

Caribbean Literature in English

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Most postcolonial literatures in English have emerged since the 1930s as educational opportunities became available to the indigenous populations of the Empire. The dissemination of colonial education does two things: it reduces the scope of indigenous knowledge and oral tradition, and at the same time allows the development of 'critique of colonial rule', which later develops into an ideology of nationalism. In the Caribbean region too the trajectory of written forms of literatures in English trace this course; and the production of literatures in English are directly related to the opening up of economic and educational opportunities for indigenous and non-white populations in the 1930s. The positivist ideas coming from Europe enter the cultural and intellectual discourses of island societies of the Caribbean region through colonial schools and, to some extent, through the Anglican and Catholic Church organizations, creating a ferment of ideas. This intellectual ferment leads to a growing self-consciousness and an awareness of colonial exploitation, cultural fragmentation and psychological dispossession, all chosen as first-class themes by Caribbean writers to carve out their unique and composite identity in and through literary and non-literary writings.

During the nearly seventy years of its history, the literatures of the British Caribbean, and later of the independent Caribbean region, have developed rapidly

making a distinct impression not only on Commonwealth literatures, but also on diasporic and world literature as a whole. The intense colonial history of the Caribbean region exacerbated by free and forced migrations, not only from Africa and some parts of Europe but also from British India and China, have caused various social, economic, political and racial problems. In the early part of the twentieth century these problems find expression in struggles for economic representation and, after 1930s with the emergence of the non-white middle class, a campaign for political representation. The rise of the middle class breaks up the rigid caste structures of the slave and migrant communities creating a new sense of deprivation and loss that now finds expression in class conflicts. The independence of the Caribbean region at different stages has allowed peoples of this multiracial and fragmented society to seek opportunities in the western world leading to new postcolonial problems—exile and discrimination. The ‘double exile’ of the Caribbean West Indian as they seek opportunities in the Euro-American world has given rise to not only incisive theories of political oppression by thinkers like Franz Fanon and Herbert Marcuse, but also broadened Caribbean literatures in English and French around the binary opposite themes of oppression and control, freedom and escape.

The polyglot and multicultural nature of Caribbean society led to an intense mixing of linguistic and cultural registers creating a linguistic and cultural creolization that was able to express the sense of dispossession more succinctly. In recent times Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott, Samuel Selvon and others have used their creolized heritage more effectively by mixing its rhythms with the Enlightenment ideas from Western Europe, such as freedom, liberty, equality and individualism. It is no mean achievement that in the last two decades two West Indian writers—Derek Walcott (1992) and V.S. Naipaul (2001)—got the Nobel Prize for literature, apart from Arthur Lewis for economics (1979). No postcolonial Indian writer has

ever won a Nobel Prize for literature, though India has a huge middle class and a daunting production of literary texts in English.¹

After World War II as war-torn Europe needed cheap labor to rebuild its cities, thousands of Caribbean migrated to Great Britain and other parts of Europe and America to seek their economic fortunes there. This was a time when the middle class West Indian also immigrated to the West to seek higher education and a better future. Their insular island identities were re-constituted as a unified West Indian racial category in the Euro-American world. Facing racial discrimination and estrangement the West Indian immigrants re-imagined the western cities, such as London, Paris and New York, the way earlier immigrants like Conrad had done before them. The cultural migration of West Indians after 1945 forced George Lamming to believe that West Indian literature did not begin with Herbert de Lisser, Claude McKay and C.L.R. James as many popularly believed, but, after World War II, in London, with the work of the immigrant novelists such as Edgar Mittelholzer's *A Morning at the Office*. Brought out by Hogarth Press in 1958, his novel dealt with race, identity and cultural displacement of Trinidadians in Britain. These three themes, identified by Mittelholzer, became the central tropes of West Indian writing.² The London fog, for example, arose as an excellent metaphor for a surreal world where the real and disfigured images of opportunity and alienation blurred to create a literature in exile. And in the works of the neo-colonial exile the steamy heat of Trinidad or St. Lucia became transformed into the cold swirling fog of London or New York.

A number of Caribbean writers also came to Europe to procure a western education and subsequently to embark on their careers. The European cities were always discursive cities for the colonial writer, cities encountered within the pages of colonial literary texts such as those of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens or Joseph

Conrad. Usually these cities were ethereal and unreal even if grotesque at times. The yearning to emigrate, the act of actual emigration and the subsequent alienation upon arrival, within this tripartite interaction, Caribbean writing discovers its literary and psychological identity as minority literature, as the literature of the dispossessed that speaks to the Anglo-American liberal reader with a malevolent urgency generating both surprise and guilt. The phenomenon of establishing a colonial world in far flung regions of the globe and the strange, sometimes negative influence of western modernity in these regions can now be gleaned through the works of many postcolonial writers. The Euro-American cities were always a lure for the fragmented West Indian writer who possessed the ability to allow the tropical light from his dispossessed islands to pass through his perforated memory and fall upon his present existence, lighting up areas of discrimination and otherness.

Caribbean postcolonial writing, this writing by exiles, has given rise to the notion of a “reverse colonization” that threatens the West as some emaciated ghost of a forgotten military campaign returning to remind the victors of the atrocities they had committed in the past. Selvon introduces the idea of a reverse colonization of Britain by immigrant West Indians in his novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). One winter evening as Moses Aloetta, the protagonist of *The Lonely Londoners* hops on to a London bus bound for Waterloo to meet a new Trinidadian immigrant he notices the sleepy fog blurring the city lights. He suddenly discovers London transformed into “another planet.”³ Under the pressure of Selvon’s gaze London becomes a strange place as emigrants arrive in ‘old Brit’n.’ The process of appropriation of a western landscape continues in Caryl Phillip’s screenplay *Playing Away* (1986) which shows a West Indian cricket team from Brixton trying to colonize an English village. David Dabydeen’s novel *The Intended* (1991) moves across colonial Guyana to the West Indian diaspora in Canada. Some writers like Earl Lovelace believe in the rural simplicity of Trinidad. In works such as *While*

Gods Are Falling (1965) and *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) Lovelace reveals the influence of rural Trinidad and the Shouter Baptist tradition on his narrative technique. He believes that: "Everyone of us is born into a place in the world, in a culture, and it is from that standpoint of that culture that we contribute to the world."⁴

In the last two decades, Caribbean women writers, novelists and poets, writers like Marlene Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, Caryl Phillips and others, have transformed the literary landscape of the region. The Caribbean diaspora in Canada, United States and Britain has now produced prolific writers like John Agard, Archie Markham, Beryl Gilong, Joan Rilet, Austin Clarke, David Dabydeen, Claise Harris, Neil Bissondath et. al. The fragmentariness of the diasporic experience places the writers of Caribbean origin, as it does all other writers from the former colonized nations, within the center of a transnational experience that is now shaping literatures of our times.

European Colonization

Though the European colonization of the Americas in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries starts with the islands of the Caribbean Basin (San Salvador was colonized in 1492 and Hispaniola in 1522), the social and literary discourses of the West have largely ignored this region by constructing it as a "meta-archipelago" of slavery.⁵ The Caribbean region comprises of eleven distinct geographical regions that were colonized at different points in time, and sometimes by different nations of the Euro-American world; these regions are Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands (Anguilla and Montserrat), Cayman Islands and the Turk and Caicos Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. The imagining of the Caribbean islands as a culture of slavery organized within the structure of 'half-formed' societies and inhabited by

deformed Caliban monsters, has resulted in a tendency amongst literary historians and critics to dismiss the oral and written literary traditions of the region as either non-existent or of slight significance.

Unlike most colonized regions of Asia and Africa, the Caribbean region possesses no unifying common language or tradition. The mixing and hybridization of indigenous or aborigine culture with subsequent European, African and Indian cultures, has created wide cultural heterogeneities more difficult to assimilate into a modular Caribbean culture. Diverse cultural and linguistic influences from Europe especially, England, Spain, France and Denmark have also become mixed with the aborigine, African and East Indian cultural and linguistic forms creating a cultural and linguistic creolization of the region. Depending on the dominance of a specific European linguistic tradition, it is possible to hear different kinds of Creoles spoken in this region—from English and Spanish Creole to French and Dutch. Both the colonial and post-colonial cultural and linguistic identity of this region are, therefore, diverse. Though a few aboriginal settlements from the late eighteenth century continue to survive in Dominica, Guyana and Belize, the ‘original’ aboriginal culture has been gradually degraded by wars, intermarriage and colonization. Demographically too, the aborigines had never been a significant group to exert a recognizable political influence in the region; and in recent years, their number has gone down drastically.⁶ The aboriginal Caribs have been reduced from about three hundred thousand in 1514 to a few thousands at the present.⁷ Walter Rodney explains that the people of the colony of British Guiana during 1881 were predominantly black slaves or Indian or other migrants; the indigenous population was a few thousand Amerindians.⁸

European colonization, beginning in the early sixteenth century, first brought in African slaves and then, after the abolition of slavery in 1834, indentured labor or

'coolie' from East India and large groups of Chinese, Portuguese and Irish workers to cultivate the sugar cane fields of Trinidad and British Guiana.⁹ The colonial power politics on the plantation affected both society and cultural identity in rather strange ways. While political power lay in the hands of the elite whites, commerce and trade was gradually taken over by East Indians. Economically dispossessed but demographically largest, the Africans dominated the cultural landscape. Till this date whenever we think of the Caribbean region we think of Africa, or people of African ancestry, ignoring other demographic groups.

Many important events took place from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries that transformed the economic and political ethos of the Caribbean region. The abolition of slavery led to the collapse of slave-based caste structures and established social hierarchies. The broadening of the new economic opportunities between 1880 and 1937 saw the emergence of a non-European middle class throughout the British Caribbean comprising predominantly of the Africans, East Indians and Chinese. The expansion of education from the middle of the nineteenth century and the strengthening of the social base of the Anglican and Catholic churches played an important role in shaping the intellect and politics of the region.

By the 1960s most of the Caribbean region had achieved independence, but its economy remained mired in debt from the World Bank and other developed nations. Caribbean political institutions, however, have been marked by political suppression, sleaze and violence, which is, exemplified in the murder of the radical Guyanese economist Walter Rodney in 1980 and the Jamaican poet Michael Stuart in 1983. These abnormal conditions have not allowed the economy of the region to develop. Most Caribbean countries, therefore, remain insignificant players in world politics or economy and their culture has been stereotyped as 'insignificant'.

Postcolonial Criticism

A large body of postcolonial criticism has made us aware that minority histories or diasporic narratives are not just about indentured, colonized or migrant subjects in the Caribbean (African and Indians), India (Bangladeshis) and in New York (Puerto Ricans) who have suffered exploitation and displacement but also about the way these subjects negotiate their identity, communal living, ethics and culture with western modernity. Some social scientists and political theorists like Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha see the lives of the colonized or indentured subjects as not just grounded in positions of “resistance” or “dominance” but functioning within “a strategy of survival”—a survival, which could be economic, political, psychic, social, literary or familial—that seeks to articulate its identity and find connections while recognizing at the same time the incommensurability and difference between systems, discourses and ideologies.¹⁰

The fragmentation of identity also prevents the attempt to universalize “survival” or to see the introduction of European technologies in colonial cultures through the binary paradigm of western modernity and indigenous pre-modern traditions. The colonized societies were constantly creating their cultural space while they were combating their indigenous practices and imposed western tradition. It is the gap, the fissure, and the in-between space that produced both, a resistance to, and a modified adaptation of, indigenous and western traditions. This could be one of the reasons why we see in postcolonial societies an adaptation of western technology—which presupposes secular and democratic structures—and an inclination for traditionalist practices—which involves a belief in hierarchy and religion. Most postcolonial societies are now entering a political and social crisis in the act of defining their culture through a cultural discourse.

The dominating Anglo-American influence on the peoples of the Caribbean Basin,

such as Cuba, Haiti, San Domingo, Trinidad and Tobago produced an English-speaking elite that negotiated the cultural histories of their own indigenous backgrounds and appropriated European traditions in their own unique ways. Their strategy of survival allowed them to write from within the Caribbean nations or write from a Caribbean diaspora, that was emerging in Great Britain, the United States and Canada. The strategy of cultural survival created its own problems. Caribbean literature, like most postcolonial literatures, was heir to an entire colonial legacy of discourse that had to negotiate with oral aboriginal and native traditions creating a cultural fragmentation of identities with its inherent psychic tensions.

Many literary critics now believe that the English Left, before the works of Foucault and Stuart Hall, have either elided or ignored the participation of colonialism and imperialism in the formation of British culture and the contribution of the literary texts in imagining the master narratives of colonialism and imperialism, except marginal references by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*. Perhaps, this is to do more with the national and cultural discourse that affected both historical and literary analyses in Britain at the time than with the ignorance of the role played by discursive forms on socio-political processes. Even Williams does not have much to say about the use of the literary text in the cause of the Empire. In Chapter seven, “Traditions, Institutions, and Formations” Williams explains the hegemonic practices of culture within “traditions, institutions, and formations.”¹¹ We expect that a book devoted so thoroughly to cultural and literary theory from a Marxist perspective would enter into a debate about imperialistic and colonial hegemonies. But Williams concludes the chapter with this weak ending, perhaps the closest he could ever get to the heart of the matter:

As a result of this displacement, the formations and their work are not seen as the active social and cultural substance that they quite invariably are. In

our own culture, this form of displacement, made temporarily or comparatively convincing by the failure of derivative and superstructural interpretation, is itself, and quite centrally, hegemonic.¹²

By and large, it is the accepted belief of the British Left that nothing of significance takes place before 1790s. Gauri Vishwanathan believes that the “failure of the British Left to conceptualize cultural practices in relation to imperialism is more pronounced in its unproblematic conflation of the terms ‘national’ and ‘imperial.’”¹³

The Rise of the Caribbean Novel

The rise of the Caribbean or West Indian novel in the early twentieth century owes more to Anglo-American, African and South Asian influences than to seemingly indigenous tradition. Claude McKay’s novel *Banana Bottom* (1933), considered by many literary critics as the first Caribbean novel, seems to be influenced more by the ideas that motivated the Harlem Renaissance in New York than by the indigenous culture of Jamaica. McKay’s education in the United States from 1912 onwards and his subsequent movement to Harlem, New York created not only his poetry of exile but also shaped the militant idealism of the Harlem Renaissance especially through his sonnet “If We Must Die” written in response to the race riots of 1919.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!¹⁴

In the 'last stand' tradition of the American West, McKay redefines the emergent militant identity of the Harlem Renaissance. Many of McKay's contemporaries in the United States considered the sonnet the first statement of the Harlem Renaissance.

McKay went on to write two novels in the 1920s—*Home in Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929)—both about capitalistic exploitation of colonized subjects and the complicity of race and class in creating hegemonies. He also developed a somewhat romantic notion of the ways in which the rural and urban Black communities could come together in what he imagined would be an idyllic America. In the first semi-autobiographical novel McKay investigates the bonding of the African community by exploring the relationship between a Haitian expatriate intellectual and an Afro-American longshoreman. In his second novel the Haitian expatriate intellectual reappears, this time in a friendship with an Afro-American musician nicknamed Banjo. In both the novels the theme of the exiled intellectual is played out with suggestions to his return to the community of Blacks. The theme of the return of the exiled intellectual to the land of his origin is explored in more detail in *Banana Bottom* where the European educated, Jamaican female protagonist, Bita Plant, rejects both the European culture and Jamaican elite status, deciding to return to the rural farming community. Just as the writer himself, the protagonists in McKay's

novels, must leave their country, cut their cultural moorings to receive an Anglo-American education, in order to find not only publishing houses but also a western readership for their books.

The educated non-European middle class hankers for opportunities of the “true cities’ of the west where they can escape the poverty and despair of their Caribbean homeland. But in exile they imagine their homelands as warmly intimate and endearing. Individual memories are as selective as national histories imagining a homeland that never existed and to which one can never return. Walcott’s evocative prose in “What the Twilight Say,” reveals this conflict in imagining a homeland:

When dusk heightens, like amber on a stage set, those ramshackle hoardings of wood and rusting iron which circle our cities, a theatrical sorrow rises with it, for the glare, like the aura from an old-fashioned brass lamp, is like a childhood signal to come home. Light in our cities keeps its pastoral rhythm, and the last home-going traffic seems to rush through darkness that comes from suburban swamp or forest in a noiseless rain. In true cities another life begins: neon stutter to their hysterical pitch, bars, restaurants, and cinemas blaze with artifice and Mammon takes over the switchboard, manipulator of cities; but here the light makes our strongest buildings tremble, its colour hints of rust, more stain than air. To set out for rehearsals in that quivering quarter-hour is to engage conclusions, not beginnings, for one walks past the gilded hallucinations of poverty with a corrupt resignation touched by details, as if the destitute, in their orange-tinted back yards, under their dusty trees, or climbing to their favelas, were all natural scene designers and poverty were not a condition but an art. Deprivation is made lyrical, and twilight, with the patience of alchemy, almost transmutes despair into virtue. In the tropics nothing is lovelier than the allotments of the poor, no theatre is as

vivid, voluble, and cheap.¹⁵

The way the homeland is imagined can only live in the imagination. The feeling of deprivation becomes almost “lyrical”. The homes of the poor are enchanted with the glow from “an old-fashioned brass lamp” and remembering them seems like a magical “childhood signal to come home.” But everything is not all right with this world. This world is also insufferable, deprived, physically unlivable and psychologically irredeemable.

Caribbean literature does not fit into a neat cultural module. Not all of Caribbean writing seems to deal with the cultural heterogeneity of the Caribbean region. A lot of writings of this region, especially of writers like V.S. Naipaul or Denis Williams, seem to function within the diasporic paradigm of ‘nations in exile;’ Naipaul’s autobiographical work *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) is more about his experiences as a brown lodger in a Wiltshire village he moved in than about West Indies, while Williams’s *Other Leopards* (1963) deals with a Guyanese search for identity in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁶ The Caribbean writer in exile does not become uprooted when he leaves his home and his critics but the West Indian experience of an African slave or that of the white/brown indentured laborer, creates its own dispossession and uprootedness. The writer in exile seems to be always at the service of an emergent capitalistic enterprise. “We anticipated by a century,” Sylvia Wynter writes, “the dispossession that would begin in Europe with the Industrial Revolution. We anticipated by centuries, that exile, which in our century is now common to all.”¹⁷ The Caribbean writer, if he intends to return from exile, must also confront the ever-changing nature of Caribbean metropolitan identity transformed by different globalizing forces and the media.¹⁸

Attempts to root Caribbean literary tradition in English Elizabethan, Romantic and

Victorian traditions by Jamaican novelist John Hearne and endorsed by other literary critics is to elide the imperialistic cultural formations negotiated by the colonized subject.¹⁹ Both Benedict Anderson and Edward Said have allowed us to see how dominant histories invent geographical territories and stereotype communities within which minority narratives are forced to operate. Residual colonial attitudes continue to survive amongst neo-colonial and modern writers who emigrate to the mother country in order to realize their dreams and perhaps act out some of their fantasies. Ralph Kripalsingh, one of Naipaul's 'Mimic Men' of the West Indies in the novel by the same name, identifies himself with stereotypical Euro-American images of London's Kensington High Street, of Hollywood and Afro-American on the Caribbean island of Isabella.²⁰ After Mr. Shylock's sudden demise one day Lieni, the Maltese housekeeper of Mr. Shylock, walks in suddenly to announce the first snowfall in London. The protagonist watches the enchanting snowfall from his Kensington lodging, then begins to reminisce about his journey to the motherland and the sleazy, violent politics of the Caribbean nations that he has left behind. This is what he has to say:

A somber beginning. It could not be otherwise. These are not the political memoirs which, at times during my political life, I saw myself composedly writing in the evening of my days. A more than autobiographical work, the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience and that knowledge of the possible which can come only from a closeness to power. This, though, is scarcely the book to which I can now address myself. True, I write with composure. But it is not the composure I would have chosen. For, as far from being in the evening of my days, I am just forty; and I no longer have a political career.

I know that return to my island and to my political life is impossible. The

pace of colonial events is quick, the turnover of leaders rapid. I have already been forgotten; and I know that the people who supplanted me are themselves about to be supplanted. My career is by no means unusual. It falls into a pattern. The career of the colonial politician is short and ends brutally. We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the accumulation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost. Politics for us are a do-or-die, once-for-all charge. Once we are committed we fight more than political battles; we often fight quite literally for our lives. Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us. There are no universities or City houses to refresh us and absorb us after the heat of battle. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties.²¹

Surely, there is a lot of West Indian political history here and some of it significantly sensitive. But if the author wishes us to believe that this personal account stands for an endorsed account of an authentic West Indian life it would be somewhat difficult to accept.

Naipaul's presentation of a fragmentary history presupposes positivist values dealing with governmentability, social justice and representative democracy, but nonetheless continues to speak from within the subjective narrative of autobiography. Self-exiled writers from the erstwhile colonized world may be able to privilege their own distinctive subjective identities through writing after acquiring a university education in the Anglo-American world, imbibing western habits of 'modernity' and exploiting its powerful publishing houses, yet they invariably fail to represent the ethnic group or the multiethnic community back home. In this sense, of communal representation, they continue to remain powerless. It is rather difficult to say which

group Naipaul represents apart from himself. What is the representative quality of his works? What issues does his fiction elide? Who sees him representative and of what? And which groups wish to appropriate him as a cultural resource to construct their religious-cultural identities? A successful self-exiled writer in the West is invariably surrounded by power and privilege, unlike the power and privilege at home. He may be able to reach out to a larger audience but somehow fails to represent the group he or she originally belongs or comes from. This is not to debunk or undermine his reputation. A Nobel Prize for him might be an acknowledgement of his merits as a British novelist who ferrets out hitherto “suppressed histories” but does it also acknowledge his representativeness? And if it does then, is this a recognition of his Caribbean, European or Indian representativeness? All groups seem to lay a claim to his fame but he is acknowledged by none so strongly as to allow others to relinquish their claim on him. In what sense does he represent the Indian diasporic experience or the Caribbean diaspora in Europe or even by extension America and Canada? Or does he speak for or represent the hybridized globalized postcolonial writer writing from within the corridors of power of the Anglo-American world? How close or distant is he from his other South Asian contemporaries such as Salman Rushdie? Not finding clear answers to these questions prevent us from reducing the pluralities of his fictionalized discourse into the modular forms of third world nationalism or multicultural Anglo-America.

And this is the problem. The rise of elite individual narratives may speak to us as representative of minority histories, fragmentation, and heterogeneities but do not always speak for a larger whole. Naipaul may possess a singularly individual sensibility and may be “a literary circumnavigator” who is at home “in himself” and “in his inimitable voice,” but if that is true it would be quite difficult for him to identify with the larger community he comes from or attempt to represent their

institutions. Literary critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee argue that Naipaul is not really “interested in defining a nation” but like Nirad Chaudhuri in “generalizing form isolated personal experiences.”²²

Mainstream and Minority Histories

It is hard to accept Paul Jay’s line of thinking that a culture is defined less in terms of national and more in terms of shared global interests. The opening up of the nationalist literary canon in the 1960s in the United States, and the arrival of a few ‘cosmopolitan’ writers and the globalization of English have definitely introduced more multicultural literary texts in school and university curriculum but the American nationalist category of seeking Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Faulkner or Walt Whitman as a part of a distinctly American nationalist ideal is not over. As long as nation states exist and influence political and cultural identities, mainstream literatures will be constructed and privileged. An attempt to build a cosmopolitan and transnational body of literature also becomes subject to national pressures. The Anglo-American nations allow the presence of their nationalist literatures and yet provide a space for multicultural literatures to be produced. This is viewed as a liberal project of democracy, more egalitarian perhaps than the majoritarian literatures of the Asia marketed as national literatures abroad representing their hierarchical traditionalist and religious identities.²³

The imagined myths of time and fiction force their ways into the master narratives of nations giving rise to political ideas and literary discourses that shape their historical reality. Despite attempts by multinational, international globalizing trends and late capitalism, most national discourses continue to imagine an unbroken continuity in their progress in order to legitimize their power. Nation states, however, have also inadvertently encouraged global phenomena.²⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein explains that national economies, encouraged by a strong governmental

organization, national identity and economic self-interest, have helped developing European world economy and further new globalizing trends.²⁵ The weakening of national control over global economy due to the rise of global capital and transnationalism may be true in the realm of economics, but it cannot be extended ad infinitum to cultural and discursive forms where strong nationalistic interest prevail without in any way harming global economic interests of nation states.²⁶

Dipesh Chakrabarty believes that this minority history may have to do with the “gap” between a disciplinary belief in representing heterogeneous pasts without wanting to place the different narratives within an overarching “whole.” Perhaps, we are unable to find “a third voice” which can bring disparate voices into a narrative whole. It is our inability to do so that gives rise to “an irreducible plurality in our own experiences of historicity.”²⁷ Caribbean literature functions within a subaltern narrative and an elitist representation/suppression through their own autobiographical narratives without being able to create a larger Caribbean narrative. The inability to assimilate different subaltern and elite voices within the larger framework of Caribbean literary tradition creates ‘an irreducible plurality’ within the representation of literary historical experience through discursive methods.

Colonial Language, Creole and Calypso

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon ably argues that the Antillean in the Caribbean region has faced an impossible task: How to forge an identity upon and through an alien tongue? In the chapter, “Negro and Language” he states:

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man’s attitudes face to face with Being. A man who has a language consequently possesses the

world expresses and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. Paul Valery knew this, for he called language “the god gone astray in the flesh ... Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex had been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation: that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He become whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle”²⁸

Other colonized countries in Asia and Africa could use the imperial language, English or French, for public discourse and indigenous languages for private communication and ritual.²⁹ The creation of Creole towards the end of the eighteenth century was a new way of living and expressing. Early in the twentieth century Claude McKay wrote in Jamaican Creole to capture the local flavor, especially his *Constab ballads* (1912) where he presents the scene of a midnight prostitute abusing a black policeman about to arrest her:

No palm me up, you dutty brute,
You’ jam mout’ mash like ripe bread-fruit
You fas’n now but wait lee ya,
I’ll see you grunt under de law.³⁰

Derek Walcott uses different kinds of Creoles—from modified to local Creole—in his sonnet sequence, *Tales of the Island* (1958) while Samuel Selvon’s short story “Calypsonian” uses Trinidadian calypso. The protagonist, Razor Blade, who has no money, decides to eat a good Chinese dinner and runs away without paying to the

chagrin of the waitress who would lose her wages; but he is happy drunk on Barbados rum and full with rice and chicken singing away a calypso:

It have a time in this colony
When everybody have money excepting me
I can't get a work no matter how I try
It looks as if good times pass me by.³¹

Even after the colonial emancipation of the Caribbean, George Lamming in his work *In the Castle of my Skin* believes that the colonial subject, not only uses the colonial language of Prospero in order to name his own reality but also endeavors to succeed in the 'temple' of learning or universities of the western world.³² The innocent dream of England as mother country immediately evaporates when the colored Caribbean or Caliban lands on its shores. The colonized 'Other' is not welcome. The English working class finds the colonial legacy somewhat strange and threatening. Jamaican Black poet Linton Kwesi Johnson catches the attitude of Black Britain thus:

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runnin' wehy fram it.

Derek Walcott captures the sad and uneven history of the Caribbean in his early poem "Prelude;" and the wish of the marooned West Indian to succeed in the cities of the West:

I, with legs crossed along the daylight, watch

The variegated fists of clouds that gather over
The uncouth features of this, my prone island.
Meanwhile the steamers which divide horizons prove
Us lost;
Found only
In tourist booklets, behind ardent binoculars;
Found in the blue reflection of eyes
That have known cities and think us here happy.

Time creeps over the patient who are too long patient,
So I, who have made one choice,
Discover that my boyhood has gone over.

And my life, too early of course for the profound cigarette,
The turned doorhandle, the knife turning
In the bowels of the hours, must not be made public
Until I have learnt to suffer
In accurate iambs.

I go of course, through all the isolated acts,
Make a holiday of situations,
Straighten my tie and fix important jaws,
And note the living images
Of flesh that saunter through the eye.

Until from all I turn to think how,
In the middle of the journey through my life,
O how I came upon you, my

Reluctant leopard of the slow eyes.

—1948.³³

From this “lost” island of St Lucia or Trinidad he straightens up his tie and fixes “important jaws” and finds in mid life the “reluctant leopard of the slow eyes”—knowledge and meaning in life.

Early narratives of the Caribbean are predominantly European preserved in letters, travelogues and dairies. And Columbus’s letters lay the foundation of the friendliness and cannibalism of the Caribbean. When Columbus returns to Spain after his visit to the Caribbean region his overheated imagination constructs a European discourse of a somewhat desirable ‘Other.’

In these islands I have so far found no monstrosities, as many expected, but on the contrary, all the people are of fine appearance; nor are they Negroes as in Guinea, but with flowing hair.³⁴

The French Dominican Jean Baptiste Du Tertre wrote *The General History of the French Antilles* (1667-1671), which portrays a multicultural society of white colonists, Indian indentured laborers and Black slaves, and Jews. Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica* (1774) provides a European presentation of Jamaica but his description seems flawed by its stereotypical prejudice of the inferiority of the Negroes.

We may find accounts of European grandeur and splendor in the Caribbean. The expatriate white Creole population created their own luxurious advantages throwing lavish parties in their Great Houses keeping away from the filth and squalor of the indentured and slave barracoons. The Victorian

Age in England developed an academic knowledge of colonial geographies around the predominant theme of race as the primary determinant of culture and history. Anthony Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1860) constructed the West Indian Creole as degenerate and indolent.

Even the West Indian writers like C.L.R. James unabashedly confessed that their literary sensibility was shaped by west European literature, history and thought. In an essay "Discovering Literature in Trinidad" (1969) James writes:

To avoid misunderstanding, I must say that I think the people of the underdeveloped countries accept me and feel that I have had a lot to say that is valid about the underdeveloped countries. That is important. But what I want to make clear is that I learnt this quality in the literature, history and philosophy of Western Europe. I didn't *have* to be a member of an underdeveloped country, though I know a lot of people who are, and yet don't know anything about those countries. I didn't have to be an exploited African. It is in the history and philosophy and literature of Western Europe that I have gained my understanding not only of Western Europe's civilization, but of the importance of the underdeveloped countries. And that is still my outlook ... In my youth we lived according to the tenets of Mathew Arnold; we spread sweetness and light, and we studied the best that there was in literature in order to transmit it to the people—as we thought, the poor, backward West Indian people ... I didn't learn literature from the mango-tree, or bathing on the shore and getting the sun of the colonial countries; I set out to master the literature, philosophy and ideas of Western civilization. This is where I have come from, and I would not pretend to be anything else ... All of us had this literary tradition; all of us had the European training; all of us wrote in the definite tradition of English literature. For us in the thirties there

was no literature otherwise ...”³⁵

In the late eighteenth century, call for independence generated a reaction to British hostility of the Caribbean people. Black schoolmaster J. J. Thomas led the revolt. Canon Nelson Higgins wrote a long poem *Hiroona* celebrating the 1795 Carib rebellion against the British in the following words:

I tell you, white man, to your teeth
No less than robbers, pirates ye,
And plunderers by land and sea.
What restless greed would make you roam
Has England no waste lands at home? ³⁶

Though the Caribbean cultural ethos was shaped by the cultural and political domination of West Europe, the use of English by the Caribbean writers was both a lure and an anxiety. Though C.L.R. James does not directly confront the discourse of power and the question of European discursive space available to colored writers, he does mention off hand that many white writers chose to remain in the Caribbean while the black and brown left for Europe to escape racism and limited opportunities made available to them.

This is not to say that C.L.R. James has not thought much about class, race, self-determination and aesthetics. Both *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and *Breaking a Boundary* (1963) bear ample testimony to his involvement with race conflict. Till his death in 1989 he was concerned with colonial liberation, the American Negro question, Lenin’s and Trotsky’s dialectical materialism. CLR’s passionate account of the San Domingo slave revolt or the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803), what he saw as the only successful proletarian revolution, and the portrayal of the revolutionary

leader Toussaint Louverture confront some important issues about resistance—its heterogeneous composition, intellectual ideas and intentions of colonial bourgeoisie. His strong desire to understand subtle forms of British imperialism led him to analyze the game of cricket in *Breaking a Boundary* and how it shaped the power politics and ethical values of Trinidad and finally transformed as a means of colonial resistance, something that the recent Bollywood movie *Lagaan* attempts to do.

Caribbean-Canadian writer M. Nourbese Philip captures this double anxiety succinctly: She writes:

english
is a foreign anguish³⁷

The power of an alien tongue could have wrecked havoc on the colonized psyche of the Caribbean writer as has been true in the case of some. But a postcolonial attack on English and its associated institutions of learning may have more to do with an ideological resentment linked to identity and nationalism. Austin Clarke's autobiography *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* (1980) highlights this ideological reconstruction and presentment of colonial Barbados. And if writing, as Michael Foucault would like us to believe, especially autobiographical or epistolary writing, has to do with "bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and the gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures one's everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living" then some sort of intellectual position on it is incumbent on the part of the writer.³⁸

In recent times many Caribbean writers express their resentment with the English language while seeking privileges by writing in it. It is possible to indict colonial rule by analyzing the hegemonic role of English in the service of the Empire. Here

is Jamaica Kincaid's indictment of colonial English and its hegemonic role in snuffing out indigenous tongues, something that Afro-American civil rights leaders like Malcolm X also preached:

I cannot tell you how angry it makes me to hear people from North America tell me how much they love England, how beautiful England is, with its traditions. All they see is some frumpy, wrinkled-up person passing by in a carriage waving at a crowd. But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed."³⁹

And yet in her *Autobiography* she talks about her early efforts to speak English naturally and effortlessly:

His visits were quite regular, and so when he did not appear as he usually did, I noticed it. I said, "Where is my father?"

I said it in English—not French patios or English patios, but plain English—and that should have been the surprise; not that I spoke, but that I spoke English, a language I had never hears anyone speak. Ma Eunice and her children spoke the language of Dominica, which is French patios, and my father when he spoke to me spoke that language also, not because he disrespected men, but because he thought I understood nothing else. But no one noticed; they only marveled at the fact that I had finally spoken and

inquired about the absence of my father. That the first words I said were in the language of a people I would never like or love is not now a mystery to me; everything in my life, good or bad, to which I am inextricably bound is a source of pain. I was then four years old and saw the world as a series of soft lines joined together, a sketch in charcoal ...⁴⁰

Kincaid's desperation is somewhat muted and more practical in the works of other writers, like V.S. Naipaul or Jan Carew who also see in the use of English an anxious opportunity and a hope. Naipaul expresses this hope and anxiety of writing in English from England:

To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world. And I suppose that in my fantasy, I had seen myself coming to England as to some purely literary region, where, untrammelled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for myself as a writer. But in the new world I felt that ground move below me."⁴¹

For Naipaul coming from one of the "half-made societies" of the world, Conrad offers both a promise and an anxiety. The success of colonial writer in England always carried with it "the moral degradation of an idea."⁴² For people of "half-made societies" writing in English works both as representation and displacement—the area of life illuminated by English literature also returns as the area of darkness.

Guyanese novelist Jan Carew has the following statement to make about English and its impact on the Caribbean region:

We have no standardised language, we have a fluid situation. The 'book language' here is one that nobody ever spoke, and the colloquial language,

the Creole language, was never institutionalized by the authorities. So obviously, some synthesis of these different languages and a rationalisation of these conflicts must come from a concrete base. I find, for example, people saying: ‘You can’t use a Creole language, you must use a sophisticated language or how are you going to deal with science?’ You can deal with science. And as the people develop science they will find the words to name and a language to deal with the science they are developing.”⁴³

A lot of literary writing in the Caribbean and in most of the erstwhile colonies now negotiates with modular forms of national identities and expresses ambivalence hard to ignore. In his *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha believes that the “colonial presence” always expresses this ambivalence “split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.”⁴⁴

Many writers such as recent Canadian-Caribbean writers have creolized English with Caribbean idiom transforming the sense of historical loss and conflict into a counter-history of appropriation and economic advantage.⁴⁵ Early Naipaul admits that though he was adept at handling the English language he was somewhat intimidated by the “alien mythology” enshrined in English literature:

With all English literature accessible, then, my position was like that of the maharaja in Hindoo Holoday, who, when told by the Christian lady that God was here, there and everywhere, replied, ‘But what use is that to me? ... Every writer is, in the long run, on his own; but it helps, in the most practical way, to have a tradition. The English language was mine; the tradition was not.’⁴⁶

Reactions to Naipaul’s works and comments have been diverse. Within Trinidad, the

country he relinquished for Britain, writers see only his “contempt” for his people “disguised as concern.” This is the sentiment Derek Walcott expresses about Naipaul in the poem “At Last:”

You spit on your people,
Your people applaud,
Your former oppressors laurel you.
The thorns biting your forehead
Are contempt
Disguised as concern.⁴⁷

Naipaul’s belief that Africa does not have a “future,” prompt many African Caribbean writers to take offence. In one of his poems Derek Walcott call him V.S. Nightfall. In an interview Jamaica Kincaid admits that Naipaul is a “great writer,” but she feels that Naipaul who blatantly despises the Caribbean Blacks, uses the criteria of “race, class and wealth;” and this according to her is “very destructive.” She concludes her interview with a scathing attack on Naipaul: “Someone like Naipaul is very destructive. He does a lot of harm to himself and to us. I may not be as good a writer but I feel I have a larger view than he does.”⁴⁸ Kincaid finds Naipaul consumed by a sense of “inner loathing” for not looking like “an Englishman.”⁴⁹

The Swedish Academy thinks otherwise. Naipaul received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 for uniting “perceptive narrative” and presenting “an incorruptible scrutiny” that forces us “to see the presence of suppressed histories.” Many American scholars, like Edward Said take offence at his anti-Islamic and casteist Hindu fundamentalist comments, his ability to describe “the Eastern regions of the Islamic world, beyond belief.”⁵⁰ Naipaul’s caustic views about India in *An Area of*

Darkness and A Wounded Civilization have offended many, though since then, his views about India have undergone a change in *A Million Mutinies*. Now, Naipaul sees in the rise of Hindutva and the use of Hindu religion to unite the country “a new, historical awakening” something that Gandhi did during the freedom struggle by using Christian ideas calling them Hindu.⁵¹ Naipaul has been seen as the great “annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to human beings” in the same tradition as Conrad and Stendhal capturing the “history of the vanquished” somewhat obliquely.⁵²

Political independence of the Caribbean region in the 1960s opened up the hegemonic male societies and brought in egalitarian reforms giving more opportunities for women to educate themselves. During the 1970s, though the male middle class Creole still enjoyed economic and social advantages, women, like Merle Hodge, began to travel abroad to acquire a decent education. Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) introduces the female Bildungsroman traversing two cultures. Women writers attempt to move away from the male modernist black/brown West Indian narrative to a more open and shifting identity that writes against the English language.⁵³ As Hodge interrogates the psyche of the colonized subject she enters into the discourse of colonial education, which invalidated the Caribbean experience, both its environment and ethos, by not representing it in books:

We never saw ourselves in a book, so we didn’t exist in a kind of way and our culture and our environment, our climate, the plants around us did not seem real, did not seem to be of any importance—we overlooked them entirely. The real world was what was in the books (quoted by Dabydeen 78).⁵⁴

Her work explores the colonial hegemony more deeply than the nationalists did; by

exploring the impact of colonialism on the people she conducts a kind of postcolonial reading of the discursive and textual areas of colonial hegemony.

The European feminist movement created an intellectual space for women to assert their social and political identity through writing. The founding of CAFRA (Caribbean Association Feminist Research and Action) in 1985 gave a new avenue for women's voices to be heard: in 1990 Ramabai Espinet brought out *Creation Fire*, a collection of Caribbean women poetry, under its aegis.⁵⁵ It celebrates the emergence of the Caribbean woman, the "Bans O' Ooman" of Louise Bennett's poem by the same name:

Bans o' ooman! Bans o' ooman!
Pack de place from top to grung.
High an low, miggie suspended,
Every different kine o' class.

One hundred and twenty one women from Trinidad, Surinam, Belize, the U.S. Virgin Islands and other Caribbean region express themselves in English, Spanish, French, patois, and the language of the Rastafarian in this volume—writers such as Audre Lorde, Velma Pollard, Merle Collins, Sandra Bihari, Stacy Johnson, and Tiffany Robinson apart from others. Merle Collin's poem "The Butterfly Born" watches the emergence of the new Caribbean woman:

De Caterpillar's death
De butterfly's birth ...
Is the poetry of science
If you watch
de movement
Famn

Ale douvan
Woman Step forward
Something new
Something true

Women writers capture the history of indentured laborer, struggles for independence and the travails of women in colonial Trinidad. Lakshmi Persaud's novel *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990) tells the story of a woman coming of age and *Sastra* (1993) reveals cultural change in Trinidad. In a confessional novel *Love of my Name* (2000), Persaud creates a memoir of Robert Augustus Devonish highlighting his country's struggles from colonial rule. Other Caribbean writers too recognize the need to come to terms with their indentured past. Rajkumari Singh in "I am a Coolie" (1973) recreates an emotive history of indentured Indian labor in the Caribbean region:

It all started with our forefathers, remember ... this is the name of our hard-working, economy-building forefathers who were called COOLIE! Think of the word. Mull over this word. What does it mean to YOU? Does it not make you aware of the hardships and trails—mental and physical—that our grandfathers and grandmothers experienced? Does it not remind you that they were brought from their far-off Motherland to save ours from total economic collapse following the Slave Emancipation experience? The word brings to mind 'rows and rows of toilers'—coolie men and women—with soft mud squelching between their toes, up to their breasts in water, planting rice ... Did not these Coolies plant sugar-cane, fields and fields of swaying sugar-cane to give the taste of sweetness to us all and to all sorts of people all over the world? And let us not forget how often this sweetness became bitter gall to them for seeking their rights ... remember ... remember ... Lallabagee ... Alice ... remember, and all those others who showed resistance for their

rights and died to lay paths of freedom for us ... remember? ... Not only in the Guyana context must COOLIE be given new meaning, but in every land of the Caribbean Sea, the Indian Ocean, the seas of the East, in Africa and Europe.⁵⁶

In the same vein Mahadai Das (1954-2003) expresses the travails of Indian coolie women—about 25 percent of the indentured labor were women—who suffered economic deprivation and rape as part of their indentured condition. In a poem “They Came in Ships” (1987) Das explains the suffering of Indian women:

From across the seas, they came.
Britain, colonizing India, transporting her chains
From Chota Nagpur and the Ganges Plain.

I see then dying at street corners, alone, hungry
For a crumb of British bread,
And a healing hand’s mighty touch.
Remember one-third quota, coolie woman.
Was your blood spilled so I might reject my history—
forget tears among the paddy leaves.⁵⁷

Both Indo-Guyanese women writers confront ethnic and gender issues in their writing and the increased sexual and physical violence against Indian women in Caribbean regions as a consequence of Indian and African racial conflicts, while Creole political hegemony and denial of property rights to women. Writing about “Per Ajie—A Tribute to the First Immigrant Woman”(1971) Rajkumari Singh talks about the rape of Indian women by white Creoles:

Per Ajie
Did bangled-ankles
Well thy sea-legs bear
While Shaib's gaze
Thy exotic
Gazelle beauty
Of face and form
Envelope.

If later
Thy chastity
He violated
'Tis nought
'Tis no shame
To thee
If man turn brute
A lotus-soul defiles.⁵⁸

Writing by women seems more affirmative and positive than men. *Beryl Gilroy's Frangipani House* (1985) portrays the life of grandmother Mama King who rejects the comforts of Frangipani House, an old people's home in Guyana, and endures the hardships of slum life. She finally discovers her dignity in community life. Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982), *In Times like These* (1991) and *The Festival of San Joaquin* (1997) handle issues of political freedom, indigenous and expatriate identities and representation of lower class Mestizo culture.

Black Caribbean women writers, like Paula Marshall, Erna Brodber and Jamaica Kincaid have also focused their attention on growing up in white America and

attempts to reclaim their Caribbean and African past through memory and ritual. Barbadian-American Paule Marshall's trilogy—*Brown Girl Brownstones* (1959), *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969) and *Praisesong for a Widow* (1983)—encourages her protagonists to return to their roots through a complex process of imagined journey, ritual and self pride. Marshall continues to explore the strength of the refurbishing past in her novel *Daughters* (1991) where a West Indian woman from New York returns to her country to help her father organize an election campaign; in the process of doing this she rediscovers her past. Erna Brodber's recent novel *Louisiana* (1994) is more rooted in the United States than in her Jamaican past. Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) explores the motif of a double orphaning—the lost African past and dead mother. The confessional tone begins the text:

My mother died the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind. I could not have known at the beginning of my life that his would be so; I only came to know this in the middle of my life, just at the time when I was no longer young and realized that I had less of some of the things I used to have in abundance and more of some of the things I had scarcely had at all. And this realization of loss and gain made me look backward and forward; at the beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. I came to feel that for my whole life I had been standing on a precipice, that my loss had made me vulnerable, hard, and helpless; on knowing this I became overwhelmed with sadness and shame and pity for myself.⁷⁶⁰

Though it is possible to see the impact of magical realism in some Caribbean

women writers such as Guadeloupe novelists like Simone Schwartz-Bart and Maryse Conde , much of the writing by women continue to negotiate the difficult terrain of subtle forms of neo-colonialism, female stereotyping and indigenous body-centered responses. Grace Nichols in her three volumes of poems, *I is a long memoried woman* (1983), *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984) and *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman, Sunris* (1996) create her own indigenous model of womanhood. Her first novel, *Whole of a Morning Sky* (1986) captures the freedom struggle in the Guyana of the 1960s.

The literature of the Caribbean region is not just limited to the neocolonial elites, writers and intellectuals, who have emigrated to the Anglo-American world in large numbers since the 1950s. Now the media also participates in creating and disseminating Caribbean culture, whether it is calypso or chutney. The archeology of colonialism and 'the habitations of modernity' to borrow a phrase from Dipesh Chakrabarty are still peopled by those modernists who may not wish to claim their indigenous past unequivocally. Issues of race and cultural difference linked to gender and sexuality continue to decide economic and political privileges that people enjoy in the democratic world. Our modern language is now so saturated and contaminated with pretentious assimilationist notions that writers need to 'rethink' the language of representation.⁶¹ It is the white sahib syndrome that feeds the fantasy and imagination of the brown and black writers of the colonial trading posts who in turn co-opt the white sahib's hegemonic vision of the colonies and translate it into fiction.⁶² The brown and black sahibs of Caribbean literature largely imitate the language of white male domination in fiction. Women writers on the contrary, writers like Merle Hodge, escape the totalizing influence of this vision by finding a new language to rename their intrinsically unique experiences, They, therefore, are able to transform the linguistic register of colonial coercion and suppression.

NOTES

- ¹ Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in 1913 during the colonial period. Rudyard Kipling won the Nobel Prize in 1907 and was the poet laureate of the Empire par excellence; he does not fit into the literary canon of India. We have been remarkably successful in other areas such as economics, physics, medicine and peace through people such as S. Chandrasekhar, C. V. Rama, Mother Teresa, Hargobind Khurana, Amartya Sen and Mother Teresa who have won Nobel prizes in different areas in different years.
- ² Louis James, *Caribbean Literature in English*, (London & New York: Longman, 1999). James points out that; “Between 1950 and 1970 over 125,000 workers were recruited from the Caribbean by a Britain in need of cheap labour” (p. 90).
- ³ Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 1972 rpt., (London: Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1956), p. 7.
- ⁴ Earl Lovelace, “Engaging the World,” *Wasafire* 1, 1 (Autumn 1984), p. 4.
- ⁵ Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*, trans., James E. Maraniss, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 1-7.
- ⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rpt 1991, (London & New York: Verso, 1983). In the chapter, “Census, Map, Museum,” Anderson argues about the power of the three institutions in establishing colonial power. He states, “Few things bring this grammar into more visible relief than three institutions of power which, although invented before the mid nineteenth century, changed their form and function as the colonized zones entered the age of mechanical reproduction. These three institutions were the census, the map, and the museum: together, they profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (pp.163-4).
- ⁷ Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 33.
- ⁸ Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). Rodney writes, “Judged by the area of concentrated settlement and cultivation, the colony of British Guiana was no less insular than the societies of the West Indies, with which it had so much in common. The census of 1881 enumerated a total of 252,186 persons. It merely touched a few settlements on the island rivers; and because of this limitation, the figure of 7,708 Amerindians was probably an understatement. Nevertheless, it remained true that the vast majority of inhabitants at that time were a product of migration and transplant over the previous two centuries and that they were confined to the coastal strip. Generations of blacks, working under white masters had markedly transformed this coastal habitat” (p. 1).
- ⁹ Walter Rodney *A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). Rodney writes, “West Indian indentured laborers were added to the Guianese population in the post-Emancipation period, they too had to face up to the steady work diet of mud and water in the maintenance of dams and the cleaning of trenches. For a long while, Africans remained the specialist shovelmen, but a report on the digging of a new canal back of Plantation Annandale in 1885 drew attention to the unusual fact that the task was accomplished by Indian

immigrants” (pp.3-4).

¹⁰ “The Postcolonial Critic: Homi Bhabha Interviewed by David Bennett and Terry Collits,” in *Literary India: Comparative Studies in Aesthetics, Colonialism, and Culture*, ed., Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit, (New York: Statue University of New York Press, 1995). Bhabha states, “And I’ve made some suggestions in this direction, for instance, by saying that if we do take this postcolonial reinscription of modernity, then maybe we have to think of culture, not merely as the production of great works of art or architecture, nor merely the countercultural narratives of liberation, but that we should be conscious of the much more interstitial, contingent images, symbols, art, songs, writings, memories, dreams that people create when those two grand options—the grand opera on the one hand, or the grand overthrow of the state on the other—are not available. And here I think an important aperçu is Fanon’s statement, somewhere towards the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he says that there are people whose lives and whose oppositions, political oppositions or cultural oppositions, are not grounded in great theories, great ethical positions, complete or totalized forms of knowledge; rather they are actually struggling to make those meanings, and it’s this kind of notion, what I might call culture as a strategy of survival, that I think would be very important. ... I’m saying that much of the weave, much of the text and texture of culture is construed in the strategies of various kinds of survival—psychic, social, the survival of the family. If you just think of the metaphors by which we now live, we talk in a way about the tenuous survival of clarified forms of sexuality, where we’re negotiating all sorts of forms of sexual expression and sexual identification. If we talk about economics, even the great nations like the United States are *surviving* with their vast credit problems. The middle classes are also surviving. ... Surviving for me, is obviously a profound sort of marginal and boundary problem; it’s where polarities, social polarities and binaries, are brought into question. If you take the women’s issue: It was again about how you survive as a mother, as a professional, as a lover. I mean to use survival, then in this very strong sense, not merely as the form of diminished existence, and I want to suggest that philosophically what we learn, for instance, through psychoanalysis and its use of the questions of ambivalence, is precisely about the survival of identity, or the struggle for identification. Intellectually, epistemologically, I want to retrieve the notion of survival as a way of actually making articulations and connections, while recognizing the problems of incommensurability, difference, and resisting the great temptations of universalizing” (pp. 239-40).

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (New York & London: OUP, 1977), p. 115.

¹² Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, *ibid.*, p. 120.

¹³ Gauri Vishwanathan, “Raymond Williams and British colonialism: The Limits of Metropolitan Cultural Theory,” in *Views From Beyond the Border Country*, ed. Dennis L. Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman, (London and New York; Routledge, 1993), pp. 217-230.

¹⁴ Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature Volume 2, ed.*, Paul Lauter, rpt., 1994, (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1990), p.1691.

¹⁵ Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, (London: Penguin Books, 1987). And Denis Williams, *Other Leopards*, rpt 1983; (London: Heinemann, 1963).

¹⁷ Sylvia Wynter, “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Discuss a Little Culture—Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism” in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* ed. Alison Donnell and

- Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 307.
- ¹⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Discuss a Little Culture—Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism" in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* ed. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 307.
- ¹⁹ John Hearne, "Wide Sargasso Sea: A West Indian Reflection," *Cornhill Magazine* (Summer 1974). Hearne saw Jane Eyre as a "metaphor" for the West Indian way of life: He wrote: "Are we not still, in so many of our responses, creatures of books and inventions fashioned by others who used us as mere producers, as figments of their imagination; and who regarded the territory as a ground over which the inadmissible or forgotten forces of the psyche could run free for a while before written off or suppressed" (pp. 325-26). Also see Louis James, *Caribbean Literature in English*, (London & New York: Longman, 1999). James writes: "As we will see, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1712) and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) are among the European works that have become embedded in West Indian writing. None of this conflicts with the fact that the basic cultures of the area are rooted in African oral traditions. For the Caribbean has been the site of continual transformation and change" (p. 4).
- ²⁰ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, (London: Vintage Books, 2001), pp 112, 134.
- ²¹ Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
- ²² Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Expire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2000), pp.117-18.
- ²³ Paul Jay, Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English," in *PMLA*, January 2001, pp.32-47. Jay argues that "As Peter Carafiol and others have demonstrated, the structure of American literary studies in United States universities has always been informed by a broadly nationalist ideal. While this ideal was based on forging an aesthetic and ideological consensus about culture and identity grounded in a limited set of texts unified around certain themes and values, contemporary criticism has become increasingly preoccupied with difference in ways that undermine the neat, superficial cultural homogeneity informing the study of national literatures. ... Perhaps more important, critical theories more explicitly engaged with political issues and affiliated with social movements dating from the 1960s helped create alliances among writers, critics, and students across national and state boundaries in a way that has systematically diminished the rationale for mapping literary studies with reference to the old paradigm of homogenous nation-states. Our awareness of the complex ways in which English and American identities have been constructed historically through migration, displacement, colonialism, exile, gender relations, and cultural hybridity has radically restructured our sense of what Paul Gilroy has dubbed the "roots/routes" of these identities. With this awareness it has become increasingly difficult to study British or American literature without situating it, and the culture(s) from which it emerged, in transnational histories linked to globalization. At the same time the remarkable explosion of English literature produced outside Britain and the United States has made it clear that this literature is becoming defined less by a nation than by a language, in which authors from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds write" (p. 33).
- ²⁴ Homi Bhabha, "Introduction: narrating the nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed Homi K. Bhabha, rpt. 2000; (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) . Bhabha states that: "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those

traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the Volk. Nor have such political ideas been definitively superseded by those new realities of internationalism, multinationalism, or even 'late capitalism', once we acknowledge that the rhetoric of these global terms is most often underwritten in that grim prose of power that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence" (p. 1).

²⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World Systems II*, (New York: Academic, 1974), p. 15.

²⁶ Paul Jay, Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English," in *PMLA*, January 2001, pp.33-34.

²⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2001), p.108. In Chapter Four, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," Chakrabarty discusses Ranajit Guha's essay, "The Pose of Counter-Insurgency" that analyses the subaltern history of the 1855 rebellion of the Santals. Chakrabarty argues: "The task of producing 'minority' histories has, under the pressure precisely of a deepening demand for democracy, become a double task. I may put it thus: 'good' minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy, but the talk about the 'limits of history,' on the other hand, is about struggling, or even groping, for nonstatist forms of democracy that we cannot not yet either understand or envisage completely. This is so because in the mode of being attentive to the 'minority' of subaltern pasts, we stay with heterogeneities without seeking to reduce them to any overarching principle that speaks for an already given whole. There is no third voice that can assimilate the two different voices of Guha and the Santal leader; we have to stay with both, and with the gap between them that signals an irreducible plurality in our own experiences of historicity. (pp. 107-8)

²⁸ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p.18.

²⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, rpt 1995, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993). Chatterjee writes, "The bilingual intelligentsia came to think of its own language as belonging to that inner domain of cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out; language therefore became a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world" (p. 7).

³⁰ Claude McKay, *Songs of Jamaica*, (Kingston, 1912), pp.74-6 reprinted in Stewart Brown, Mervyn Morris and Gordon Rohlehr eds, *Voiceprint* (Harlow, 1989), pp. 222-3.

³¹ Samuel Selvon, *Foreday Morning: Selected Prose 1946-1986*, (London: Longman, 1989), ed Kenneth Ramchand and Ssusheila Nasta, p. 147.

³² George Lamming, *In the Castle of my Skin*, (Chicago, Illinois: University of Michigan Press 1991), p. 15

³³ Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, (New York: Noonday Press, 1987), pp. 3-4.

³⁴ Christopher Columbus, Letter (1943) quoted in Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead, eds, *Wild Majesty*, (Oxford: 1992), p. 14.

³⁵ C. L. R. James, "Discovering Literature in Trinidad," in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, ed. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 163.

³⁶ Canon Horatio Huggins, *Horoona*, (Trinidad, Port-of-Spain, 1930), pp. 341-2.

- ³⁷ M. Nourbese Philip, *she tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks*, (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 32.
- ³⁸ Michael Foucault, "Self Writing" in *Michael Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al., *The Essential Works of Michael Foucault 1954-1984, Volume I* (New York: The New York Press, 1994), p. 221.
- ³⁹ Jamaica Kincaid, *A small place*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), pp.32-33.
- ⁴⁰ Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, (New York: Plume, Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 6-7.
- ⁴¹ V. S. Naipaul, "Conrad's darkness," in *The Return of Eva Peron*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 233.
- ⁴² Naipaul, *The Return of Eva Peron*, *ibid.* p. 233.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Chris Searle, *Words unchained: Language and revolution in Grenada*, (London: Zed, 1984), pp. 241-42.
- ⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, rpt., 2001, (London & New York: Routledge. 1994) Bhabha writes: "Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the 'other scene' of Entstellung, displacement, fantasy, psychic defence, and an 'open' textuality. Such a display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic). Its discriminatory effects are visible in those split subjects of the racist stereotype—the simian Negro, the effeminate Asiatic male—which ambivalently fix identity as the fantasy of difference To recognize the difference of the colonial presence is to realize that the colonial text occupies that space of double inscription, hallowed—no, hollowed—by Jacques Derrida." (pp.107-8).
- ⁴⁵ Tobias Doring, "Introduction: Caribbean-English passages: Intertextuality in a postcolonial tradition," in Tobias Doring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in postcolonial tradition*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).
- ⁴⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles*, rpt., 1976, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 25-27
- ⁴⁷ Derek Walcott, *Sea Grapes*, (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1976).
- ⁴⁸ Interview with "Jamaica Kincaid: From Antigua to America," in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, ed Frank Birbalsingh, (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 140.
- ⁴⁹ Interview with "Jamaica Kincaid," in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, *ibid.*. Kincaid says: "You see it in Naipaul's face—the inner loathing. I imagine him being the sort of person who, when he comes across his reflection, thinks that that cannot be what he looks like, because he must somehow think he looks like an Englishman" (p. 139).
- ⁵⁰ V. S. Naipaul, "India Through V.S. Naipaul's Eyes," 9 September 2001, Radio National Australia. Naipaul felt the benign influence of the caste system in India thus: "The caste system, that friendly society which provides people with every kind of cushion in bad times, will be around for most people in India." Both Mushirul Hasan and Edward Said see his views on Islam somewhat biased. See Mushirul Hasan, "A Million Mutilations" *Indian Express* (27 November 1999) where Hasan mentions that Naipaul should be

appointed as the chairman of the review committee of the Indian constitution given his anti-Muslim bias. Also see *In Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine how we See the Rest of the World*, rpt., 1997, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). Said has the following comment to make about Naipaul's treatment of Islam: "V. S. Naipaul's role in helping to clarify this general hostility towards Islam is an interesting one. In an interview published in *Newsweek International* (August 18, 1980) he spoke about a book he was writing on 'Slam', and then volunteered that 'Muslim fundamentalism has no intellectual substance to it, therefore it must collapse.' What Muslim fundamentalism he was referring to specifically, and what sort of intellectual substance he had in mind, he did not say. Iran was undoubtedly meant, but so too—in equally vague terms—was the whole postwar wave of Islamic anti-imperialism in the Third World, for which Naipaul has developed a particularly intense antipathy, as demonstrated in his *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*. In *Guerillas* and *A Bend in the River*, among Naipaul's most recent novels, Islam is in question, and it is part of Naipaul's general (and with liberal Western readers, popular) indictment of the Third World that he lumps together the corrupt viciousness of a few grotesque rulers, the end of European colonialism, and post-colonial efforts at rebuilding native societies as instances of an over-all intellectual failure in Africa and Asia. 'Islam' plays a major part according to Naipaul, whether it is in the use of Islamic surnames by pathetic West Indian guerrillas, or the vestiges of the African slave trade. For Naipaul and his readers, 'Islam' somehow is made to cover everything that one most disapproves of from the standpoint of civilized, and Western, rationality" (p. 8). In a review of Naipaul's *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, Said makes the following comment: "Somewhere along the way Naipaul, in my opinion, himself suffered a serious intellectual accident. His obsession with Islam caused him somehow to stop thinking, to become instead a kind of mental suicide compelled to repeat the same formula over and over. This is what I would call an intellectual catastrophe of the first order." Fiachra Gibbons, "Naipaul lets rip at 'banality of Indian women writers,'" *The Guardian* (February 22, 2002) states: The intellectual life of India, the Sanskrit culture, stops at 1000 AD. Islam was the greatest calamity that befell it. Now people think only the Muslims built anything but what they brought was a slave culture that lasted in some parts of India until almost the other day. To be a Muslim you have to destroy your history, to stamp on your ancestral culture. The sands of Arabia is all that matters. This abolition of the self is worse than the colonial abolition, much worse."

⁵¹ V. S. Naipaul in an interview in *Outlook*, 15 November 1999. Naipaul comments on Hindu fundamentalist and secular traditions thus: "To say that India has a secular character is being historically unsound. Dangerous or not, Hindu militancy is a corrective to the history I have been talking about. It is a creative force and will be so. Islam can't reconcile with it."

⁵² The Swedish Academy, Citation 2001.

⁵³ Simon Gikandi, "Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*," in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, (London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 14. .

⁵⁴ Quoted by Simon Gikandi in "Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment," *Past the Last Post*, *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Ramabai Espinet, *Creation Fire: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry*, (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1990).

⁵⁶ Rajkumari Singh, "I am a Coolie," in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* ed. Alison Donnell

- and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 352-53.
- ⁵⁷ Mahadai Das, "They Came in Ships," in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* ed. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 302-03.
- ⁵⁸ Rajkumari Singh, "Per Ajie—A Tribute to the First Immigrant Woman," in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* ed. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 304
- ⁵⁹ Beryl Gilroy, *Frangipani House*, (London: Heinemann, 1986).
- ⁶⁰ Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, (New York: Plume, Penguin Books, 1997), p. 3-4.
- ⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, rpt., 2001, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 175
- ⁶² Gilandi has forcefully argued that the modernist writers like Lamming and Naipaul have only transferred the manipulative authority—"power and control"—from the white male colonizer to the black/brown male neo-colonial. Refer Simon Gikandi, "Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*," in *Past the Last Post*, *ibid.*, p. 7.