

# Caribbean In/Securities

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# Caribbean In/Securities: An Introduction

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This essay serves as an introduction to a special section on Caribbean in/securities. As well as offering insight into the concept of “in/security,” it will provide a substantive analysis of Erna Brodber’s novel *Nothing’s Mat* as a fractal narrative of gendered in/securities in the Caribbean.

## Caribbean In/Securities and Creativity

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

The first is that security and insecurity, though they appear to be global human concerns emblematic of the twenty-first century since the terrorist attacks on the twin towers in New York in 2001, are reconceived as deeply located and historically grounded. When the Caribbean becomes a spatial center from which to look at security, the region’s distinctive spatiohistorical formation highlights a history of violent insecurity that goes back at least five hundred years. It begins with the shocking encounters and protracted brutality of genocide and enslavement, and, as we see in David Featherstone’s essay here on the repression of seamen’s riots, continues through the transnational security regimes that characterized

European colonialism.<sup>1</sup> The region's status as a global "crossroads" highlights how insecurity and security are produced over time through the ongoing, iterative friction of legal and illegal flows of people and goods across the region. At the same time, the region is at the sharp end of centuries-old cycles of natural hazards as well as accelerating global environmental destruction and climatic change. The Caribbean reveals that specifically located and historical configurations of security and insecurity are articulated across a range of different temporalities—sudden, chronic, and geologic—and different spatialities, all of them territorially bounded, transnationally networked, and globally pervasive.<sup>2</sup> Security and insecurity are therefore not fixed, either in their definition or in their form.

The second distinctive element is the term *in/security* itself, an orthography that has been developed to highlight that, far from being fixed binary states or goals, security and insecurity are constantly produced and reproduced in relation one to the other. This relationality entails a constant and diffuse agentic negotiation between security and insecurity, not least around defining and prioritizing risks and vulnerabilities from a range of perspectives. Ronald Cummings's essay in this special section, for example, gives a welcome insight into the range of in/securities that Maroons have negotiated—such as livelihood and food in/securities—as they not only fled the plantation but also sustained a life beyond it.<sup>3</sup> At the most extreme, one actor's security measure might actually be the source of another person's insecurity—see, for example, the security encounters around the Tivoli Incursion, described in Anthony Harriott and Rivke Jaffe's contribution to this collection.<sup>4</sup> Negotiation is therefore not the preserve of security professionals but draws in a wide range of actors at a range of scales, those who manage nationwide risk (for example, as we see in Susan P. Mains's essay here, government officials involved in the politics of planning for the perceived security of tourists),<sup>5</sup> and those who have to strategize daily to survive profound threats at the smallest scales, in the home and in the body (see my own contribution below).<sup>6</sup> The negotiative agency that is central to in/security distinguishes it from precarity, as developed by Judith Butler, who explains that the precariat are made vulnerable because of processes of precaritization that are managed through governmentality: precarity is distributed as an effect of power.<sup>7</sup> In/security focuses not on vulnerability to insecurity but on the diverse modes of agency of those who negotiate

1 David Featherstone, "Politicizing In/Security, Transnational Resistance, and the 1919 Riots in Cardiff and Liverpool," this issue of *Small Axe*, 56–67.

2 For more on the effects of relocating a concern with in/security to the Caribbean, see Patricia Noxolo and David Featherstone, "Co-producing Caribbean Geographies of In/Security," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 4 (2014): 603–7.

3 Ronald Cummings, "Maroon In/Securities," this issue of *Small Axe*, 47–55.

4 Anthony Harriott and Rivke Jaffe, "Security Encounters: Negotiating Authority and Citizenship during the Tivoli 'Incursion,'" this issue of *Small Axe*, 81–89.

5 Susan P. Mains, "In/Secure Conversations: Rethorizing *Life and Debt*, Tourism, and Caribbean Geopolitics," this issue of *Small Axe*, 90–104.

6 For more on the uneven spatial patterning of the negotiation of in/security, see Patricia Noxolo, "In/Security: Global Geographies of a Troubled Everyday," in *Geography* 102, no. 1 (2017): 5–9.

7 See Jasbir Puar, ed., "Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejc, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanovic," in *TDR* 56, no. 4 (2012): 163–77.

between security and insecurity. As Kevon Rhiney's essay in this section points out, insecurity, vulnerability, and precarity are clearly linked, and the negotiative agency within in/security is obviously constrained by power and opportunity. Nonetheless, Anyaa Anim-Addo's essay demonstrates that without a focus on the everyday agency of a range of people—the mobile strategies of recently emancipated higglers, for example, constrained as they might be—they disappear as agentic people from the historical records.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the concept of in/security seeks to spotlight diffuse modes of negotiation around in/security.<sup>9</sup>

The third and final distinctive element, then, is played out most noticeably in this collection in Mains's contribution and in my own analysis of Erna Brodber's *Nothing's Mat* below. In these, creative practice is recognized as a resource for examining specific modes of negotiative agency: for example, discursive, corporeal, and visual modes. Creative negotiation is at the heart of creative agency: the risk that the artwork will not go well or will not arrive at all is played out through negotiation with the possibilities and limits of a wide range of accessible media, whether words on a screen or page, ink on paper, the dancing body, or the sound of music or spoken words. Creative work is sometimes mimetic, but I am not suggesting that it can take the place of the wide range of everyday negotiation of in/security; indeed, this interdisciplinary collection deliberately brings together research using a range of methods (interviews and discursive and archival work) to explore in/security on a range of lived terrains. In the analysis that follows, creative practice offers accessible insights into how negotiative agency around a specific form and location of in/security actually takes place.

### Gendered In/Securities: Negotiations around Sexual Violence through the Fractal Fabric of Community in Erna Brodber's *Nothing's Mat*

In/security is a concept that unfixes and locates articulations of security and insecurity, reconceives them as produced relationally, and draws on creative practice as an approach to understanding the negotiative agency highlighted by that relationality. In what follows, I think through gender in the Caribbean, and in particular gender-based violence, as a locus for the negotiation of in/security. Brodber's *Nothing's Mat* is read as a creative practice that articulates this negotiation through the concept of fractals. At the heart of the concept of the fractal is Benoit Mandelbrot's observation that even natural shapes such as coastlines and clouds that seem completely irregular often resolve themselves into repeated patterns, or recursions, at a range of scales.<sup>10</sup> These recursions seen as a figure of recurring sexual abuse in families,

8 Kevon Rhiney, "Moving beyond the Binary Trap: Global Change, Vulnerability, and the Coproduction of Resilience among Caribbean Farmers," this issue of *Small Axe*, 68–80; Anyaa Anim-Addo, "Reading Postemancipation In/Security: Negotiations of Everyday Freedom," this issue of *Small Axe*, 105–14. As Anim-Addo explains, a higgler is a mobile market trader.

9 For more on the everyday negotiation of in/security, see Jef Huysmans, "Conclusion: Insecurity and the Everyday," in Patricia Noxolo and Jef Huysmans, eds., *Community, Citizenship, and the 'War on Terror': Security and Insecurity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 196–207.

10 Benoit Mandelbrot, "How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension," *Science* 156 (1967); 636; see also Ron Eglash, *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design* (New Brunswick,

as Brodber does, could easily become a wretched destiny, but I argue that Brodber deploys the fractal to reimagine the Caribbean gendered community as a variegated, patchwork terrain on which concepts of bioculturally fixed and sometimes violent gender identities can be challenged and renegotiated with concepts of more fluid gender roles within family and community.<sup>11</sup>

In working toward this analysis, it will be helpful to map out Caribbean gendered in/security as an active field in which a range of actors, including women in their everyday lives, creatively negotiate gendered violence in the region. Most publicly, 2017's Tambourine Army and #lifeinleggings campaigns are clear examples of how gender-based violence is being contested politically.<sup>12</sup> Focused on "breaking the silence" around the deaths and suffering of women in the region, these activists publicize women's and girls' everyday experience of having to defend themselves against sexual violence.<sup>13</sup> In 2012, the United Nations Caribbean Human Development Report asserted that the "silence" being broken is a combination of institutional marginalization and familial complicity, alongside failures in policing and criminal justice systems, all of which mean that three of the ten highest-per-capita rates of recorded rape globally occur in the Caribbean, with low conviction rates, while there are also shockingly high rates of child sexual abuse.<sup>14</sup> The public campaigns build on the preexisting research of

NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 4, 14. For a fuller exploration of fractal patterning in Caribbean literature, an early presentation of which I am very proud to say Erna Brodber discussed with me while she was writing *Nothing's Mat*, see Pat Noxolo, "A Shape which Represents an Eternity of Riddles: Fractals and Scale in the Work of Wilson Harris," *Cultural Geographies* 23, no. 3 (2016): 373–85; see also Alan Riach, "The Presence of Actual Angels: The Fractal Poetics of Wilson Harris," in *Callaloo* 18, no. 1 (1995): 33–44.

- 11 I use the metaphor of "patchwork" loosely. An obvious comparison with Brodber's use of the sisal mat as a material metonym for fractal community would be literary uses of African American quilting, such as in Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use," in *In Love and Trouble* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973). However, in this brief essay I resist this potentially fertile comparison, precisely because I would like Brodber's subtle, Caribbean-focused agendas not to get subsumed within a critical discussion surrounding quilting and identity that became rather fraught and occasionally exclusionary over the years (for a helpful critical summary, see Sam Whitsitt, "In Spite of It All: A Reading of Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use,'" *African American Review* 34, no. 3 [2000]: 443–59). In this small space the sisal mat can stand alone.
- 12 See Kate Chappell, "Tambourine Army Hits Back against Sexual Violence," *Guardian*, 10 March 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/jamaica-caribbean-tambourine-army-sexual-violence](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/jamaica-caribbean-tambourine-army-sexual-violence); see also the Lifeinleggings Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/officiallifeinleggings](http://www.facebook.com/officiallifeinleggings). The large array of terms surrounding gender-based violence (violence specifically routed through gendered identities) in the Caribbean testifies to the unnervingly wide range of forms that such violence takes; these include the more general violence against women, the more specific intimate-partner violence or sexual violence, and the sickeningly banal "battering," "rape," and "abuse" that remain common in legal terminology; see, for example, Halimah DeShong and Tonya Haynes, "Intimate Partner Violence in the Caribbean: State Activist and Media Responses," *Global Public Health* 11, nos. 1–2 (2016): 82–94; and Stacy Ann Elvy, "A Postcolonial Theory of Spousal Rape," *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 22, no. 1 (2015): 89–167. As terms used to describe and address painful lived experience, none of these is without political implications. This essay mainly addresses sexual violence, both fictional and factual but always heavily gendered. I am aware of the necessary contestation surrounding all relevant terms, as well as the political importance of privileging lived experience, but I approach Brodber's novel as a critical and creative construction of sexual violence within a political field in which voice and representation are crucial to empowerment and justice: novels cannot stand in for lived experience, but they can play their part in articulating that experience. For a longer discussion of what novels can and cannot articulate in relation to embodied experience, see Patricia Noxolo, "Towards an Embodied Securityscape: Brian Chikwava's 'Harare North' and the Asylum Seeking Body as Site of Articulation," *Social and Cultural Geography* 15, no. 3 (2014): 291–312.
- 13 See Sandra Reid, Rhoda Reddock, and Tisha Nickenig, "Breaking the Silence of Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean: A Community-Based Action Research Intervention Model," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23, no. 3 (2014): 256–77.
- 14 United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Caribbean Human Development Report* (New York: UNDP, 2012), 26. With these globally comparative figures, it is worth noting that the report also claims that rates are highly varied across the region and that in islands with relatively small populations, "minor increases in occurrence produce dramatic increases in per capita rates" (25).

the many Caribbean academics who have voiced their concerns for decades about sexual violence in the region.<sup>15</sup>

In reconceiving sexual violence as gendered in/security, this essay joins these more high-profile political, public, and academic voices in reconceiving gendered violence as fundamentally unfixed and therefore as amenable to change. Far from being ineradicably cemented in bioculturally embedded gendered identities that men police but for which they are not responsible,<sup>16</sup> I argue that gendered violence in the Caribbean can be challenged by uncovering the ongoing relationship of these fixed identities with equally deeply embedded but much more flexible forms of gendered identity. *Nothing's Mat* is a creative practice that reveals this relationality. Gendered in/security assumes, as Brodber does, that this relationality is always already ongoing, such that the false security of apparently stable but often destructive masculine and feminine roles that engender a community within which women are often under threat from sexual violence is always already in relationship with more fluid and mobile gendered identities that enable men and women to produce more creative forms of community together.

The rest of this essay therefore focuses on Brodber's novel. Erna Brodber is a Jamaican writer, one of relatively few in the postindependence generation of classic writers who stayed rather than emigrated, resisting the pull of the metropolitan that Andrew Salkey wryly summed up in the phrase, "Emigrate or vegetate."<sup>17</sup> Brodber began her career as a lecturer in sociology at the University of the West Indies and is known for writing sociological and historical work on gender and family in the Caribbean as well as novels.<sup>18</sup> Her experimental and innovative writing style (which she describes as "head-hurting" fiction) arises from a desire to speak about the Caribbean in its own terms and through its own linguistic and conceptual constructs.<sup>19</sup> Brodber argues that colonial and metropolitan theories have historically conceived of the Caribbean, particularly its family structures, in terms of "fracture" and lack (in a repeated contrast to ideal-type Euro-American nuclear family patterns) rather than on its own terms.<sup>20</sup>

15 See, for example, Patricia Mohamed, ed., *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 2001).

16 See, for example, Adele D. Jones and Ena Trotman Jemmot's critique of "the convergence of constructions of childhood, male privilege and gender inequality in the reproduction of child sexual abuse and cultures of silence and impunity," in "Status, Privilege, and Gender Inequality: Cultures of Male Impunity and Entitlement in the Sexual Abuse of Children; Perspectives from a Caribbean Study," *International Social Work* 59, no. 6 (2016): 846. See also Jennifer Holder-Dolly and Valerie Youssef, "'You Have No Friends, You Have to Stand Up for Yourself': Men Negotiating Domestic Abuse," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, no. 4 (February 2010): 1–23; Halimah DeShong, "Policing Femininity, Affirming Masculinity: Relationship Violence, Control, and Spatial Limitation," *Journal of Gender Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 85–103; Raquel Sukhu, "Masculinity and Men's Violence Against Known Women in Trinidad—Whose Responsibility?," *Men and Masculinities* 6, no. 1 (2012): 71–92; and UNDP, *Caribbean Human Development Report*.

17 See Kate Quinn, "'I Will Let Down My Bucket Here': Writers and the Conditions of Cultural Production in Post-independence Trinidad," in Bill Schwarz, ed., *Caribbean Literature after Independence: The Case of Earl Lovelace* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2008), 21.

18 See, for example, Erna Brodber, *Woodside, Pear Tree Grove P.O.* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

19 See Erna Brodber, "Me and My Head-Hurting Fiction," *Small Axe*, no. 39 (November 2012): 119–25.

20 See Erna Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* (Cave Hill: University of the West Indies, 1982).

Her work often references the resultant frictions between Caribbean culture and the European foundations of academic disciplinary training in the region.

For example, *Nothing's Mat* is the story of a young woman whose academic study takes her to visit her own family in rural Jamaica—as she journeys into the past of her own family, she learns to recognize the recursive (self-repeating) patterns of child-shifting practices and begins to think about her family and community as “fractal” rather than “fractured.”<sup>21</sup> Like the sisal mat that the character named Nothing has begun to make and that the narrator continues, the narrative design reflects the fractal patterning of the family and community. The novel begins with the narrator at thirty, unwell and feeling “like nothing” (2), and moves further and further back into history, tracing the family background of “Nothing,” which the narrator is weaving into Nothing’s sisal mat. Eventually it reaches a central point of the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, which is described by one character as “the autoclaps,” a history-ending apocalypse (21).<sup>22</sup> At each historical moment, multiple stories of sexual violence are presented as a recurring pattern in the fabric of community. For example, the narrator finds that one of the stories about why her grandmother is known as “Nothing” highlights child sexual abuse. Her great-grandmother Clarise’s first sexual encounter with an adult man (a much older neighbor called Mass Eustace) happened when she was too young to grasp its significance. Not understanding that she was pregnant, she gave birth on her own, in a latrine. Hearing strange noises, Clarise’s adopted mother, Aunt Maud, asked what was wrong, and she said “Nothing.” The name stuck, resonating at first in the answer given to neighbors who hear the baby crying: “Nothing’s wrong” (17). When the narrative reaches the Morant Bay rebellion, it works forward again temporally, back through the same incidents, retelling them from a range of character perspectives and revealing new community connections, before spiraling through to a point after the moment the book began, where the narrator’s life has now become a lot more hopeful through the exercise of weaving the fractal history of her family into the sisal mat. Indicating that the tail of the spiral narrative is part of a fractal pattern that will carry on into the future, the narrator recognizes a benefit for her two adopted children: “[They] won’t know the nothingness that set me to completing Nothing’s mat, because they understand more about ancestral spirits and energy than I knew at thirty. I do feel that I have accomplished something: I have set them off on the right path” (106).

It is clear that *Nothing's Mat* works to replace the marginalizing notion of Caribbean family and community as “fractured” with a concept of community as “fractal.” This concept brings a deeper understanding of the contingent and polymorphous households created by what Olive Senior calls “child shifting”: these are not nuclear families or ordered family trees somehow

21 Erna Brodber, *Nothing's Mat* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015), 36; hereafter cited in the text.

22 *Apocalypse*, or a large-scale disaster or collapse, is the usual sense of “autoclaps.” See, for example, Ken Jones, “Autocrats and Autoclaps,” *Jamaica Observer*, 14 March 2015, [www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/Autocrats-and--autoclaps\\_-18555688](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/Autocrats-and--autoclaps_-18555688); but see also Kei Miller, *Augustown* (London: Orion, 2016), in which an imagined dictionary offers a different etymology: “Noun. An unexpected, often unpleasant sequel to a matter that had been considered closed. In German, achterklap” (159).

gone wrong.<sup>23</sup> Brodber's narrator explains that these are fractal communities, in which people make complex, multiple connections one with another, generation after generation, in repeating patterns of seemingly ad hoc affinity and adoption, often simply because they care for each other: "We feel for each other and carry each other's pain and blessing so much so that if the designated one cannot or will not perform, we take on the task" (103).

Yet the fractal is not a necessarily redemptive move, particularly when combined with the kind of trauma that attends sexual violence repeated over generations. The sense that repetition can be a condemnation is acknowledged at Nothing's death, when the narrator notes that Nothing's instruction when she began helping her with the mat—"Your end is your beginning" (14)—referred to the way one strand connects with another to continue the spiral pattern. At Nothing's funeral, the narrator is suddenly apprehensive about assisting with her dressing for the coffin: "Her feet and my hands, the end being the beginning. Was I really going to be lost in a recursion . . . ?" (39).

Aunt Maud's piece of the story illustrates how trauma can be a recursive condemnation within constructions of gendered identity as endlessly reproduced in fixed forms. In the violent aftermath of the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, Maud is violently raped by six men, led by a Maroon who is complicit with the colonial authorities.<sup>24</sup> So violent is the rape that Aunt Maud has to self-medicate using local herbs to address the wounding and infection that sets in, exacerbated by the fact that she then has to walk miles to avoid prosecution by the colonial authorities. The young girl, Clarise, whom she effectively adopts in order to protect from a similar experience, bears the brunt of the trauma that Aunt Maud carries with her. Terrified by any signs of the girl's emerging sexuality, Maud overreacts to an interaction with a stranger and chooses to settle in St. Ann only because there are "too much man in Kingston" (52). Where the combination of "man" and sexuality represent inevitable abuse for Maud, her only recourse is to keep Clarise away from men. Clarise resents Maud's anger; silence and anger are part of Maud's strategies of protection, but the combination of the two leave Clarise with few answers. However, Clarise also recognizes that sometimes Maud offers warmth and comfort: another of Maud's silent strategies in the face of the threat of gendered violence is to stay awake all night to protect Clarise when they are sleeping rough in caves (54). Yet Maud is ultimately not able to protect Clarise in St. Ann, when Mass Eustace abuses her (16). Moreover, Nothing's life repeats the pattern, in her abusive relationship with Everard Turnbury, who "hit the girl and more, carried their business outside" (28). Turnbury (caught in his own repeating raced and

23 See Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (London: James Currey, 1991). Senior's discussion of the practice of "child-shifting" has been recently summarized in Suzanne Scafe, "She Found a Way, Left the Child": 'Child-Shifting' as the Plantation's Affects and Love's Paradox in Donna Hemans' 'River Woman,'" *Feminist Review* 104, no. 1 (2013): 61–79.

24 See Kenneth Bilby, "Image and Imagination: Re-visioning the Maroons in the Morant Bay Rebellion," *History and Memory* 24, no. 2 (2012): 41–72, in which Bilby notes that Maroons are often seen in stark "hero" or "traitor" terms in relation to antislavery rebellions, including Morant Bay. Other historians have reexamined the evidence to advance more complex histories of the roles and motivations of Maroons in the Morant Bay rebellion; see, for example, Mimi Sheller, "Hidden Textures of Race and Historical Memory: The Rediscovery of Photographs Relating to Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 72, no. 2 (2011): 560.



gendered cycle of drunkenness and violence) spreads evil rumors about Nothing (69); Maud nonetheless ensures he is unable to force himself sexually on the girl (68). His rumors lead some in the community to begin to say that the girl is called Nothing because “nothing could be made in Nothing’s womb” (28).

More than either redemptive or condemnatory, the fractal is reimagined in *Nothing’s Mat* as a crafted terrain on which to negotiate gendered in/security as not just fixed but also fluid. The underlying fractal patterning that produces community is not just one of repeated sexual and gendered violence, the stories of which must not be silenced; it is also a pattern of multiple stories and understandings that weave into and through each other to produce a strong but flexible and mobile representation of individual identities and the communities they engender. This polyphonic negotiation between fixed and fluid gendered identities is most clearly demonstrated in the elaboration of naming, where a person is “wrapped in several names,” each with a story behind it (2). For example, as Nothing becomes an elder in the community, she becomes known as Cousin Nothing, shortened to Conut (1), and as Miss Nothing by people who show their respect by adding a pre-name but also show different levels of intimacy (39). By the time the narrator comes to know Nothing, her family name has changed several times—from Walker (because her mother, Clarise, walked such a long way with Maud), to Reid (Mass Eustace’s name), to Turnbury (for her first husband), and now to Tull (for her second husband) (22). And there are several quite different stories around her being called Nothing or Conut in the first place—there is the story of her birth, given above; there is the story of how she was a very small baby, weighing almost nothing (23); and there is the story that Conut might be short for Coconut because she owns a coconut plantation (32). Each of these stories is true: the multiplicity of stories all swirl around the name, layering it with meaning and producing Nothing in multiple ways as a member of a flexible community that is constantly in process of being produced. The stories of her naming, each laced with bitter experiences of sexual violence and abandonment, as well as warm and affirming stories of adoption and connection (106), are all part of the complex fractal fabric of a community that is always recursively being produced.

The labor of crafting Nothing’s mat materializes this fractal fabric and highlights the agency, the everyday labor, of engendering community. The fronds have to be chopped from the macca tree; then they have to be cut, beaten, and washed to make the strings of sisal. The sisal has to be dried, combed, and then twisted into strong cord. The cord is then twisted and sewn into circles. The narrator is taught this process by Nothing, and it is through the shared activity that they form their mutually enriching relationship—the narrator is “caught up in the activity” (13–14). As they work the cords into a mat, Conut tells stories about the diverse ways their shared family connections came to be worked together. When the narrator is unable to fit the stories Conut tells into the academic grid she brought with her, she decides to go off grid and “focus on the never-ending circles that [they] were making that seemed like a mat of family” (14). So when Nothing dies, the narrator continues the work from the first circular seed

that they made together: “In my mind I called this Miss Maud. Smaller ones in descending order were crafted and I gave them names” (18). Every smaller circle that the narrator adds to the mat, each a recursion of the first, represents a family member, and she teaches this labor of crafting community to her own adopted children: “The children will find a way of expressing this, I know, even if it means finding another heaven-blessed plant, making it into strings, shaping these strings into circles within their own recursions and iterations” (106). The ongoing recursive increase of the mat demonstrates that the capacity of community to recognize each of its members and to bind them together across the divides, caused not only by sexual violence but also by the ongoing legacies of colonization, enslavement, and discrimination, is not something that can be assumed to occur naturally. A community with the resources to negotiate gendered identities in order to challenge sexual violence is always already available but cannot be assumed: it has to be skillfully negotiated and brought into being.

This essay began by elaborating Caribbean in/security as located but unfixed, as relational, and as characterized by forms of negotiative agency that are amenable to exploration via creative practice. It has also argued that gendered in/security in the Caribbean is a locus of active negotiation between the false security of fixed but destructive gendered identities and more fluid identities that produce flexible communities that can challenge sexual violence. There is consensus in the literature on gendered violence that community is both complicit in silencing it and potentially powerful in recognizing it. *Nothing's Mat* is a creative work that reimagines Caribbean community as fractal rather than fractured, conceiving its recursive patterns of voicing and storytelling as revelatory, not only of the fixed gendered identities that reproduce the recurring patterns of sexual violence that plague Caribbean community but also of more fluid forms of gendered identity that might produce communities that can contest and challenge sexual violence. Such communities cannot be assumed but must be painstakingly produced through the labor of crafting more open communities every day. I suggested earlier that groups such as the Tambourine Army and #lifeinleggings are doing this important work by crafting recognition of gender-based violence: their work, and that of academics and other allies, is likely to ensure that the region will not, in the future, be “lost in a recursion” of gendered violence (39).