
# Grandma's Hands: Transgenerational inheritances of Jamaican food and land practices

A Research Paper

by:

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## Author's Note

This thesis employs an ethnographic and narrative mode of writing to reflect the relational and embodied character of my fieldwork, conducted in Jamaica and the UK during summer 2025. While elements of this work draw on affective encounters, my intention is not to romanticise Jamaican cultural life or to reproduce simplified narratives. The practices I observed (of care, conflict, and cooperation) exist within a landscape shaped by colonial histories, migration, and uneven development. They are treated here with analytical caution rather than cultural idealisation. As a British-Caribbean researcher, my positionality informs the interpretive choices of this work.

All fieldwork was completed prior to the impacts of Hurricane Melissa, and to my knowledge none of the participants were harmed.

I disclaim here that some of the organisational and proofreading tasks were supported by digital tools, including the use of AI (i.e. ChatGPT, Speechify, OtterAI). I can confirm all conceptual analysis and interpretation is solely my own.

# Contents

# Abstract

This thesis traces how Jamaican land and food practices function as sites of knowledge, cultural continuity, and care across migration and generation. Adopting relational ethnographic methods and carried out in rural Jamaica and with British-Caribbean growers in London, it explores how embodied and situated ways of knowing persist. This research paper argues for the importance of recognising these daily practices as vital epistemologies, responsible for sustaining knowledge, cultural belonging, and ecological ethics in diasporic life.

# Relevance to Development Studies

This work matters because the knowledges I attempt to document and unpack are disappearing — not due to irrelevance, but due to structural neglect and erasure. Jamaica's rural landscapes have long been sites of extraction and marginalisation. Meanwhile, diasporic communities in the UK navigate new forms of racial capitalism that make such knowledge appear dated or impractical.

At the same time, a growing number of young people — myself included — are looking to reconnect. To understand not only where we come from, but what has been carried. This research speaks to that longing. It centres voices — aunties, farmers, cooks — that are often overlooked in both academic and development discourses.

The everyday practices of rural Jamaicans — often dismissed as 'backward' (see Asad, 1975; Wolf, 1982) or 'nostalgic' (see Clifford, 1994; Boym, 2001; Brah, 1997) — hold profound insights into how people care, know, and survive under the weight of coloniality and modernity. To study these practices is to ask what kinds of futures can be imagined — not just for Jamaica, or its diaspora, but for all of us invested in building a sustainable future.

# Keywords

Foodways, Epistemic Survival, Relational Knowledge, Jamaica, Care

# Acknowledgements

*Grandma, Granddad, and Aunty this is for you;*

*I am only able to do this because of you.*

*Cleo and Pinto – I don't know how to express in words how deeply grateful I am for the generosity, care and support you have shown towards me, my family, and my endeavours.*

*Thank you.*

*I also want to express my deep gratitude to every interlocutor, professor, friend and family member that I have had the pleasure of connecting to through this project. I could not have done this without you.*

# How to read this paper

Dear reader,

I do not want this to be an easy, simple, digestible read. It is meant to be messy. I'd like you not to read it linearly. Look at the pictures, then go back and look at them again. Get lost in the images of people's faces; look at the wrinkles near their eyes, look at the scars on their hands. All these details are part of the story I intend to share with you. These stories are about the real, complex lives and (even more importantly) legacies of these people.

There is nothing neat or organised about these histories, stories, or perspectives, because past events have profoundly shaped the present and will inevitably shape the future. And it is this assembled nature that I attempt to echo in the structure of my work. Both the ethnographic and photographic encounters are a reflective insight of the methodological approach that I adopted throughout the duration of this research.

The embolden words in this paper refer to the glossary (see p.64), providing specific concepts and terms which may need further translation. Similarly, the *figures* refer to a photo appendix (see p.51), documenting photos taken throughout the course of this research.

To further enrich the reading experience, I have paired eight songs with specific chapters that I highly recommend you listen to whilst sifting through the words on the pages.

In the referred chapter please listen[1] to:

Chapter 1:  Alton Ellis' *I'm Still in Love*

Chapter 2: Bill Wither's *Lean On Me*

Chapter 3: Beres Hammond's *I feel good*

Chapter 4: Chronixx's *Smile Jamaica*

Chapter 5: Eva Cassidy's *Songbird*

[1] All of these songs are easily accessible anywhere where you listen to music (i.e. Spotify, Apple Music, Youtube, etc.). I have also created a playlist in Spotify, titled "LF RP 2025" (https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3NVdTMyAqpo67QL2kKkur1?si=2505ff6b3009403d)

My true wish is that the underlying message of this read sits with you long after you have finished the last page – maybe something about it may disturb you slightly or leave you with a tingling sense of dissatisfaction. This topic applies to each and every one of us in different ways. I implore you to remember this.

* * *

To learn again you really have to listen.

— *Robin Wall Kimmerer*

# 1. Introduction

*"This is more than just looking at the individual act of frying fish or planting seeds…This is about survival."*

-Facey, Aug 2025

This topic concerns not simply food, land, or migration, but the dense interweaving of memory, care, and cultural reproduction as lived and expressed through everyday Caribbean practices. This paper explores how food and land-based practices in rural Jamaica – cooking, gardening, storytelling – are not only acts of sustenance or economy but deeply embedded cultural technologies. These practices nurture belonging, signal histories, and cultivate ontological resilience. In short, this work is about how people survive — materially, emotionally, politically — and how they pass on the knowledge needed to do so.

This research situates these practices in accordance with contexts of migration and intergenerational inheritance, from the Windrush era to the present. While existing scholarship (see Gilroy, 2003; James, 1989; Mintz, 1986; Williams, 2013; ) has illuminated Caribbean histories of plantation economies, diaspora formation, and culinary heritage, far less is known about the everyday, embodied, intergenerational transmission of food and land knowledge. Namely, how practices are remembered, or reshaped within contemporary Jamaica and Black-British communities. This project addresses that gap by foregrounding the sensory, relational, and affective dimensions of these practices, showing how they carry ecological ethics, memory, and modes of belonging. My contribution lies in tracing these knowledges through lived experience, revealing their fragility and endurance within the shifting agrarian and diasporic conditions.

## 1.1 Background

Understanding this research requires situating it within the longer history of Caribbean migration to the UK, particularly the movement of Jamaicans during and after the Windrush era (late 1940s—1970s). This period saw tens of thousands of Caribbean people migrate to Britain in response to postwar labour shortages, forging new diasporic communities while navigating racism, exclusion, and the pressures of remaking a safe home in a hostile environment.

For many in this first generation, food and land practices became crucial forms of cultural survival. Growing callaloo in allotments, recreating Sunday dinner traditions, sharing plants and herbs between family and friends, or sending barrels 'back home' were all ways of sustaining connection despite displacement. From my second- (my parents' generation) and third-generation (my generation) descendants these practices are inherently uneven, felt through

fragments: smells, stories, dishes, memoirs of grandparent's kitchens, or occasional trips 'back home'.

This diasporic context shapes the questions at the core of my research (see below, section 1.3). By placing rural Jamaica in relation to Black-British Caribbean life, the thesis examines not just the movement, but the politics of transmission – i.e. how practices endure, adapt or fade – within a transnational landscape shaped by colonial history, economic precarity, and the intimate labour of cultural reproduction.

## 1.2 What's the problem?

Despite extensive scholarship on Caribbean migration and agrarian change, we still lack an understanding of how everyday Jamaican food and land practices transmit knowledge, care, and belonging across generations and geographies. Or in a broader sense how cultures are able to reproduce and sustain themselves transgenerationally through processes of migration, and larger global forces (e.g. capitalist contemporary pressures or colonial histories). Existing accounts often overlook the embodied, sensory, and relational dimensions of these practices, treating them as cultural remnants or nostalgia rather than active modes of survival. This research addresses that gap by examining how these knowledges are lived with, reshaped, or at risk of loss within both rural Jamaica and the Black-British diaspora.

## 1.3 Research Questions

At the heart of this project are the following questions:

1. How are food and land practices in rural Jamaica sites for the transmission of local knowledge and care, and how do they reflect the pressures of social reproduction under changing agrarian and capitalist conditions?
2. What constitutes "(Jamaican) local knowledge" or a "Caribbean way of knowing", and how are these expressed through practices, memory, language, food and relationality?
3. How have migration and generational change affected the transmission of local knowledge within the diaspora, particularly between first generation, second and third generation Black-British Jamaicans?
4. How do historical and contemporary development logics affect the capacity to reproduce this knowledge?

This thesis is animated by the tension between these questions and what I have observed during my fieldwork. My role as a researcher is not neutral, and I do not aim for neutrality. Instead, this work offers a restorative approach to knowledge-making, one that privileges felt experience, relational truth, and decolonial healing.

## 1.4 Theoretical Framing

This project assembles insight from decolonial, feminist, and Caribbean thinkers, guided by a commitment to relationality and care. The concept of assemblage, as defined by Deleuze (1984), refers to the point at which material practices or actions (i.e. bodies, land, objects) meet expressive dimensions (i.e. ideas, affects, cultural meaning) which together birth new relations and forms of knowledge. It is essential to note that neither layer explains the other. But together, they form a relational occasion of meaning.

Buchanan's (2015) work further delves into this assemblage theory, where he notes:

> In practice, the assemblage is the productive intersection of a form of content (actions, bodies and things) and a form of expression (affects, words and ideas). The form of content and the form of expression are independent of each other – their relationship is one of reciprocal presupposition. (ibid.: 390).

In essence the element of relation being described here is the fundamental component which helps me to articulate that knowledge does not occur as an isolated. Instead, knowledge arises not from abstract ideas or material things, but from the convergence of embodied histories and experiences, with the places or worlds that hold them together.

Simply put, I am engaging with questions surrounding knowledge production. This means asking whose knowledge counts (Spivak, 2023), what kinds of knowledges are produced, and which kinds of historical or material conditions are being foregrounded over others. I approach this through three interrelated/intersecting theoretical spheres: (1) the political economy of survival, which exposes the gendered and material hierarchies of global food systems; (2) the coloniality of knowledge production, which interrogates the silencing and displacement of Caribbean and non-Eurocentric epistemologies; and (3) relational and ecological ethics of care, which reimagine knowledge as co-constituted between humans, nonhumans, and land itself. The six theorists that help me frame this research collectively help me to mould my argument; their works are not only in conversation with mine but with each other's.

### 1.4.1 The Political Economy of Survival

For the political economy part of my framework I have reached for Mezzadri's work on social reproduction in response to Bernstein's analysis of classes of labour. Both authors reveal how classed and gendered relations of (re)production shape agrarian life and everyday survival, exposing how capitalist systems define whose labour and knowledges are valued.

In his work on food regimes, Bernstein (2016) situates agrarian political economy within the global capitalist system, arguing that rural production and reproduction cannot be understood in isolation from global food regimes and capitalist accumulation. This is to say that…(quote). His work focuses on how agrarian transformation, class differentiation, and labour relations are restructured through changing capital flows and global commodity chains; where he insists that the agrarian question(s) underlying the cause of agrarian transformation [i.e. who owns what, who does what, who gets what, what do they do with it (see Bernstein, 2010)] remain relevant in so far as small producers' livelihoods are constantly being reshaped by the logics of global capitalism and agro-industrial integration.

Laying out Bernstein and Byers' (2001) perspectives alongside the works of decolonial scholars (see Mignolo, 2007; Trouillot, 1992), exposes the Eurocentric epistemologies on which Bernstein's frameworks are contingent. Epistemologies that are responsible for the erasure of alternative agrarian and ecological knowledges, such as some of the ones/examples/narratives I foreground in this research paper.

Furthermore, if we look at the work of scholars who believe utilise relational ontologies (through reciprocity, care, and more-than-human relations) in their research (see Glissant, 2009; Kimmerer, 2013), what emerges is something beyond Bernstein's definition of production. Challenging this notion of production and instead valuing alternative bases for value and survival.

In essence, Mezzadri and others' (2024) overview of social reproduction within the realms of political economy critiques Bernstein's analysis of agrarian labour and class. Her argument stretches Bernstein's materialist framework to engage with the role of gendered and reproductive labour (dependent on hidden forms of care and social reproduction). She emphasises the crucial role of social reproduction (that is the reliance on different forms of labour, namely care) in the sustained function of global capitalism. What I particularly appreciated from her paper, was the ways in which the authors she has focused on have collectively expanded the definition of 'the agrarian'. She says (ibid.: 9):

> 'the agrarian' is represented as a contested space redesigned and reorganised by multiple processes challenging 'old' forms of agrarian life and/or where agricultural processes take place across expanded and flexible geographies of production and social reproduction, connecting states, regions, communities and even land and seas.

From this I took, that these agrarian sites are complicated, messy and require research that deals with these natures, which seconds my approach to Jamaican knowledge production. These investigations demand multilayered and context-specific analysis, failing to do so simply means that you also fail to consider the totality of the situation at hand. A nuanced, non-romanticised, and non-static understanding of these issues is the aim here. This is not to say that analyses that generalise a moment in time do not have their uses also, however heterogeneous analysis is important. Mezzadri (2024) goes on to argue that capitalist production relies fundamentally on the invisibilised, undervalued and often feminised labour of social reproduction. There is a slight tension in feminist social reproduction theory, in that it has been largely theorised from a global north perspective and not from a "majority world" (ibid.: 3) one. This is something that Mezzadri addresses in her work (ibid.) and is a tension that my research speaks to.

### 1.4.2 The Coloniality of Knowledge Production

I've used the work of Trouillot and Mignolo to examine how colonial histories and global hierarchies of knowledge shape what is remembered, embraced, or erased – calling for epistemic critique and reflexivity when it comes to anthropological/ethnographic research endeavours.

Mignolo (2007) calls for radicalised 'epistemic delinking', whereby thinking within the borders of the Western episteme is dethroned thus embracing ways of thinking outside of Eurocentric paradigms of modernity and coloniality. His geopolitics of knowledge highlights how global power relations shape what is treated as valid knowledge, that knowledge is rarely neutral or universal, and it calls for delinking from Eurocentric universals so that many ways of knowing can flourish. Returning back to the precious section, it is this epistemic critique that Mezzadri connects to material labour and gender. Further on I elaborate on how Glissant (2009) and Kimmerer (2013) offer embodied, ecological and relation examples of decolonial thinking in practice, which is at the crux of what Mignolo is defending. In a nutshell, Mignolo legitimises Caribbean epistemologies, local knowledge, and essentially my own positionality as an example of cross-border thinking between the Caribbean and the UK.

Whereas Trouillot (1992) does the work of historicising the colonial silences that Mignolo (2007) wants to delink from. Trouillot's (ibid.) core idea illustrates how history and anthropology reproduce silences – where some stories are erased, whilst others remain amplified. He maintains that "narratives are made of silences, not all of which are deliberate or even perceptible… [resultantly] the present is itself no clearer than the past" (1992:152-3). He pushes for the awareness of power in knowledge production to be more widely recognised. He further insists (particularly in the Caribbean context) that we must understand culture as historically produced, heterogeneous, and in motion (ibid.: 32). Therefore, to sufficiently theorise about Jamaica or Jamaican culture, he says theoretically one ought to keep multiplicity, historicity, heterogeneity in mind (see ibid.: 19). If knowledge production is viewed as a sort of cultural labour (where the concern is care, cultural/memory transmission, and epistemic/cultural survival then), Trouillot's work links with Mezzadri discussing whose labour and care gets erased. In my view, it is often marginalised populations who are burdened with these experiences. This is an approach that Kimmerer agrees with and consequently compliments her efforts to recuperate marginalised ways of knowing.

Lastly Trouillot supports Mignolo's aim of epistemic opposition or disruption – that is aim of pushing back against hegemonizing Western epistemic norms. The combination of these arguments helps justify my use of ethnographic method – where I am essentially exploring what sorts of knowledges count, whose narratives get to be listened to, and in what ways memory and silence shape belonging.

### 1.4.3 Relational & Ecological Ethics of Care

I've relied on Kimmerer and Glissant to help me offer relational, ecological alternatives to Eurocentric epistemes. This means, viewing knowledge as embodied, relational, and co-constituted between humans, non-humans, and the land.

In Glissant's seminal work on the 'poetics of relation' (2009), articulates relation as the basis of Caribbean identity – multiple, opaque, and constantly in flux. He writes that "Opacities must be preserved; an appetite for opportune obscurity must be created." (ibid.: 119). Opacity here is a method of relation, not withdrawal, that ultimately resists the capitalist and colonial demand for transparency, that is the expectation that the Other must be knowable, simplified, and fully legible. He goes on to reject essentialism and champion creolisation as a political and epistemological practice. As a Martinican academic, philosopher, and poet, Glissant is a useful person to think with in my research because he helps me to justify my methodological focus on connection, multiplicity and opacity. Glissant reminds us that relation is shaped as much by

speech as by silence. The erasure or disappearance of languages "lacking the support of economic power" (ibid.: 111) signals how knowledges and histories are lost not by happenstance but through global hierarchies of visibility and value. In this sense, Glissant's arguments ground Trouillot's (a fellow Caribbean theorist's) idea of history as relation and silence. They both show us that Caribbean histories emerge through entangled relations and silences, both heavily influenced by power dynamics. Jamaican food and land practices, from this perspective, become living archives that hold both memories and erasures, revealing knowledge produced through regeneration, movement, and loss.

Overall, thinking with Glissant, in the context of Jamaican food/land practices, allows me to underline the importance of a relational, opaque and situated understanding of knowledge (production). It also situates Jamaican practices within the archipelagic complexity of West Indian histories.

This Glissantian approach resonates deeply with the work of Kimmerer's relational ecology (2013) and simultaneously her work extends Glissant's relation to the realm of human-nonhuman ecology.

Kimmerer's (ibid.) core argument advocates for an ethic of reciprocity – a knowledge system where care for the land and community is central. She combines indigenous science and Western botany to show that knowledge is relational, embodied, and non-hierarchical. For me, she illustrates how Jamaican food and land practices act as forms of care, survival, and pedagogy (see hooks, 1994). A particular belief (ibid.: 49) of hers which stuck out to me was:

> Science can be a language of distance which reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects. The language scientists speak, however precise, is based on a profound error in gram- mar, an omission, a grave loss in translation from the native languages of these shores… [Hence]what lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.

If we take "science" (ibid.) as a pseudonym for academia, this sums up my feelings towards the nature of producing Eurocentric academia for consumption predominantly in Western circles. In this paper I have actively chosen to resist the categorisation of 'traditional academia'. To me, this is a proximity-building process. Of course, I am aware that this research has allowed me to illuminate these voices and to spend time with them in the first place. However, the feeling of dismissal or distance still stands. And it is this dichotomy that is indicative of the exact issues present in the hierarchy of knowledge.

Returning to a more political economy lens, Kimmerer opposes Bernstein's instrumental view of production by drawing attention to care-based economies and thus simultaneously expands the elements needed for a thriving society. Additionally, Kimmerer's work seconds Mezzadri's call to value reproductive labour as central to survival. She asserts that "[p]ioneer human communities…have an important role in regeneration… When they reach the edge of easy energy, balance and renewal are the only way forward" (Kimmerer, 2013: 284). Here Kimmerer reminds us that our ability to renew (as a society or otherwise) is dependent on reciprocal relations between early and mature systems. Similarly, this mirrors Mezzadri's argument that agrarian life as well as cultural survival is sustained through reproductive labour.

Digested together, these perspectives foreground Caribbean food and land practices as both sites of epistemic contestation and practices of repair. This is to say, that they pay attention to certain kinds of knowledges which does some of the work in undoing the damage caused by the systemic erasure of relational, embodied, situated epistemologies. The political economy of survival (as outlined by Mezzadri and Bernstein) exposes the material hierarchies of production and reproduction – that is how global capitalism organises who produces food, who benefits, and whose work is rendered invisible. Ultimately this becomes a *politics of knowledge* because it exposes the ways in which economic systems shape what kinds of labour and (knowledge) expertise are valued. Mignolo (2007) and Trouillot's (1992) take on epistemology and coloniality directly address the epistemic dimension of colonial power; this is how certain worldviews and histories are dismissed or silenced. Their work grounds my analysis in the historical and discursive structures that define what *counts* as knowledge. And lastly, ecologies of care and relation (Kimmerer and Glissant's areas of expertise) offer an ontological alternative. A way of knowing grounded in reciprocity, relation, and multiplicity. By centring these, I am enacting epistemic disobedience in Mignolo's terms (2007); asserting that Caribbean and indigenous worldviews are invaluable, complex epistemologies – not folklore nor reminiscent nostalgia.

## 1.5 Structure

Structurally, this thesis moves between narrative, analysis, and sensory description. The piece includes both photographic and ethnographic vignettes to ground the theory in lived experience. These are not decorative — they are integral to the methodology. Through these interludes, I hold space for the richness, intimacy, and complexity of the lives and landscapes I have engaged with during the time I have spent researching.

The thesis unfolds across four core chapters:

- Chapter 2: *Attempting Nourishing Research* outlines my methodology, positionality, and the challenges of conducting research in and on a place so intimately tied to my own identity.
- Chapter 3: *Food, Land and Cultural Reproduction* explores how cultivation and cooking become tools of intergenerational care and cultural resilience, especially in rural Jamaican households.
- Chapter 4: *Embodied, Sensory, and Affective Knowledge* delves into how knowledge is transmitted through the body, senses, and relationships, drawing on moments of storytelling, touch, smell, and ritual.
- Chapter 5: *Belonging, Healing, and Diasporic Return* reflects on the diasporic politics of return, intergenerational longing, and the politics of "coming home."

The structure of this thesis reflects non-linear, relational and grounded knowledges I engage with in this research. Caribbean intellectuals, from Glissant (2009) to Wynter (2003), remind us that fragmentation, opacity, and poetics are vital modes of inquiry. I am writing within and amongst these inheritances. Resultantly, I ask the reader to read with openness. Let the narratives take you into kitchens, and onto hilltops. Read the silences, the smells, the lilt of voices, as seriously as you would citations. That is where the knowledge I am talking about resides.

# 2.Attempting Nourishing Research: Methodology & Data

## 2.1 Methodology

To explore how Jamaican land and food practices function as sites of knowledge, this section clarifies my embodied and relational methodological approach I adopted throughout my research.

My research is grounded in six weeks of engaged fieldwork in St Elizabeth, Mandeville, in semi-rural south-central Jamaica. I have a personal connection to this place as it is the parish where my grandparents grew up and is where my great-aunt still owns property. My family and I are also familiar with this part of Jamaica. This is where much of my fieldwork took place, to observe what food and land practices (cooking and gardening) look like in contemporary rural Jamaica. Rather than approaching my participants through formal interviews alone, I embedded myself in the everyday rhythms of domestic work, gardening, cooking, cleaning, and community exchanges. My days were shaped by sitting on verandas, communal eating, listening to music, storytelling, planting and picking various fruits and veg. Most of the time I was encouraged to take the time to actively 'do nothing'. One of the most important lessons I took from time with Pinto, was learning to go with the flow (also known as **vybzing**). Although 'doing nothing' has a negative association in the Western vernacular, in the Jamaican context it means to just *be* or to relax; this is a fundamental part of Jamaican culture. This allowed me to witness knowledge as it circulated through hands, gestures, memory and land. Another reason why it was important to approach this research ethnographically, is because a lot of meaning was exchanged without 'doing' anything.

Two key interlocutors, Cleo and Pinto[2], were central to this experience. Cleo, a family friend whose relationship to my family began long before I arrived on this earth, honestly treated me like her daughter. From inviting me to Jamaica, drawing me into the garden as a learner and a helper, to modelling and translating all sorts of Jamaican-specific contexts. She really continues to demonstrate acts of care, discipline and pedagogy in ways I could have never predicted. Pinto, partner of Cleo and very much involved in the Jamaica family responsibilities that my grandparents and great-aunt rely on, welcomed me into his home and his never-ending network of people, where conversations about land, work, community and his life unfolded alongside the constant presence of sound systems and radio. These relationships formed the foundation of not

[2] Who I refer to as aunty and uncle, out of respect.

only the data I collected, but the form of knowledge that emerged: relational, affective, and grounded in co-presence.

This methodology aligns with feminist and indigenous approaches (see hooks, 1994; Kimmerer, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Harcourt, 2015) that prioritise reciprocity, embodiment, and co-creation of knowledge. Rather than extracting information, I participated in day-to-day life, allowing ethnography to become a shared practice of doing, sensing, and remembering. By foregrounding embodied and sensorial engagement, this section has shown why certain knowledges fail to be captured or appreciated through traditional extractive methods, directly speaking to the central question of how such practices transmit care and cultural continuity.

### 2.1.1 Ethics

Thus far, I haven't gone into much detail about the ethical decisions that were made prior to and during my research process. There are a few important aspects that need unpacking. The first was my choice to refrain from anonymising any of my participants (and myself). For me it was important to foreground the voices and faces of the lives I was engaging with. A chance to humanise these narratives. As a result, I created consent forms, asking for permission to use the names, words and images of the people in this paper. To keep this conversation of privacy and in a sense opacity open, all my interlocutors had the opportunity to remove themselves from the research, as well to anonymise themselves at any time whilst I was conducting research. They also were made aware that they had access to a draft of my research, so they could edit or alter the things I had written about or referenced. All my participants, bar one, had no issue revealing their identities.

Additionally, to allow my interlocutors to continue to engage in the research I have carried out as well as to continue nurturing the relationships we have built over this period, I will be sending a copies of my completed thesis to Jamaica and to the UK (both physical and electronic copies) so my interlocutors have a chance to see how I have interpreted our interactions. An opportunity for me to give back.

### 2.1.2 Challenges, Choices, and Return

Due to the challenges arising because of my lack of familiarity with the functions of Jamaican society, I felt extremely bound to the networks of Cleo and Pinto. While this meant that I was limited by their known networks to other similar people, it also allowed me access to a network of people which I could integrate into more easily in the short period I spent researching. However, this did mean that m this research predominantly engaged with interlocutors who

shared similar values to Cleo and Pinto. They also agreed with utilising natural ingredients, nurturing traditions, and looking out for their community. Furthermore, I was living in a Rastafarian household (because Pinto is a proud Rasta man from the age of twelve). And many of the farmers I met were fellow Rastafarians. Rastafarian principles involve an Italistic lifestyle, being community orientated especially giving back and looking after the elderly and the young, and honouring **livity**.

Noteworthy is here is the palpable influence that Western (particularly US) consumer culture has amongst the younger Jamaican generations. Shaped perceptions of modernity render local rural practices as out-dated or cumbersome, illuminating the depth of dependency the Caribbean has to the West (culturally, economically, and symbolically).

In essence what I observed from the environments I occupied was that there were two camps: a) those preserving cultural Jamaican traditions versus b) those who were willing to disregard all it in assimilating with Americanized cultures. Resultantly, if I were to conduct this research again with more time and resources, I would first vary the types of community I spent time with (communities with opposing understandings of societal progression). I would also vary the ages I engaged with, because for the most part I was researching people who were over the ages of fifty – which means that this paper is almost entirely absent of the younger voices Jamaica and the Black-British Diaspora. The younger generations are where real contentions start to emerge not only generationally but transnationally about what aspects of Jamaican culture remain important and which are not. And lastly, I would spend more time analysing and conceptualising the definition of 'Jamaican ways of knowing' amongst diasporic communities.

In addition, another area that is lacking in this paper, although I was able to conduct a couple of interviews with Caribbean growers' collectives in the UK, was the comparative element of UK versus Jamaican knowledge production. This was a result of a lack of resources, mainly time. In comparison to the six weeks I spent in Jamaica, I was only in London for one week. The two growers' groups that I did visit, were on opposite sides of London and I was only able to visit them once each. Of course, as I spent more time talking to people in these circles, they suggested I interview and visit other spaces and groups doing similar things. Consequently, this paper only hints at the comparative approaches to cultural reproduction and preservation (between Jamaica and England) and offers a limited view and analysis of the values of some of these diasporic communities in London. However, with more time or a larger research project, I would love to explore how food and land practices within Jamaican British households and communities have

transformed over time. And how this transformation maps on to that of cultural knowledges in Jamaica. In all honesty this could be a separate thesis topic, in and of itself.

## 2.2 Raking

After strolling fifteen minutes down a long residential road in Bellingham, South London, I came across a large black gate (*figure 17)* in between two houses that fit the instructions[3] I was following. The gate was left ajar and I gingerly pushed it, to be greeted by another stretch of lawn. I had come to visit and volunteer at Coco Collective Community Garden – an "intergenerational safe space to connect, learn, heal & grow" – where I was meeting Val (the founder) to chat more about what she does and to share some of the things I had been researching. After walking down this long stretch of path (*figure 18*), I came to another opening where a humble shed (*figure 19*) and table first appeared in the small opening to the allotment. I first met Val's mum, an older lady who was busy helping on the allotment, she asked me to sign in to the visitor's book behind me. Shortly after shaking her hand, her daughter Val popped out from another corner of the allotment. It was a sunny, dry and autumnal day. It had reached the natural lull point in the afternoon (around three o'clock), where the day naturally slows down and gets a little quieter. I accompanied Val to a small circular piece of ground that was all just loose earth. There was one rake that was on the floor, and Val suggested that raking might be an enjoyable activity to do together whilst I interviewed her. I picked up the fallen rake, and she disappeared somewhere and reappeared with a much larger and wider rake. The task we were going to collectively attempt (whilst interviewing) was to level out this piece of earth, being careful to leave a slight peak in the middle that was even all the way around the circle. This was going to be used as a relaxation or meditation space. Val envisioned planting herbs or fern which would spread out over the earth, making a naturally scented carpet, which would allow people to come, relax, and be closer to the earth. Raking, in and of itself, is not an action that I am unfamiliar with, but it is not something I have ever done in a circle. It was quite meditative levelling out the soil, and pulling out pieces of plastic to throw away, or discovering hidden treasures in the soil (i.e. old glass bottles, a huge stone, and the sole of a boot). The conversation, or interview, flowed well, mediated by the action of raking, and before we knew it, we had over an hour of conversation for me to process at a later stage. Meanwhile, being with Val (the lady in charge) meant that the entire conversation was influenced by various people coming to make their presence known. Often greeting us, letting me know who they were to the

[3] "The black gate next to no. 75" (Research Journal, 5th Sept 2025).

community garden, and coming to catch up with Val. The sense of community was strong, and I was honoured to be able to have been a part of it for the few hours that I was there.

~

## 2.3 Collectives

From my time in London, this Vignette comes from an interview I had whilst raking (*figure* 20*)* with Val, the founder of Coco Collective (*Instagram*, no date). Coco collective is a black growing collective in Croydon (South London), which prioritises preserving and passing on Afro-Caribbean land practices. This collective was birthed during/after COVID-19, to create a space where Caribbean and African diasporic communities could come together and reconnect with nature and each other. I also interviewed two other organisers or leaders of 'Black Rootz', a different diasporic collective in North London with similar ambitions, particularly concerned about food sovereignty and preserving knowledge. These perspectives shed light on the importance of community organisers in diasporic communities but also summed up some of the diasporic attitudes shared about protecting Caribbean ways of doing things. The interview highlighted/confirmed what knowledges had been transferred across migration and generation, and the challenges that came with this. Also illuminating the idea of these communities as the custodians of African and Caribbean knowledge. Not only were these vital sites of knowledge transference outside of Jamaica, but these collectives operated as informal archives (keepers of stories, practices, memories, techniques, and seeds) which echoed the intergenerational circuits I recognised being passed down to me in Jamaica. Demonstrating how 'a Jamaican way of knowing' travels and is reconfigured, sustained through acts of relation.

From the conversations I was having, it was almost a unanimous opinion in these spaces that growing food sustainably was a part of an ancestral responsibility that needed to be taken seriously for the health of their communities. Put differently, tending to the soil became a culturally reparative, healing, and grounding act within these circles.

> Val: Oh, because you know where, where you've come back from Jamaica, yeah, you know, our people just naturally live on the land, right? They know they know how to honour the land, because they know that they can't do anything without the land…[people talk] about permaculture and sustainability, but it's just our indigenous ways of being…

Therefore, there is a need to preserve these situated knowledges, in the name of environmental sustainability, which simultaneously serves to protect diasporic continuity. This demonstrates how Jamaican ecological logics (e.g. making use of what the land provides for you) can be adapted to urban diasporic contexts. Inherently showing that Caribbean knowledges include ecological ethics that can survive migration, despite being transformed in the process.

The conversations I had with the community organisers of these collectives, three black women all over the age of forty, raised the importance of encouraging community engagement as well as the issues surrounding the labour of these roles. They all conveyed the intense invisibilized labour that goes into managing these roles. Including negotiating with councils, applying for funding, supporting members of the community, and dealing with burnout.

> Val: what was interested in Jamaica, like seeing the people that kind of take on the community leader role, and the things that they kind of inevitably have to pick up as because they kind of end up being the person that people come to for everything…And so you just get called, which is obviously, in itself, is an honour, but at the same time, yeah, it's a lot.

Val here introduces the honour of being a community leader in diasporic spaces, but also the toll it takes to maintain these initiatives without community support. She effectively mirrors the gendered and care labours I witnessed in Jamaica (e.g. that of Ms. D., of my grandmother, and of Cleo who spent a lot of time in caring roles), depicting continuity across the two different continents. I am making the point here that knowledge reproduction is entangled with forms of social reproduction, where organisers are responsible for sustaining communities under much burden and strain. That is, cultural reproduction does not happen in and of itself, it requires labour and structure.

Lastly, I'd like to touch on the ability of systemic pressures to shape cultural knowledge survival/continuities. Both Val and Pam raised issues of mental health within Black British community, particularly during and post COVID19 where mental health issues have become prevalent in Western societies. These women mentioned feelings of being overstretched and dealing with income precarity and institutional neglect which ultimately affects their capacity to sustain these cultural spaces. Pam reflects this sentiment well:

> Because actually, we saw what happened in lockdown. We saw how [our] people became a vulnerable solution, yeah, people that suffered the most with the communities that come from the most deprived areas.
>
> And then when you look at spatial injustices, justice, we don't have access, our food is linked to our health. Yeah, our food is linked to our progression as a community. Our

> food is linked to our own sustainability, because if we don't have access to land, then we can't provide ourselves food. Yeah, it's linked to our culture. It's linked to our self, our sense of self, worth, our confidence, very much within culture and culturally.

Collectively, these conversations emphasise that diasporic growers in London are central to understanding Jamaican epistemologies today. However, a poignant observation for me was the acute sense of responsibility and action especially amongst the younger generations in the UK around food and land practices, that I did not really pick up on in Jamaica (or at least not in the same way). There was a real political focus. A need to protect what knowledge was left. Val notes that, "the younger people…I noticed what motivated them more was that political voice". And Pam similarly states that "food (sovereignty) *is* political". I understood this call to action as being a result of migratory histories where various cultures had to rebuild a semblance of their cultural norms in a new country. The other is the undercurrent of the anti-immigration politics rife in Europe when I was conducting my research, which suggests why the younger minoritised voices felt a need to defend themselves and their communities against larger structural and political forces. The next section wonderfully juxtaposes this call to action, with a moment of silence where I reflect on the epistemological lesson transferred through simply being still.

## 2.4 Beetle Symphony

This was an experience that I never really got used to, something that occurred every day (without fail) when I was in Jamaica; something that I appreciated deeply some days and ignored completely on others. It is (what Pinto titled) the "Beetle Symphony". Music that emerged from the greenery that surrounded Cleo and Pinto's house (*figure 21*). Their abode was located at the end of an annex in the hills. On the drive back to the house, you would take a sharp left, where a gravel road would take you past two houses, and as you keep driving you pass a breathtaking hill-dropped view of St. Elizabeth – namely green for as far as you can see, with tiny houses dotted about.

I remember my aunty asking me if "I could see the shades of green". I was slightly perplexed by the question at first, but she was alluding to the immense variety of greens available wherever you look. She said after leaving London and retiring in Jamaica, it took her a while for her eyes to adjust but now she 'sees' it. This gravel road is lined with **pear**[4] trees, ackee trees, all manner of herbs

[4] These **pears** played a huge role during my trip to St. Elizabeth. It was avocado season and so these trees were peppered with the most beautiful, shiny, and smooth kinds. Pears also played a huge role in my diet. They made an appearance in most meals, certainly every day, sometimes twice or even three times a day. The role of choosing a ripe pear from the veranda was something that carried a high level of importance – choose incorrectly and

and fruit trees. Right at the end of this street it opens out to reveal the house and yard. It feels a little like being in a tame jungle, with the tropical climate, and the variety of plants growing of all shades and colours. The perfect environment for insects to nest at the base of the grassland. So, in the evenings, where often Cleo, Pinto and I would gather to eat dinner, sit with each other and reflect on the day, we would be accompanied by an all-encompassing hum. This is not a quiet sound either, it is a distinct buzzing or humming that is coming from all the insects in the surrounding greenery. You can't see where this sound is coming from but as you look out into the night, this sound is coming from everywhere. As you listen more intentionally (and in my case after you have asked questions about what it is), you realise that this is the sound of beetles, crickets, frogs, snakes, and a whole host of other insects communicating with each other. I decided that this was their way of letting us know that evening was now upon us, and that it was cool enough for them to come out and play. Cleo, Pinto, and I discussed in depth that this sound – a very peaceful, lulling, sound might I add – consisted of multiple harmonies, melodies and textures. And thus, the term 'Beetle Symphony" was born.

~

### 2.4.1 Unpacking Beetle Symphony

The key idea of the theme of this excerpt was the connection achieved through silence. The amount that we as humans were bonding without speaking or *doing*. And by 'doing' here, that is without actively trying to make active conversation or trying to entertain each other. Of course, we were relating by occupying space together and actively listening. However, there was no formulated plan as such. We were connecting to the more-than-human, and the realms of knowledge that are transferred without a human utterance. From personal experience, I am aware that Caribbeans spend a lot of time just being, in other words just **vybzing**. There is no strict rule, it is not about the silence in and of itself; more so the ability to just be with each other with no predisposed or shared plan. In that moment, anything could have happened. I could have proposed that we eat dessert, light a joint, or go and look at the stars. Instead, we sat in silence and appreciated that we were not alone that evening. We ended up noticing the different timbres, harmonies, and pitches of the Beetle's Symphony. Pinto remarked, 'we have been invited to a concert… the frog's croak was the tuba of the orchestra'. This acknowledgement of more-than-human kin, or the idea that we exist in relation with others is reflected in Kimmerer's work (2013). Where she echoes, that traditionally communities lived in relation to their

everybody is eating unripe avocado with their meal. The feel of a ripe pear was something I had to learn. I will add that these are the same variety of pears that my granddad in London pines for on a regular basis. The same variety that would have grown so abundantly in his hometown (St. Elizabeth) when he was a boy.

environments. Moments like this one happened on a continual basis (i.e. moments of silence, that became collective points of reflection) throughout my trip – a continuous reminder that it is ok to just exist, without any expectations or demands. And we as the human species are not occupying Earth alone; hence we have a collective responsibility to ourselves, each other, and the spaces we occupy together.

## 2.5 Sounding the Paper: On Music, Memory, and Method

This section will make space for the importance of music, harmony and rhythms, in the Jamaican context. Contributing to answering my main research question, I will explore how sound and music structure everyday practices, memory, and belonging, shaping how knowledge is felt, recalled, and shared. In the 'how to read' section of this paper eight songs to accompany this read. All of them have significance, either to myself, my interlocutors, or my trip. I chose these songs to be a part of the reading experience because methodologically, in the Caribbean context song, harmony, melodies and baselines are a part of a Jamaican way of knowing. I am not only honouring these epistemologies where knowledge is carried through sound, but I am creating a form of acknowledgement to anyone from the Jamaican diaspora who (upon listening or recognising some of these songs) will instantly understand a certain shared context (see the works of Gilroy (2003), Glissant (2009), and O'Shea (2005)).

Below is a brief synopsis of the relevance the selected songs to me and my participants:

**Alton Ellis** *I'm Still in Love &* **Beres Hammond** *I feel good*

> For anyone within the Jamaican diaspora, the first few seconds of these songs will instantly reveal the great works of these two Reggae giants. Covering both the 'Rock Steady' and 'Lover's Rock' eras of reggae music, these icons are well admired and played today in Jamaican contexts. These are musicians who are appreciated across generation.

**Bill Withers** *Lean on Me*

> This song is one of my granddad's favourites. I have vivid memories of him reminding his grandchildren of the importance of these lyrics – the importance of family and community.

**Chronixx** *Smile Jamaica*

> Another well recognised song in the diaspora, from a younger reggae artist. The message of the song reminds Jamaicans to reclaim joy in the face of hardship and to treasure the beauty of Jamaica's spirit.

**Eva Cassidy** *Songbird*

This is the song that Pinto played on the sound system (see chapter 4), and it influenced me in a way I will simply never forget. This reflects Jamaicans love for true melody, as well as car journeys with my mum and siblings where this song would play on the radio.

**Ayanna Witter Johnson** *Grandma's Hands*

This is my sister's cover of Bill Wither's song. This is an ode to my grandmother, as well as a deep reverence for the hardships that my grandma and her generation endured, laying the foundation for the subsequent generations.

**Bob Marley and the Wailers** *Waiting in Vain*

Another staple for Jamaicans; an absolute classic. Bob Marley is a globally recognised freedom fighter who is in part responsible for putting Jamaica 'on the map' for many people (amongst other things). What Bob Marley and his group achieved is iconic, and it would be wrong to exclude them from this line up.

On one hand you could say I am dislodging the hierarchical value of academic legibility, where text tends to be privileged over other sensorial expressions. On the other hand, more than a combative decolonial act, I was interested in recreating the sonic context of my research whilst in Jamaica. Where I would travel from soundscape to soundscape. Music marked territories and existed everywhere from beach huts to verandas. For me, incorporating music here (other than a fun exercise for me) is a way of reconstructing a particular ethnographic atmosphere, vital for understanding a Jamaican way of being. Attending music as a way of knowing demonstrates that food and land practices are embedded within wider sensory and cultural worlds, extending our understanding of how knowledge and care circulate across rural Jamaica.

## 2.6 Positionality: Revealing my why

In addressing the main research question, this section clarifies my positionality as a diasporic researcher whose presence shapes what knowledge becomes visible, shared, or withheld.

I approach this research as a third-generation Black-British Jamaican, whose relationship to the island is shaped by memory, inheritance, and longing. My positionality is formed through what Avtar Brah describes as *diaspora space* (1997) – a site where multiple histories, attachments, and identities coexist, rather than a simple one or the other. Returning to Jamaica, after twelve years, as both researcher and family member placed me in a position of proximity and distance. Both at home, yet not entirely.

My presence in the field was therefore never neutral. I was often positioned as "the granddaughter", "the foreigner", or "the **hinglish gyal**", and these kinds of identities shape how people spoke to me, what they taught me, and the kinds of knowledges they shared with me. Most importantly this shaped how they viewed me. At the same time, my diasporic distance enables certain insights. Moments where practices taken for granted locally appeared to me as deeply meaningful, fragile, or in transition.

Acknowledging this positionality is central to my methodology. It clarifies that this research is neither objective nor detached; it is rooted in relation, responsibility and the ethics of return or giving back. My own process of belonging, remembering, and relearning is therefore not separate from the data, but part of the analytic frame through which I understand Jamaican food and land practices.

Recognising my non-neutral position reinforces that knowledge is produced relationally, and that studying Jamaican food and land practices requires accountability to the communities and histories that shape them. The intention of this work is a restorative one, a chance for me to give back to my community.

# 3 Food, Land and Cultural Reproduction

This chapter traces how gardening, cooking, and other land-rooted practices in rural Jamaica extend far beyond questions of sustenance or survival. They are intimate modes of cultural transmission — ways through which histories are held, kinship is activated, and identity is felt across space and time. Through these everyday acts, people bring together land, memory, tools, stories, and relationships — creating assemblages that nourish both body and the sense of belonging. In attending to these practices, I explore how diasporic and rural lives are shaped not only by what is done, but by how it is done, and with whom.

## 3.1 Sweet Potatoes

This section foregrounds the sentiment of situated knowledge (production) using a sensory vignette of baking with an elder (figure 1). I explore baking as a site of Caribbean knowledge production, where memory, technique, and intergenerational relation come together in everyday cooking practices.

I want to share a moment in time where I baked the much revered '[Jamaican] Sweet Potato Pudding' with Ms. D. To set the scene I'd like you to look at the photo above of Ms Denton's hands peeling sweet potatoes. This picture was taken in the process of me a) learning how to make her recipe *and* b) interviewing her. This is where my understanding of interview as a lived practice of witnessing and relating emerges. To me, this interview was conducted in the style of a casual chat, where I assumed the role of a young inquisitive grandchild of my interlocutor. I also didn't know how long this process would take, or how keen Ms D. would be to answer all of my questions. Alas, I started and we kept going until we stopped.

Rather than approaching this encounter through extractive questioning, baking became the method — a form of co-labour that aligns with indigenous and feminist methodologies which privilege 'doing with' over 'asking about' (see Kimmerer, 2011; Harcourt, 2015). In this sense, the kitchen functioned as a site of knowledge production, where conversation moved gently between memory and movement, closer to what Christina Sharpe, in *In the Wake* (2016), describes as attending to life through the ordinary rhythms of care and continuation**.** This mode of research unsettles the idea that knowledge is best gathered through distance and neutrality, suggesting instead that to cook alongside is to enter into relation, allowing memory, technique, and care to surface through embodied practice rather than direct inquiry.

## Ms Denton (Ms D.) – age 83

Ms Gurzelle Denton (introduced to me as Ms D. or Ms. G), is a neighbour of Cleo and Pintos (the aunty and uncle I stayed with the entirety of my trip). I can't exactly recall what the reason was behind our first introduction, but I'm almost certain that it involved a chance to share our company. Ms D.'s garden and general awareness of all things plant-related, is truly her prized possession. Instead of sitting in the living room, we did a casual tour of her garden whilst she caught us up on how she was doing and what her latest findings were in her garden. Quite honestly, this lady felt like she could have been one of my grandma's friends. Not least because of her British accent, but because although she was born near St. Thomas, Jamaica, she spent the vast majority of her life in London (where she raised her kids and fulfilled her working career). I remember being deeply tickled by the brown "Southwark Council" bin, that resided behind Ms D.'s gate – she had shipped this over with the rest of her belongings from the UK when she came to Jamaica to retire with her husband. Watching her manoeuvring through her yard, stroking leaves, checking the moisture of the soil, picking avocados – her hands harness the knowledge of an encyclopaedia.

The story of how all the ingredients came together for this sweet treat, is quite an interesting one (see photo appendix – *figures 1-9*). Firstly, every ingredient was received or sourced from someone I had a connection with. The coconuts were from Pinto's tree, the sweet potatoes were from one of Pinto's farming friends, the pantry items overall were from Ms. D.'s kitchen. What became clear through the gathering of ingredients — sweet potatoes from a neighbour, coconut from a cousin's tree, spices passed between kitchens — was that provisioning here was not an individual task but an assemblage, a coming together of bodies, materials, and relations that exceed any single actor. Following Deleuze and others (1984), we could think of this not as a linear supply chain but as an assemblage of care and necessity, where each element enters into temporary alignment for something to be made. In Glissant's (2009) terms, this is relation lived materially, a form of creolised co-labouring, where food is not just produced but composed through networks of reciprocity and shared obligation.

Furthermore, it is difficult to put into words the feeling I was having as a third-generation researcher from the Jamaican Diaspora, watching Ms D. work her way around her kitchen to make this treat. My grandma (who used to make this for the family on a regular basis) is no longer able to. So when the opportunity to create this recipe arose, I seized it with all my might and refused to let go. I was adamant that I was not going home before I had made and tasted a sweet potato pudding with Ms. Denton! Back to the kitchen itself. Everything about that environment, from the colour of the cupboards to the jars left on the counter, to the coasters on the kitchen table, reminded me of being in a Caribbean kitchen – my reference would be my grandparents' house, which was my second home[5]. The familiarity of this environment, to me, the sweet, spiced smells that came from the oven, the way that Ms Denton opened her draws and closed them before resuming baking – are all ways that I am accustomed to. A lot of them I have been told off for not abiding to in my own grandparents' kitchen. "Lauren, close the draw nuh" or "Come out the kitchen chile!", are memories that resurface just by stepping foot in this space.

Standing in that kitchen, I recognised gestures I had seen my grandmother make. The way Ms D. wiped her hands on her apron, how she organised ingredients by intuition rather than measurement, how smell rather than timers dictated readiness. I vividly remember her stating that "it is ready when it's ready; I do not cook by time" (Ms Denton, 26th Aug 2025). As Mintz and Du Bois (2002) reminds us, tradition is not simply inherited but re-enacted through

[5] Meaning that throughout my childhood I was there so often that it felt like a second home. A Jamaican household I was very familiar with.

repetition, through "the remembered practice of everyday life" that carries culture without needing to name it. As a third-generation diasporic researcher, my witnessing was not neutral observation but a return through recognition, a moment where memory moved across bodies and time, not as nostalgia but as practice still alive in muscle and movement**.** It was in these quiet repetitions that I understood tradition not as something preserved, but as something continually lived into being. This encounter demonstrates that Jamaican local knowledge is not abstract, or nostalgic, but lives on through embodied memory and care. All central elements in response to the first sub-question on what constitutes a Jamaican way of knowing.

## 3.2 Porridge

To deepen my answer to the previously mentioned research sub-question, this breakfast related vignette shows how everyday food rituals carry intergenerational knowledge and diasporic belonging.

The moment I will recount for you now feels particularly poignant as a third-generation diasporic researcher. I caught myself appreciating the fact that I was able to carry an action/ a routine/ a ritual that my grandmother had held for the entirety of my childhood. I am talking about the act of making, serving, and *drinking* oats porridge with my grandparents.

Anyone from Jamaica will tell you that porridge is a large part of Jamaican breakfast cuisine. There are many varieties (including peanut, cornmeal, oats, green banana, arrow root, etc.), my favourite of them all being **hominy** corn. As I was stirring the pot, I heard the bang of my Granddad's walking stick (pictured above) on the wooden floor. My Grandma sits at the head of the table; my Granddad takes the longer edge of the table next to her. Upon serving, I placed the bowls now filled with porridge, on the brown 1970s-style placemats in front of them and watched them gratefully receive the bowl with childlike eyes as they waited for me to get their spoons. I fetched them both spoons, served myself a portion, and joined them at the table. Grandparents and grandchild enjoying the same meal. This formed the backdrop of the life history interview I conducted with my Granddad. Once the porridge was finished, we started conversing about his childhood.

Serving porridge here becomes more than an act of feeding, it forms part of a larger circuit of care and cultural continuity**.** Sylvia Wynter reminds us that food practices are not only about survival of the body but about the survival of ways of being human otherwise (McKittrick, 2015), resisting the narrow colonial definition of the human as an economic subject. Likewise,

Kimmerer (2011) frames such acts of mutual nourishment as forms of reciprocity that bind generations into relation, where food carries memory forward not through archive but through repetition and offering. What looked like breakfast was, in fact, a rehearsal of belonging, a quiet handover in which care moved back up the generational line, keeping cultural life circulating through embodied practice.

In many ways, the rural Jamaican imaginary continues to be shaped by ideas of repair, self-sufficiency, and a temporality not governed by Western speed, echoing what Sylvia Wynter identifies as alternative modes of being human beyond the colonial script (McKittrick, 2015). Meals like sweet potato pudding and porridge — humble, resourceful, made from what is available rather than what is desired — speak to this history. These were not luxury foods but foods of survival, stretched with sugar to become treats, embodying what Mintz (1986) traces as Jamaica's contradictory relationship to sugar: a substance born from plantation extraction, yet repurposed domestically into moments of joy and care. In this sense, food becomes more than sustenance; it becomes a lens through which broader histories of labour, colonialism and cultural resilience become visible. Kimmerer (2013) reminds us that everyday acts of preparation are also acts of remembering, and Tsing (2015) urges us to notice how life continues within the ruins of extractive systems. Consequently, to cook porridge or pudding, then, is not simply to reproduce tradition — it is to quietly insist on survival through improvisation, to hold onto relational ways of living even within a world shaped by loss.

Through my granddad's stories and the act of making and serving porridge, this ethnographic moment shows how knowledge is transmitted relationally, carrying the nuances of diasporic continuity and cultural survival.

## Granddad (Powder-tail) – age 85

This is my maternal grandfather; he has been a stable presence in my life since before I can remember. He shares his memories and stories with me of growing up in an agricultural, community-oriented, part of Jamaica, and about assimilating to life in the UK in his early twenties and creating a life in London over the past sixty years. To me he is one of my main points of reference to Jamaica and is one of the reasons I understand and respect Caribbean culture so highly. When I brought him back three **pears** from Jamaica, he took the time to wrap each one in a tea towel (to continue the ripening process) and told me how this was the nicest **pear** he had since he was a boy. His hands now broad and pale, sit firmly on top of his walking stick inherited from his aunt. He is a man who is familiar with the **runnings** [footnote here: explaining this word] of the London Underground, and later he took up a career as a local barber. His stories speak to the labour, memory and care of a generation who migrated abroad from the West Indies to create a better future for themselves and their offspring.

### 3.2.1 Drinking Porridge

Why "drinking porridge"?', you ask. 'Surely porridge is something you eat'… I agree entirely. To this question, I quite honestly have no answer. For some reason within this diasporic context, which involves anyone who is a seasoned Jamaican porridge-drinker, one should be able to relate to the fact that the verb is 'to drink porridge', not to eat it. This could be a textural thing, however there is a vast array of porridges that are cooked and appreciated in a Jamaican household (in the 6 weeks I was in Jamaica this included: cornmeal, arrowroot, coconut, oats, peanut and green banana). By textural, I mean that there are many different varieties of porridge, all with different thicknesses, textures, and flavour. The porridge I prepared for my grandparents one Sunday morning, the last time I would see them for a while, was oats porridge (ingredients: Oats, milk, coconut sugar, nutmeg, bay leaves). This is the same porridge my Grandma would have cooked me when I was growing up. It also happens to be the exact same kitchen, on the same stove, same pots and the same kitchen table that I would have eaten at the entirety of my childhood. This is to say that something about this practice of porridge making felt extremely full circle. I could relate to the anticipation of waiting for the bowl to get to the table and watching the nutmeg-scented steam warm your face as you wait for a spoon to be handed to you. The three of us sat together once I had plated our breakfast; starting from the edges where the porridge is cooler. Then the slurping ensued. My grandparents, both over eighty-five years of age, strictly slurp their porridge and I believe this is where the 'drinking' aspect of eating porridge takes hold. After twenty-eight years, I still refuse to slurp my porridge. But at least in that moment I knew they were content – the louder the slurp, the more one is enjoying their meal.

~

# 4 Embodied, Sensory and Affective Knowledge

The previous chapter defines Caribbean local knowledge as an embodied and relational way of understanding the world. This chapter moves on how this knowledge is transmitted. Acknowledging the absence of, or lack of appreciation for, the idea that knowledge is enacted through the body, highlighting how relational and embodied knowledges are devalued under colonial-capitalist regimes. But remain critical for survival and identity continuity. I argue that food (through land relations) operates as an embodied archive of resistance and continuity. A form of knowledge that is reconfigured and reinvented across migration and generational changes.

## 4.1 Avocadoes

I use avocadoes here to illustrate how a simple act of bringing back fruits from abroad becomes a moment where embodied and affective knowledge travels across continents.

My granddad and his love for **pears**, is something I have normalized, but in no way is his urge craving for **pears** coincidental. I'm not sure of the name of that variety, but the appearance of the fruit in the trees looks like camouflaged gems. Due to their colour, sometimes they look hidden, but once you catch the smooth, shiny, rounded silhouette there is a beauty about it which ought to be admired. During my stay at Cleo and Pinto's house, there were multiple **pear** trees around the yard, but the best one (in my opinion) was stationed directly over the goat pen avocadoes (*figure 14*). Hence the running joke, that the goats always ate the best **pears** out of all of us. We are talking about the one fruit, with multiple associations: i) Knowing when the avocadoes were the perfecting ripeness, this was something I was not entrusted with when I first arrived but was asked to before meal times towards the end of the trip ii) I was reminded that although there was an abundance of **pears** they are seasonal, which explains in part why they are so highly cherished iii) On returning back to London, we picked and wrapped three **pears** to take back to my granddad, knowing that I couldn't return empty-handed.

What may initially register as a simple act of gifting — bringing avocados from Jamaica back to London — can also be read, following Kimmerer (2013), as a form of relational practice through which diasporic subjects sustain ties to land and memory. Kimmerer (2013: 265) describes everyday gestures of exchange with the more-than-human world as "ceremonies of remembrance," where small but meaningful acts reaffirm that belonging emerges through

material encounter. In this sense I would argue that the avocado becomes more than a food item; operating on a sensorial repository of ecological memory, a living archive that carries traces of ancestral soil across geographic and temporal distance. When my grandfather held and tasted the fruit with visible reverence, the moment exceeded nostalgia. He shared with me, "[t]his is the nicest **pear** my lips have tasted since I was a boy" (Granddad, 1st Sept 2025)It signalled how plants can mediate intergenerational continuity, enacting what Toni Morrison (2005) terms rememory—the idea that places, and the materials of those places, remember us even when displacement interrupts direct connection. Read this way, food and land practices function not simply as sustenance but as infrastructure for diasporic relation, an everyday technology through which past and present, homeland and host land, are momentarily brought into contact. The avocadoes here became a repository of ecological memory, revealing the affective and embodied ways knowledge survives displacement.

## 4.2 Aloe

This section uses aloe vera plant to depict intergenerational and cultural transnational knowledge transmission, weaving together land, care and memory across time.

Aloe is another character that played a large role in my stay, and more broadly plays a large role in my understanding of care in a Jamaican context. There is something quite poignant about the aloe plant (*figures 10 & 11*). Of course, designed for desert-like or tropical climates, it is an example of resilience. Not only resilience, but adaptability. It is a plant designed for desert-like conditions and yet has managed to survive in both the tropics and Western climates. Being raised in London, I am accustomed to seeing aloe plants growing in old plant pots in the corner of a kitchen window at my great-aunt or grandparents' house. However, the aloe plants I saw growing heartily and strong in the Jamaican soil were incomparable, the size, the colour, the shape, and the quantity of plants. Growing furiously and unabashedly.

Aloe grows quietly along the edges of many Jamaican yards — not cultivated in neat rows but allowed to take root where it finds space, adapting to dry patches of earth and thriving with minimal tending. Its resilience is part of its cultural significance; it is a plant that endures, and in doing so becomes a quiet companion in everyday life. In the Jamaican households I spent time in, aloe was not spoken about with reverence, but it was always *there* — cut, rubbed, applied, passed down in gesture rather than formal instruction. To know aloe is to know a way of caring

that is practical, embodied, and relational, where healing emerges not from prescription but from lived familiarity with land and plant.

In this sense, aloe forms part of a living medicine cabinet — grounded in the belief that the land itself holds the remedies necessary for sustaining life. Knowledge here is not abstract or disembodied; it lives in hands that cut the plant, in skin that learns the texture of its gel, in memories of when and how it was used. This aligns with Kimmerer's (2011) framing of more-than-human relations of care, where plants are not passive resources but active participants in reciprocal practices of survival and tending.

However, aloe also exposes a tension. While older generations reach for it instinctively, younger Jamaicans often express reluctance — favouring pharmaceutical creams, bottled juices over fruit that stains hands, or fast food that promises convenience without mess. This hesitation is not trivial; it speaks to shifting assemblages of care and consumption, where land, body, climate, memory, and global capital intersect. As Doreen Massey (2004) reminds us, place is not a static container of tradition but a constellation of relations, continually reconfigured through movement, aspiration, and economic force.

Following Dotson's (2011) critique of epistemic violence, the quiet dismissal of plants like aloe in favour of branded wellness products or imported medicine reveals a deeper, structural devaluing of local, land-based knowledge. To disregard aloe is to participate, even subtly, in the erosion of an epistemology that ties care directly to place. What interests me here is how a single plant — in its uses, neglects, and quiet survival — can open out onto broader questions of food sovereignty, memory, and the politics of knowing what heals. Aloe's place in Jamaican daily life reveals that intergenerational knowledge persists through ordinary acts of tending and using plants. This is one of my core answers to my second research sub-question.

## Cleo – age 68

Cleo has known of my existence much longer than I have been aware of hers. None of this research would have unfolded in the way it did without my connection to her. She plays a special role in this work; she remained a bridge or translator (if you will) between Jamaican and British-Jamaican realities. Having spent most of her adult life in England, Cleo has undergone (and continues to undergo) the transition to life in Jamaica. That is appreciating the ways that Jamaicans live in Jamaica. No easy task and something that I spent my time trying to nuancedly tap into – i.e. how and why Jamaicans do the things they do in a cooking and gardening related context. Subtle things like how you answer the door, being less smiley, reiterating thick patois, making me a cup of tea – Cleo's assistance throughout this process was vital for me to be able understand, at such a quick pace, what was happening around me. This extended to being aware of who was concerned with what, the interest people had in me, the things I should be paying attention to, and fundamentally how to *be* in this context as someone who is very familiar with my home context/my point of reference.

## 4.3 Cerasee

This section explores how **cerasee** practices illuminate the tensions between inherited knowledge and diasporic forgetting, offering insight into how knowledge is transmitted or lost.

**Cerasee** was another figure that kept cropping up during my research in Mandeville, not always in use, but always present in story, in memory, in the quiet authority of older women's voices. Often described as something "you'd find in the back of your grandma's cupboard," it sat somewhere between medicine and myth. **Cerasee** tea bags, now neatly packaged and pushed to the back behind imported herbal blends, carry the trace of an older practice**:** the summer **washout**, a ritual where children were made to drink the bitter brew to cleanse the body from the inside out. *"It's good for you even if you don't like it,"* someone told me — a phrasing that holds both care and command. Today, **cerasee** appears again in natural soaps, sold at wellness stalls and tourist markets, its bitterness made palatable through branding, its history smoothed over into a signifier of authenticity.

Where the avocado has moved through traditions of care and memory, **cerasee** moves through discipline and relation. Its bitterness becomes a pedagogy of connection — to the body, to land, to an idea of health that is not about comfort but about maintenance, surveillance, and care as an active verb. bell hooks (2009) argues that care, particularly in Black domestic contexts, is rarely sentimental. It is structured, often strict, and deeply social**,** shaping subjects through acts of insistence, not just nurture. The **washout** ritual sits within this logic, an act of collective bodily regulation, where health is not privatised but lived as a shared ethic, maintained through repeated, even resented ritual. From a colonial standpoint, hygiene and nutrition is more about survival than anything else. Being sick or hurt – could cost you or your family's life – therefore care here is intrinsically related to labour (Mezzadri, 2024).

This aligns with Caribbean feminist epistemologies, which understand knowledge not as abstract insight but as something that passes through the gut, through obedience, through the bitter swallow. In this sense **cerasee** operates as a relational technology, binding generations through an embodied act of ingestion that says: *"This is what it takes to stay well."* As Mezzadri (2024) argues, bodies are disciplined in and through labour; here, the labour is not only economic but affective, enacted *through* small, gendered acts of care that tether the domestic to the agrarian.

What interests me here, is how **cerasee**, like aloe, shows how plants can hold together systems of relation — human and more-than-human — even as global pharmaceutical and wellness markets attempt to extract, repackage, or replace them. The change in usage and understanding

of this plant, relays a story about shifting economies of knowledge, value and taste — and what gets lost, or made bitter, in the process. Namely that under capitalist pressures, indigenous or ancestral knowledges are often dismissed, replaced by ideals of convenience and efficiency which erase the need and frequency of certain traditions to be practiced.

Deviating slightly here from the use of **cerasee** itself toward the cultural significance of this practice, I want to introduce the significance of cultural values into this discussion. During an interview with Cleo where we touched on her time as a primary school teacher in Jamaica, she mentioned the vast differences in attitudes towards education, respect and community between Jamaica and England. Something she ascribes to values nurtured in upbringing in Caribbean versus Western value systems. In conversation with myself, Cleo recalls:

> C: Then I came to Jamaica for the year… teaching in Jamaica completely spoiled me. My students gave me no trouble whatsoever. They highly respected me, and I just had a lovely time at school. …I'd be doing my shopping… on a Saturday, and all of a sudden someone's grabbing my bag. When I look around, it is one of my students. 'Our teachers don't carry their bags' [they said]. I said, 'don't be so stupid'. I said, 'I carry my bags'. [They said] 'we'll carry it for you'. So it was, you know, it was those sorts of experiences that I'd never, ever seen or recognized in England that really made me fall in love with Jamaica.
>
> L: And what are those values that are instilled in Jamaican children that are not in the UK?
>
> C: Oh gosh, respect for elders. Number one. That's a big, big one. … Yeah, I suppose it is home training, the respect they have for the teachers, what else, and the immaculate way they kept their uniforms, that the pride in attention, in an attention to their to their parents…was a major [one]. Okay, which I've never seen in English schools…not in the everyday school In…England, you couldn't compare that with the everyday school in Jamaica. And you know the respect they have for…their materials, their…So it's a completely different mindset, a completely different everything, just completely different.

Western educational systems/curriculums tend to orientate achievement on individualistic outcomes – i.e. your ability to argue a specific opinion, or what progress that child has achieved. In the Caribbean on the other hand, schools focus on attitudes towards others, presentation, and willingness to help or participate, as highly as they do academic attainment. These communal values were further reinforced when Cleo and I visited Auntie B. (Cleo's aunt). Auntie B., a woman in her late nineties, recalled "not having much growing up" (Auntie B., 2025), but always looking her best when she went to school. Hygiene, presentation, and effort are aspects of

Caribbean culture that are instilled from a young age. Equally, 'respecting your elders' and caring for your community is another, something I saw firsthand in Jamaica where most weeks Cleo, Pinto and I would spend time with elders in the community.

Through **cerasee**, we see how bodies become sites of cultural discipline and care and how this reflective of Caribbean values. Revealing the fragility and resilience of knowledge transmission across diaspora.

## 4.4 Alligator Pond

It is a hot afternoon, but the clouds and the water are giving the illusion that it is much cooler than it is. I am observing the various ways that the sand collects around our feet as the tide comes in and out. I am sitting with my aunty and her cousin. We are three women – twenty-seven, sixty-eight, and seventy-one – who share the fact that we have Jamaican heritage but have spent considerable amounts of our lives in London. I am listening to my aunties talk about their experiences of coming to Jamaica to look after their elderly parents who had come back to Jamaica to retire. This is a very common phenomena/journey for Caribbeans who immigrated to the UK between the 1950-1960s, with the hopes of building a better future for themselves and their children. The aim for many of them was to return home.

Although I am facing the sea front, towards the shore where the waves that crash around our feet are warm, I can also feel the cool current of the river flowing in from behind me. We chose this part of the beach intentionally – "where the river meets the sea" (Cleo, Aug 2025). For now, we are the only people occupying this space. The rest of the locals are far down by the shallow part of the river, also known as Alligator Pond *(figures 22 & 23)*. This was my great-aunt's favourite river to visit when she came back to Jamaica from London to check on her house. This is also the same place where my older sister simultaneously spotted a dead man on one side of the river and a baptism happening on the other side. Lying down in the salty water, I'm not sure what exactly it is that I find so comforting, but it is almost as if this place already knows me. I have only been here one other time. I look over at the horizon, today it is a little hazy. My aunties are exfoliating their feet with the black sand. Taking small clumps of sand in their palms and rubbing their heels slowly. Our feet are almost touching; "Lauren come on" they babble at me mid story. I joined in.

~

### 4.4.1 Musing on Alligator Pond

This scene involves three women, all with Jamaican heritage but having spent most of their lives in the UK. Sitting down at the outermost stretch of the beach, far away from the rest of the locals, all of whom observed our movements as we walked further down the shore. Both Cleo (now living predominantly in Jamaica) and Marcia (who still lives in the UK but visits regularly) shared with me the stark transition they underwent to look after their elderly parents, who had 'come back home']. Interestingly, even though Marcia and Cleo had both had multiple experiences visiting Jamaica throughout their childhood and early adult lives, they both expressed how they could never be prepared for what it took to navigate a Jamaican way of life (as the 'adult'). Funnily enough, this compass was not something passed to them from their parents (born in Jamaica), instead it was something they had to stumble and figure out on their own or with the connections they had at their disposal. What was clear was that they were not (and continue to not be) perceived as 'true Jamaicans' – nor was I. With that said, it is undoubtable that we were all inherently Jamaican. The sheer glee of being able to eat fresh Escovitch fish and dumplings at the beach (*figure 24*), the feeling of the sun on our skin, reaching for a Red Stripe beer whilst humming along to Beres Hammond – all quintessentially Jamaican-specific experiences. And yet, there were things that would only ever qualify us anything more than British Jamaicans. The way we walked, the way we talked, the way we dressed.

In the previous sections, I traced how seemingly ordinary plants and food practices — avocado, aloe, **cerasee** — operate as sites of embodied knowledge production. Each encounter made visible how food and plant relations teach through the senses: through taste, touch, memory, and ritual. Rather than treating knowledge as abstract or discursive, these moments showed how knowledge is carried through the body, passed between generations not only through speech but through gesture, ingestion, and care.

Across these examples runs a shared thread: plants act as important actors in the making of cultural memory and the reproduction of life. Whether through tenderness (avocado), discipline (**cerasee**), or everyday healing (aloe), these practices reveal a moral and ecological economy of care that is lived at the level of the domestic and the intimate. What may appear as small acts — applying aloe to a burn, drinking a bitter tea, carrying fruit across an ocean — are in fact *modes of epistemic preservation*, holding together memory, land, sovereignty, and care in ways that challenge the extractive logics of both colonial agrarian histories and contemporary wellness markets.

In this sense, embodied knowledge becomes a method of survival and continuity, enacted through relation with land and more-than-human life. These plants are not passive resources;

they are active participants in diasporic and agrarian memory**,** holding open small but significant spaces of connection, even as global forces accelerate disconnection.

If chapter four traced how knowledge is carried in the body, Chapter five turns toward the question of what bodies carry home — and what it means to seek belonging through return. This is the crux of why these kinds of explorative research are relevant today. I now shift focus to how return — to land, to lineage, to place — becomes a practice of healing, particularly for those who move between Jamaica and its diasporic elsewhere. Here I examine belonging not as a fixed origin but as a process, one negotiated through rituals of return, sensory recognition, and acts of care that defy distances. If avocado, aloe, and **cerasee** reveal how the land remembers us, the next chapter asks what it means for diasporic subjects to remember the land in return.

# 5 Belonging, Healing and Diasporic Relations

In this final chapter I will draw together themes through the affective dimensions of return; this involves the emotional geographies of food, land, and kinship that heal or restore disrupted lineages. I will take the opportunity here to meaningfully reflect on the diasporic desire to connect Jamaica, and more broadly a sense of cultural identity (Hall, 1990). Not as nostalgia but as political yearning and struggle for ontological continuity.

The phrase "going [back] home" (see section 5.4) was something I was exposed to on a regular basis. As a community of immigrants, the idea was to head abroad, save up some money and head *back home* (in this case back to Jamaica). Whether it was my granddad saying "back home the mangoes are soo sweet" (interview, 5 Sept 2025), despite the fact that he has spent over sixty years residing in London. Or a family friend asking me if I would consider 'coming home', meaning to move 'back' to Jamaica at some stage in my life. This is a concept, widely theorised by diaspora and identity scholars. Theoretically, the idea of returning back to a diaspora is less of a discovery of origin, and more of a re-orientation or connection to it (Brah, 1997). Thus 'going home' becomes a dance between desire, memory and becoming. For Hall (see 1990, 1992) diasporic identity is a positioning. One that creates space to reconnect or renegotiate belonging. Therefore 'home' becomes a transitory site of remaking, longing, and memory. A negotiation of belonging across generations, histories, and geographies.

This chapter attends to how return happens in fragments — through fruit, through music, through the smell of **scallion** frying in oil — and how the body becomes the site where these fragments are stitched back into meaning. Here, land serves as the container for both healing and memory restoration to take place; sometimes welcoming, sometimes estranging. To return is not always to be recognised; it is to learn again how to read place, and how to allow place to read you in return.

Earlier, I asked the reader to listen while moving through these pages not solely to create a specific atmosphere, but to enact a method. Music, like food, is a vehicle of diasporic memory, a form of return that reaches the body before the intellect. In this way, what follows explores how belonging is sensed before it is claimed, and how diasporic return is lived through sensory practices rather than declarations of identity.

The last chapter illustrated how plants hold embodied knowledge, whereas this chapter asks what it means for bodies shaped elsewhere to seek knowledge of land again — not through

possession, but through attentive contact. The following sections will explore how Jamaican knowledges are evolving diasporically, it will also touch on my positionality, and the obstacles that interrupt cultural continuities.

## 5.1 The Art of Picking Fruit

The following vignette explores fruit-picking as a relational encounter that reveals how knowledge survives through guidance, proximity, and shared practice.

Fruit picking became one of the first ways I learned *how* knowledge moves through relation. It rarely happened as a formal lesson. Instead, Ms Curdell calling me over to check an ackee pod I had just picked (*Figure 25*), for example, became a moment where I was positioned not as a researcher but as someone's granddaughter. Demonstrating an entangled network of care and education that operated through touch, instruction, and shared time. These encounters were not just about the fruit itself but about how to approach it. That is, how to know when ackee has opened safely on its own.

These examples encompass my understanding of knowledge here as a practice of care**.** Ultimately the lessons I was being taught were about sustenance/survival; how to know when a plant is poisonous or when to a pick a fruit when it is at its peak nutritional value (or ripeness). In these moments, instruction did not separate from affection; correction was disguised with humour and knowing how to pick fruit was inseparable from knowing how to be with others. In other words, these were communal lessons being passed down from generation to generation. A lot of the time, the way I was being told to do something never had a reason behind it – it was just 'because [I said so]'. In some sense, the teaching never ended at the tree or in that particular location. The fruit initiated a sequence of tasks — washing, de-shelling, distributing, storing, checking back in a day or two to see if it had softened enough to eat. In this way, fruit became another medium through which care extended, moving between bodies and households, reinforcing a social rhythm of tending and sharing.

Following feminist political ecology and Black Caribbean domestic epistemologies, we can interpret these acts as forms of world-making labour, where care is not abstract sentiment but a daily practice that binds people to each other and to land (see Rocheleau, 2013; Harcourt, 2015; hooks, 2009). To pick fruit is to enter into a relationship with place. Not to master or control it; but to learn its timing, its moods, its tastes. And importantly, it is also to be invited into a lineage

of knowledge-keepers, even if temporarily. Being corrected on how to pick mountain guava (*figure* 26) becomes an initiation gesture, a quiet inclusion into the rhythms of local memory.

What this reveals is that knowledge in this context is not a fixed object but a relational affair — something that happens between bodies, land, and gesture. Rather than simply documenting this knowledge, my position in these moments was to participate in its circulation, to feel how it is remembered, repeated, sometimes lost, sometimes remade—particularly along diasporic lines, where return becomes a re-learning of care from those who never left. The teachings embedded in picking fruit reveals both continuity and vulnerability, showing how diasporic distance can weaken or reshape intergenerational transmission.

## 5.2 The Fundamentality of Music

The reflections that follow present music as a way of knowing that shapes belonging and cultural memory across migration.

I'd like to move on to the importance of valuing different epistemologies – or ways of understanding the word. In short, it requires learning to appreciate the value of the ways in which our relationships to food, music, land, nature and each other can shape the way we interpret and perceive the world. As Trouillot (2002) and Glissant et al. (2019) suggest, everyday practices like food, music, and gardening offer entry points into the community's way of knowing and living.

As mentioned in the methodology section, music occupied an important role in this excursion. Drifting from car radios, spilling out of cars promoting presidential electoral campaigns, blaring from roadside speakers, and wrapped itself around quiet moments on verandas. From my research journal, I have recounted (research journal, 21st July 2025)):

> Music | about 4ish after we got back from visiting Ms D. P. decided he needed to test the sound system for the party tomorrow. P. = Music, wine, herbs[6] ("sorry if I'm disturbing you")
>
> - His sound system is angled towards the window in the back room. 3 or 4 black speakers, stacked on top of each other (height: taller than me)
> - Bass blasting

There was a specific day, where Pinto decided to play Eva Cassidy's album, Songbird (see playlist). I cannot reiterate what happened to me in that moment, but my heart melted.

[6] By using the word "herbs" here, I am referring to marijuana.

Potentially because it reminded me of home and my mother's music taste. We all sang together on the veranda, and shortly after I listened to the song on repeat for the next few days. Listening to Pinto's sound system on the front porch, I began to understand music not only as entertainment but as a form of diasporic infrastructure — something that holds together bodies, memory, and land. Music did not simply mark time; it created conditions for belonging**,** forming a kind of sonic ecology that made return feel possible even before my patois-speaking abilities could catch up.

Where fruit offered a language of touch, ripeness and care**,** music offered a language of vibration, pulse and recognition. To hear a familiar bassline in Jamaica as someone who grew up hearing that same bassline in London is to experience what Gilroy (2003) refers to as the counterculture of modernity**.** It becomes a circuit of sound that binds dispersed communities through shared frequencies rather than shared geography. In this way, diasporic return is often experienced sonically before it is cartographically. And so, belonging arrives not through the certainty of origin but through an underlying recognition or sense of comfort becomes conscious thought.

This aligns with the work of diaspora theorists like Avtar Brah (1997) and James Clifford (1994), who argue that home is not simply a place but a set of relations, continually improvised and reactivated. Music, like food and gardening, becomes an act of survival, a way of reclaiming continuity in the face of systemic fragmentation (Trouillot, 1992). These practices do not merely preserve tradition — they create new grounds for relation, new ways of being Caribbean outside the geographic borders of the region. In this sense, listening is also a form of care, a way of tuning oneself into a collective rhythm that refuses isolation.

To take music seriously here is t*o expand the category of who and what teaches*. As in Haraway (2016) and Kimmerer's (2013) calls to recognise more-than-human teachers, music joins land, elders, and even beetles as agents of knowledge**.** Knowledge does not only speak — sometimes it sings, vibrates, or hums at a low frequency on a humid evening. To listen is, therefore, to enter into relation with. Or to accept that we are not the only narrators of belonging — sound, land, and more-than-human presences narrate too. By foregrounding music as a mode of knowledge, this vignette highlights how certain epistemologies are reproduced or lost depending on diasporic landscapes.

## Auntie B. (Google) – age 96

I am still not over the privilege I felt to be able to converse with Auntie B. With almost a century of life under her belt, I am aware that she has *seen* some things. Being Cleo's aunty, I was introduced as one of Cleo's adopted daughters (meaning I was part of the family). Ready for a chat, a laugh and a gossip, Auntie B. graciously made me feel at home.

Often referred to (by her family) as 'Google', Auntie B's sense of humour, quick-wittedness, and navigation of her three phones had me fixed in a perpetual state of awe. This combined with the fact that the stories of her childhood, meant that I was being exposed to her sense of Jamaica in the 1930s. Astonishing.

Auntie B has not only lived many different lives, including one in the UK, but she shared with me the different skills she had gathered along the way. Some of which were sewing, tailoring and dressmaking. The picture below is of a dual-coloured woollen doily that she had made in her younger years.

## 5.3 Scallion

I continue to explore how acts of cultivation signal both the desire to sustain knowledge and the challenges of reproducing land-based practices across diaspora. The act of planting **scallion** was small and unspectacular, but it stayed with me. I recorded some of it in a research journal (Research Journal, 26th July 2025) I was keeping at the time:

> C. woke me up with some tea around 08:30ish the same way grandma would. Called my name whilst coming into my room. She proceeded to do more housework, she then served P. his porridge, followed by me, followed by herself.
> P. was peeling Cassava when I woke up so I went over to him to see what he was doing and to capture some of it on my phone.
> I helped him out a little bit (all of these small things he wouldn't ask usually but since he was struggling to walk today he asked if I could wash off the cassava and put it in the freezer. He also told me to plant some **scallion** – P: "ya cyan com' a Jamaica and not plant nuttin'". So I did, used the machete and planted 4 **scallion**

Pinto saying "ya cyan com ah Jamaica and not plant nuttin'" is Jamaican patios for, 'you can't come here and leave without planting anything for next year'. He was essentially saying that I must plant something for when I next return. In that moment, I recognised that this was not just an activity; it was an invitation into a temporal practice of care — one that extends beyond the span of my visit. Planting **scallion** was a way of inscribing presence into the land, not through ownership but through contribution, through the soft labour of leaving something that will grow when I am gone.

The process was simple: red dirt, a trowel, cassava peelings, sun, water. Yet within this simplicity lay a dense set of relations — between soil and memory, labour and future, body and belonging. To plant was to participate in what Gilroy (2003) calls an unfinished return, where belonging is not restored through grand declarations of identity but through small, daily, and embodied acts that reaffirm connection to land despite histories of rupture.

This moment clarified for me that Jamaica is not only a place of belonging, but of repair. A site where knowledge is not just remembered but re-enacted into the future through care-labour. **Scallion**, like music and fruit, becomes a vessel for cultural resilience, ensuring that ways of seeing, cooking, and tending persist despite the pressure to forget under global regimes that have little interest in preserving such knowledges.

To plant is to declare, quietly, that knowledge survives not because it is archived but because it is practised. Yet this also reveals a contradiction: while these practices endure, disconnection and

complacency threaten their continuation. Younger generations — shaped by convenience, migration, and global consumer culture — overlooked (at least during my research) the significance of planting **scallion**, seeing it as labour rather than legacy. This is not a moral failing but a symptom of a broader epistemic shift, where what is considered valuable knowledge is increasingly dictated by systems that do not recognise slow, land-based care as expertise.

Thus, awareness and intent become crucial factors here. Knowledge does not simply pass itself on; it requires relational conditions that make transmission possible — invitation, presence, repetition, and the willingness to learn through doing. In this way, planting **scallion** became both method and metaphor: a commitment to nourishing research**,** where learning is not extractive but mutual, sensory, and oriented toward continuity rather than collection**.**

This brings me to the end of the analysis section, where I have attempted to explain how the Caribbean epistemology is a relational one. It does not function in an individualistic, profit-oriented and competitive way. Instead, it adopts a collective, temporal, caring and reciprocal nature.

My aim here is not to speak about the nature of all Jamaicans – nor can this be applied to the whole of the Caribbean. However, from the research that I have carried out, in relation to the food and land practices I observed in St Elizabeth and London, these are the themes that stood out to me. The logic behind "planting for next year" demonstrates that knowledge reproduction is a forward-looking act, and that diasporic life complicates the conditions needed for such regeneration.

## 5.4 Going 'back home'

This final section demonstrates how returning 'home' reveals the tensions between belonging and distance, shaping the fate of intergenerational knowledge. Throughout the course of this research, I have been asked many times if I 'would return back to Jamaica?'. This is not a straightforward question, and one that I am going to take the time to elaborate on.

Return (see section 5 on diaspora studies), in the diasporic sense, is rarely a clean journey from one place back to another. It is instead a process of re-entering relation, often hesitantly, sometimes through longing rather than arrival. For those of us shaped in-between — British Jamaican, raised in London but tethered by memory, taste, and family to elsewhere — return cannot be understood purely in geographical terms. Following Gilroy's (2003) insistence that diaspora moves through routes rather than roots, and Glissant's (2009) refusal of origin as a

singular point of belonging, I approach return here not as a conclusive act but as a (em)bodily negotiation: a series of encounters through which belonging is rehearsed, questioned, and sometimes briefly felt.

To begin with I have always felt Jamaican (to some extent). The reality that I was born into was shaped by Jamaican understandings, and so this is my frame of reference (although I have only ever been to Jamaica twice in my lifetime). I have an affinity and connections with the country, so returning will be inevitable. The degree to which I return is what I would like to explore here.

Currently there are a variety of hesitations. The first being that navigating Jamaica safely and in a functionable fashion would take a lot of work. In a sense I would be subscribing to a new environment, where the population I would be engaging with would forever see me as an outsider or "a foreigner" (at least to some degree). That is someone with access to commodities and environments that they may not have access to. Secondly Jamaica is all about who you know. My connections in the Caribbean currently are very small. Could this lead to a sense of isolation (potentially), does this mean that I could not build them slowly? Of course not. But outside of Cleo and Pinto's communities, it would take a while to build a network of people with similar interests to me. Meanwhile, there is a strong network (starting to dwindle), of British-Caribbeans. That has been established for over 60 years. A community that I am strongly a part of, which I would be leaving behind. Thirdly, I am also accustomed to a certain way of life in the UK, bureaucratic and digital infrastructure meaning for example having constant access to reliable wifi or being able to pay a bill online. Jamaica does not operate in the same way. Everything about how to function in Jamaica requires patience. One of Cleo's relatives summarised this perfectly, she commented "Jamaicans are used to making do or doing without. Unlike people…from the West who expect things now, or yesterday". And I couldn't agree, this isn't to say I couldn't adjust, but it certainly is a transition that shouldn't be underestimated. Fourthly, and I know this sounds trivial but bear with me, adjusting to a climate full of mosquitos where you are the one with 'foreign blood' is not something to take for granted. Indeed, there are ways to manage this, but again this requires another level of adjustment. Finally, and most importantly, all of this does not mean that I am not interested in working with or on issues related to building or supporting Jamaica (and its communities). Nor does it mean that I would not consider moving there at some point in my life. These reflections bring up the tensions and obstacles to knowledge transmission across geographies. Namely that through processes of migration cultural continuity (as in one set of knowledges), becomes disrupted. That is my understanding of food and land practices as a British Jamaican twenty-eight-year-old, would not entirely match that of a Jamaican of the same age.

In summary, the answer is not no, but the answer right now is not yes either for a variety of reasons. However, I would like to stress that I will always identify with Jamaica and will spend the rest of my life in relation with its people and cultures. This conclusion demonstrates that returning is both a method and a metaphor: it reveals what endures, what has shifted, and what is still possible for future generations. I have posited that diasporic knowledge is an uneven and relational process and I have presented some of the obstacles to its reproduction.


## Pinto (Ras P.) – age 71

This person is another central figure in my research. Again, without this man's networks and abilities to build community – fulfilling this research in the time I had would have been a very different story. He adopted me entirely into his way of life, pulling on all sorts of knowledges to help me gather the information and resources to make this project viable.

I am aware that I have said this a few times already, but the stories and experiences that Pinto shared with me are quite unlike anything I have ever encountered before. A self-professed Rastafarian at twelve years old, led him to being kicked out of his strictly Christian household. Since then, he has lived all over the world, studying as a RAF engineer in the UK, working in America, Middle East and the Caribbean. To try and summarise this man's experiences to the confines of this box would be a futile task.

To me the most invaluable lesson Pinto left with me was *how* to be still. To stress less, and to go with the flow. Pinto's ability to build, nurture and harness connection was a masterclass I never knew I needed. Not only this, but he is a fierce protector and made me feel incredibly safe, from the moment I touched down to the moment I left Jamica.

# 6.Conclusion

I maintain that this thesis was never solely about plants or food, but about knowledge, care, survival, and belonging in the aftermath of colonial and capitalist pressures. This research has been committed to raising the importance of Caribbean epistemologies before they disappear with the older generations (at least in the diasporic context). These ontologies are linked to legacies, struggle, resilience, and adaptation and deserve to be protected. Through the framing of embodied knowing, that is my approach to treat gardening, storytelling, and cooking as affective knowledges, I have focused on how people reproduce knowledge. In short, cultural knowledge is (re)produced through doing, feeling, and relating.

Food and land practices are forms of cultural and ontological resilience, these are not just tools for building the economy or stability of a society, they are a way of nurturing personhood, belonging, and relational identity, especially amongst diasporic or displaced peoples.

To revisit my research questions, I began by arguing that despite global capitalist pressures, in rural Jamaica food and land practices transmit knowledges through relational and embodied means. Next, I define Jamaican local knowledge broadly as an affective and embodied epistemology mediated through acts of care, intergenerational transmission and sensorial practices. I then attribute changes in geographies and generation to the reconfiguration of knowledge transmission, that have created ruptures or a weakening of these modes of transmission across distance and time. Lastly, I assert that the reproduction of Jamaican epistemologies is undermined by colonial and modern development logics, who devalue everyday ways of knowing. Reshaping rural livelihoods and community-rooted practices whilst privileging Western economic and epistemic priorities.

This research speaks to the survival of minoritised knowledges in the wake of colonial disruption. I position this work as restorative, reciprocal and relational – foregrounding the importance of nourishing and care*ful* research, conducted by and amongst people in diasporic communities. The concluding point of this research brings together the observations I have made during the short duration of this research, rather than making any finalising remarks on the trajectories of knowledge production for Jamaica and its diaspora. In my opinion, this would be a futile task. Over the course of this academic exercise, I have learnt that there is something quite exposing and vulnerable about researching a topic or an issue that sits so closely to your own positionality. However, there is an equal amount of reward that comes from knowing that I have

represented the voices of people that matter to me. The entirety of this exercise has been one of deep reflection, gratitude, and care.

At its core, this work asks you to recognise that Jamaican gardening and cooking practices are not simply domestic or nostalgic pastimes. They are political, epistemic, and affective acts of survival.

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Lauren (Me) – age 28

I can only hope that this paper in some way nurtures the hearts of those who read it – academics, farmers, policymakers, and elders alike.

As someone raised within this Caribbean orientation, I care deeply about the practices I have shared in this paper. These small details are intrinsically intergenerational and remain the nexus of what I have tried to foreground in this work. Why? Well, because this is how you keep these cultural legacies alive. These stories are derived from real histories and epistemologies, that deserve to be preserved.

In this paper, I am offering a form of *care-full* research; research that aims to nourish not extract. One that is equally restorative for me, my participants and potentially my readers.

I hope that some part of this remains with you, long after you have taken in the last word. Thank you for *listening*.

# Photo Appendix

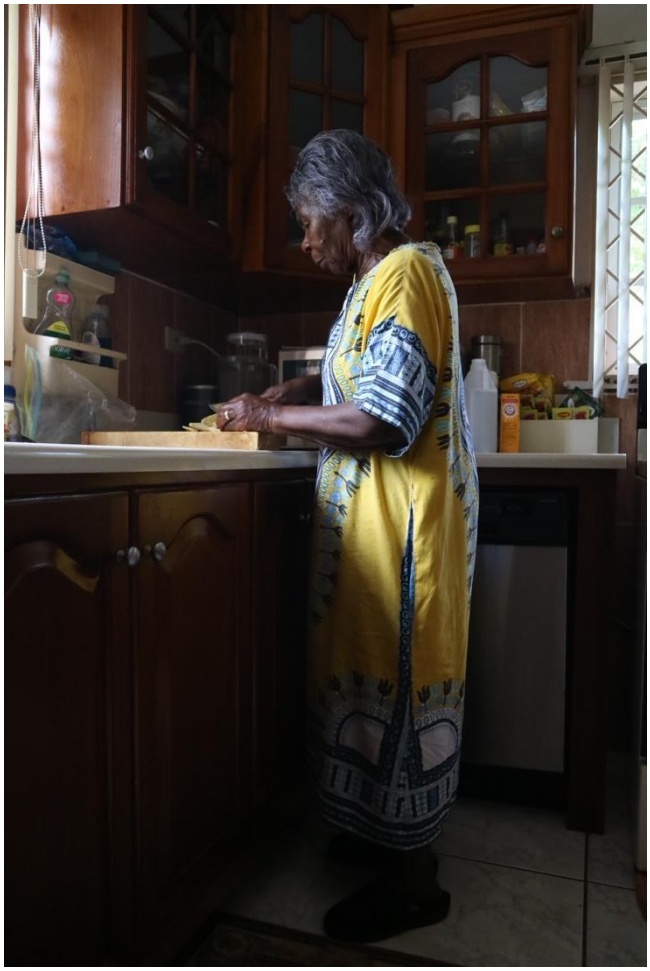

*Figure 1*: Ms D. in her kitchen

*Figure 2&3*: Washing and rinsing potatoes in the sink w Ms Denton

*Figures 4-7 (Top Left, clockwise to Bottom left)*: Preparing and baking sweet pudding with Ms D. and a photo of Ms D.'s oven; Sweet potato pudding baking and breadfruit roasting

*Figure 8: Jamaican sweet potatoes*

*Figure 9: Pinto, a friend and I collecting them*

*Figures 10 & 11*: Pictures of aloe plants (in the UK and JA)

*Figures 12-14(Top centre, Bottom left, Bottom right)*: Pictures of the Veranda in Jamaica (various fruit and vegetables on the ground)

*Figure 15*: Sound system on the Veranda in Jamaica

*Figure 16:* The camouflaged avocadoes above the goat pen

*Figure 17:* The black gate

*Figure 18:* The path


*Figure 19:* The shed

*Figure 20*: Raking with Val

*Figure 21:* The view I had listening to Beetle Symphony (except it was pitch black)

*Figures 22 & 23:* Of locals at Alligator Pond

*Figure 24:* Fried dumpling and Escovitch fish at Alligator Pond

*Figure 25:* Me holding an ackee fruit

*Figure 26*: A calabash of mountain guava

# Glossary: Patois and Colloquialisms

**Cerasee**| *Sir-see* – The leaves and stem of a bitter melon plant, commonly used to make tea

**Hinglish**| (Jamaican patois for) English

**Hominy** (corn)|*Hum-ih-nie* – Corn that has undergone a chemical process which softens the kernels causing them to become tender and slightly chewy

**Gyal**| (Jamaican patois for) Girl

**Pear**| Another word for avocado in the Jamaican vernacular. Coming from the term 'avocado pear'

**Runnings**| This literally means the way that things are run, or an understanding of

**Scallion**| *Scel-yon* – is another word for spring onion

**Vybzing**| The act of chilling out or to go with the flow. Derived from the word vibe, meaning a feeling, or the verb 'to vibe'

**Washout**| Is a traditional herbal detoxification or cleansing process, used to remove parasites and toxins from the body

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