a direct form of remembering, but rather a means of engaging with history by navigating the everyday discontents of farming, backyard gardening, and life within the context of the monkey problem.

## **Primate Visions**

Donna Haraway (1989) in *Primate Visions* explored how dominant 20th-century scientific discourse portrayed primates as a mirror through which human nature could be understood. Science reinforced the idea of a hierarchical relationship between humans and other animals. Haraway questioned the objectivity of primatological methodologies and argued that

their findings were filtered through cultural and gendered lenses, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating male dominance in scientific endeavors and primatological understandings. The later restructuring of primatology through feminist critique, Haraway argues, was not a result of gender differences but rather a historical product of shifting political and cultural structures of science, race, and gender. *Primate Visions* continues to resonate today as a call for a more critical approach to studying animals, especially primates, grounded in recognition of the capacity of complex human power dynamics to bias science. Science appears in numerous forms in this dissertation: the science of preclinical drug testing in animals, the agroecological science of local farming and environmental interventions, the public health science of decisions about local populations' access to health care infrastructure and technology, the economic science of crafting local tourist economies, and the primatological science of researchers seeking to quantify and intervene on farmers' crop loss and food insecurity.

Multi-species scholars continue to build on Haraway's work by studying contemporary primatology and primate research as one prominent example of the interface between humans and animals. At the panel *Sex and Gender in Primate Worlds* at the 2025 Society for the Social Sciences of Science (4S) Conference in Seattle, Washington, we reactivated these conversations to explore how disparate multi-species struggles coalesce and resound in human-constructed worlds, including private collections, cities, plantations, farms, factories, laboratories, research facilities, zoos, parks, and museums. My participation in this panel was a formative moment in the writing of this dissertation.

At this panel, Max Fennell-Chametzky (2026) questioned how place and precarity in university politics reverberate across human and non-human lives. Max's exploration of university power, funding structures, and physical spaces informed my understanding of how

academic tourism and the medical and veterinary institutions on St. Kitts, and the academic centers in the United States, with which research sites on St. Kitts are affiliated, may play a very active role in shaping not only unequal distributions of money and land ownership but also that the very credibility of different peoples' knowledges, based on academic hierarchies centered on degrees and interpersonal relationships. The hierarchies that exist within academia and research perpetuate and maintain certain informational status quos that favor Western academic knowledge over the lived experiences of locals, farmers, and others whose knowledges may be more attuned to the natural world.

Quinn Georgic (2026a) confronted ongoing reverberations of colonial and racial hierarchies within the field of primatology, asking us to consider what it means for something to be made a subject of study. In a follow-up piece, Georgic (2026b) reflected on his ethnographic research at the 30<sup>th</sup> International Primatological Congress and with primatologists in Madagascar. Georgic argues that primatology has become an increasingly political field, and primatologists are increasingly aware of these politics. Georgic suggests that ethnographic research of primatology should move beyond paranoid readings that seek to unveil the political nature of scientific disciplines, and instead analyze primatologists' reflexivity. This analysis, Georgic believes, presents new avenues for ethnographic researchers, like myself, who consider other scientists and researchers in fields with continually evolving political and ethical norms. Georgic believes that STS scholars and ethnographers can analyze how previous critiques of scientific disciplines have been metabolized and responded to by practitioners and scientists, thus fostering a richer dialogue between social science theory and contemporary scientific practice. I take Georgic's call seriously — rather than solely critiquing science and scientists, I seek to faithfully represent their reflexivity, and the ways in which scientists of all different kinds are

already navigating numerous ethical considerations in every decision they make. In my analysis of how scientists understand affect and consent in multi-species contexts in Chapter 3, I hope to portray scientists realistically as practitioners who do their best to navigate the scientific, interpersonal, and economic constraints that shape their daily lives.

Lilith Frakes (2026) addressed the deep echoes of the nature/culture divide by formulating “Hybrid Primatology,” a framework that conceives of primatology capable of engaging entangled forms of primate life, including hybrid figures that emerge in shared ecologies irreversibly shaped by humans. Hybrid primatology is not grounded solely in scientific or conservation values, but rather foregrounds the lived realities of primates whose worlds are shaped by entanglement, ambiguity, and improvisation as they respond to the conditions of the Anthropocene. Practitioners of hybrid primatology recognize scientific practice as itself always hybrid, produced through institutions, histories, care relations, and shifting ecological conditions.

I am not a primatologist, nor even an ethnoprimateologist, but my project exists in conversation with other researchers on St. Kitts who have conducted ethnoprimateological and veterinary research on the monkey problem — namely Sana Saiyed, Kerry Dore, and Christa Gallagher. Inspired by Frakes’ formulation of Hybrid Primatology, I seek in this dissertation to represent how the anxieties and aspirations of researchers like myself reverberate through the lives of the non-human primates — captive, wild, and hybrid — with whom we have shared our daily lives. I hope that this dissertation can simultaneously provide a faithful ethnographic account of the monkey problem of St. Kitts and contribute a critical addition to thinking about historical and contemporary trans-, queer-, decolonial, and feminist conceptions of sex and gender as lived and experienced in multi-species contexts. The division of human from animal, and the division of nature from culture, are experienced materially in the ways in which spaces

are constructed in consideration of certain species and not others. This dissertation is one work in a rising movement that builds on the conversations that began with Haraway's *Primate Visions* to explore how disparate multi-species struggles coalesce and resound in human-constructed worlds.

## **Visions from the United States Empire**

On Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026, United States President Donald Trump posted a cartoon video generated by artificial intelligence that features an image of Former President and First Lady Barack and Michelle Obama superimposed on the bodies of gorillas. This racist image is an explicit and overt mobilization of animalization and dehumanization, two common techniques of racialization. Animalization is the association of certain people along lines of race, ethnicity, culture, or gender as being more animal or more closely related to nature; dehumanization is the imagery of certain people as less than human or less human than others. Both animalization and dehumanization have long histories informed by anthropometry, eugenics, and other pseudoscientific fields that sought to define different groups of people as not only different races but different species. These historical fields informed the logics that were used to justify the colonial mission by framing non-human beings and certain kinds of people as hierarchically lower than humans. These hierarchies, in turn, justify the conception of certain people, animals, and lands as property and as extractible. In an address to Portland State University on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975, American novelist Toni Morrison reflected on the power of racist imagery,

It's important, therefore, to know who the real enemy is, and to know the function, the very serious function of racism, which is distraction... It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being (Morrison 1975).

Blatantly racist imagery, like this AI-generated caricature of President and First Lady Obama, functions to distract from systemic violence and racism that are happening right now — in the United States, in the broader United States Empire, and elsewhere. In 2026, the Trump Administration rebranded the former Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice to focus on anti-white discrimination. They've banned DEI programs and federal funding for DEI-related initiatives and research, and have been systematically rolling back protections for marginalized groups in the United States.

The blatant racist imagery being publicized by the Trump administration, like this cartoon of the Obamas, serves to distract from racist policies and structures, and serves to distract the people who would oppose them. While I critique certain versions of scientific experimentation on St. Kitts, science in the United States and transnational science funded by the United States government are being defunded. Interlocutors of mine on St. Kitts who had been studying at Colleges and Universities in the United States are having their student visas revoked. One interlocuter shared with me that they were deported back to the Caribbean by ICE in early 2026, immediately after graduating with their Medical Doctorate (MD) from a University Medical School in the United States.

Racist imagery serves to distract from collective reckonings that are happening with the structures of power that facilitate the gendered sexual violence against women that are currently coming to light. One well-known example of this in 2026 is the publication of the Epstein Files. The public of the United States is being presented with a clear and massive set of evidence showing grooming, sexual non-consent, and violence that was enacted against young women and girls for decades. The question of consent in higher education, and society at large, continues to burn. In this way, the questions of consent that are central to my dissertation extend far beyond

St. Kitts, to the ways in which people interpret the consent of individual animals and whole species of animals, how governments interpret the collective consent of their constituents, and how different groups of people attempt to control the distributions of power that determine *who* and *what* is allowed to have the agency to consent or not in the first place.

This dissertation is largely about St. Kitts. Through tourism, migration, music, social media, and other forms of cultural exchange, the happenings on St. Kitts echo and transmit across the Caribbean archipelago, the United States Empire, and the rest of the world. Some authors have conceived of the comings and goings from Caribbean islands through the language of islanding and offshoring (Baldacchino 2010; Sheller 2018; Sidaway 2012; Wong 2015). Islanding and offshoring are economic strategies that perpetuate colonial-era exploitation and plantation-economy logics, rendering island territories enclaves for global capital, tourism, and tax evasion, while local populations face high debt, disaster vulnerability, and poverty. These authors provide an important critique of the uneven exploitative impacts of islanding and offshoring on Caribbean peoples. Kittitian-American ethnomusicologist Jessica Swanston Baker (2024) troubles the discourses of islanding and offshoring in her research on St. Kitts.

I argue in this book, the layered archipelagic relation of the interactive, intervisible, intertraversable cluster of small islands in the eastern Caribbean cannot be apprehended via the definitive, two-laned continental imaginary buoyed by a "going to" and "coming from" discourse. Instead, comprehension of the small-island inhabitance of Kittitians and Nevisians, a central focus of this book, is better served by the relationality and multiplicity inherent to the archipelago. The archipelago is a form that accounts for the infinitude of the "somewhere else" -something else, someone else, sometime else-from which "everything" comes. (21)

In thinking from and about St. Kitts, Baker brings complexity to the notion of scale in multi-scalar ethnography. She analyzes a popular song, "Area Code 869," written by NuVybes Band, my favorite band on St. Kitts. NuVybes are part of a local genre of music that comes and goes from St. Kitts called Wylers. This song, about the intergenerational and diasporic

attachment that people have to the small two-island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis, gestures towards the rhythmic and shifting circumstances specific to postcoloniality, islandness, blackness, and smallness as they unfold to and from St. Kitts and Nevis on a global scale (5-6).

One of my interlocutors, Lovis, a Kittitian descendant of maroons, shared with me his belief that St. Kitts would likely be one of the last places on Earth where life would survive after climate-change-driven catastrophe. “It’s a sanctuary island,” he said, “like Noah’s ark. Even when all else burns, we will be here.” Lovis pointed to Mt. Liamuiga, a large volcano at the center of the island. It was surrounded by clouds but still visible in the distance. “You know what Liamuiga means?” he asked me. “Fertile land,” I responded, remembering an inscription I had read at the Brimstone Hill, a museum built on the historical site of a former English colonial military fortress. “We’ll be here,” he continued, “she nourish us even after all else burns.” From Lovis’s vantage point on St. Kitts, a small island with just over 35,000 people living across 65 square miles, it sometimes seemed like the world was burning – he viewed St. Kitts as an island insulated from a world plagued by pollution, pandemic, climate change, disaster, and war. It was not that St. Kitts was without its own discontents and fires. This burning echoed through St. Kitts in ways that Lovis was attuned to, hearing about them through his work as a tour guide on Mt. Liamuiga, leading groups of tourists and visitors on a 4-5 hour hike up and down the mountain multiple days a week. On these tours, Lovis would share his extensive knowledge of St. Kitts’s natural history. He often pointed out plants and shared information about their local medicinal uses, along with anecdotes about their effectiveness. So too would tourists share news of the outside world with Lovis, and he would listen. Lovis was practicing something that Baker calls archipelagic listening: “Listening, the process through which the sonorous becomes audible, is a process of attachment between the sensible, its articulating language, and its defining discourse”

(146). Hearing Lovis’s reflections on decades of his own archipelagic listening clued me in to the ways in which Lovis viewed the outside world as a place that St. Kitts was constantly surviving in spite of and in relation to.

Even before colonization, St. Kitts has always been defined by migration, of people and other flora and fauna, to and from the island. During my fieldwork, I met immigrants to St. Kitts who fled the war between Russia and Ukraine. I met individuals who came to St. Kitts for carnival and stayed for love. I first arrived in St. Kitts in 2017 for my own complex reasons — the child of Russian-Jewish refugees from Ukraine who immigrated to the United States, I was brought to St. Kitts by particular flows of power and capital that drew me to the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Facility (SKBRF) for an internship. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I spent significant time with interlocutors participating in educational tourism, international students attending medical or veterinary education on the island; eco-tourism, such as individuals contributing to the conservation of endangered turtles on St. Kitts; and scientific tourism, including research on the numerous flora and fauna of St. Kitts beyond monkeys. The capture and export of monkeys from St. Kitts for experimentation is fueled by a growing demand and shrinking availability of nonhuman primates for biomedical studies in the United States and Europe, a human-constructed “monkey shortage crisis” (Grimm 2023).

What does it mean for people and animals to be labeled as problems? My dissertation examines this question by re-framing the issue of invasive green monkeys on St. Kitts, a predominantly Black Caribbean island. Increasing encounters between people and monkeys, and food insecurity experienced by both, constitute a phenomenon locally known as “the monkey problem.” Scientists, veterinarians, policymakers, and primatologists have sought to address the monkey problem, which has escalated since the local abolition of sugar plantations in 2004, but

have been unsuccessful. I conducted 16 months of ethnographic inquiry, archival research, and semi-structured interviews with interlocutors at farms, laboratories, local archives, and eco-tourist destinations. I posit that the monkey problem presents as a site of uncanny relations, wherein people and animals are haunted by the afterlives of slavery and the legacies of plantation logics. My research on the monkey problem reveals how the designation of people and animals as problems is used to justify the reproduction of plantation logics predicated on non-consent and violence.

In chapter 1, I introduce the analytical term “building animosity” to describe how negative emotions build between different stakeholder groups in the monkey problem of St. Kitts. Building animosity is language that occurred *in vivo*, originally used by a Kittitian animal technician to describe how negotiations of space between primates can result in escalating antagonism, discussed in Chapter 3. Building animosity is a locally situated phenomenon, but it is also an affective infrastructure that results at the intersection of numerous transnational trends — the “valley of death” or the lack of research funding and regulation of translational research between biomedical drug discovery and clinical expertise, within which animal models research faces numerous challenges to be sustainable and effective; cycles of sexual violence that have occurred and replay at these scientific facilities; Caribbean peoples’ struggles against environmental racism, food insecurity, and neocolonial resource extractivism; and conflicts between different groups of people on St. Kitts.

In the course of crafting my research project, it was of the highest importance to me to sit with the intertwined histories of racism and speciesism. As I discuss in Chapter 5, recent books at the intersection of Critical Race Theory and animal studies have advanced this conversation by highlighting how these processes inform and are informed by one another (Bennett 2020,

Jackson 2020, Boisseron 2018). Carceral logics and policing, unsustainable extraction of environmental resources, unfair labor practices, climate change, and gendered non-consent are interconnected issues that are causing significant suffering in the world. Ultimately, I argue that the imagery and rhetoric that permeate the monkey problem of St. Kitts implicitly draw on racist and speciesist narratives that favor the work and action of certain groups of people, such as foreign investors, over the labor and subsistence of local people and animals.

I believe that this ethnography of St. Kitts has a significant bearing on these transnational conversations. The problem of food insecurity in the monkey problem is, as farmers on St. Kitts clearly articulate, an issue of incomplete colonial emancipation and national sovereignty. Reliance on other nations for food imports perpetuates power imbalances, which result in what is known as economic colonialism. Economic colonialism is a system in which a dominant nation, in this case the United States, exploits territories that depend on it for resources, labor, and markets for its own economic benefit, even after political independence. This is done through long-term structural dependencies, unequal trade, and significant wealth transfer. Even though St. Kitts and Nevis have been an independent country since 1983, the lack of local food sovereignty makes Kittitians a captive market for crops and finished goods from the United States. Multinational corporations and foreign powers have exerted similar forms of unequal influence over St. Kitts and Nevis, a Small Island Developing State with only 35,000 inhabitants living on sixty-five square miles. This economic colonialism creates a structurally dysfunctional local economy, reliant on a tourism-driven model that treats local ecologies primarily as resources to attract tourists, visitors, and foreign investors. Through people's experiences of food insecurity, the consequences of the monkey problem are exacerbated by economic colonialism. My interlocutors who were Kittitian farmers, including Dr. Leighton Naraine, advocated for food

sovereignty: the right of individuals and communities to define, control, and govern their own food systems. Rather than prioritizing corporate profit or global commodity markets, these interlocutors' vision of food sovereignty emphasized local, culturally appropriate, and ecologically sustainable food production, distribution, and consumption. Beyond food security, which refers to people having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their daily needs, food sovereignty operates at the intersection of power, rights, and food systems. My interlocutors' vision of food sovereignty involved having a say in the land, seeds, water, and labor that create their food. While food security measures whether a person is fed, food sovereignty asks if they have a democratic say in how they are fed.

## **The Question of Genre**

In analyzing my ethnographic notes, photographs, archival sources, and the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews I conducted, I have been sitting with the question of genre. The question of genre is central to the work of Jamaican American anthropologist and curator David Scott in *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004). Scott reads across the revolutionary past and post-colonial present of the Caribbean to interrogate the contemporary concerns and preoccupations of post-colonial life. This sort of interrogation of the present, for Scott, means attention to both the questions and answers of the anti-colonial past and those of the post-colonial present.

In Chapter 2, "Romanticism and the Longing for Anticolonial Revolution," Scott argues that anti-colonial transitions have historically been understood through the literary mode of romance. Reading Caribbean histories of revolution, specifically *The Black Jacobins* (James 1989), through the literary mode of tragedy rather than romance, becomes a generative practice

for Scott. Both tragedy and romance, as modes of historical emplotment, offer distinct perspectives on human history. Scott practices remembering the same past in two different ways, side by side. Considering *The Black Jacobins* as a romance focuses on the epic momentum of its historical revolutions and related themes of redemption and liberation (71). Reading *The Black Jacobins* as a tragedy rather than a romance raises questions about human history as progress or as rational (12, 66). Ultimately, Scott follows the conceptual underpinnings of *The Black Jacobins* and its arguments about revolution to understand romantic longing in the anti-colonial past in relation to the imperfections of the postcolonial present. Reading *The Black Jacobins* through the lenses of both romance and tragedy is, then, a practice of moving between the text as a historically bounded source and as a source of inspiration and provocation for the contemporary.

Framing the monkey problem as a tragedy would be reductive and inaccurate. The genre of tragedy can be useful for exploring suffering, but for those living on St. Kitts, there has been neither a dramatic reversal of fortunes nor a sudden downfall. The monkey problem is part of the social and ecological infrastructures of daily life on St. Kitts. It is a slow and creeping experience, which I have come to understand as being punctuated equally by absences as by presences — the absence of food sovereignty; the disappearance of crops; the incomplete attainment of decolonial emancipation, delayed inevitably. Additionally, my interlocutors' experiences are not fiction or historical retellings. However, my interlocutors do describe feeling that their experiences are treated like fiction — that they testify to the negative effects of the monkey problem, year after year, and that nothing changes. I have found it useful to think of the monkey problem as eco-horror, a subgenre of horror, to understand how much of it occurs in the subjective experience of my interlocutors, whose sleep, nervous systems, and daily rhythms have

become attuned to the presence and absence of monkeys. Beyond a quantifiable amount of crop loss or food insecurity, the monkey problem is also a complex affective infrastructure that shifts people's perception of their world into something stressful and anxiety-provoking, and at the same time in a way that is not perceptible to others, resulting in a sensorial mismatch that then reifies the sense of horror in that people are treated as though their very real experiences of suffering are fictional or do not matter.

Eco-horror portrays the natural world as an unnerving force that reacts adversely to human destruction. Beyond parables and cautionary tales, eco-horror captures experiences that are often too uncanny or violent to be understood otherwise — experiences such as natural disasters, food insecurity, and situations in which problem animals fight back against humans who are also provocateurs. According to literary scholars Tidwell and Soles (2021), common tropes in eco-horror include *anthropocentric destruction*, where humans commit horrifying acts against animals or the environment, and *environmental consciousness*, in which animals or other non-human living beings serve as agents of ecological awareness. Eco-horror literature and cinema have experienced a major surge in the twenty-first century, with much of the genre exploring the negative consequences of climate change, pollution, and other forms of human violence inflicted on animals and environments. The genre of eco-horror offers an opportunity to reflect on anxieties about humanity's future, exploring environmental collapse and the blurring of human-non-human boundaries.

The depiction of the Caribbean as a site of horror — distinct from the romanticized myths of tropical paradise that pervade tourist-attracting media and from purely tragic narratives — is a critical perspective in postcolonial literature and theory, which some have termed Caribbean Gothic (Franchi 2015). The Gothic trope in European literature is characterized by suspense,

terror, and supernatural occurrences – famous examples include *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Through literature and other modes of Gothic expression, people can engage with intense, sometimes irrational emotions, madness, curses, haunting, and the macabre. The Gothic sensibility, which developed in Europe in the 18th century, directly engaged with the repressed underbelly of Enlightenment thought, what David Scott, in his reading of *The Black Jacobins* as a tragedy, calls the paradoxes of colonial enlightenment: the idea that enlightenment also entailed ineffable violence against others.

In the Caribbean, European colonizers expressed the darkest, most repressed desires of power, sexual fantasy, and bodily violence, precisely at the same time of “enlightenment” where elites prided themselves on civilized elegance and rationality. The Caribbean was rendered a place of real terror, where Europeans expressed cruelty through genocide, sexual violence, and bodily violence against those with no legal means of redress. The Haitian Revolution and the expulsion of many European colonizers added another layer to the image of the Caribbean from the vantage point of European fears. There is something appropriately circular about contemplating horror and the Gothic in thinking about the Caribbean. Caribbean Gothic literature – works by authors such as Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, and Shani Mootoo – adapts Gothic conventions to challenge white Western accounts that offer essentialist, unified depictions of colonial history. Caribbean Gothic literature explores the region’s histories of slavery, colonialism, and environmental beauty as a landscape of nightmare, haunted by the trauma of the past. This is significant in that the Caribbean Gothic stakes a claim for the continued relevance and value of a postcolonial Gothic that does more than condemn the horrors of the past. Scholars most often theorize the Gothic in relation to literature and film. In this dissertation, I offer an ethnographic account that captures elements of eco-horror in daily life. To do that, I analyzed my

ethnographic and qualitative data with an eye for Gothic and eco-horror themes such as the eerie, the uncanny, and the haunting. In *Monstrosity and the Psychoanalytic Dimensions of the Uncanny*, Rodrigo Gonsalves theorizes that every monster is always a re-edition of a previously forgotten monster that returns to remind us that the past has not passed yet, even when they present themselves as a future to come. Gonsalves traces the analytics of monstrosity through Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis and applies them to understand the subjective suffering that derives from contemporary global capitalism. Reflecting on the monkey problem as eco-horror is one way to understand the situated narratives and experiences of people and animals on St. Kitts in the context of the broader monstrosity of global capitalism and the related horrors of global climate change.

Eco-horror films and books offer an opportunity to reflect on anxieties about humanity's future, exploring environmental collapse and the blurring of human-non-human boundaries. Films including George A. Romero's *Monkey Shines* (1988), the story of a capuchin monkey used in experimental fear treatment that becomes hostile, *Shakma* (1990), where an experimental drug drives a baboon to attack people, and *The Monkey* (2025), where a cursed toy monkey causes terror, all showcase how non-human primates particularly serve to trouble and blur the line between human and animal through their similarity to people and the intense intimacy they share with humans. There is a long history of reading horror in Caribbean life. Anthropologist and Folklorist Zora Neal Hurston (2009 [1938]) studied the figure of the Haitian zombie. Hurston documented that the symbol of the zombie represented the lost identity and dispossession linked to slavery and racial capitalism in the Caribbean. Persephone Braham (2017), in analyzing Caribbean literature and folklore, illustrates that monsters are cultural metaphors that reveal regional history, power struggles, and the politics of cultural identity. For

example, hybrid female figures such as sirens, mermaids, and giant Amazons symbolized fertility, exoticism, and the perils of colonial encounter. European explorers used conceptions of monstrosity to dehumanize indigenous and enslaved populations to rationalize conquest and exploitation. After revolution and post-colonial independence, these monstrous figures became metaphors and symbols, in Caribbean literature and folklore, for the problems of the afterlives of slavery and indentureship, and the discontents of postcolonial identity.

I posit that eco-horror analysis allows for the inclusion of St. Kitts- and Caribbean-region-specific historical notions of horror to understand how people navigate unsettling science and consent in daily life. My interlocutors describe the monkey problem as alarming, unnerving, disquieting, troubling, and occasionally disturbing. Farmers' descriptions of green monkeys often used rhetoric that framed them as monstrous – an ever-growing population of alien pests whose presence is constant and unabating, and continually makes it impossible to grow food by ravaging farms. In this sense, "monstrous" describes the extraordinarily large size and scale of the monkey problem, and the ways in which green monkeys are viewed as unnatural or invasive.<sup>1</sup> It's not that farmers necessarily find monkeys scary, but rather that the monkey problem, separate from the presence or absence of actual monkeys, is an affective infrastructure that conditions people, in shifting their nervous systems, somatic attunements, and relationships to space and time, to experience daily life with building animosity. People's daily lives – the

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin (2017) has written extensively about the category of "invasive" as it is applied to migrating people, as well as to plants and animals that are of concern in the areas of ecology and conservation. Species are generally labeled as invasive when they threaten native species. Invasive others are often described in similar ways, and patrolled and controlled through technologies and policies grounded in the logics of alienation and invasion. The labelling and management of invasive others are ultimately ways of maintaining and reifying borders — the borders between nations and the borders between species. Ticktin argues that scientific and biological categories of the invasive are not objective language, but rather socially informed notions used to produce demarcations, divisions, and exclusions with significant political ramifications.

rhythms of waking and sleeping – and their nervous systems are shaped by their attunement to the monkey problem. The monkeys themselves may, differently, experience life as horrific, from a resource-scarce wilderness plagued by conflict between troops of monkeys competing for limited territories to culling, sterilization, hunting, and invasive experimentation in laboratories in captivity.

In Chapter 1, farmers like Tynew, Sartre, and Kulo describe waking early, listening to the snap of a twig and the rustle of a branch. Their sleep is disrupted, and their nervous systems are on high alert at all times for the possible presence of monkeys. These farmers recalled scenes of nightly vigilance: waking before dawn, listening for movement in the dark, their nerves attuned to the distant chatter of monkeys and the crack of tree branches. These rhythms of anticipation are ruled by both the patterns of day and night and the shifting seasons, in which the food insecurity and resource scarcity of both Kittitian people and green monkeys rise and fall to the rhythms of the island, its weather, its fruit trees, and their shared ecology. Humans and monkeys come to inhabit these shared temporal fields, shaped by food insecurity, intrusion, fatigue, and the constant labor of keeping watch. In this sense, eco-horror does not necessarily describe feelings of fear or terror, but rather captures fraught relationships with nature, the frustration of navigating resource scarcity and food insecurity, and the psychological and somatic impacts of disrupted sleep and nervous-system attunement predicated on the need for ceaseless alertness.

At times, the monkey problem results in moments of escalation, not only between monkeys and humans but also between people – exceptional instances of violence that are then normalized as part of daily life by affective infrastructures that normalize and invisibilize people's experiences of suffering and frustration. Part of what the notion of eco-horror captures is the way these people, who testify to their experiences year after year, are told that their

experiences are not real, or shown that their suffering does not matter through continued stagnation. In *Horror of the Anthropocene*, Emily J. Bourke (2019) writes, “the human activity responsible for the Anthropocene has also made an indelible impact on the horror genre, causing representations of environmental issues to evolve (and, indeed, mutate) along with scientific understanding” (10). Just as Gothic and Horror media and literature sustain the people who read them, so too can an anthropological analysis of horror and monstrosity in my interlocutors’ daily lives, I hope, help guide me in understanding how communities of various scopes – local, proximate, distant, and global – are navigating historical and contemporary challenges that can only really be understood when we examine the individual narratives and stories of the people living them.

In Chapter 2, a farmer Tayon describes how the monkey problem was more than crop loss, but a reorganization of bodily life. Beyond the presence or absence of monkeys, the monkey problem is an infrastructure that, even to those who are unaware of its effects, structures life changes – the possibilities for daily life. Eco-horror analysis is apt, as eco-horror focuses on the uneasy relationship between humans and nonhumans, in which the natural world is simultaneously monstrous and monstrously wronged by humanity (Fitzpatrick 2023). Representing the monkey problem as an eco-horror harkens back to the hinge point where environmental and species identities were formed alongside historical colonization predicated on exploitation, consumption, non-consent, and uneven power relations. In some ways, the monkey problem maps onto “revenge-of-nature” narratives common in eco-horror, in which human protagonists are both agitators and victims (Rust and Soles 2014, 509). An inquiry into the monkey problem as an eco-horror can reveal the darker, more complex aspects of humans’ relationship with the natural world, including fear of animals and the environment.

To be clear, this is not an analysis of symbolic figures and Caribbean folklore. It is not that St. Kitts is not replete with stories of jumbies, trickster spirits of the dead; jack-o-lanterns, large traveling ghost flames; or soucouyants, shapeshifting women who feed on humans' blood at night. The narratives surrounding the figures of the monkey, the farmer, and the scientist on St. Kitts express a horror endemic to daily life. People have come to understand these identities through a combination of observable facts, emotionally charged stories, and the building of animosity, which can make daily life feel illogical. To consider the testimonies of farmers – their experiences of fear, frustration, hunger, and animosity – as part of a broader eco-horror narrative offers the opportunity to rethink the unsettling elements of the monkey problem without falling back into an anthropocentric account that privileges objective scientific fact over the subjective experiences of both humans and animals.

Each of the different analytics I pursue in this dissertation captures some of the complexity of the monkey problem, but is also insufficient. Thinking with eco-horror attends to how people experience the natural world as perturbing, worrying, or frightening. The Caribbean Gothic is useful for tracing histories and contemporary instances of violence amongst people — human terror, cruelty, sexual and bodily violence as they continue to cause suffering amongst and between people. Thinking about experimentation in the Caribbean — and the Caribbean as a historical laboratory for colonial experimentation — encourages analysis of the human and subjective elements of science and environmental intervention. Thinking about the uncanny can show how different elements of the monkey problem reveal humanity's incomplete and imperfect mastery over the self and our world, and unsettle the idea of mastery itself. Thinking about haunting helps represent the troubling and uncanny ways that contemporary life is continually affected by the afterlives of slavery and the legacies of plantation logics. In this way,

following how certain people and animals are designated as problems can help unsettle designations of invasiveness and othering, which remain central processes that inform the uneven distributions of suffering and security on St. Kitts and in the world beyond.

Reflecting on the discontents of historical projects of experimentation that resulted in the monkey problem of St. Kitts, then, is ultimately a mission both of re-remembering the violences of experimentation as they occurred within plantation logics and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and of the failures of experimentation that continue to affect post-colonial times. Eco-horror analysis is apt in that it moves beyond false dichotomies between guilt and innocence and between reason and irrationality. I believe that the ethics of reading that Scott offers, as a practice of remembering and re-remembering in generative ways, provides a realist approach to viewing experimental failures in the past and present, not only as problems or flaws but rather as legacies and conditions that require continual engagement to navigate.

## **The Monkey, The Farmer, and the Scientist**

I conducted 16 months of ethnographic observation of human-monkey interactions across research facilities, tourist destinations, farms, and backyard gardens on St. Kitts, and archival research at local newspapers, libraries, and government archives. Contemporary scholars have developed methods for conducting multi-species ethnography in diverse settings (Bastian et al. 2017; Blanchette 2020; Bubandt 2023; Chao 2018; Coulter 2016; Govindrajan 2019; Haraway 2003, 2008, 2020; Kohn 2013; Kopnina 2017; Raffles 2010; Tsing 2015; Todd 2014). Multi-species ethnography is a methodology grounded in the understanding of ecology as a complex system of interdependency in which humans are not solitary actors. Multi-species ethnography emphasizes nonverbal and multi-temporal sensory modes, such as sight, smell, and sound. I

utilize pseudonyms for all my research participants. I employ the ethnographic practice of crafting composite narratives from excerpts and conversations to make my data as unidentifiable as possible and to protect the confidentiality of individuals who shared their stories and time with me.

Like in books and movies in the genre of eco-horror, humans are both agitators and victims in the narrative of the monkey problem. The consequences of violent colonial experimentation on people, animals, and the land continue to haunt people. The monkey, the farmer, and the scientist – the three leading actors of this eco-horror – are each haunted differently by fantasies of scientific objectivity, the afterlives of slavery, and intertwined histories of racism and speciesism. These people and animals are not personages in a book or a movie – they’re real beings with complex desires and relationships. At the same time, they exist in environments where the possibilities for choice have been limited by the ways these histories continue to shape daily life. As human-animal encounters become increasingly contentious and environmental tensions escalate worldwide, my research on the monkey problem reveals how colonial logics of experimentation rely on the designation of both people and animals as problems to justify the reproduction of non-consensual and violent experimentation in the name of an imaginary human majority and greater good.

Monkeys are trickster figures, continually resisting the attempts of humans to control and contain them. As I explore in Chapter 8, which focuses on queer and trans interlocutors on St. Kitts, people also continually resist and disrupt the categories and identities imposed on them. Kittitian-American ethnomusicologist Jessica Baker (2024) introduces the concept of “island time” to show how the very fabric of time is perceived and functions differently on St. Kitts. Island time is both “an escape from the ‘real world’ through its insistence on time’s inherent

relationality,” wherein Kittitian business owners “encourage tourists to stay longer, suspend their other temporal realities, indulge, and spend more,” but it is also more than the economic invitation towards leisure, it is “a relation between the geomateriality of the island itself and the experiences of time” (46). The farmer, the scientist, and the monkey are not just identities but rather particular positions in relation to time – beings whose daily rhythms, access to food, waking and sleeping, and modes of interpersonal care are all entangled in a particular more-than-human relationship to time that they have come to share.

Baker traces how Black girls and young women in St. Kitts are characterized as too “fast,” a way of describing “both the speed of their bodily development and the manner in which their bodies move and are perceived” – local parlance that is meant to “curtail excessive deviant sexual activity” that comes from a long colonial history of the racist sexist conception of Black women as hypersexual (21). Kittitian monkeys are differently seen as problematically inhabiting space and time – their biologically driven foraging behaviors interpreted through a culturally specific, anthropocentric lens in which gendered and raced terminology blurs the boundaries between conceptions of human and non-human beings, echoing historical colonial logics of dehumanization. In this way, we can think across the ways that peoples’ senses of time, of place, and of narrative are, as Baker writes, drawing on the work of Sarah Sharma, part of “a differential economy” wherein these senses are “‘limited or expanded by the ways and means’ that we find ourselves and others ‘in and out of time,’” because of “the inherent unevenness of temporal relationships” wherein temporal-ordering structures are “rooted in geographic and ultimately racialized, sexualized, and class-based conceptions of the relationship between space and time” (49).

In this way, to analyze the rhythms, tempos, and roles ascribed to the monkey, the farmer, and the scientist on St. Kitts is a practice of what Baker refers to as metageography, or inquiry into “the way people order their worlds on the basis of geographic hierarchies,” which “gives way to island time as a metachronographic concept that ascribes temporal conditions to metageographic sites” (49). That is to say, mapping peoples’ *perceptions* of reality – their interpretation of affect – their somatic attunements to time – as they are structured and restructured by those living within particular relationships to geography and time, is a way to understand the uneven access to different rhythms of being, and different ways of being that are ultimately treated as intelligible or not, belonging or not, and capable of consenting or not.

Baker writes that island time is a localized imbrication of Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997), which conceives of two distinct subjectivities that spring from differing orientations to space and time, as manifested in geography and history (144). The first is “Root-identity,” the orientation to space and time predominant in the logics of coloniality, which finds its authority in the basis of origin and filiation. The second is “Relation-identity,” produced by networks of Relation, or the contradictory experience of contacts among cultures. Glissant writes towards a sense of infinite difference in the world. Rather than fixed places of origin, Glissant praises sites of connectivity as enabling multiple histories and ways of being to coexist. In opposition to an understanding of history as singular, knowable, and totalizing, as assumed in Western epistemologies, Glissant’s concept of relation opposes totalitarian conceptions of encounter with the other (such as racism or apartheid) through its inherently multicultural and multi-historical basis (72, 125).

In Glissant’s conception of Relation, encounter with the other is the very basis through which identity emerges. Rather than identity being atavistic, constituted by origin/filiation and

territory, Glissant's version of identity is about continually shifting conceptions of belonging. For example, in Caribbean composite cultures, the formation of identity is guided by Relation; the principles of which, Glissant writes, include errantry (the will to travel, as opposed to identity as the will to root) and hybridity. Central to Glissant's approach is poetics, because seeking to describe Relation with prose is an impossible task given that it encompasses a totality of relations and relationships, a "consciousness of consciousness" (27). Relation is a site of struggle and resistance but also of change and futurity.

Glissant thinks of the plantation as a site of Caribbean identity and memory formation, arguing that the plantation model enacts a productive fantasy of control over the world (63, 70). This is one example of Glissant's broader claim that Western ontological formations of the subject occur always in relation to the Other. For example, the Black creole figure of the Caribbean arose in response to violent colonial fantasies, such as that of the plantation, but took on its own meanings. He considers Creole folk tales, in which the trickster figure is depicted with playfulness and trickery, as a form of resistance to this Western conception. Glissant believes that repetition is central to how the creolized figure moves forward in life, given that they cannot stake a claim to Root-identity. Such folk-tales arise out of necessity, creating a subjectivity in relation to violence that makes generative possibilities unavailable in Western epistemology possible. Maroonage was a related form that built itself into the relations between cultures and became the basis for a sort of continuity through relations.

At the core of Glissant's writing is a critique of the idea of culture as monolithic, and also of cultural relativism. The concept of Relation is a framework for Glissant which acknowledges the infinite differences between individuals despite their inhabiting a shared world. Places of origin for Glissant are sites of difference and, by extension, of connectivity, but Caribbean

identity necessarily lacks access to such understandings of origin. The dynamic process of transformation occurring in the Caribbean archipelago is Relation in process, wherein worlds that are physically distant remain connected across time and space. The particulars of Caribbean history and culture, despite the suffering they contain, produce what he views as the potential for global peace or consensus. This is, in part, due to the way the people of the Caribbean demonstrate their ability to relate to themselves and their ancestors across loss and rupture. Despite the blurring of life and death in the slave ship of the Middle Passage, or perhaps because of this blurring, there exists a version of Relation that is horizontal rather than vertical, guided by Relation-identity rather than Root-identity. Relation is connection that has arisen both because of and beyond the past.

Moving beyond place, the concept of “the Other” then becomes central to Glissant’s analysis of identity — it is a duality of self-perception through the Other through which identity arises (17). Relation can also occur between the self and other, and can even occur across physical and language barriers. In this way, Relation can be thought of as inherently defining identity as something unfixed. As such, Glissant renders Caribbean reality knowable: enduring suffering imposed by history, a multiform culture that provides forms of Relation capable of transcending nonhistory, and complex and energetic cultures characterized by relation and all the ways it occurs, including storytelling, connecting, transforming, and reshaping culture.

Gilroy (1993) writes about music in a way that resonates significantly with Glissant’s account of diversion as an oral culture of storytelling that resists Western conceptions of historical retelling. Music, as Gilroy writes, carries historical significance as a psychic way through which enslaved peoples escaped from the plantation through music and dance. For Gilroy, music contains their memories, both fragmented and plural. This is what, I believe,

Glissant would refer to as repetition. Repetition is Glissant's method of writing in *Poetics of Relation* — seeking to capture a sense of cultural recombination in the Caribbean. It is in this same register that Baker offers listening as a methodology:

Listening to make connections to develop a kind of competence, the archipelagic listening of my interlocutors, the practices of sonic enchantment, semiotic articulation, and the geography of thought that regulate them, attunes to multiple sonic and discursive horizons of relation and their possibilities (146).

I am aiming here to really listen to my interlocutors, human and more-than-human, as they come to exist in the monkey problem as a shared relationship with geography and time. To think about Relation as it may occur between different species, and about how animals have always been intrinsically involved in human culture, and humans in turn in shaping natural environments. In this way, I trace these shifting identities of the monkey, the scientist, and the farmer as I came to see and hear them represented by my interlocutors, not as roles in a fiction or personages in a narrative, but as stories that I listened to and for, as particular iterations of how different groups of beings conceive of the other, and of endeavoring to make complex perceptions of reality knowable to others whose conceptions of identity and attunements to time and space may be different.

The Monkey – Green monkeys are native to forest habitats in West Africa. The taxonomic name green monkey comes from the monkey's green-tinged golden fur; they often blend into trees and natural environments, making them appear elusive and almost mystical. Some of my interlocutors reported to me that until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many locals on St. Kitts regarded the monkeys as a superstitious, mythical presence; some even questioned their existence because they so rarely encountered them. They are challenging to spot in the wild because they blend in with their surroundings, such as trees. The invasive green monkey first arrived in the Caribbean islands more than 350 years ago, when early settlers arrived on ships

from West Africa. The earliest preserved written records from St. Kitts date back to 1700, with wild monkeys already roaming the island. Some theories suggest that they escaped from French plantation owners who kept them as pets and a source of food. Although they are considered invasive and a problem, they are differently valued in scientific research, tourism, and conservation efforts.

The Farmer – Farmers on St. Kitts generally do not make a livable wage. Almost all farmers on St. Kitts supplement their income with additional work. The increasing frequency of encounters between farmers and monkeys, combined with related food insecurity experienced by both groups, creates what is locally known on St. Kitts as “the monkey problem” (Dore 2018; Gallagher 2022). Though monkeys have been present for a long time, the monkey problem, as it is currently known on St. Kitts, began to escalate in 2004, after the abolition of the sugar monocrop plantation industry.

It was only after sugar monocrop farming ceased that monkeys became a problem, because the artificially constructed line of sugar plantations separating the forest from the coastlines dissolved. Monkeys that had previously been confined to the forests in the central mountains of the island started appearing more frequently in human-occupied areas, at the same time as people began increasingly using land to grow subsistence crops instead of sugar. This transition coincided with an increase in government-led efforts to increase local agricultural development. Only after 2004 did the monkey problem begin escalating. The monkey problem is one of the unsolvable problems and irreversible consequences of colonial experimentation enacted upon the lands and ecologies of St. Kitts. The current version of the figures depicting the Kittitian farmer as the primary victim of the Kittitian monkey only proliferated after 2004.

The Scientist – Three independent facilities on St. Kitts conduct drug testing on green monkey research subjects. Each facility houses hundreds to thousands of monkeys at any given time. These facilities conduct various health- and behavior-related research, including animal models of disease and the testing of pharmaceuticals and drugs for safety and efficacy. The oldest of these facilities, the Behavioral Science Foundation (BSF), was founded in 1971.

All three facilities rest on the land of former slave-holding sugar monocrop plantations. St. Kitts is also a significant site for educational tourism, with two international medical universities and one international veterinary university. These sites generally draw international scientists, professors, and researchers from Asia, North America, and Europe. International scientists, biomedical practitioners, investors, and businesspeople manage these facilities and institutions while employing local Kittitians in various roles, including animal care technicians, facilities managers, and veterinary assistants. Animal rights activists, many of whom are also scientists or researchers, are drawn to the island to conduct research or assist with mitigation efforts related to the monkey problem and other local environmental issues, including drought, coral bleaching, endangered turtle conservation, and flooding following adverse weather events. While the historical figure of the colonial scientist was concerned with maintaining the sugar monocrop plantation system, the current figure of the scientist is often concerned with repairing or mitigating environmental problems, many of which are anthropogenic.

In part, the invasive green monkey problem on St. Kitts can be understood through the lens of plantation futures – the contemporary reconfiguration of plantation lands and logics – since the abolition of slavery on the island in 1834. In her essay “Plantation Futures,” Katherine McKittrick (2013) argues that the historical configurations of the plantation are not confined to the past but are actively recast in contemporary contexts, both through geographies and through

logics of productivity that rely on large amounts of unpaid or cheap labor. Plantation logics describe how the broader global economy thrives on the persistent impoverishment of Black people. In trade, tourism, and agriculture, plantation logics continue to inform not only prisons but also cities, resorts, and diversified farms.

On St. Kitts, as on many Caribbean islands, former plantations remain a significant presence in the island's geography. Science laboratories and facilities repurpose former sugar plantations into cutting-edge research spaces, attracting capital through scientific investment. Business owners have transformed great houses into museums, restaurants, stores, hotels, and alcohol distilleries. Many farms are also located on former plantation lands, and there are significant challenges in repurposing these lands for diverse farming ventures. The organizing logics and spatial distributions of former plantations continue to affect contemporary life experiences on St. Kitts in unseen ways. The exacerbation of the monkey problem is one of the most, if not the most, unexpected persistent issues to have arisen since the local abolition of plantations.

Tao Leigh Goffe (2026) argues that the contemporary climate crisis is a direct result of plantation logics: the economies and ideas of plantation slavery have produced contemporary extractive capitalist forms. It is certainly true that the monkey problem is exacerbated by climate change, as the frequency of severe weather events and zoonotic spillovers becomes an ever more pressing concern. At the same time, it would be reductive to argue that life on St. Kitts is solely a result of plantation futures. For one, plantations are only part of the larger historical context of colonial experimentation in the Caribbean. Colonial experimentation is a term that describes how European imperialism rendered the Caribbean as a laboratory for Western exploitation through numerous imperfect and improvisational forms. The Caribbean was treated as a living laboratory

where colonial powers tested medical, agricultural, and socio-economic frameworks: non-consensual medical procedures on human subjects that served as early precursors to modern vaccines, birth control pills, sterilization operations, and military and environmental testing for napalm, Agent Orange, and Uranium.

At the same time, life in the Caribbean is so much more than the afterlife of colonial experimentation. Caribbean peoples have developed ways of being that resist and disrupt colonial logics, and which exist separately from them. For example, Gilroy (1993) considers the figure of *the ship* in Caribbean poetry and literature integral to the history of the Black Atlantic. The figure of the ship allows for moving beyond what Gilroy saw as a nationalistic focus of 20<sup>th</sup>-century discourses on the Caribbean, which he believed was “antithetical to the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international” political movements that have arisen from the Black Atlantic (30). The figure of the ship offered a way of thinking about roots and routes, or about the flows, exchanges, and in-between elements of Black Atlantic culture and thought, within which Gilroy situates his critique of both Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism (191). To think of contemporary life construed solely as plantation futures would be inaccurately Eurocentric in that it would fail to account for the work of Black and Caribbean peoples to form life beyond the constraints of European imperialism, and for the new desires, social relations, and modes of association that have arisen in the Caribbean, for example through artistic expression, music, storytelling, and counter-cultural philosophical discourses that offer radical alternative traditions, what Gilroy calls “politics of transfiguration” or ways of being that resist modern Western racial discourses and ethnic absolutism (2, 37).

What is the relationship between colonial experimentation and contemporary scientific experimentation, such as animal models of disease research, diversified agricultural engineering

ventures, and environmental intervention? Colonial experimentation on St. Kitts encompasses not only the practices that occurred on sugar plantations but also genocide and the erasure or relegation of other ways of knowing – Indigenous ways of life, scientific traditions, and philosophies of environmental coexistence – as figments of the past or as illegitimate ways of knowing. At the same time, vernacular forms of experimentation, such as the Traditional Ecological Knowledges that emerged in maroonage, local Kittitian forms of plant medicine (see Whittaker 2001), Kittitian practices of monkey trapping, and emerging Caribbean calls for environmental racial justice and food sovereignty, have arisen in relation to and in resistance to colonial logics. Contemporary scientific ventures, including pharmaceutical experimentation on captive green monkeys and primatological population-level interventions on wild green monkeys such as sterilization and culling, are descended from colonial Western ways of knowing, but they are also sites of recombination and Relation. Transnational exchanges of different forms of scientific knowledge and ways of knowing result in the mobilization of science on St. Kitts, within a complex post-colonial setting marked by unique discontents. This is the case in implementing complex pest management programs aimed at conserving endangered species such as turtles, diversified farming ventures, and controlling invasive fungi, plants, and animals, including green monkeys.

## **Nonhistory**

In *Poetics of Relation* (1997) and *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), Glissant writes towards an infinite sense of difference in the world. Rather than fixed places of origin, Glissant praises sites of connectivity as enabling multiple histories and ways of being to coexist. Glissant's analysis of post-colonial life in the Caribbean may help make sense of the haunting, unsettling,

and disquieting elements of the monkey problem. Glissant's conception of the Caribbean challenges the notion of a fixed history from the outset. If Enlightenment epistemology conceives of the world as moving towards "a global historical consciousness," Glissant instead argues that the Caribbean is a site of discontinuous relation.

In such a context, history as far as it is a discipline and claims to clarify the reality lived by this people, will suffer from a serious epistemological deficiency: it will not know how to make the link. (Glissant 1989, 61).

Nonhistory erases the possibility for collective memory, a "dead tissue that colonial ideology had deposited along their [Caribbean nations'] borders" (1989, 62). For Glissant, there is no one fixed version of history. If we take Glissant's description of the *nonsense* in Caribbean storytelling as seriously as Scott considers the genres of romance and tragedy, then the Caribbean trickster folk-tale operates almost as an anti-tragedy, delegitimizing the knowability of history. Glissant views the process of orienting in the Caribbean as a poetic process of transformation. Some authors, such as Paul Gilroy (1993), refer to this transformation as creolization. However, Glissant is somewhat critical of the concept of creolization, arguing that it is insufficiently descriptive of the Caribbean context. The history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is not lost or forgotten in Glissant's conception. Rather, Glissant focuses on how colonial violence disrupts people's ability to make sense of history. Glissant argues that rootedness in the West became fixed in space and time with the construction of nation-states, but that this "totalitarian drive" is a way of viewing the world that reproduces the ideologies of imperialism (1989, 14).

Chaos has no language but gives rise to quantifiable myriads of them. We puzzle out the cycle of their confluences, the tempo of their momentums, the similarities of their diversions. (1997, 125)

Glissant argues that the understanding of history as singular and totalizing, also related to territorial conceptions of land possession and conflict, was disseminated by Western colonialism. Glissant, in contrast, believes that history is not totalizing. Glissant's belief arises in part due to the presence of rupture and trauma-related nonhistory in the Caribbean: "Memory in our works is not a calendar memory; our experience of time does not keep company with the rhythms of month and year alone; it is aggravated by the void, the final sentence of the Plantation" (1997, 72). Such nonhistory is a loss or lacuna related to the Middle Passage. In opposition to an understanding of history as singular, knowable, and totalizing, as assumed in Western epistemologies, Glissant's concept of relation opposes totalitarian conceptions of encounter with the other through its inherently multicultural and multi-historical basis.

Glissant conceives of encounter with the other, in the post-colonial Caribbean, as the basis through which identity emerges. Rather than identity being atavistic, constituted by origin/filiation and territory, Glissant's version of identity is about continually shifting conceptions of belonging. For example, in Caribbean composite cultures, the formation of identity is guided by creolization; the principles of which, Glissant writes, include errantry (the will to travel, as opposed to identity as the will to root) and hybridity (the re-combination of cultures, languages, cuisines, and music). Central to Glissant's approach to theorizing the Caribbean is poetics, because seeking to describe Relation with prose is an impossible task given that it encompasses a totality of relations and relationships, a "consciousness of consciousness" (27). Relation is a site of struggle and resistance, but also of change and futurity.

Glissant (1997) views the plantation as one of many sites of Caribbean identity formation, arguing that the plantation model embodies a productive fantasy of control over the world (63, 70). This is one example of Glissant's broader claim that Western ontological

formations of the subject always occur in relation to the Other. For example, the Black Creole figure of the Caribbean arose in response to violent colonial fantasies, such as that of the plantation, but took on its own meanings. He considers Creole folk tales, in which the trickster figure is portrayed as playful and cunning, as a form of resistance to this Western conception. Glissant argues that repetition is central to how the creolized figure moves forward in life, since they cannot stake a claim to history. Such folk tales arise out of necessity, creating subjectivity in relation to violence, thereby making generative possibilities that are unavailable in Western epistemology available. Maroonage is one example of a form that developed into a cultural relationship and became the basis for continuity within that relationship.

At the core of Glissant's writing is a critique of both the idea of culture as monolithic and cultural relativism. Glissant instead offers the concept of Relation, which acknowledges the infinite differences between individuals despite their shared inhabitation of a world. For Glissant, places of origin are sites of difference and, therefore, of connectivity. Glissant offers creolization, or the dynamic process of transformation occurring in the Caribbean archipelago, as an example of Relation in process, in which worlds that are physically distant remain connected across time and space. The particulars of Caribbean history and culture, despite the suffering they contain, produce what he views as the potential for global peace or consensus. This is, in part, due to the way the people of the Caribbean demonstrate their ability to relate to themselves and their ancestors across loss, rupture, and nonhistory. Despite the blurring of life and death in the Middle Passage, or perhaps because of this blurring, a version of Relation emerges that can transcend time, record, and place. This Relation is not about making sense of the past, which is unknowable and inaccessible, but rather about the connection that has arisen both because of and beyond that past.

Glissant suggests an account of identity as constructed in Relation, rather than in rootedness or fixedness. Despite the construction of the Westphalian nation-state and its spread through imperialism (1997, 14), nomads and wanderers remain. Glissant analyzes errantry (adventuring, wandering): the root of self that remains during errantry despite a lack of physical rootedness. Moving beyond place, the concept of “the Other” is central to Glissant’s conception of identity — identity is a duality of self-perception through the Other through which identity arises (1997, 17). Relationships can also form between the self and others, and even across physical and language barriers. In this way, Relation is unfixed, capable of transcending sameness/difference. As such, Glissant renders Caribbean reality knowable: enduring suffering imposed by history, a multiform culture that provides forms of connection capable of transcending nonhistory, and complex and energetic cultures characterized by relation and all the ways it occurs, including storytelling, connecting, transforming, and reshaping culture.

In making sense of the monkey problem as a combination of traceable amounts of food insecurity and crop loss, and as somatic and sensorial attunements that result in perceptions of the world as a site of building animosity and eco-horror, it is important to question how identities of beings within the monkey problem are constructed in Relation to the monkey, the farmer, and scientist as they are rendered “other” on the island. Glissant’s idea of identity, as constructed in unfixed Relation that can transcend sameness and difference, offers a way of understanding how people and monkeys have both contributed towards contemporary life and culture on St. Kitts. Glissant did not write using contemporary terms like more-than-human or non-human other, but writing on Relation was grounded in a poetic exploration of the centrality of water, land, and body as sites of the negotiation of sameness and difference. Drawing on Glissant’s writing as a way of understanding contemporary life in the Caribbean, and the ways in which the history of

Caribbean peoples, animals, and environments have become together through dynamic processes of transformation, opens a way to understand the monkey problem in its locally-situated context, not as an exceptional situation, but as part of Relation. The roles of the farmer, the monkey, and the scientist can then be understood through the lens of Relation-identity rather than Root-identity – as orientations to space and time produced by contradictory experiences of contact between beings of different cultures, species, perceptions, and somatic attunements.

In Part One, “Monkeys Everywhere,” I focus on the testimonies of farmers and agricultural workers – those most negatively and directly affected by the monkey problem. I heard numerous stories about how the monkey problem pervaded people’s consciousness, evoking fear, frustration, and jarring moments of escalation. Many of these feelings did not involve the actual presence of monkeys but reflected the ways in which the monkey problem is defined by messy relations among people, animals, and the natural world. “Building animosity,” as this phenomenon was described by one of my interlocutors, is the central analytic of Chapter One. People’s nervous systems, attuned to food insecurity and so continually affected by the negative multi-species consequences of colonization and historical rupture, shift their perception of the world, resulting in building animosity – growing frustration, fear, and anger, as farmers continue to testify to the damage year after year, only to find that their experiences are not acknowledged, respected, or validated, and their situation does not improve.

Chapter 2, “Monkey See Monkey Do,” building on anthropological theories of affect, posits that the monkey problem is characterized by mismatched sensorial attunements, leading to continually delayed resolution and disagreement about the very nature of reality. Researchers have already demonstrated that monkeys cause significant crop loss for farmers, and have proposed interventions, yet this has remained insufficient to enact change. If there is sufficient

research documenting the problem, and there are sufficient proposed solutions to the problem, then why doesn't somebody, anybody, do something? I consider how a critical and translational multi-species ethnographic approach may help explain the breakdown in the relationship among research, policy, and public consent towards environmental interventions and responses to wildlife conflict. In the context of my research on St. Kitts, multi-species ethnography may translate and contextualize the findings of (ethno-)primatology within broader historical and transnational conversations about the intertwined problems of racism and speciesism, the afterlives of slavery, and the legacies of colonial experimentation.

In Part 2, "Unsettling Science and Consent," I explore how the ecologies and narratives of the monkey problem extend into the laboratory and to the primate research facilities known locally as "monkey farms." These research facilities are also laboratories where humans, animals, and other entities coexist in interspecies webs of care and commitment, wherein all beings are subject to one another's power. In Chapter 3, "Affective Consent: Rethinking Consent Through a More-than-human Lens," I present the results of ethnographic observations and interviews at biomedical laboratories that conduct research on captive invasive green monkeys on St. Kitts. I introduce the concept of affective consent – a framework that describes the nonverbal mediations of consent and refusal, such as body language observed during monkey matchmaking for group housing. I argue that existing consent models are insufficient for animals, and certain people and settings. At the same time, interpreting affect is an imperfect, messy trial-and-error practice. This framework highlights how local contexts and historical conditions shape everyday affect, multi-species relations, and the mediations of consent.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the processes of sedation and desensitization, which are central to experimentation on monkey research subjects. Desensitization to the invasive procedures of

scientific experimentation on sedated experimental monkeys at monkey farms exists in relation to high rates of sexual harassment between laboratory staff. These processes, I argue, are also affected by, and part of, the monkey problem and building animosity. Ultimately, I move to consider cycles of non-consent that occur between people working at these facilities, and how they relate to non-consent being enacted against monkeys — these moments of violent or traumatic escalation are also ultimately part of the relations that construct the interconnected identities of the monkey, the farmer, and the scientist.

In Chapter 5, I make sense of these cycles of non-consent through the historical context of how these monkey farms are built on the lands of former sugar plantations, where non-consent was a central driving force of racialized (re)productive accumulation. Workers reported these monkey farms as haunted by jumbies – ghosts. I build on Aisha Beliso-de Jesús's (2015) theorization of co-presences to consider non-consent as a persistent co-presence reproduced in spaces of desensitization, when violence is normalized as part of daily life. I contextualize non-consent as a historically traceable co-presence mobilized by European colonizers as a mechanism of colonial domination and racialized (re)productive accumulation. If non-consent haunts the space of desensitization, then consent can be redeemed as a communicative form when sensitivity is prioritized. The intervention of prioritizing sensitivity circles back to the concept of “Affective Consent” introduced in Chapter 3, which describes how I observed humans already respecting the consent of animals that cannot speak but can be known. I build on the discussion of sensitivity in Chapter 2 to offer “nurturing sensitivity” in Chapter 5 as a method for considering embodied knowing as a research technology. Going beyond the critique of the divides of nature and culture (Haraway 2003, Latour 2012) and human and non-human (Descola 2013, Fernando 2022, Gosine 2021), I advocate for investigation at the intersection of separate

and unified experience – of co-presence, and the possibility of attunement to self and other despite difference and the imperfection of the senses. Thinking about affective consent may transform how we think about ethical and pleasurable forms of relation, respect for the (non-)consent of animals, and sensitivity as something worth cultivating.

In Part 3, “Belonging,” I delve into narratives and people that come and go from St. Kitts. In Chapter 6, “Foreigners,” I focus on the ways in which the voices and narratives of the beings most negatively affected by the monkey problem — Kittitian farmers, and monkeys themselves — are often ignored, subsumed by broader narratives espoused by media and supported by the government of St. Kitts, which portray monkeys as cute, attracting tourist capital, and a natural resource and scientific asset to the island. People who own their own land – generally foreign investors who can afford to participate in the Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, or Kittitian elites who own businesses and are protected from food insecurity – are differently affected and therefore less attuned to the monkey problem. Business owners in the transnational market for groceries and goods actually benefit from the near-impossibility of sustainable agriculture on the island. Feeling that their stories and voices are ignored only contributes to building animosity between farmers and these other stakeholders across lines of race, class, and power.

In Chapter 7, “Monkey Stories,” I follow Astrid, a recent immigrant to St. Kitts from the United States, as she navigates what it means for her and her family to cultivate a sense of belonging on the island. Analyzing Astrid’s story alongside historical newspaper sources on green monkeys, I further explore what it means to develop partial attunement to the monkey problem. This chapter builds on the argument about mismatched attunements and power

dynamics in Chapter 2, reflecting on the complexity of St. Kitts' post-colonial context and social relations therein.

Chapter 8, "Horizons," offers an ethnographic exploration of queer and trans life on St. Kitts, exploring the complex interplay between alienation and belonging in a postcolonial landscape. This article considers how the logics of exclusion applied to invasive species mirror the marginalization of LGBT+ individuals who are frequently labeled as "not belonging" or "unnatural". The chapter builds on Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's concept of the "burden of inclusion," originally discussed in Chapter 5, in relation to cycles of non-consent. I argue that the decriminalization of same-sex acts on St. Kitts in 2022 represents a "violence of humanization" where queer people must still prove their right to exist within a cis-heteronormative state. This is further explored through Kittitian Ethnomusicologist Jessica Baker's concept of "archipelagic listening," which captures the "doubleness" and "tripleness" of Kittitian life — a phenomenon in which individuals selectively perform their identities to navigate safety, community, celebration, and resistance to neo-colonial imperatives for productivity. I follow the metaphor of "fruit" to analyze how queer identities "ripen" in relation to their environment, contrasting the "naturalized" status of non-native mangoes with the "problem" status of queer people. By invoking José Esteban Muñoz's concept "queer horizons," I consider how queer futurity on St. Kitts is not a naive fantasy but a radical demand for social change grounded in "archipelagic listening" connected to historical moments of resistance locally and globally. Ultimately, I assert that the Kittitian queer feminist sense of futurity is inextricably linked to broader calls for food security, decolonization, and racial justice. This work turns away from violent investments in plantation logics to embrace a more resilient and liberated future on St. Kitts and in the archipelagos of sound and cultural exchange beyond.

## ***Part 1: Monkeys Everywhere***

### **Chapter 1: Building Animosity**

This dead tissue, or the violent ideologies imbued by colonialism that came alongside rupture from history, can neither be ignored nor made sense of — diversion is then a third approach, outside of chronological understandings, “a study of the folk imagination,” a way to engage the “creative link between nature and culture” that is “vital to the formation of a community” (Glissant 1989, 63).

#### **Introduction: A Monkey Summit on Monkey Hill**

I arrived at an empty soccer field. There had been no address, only a set of directions: turn off Island Main Road at the Rams roundabout; continue the road to Monkey Hill until you pass the church; park at the playing field. I parked my car on the side of the road and anxiously paced around the soccer field, hoping that I had found the correct spot. I arrived right on time at 11:30 am, as the invitation instructed. Like most gatherings on St. Kitts, arriving on time actually meant that I was early — I was the first to show up.

Ten minutes later, a large open-air bus appeared and parked beside me. The words “jungle explorer” were painted on the side.

“Good morning. Here for the monkey summit?” the driver asked.

“Good morning. Yes, I am!”

“Climb onboard.”

Over the next 20 minutes, people began appearing in carpools. I soon waved to Denise, a farm vendor from whom I had been buying my groceries for the past month. She sat beside me, and we struck up a conversation. Primatologist Dr. Kerry Dore, who had invited me to the summit, arrived shortly after. This was my first time meeting Kerry in person — we had previously only met on Zoom — and I was anxious to make a good impression. I wanted to

speak to her, but she was busy messaging and calling latecomers. At 12:15 pm, one final car arrived. With the bus packed, we started our trek up into the densely forested mountainside.

Even as we kept driving higher into the hills, signs of agriculture were visible all around. Different areas of the mountainside were fenced and fractioned off. Some plots of land were steep and hilly, while others were flat or had slight inclines. Vibrant shades of green filled my vision. The bus bounced up and down as we drove up the mountain — some parts of the road were not paved. I gripped the seat in front of me.

Ruins, new and old, peaked out all around. We passed a sugar column, a large circular brick structure that had formerly been used to process sugarcane by burning it for crystallization and extraction. It was now in the midst of a slow collapse. Dislodged bricks were strewn around its base. Bananaquits, or sugar birds, flew by overhead. Their high-pitched call echoed around us, a short, repeated twittering. Dogs barked in the distance. A troop of green monkeys briefly appeared in view. They ran across the road behind the bus. There was a larger monkey, likely a mother, with three smaller monkeys, likely adolescents. They disappeared back into the trees as quickly as they had appeared, their golden fur blending into the foliage. Their brief, almost spectral presence hinted at the deeper, unsettling relations that had brought all of us onto the bus in the first place.

I had seen these large, open-face buses before, picking up or dropping off tourists at the Marriott hotel. These buses were generally used for tourism excursions, but this one had been recruited as transport to the Monkey Summit. As we arrived, we stopped next to a dilapidated block-and-brick building the size of a large garden shed. As we filed out of the bus, the procession of farmers and government agents beside me walked onto the shed two at a time, taking a better look at the wedges of the Caribbean Sea that peeked out between the hills. I could

see the Island Main Road and the town of Cayon far below. I walked with Denise. In our conversation, I learned more about her. Denise was a migrant worker from nearby Anguilla. She was both a farmer and a food vendor — someone who grew her own produce and sold it for other farmers. She shared that she sold crops grown by farmers from St. Kitts and Nevis, as well as produce that arrived by ship from nearby islands like Antigua and Saint Martin. She had friends and family on nearby islands and was part of a network of farmers, vendors, produce traffickers, agro-processors, couriers, and consignors spanning the Lesser Antilles and the Eastern Caribbean Sea.

Recent migrant farm workers, like Denise, make up a large part of the agricultural workforce. Many Kittitians have negative associations with agriculture. The first reason for this is that local plantation labor, historically conducted on sugar monocrop farms until their abolition in 2004, is associated with histories of slavery, indentureship, and exploitation. In my experience, older Kittitians are more likely to have negative associations with agriculture for this reason. The second reason is that the British colonial government used to assign agricultural work as a form of public service for those convicted of crimes. This has persisted even after the decolonization and government reorganization of the nation of St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983. In particular, the correctional service of St. Kitts and Nevis utilizes prison agriculture as part of its post-colonial nation-building efforts. At Russell's Rest, the "prison farm," a collaboration of the Ministry of Agriculture, His Majesty's Prison (HMP), and the St. Kitts-Nevis Defense Force (SKNDF), individuals indicted of crimes are assigned to farm labor in what the government frames as a rehabilitative program. As described on the Instagram of Prime Minister Terrance Drew, the goals of the prison farm are for prisoners to participate in farming activities to learn skills, grow food for the facility, and contribute to national food security. This "model farm"

project emphasizes “self-sustainability, a double entendre for the word sustainability in that farming both aids in local food security and is part of efforts to make the prison service self-sustaining on the islands. Incarcerated individuals farm subsistence crops, poultry, and fish, which are then repurposed for school meals. Though the St. Kitts and Nevis constitution prohibits slavery, servitude, and forced labor (U.S. Department of State 2023), this project persists because it is framed as rehabilitation. At the same time as many Kittitians have negative associations with agriculture, the nation’s government enthusiastically espouses agriculture in its policies, national events celebrating agriculture, and its social media presence. For these local reasons and related transnational struggles with food insecurity across the majority of Caribbean islands, migrant workers have come to make up a large share of the agricultural workforce on St. Kitts.

We approached the farm of Mr. Keithley Armstrong, a prominent member of the St. Kitts agricultural community. Mr. Armstrong was a farmer, trapper, and entrepreneur who was well-known for his involvement in the burgeoning farm-to-table movement on St. Kitts. I had heard about him numerous times before ever meeting him. The farm-to-table movement was attracting significant interest from wealthy tourists and investors, and I often saw articles and videos about it circulating in different St. Kitts Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Mr. Armstrong and his farm had been featured in several promotional videos and news stories about agriculture on St. Kitts, accompanied by visits from Prime Minister Terrance Drew (SKN News 2024). Armstrong Farms was emblematic of successful agricultural diversification on St. Kitts, which helped meet the country’s mission of providing a facilitative environment conducive to the development of agricultural tourism (Williams 2022). Mr. Armstrong was also a major actor in the ethnographic

work of Dana Conzo (2022), a food systems anthropologist who had previously conducted fieldwork research on agriculture in St. Kitts.

There were about 30 white plastic chairs set up in a circle under a massive white awning. It was a hot, humid summer day, and without the awning, the sun's rays would have been uncomfortable. Even under the awning, it was still uncomfortable. Participants were dressed in a wide range of styles, from shorts and t-shirts to one government agent wearing a particularly nice formal pantsuit. An old wooden lectern with a black metal microphone stood in the middle. Participants took seats in the circle. I initially stayed standing because I wanted to make sure there were enough seats for all the Monkey Summit participants before I took one. I was standing a few feet behind the government agent wearing a pantsuit, quickly scribbling notes in my ethnographic notebook. One of the farmers, a young man from Nevis, made a remark to the government agent in Kittitian Creole. He said something along the lines of, "he's standing behind you because he likes you." The government agent let out a laugh, and she turned to look back at me. I had lived on St. Kitts long enough to have a basic understanding of Kittitian Creole, even though I could not speak it myself. Likely, the Nevisian farmer had assumed that I would be unable to understand. I laughed quietly to myself and took a seat.

Throughout the monkey summit, participants spoke in a range of English and Kittitian Creole, most of which I was able to understand. Throughout my fieldwork, at events like Monkey Summits, in interviews, and in daily interactions, my Kittitian interlocutors would fluidly switch between Kittitian Creole and English. There were generally a few reasons they would do this, based on when they wanted to make a point, or when they wanted me, as an outsider and a researcher, to understand them, or not. Having access to a voice recording of this event was very helpful, as I had to listen to certain sections multiple times to ultimately

understand them. I didn't always voice-record my interviews, as participants often requested not to be recorded. My understanding of Kittitian Creole improved significantly by the end of my fieldwork.

Monkey summits were intermittent gatherings on St. Kitts and Nevis where people involved in agriculture exchanged information on dealing with invasive monkeys. This particular summit was hosted by the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) project, a network of Caribbean organizations funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the United States Department of Agriculture. Launched in 2010, IAS has been working to address “the detrimental impacts of invasive alien species on the Caribbean,” including “the potential threat posed by IAS to health and livelihoods; to intra-regional and international trade; and to the Caribbean’s endemic biodiversity and priceless ecosystems” (Caribbean Invasive Alien Species Network. 2022). Most of the IAS’s work centered on research and public awareness campaigns. IAS dealt with numerous invasive flora and fauna, including rats, donkeys, lionfish, and mongooses. On St. Kitts, monkeys were the most notorious and well-known of these invasive species.

The June 2023 monkey summit brought together approximately 20 farmers from around St. Kitts and Nevis, some of whom also worked as trappers. There were also other invited stakeholders, including the Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, small-business owners in the tourism sector, and government employees from the St. Kitts Tourism Authority and the St. Kitts Department of Environment. I was invited to attend this summit by Dr. Dore, who had spent years researching invasive green monkeys on St. Kitts. Dr. Dore and Dr. Melvin James, the former Director of Agriculture, facilitated the session. While chatting during our drive down from the summit, I learned that Kerry had personally invited many of the farmers present. She

had drawn on the personal connections she had developed during more than a decade of living on St. Kitts and researching green monkeys.

After everyone was seated, the microphones and recording devices were readied, and introductions began. “Welcome, everyone. We're thrilled to have you here for our farm multi-stakeholder monkey management workshop.” The conversation was lively, and people were passionate about the topic at hand and eager to speak, sometimes even interrupting one another. The conversation often referenced monkeys, shifting between topics such as personal grievances, anecdotes, suggestions for management strategies or technologies, and seasonal crop choices. Farmers from Nevis spoke about their success with electrical fencing, while those from St. Kitts complained about how fencing wasn't feasible to obtain and maintain. Farmers on Nevis were more likely to own their own land than farmers on St. Kitts due to disparate policies across the two islands regarding land tenure, which was a major factor in these differences.

One farmer, a Black Kittitian man named Sartre, reflected on Citrus Canker, a bacterial disease of citrus plants endemic to the United States that had recently reached St. Kitts. This farmer drew an interesting connection between this disease and the problem of invasive monkeys.

Some things, after a couple hundred years, could become really problematic. Monkeys took a few hundred years, but moved from pet status to pest status. Remember — only 12 or 13 of them were brought into French St. Kitts in the seventeen hundreds. When the British run them out [the French], they left them [the monkeys] to run wild. It is very dangerous to bring in things undeclared. It is dangerous to bring in things without the quarantine officer know what you're doing. It may not be problematic now, but it might spread. Recently, some citrus plants came into the country. They had a disease on them called Citrus Canker. They were allowed. The citrus industry, they spend millions to control Citrus Canker in the United States. So be careful. We can bring in something now, and your generation twenty thirty years down the road might be back here about invasive Citrus Canker. The monkey thing started over 250 years. Now it's taken our life. Now the problem we know, how destructive they are.

The French colonized St. Kitts and Nevis in the early 17th century. Throughout St. Kitts's history, the French and the English frequently clashed, fighting over control of the island. After their defeat in 1782, the French left St. Kitts, and the island came completely under English colonial occupation. While this colonial history is well documented in textbooks and museums, the origin of the invasive monkeys on the island remains a subject of speculation. Some believe that the monkeys were brought as pets, while others think that they were brought as a potential food source for settlers. Consistent across all the accounts I heard, however, was a shared understanding that introducing monkeys to the islands was a mistake. Sartre continued, testifying to his understanding of the damage they caused to him and fellow farmers:

They feed on harvestable produce of almost every kind. Even vegetables that are underground, they detect somehow. I've done a survey looking at the losses from several farms. We found out that they eat so many different crops. They will attack almost anything... Anybody who go into seasoning and leafy vegetables, you have to be careful because as the as the monkeys go through, it is also possible that they drop their excretory material. That's where a lot of people get certain stomach ailments. Monkeys excrete their fecal material and urinary material, and it gets on your crops, which you then cooking. It becomes a problem. It doesn't happen every day, but it can happen to the wrong person.

The possible presence of monkeys or their excrement caused significant everyday worry for this farmer. To live in the monkey problem, for this farmer, was defined by more than just crop loss – the possibility of their excrement made this farmer wonder about the safety of consuming their crops.

## **Monkey Problems and Other Problems**

Monkeys are a daily topic of conversation on St. Kitts. Monkey Hill, Monkey Bar, Monkey Summits, monkey problem, monkey tourism — literal and symbolic monkeys have permeated life on St. Kitts and its imagery. Once, when back in the United States, I met an Uber driver from Trinidad. When I mentioned that I had been living and working on St. Kitts, he

immediately laughed and responded, “The Monkey Eaters’ Island? Why would you go there?”

The stereotype of Kittitians as monkey-eaters, which circulates in the Caribbean, has some truth to it. Many Kittitians do consume the meat of green monkeys, locally known as “bush meat.” It is typically eaten in stews and soups. However, individuals’ Kittitian opinions about eating monkeys vary widely.

In interviews, when I asked them about the monkey problem, many of my interlocutors brought up the practice of eating bush meat, even if they themselves had never partaken in it. One of my interlocutors, a Kittitian scientist named Lottie, once said to me “bush meat is disgusting and I would never try it. But many people in the countryside eat it. That’s part of the monkey problem – they don’t have enough food and have to eat bush meat. I’m Kittitian, but I’m not *that* Kittitian.” Though many of my interlocutors found the practice unappealing, class divisions shape the unevenness of attitudes towards eating bush meat, as those facing food insecurity are more likely to rely on the monkeys for food. Akeem and Tynew, two of my interlocutors who are farmers, recalled eating bush meat as children, when their neighbors would cook up a large well-seasoned stew of it and share it with the community. The practice of eating bush meat, much like the fear of monkeys’ excrement, was an example of how life within the monkey problem involved entanglement with green monkeys beyond the simple issue of crop loss – the existence of green monkeys continually refuses to be entirely separate from the self. The animal in the human, and the related feelings of disgust, commonly circulated in my interlocutors’ conceptions of daily life.

Generally speaking, Kittitians’ and locals’ cultural attitudes towards monkeys are highly negative. The green monkeys are viewed as pests. They are classified as invasive by biologists. Primatologists, farmers, and government agents have proposed various solutions to the monkey

problem. One common proposal is culling: the mass killing of monkeys. However, cruise ship owners, one of the island's most significant and consistent sources of income, threaten to stop docking in St. Kitts if culling begins. Cruise ship owners fear the negative international attention it may attract from wealthy investors and stakeholders concerned about animal well-being, citing the intense negative attention the culling of green monkeys on St. Martin has drawn as an example of the kinds of international public attention they seek to avoid (Freedom for Animals 2023).

International animal rights activists, largely citizens of the United States and the United Kingdom, argue for the release of captive green monkeys from research facilities. They advocate for methods of population control that they deem the most humane, such as sterilization. While there have been attempts at sterilization programs, they have not resulted in meaningful change. A sterilization campaign was conducted by the Ross University Veterinary School of Medicine for several years. Despite sterilizing thousands of monkeys, population numbers are estimated to have bounced back in just two to three years. None of these solutions has ever been implemented effectively enough to make a difference. In my research, I interviewed interlocutors across all these relevant stakeholder groups (see Appendix 1).

The first recorded agricultural summit of St. Kitts and Nevis, a workshop held by the Department of Agriculture to discuss issues pertaining to invasive species, was held in 1995 (St Kitts and Nevis Observer 1995). I found the advertisement for the Department of Agriculture's first-ever "agricultural open day" while conducting supplementary archival research at the St. Kitts and Nevis Observer archives. However, various iterations of agricultural gatherings and workshops have existed much longer. One of my interlocutors, a Black Kittitian elder named Akeem, recounted to me that he had been attending agricultural summits since the 1960s. This

tradition is still observed every few years, though monkeys are now a more frequent topic of conversation.

Akeem was in his late 60s. He walked with a slight limp, but was otherwise in great shape. He was a farmer who also occasionally worked as a trapper, capturing wild monkeys and selling them to the scientific facilities on the island. I met Akeem through interlocutors of mine who had a backyard garden, for whom Akeem offered free trapping services. Akeem invited me to visit his farm, eager to show me evidence of the damage caused by monkeys. Like many of my interlocutors, Akeem was excited about the opportunity to speak with me after hearing that my goal was to learn more about the adverse effects of monkeys. Although I was open with my interlocutors that I could not guarantee anything would change because of my research, they responded that the opportunity to speak on these issues, to testify to them, and to have them recorded felt important. Akeem said that it gave him hope.

Akeem recalled that he had been attending agricultural open days for over 60 years, but had stopped attending because he didn't find them helpful.

I've been going to meetings since in the 1960s because I had animals. Every food meeting, it was adequate. They used to invite me. I would be called by the Agriculture Department, you know. But now I don't want to hear from them, because all you get from it is the scientists' point of view. Whatever new problem they have discovered in our chemicals. That kind of thing. That's the use, and that's all I get from it. Nothing change. They have a thing that they come up with every year, see. The way forward for agriculture. It's always different, but it's also the same thing every year. At the end of it, we have nothing.

For Akeem and many farmers on St. Kitts, the monkey problem was one of numerous issues and concerns. Akeem's daily life consisted of navigating innumerable challenges, including wandering livestock such as sheep and goats, wild hogs, drought related to aquifer depletion, hurricanes, unpredictable heatwaves, and high equipment costs.

The problem of invasive green monkeys garners significant local and international attention and debate, yet remains unresolved despite decades of attention. Veterinarian Christa Gallagher, a professor at Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine on St. Kitts, who has conducted significant research on the monkey problem, posits that it is an unsolvable issue (Gallagher 2022). This is because the solutions proposed by some groups, such as Kittitian farmers and backyard gardeners, often conflict with the desires and requests of others, including animal rights activists and cruise line owners.

Gallagher believes that the monkey problem is a “wicked problem,” drawing on the term from the field of social policy planning. Wicked problems are complex issues that are difficult to delineate. Wicked problems, in contrast to tame problems, are considered unsolvable because no matter what decision one makes toward a possible resolution, a significant portion of stakeholders will be unhappy with the outcome. Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber originally delineated wicked problems as having no definitive formulation and no final solution; every attempt to address them creates new issues (Rittel and Webber 1973). The monkey problem is a wicked problem because people fundamentally disagree about what solutions are viable or ethical. For example, while some support sterilization and culling as interventions towards the population control of green monkeys, others oppose these interventions for a number of reasons — they may view them as unethical, or have vested personal or business-related interests in green monkeys. In this way, any action or intervention on the monkey problem would leave some groups dissatisfied.

In the broader literature on dealing with wicked problems, people have considered approaches centered not on solutions but on interventions — even if a problem cannot be eliminated, further actions taken can still be intentional and thoughtful. For example, Nancy

Roberts (2000) divides plausible approaches to dealing with a wicked problem into (1) authoritative, vesting individuals with authority and responsibility to solve problems; (2) competitive, incentivizing individuals to propose interventions at a faster pace; and (3) collaborative, bringing stakeholders together to share information and coordinate effort. In the context of the monkey problem, an example of an authoritative intervention would be the government enacting a large-scale population-control initiative targeting green monkeys. An example of a collaborative intervention is the agricultural workshops and monkey summits, which Dr. Kerry Dore and others have already been orchestrating. An example of a competitive intervention would be incentivizing individuals or organizations to develop new, effective strategies to address the monkey problem. In a sense, competitive interventions do currently exist, though not without their own discontents. Individuals and organizations in St. Kitts can apply for funding from international bodies such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has invested more than \$5 billion over 30 years to combat biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Latin America and the Caribbean. During my time on St. Kitts, I volunteered my time with one local organization, the Caribbean Sustainable Environmental Awareness Organization (CSEAO), which aims to address environmental issues on St. Kitts through community-based initiatives. I assisted members of CSEAO with a literature review on green monkeys to support an application to GEF funding for a drone-enabled monkey surveillance initiative to help farmers plan against crop loss. Last I heard from my contact at CSEAO, someone else at CSEAO had taken the proposal we had written and decided to submit it through a different organization instead. Neither my contact nor I ever got any further updates from CSEAO.

Dr. Gallagher proposes a harm-reduction-based approach (Gallagher 2022) through mitigation-based interventions grounded in “One Health,” the Veterinary Medicine concept that health spans humans, animals, and their shared ecosystems. Gallagher favors what Roberts would call the authoritative approach, particularly advocating for the need for cross-sectoral policy and evaluation mechanisms, managed by the government of St. Kitts and Nevis and its constituent ministries, to manage both the real and perceived social, economic, and ecological impacts of agricultural damage to crops caused by monkeys (Gallagher and Stephen 2024). Dore has also co-published a comprehensive plan to mitigate the monkey problem through sterilization-based population control of green monkeys on St. Kitts (Dore and Daigneault 2025).

Gallagher’s and Dore’s proposed approaches and interventions, if enacted and supported by the local government, have the potential to reduce the harms of the monkey problem and address food insecurity. At the same time, this wicked problem persists despite decades of “monkey summits” and community workshops, government initiatives, foreign investments, transnational grants for invasive species management, educational initiatives, and monkey-sterilization campaigns. Interlocutors of mine from the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Facility (SKBRF) and the Behavioral Science Foundation (BSF), two research centers on St. Kitts that conduct various forms of experimentation on captive green monkeys, recall that they have been advocating for interventions to address the monkey problem since the 1980s. I have come to understand that the monkey problem is not a distinct, separable problem but rather the intersection of multiple phenomena that can only be understood by examining both local and transnational perspectives, even as the two are not entirely separable, and have come to exist in Relation to one another.

On the one hand, we have the persistent and escalating issue of climate change — the “super wicked problem” in which those seeking to solve it are also causing it, and there is no central authority dedicated to finding a solution (Kelly et al. 2012). Climate change drives greater encounters between humans and invasive species, increases the likelihood of ecosystem disturbances, and heightens the vulnerability of human and animal populations to food insecurity. My interlocutors reported numerous ways in which climate change affected their lives, including local issues ranging from soil erosion and aquifer depletion to increasingly shifting and unpredictable fruit and weather seasons.

On the other hand, climate change is inseparable from the social and economic conditions that perpetuate it — global capitalism, and the logics within which it is grounded. As previously discussed, Kittitians’ negative attitudes towards agriculture stem from the violence of sugar monocrop plantation farming and the association of agricultural labor with penal sentences (Jenkins 2014; Leroy & Jenkins 2021). Dr. Conzo (2022) writes that though slavery was outlawed in 1838, sugar farming persisted in the *plantation economy modified*. In this modified format and other further modified formats that followed, Black Kittitian people continued to work on sugar plantations as low-wage laborers, and daily life did not significantly change after the abolition of slavery. There were limited job opportunities outside of agriculture, and land was still largely controlled by the wealthy British- and British-descended landowning class known locally as “white Kittitians”. Plantation logics dominated the island’s land and economy, and opportunities for business outside them were limited (Conzo 2022, 36-37). Hortense Spillers (1987) has argued that the commodification of Black peoples’ bodies during slavery, what she calls “racialized (re)productive accumulation,” is a persistent process that extends beyond the partial abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865 (in the former British Empire, including

St. Kitts and Nevis, slavery was formally abolished in 1833.) This racialized (re)productive accumulation is a form of logic predicated on exploiting people for cheap labor, which persists through carceral logics, debt, environmental racism, and legal apparatuses which grant only certain populations of people, such as citizens, particular rights and protections.

The productive logics of plantations relied on cheap labor. First, enslaved African arrivants and their descendants. In the mid-19th century, following the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, St. Kitts and Nevis turned to low-wage apprenticeships and Indian indentured laborers as a new source of plantation labor. When Kittitians refused to work, a ship named the Dartmouth was recorded as bringing over 300 Indian indentured workers to St. Kitts in 1861 (St. Christopher National Trust and National Museum 2024). After indentured labor in the British Empire was formally banned in 1917, plantation owners drew on Afro- and Indo-Caribbean migrant laborers from Jamaica, Haiti, and Guyana. Histories of slavery, indentured labor, and low-wage farm labor continue to taint contemporary Kittitian's attitudes toward agriculture. This structure of violence endures in modern society under different names and in unique geographically situated conditions. Scholars have significantly studied the slavery-like conditions, such as the apprenticeship system, labor contracts, and economic coercion, that persist in the Caribbean even after official abolition (Browne 2017; Lightfoot 2015; Vasconcellos 2015; Williams 2021). These “afterlives of slavery” (Hartman 2022 [1997]) persist in the present day through the economic limitations on the formerly enslaved and their descendants. My interlocutors taught me that food insecurity, which they frame as the lack of food sovereignty, is part of these structures of economic limitation.

For Kittitians, the monkeys are an unavoidable reminder of colonial violence and the historical circumstances that brought both the Kittitian people and monkeys to the island. My

interlocutors were keenly aware of these histories and how multinational politics perpetuate these uneven power relations. Even as people do not necessarily actively recall these histories in their daily interactions with monkeys, they often brought them up to me in interviews and in their testimonies at agricultural events and monkey summits. The monkey problem exemplifies how the legacies of plantation farming continue to organize and shape the geographies of contemporary life. Akeem spoke clearly on this topic: “The United States? The United Kingdom? They care more about the well-being of monkeys [than of Kittitians]. Nobody sending reparations. Nobody is coming to help us.” In referring to reparations, Akeem asserts that the monkey problem, a by-product of the French and English colonization of St. Kitts, is one of the ongoing consequences of historical colonialism for which the people of St. Kitts were never compensated, monetarily or otherwise.

Land redistribution occurred in St. Kitts leading up to the independence of St. Kitts and Nevis from the United Kingdom in 1983, wherein the wealthy white British-descended landowning class on St. Kitts was stripped of their citizenship and had their land ownership bought out. Sugar plantation farming was banned on the island in 2004, following the collapse of the global sugarcane farming economy, partly due to a shift in global demand from sugarcane to sugar beet cultivation. The economy of St. Kitts had been made to be reliant on the export of sugar since the island’s first colonization by the English in 1623. The sugar industry had undergone numerous cycles of booms and busts, often driven by economic and political changes abroad that altered demand for sugar. In this way, agriculture on St. Kitts had long been subject to unseen and unknowable forces that affected peoples’ livelihoods. Glissant (1989) described the experience of Caribbean peoples as “a population whose domination by an Other is

concealed” because the structures of power that affected everyday violence under colonization were unknowable by those experiencing their effects (20, 23).

## **Building Animosity**

Topics of conversation at the summit often led to testimonies about the monkey problem, which farmers on St. Kitts and Nevis experienced differently. One farmer, Tynew, a Black Kittitian man speaking in a mix of English and Kittitian Creole, recounted the weight of the monkey problem on his daily life.

The constant work in trying to protect yourself from monkeys, it adds to your family care. You can't just go there [to your garden or farm] and cultivate. You have to have barriers. You have to spend time. It takes away from your personal time. One family member has to go at dawn, and another has to go until dusk. Your whole life is spent there, in order to keep the monkeys off of your farm. And as soon as you make a mistake, they're all over us. You can lose markets, because of them, in that you become an unreliable supplier. Because you promise somebody something because you see your harvest coming through. And then when you look, it's destroyed. It's compromised. Some folks have even had to relocate. I know several persons move from higher up or farther down [the mountain]. Especially if you're doing what we call extensive farm building. You're planting in a big area, it's unprotected. You're using the will of God, hoping that you will get your crops.

Farmers and their families spend significant time and energy keeping monkeys off their farms.

Farmers must coordinate with family members or other farmers to ensure that at least one person is physically present on the farm from dusk to dawn, thereby deterring monkeys from stealing their crops. The high cost of the monkey problem to people's time, autonomy, and psyche is an unavoidable part of daily life. In calling on the will of God, this farmer shows that the monkey problem feels beyond his control.

The transient and unpredictable presence of monkeys — and the paranoia-like feelings farmers experience — create an ominous landscape in which farmers' daily lives become sites of broken agency, their decisions and choices shaped by the monkey problem and a creeping,

ambiguous atmosphere. In testifying that “Your whole life is spent there, in order to keep the monkeys off of your farm,” this farmer is showing how he has come to inhabit a daily life wherein his relationships to space and time – his family’s rhythms of sleep and waking, and daily schedules – are shaped by “constant work” of surveilling their land for monkeys. The idea that his whole life is spent there, and even then, that “as soon as you make a mistake, they’re all over us,” that one cannot make mistakes and must call upon the will of God to grow food, shows this farmer perceived the monkeys’ presence as ominous. In this sense, ominous describes the foreboding feeling of impending harm. This farmer experienced the monkeys and his environment as beyond his control, marked by monkeys’ unpredictable and all-pervading nature. This ominousness is one of the ways the monkey problem shapes people’s perception of their world, like an eco-horror, by restricting their daily lives and shifting their relationships to space and time in ways beyond their control.

Another farmer, Kulo, an Indo-Caribbean man who had migrated from Haiti, recounted a particularly charged encounter with a monkey.

Some persons have become petrified and horrified about monkeys. They never stop reappearing. I’ve heard stories. Mr. Nesbitt give me a story about how they were in a tree once, and he reached the point where he felt, ‘I should get out of here’, because they were jumping from branch to branch, gathering for an extended time, and their patience was running thin. There has been at least one serious incident here, where a monkey attacked a man. It was maybe, in its way, provoked. He had sprayed its eyes, when it had come to his window. It came to the window and he warded it off by spraying it. Maybe 20 minutes, half an hour later, when he stepped out of the door. It pounced on him and took its revenge. We don’t want a case like that. We want to coexist peaceably. So what are some of the things that we can do? Because as we said, eradication is not an option. I mean, they’re needed in the tourist trade. And it’s not just the petting aspect of it, you know. People come to see them in the wild as well. I had my sister-in-law here, and had to find some monkeys for her to see in the wild as we drove around. Sometimes, you know, they’re just teeming on the hillside and people love to see that. And of course, there’s also those who are doing the petting. There’s also the research component, and it employs a lot of people. So what we need to think about is, how do we coexist?

This moment of encounter is emblematic of what one of my interlocutors called “building animosity,” or increasing rates of inter-group animosity in relation to the problem of invasive monkeys (the specific anecdote from which the language of “building animosity” arose will be elaborated on in Chapter 3). This animosity occurs between people and monkeys, as well as between different monkey troops that compete for land and resources. It extends across various groups, including farmers who feel the government fails to represent their interests or address their needs. Building animosity does not occur only from farmers towards monkeys, but also among farmers towards government agents, other farmers, and other people they perceive as holding positions of power, such as business owners, international investors, and even the United States as a whole.

While some of my interlocutors described their experience as frustration at having to spend significant time and energy trying to keep monkeys off their land, others described feelings of paralysis, anxiety, anger, and even resignation. These emotions arose in response to the various permutations of the monkey problem: the invisible presence of monkey excrement, the loss of crops, and violent moments of escalation, such as Kulo’s anecdote about a monkey attacking a monkey that had previously sprayed it with a water hose to deter it from his farm.

Kulo expressed a desire to coexist peacefully that he felt was unattainable. He believed that his own needs as a farmer were at odds with the tourist trade, the presumption being that tourists would stop coming to St. Kitts if an intervention such as eradication, culling, or sterilization were undertaken. He also named “the research component,” the idea that intervention on monkey populations might somehow negatively affect the flow of science- and research-related capital to the island. Farmers like Tynew and Kulo are often told such explanations for why intervention has not yet happened, or cannot happen. Even as farmers

testify to their experiences, and researchers quantify and underscore the significance of the monkey problem, and advocate for intervention, these farmers have come to internalize explanations for why nothing can be done. Their suffering is invisibilized by stories and explanations that treat the island's overall economic well-being and its tourist economy as somehow more important, even at odds with their individual well-being and experiences. Tynew shared with me both his anger and his resignation:

Always the capitalism. So, I get angry, you know. At the monkey summits, say dem “I want to volunteer. I want to volunteer.” How I see, personally, this we call the false war. Right? They always find ways to maintain the status quo. To keep the Third World. We need to be able to make a case. That's what they say. In a scientific case, to show that our monkeys are pests, they're causing you this kind of damage, and you have to do something about it. In other countries, they do this [culling], with deer, and pigs. But they don't do it here. That is true elsewhere, but in St. Kitts we [monkeys are] overpopulate. So I think we're in a different situation. We haven't done a good job of explaining ourselves. I also think that we as the farming community, we also have to rethink our strategy. I think whatever we do is always going to be difficult to protect the farm.

Stress, frustration, tiredness, and resignation, punctuated by moments of escalation, are emblematic of the monkey problem, within which these farmers find themselves and their livelihoods continually threatened by the presence of monkeys. Sartre described how monkeys' excrement, which was invisible, could lead to health issues among those exposed to it; both the presence and absence of actual monkeys contributed differently to the overall stress that farmers faced about the monkey problem. Even when farmers successfully deter monkeys, they always eventually return. The invisible excrement that green monkeys release crosses the boundary between the human and the non-human and contaminates people's bodies. The practice of eating bush meat, by which some Kittitians deem others as partaking in something disgusting or low-class, is also a manifestation of food insecurity as exacerbated by the monkey problem. Through their excrement and their foraging behaviors, which farmers constantly try to banish but which ultimately return, the green monkeys refuse every attempt at control. Their transient presence in

people's homes and daily lives, like an uninvited family member who comes and eats one's food, renders them an unavoidable, messy source of entanglement. Their excrement, their status as a source of bush meat, and their foraging behaviors are all examples of how green monkeys even intrude into people's sense of personal and bodily autonomy.

Though farmers recount and testify to researchers who interview them, and at monkey summits where other farmers and even government agents witness them, that such experiences are untenable, these experiences are only getting worse. "Building animosity" is not a noun, but a verb-phrase indicative of a changing, escalating set of experiences — a growing, continuous experience of hostility, fear, and frustration that people experience emotionally and physically.

Through the invisible and disease-causing excrement monkeys release, the constant brooding worry that monkeys will take one's crops, the fear of escalation into violent encounters, the sensorial attunement to the possible presence of monkeys, the somatic relationship to space and time shaped by ominous and unsettling environments, the understanding that food insecurity is a consequence of historical harms of colonization, and related building frustration with government and international stakeholders, the monkey problem motivates feelings of animosity in innumerable ways. Building animosity is ultimately an intrinsic part of how and why people perceive the monkey problem in the register of eco-horror. Farmers increasingly spend time and energy fortifying their properties against the unpredictable presence of monkeys, who can swiftly and devastatingly wipe out their crop output, as one farmer described it: "the constant work in trying to protect yourself from monkeys."

Conversely, Dr. Dore's research shows that farmers feel empathy for green monkeys based on shared experiences of food insecurity (Dore 2017; Dore et al. 2018). My interlocutors similarly reported that monkeys were themselves also victims of food insecurity and constrained

autonomy. It is the duality of this experience – that farmers both empathize with and feel frustrated by monkeys – that makes the monkey problem unsolvable. Even as farmers direct their frustration in many directions, at their local government, at monkeys, at international flows of power, at tourists, at colonial histories, or at the contemporary United States, there is no simple solution to the farmers’ dilemma. The monkeys are not only a pest but also are suffering. Even as farmers advocate for culling, sterilizing, and hunting monkeys, there is no simple path forward that can satisfy both their empathy and animosity. At the same time, farmers internalize pervasive narratives about the tourism economy that explain why intervention is impossible and why their own needs and desires are at odds with their country's economic well-being. In this way, both monkeys’ and farmers’ experiences of suffering are normalized in daily life.

Tynew concluded by discussing the desire to “coexist peaceably,” in part because he acknowledges certain benefits to the monkeys’ presence on the island, including the tourist and scientific capital they attract. This brief comment is also key to understanding Kittitians’ experiences with the monkey problem. There are certain pervasive narratives advanced by scientists, animal rights activists, and the government about monkeys. These narratives emphasize the monkeys’ well-being, cuteness, suffering, and the capital they draw to the island. These narratives not only ignore but also invisibilize farmers.

Invisibilization is a form of marginalization in which the suffering of certain groups is systematically excluded from hegemonic discourse. Sociologist Benno Herzog (2019) writes significantly about the process of invisibilization as a mechanism of oppression, through which those in power attempt to govern misery rather than solve or overcome it. In the context of the monkey problem, not only power and capital but also visibility and perception are unevenly distributed across stakeholder groups, including farmers, scientists, business owners, investors,

and bureaucratic entities such as government ministries and transnational organizations. Research like that of Dr. Dore, Dr. Gallagher, and myself wrestles with a dual challenge — not only bringing attention to the monkey problem, or proving that it exists and documenting its contours, but also *making people care*. Resisting invisibilization requires making people's experiences legible in the same social grammars that veil their suffering and the mechanisms that perpetuate it. The suffering of farmers is not invisible, but it is invisibilized within an ecology shaped by the legacies of exploitation and the uneven distribution of power, capital, and authority. Building animosity occurs in response to this continued invisibilization, in which not only are farmers' crops being stolen, but their lived experiences of worry, frustration, and suffering are also ignored, leading to an escalation of those feelings. The feeling that they are not believed about these experiences — as evidenced by the lack of government action on the issue — or, worse, that they are believed but that this, too, is insufficient — only further fuels this building animosity.

No two people have the same experience of the monkey problem. For example, a handful of my interlocutors had benefited from a local government program that compensated farmers for trapping or hunting monkeys, paying per monkey tail. Although the monetary benefit was small, just a few dollars per tail, this program made the participating farmers feel that the government was supporting their endeavors. At the same time, although many farmers had heard about this subsidy, they had never been able to participate in or benefit from it. When I asked Akeem about this, he responded that “I never got paid because I didn't have an in. I didn't know anybody at the Ministry of Agriculture.” Akeem believed that participating in the program would have required a personal connection to the small staff of people at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Like most of my interlocutors, Akeem was unsure about where or how to find information on participating in this program.

These examples are part of a broader set of narratives that extends far beyond how Kittitians engage with actual monkeys. Building animosity is a social and cultural experience, in which the monkey problem is not only a physical and environmental phenomenon but also an emotional and affective one. The monkey problem, in this sense, encompasses not only actual experiences of crop destruction by monkeys but also feelings of helplessness in the face of invisibilization, the erasure of suffering, and inconsistent and ineffective attempts to address the issue. As in the narrative of a haunting in eco-horror literature and film, farmers contend with not being believed, even as they actively suffer. Frustration with the lack of government assistance, anger with perceived post-colonial and neo-imperial economic powers and stakeholders, who exist both on- and off-the-island, and the emotional, physical, and psychological toll of negative personal experiences with actual monkeys like the “constant work” of protecting one’s crops, all coalesce in building animosity.

## **Conclusion: Building Animosity as an Affective Infrastructure**

Building animosity offers a framework for understanding the subjective and affective elements of the monkey problem that go beyond the objective description of food insecurity. Researchers have already demonstrated that monkeys cause significant crop loss — facts alone have been insufficient to enact actual change. Instead, farmers exist in a recursive cycle of constantly dealing with forces beyond their control. Farmers’ feelings of being “petrified and horrified,” and the cyclical, unpredictable nature of the monkey problem, make these encounters feel illogical. The escalation and increasing frustration with these issues, which I term building

animosity, render the monkey problem a growing source of stress for those living with it. The story of the farmer being attacked by a monkey highlights the complex, escalating nature of these conflicts. The struggles with the monkey problem are not only about pests but also about the charged relationships among people, monkeys, and their environment.

Even after the decline of sugar plantations, colonial logics of experimentation continue to persist. It can be challenging to perceive these persistent logics because of invisibilization — international flows of power, produce, and money are invisibilized and simultaneously serve to invisibilize the narratives of the people most negatively affected by them. Not only are the narratives of farmers on St. Kitts invisibilized, but their suffering is also normalized as part of daily life. Even when people's experiences of suffering have been recorded by primatologists and other researchers, this has been insufficient to effect change because the suffering has become mundane. The monkey summits and other agricultural gatherings, which have been ongoing for decades, repeatedly raise the same debates without resolution. Just like Akeem described, "The way forward for agriculture. It's always different, but it's also the same thing every year. At the end of it, we have nothing." The monkey problem is an intractable conflict rooted in colonial histories that have left unresolved issues in the present.

In this way, the monkey problem comes to describe much more than just monkeys' foraging behaviors or increasing rates of encounter between people and monkeys. The coalescing of these numerous issues into the monkey problem exemplifies what Glissant calls Diversion. Rather than historical colonial logics of experimentation, scientists, primatologists, trappers, and Kittitian farmers develop responses grounded in alternative logics of life-affirming experimentation that have arisen locally and transnationally. These local strategies of improvisation are centered on connection to the land and connection to community. The monkey

summits, too, are a manifestation of this diversion. These gatherings, which have been ongoing for decades, repeatedly raise the same debates without resolution. Just like Akeem described, “The way forward for agriculture. It’s always different, but it’s also the same thing every year.”

The monkeys themselves are trickster figures in an eco-horror that pervades people’s and monkeys’ lives. There is no resolution in sight. Yet, even as the monkey problem remains unsolvable, it is a navigable reality that Caribbean peoples have learned to live with. The conflicts surrounding the monkey problem, as well as the various calls for intervention, mitigation, and liberation in relation to it, are themselves ways of making meaning in the present. Diversion describes the process by which violence of history is processed, not through a sort of historicizing or elimination, nor necessarily through solving or not solving contemporary problems, but through the very act of engagement with issues of the present. It is not a direct form of remembering, but rather a means of engaging with history by continuing to navigate the everyday discontents of farming, backyard gardening, and life within the context of the monkey problem.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss attunement and sensation, and the multi-species ethnographic method, which I seek to mobilize to utilize research as a cathartic force not in logical resolution but in the disruption of established narratives. That is to say, rather than seeking to intervene on the monkey problem by culling or sterilizing monkeys, perhaps an ethnographic account of the monkey problem can offer a different form of intervention, grounded not in logics of mastery or control, but rather in dismantling cultural constructs of belonging — an ethnographic meditation that can accept the lack of boundaries between self and other, and embrace confrontation with suffering, and the unsettling components of everyday life.

## Chapter 2: Monkey See, Monkey Do

In the contrasting framework elaborated here, the black(ened) maternal body's endocrine system, organ systems, neuropsychological pathways, and cellular functioning are essential agencies in antiblack necropower, such that the distinction between the body and war's weaponry no longer rests on a solid boundary between human subjectivity and external environment, nor that of subject and object. Here, acts of war are not exclusively directed by intentional human action, and the harnessing of war's weaponry exceeds the subjectivist domain. While I share Mbembe's concern regarding the manner with which colonial racialization produces and is produced by the spatialization of populations into "cells," my emphasis is different. I want to query how social processes—the prison "cell," the political party "cell," and the military "cell"—interact with somatic cellular processes, producing alterations to the immediate cellular environment and cellular functioning in a manner that we might also describe as necropolitical. (Jackson 2020, page 205).

### Attunement

"Monkey see, monkey do" is a common idiom that describes the act of imitating or mimicking another person's actions without understanding them. The saying is thought to have originated in Jamaica in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, referring to learning something by mimicry without understanding its mechanisms or consequences (Whitman 2013). Typically, this phrase is used to describe children mimicking their parents' behaviors. This phrase, I believe, can help explain why those with the most power, money, and status on St. Kitts continue to reproduce the current status quo of the monkey problem, without understanding the consequences of their actions. By repeating the actions of past generations, or lack thereof, individuals who are not attuned to the monkey problem's wide-reaching negative effects inadvertently reify government policies and funding allocations that ultimately maintain the monkey problem. I argue that the monkey problem is defined by mismatched attunements — that those in power are not sensorially attuned to the negative consequences of the monkey problem, even as they are also affected by them.

## Visitors

Over my 16 months of ethnographic and archival fieldwork on St. Kitts, I had frequent calls with my family back in California. As they would ask me about my day and my research, they often heard about the monkey problem. My aunt and grandmother came to visit me for a week on St. Kitts in May 2025. We ate lunch not more than twenty feet away from a troop of monkeys feasting on an offering of fruit set out by Shipwreck Beach Bar, a beachside restaurant popular amongst tourists as a place to see monkeys. I didn't even think to point out the monkeys, because I was so used to seeing them in my everyday life. Without me directing their attention, and with beach views distracting them, my aunt and grandma failed to notice the monkeys.

While walking outdoors in Frigate Bay, where I had helped my aunt and grandma secure an apartment for their stay, monkeys often made their presence known in ways I had become attuned to. Half-eaten fruit strewn on the ground and shadows passing in the corner of my eye would clue me in to their presence. The rustle of bushes and trees, and the chattering or barking in the distance, melded with the sounds of daily life. Monkeys would dart between areas of dense foliage, preferring to stay hidden amongst the trees. They don't like being exposed, and they tend to avoid roads and open areas. Though we encountered monkeys multiple times almost every day, my aunt and grandma never once actively noticed or saw a single monkey. Towards the end of their visit, I redoubled my efforts. When I saw monkeys running between the trees, I would point and try to draw my family's attention. Every single time, the monkeys were gone before my family could turn their heads quickly enough to see them.

Tourists like my grandmother and aunt, even after hearing extensively from me about the monkey problem and its wide-reaching consequences, claim they did not encounter a single monkey during their visit to St. Kitts. If one was not familiar with their behaviors or attuned to

them, it was easy to miss their presence. In the same way, noticing *the monkey problem*, separate from the actual presence or absence of monkeys, also requires cultivated attunement for one to understand.

During my ethnographic research, I conducted observations and semi-structured interviews at farms, laboratories, local archives, and tourist destinations (see Appendix 1). My interviewees included biomedical scientists, primatologists, environmental researchers, farmers and other agricultural workers, government agents, and tourists — anybody on St. Kitts who agreed to talk to me. Fewer than half of my interlocutors were born and raised on St. Kitts, though many had lived there for years. Many of these people had identities that blended between and beyond these categories. Some long-time residents lived between the worlds of the tourist and the local. Many farmers were also employees elsewhere or business owners. Many island residents, including staff at monkey research facilities, engaged in part-time farming or backyard gardening.

My own attunements, both to monkeys and to the monkey problem, developed slowly over the course of this research. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich coined the term “multi-species ethnography” to describe the emerging genre of ethnographic research that attends to non-human others as politically and biographically legible figures (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). They write that multi-species ethnography is characterized by a “multisensory approach” which involves “grappling with unfamiliar sensoriums, with different kinds of touch, smell, taste, and vision,” and “the overlap of sensoriums and the inter- and intrachange of sensations across species boundaries” (564-565). In reading or conducting multi-species ethnography, we are reminded that humans are also an animal species amongst many. Through the research process, I not only came to better understand Kittitian people and monkeys, but also the multi-sensory

context of the monkey problem within which they lived. This understanding of the monkey problem developed intellectually, but also through my bodily and sensorial attunements. My own attunements were different than that of my interlocutors. I was often less sensitive to the presence and behaviors of monkeys than long-time residents, farmers, scientists, and descendants of St. Kitts. At the same time, I was more sensitive in my reactions to certain kinds of violence than interlocutors of mine who viewed these actions — such as hunting a monkey — as mundane. As I lived on the island, I gained insight into how others, too, may experience shifts in their multi-sensorial attunements.

## **Presence and Absence**

Tayon was a farmer in the Monkey Hill area. I was connected to him through other interlocutors of mine, who recommended we speak because Tayon was very frustrated with monkeys. They believed he would have a lot to say. When I first contacted him via WhatsApp, he was eager to speak, and I arranged to meet him the following day at sunrise on his farm.

Tayon was Kittitian-born and raised, and had an adult son with whom he shared the labors of his farm. He reflected that it was their way of spending time together. Tayon explained to me that farming made him little to no money. All of his money came from his other work — he ran a beachside tourist business, renting sports equipment and leading aquatic tours. He occasionally worked part-time as a monkey trapper for local properties in the Monkey Hill area, but the majority of his income came from his tourism business. Tayon enjoyed farming and the connection to the land that he cultivated through it. “It keeps me grounded,” he explained to me, picking up a pinch of rocky, sandy soil and rubbing dirt between his fingers, “I like to feel St. Kitts with my hands.”

After we entered his farm through a locked gate in the fencing, Tayon pointed out several traps he had set up around the property. They were large contraptions, made from a combination of metal and wood. The empty traps had a panel visible from afar that protruded into the air. When a monkey entered the trap, baited by an offering of fruit, the trap would shake, and the panel would fall, trapping the monkey inside. Tayon pointed to one of the traps as we entered the farm, “We caught one.” Of the ten or so traps around Tayon’s property, one of them had no panel sticking up.

We approached the panel as we continued talking. It was on the far side of the property. As we walked, we carefully traversed rows of soil tilled into small mounds. “They’re growing inside,” Tayon cautioned me to walk carefully, showing how he walked to avoid the plants, “step between the rows.” It took us almost 10 minutes to reach the trap. As we approached, Tayon let out a sigh. “Another cat.” Wandering, semi-wild cats were a common sight on St. Kitts. This cat, brown with a bushy white tail, sat calmly and quietly in the trap. As soon as he began to lift the panel, the cat jumped out and ran off. We watched as it jumped through a small hole in the fence surrounding his farm and disappeared into the brush.

It was through moments like these that I came to understand that the monkey problem persisted regardless of the presence or absence of monkeys. There was no actual monkey involved, yet monkeys and the monkey problem were central to the conditions of the entire interaction. The fencing surrounding the property, the traps that Tayon had spent time and money to construct, and the very frustration that had set the stage for my meeting with Tayon — all of these things were intrinsically informed by the monkey problem, even as no actual monkey presented itself.

I posit that the monkey problem is not simply a problem of crop loss, but a reorganization of bodily life. Building animosity is an infrastructure that, even to those who are unaware, structures life chances — the possibilities of daily life (Bendix 1978; Kivak 2024; Weber 1978, 2007). The farmers I have quoted in Chapter 1 recalled scenes of nightly vigilance: waking before dawn, listening for movement in the dark, their nerves calibrated to the sounds of distant monkey chatter and cracking tree branches. These rhythms of anticipation are ruled by both the patterns of day and night and the shifting seasons, in which the food insecurity and resource scarcity of both Kittitian people and green monkeys rise and fall to the rhythms of the island, its weather, its fruit trees, and their shared ecology. Humans and monkeys come to inhabit these shared temporal fields, shaped by food insecurity, intrusion, fatigue, and the constant labor of keeping watch.

German sociologist Max Weber developed the concept of life chances to describe how an individual's access to resources was determined by social structure and stratification. Weber primarily conceived of this social stratification as a hierarchy that stratified society by a combination of social status, wealth, and power. Contemporary anthropologists such as Aihwa Ong (1999, 2016) have built on this concept to explore how globalization and capitalist development have produced new forms of inequality, shaping who has access to health, security, and economic opportunities.

Weber was no stranger to human-animal relations. In *The Religion of India* (1916), he examined the sacred place of the cow in Hindu society. He found that the prohibition of cow slaughter, as a religious and cultural practice, reinforced certain social hierarchies and caste distinctions on the basis of the sacredness of the cow. Non-humans have been central to understandings of social organization since the modern beginnings of the discipline of

anthropology, in studies of animal worship and of totemism as a kinship system that ancestrally linked humans to symbols in the natural world (Boas 1916, Durkheim 1915, Frazer 1910, Radcliffe-Brown 1952, Levi-Strauss 1963, Tylor 1871). However, though animals were central figures in 20th-century anthropology, they were defined through the ways humans related to them, in symbolic or discursive modes of affiliation, kinship, and worship. Contemporary multi-species anthropologists have critiqued the division of nature and culture, which was foundational for earlier anthropological scholarship. Kirksey and Helmreich (2010) describe the field of multi-species ethnography as prioritizing treating non-human others as biographically and politically legible figures. The multi-species ethnographer, in this conception, is able to translate non-linguistic symbols, meanings, and experiences into human language and meaning.

As part of this movement towards multi-species ethnographic scholarship, I conceive of life chances as a multi-species phenomenon. The framework of co-culture can be useful for tracing life chances as multi-species phenomena. Co-culture frames mutual cultural evolution as always occurring among various animal species, including humans (Sueur and Huffman 2024). Though Sueur and Huffman primarily offer examples of co-culture that involve multi-species cooperation and cultural exchange, the monkey problem is perhaps better understood as what anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando (2022) calls uncanny ecologies: interspecies webs of care and commitment, which also carry hierarchy, obligation, and violence integral to human-non-human kinship (569).

Fernando traces how the uncanny has increasingly been used in anthropology and the environmental humanities to describe climate change and the growing rates of encounters it brings between people and non-human others. These ecologies are uncanny, Fernando holds, in that they force people to face the “unpredictable, miraculous, monstrous, and uncanny aspects of

the Anthropocene” (571). These ecologies are not merely “strange in the sense of being unknown or alien,” Fernando writes, “their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters, we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence of proximity of non-human interlocutors” (570). While some groups of people, such as farmers, do engage directly with monkeys in their daily life, a majority of stakeholders on St. Kitts, including foreign landowners, bureaucrats, public officials, and tourist business owners, conceive of the monkeys as tourist attractions rather than as complex and agential beings. Even if they are told about the monkey problem and crop loss, their sensory attunement and fundamental perception of the world limit their ability to grasp the significance and weight of the problem beyond an intellectual level.

To turn towards the monkey problem – to acknowledge and come to understand the suffering of both Kittitian farmers and green monkeys – would also require an acknowledgement at the inability of people to control animals or the natural world. In this way, the rendering of monkeys, through media, tourist tchotchkes, and children’s books, as cute and innocent, and the humanization of captive green monkeys as an easy substitute for human experimental subjects, turns away from the presence of *actual* green monkeys, and the suffering, violence, frustration, and effort needed to really live in relation with them. It is this same turning away that invisibilizes the real, complex experiences of both monkeys and farmers in the monkey problem, resulting in building animosity amongst beings whose suffering becomes normalized in daily life. I posit that the monkey problem presents itself as a site of uncanny relations, in that the illusion of human mastery over the self and others is continually compromised by the non-conforming presence of farmers, scientists, and monkeys whose bodily experiences refuse to be ignored.

Just as my grandmother and aunt failed to see a single monkey during their week-long visit to St. Kitts, and just as my interaction with the farmer Tayon was shaped by the absence of monkeys, conducting a multi-species ethnography of the monkey problem necessarily involved venturing into what is unseen and unsaid, and into messy relations with non-human others — co-cultures that affect human worlds in messy and unruly forms, what Radhika Govindrajan (2019) calls unruly interspecies intimacies.

## **What Goes Unsaid**

Monkeys are not the only animal culprit causing food insecurity and farmers' crop loss on St. Kitts. Alongside monkeys, invasive mongooses and rats sneak onto farms and eat produce (Caribbean Invasive Alien Species Network 2022). Even more harmful are wandering livestock animals, including goats, sheep, and pigs. In St. Kitts, many farmers, particularly those with multi-acre farms, keep livestock. Leighton Naraine, one of my key interlocutors, was a professor at Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College (CFBC) on St. Kitts. Leighton was a Guyanese-American immigrant to St. Kitts and had worked for CFBC since 2012. Leighton wrote about the benefits of using livestock in agriculture, including waste cycling. He advocated for a “diversified-integrated model” that uses domestic animals to increase the productivity, flexibility, and sustainability of local farming. For Leighton, this strategy was part of a political commitment to advancing food sovereignty, which he believed was intrinsic to decolonial emancipation from St. Kitts's economic reliance on food imports and tourism.

The farming strategies that Leighton researched were not always available to under-resourced farmers on St. Kitts. Many farmers on St. Kitts allow their livestock to roam freely off their farms. Wandering herds of sheep and goats were a common, almost daily, sight for me

during my fieldwork. These unattended sheep, goats, and pigs then make their way onto other people's farmland. Tayon estimated that one pig can decimate the plant life growing on one acre of farmland in just one hour. These animals cause devastating crop loss. In this way, “the monkey problem” of St. Kitts actually comes to describe crop loss enacted by monkeys and goats, sheep, pigs, mongooses, and rats – all animals who can, at different times, become problems.



***Figure 2.1 Photo of Wandering Goats***

*A picture of the researcher taking a photo of wandering livestock in the Monkey Hill neighborhood.*

Agricultural crop loss due to monkeys is undeniably a large problem — in her assessment of crop loss across 64 farms on St. Kitts, primatologist Kerry Dore (2013) recorded 176 incidents of monkey-caused crop damage, compared to 16 by pigs and 12 by livestock. However, Dr. Dore recorded that monkeys destroyed only 4,853 pounds of ground crops over 12 months, while pigs destroyed 10,475 pounds, more than double that amount. While crop damage by monkeys occurs much more frequently, pigs do significantly more damage per raid. Monkeys are still framed as the primary culprits behind these multi-species, multi-responsible crop losses because they are the most notorious invasive pests on St. Kitts. It is also in this way that the monkey problem comes to encompass more than a quantifiable or traceable amount of crop loss caused by monkeys. Wandering livestock and the individual farmers responsible for them, who fail to attend to them due to a lack of resources, are also culpable for the overall animal-caused crop destruction on St. Kitts. However, the life chances of these farmers and livestock are both ultimately shaped by resource-constrained conditions that necessitate less-than-ideal decisions. Ultimately, the monkey problem is more than quantifiable crop loss — the complex psychological effects of food insecurity and the detrimental somatic attunements to monkeys' frequent and fleeting presences coalesce into significant losses of time, energy, and sleep for farmers.

In this way, blaming food insecurity on the presence of invasive monkeys, or attributing all of these issues to the monkey problem, is what Glissant (1989) calls *Diversion*. Even as the monkey problem remains unsolvable, it is a reality these farmers continually find ways to navigate. The conflicts surrounding the monkey problem, as well as the various calls for intervention, mitigation, and liberation in relation to it, are themselves ways of making meaning in the present. *Diversion* describes the process by which historical violence is processed, not

through a sort of historicizing or elimination, nor necessarily through solving or not solving contemporary problems, but through the very act of engagement with issues of the present. It is not a direct form of remembering, but rather a means of engaging with history by navigating the everyday discontents of farming, backyard gardening, and life within the context of the monkey problem.

During my visit to his farm, Tayon pointed out three other farms visible along the edges of his property, swathes of green hillside interspersed with patches of dense foliage. One farm, whose fences could be seen in the distance, overlooked Tayon's farm from the top of the hillside. "Monkeys are a big problem," he described it to me, "but so are my neighbor's goats." I asked Tayon how he knew it was his neighbor's goats. He explained it clearly.

Which type of animal cause crop destruction is not hard. Monkeys leave a trail. They take bite and throw them [crops] left and right. Pigs close to the ground, uproot plants and soil. Goats are simple. They eat everything they see. Crops, plants, grasses, weeds too. If everything gone, it was goats.

For Tayon, identifying the species of animals that ate his crops was easy. Determining who, if anyone, can be held responsible for this is the more challenging dilemma. Even if a farmer suspects that they may know, it is not always possible for them to prove it or to provide evidence. I brainstormed with Tayon, curious about his options. "Have you spoken to the farmer?" I asked, "or, is there an authority you could report this to?"

According to Tayon, holding someone legally, socially, or otherwise responsible for crop destruction caused by their livestock is generally not feasible on St. Kitts. If he reported his neighbors to the Ministry of Agriculture, he feared they could retaliate, which might ultimately worsen the situation. "They are my neighbors. Good, bad, they are still my neighbors."

Farmers work in resource-limited settings. The resources required to care for livestock, including sufficient land to feed them and fencing to keep them out of certain areas, are not

generally available to farmers due to financial constraints. Multiple farmers I spoke to said they had no choice but to let their livestock roam because they could not afford to keep them fed otherwise. Farmers on St. Kitts generally do not own their own land and are therefore hesitant to invest in infrastructure such as fencing. Damage from storms and hurricanes, as well as plant growth, can quickly deteriorate fencing. Fencing is not a one-time investment but a mitigation effort that requires ongoing attention and repair, which is often not feasible. In interviews, farmers expressed a range of obstacles to farming, many of which involved their neighbors — human, animal, plant, fire, and weather being the most common.

Like Tayon, most farmers on St. Kitts do not consistently break even or make a profit in their agricultural work. Even Leighton, a respected professor who had spent much of his career developing experimental agricultural methods, had to draw on his other streams of income — his academic and administrative salaries from CFBC, and additional income from apartment building management — to keep his farm going. Almost every farmer I spoke to had additional sources of income, from other non-farming jobs, which they used to subsidize their farming efforts. The few of my interlocutors who did make a profit through their agricultural work did so by scaling their farming operations to be larger, and by creatively tapping into the tourism economy by turning their farms into sites of eco-tourism tours, or otherwise by partnerships with local restaurants, cafes, and hotels that allowed them to participate in the farm-to-table dining movement that was popular with tourists. That is to say, subsistence farming alone is not currently a sustainable practice on St. Kitts. When I asked Tayon why he engaged in agricultural work despite it not being profitable for him, he picked up some dirt and crumbled it, letting it slowly fall back towards the ground. He reflected in silence for a moment before answering, “Connecting to the land is important for me. I may make money from it one day, if I keep

investing. I might not. I do it because I like touching the dirt, the soil. Feeling it in my hands keep me grounded.”

Tayon began working at sunrise every day. I had initially assumed that this was to get ahead of the midday sun and heat. Tayon explained that he or his son would take turns being on the farm at dawn to deter monkeys, which generally woke and began foraging with the sunrise.

Rain or shine, we're here each morning. We don't take a morning off because the monkeys are smart. They always waiting in the bush. Even if you can't see them, they see you. They watching, waiting. When one of them sees you leave the farm, they call the others. The moment you gone they all come. If one of us here, they stay away. They respect your territory, but only if you show them it is yours. You miss one day, they come and eat all your crops.

Tayon would begin his farming practice at sunrise, bright and early, as part of his way of communicating with his monkey neighbors — he used his physical presence to establish the boundaries of his territory in a way that monkeys would understand. “I used to shoot them. If you observe, identify the alpha, and shoot, that generation of monkeys will stay away. But it only last a few months. They always come back.” Nowadays, if a monkey ventured onto his property while he was present, Tayon or his son would rattle one of the metal cages, so that the loud sounds would frighten the monkey away. “They're smart,” he repeated, “they learn and remember.” A monkey that was frightened away would be unlikely to return for at least a season.

While Tayon had grown accustomed to communicating with monkeys in this way, wandering pigs and herds of goats or sheep were less respectful than his monkey neighbors, and he had no successful strategies for keeping them off his property. To blame crop loss solely on monkeys is to make them a scapegoat for other instances of animal-caused crop loss, and for social and economic limitations that are ultimately inseparable from environmental racism and the legacies of plantation farming.

It is not only the extent of crop loss but also the frequency of monkeys' attempts that makes it such a psychologically and emotionally significant issue. In this anecdote, Tayon, like many farmers and other agricultural workers on St. Kitts, describes how the rhythms of his daily life, such as his sleep cycle, are shaped by the monkey problem. Anthropologist Matthew Wolf-Meyer (2012) has written about how cultural and technological changes, including the influences of medicine and industrial capitalism, have altered people's sleeping habits from the 1800s to the present. Sleep<sup>2</sup> behaviors are among the often-invisible ways that culture scripts seemingly personal decisions. Wolf-Meyer specifically traces how, prior to the proliferation of factory shift work, Americans commonly had two nightly periods of rest, supplemented by daytime naps. The rise of the eight-hour workday also led to a new sleeping regimen — eight uninterrupted hours of sleep at night — and to the pathologization of other sleep patterns. Meyer-Wolf argues that this pathologization was not rooted in biology but rather in the productive imperatives of capitalism, which led to the rise of the use of both legal and illicit drugs to promote sleep and stimulants to combat sleepiness. Meyer-Wolf critiques the current understanding and treatment of sleep, arguing that most sleep pathology is a consequence of industrial control over human life. Similarly, the social structures and belief systems that sustain the monkey problem — rooted in plantation logics that not only prioritize productivity over well-being and rely on cheap, productive labor to be sustained — also affect the daily lives and rhythms of people who adjust their very nervous systems, circadian rhythms, and sleep practices to accommodate life in the monkey problem.

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<sup>2</sup> While sleep is not a primary focus of my ethnographic and qualitative inquiry, future research would benefit from greater attention to the effects of the monkey problem on people's sleep, dreams, and rest practices.

Julie Livingston (2019) describes capitalism as “self-devouring growth,” an unsustainable loop of environmental extraction and consumption with far-reaching negative effects. Self-devouring growth is a cycle of positive feedback that grows in scale and consequence. In the same way, building animosity in the monkey problem is a recursive, escalating process. Animosity is not a fleeting emotion — it is not just frustration, anger, grief, or fear. Animosity is a “building” infrastructure of affect insofar as it extends through the past, present, and future. This animosity has a biography — it is a slow accumulation shaped by colonial species introductions, failed state responses, conservation regimes that privilege certain lives, and global tourist imaginaries that sentimentalize the very animals against which farmers must protect themselves. In this case, animosity is a part of the ecology that binds humans, animals, the environment, and institutions. To exist within this multi-species entanglement is labor, often unchosen and exhausting. Farmers metabolize this labor through anxiety, muscle tension, changed daily rhythms, and heightened sensorial attunement to their environment.

As Leighton reminded me in one of our many conversations over my time on St. Kitts, “we do have the monkey problem here, but no small Caribbean island nation currently has food sovereignty.” The monkey problem certainly contributes to food insecurity, but other Caribbean islands without monkey problems still face similar challenges. Leighton’s understanding was common amongst my interlocutors — many of the farmers I interviewed framed their desire for food sovereignty as an inherently decolonial and emancipatory vision. For these farmers, the monkey problem is one in a set of obstacles to food sovereignty, which they believe is intrinsic to their personal freedom and autonomy.

Food insecurity and a lack of food sovereignty are broad-reaching issues on St. Kitts that affect everyone, not just farmers. The poverty rate on St. Kitts is estimated at 21.8%, and 42% of

the population faces moderate to severe food insecurity (Abel 2023; CARICOM 2025; Resilient Caribbean Initiative 2026; United Nations 2026). The World Food Program’s Caribbean Food Security and Livelihoods Survey (2025) attributes this to high import dependency, supply chain disruptions, and rising costs of living – about 80% of food on St. Kitts is imported. High global shipping costs make imported food inaccessible, and the reliance on imported foods leaves local consumers extremely vulnerable to international supply chain volatility. Food insecurity is deeply linked with poor nutritional health and high rates of diet-related diseases such as adult diabetes. These effects are unevenly distributed based on class and wealth, but nobody in St. Kitts is, to some extent, not negatively affected by St. Kitts’ reliance on imported foods. Even wealthy tourists and visitors are limited in their food choices and access to groceries. For these wealthier stakeholders, however, these constraining circumstances may be experienced more like an inconvenience than a major problem.

In this way, thinking about the monkey problem as a site of building animosity, an affective infrastructure that shapes local (co-)culture, economy, and ecology, is a way of attuning to the adverse effects of global capitalism and the legacies of the conditions from within which it arose — what scholars call the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 2022 [1997]), and plantation futures (McKittrick 2013). The dependence on imported food and the impoverishment of soil and marine ecosystems are signs of a regional food system that is not integrated with its local ecologies, because transnational food markets presently rely on conditions where land, water, and sea are not integrated with regional food systems. Through islanding, offshoring, and tourism, the islands’ ecologies are reframed as extractable resources to satisfy foreign interests. *Stronger Caribbean Together*, a non-governmental organization, defines food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and

sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems” (StrongerCaribbeanTogether 2022). Thinking of the monkey problem as a site of building animosity allows for understanding such multi-species concerns as non-exceptional examples of how Caribbean peoples continually resist conditions of codependency that deny people’s rights to self-determination and the completion of decolonial projects. These challenges are not unique to the Caribbean — they are intrinsic to what anthropologists conceive of as the increasingly urgent challenges of our present moment, framed as late liberalism (Povinelli 2016, 168), the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2006; De La Cadena 2019), the Plantationocene (Wolford 2021), and the Chthulucene (Haraway 2020). At the same time, the people of St. Kitts experience these challenges in unique ways.

The monkey problem is as much a question of invasive animals and regional food sovereignty, grounded in agroecology, as it is an issue of colonial legacies, post-colonial discontents, and contemporary human rights and accessibility. In this way, investigating the monkey problem means examining how the Caribbean region is kept in a state of dependency that denies people’s right to self-determination and the completion of a true de-colonial project. My interlocutors’ personal desires — to grow their own food, to connect to the land they live on, and to build intergenerational and community wealth — are also decolonial visions of a more just future. Thinking with building animosity opens a broader horizon: if animosity is an ecological condition rather than a personal feeling, what kinds of relational, provisional, imaginative possibilities emerge within it? And what forms of relation may open the way for futures beyond building animosity?

## What Goes Unseen

Imagery of monkeys is pervasive on St. Kitts. After picking them up from the airport, one of the first things my family noticed was a massive sign that reads “HELP PREVENT THE NEXT INVASION,” located facing the Island Main Road and unavoidable for those arriving in St. Kitts through the airport.



**Figure 2.2 Green Monkey Sign**

*This sign faces a major roundabout right off of the Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport (SKB) exit, the main airport on St. Kitts. The sign is the size of an average, large highway billboard or bulletin, about 14 feet tall and 48 feet wide – 672 square feet. The sign was created by the Center for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI) in collaboration with other local and transnational institutions.*

While the specific call to action may not be immediately clear to those unfamiliar, the message is clear — green monkeys are bad. Someone intrigued by the sign may then do an internet search, which will quickly bring up articles like the article “Monkey Problem: St. Kitts’ great attraction becomes great headache” on BBC news, and the Blog Post “CABI warns that like on St Kitts and Nevis, invasive green monkeys could become a significant threat to crop production on other Caribbean islands” on the Center for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) website.

# Monkey problem: St Kitts' great attraction becomes great headache

15 August 2019

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**Gemma Handy**

Basseterre, St Kitts

**Figure 2.3 Screenshot of “Monkey Problem” News Article**

*This screenshot features the title of one of many news articles that reference the monkey problem of St. Kitts. This particular news article was published on BBC News’s Latin America section (Handy 2019).*



**Figure 2.4 Screenshot of Online Invasives Blog Post**

*This screenshot features the title of a news article that demonstrates how the monkey problem of St. Kitts is perceived transnationally as a threat to the well-being of other Caribbean islands (Coles 2023).*

These articles provide summaries of the monkey problem, generally focusing on the contrast between how monkeys “enthrall holidaymakers” and how they “cause misery for local farmers” through their role in crop loss and food insecurity (Handy 2019).

These sources all provide different estimates for the numbers of monkeys on the island — while the BBC article guesses 60,000, the CABI-funded sign referenced earlier reports “30,000?”, and a recent report by Dr. Dore estimates between 22,000 and 38,000 (Dore et al., 2023). Though St. Kitts is a small island, even 60,000 monkeys is a small number on the global scale of monkey trapping and shipping. As a point of comparison, it is estimated that 35,000

non-human primates are imported annually to the United States alone for research, primarily funded by pharmaceutical companies, contracted research organizations, and other for-profit research entities. Over 105,000 primates are currently used or held for research and testing in the United States, with over 35,000 imported each year, and the demand is growing (“Primates in Context” 2025). The entire population of green monkeys on St. Kitts would not meet the import demand for experimental primates in the United States for two years.

Tens of thousands of non-human primates are trapped from the wild each year to be supplied for the international wildlife trade, biomedical research, the exotic pet market, and the bushmeat industry. Comparatively, only a few hundred primates on St. Kitts are trapped every year. The local St. Kitts monkey research facilities primarily use experimental monkeys bred in captivity, and shipping restrictions make it both challenging and unprofitable to ship Kittitian Green Monkeys off the island. Primatologist Kerry Dore suggests that, with sufficient funding and manpower, it would likely be possible to address crop losses by trapping and sterilizing, or by hunting a significant portion of the green monkey population on St. Kitts in just a few years (Dore and Daigneault 2025). However, doing so would not actually be a solution to the monkey problem as other stakeholders define and understand it. The desires of different stakeholders regarding the monkeys are in conflict. For example, cruise-ship tourism business owners have threatened to stop docking in St. Kitts if this intervention were to take place. Building animosity occurs not because there is no solution for farmers, but because different stakeholder groups have different, at times incommensurable, ideas of what a solution could mean. Just as farmers advocate for the government to cull, sterilize, or hunt green monkeys to decrease their population numbers, in part due to empathy for the monkeys’ own experiences of suffering due to food insecurity and starvation in the resource-limited wilderness, so do international scientists,

international animal rights activists, government actors, and transnational investors, many of whom do not live on St. Kitts, have their own desires to maintain the status quo. The monkey problem is, in this way, an issue of conflict among people amid uneven distributions of access to capital, mobility, and power. Though farmers are highly sensorially attuned to their local social and natural conditions, they generally have the least say in what actually happens.

Dr. Dore, building on over 14 years of sustained community-based participatory research with farmers and the local community on St. Kitts, has collaborated to publish a comprehensive management strategy to help reduce human-primate conflict there (Dore and Daigneault, 2025). At the same time, the more-than-sufficient research, evidence-based reports, and proposed strategies published to date remain insufficient to create significant change. Kerry's research and advocacy work — replete with stories of non-cooperative government ministries, complex and limited funding and support, and even disappearing grant money — is one voice in the infrastructure of building animosity.

Co-existing with the realms of academic research, primatology, and news articles, there is pervasive local imagery of the monkeys, which centers on their cuteness, rendering them a totem or mascot for the island. At Port Zante, where massive cruise ships release thousands of tourists visiting St. Kitts for a day, the shops are full of the imagery of monkeys. Shirts, shot glasses, mugs, and decorative tapestries depict St. Kitts with artistic renderings of monkeys, often in cute cartoon styles that exaggerate their features. There are multiple series of children's books centered on Kittitian green monkeys. Stuffed animal monkeys, some almost life-size, can be found in every other store. This imagery of the monkeys on St. Kitts is an incisive example of the contradiction between the colonial tourist imaginaries of the Caribbean islands, as sites of paradise, and the reality of life on these islands.

Many of my interlocutors, who were farmers and backyard gardeners, navigated significant aspects of their daily lives in the context of the monkey problem and its rhythms. The very structure of their day was shaped by the need to adjust to the shared temporal and physical demands of growing food under constant threat of crop loss. Farmers like Tayon would wake at sunrise because monkeys wake at sunrise. Farmers' nervous systems were reactive to the rustling of foliage, alerting them to the possible presence of monkeys. Their sensorial attunements enabled them but also confined them to particular relationships to space and time, through which they came to perceive their daily life through the affective infrastructures and ecologies shaped by the social and economic challenges of food insecurity. Conversely, tourists and foreign investors who were largely absent from the island were limited in their ability to perceive the monkey problem, even if they had an intellectual understanding of it. Just as one can easily miss the presence of monkeys if they do not have a cultivated attunement to them, so too is the monkey problem itself sensorially inaccessible to someone whose senses and body are not adjusted to make sense of its signs.

The process of attunement to the monkey problem is uneven, just as the burdens of food insecurity and crop loss are unevenly experienced across St. Kitts's social, economic, and geographical terrain. Dr. Sana Saiyed (2025), an ethnoprimateologist and recent doctoral graduate, conducted research at the Calypso Bay Resort neighborhood, a wealthy residential community in St. Kitts. The neighborhood consists of 59 villas, many of which are occupied year-round by a mix of affluent Kittitians and immigrants primarily from the United States and Europe. Saiyed found that 90% of her participants considered the green monkeys who roamed Calypso Bay to be aggressive without being prompted and an issue because they made it challenging to maintain household gardens. At the same time, people perceived the monkeys as

part of Kittitian life and heritage, and as similar to humans insofar as they are intelligent and social. The residents and workers of Calypso Bay Resort — 13 of the 20 residents were white immigrants to St. Kitts — became initiated into these paradoxical perceptions of monkeys, emblematic of life in the monkey problem, over the course of living or working there for 10 or more years. Even residents of St. Kitts who were not directly descended from enslaved Kittitian arrivants still became at least partially initiated into the multi-species and ecological consequences of the afterlives of slavery, through the local reliance on imported produce, even if they did not necessarily understand this. For the wealthiest and most privileged on St. Kitts, the monkey problem is less an issue of food and economic security, and is experienced more like an inconvenience — constrained options for food, high mark-ups on fresh groceries, and volatile food prices and availability. This unevenness — between perceptions of the monkey problem as all-pervasive or as inconvenient — is also related to the island's uneven distribution of power. Saiyed writes,

Many of the residents of Calypso Bay, local and immigrant, hold positions of power within the government or at key academic and biomedical institutions. As such, their perceptions of green monkeys hold substantial weight in the country-wide discourse on green monkey management (4).

These individuals, who found green monkeys inconvenient, had significantly more authority than the farmers whose livelihoods and well-being were most negatively affected by the monkey problem. This unevenness in power is distributed in relation to uneven attunement to the monkey problem itself. Farmers' work requires them to spend considerable time and energy reading and reacting to the seasonal rhythms of St. Kitts. For example, differences in the fruit trees' productivity periods alter the distribution of fruit across the mountains and forests of St. Kitts, directly affecting monkeys' foraging behaviors and patterns. Farmers have a strong understanding of these cycles and seasons and can advocate for interventions tailored to the

specific space and time of their local ecological conditions. However, these residents of Calypso Bay, some of whom engage in backyard gardening but most of whom are not particularly attuned to their local ecological conditions, simultaneously have less attunement and greater weight in country-wide discourse on green monkey management. These Calypso Bay residents are an intermediate group compared with foreign investors, business owners, and landowners, many of whom spend little to no time on St. Kitts yet have significant economic and political sway over the government and decisions on green monkey management. The distributions of attunement to the monkey problem are generally *inversely* related to political or economic power and sway.

Anthropologist Naomi Schoenfeld (2020), who conducted research on the biocompanion relationship among humans, tumors, and tobacco in Cuba, draws on China Miéville's novel *The City in the City* to describe zones of mutual apprehension, a phenomenon she calls "crosshatching." Crosshatching in sewing is a quilting technique that creates a grid pattern by sewing parallel lines that intersect, adding texture or pattern. Crosshatching is also a technique in sketching, drawing, and etching — a layered, intersecting set of parallel lines used to represent texture and create the visual illusion of three-dimensional form. Schoenfeld offers crosshatching as an analytic to describe zones in which people's perceptions of the world vary so significantly that these realities seem to exist in parallel, with some perceptions simultaneously negating others. Schoenfeld writes, "Like the protagonists of Miéville's story, I found myself crosshatching, 'seeing the previously unseeable, apprehending two realities simultaneously'" (40). Schoenfeld uses crosshatching to describe the coexistence of opposing viewpoints in Cuba, such as socialism and capitalism; the celebration of both tobacco and lung cancer treatments; and impoverishment and advanced science and technology.

On St. Kitts, I came to understand the monkey problem as defined fundamentally by incommensurable attunements. For Schoenfeld, crosshatching is a useful analytical tool for holding the complexities of one's conceptual field, as a way of seeing or perceiving a situation whose elements are contradictory or even incommensurable. On St. Kitts, crosshatching occurs in the ways in which parallel and contradictory socially informed perspectives on the monkey problem have come to coexist — monkeys as pests and as suffering animals worthy of empathy; a tropical paradise and a site of resource extraction; a growing tourism economy and food sovereignty inevitably delayed. Cross-hatching also describes how researchers, writers, and artists represent the monkey problem, using modes of writing or painting to present opposing viewpoints in an attempt to capture its form. To inquire into the monkey problem is to unsettle understandings of the alien and the native, the invasive and the belonging, and the Kittitian and the foreigner.

In seeking to describe the emergent modes of living beyond the boundaries of destructive, extractive capital, interdisciplinary scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) offers the concept of “submerged perspectives.” Submerged perspectives are ways of being and living that are imperceptible through extractivism's ways of knowing and rendering worlds. In attuning to social ecologies in zones of continual extraction in Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador, Gómez-Barris posits that submerged perspectives, though they are sometimes silenced and invisibilized, “cannot fully be contained” by extractive enclosures (12). That is to say — even as the intertwined problems of extractive capitalism, climate change, and environmental racism continue to shape the conditions of life, so do people, animals, plants, and ecologies continue to adapt to exist beyond them. Gomez-Barris posits that attuning to submerged perspectives is a

way of decolonizing the senses. Decolonizing the senses requires attuning to natural, physical, and social phenomena through embodied, sensuous, and situated ways of knowing.

Many people, like the farmers of St. Kitts, do not have a choice in how they are attuned to monkeys and the monkey problem. They come to have their embodied and situated ways of knowing as part of daily life, and of navigating the extractive zone. Their perspectives are ‘submerged’ by the affective infrastructures of the monkey problem that invisibilize their struggles. At the same time, these ways of being are important as they resist and refuse the terms of racial capital and the continued legacies of colonial extraction. Tending to the social ecologies that become visible and palpable through submerged perspectives is, for Gómez-Barris, a way to “[catalog] life otherwise,” the modes of living that exist alongside and proliferate within the extractive zone, “even if not perceivable” (4). Gomez-Barris is reframing research on submerged perspectives as itself a refusal of extractivism’s claims to and desire for totalizing capture. Submerged perspectives undermine the ways of seeing and knowing through which colonialism and extractivism operate, which they require to render worlds as extractible.

Gomez-Barris argues that the imperfection of perception is a site of vulnerability for exploitation by extractive violence, but that it is also a site of resistance to such exploitation. I paraphrase Gomez-Barris as meaning that humans are fragmented from nature and animals through the dissemination of ideas stemming from cosmologies that treat land and animals as extractable commodities. Cross-hatching offers a framework for understanding how research and writing might move towards representing embodied, sensuous, and situated ways of knowing, rather than prioritizing the intellectual, logical, or measurable. Research has consistently proven insufficient to solve the monkey problem because perspectives that favor the tourism economy and render St. Kitts’ natural beauty and non-human life as sources of value to be extracted

invisibilize the monkey problem and the people most affected by it. The perspectives of farmers on St. Kitts — embodied attunements to the rhythms of St. Kitts and its ecologies — are forms of multiplicity, carrying what Gomez-Barris calls the “irruptive potential of multiplicity” that occurs in the murk and muck of “submerged” spaces (12). The visions of the future that farmers on St. Kitts advocate, of subsistence and food sovereignty, are also decolonial futures with the potential to disrupt modes of being predicated on extractive capital.

In writing the results of this research, I am attempting to cross-hatch, or to provide a representation of the monkey problem that simultaneously captures perspectives that can appear incommensurable. This ethnography is an attempt at a cross-sector translation between scientists, government ministries, local communities, and non-human others. The breakdown between research and public consent regarding intervention on the monkey problem reveals how social and regulatory hurdles are as significant as scientific ones. Years of research have failed to solve the monkey problem, I argue, not only because there is a lack of strategic communication to bridge public opinion and policy advocacy to upgrade plantation-era regulations, but also because the very sensorial attunements of different stakeholders are made incommensurable to one another by the affective infrastructures of inequality in the monkey problem. The multidimensional puzzle of the monkey problem involves conflicts not only in public opinion and uneven distributions of power, but also in uneven access to sensorial attunement — the language of the monkey problem — needed to understand or make sense of it. This dissertation attempts to capture this depth.

The ways in which we perceive others, as is core to ethnography as a methodology based on observation, are always inherently incomplete. The completeness of our perception is an illusion, extending our subjective suppositions onto the other in an attempt to account for that

which we cannot distinguish. To map an ecology is only to approximate its web of interconnectedness by creating artificial boundaries around it. Among these assumptions is what ethnic studies scholar Jasbir Puar terms *biopolitical anthropocentrism* — the assumption that humans are inherently more important than other actors, living and non-living (Puar 2015, p. 59). Puar, researching the permeable multi-species ecologies of Israel and Palestine, offers the language of *becoming*, which acknowledges that the circumstances that one must inhabit and reconcile with their own embodiment can both generate and limit potentialities (62). Building animosity in the monkey problem — a state of *becoming* that refers to the growing negative feelings occurring between different actors, human and animal — also pushes us to acknowledge not only the positions of different groups of humans on St. Kitts such as farmers, tourists, scientists, and business owners, but also the perspectives of monkeys themselves, which they communicate through their non-verbal behaviors. In Part 2, I delve into this topic by focusing on the ways scientists and veterinarians come to understand and translate monkeys' behaviors into scientific protocols and veterinary care. Considering the fragile divide between people and animals raises questions about the boundaries of humanness, animality, and broader conceptions of “problems” as they infuse life and non-life.

Considering the animal/human divide as a rupture, and one that is “fragile,” as Caribbean scholar Andil Gosine (2021) suggests, we can move towards thinking of science as a site for understanding non-human consciousness and communication at its best, and for biopolitical anthropocentrism at its worst. In the case of the monkey problem, this science includes primatological research documenting crop loss; environmental research and regulation of the air, water, and land of St. Kitts; agroecology and agricultural development; and — as I will discuss in Part 2— biomedical pre-clinical science that uses monkey research subjects. I seek to write

alongside the intervention Gomez-Barris terms “decolonizing the senses,” while remaining sensitive to the ways this language fails to acknowledge and address the material harms of colonial violence. In chapter 6, I propose the alternative language, *prioritizing the senses*, that I hope captures the goal of her intervention well. I posit that prioritizing the senses is intrinsic to a decolonial multi-species ethnographic methodology, which Gomez-Barris suggests can allow for the consideration of embodied knowing as a research technology.

## **Monstrosity**

“Monkey see, monkey do” is a common phrase that refers to learning by mimicry without understanding its consequences, typically used to describe children mimicking their parents’ behavior, such as when a child uses profanity without fully understanding its significance (Whitman 2013). This phrase, I argue, also captures the mechanisms by which the monkey problem reproduces — why those with the most power, money, and status on St. Kitts continue to reproduce the current status quo without understanding the consequences of their actions. By mimicking past generations, individuals like the residents of Calypso Bay, who are themselves inconvenienced by the monkey problem but are not attuned to its wide-reaching negative effects, choose to support government policies and funding allocations that ultimately maintain the monkey problem. “Monkey see, monkey do” describes how individuals learn through observation rather than through either instruction or embodied attunement. Within the monkey problem, cross-hatching, which describes the distribution of incommensurable perspectives and affective attunements among people who live alongside one another yet experience very little overlap in how they spend their time and attention, perpetuates inequity in life chances across both human and animal co-cultures.

Cross-hatching, in this way, can also refer to the fragile division between nature and culture — the ways in which people have historically turned away from non-human others and the environment in their attempts to create culture that is separate from the natural world. As people continue to reproduce this division and the hierarchical logics it relies on, they are increasingly faced with the consequences of building animosity. Locally, the unpleasant interactions that build animosity, and globally, the increasingly extreme weather events resulting from climate change, force people to face the consequences of what they have turned away from, which continue to return. As Rodrigo Gonsalves writes in *Monstrosity and the Psychoanalytic Dimensions of the Uncanny* (2025),

Monsters appear in our history, setting some prerogatives about monsters and monstrosity from within past periods of time and their resurface in culture. Because monstrosity takes place in history as a necessity to change, slavery was and still is a monstrosity. The exoticism ideologically imposed over bodies was and still is present in our reality, which is another aspect of monstrosity. The extermination camps, the genocides, the horrors of domination and oppression, the structural ruling over black, native and women bodies, these are all historical and structural elements of monstrosity. This only reinforces the philosophical prerogative that monstrosity appears where contradictions are at stake, where better politics are required to surface. (133)

As the monstrosity of historical violence continues to (re-)surface in the present, people are continually faced with the uncanny consequences of past violence. As Gonsalves writes, violences from the past “resurface in culture” and are also part of the symbolic and imaginary fabric that formulates culture — “better politics” must “face our contradictions head on instead of repressing them” (133). Ultimately, both Kittitian farmers and green monkeys suffer in uncanny ecologies at the hands of local conditions, which continue to turn away from their experiences. This turning away invisibilizes and submerges their perspectives, yet it is reproduced from generation to generation as people repeat it.

At the same time, the monkeys, as trickster figures who continually defy human attempts at control, disrupt capitalism. They are monstrous in their trickster quality. Farmers and monkeys then create value relations that reject capitalist notions and the commodity's resistant physical nature. The continual confrontation of people with monkeys, and of the empty subject with the amorphous presence of the real, displays the truth of this mirror relationship, conferring on it its antagonistic tension. In their persistent refusal to be made away with, and with the continued gaze which they return and adapt to, horror in the monkey problem lies in the gaze itself, in being watched by the monkey — the price to be paid to sustain a coherent self-image predicated on turning away from the suffering of people and monkeys that persist no matter how much people seek to submerge them and turn away from them.

## ***Part 2: Unsettling Science and Consent***

### **Chapter 3: Affective Consent**

The contemporary construct of informed consent emerges from these dimensions of clinical care and research. It is a *discursive practice*, defined through the myriad ways in which it is produced in local situations. It is not a stable and known fact. Rather, it is an elusive ideal, brought into existence by law and philosophy (Beauchamp and Faden 1995; Arnold and Lidz 1995) and mandated by evolving federal policy. The research establishment must strive to achieve its tenets. ‘Informed consent’ did not exist, *as we invoke it today*, during the era of the plutonium experiments. Attempts to apply our current understandings of such a fluid concept to a previous era in order to assess ‘ethical behavior’ are misguided and miss a very important point – consent today is a highly problematic construct. (Kaufman 1997, 186).

### **Attuning to the Green Monkeys of St. Kitts**

Three facilities on St. Kitts conduct research on captive green monkeys. These facilities conduct life-saving, important health- and behavior-related research, from developing vaccines to testing drugs for clinical safety and efficacy. For example, St. Kitts green monkeys were key in research on the biological impacts of alcohol consumption, which would have been unethical to test on human research subjects. At the same time, international animal rights activists consider this research to be cruel. Animal rights activists frame research monkeys as involuntary subjects, unable to consent and ultimately forced to live in inhumane conditions and to be subjected to invasive and sometimes even painful scientific research (ARFF 2019; Primatefreedom 2005). The use of animals in research remains a contentious issue of debate among scientists, researchers, bioethicists, and activists alike (Waldhorn et al. 2022).

The first of these facilities was founded in 1971. All three facilities were established on the land of former slave-holding sugar monocrop plantations. The historical buildings at these sites have been renovated and repurposed for the facilities' daily activities. These facilities have transitioned away from growing sugar and are now sites for the cultivation of captive monkey

research subjects, housed in large social enclosures or caged areas containing ropes, swings, tree branches, and other haptic materials. The monkeys spend most of their time in these enclosures, grouped with great attention to their social dynamics, including age, gender, and size. These housing configurations are determined based on both scientific agendas and individual monkeys' behaviors. The group housing units, effectively large cages made from chain-link fencing, are semi-permeable to the outside world. The housing units are suspended above the ground, so that monkeys' excrement falls through the holes in the fencing to the ground below. Dedicated janitorial staff use pressurized hoses to wash away this waste multiple times a day.

In this chapter, I primarily reflect on ethnographic observations and interviews conducted at two of the three animal research facilities on the island. I conducted semi-structured interviews with researchers, veterinarians, scientists, animal technicians, laboratory staff, and other current and former employees from all three facilities. I deliberately do not name the facility where each ethnographic encounter took place to provide maximum confidentiality for my interlocutors. I utilize pseudonyms for all my research participants. I employ the ethnographic practice of crafting composite narratives from different excerpts and conversations to make my data as unidentifiable as possible, to protect the confidentiality of individuals who shared their stories and time with me.

Kittitians and locals generally know little about what goes on at these monkey research facilities, colloquially known as “monkey farms.” Locals believe that these monkey farms help decrease the number of invasive monkeys in the wild. Some wild monkeys are captured for research, but most research subjects are descendants of other captive monkeys housed at the facility for at least 2 generations. Beyond trapping and breeding, creating a suitable monkey research subject requires a significant investment of time and attention, including feeding,

genome mapping, vaccinations, veterinary care, behavioral observations, cleaning and maintenance, and daily enrichment.

One of my key interlocutors, “Tom,” is a white professor at a major U.S. research university who visits St. Kitts periodically to conduct research. He was initially hesitant about my inquiries to conduct an ethnography at his facility. “How do I know you are not an undercover animal rights activist?” he once asked me. I reassured him that my own progress as a graduate student in a medical anthropology PhD program depended on my honesty. Over many conversations and years, we gradually built a sense of trust.

In this chapter, I examine the language of consent, non-consent, and refusal as it is mobilized in transnational conversations about animal experimentation and local discussions in the context of St. Kitts. Contemporary bioethics currently confines the possibility of consent to the human realm. Many people assume that animals cannot give consent. At the same time, animal industries grounded on exploitation claim that animals consent to participate in research, agriculture, or entertainment. The guise of consent in these contexts becomes a tool for defending the exploitation of animals rather than for protecting them (Blattner et al. 2022; Palmer et al. 2023).

If, as animal rights activists claim, research monkeys have been made into involuntary research subjects, and the guise of consent has simultaneously become a tool to justify the exploitation of animals, then how can we rethink consent as a communicative form in a way that is sensitive to the desires and well-being of animals themselves? In this chapter, I argue that the current predominant frameworks for consent among people – affirmative consent and informed consent – and the corresponding concepts for animals – assent and informed consent by proxy – are important, yet also insufficient. I describe a category of consent that *does* occur between

animals and others who cannot participate in verbal consent. I call this category **affective consent**. Affective consent describes the situations in which animals *can* express consent and refusal, through the negotiation and interpretation of nonverbal behaviors, and can experience potentially traumatic non-consent when their refusal is ignored.

This chapter contributes to existing conversations that seek to theorize the mediations of consent in human and animal contexts. Greenhough and Roe (2011) demonstrate that bioethical debates about the use of human subjects tend to focus on issues of consent and language, whereas work in animal welfare increasingly focuses on the affective elements of ethical practice. The concept of affective consent that I offer here brings these two conversations together, building on Greenhough and Roe's suggestion that "an ethics derived from somatic sensibilities might be used to complement and extend existing ethical practices" (61). Drawing on multi-species ethnographic observations conducted at monkey farms on St. Kitts, I provide examples of affective consent in the local context of animal research on the island. I then consider the utility of affective consent for understanding non-linguistic negotiations of consent among people, such as those silenced by uneven power relations, navigating non-linguistic mediations, or otherwise unable to participate in informed or affirmative consent.

Interpreting affect is a messy, challenging task that relies on trial and error. The framework of affective consent describes how animals and people ultimately navigate moments of encounter that may necessitate constrained decisions on unexpected timelines and at the peripheries of clearly defined borders, policies, and other boundaries. Affect coalesces from numerous circumstances that extend beyond the present moment. For example, one cannot understand why escapee monkeys remain living on the property of these research facilities without understanding the historical and contemporary context of St. Kitts. Staff learn to

interpret monkeys' affective states through extensive training and practice. Paying attention to affect may elucidate what scientists described as the “magical” aspects of consent – the role of affect in the mediations of (non-)consent that current consent frameworks insufficiently consider.

## **Monkey Matchmaking**

Staff take extreme care in deciding which monkeys should be housed together. Re-housing is one of the most direct instances of monkey-on-monkey consent and refusal that I witnessed. Due to shifting research protocols, most animals spend only a few months in any given housing configuration. The process of determining housing units, which I refer to as “monkey matchmaking,” is central to the research operations of the facilities.

Layla is a young veterinary technician in her early twenties. She has been working in animal research and care for about a year. She is a Black Kittitian woman who has earned her associate's degree in business at Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College, the local community college. Like many of the staff at these facilities, she found the job through word of mouth. Her uncle, a staff member at another facility, leveraged his network to help her secure a job.

I asked all the staff whom I interviewed about their personal opinions about monkeys. Layla said that she used to think they were cute and innocent before she started her job at the facility. Since learning more about monkeys, she no longer felt that way. To teach me about how and why captive monkeys would often harm one another, she walked me through a veterinary compound. In this building, animals were taken for non-experimental medical treatment and care. “Here, we house monkeys who are recovering from injuries,” Layla explained to me. “Sometimes, when a monkey is placed into a social situation where it is rejected, it will get significantly injured in the process. That means we get to take them here and give them special

treatment for a while.” At the veterinary compound, monkeys received attention for various health issues, but injuries inflicted by other monkeys were the most common.

At these research facilities, monkeys who are not actively enrolled in research studies generally live together in groups of 5 to 20. A significant challenge for staff is finding combinations of monkeys that can get along when living together. While there are certain best practices, such as housing same-sex monkeys together and grouping family units, significant improvisation and trial-and-error are also central to this process (Murti et al. 2024). It is common for a monkey to be rejected by its housing group. When this happens, monkeys communicate their refusal to cohabit through various behaviors, including fighting, biting, and scratching the unwelcome monkey.

Individual monkeys did not ask to be placed in the same enclosures together. It is the staff’s decision to put them in an enclosure together that ultimately subjects both monkeys — the scratcher and the scratched — to potentially non-consensual housing reconfigurations. I observed numerous instances of staff members’ deep concern for the well-being of monkeys. Beyond giving her employers a good impression, Layla felt intrinsically motivated to spend time monitoring the monkeys for injuries, which went beyond her prescribed job role. “Every day, when I walk through [the enclosures], I take my time to check on each monkey. I look for scratches. I look to see if they are behaving strangely. Injured monkeys will get lethargic.”

Layla cared more about the monkeys’ well-being than some of the other staff. When I asked her about this, she said that she thought that the “older people still think of the monkeys as pests.” Green monkeys are labeled invasive because they disrupt human farming projects, and many Kittitians see them as a nuisance. Each staff member had a different level of concern and care for monkeys. The younger staff and recent hires generally cared more about monkeys than

the older, more seasoned staff. When I asked the management at the facilities about this, they attributed it to the increasingly robust training that they offered new hires during onboarding.

Saiyed (2025) has documented that attitudes towards monkeys on St. Kitts differ across ethnic groups, generations, and even neighborhoods. For example, while Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean farmers are likely to share negative opinions about monkeys, wealthy white and East Indian residents of the island are more likely to perceive them as cute or harmless. Shifting generational cultural attitudes towards monkeys affect the institutional culture in these facilities, which are managed and owned primarily by white and Asian international scientists, but employ majority Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean staff.

Davies (2021) argues that national and local differences in the constitution of animal research are generally caused by two key variables: the location of institutional authority and responsibility to permit research projects, and the distribution of epistemic authority to shape research practices. The changing training protocols for new hires reflect uneven power relations between people and animals, as well as between different kinds of people, and the translation of disparate cultural conceptions of green monkeys. The epistemic authority of animal research policies exported from other countries changes the content of training at these St. Kitts research facilities. These trainings reflect the combination of the increasingly global scope of the regulation of biomedical research and testing using animals with the national civic epistemologies arising from St. Kitts's local history and cultural context.

Layla pointed out two monkeys sharing a large double-sized cage. “These two are a new pair, but we found that they enjoy being housed together. X937 is a mother who lost her baby. She was really grieving, and she refused to eat. A613 was getting malnourished in her previous

housing situation.” A613 was a younger female, visibly smaller than X937. Layla reflected to me,

In all-female housing groups, monkeys will rarely resort to violence against one another. Males’ll scratch and bite. But females will still bully each other in different ways. They would steal her food. She was smaller than the others. But these two enjoy living together. X937 treats her like a daughter. She’s gotten happier and started eating again. They groom each other.

Green monkeys A613 and X937 expressed satisfaction with their housing situation by engaging in positive relational behaviors, such as grooming.<sup>3</sup> Green monkeys in the laboratory exhibit a diverse range of behaviors in response to different housing conditions. They refuse a housing configuration by biting or scratching. They socialize by grooming one another. Sometimes, they express refusal over a longer period, such as when A613 was slowly deprived of equal access to food by the other monkeys in her housing configuration. To observe this required sustained attention to A613’s bodily changes over time.

Monkeys demonstrate consent and refusal to one another through their actions. These modes of communication can become legible to humans, such as scientists, veterinarians, and animal care technicians, when they are trained to understand and interpret them.<sup>4</sup> This training can require sustained attention over many months or even years. I had the opportunity to observe

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<sup>3</sup> Experts on the behaviors of green monkeys may notice that I am simplifying monkey behavior here. Often, grooming behaviors or not only a sign of friendship or affection, but also a way of expressing dominance in social hierarchies. Monkeys’ actions must be interpreted through the context of their own desires and social dynamics for recognition to be accurate. I leave out some relevant details about monkey’s breeding habits and other behaviors and social dynamics in the body of this chapter because I focus on examples that are representative of my overall research findings.

<sup>4</sup> As Kaufman (1997) noted, “Risks to individual subjects vary enormously as does the health status of persons who participate in research projects” (184). It is both the actual moment-to-moment health status of the person or monkey, and the speculation for future risk, which must be interpreted in making decisions for the specialist or practitioner. In this way, just as monkey scientists practice interpreting affective consent by learning monkey’s physical behaviors and body language, so do medical practitioners learn to interpret people’s bodily status through various non-linguistic measures (pallor, blood pressure, breath rate, pulse-ox, etc.) in making decisions regarding scientific experimentation and medical treatment. These, too, are examples of the interpretation of affect.

multiple employees at varying stages of the training process. The first stage generally involved reviewing written documents and watching video trainings. Then, trainees would begin shadowing existing staff members in their daily activities.

Layla once pointed out a chair just a few feet away from a primate enclosure, facing it. She described the process through which she became attuned to monkeys' behaviors,

I wore the same clothes each day. I would sit and watch. I had a checklist of different behaviors, and I marked each one with a tally mark. I looked for feeding and aggression. Vocalizations to alert others to danger. They use body language and facial expressions to tell how they're feeling. If you watch for a long time, you can see them all talking.

Like all trainees, Layla went through a period in which she had to wear the same clothes and sit in the same spot for months so the monkeys in that enclosure could acclimate to her presence and stop reacting to her. Over that time, she slowly practiced noticing and interpreting the monkeys' behaviors and bodily expressions. Observing how monkeys responded over time to various drugs, supplements, or other interventions was a crucial part of the research process. Although I observed and noticed some of these behaviors myself, I am not a trained primatologist or veterinary technician. I relied on the veterinarians, technicians, and researchers whom I shadowed and interviewed to help me notice, interpret, and understand these behaviors.

Certain fundamental assumptions about humans and animals persist in current global animal research discourse. Namely, it is assumed that animals cannot consent. However, I observed scientists and animal caretakers on St. Kitts who, attuned to affective forms of non-verbal consent and refusal in animal subjects, would talk about monkey matchmaking using the language of consent. Staff needed to cultivate this attunement to be effective in their jobs. The concept of affective consent describes the mediations of this attunement – the cultivated ability to notice and interpret the behaviors of others. It is not just something I believe people should strive for – it is something already happening. Affective consent describes how people and

animals are already attuned to (non-)consent in human-animal and more-than-human interactions. At the same time, even at its best, monkey matchmaking relies on trial and error. In this way, theorizing affective consent requires recognizing the challenges and imperfections inherent to this attunement.

## Affirmative and Informed Consent

In animal welfare law and policy, it is currently supposed that animals cannot consent. Yet, I witnessed numerous instances of animals consenting, expressing refusal, and experiencing non-consent. I argue that consent, as it is presently mobilized in bioethics, scientific research, and adjacent law and policy, fails to center the subjectivity of non-human animals. The concept of consent is limited when we think of non-consent as a phenomenon that can only exist between (some) humans. To better understand these concepts, let's examine the two popular models of consent for humans, informed consent in research and affirmative consent in interpersonal relationships, as well as the related concepts of assent and dissent for animals.

This chapter builds on work in anthropology, bioethics, and related fields that explores how historical contingencies shape decision-making surrounding informed consent in science and medicine today (Kaufman 1997; Radin and Kowal 2015; Reardon 2020; Stark 2019).

**Informed consent**<sup>5</sup> refers to the responsibility of researchers and institutions to inform research

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<sup>5</sup> Analyzing the history of non-consensual medical research at American universities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kaufman (1997) troubled assumptions about moral progress in medical research. The goal of informed consent, Kaufman suggested, was to make sure that governments and research institutions respected personal autonomy and the right to information. Kaufman offered examples of how research ethics changed from the mid-to-late 1900s as the ethics of informed consent began to formulate in response to violent histories of human experimentation. "The lack of problematization of this [consent] concept," Kaufman wrote, "is one guide to the interpretation of past events" (166). Kaufman posits that the contemporary narratives about informed consent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had come to a sort of stagnation, wherein most people assumed that society and research had arrived at a morally correct position in which everyone understood and acted pragmatically in the framework of informed consent. Kaufman warns readers not to become settled in their definitions of consent, for it is in that stagnation that lies the risk for the

subjects of the risks and benefits associated with their participation, and to ensure that participation is voluntary, in both scientific and social scientific inquiries, as well as in medical and social work practices. The informed consent model was developed in response to a lengthy history of harm in research. The Belmont Report, written by the United States National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in 1978, identified several key ethical principles that underlie the conduct of research involving human subjects (Sims 2010). One of these principles is informed consent, but it remains a contested site of knowledge and practice.

**Informed consent by proxy** is currently the standard for animal care and research contexts (Janssens 2024). Informed consent by proxy is the process by which a third party, such as an animal's "owner," confirms their willingness to allow the care or treatment of an animal. Informed consent by proxy is already applied in research involving human subjects who cannot give informed consent, including young children, disabled people, and some elderly people. However, there are ethical issues surrounding consent by proxy. For example, legally authorized representatives or third parties, known as proxies, may have economic and emotional interests that can bias their judgment. Rock and Babinec (2008) argue that people who are particularly close to certain animals, such as pet owners and veterinarians, tend to attribute what might be called personality, self, or soul to nonhuman animals. This creates a double bind – people close to non-human animals may be best equipped to interpret their communication, and to respect

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reproduction of research conditions that may, in the future, be looked back upon as unethical or violent. I build on Kaufman's argument here to offer a troubling of existing concepts of consent based on their ableist anthropocentricity. The framework of affective consent adds to conversations about the treatment of animals and people who are considered to be unable to participate in informed consent. This aligns with contemporary critics such as historian and medical ethicist Harriet Washington (2021), who contends that the right of Americans to say "no" to risky medical research in the contemporary is eroding.

them as subjects. Yet their personal relationships can also hinder unbiased, independent judgment. Janssens suggests that proxies should have both personal experience with the individual animal and expert knowledge of the species; multiple proxies can deliberate together when no individual proxy possesses both.

In discussions about sex, sexuality, and human relationships, there is a movement for **affirmative consent**. Affirmative consent is defined as a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision amongst people to engage in sexual activity. This requires internal assent, or the person's decision, and the external performance or expression of consent, through words or actions (Gruber 2022). The affirmative consent framework has arisen from feminist theory and activism that seeks to prevent sexual harassment and violence (Halley 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Affirmative consent and informed consent have emerged from activist, legal, and scholarly movements aimed at addressing historical and ongoing violence. However, there is still an uneven distribution of access to consent. Uneven access to informed consent occurs across redlined geographies characterized by unequal distribution of capital, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Washington 2021). Medical power and authority have historically produced contexts where the refusals and non-consent of marginalized peoples have been denied, dismissed, or ignored, what Tosh (2019) calls the standardization of a therapeutic rape culture. Benjamin (2016) and Simpson (2017) have demonstrated the severe limits of consent and refusal

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<sup>6</sup> This chapter is informed by conversations that have opened because of the MeToo movement — the work of countless organizers who sought to change the conditions of their lives. At its core, the MeToo movement is a rejection of normalized sexual assault under the authority of heteropatriarchal power. Without this activist movement, the theoretical, legal, and activist conversations that have been occurring in the past decade would not have the weight in demanding justice and reparations. I hope to add to these conversations, including the parts of them happening within anthropology and more broadly at institutions of higher learning and research (King et al. 2020; Torres 2019). As I will show, although these conversations are nation specific, their resonance is seen globally. The impetus to see how to theorize consent in a place like St. Kitts is thus compelling.

under settler-colonialism, racism, and uneven power relations. Access to consent is hindered by the distributive orders of race, class, citizenship, gender, queerness, and (dis)ability (Jain 2020; Nelson 2016; Roberts 2022; TallBear 2023).

Fischel in *Screw Consent* (2019) argues that consent is an insufficient framework for understanding pleasure and violence in sex, in part because of pervasive ableist and anthropocentric assumptions about subjectivity, emotion, intelligence, suffering, and experience. There is continual debate over what circumstances or coercive conditions can undermine consent, including lies, promises, gendered pressures, gross inequality, or financial need.<sup>7</sup> Current sexual politics can marginalize atypical and non-normative sex, thereby also creating unevenness in the usefulness of the concept of consent. Thinking across different examples of how consent fails to hold up in non-normative contexts, Fischel argues that we should “screw consent,” or move away from the idea of consent as a metric for pleasure or suffering. I diverge from Fischel in that, rather than screwing consent, I hope to *reclaim* the idea of consent as useful by reformulating how it is defined.

Despite the plentitude of existing frameworks for consent, they remain insufficient for parsing consent and non-consent as both people and animals experience them. It is not sufficient to theorize across informed consent and affirmative consent for people who are silenced by

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<sup>7</sup> These conversations-in-progress include ongoing debates about what constitutes mental agreement and performative consent (Firestone 1970; Gruber 2022). Bletzer and Koss (2004) conducted research on “rape myths,” or beliefs about the circumstances where sexual violence occurs, as well as the types of people who commit it, and how they do so. Bletzer and Koss show that affirmative consent is an area of conceptual ambiguity, despite written laws and policies, due to challenges with recognition. These challenges with recognition occur because there are many disparate social understandings regarding what constitutes appropriate communication. For example, there are differences between the definition of affirmative consent in United States federal law, which recognizes passive consent (lack of verbal objection), and actual US court proceedings, which require the recognition of active non-consent (requiring a survivor to explain how they displayed behavioral or verbal statements of refusal or disinterest in having sex).

uneven power relations, or for animals. Not only is the concept of consent absent from current animal welfare law and policy, but it is also rarely present in animal rights discourse (Andrianova et al. 2021; Braun 2021).

**Assent** is the process by which certain groups, such as children, elders, and disabled people, can express their choice to participate in research or care, even when they are deemed not sufficiently competent to give informed consent. Animals, under current research ethics and guidelines, are considered incapable of consenting or even providing assent (Arnason 2020; Braun 2021). Contemporary animal research ethicists such as Fenton (2014) contend that animals cannot assent but can **dissent**, or express their desire to be removed from painful or stressful situations. Anthropologists have additionally theorized the importance of refusal for moving consent towards justice (Shange 2019; Stark 2019; TallBear 2019). Potentially traumatic **non-consent** occurs when dissent, or refusal, is ignored.<sup>8</sup> Fenton theorizes that a more just future would require respecting the agency of animal research subjects by honoring animal dissent. The opposite of dissent in animal research ethics is not assent but rather **acquiescence**, or the lack of dissent. However, animal rights and animal research guidelines do not presently require acquiescence nor the absence of dissent. Fenton theorizes that adopting dissent-based policies would require significant changes to existing animal research protocols worldwide and severely limit current nonhuman animal research.

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<sup>8</sup> Refusal, in human contexts, is defined as an informed negative response to a request for consent. In contrast, dissent is defined as an uninformed negative response to one's immediate bodily conditions by an animal or by a person considered not to have the full capacity to understand a situation. This ethical distinction is generally made to clarify which beings are legally considered unable to consent because they are not sufficiently competent to give informed consent – namely, some people and all animals. In law and policy, it is called **suppression of dissent** when dissent is intentionally ignored, marginalized, or punished. For the purposes of this chapter, I use non-consent to refer to instances where either refusal or dissent are ignored.

As Meijer explores in *When Animals Speak* (2019), non-human animals do speak and act in politically legible ways. When they are ignored, it is not because they are silent, but because we fail to recognize them. What is missing from the paradigm of assent, dissent, and acquiescence is recognition of what happens when these expressions are ignored: non-consent. Part of the intervention of affective consent is to draw attention to how animals can and do experience potentially violent and traumatic non-consent, both within and outside the laboratory. These negotiations are not always in relation to humans. Sexual assault-like behavior has been documented in nonhuman animal species, including mallard ducks, orangutans, and many insects (Crawford & Galdikas 1986). Acknowledging non-consent as experienced by animals, I argue, subsequently requires acknowledging that animals *can* consent, but may communicate and experience their consent and refusal in non-anthropocentric ways that fundamentally lie outside of the humanistic morals or values upon which the frameworks of affirmative consent and informed consent are predicated. Animals may have different desires for what they deem consensual or not, pleasant or pleasurable or not, and painful or suffering or not (see Fair and McMullen 2023 on non-human species-being).

Janssens (2024) presents a perspective that differs from Fenton's. Whereas Fenton believes that animal dissent and acquiescence can act as a substitute for consent, Janssens argues that dissent and acquiescence fail to consider the problem of humans' (in)capacity to decipher animal dissent. Janssens believes that the most promising method for obtaining informed consent from animals for research, care, or treatment is to gain consent by proxy from "thoroughly informed competent humans," in combination with seeking assent and being alert to dissent.

While informed consent by proxy is an important concept that is moving the ethics of animal care in a virtuous direction, it still fails to center consent and non-consent as experienced

by animals themselves. Informed consent is not possible for animals, but that doesn't mean that no form of consent is possible. I define and delineate affective consent as an alternative descriptive category that focuses on the experiences of animals themselves. Affective consent is a theoretical framework that may be generalizable; however, operationalizing it in daily life requires attention to affect—the specific circumstances of situated human-animal or animal-animal interactions. To do so requires expert knowledge and, like consent by proxy, relies on “thoroughly informed competent humans” to act as interpreters of animal affect (Janssens 2024).

I observed that scientists are already attuned to the affective aspects of caring for animals. The process by which proxies make decisions on behalf of animals is already dependent on interpretations of affective consent. Like in the continual reconfigurations of monkey matchmaking, affective consent is challenging to interpret, and even in the best-case scenarios, it involves trial and error. Affective consent and its challenges must be acknowledged to advance conversations about consent. Examining consent through a more-than-human lens may also enhance our understanding of consent in human contexts.

## **Theorizing Affect through a More-than-Human Perspective**

This chapter joins a robust conversation about affective relations between animals and humans in fraught settings, including laboratories (Clark 2014; Davies et al. 2024; Frieze 2025; Kohler 1994, 2020; Rader 2004), agriculture (Blanchette 2020; Despret 2008, 2016; Holloway et al. 2014; Porcher 2017), primatology (Dore 2017, 2018; Georgic 2026; Haraway 2020), urban landscapes (Barua and Sinha 2019; Hinchliffe et al. 2005), zoos (Palmer et al. 2016), and conservation (Chua et al. 2021; Salazar Parreñas 2018; van Dooren 2014, 2019). For example, in the context of endangered orangutan care at sanctuaries in Sarawak, Borneo, Salazar Parreñas

(2018) connects the discrete interactions between human and orangutan interlocutors to the broader economic, ecological, and social context of Sarawak to demonstrate how locally-produced affect cannot be understood if observed and described only in anthropocentric time scales. Salazar Parreñas thinks across short encounters, instinctive reactions, transient ethnographic contacts, varying lifespans, accelerating deforestation, and longer timelines of climate change and extinction to explain the increasing rates of non-consent being experienced by both humans and orangutans in Sarawak. This conception of affect accounts for the more-than-human conditions that create uneven access to consent and refusal, and can affect why one consents.

Salazar Parreñas's conception of affect, as existing beyond anthropocentric timelines and human senses, aligns with what Frieze (2025) calls the invisible work of experimental animals and animal technicians, and what Despret (2008) calls the becoming of subjectivities. In investigating how animal technicians' knowledge of mouse bodies in the laboratory setting is filtered through scientific and bureaucratic flows of translation, Frieze argues that certain forms of human and animal knowledge and communication are rendered invisible by social hierarchies and the technologies that reify them. Despret, drawing on the work of Porcher (2017), illustrates through their research on farming practices that animals and humans not only engage in communication but also remake one another's subjectivity. This parallels Giraud and Hollin's (2016) investigation of a large-scale experimental beagle colony, wherein care relations were shown to remake beagles' subjectivities and manufacture compliance. These authors evince that affect is more than embodied behaviors or non-linguistic communication. In every affective encounter, there is the coalescing of ineffable circumstances that extend beyond us and through

us. In every instance of non-linguistic expression and interpretation, affect carries with it the significance of converging timelines and inestimable circumstances.

The idea of “more-than-human” goes beyond a “multispecies” perspective in that it describes “nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 2). St. Kitts is marked by the historical effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, including the ecological consequences of sugar mono-crop farming, the introductions of invasive monkeys and other flora and fauna (see Wanderer 2015), the manifestations of environmental racism (Ferdinand 2021), and food scarcity as experienced by both Kittitian monkeys and people (Dore et al. 2018). Green monkeys were introduced to St. Kitts by trans-Atlantic slave traders over 350 years ago.

To understand affect on St. Kitts, we must contextualize monkey matchmaking within the history in which it was formed. St. Kitts and Nevis is a primarily Black Caribbean country, with small minorities of affluent white and Asian residents who control a significant amount of its wealth and resources. In 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis gained independence from the United Kingdom. Sugar plantations were abolished in 2004, when the island transitioned to a tourist economy (Conzo 2022). The farms and facilities where monkey research is conducted are situated on land that was previously used for plantations, but the presence of these facilities predates both independence and the abolition of plantations.

Kittitian farmers and backyard gardeners are increasingly finding their efforts to grow food thwarted by the growing populations of scavenging monkey troops. The increasing frequency of encounters between humans and monkeys, along with the related food insecurity experienced by both Kittitians and monkeys, combine to create what is now known on St. Kitts

as “the monkey problem.” The high cost of imported produce on the island makes accessing healthy food a challenge. At the same time, predominantly white and Asian business owners benefit from the monkeys as a tourist attraction, while international scientists benefit from using them as research subjects. For farmers, the need for intervention, such as culling or sterilizing monkeys, is urgent (Dore 2018; Dore et al. 2018). Other parties, including animal rights advocates and tourism investors, have conflicting agendas. More-than-human, in the St. Kitts context, alludes to the non-primate beings and forces with whom humans and monkeys on St. Kitts are entangled, including the social currents of science, regulation, capital, tourism, and technology.

When I visited these facilities for my ethnographic research in 2024, several monkeys were outside the enclosures. They would come and go, picking wild mangos or starfruit and sitting atop an enclosure while eating. I would notice them resting in the trees' foliage on the property. These monkeys, I learned, were escapees. Such escapees, Tom explained to me, often did not venture far. They remained living on the edges of the facility's property. Tom theorized that this phenomenon occurs for two reasons. The first is that the monkeys had become accustomed to relying on the facility's staff for food. Food insecurity is experienced by both monkeys and people on St. Kitts, who compete for limited space and natural resources (Dore 2019; Gallagher & Stephen 2024; Saiyed et al. 2025). When they left the facility, seeking food in the wild, they encountered a scarcity of resources. They returned because they had no better options. Tom once said to me, “These animals have it good. Compared to the monkeys caged up in US facilities, this is practically a hotel for them. In the wild, they would starve. We take good care of them here.” Second, wild troops of monkeys had territories that they were constantly negotiating with other troops. Existing troops of monkeys would be unlikely to accept an

outsider. These factors culminated in the continued restricted mobility of these escapees – neither caged nor entirely free. They lived in the peripheries of the laboratory.

The monkeys' decisions are limited by the broader conditions in and outside of life in the research facilities. To escape from the laboratory, where they were caged but well-fed and cared for, was to enter a resource-scarce wilderness, where conflict between wild monkey troops navigating food insecurity ultimately restricted their mobility. Neither entirely an act of consent nor refusal, monkeys' decisions to stay or to leave were both limited and limiting. These animals live in an environment where the very possibilities for consent and refusal have been limited.

The history of the three monkey research facilities on St. Kitts is inextricably linked to the monkey problem. Science is seen as valuable to the St. Kitts economy in that the facilities trap and house invasive monkeys, who already exist at unsustainably high populations in the ecology (Dore 2017). Wild monkey troops compete for land and territory amid growing struggles in a wilderness marked by resource scarcity and food insecurity. To help reduce the wild monkey population, trappers capture them. Green monkeys are then taken to local laboratories or exported as research subjects for animal studies elsewhere.

Captive green monkeys thus come to live in these facilities, where scientific agendas are the primary factor in determining the duration of different housing configurations. It is also these circumstances that come together to limit the choices of escapee monkeys. The definition of affect that these authors offer shows how short visceral encounters are inseparable from broader historical and contemporary conditions. Local circumstances produce affect, so the possibilities for affective consent and refusal are contingent on circumstance. It is also these circumstances that create the local conditions for the care of monkey research subjects at these facilities, which ultimately interface with international animal research regulations, creating unique, specific

convergences and divergences in local animal research and care practices, and the mediations of consent therein.

Affective (non-)consent is not limited to non-human animals. Affective consent occurs in relationships where verbal communication is not possible, such as care-taking relationships with children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. For many marginalized peoples around the world, the desire for safety has necessitated quiet or even silent encounters, making affirmative consent impossible (Bauer 2021; Puar 2017; Smilges 2022; Quashie 2012). Racialized cis-hetero patriarchy dispossesses queer, trans, and other marginalized people from the possibility of verbal consent by rejecting their existence and silencing their voices. In the Caribbean in particular, European colonizers historically enacted non-consent on people, animals, and the land, with the effects of this violence still affecting daily life today (see Elvy 2015 on sexual violence between people; Fanon 1952, 1963; Glissant 1997; and James 1989 on historical colonial violence on people; see Ferdinand 2021 on colonial violence against the land and environments).

Life is suffused with affectively charged interactions. Being silent, silenced, or quiet does not mean that people do not still navigate mediations of consent and refusal (see Horgan 2024 on the unspoken mediations of gay cruising spaces). People express consent and refusal in daily life, even in situations where access to written or verbal consent is uneven. In contexts where affirmative and informed consent are unavailable, expressions and interpretations of affective (non-)consent become central. Because conditions persist in which people and animals are unable to access ideals of informed or affirmative consent, it is essential to investigate the challenges of recognizing affective (non-)consent.

The microcosm of both people's and monkeys' affective consent and refusal within and outside of these facilities on St. Kitts is shaped by global conversations about animal

experimentation and the broader social and environmental conditions of St. Kitts, which involve rising levels of animosity between competing troops of monkeys and between farmers who are distressed by monkeys. The negotiation of (non-)consent and violence between people and monkeys is the innate challenge of their everyday care in and out of captivity. Analysis of affect can help identify and explain when and how people and animals express refusal, and how and why others succeed or fail to interpret and respect these expressions, ultimately resulting in affective (non-)consent. For example, thinking with affect can clarify the mechanisms by which non-consent is reproduced in instances where, as in both animal care and human sexual violence, someone argues that “their body language was telling me yes.” In this instance, the framework of affective (non-)consent creates an opening for inquiry into how and *why* people misinterpret not only affect but also verbal communication, ultimately resulting in non-consent. Investigating and accounting for the misinterpretation of communication and affect, whether caused by a lack of training or education, personal attitudes, or hetero cis-patriarchal conditioning, can allow for reparative opportunities, such as continuing education, to be conceived in new ways.

## **A Little Bit of Magic**

Sam, a white veterinarian from the United States, recounted to me an anecdote of monkey matchmaking while walking between monkey enclosures, which helped me understand how these broader dynamics play out in the affective encounter.

I had a nice male pair I did recently where there was a bigger male that was getting older and having trouble with his sight. He was getting a little bit aggressive and nervous because he couldn't see very well. He wasn't outwardly gonna cause a problem, but he was nervous. I found a very friendly, smaller, skinnier male who was very open. So I tried the two of them together, and they became best friends. Buddy buddy. This huge old man just got along really well with the younger one. It's not necessarily dominant or subordinate. It's not like the dominant one is going to be stealing all of the others' food and saying, 'This is mine. This is mine.' It's more just that they have to get that hierarchy

out of the way and established. Then, they can be friends, as long as we they all agree who is in charge. One funny part about it too is that if you have two males next to each other, but separated by fence, in different enclosures, and they can see each other. They will not want to get together at that point. It's like they are building animosity with their neighbor, because they're trying to challenge the one next to them. But because of the physical separation, they haven't been able to get their hierarchy sorted out. Those ones are the trickiest. If you want to get monkeys to get along, it is ideally ones that haven't met before, and that are both being moved to a neutral new location, so nobody is defending territory.

Sam, drawing on their learned attunement to the monkey's behaviors, describes a typical instance of affective refusal between two male monkeys. In this telling, the physical separation of the fence is archetypal of the conditions that foster "building animosity" between people and monkeys on St. Kitts, on a broader scale, where the monkey problem is continually deferred by temporary and incomplete measures. Animosity builds among wild, roaming monkey troops that compete for food, among people seeking to keep monkeys from stealing crops from farms and gardens, and differently among captive monkeys in research enclosures.

The specific affective refusal of these two male monkeys, which plays out in a short and violent encounter, is a discharge of the "building animosity" that occurred on a longer timeline. This parallels the even longer timelines of building animosity between people and monkeys in St. Kitts. The violence of non-consent these monkeys experience when placed together is an expression that carries the weight of circumstances long established: their introduction to St. Kitts by humans, their capture and rearing in the laboratory, and the food insecurity experienced by both people and monkeys on the island. The monkeys are limited in their capacity to negotiate agreement and refusal by the conditions in the facility, the conditions which encourage the presence of these facilities, and the broader cycles of historical and ongoing violence experienced by Caribbean people and animals.

The process of monkey matchmaking is labor-intensive, requiring consideration of scientific agendas, funding sources, human capacity to perform the work, and monkeys' own desires. Monkeys' nonverbal responses provide valuable scientific information that technicians spend significant time observing. Technicians spend months training to decipher this nonverbal lexicon of monkeys' behaviors, and how those behaviors could express various levels of contentment and discontentment with their housing arrangements. Technicians perform their jobs by learning how to interpret affective consent and non-consent in monkeys. Affective consent, both for monkeys and for the people interpreting it, relies on cultivated attunement. Coming to know how beings communicate happens slowly over time and requires a granular level of attention to animals' body language and bodily state. It can be challenging, if not impossible, for people to interpret affective consent and non-consent in non-human animals without training to attain this expertise. Even after training, interpretation is not a perfect process.

Though they had the process down to a science, employees' personal attitudes still played a role. "The younger technicians are very on board with helping me with that process. The older ones are not — I think they're feeling resistant to change, because this is a new set of practices. I think the younger generation coming in and being most of the workforce now is really changing a lot in a good direction," Sam described to me. The process of consent and refusal between monkeys was not reliant on the composition of the human veterinary technician staff, but it was certainly affected by it. Each staff member had a varying level of sensitivity to monkeys, which also contributed to varying levels of success in interpreting their affective consent and non-consent, and, subsequently, in caring for them.

An interpreter of affective (non-)consent relies on multiple overlapping attunements that extend beyond scientific expertise. Sam once reflected to me, "the monkey matchmaking process

takes a little bit of formula, a little bit of magic.” Magic, in this sense, stands in for the numerous unknowable variables that are all coalescing in the present. Despite this unfathomable complexity, staff are increasingly successful at the process of monkey matchmaking. Beyond scientifically and empirically determined analyses of green monkeys’ behaviors, people who care for monkeys cultivate an affective attunement to the monkeys’ ways of being that builds on their pre-existing understandings of the broader social, cultural, and ecological conditions of their environment.

It is also due to this complexity that informed and affirmative consent are already unevenly accessible to people. Interpreting affective (non-)consent relies on attunement to individuals’ behaviors, social dynamics, and the broader cultural, economic, and political dynamics from which affect is produced. The monkeys’ brief moment of violent refusal is constitutive of building animosity in the monkey problem. Local historical and contemporary conditions inform the choices both people and monkeys can make in the laboratory. In this way, primatological and scientific understandings are necessary but not sufficient for accurately interpreting affective consent and non-consent. The interpreter must paradoxically draw on their connection to their own humanness to analyze the affect of a non-human animal (see Ticktin 2014). Although the framework of affective consent may be generalizable, the actual practices of interpreting, translating, and respecting affective (non-)consent are locally produced. It requires knowledge of local social and cultural dynamics to make sense of them.

Affective consent contributes to existing conversations that seek to theorize the mediations of consent in both human and animal contexts. Building on Greenhough and Roe’s (2011) call for ethics for animal experimentation that are situated and sensitive to affect, Blattner (2020) proposes the framework of “embodied consent,” a two-part consent process that

emphasizes *interpretation* and *protection* (104, 106). Interpretation refers to how experts utilize their knowledge to recognize how “animals readily use their bodies, their facial expressions, and their chemical, olfactory, and other senses, to communicate willingness to embark on or to reject a project” (103-104). Protection refers to determinations about animals’ best interests and well-being through the collective elaboration of established legal rules to minimize risk, force, and harm (105). Embodied consent critiques and builds on consent by proxy through its focus on community responsibility for honoring animals’ voices, offering a model that prioritizes animals’ capacity for self- and co-determination (110).

Embodied consent is an aspirational and prescriptive model that people can strive for to create safe environments where animals are respected and valued (Van Patter and Blattner 2020). In contrast, affective consent is not prescriptive but descriptive. Affective consent describes the imperfect process I observed through which humans and animals interpret each other's affective signals as they navigate and negotiate their daily lives – a framework that troubles and expands on Blattner’s notion of interpretation. Affective consent offers a distinct intervention from embodied consent in that it describes the ways that (1) affect is always locally produced, and so may be limited in its generalizability across species, geographies, and cultures; (2) the interpretation of affect is always imperfect, because it is subject to indeterminacy, what my interlocuter called “a little bit of magic,”; and (3) humans default to affective mediations in contexts where they are silenced or marginalized by uneven power relations. Whereas embodied consent offers a model for improving animal research and care, affective consent describes the imperfect process already happening.

Affective consent is communicated through nonverbal cues, including body language, sounds, and physical releases such as unavoidable and uncontrollable corporeal expressions,

including fluids (blood, urine, tears, sweat, excrement), and involuntary movements. The recognition and interpretation of affective consent rely on sensorial exposures and visceral impressions. Like embodied consent, affective consent seeks to incorporate existing categories of behavior, including assent, dissent, and acquiescence, as important but insufficient descriptions of experience.

At the same time, there are substantial challenges in recognizing affective (non-)consent, such as the intensive time and training required for animal care technicians to cultivate attunement to green monkeys. Indeterminacy, as theorized by Nadasdy (2021), describes the conflicting and paradoxical forms of being and knowledge that exist in the world. Failure and trial-and-error are inherent to the process of interpreting affective consent because of indeterminacy – affect does not necessarily have only one correct interpretation. Affective consent extends beyond assent, dissent, and acquiescence, offering a distinct framework from embodied consent, in that it seeks to encompass the imperfect, the unknowable, indeterminacy, and the “magic” of successful communication that occurs despite these limitations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focuses on monkey matchmaking, which is the least violent and controversial aspect of monkey research in St. Kitts laboratories. Most invasive pre-clinical drug testing occurs while animals are sedated, during which they become unable to respond or react. Sedation is important for protecting the well-being of both staff and animal research subjects, but the interpretation of affective (non-)consent becomes impossible after sedation is administered to animals. As the goal of this chapter is to show how an analytical acknowledgment and focus on affective (non-)consent may ultimately assist in understanding multi-species structures of

injustice, which Eva Meijer (2023) demonstrates are globally connected forms of oppression that affect both humans and animals, this chapter focuses on aspects of animal care, such as monkey matchmaking, where animals are not sedated.

Every primate species has significantly different behaviors. Green monkeys on St. Kitts have been documented to exhibit distinct behaviors, troop sizes, and foraging patterns compared to those of green monkeys elsewhere (Chapman 1985; Dore et al. 2023). In this chapter, I focus on the mediations of affective consent specifically between people and green monkeys on St. Kitts. The mediations of affective consent for the actors in this chapter will differ from those in other settings and contexts. Additionally, the behaviors of primates, such as green monkeys, are generally more perceptible to people and better researched than those of different animal species (see Hobson-West and Davies 2018, for consideration of sentience across various animal species in research).

Davies (2012) argues that rather than seeking universal principles to protect animals from harm, researchers should focus on the particular and situated entanglements of animal and human suffering. Davies, in ethnographic observations of laboratory mice, found that even individual mutations and personality traits change a being's unique expressions of affect. At the same time, Davies believes that a focus on the shared experiences of suffering among humans and animals can serve to connect the disparate affective capacities of different beings across space and time. This chapter builds on Davies's call to draw attention to the specific affective mediations of suffering through a focus on non-consent experienced by both people and animals. While the particular mediations of affective consent that are discussed in this chapter may not be generalizable to other contexts, the framework of affective consent offers an analytic and semiotic opportunity to reconsider how we understand consent and non-consent for animals and

people, even in conditions of limited choice, whether those caused by experimental protocols, uneven flows of power, restricting policies, or limiting environments. While this study focused on the laboratory environment, affective consent can be relevant to other contexts. My future research will examine its mediating mechanisms across other human and animal contexts to explore its generalizability and its utility for legal and educational applications.

Scientists and laboratory technicians can only interpret monkeys' affect after substantial training and education. Even at its best, monkey matchmaking, which relies on humans' attunement to affective (non-)consent, still involves some degree of failure. This attunement was learned, and could be improved, but was always imperfect. This imperfection is due to indeterminacy: affect is the result of numerous ineffable coalescing circumstances. This is one of the significant innate limitations that people face in interpreting affective consent. Paying attention to affect may elucidate what scientists experience as the "magical" aspects of consent, or the mechanisms of (non-)consent which current language and thinking around consent are unable to illuminate sufficiently.

## Chapter 4: Sedation and Desensitization

What if the other cannot be known? What if difference cannot be recognized? What other languages could we use to talk about cohabitation and the multiple temporalities of modernity? Would acknowledgment, rather than recognition, allow for a different politics of life, beyond the logics of understanding and sovereignty? I understand “acknowledgment” as the political and ethical act of surrendering the desire to know through already established categories and of accepting the challenges of difference and the possibility of not knowing, not understanding, and thus embracing uncertainty. Acknowledgment calls for a coming to terms with the fact that difference exceeds categories; the other cannot be assigned a fixed identity, only an opaque and shifting sense of belonging. This kind of relation to difference requires struggling with categories of recognition, undoing them in order to realize that there is no identity contained in them. I thus see acknowledgment as a space for what Jacques Rancière (1999) calls politics, where the other’s difference introduces change in established discourses and thus discards preexisting identities. (Giordano 2014, page 9).

### Sedation

Monkey matchmaking, the focus of Chapter 3, is the cornerstone for the well-being and reproduction of the captive monkey subject. I argued that affective consent — how animals and people interpret the expression of consent or refusal through affective cues such as body language — is a central component of that process. In Chapter 4, we examine the process of animal sedation. Sedation is the process by which these same experimental monkey subjects are rendered unable to respond or communicate in any way, dramatically altering the manifestations of affect within the laboratory.

Within the frameworks of informed and affirmative consent, it is currently held that people cannot consent under sedation or when they are intoxicated. A common example of this is after consuming alcohol, which changes people’s perception and decision-making processes. Intoxication is generally understood as removing one’s ability to offer consent, not because one is necessarily so sedated that they cannot speak or understand, but because the possibility of making decisions is in itself changed by the introduction of the effects of the toxicant. In being

sedated and in being experimented on under sedation, animals are no longer able to express refusal through body language — affective consent entirely becomes impossible.

Sedation is an important safety measure for both laboratory staff and the monkeys themselves. Monkeys are sedated prior to participating in preclinical drug testing or diagnostic procedures, which may be uncomfortable at best and invasive, painful, or even harmful at worst. Interpreting affective consent requires observing monkeys' changes in affect across multiple temporal scales. Monkeys cannot offer affective consent under sedation whatsoever, but their bodies do still have affect. Affect can include visceral bodily reactions that do not require being awake, such as blood, bruising, and excrement. Consent ultimately becomes insufficient as a metric for well-being during sedation, where the goal shifts from respecting refusal to determining what forms of harm are ethical and necessary for the scientific process. At the same time, scientists continue to be attuned to affect — and to visceral bodily reactions — as they try to limit other forms of harm beyond the scope of those ethical decisions.

In considering sedation, this chapter shifts to the question of how laboratory staff are made desensitized to bodily violence against monkeys through the process of invasive scientific experimentation on sedated primates. At these facilities, where numerous instances of sexual assault and violence have occurred over the past three decades, my interlocutors question whether desensitization to bodily violence on monkeys contributes to the desensitization of bodily violence against people. Building on Chapter 2's exploration of attunement and the senses, I argue that the creation of the laboratory space relies on two forms of desensitization — forced desensitization of monkeys through sedation, and learned desensitization of people through the process of acculturation to the laboratory and the violence that is a part of its procedures. Even as these violent laboratory procedures are important for the scientific process

and may result in significant biomedical progress, they have affective consequences for people who become desensitized to violence and then reenact it in other forms. I theorize that much like sedation compromises one's ability to make decisions and offer consent, the process of socialized desensitization — of becoming desensitized to violence due to a culture that normalizes violence as something mundane — also compromises one's capacity to navigate consent and refusal.

## **The Standards of Scientific Experimentation**

Just as human subjects research goes through a process of ethics review through Institutional Review Boards, animal subjects research goes through a process of ethics review through Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) or Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) (see Poort et al. 2013). For research sponsored by a University, IACUCs review research protocols, weigh risks and benefits, and determine whether the research is sufficiently ethical to receive approval. AECs follow a similar process, but for research not sponsored directly by a university but by a private entity such as a pharmaceutical company. Because this process generally consists of reviewing documentation rather than observing affect at the facilities where this research takes place, there can be significant differences between the proposed project and its actual execution.

One way animal researchers establish a standard for animal care is through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). SOPs articulate the processes of animal care, handling, and experimentation into component steps. One of the first SOPs that new hires learn is about how to sedate a green monkey. The first step of this SOP requires injecting a monkey with a solution of ketamine and xylazine. Then, they would wait for the monkey to be fully sedated, possibly

administering more of the drug cocktail if needed, before transferring them to a research center. After reading each SOP, staff were required to take virtual quizzes on a tablet to ensure they retained knowledge of the procedures.

A few days after learning about SOPs, I accompanied Hari, a Black Kittitian animal technician in his early thirties, to one of the enclosures where experimental subjects actively enrolled in studies were kept in individual cages. Hari, I learned, had been working at the facility for over ten years in his current role. He had joined the facility straight out of high school.

Hari quickly and efficiently grasped the leg of the monkey through the metal bars of the cage. His movements were assured and efficient. The monkey struggled against him, flailing its limbs, but was unable to reach him through the metal fencing. This was a clear instance of affective non-consent — the monkey was expressing refusal that was being ignored. Hari smoothly injected its leg with a syringe filled with a sedative. He then went around and did this to 3 more monkeys. I was uncomfortable but felt reassured by Hari's calmness. He explained that each monkey had a unique personality and responded differently to handling. Some would fawn, preferring not to struggle. Others were aggressive, actively fighting Hari's grasp, trying to swipe at him, escape from him, or even bite him.

Hari taught me that the sedation process was as much about observing the animals' behavior as about following the SOPs. Though the amount of sedative could be estimated based on the animal's size and body weight, the most important thing was interpreting the monkey's body signals. He lifted and dropped the arm of A812, one of the experimental monkeys who had been sedated. "See how he's still awake? We're going to give him some more [sedative] because we don't want to risk getting bitten." Handling the monkeys seemed simple and natural to Hari. These multisensory attunements that Hari and other laboratory technicians developed over time

enabled them to perform laboratory procedures on animal research subjects, navigating both SOP guidelines and animals' attempts to resist them.

The process of animal sedation is one example of animal care that relies on informed consent by proxy (see Janssens 2024). Hari and other technicians like him were instructed to ignore the animals' refusal and to enact a particular procedure. This procedure relies on attunement to affective consent and refusal: the laboratory technician responds to animals' behaviors, grabbing them or adjusting sedative levels as needed to achieve a fully sedated state. Before sedation, the animals either offer affective consent to sedation — they fawn, or they allow themselves to be grabbed and injected, or they offer affective refusal by biting, swiping, or jumping around. These behaviors are not ignored, insofar as the technician still notices and responds to them, but the affective refusal is not respected in itself, ultimately resulting in affective non-consent. For informed consent by proxy to be possible, the process through which a proxy decides on behalf of an animal already involves attunement to affective consent. Directing our attention to affective forms of (non-)consent is important because it encourages thinking beyond the individual relationships between two people or two animals to consider structural, social, and cultural factors that ultimately create the context within which consent is requested, given, refused, or ignored.

The unconscious, sedated monkey becomes unable to offer any form of response. At this point, interpreting affect becomes significantly more challenging, as animals become unable to consciously respond to stimuli. The animals may still have visceral responses to certain stimuli — for example, urinating or defecating while sedated, or flinching in response to pain, bleeding, or other visceral actions that can occur unconsciously. These visceral reactions are also forms of affect that can be interpreted by a laboratory technician. However, the process of sedation

significantly narrows the affective possibilities of a given moment, making affective (non-)consent significantly more challenging, or even impossible, to interpret in the present moment, especially when harm is not immediately visible.

When the animal is sedated and unable to consciously respond, SOPs hold staff accountable for the monkey's ethical treatment, as determined by approval from an IACUC or AEC. SOPs enforce the ethos of scientific expertise over the facility and its research management. The written SOP guidelines establish a different consent framework within which research technicians can function in a manner deemed ethical by an authority, with minimal harm to the animals and consideration of their suffering and well-being, thereby circumventing monkey responses. In this way, by following the instructions in an SOP, the laboratory technician can act within the conditions consented to by these governing bodies and funding sponsors, who have predetermined which forms of treatment are ethical.

In animal ethics as currently defined, informed consent by proxy requires designating a third party as the proxy. I observed that institutional authority was, at times, the proxy for the consent of both individual humans and monkeys. In the excerpt above, Hari was not an advocate or a proxy for the animal's consent, but rather an agent of his employers, acting within a paradigm established by the authority of the institutions and protocols that inform his vocation.

Sedating animals is a method to ensure the safety of both laboratory technicians and the animals. The laboratory technician determines the degree of sedation a monkey experiences using a formula that accounts for multiple variables, including the monkey's size and weight, the duration of sedation required for the study procedures, and the subjective interpretation of bodily signals. The technician's ability to read the monkey's affective signals is the cornerstone of this laboratory procedure. This example shows that scientific protocols and affect are rarely, if ever,

entirely disentangled. Not only do they inform one another, but they are also subject to external flows of power and authority beyond the parties immediately present. According to the guidelines for informed consent by proxy, technicians serve as proxies for determining what is in an animal's best interest. However, the reality is that the laboratory technicians act on behalf of the facility that hired them, and the IACUCs and AECs that support the facility's authority. When animals are sedated, and affective interpretation becomes challenging or almost impossible, the standard operating procedures become the primary protection for the research subject. I heard numerous stories of former employees who were fired or let go for failing to follow these protocols or for failing to adequately care for the monkeys' well-being.

Animals become research subjects through contractual agreements between researchers and institutions, which govern the ethics of experimentation and what it means to be a research subject in a particular time and place. Different institutional authorities, including those of these scientific facilities, are shaped by social currents that grant them power, such as affiliations and sponsorships from pharmaceutical companies, universities, donors, and governments (see Gameiro and Quet 2023). Researchers and institutions seek and give consent to one another, and animal research subjects are the resources upon whom their scientific authority is then enacted. In this way, SOPs serve as a consent-like procedure that ensures animals are treated well enough to prevent undermining the research itself.

## **The Persistence of Small Violences**

Soon after the sedation took effect, Hari began transferring the animals from their cages into a wheelbarrow. I watched as he threw one of the sedated monkeys into the wheelbarrow. As it flew through the air, its limbs flailed. I released an audible gasp as I heard A812's head bang

against the side of the wheelbarrow. Hari was unfazed and repeated this with multiple other monkeys.

Though IACUCs and AECs protect animals, they simultaneously create conditions in which animals may experience potentially traumatic forms of non-consent and other harm. Once animals are sedated and are unable to communicate refusal, consent in this setting is obtained from human proxies rather than from the animals themselves. For example, certain forms of violence *are* deemed ethical — like using certain forms of controlled harm to induce diseases in monkeys, like COVID-19, diabetes, or even neurodegeneration. Inducing these conditions is a form of controlled violence that is deemed ethical and necessary for the scientific process of testing drugs for safety and efficacy of treatment. Hari, I believe, in this instance, was actually enacting violence on sedated monkeys that the facility had not accounted for, and which the management would deem unnecessary.

Individual laboratory technicians handled their jobs differently. Some, like Hari, who viewed the monkeys as pests, did not care for their well-being beyond the minimum required to fulfill their jobs. Others with a higher level of sensitivity recognized the violence but explained it as a sacrifice in the name of the greater good produced by animal research. It is the responsibility of laboratory technicians, as agents of a proxy board or body, to interpret both SOPs and the animals' behavior to determine how they will accomplish animal care and scientific experimentation. However, significant other biases also shape these decisions. The small violence that Hari enacted, of throwing rather than carefully transferring the monkeys into the wheelbarrow, was the kind of detail that SOPs fail to capture or hold people accountable for. The sedation of the animals also made them vulnerable to abuse of this kind.

In a later conversation, without naming Hari, I shared what I had witnessed with Casey, a supervising veterinarian at the facility who was from the United States. They sighed. “I know the kind of thing you’re talking about. I’ve been trying to educate the locals about how to best care for animals. We’ve been having a lot of success with the newer hires, but some of the more seasoned employees are still resistant. Hating monkeys is ingrained in them since childhood.” I understood then that while this violence was certainly one that I viewed as unethical, and one that this veterinarian viewed as unnecessary, it was also naturalized as part of the processes of the facility. This veterinarian was not surprised by my anecdote and rather understood it to be in line with their own experience of the facility’s operations.

SOPs cannot, and ultimately fail to, capture every aspect of the handling dynamic. Both people and monkeys often defy and resist the expectations placed on them. Scientists utilize split-second decisions, informed by cultivated responses and understandings of the monkey’s physical, auditory, and social expressions, to execute scientific protocols. SOPs are very comprehensive, but neither written procedures nor management oversight is sufficient to control every action required to conduct scientific research. Sometimes, even the awareness of management or animal care staff is insufficient to stop the normalized, frequent repetition of unnecessary forms of harm in the facility’s operations.

The laboratory practices at these facilities point to a broader culture of ambivalence towards animals that has been shifting since I first visited St. Kitts in 2017. There has been a significant effort to improve the quality of life for research animals, led primarily by the veterinarians at the facilities. The well-being of these monkeys was not only a matter of good or ethical treatment of animals, but also a component of maintaining high-quality science itself — happier, healthier animals meant that research studies were more likely to yield good results. For

this reason, scientists are constantly working towards more comprehensive procedures, training, and documentation. Yet, small violences persist. For a sedated animal that cannot express any form of affective consent or refusal, SOPs are of the utmost importance, as they are the only means of protecting that animal's welfare and well-being. These contractual safeguards are also insufficient to protect the animals.

Scientific procedures can protect captive animals, but violence against green monkeys is naturalized within the social currents and dynamics of the islands' recombinant cultures and ecologies. Greater attention to instances of affective consent and non-consent is an analytic approach that can account for interactions and encounters that lie outside of the technical imaginary of SOPs. However, in many instances, affective (non-)consent is an insufficient framework for understanding harm that occurs in research settings that purposefully sedate animals to render them unable to respond. In such instances, we must look at the visceral components of affect — bruises, bleeding, bodily discharges — and at changes in attitude, demeanor, and well-being, only traceable over time, to try to interpret the long-term effects of the harms of cyclical affective (non-)consent.

In this example, I observed the experiences of sedated animals who cannot express refusal because they are unconscious. Veterinarians trying to prevent or intervene in such instances of harm must then pay attention to different forms of affect, which occur over longer time-lines, to try to understand and intervene on the myriad of different possible iterations of harm these monkeys are subjected to, some of which are necessary to the scientific process and so deemed ethical and acceptable, and others which are not. While the continued evolution and refinement of procedures and training may, step by step, help eliminate violent oversights, it may also never do so entirely.

The landscape within which these violences emerge can be better understood through analysis of affect as it is produced in the local social and physical environment. Hari threw these monkeys not because he was malicious towards them, but because he lived in an environment where it was normalized to hunt monkeys and think of them as invasive pests. For Hari, his interpretation of the SOPs also involved his pre-determined cultural and social assumptions about the green monkeys of St. Kitts, in the context of building animosity in the monkey problem.

By analyzing the social and cultural assumptions that informed Hari's decision to commit violence against these monkeys while they were sedated, we can also better understand *why* and *how* these instances of violence occurred. In this way, analysis of affect has practical implications for the treatment of animals in and outside of the laboratory. After sedation, affective consent becomes impossible because the animals are stripped of the ability to refuse. However, other forms of affect persist, such as long-term behavioral changes in these animals that may evidence the harm of being thrown into the wheelbarrow over a different timescale. The impacts of harm still produce affect, but interpreting this affect is significantly more challenging. In this case, focusing on *harm* and *violence* rather than consent is important. Tracing the enactment of non-consent *and* other forms of harm and violence beyond law, policy, or laboratory procedures, as well as the social conditions that contribute to their cyclical recurrence, is part of the challenge faced by veterinarians and others attuned to animal care.

## Noticing Difference

The air is filled with the smell of poop, and the sounds of numerous green monkeys jumping, playing, socializing, and vocalizing. Ami, a Black Kittitian animal technician in her late

twenties, is walking me through the group enclosures of a monkey research facility. Amid an otherwise loud and active environment, one enclosure is quiet. This group of monkeys lay down on the ground, moving slowly and noticeably less active than the others around them. One of them grooms the fur of another. Hari tells me,

These are our old ladies. Green monkeys usually live 10 to 12 years in the wild, but here in the laboratory, they don't have the same stress to find food or compete with others. They have health care and vaccines. They live a long time—more than 20 years. We used them in studies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Now we are just taking care of them for the last few years of their lives, keeping them comfortable.

I learned from my research that scientists considered green monkeys on St. Kitts to be among the most fortunate captive primate research subjects in the world. The quality of life at these facilities, wherein social enclosures are often outdoors and permeable to diverse and interesting stimuli from changing seasons and passing fauna, is significantly better than at comparable facilities in the United States, which are often completely indoors and house monkeys solely in individual cages (Kofman 2025).

The example of neurodegeneration research with these “old ladies” is a subset of the numerous biomedical and behavioral research and testing activities that occur at these facilities. Neurodegeneration is the progressive deterioration and death of cells in the brain and spinal cord. It can lead to incurable and debilitating conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, motor problems, and cognitive decline. Neurodegenerative diseases are emerging as profoundly significant global health challenges, closely linked to the demographic shift toward aging populations and the potential long-term repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Neurodegeneration research increasingly relies on animal models to test drug safety. Scientists endeavor to stabilize neurodegeneration, a form of physiological instability and deterioration, which is increasingly reproducible and sustainable in animal research subjects.

There are two ways to do this. The first is to rear animal research subjects that live long enough to develop neurodegeneration naturally. This is called a “**naturalistic model.**” These old ladies are lucky, insofar as they were part of a naturalistic study. They were treated for the symptoms of neurodegeneration they developed in their old age, and then observed to see the safety and efficacy of the treatment.

This contrasts with other research wherein scientists purposefully induce analogs of diseases of aging, such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and related dementias, in primates. This is called the “**experimental model.**” In the experimental model, “inducing analogs” generally refers to scientists selectively damaging or decomposing parts of monkeys' brains. One example of this is that scientists will inject monkeys' brains directly with a virus or a toxic substance like tetrodotoxin – puffer fish poison – to induce neurodegeneration. This controlled form of harm then produces neurodegeneration. Scientists then test medicines and treatments meant to slow or reverse these symptoms on the monkeys they harmed to determine their efficacy and safety before they ever reach human subjects testing.

These old ladies on St. Kitts are, Ami tells me, considered among the most privileged captive monkey experimental subjects in the world. Ami attended college in the United States. She recalls that when she worked with experimental primates as a research assistant during her undergraduate studies, they were extremely unhappy. Those monkeys, she remembers, were bored out of their minds — confined to underground laboratories where they did not see the light of day. In contrast, these monkeys on St. Kitts are housed in outdoor facilities in social enclosures and are well cared for by a team of dedicated staff who provide food, enrichment activities, and free healthcare. Most experimental primates worldwide do not experience this

quality of life. A majority of experimental primates worldwide are housed indoors and are increasingly subjected to experimental studies that harm them, rather than naturalistic studies.

In both models, disabling monkeys — whether through induced harm or by keeping them alive into old age — increases their scientific utility and monetary value. Both the well-being and the disease of experimental animals, whether naturally occurring or artificially induced, are ultimately valuable because they are necessary for biomedical progress.

## **The Valley of Death**

The differences between what the American veterinarian viewed as ethical and what Kittitian laboratory technicians like Hari interpret as ethical reflect a phenomenon that anthropologist Adriana Petryna (2005) calls ethical variability. Based on ethnographic observations of transnational clinical trials testing drugs on people, Petryna uses the term “ethical variability” to refer to the flexible, inconsistent application of international ethical guidelines in globalized clinical trials, where standards are adapted or lowered in response to local economic and political conditions. One example of this is how, in low-income settings, patients are more often treated as subjects rather than partners in care, and safety reporting becomes erratic. International ethical guidelines, in these cases, are insufficient to protect research subjects from exploitation, especially where research practices and local conceptions of ethics differ significantly across different countries and cultures. Petryna found that contracted research organizations (CROs) and pharmaceutical companies would benefit from ethical variability, taking advantage of inconsistent regulatory and economic access to accelerate drug development and profit.

The landscape for animal research is different but not dissimilar from that of human transnational clinical trials. Animal models research exists in what scientists have dubbed “the valley of death.” This valley is the rift between basic scientific bench research and clinical research, such as testing treatments, diagnostics, and prevention for safety and efficacy in actual people that Petryna observed. Translation from basic science to human clinical studies forms a critical path. On the left, we have preclinical drug, diagnostic, and treatment discovery. While this research is conducted in a laboratory setting, scientists often have clinical goals and applications in mind for their work. On the right, we have clinical research, in which drugs deemed sufficiently safe for human testing are studied to determine their clinical potential. Between these two lies “the valley of death,” a space where little funding and support are available. Drug testing on animals, like the kind that happens to green monkeys on St. Kitts, occurs in this valley of death, which means that people who participate in it, whether in academia or industry, face significant challenges in securing investments of time, attention, and money for their work. They create cheap forms of labor, like the animal technicians on St. Kitts, who were paid just above minimum wage, to make the care of these animals sustainable and affordable. This cheap labor is maintained by broader social and economic conditions on the island, as these wages are equivalent to what employees could earn elsewhere. At the same time, scientists see novel methods for disabling monkeys as a form of progress. In this way, the very definitions of disability and utility are reframed by the infrastructures and affects upon which they rely. The SOPs are the intersection of transnational regulation and local practice.

Scientists I interviewed held differing views on the efficacy and ethics of both naturalistic and induced research models. For example, scientists working at the Behavioral Science Facility (BSF) on St. Kitts favor utilizing older monkeys with naturally occurring symptoms of

neurodegeneration. They frame the naturalistic model as more effective scientifically, in that no undue harm is being done to the monkeys. Naturalistic studies, they believe, are more likely to accurately reflect the physiological mechanisms of neurodegeneration in humans. In contrast, scientists working at the Biomedical Research Facility on St. Kitts (SKBRF) favor the experimental model because it is more efficient and consistently produces large numbers of suitable animal subjects for research at a lower cost. Scientists, I came to understand, use the jargon of experimental and naturalistic studies to express ethical and moral decisions under the guise of objective science. The justifications they gave for their decisions were framed as methodological rather than ethical or moral, despite their significant ethical and moral ramifications for the lives of experimental monkeys.

In both naturalistic and experimental models, green monkeys are valued as super-abled research subjects. The central motivations of medicine are purported to be treatment, cure, and palliation. In contrast, disabling monkeys in research increases their scientific utility and their monetary value. The capacities of pharmaceuticals to harm and to treat are both potential sites of utility. For example, in experimental models, novel approaches to inducing neurodegeneration in monkeys constitute scientific progress.

The valley of death, a human-constructed problem of funding availability and research priorities, can produce new forms of value for the transnational pharmaceutical economies and pre-clinical animal models of disease research that benefit from it. These transnational conditions then decompose the ethical obligations of researchers, rendering death, disability, and damage not only normalized but also forms of progress to which people actively become desensitized. At the same time, oversights and minor, non-regulated violence hinder this research process and undermine the independent variables needed for this science to be valid: the well-being of

monkeys and the reproducibility of research procedures. Unintended harm and violence, like Hari throwing sedated monkeys into a wheelbarrow, hinder the progressive and controlled violence of the scientific process.

## **Non-Consent**

In September 2023, I had just moved my entire life to St. Kitts for my fieldwork. Lottie, a former laboratory technician from one of the facilities, was in the driver's seat beside me. The sun was setting, but we couldn't see it as the last winds and rains of Tropical Storm Philippe were passing. She drove up to Monkey Bar, a popular evening destination for dinner and drinks for tourists and locals alike. We were lucky to find a parking spot just across the road. Monkey Bar was one of several bars all lined up along a narrow road, a popular destination called "the Strip." Even on a Sunday, during a tropical storm, cars were packed in tight. We were in the middle of the island's wet season, which spans from July to December every year. We ran from the car to the restaurant's entrance through the sideways rain. The waiter pointed to a few seats in the back corner, the only ones left unclaimed. The water was already beginning to evaporate off us by the time we sat down.

I looked across the table to Lottie. The occasional spray of warm rain would drift towards us when a gust of wind picked up. Monkey Bar was notorious for having long wait times. We sipped on mixed drinks. Reggae music played in the background. It was loud, but something about the ceaseless noise created a sense of privacy between us.

Now dis one dedicated to the girls dem  
Wid di angel face and the devil heart  
Yuh kno say ragamuffin Chaka Demus an' yute  
Pliers come to deal with case  
Step up my yute, hear dis!

“You know, this song is about abortions?” Lottie said to me. Though I had only arrived back in St. Kitts to start my year of fieldwork about two weeks earlier, I’d already heard the same song at least a dozen times.

Murder she wrote (fi real, fi real)  
Murder she wrote  
Murder she wrote  
Murder she wrote

It was good to see Lottie. We had kept in touch over Instagram, but it had been 6 years since we’d seen one another in person. “Things are so backward here on the island. I’m surprised you came back,” she said to me. “Just listen to the music. ‘Murder she wrote.’ He’s talking about her killing a baby. They still believe women shouldn’t get abortions here.”

Now every middle of the year dis girl go have abortion  
Fi di coolie white man, Indian, no seekin' an infant  
An jus' di other day me, see her six months pregnant  
Now she walk pass with a girl with other baby in a pram.

“How have you been? Since everything happened at Bourryeau?” I had met Lottie when I had worked as an intern at the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Facility (SKBRF). Bourryea was the name of the former slave-holding estate upon which SKBRF had been built. Like many of the conversations I would have in the following months, she was curious but cautious to bring up the past.

After complaints from employees and interns at the SKBRF, Dr. Eugene Redmond, the founder and former president of SKBRF, was found guilty of sexual misconduct with at least 13 students from 1990 to 2018. Redmond was a professor at the Yale School of Medicine. Following my report to the University-Wide Committee for Sexual Misconduct, the University launched a legal investigation in 2009, led by attorney Deirdre M. Daly. The details of these events are well recorded and publicly available, and will be further discussed in Chapter 5 (Daly

2019). I was a former intern at SKBRF in 2017, the last time Redmond accepted interns at the facility.

During my ethnographic research, the Redmond story came up numerous times in conversations with my interlocutors. My time working on the island and the connections I had made as an intern at SKBRF would ultimately grant me unprecedented ethnographic access. Yet this access was flavored with guilt and apologies. I was always associated with the violence that Redmond had enacted. It haunted my interactions.

Lottie was eager to share the aftermath with me from her perspective. “After the report of Dr. Redmond and his removal from the University and the monkey farm,” she was referring to how Redmond had been voted off the board of directors for SKBRF after what happened, “it was a massive shock to the whole community.”

“Suigetsu was so shocked when the news came out. He had had no idea.” Suigetsu was a scientist and researcher who had mentored me during my internship and had been a long-time collaborator of Redmond’s. “He visibly cried at a meeting where Matt shared the news with everyone at our weekly all-staff meeting. I had never seen him cry before.” Matt was Dr. Matthew Lawrence, the current CEO of SKBRF, a former intern himself and student of Redmond’s. We sat in the weight of the conversation for a moment. Lottie let out a long sigh. “Matt shared that he had also had ‘an encounter’ back when he was an intern in college here. In the 1990s. But he didn’t give any details.” She lowered her voice. “Do you think he [Matt] *really* didn’t know?”

Seh girl yuh pretty  
Yuh face is pretty, but yuh character dirty  
Gal yuh just act too, flirt, y flirty  
Yuh run to Tom, Dick, an' also Harry  
An' when yuh find yuh mistake  
Yuh talk 'bout yuh sorry, sorry, sorry

Other conversations I had already had with former employees at SKBRF had contained similar content. People often had questions about my decision to return to St. Kitts after everything that happened. They were worried, they said, about me, and the emotional weight of it all. One person even asked me, “Are you sure you aren’t here on a mission from vengeance?”

Lottie went on to share that, a year later, in 2019, she herself was assaulted by someone else who worked at the research facility. “He had a wife, so I thought he just wanted to be my friend,” she told me. “I didn’t expect a married man to act so improperly.” She had gone on to report him. He no longer worked at SKBRF. “You can’t tell anyone,” Lottie cautioned me. “He told my boyfriend. And my boyfriend broke up with me. Can you believe that? And then rumors about me started going around the facility.” Lottie gave a long, emphatic sigh. “*Men*.” In this last exclamation of *men*, I understood that Lottie was referencing how the patterns of power in these dynamics were often gendered. Lottie is, like many of the interlocutors I reference, a composite actor – not an individual interlocutor but a representative figure blended from the traits, stories, and experiences of multiple real-life participants (see Yim & Schwartz-Shea 2022). The most important reason I have chosen to write this way is to protect participant anonymity: crafting composite personas helps safeguard the identities of vulnerable participants, making it impossible for readers to pinpoint real individuals.

When I worked as an intern at SKBRF in 2017, one of my fellow interns had also been assaulted by a different coworker. As an intern, I also heard multiple stories from other staff who had experienced gendered sexual harassment in the form of uncomfortable comments. Many of these stories were shared with me in passing as though they were mundane — simply part of daily life at these facilities, not as exceptional.

After my return to St. Kitts for ethnographic fieldwork years later, I continued to hear stories about instances of sexual violence at these facilities, even though I did not explicitly ask about them. In response to general questions about the experience of working at these facilities, four separate interlocutors recounted instances of sexual assault that they observed or experienced since 2017, involving themselves and other co-workers. Fifteen other interlocutors recounted instances of sexual harassment they had personally experienced. Sexual harassment is a wide spectrum, which can range from subtle non-verbal behaviors and passing comments like jokes to intimidation, stalking, and sexual assault. Many of these interlocutors experienced sexual harassment as part of a hostile or intimidating environment. While a majority of these anecdotes came from women who had experienced sexual harassment by men, there were also a few instances of sexual harassment in other gender combinations. Many of these instances also occurred within unequal power dynamics, such as between supervisors and their subordinates, or between older individuals and more senior staff, as well as younger, more recent hires. I estimate that, accounting for staff turnover, there were fewer than 150 employees across all 3 monkey farms on St. Kitts during my research period from 2022 to 2025. Considering that these facilities are quite small, the amount of sexual harassment that was recounted to me was significant.

I was sad to hear from Lottie that non-consensual violence between coworkers had even affected her. Lottie continued,

[The research manager]’s gone off the rails. He’s become more strict and less forgiving about the work. ‘Get it done my way, or get out.’ He started hiring a lot of new people. International folks with fancy degrees. They have no idea how to actually work with monkeys. He’s refusing to train students from St. Kitts. He doesn’t bring in interns anymore, or anyone, really, who would only be at the facility for a temporary period of time. He thinks bringing in outsiders will change the culture of it all.

“Do you think it will?” I asked. She responded,

I'd love to hope so, but part of me thinks that the monkey farms haunted. We are always doing things to monkeys' bodies which be intrusive. You know what I mean? We constantly doing things to the monkeys that harm they bodies, and we become normal to it. Men, people like Prince and Hari [she named multiple male coworkers at the facility], they don't like monkeys, and they don't like women. We all just bodies to them.

Lottie believed that laboratory staff are made desensitized to bodily violence against monkeys through the process of invasive scientific experimentation on sedated primates. At these facilities, where numerous instances of sexual assault and violence have occurred over the past three decades, Lottie ponders whether desensitization to bodily violence on monkeys contributes to the desensitization to bodily violence against people.

Lottie is one of the numerous interlocutors who raised similar speculations to me. All of the people who brought this up to me were themselves victims of sexual harassment or violence in the past, whether at their workplace or otherwise. Even as these interlocutors may continue in their work as laboratory staff, inducing harm in monkeys as part of their day-to-day labor, they were simultaneously frustrated with the violence that had become normalized in their everyday lives.

## **Disclaimer**

I approach this part of my writing with great caution because exposing such violence would also mean exposing the livelihoods and jobs of people involved. After 2018, SKBRF began to distance itself from this past. The previous managerial company, Axiom Research Company, closed down. It was replaced by Virsio, a company run by Dr. Matthew Lawrence. In an informal conversation, Dr. Lawrence shared that this regime shift reflected the institution's desire to move away from the wrongs of its past. However, many of the 4 instances of sexual assault and 15 instances of sexual harassment that were recounted to me in interviews occurred after this institutional transition, indicating that the problem of sexual violence persists.

These instances of sexual harassment and assault have occurred in all sorts of gendered and hierarchical combinations. However, the most common combination is with men perpetrating the non-consent against women. I will not name my individual interlocutors or the stories that they shared with specificity in this section because my goal is not to incriminate anyone while reporting on this violence. All names mentioned in this chapter are pseudonyms, and many key details that could identify people have been omitted, except for those of Dr. Eugene Redmond and Dr. Matthew Lawrence, who can already be identified based on existing public documentation.

SKBRF's work to move forward from its past cycles of sexual violence was brought up to me by numerous interlocutors, many of whom also were motivated to apologize to me or seek me out and participate in my research in part due to my previous status as a victim of this violence. This work and the restructuring of SKBRF's management and leadership have been formidable. Current employees have expressed to me numerous ways in which SKBRF has been improving its ethics in Human Resources management and the treatment of monkey research subjects across housing, matchmaking, and research protocols. Interlocutors were excited to share examples of this progress and eager to have it featured in my research.

## **De-sensitization**

The transmission of sexual assault practices traveling across multi-species lines is an uncomfortable but not unknown phenomenon. Alex Blanchette, an anthropologist who conducted ethnographic fieldwork at industrial pig farms and confined animal feeding operations in the United States, reported on a related occurrence in *Porkopolis* Chapter 4: "Stimulation" (2020). At industrial pig farms, humans are intimately involved in the reproduction of piglets.

Blanchette calls this process inter-species sex work — humans and technology are integral actors in the industrial reproduction of piglets. Blanchette learns that there are strict gendered divisions of this labor, wherein men work in artificial insemination, while women work in delivery.

Blanchette’s interlocutors attribute these gendered divisions of labor to an occupational hazard known as pheromonal pollution. Pheromones cross species lines by permeating the air in confined animal reproductive operations, and cause both humans and hogs to act differently.

Blanchette’s interviewee, Janine, a manager of one of these operations, believes that these pheromones can cause increased rates of human arousal and human-on-human sexual behavior. Separating this labor by gender is a way of decreasing the risk of human-on-human sexual behaviors in the workplace.

She explained that the interspecies sexual division of labor was a matter of risk: it was safer to have a single-gender majority in each department, especially during the (undersupervised and understaffed) weekend shift. At some point in the mid-2000s, she asserted, a manager friend of hers who was working overtime caught two employees having sex in a barn room during a weekend shift. I blurted out an unprintable expression of shock— initially because of the site of the act, but also because such an embarrassing, but ultimately inconsequential, incident would merit a wholesale shift in corporate policy. I had missed the point. ‘It’s all the pheromones in the air,’ Janine clarified. Allegedly, some managers speculated that hog pheromones in the barn’s atmosphere, concentrated by the use of specially selected Chinese Meishan ‘heritage’ boars, were arousing workers. She framed the industrial generation of porcine semiochemicals as imperceptibly leaping across species, and as an occupational hazard. (92)

Blanchette theorizes pheromonal pollution as an instance of inter-species infection, wherein “porcine instincts [are] overtaking human agency,” and “the invisible substances of hormonal attraction infects human work” (92). I am drawn to this anecdote in particular for its visceral description of how both human and animal behaviors are transformed by the environment of encounter.

Just as Blanchette describes how artificial insemination and the mass-reproduction of industrial porcine bodies remake gendered practices of labor and animal care, so too do the drug-

testing practices of the St. Kitts monkey farm remake the practices of labor and animal nature in both humans and experimental monkeys. It is not that monkey pheromones are floating in the air; rather, a parallel process of desensitization and resensitization is taking place. The processes of monkey matchmaking, sedation, and experimentation at these facilities — and the habituation of people to these processes as forms of labor that constitute their daily lives — desensitize human workers, or perhaps sensitize them differently, to how they navigate consent and refusal among primate bodies. The instances of non-consent that happen at these facilities both inform and are informed by the forms of violence and care that reproduce the experimental monkey.

Pheromones affect people's sensitivity, contributing to the manifestation of the affect of people and pigs in these industrial farms. At the monkey farm, different phenomena affect people's sensitivity. The unpleasant smell of feces in the air makes people want to rush their work. The administration of sedatives to monkeys desensitizes people to conducting invasive and violent scientific procedures with no bodily response. The transnational valley of death and the economic and resource limitations it imposes on the scientific process are part of a transnational power differential that results in ethical variability and has social consequences for everyone and everything at these facilities. Non-consent has permeated the air at these monkey farms for decades, and it continues to be transmitted and enacted between animals and people.

At the same time that staff spend significant time cultivating affective attunement to monkeys' affect as part of animal care and monkey matchmaking, these same staff also learn to enact certain forms of controlled harm to monkeys as part of the scientific process. My interlocuter, Lottie, reflected on how laboratory staff, who become desensitized to bodily violence against monkeys through the process of invasive scientific experimentation on sedated primates, may then be prone to re-enacting non-consensual violence on other people. At these

facilities, where numerous instances of sexual assault and violence have occurred over the past three decades, bodily violence in the form of non-consent between people has run rampant. Even as these facilities seek to move forward, the impact of these past violences remains profound.

The enacting of laboratory procedures predicated on the sedation of monkeys, I have come to understand, is a practice of desensitization that travels in two directions. The forced physical desensitization of monkeys through sedation or intoxication mirrors, or reflects, the learned desensitization of people who then conduct invasive and harmful laboratory procedures on sedated monkeys. This violence is necessary for the scientific process and results in significant medicines and treatments that have the potential to improve the lives of humans and non-human animals. Nevertheless, the desensitization of people to the violence inherent in the scientific process may, some of my interlocutors believe, contribute to interpersonal violence and recurring instances of non-consent between people. This desensitization is not always limited to forms of violence deemed ethical or necessary — people also become desensitized to excess violence, like Hari throwing the monkeys into the wheelbarrow, which in turn becomes a normalized behavior at these facilities. People also become desensitized to sexual harassment as it becomes normalized as part of everyday life in working at these facilities, which will be further explored in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Nurturing Sensitivity

Discerning between the scientific and the magical/spiritual is itself a biopolitical function of the modern state. But when belief in the magical both organizes profit margins and is augmented by the mysterious mechanics of contemporary global capitalism, the label of crime that is deployed to regulate sales must be protean. That is, crime must move around from target to target, but also in and around the definition of what a ‘crime’ is in medico-legal framings. The definitions change in relation to both markets and those kinds of knowledge that can be deemed magical or non-scientific, and therefore illegal, because of the special relationship that the state has to them through science. What was considered criminal some 10 years ago in the form of distributing Chinese herbal therapies in some states is not only legal now, but also regulated in ways that criminalize those who do not distribute the forms of herbal medicines that have been approved by the FDA. This, I suggest, might be read as a different kind of magic that invokes criminality at critical junctures where there is no credible witness as to what should or should not be considered medically valid (Adams 2002, page 680).

### Non-Consent as a Shared Experience

Desensitization to the invasive procedures of scientific experimentation on sedated experimental monkeys at monkey farms exists in relation to high rates of sexual harassment between laboratory staff. In this chapter, I delve into the historical context of how these monkey farms are built on the lands of former sugar plantations, where non-consent was a central driving force of racialized (re)productive accumulation. Workers reported these monkey farms as haunted by jumbies – ghosts. I build on Aisha Beliso-de Jesús’s (2015) theorization of co-presences to consider non-consent as a persistent co-presence that haunts plantation futures – the ways past configurations of the plantation are recast in contemporary contexts (McKittrick 2013). Co-presences include deities, spirits, and ancestors, but also histories of racial trauma. I theorize that non-consent is a co-presence reproduced through desensitization, when violence is normalized as part of daily life. I draw on Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s *Becoming Human* (2015) to contextualize non-consent as a historically traceable co-presence mobilized by European colonizers as a mechanism of colonial domination and racialized (re)productive accumulation.

If non-consent haunts the space of desensitization, then consent can be redeemed as a communicative form when sensitivity is prioritized. In Chapter 3, I proposed the concept of affective consent to describe how humans already respect the consent of animals that cannot speak but can be known. I build on the discussion of sensitivity in Chapter 2 to offer “prioritizing the senses” as a method for considering embodied knowing as research technology. Going beyond the critique of the divides of nature and culture (Haraway 2003, Latour 2012) and human and non-human (Descola 2013, Fernando 2022, Gosine 2021), I advocate for investigation at the intersection of separate and unified experience – of co-presence, and the possibility of attunement to self and other despite difference and the imperfection of the senses. Thinking about affective consent may transform how we think about ethical and pleasurable forms of relation, respect for the (non-)consent of animals, and sensitivity as something worth cultivating.

## **The History of Non-Consent and Scientific Experimentation on St. Kitts**

Three facilities on St. Kitts conduct research using green monkeys as research subjects. Each facility houses thousands of monkeys at any given time. These facilities conduct various health- and behavior-related research, including animal models of disease and the testing of pharmaceuticals and drugs for safety and efficacy. The Behavioral Science Foundation, colloquially known as “BSF,” is the oldest primate research institution on St. Kitts. It was founded in 1971 on the land of the Estridge Estate, a former slave-holding sugar monocrop plantation.

BSF was founded by Dr. Frank Ervin. My interlocutors describe Dr. Frank Ervin as a kind man who cared about social justice and about the people of St. Kitts. Today, the facility is

run by a team that includes multiple of his surviving family members. The facility accepts students from Ross University Veterinary School of Medicine (RUSVM) each year as part of a rotation, during which the head Veterinarian guides students through the facility and demonstrates aspects of animal care and behavioral research.

In 1976, Dr. Eugene Redmond, a professor at the Yale School of Medicine, was hired by BSF as a researcher. Interlocutors of mine who have been around at BSF since its inception recalled that Redmond left BSF in the 1980s and opened his own facility because the BSF management was not supportive of the kinds of experiments he wished to conduct, deeming them too violent and unethical. Others described personal conflicts between Redmond and others, who viewed him negatively because of what one interviewee described as “his sexual proclivities,” in that Redmond was likely gay or bisexual, or at least experienced some level of same-sex attraction. It was challenging for me to distinguish which of these remarks were homophobic.

In 1982, Redmond purchased his own property on the Lower Bourryeau Estate, another former sugar plantation a few miles away. Bourryeau became home to the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Facility (SKBRF). The buildings and structures of this sugar plantation became subsumed into what became the biomedical facility — the “master’s quarters” became the housing for Redmond and his interns, and the former sugar mill became an office and spare bedroom. The account I offer here is pieced together from archival documents, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic observations: Dr. Redmond often proposed projects that the other scientists at BSF found off-putting or even unethical. Multiple people on St. Kitts have remarked to me that “Redmond was a creep,” explaining to me that Redmond’s scientific interests were

particularly invasive in the ways they proposed to treat monkey research subjects, and that his personal affect was often uncomfortable for other staff and researchers of all genders.

In 2017, I was employed as a research intern at SKBRF while I was an undergraduate student at Yale University. This began my entanglement with St. Kitts and the monkey problem — it was my own initiation into what I later came to describe as an eco-horror. I was one of the last interns accepted at the facility. After returning, I reported Redmond to the University-Wide Committee for Sexual Misconduct for sexual harassment and assault. Following this report in March 2018, Yale University, where Redmond was a professor, launched an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct, the results of which are publicly available (Daly 2019). The report, published in 2019, found that Redmond had sexually assaulted five students affiliated with the university's research and engaged in sexual misconduct with at least eight other undergraduates over a period of 25 years. The report notes that the interns' accounts of sexual misconduct reflect “textbook grooming behavior,” wherein Redmond garnered students' trust, established control, and created an “environment of secrecy and isolation” (11).

The investigation surfaced that a group of Yale students had made similar complaints against Redmond in 1994, which were not sufficiently followed up on at a time when the University did not have a University-Wide Committee or any other committed infrastructural mechanism with which to deal with sexual misconduct allegations. Some months later, in January 2019, a third confidential complaint came forward and reported that Redmond had sexually abused him when he was a Yale undergraduate working in St. Kitts.

The investigation took about six months. Attorney Deirdre Daly and her team contacted all current and former students who had worked with Redmond at SKBRF, and interviewed over 110 witnesses, 38 of whom were current or former students, and 34 of whom were Yale

professors and administrators. This investigation revealed that Redmond had sexually assaulted at least 5 college students from 1990 to 2018, and had committed other acts of sexual misconduct involving at least eight additional students. Daly and her team wrote,

We found the students' accounts to be highly credible. When interviewed, the students were candid and straightforward; they neither embellished facts nor appeared vindictive. There were no eye-witnesses to the assaults, and each of the students acknowledged that they were intoxicated at the time of the assaults. Some also stated they had blocked out memories so that they do not recall the full details of what happened. But each incident is corroborated, at least in part, by written communications and interviews with family members, friends, or therapists to whom the students reported the incidents. The strongest corroboration for the assaults is the striking similarity between the students' accounts of what happened, despite the fact that the incidents occurred years, and, in some cases, decades apart, and the students do not know one another or the nature of their individual accounts. It is also relevant to our findings, as discussed later in this Report, that Redmond tried to obstruct our investigation by encouraging some witnesses not to cooperate with us, to provide false information, or to withhold relevant information. (2)

This investigation revealed a cycle of sexual violence — there was “striking similarity between the students' accounts of what happened, despite the fact that the incidents occurred years, and, in some cases, decades apart, and the students do not know one another or the nature of their individual accounts.” When I was navigating the tense psychological and social terrain of my internship at SKBRF and the power dynamics therein, it often felt to me as though we were possessed by ghosts whose identities were unknown to me. Events unfolded with little to no correlation to my own agency or actions. Like in a horror movie, my experience involved a slow unfolding of violence, wherein the cycles of violence and non-consent occurring at this facility slowly revealed themselves to me.

Like in the ethnographic excerpts in Chapter 4 of the sedated monkeys being thrown into the wheelbarrow, their heads knocking against the sides, I also saw numerous instances of small violence against green monkey research subjects. I will not share excerpts from 2017 because I was not an IRB-approved ethnographer at that time, but rather a researcher intern who signed a

contract agreeing not to disclose my experiences. However, numerous publicly available sources corroborate what I saw. A letter titled “Eugene, Don’t Be Mean,” (2011) published virtually by the group Free the Animals, writes,

Eugene Redmond has spent decades – as a Yale University professor, and as director of The St. Kitts Biomedical Research Foundation – using primates in cruel\* and sometimes bizarre experiments. To supplement his income, he sells wild-caught monkeys from the island of St. Kitts to laboratories around the world.

Rumor is, Dr. Redmond is currently trying to arrange a shipment of monkeys to the U.S. As you know, activists have made this a difficult job! Please write to Dr. Redmond and urge him to abandon his plans to export monkeys.

Join South Florida Smash HLS in the hard-hitting campaign against Worldwide Primates, a notorious company that supplies monkeys for use in cruel experiments. Together we can shut down Worldwide Primates and make history for animals. What part will you play?

\*For example, Redmond collaborated with researchers from Yale University and UCLA (including infamous vivisector David Jentsch) on a study that took place at The St. Kitts Biomedical Research Foundation in which young, wild-caught monkeys suffered twice daily injections of PCP for two weeks, and then the monkeys were killed and their brains examined. The study was supposed to reveal something about schizophrenia in humans.

Where the call-to-action refers to shipping primates through airplanes and how “activists have made this a difficult job,” they are referring to how many commercial airlines stopped shipping primates for research between 2012 and 2014. Most commercial airlines did not adopt a single, universal ban, but intense pressure from animal rights groups like PETA resulted in a majority of major commercial airlines, including Air Canada, United Airlines, China Southern Airlines, and Air France, banning the transport of monkeys to laboratories due to concerns for animal welfare and pressure from activists. The call to action then lists Dr. Redmond’s contact information, including his phone number and email address. It offers a sample letter that one could send to Dr. Redmond.

Dr. Redmond,  
The primate trade is a dying business. Airlines don’t want the

controversy, and you don't need the headache. There's a rumor that you are trying to arrange a flight of monkeys from St. Kitts to the U.S. Please, abandon these plans!

Many people were and remain concerned about Redmond's research, including that conducted at SKBRF. Redmond retired in 2018 and is no longer actively involved in SKBRF's research. In my interviews with staff at SKBRF, they report considerable care for the well-being of their green monkey research subjects and that they are continually striving to improve their care. As mentioned before, these pursuits are not only motivated by morals or ethics — happier, healthier research subjects yield more accurate, reproducible results.

During my return to St. Kitts as a PhD student in anthropology, conducting ethnographic fieldwork on the monkey problem, many of my interviewees knew about the history of sexual assault at SKBRF that was uncovered in the 2018 investigation. They were often curious about my personal history with St. Kitts and the science facilities. Though I did not initiate this topic, many of them brought it up, asking what it was like to be an intern at SKBRF or about my role in the reporting and investigation that transpired. These conversations often served as the starting point for my interviews or ethnographic observations. My involvement in ending a cycle of sexual violence that had lasted over 25 years at SKBRF ultimately facilitated my ethnographic access in numerous ways, as it created a connection between myself and interlocutors involved in research on monkeys on St. Kitts.

I came to understand that these cycles of interpersonal violence were also part of the monkey problem. The average person on St. Kitts, resident or tourist, does not have access to these research facilities, nor knowledge of what happens at them. Because locals generally perceive the monkeys as invasive, a pest, and a problem, these negative local attitudes result in public consent for what these facilities do — these facilities actively benefit from and profit from

the monkey problem, and are generally seen as providing a public good in decreasing the amount of wild monkeys on St. Kitts. While a majority of my interlocutors who did not affiliate or work with these facilities, such as farmers, had no idea what actually happens at the facilities, they did have a mythologized vision of these research facilities, locally known as “monkey farms,” as being unambiguously good in that they get rid of monkeys from the wild and create meaning by transforming these wild pests into scientific research subjects with economic benefits for the island.

Since its inception in 2015, the MRI brought to SKBRF for experimental purposes has been the only MRI on St. Kitts and has served people from 15 neighboring Caribbean islands. This MRI was funded by research-related funding from SKBRF but provided significant benefits to people in St. Kitts, who could use it to scan for common health issues such as broken or sprained bones. This benefit was very real, and regardless of the motivation for the MRI’s inception, it came to serve an important service for the health and well-being of people on St. Kitts. However, the locals’ general perception of these facilities as good invisibilizes cycles of violence that, I argue, are also constitutive of building animosity in the monkey problem.

Psychological vulnerability is often an element of horror narratives, and it is a central component of the reproduction of non-consent — people re-enacting trauma responses in different forms. In this chapter, I will discuss how many of my interlocutors perceived these monkey farms as haunted by jumbies, or malevolent spirits, and as places permeated by a sense of dread. My intention is not to treat these experiences as fictional or imaginary, but rather to think critically about the ways in which my interlocutors perceived certain elements of their daily life as unsettling, frustrating, or even untenable, and simultaneously have these experiences invisibilized or treated like fiction in an environment where violence is normalized as part of the

status quo. The cycles of non-consensual violence between people and animals are one of the multiple overlapping ways that people come to perceive parts of their life like an eco-horror due to particular orientations to space, time, and the interpersonal social and bodily terrain of consent that people navigate within the monkey problem. In considering the history of these scientific facilities, built on former plantations where non-consent was a central driving force of racialized (re)productive accumulation, I speculate that cycles of non-consent travel between human and animal worlds in both directions. This speculation troubles the idea of human mastery over the self and others — the recurring non-consent between people is evidence of the animal in the human and the human in the animal.

## **Jumbies, or Ghosts**

Dorreen, one of my key interlocuters with whom I met many times throughout my fieldwork, had worked on and off at one of the facilities and maintained a positive relationship with them for many years. The conversation took a turn: “When you were at Bourryeau, did you see them? The jumbies?” She was asking about ghosts at the facility. When I was an intern, I lived on the facility’s grounds at the former Bourryeau great house. SKBRF, BSF, and West Farm were all on the lands of former plantations that had been purchased and converted into research facilities, which the locals called monkey farms.

“I don’t think I ever saw them. But I definitely heard lots of weird sounds at night,” I recalled. The walls creaked often. The other interns and I attributed it to the lizards that crawled along the walls at night, eating mosquitoes and other bugs. There were other critters too – millipedes and centipedes – which were loud enough to create audible thumps when they moved

across the floor. “I always thought it was lizards,” I responded, “but I wouldn’t be surprised to hear people think there are jumbies there.”

“We call the lizards *wood slaves*,” Doreen reflected, “because they are the slaves of ghosts coming to visit.” We sat in silence for a moment. “It’s a good thing when they come,” she continued, “they visit when they feel safe.”

“The bedroom where Dr. Redmond used to sleep have been converted to an office,” she said, “but everyone who works there gets a mysterious rash. Other people at the facility have been getting sick more often too. The staff think it the jumbies.”

This was one of many conversations that I had with former and current staff members at SKBRF. Though I never brought up the topic, many individuals wanted to speak about the former history of sexual assault at SKBRF at least once. Doreen was doing so indirectly here, by updating me about the changes at the facility since my time there. Many of these conversations involve some sort of apology to me, in which people express that they had had their suspicions and wish they had said something or acted on their feelings sooner. Seeing me, one of them said, was like seeing a jumbie, in that it was like seeing a figure from the past that they did not expect to see.

At these research facilities, many of my interlocutors describe the sites as haunted or as home to jumbies. Jumbies are mythological spirits in Caribbean folklore, generally considered malevolent. For many of my Kittitian interlocutors, jumbies were also a very real part of daily life. Different islands have different concepts of jumbies — the Kittitian Jumbie is generally thought to be the ghost of a former slave-owner, kept alive by the violence they committed.

## Theory of Non-Consent as Co-Presence

In unsettling science and consent on St. Kitts, I am trying to shine light on violence that has been normalized in daily life — a haunting that has been playing out for hundreds of years. Considering the fact that these scientific facilities are on the same grounds as a former sugar plantation, it is in some ways unsurprising that there are forms of violence, including bodily violence and sexual violence, that have become part of the daily life in this place. One of the managerial staff once said to me, “Almost every day, I think about the fact that we are working on a former sugar plantation. The people employed here are likely descendants of former slaves, many of whom may also have worked here. It haunts me.” These cycles of non-consent are visible manifestations of the afterlives of slavery in the present. They haunt human and animal bodies alike in complex and unexpected, intercorporeal forms.

Mayanthi Fernando (2022) writes that recent scholarship in multispecies studies and the *nature-culture* turn has sought to recognize the agency of nonhumans, but has largely restricted this thinking to natural entities such as plants, animals, and geographical features. Supernatural beings have been left out of the conversation, thereby preserving the distinction between nature and supernature. To truly undo the nature/culture distinction, Fernando argues, means attending to this third domain — what she calls the more-than-natural. Fernando urges readers to consider the Anthropocene and the climate crisis through the lens of uncanny ecologies: interspecies webs of care and commitment that bring together animals, humans, spirits, and deities.

Aisha Beliso-de Jesús (2015) is an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork on present-day practices of Santería in Cuba. Santería is an African-inspired, Cuban diasporic religion. Though Santería has historically been stigmatized as witchcraft or superstition, it has numerous followers around the world and is rapidly growing. Beliso-de Jesús explores how historical

projects of racialization and counter-colonial assertions of Black religious power have shaped modern mediations of Santería. Beliso-de Jesús proposes the term co-presence to capture the transnational beings involved in Santería, in which racialized and gendered spirits, deities, priests, video recordings, and religious travelers remake local, national, and political boundaries. co-presences are spirits that live alongside people and animals — historical entities and beings whose existence is maintained in screens, smells, and relationships. Ancestors can be co-presences, and forms of trauma can also be co-presences.

Beliso-De Jesus maps the phenomenon of co-presence in the lives of Santería practitioners, mapping its ritual negotiation of race, imperialism, gender, sexuality, and travel. Among the many spirits and deities that Santeria channels, racial trauma and struggle are also co-presences: “The batarumba cajones, three tapered wooden boxes with a hollowed-out center, provide a sap and tone that produce a cha-cha’ed critique of colonial violence” (125). These wooden boxes are transformed through the ritual of drumming, drawing new significance from the past and in the present – the drumming becomes a means of communication across space and time, and the drummer a channel for co-presences of healing.

Santeria carries specific ascribed goals and recognitions in relation to histories of race and place, even as its practices extend beyond human conceptions of difference (144-145). In particular, the author’s examination of the sexualizing and gendering of power within spiritual hierarchies provides an interesting juxtaposition to the conception of Santería as resistance or as a decolonizing practice, as well as to liberal subjectivities (namely, queer feminism) associated with global Western imperialism (204, 209). Even within the transnational Santería community, competing and conflicting assemblages and authorities constantly mediate the locationality and authenticity of practice and belonging (202). Such assemblages hold race, sexuality, and

nationalism in tension, often coming to different conclusions about things like gendered roles in ritual or gendered positions of power and priesthood tied to fears of “contaminating femininities and perverse (homo)sexualities” (197).

Beliso-De Jesus’s exploration of the phenomenon of co-presence reveals how co-presence is part of the dynamic circulation of religious transnationalisms. In this dissertation, I am moving towards something like an exploration of non-consent as a co-presence. I think of it as something like a virus, transmitted between people and other beings, re-enacting and re-infecting. This non-consent occurs between people and the land in their quest to extract its resources, and is then re-transmitted between people and animals. In the simplest sense, these monkey farms are places where both violence against animals and violence against people, in both their history as a plantation and their contemporary use as a scientific facility, have been a persistent co-presence. I speculate that among the specters that my interlocutors report seeing at these facilities are not only jumbies but also the co-presences of non-consents past and present. Contemporary experiences of non-consent, alongside experiences of food insecurity, are, I argue, integral parts of the monkey problem and of building animosity.

Native American (Apache/Tewa/Lakota) Psychologist Eduardo Duran (2019) writes about how Indigenous communities have adapted Western psychotherapy to develop trauma-informed counseling techniques that are sensitive to the trauma of colonization. Duran writes that, when the Earth is wounded, the people who are caretakers of the Earth are also wounded on a very deep soul level (17). In discussing historical trauma and the notion of internalized oppression, a phenomenon also known in psychoanalysis as identification with the aggressor, Duran argues that the identification of the victim with the perpetrator occurs, in part, because of the transfer of energy between the two. Duran and the Indigenous healers he has learned from

hold that injuries can occur at the physical, psychological, and spiritual levels — that if symptoms persist after psychological and physical/medical treatment occurs, it is because of the presence of spirit injury (20). In this way, non-consent must be understood as having psychological and physiological effects, but also as a particular form of spiritual injury that is being reproduced and transmitted between people. Non-consent is a co-presence that reproduces in places where insensitivity or desensitization is cultivated, and is then transmitted through instances of harm.

These monkey farms are the site of ongoing cycles of violence, but the replaying of these violences in different forms can be understood as part of a cycle of Earth wounding, or historical trauma, that can be traced back to colonization. Duran defines historical trauma as the notion of internalized oppression, a parallel to psychoanalytic conceptions of the clinical phenomenon known as identification with the aggressor, wherein lines of victim and perpetrator can psychically blur in colonial and post-colonial settings (Fanon 1952; Freud 1912, 1919; Freud 1967). Racialized and gendered sexual violence was central to projects of Western colonization and medicine, such as in maintaining the structures of the plantation (McClintock 1995; Spillers 2022; Hartman 2022), ultimately wounding not only people but also the Earth and natural environments in ways that subsequently translate back to human psyches (Todd 2022; Watts 2013). The intersection of gendered racial violence and environmental violence, what Ferdinand calls environmental racism (Ferdinand 2021), was the foundational non-consent to which these cycles of violence can ultimately be traced.

## The Visceral

Non-Consent is a significant problem globally. As explored in Chapter 3, certain fundamental issues in current conceptions of consent perpetuate uneven access to both informed consent in medicine and research and affirmative consent in interpersonal relationships. The line between these two frameworks of consent is blurred in certain settings, for example, in these laboratories on St. Kitts, where non-consent is transmitted and transmuted in both forms. There is limited research that simultaneously addresses issues in both informed and affirmative consent. One example is the work of Joanna Bourke (2021), who seeks to make sense of the crisis of sexual assault happening in the United States military, wherein victims face special difficulties in having their abuse acknowledged and responded to appropriately. Part of these challenges has to do, Bourke argues, with the medical pathologization of victims of sexual harm. Victims of sexual abuse can only access treatment if they accept a psychiatric diagnosis, or, in other words, classify themselves as mentally ill.

People lobbying for improved care of victim-survivors maintain that sexual trauma is not a diagnosis or a mental health condition, but rather an experience. Currently, the medical model of disease dictates that traumatic experiences are not themselves a medical problem. Rather, an individual's inability to remain productive in daily life after a traumatic experience of non-consent is indicative of mental illness that needs treatment. Even if victims are well-adjusted or actually are dealing with their experiences of non-consent in a healthy manner, individuals in the military must claim mental illness and an inability to deal with trauma in order to receive acknowledgment and treatment. The implied proper or healthy response to non-consent in the military context is, Bourke argues, desensitization: to continue life as usual, because non-consent has been normalized as part of daily life that people must learn to contend with. Reacting

negatively or being sensitive to non-consent in the military setting, where violence is a normalized as part of life in a military career, is then framed as indicative of mental illness because the victim is traumatized by something that others have been desensitized to and so normalized.

Bourke finds that the concept of trauma, as it is applied to victims of sexual abuse in the military, ultimately places great weight on social scripts and performativity. Victims of sexual abuse must comport themselves *as* victims and perform a particular socially-legible version of helplessness to receive treatment. I read Bourke to mean that the medicalization of sexual abuse also reifies non-consent as part of the expected social scripts of daily life in the military. Victims must learn how to enact the performance of certain scripts in order to have their suffering acknowledged by medical authority, taking away their ability to reclaim or narrate their experiences on their own terms. This approach to non-consent in the military ultimately frames victims as innocent and helpless, rather than empowering them to reclaim the experience in their own terms. Said differently, Bourke argues that the medicalization of sexual trauma as mental illness pathologizes the individuals who are themselves victims of sexual assault, rather than the sexual assault itself.

Elsewhere, scholars have been contending with cycles of non-consent as they pervade higher education (Bergeron et al. 2026; Gunderson and Mrozla-Toscano 2023; Marcantonio et al. 2024). These researchers report that abusive organizational cultures exploit people's trauma responses by rewarding compliance, emotional self-suppression, and silence. In contexts where speaking up is punished, people who hesitate to say no or struggle to advocate for themselves can be pushed harder, given less protection, and expected to endure harm without complaint. In these settings, boundary violations can become routine, and resistance is framed as a character

flaw. In many cases, these environments can actively reinforce trauma-based desensitization by rewarding self-erasure. These dynamics, which play out in daily social interactions, can become structural in workplaces where the erosion of well-being for the sake of high performance is expected. These systems are already structural in professions such as medicine, law, business consulting, and higher education — organizations benefit while employees pay the psychological and physiological cost of these exploitative dynamics. Trauma-informed work requires accountability, boundaries, and the refusal to profit from harm. Awareness is incredibly important — economies of erasure can be disrupted when people understand that their distress is a rational response rather than a personal failure.

Non-consent was a central mechanism for the reproduction of the plantation form. Taking a historical perspective is important for situating the monkey problem, and the various forms of non-consent that are core to it – between different people and between people and the natural world, including animals and the land. Renowned psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, born in Fort-de-France, Martinique, in 1925, argued that colonialism not only exploited the material resources of colonized regions but also imposed psychological and cultural burdens on colonized peoples (Butts 1980; Fanon 1952, 1963; Fatira 2020; Gonzalez 2021; McCollum 2009; Zahra and Bakar 2017). Colonized peoples could simultaneously feel inferiority and resentment alongside identification and the desire for acceptance by the colonizing power. Central to his understanding of the experience of blackness under French colonialism was the concept of self-alienation, or the complex desire for liberation from the colonial system whilst desiring to conform to colonially-prescribed hegemonic identities. In this way, the psychic and social geographies of consent were altered and constrained in settings where people's very desires were transformed by the colonial encounter.

Fanon (2004 [1963], 2008 [1952]) highlighted the psychological effects of colonialism on the identity formation of individuals living under colonialism. He argued that colonialism disrupts and distorts the collective memory of colonized peoples, rupturing them from their history, traditions, and cultural practices. Fanon's understanding of the psychological effects of colonization on the individual and the collective consciousness of colonized populations was grounded in psychoanalytic theory, psychiatric understandings, and decolonial theory. Fanon recognized land not only as a physical plane or resource, but also as a symbolic and political terrain. He argued that the struggle for land was at the core of the decolonization process, because colonizers often used the disruption of people's connections to their ancestral territories as a tool of domination. The loss of land and the accompanying cultural and spiritual ties contributed to a sense of alienation, dislocation, and fragmentation of identity amongst those colonized. As such, contestations over land claims were not only material but also intrinsically related to one's sense of self and belonging.

Fanon (1963), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, argued that reclaiming, repossessing, and redistributing land was an essential step in challenging colonial domination and asserting the identity and autonomy of colonized peoples. Fanon's writing has been received as foundational to Caribbean Ecopoetics and Relational Philosophy, pioneered by later Caribbean theorists such as Glissant and by contemporary postcolonial environmental humanities scholars, who will be discussed later in this chapter (Gray & Sheikh 2018). These scholars use Fanon's foundational claim that the land is the most essential value and weave it together with Caribbean poetry and theory to argue that diasporic peoples can overcome colonial rupture by forging new socio-ecological relations with the land.

Scholar Achille Mbembe, in his analysis of Franz Fanon's writings, draws attention to the visceral (Mbembe 2001, 2016). The term visceral refers to deep emotions, instincts, and bodily sensations — smells, tastes, pain, waste, and refuse. Mbembe emphasizes the ways in which Fanon's writings focused on the embodied experiences of the colonized individuals and the physical, not only psychological, manifestations of racism under colonial oppression. Mbembe argues that connection to one's bodily experiences and physical reality was a means of escaping the psychological violence of racial trauma, such as experiences of self-hate resulting from racial discrimination. Building on this, I hope in this Chapter to re-situate affective consent, as a technology for connection to one's bodily experiences, as a core intervention of this dissertation. The visceral, or the bodily dimensions of experience, in Fanon's conception, provided a means for sense-making in the instances where memory may have failed. I hope that the intervention of affective consent, as moving towards an ethical consent framework predicated on prioritizing one's senses and connection to more-than-human others like animals, the land, and the Earth, can effectively describe the ways that I observed my interlocutors were already, as Fanon argues, tethering to the Earth, the ground, the land, and the body as a means of relating to that which cannot be remembered.

## **Non-Consent as a Mechanism for Racialized (Re)Productive**

### **Accumulation**

Medical and sexual non-consent of Black people, particularly of Black women in the Caribbean and the United States, was central to the production of the conditions of modernity (Jackson 2020; Morgan & Weinbaum 2024; Nuriddin et al. 2020; Spillers 1987). Theorizing consent and non-consent as more-than-human phenomena must be done in a way that is sensitive

to non-consent as it continues to be enacted and experienced by humans as a contemporary racialized and gendered mode of violence. Theorizing affective consent can have liberatory potential for reconceptualizing how animals are treated in and outside of research, and, hopefully, for inquiring more deeply into why and how non-consent remains a significant and persistent form of violence between humans.

Marxist and Black Feminist theories have argued that the extraction of uncompensated labor and biological reproduction – the racialized denial of bodily autonomy and consent – was a form of structural coercion and violence historically used to drive capitalist growth (Davis 2011; Morgan & Weinbaum 2024; Roberts 2014; Spillers 1987; Weinbaum 2019). Since its inception, racial capitalism has depended on what feminist Marxist theorists call processes of racialized (re)productive accumulation, meaning that the labor force to sustain racial capitalism requires the ongoing exploitation of reproductive labor — both the biological labor involved in reproducing laborers and the domestic and care work that are hyper-exploited or unremunerated because they are devalued and relegated to the private sphere (Bhattacharya 2017; Boris and Salazar Parreñas 2008; Federici 2012). That is to say, non-consent was a central driver of racialized (re-)productive accumulation. The logic of racial capitalism is reproduced on the plantations upon whose land these laboratories, locally called “monkey farms,” are built and persist in different but not entirely dissimilar forms – now cultivating captive experimental monkeys rather than sugar. The historical acts of violence and exploitation that occurred on St. Kitts and at these plantations were not isolated incidents but were integral to the development of modern medical science, institutional, and economic systems that define the conditions of modernity (Bridges 2011; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Owens 2017; Washington 2006). This is visible in St. Kitts, where the spatial logics of former plantations continue to inform daily life, especially on monkey

farms, where the use of cheap labor to cultivate experimental monkeys relies on the same logics that Conzo (2022) refers to as the *plantation economy further modified* (37).

Conzo (2022) writes that though slavery was outlawed in 1838, sugar farming persisted in the *plantation economy modified*. In this modified format and other further modified formats that followed, Black Kittitian people continued to work on sugar plantations as low-wage laborers, and daily life did not significantly change after the abolition of slavery. There were limited job opportunities outside of agriculture, and land was still largely controlled by the wealthy British- and British-descended landowning class known locally as “white Kittitians”. Plantation logics dominated the island's land and economy, and limited opportunities for business existed outside of them (Conzo 2022, 36-37). Hortense Spillers (1987) has argued that the commodification of Black peoples’ bodies during slavery, what she calls “racialized (re)productive accumulation,” is a persistent process that extends beyond the partial abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865 (in the former British Empire, including St. Kitts and Nevis, slavery was formally abolished in 1833.) This racialized (re)productive accumulation is a form of logic predicated on exploiting people for cheap labor, which persists through carceral logics, debt, environmental racism, and legal apparatuses which grant only certain populations of people, such as citizens, particular rights and protections.

Government intervention in the sugar industry in St. Kitts, implemented to lessen the control of the white Kittitian planter class who had held economic, governmental, and land control over the island for over 300 years, resulted in the *plantation economy further modified* after the passage of the Sugar Estates and Land Acquisition Act on St. Kitts and Nevis in 1975, wherein the government purchased sugar estates from the former plantation owners for 20 million USD (Conzo 40). For Black Kittitians, the nationalization of the sugar industry was

intended to mean local control over economic and natural resources, a release from white domination, and economic diversification. However, Black Kittitians understand the post-colonial period on St. Kitts as a period of incomplete emancipation, “the takeover as ‘simply a changing of the guard’ not the emancipatory revolution it was portrayed [to be],” wherein “the government took the role of the ruling class of planters” and “the nationalization of the sugar industry brought sugar workers higher pay but did not significantly change the social structures of the island” (40). As in *the plantation economy further modified*, the monkey farms retain an export-oriented economic model, though focused on the export of scientific research rather than sugar, with international stakeholders benefiting significantly from the islands’ resources while local people benefit minimally.

Scholars have explored the origins of contemporary medical experimentation by examining how colonial narratives that dehumanized Black individuals established enduring frameworks of racialized violence and systemic inequity. Many of my interlocutors who scientists and researchers viewed animal models of disease research as important in that it provides a more ethical alternative to biomedical research on humans. At the same time, historians and scholars writing at the intersection of Critical Race Theory and animal studies argue that speciesism and racism are interwoven. For example, the 15th-century memoirs of white men traveling from Europe to sub-Saharan Africa often dehumanized Black women, comparing them to apes and defeminizing their bodies (Adekunle 2025; Benkert et al. 2019; Wallace-Sanders 2002). Such narratives laid the groundwork for the perpetual violation of Black women and justified the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1500 and 1770, racial ideology became increasingly gendered, with narratives of savagery and inferiority interwoven into the racialized-gender category of Black womanhood. These distorted images of femininity,

sexuality, and civilization justified assumptions of cultural inferiority and provided pseudoscientific justifications for race-based slavery (Constantine 1966; Gordon-Chipembre 2011).

In understanding the connection between historical and contemporary cycles of non-consent on St. Kitts, I draw on scholars at the intersection of Afro-pessimism and critical animal studies who have argued that enslavement and colonial encounter encompassed both human and non-human forms of life (Bennett 2020, Boisseron 2018, Jackson 2020). Discourses on non-human animals and animalized humans were forged in relation to one another, on the basis of idealized teleological conceptions of the human. Peter Singer, for example, argued that antiblack animalization was not merely a symptom of speciesism, but rather a distinctive modality of discursive violence that leveraged humans and animals against one another (Singer 2001). Singer's work popularized the term *speciesism*, which refers to prejudice against animals as a related phenomenon to racism and sexism.

Scholarship on the intersection of race and animality has built upon and critiqued previous iterations. Marjorie Spiegel's book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1998) was a groundbreaking work of academic scholarship. Spiegel compared modern animal cruelty with the enslavement of Black people. This academic argument also served as the basis for animal rights campaigns by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), whose 2005 fund-raising exhibit was titled "Are Animals the New Slaves?" People have had mixed responses to such scholarship, activism, and exhibits. The association of the enslavement of Black people in the past with the mistreatment of animals was used primarily as a tool to serve animal rights. Such scholarship has been critiqued for racial insensitivity in relegating anti-Black

racism to the past, and others note that comparing human and animal suffering carries risks of trivializing the human condition (Armstrong 2002; Fowler 2006).

Critical race scholars separately argue that conceptions of race, as forms of identification within humanity, draw on the same logic as totemic identification with animals, in which animals are cast as representative of certain symbolic qualities rather than as complex agential beings. Contemporary scholars have sought to mend the gap between scholarship on race and animality through multi-species ethnographic work that is attentive to race, and through rhetorical and archival analysis on the ways in which speciesism and racism have been historically mobilized in support of one another (Ahuja 2021, Boisseron 2018, Bennett 2020, Goodfellow 2021, Gumbs 2021). For example, Bénédicte Boisseron in *Afro-Dog* (2018) argues that the animalization of humans and animals has a contiguous and intersecting history that must be traced with historical and cultural specificity. Claire Jean Kim, in *Dangerous Crossings* (2015), explores the problematic nature of analogizing the struggle for animal rights to racial oppression. While initially recognizing the importance of campaigns like PETA's "We Are All Animals" and "The Animal Is the New Slave," Kim later realizes that grounding the moral consideration for animals on the erasure of race is flawed. She argues that challenging the animal-human divide is crucial for animal rights activism, but framing it within a racial paradigm risks perpetuating racism.

Building on this conversation, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) argues that human animality — the ways in which Indigenous Americans have been likened to animals, or how the enslavement of Africans was justified by their purported animality — has less to do with likeness to animals than with the very terms through which nature is defined as separate from culture. Iman Jackson considers racism and speciesism as related forms of prejudice and inequality in that they are predicated on co-constituting logics. The foundational theories of nature and non-

human animality are co-constitutive with conceptions of race that arose within the Western colonial encounter.

In *Becoming Human* (2020), Jackson reads Black and African diasporic literature and art as disrupting human-animal distinctions through unruly conceptions of being and materiality. These primary sources offer what Jackson interprets as non-binaristic models of human-animal relations, such as those predicated on experiences of precarity shared by both humans and animals. Jackson questions and reimagines human and animal recognition in ways that oppose necropolitics and the abjection of non-humans and animals. The literature and art that serve as Jackson's primary sources share many characteristics with scientific and philosophical discourses. Jackson self-describes her methodology as a translation between these genres of communication as they inform one another's narratives and recursive investments. Building on the work of Hortense Spillers (1987) and Sylvia Wynter (2003, 2015), Jackson offers three key arguments:

1. Scholarship on the history and philosophy of anti-blackness has overlooked the role of gender, sexuality, and maternity, given the historical conscription of the Black female as the boundary of human/non-humanness (see Spillers 1987).
2. Eurocentric conceptions of the human define their limits based both on blackness and on animality.
3. Black art and literature are already featuring ontological and materialist thinking that are moving towards the overturning of Eurocentric conceptions of the human and, in particular, men.

Through her focus on humans whose humanity is questioned or negated, Jackson reveals the political stakes of thinking about the figure of the animal for both humans and non-human others. The third argument in *Becoming Human* is especially pertinent: the recognition of personhood and humanity for those people who have historically not been treated as wholly human would, in itself, not be sufficient to annul the "animalization" of blackness. Jackson

offers an intervention on the idea of belonging as a reparative, through theorizing the burden of inclusion.

Jackson theorizes animalization as a method of biopolitical expression that co-constitutes with other expressions of anti-blackness. Jackson argues that historians' and theoreticians' responses to the centrality of animalization have been inadequate, as they have misrecognized its complexity. She holds that binary frameworks, such as humanization versus dehumanization, are insufficient to understand anti-blackness. Jackson defines anti-blackness as a biopolitical regime that utilizes technologies of humanization to refigure blackness as abject human animality and to extend human recognition in an effort to demean blackness as the animal within the human form. Even when blackness is included in understandings of universal humanity, this humanity is a conflicting one, because there remains structural violence in humanity.

In building on the work of Sylvia Wynter (2015), Jackson posits that universal humanity is a particular ontological genre of man which is produced through racializing violence, namely the constitutive abjection of Black humanity. Jackson argues that the humanity of Black people has historically not been denied, but instead has been appropriated, inverted, and plasticized through a race-crafting methodology that relied on abjecting animality, or the notion of animality as abject. The very constitutive function of this recognition reveals that Black abjection is both a violent recognition and a violent inclusion. In this way, Jackson troubles the idea of belonging — not only is alienation a violent alternative to belonging, but belonging itself can be violent.

The basic unit of analysis within liberal humanism, what Jackson refers to as “Man,” is produced by an untenable dichotomy between the figures of the human and the animal, based on false metaphysical premises wherein “the black(ened) female is posited as the abyss dividing organic life into ‘human’ or ‘animal’ based on wholly unsound metaphysical premises” (12).

Said differently, one axis of the violence of belonging/alienation is that of the human versus the animal. Marginalized people, including those marginalized on lines of race and gender, are placed as the dividing line between the human and the animal, and are also then made to bear the burden of this failed metaphysics.

Ultimately, Jackson holds that racial hierarchies and constructions are reproduced through violent processes of both dehumanization and animalization. Jackson re-defines dehumanization as a violence of humanization, or the burden of inclusion into a position within a racially hierarchized universal humanity. There are two core reasons for reformulating dehumanization as the violence of humanization. The first is that humanization can also be a violent process, as in the case of animals forced to conform to human society.

The focus of my dissertation — the monkey problem of St. Kitts — is an example, I believe, of the violence of humanization. Green monkeys, wild and captive, experience humanizing violence in that they are continually hunted and sterilized in the wild, or sedated and experimented on in the laboratory. Captive monkeys are used as animal models for human biological and behavioral research through complex procedures and conditions that strip them of much of their autonomy.

The second reason for reformulating dehumanization as the violence of humanization is that reparative interventions that seek to recognize the humanity of historically dehumanized groups or individuals are insufficient because humanity remains hierarchized and uneven. Human recognition and inclusion are not at odds with the violence of animalization. Animalization and humanization are thus not incompatible. Not only is there a slippery boundary between the two, but there is also a human in the animal and an animal in the human.

In applying Jackson's theorization to the monkey problem, it is clear that the solution is not to give monkeys the same rights and respect as people. Many marginalized people around the world are stripped of their agency and autonomy, and so this would be an insufficient intervention. I build on Jackson's redefinition of dehumanization as a violence of humanization to think about the cycles of non-consent that are cyclically repeating at these monkey farms — non-consent between people, and non-consent enacted by people upon animals. Both invasive monkey research subjects and Kittitian laboratory staff are made to bear the burden of (de-)humanization in their recruitment to the logics of racial capitalism that reproduce at these facilities. My ethnographic findings demonstrate that these experiences of burden, such as the literal and uneven manifestation of food insecurity, are shared by both invasive animals and marginalized people. St. Kitts and Nevis, colonized by Britain in 1623, became the first colony in the West Indies and was sometimes called the "Mother Colony" in historical accounts. Non-consent, I believe, became naturalized into the ecologies and cultures of St. Kitts through hundreds of years of experimentation in resource extraction and sugar-cane production on plantations where non-consent was a central mechanism of reproduction. The logics of racialized (re)productive accumulation persist in monkey farms, though in different forms and with different manifestations.

Jackson's text, at the intersection of animal studies and critical Black studies, is grounded in an understanding that the abject abstraction of "the animal" in discourse on animalizing and dehumanizing violence is not an empirical reality but rather a metaphysical technology of biopolitics and necropolitics. Her critique of anthropocentrism calls not for anti-anthropocentrism, but for a critical and accountable humanism. Such a reimagined humanism requires engagement with *being* in a biopolitical context by considering the entanglements of

humans, non-humans, and environments across time- and space-specific contexts. Such a rethought humanism then requires interrogating the epistemological basis of the Western human. This Western Human, Jackson argues, has been cast as secure within the logic of liberal humanism, but in fact is debatable and contingent on arbitrary and blurry distinctions.

I extend Jackson's theories also as a call for thinking about the relation of not only blackness and gender to animality, but about the ways in which these identities and their reproduction within racial capitalism rely on exploitative logics that normalize desensitization to both enacting and experiencing (affective) non-consent. St. Kitts is a primarily Black Caribbean Island, with over 94% of the population identifying as Black at the time of my fieldwork in 2024. The racial constructions of identity on St. Kitts are related to locally situated constructions of animality, invasiveness, and belonging. These identities and their signifiers in Kittitian Creole and regional language variations differ from those in other places. For example, the category colloquially known as the "white Kittitian" historically refers specifically to the white British- and British-descended former plantation- and landholding-class on St. Kitts, who are perceived as not belonging even as they continue to benefit from the uneven distributions of capital and power on St. Kitts. On St. Kitts, green monkeys are perceived, for different reasons, as not belonging, despite having been present on the island for over 350 years. The social and cultural identity of the Black Kittitian, who is a citizen and who belongs, is predicated on the post-colonial liberation of St. Kitts in 1983. Both Kittitian people's and monkeys' identities are formed by these histories. Belonging in this context occurs not only in inclusion or exclusion, but through both at the same time, a negotiation in flux with one's socially and locally embedded identities.

Ultimately, Jackson calls for a provisional understanding of humanity that is epistemologically troubled by the work of racism, sexism, and speciesism. “Yet when the authors of this field [post-humanism] speak of a human, they most commonly speak of one whose ontological integrity is assumed and idealized rather than plasticized, even when the goal of post-humanism and animal studies is ultimately to interrogate or undermine that certainty” (16). To reconcile such violence, Jackson states, would require showing how hierarchies of humanity bear on the hierarchies of animality, and vice versa. I understand Jackson here to mean that stopping the reproduction of cycles of harm and non-consent would require an acknowledgment that humans are not immune to the violence of non-consent, which is often seen as uncivilized and innate to the animal world rather than to the idealized Western conception of the human as civilized, predicated on the capacity for mastery over the self and other. If the designation of people and animals as problems is used to justify the reproduction of plantation logics predicated on non-consent and violence, then to face this violence would require disrupting the illusion of human mastery over the self and others, which is already continually compromised.

These hierarchies manifest in local and everyday experiences of alienation and belonging. Building on Jackson’s theory allows us to think of the hierarchies of humanity and animality as mutually reinforcing discourses that have historically coevolved. Writing in such a way that is attentive to this critique, then, requires not only investigating the position of race and gender in relation to power and privilege amongst humans, but the relation of race and gender through power and privilege also to animality and to actual non-human animals in settings like the monkey problem, wherein humans and animals are inextricably imbricated.

The laboratory, predicated on the ideas of sterility and separation from nature, and of objective scientific experimentation and controlled variables, is plagued by non-consensual

violence on St. Kitts. I theorize that the desensitization of people to violence against monkeys, a necessary and important part of the scientific process, contributes to the desensitization of violence against people, perpetuating cycles of non-consent enacted between people. Ultimately, these cycles of non-consent travel in both directions, reproduced by logics of problematization that seek to ignore people's and animals' capacity to experience the violence of non-consent, even in settings where their capacity to offer consent is compromised or diminished.

Theorists frame the laboratory as a man-made environment in which captive animals exhibit behaviors distinct from those of their free-ranging counterparts (Kohler 1994; Rader 2004; Sharp 2017, 2018). Scientists seek consent from universities or independent review boards as a way of justifying certain forms of violence against monkeys in the laboratory. Scientists default to the judgment of these external sources as a proxy form of consent when actual consent between scientists and research subjects is not possible. People working in these laboratories come to utilize the idea of implicit or non-verbal consent to explain why they perform actions that are ultimately recognized by others as non-consensual and violent. In this setting, the possibility for non-violent relations with monkeys deteriorates, in part because the violence against monkeys is deemed a necessary and acceptable part of the scientific process by these institutional authorities. Violence is naturalized within the laboratory's built environment and culture, and people become desensitized to it. As my interlocuter Lottie in Chapter 4, and other interlocuters reflected, their experiences of sexual harassment and assault at these facilities, where people work to cultivate monkey research subjects, are related to how they perceive men treating both women and monkeys badly in different ways. The contemporary geographies of non-consent, which are unevenly distributed across lines of sexism, racism, and speciesism, are a product of histories of non-consent and violence as mechanisms for the cultivation of sugar

through racialized (re)productive accumulation. These racial and species hierarchies and constructions are reproduced through violent processes of both dehumanization and animalization. Not only is there a slippery boundary between the two, but there is also a human in the animal and an animal in the human. Only in sitting with the recognition of non-consent that occurs between both humans and animals can we work towards repair — towards ending cycles of racializing, dehumanizing, and animalizing violence that continue to harm both people and animals whose lives continue to be shaped by racialized (re)productive accumulation.

## **Nurturing Sensitivity**

As explored in Chapter 4, I theorize that non-consent thrives and is transmitted in spaces where desensitization is cultivated. In theorizing the qualities of non-consent as a co-presence, it seems not to follow a horizontal diffusion of symmetrical or equal agencies across and between humans and nonhumans, but rather to exist in a relationship defined by possession. Possession both in the horror sense, such as to be possessed by a specter or a co-presence, and also possession as in racialized and colonial conceptions of ownership and control – a state of holding or custody in which certain people are seen as having dominion over other people or beings. The racialized concept of possession was also central to the logics of racialized (re-)productive accumulation.

Non-consent is not necessarily sovereign over people, but it shapes people's actions through a vertical, non-egalitarian configuration of being-in-relation, wherein the individual possessed by historical non-consent finds themselves, in a space of compromised awareness, also compromised in their agency. In this way, both the beings enacting and experiencing non-consent exist in uncanny ecologies that resist and fail to meet Western conceptions of mastery

over self and others, who are subjected to non-consent and made to experience a lack of self-possession in its retransmission. Historically, this can be attributed to the role non-consent played in delineating between enslavement and freedom. To frame non-consent, then, as a co-presence with the power to influence people's agency in its reproduction, and which thrives in spaces where people's attunement and sensitivity are already compromised, I believe that the agency of the person to become sensitive, or (re-)sensitized to (non-)consent and bodily autonomy, lies in nurturing sensitivity. One version of nurturing sensitivity that I focus on in this dissertation is affective consent.

Mobilizations of consent as a concept are limited by colonial conceptions of possession, or of the body and land as property, as well as by distributive hierarchies of humanity, race, and species that were historically mobilized through scientific expertise and as forms of social order (Boisseron 2018, Jackson 2020). Consent can be redeemed as a communicative form when prioritizing sensitivity in all its forms — when we consider affect, or how non-human beings and even non-living beings express agency in complex ways that may not be immediately intelligible to humans. I hope that broadening the understandings of consent and non-consent to include non-human others, affect, and visceral bodily reactions can serve to draw further attention to the prevalence of non-consent in the world as it is naturalized into our cultures and ecologies, which can then, in turn, help to solve ethical quandaries surrounding consent that continue to trouble the human experience.

In exploring sensory attunement to the differences and multiplicities that proliferate in zones of continual extraction, yet remain imperceptible through extractivism's ways of knowing and rendering worlds, Gómez-Barris (2017) poses “submerged perspectives” to attune to social ecologies in the extractive zone. Submerged perspectives are the ways of relating existences that

are sometimes silenced but ultimately “cannot fully be contained” by extractive enclosures (12). Submerged perspectives are a “decolonial gesture” (13), then, in at least two senses. First, tending to the social ecologies that become visible and palpable through submerged perspectives is a way to “[catalog] life otherwise,” the modes of living that exist alongside and proliferate within extractive zones, even if not knowable within the logics of measurement (4). This is a refusal of extractivism’s claims to and desire for totalizing capture (whether through seeing, knowing, thieving, extracting, or taking), and a refusal too of the ways that capture is analytically reproduced “if we only track the purview of power’s destruction and death force” (3). Second, submerged perspectives are decolonial gestures in that they undermine the ways of seeing and knowing – the sensorial attunements predicated on objectivity, metrics, and the quantifiable – through which coloniality and extractivism operate. Submerged perspectives do this through their evasion of being measured or known through colonial sensorial attunements. In this way, Gómez-Barris orients us toward embodied, sensuous, and situated ways of knowing, attuned to the “irruptive potential of multiplicity” (12), and to the beings, doings, and relating that happen in the murk and the muck of “submerged” spaces.

Gómez-Barris argues that the imperfection of perception is a site of vulnerability to colonial violence, but also a site of resistance to such exploitation. Considering the animal/human divide as one of the constitutive ruptures of colonization, and one that (like any rupture) is imperfect, or “fragile,” as Andil Gosine (2021) suggests, we can think of science as a site for the understanding of non-human consciousness and communication at its best, and for anthropocentrism and prioritizing the human at its worst. I interpret Gómez-Barris as meaning that humans are fragmented from nature and animals through

the dissemination of ontologies and cosmologies that treat land and animals as extractable commodities. I seek to write alongside the intervention that Gómez-Barris terms “decolonizing the senses,” while remaining sensitive to how this language fails to acknowledge and address the material harms of colonial violence. I propose an alternative language, *prioritizing the senses*, that I hope will be useful for contextualizing attunement to affective consent as a way of following through on the kinds of knowing that Gómez-Barris is describing. I argue that prioritizing the senses is intrinsic to the multi-species ethnographic method, which Gómez-Barris suggests can allow for the consideration of embodied knowing as a research technology.

Investigating the affective and visceral components of (non-)consent, as a way of prioritizing the senses, creates the possibility of attunement to self and other, enabling communication that transcends colonial domination of the senses and a reconnection to self and other beyond colonial imaginaries. Prioritizing thinking about consent in all its forms — affirmative, informed, and affective — may ultimately transform how conversations about consent seek to define ethical and pleasurable forms of relation, and how people understand the (non-)consent of animal research subjects.

What could consent in the Anthropocene look like if we prioritized the diverse senses, modes of thought, and ways of being arising in post-colonial St. Kitts, the Caribbean, and other contexts? Political philosopher Malcom Ferdinand (2021) calls for “decolonial interspecies alliances” wherein people and animals may form “politically strong alliances” through which they “can oppose the Plantationocene and its slaveries” (227). In line with anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando’s (2022) call to think with the more-than-natural, I extend Ferdinand’s call

for sympraxis with decolonial interspecies alliances to include not only animals, but also spirits and deities as co-conspirators in resistance and renewal. In this chapter, I argue for a conception of consent that includes non-human animals. This, too, is limiting. Indigenous onto-epistemologies like Place-Thought (Watts 2013), grounded normativity (Coulthard 2014), reciprocity-based worldviews (Baker 2017, Reo 2019, Salmón 2000), and Caribbean re-matriation (Ferdinand 2021). Such worldviews offer versions of multi-species relations otherwise (Ahuja 2016, Gosine 2021), conceiving of consent beyond the human-animal to encompass relationships with non-human others, including ecologies and lands. Authors like Savannah Shange (2019) and Eve Tuck (2018) have also theorized consent and refusal in research, offering alternative ethics of engagement. Shange, for example, treats refusal to participate in research as a form of data, signaling towards forms of resistance or non-conformity that can be theorized without crossing the interlocutor's boundaries. To respect refusal is not only a question of ethics but also of what can be considered compelling research. It is only by allowing others to refuse that we can facilitate the conditions for consent to be possible.

## ***Part 3: Belonging***

### **Chapter 6: Foreigners**

In the Black American imaginaries of the United States, Atlantic storms are commonly associated with the transatlantic slave trade. Originating off the coast of Africa, making their way to the Caribbean basin and the Gulf of Mexico, and then heading back to the North Atlantic towards Europe, these storms are a reminder of the trace of this historic crime for which no justice has been done. In this imaginary, the storm is no longer only a spiral of winds and torrential rains. It is charged with the memory of the ancestors who were lost in the Atlantic and with rage have come aground the American coasts. In this movement, the storm behaves like a slave ship recalling past injustices and reinforcing contemporary inequalities: the storm becomes a colonial hurricane. (Ferdinand 2019, page 66).

### **Monkey Tourism**

Tourism is an intrinsic part of daily life on St. Kitts. The people who keep baby monkeys and make money by having tourists take pictures with their non-human primate companions are legally classified by the government as monkey vendors, colloquially known as monkey peddlers. On Monday, September 25th, 2023, my friend Victoria was visiting me on St. Kitts from the United States. I drove us to the Sky Park, a popular tourist attraction. At Sky Park, tourists board a large ATV and are taken up to Mt. Liamuiga, and then zip-line down the mountain.

We parked about a 5-minute walk away, off the dirt road leading to the tourist destination. As we exited the car, we saw a man quickly leave his house nearby. He opened a small, locked cage he had sitting in his front yard, which contained a baby monkey. He quickly approached us. I was not fazed by this, as I had encountered monkey vendors many times before.

“There’s a monkey vendor coming toward us,” I told Victoria, “he’ll try to get you to pay to take a photo with a baby monkey. It’s up to you.”

“I don’t want to take a photo with it,” Victoria replied.

It took about another minute for him to make it all the way to us. Before even exchanging a greeting, the baby monkey jumped from his shoulder, where it had been sitting, onto Victoria's. The monkey was wearing a diaper. It was outfitted with a collar and leash, which dangled to the side and touched the ground.

"Give me your phone," the Peddler said. Victoria was caught off guard, despite my having warned her. She seemed unable to respond in any way other than to go with the vendor's suggestion. She handed him her phone, and he took a few photos of her with the monkey.

"That'll be \$15," he said when he handed her back the phone. She dug through her purse for bills and then handed them to him.

"You want a photo too?" he turned me and asked. "I'm all good," I responded.

Monkey peddlers employed a keen attunement to social dynamics to cultivate participation in their services. What I noticed in these interactions was that the monkey peddlers were extremely adept at eliciting verbal agreement and payment through discomfort. With the baby monkey on their shoulder, most people found it hard to refuse.

At first glance, it may seem that power was flowing in favor of the monkey vendor. Despite Victoria's discomfort and mixed reaction, the man succeeded in soliciting money from her for a service she did not want. However, this interaction was informed by significant differentials in access to power and capital that invisibly defined the moment. Victoria, a lawyer from the United States who could afford to visit St. Kitts as a tourist, was in the position to spend her money or capital for a tourist service. Though she failed to refuse or dismiss the Monkey Vendor, despite her desire to do so, it was ultimately her capital that she handed over. Tracing the broader and invisible flows of power and capital that informed this interaction — flows that were actually incredibly visible to the monkey vendor, who had become adept at navigating them

through his work, one can begin to understand what Sanchez and Adams (2008) call “the Janus-faced” character of tourism in the Caribbean — the contradictions that exist between tourism and nation-building, and the counter-productive effects that tourism may have in both supporting and undermining local sovereignty. Ultimately, I argue that, though the tourism economy is certainly different from its predecessor, the sugar monocrop plantation farm economy, there remain certain persistent logics between the two, which ultimately create uneven disparities in the distribution of wealth and power. In the contemporary tourism economy, the locus of power and ownership has shifted from the “white Kittitian” British and British-descended landowner to the largely physically absent land-owning foreign investor.

## **Icon of the Seas**

On Tuesday, January 30th, 2024, the Icon of the Seas, the largest cruise ship in the world, arrived in St. Kitts as a stop on its first-ever voyage. This was a spectacle. People from across the country came to Port Zante to witness its arrival. I spent the day conducting short interviews with tourists who had just gotten off the boat and observing their interactions with monkey vendors who walked around with a baby monkey on their arm. As I have learned from various conversations over the course of my fieldwork, these monkeys are captured and taken away from their troops as babies. The monkey peddlers raise them. To solicit money at Port Zante, they must pay for permits from the Department of Agriculture. Together, these peddlers generally make thousands of dollars on days where a large cruise ship docks on St. Kitts. Their methods are simple – they approach you and place the baby monkey on your shoulder. Then, they offer to take a picture of you with your phone. Then they charged people \$20 USD for the interaction.

At Port Zante, the major port where cruise-ship visitors dock and then shop, I observed that people were sometimes visibly distressed by these interactions. Their faces would contort with discomfort, and they would often bend their backs as though to get away from the monkey. Rarely, however, did people say “no,” and often they tried to hide their fear and discomfort. Though people would express their discomfort or squeamishness through small bodily reactions like yelps, welps, and shakes, they still smiled as the vendor or a loved one snapped a photo of them.

Few people succeeded in refusing monkey peddlers. The most successful strategy I saw was preemptive refusal — people who noticed monkey vendors approaching and would emphatically shake their heads, or even walk away from them, gesturing an “x” with their arms and vocalizing an emphatic “no thank you.” More often than not, I observed, people who were surprised by a monkey peddler’s approach ultimately partook of the service and paid for it.

Monkeys are a social commodity that must be understood within the broader post-colonial conditions of St. Kitts, in which possibilities for consent and refusal are unevenly distributed. For monkey peddlers, their work is a way to make money from wealthy tourists. Though there may be discomfort present in the complex decisions to refuse or accept the monkey vendor’s assertive prompting, there are also broader power dynamics at play. The monkey vendor’s long *durée* is an important factor in understanding the interaction. The monkey vendors’ livelihoods rely on the consent of tourists, who are in a position of privilege and power, demonstrated by their capacity to visit St. Kitts in the first place. The monkey vendors, unlike scientists or farmers, utilize cultivated attunement to their local environment to benefit from the flows of power and capital within the rhythms of the tourism economy. Analyzing the affective encounters between monkey vendors and tourists offers another example of how people are

already attuned to the affective components of the mediations of consent – monkey vendors make money by crafting a service that is only possible through deep attunement to tourists’ affect.

On this day, Port Zante was full of locals and tourists. I ran into multiple friends and interlocutors while I was there, who had taken time out of their workday to come and witness the Icon of the Seas. The port had the energy of a carnival – women dressed in full fête attire walked around, prompting tourists to take photos posing with them. A band played live Soka music while multiple performers danced around on stilts. The port was filled with life and celebration.

I approached people wandering around Port Zante and asked them a few short questions: Did they come to St. Kitts on a cruise? Did they encounter a monkey vendor? If yes, did they pay them for their services? And, had they ever heard of the monkeys of St. Kitts before? When speaking with locals, including government officials, tourist interest in the local monkey population was often, if not always, cited as a particularly important aspect of the monkeys’ presence on the island. Many locals working in both the government and the tourism industry generally believed the monkeys were an important draw for international visitors.

What I learned at the port was that almost none of the tourists had ever even heard of the monkeys of St. Kitts. Of the fifty people I conducted brief interviews with, only ten had ever heard of the local monkeys. Six of the ten who knew about them had only recently learned of them from local tour guides and bus drivers on day trips to St. Kitts. Overall, among the 122 tourists I interviewed on St. Kitts over 16 months of fieldwork, only 18 had known anything about the monkeys before visiting the island. While this may not be a statistically significant sample, my data collection supports the claim that a majority of tourists who visit St. Kitts have no prior knowledge of the local monkeys. The results I report in this section may be particularly

significant for Kittitian readers, in that they reject a widely-held assumption on St. Kitts that tourists are drawn to St. Kitts specifically to see monkeys.

The monkeys of St. Kitts have certainly attracted international attention from animal rights groups and various media outlets. However, it is usually during tourists' visits to the island that the monkeys become a common topic of conversation. Tour guides, taxi and bus drivers, and locals chatting with tourists frequently mention the monkeys and the monkey problem — it is locals who keep the monkeys a daily topic of conversation. Social and cultural understandings of the monkeys, as invasive, and as problems, are transmitted and reified in these daily interactions. When I asked tourists what specific things they were told about the monkeys, tourists' answers often fell into one of three categories. People learned that (1) there were more monkeys than people on the island, (2) the monkeys are considered invasive, and (3) the government is trying to humanely deal with the monkeys because of their overpopulation. Their understanding of this third point was usually vague and limited. (My understanding of this third point was also vague and limited at any given time, as there always seemed to be some sort of intervention being planned, but not executed, by the government at any given time.)

When I asked long-time residents about their understanding of the monkey problem, they often shared the perception that those in power were waiting to discover or create humane and effective solutions that did not yet exist. Long-time residents refer to the immigrant population on St. Kitts who are not tourists and are not born or raised on St. Kitts — many are business- and land-owning, gain citizenship through the Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, and immigrate from North America or Europe. When I asked long-time residents who they believed was in power or should be responsible for the monkey problem, they generally answered that the government was, with some naming the Ministry of Environment and the Department of

Agriculture. Kittitians who were not farmers or backyard gardeners, long-time residents, and tourists whom I interviewed generally expressed a desire for some sort of intervention other than seeing the monkeys killed or hunted; in contrast, Kittitian farmers generally favored hunting as an intervention. Long-time residents and tourists generally had favorable attitudes and responses towards sterilization, and less positive attitudes towards culling or hunting. These answers were generally consistent regardless of the international residents' and tourists' race or country of origin, which were most frequently the USA, Canada, or the United Kingdom. Kittitian farmers and backyard gardeners generally responded favorably to all of the proposed interventions, but especially favored the idea of an open hunting season and compensation for the culling of monkeys by the tail.

To understand the affective encounters between tourists and monkey vendors, it is useful to contextualize the tourism economy of St. Kitts historically. In 2005, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis officially abolished the sugar industry, ending monocrop agriculture and opening the way for tourism as the new chosen economic driver. Newly available land, an agricultural-based workforce, and a push into tourism were significant transitions for the post-colonial economy of St. Kitts and Nevis. Cruise ship tourism, favored by the government of St. Kitts and Nevis for the consistent capital it brings to the island, is a significant part of the logic that sustains the monkey problem. Cruise ship visitors tend to stay on the island for 8-10 hours, returning to their cruise ship to sleep while traveling between other Caribbean Islands. Ian Gregory Strachan (2003) and Marcus Rediker (2007) have shown that contemporary cruise tourism has its historical roots in the legacy of slave ships and the economic structuring of the Caribbean through the plantation system. In particular, cruise ships were developed to generate additional revenue on ships that would otherwise transport goods to and from the Caribbean.

Strachan describes contemporary Caribbean tourism as part of a neoplantation enterprise that rebranded the violence of plantation systems as paradisaal tourist attractions. Historical accounts show that Caribbean cruise tourism grew out of the shipping of sugar and bananas by companies such as the United Fruit Company, which operated plantations in the region, linking the transport of agricultural goods with passenger travel (Battle-Baptiste 2017, Honey 2019).

Tourism is currently the primary economic engine in St. Kitts and Nevis, estimated in 2023 to account for about 35% of all jobs on the islands, including roles in hotels, restaurants, taxi services, and craft vending (International Monetary Fund 2023). Following the decline of the sugar industry and the abolition of sugar plantations, tourism became the chief source of foreign exchange. Caribbean tourism, Strachan argues, continues to operate with the same labor systems and dependency structures as plantations. Tourism continues colonial labor and dependency structures, in which local populations serve foreign visitors. These neocolonial structures are reproduced, Strachan argues, by framing the islands as Edenic and obscuring the realities of local populations. These neocolonial economic structures prioritize economic returns by reinforcing historical inequalities.

Cruise-ship tourism and other related forms of transnational capital flow that rely on cheap labor are part of what Malcolm Ferdinand (2021) calls “the modern tempest”, defined by forms of “colonial inhabitation” predicated on the exploitation of land, nature, and “othercide” or the exploitation, and refusal of co-inhabiting the Earth in the presence, of beings and people who are different from the colonizer in appearance or beliefs (24, 28-29). In tracing the atmospheric and geographic consequences of this modern tempest, Ferdinand follows “colonial hurricane politics,” a set of “strategies and schemes” that turn “partly natural disasters into profitable events that reinforce the world’s colonial foundations, increase the wealth of the

masters, and exacerbate the enslaved person's subjection and misfortune" (66). Ferdinand is referring to what Mimi Sheller (2020) calls the "Non-Profit Industrial Complex," in which transnational non-governmental organizations capitalize on disasters to take over local government functions and impose neoliberal policies that primarily benefit international financial institutions (Sheller 4, 16). I argue that the persistent logics of colonial hurricane politics extend far beyond humanitarian disaster relief and also include cruise ship tourism, eco-tourism, educational tourism, international animal rights tourism, and scientific islanding and offshoring — all parts of a global storm that ultimately blows certain kinds of people and capital to and from St. Kitts.

A handful of my interlocutors were Russian migrants who had fled to St. Kitts after the economic sanctions imposed on Russia due to the Russia-Ukraine war. These interlocutors were excited to meet me, a fellow Russian speaker, as many of them spoke little to no English. I was a first-generation college student at Yale University when I first came to St. Kitts as an intern in 2017. As the child of Russian-Jewish refugees who left the former Soviet Union, now Kyiv, Ukraine, in 1989, I was strongly motivated by a perception of a scientific career as an opportunity for economic mobility.

Russian Jews were a marginalized group in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, cast as genetically inferior, distinct, and a dangerous other. From 1791 to 1971, Jews were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement, a massive ghetto in the western region of Imperial Russia largely overlapping with contemporary Poland and Ukraine. Jews were banned from major cities and underwent severe economic hardship. This religious prejudice shifted to scientific and systemic racism in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Empire and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Soviet Union. The Soviet Union legally classified Jews as a nationality, creating a bureaucratic, racialized identity

that persisted in documentation cards and identity documents like internal passports (Mogilner 2023). Upon migrating, many Russian-speaking Jews, like my family, faced different racial logics, coming to be seen as white under American racial logics. However, centuries of antisemitism were ingrained in their understanding of the world.

I was raised in a multi-generational household that included my great-grandparents, Holocaust survivors born in 1923 and 1924, who passed away in their 90s when I was in my 20s. In unforeseen ways, these historical trends were also parts of the modern tempest — a global storm that led to my own entanglement with St. Kitts. The life chances that ultimately led me to research St. Kitts and become attuned to the monkey problem are the same kinds of logic that draw other scientists and international researchers of all kinds to work on St. Kitts, at monkey farms, in endangered turtle conservation, and on soil erosion mitigation. These researchers, like me, even when we are critical of neo-colonial flows of power, also serve to reproduce them as academic tourists who ultimately benefit from the research we conduct on the island.

My familial history and my family's migration as Russian Jewish refugees from Ukraine to the United States during the dissolution of the Soviet Union were ultimately inextricably tied to the same social currents and winds that ultimately led to the current immigration of Russians to St. Kitts. This is just one example of how St. Kitts, historically through its sugar-export economy, and in the post-colonial contemporary through its citizenship-by-investment (CBI) program and tourism-driven economy, is heavily shaped by foreign influences and global shifts in political power. The “valley of death” discussed in Chapter 4, the transnational lack of funding and support for translational research, and the cycles of gendered non-consent amongst people currently

at the center of international attention, discussed in Chapter 5, are also part of this global storm.

## **Kittitian Hill**

Tatiana was a long-time resident of St. Kitts, and an immigrant from Russia, who once described herself to me as a “бывший олигарх,” a former oligarch. I met her through the small network of other Russian immigrants on St. Kitts, who were generally excited to meet me because I was русскоязычный, a Russian-speaker. Tatiana sat in the passenger seat beside me as we drove on the Island Main Road to the opposite side of the island from Frigate Bay, where we both lived. We chatted about my research as we drove through stretches of road, increasingly enclosed on both sides by wild sugarcane. When a domestic plant becomes rewilded, it is called feralization — the process by which cultivated plants adapt to survive in a wild-like state without human intervention. Sugar cane, which dominated the economy of St. Kitts for over 300 years, is now largely abandoned. We drove past visible remnants of plantations, such as mills and chimneys scattered across the landscape, and fields of overgrown sugarcane alongside guinea grass and wild vegetation. Many of these former estates have been converted for different purposes: some as monkey farms or research sites, some as shops or housing, some as museums, and many as hotels and resorts. The Kittitian Hill is a resort development in Saint Paul Capisterre Parish. It is set on the hillside, from which the Caribbean Sea is visible.

As we approached the area, we began to drive more slowly. Even going at a slow pace, we still passed the turn from Island Main Road — the sign reading “Kittitian Hill” seemed to appear out of nowhere. After a quick U-turn, we turned off Island Main Road and began to make a slow and extremely bumpy drive between carefully manicured arches of trees.

The Kittitian Hill resort was founded in 2006 by Val Kempadoo, a Trinidad-based entrepreneur, and was largely funded by capital from the Sugar Industry Diversification Foundation (SIDF), established in St. Kitts. The SIDF was a government charity set up to raise funds for displaced sugar industry workers. As part of the Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, individuals or families seeking St. Kitts citizenship must make a minimum contribution of \$250,000 per person to this charity as part of their citizenship application. The SIDF was established in September 2006 under the Foundations Act of 2003, which was the post-colonial government's policy for regulating non-governmental organizations and non-profit foundations. The purpose of the Foundation was to “research into the development of other industries to replace the sugar industry” and “to fund the development of these industries” (CBI program).

The SIDF is no longer operational — it was discontinued and replaced by the Hurricane Relief Fund (HRF) from 2017 to 2018, at which time the required contribution for CBI was reduced to \$150,000 (Balakrishnan 2017). The HRF was replaced by the Sustainable Growth Fund (SGF), which retained a \$150,000 contribution requirement for CBI. The SGF has most recently been replaced by the Sustainable Island State Contribution (SISC), which reinstates the required contribution at \$250,000 USD in exchange for citizenship. Alternatively, individuals seeking to purchase citizenship may invest in real estate, with the minimum investment for citizenship as of 2024 set at \$325,000 for condominiums, shares, or fractional ownership in developments. The property at Kittitian Hill represents one of the properties where individuals may purchase such real estate shares.

In 2013, the SIDF sold its stake to Swiss Entrepreneur and heir to Nestlé Patrick Liotard-Vogt, making Kittitian Hill a private company. Reporter Willi Schneider (2013), who interviewed Liotard-Vogt, writes

The flamboyant Nestlé heir Patrick Liotard-Vogt is building a multi-million-dollar resort for the rich and famous in the Caribbean. It will include 84 mini-villas, seven luxury suites, restaurants, and cinemas. 'The biggest investment of my life. It's not just my money, but my whole heart,' Liotard-Vogt revealed in an interview with spot on news. Paradise lies at 17 degrees longitude and 62 degrees latitude. A few circumnavigators know this, and so did Christopher Columbus. Otherwise, the Caribbean island of St. Kitts seems almost to exist, so untouched is it.

Although St. Kitts and its neighboring island of Nevis are only 60 kilometers or a twelve-minute flight from the celebrity hotspot of St. Barth, the Garden of Eden feeling here is more intense than in the rest of the Caribbean: secluded beaches, abundant sunshine, local rum specialties, reggae music, and above all, deeply relaxed locals who are neither impressed by John Travolta, nor by Oprah Winfrey or Bill Clinton. They have long appreciated this paparazzi-free zone.

Just like Nestlé heir and Asmallworld boss Patrick Liotard-Vogt, who, together with partner Val Kempadoo, is currently building a \$600 million resort in the tropical mountains. Not a concrete bunker, but a self-sufficient eco-complex designed for sustainability and built entirely in harmony with nature. "Kittitian Hill" ( [www.kittitianhill.com](http://www.kittitianhill.com) ) offers, in its first phase, 84 mini-villas (all with private pools), seven luxury suites (with 30-meter pools), and a boutique hotel – pure relaxation for well-to-do philanthropists from around the world.

In a later phase, an entire village will be added: with a Soho House-style hotel, retail space, bars, restaurants, a cinema, and a conference center. The project encompasses art, culture, wellness, and indulgence in equal measure – refined pursuits that Patrick Liotard-Vogt, who discovered the island through his online community Asmallworld ( [www.asmallworld.com](http://www.asmallworld.com) ), has always been passionate about. "I see myself as a kind of lifestyle advocate, offering top-tier relaxation to a very discerning clientele. I want to create an oasis of bliss where those who have already seen it all can feel at ease," Vogt explained in an interview with the news agency spot on news.

To ensure this clientele wants for nothing, all sorts of extras are offered: an 18-hole championship golf course, a rum bar with the world's largest collection, a Sedona spa from Arizona, a farm-to-table restaurant, a Scandinavian gourmet temple modeled after "Noma," a helipad, a private beach club, two 50-meter berths in the developing yacht harbor, and a private runway for the club plane that shuttles to St. Barth. All this comes at a price: up to \$6,000 a night!

But regardless of how much money someone is willing to spend, check-in is possible starting Christmas. Access to "Kittitian Hill" is by invitation only. Or as a member of the online community, Asmallworld, all of whom recently received a voucher for a free week. Or as a local resident — a so-called Kittitian. This local, tax-free citizenship, including a visa-free passport for all Schengen countries, can be applied for with an investment of at least \$400,000 in government-approved projects. This is the grand business plan behind the ambitious project of Swiss investor Liotard-Vogt. "Kittitian

Hill" is one such government-recognized project that can grant naturalization in the Commonwealth nation of St. Kitts, provided the rigorous due diligence process is passed. This is why Russian and Chinese multinationals are currently beating down the door of the millionaire heir.

"Among the passport holders is the who's who of the global financial elite," says Liotard-Vogt, who, despite holding a Swiss passport, has also converted: "The biggest investment of my life. Not only my money, but my whole heart is in it. Clearly, I can only manage this by becoming a local. I'm a proud Kittitian!" The lifestyle isn't a big deal, as it's just as relaxed as the Swiss way of life. It's just that things move at a slightly slower pace here – true to the island motto: Rush Slowly!

This resort, for "the rich and famous in the Caribbean," was experienced as dystopic by my Kittitian interlocutors. One of my interlocutors, Lovis, a Kittitian descendant of maroons, had told me about Kittitian Hill long before I visited. Lovis led hiking tours of Mt. Liamuiga and once pointed Kittitian Hill out to me from a distance while we were hiking. "They closed the original hiking entrance to build Kittitian Hill," he had told me, "it a gated community for white oligarchs and Black politicians. It's built like a fortress, so Kittitians cannot enter. People take choppers [helicopters] to get there straight from the airport."

Schneider writes that access to Kittitian Hill was by invitation only, unless one is "a local resident — a so-called Kittitian." However, my Kittitian interlocutors, like Lovis, experienced Kittitian Hill as something insular and separate, an island within St. Kitts that Lovis imagined was accessible only by helicopters.

As Tatiana and I drove up towards Kittitian Hill, I could see that it was not meant to be accessible by car. Kittitian Hill was accessible only by one long, badly maintained road, which it took us over 20 minutes to drive up. Though the trees on the sides were carefully manicured, forming perfect arches all along the road, the road itself was in horrible shape. I was constantly maneuvering side to side to avoid massive holes and dips. My rental car, a compact Kia hatchback, was scraping audibly along the bottom and sides.

Media refers to Kittitian Hill as one of the largest successes of the local farm-to-table movement on St. Kitts. The website for the resort clearly claims “organic farm-to-table food,” and their restaurant is named “The Farm Table.” Leighton, one of my key interlocutors and a Guyanese-American agricultural scientist, understood Kittitian Hill differently. He once reflected to me, “It is an example of the budding farm-to-table movement, but that doesn’t filter down into the economy. Places like Kittitian Hill, built on personal and political connections, do not participate in agricultural education or local collaboration.”

It was Thursday, November 21st, 2024, and Tatiana and I had been invited to help two Russian investors, AJ and Adam, negotiate with the management of the Belmont Resort on Kittitian Hill. These foreign investors spoke little to no English, and so had reached out to their friends in the informal network of Russian-speaking people on St. Kitts for support. Tatiana, who had studied English in school and was fluent, was recruited to act as their translator. They graciously allowed me to tag along as an additional source of translational support in return for participating in my ethnographic research.

Though Schneider’s article frames the resort as ready for visitors, it was clearly still under construction. As the arches of trees slowly gave way to construction sites, it was clear that multiple villas and cottages on Kittitian Hill were incomplete. There were sets of walls without roofs, and lumber and other construction materials scattered in large piles. I would learn shortly from the conversation I observed that there were no plans to complete these villas because the management of Kittitian Hill was not doing well financially.

We approached a security gate, where a Kittitian woman sitting in a small white booth rolled down her window and asked us about the reason for our visit. The signage was confusing, and we got lost multiple times while driving on small, winding roads between villas and

cottages. Eventually, some Kittitian landscape workers directed us towards the Farm Table, where we were meeting. We parked and approached the restaurant, which featured multiple massive infinity pools overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Though a handful of staff were present, we were the only non-staff present. Adam and AJ soon approached us, and we all made introductions. We spoke in Russian.

Adam and AJ were, I guessed, in their late 40s or early 50s. I learned that both owned villas at Kittitian Hill, which they had purchased to obtain citizenship. They described this decision as strategic for their long-term financial well-being, noting that having St. Kitts and Nevis citizenship gave them access to many countries they could not visit with their Russian citizenship. They both spent very little time on St. Kitts and Nevis. Their goal in meeting with management, they explained, was to discuss why they had not been paid the dividends or profits they were owed by Kittitian Hill for renting out their properties to the resort. They had not been paid their dividends, they said, in over five years. They understood that this was likely because the resort was not in a financial position to pay the dividends and were willing to compromise — their goal was to negotiate a single payout for 25% of what they were owed over the past five years.

About 15 minutes later, two people from management at Kittitian Hill approached us to speak. I learned that these were Sherry, an Indo-Caribbean woman from St. Kitts, and Doug, an Afro-Caribbean man who said he was from Anguilla but spoke with an American accent. They began by sharing with us who they were and what their roles were. They explained that the Sugar Industry Diversification Foundation, as a non-profit foundation, had appointed a board of directors. That board of directors then hired a consultancy, Guishard and Associates, to assist them in managing Kittitian Hill's finances and operations. Sherry was the representative point of

contact for the owners and shareholders of Kittitian Hill, an employee of the resort, and Doug was an employee of Keyshawn and Associates. He shared with us that his company had previously done similar work in Anguilla for another resort and succeeded in turning it from a three-star to a five-star resort. They wanted to use the same strategies that had been effective there to set a higher standard for Kittitian Hill, thereby increasing its profitability and revenue. Doug described Kittitian Hill as “virgin territory,” which was an exciting business opportunity because “it has the possibility to make a lot more capital than it currently is, if we better develop it.”

While all of this information was incredibly interesting to me as an ethnographer, Adam and AJ were not interested in understanding this history because they did not see why it concerned them. “Они пытаются отвлечь нас бесполезной информацией,” AJ commented to us. “They are trying to distract us with unnecessary information.” Tatiana and I looked at each other and silently decided that neither of us would translate that comment for Doug or Sherry.

Doug then pulled out a document and began explaining to us the structure of the dividends owed to Adam and AJ. As part of the homeowners’ association, Adam and AJ were due money through a program known as the “lifestyle owner management program,” meaning they received profits not only when their own villas were rented to tourists, but also an equal split of shares amongst all villa owners. We learned, then, why Adam and AJ had not received any money for the past five years — Kittitian Hill had been failing. “They built a golf course, but then it became overgrown and was lost,” Doug offered to us as one example of how ineffective the previous management had been. “Guishard and Associates were only hired two years ago, and we have not had enough time to fix the errors of the previous management.” By citing this change in management, Doug was able to divert attention and responsibility away from himself

and any specific person or entity. The SIDF no longer existed. The previous management no longer had a stake in the property. Even the current staff were mostly new hires — there was nobody present for Adam and AJ to hold accountable for the resort’s failure. Ultimately, they negotiated a deal for a 10% pay-out from the amount that Adam and AJ were owed.

As Tatiana and I drove back to Frigate Bay from our afternoon meeting, I learned a little bit more about her. Her kids had citizenship in St. Kitts, but she did not. Her husband, from whom she was separated but not divorced, was a Russian businessman who lived in Barbados but had St. Kitts citizenship. While she raised their two children on St. Kitts, he supported them financially from afar. Tatiana did not love St. Kitts. She felt stuck, she said, but did not know where else they could go. “We left Russia because my husband was a former oligarch,” she told me. “With international sanctions, our options were to stay in Russia and not get to go anywhere else again. To retain our ability to travel, we had to leave.”

## **Uneven Mobility**

All of the different actors in this chapter — the monkey vendors, Tatiana, Adam and AJ, Doug, and Sherry — had different relationships to migration. Mimi Sheller (2024) refers to people’s power to travel and migrate as kinopolitics. For Sheller, kinopolitics reflect the geopolitical intersections of tourism, performance, and placemaking — the uneven relations of (im)mobilities shaped by power, capital, state borders, national identities, and political alliances and conflicts. Sheller writes,

Mobilities research highlights how transnational mobilities including those relating to tourism are governed by, and performed within, highly unequal mobility regimes. One of the key ways of producing tourist space is through the control of mobilities and immobilities *via* the many kinds of structural ‘moorings’ that afford differential possibilities for (im)mobilities, whether in the form of passports, border checkpoints, ethnic and racialized exclusions, exclusive hotel design, elite membership clubs,

uniforms, walls and entry gates, toll highways, private islands, or electronic databases, to name just a few (853).

Building on Sheller's reflection on how kinopolitical relations play out in actual places and embodied performances, I theorize that the discomfort of the tourist interacting with a monkey vendor, even in a position of power, is shaped by a global economy that fosters geopolitically uneven societal and ecological impacts. The baby monkey, who is made a tourist commodity, is humanized or made to conform to human expectations of behavior, both the expectations of the monkey vendor and the tourist. At the same time, monkey vendors use their attunement to tourists' affect as a power to encourage tourists to spend money taking pictures with baby monkeys.

Adam and AJ are examples of the foreign investor, for whom an investment in St. Kitts translates into significant mobility capital. Tatiana offers a more complicated figure, one whose own mobility has become limited, as she is neither a citizen of St. Kitts nor in a position to leave. Other international immigrants and visitors who were my interlocutors shared significantly complex relationships with this mobility power. Jenya and Tanya, a married couple in their early twenties, came to St. Kitts after responding to a job posting by former Russian oligarchs who now live full-time on the island. I met them through a friend of mine, who was similarly a working-class migrant employed by "former Russian oligarchs," as they often referred to Russian Kittitians. These workers became a cheap source of labor for these Russian expats, some of whom openly expressed to me in interviews that they did not like Black people and did not wish to interact with Kittitians or Caribbean peoples, despite living full-time on St. Kitts. They would hire people like Jenya and Tanya as servants to perform numerous duties in facilities management, landscaping, cooking, and cleaning. I did not see them often, as they worked most days and were only free when their employers were traveling. Jenya once remarked to me,

Такое ощущение, будто нас продали в рабство. Наши расходы на жизнь примерно равны нашему заработку. Мы не ненавидим свою жизнь здесь, но при этом чувствуем, что застряли. Мы не можем позволить себе уехать. Нам не по карману билеты на самолет обратно в Россию. Наши работодатели пообещали: если мы отработаем здесь два года, они оплатят нам обратные билеты. Мы с нетерпением ждем наступления этого дня.

(It feels like we have been sold into indentured servitude. Our living expenses are about equal to our income. We don't hate our life here, but we also feel stuck here. We can't afford to leave. We can't afford plane tickets back home. Our employers said that if we work here for 2 years, they will pay for our return tickets. We are excited for that day to come.)

Many Kittitian farmers have limited mobility. This is, in part, sustained by local policy: according to Lowitt et al's (2015) study on factors affecting the innovation potential of small-scale farmers, only thirty-five percent of farmers on St. Kitts own the land they live on, and only eight percent of the farmers own the land they do agricultural work on. This creates a contradictory sense of placelessness and constraint: farmers are tied to the land through their profession, yet are landless. This contrasts with mobile tourists and foreign investors, such as former Russian oligarchs, who have significant access to both financial capital and mobility.

While the differences among tourists, long-time resident/locals, and Kittitians are significant and important for the analysis I have offered of differential access to mobility, capital, land ownership, and power, these categories are unstable. Baker (2016) interrogates how categories such as local, visitor, and tourist can become unsettled on St. Kitts, where “the reuse and reinvention of spaces, people, and things has been a matter of necessity turned tradition” (263). That is to say, people and things have multiple meanings on St. Kitts because Kittitian people have dealt with the consequences of unstable employment and uneven mobility power since the island's colonization. That is to say, that the categories of tourist/visitor, long-time resident/local, and Kittitian have constantly shifted on St. Kitts, where life has always been defined by migration and Relation. Baker writes, “Historically, the uncertainty and scarcity of

employment in St. Kitts since the beginning of the twentieth century facilitated a culture of occupational multiplicity” (263). This aligns with what Glissant (1989) describes as Diversion, as previously discussed in the introduction. Diversion is a process by which this history is processed. It is not a direct historicizing, but rather a means of engaging with that history through the everyday. Rather than “a return to the longing for origins,” or an attempt to trace history back further than the rupture of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, diversion allows for “a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully tunneled away,” which allows one to “put to work the forces of creolization” (26). As such, the trickster strategy of diversion is a way to “find another place,” not in the past but in “the resolution other peoples have achieved”—finding meaning in the shifting relations of the present rather than those of the past (23).

Diversion is a crucial resistance strategy for Caribbean peoples. Rather than confrontation, diversion is about finding indirect ways to regain agency in the face of histories of slavery and colonial rupture. Monkey vendors, who navigate uneven mobility by exploiting tourist fantasies that frame baby monkeys as part of a broader Edenic paradise worth photographing, employ a version of the trickster strategy of Diversion. Doug, in citing the dissolution of the SIDF and the turnover of management at Kittitian Hill, where no one can be blamed for missing money or past service failures, is employing another iteration of the trickster strategy of Diversion. While these strategies may be effective, the access to capital and mobility they cultivate remains uneven, shaped by global flows of power and capital that intersect on St. Kitts.

The monkey problem is just one of the unsolvable or “wicked problems” that people on St. Kitts are facing. Even after the decline of sugar plantations, the consequences of plantation economies continue to pervade the island in various settings, including scientific facilities and, as

I argue in this chapter, ecotourism sites, hotels, and resorts. Rather than sugar, landowners and business owners now cultivate experiences, leisure, scientific progress, and other services and commodities. The farm-to-table movement is a form of agriculture that centers on catering to tourists. At the same time, tourism is not so black-and-white. Baker theorizes that, especially on small islands like St. Kitts, where the geography and physical layout mean that local residents are not separated from tourists, and that visitors and locals are not “shielded” from one another, the experiences of these groups of people blur – a particular iteration of what Glissant describes as identity rooted in Relation. At the same time as the identities of these people are constructed in relation to one another, people retain uneven access to consent, capital, power, and mobility in ways that are not traceable across these categories. If we think about the monkey problem as an affective infrastructure – a set of social, physical, and spatial systems that shape, channel, and manage affects – then Baker’s reformulation of what it means to *belong* on St. Kitts offers a way of thinking through the complexity of attunement, and the ways in which these different groups of people become differently attuned to their environments, and to life on St. Kitts, through particular relationships to space and time as they intersect with tourism and migration.

Following the comings and goings surrounding music festivals on St. Kitts, Baker (2016) notices that these international spectacles are not defined by attempts to appeal to foreigners, but rather by their appeal to local desires to associate with foreignness. Put differently, Baker argues that these music festivals are a way for Kittitians, locals, and tourists to have their desire for mobility fulfilled through encounters with foreigners and international music. This local desire to associate with foreignness, Baker believes, can be traced to Black American cultural products, such as music and media, which represent a different form of modern blackness that is seen as appealing in Afro-Caribbean societies. American pop-culture interventions in the Caribbean

since the early twentieth century are the historical precursors to current transnational Caribbean culture and trends in music, fashion, and media – what Baker calls the transnational scene. In this way, Baker understands tourism not only in the context of islanding and offshoring, or as a question of access to mobility, but rather sees migration as a matter of necessity — an ontological aspect of Caribbean life that is and always has been defined by migration and movement in all its forms, and so tourism as an undeniably significant aspect of local culture that has meaning beyond the kinopolitics and capital that sustain them. Baker (2024) writes,

I argue in this book, the layered archipelagic relation of the interactive, intervisible, intertraversable cluster of small islands in the eastern Caribbean cannot be apprehended via the definitive, two-laned continental imaginary buoyed by a "going to" and "coming from" discourse. Instead, comprehension of the small-island inhabitance of Kittitians and Nevisians, a central focus of this book, is better served by the relationality and multiplicity inherent to the archipelago. The archipelago is a form that accounts for the infinitude of the "somewhere else" - something else, someone else, sometime else-from which "everything" comes (21).

Baker draws our attention to “sometime else,” akin to what Glissant (1989) calls synchronic connectivity: the way history continues to exist in the present (80). The islands of the Caribbean have always been shaped by coming and going — contemporary tourism and its post-colonial discontents are but transmutations of past conditions. At the same time, the relationships between islandness and other conceptions of Blackness have changed and continue to change in the present moment, informed by the revolutions and anti-colonial discourse of the past, and the decolonial and post-colonial visions that arise on and from St. Kitts. Baker in *Island Time* (2024) theorizes with Glissant’s concept of Relation:

Glissant also suggests that there are two subjectivities that spring from differing orientations to space and time as manifested in geography and history. The first, "Root-identity;" characterizing the logic of coloniality, is an authority based on origins and "filiality;" "Relation-identity;" in contrast, "produced in the chaotic network of Relation;" is linked "to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;" an experience he repeatedly describes as a "shock;" As Michael Wiedorn explains, "rather

than plunging vertically along a temporal axis into the past, [Relation-identity] would reach out horizontally on a spatial axis to other, contemporary cultures in the present.’ (144)

Relation and Relation-identity are always shaped and defined by the “conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures” — there does not exist a version of life on St. Kitts that is not constantly being shaped and reshaped by Relation. In this way, Baker, building on Glissant, offers us a way of understanding contemporary life on St. Kitts as it is and always has been defined by migration, not as a neutral concept but as a complex historical phenomenon that includes the enduring power relations of colonialism, the afterlives of slavery, the geopolitics of tourism, and the uneven distributions of (im)mobility therein.

## **Conclusion: Relation**

As tourism is an intrinsic part of daily life on St. Kitts, and the categories of visitor and foreigner often blur with those of the local and the Kittitian, it becomes apparent that the designation of certain people and animals as problems is a rhetorical strategy that reproduces the unevenness of access to a claim to belonging. At the same time, belonging is not a reparative for uneven access to mobility, capital, or power. As Baker shows, Caribbean life has always been shaped and defined by migration. Both mobility — the ability to leave — and belonging — feeling seen, valued, and welcomed in a place — then, are sites of tension. Building on Baker’s theorization to think about the monkey problem, it becomes clear that the designation of green monkeys as invasive, even as they have been present on the island for hundreds of years, is not a reflection of their status as alien but rather a culturally informed valuation of their behaviors as problems relative to the desires of people on St. Kitts. The monkeys are certainly an alien species insofar as they are native to coastal regions of West Africa. Designating the monkeys as invasive, rather than merely foreign or alien, ultimately has significant ramifications for how

they are treated today, even as these categories are unstable. The monkeys are not a problem because of their inherent foreignness, but rather because they represent *versions* of both foreignness and belonging that are undesirable – a culturally informed conception of monkeys as a problem that is then reformulated through scientific jargon into the presumably objective category of being invasive.

Similarly, the designation of certain people as problems, for example, the designation of farmers as failures, as one government report refers to them as “part-time farmers who generally exhibit weak farm management,” invisibilizes that many of the challenges of diversified farming are a direct result of centuries of forced migration to fuel sugar-plantation mono-crop farming, and also has significant negative ramifications for how farmers are treated today (Thomas 2004). The placelessness that farmers experience, neither mobile nor able to belong on the lands where they live, is a stark contrast to the foreign investors’ mobility and ability to own land, to be welcomed, and to belong on a land that one does not live on. At the same time, these uneven infrastructures are also unstable.

In *Engineering Vulnerability* (2022), Sarah Vaughn builds on ethnographic fieldwork in Guyana to theorize that offshoring functions by creating breaks in space and time, thereby repeating and also disrupting legacies of dislocation and rupture. Vaughn focuses on climate adaptation, the process by which ecologies demonstrate resilience in transforming and maintaining themselves in the face of external stresses. Guyana’s climate adaptation practices are evident in its dwellings and infrastructure, including the maintenance and repair of roads, homes, and dams following hurricanes and floods. Offshoring and islanding processes are cyclical as they invest and profit from disaster and repair. Vaughn theorizes that race haunts Guyana as “forces of the past” that manifest as unequal vulnerabilities to climate disasters in the present

(21, 23). In this way, an ethnography of climate adaptation is not only a description of human technological pursuits but also of the political imaginations that constitute them.

I think of the tangible examples of scientific offshoring that Vaughn observes, namely in civil engineering and infrastructural responses to hurricanes and flooding, as synchronic connectivity and as the repetition of foundational colonial violences upon which Guyanese society was literally, physically built. Ultimately, Vaughn finds that the practices and language of preparedness are ambivalent: they are both technocratic and a style of political humor for Caribbean peoples, part of a way of relating to nature through everyday life constructed by histories of environmental and racial-political vulnerability. For Vaughn, Caribbean understandings of the politics of the future are shaped by how storms render settler colonialism unstable and its infrastructures prone to breakage. Though repetition of the past occurs, settler colonialism and its logics of racial division, Vaughn argues, are unstable and unsustainable — ways of being that are slowly being worn down (68). Synchronic connectivity describes a worldview in which all global cultures and histories exist in messy, non-linear webs of relations, not a sequential chain of events but as repeating cycles, ineffable entanglements, and rhizomatic relations that spread sideways, enmeshing with one another through contact between cultures. Like in Vaughn's description of the ways in which islanding and offshoring operate as breaks in space and time can also disrupt legacies of dislocation and rupture, synchronic connectivity describes particular orientations or perceptions of space and time in the Caribbean wherein the past, present, and future feed into and continuously echo one another, including across disparate geographies.

Ian Whitmarsh, in *Biomedical Ambiguity* (2011), in an ethnographic inquiry of race, asthma, and research on Barbados, offers a different example of how belonging, identity, and

flows of coming-and-going operate in the Caribbean. Barbados is a site of significant biomedical research due to the particular ways in which state bureaucracies and scientific enterprises designate ethnic and racial categories. This is informed by global trends in which identity categories are increasingly shaped by genetic and ancestry mapping. While this genetic and biological asthma research is a site of off-shoring, Whitmarsh's focus is rather on how transnational genetic science interfaces with complex social histories and legacies of colonialism, such as when it mobilizes certain conceptions of race and ethnicity categories — Whitmarsh examines different constructions of identity, including designations such as Black, Afro-Caribbean, and Bajan, which are used to categorize individuals across encounters with researchers and biomedical practitioners. Genetic research on Caribbean peoples has contested meanings, for example, how Afro-Caribbean populations, who are the subjects of genetic research, have results that are assumed to also apply to African American populations.

Cultural beliefs and socio-economic factors converge with medical and scientific discourses on the perceptions and management of asthma in Barbados, where the government portrays the population as biologically Black to attract international research, in part because of an economically-driven desire to gain access to cutting-edge biomedicine. This international genetic research on asthma in Barbados ultimately shapes understandings of race, identity, and health disparities across the United States and the Caribbean. At the same time, race-disease links as offered by scientific conceptions gain new meanings when translated to domestic use by Bajan families. Conceptualizations of environment, identity, biology, and disease, which contrast across United States scientific and Bajan-Caribbean understandings, ultimately become sites of recombination, where the contradiction inherent to different terms allows for strategic resistance and also ontologically recombinant significances to arise, at times intentionally, and at other

times perhaps with reasons not easy to make sense of but ultimately serving to change medicine anyway.

In Chapter 3, I argued for an understanding of affect as multi-temporal — as the manifestation of the multiplicitous conditions of the past and present across numerous, often unknowable, scales of time, manifesting in the current moment. To understand the present moment is a challenge. Scholars of the Caribbean have tackled this challenge in different ways, through what Kamau Brathwaite (1999) calls tidelectics, and what Jessica Baker (2024) calls archipelagic listening. Whitmarsh and Vaughn are, I believe, conducting versions of archipelagic listening in their ethnographic observations, attuning to the multiplicity and ambivalence of meaning.

Barbadian poet and academic Kamau Brathwaite offers the tidelectic as a way to highlight the dynamic, sonic, and performative aspects of expression. In her analysis of Brathwaite's poetry, Reckin (2003) defines tidelectics as the rejection of the notion of dialectic, wherein the third step is synthesis or resolution, and instead calls for ripple-and-tide movement to describe the creative process of Caribbean poetics such as the trilogies structure of the *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem*, and the *X/Self poem*. Tidelectic describes the convergence of history and environment in the present moment — an understanding of trans-oceanic movement-in-stasis, a to-and-fro and back again that is both idealized and mythologized, highly particularized, distinct on each Caribbean island, and historicized, as in references to the Middle Passage. For Brathwaite, these resonances form a sound-space, which can be understood through the performativity of sound. Sound reveals trans-oceanic relation, through rhyme and rhythm, through language and music, and animates sound-space by bringing the living and the dead into

presence. The tidalectic represents the “creative process” of recombination, producing new identities, new meanings, and new affects.

In understanding “sound as ubiquitous” and “listening as a distributed act (processual and instantaneous) wherein “the audibility of sound is made possible through preexisting mental forms, forms that are revealed through repeated encounters,” Baker (2024) describes “archipelagic listening” as “listening to and in Relation” and a way of deciphering “the sensible, its articulating language, and its defining discourse” (146). In this way, “listening is a device for integration into a milieu and for the definition of plots within this milieu,” wherein these milieus extend far beyond the geographic territory of St. Kitts, and

Listening to make connections to develop a kind of competence, the archipelagic listening of my interlocutors, the practices of sonic enchainment, semiotic articulation, and the geography of thought that regulate them, attunes to multiple sonic and discursive horizons of relation and their possibilities. (146)

By listening to the repetition inherent to Caribbean archipelago, and to the change and transformation that happens amidst that repetition in Relation, Baker believes that one can come to understand the horizons of the life from St. Kitts, not geographical but physical horizons nonetheless insofar as they are created by the wave-forms of sound and Relation, “constituted by trajectories modified by race, islandness, smallness, and the swelling and shifting constellation of individual and collective desires, themselves islands of other expansive archipelagos” (146).

Vaughn’s focus on counter-racial thinking as an anthropological analytic offers an example of this archipelagic listening in tracing racial-political orders that implicitly inform debates about science and engineering in the face of climate change. This attention makes visible the ways in which liberal humanist institutions can actually block action on climate change and racism through their rhetoric on human equality that does not actively consider, or perhaps actively forgets, historical movements for emancipation and decolonization. In particular, the

basis of Vaughn's ethnographic method, which focuses on the interlocking of nature and race as a basis for understanding conceptions of preparedness for disaster expertise in Guyana, offers a contemporary and operationalized version of Caribbean-specific anthropological methodology in which the present is continually understood through its co-constitution with the past and future. In researching the material arrangements of techno-scientific expertise as they inform day-to-day labor in both human-built and natural environments, Vaughn finds that climate adaptation is shaped by relational ontologies. Vaughn theorizes that these ontologies arise in ecologies of expertise, wherein Caribbean responses to disaster are sites of impermanent recombination and consequently creative forms of response. Engineers' decision-making processes, she argues, are a response to the ontological (in)stability of infrastructures as they are subject to erosion. They produce innovation narratives, creative responses that reconstitute through the political, environmental, physical, and historical realities of Guyana, to address the intersecting socio-material and ethical demands of responding to climate change. The broader approach of thinking of these intersecting realms as intersectional ecologies brings together the intellectual traditions of Caribbean thinkers and anthropology to consider materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity as co-constituting commitments in anthropological exploration.

Climate adaptation, carried out through scientific advancements and grounded in ecological theories of resilience, is simultaneously a site of repetition and of change. In ethnography at sites of resistance to these ongoing colonial histories and hauntings, human rights campaigns, and attempts at repair and reconciliation, which occur tangibly in the contemporary Caribbean through state base compensation and reparations campaigns, Vaughn theorizes that understanding climate adaptation requires a sort of self-contradictory practice of thinking about race which she calls "counter-racial thinking," wherein individuals simultaneously acknowledge

race and create distance from it; this ambivalence creates room for imagining new and different ways of engagement with the planet (23).

(Uneven) Access to mobility is not a passing set of conditions but is rather constitutive to Caribbean island life, which has always been shaped by migration. The ability to stay, to be present, and to relate to one's home — belonging — then exists in tension with migration and Relation. Archipelagic listening, which, for Baker, involves ethnographic listening to people, music, and other sounds as they emerge into a metaphysical geography of changing waves and thought-forms, can also reveal how international flows are changing identity and Relation on St. Kitts in the contemporary.

Whitmarsh argues that biomedicalization operates differently in the Caribbean than in other contexts — a cycle of acceptance and counter-discourse keeps such processes unstable. This cycle can be understood as aligned with the cyclical nature of Caribbean sense-making. Previous anthropological theories of biomedicalization and pharmaceuticalization are destabilized in the Caribbean. Even classic ethnographic understandings of value and critique are troubled by the means through which Caribbean ontologies hold concepts, which Baker argues are generally perceived in a continental context as stable or singular rather than as plural and ambivalent.

For Whitmarsh, Vaughn, and Baker, ethnography in the Caribbean necessitated a focus on ambiguity and multiplicity. The ontological category distinctions upon which Western thought operates are different from those in the Caribbean, where belonging, as a practice of claiming filiation through myth-, truth-, and meaning-making, results in recombinant, contradictory, and ambivalent understandings that ultimately translate the natural and biological world into recombinant cultural, psychic, and spiritual forms of meaning. These forms of

meaning ultimately inform new forms of Relation and identity, what Baker called “Relation-identity,” in which multiple contradictory realities coexist. In this way, monkeys are an eco-tourist attraction, even as tourists do not come to St. Kitts to see monkeys. Victoria was made uncomfortable by the monkey peddler, and consented to give him \$15 anyway. Cruise ship tourism maintains the logic of economic structuring of the plantation system, even as St. Kitts has always been, and continues to be, in a constant state of flux and migration.

Tourist development interfaces with the cultivation of post-colonial political and economic sovereignty in complicated ways, with rhetorical and cultural consequences as well as material and economic ones. The locus of power on St. Kitts has shifted from “white Kittitian” British- and British-descent landowners to a post-colonial government and foreign investors. At the same time, the government of St. Kitts does repurpose for a broader national agenda that includes strengthening the state, self-determination, and economic sovereignty, even as who the state is and who its citizens are change and continue to be transformed by foreign migration and investment, such as by welcoming visitors who become residents, Kittitian diaspora who view the island as a second home, digital nomads, former Russian oligarchs, and others people fleeing economic and political conflict elsewhere around the world.

## **Chapter 7: Monkey Stories**

### **Introduction: Agents of the Devil**

Most farmers on St. Kitts do not own the lands they live on or farm on, a direct result of the island's history as a sugar plantation economy. For centuries, large sugar monoculture plantations dominated St. Kitts' landscape (Conzo 2022). This system concentrated land ownership in the hands of a small number of European planters and merchants, while indentured servants and enslaved African-descended peoples worked the land without ownership rights. After the sugar industry became unprofitable and was closed down by the government in 2004, the government of St. Kitts purchased the majority of the sugar lands from the private landholders and companies that owned them. Since then, most of the islands' arable land has been owned by the government. The government currently operates a Land Tenure System, under which farmers lease land from the government for agricultural purposes. While freehold ownership is possible for citizens, the legacy of concentrated land ownership and subsequent government acquisition of the sugar estates means that the majority of small-scale farmers and backyard gardeners operate on leased government land (Government Lands Regulation Act 2002). Because people do not own their land and have no guarantee their leases will be renewed, they cannot invest in it with the assurance of long-term returns. For this reason, farmers are hesitant to invest significantly in the land they are farming.

McKittrick (2013) defines "plantation futures" as the ongoing impact of the plantation systems and logics on Black communities. McKittrick contends that the plantation was not only a historical site of slavery and violence, but was also a blueprint for modern forms of racialized oppression and dispossession that continue to play out in contemporary spaces. The term also

highlights the ways in which Black and Caribbean people have resisted and survived these systems, in defiance of plantation logics. Plantation futures are defined by numerous co-presences – animal, plant, and more-than-natural – who shape the experiences and lands in which individuals navigate their daily life on St. Kitts.

Primatologist Kerry Dore (2018) writes that the monkey problem can be defined as the intersection of three local and more-than-local phenomena: (1) increased rates of contact between farmers and monkeys on farms; (2) contestations over the future of St. Kitts's land, and (3) global debates over monkey management strategies. Dr. Dore and a majority of farmers on St. Kitts frame that these increasing rates of contact between farmers and monkeys increasingly became a problem after the dissolution of sugar plantation farming on St. Kitts in 2004, at which point humans began subsistence farming at increasing rates, and monkeys began migrating towards human farms, which previously primarily produced sugar, also in increasing rates. In my archival research, I came across multiple historical sources that frame monkeys as problems even earlier than 2004.

In *West Indian Green Monkeys: Problems in Historical Biogeography* by W.W. Denham (1987), the author primarily focuses on the biological history of how green monkeys ended up in the Caribbean islands. While a major focus of the text is on Barbados, there is a short section titled “A Comparison of Barbados and St. Kitts,” where Denham offers an interesting reflection on people's attitudes towards green monkeys. He frames colonial introductions of invasive species as a “natural experiment” now playing out, and he seeks to report on its results:

...while Kittitian accounts uniformly describe the monkeys as destructive pests, they invariably do so in colorful and humorous language that is strikingly different from the premature obituaries that characterize the Barbadian sources. (55)

Denham's 1987 book, citing historical sources from the early 1700s, shows that the framing of monkeys as problems on St. Kitts extends back centuries.

In my archival research at the newspaper *The St. Kitts and Nevis Observer*, I came across two articles from Nevis from 1995, the first year of the newspaper's publication, that also frame green monkeys as problems (appendix 3). Sugar production on Nevis slowed after the 1930s, and Nevis ceased all sugar-processing activity by 1950, much earlier than the transition on St. Kitts in 2004-2005. Nevis transitioned to an economy that prioritized tourism, light manufacturing, and diversified farming decades before the final closure of the sugar plantations on St. Kitts. In some ways, these 1995 articles from Nevis foreshadow the same narratives that would pervade St. Kitts just a decade later.

In one of these articles, the author, Mr. John Frith (1995), describes the monkeys with great unease: "Agents of the devil, small in size or in consequence, they usually seem more annoying than dangerous. But if we are not careful they can give us a terrible turn. Irritation one day, tragedy the next" (14). Mr. Frith compares monkeys to mosquitoes, which may appear at first glance to be a nuisance but whose bites, if carrying a disease, can quickly become life-threatening. Mr. Frith views the monkeys as dangerous because, as they are related to people, and "we are enchanted by his person-like appearance, his agility, his antics, his humorous mimicry," people fail to see that monkeys may be humorous but also dangerous (14). It is this doubleness, of being simultaneously enchanting and dangerous, that fuels Mr. Frith's fear. He writes,

But monkey in the wild, in troupes sixty strong, hungry, un-controlled — any and all of us who have tried to grow anything edible for self or for profit know how quickly amusement can become annoyance can become national tragedy... if man unleashed a plague of monkeys in pure innocence, he has a habit of unleashing far greater nuisances willfully, in the interests of greed. Most of what we call "pollution" falls in this category. (14-15).

Interlocutors of mine who were already adults and engaged in farming or backyard gardening before the dissolution of sugar plantations in 2004-2005 recall a stark difference in the monkeys' roaming behavior, often stating that they had never seen monkeys go further south than the mountain forests before 2004. Mr. Frith's article foreshadows the future version of the monkey problem of St. Kitts, showing how individuals attuned to the presence of monkeys even before 2004 may have experienced them in the register of eco-horror, or, as Mr. Frith writes, "agents of the devil."

The second article (see appendix 3), by an unnamed newspaper contributor, outlines how monkeys became "an ever-increasing problem for commercial farmers and home gardeners" after "Hurricane Hugo destroyed much of the vegetation in the mountains," leading to the monkeys coming to the lowlands to forage (15). It is especially interesting that both articles are written by Nevisians, as Nevis has historically had significantly lower rates of monkey-related crop loss and lower populations of monkeys, in part because Nevis has different land-tenure policies than St. Kitts, and farmers are more likely to own their land and so be able to invest in crop-protection measures like electric fencing.

This author describes the hurricane destruction and subsequent monkey foraging as a dual problem, framing nature as disconcerting, even writing that they are "aggressive" and that "they destroy everything in sight." The author reports with fear on their experience with monkeys:

The monkeys can also get quite large and some say an angry monkey could kill a dog or become aggressive with children when they feel trapped. Monkeys have been known to be aggressive when they feel cornered... Some monkeys carry certain diseases, requiring one to throw away everything the monkeys have tasted. (16)

The idea that monkeys are a destructive force is a rhetorical stance that carries consequences. Monkeys, facing food insecurity after a hurricane, are foraging for food. The framing that monkeys are "aggressive" and "destroy everything in sight" makes them out to be

problems spreading the same destruction wrought by Hurricane Hugo. The idea that they carry unnamed diseases frames them as carriers of pestilence, tainting the environment with their presence.

The anonymous author (1995) also described how farmers reported significant challenges in farming, attributing them to fear of monkeys, but also described several possible solutions,

...the options so far seem to be (1) live capture and removal of the monkeys, which is difficult, expensive and time-consuming, (2) shooting the animals, which is dangerous and inhumane, (3) sterilization of the monkeys, which is very labor-intensive and requires a long term commitment, or (4) electronic fencing, which some farmers are currently trying and seem to be having good results. Others have suggested exporting the monkeys or the monkey meat, if there is a market for it. (15-16)

In recent years, farmers on Nevis have reported significantly fewer problems with monkeys, largely because they are more likely to own their farmland and can invest in electric fencing. However, the mitigation strategies described here remain consistent with those I repeatedly heard about during my fieldwork on St. Kitts. Electric fencing is considered the most effective way to keep monkeys off a farm, but it requires a high initial investment and access to a power source, making it unavailable to most Kittitian farmers.

This anonymous 1995 article repeats a narrative I have heard in many versions: the impossibility of solving the monkey problem due to foreign stakeholders. The author wrote,

Daniel Arthurton of the Agriculture Department told the *Observer* that the solution to the problem is quite complicated. “You cannot just kill the monkeys. You must figure out a way to control the problem another way,” he said. He added that in Barbados, the monkeys were killed or sold for research purposes, and there was a world outcry about the practice. Tourism was adversely affected because many groups condemned the killing, and there was a boycott of the island (15).

The government agent’s diversion away from the possibility of a solution – that one cannot intervene on monkeys for fear of tourism being adversely affected – is ultimately indicative of the same narratives that continue to pervade the monkey problems on both St. Kitts

and Nevis today, though Nevisian farmers have been much more successful in the use of electric fencing to keep monkeys off of their properties. The article continues,

Monkeys are smart animals... One resident said the local neighborhood monkeys recognized his car and would raid the garden as soon as he drove away... As I was sitting writing this story, a monkey passed by my garden and ate a few oranges. It's the first monkey I've ever seen in my neighborhood.

As in the 1700s, the 1990s, and the contemporary moment, farmers report using numerous improvisational strategies to protect their crops from monkeys and other wildlife. My interlocutors described using scarecrows, spraying produce with dead fish or hot peppers, noise machines, and windmills. The fact that people's narratives about monkeys as problems on St. Kitts have remained relatively consistent, dating back to the introduction of green monkeys in the early 1700s, shows how the logics of colonial extraction frame non-human others who do not conform to anthropogenic conceptions of mastery over nature as problems. These narratives and logics persist in post-colonial conditions on St. Kitts in different iterations and forms, existing in Relation to the island's inhabitants and culture as they continue to be defined by migration and recombination. In these articles, monkeys are described as smart, aggressive, carriers of pestilence, and even "agents of the devil," yet are portrayed as untouchable because of their importance to tourism and to international stakeholders imagined to care more about the monkeys' presence than the food security of local farmers. By ending with the presence of a monkey in their garden, the first they've ever seen in their neighborhood, the author harkens to the creeping nature of the monkey problem, slowly but surely increasing in scope and consequence. In my ethnographic research, farmers shared similar narratives, justifying the lack of government action or intervention regarding the monkey problem by citing the monkeys' status as an eco-tourist attraction. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 6, actual tourists rarely knew

anything about green monkeys prior to coming to St. Kitts. So, what are these mysterious foreign stakeholders who are purported to favor the monkeys over the lives of local people?

As part of my research, I sought to identify and interview animal rights activists who worked at organizations such as the Primate Freedom Project and the Animal Rights Foundation of Florida and maintained online pages advocating against animal experimentation on St. Kitts. I was ultimately able to contact only 3 of these international animal rights activists, and many of my inquiries and emails went unanswered. I interviewed Zella and Selby over Zoom. Zella and Selby were both white women from the East Coast of the United States. Zella was a professor at a large research University in her 30s, and Selby was a veterinarian and a part-time lecturer at a Veterinary school in her 40s. Terry, a white man who had retired in his 70s after working for many years for an environmental non-profit organization, I interviewed over a phone call.

In these interviews, I learned that each of these United States-based activists had little to no understanding of the monkey problem of St. Kitts. Though they had well-intentioned concerns about the violence of scientific experimentation at the facilities on St. Kitts, their ethical stances were largely framed in terms of animal welfare, without regard for the relationships between animals and local people. That is not to say that the agendas of international animal rights activists are incommensurable with local farmers' demands for emancipation from the monkey problem. Rather, animal rights activists, like cruise ship tourists and educational tourists attending veterinary or medical school on St. Kitts, carry certain transnational positions of power and privilege that they use to advocate for certain versions of the allocation of resources on St. Kitts, but which may also ultimately serve to reproduce or reify the monkey problem. These activists, like other international stakeholders discussed in Chapter

2, can serve to reify the monkey problem by advocating for monkeys' well-being while remaining unconcerned about the impact of the monkey problem on local people's well-being.

Each of these activists had at some point participated in campaigns advocating for the well-being of wild or captive green monkeys on St. Kitts. Selby had led one of these campaigns, while Zella and Terry had only contributed in minor ways, such as spreading information about these campaigns through their personal networks and providing occasional administrative assistance. Terry, in particular, had once helped design a website for one of these campaigns. At the time of our interviews in 2023-2024, these activists had not engaged in St. Kitts-related work or activism for years. They were primarily spending their time and attention on numerous other international animal rights concerns, such as the government of Sint Maarten's plan to kill its entire population of green monkeys to avoid a population boom and the subsequent monkey problem seen on St. Kitts (Bird 2023). Each of these activists, motivated by both their ethical and moral values and by shifting international media attention, sought to make their efforts and activism timely. They rarely thought about or engaged with the monkey problem in St. Kitts in daily life anymore. These international animal rights activists, with their attention and time fixated elsewhere, were likely not the purported international stakeholders whose outrage would negatively impact tourism on St. Kitts. In reality, there is no one identifiable monolithic group of foreign stakeholders.

While it is possible that animal rights activists, cruise-ship owners, and foreign journalists *could* respond negatively to a culling or sterilization campaign against the green monkeys of St. Kitts, which could negatively impact tourism on St. Kitts, there is no conclusive evidence that this will necessarily be the case. As shown in Chapter 2, many international immigrants now living on St. Kitts actually know little to nothing about the wide-reaching consequences of the

monkey problem — a phenomenon that contributes to the reproduction of attitudes and policies (or, as Gallagher & Stephen 2024 argues, a lack of policies) that ultimately sustain the monkey problem. However, *the narrative* of foreign stakeholders favoring the lives of monkeys over people is one that came up again and again in my interviews. I estimate that 30 of the 44 agricultural workers I interviewed shared some version of this belief — that the government was prioritizing the care for monkeys by foreign stakeholders or tourism business owners over the well-being of local people. It is this narrative that ultimately plays a key role in constructing the monkey problem as an affective infrastructure sustained by the people and animals living within it.

Analyzing these sources reframes and contextualizes the 2004-2005 transition to a post-sugar economy not as a point of inception for the monkey problem but rather as a point of reckoning — a moment when the effects of building animosity reached a peak or climax as it became clear that the monkey problem was to remain persistent in and through post-colonial transitions of the island. In this chapter, following the story of Astrid — a white American visitor turned St. Kitts resident — I examine narratives and stories about the monkey problem as they intersect with conceptions of what it means to be foreign or local, to belong or not, and how ones' shifting attunements to monkeys and the monkey problem over time can also result in shifting understandings of what it means to live in relation to the people and animals of St. Kitts. Astrid, like me, had developed partial sensorial attunement to the monkey problem over time. At the same time, she was not informed about local colonial histories, which led her to be only partially attuned to the monkey problem without understanding its context. Following Astrid can further demonstrate the dynamic described in Chapter 2, through which the monkey problem is

reproduced at the intersection of uneven attunements and power dynamics, and differently experienced by those with varying attunements.

## **Becoming Local**

When I posted on the St. Kitts and Nevis Backyard Gardening Facebook group, seeking individuals interested in discussing their experiences with green monkeys, Astrid was one of the first to respond. Astrid and her family lived on a small property in Half-Moon Bay, on the edge of Conaree Village. They were a white family who had recently immigrated from the United States. Half-Moon Bay was a popular neighborhood on St. Kitts for immigrants, students, and visitors. Virtually every home on the hillside had views of the Caribbean Sea. Half-Moon Bay was a quiet, very residential neighborhood, but less than a ten-minute drive to nearby restaurants and grocery stores. Conaree, by contrast, was a neighborhood inhabited primarily by Black Kittitians, most of whom were long-time descendants of the islands' settlers and arrivants. Astrid's property straddled the line between the two neighborhoods.

Astrid's mother had relocated to St. Kitts from the United States to work at Ross University School of Medicine (RUSVM). RUSVM attracted primarily international veterinarians, students, and staff. It was a major employer on the island. While visiting her mother on the island, Astrid became acquainted with the man who would later become her husband, also a resident of the island. She enjoyed her visit immensely and decided to settle on St. Kitts. She and her husband took advantage of the island's Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, which allowed them to obtain citizenship by purchasing property. They invested in a gorgeous two-story house with a lush backyard garden. Their house is divided into two buildings

with separate entrances, both facing the same patio area. They rent the second building to visitors and tourists as a place to stay, as a secondary source of passive income.

Astrid was no stranger to green monkeys. One troop occupied the territory around her home. She described them to me as two adult females and a group of younger adolescent monkeys. This troop would visit her garden regularly, almost every day in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings. A "troop" of green monkeys is a social group of typically 10 to 50 individuals, or sometimes more, consisting primarily of related females, their young, and a few males who transfer between groups. The highest-ranking matriarch usually leads a given group. The members spend their days foraging, grooming, and interacting socially.

Troops are centered on related females who remain in their natal groups throughout their lives. Young males leave their troops to find new ones when they reach maturity. However, this process can be dangerous, especially given that these groups are hierarchical and may utilize physical violence as part of maintaining these hierarchies. Troops negotiate territories with one another. Encroaching on another troop's territory can lead to conflict. Such conflicts have been increasing on St. Kitts, where monkeys compete for natural resources in a resource-constrained wilderness.

Astrid had a high level of attunement to these dynamics. She spent a significant amount of time observing monkeys. Female monkeys were generally smaller than male monkeys, and the difference was easy to spot. Astrid referred to her local troop as her neighbors and could describe each member in detail. In part, Astrid had cultivated this attunement while researching for her writing projects. Astrid was a children's book author, and through our conversations I came to learn that there were a number of storybook series on St. Kitts that centered on green

monkeys and could commonly be found in Kittitian households, schools, and libraries, including at Astrid's local international K-12 children's school.

In her spare time, she enjoyed gardening. As she walked me around her property, Astrid explained the various experiments she had conducted, planting a range of fruits and vegetables with varying degrees of success. Her garden would produce a surplus of fruit in most seasons, with enough to share with her friends and neighbors. Astrid had a good relationship with these monkeys and saw her garden as a shared space where both she and the monkeys benefited from the food she grew. Astrid's story offers a counterpoint to the narrative of building animosity, showcasing how human-monkey relationships aren't always antagonistic. Nonetheless, Astrid devoted considerable time and energy to thinking about the monkeys.

She had a clear understanding of the social dynamics between her family and the monkeys who would pass through her property. Astrid ran a small microgreens business, which she said she was able to grow without issue because it was under a covered breezeway. In this breezeway was a table and chairs where she and her family would dine and spend a significant amount of time. They had been growing microgreens there for six years without any monkey issues, she recounted to me, because the monkeys did not like enclosed spaces and tended to stay away from the areas where she and her family spent significant time. She felt that, in this way, the monkeys respected her family's personal space.

Mice and doves had caused issues here and there, Astrid remembered, but monkeys were generally not a nuisance to her. Rather, they were an accepted part of daily life. While showing me a large plot at the edge of her property, Astrid pointed out that watermelon and pumpkin were very popular amongst green monkeys, to the point that she had not been able to grow them

successfully. She had some success with placing metal baskets around the pumpkins one season, but the monkeys eventually figured out how to move the buckets and access the pumpkins.

For Astrid, her family, and the plants and animals in her garden, small mediations like those I describe are the acts of giving and receiving that create meaning in daily life. By paying attention to Astrid's care for small things, such as plants, through the slow, routine tasks of planting, watering, and harvesting, I came to understand how backyard gardening was significant to Astrid's life beyond its straightforward role in her family's access to food and capital. The small, daily actions intrinsic to backyard gardening comprised Astrid's relationship to her home, the land she lived on, and the multi-species communities she lived in relation to.

This echoes what food systems anthropologist Dana Conzo (2022) describes in her dissertation, "Reclaiming the Future Through Small-Scale Agriculture: Autonomy and Sustainability in the Caribbean."

For my participants, their commitment to agriculture is deeper than beyond the above-mentioned advocacy for agricultural development. Whether through active resistance or 'simply making a life' (Reese 2019:2), agricultural spaces, for my participants, are spaces of social networks and community building, reclaiming former sugar industry spaces and forging placeness within placelessness, cultivating environmental and cultural sustainability, and fostering food and economic autonomy and health and wellness for individuals and communities. (105)

In both backyard gardening and larger-scale farming, agriculture can provide food security and profit, while also holding significant social and cultural importance. Agricultural spaces are a means of building community through shared labor and fruit, cultivating interpersonal connections, and fostering autonomy and wellness for individuals, families, and communities. Astrid's microgreens business helped her meet her neighbors and develop a community on an island where she was an immigrant.

Practitioners of backyard gardening and farming navigate and relate to numerous co-presences, including unpredictable weather, shifting seasons, the afterlives of slavery, actual monkeys, flash floods, and long-term drought. As Conzo describes, agriculture is more than just a way of making a living; it is a form of active resistance through community building and forging a 'placeness' with the land. In this way, the practice of backyard gardening and farming is not dissimilar from how Beliso-de Jesús describes her interlocutors' engagement with co-presences and more-than-human others in her ethnography of the religious and spiritual practices of Santería. Beliso-de Jesús describes how wooden boxes — boxes made from the remains of trees — are transformed through the ritual of drumming, drawing new significance from the past and in the present: “The batarumba cajones, three tapered wooden boxes with a hollowed out center, provide a sap and tone that produce a cha-cha’ed critique of colonial violence” (Beliso-de Jesús, 125). Drumming becomes a means of communication across space and time, and the drummer a channel for co-presences, affecting the present, offering the possibility for collective agential healing. It’s not that farmers and backyard gardeners necessarily viewed their work as nonsecular, spiritual, or religious, but rather that the act of navigating the daily life of farming and gardening in the monkey problem is an engagement with extra-sensorial attunements that connect oneself to co-presences human, animal, plant, land, weather, and beyond. In enacting improvisational strategies to change the rhythms between plants, monkeys, and land, farmers are also cultivating interpersonal autonomy.

Astrid aspired to grow crops like eggplants, tomatoes, and sweet bell peppers. She had failed so far because monkeys would find and eat those crops before they were ripe enough for human consumption. Astrid would share this information and seek advice through the “St. Kitts Backyard Gardening” Facebook Group, which had over 3000 members in 2025. She learned

from this group that community members had successfully grown these crops by building small shade houses, a method she planned to attempt in the near future. This virtual group served as a crucial space for people to exchange information. Multiple of my interlocutors had directed me to it. One of my interviewees, one of the original founders of the Facebook group, said that “it gives people a place to connect and learn from each other. I think backyard gardeners are a lot more successful when they can share information.”

When talking with Astrid about the benefits and concerns she had with different suggested interventions, she responded to the idea of spraying produce with dead fish, saying, “This is not something I want to entertain with the smell and attracting rodents, but I believe this can work in larger-scale farms.” Spraying produce with dead fish created an unpleasant smell that was effective insofar as it deterred monkeys from seeking out produce that smelled bad. Others would spray hot pepper spray on fruits, which seemed effective but was highly labor-intensive, as it needed to be reapplied almost daily.

Astrid was aware of the kinds of destruction monkeys caused, but felt generally unable to do anything about it. She was able to describe what she believed was a logical reason for almost all the monkeys’ behaviors. Astrid pointed out to me,

When we don't see rain and it is dry, the monkeys will pull the stems off the tops of the papaya trees to get the water, and also green onions will be pulled from the garden beds for the water content. We put out water bowls in dry times to try and deter this behavior and it seems to work.

While Astrid experimented with various interventions and improvisational strategies to prevent crop loss, the stakes were quite low for her. Astrid’s relative comfort was distinct from that of most Kittitian farmers. Beyond the simple fact that Astrid was a white American immigrant to St. Kitts, it was significant that she owned the land on which she and her family lived. Most Kittitian farmers did not own their land; instead, they leased it through the Land

Development Act. After decolonization and independence in 1983, the St. Kitts and Nevis government reclaimed most of the land on St. Kitts from the wealthy, white, British- and British-descended landowning class. The St. Kitts government permits 35-year leases for agricultural use to its citizens, renewable for one additional term. For this reason, many people initially choose to engage in agricultural work to secure a subsidized 35- or 75-year lease on a particular property for themselves and their families to live on.

The price of land on St. Kitts is quite steep. The sale of land is generally geared towards foreign investors participating in the Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program. The CBI program enables individuals to obtain citizenship and a passport by making a qualifying investment in the country, typically by purchasing real estate valued at a minimum of \$250,000 USD. Conversely, Kittitian farmers are subject to rising rent prices that the government adjusts annually and can reclaim at any given time. These conditions make it challenging for farmers to invest in their land over the long term, as the government can reclaim it and displace them at any time.

Astrid's family's relative financial stability, running a local sailing school, made backyard gardening more of a hobby than a necessity. This mitigated the stress caused by foraging monkeys. Astrid had a very different experience with monkeys than the average Kittitian farmer, and was shielded from this building animosity by government policies that supported her and her family's well-being but did not shield Kittitian farmers.

## **Eco-Horror Without Context**

Astrid recalled two instances when the troop of monkeys she coexisted with was disrupted. The first was when trappers came to her property. The trappers asked for permission

to catch monkeys, framing themselves as offering a free service to alleviate the burden of monkey-crop loss in her garden. After receiving permission, the trappers set up steel cages on and around her property. Astrid estimates that they caught somewhere between 10 and 20 monkeys. At the time, Astrid was excited about the potential impact this might have on her garden's fruit output. This was during a season when 20-30 monkeys would regularly roam through her property, making it nearly impossible to collect fruit from the mango, papaya, or guinep trees.

Although the troop size decreased significantly due to trapping, this did not actually reduce the destructive behavior of the remaining monkeys on her crops. Astrid laughed as she told me this story — the presence of fewer monkeys did not make any major difference to the overall experience of crop loss. Astrid's experience echoes that of many of my interlocutors. There are so many monkeys roaming the wild that trapping often has little to no impact on daily life. The areas that troops claimed as territory would quickly be claimed by other troops after disruption.

The second instance of disruption was more jarring. While sitting in her garden, under her covered breezeway, Astrid heard a loud noise. A gunshot echoed through her property, just feet away. She and her husband jumped up. They ran to the entrance of their property, where a man was standing with a gun. He had shot a monkey, which had been clinging to their fence. Its dead body hung on the fence. Guts sprayed the entrance to their property. Blood was seeping out of its torso.

They approached the hunter with anger and demanded an explanation. The hunter, Astrid remembers, responded with anger in his voice. He shared that he was frustrated at the loss of crops from his own farm or garden and had decided to start hunting monkeys. Astrid described

that since this encounter, she had not felt entirely the same in her home and backyard. She always had a nagging worry in the back of her head that the hunter could appear again. The fact that a stranger had shot a monkey right on her property was a traumatizing event for her. At the same time, Astrid and her family lived a relatively comfortable life, but they were not entirely shielded from the widespread effects of building animosity.

After this jarring moment, Astrid did some research on local laws. She learned that shooting monkeys in the residential neighborhoods was against the law on St. Kitts and Nevis. She also learned from other neighbors that this man was a retired police officer and that several had similar unpleasant experiences with him. Her neighbors supposed that the man had guns because of his previous work as a police officer.

She recalls that this gunshot dramatically changed the dynamics of that monkey troop. The monkey killed had been a mother, and several baby monkeys had been left orphaned. Monkeys stayed away from her property for a season, but soon began to return. More monkeys from outside the territory eventually arrived and joined the local troop, forming a new, reconstituted troop with some of the previous inhabitants.

Astrid had the ability to recognize and intimately recall the personalities and social dynamics of the shifting troops of monkeys whose territory included her home. She had a greater capacity for this than most of the people I interviewed, except the farmers, laboratory technicians, and veterinarians whose jobs required them to observe individual monkeys daily. These monkeys were her neighbors, and she considered it important for her to know them as part of her relationship with them.

Astrid noted in her reflections that neither the gunshot nor the trappers had a long-term impact on crop losses on her property. More monkeys always came to replace the ones that were

killed. This is consistent with primatologists' assessments of green monkeys on St. Kitts. There were more monkeys than the islands' ecosystems can sustain, and the monkeys themselves are suffering from food insecurity because there is too little food in the wild. At the same time as she recognized this, Astrid told me she feared that if other interventions, such as culling, were not taken, crop destruction might continue to increase. She had heard that some people were trying to sterilize the males with darts, and personally believed this method would be the most humane.

Astrid's story demonstrates, I believe, what it means to become partially attuned to the monkey problem of St. Kitts without understanding the historical, colonial, or broader transnational context of food insecurity and environmental racism in the Caribbean. This instance of violence against a monkey was a moment of escalation that initiated Astrid into the eco-horror of the monkey problem. She understood this moment to be exceptional and traumatizing, even as many Kittitians and particularly farmers would experience hunting monkeys as a violence normalized as non-exceptional – part of daily life. Astrid reflected that the fact that this unexpected act of violence occurred on the property she owned, in her home, made it particularly jarring for her; in comparison, a majority of Kittitian farmers do not own the land they farm or live on, and have no choice but to hunt monkeys to protect their agricultural ventures. The former police officer turned monkey-hunter, so frustrated by monkeys that he was possessed to start hunting and killing them, became what Astrid experienced as an agent of the eco-horror; at the same time, this police officer experienced eco-horror in a different way, walking around the Conaree neighborhood shooting monkeys out of anger and frustration – an embodied experience building animosity. The monkeys themselves are not only aggressors, whose foraging behaviors negatively affect people, but also, at times, victims in the narratives of this eco-horror, evidenced by how Astrid felt sympathy for the monkey but did not describe

empathy for the Kittitian policeman. Astrid's relative financial stability and daily comfort minimized the impact of building animosity on her daily life. Still, these conditions did not prevent her from being affected by the monkey problem, and she feared that without intervention, her losses in the garden would continue to worsen.

## **Cosmopolitics of Relation**

Ferdinand's (2019) idea of "a cosmopolitics of relation" reframes politics to include human and non-human actors in a common world built on diverse, entangled relationships rather than just human interests (233). This idea challenges colonial, anthropocentric logics by advocating for worldly ecology, in which humans and non-humans work together to establish shared life across different aesthetics and ontologies. Ferdinand's idea of a cosmopolitics of relation expands on Glissant's concept of Relation to acknowledge the plurality of encounters for humans and non-humans. For Ferdinand, such "interspecies alliances against the Plantationocene" are sites of theorizing reparations for slavery and the transatlantic slave trade (226).

"Wicked problems" like the monkey problem (see Chapter 2) can be understood not only as sites of narrative conflict but also as sites of conflicting realities. A cosmopolitics of relation approach necessitates political actions situated in specific contexts and that address conflicting realities, rather than relying on abstract, universal truths. For people plagued by food insecurity or agricultural losses due to the transient, unpredictable presence of monkeys, their familiar world is rendered strange in moments of violent encounter, such as between the farmer and the monkey that assaulted him (see Chapter 1), or, differently, Astrid and the monkey hunter. The world becomes unrecognizable, generating a sense of dread and unease, but these eco-horror-like

moments of escalation are unevenly experienced and understood across different class, race, and power hierarchies. Astrid was relatively shielded from many of the negative consequences of the monkey problem, even as she faced unique challenges as a recent immigrant seeking to cultivate a sense of belonging and community on the island.

I contended in Chapter 1 that the narratives of building animosity in the monkey problem are best understood through analysis of the uncanny in the genre of eco-horror. Eco-horror scholarship is growing steadily and has provided academics with a venue to explore critical frameworks that interrogate the interstices between fear and nature across a range of thematic narratives. While eco-horror analysis is generally applied to cinema and literature, its use in analyzing ethnographic narratives may be generative as concerns about climate change and invasive species continue to rise. Analysis of the monkey problem as an eco-horror that continually plays out in daily life offers a critical frame for embracing and further exploring human anxieties about multi-species encounters and precarious environmental futures. At the same time, comparing the experiences of Astrid, who saw monkeys as a nuisance, and the historical local newspaper authors, who framed monkeys as “agents of the devil,” reveals how people fundamentally experience life on St. Kitts differently through their uneven attunements.

The stories analyzed in this chapter show how narratives of the monkey problem come to blur genre boundaries. Denham’s (1987) primatological monograph describes Kittitian accounts of monkeys as destructive pests and as using “colorful and humorous language” indicative of comedy (55). Astrid’s experience, along with those of other farmers discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, demonstrate different kinds of post-colonial relationality. While I contend that eco-horror offers an apt metaphor for understanding the complexity of the monkey problem, reducing people’s complex life experiences to a single genre ultimately shifts the focus away from other

narratives – stories of comedy, romance, and resilience – that are equally important and real. Fernando (2022) grapples with the concept of the more-than-human and the more-than-natural, wherein the *more-than* is not a horizontal, egalitarian extension of powers, but rather hierarchical, full of relations of subjection and violence. Interspecies webs of care, intimacy, and subjection are sites of both benevolence and violence. Bringing together the Caribbean concept of co-presences with Fernando’s pursuit of the anthropology of the supernatural, or what she calls a “negative zoology” (2023), can reframe the monkey problem of St. Kitts as a dynamic space where the past and present collide. Examining these narratives can reveal the specific co-presences of the monkey problem and the relations among them. In this pursuit, we can question what co-presences travel with and through monkeys and the people who care about them.

## Chapter 8: Horizons

The Caribbean Sea is not an American lake. It is the estuary of the Americas. In this context, insularity takes on another meaning. Ordinarily, insularity is treated as a form of isolation, a neurotic reaction to place. However, in the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. A Caribbean imagination liberates us from being smothered. (Glissant 1997, page 139).

### **“Everybody monkey is they idol”**

Dr. Steve Whittaker is an environmental scientist from St. Kitts. We first met on St. Kitts in 2017, during my internship at a primate biomedical research facility, where Whittaker had previously interned. He was pursuing a post-doctoral fellowship in Environmental Science at the Yale School of Public Health while I was an undergraduate student at Yale College. When I returned to St. Kitts in 2023, Whittaker was living on the island full-time. He became one of my key interlocutors and collaborators. In 2025, Whittaker and I presented together at the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) conference in St. Maarten on a panel titled “Living, Breathing, and Eating: Resilience on St. Kitts”. As we prepared our content, Whittaker gave me the opportunity to review the slides from a presentation he had previously given at Yale University in 2018, titled “Climate Change and Food Insecurity: Perceived and Actual Impacts on Food Resources in the Eastern Caribbean country of St. Kitts and Nevis.” In these slides, Whittaker reported the findings from 228 surveys on St. Kitts and Nevis administered from 2015 to 2017 to assess the effects of food insecurity on diet. One of the most startling findings from this research was that LGBT+ people on St. Kitts and Nevis were two times more likely than their cisgender/straight counterparts to experience hypertension and other chronic health problems, such as chronic pain and gastrointestinal problems. Dr. Whittaker believes that this is because LGBT+ people

differently experience the effects of climate change, extreme weather events, and food insecurity than cis-/straight people.

My research did not focus specifically on the uneven impacts of food insecurity and the monkey problem on queer and trans people. However, during my 16 months of ethnographic research on St. Kitts conducted from 2023 to 2025, I spent significant time with queer and trans interlocutors. Though I set out to research the monkey problem, I found myself drawn into queer and trans community spaces because of my own queer and non-binary identities. Ultimately, a significant portion of my interlocutors on the island identified as queer and trans. Our shared identities created a sense of shared interests and trust between us. I experienced homophobic and transphobic comments and violence on St. Kitts, but I also found support from queer and trans interlocutors who shared different versions of these experiences. In this chapter, I report on ethnography with LGBT+ interlocutors to discuss some of the ways in which queer and trans people experience life on St. Kitts differently.

My goal in this chapter is to provide an ethnographic reflection on queer and trans life on St. Kitts as I came to understand it. I do not explicitly seek to prove, disprove, or contextualize Dr. Whittaker's findings. Instead, I hope to provide an ethnographic account of my experiences with LGBT+ people in St. Kitts and Nevis and to reflect on how they spoke about their own experiences and identities. This chapter departs from the rest of this dissertation insofar as it is not directly concerned with monkeys or the monkey problem. However, there are persistent logics and language across the ways in which Kittitian people talk about queer and trans people not belonging on St. Kitts, and monkeys not belonging on St. Kitts. Additionally, it is my understanding that no person on St. Kitts is not at least indirectly affected by the monkey problem insofar as it constrains people's choices regarding food and groceries. In this way, this

chapter provides an ethnographic look at the complex lives of queer and trans Kittitians both within and beyond the context of the monkey problem.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association, ILGA, has world maps that discuss local legal frameworks and policies, as well as relevant international human rights treaties affecting LGBT+ people in different countries (ILGA World). In their map of St. Kitts and Nevis, they record that the last hate crimes based on LGBT+ identity occurred in St. Kitts and Nevis in 2019, and that “Consensual same-sex sexual acts were decriminalized” in St. Kitts and Nevis in 2022. St. Kitts and Nevis take on an intermediate policy landscape, wherein there are currently no longer any laws criminalizing queerness or transness, but also no laws protecting queer or trans people from hate crimes based on gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. Same-sex unions are not recognized in St. Kitts and Nevis, nor can queer and trans people adopt. These policy insights are helpful metrics for determining the extent to which a given country accommodates queer and trans people.

Policy analyst Moyia Rowtham (2024) holds that many of the laws in St. Kitts and Nevis, including the “anti-buggery laws” relevant to LGBT+ people, are remnants of British colonialism, carry ambiguous language, and have enforcement mechanisms that are not clearly defined. While there is limited research on LGBT+ policy and experience in St. Kitts currently, there is significant research regarding how anti-LGBT+ laws and attitudes from British colonization have created and upheld negative public discourse in other post-colonial countries, including India (Dua 2023) and other Caribbean islands (Crawford 2025; Heron 2025; McNeal 2019). British colonization embedded Victorian-era puritanical beliefs about sex and gender into legal and social frameworks of its colonial territories by imposing colonial laws that criminalized same-sex intimacy and fluid gender identities. In particular, legal texts like the 1860 Indian Penal

Code and the 1916 Criminal Code in the British Caribbean actively suppressed diverse local understandings of gender and sexuality by declaring (what are now called) queer and trans identities as unnatural and illegal. The persistence of these inherited laws in post-colonial nations results in state-sanctioned homophobia and reifies the idea of LGBTQ+ people as legal outcasts, criminals, or a moral threat to society.

My interlocutors on St. Kitts shared perceptions that their home country had significantly less accepting attitudes toward LGBT+ people than other nearby Caribbean islands. They attributed this to severe homophobic codes, sustained from British colonization into post-colonial times, which they believed created and upheld negative public discourse. At the same time, queer and trans life on St. Kitts persists and is becoming more visible.

Examining how these policies and histories shape contemporary life can help us understand the circumstances that inform queer and trans people's experience in contemporary post-colonial St. Kitts, but it would also be insufficient to grasp the complexity of queer and trans experience. As Haritaworn writes in "Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms" (2015), "racialized and colonized populations have been targeted as (then) too queer and (now) not queer-friendly enough, they have also been targeted as (then) too close to nature and (now) destructive of it" (6). The assessment of St. Kitts as a homophobic and transphobic place is reductive in that the contemporary experiences of queer and trans people on St. Kitts are affected by a long history of criminalization and social stigmatization of LGBT+ desire and expression grounded in European colonization. The import of homophobia and transphobia by British colonizers has had lasting effects on the legal landscape of St. Kitts, even after independence. Scholars studying queer and trans identity have framed this analysis by modifying "transatlantic" to "trans\* Atlantic" to allow for consideration of the fluidity of gender and sexuality that has historically been missed in

Black Atlantic studies, and to highlight the important role of religion and culture in informing gender identities in the Caribbean (Escalante 2019).

My queer and trans interlocutors shared numerous experiences of being treated and explicitly named as social and moral “problems” within cis-hetero-normative society, making their very existence a site of tension. Social embeddedness in their family units was also a site of narrative tensions, wherein queer and trans people felt captive and uncomfortable, even as their families became sites of queer relations. My interlocutors felt inhibited by the state, society, *and* their families. In this way, queer and trans experience in daily life was punctuated by alienation, in that the expression of one’s queer and trans identities was always also alienation from cisgender/heteronormative narratives. At the same time, the opposite of alienation, or belonging, was not always a plausible solution – my interlocutors expressed belonging as at odds with authentic self-expression in that belonging required conforming in ways that were also challenging if not impossible (see Chapter 5, where I build on Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s conceptual work in *Becoming Human* (2020) to reframe issues of belonging and alienation as the burden of inclusion).

There is a common saying on St. Kitts, “everybody monkey is they idol.” It is particularly common amongst older Kittitians – an adage that carries intergenerational wisdom. Dr. Jessica Baker, a Kittitian ethnomusicologist, recounted her personal experience of this proverb to me in a voice note. She had been speaking to her aunt, who recalled that her grandmother often used the phrase. It indicates the experience of defending one’s personal troubles. Usually used in reference to someone’s children or pets, it describes how a nuisance or wrongdoing that belongs to someone, or is part of their family or community, does not bother them as much as one they do not claim. Even if someone is annoyed by a nuisance in their life, they may still defend or

protect that nuisance from others because they feel a personal attachment to it. Dr. Baker conjectured, “Maybe it refers to when wealthy people had monkeys as pets. They were noticeably becoming a nuisance, but everyone held the sentiment ‘It’s not my monkey that’s a nuisance. It’s your monkey that’s a nuisance.’”

This common saying carries a complex truth about life on St. Kitts. Though there are pervasive homophobic and transphobic sentiments on St. Kitts, people simultaneously feel an attachment to their bothers. This chapter considers how my interlocutors’ intersectional identities and vulnerabilities are reproduced socially and physically, through policy and infrastructure, and are experienced in everyday life. At the same time, people build resilience to adverse weather events, such as hurricanes, and to adverse ecological conditions that cause food insecurity, such as the monkey problem, through their ties to the local community. To be queer or trans in a cis/straight-normative setting is experienced as alienation, which ruptures the belonging upon which community-based resilience is experienced. This belonging is negotiated against locally conceived cisgender/straight narratives and identities. The categorical imperative of the straight, cisgender human is not incidental, nor contrary to the conditions of disenfranchisement and marginalization, but rather is a particular historical colonial social construct that is now central to the ways in which spheres of belonging and alienation become locally mapped and executed. At the same time, queer and trans people do find community and cultivate joy and love in their lives, despite homophobia and transphobia. Just as belonging can be challenging, so too is alienation not so simple – everybody monkey is they idol.

Though this chapter is not explicitly about monkeys or the monkey problem, it is part of my larger assertion in *Primates and Plantation Futures* that only by considering how animals, and people who are silenced by uneven power relations, experience non-consents in the past and

present, can we turn away from ultimately violent investments in the reproduction of plantation logics, and embrace a queer feminist sense of futurity. In this chapter, based on the visions for the future of my queer and trans interlocutors, I offer an ethnographically informed version of a queer feminist sense of futurity on St. Kitts. Thinking with Jose Esteban Muñoz's concept of "queer horizons" in *Cruising Utopia* (2019), I argue that though queer and trans identity may be experienced as alienation in the present, queer feminist visions for the future may also be the basis for more liberated and more resilient futures for all. In this chapter, as in elsewhere in the dissertation, I craft composite narratives to synthesize data from multiple interviews, field notes, and observations into cohesive characters and stories. By presenting this data as stories, I strive to get at the essence of the experiences of my queer and trans interlocutors without making their individual qualities or characteristics identifiable.

## **Fruit**

Over the course of my time on St. Kitts, I experienced homophobic and transphobic comments and micro-aggressions on an almost daily basis. As I walked down the street, strangers would often comment that they disliked or didn't understand my clothes or hair. Over time, I changed my presentation to be more male gender-conforming, in part because of the stress these constant comments caused me. At the same time, my identities created access to interlocutors who themselves were queer and trans, and who were also seeking community. My visible queerness often prompted strangers to approach me, whether to deliver a negative comment or to strike up a conversation. One Black Kittitian woman came up to me as I was eating lunch with a gay friend, Angel, a Black American veterinary student. She had bright red braids.

“Are y’all fruit?” she asked.

I laughed nervously, unsure of where the conversation would go. This interaction could easily become an unpleasant one. Angel and I gave each other hesitant glances. I didn’t detect animosity in the woman’s body language, so I responded. “Yes.”

“Me too,” she responded, “I thought I smelled something fruity.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m Bri.”

“I’m Vee.”

We quickly struck up a conversation. I shared with Vee that I was an anthropologist writing a book about St. Kitts. She was eager to share her thoughts and experiences, and we scheduled a follow-up time to talk. In this way, my ethnography and my recruitment of interlocutors were biased. Many people did not wish to speak with me because of the way I presented. At the same time, my own identities opened the door to understanding other spaces and experiences that may have been inaccessible for a different researcher. I aim to explain and address this bias through this chapter.

The category of “fruit” that Vee offers is illustrative in that many of my interlocutors on St. Kitts did not actually self-identify with categories of “queer” or “trans.” Most of my transgender interlocutors did not identify as transgender or trans, simply as men or women. Similarly, some of my interlocutors who were men who have sex with men did not identify as gay or even bisexual.

As discussed previously in Chapter 6, Baker’s (2024) methodological approach, “archipelagic listening”, involves listening to make connections to develop competence across Caribbean discursive horizons of relation and their possibilities. In attuning to queer horizons on St. Kitts, it is essential to listen to the times and rhythms with which people choose to express

their queer and trans identities. Through archipelagic listening, Baker investigates what she calls the Kittitian-Nevisian sensibility of doubleness and triple-ness, a phenomenon she describes as a disruption of categories such as tourist, local, visitor, and national that occurs on St. Kitts, where people and things live multiple lives, sometimes double, sometimes triple. In particular, Baker finds that such divisions visibly blur at large events like music festivals, carnivals, and fetes, wherein all sorts of people party, dance, and share space in ways that transcend these categories.

Though Baker does not explicitly discuss this doubleness and triple-ness in relation to queer and trans identities on St. Kitts, I find it a valuable way to understand this category of fruit that my interlocutor Vee offered. On St. Kitts, queer and trans people often led multiple lives simultaneously. Especially at music festivals, definitions of proper heterosexual and cisgender presentation blur, as people dress in elaborate costumes that are certainly queer in their bedazzled extravagance, and all different combinations of people dance and mingle. At such music festivals, public displays of sexuality are common. Jessica Baker writes that this is a way for Kittitian and Nevisian people to reclaim sexuality, work, and labor for pleasure rather than production (15). I observed that even in daily life, queer and trans people blend into their families and communities, selectively deciding when and how to share the queer and trans aspects of their identities to preserve their safety and comfort.

On St. Kitts, fruit grows with seasonality. For example, Mango season in St. Kitts and Nevis typically runs from June through August. At this time, an abundance of mangoes will rapidly grow and ripen throughout the island. The number of mangos often exceeds what people can gather. Even on farms where multiple workers were tasked with gathering mangos, mangos would litter the ground. They would gradually rot, releasing a sweet stench as they melted back into the Earth.

Mangos are not native to the Caribbean. They are native to South Asia, introduced to the Caribbean region by Europeans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Colonizers from Spain and Portugal brought them from colonies in India to Africa and Brazil, after which they quickly adapted to the tropical climate and naturalized across many Caribbean islands. Unlike monkeys, labelled invasive, or queer and trans people, labelled as problems and not belonging, mangoes are categorized as naturalized because humans have decided that they now belong on the island.

Mangos are not without their own discontents. Mango rotting, caused by fungal diseases like anthracnose, is one example of the risk that comes with growing mangos. Mango rotting causes major problems on farms, leading to significant crop losses and the potential for diseases to spread to other plants. Farmers are constantly taking efforts to prevent mango rot. Farmers use integrated management strategies that combine orchard sanitation, targeted fungicide use, proper harvesting techniques, and careful post-harvest handling to avoid fungal diseases. Orchard sanitation involves constantly removing dead fruit from the tree canopy and ground, and pruning to thin tree canopies, to avoid the spread of fungal spores by wind and rain. Despite the significant effort required to grow mangoes safely, without the risk of them rotting, people still love them. Every summer, a mango festival is held on St. Kitts and Nevis to celebrate the presence of mangos, where farmers and chefs from around the islands collaborate to showcase dishes that center on mangos. Everybody monkey is their idol.

Unlike mangoes, queer and trans people are generally considered a less desirable fruit on St. Kitts currently. One stranger, whom I encountered in passing a few days after I first came to St. Kitts for fieldwork, likely remarking on my long hair and gender non-conforming clothing, said to me, “Why do you look like that? You look like something is wrong with you – unnatural.” There was something about my gender presentation that she immediately felt did not

belong on the island. I might speculate that Vee's decision to choose the metaphor of fruit harkens to a particular fruity Caribbean tropical fantasy which frames the Caribbean islands as replete both with an abundance of tropical fruit and the potential for the fulfillment of other desires like sexual tourists' fantasies predicated on exoticism.

To accept queer and trans people as naturalized or belonging would trouble colonially imported ideals of hetero-normative family units and biopolitical imperatives for reproduction, which continue to affect post-colonial life on the island. At the same time, people already resist these ideals through alternative ways of being in the Caribbean, such as what Jessica Baker calls "island time," the tempos of life on St. Kitts and Nevis wherein Caribbean people resist dominant imperatives for productivity through Black rest and leisure. Baker writes, "Island Time presents speed and the archipelago as the central organizing concepts from which a broad range of West Indian performance practices emerge" (16). In thinking about the centrality of performance to gender and sexuality, and to the ways in which queer and trans people on St. Kitts selectively choose when and how to perform their queerness and transness or not, I build on Baker's work to move towards what I see as a synchronic connectivity between queer feminist visions for the future, and other resistant Caribbean ways of being.

The ways we think about the non-human other — the shore, the waters, the hurricane, the environment — and the human and its spectral others — the monkey, the farmer, and the scientist — are critical positions in cultural configurations, rights-based frameworks, and research projects. The categorical imperative of the human is not incidental or contrary to the conditions of disenfranchisement and marginalization, but rather is central to the ways in which spheres of belonging and alienation are navigated. In this way, an attunement to the ways in which people speak about their natural world, and the related ways in which they see queerness

or transness as “unnatural,” as good fruit or bad fruit, as invasive or problems or belonging or naturalized, can serve to reveal how a queer feminist liberatory mission for St. Kitts is also an intersectional venture, mutually imbricated with my other interlocuters’ calls for food security, decolonization, and racial justice.

Other Caribbeanist authors offer generative ways of thinking the queer Caribbean.

In “What the Sand Remembers”, Vanessa Agard-Jones employs sand as a metaphor for reading gender and sexual alterity of the past through the physical setting of the present. Agard-Jones chooses sand in that it “returns us to the body’s messy realities” (Agard-Jones 2012, p. 326). In the sand, she traces memories from the late 19th to early 20th century, urban Saint-Pierre, to the modern late 20th century, remote Sainte-Anne. She narrates across space and time, bringing together transnational queer theory and Caribbeanist theory. Agard-Jones tracks queer presence in a place where “the archive is shallow, and where the ravages of the plantation, then later of the colony, and even worse still, of the salinated air, have meant the slow erosion of all things putatively concrete” (339). Sand is the only permanent inhabitant of “empty space,” which is ephemerally animated by social and sexual “magic” (336) on the margins of colonial-capitalist (re-)productivity and across racialized class strata (338). Queerness always was and continues to be found in the ephemeral, untraceable, and unquantifiable times and places.

In “Spray,” Agard-Jones (2014) turns to theorizing with aerosols near and far, such as personal bug sprays and larger-scale crop dusting. Air, weather, and spray offer Agard-Jones a physical presence that floats across space and time, bringing together histories of war, agricultural science in the United States, and plantation labor in the Caribbean, with contemporary concerns about insects, disease, and bodily autonomy. Agard-Jones’s approach can be characterized by a practice of making sense of the past through grounding in the physical

and non-human elements of the present. The environment retains traces of the past that extend beyond the human. Agard-Jones's ethnographic approach offers a rethinking of traditional ethnographic methods to incorporate and operationalize Caribbean understandings of synchronic connectivity, repetition, and relation (see Benitez-Rojo 1996; Glissant 1989).

Just as Agard-Jones focuses on sand and sprays, so too, perhaps, can the idea of fruit offer us a way to inquire into the ways in which queer and trans identity on St. Kitts fruit, or ripen, in relation to the conditions around them. Fruit, after all, is central to the tropical imaginary of the Caribbean archipelago.

## **Love**

I met Sonny at a Papaya festival, where he struck up a conversation with me. Sonny was an immigrant from West Africa. He had come to St. Kitts to attend Windsor Medical School. Windsor was one of two medical schools on St. Kitts, alongside UMHS, the University of Medical Health Sciences. UMHS primarily serves white and Latino students from North America and the Hispanic Caribbean, namely Canada, the United States, and Puerto Rico. Windsor Medical School primarily serves students from South Asia, West Africa, and North America, with the largest populations being from India and West Africa.

Sonny once told me that many of his family members in West Africa were familiar with Windsor Medical School, viewing it as a pathway to practicing medicine in the United States or Canada. Sonny had finished Windsor Medical School and graduated not long before I met him. He shared with me early on in our friendship that he planned to practice Orthopedic Surgery in Canada, hoping to move to Saskatchewan, where some of his siblings had immigrated, and he now had nieces and nephews.

Though Sonny had this practical and very possible plan, it was one that he continually deferred. Sonny had fallen in love with a man named Kendall, a Kittitian who was born and raised on the island. Kendall was very tall, and towered above me when I met him. Kendall, I learned over time, had plenty of Kittitian friends, gay and straight. He lived with an elderly family member, whom he cared for. He worked at the airport for a major airline, which provided him with flight benefits. This allowed him to take affordable periodic trips and vacations to visit family and friends who had moved to the United States, specifically to Florida and New York, two major sites for immigrants from St. Kitts.

Sonny became one of my key interlocutors on St. Kitts. Throughout the years I've known him, Sonny has consistently expressed his intention to move to Canada. He desires to live closer to his family and feels unfulfilled with his life on St. Kitts. He feels unable to be authentically queer on St. Kitts, which he experiences as an extremely homophobic place: "The homophobia is just as bad as back home in West Africa," he once told me, "Which makes St. Kitts feel more familiar to me in some ways. But the gay people themselves here are meaner. I don't have many gay friends."

Sonny had spent some years living in the United Kingdom, away from his family, during which time he had come to feel comfortable with himself as someone attracted to other men. He felt stifled and frustrated in St. Kitts. Like many queer people around the world who experience homophobia, Sonny felt dissatisfaction with the present. Even as Sonny used the term gay, he was often reluctant to do so. I believe that he did this, in this instance, because he was in conversation with me, and I would often use the term gay in a broad, all-encompassing way. He did not necessarily identify that way himself. Like many of my interlocutors, Sonny perhaps would better be described under the ambiguous category of fruit, in which he was at times

subject to homophobia and at times not. Like me, he at times sought to express his queer identity, such as through his choice of clothing, and at other times chose not to do so, to protect his safety and sense of well-being. Doubleness and triple-ness were often a necessity on St. Kitts, wherein it would be tiring and potentially unsafe to express queer identities publicly.

Sonny and I formed a queer kinship because we were both foreigners and outsiders on St. Kitts. We often spent our free time together. St. Kitts did have a network of queer and trans people, but in part to protect themselves, they were slow to accept non-Kittitians into their community spaces. Though Sonny was Black, his accent marked him as not Kittitian. People recognized me as either a tourist or a medical or veterinary student, the most likely reasons that a 26-year-old visibly queer white person with a United States accent would find their way to St. Kitts. Though I was not a veterinary student, I came to expect and even respond to these identifiers in daily life.

During my time on St. Kitts, I was a regular attendee at outdoor yoga classes on weekday evenings and weekend mornings. At these yoga classes, the teachers, all immigrants to St. Kitts, were quick to notice me as being queer. They were also kind enough to introduce me to other queer friends of theirs on the islands. It was through one of the yoga teachers that I met an older white man named Samuel, who had been living on St. Kitts for over 20 years. His husband was a Caribbean man from another Caribbean nation. They had moved to St. Kitts after Samuel was offered a job caretaking for a private villa. Samuel was in his late 60s, with money and time to spare. He identified as a gay man. He would often invite gay men from around St. Kitts to spend time at the pool in his villa, and would host elaborate dinners where he hired local private chefs. It was through these dinners that I met many gay men around St. Kitts. And it was through these

gay men that I then met other queer and trans interlocutors from their social networks, through events and gatherings that they invited me to.

I slowly made my way into the world of queer and trans Kittitians. I learned that I was shielded from much of the homophobic and transphobic violence they experienced by my status as a foreigner. My queerness was seen as part of my foreignness, because neither belonged on the island. For queer and trans Kittitians who sought to belong, they either remained closeted and quiet about their identities or risked ruptured family connections and lost kinship ties. There was a dearth of spaces where they could peacefully express their authentic selves. I came to understand that queerness on St. Kitts was experienced as a form of alienation.

At the same time, it was not simply alienation that was the problem. Belonging, too, was fraught. One of my interlocutors, Devon, and his boyfriend, Charmaine, helped me to understand this. Devon was from St. Kitts, and Charmaine from Nevis. They were in their early twenties, and both still lived with their families. The two would travel back and forth between the two islands, switching family homes every week or two. Neither home was entirely comfortable, and each of their families had its own nuanced negotiations of acceptance and refusal of the young men's romance and queer self-expression. By moving between the two, however, they maintained that they were able to avoid feeling too confined in either island.

Devon and Charmaine had always dreamed of leaving St. Kitts and Nevis to move to the United Kingdom one day. There was no defined date for this future, but it was a response to feelings of being confined or captive on St. Kitts and Nevis. The United Kingdom, where they had previously vacationed and enjoyed their time, came to be an erotic refuge for their imaginations. Many of my interlocutors had similar visions of queer futures elsewhere, in the United States or other Caribbean islands like St. Martin, that they thought would be more

accepting. This longing, queer (re-)homing desires — the desire to find a home — demonstrates how belonging is negotiated against hegemonic cis-/straight narratives. Queer and trans people express (re-)homing desires because their identities cause rupture from their local community and family ties. Queer and trans people on St. Kitts were labeled as hyper-individualistic, and their desires to belong were framed as queer personal exercises to assert their identity. Belonging — social embeddedness — was oppressive for queer and trans people, even at the same time as it was essential to them.

On St. Kitts, I witnessed, in passing, multiple gay destination weddings of tourists over the course of my ethnographic fieldwork. The conflicting desires of emigration and staying were, in many ways, inversions of the post-colonial island fantasies held by tourists. Tourists to the Caribbean, mainly hailing from North America and Europe, consider the Caribbean to be a prime site for sexual tourism (Nixon, 2015). Like the colonial fantasy of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise replete with fruit, there is a global imaginary, upheld by film and media, of the Caribbean as a paradise abounding with erotic opportunities. At certain times, the island's government and investors embrace these fantasies and seek to reproduce them. The government of St. Kitts and Nevis is actively pursuing a tourism-driven economy – the government's reports frame the tourism sector as a critical engine for job creation, economic diversification, and post-pandemic recovery (St. Kitts and Nevis Information Service [SKNIS] 2025, 2026). At the same time as it was made clear to me on numerous instances that my queerness and transness were not welcome on St. Kitts, my foreign identity not only protected me but also is what ultimately created the particular and biased version of access that I was able to cultivate in researching the monkey problem of St. Kitts.

Like in the adage “everybody monkey is they idol,” belonging comes with both benefits and frustrations, in part because the alternative to belonging is alienation. These same tourist imaginaries and the hierarchies of capital and power that reproduce them render it challenging for queer and trans Kittitians to actually emigrate from the island. Even if they are successful in securing visas or citizenship in another country, Caribbean immigrants in North America and Europe must navigate different challenges and discontents (see Foner 2018; Roopnarine et al. 2023). The fantasy of erotic refuge elsewhere, for Kittitians, was a complex set of negotiations. Their decision to stay was not always a conscious one, but was often driven by circumstances that made leaving challenging.

At the same time, neither alienation nor belonging exist without their own doubleness and triple-ness. Queerness, race, and class, local and tourist: these categories can all separate people, geographically, socially, and culturally. But, as Baker writes, there is a different narrative on St. Kitts and other small Caribbean islands. Relationality and multiplicity are inherent to the archipelago and to Caribbean peoples’ socially embedded identities. Baker writes,

I argue in this book, the layered archipelagic relation of the interactive, intervisible, intertraversable cluster of small islands in the eastern Caribbean cannot be apprehended via the definitive, two-laned continental imaginary buoyed by a ‘going to’ and ‘coming from’ discourse. Instead, comprehension of the small-island inhabitance of Kittitians and Nevisians, a central focus of this book, is better served by the relationality and multiplicity inherent to the archipelago. The archipelago is a form that accounts for the infinitude of the ‘somewhere else’ -something else, someone else, sometime else-from which ‘everything’ comes. (21)

Beyond islanding and offshoring, Baker opts to focus on relation. The framework of archipelagic listening offers a methodological model for moving beyond the binary of belonging/alienation. Navigating queerness and transness on St. Kitts is more than a matter of coming from, going to, or staying on the island. It is more than heritage or the decision to stay or leave. Queerness and transness neither belong nor do not belong on St. Kitts. They do not *only*

come from or go to the island, and do not *only* come from the past nor exist in a liberated future. Instead, queerness follows relational routes, which a researcher who employs archipelagic listening can hear and notice. Queerness on St. Kitts is simultaneously figured both by belonging and by alienation. It is also in this way that the effects of environmental events and catastrophes echo and abound throughout the culture and its people, with these effects interfacing with a doubleness and triple-ness that resound across environment, geography, identity, and society.

## **The Politics of Futurity: Decolonization and Queer Horizons**

When I first met Sonny, he said he would be moving to Canada within the next 6 months. Every few months, Sonny would extend his timeline to leave. He said that he and Kendall had a calm and happy relationship, but that Kendall had no plans and no desire to leave St. Kitts. They were not headed to the same future, and their desires ultimately had a major impasse. Sonny maintained that he was studying for his board certification examination and planned to leave St. Kitts one day. But he continually deferred his examination because it would mean an inevitable separation from Kendall. In this way, Sonny's desire for authentic expression and freedom to love, which could be found in places other than St. Kitts, or in the future, was at odds with his existing relationship and love with Kendall, on St. Kitts, in the present.

In "Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity," José Esteban Muñoz (2019) introduces the concept of the "queer horizon" to describe how queer individuals worldwide have critiqued the present and envisioned alternative futures. The horizon represents the promise of the future. Hope, which Muñoz argues is what fuels queer and trans activist imaginaries, is always found in the future, because the present can be dissatisfying and actively hostile against them. For queer and trans people, hope is vital to the motivating force that Muñoz calls "queer

utopianism,” wherein utopia is not a naive fantasy, but rather a radical demand for social change. Queer utopianism invokes imaginaries that are not simply extensions of the current social order but are rather radically different and more just.

Sonny’s decision to stay and to continue to try to craft increasingly beautiful near futures in his daily life on St. Kitts is fueled by his desire, what Munoz calls Queer futurity. Queer futurity is a critical lens through which to understand and challenge the limitations of the present, grounded upon the notion of queer utopianism. Queer futurity is not solely about identity or sexual practice in the present, but rather a potential to envision and strive for more just futures of various kinds, across different and multiple possible horizons. I believe that Queer futurity, as a Queer Feminist liberatory vision, is intrinsically related to other Caribbean calls for liberation, both from cis-hetero-patriarchal violence and from environmental racism (see Bonilla 2020; Ferdinand 2021, pages 11, 89, 146 on environmental racism and the double fractures of modernity).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Yarimar Bonilla in “The Coloniality of Disaster: Race, Empire, and the Temporal Logics of Emergency in Puerto Rico, USA” (2020) frames the Caribbean as a site of failed colonial experiments. Bonilla argues that catastrophic events like hurricanes and earthquakes, but also other forms of political or economic crises, serve to deepen the fault lines of long-existing racial and colonial histories. This analysis is useful for understanding how vestigial colonial policies like British anti-buggery laws continue to inform contemporary homophobic and transphobic sentiments on St. Kitts. Bonilla rethinks “resilience” and “recovery” in the Caribbean context, based on the ways that Caribbean peoples’ autonomous organizing resists colonial capitalism’s temporal logics of state subjugation. Bonilla ultimately argues Caribbean peoples conceptualize resiliency in two contrasting ways: the first is a cooptation of the concepts of reparations and resiliency in service of neoliberal recovery, wherein post-colonial state dynamics replay colonial logics; the second is as a site of gestating new forms of sovereignty and new visions of postcolonial recovery.

Frantz Fanon (1952, 1963) argued that colonization had psychological impacts on the relationship between people and land. For example, colonialism often utilized the disruption of the connection between people and their ancestral territories as one of its technologies of domination. The loss of land and the accompanying cultural and spiritual ties contributed to a sense of alienation, dislocation, and fragmentation of identity amongst those colonized. As such, Fanon recognized land not only as a physical plane or resource, but also as a symbolic and political terrain. He argued that the struggle for land was at the core of the decolonization process. Contestations over land claims were not only material but also intrinsically related to one’s sense of self and belonging. Fanon conceived that access to connection to self and ancestors, beyond memory of the recent past and present, is manifested through the ability of people to relate to the land.

Muñoz posits that queerness is not a fully realized state in the present but rather *exists* as a horizon of being — something to strive towards that is “not yet here” as cis-hetero-patriarchal societies continue to devalue and harm queer and trans people, marking them as queer and trans rather than as fully recognized persons. Individuals still hold hope for and work towards more sustainable futures – homophobic/transphobic social-cultural conditions in the present lay the basis for queer desire. At the same time, Queer futurity is ultimately unsettling of the present, as it highlights the limitations and oppressions embedded in our current social, political, and cultural structures. Queerness, by its very nature of existing outside and often in opposition to dominant timelines, carries within it a critical perspective on the present. The concept of Queer futurity amplifies this critique by providing a framework for understanding how queer desires and expressions of the self point towards the limitations of the present and offer pathways to more liberatory futures. In this way, a queer feminist viewpoint is a call not to be satisfied with the current situation and to actively cultivate the horizon of queer possibility, even if it may, at times and to some, seem improbable or even impossible.

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In this way, reclaiming, repossessing, and redistributing land, in the conceptions of both Fanon and Bonilla, are essential steps in challenging colonial domination and asserting the identity and autonomy of formerly colonized peoples. Just as Fanon saw decolonization as a struggle rooted in recent shared experiences and a sense of belonging, Queer futurity is also rooted in a shared memory and experience, and a desire for a different, more just future. In this way, decolonial and queer futurist visions of the future align with Bonilla’s definition of resiliency as a site of gestating new forms of sovereignty and recovery.

Extending Bonilla’s analysis, in conversation with Muñoz, we can understand homophobia and transphobia on St. Kitts as, in part, consequences of what Bonilla calls colonialism’s failed experiments, to which post-colonial states’ responses remain sites of value extraction and unevenness. The experiences of alienation shared by queer and trans people in St. Kitts inform their collective desire for a “not yet here” utopia. The lines of queer and trans alienation are sites of value extraction and unevenness. From the perspective of queer horizons, survival is not about assimilation or repair, but about building alternative, more resilient futures. Queer horizons for human-animal and racial futures can be understood through Jackson’s theory of the violence of inclusion – queer utopianism is not about inclusion or belonging to cis-hetero-patriarchal society, but somewhat inherently about seeking queer, trans, decolonized futures, within which relationships to animals and to the land are also queered and decolonized. These sentiments are also present in other recent Caribbean writing, including Mimi Sheller’s “island survivalism” (2020) and Malcolm Ferdinand’s “plantationary emancipation” (2021). These authors emphasize the ability of Caribbean peoples to create their own spaces and futures, embodying forms of resistance that are not just about survival but also about thriving on their own terms.

Muñoz emphasizes that the seeds of Queer futurity can be found in the past – in historical moments of queer resistance, artistic expression, and community building. By examining these "then and there" moments, Muñoz argues, we can glean insights and inspiration for imagining and building the "not yet here." This act of looking to the past to inform the future is a critique of the erasure and marginalization of queer histories. Agard-Jones offers a different approach by reconstructing queer and trans histories through her focus on the continuity of the natural world. I speculate that Agard-Jones's focus on spray and sand operates as a Caribbean approach to rethinking how anthropology is conducted by bringing new meaning to more established decolonial and queer practices of reading between and against the grain of an archive. Ethnography, which focuses on physical and embodied realities, human and non-human, such as sand and aerosols, or fruit, can be understood as a methodology for inquiring across the past, present, and future, also aligning with what Baker calls archipelagic listening.

On St. Kitts, the visions of Queer futurity that are arising exist in relation to other Kittitian and Caribbean ways of being, liberatory visions, and calls for justice. As Baker writes, "This feeling, of meaningful connection and abject difference, a reaching and pulling toward a shared something while being set apart, constitutes my own experience of relation, across a broadly construed Caribbean, as a kind of paradox," wherein archipelagic listening is a tool for grasping this paradox, "grasping, but also articulating, analyzing, comprehending it as a paradox of aurality distributed in a multidimensional field" (121). For Baker, archipelagic listening is a way of attuning to the paradoxes of belonging and alienation, and the world beyond them, by focusing on the poetic, musical, and rhythmic ways that people communicate across space and time in the Caribbean. Queer and trans people, through their ability to envision alternative futures, offer a model of resilience that is not just about adapting to the present but actively

seeking and creating a more just future. Listening with an archipelagic ear can help trace how the liberation of humans and animals, too, is inextricably linked.

In practicing archipelagic listening – in listening to the desires, wishes, and ways of being of queer and trans interlocutors past and present, near and far – I have come to understand that Queer futurity on St. Kitts manifests as a different way of being, beyond a desire for belonging. Though these desires exist in relation to transnational queer and trans movements, they are also distinct from them, a sort of queer island time wherein subjectivities springing from differing sexual orientations and gender identities are also orientations in space and time as manifested in geography, history, and future horizons. Queer feminist visions from St. Kitts are fueled not by colonial fantasies of abundant fruit, nor solely of naturalization, but rather by a Caribbean and Kittian queer horizon, replete with its own fantasies and discontents, but which nonetheless offers a vision for the future not predicated on violent investments in the reproduction of the past. Even as these queer horizons are sensitive to and informed by violence and suffering in the present, these visions for the future are hopeful, at times utopian, and urge for a better future.

## **Seasons Pass**

In July 2024, Sonny and I were invited to the second-ever Pride Cruise on St. Kitts and Nevis. There was no official posting or virtual recruitment for this event anywhere. It was all word of mouth. Individuals were invited through their informal social networks. One friend, a Kittitian trans man named Lex, had forwarded Sonny the invitation over WhatsApp.

At around midday, as the sun was at its peak and many people fled indoors to try to avoid the humid heat, Sonny and I made our way to the small docks in Frigate Bay, where private ships would anchor. Though we arrived at the time listed on the flier, we were among the first. Slowly,

queer and trans people trickled in to meet us. People were dressed conservatively. In my experience with Pride events in other countries, many would wear rainbow garb and flamboyant apparel, but here, I saw sports jerseys, neutral shorts, and t-shirts. I recognized a few people, but many I had not yet encountered in my previous social engagements with the queer and trans network of St. Kitts. About 40 people showed up.

An hour and a few awkward conversations later, we all boarded the boat and departed out to sea. When we were far from the coast, out of sight of the eyes of the coastline, a miraculous transformation took place. People removed the clothes they had arrived in and donned rainbows. One man put on high heels. Which was a statement, given that we were on a boat, where many were barefoot. Others donned rainbow flags. One man wore lingerie.

We danced to popular genres of music on St. Kitts – Wylers, reggae, Soca, and Afrobeats. Like at carnivals and fetes, people danced in all sorts of combinations of genders and styles. Yet, beyond what I have witnessed at popular festivals and carnivals, there was space for queer and trans people to dance in explicitly queer and trans ways. There was room for intimate embraces in gay and queer combinations, which I have seen and experienced can draw wary glances and even words of objection on the island. On St. Kitts, this would have been forbidden fruit. I let out a sigh of relief. That evening, even if just for a moment, I was free from feelings of fear, and I experienced every time I went out dancing on St. Kitts, and from the practices of restricting my self-expression that had become almost second nature to me by that time. I could tell that I was not alone in this feeling.

On this boat ride, I felt as though I was floating in a dream-like state. Music blasted out from the boat, outwards into empty waters. Even after the sun fell, we danced in the darkness, bodies grinding, music filling the empty air above the Caribbean Sea. I had a sense that the

music, blaring into the silence around us, was a kind of protest, a declaration, a way of taking up space – We are here.

During this boat ride, people found amusement with me. Strangers began asking me to matchmake for them. They would share with me, in detail, the kind of person they wanted me to seek out for them. “I want a dread-head who is taller than me.” “She needs to be smaller than me so I can hug her easy.” “She should be rich!” “I want him to cook really well.” “I want her white, pale, like you.” “I like a darkskin man. It would be nice if he lived on St. Kitts. I live on Nevis, but I could visit him.”

I’m not sure how exactly this game began. Perhaps, like for many ethnographers, my status as a foreigner made people feel comfortable saying things to me that they would avoid sharing with someone closer to them. Perhaps my foreignness made my own presence there appear fantastical and out of place in a way that encouraged people to speculate on the forms of relation that they desired. The requests were quite fantastical, especially given that, as a foreigner who had not lived on St. Kitts very long, I was unlikely to be a good matchmaker. But it was also clear to me that there was another point to this activity. In articulating their desires and fantasies to me, people were describing the kind of fruit they wished to bite into. The type of fruit they dreamt of.

Queerness offers a vision for a future predicated not on belonging to an unwelcoming or reluctant cisgender/straight society, but on different horizons for the future. Like Jessica Baker writes,

these horizons — like those visible from the shores and mountainous highpoints of the Caribbean islands – are constituted by trajectories modified by race, islandness, smallness, and the swelling and shifting constellation of individual and collective desires, themselves islands of other expansive archipelagos. (146)

Though queerness can be experienced as alienation in the present, it may also be the basis for different futures, with their own discontents, but which hold the hope for more liberated and so more resilient futures for all. This pride cruise was an ephemeral, doubled, and tripled act of creating a temporary, liberated space that is both alien to the shore and deeply rooted in the island's unique relationality. Queerness is already part of the relationality and multiplicity inherent to the Caribbean archipelago.

New fruit grows with every season. Queerness exists in ephemeral spaces, passing in-between moments, and is not centered on assimilation into heteronormative structures. Through the Pride boat ride, the queer and trans people of St. Kitts convened out at sea. It was not to make a point, not to protest, but for themselves.

# Conclusion

## Entanglement as Method

I was born in 1997 in Santa Monica, California, and raised in West Los Angeles, walking distance from the West Los Angeles Veterans' Affairs (VA) Medical Center and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). During my archival research, I learned that a colony of green monkeys from St. Kitts was established at UCLA in 1975 and housed at this VA Medical Center until being moved to Wake Forest University in 2008. Though I never saw or heard them, green monkeys from St. Kitts had been my neighbors growing up. Learning this knowledge felt uncanny — my own entanglement with the St. Kitts green monkey actually extended back to the place of my birth. In defining different elements of the uncanny, Gonsalves writes,

if this really is the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why German usage allows the familiar (das Heimliche, the 'homely') to switch to its opposite, the uncanny (das Unheimliche, the 'unhomely'), for this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being Repressed. (20-21)

The heimlich, or the familiar, merges with its formal antonym, unheimlich, when that which was intended to remain secret, or hidden away, comes into the open. These green monkeys were not a repressed part of my unconscious, but my learning about their presence decades later was also uncanny insofar as it was a collapse between my present attunement and past ignorance. As Gonsalves reminds us, the uncanny blurs the lines between individual history and local context, and between internal and external.

What the uncanny demonstrates is how objectivity can be problematic without accounting for individual history and local context, the pulsional circuits of the subject must always be accounted for. Thus, the uncanny portrays a certain blurring of lines between external-internal, between different temporalities, present in our interpretation of reality itself. For example, the process of internalizing laws to participate in society is an uncanny redoubling process for the subject, the renunciation of satisfactions and

endurance of dissatisfactions become economic modes of existence shaping how we live our lives. This peculiar unconscious (dis)agreement with the Other can easily invite someone to the couch. As Freud states, the uncanny signals repression “...we are dealing with the actual repression of a particular content and the return of what has been repressed, not with the suspension of belief in its reality” (Safatle 2017, 353). (34)

As I have argued, the persistence of the monkey problem is reproduced by desensitization, invisibilization, and erasure. When people become desensitized to suffering that becomes mundane or normalized in daily life, such as in “internalizing laws to participate in society,” wherein “endurance of dissatisfactions become economic modes of existence shaping how we live our lives,” it is not surprising that the uncanny signals repression. In psychoanalysis, repression is the foundational defense mechanism of the psyche – the ego’s way of burying unacceptable desires, traumatic memories, or painful impulses in the unconscious mind to keep them from disrupting conscious awareness. Repressed material doesn’t vanish, but rather retains its emotional energy, which can then be expressed in dreams, slips of the tongue, or psychological symptoms: “the ‘uncanny’ is that class of of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud 2003 [1919], 2). Freud uses the mechanism of repression to explain the uncanny as a linguistic paradox that mirrors a psychological reality, “Thus Heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich. Unheimlich is in some way or other a sub-species of Heimlich” (4).

The existence of experimental green monkeys, a commodity form wherein the wild green monkey is made captive and then bred, vaccinated, and processed through human labor to embody certain attributes, is also an uncanny process, wherein experimental monkeys are created whose value-relation significantly surpasses the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of it, and yet are also haunted by the autonomous and immutable

traits of the wild green monkey that remain within, the “haunting autonomous traits of commodity” (Gonsalves 171).

In following green monkeys on St. Kitts and beyond, I am aware that these monkeys trace a form of monstrosity predicated on violence against animals and against people. For Gonsalves, monstrosity is a reflection of the current politics that have been normalized into daily life in late liberalism, wherein “our sensibilities are too overwhelmed to transform ourselves or the reality which surrounds us” (133). Monstrosity is simultaneously a catalyst for political change, what Gonsalves calls “an ally” in the process of change, in that “it makes us question the oppressions which we normalized over time” (133).

The medical report above, in spite of its claims to the contrary, suggests that the primates used by UCLA are subject to rough treatment, which we believe is a common occurrence at such facilities. Daily exposure to suffering has been repeatedly shown to desensitize those exposed regularly to it.

The document was part of a partial response by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) to [an open records request filed by a UCLA honors student](#) seeking information on the use of primates by her university. A small portion of the information she requested at the beginning of the 2002 school year was released months later only after repeated requests, much determination, and public protest. The university has not released a census of the primates at the university.

This report has brought to light a facility hitherto overlooked by us. The name of the facility seems to vary depending upon the source of the information. It is referred to variously as: the Vervet Research Center, the Sepulveda Valley Nonhuman Primate Research Facility, the UCLA-VA Vervet Monkey Research Colony (VMRC), or simply, the Sepulveda Primate Facility.

It is located next to, and administratively associated with, the Veterans Administration Hospital in Sepulveda, California.

Documents from UCLA suggest that there are at least 500, and perhaps more than 700, vervets held there. Infant mortality is said to be high, but is offset by the larger number of births. The population is increasing.



Vervets at UCLA's VMRC

The medical record above was included among documents associated with UCLA researcher William P. Melega, PhD. UCLA received \$341,097 in FY 01/02 from the NIH National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to support Mr. Melega's research. The funded project was begun in 1997 and is marked for funding through March 2005. At the end of the period, his research will have generated over \$1.5 million for UCLA.

**Figure 9.1 UCLA-VA Vervet Monkey Research Colony Screenshot**

*Screenshot taken on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, from [www.primatefreedom.com](http://www.primatefreedom.com)'s page on Vervet monkey #9382, who was housed at UCLA.*

The Primate Freedom Project is a non-governmental organization dedicated to “ending the use of nonhuman primates in biomedical and harmful behavioral experimentation” (Primate Freedom Project Mission Statement, n.d.-b). They keep a public archive of medical records that suggest rough treatment of experimental monkeys, aiming to hold researchers accountable.

Vervet monkey #9382 at UCLA was recorded as having been sacrificed after suffering mysterious injuries,

While transferring animal #9382 from its vivarium cage to the transport cage, the animal began biting the metal vivarium cage. Biting has been observed previously with other Vervet monkeys. After the animal was secured in the transport cage, it was observed that the animal was bleeding from its mouth and was having difficulty opening and closing its mouth. Initially it was believed that the animal had either bitten its tongue or broken a tooth from biting the cage. The animal was then anesthetized and examined by UCLA Veterinarians. It was concluded that the animal had a fractured maxilla. This was very surprising as we did not notice any particular action that resulted in this condition. Furthermore, this was a standard procedure that had been used for several years without any injury to any animal.

We suspect that the animal's head was either struck by the metal vivarium cage door as he entered the transport cage, or, that he banged his head against the side of the metal vivarium cage before entry into the transport cage.

This instance of animal suffering is exceptional insofar as the “standard procedure” which the animal underwent “had been used for several years without any injury to any animal,” and yet is also an instance of escalation indicative of the ways that building animosity occurs at institutions that house captive experimental primates.

The Primate Freedom Project was a locally situated instance of animal rights activism. It began in 2001, when nine student members of a UCLA group, “Students for Animal Liberation,” requested public records regarding UCLA researchers using non-human primates in experiments. When access to these records was continually denied, fifty activists staged a protest in the hallway of the UCLA Chancellor's office, demanding access to the public records. Eight months later, in May 2002, the documents were finally released.

Activists like those at The Primate Freedom Project do make a difference. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs has recently committed to ending research on animals as models for medical conditions and treatments, ending a long effort by activists and lawmakers to halt studies that harm dogs, cats, and primates (Kime 2025).

Marjorie Spiegel argued in her famous book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1998) that there is a direct connection between human slavery and animal exploitation — intervening against speciesism and racism can only be done in conjunction with one another. Malcolm Ferdinand (2021) refers to this as the double fracture of modernity.

The first proposition is based on the observation of modernity's colonial and environmental double fracture. This fracture separates the colonial history of the world from its environmental history. This can be seen in the divide between environmental and ecological movements, on the one hand, and postcolonial and antiracist movements, on the other, where both express themselves in the streets and in the universities without speaking to each other. (4)

Guided by Afro-Caribbean understandings of the Earth as mother, Ferdinand considers assaults on the environment and racist violence as contingent upon one another: he argues that the colonial domination of people (race) and the colonial domination of the environment (property), what he calls the double fracture of modernity, results in *environmental racism*. Similarly to how Ferdinand positions this double fracture as a central problem contributing to ecological crises, critical race scholars have critiqued multi-species ethnography and animal rights activism for failing to be sensitive to inequality amongst humans along lines of race (Ahuja 2021; Kim 2015; Jackson 2020). Analyses of primate-human interactions have historically overlooked the significance of regimes of racialization in shaping how primates are assigned identity and cultural meaning within regional politics (Georgic 2026; Govindrajan 2015; Haraway 2020). Building on the work of contemporary multi-species anthropologists who have recently set about to explore how multi-species ethnography can be used to unmask power hierarchies and unsettle the harms of colonial violence that affect both humans and non-humans (Chao 2022; Salazar Parreñas 2018), I worked towards a multi-species ethnographic approach that was attentive to such critiques by focusing on the role of race in the monkey problem.

The term multi-species ethnography (MSE) was coined by Kirksey and Helmreich to describe what they observed as an emerging trend among ethnographers to attend to non-human others as politically and biographically legible figures (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). Haritaworn argues that discourses of animality and race are deeply entangled, such as how populations who have historically been considered to inhabit space pathologically, “degenerate bodies” both human and animal, are paradoxically targeted both as being too close to nature and destructive of it (Haritaworn 2015). Parreñas shifted the perspective of multi-species ethnography through her work on orangutan sanctuaries in Sarawak, demonstrating MSE methods across multiple overlapping time scales, including short affective encounters, transient ethnographic contacts, varying life spans, and longer timelines of colonialism, climate change, and extinction (Salazar Parreñas 2018). The monkey problem of St. Kitts is representative of collective experiences of harm and food insecurity that cross species lines. My research considers monkeys not only as a nuisance or a foil for human desires, but also as social and political actors in their own right.

Anthropologists contributing to science and technology studies have argued that categories of the human and the subject are continually recrafted in the face of changing scientific paradigms (Bourdieu 1975; Haraway 2020; Kohler 1994; Sharp 2018; Rader 2004). Contemporary critical race theorists have also begun to scrutinize categories of race and species, including in the context of environmental and laboratory sciences. These scholars have argued that historical devaluation on lines of race(-ism) and species(-ism) are actually essential to, rather than subsidiary to, the metaphysical figuration of matter, objects, and animals that allows for sustained assaults on non-human others (Ferdinand 2021; Jackson 2020). Theorizations on the intersection of race and the environment suggest that environmental crises are deeply entangled with current modes of state power and racial capital (Ahuja 2021; Bennett 2020; Boisseron 2018;

Yusoff 2018). Euro-American scientific discourse, alongside modern animal rights, anti-vivisectionist, and environmental conservation campaigns, frames non-human others, such as lands and animals, as property and as sites for the extraction of value (Kimmerer 2013; Liboiron 2021; TallBear 2019). Following traditions of decolonial and postcolonial critique (Fanon 2008; Wynter 2001), Jackson contends that appeals to move “beyond the human” may actually reintroduce the harm that the post-human turn seeks to disrupt, by ignoring ongoing racism and related power hierarchies amongst humans (Jackson 2013; Jackson 2020). I explore how mobilizations of categories of animality and race inform the agendas of intervention upon the monkey problem. My research draws on these critiques by existing in a space of knowledge production and exchange between those invested in the well-being of non-human animals and the environment, and those invested in decolonial and race-related liberation for humans.

This project attended to the colonial and racial lacunae of multi-species ethnography through a grounding in local Caribbean thought. Theorizations of the Caribbean as a site of ontological recombination (Benitez-Rojo 1996; Glissant 1997; Whitmarsh 2011) can guide the reframing of the monkey problem and its constitutive categorical configurations. I see green monkeys as sharing in a particular human-non-human colonial history, and an interface of Relation. In this way, this project moves towards a multi-species ethnographic approach informed by analyses of race and Caribbeanist theory, which can provide insights about human power structures and hierarchies in relation to conceptions of multi-species justice on St. Kitts and beyond. This approach works to reimagine justice, for animals and for humans, as conceived of locally and in transnational conversations.

This project builds on anthropology’s rich historical engagement with the Caribbean as a site of political and economic decolonization and emancipation missions (Norton 1983;

Pemberton 2010; Sheller 2025; Slocum and Thomas 2003; Thomas 2011, 2016, 2019, 2022; Trouillot 2015), and as a site of ambiguity wherein ontological category distinctions operate in recombinant, contradictory, and ambivalent ways ultimately different than in the West (Agard-Jones 2012; Agard-Jones 2014; Benitez-Rojo 1996; Gosine 2019; Vaughn 2022; Whitmarsh 2011). To study the Caribbean necessitates the development of recombinant methodologies capable of investigating practices of truth- and meaning-making that translate across biological, natural, psychic, cultural, and spiritual conceptions. Inquiry into Caribbean ways of being and Relation, as they provide an alternative to colonial racial categories, species hierarchies, and violent relationships to the land, can help to theorize what caring relations between people, animals, and the land can look like across contemporary science, agriculture, and ecological intervention. My goal in this approach is not to reify the Caribbean as a paradise or to fantasize about Relation in the Caribbean as a reproducible set of egalitarian or utopian social structures. Rather, in inquiring into the co-presence of trauma and violence, such as non-consent, and visions of resistance and harmony, such as local queer feminist and decolonial visions of the future, there arises the possibility of reframing problems as Relation. For example, what Ferdinand calls “alliances of nuisance makers,” or the animals and plants whose “stubborn existence works against the monoculture of colonial plantations,” the “colonial army killers,” including mosquitos who contributed to the Haitian revolution by repelling European military, and the “anticolonial diplomats” like the snakes who cohabitated with Maroons in the hillsides of Martinique and protected them (227-228). Perhaps, in line with Ferdinand’s framing of nuisance as decolonial interspecies alliance, we can rethink the monkey problem of St. Kitts as a site of continued resistance to late liberal logics that seek totalizing neocolonial domination over the island.

Ferdinand centers anti-colonial and abolitionist critique for their potential for multi-species emancipation. This project seeks to understand how multi-species ethnography, informed by Caribbeanist ways of theorizing indeterminacy and contradiction in ontological distinctions (Gilroy 1993; Glissant 1989, 1997; Scott 2004), can act in the service of these political projects of repair and emancipation (Jobson 2020, 2024; King 2019; Sheller 2020; Vaughn 2022). Repair, as conceived of by some Kittitians, in their local context, includes culling large populations of monkeys; international animal rights agencies disagree. This project shifts the grounds of this contestation by examining the intersections of violence against people (racism) and violence against animals and the environment. What might reparations and repair for the monkey problem, including for green monkeys themselves, look like? This project explores how the emancipatory futures put forth by different Caribbean and postcolonial authors might work in conversation with the visions of the future continually arising from St. Kitts's local context.

## **Sovereignty**

This dissertation has explored the monkey problem on St. Kitts not merely as an ecological challenge of pest management, but as a complex infrastructure of affects shaped by the afterlives of slavery and the persistence of plantation logics that inform people's relationships to space and time. By unsettling existing conceptions of science and consent, I have argued that the escalating tensions on the island—what I term building animosity—are manifestations of mismatched sensorial attunements between those who live in intimate, often distressing or discomforting, proximity to the natural world and those who govern it from positions of transnational power. Through the lens of eco-horror, I have illustrated how the monkey, the farmer, and the scientist are haunted by the "modern tempest" of global capital and colonial

history, navigating a reality where the boundaries between human and animal, and between past and present, are perpetually blurred. At the same time, the trickster nature of the Kittitian green monkey reminds us that mastery is an illusion, and that justice lies in the "magic" of successful communication across difference.

Ultimately, this research suggests that the "monkey problem" serves as a site of diversion, where ineffable historical traumas are processed through the tangible struggles of the present. Moving forward requires a shift toward reversion—an active shaping of food sovereignty and identity through a committed relationship with the land and its more-than-human inhabitants. Central to this work is the concept of affective consent, a descriptive framework that recognizes how my interlocutors were already attuned to the non-verbal mediations of agreement and refusal enacted by both monkeys and people. I have shown that while sedation and desensitization in the laboratory can normalize violence, nurturing sensitivity to these affective cues offers a path toward attunement to the self and others. By embracing queer horizons and decolonial interspecies alliances, we can turn away from the violent investments of the plantation past and toward a more resilient and liberated future for all.

For many of my Kittitian interlocutors, calls to end the monkey problem were inseparable from calls for food sovereignty – the rights of peoples and communities to define, control, and govern their own agricultural and food systems. These interlocutors felt that their right to subsist on the land without being economically reliant on imported crops from other countries is a fundamental part of their desire for autonomy and self-sufficiency. Agricultural development is a site of community-building for Kittitian farmers and backyard gardeners, who cultivate resilience through the active process of *dealing with* the unsolvable issues of the present. To understand resilience in the context of the monkey problem, it is helpful to draw on Glissant's (1989)

concept of reversion. Glissant writes, “Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away...” (26). Engaging with the monkey problem, including through agricultural ventures, is a form of reversion in that people are turning to their local lands and conditions – the “point of entanglement” that binds them together through their bodies, their food, and their ecologies.

St. Kitts is still economically dependent on the import of produce largely from the United States. Many farmers have trouble making agriculture sustainable in part due to the monkey problem and in part due to financial challenges related to high start-up costs and the government’s policy of centralized land ownership. Nonetheless, the development of sustainable agricultural practices has important implications for Kittitian culture and community formation. In this way, while agriculture is not a source of external revenue production for the island as a whole, “agriculture maintains and fosters sustainability and autonomy in terms of community networks and social relationships, cultural heritage, the food system, and the economy for those involved” (Conzo 2022, p. 177).

I have argued that the so-called monkey problem of St. Kitts is not a simple issue of pest control or overpopulation, but rather a site of building animosity and eco-horror. Through an ethnographic account of a monkey summit and the stories of Kittitian farmers, I’ve shown how this daily struggle is a convergence of specters of colonial violence, the afterlives of slavery, and intertwined histories of speciesism and racism. These hauntings manifest as feelings of paranoia, the psychological toll of constant labor, and uncanny interspecies encounters. More than being an objective problem to be solved, these ethical debates function as a form of diversion, wherein people engage with ineffable, violent histories through the tangible struggles of the present. In

this way, this dissertation moves beyond a definition of the monkey problem as a quantifiable amount of crop loss or food insecurity, to encompass the other indirect ways in which the monkey problem describes people's subjective experiences, somatic attunements, and sensorial mismatches. To fully grasp the complex, multi-scalar nature of this eco-horror, an innovative methodological approach is required. It is this approach— a critical multi-species ethnography — that I work towards in my engagement.

Ultimately, this dissertation has demonstrated that the monkey problem is more than an ecological issue. It is a constant, uncanny experience rooted in the profound historical violences of colonialism and slavery, persistently shaping the landscape and lives on St. Kitts. The subtle resistance to diversion, the ongoing development of resilience through community-building, the embodied practices inherent in navigating multispecies entanglements, and emerging Caribbean calls for food sovereignty represent a forward-looking engagement with these entanglements. This is precisely what Glissant describes as reversion: not a simple return to an origin, but a vital, active shaping of sovereignty and identity through their ongoing relationship with the land and its complex inhabitants.

## **Tricksters**

The trickster figure is central in Afro-Caribbean and African-American literature, religion, and spiritual practices. One of the most famous trickster co-presences is Esu-Elegbara, a central Orisha in Yoruba religion, also known as Elegba or Legba. Esu-Elegbara is seen as a divine messenger and an intermediary between humans and spirits. As a guardian of the crossroads, he serves as both a trickster and a sage or teacher, challenging humans about their

own character. Harry Lefever (1996) quotes Henry Louis Gates (1983) in writing about Esu-Elegbara,

Of the music, myths, and forms of performance that the African brought to the Western Hemisphere ... one specific trickster figure [Esu-Elegbara] ... recurs with startling frequency in black mythology in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. This figure appears in black cultures [sic] with such frequency that we can think of it as a repeated theme or topos. (Quoted in Lefever 324)

Gates claims the figure of Esu-Elegbara, in its migration from Africa to Cuba to the United States, transformed into Echu-Elegua, with a monkey at his side, a secular myth he calls “The Signifying Monkey” (Gates 51-52, 325). Esu-Elegbara or Legba in Africa, and their New World manifestations of Echu-Elegua and the Signifying Monkey, carry traits that are generally shared by trickster figures: “individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture” (Lefever 326). David Sebastian Cross (2013) argues that the trickster figure, which, in the context of African-American literature, has been dubbed the signifying monkey, is indicative of “agency achieved by African and African-American writers through the use of the trickster figure” in that the signifying monkey resists and disrupts the four primary tropes of European literature, “the four so-called master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—as identified by prominent white philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (42-43). Metaphor (the trope of perspective) and metonymy (the trope of reduction) rely on establishing direct equivalences or contiguous associations; the Signifying Monkey disrupts these patterns by engaging in double-voiced discourse, indirection, and playful misdirection. Synecdoche (the trope of representation) is used to establish unified totalities or hierarchical structures; tricksters fracture this wholeness by asserting fragmented, decentralized, contextual realities. Western irony (the trope of the

dialectic) is a structured rhetorical device where a statement contradicts what is directly said – tricksters utilize epistemological irony to communicate subversive meanings that dominant discourse cannot decipher.

The Signifying Monkey is a trickster trope in that he is “the ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black as simian-like” (Gates 686). In this way, the Signifying Monkey dwells at the margins of discourse, embodying the ambiguity. For Cross, the Signifying Monkey is not a character but a meta-trope, mirroring the Yoruba trickster Esu-Elegba, which African, African-American, and Black diasporic writers use to bypass European epistemologies and create independent systems of meaning. Inherent to tricksters is their capacity to embody multivocality and multiplicity, expressed through the abilities of storytelling and performance. Cross (2013) writes that manifestations of multivocality include “the tricksters’ dialogic, double-voiced nature,” their “ability to play different roles in the context of a performance,” wherein “performed narratives are inevitably tied to the political and social exigencies of the moment,” in that the trickster, in a “mediating capacity,” becomes central to “the processes of both creation and interpretation” (Cross 41-42). In this way, The Signifying Monkey, as a trickster spirit, “reads the language of the gods and translates it for the people,” ultimately acting as an intermediary between humans and co-presences through their capacity as “border crossers,” wherein tricksters mirror and reveal the ways in which humans construct and reconstruct cultures (Cross 41-42).

In a sense, it is not surprising that one of the main actors in the eco-horror of the monkey problems is the monkey itself, a trickster presence. Trickster figures in horror often act as catalysts of terror, even as they cross boundaries and trouble distinctions between good and evil, or between the natural and the supernatural. In crossing the borders of nature and culture, and

literally crossing the boundaries of people's homes, laboratories, and farms, green monkeys continually resist plantation logics that seek to persist even after the downfall of sugar plantation farming on St. Kitts in transmuted forms like laboratories or monkey farms and various forms of tourism.

José Piedra (1985) explores a phenomenon he calls "the mythology of compromise" and analyzes examples from various European folktales, as well as from Yoruba culture in Africa and Yoruba-derived cultures in the Americas. The mythology of compromise describes how subaltern peoples seemingly imitate dominant European culture and language, in part because refusal to compromise has often led to further marginalization of non-European cultures, languages, and values by relegating them to folkloric status (362). Piedra emphasizes the centrality of the monkey figure in many mythologies of compromise — monkey tales challenge interpreters and the interpretive process itself. Monkeys, for Piedra, are ambiguous figures — they serve neither as signs of submission nor of refusal, instead imperfectly imitating hegemonic society. Monkeys challenge the common pairing of knowledge and language, showing that it is not straightforward (363). Piedra shows that, while many mythologies portray knowledge as a divine gift, in which humans' use of language approximates divine knowledge, the monkey is a mediating figure, playful and unpredictable even while human-like, and effective as a trickster in that it challenges interpretation and shows the limits of language.

One example Piedra analyzes is the Yoruba figure *Coco Macaco*, which, in both West Africa and Cuba, is associated with the two opposing identities of dreaded ghost and playful monkey (Piedra 376). *Coco Macaco* is reminiscent of *Esu-Elegbara* and the *Signifying Monkey* at his side, in that both deities can work for and against humans (Piedra 375). Cross writes that *Coco Macaco* is an important symbol in both African and Caribbean traditions because "it

reflects the mimicry of discourse and the mockery of tradition with defensive purpose,” by becoming “the middle ground where ‘primitive’ African discourse and ‘civilized’ Western discourse meet” (Cross 71-72). In this sense, Esu-Elegbara in the Yoruba tradition and the Signifying Monkey in African-American discourse, Cross writes, symbolize both “the nature and function of interpretation” and “the practice of double-voiced utterancy” — a rhetorical strategy that takes advantage of how two people can interpret the same text or myth differently, what Gates calls “the process of Signifyin(g),” which “provides a foundation for formal black literature” (Gates 100).

Esu, the Signifying Monkey, and their corresponding myths are focal points for Black theories of formal language use, according to Gates — both tricksters create a tension evident in the double-voiced discourse of Black texts and related to the search for voice (Gates 21). In this way, the figure of the monkey can also be understood as central to the phenomenon that Kittitian-American ethnomusicologist Jessica Baker (2025) describes as “a Kittitian-Nevisian sensibility of doubleness and repurposing” wherein “many things on the Eastern Caribbean island lead double, sometimes triple, lives.” Thinking expansively, the Kittitian green monkey, much like the mythic co-presences of The Signifying Monkey and Coco Macaco, is a trickster figure that embodies ambiguity. In building on Glissant’s concept of Relation, Jessica Baker writes about archipelagic listening as the capacity to trace sound as it resonates and rebounds throughout the Caribbean archipelago. Baker listens largely for music, tracing the coming and going brought on by music festivals. “Sound,” she writes, “which comes into experience through listening, can be understood as an ‘autonomous entity fashioned by a listening,’ in that it is only through repeated encounter that the “the sonorous becomes audible” and “sensible” (Baker 2024, 146). It is also only in repetition in listening for monkeys, and to discourse about the monkey

problem, that one can come to understand the Kittitian green monkey, even as its trickster nature is continually attributed as the source of human problems, as also a sage and a teacher, engaged in a sort of post-colonial nuisance making that resists and rejects invisibilization and forgetting, and which makes itself a problem over and over, building animosity that may, some way, someday, culminate in something else, some other Relation, beyond animosity.

## Appendix 1: Table of Interview Participants

| <b>Participant Category</b>                                                                                                   | <b>Number Interviewed</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Staff employed at monkey research institutions at time of research</b><br>(constituent groups described below:)            | <b>55</b>                 |
| • Veterinarians                                                                                                               | 2                         |
| • Veterinary technicians and Veterinary assistants                                                                            | 4                         |
| • Research assistants and staff                                                                                               | 22                        |
| • Other staff (facilities, groundskeeping, mechanics, other daily duties)                                                     | 20                        |
| • Academics, research managers, and supervising researchers                                                                   | 6                         |
| • Number of staff who were not Kittitian (international workers or immigrants)                                                | 19                        |
| <b>Former staff at monkey research institutions</b>                                                                           | <b>3</b>                  |
| <b>Academics or professional researchers</b> (not affiliated with monkey research institutions)                               | <b>12</b>                 |
| <b>Agricultural workers</b> - many had other employment outside of agricultural work (constituent groups described below:)    | <b>44</b>                 |
| • Identified as Kittitian-born and raised                                                                                     | 28                        |
| • Immigrants and migrant workers                                                                                              | 16                        |
| • Farmers                                                                                                                     | 26                        |
| • Participated in monkey trapping                                                                                             | 8                         |
| • Farm vendors                                                                                                                | 16                        |
| • Other agriculture-related roles                                                                                             | 13                        |
| <b>Government ministry representatives, secretaries, and other government or government-contracted-organization employees</b> | <b>13</b>                 |
| <b>Backyard gardeners</b>                                                                                                     | <b>24</b>                 |
| <b>Tourists and short-term visitors</b>                                                                                       | <b>122</b>                |
| <b>Students</b>                                                                                                               | <b>26</b>                 |
| • International Students (Medicine or Veterinary Medicine)                                                                    | 20                        |
| <b>International Animal Rights Activists</b>                                                                                  | <b>3</b>                  |
| <b>Total Interview Participants</b>                                                                                           | <b>294</b>                |
| • Identified as Kittitian                                                                                                     | 103                       |

## Appendix 2: Declaration of Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

### Data Availability Statement

|                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Data not available<br/>– participant<br/>consent</b> | <p>The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research supporting data is not available.</p> <p>For more information, see UCSF IRB Approvals #23-38699 and #23-38692, and St. Kitts Ministry of Health Interim Ethics Review Committee approvals #IERC-2023-10-064 and #IERC-2023-10-063.</p> |
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