

Unit 6

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN CANADIAN LITERATURE

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AFRO-CANADIAN LITERATURE

An anthropological investigation into the cultural aspects of Canadian nationalism reveals that its notion of nation is narrated with diverse cultural and ethnic entities. And thus, Canada is aptly described as a mosaic of cultures; and the blacks or Negroes constitute a significant aspect of Canadian cultural history. The Negro has become an actor in the context of an emerging national history, as a person who acts and reacts, as well as one acted upon.

One of the ongoing controversies in the black Canadian community revolves around appropriate terminologies. Some may refer to black Canadians as Afro-Canadian or African Canadian. Caribbean Canadian is often used to refer to black Canadians of Caribbean heritage, although this usage can also be controversial because the Caribbean is not populated only by people of African origin. The Caribbean includes large groups of Indo-Caribbeans, Chinese Caribbeans, European Caribbeans, Syrian or Lebanese Caribbeans, and Amerindians. The same racial diversity is also true of Africa, although this is far less frequently cited as an argument against the use of African Canadian. The term Afro-Caribbean-Canadian is occasionally used in response to this controversy, although as of 2006 this term is still fairly rare.

Most black Canadians could trace their ancestry back to people who were indigenous to Africa. The vast majority have relatively recent origins in the Caribbean, while others trace their lineage to the first slaves brought by British and French colonists to British North America.

The history of blacks in Canada prior to the 1833 abolition of slavery in the British colonies, though extensive, is rarely mentioned in Canadian media or education. The first recorded black to set foot on land now known as Canada was a free man named Matthew DeCosta, who traveled with Samuel de Champlain as a translator.

Many black Canadians trace their lineage through twentieth century migration from the United States, Latin America, The Caribbean, or directly from Africa. There is a sizable community in Nova Scotia who trace their ancestry to freed American slaves who fled to Canada seeking refuge. Black and other Canadians often draw a distinction between those of Caribbean ancestry and those of African descent.

According to the 2001 census by Statistics Canada, 593,335 Canadians identified themselves as black (not including 70,000 other who claim to be of mixed black and European), constituting 1.97 per cent of the entire Canadian population. The majority of black Canadians live in five major Canadian cities. As of 2001, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Halifax were home to approximately 78.4 percent of all black Canadians.

According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey released in September 2003, nearly one-third (32%) of blacks said that they had experienced some form of racial discrimination or unfair treatment sometimes or often in the five years prior to 2003.

Canada is a country of emigrants- a country with long tradition of welcoming refugees and dissidents from all over the world. Blacks have lived in Canada since the beginnings of trans- Atlantic settlement. Africa is the ancestral homeland of Canada's black population, but very few arrived in Canada from there. The earliest arrivals were slaves brought from New England or the West Indies. Between 1763 and 1865 most

blacks migrating to Canada were fleeing slavery in the US. Today, the blacks constitute two percentage of Canadian population.

In 1628, nine years after the Dutch ship unloaded the cargo of Africans at Jamestown, David Kirk, the so called English conqueror of Quebec, brought a slave boy to the French shores; and Negroes were present in New France and in British North America thereafter. Oliver le Jeune is the first black to have been transported directly from Africa to Canada. He was sold in 1629 in Canada as a slave but apparently died a free man. Local records indicate that by 1759, there had been 1100 black slaves in New France. Most of these slaves lived in Montreal. Those who were slaves gained their freedom in 1834; and the black population grew in numbers and sometimes in strength during the next two decades as a result of a substantial influx of fugitives from the US.

Blacks in Canada have thus diverse historical origins. Robin Winks in his, "Blacks in Canada" distinguishes seven distinct historical groups.

1. Those who came as slave with the empire loyalists, such as the Sewells, Wentworths and Smiths.
2. The black pioneers who came to Nova Scotia as free men skilled as caulkers and coopers.
3. The Maroons, descendents of the fierce Jamaican rebels who deported to Halifax.
4. The refugee blacks who were brought to Nova Scotia between 1830 and 1816.
5. The fugitive slaves who came to Canada via underground railroads.
6. The contemporary west Indian migrants who began to arrive during the First World War who take up work in the coal mines and shipyards.

7. The urban American blacks who came to work as porters on the railroads. A recent survey shows that:

- * 70 percent of all blacks in Canada immigrated from the Caribbean and Bermuda.
- * 60 percent of all blacks (nearly two out of three) are under the age of 35.
- * There are 20,000 more black women than black men in Canada.
- * Seventy percent of all blacks live in Toronto and Montreal.
- * The number of blacks in Montreal was tagged at 101,390 and in Toronto at 240,940.

In 1793, Upper Canada became the only colony to legislate for the abolition of slavery. Black migration to British North America included a band of Jamaican maroon descendants of black slaves who escaped from the Spanish. The largest number of American blacks arrived in Canada independently, using a network of secret routes known as the Underground Railroad. It is an informal network of safe houses and people who helped fugitive slaves pass from slave states in the U.S to Free states or to Canada. And it is estimated as around 30,000 slaves had found their way to Canada via Underground Railroad. On the banks of the Detroit River, where the Underground Railroad is said to have had its terminus, the monument proclaims, "found in Canada friends, freedom and protection under the British flag..." (Bertley, 83)

With the end of American slavery in 1865, many thousands of Canadian blacks returned to the U.S, although in response to American legal inequalities small groups of black Americans continued to move into Canada. The black population in Canada did not increase substantially, until 1960s, when changes in the immigration act removed a bias against non white immigrants and permitted large number of qualified West Indians and

Africans to enter Canada. This major influx of black people has greatly outnumbered the original black population in every Canadian region.

Partly as a result of poor conditions in their new country, substantial number of blacks left Nova Scotia and New Brunswick for Sierra Leone in West Africa. In 1792 almost 1200 black Loyalists sailed from Halifax to found the new settlement of Freetown. The fugitive blacks who had arrived in Ontario via Underground Railroad typically arrived destitute. And without government land grants, they were usually forced to become laborers on the lands of others. Until the 20th century, most Canadian blacks were employed in the lower paying categories or as unskilled laborer. Many young blacks are now entering businesses, professions and trades. And it is important that until 1980, black Canadians received lower average wages than white Canadians.

In their settlements, the early blacks had the opportunity to retain cultural characteristics and create a distinct community. Styles of worship, music and speech, family structures and group traditions developed in response to the conditions of life in Canada. The chief institutional support was the separate church, usually the Baptist or Methodist, created when white congregations refused to admit blacks as equal members. Canada likes to point with pride to abolitionist tradition and its part in the Underground Railway, and thus, by implication, its superiority to the United States. But slavery existed in Canada for more than two hundred years, from as early as 1628, in New France until the abolition of slavery by the British Emancipation Act of 1833. Moreover, Canada's racial politics have been very similar to those in the United States. Robin Winks writes, "much of Canada's participation in the abolition movement resulted from geographical proximity rather than from ideological affinity. Negroes fled to Canada...for negative

rather than positive reasons, and once they encountered race and colour prejudice, not unlike they found in Massachusetts or Ohio. Free they were, but equal they were not" (109).

Traditionally, blacks are generally confined to segregated residences in the poorest areas of cities. Better housing opportunities are not available to them. There are considerable restraints on employment opportunities for blacks as well. Winks points out that the blacks who came as slaves worked primarily as household servants. The refugee slaves of the 19th century primarily found employment as farm laborers. In more recent times, blacks still occupy the lowest levels of occupational scale: 50% of Montreal black males in the 1940s were railway porters; and 80% of the working females were domestic servants. There are many examples of discrimination against blacks in public accommodations and services in Canadian history: restaurants and taverns refused to serve them in various cities during the 1930s and 1940s; they were denied the right to join the Boy Scouts or the YMCA in places like Ontario. They were denied access to beaches, parks and theatres in some cities, and in Halifax they could not be buried in Anglican cemeteries.

Black women were forced to work to support themselves. They have always played an important role in family life and have experienced considerable independence as a result. Raised in a communal fashion, frequently by their grand parents or older neighbors, black children developed fraternal relationships throughout the local community. Urbanization and increasing secularization have changed the role of the church and local community; and the new immigrants are bringing their own Caribbean and African heritage to Canada, though they too are adapting themselves to the

conditions of Canadian life. There is no longer a single black Canadian, but the historic values of a people who sought freedom in Canada continue to influence black institutions and attitudes today.

British charitable organizations sponsored schools in most of the Maritime black communities by 1780s and during the 19th century, British and American societies established schools for blacks throughout Ontario. In addition, the governments of both Ontario and Nova Scotia created legally segregated schools. Although almost every black had access to either a charity or public school, funding was inadequate and education tended to be inferior. With urbanization black children were admitted into integrated city schools. Until recently, the average black person had a lower educational level than the whites. The new migration is changing this situation dramatically. Blacks in every Canadian region except the Maritimes now have a higher standard of educational achievement than the whites.

In the field of politics, the blacks are emerging as an important and significant force. Though the blacks have never formed a large group to wield direct political influence, several individual blacks have made significant contributions in the political field. There have been black municipal councilors, judges and school trustees. William Hubbard was the acting mayor of Toronto from 1894-1907. Leonard Braithwaite was the first black federal member in 1968, and later he became lieutenant governor of Ontario in 1980s.

The diversified origin of today's black population has been a barrier in attaining a unified group identity, yet whatever be their background, the blacks face a typical set of problems. Opinion surveys and provisional human rights commission reports reveal that

racism survives and that blacks still face discrimination in several fields. This creates the basis for a common experience and encourages a common response. Fostered by black newspapers, magazines and community organizations, and enriched by greater numbers and cultural variety, a new black community is being developed in modern Canada. Today, the black multi-cultural society of Canada holds the motto onto their hearts: "Be Black and be proud" (Winks, 124).

Anto A. Paul

CARIBBEAN CANADIAN LITERATURE

In Canada's multicultural mosaic the Caribbean or West Indian immigrant group has carved out its own space and Caribbean writers have also staked a claim in the literary landscape of the nation. It is a historically established fact that Canadian immigrant policy had not encouraged African and Asian immigration. Till the 60s very few immigrants from the so called "Third World" were able to enter Canada. It was only when the 1966 White Paper on Immigration was introduced and a more non-discriminatory process of screening candidates emerged, that the number of coloured population in Canada increased substantially, with the large scale migration of West Indians, Asians , Africans and others. Canada's black population originally comprised the freed blacks who settled in parts of Canada dating from the American Revolution as well as the descendants of those slaves who used the underground railway network to flee from the U.S. to Canada. The earliest Caribbean migration to Canada took place in the second half of the eighteenth century. Besides some of the slaves

freed by British loyalists, a small band of Jamaican 'maroons' or escaped slaves came to Canada (Walker 8). Canada has its own brief history of slavery with the import of slaves from early 17th century to the 1860s. These slaves were brought from New England or the West Indies and were enslaved in New France, with most of the slaves living in or near Montreal.

West Indian migration to Canada occurred in three stages. From 1900 to 1960 the number was small. However, postwar economic conditions saw a marginal increase in the period of the 50s to the 60s, as there was a demand for cheap labour. Before the 60s, immigrants from the British colonies were employed as farmers, factory and mine workers, mechanics, domestics, porters and clerks. The second period, from 1960 to '71, corresponded with the 'liberalization' of immigration policy and saw a considerable influx of West Indians. The third period coincided with economic recession of the early 70s. In the 60s, the job market in education, health sciences, and office work, required skilled workers. The syndrome of "brain drain" from the Third World began, as Canada welcomed a certain category of immigrants from the West Indies, and other developing countries. Immigrants from the Caribbean included a minority of entrepreneurs and educated and qualified professionals, the majority however remained as taxi drivers, factory workers, and got employment in other low paying jobs, with unstable working as well as difficult living conditions (*The Canadian Encyclopedia* 1988).

It is important to remember that the Caribbean or West Indian community is not a homogenous one. There are regional, ethnic, class, historical, socio-cultural and individual difference, together with the very important linguistic ones. The colonizer's identity has left its stamp on all the post-independent nations of the region. With the decimation of the indigenous Caribs, Arawaks and Amerindians, there was no pre-colonial culture to turn to and the complex ethnic mix of the region initiated the search for an 'independent' cultural and literary identity in the Anglophone Caribbean territories in the post-independent period, an absolutely difficult task. The search for a Caribbean aesthetic has been renegotiated and redefined in the decades since independence, and it has been realized that in a plural culture a single notion of 'Caribbeanness' is untenable, rather the preferred notion is of a syncretic model of inclusiveness which accepts diversity and hybridity as the basis for both Caribbean aesthetics and cultural identity (Donnell and Welsh 6).

While the Caribbean region has settlers of diverse origins such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, Chinese, East Indian, Syrian etc., the overwhelming scholarly focus over the years has been on the African dimension of the population, resulting in an Afro-centric view of the Caribbean. This has overshadowed the considerable presence of Indian origin people, who, together with the Afro-Caribbean, formed the two major ethnic communities in Guyana and Trinidad. With the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, the British planters in Guyana and Trinidad desperately needed labour to meet the severe shortage of workers. India was the obvious alternative major source of supply.

Thus was initiated the system of indentured emigration, with the first batch of Indian labour arriving in Guyana in 1838 and Trinidad in 1845. This crossing of the waters, or the infamous *kala paani*, crops up repeatedly in Indo-Caribbean discourse. Indenture was finally abolished in 1917. The workers were mostly recruited from the rural interiors of U.P. and Bihar, some from the North-West Frontier Provinces, a small number from the south and from Bengal and Orissa, Calcutta being the main port of embarkation. The workers thus had no shared basis to establish a collective community or cultural ties. The majority were Hindus, some Muslims and a few Christians. The predominant language was the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi. Indenture was as harsh and exploitative as slavery though it allowed the Indians to retain their language and cultural practices and left them with the option of going back to India after the completion of their indentured period. But this option entailed many pitfalls, resulting in the individuals, more often than not, returning to the Caribbean and opting to be re-indentured (*Surviving the Fracture* xii).

In the early pre-independence Anglophone literary canon of the Caribbean, the literary 'motherland' was metropolitan London, and the writings of **V.S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott** and **Kamu Braithwaite** were offered as the very ground of Caribbean literary studies and undergraduate courses (Donnell and Welsh 7). However in the post-independent eras of the 60s and 70s, the limitations of a canon that had a narrow historical range and an overwhelming male and African Caribbean bias became apparent. With the emphasis on black consciousness, and emergent

Black Power movements, the writings by black and anti-colonial writers which celebrated the popular 'folk' traditions and emphasized the regional, became important ideological means of underscoring indigene identity and creolization. The complex language situation in the Caribbean becomes an important focus of its literature. The linguistic term 'creole' should not be confused with "Creole", though both derive from the Spanish *criollo* which denotes a person born in or native to the region. Creole is mostly used to describe those of predominantly European descent, settled in the Caribbean, seeing it as their home. Linguistic forms which are closest to dialect or what Kamu Braithwaite termed 'Nation Language' are denoted by the term 'creole'. These are language systems in their own right. 'Patois' or 'patwah' are less linguistically accurate terms for what is known as creole language (Donnell and Welsh 10-11). However, dialect and patois have been re-appropriated as a means of cultural resistance to Standard English, by certain writers like Trinidad born Canadian poet, essayist, and fiction writer, **M. Nourbese Philip** and members of the Jamaican theater group Sistern. The orality of creole, and its ability to express a vast emotional range, contributes largely towards its appeal. The majority of the Caribbean people use some form of creole language part of the time. It is interesting to note that Indo-Guyanese writer **Sasenarine Persaud**, who lived in Canada for a while before shifting base to Miami, objects to Braithwaite's notion of national language, as it does not take into account the East Indian linguistic specificities which have infiltrated the language of the people. The creolisation of culture and language has been in fact an area of

resistance so far as the indentured Indians were concerned. By the time they arrived, the basis of the colonial society had been laid. The dominant white culture was 'creole culture' and was opposed to 'coolie culture'. In time the basic components of creole culture, which was adopted by the blacks, developed its own legitimacy through later Black Nationalist sentiments. In the hierarchical plantation society, both 'coolie' and 'nigger' were at the bottom of the ladder. The blacks however, disparaged the 'coolie culture', claiming superiority by aligning themselves with the ruling classes' creole cultural values. The antagonism between 'nigger' / 'creole', or *kirwal* as the early Indians termed them, had its roots in several misconceptions and racial prejudices. Traditionally having held his own culture for ages, the Indian saw his culture as superior, by virtue of its being an ancient civilization (*Surviving the Fracture* xiii). The legacy of the experience of slavery and indenture has been persistent racial tensions between the two major ethnic groups, continuing in the post-independent period. Political unrest, racial tensions and marginalization led to large scale East Indian migration, particularly in Guyana's case.

The literature of the Caribbean, like its history, has been the outcome of negotiations and interactions, often enforced, between different cultures. So though there are some identifiable dominant tropes, themes and stylistic devices in Caribbean writing, tracing the various paths and bends in the continuing journey of this literature originating in an environmental and cultural space where hybridity and plurality has been the lived realities of the

people, becomes an interesting study. Since a majority of Caribbean writers are part of diasporas in Britain, Canada and the United States, it is no longer feasible to talk of a center, or a unified field of Caribbean Literature. In fact, this move away from what is seen as the central space, far from being deflating, can be seen as energizing, adding vibrancy and imaginative freedom to the writing that emanates from the Caribbean as well as the diasporic experience.

Caribbean women's writing, latecomers on the scene, came to be noted only in the 70s; by this time, an established male canon had led to identifying characteristic themes, tropes and aesthetic regional trends. One can draw a parallel here with the fate of Indo-Caribbean writing in general and Indo-Caribbean women's writing in particular. While black women's writing began to be critically read and evaluated against the well established body of post-50s Caribbean male writing and the Anglo-American and French Feminist thoughts that had paralleled the early 70s women's movement, the alternative agendas of Caribbean and Western feminist writing voicing their respective silences, often drowned Indo-Caribbean and other denominations of ethnic Caribbean women's voices (Donnell and Welsh 19).

Two distinct generations of Caribbean Canadian writers can now be located on Canada's literary map, linked to the inception of their writing activity, and also by their ethnicity. One group became active in the 60s and 70s and includes **Austin Clarke**, a 50s immigrant from Barbados. Clarke can be hailed as the pioneer of Caribbean Canadian Literature. His two early novels, *Survivors*

of the Crossing (1964) and *Amongst Thistles and Thorns* (1965) were followed by his trilogy focusing on the hardships of the immigrant experiences of the Barbadian community in 60s Toronto. They are *The Meeting Point* (1967), *The Storm of Fortune* (1973) and *The Bigger Light* (1975). *The Prime Minister* (1977) and *Proud Empires* (1986) focus on island politics in pre and post independent Barbados. Clarke has published six collections of short stories, including *When Women Rule* (1985), *Nine Men Who Laughed* (1986) *In This City* (1992) and *There Are No Elders* (1993). His short stories chronicle urban alienation, loneliness, individual struggles. His fiction interweaves dialect with Standard English, often employs inner dialogue and formal variations, like using the letter format to reveal individual psychology. Despite the often bleak and despairing portraits of urban immigrant struggle, Clarke's idealized vision hopes for a more equitable society. His more recent novels are *The Origin of Waves* (2003) and *The Polished Hoe* (2003), which won the Giller Prize and the Regional Commonwealth Prize in 2003.

Among the noteworthy younger generation of Afro-Caribbean male writers are **Andre Alexis** from Trinidad and **Cecil Foster** from Barbados. Alexis is a novelist, playwright and short story writer. It is interesting to note that racism, exile and dislocation are not the major aspects of his works. His first work of fiction *Despair and Other Stories* (1994) is powerful and disturbing, tinged with sly humour. The stories have bizarre elements; a sort of dream logic pervades them, where the real often surfaces in the guise of the surreal. His novel *Childhood* (1998), which won Books in Canada First Novel Award, was

also a co-winner for the Trillium Book Award. The novel's autobiographical elements addresses themes of loss, absence, true meaning of love, unreliability of memory, and search for knowledge. He has performed and produced the short play *Lambton, Kent* in 1995, which was later published in 1999.

Cecil Foster writes both fiction and non-fiction, focusing on social issues and experiences of emigration. His novels include *No Man in the House* (1991), *Sleep On, Beloved* (1995) *Slammin' Tar* (1998), and *Dry Bone Memories* (2001). Foster belongs to a generation of "left behind" children, whose parents left Barbados during the 50s and 60s in search for better opportunities in U.K., U.S. and Canada (Sandiford *The Antigianish Review*). *No Man in the House*, based on Foster's own experiences, depicts the protagonist as a child coping with poverty and sense of abandonment, striving to make something of his life, guided and encouraged by two people, an indomitable grandmother and an encouraging teacher. *Sleep On* addresses issues from a Caribbean mother's point of view, the compulsions triggering migration, and the consequences of long awaited reunion. In Foster's own case he was reunited with his mother after twenty one years, at the age of twenty three.

Among the Caribbean women writers, some of whose works began to attract critical acclaim in the 80s and 90s, are black women poets and writers such as **Olive Senior** and dub poets **Lillian Allen** and **Afua Cooper**, **Makeda Silvera** who projects her lesbian identity through her poetry. There is, of course, the well-known Trinidadian trio of **Claire Harris**, **M. Nourbese Philip** and **Dionne Brand**.

Recognized as one of the leading literary faces from Jamaica, Olive Senior has published eight books, two collection of poems, and three of short stories. She won the commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1987 for *Summer Lightening* (1986). Among her other works are *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995). Senior's works explore moral issues, rural-urban tensions, and issues pertaining to colonization, history, religion, race, and politics. There is subtle irony and humour in her relaxed conversational tone of voice. Lillian Allen pioneered dub poetry in Canada, and in 2003 formed the Dub Poets Collective. Dub poetry grew out of African rhythms, Jamaican reggae, and Jamaican creole language or 'patois'. It is performance based poetry which incorporates, in Allen's own words "performance, drama, fiction, theatre, music, opera, scat, acapella, comedy, video, storytelling and even electronics" ('De Dub' 15). She has successfully blurred the border between oral and written, and despite initial resistance to this subversive form by the League of Canadian Poets, Allen's efforts have made dub poetry a part of the Canadian literary repertoire. In this genre language becomes an important tool to challenge and resist colonization and Anglo/European cultural imperialism. It stresses sound, repetition, rhythm, wordplay, rather than sense—imagery, metaphor, etc., to convey themes of social oppression. Some of Allen's important works include *Rhythm an' Hardtimes* (1992), *Women Do This Every Day: Selected Poems of Lillian Allen* (1993) *Psychic Unrest* (1999).

Jamaican **Afua Cooper** belongs to a younger generation, who followed Allen's lead. She, like Allen, follows the African tradition of Griot or storyteller, who is the keeper of social memory. She has an oracular voice and feminist sensibility and sees herself in the tradition of Shamans. While raging against the inequities and the humiliations of this world, her transformative vision seeks change through the power of love. Her works include *Breaking Charms* (1983), *Memories Have Tongue: Poetry* (1994) and *Utterances and Incantations: Twelve female Dub Poets from the Black Diaspora* (1999).

The Trinidadian writers Harris, Philip and Brand have published poetry, fiction, and essays. Their dominant approach has been to foreground their triple marginalization of race, gender and class. Their highly articulate, politicized, militant voices, essentially places their writing in the genre of 'Writing of Resistance'. They subscribe to Afro-centric feminist politics and engage with existing Eurocentric standards. Since feminist thinking targets masculinist thinking, with its claim to universal subject position supported by religion, philosophy and language, an important focus of their writing is the linguistic aspect, with language becoming a vital subversive tool for deconstructing and decentering. They display an ambivalent attitude towards the coloniser's tongue. Philip's works include her collection of poems *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1986), where she uses the Caribbean "demotic" and *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), which relates in poetic prose a female traveler's quest through time

and place for Dr. Livingstone, in the course of which she discovers her colonized, black, female identity.

Dionne Brand uses Trinidadian “tag-talk”, while Lillian Allen employs Jamaican “dread talk”, a Rastafarian form of Jamaican English. This elasticity and range in the regional variations of English dialects in the Caribbean, leads to a “language continuum” that enlarges the dimensions of Canadian writing and provides “vibrancy and violation” (New 179) to the nation’s literature. Philip has also written the play *Coups and Calypsos* (1999). The play dramatizes one of the least talked about areas in Caribbean society, the issue of racial mixing or ‘douglarisation’. In Dionne Brand’s case, her lesbian identity is an important marker. Brand’s use of language and images takes into consideration her experiences stemming from homophobia, as well as issues of race, class, gender and social justice. Her poetical works include *Primitive offensive* (1982) and *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984). In her collection of poems, *No Language is Neutral* (1990), Brand rewrites the history of blacks, women and immigrants. The poems in the collection *No Language*, focus ultimately on the undeniable truth that sexism, racism and alienation are present everywhere for black women, whichever end of the hemisphere they are in, and so, no language is neutral even in the islands. Brand’s fictional works include *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (1988). Her debut novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), passionately denounces the discrimination faced by women, minorities and lesbians. Her recent novels include *At the Full Change of Moon* (1999) and *What We All Long For* (2005).

While Brand and Philip are more confrontational, Harris's tone is milder and more willing to recognize the commonalities along with differences in a plural society. Harris's works include *Fables From the Woman's Quarters* (1984), *Drawing Down a Daughter* (1992), *Dipped in Shadows* (1996), and *She* (2000). *Drawing Down a Daughter* is a long poem, using collage technique, with fragments of verse, story, dreams, journal, all coming together to connect in the end. *She* is described as "A novel in poetry" and plumbs the depths of a woman's consciousness. Harris here once again plays with language as creative tool to narrate, through an epistolary format, the female protagonist's obsessive yearning for a child in the aftermath of a false pregnancy, her self fragmentation, leading to six different personalities expressing themselves.

Focus on selected Afro-Caribbean literary works:

Poetry :

M.Nourbese Philip's use of the Caribbean "demotic" in *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1986), underlines the political function of language. Philip pits the subversive demotic, which she calls "my only mother tongue" (Frontiers 20), a key factor in identity, against the father tongue. In "Discourse on the logic of Language" she employs a variety of formal and graphological techniques, aligned to writing in the feminine. Positioned in the center of the page is the child's painful, repetitive and contradictory chant, claiming two heritages: *and english is /my mother tongue /is/my father tongue/is a foreign lan lan lang /language//anguish/anguish* (58). In a play of words and plural meanings Philip draws attention to the daughter having "no

mother to tongue/no tongue to mother” (56). On the left margin of the page in a horizontal position lies the marginalized mother tongue, which however, because of the clear bold capitals, underscores its influence on language. The mother touches her tongue to the child’s, blowing words into her mouth: “HER WORDS, HER MOTHER’S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER’S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE” (58). Philip positions on the right of the page , in compact small italics the ‘White Father’s’ “Edict”, revealing how speech becomes a tool of domination. In this poem Philip aims to achieve a partial balance between the two tongues.

Lillian Allen’s composition “One Poem Town” from her collection *Women Do this Everyday* (1993) was written in response to the League of Canadian Poets’ initial resistance to acknowledge Dub poetry. The poem makes a dig at those occupying academic and socio-cultural power positions , differentiating and categorizing literature as ‘high’ and ‘low’. *Hey! Hey! Hey! This is a one poem town/...../ keep it kool! kool! kool! / on the page/’cause, if you bring one in/any other way/ we’ll shoot you with metaphors/tie you cordless/ hang you in high ironies/ drop a pun ‘pon your toe/...../’cause this is a one poem town/and you are not here to stay?!/Are you?* (Women 117). The last lines represent the common racist queries aimed at immigrants. The final “Are You?!” has been cunningly inflected, lending itself to a dual meaning, depending on the speaker. It could signify a threat against the dub poet, or uncertainty on the part of the discriminating ‘kool’ poets. Some readings of the poem would focus on the “dubbing” or doubling of voices and personae, in both

written and spoken versions, with the dub poet mimicking the mainstream poets, who in turn could be imitating the dub poet. Other readings explore the chasm between the depiction of mainstream Canadian literature via the image of a one-poem town and its contradiction of the multicultural ideal.(Casas). The poem enacts this ideal through its hybrid form, mixing African Caribbean rhythms with North American myths of violence in Westerns and the satirical reverberations of the title, bringing to mind the Wild West's genre's 'One-horse Town'.

Drama :

Lambton Kent : A Play,(1999) displays Andre Alexis's avant-garde inclinations. The short play takes the form of a lecture, and falls into the genre of a monologue play. Dr Mtubu an African anthropologist takes us on a journey through rural Ontario, including the counties of Lambton and Kent. Alexis's subversive wit makes the journey a comment on the White man's study of the habits of African ethnic groups in the interiors of the Dark Continent. As Mtubu passes through the villages of southern Ontario, he notes and later demonstrates via slides, maps, even two dancers-- "movement specialists", the gestures and movements of the people in Canadian small towns. The playwright has a dig at Breton's *The Last Spike*, as Mtubu theorises about the influence of the railways on Canadian behaviour patterns and indulges in quasi-academic speculations about Hickson rural folk, who used bibles to kill mosquitoes! There are surreal observations of funeral and sexual rites in rural Canada.

Fiction:

Slammin'Tar (1998), **Cecil Foster's** third novel, portrays the struggles of illegal immigrants from Barbados, who come to work for ten months on a tobacco farm at Ontario. The forty-two year old protagonist, Johnny Franklin has been with the Canadian Migrant Labour program for more than two decades. Through his and his friends and co-workers stories, the alienation and dislocation of their lives is foregrounded. After ten months, when they return 'home', to the Caribbean, they feel estranged from friends and family. Sometimes they return to wives who have turned elsewhere for emotional support. Foster depicts a vivid range of individuals and voices. He uses the Anansi motif of African oral tradition, to interweave his narratives. "Brer Anansi", the spider, associated with Bajan folklore, has a fascinating, quite often comical personality and an unapologetic subjective voice (Canadian Literature 2007). The storyteller provides moral lessons, gives mythical explanations, and warnings. The narration also at one point focuses on the farm owner's story. While the farm workers stay on for the money, they secretly dream of 'slammin' tar', that is, escaping from the farm even if it means living life as illegal immigrants. The novel highlights the meager options available to these workers.

Dionne Brand: In *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), Brand's preoccupation with the institution of slavery is evident. In this novel she interrogates diasporic identities, as she maps the lives of her black male and female characters spread over the Caribbean, America and Europe. The novel's structural as well as ideological unity ensues from the characters sharing a

cultural heritage, and family root. These men and women are linked to a common ancestor, an African slave Marie Ursule, who lived in nineteenth century Trinidad. Each chapter of the novel narrates the story of one of the descendants. Marie Ursule is presented as “queen of rebels, queen of evenings, queen of malingerings and sabotages”, had participated in a failed slave revolt and punished with lashes and as a consequence of her rebelliousness, sold several times. The ancestral figure is doubled in Marie’s daughter Bola, who as free black woman, represents her commitment to the future, as she mothers a dozen children with diverse traits and fates. Marie/Bola’s absent presence looms large over her descendants marking them with the trauma of slavery, the loneliness, rootlessness and suffering, even while inspiring them with her courage and resistance. Brand’s feat in the novel has been her ability to balance the opposing forces of race and kinship, stemming from the myth of origin in the form of Marie Ursule, with the lived realities of Marie’s globally dispersed descendents. This balancing act is evident also in the novelistic structure, which, like her characters and plots, is a hybrid form, halfway between the novel and short story collection (Dominguez 66-71).

Nearly a decade after Afro-Caribbean writer Austin Clarke, **Harold Sonny Ladoo’s** work was published. East Indian Trinidadian Ladoo’s literary debut was a brief one. His sudden death after his first novel *No Pain Like This Body* (1972) was followed by the posthumous publication of *Yesterdays* (1974). If Clarke’s early focus was on the travails of Barbadians in Toronto, Ladoo delineated the wretched lot of the indentured rural Indians in Trinidad in the

early part of the twentieth century. Ladoo's passionate, angst ridden, satirical eye censures the brutal colonizer and particularly targets imperial education.

Ladoo's influence is apparent in the writings of **Arnold Harrichand Itwaru**, hailing from Guyana, who belongs to the later generation of Caribbean writers whose publications began to appear in the 80s and 90s. Another East Indian writer **Samuel Selvon** came to Canada in the late 70s, after having become an established writer living in London since the 50s. Selvon's well-known *Moses* trilogy depicted the life of West Indians in the London of the 50s. "Angus at the Races", a short story about the escapades of two West Indian immigrants at the Calgary races, is his only work published in Canada. Selvon's death in 1994 left incomplete several fictional works as well as the work on his memoirs.

Among the East Indian Caribbean writers who started publishing in the 80s, the most prolific has been **Cyril Dabydeen**, who comes from Guyana. Dabydeen's works include poetry, short stories, novels and critical essays. He has more than seven collections of short stories, three novels and several anthologies of poems. He has been Poet Laureate of Ottawa from 1984 to 87. Some of his poetical works are *Goatsong* (1977), *Elephants Make Good Stepladders* (1982), *Coastlands: New and Selected Poems 1973-1989* (1989), *Discussing Columbus* (1997) and *Hemisphere of Love* (2000). *To Monkey Jungle* (1988), *Jogging in Havana* (1992), *Berbice Crossing* (1996), *My Brahmin Days* (2000) and *North of the Equator* (2001), form part of his short story collections. His debut novel *The Wizard Swami* (1989) and Short fiction *Dark*

Swirl (1989) was followed by the autobiographical novel *Drums of My Flesh* (2005). Dabydeen's imagination has been shaped by the polarities of space, spirit and identity. The coastal environment of his childhood in Guyana, South America, his growing up in the environs of a sugar estate, his memory of the indentured cane workers and a village comprising predominantly Indian origin labour force, with a smattering of Blacks, all formed part of his imagination. His double diasporic sensibility is fuelled by the trauma of that first crossing by his ancestors and the anxieties of starting anew in Canada. One sees a recurrent pendulum metaphor in his writing; the dialectical tension between place and psyche, the constant swing between 'here'/Canada and 'there'/Guyana/India, becoming a way to cope with a state of flux and insecurity. Dabydeen's works mostly exude a sort of wistful idealism, a desire for tolerance and peaceful co-existence and an attempt to reduce racial differences (*Surviving the Fracture* 28).

One apprehends a vastly different angst-ridden vision in the writings of his contemporary **Arnold Harrichand Itwaru**, also from Guyana. Itwaru writes poetry, fiction and non-fiction. *Shattered Song (A Journey from Somewhere to Somewhere)* (1982) and *Body Rites: (Beyond Darkening)* (1991), are two of his poetical works. His debut novel *Shanti* (1988) was followed by *Morning of Yesterday: Seven Short Stories* (1999) and the novel *Home and Back* (2001). The Indo-Guyanese experience of indenture preoccupies Itwaru, along with its continuing effect on East Indian immigrants to Canada. One of Itwaru's chief targets of criticism is the Imperial system of education, whose reflection he

sees in the Anglo-American system. His tone of voice is polemical, aggressive, passionate, sometimes lyrical and erotic, often angry and anguished at the same time. *Shanti*, set in the period of the approaching end of colonial rule in Guyana, passionately denounces the functioning of a system whose lasting effect was apparent in the divided psyche of a nation where Blacks and East Indians existed in a state of mutual animosity and mistrust (*Surviving the Fracture* 66). Women's exploitation and terrifying conditions in colonial Guyana are foregrounded in the novel. Both his novels concentrate on the pain of the indentured past, without holding out any glimpse of hope. His short stories reflect a similar dark vision, presenting hopeless characters who remain insecure aliens in their new homeland in Canada.

Also from Guyana, but belonging to a later generation, comes **Sasenarine Persaud**. Unlike the more culturally mixed environment of Itwaru and Dabydeen's growing up years, Persaud came from a home atmosphere which had retained to a large extent the abiding influences imbibed from ancestors who had created pockets of rural north India in Guyana. This makes Persaud focus not only on his Guyanese East Indian identity but also "Hindu Indian". Persaud has published six collection of poems, including the trilogy *A Surf of Sparrow's Songs* (1996), *The Hungry Sailors* (2000) and *A Writer like You* (2002). He has written two novels, *Dear Death* (1989) and *The Ghost of Bellow's Man* (1992) and a short story collection *Canada Geese and Apple Chatney* (1998). He has also published several critical and theoretical writings. His original theory of "Yogic Realism" applies the spirit of yogic principles,

forms and Indian philosophical concepts to writing. He draws on Indian aesthetic theories of writing, “ancestral aesthetic” (*Yoga as Art* 61), for his brand of creativity, naming it “Indic literature” (61).

Not much inclined to nurture ancestral or Caribbean links is **Neil Bissoondath** from Trinidad, who dismisses the political necessity of a hyphenated identity and considers himself a Canadian writer. Undoubtedly one of the more talented among Indian origin writers from the Caribbean, Bissoondath has attracted considerable attention of mainstream critics. He has written two collection of short stories, *Digging Up the Mountains* (1985) and *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* (1990). His several novels include *A Casual Brutality* (1988), *The Innocence of Age* (1992), *The World Within Her* (1998) and *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night* (2005). Bissoondath’s characters and settings go beyond the Caribbean and Canada, the writer also refusing to be constrained by gender, often adopting the female voice. Bissoondath’s is a rather bleak vision and his writing deals with island politics, his predominant themes are displacement, entrapment and the desire to escape.

Rabindranath Maharaj, also from Trinidad, came to Canada as late as the 90s, to fulfill his desire to become a writer. *The Interloper* (1995), *The Writer and his Wife and Other Stories* (1996) and *The Book of Ifs and Buts* (2002), comprise his short story collections. His novels are *Homer in Flight* (1997), *The Lagahoo’s Apprentice* (2005) and *A Perfect Pledge* (2005). Maharaj’s writing has the important ingredient of humour, most of his works being tinged with a tragic-comic element. Critics have commented on his

Dickensian canvas of characters, a large number who are eccentrics. While projecting a critical eye on his island home, the criticism is tempered with humour. The “exile” sensibility strongly present in his works links him to writers like Naipaul, Ladoo and Selvon. However, Maharaj’s alienation is not so much linked to place; his preoccupation is with an internal exile, the sense of being different from others, which can be experienced even without having left one’s home. The main thematic elements of his works are the journey motif, displacement from place as well as self, and the need to respect individuality. Maharaj depicts the ambiguities of the immigrant experience with subtlety, pathos and humour.

Among the new young generation of Indo-Caribbean writers **Raywat Deonandan** has made his mark with two works of fiction. His short stories in *Sweet Like Saltwater* (1999) are set in India, the Caribbean and North America, while his novel *Divine Elemental* (2003), shows a Greek-Canadian entomologist pursuing his study of a quixotic wasp in village India, while at the same time interested in tracing the history of Alexander of Macedonia’s journey in India. The narrative, in between a romance between unusual lovers, looks at the polarities of science and faith, East and West, ancient and modern, and seeks to determine how reality is defined by our perception.

Late comers to the scene of Indo-Caribbean literature have been women writers, who are also fewer in number compared with their male counterparts. The reason for their relatively small creative output, has been cited by Jeremy Poynting as the “domestic, educational and social disadvantages suffered by

the Indo-Caribbean women” (*East Indian Women* 243). Of the three established Indo-Caribbean women writers, **Ramabai Espinet** from Trinidad is the most vocal and politically aware. Writer, academic and activist, Ramabai has written an anthology of poems titled *Nuclear Seasons* (1991), several short stories that have appeared in journals, edited an anthology of Caribbean women’s poetry and written a novel, *The Swinging Bridge* (2003). Her writing incorporates themes of displacement, women’s experiences of Trinidadian cultural politics and importantly, gender relationships within the East Indian family structure. Espinet subscribes to a syncretic vision and lays claim to multiple identities as a political necessity. Indo-Trinidadian **Shani Mootoo’s** creative impulse finds expression in painting and visual art, poetry and fiction. Her works display a strong desire to challenge borders. Mootoo’s art attempts to represent states in flux, which includes the self. In her case alienation and displacement stems not from a geographic space but her body, marked with the “deeply inscribed memory of umpteen generations of gendering” (“Dear Shani” 33). Mootoo’s alternate gender perspective imbues her creativity, her writing projects cultural fluidity and valorizes hybridity. Mootoo’s works include her short story collection *Out on Main Street* (1993), her novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *He Drowns She in the Sea* (2005) and her poetry collection *the predicament of or* (2000).

Madeline Coopsammy, also from Trinidad, has written short stories and poems, some remain unpublished; others have appeared in journals and anthologies. Her first publication is a collection of poems *Prairie Journey*

(2004). Coopsammy's writing shows a preoccupation with the racially stratified Trinidad social milieu, focusing on the legitimacy skin colour gives to racial and class hierarchy not only in the Caribbean, but also in white mainstream Canada.

Focus on Selected Indo-Caribbean Literary Works :

Poetry: The speaking voice of **Ramabai Espinet's** *Nuclear Seasons* (1991), emerges as strongly feminist, passionate and outspoken, championing both individual and collective freedom, straining against restraints and injustices and striving for harmony and syncreticism. The title poem "NUCLEAR SEASONS", sounds a warning note for all those warmongers, "Agent Orange" (61), who coerce boys to become gun-crazy "killer sons"(59). There's still time to *Wrestle the World/still green and ardent/Out of the cock-crazed /Agonized hands* (61). The poetic persona warns that if the enemies of peace persist with their "wanton arts" then *The hand that rocks the cradle / Will detonate the nightmare /In the end* (59). The persona merges with the collective "WE" of the mothers who've lost their sons, and identifies with Kali's duality, (*Kali—with double tongue*) (62):

WE, the mothers of the darkest night

We, the fiercest

The true destroyers

The true creators

While weeping anguished tears for the lost sons, they simultaneously engage in the utopian endeavor *To prepare our daughters, / the new women, for / The sacred ground / Of reclamation* (62).

In “AN AGEABLE WOMAN”, the persona waits for the younger generations

To recover from sleeping
And too much purple dreaming
.....
To bear the banners
We made them for
From our blood and bone (82).

Her claim to the Caribbean is not spurred by material concerns of it having become “A lovely piece of real estate” (81), but because of her back-breaking work on the land, her contribution towards agriculture and greening of a difficult terrain. The woman patiently waits for a time when the “fiery breath” of youth would add to “Our aging swansong” (82) and sing songs

For healing and the earth
Delivered from falsehood
And laden with new colours
For all (83).

Madeline Coopsamy’s concerns regarding colonization, rootlessness, ancestral past and immigrant experience are explored in *Prairie Journey* (2004). The poems in the collection trace the course of her life from youth to maturity, bridging her Caribbean and Canadian experiences. One of the areas giving rise

to stereotyping and belittling of Indians in the Caribbean, pertained to what was seen as their uninteresting, tasteless, unimaginative food, responsible for passivity and lack of virility in East Indian men. In “The Birth of Roti”, the poetic voice proudly traces the cultural inroads of the *roti* from its *humble beginnings / on the streets of ‘Coolie Town’* (8), to its penetration

to the farthest corners of our multicultural earth

this global village free-trade zones

the refugee-filled metropolises

of New York, Winnipeg,

London or Miami (7-8)

This conquest of taste buds gradually started when Parvati, during those early school years, *habitually brought / a curried lunch / packed in a carrier / the kind labourers used* , embarrassing her Indian classmates, while others held their noses. Soon however, the racially mixed group comprising *those whose grandfathers / had overstepped the boundaries / fathering children / the sociology texts had never classified*, realized that this was “food made in heaven”, worth “queuing up” for! (*Surviving the Fracture* 281). Coopsammy’s immigrant in the poem of the same name is “a black anomaly within a land of snow” (“Immigrant” 26), who feels chilled , not so much by the *blizzards and frosts / of barren Prairie winters*, as by the “guarded hostile looks” of the white mainstream. This puzzles the woman who had attempted to defy biological determinism of race and had depended on her education to transcend class borders and to negate stereotypes:

Not slave, neither ayah nor domestic

but now as pedagogue she comes

wistfully seeking a better life. (26)

Fiction: Cyril Dabydeen's *Drums of My Flesh* (2005) has strong autobiographical elements. It is a fictional retelling of the author/narrator's past, encompassing his story of the family's indentured immigrant roots originating in India, embracing South America/Guyana and anticipating the future migration to Canada. It is in Canada that the narrator, beset with the persistent "*sense of ancestry [of] what's lost but never forgotten*" (*Drums 2*), would conjure up for his daughter Catriona, the progeny of an Irish mother and Indo-Guyanese father, the drum beats of throbbing memory images imprinted on his mind and spirit. The Canadian part of the narrative describes the father walking with his daughter along the Rideau River. As he conjures up disparate threads of culture and civilization for Catriona, from fur traders to European explorers to native peoples to Champlain, Jolliet and Berbeuf to Cartier, his underlying message is the immigrant status of all. The park along the river is inhabited by "*a kaleidoscope of people*"(66), all "*travelers marking out their own boundary spaces*"(43). He sees his own pioneering spirit as no less than Susanna Moodie's. He anticipates Catriona's question about his identity one day. "*Yes, where did I come from? What foreign territory?*"(230). In a voice that is "*a sustained immigrant's song*"(124), he tells his daughter the story of his own becoming, of those formative childhood years dogged by poverty and insecurity, torn between the pull of his mother and grandmother in the

colonized environs of the plantation village, and the abiding desire and nostalgia for his paternal home in Brighton village on the Corentyne, which signified freedom. The father's wishful thinking and hope for the daughter endows her with sensitivity and empathy for the deprived peoples of the world, and the recognition of her Indian roots, "*because there her ancestry begins*" (231).

Dabydeen often portrays strong women characters in his works. In *Drums* the narrator's paternal grandmother "Brighton Ma", living by the seaside, becomes an archetypal figure, an 'old woman and the sea' image, who used to cast the net for an indiscriminate catch of the sea's bounty. "*Ma commanded us , the sea at her beck ad call, such was her spirit*"(75). (*Surviving the Fracture* 55-57).

Neil Bissoondath: In his third novel *The Worlds Within Her* (1998), Bissoondath speaks through the voices of two women, a mother and a daughter, presenting very different worlds of experience. The main theme is quest for identity and aligned to it the slippery nature of truth. The events in the novel span both Canada and the Caribbean. The story unfolds through the third person perspective of Yasmin and the first person voice of her mother Shakti Ramessar.

Shakti Ramessar's portrait is of a remarkable woman belonging to the elite of island society. Though Mrs. Ramessar is already dead at the beginning of the novel, hers is an overwhelming presence from Prologue to the Epilogue, narrating her story, unburdening herself to the comatose friend she visits

regularly in a Canadian hospital, drinking tea with her in a ceremonial manner, leaving her regrets and her last 'message' for her daughter Yasmin, with Mrs. Livingston, the friend. The author skillfully weaves together the worlds of island politics and love, the public world and the private, setting in context the important Icarus motif as it operates in the public lives of individuals and has repercussions on the private. Yasmin's journey from Canada to her mother's island home, carrying her mother's ashes, is also a journey of self-discovery, in the course of which she gets significant glimpses into her mother's world, hoping the journey would illuminate the enigma of her parental past (*Surviving the Fracture* 151). Bissoondath's novel ends by giving Shakti Ramessar the last word, affirming one of the important themes of the novel: "I am not a final product, Mrs. Livingstone. I am a process. As you are. As is everyone. It is to me the most unsettling, and most reassuring truth about what young people today call 'identity'. My dear, I haven't got *an* identity. None of us does. What a great tragedy that would be, don't you think?"(*The World Within Her* 417).

Ramabai Espinet's short story "Barred : Trinidad 1987" (*Green Cane* 80) evinces a concern with the emergence of the Indo-Caribbean voice and touches on Afro-Creole attitude toward Indians, at the same time raising questions of belonging and identity. The story has a set of different narratives, with first person nameless narrators. The first part focuses on the insecurities experienced by an Indian woman who had returned home after being away in Canada, her present home. She has lost the symbolic key to her home. She

keeps awake at night fearful for the intruder's footfall. The section closes with her poignant question: "This is the land that spawned me, far from the continent of my origin. Can an island be someone's home I wonder?" (81). In the next section the narrative veers to the past as the speaker, a peasant woman from a different time frame also experiences insecurity. The voice from an earlier identification declares: "I am Indian, Plain and simple, not East nor West, just an Indian. I live in the West" (81). The ambivalence of the enemy is underscored here. It is not the fear of a hostile environment, but the insecurity within the four walls that she has to contend with. The specter of rum-induced domestic violence looms as the drunken husband impatient with delay in being served food, kicks, hurls blows at the woman, and advances threateningly to kill their baby daughter.

Espinete depicts an area of resistance and survival as the woman picks up the cutlass, the fire, and as he stumbles on the bed " quick quick I chop him two, three times, me ain't know how hard..." (82). The author also focuses on racial stereotyping and prejudices against the East Indian community. She makes use of creole speech to represent the Afro-Creole speaker talking about the Indian male, "no backbone, no stamina..." (83). Envy and mistrust targets the Indian's business acumen, as the Creole speaker says, " is only me and you stupid enough to think is white people" (82), who were responsible for the black's unemployed condition, rather it was the Indians. In the last section of the story the voice is of a young woman with an unemployed husband, who by thrift and shrewd intelligence makes survival possible. Espinete focuses on the

racial interaction among working-class women, when a creole neighbour taught the young Indian woman to make “sugar cakes and tamarind balls” (84), to sell in the small shop she had set up, whose origin had been a small pack of Anchor cigarettes left behind by the husband. Her first customer had been a polite “Negro gentleman” (84).

Shani Mootoo: “Out on Main Street”, the title story of Mootoo’s collection *Out on Main Street* (1993), is an amusing, but significant story. It underscores the need of the “Indian Indian” to have a hybrid “other” in order to bolster the self’s authenticity. The protagonist’s sweet tooth is the overt focus. More importantly, while exploring the “Indian” connection, the story questions the notion of “Indianness” and critiques homophobia, present more within coloured groups. The narrator reveals the difficulties she had each time she and her girl friend Janet were out on Vancouver’s Main Street. The kind of “othering” they experience here engages with issues of language, nationality, gender and sexuality, cultural continuity and change. The narrator prides herself for being “Hindu Par Excellence” with a more superior knowledge of Indian traditions than the Presbyterian Janet. However, both are made to feel their “watered-down Indian” status in the sweet shop run by two Indians from India, who mockingly ask, “Where are you from”? when she points to particular sweets, asking for them with names they are commonly known as in the Caribbean. The narrator’s dislike for the man is enhanced by jealousy as the male gaze focuses on Janet’s attractions. To the women in the shop she looks “like a gender dey forgot to classify” (48). Made to feel a “bastardized India because I didn’t

know Hindi”, the narrator looks forward to the day “I find out dat place inside me where I am nothing but Trinidadian...” (52), an equally uncertain and contentious identity (*Surviving the Fracture* 243-244).

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