

CONCLUSION

*O Tongue of the Nation! Why don't you speak
for yourself?* (Leonard Cohen)

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago in 1498 paved the way for European powers to establish their supremacy in the region and hastened the extinction of the aboriginal tribes of the Caribbean. In his lecture "Concepts of the Caribbean" George Lamming says "Before Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean at the end of the fifteenth century, there was a very viable culture and civilization in these islands. Within a matter of twenty-five or thirty years of Columbus' arrival the aboriginal population was almost totally destroyed" (Birbalsingh 2). When the colonists needed labourers to work in the sugarcane plantations in the Caribbean, they brought African slaves. With the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, Africans and indentured labour from India were brought to work in the plantations. When Britain became a major power in the Caribbean, the islands of Trinidad and Tobago were integrated in 1883 to become a crown colony. Trinidad and Tobago became an independent state in 1962 and a republic on August 1, 1976 within the Commonwealth of Nations. African Caribbean women writers Claire Harris,

Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand of Trinidad and Tobago migrated to Canada between 1960 and 1970.

Aboriginals from Asia arrived in Canada about 40,000 years ago. John Cabot, an Italian navigator was the first European to reach Newfoundland in 1497. The French succeeded in establishing the first European settlement in 1605 and founded Quebec in 1608. A vast country like Canada needed people to live and till the land. Canada took advantage of the slave trade to form a work force. After the abolition of slavery, the Blacks from the United States migrated to Canada to form part of the manpower in the agriculture sector. When Britain enforced its immigration restrictions in 1962, Caribbean immigrants moved to the U. S. and Canada. According to Birbalsingh the Canadian Immigration Act of 1967 made it easier for the Caribbeans to migrate to Canada.

Harris, Philip, and Brand had British colonial education in Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, there was no problem for them either to get jobs or to secure admission to institutions of higher education in Canada. Harris, Philip, and Brand observed that there were immigrants from diverse cultures, languages, religions, and regions settled in Canada. But the policy of Canadian multiculturalism failed to make the lives of non-Europeans equal and comfortable. Unfortunately the Blacks were singled out and deprived of certain benefits and basic human rights because of the colour of their skin. In theory, Canada seems to take pride in her multicultural diversity, but it escapes in the thin Canadian air and the fog of racism blinds Canada's scarce sunny horizon. Canadian Federal Government dominated by Anglo Saxons seems to transform the initial pleasant smile into an

unpleasant and unwelcome frown when they encounter the "Others" especially the Blacks in Canada.

Blacks in Canada with a previous history of slavery and oppression protest against racial discrimination. They express their protest and dissent in a discourse that makes a difference. What Harris, Philip and Brand write springs out of their previous and present experience of colonial power in the Caribbean and Canada. Publishers in Canada do not welcome the kind of discourse Harris, Philip and Brand write. The classic example is that of Nourbese Philip whose manuscripts were rejected twenty-five times before they were published. In "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" Harris writes that Irish or Czechoslovakian writers are considered Canadian whereas "the works of visible immigrants" (Cudjoe 309) are not considered Canadian.

The focus of the study is on the use of the English language by Harris, Philip and Brand that makes a difference in their prose and poetry. Their dissent of the English language brings to the fore their colonial experience in the Caribbean, the vertical mosaic of multiculturalism and racial discrimination in the land of their reterritorialization and the horrid past of the inhuman slave trade that dehumanized the people of Africa.

It is the theory and practice in the literature of the post-colonial era that gave the impetus and inspiration to writers like Harris, Philip and Brand to express their dissent in the language of their erstwhile colonizers. Hence the literature written by the colonized are classed under postcolonial literature. In his article "The

Scramble for Post-colonialism", Stephen Slemon (Ashcroft et al. 45) writes that Post-colonialism is a way of documenting and structuring one's native creative urge which emerged as a result of the departure of what Edward Said (1978) calls "Power and Knowledge" of the colonizer. Padmini Mongia writes that for many critics, postcolonial theory includes different critical approaches which deconstruct European thought (2).

The colonial and imperial powers that brought its language and literature to the colonies also empowered the colonized to decolonize the colonial language. Writers from the erstwhile colonies write back to the colonizer in the colonizer's own language by questioning and deconstructing the imperial codes and colonial discourses in a language of dissent. In the article "Post-colonial Literatures and counter-discourse", Helen Tiffin writes that 'decolonization' is a process (Ashcroft et al. 95). After the collapse of the imperial power in the colonies, the European narrative that ruled the literary world had to give way to the challenges which non-European writers took up not only to decolonize and deconstruct the colonizer's language and literature, but also to re-create their past while narrating their colonial experiences and present predicaments. For this purpose the colonial concept that discarded whatever is non-European as 'Oriental' became the theme and purpose for many non-European writers who in the language of their colonization address their dissent and narrate the past that was destroyed by the imperial power. Native experiences and colonial influences of the colonized in their own land as well as the not so friendly atmosphere and attitude of the country of their reterritorialization created a new kind of narrative. Such a

narrative demanded a language that would be different from that of the colonizer, but at the same time it would have to be understood by the Centre and Frontier as well as the Power and the Periphery. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) "Literature of colonies emerged in the present out of the experiences of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tensions with imperial power" (2). Black women writers like Harris, Philip and Brand have unmasked the power relations of their world by their powerful prose and poetry in the very language of the colonizer. Post- colonial literature has come from the boundaries and frontiers which European historians and philosophers discarded as uncivilized, unmanageable and 'subaltern'.

In her essay "Managing the Unmanageable" Nourbese Philip, makes her ironical dissent of the European misunderstanding of other cultures and the imposition of 'his story' on 'Others'. It is the European attitude to other cultures that made them think that other cultures are unmanageable. Therefore they recommended the managing of the "Others": Africans, Asians and the aboriginals: "At all times they must be managed" (Cudjoe 295). European powers destroyed or distorted ethnic people/cultures or history, which they thought would be a threat to them. In their *Closed Entrances*, Arnold Harrichand Itwaru and Natasha Ksonzek write, "...the imperialization of vision teaches (among other grievous concerns) approval of the atrocity of conquest, pride in the expansion of European and British colonial military occupation 'overseas' " (6).

The policy of multiculturalism of the Federal Government is intended to make Canada a land of colourful and beautiful people. However the mosaic instead of being a horizontal splendour has become a vertical artifice with the white chips at the top and the black ones at the bottom. Canada is a country of many civilizations and cultures; it is a country of immigrants with a heterogeneous and culturally pluralistic society. The most important feature of Canada's population is its diversity in language and religion as well as culture and race. The British and the French form the majority population and the others are minority groups in Canada.

Prime Minister, Lester B Pearson appointed the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963. The main aim of the Commission was to bring together the Anglophone and the Francophone Canadians to promote harmony and encourage them to share the governance of the country. Many ethnic communities in Canada felt that the Commission neglected their interests. Therefore the Commission was forced to recommend steps to be taken to develop the policy of Multiculturalism. Hence the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism recommended a policy of Multiculturalism. Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau proclaimed in the House of Commons the federal policy of Multiculturalism within a Bilingual framework in October 1971. But it was in 1988 that the Act for the preservation and enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada was legislated and Bill C- 93 was passed to integrate diverse ethnic communities by preserving, enhancing, and sharing their cultural heritage. Brand migrated to Canada in 1970. She writes in her *Bread Out Of Stone*, "When I

herself the entire burden of the Europeans. The African was a slave of his European master. In her *Dipped in Shadows*, Claire Harris sympathizes with Africans and other non-whites who still have to carry the white man's burden:

my sisters the white man's
burden is still borne
on the backs of
Africans Asians
Aboriginal peoples
Women children
the bearing enforced by fists and bombs

in such a mind
subjugation is a gift

in such a mind
the mutilation of peoples planet skies

in such a mind
AIDS? (Atlantic culture of vaccine in monkey's blood to be tested
in Central Africa?) the cigarette's cancer chemical abuse and
shifted nuclear wastes new greeds dead Romany Jews Palestinians
in such a mind lost graces decencies knowledge bled
resources the common humanity shattered into us and them
the curved ribs of starvelings
a small thing
in such a mind

a very small thing

my sisters watch

we are not

or even safe (56)

Brand takes objection to the calling of African people “primitive” in her poem *Primitive Offensive*. Philip argues that though Canadian ethos supports freedom of the individual, its offshoot is an ideology of racism. Harris says that the inhuman racist attitude towards the black has been going on for more than three hundred years. While discussing the attitude of the police towards the Blacks, Harris writes that most often white policemen are acquitted in cases involving black people. In a hard hitting criticism of racism, Brand writes that there is a “pathological hate” (*Bread out of Stone* 10) of Native People.

Colonizers deterritorialized Africans from their own native land and language and brought them as slaves to North America and Europe to serve them. The colonial power continued in colonies even after the emancipation. Blacks who came to Canada also came under the rule of their erstwhile colonizers. Canada became a country of reterritorialization for Blacks who have been pushed to the margin. One of the narrators, a Native Indian in *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Talking of Racism*, gives an account of how they were uprooted from the reserve they were living. “When they refused, they were forcefully bundled up in a truck, locked and hauled away like cattle” (Brand and Bhaggiyadatta 20).

Caribbean women writers are also linguistically deterritorialized in Canada. In her "Discourse on Language" in *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks*, Philip describes that the English language is her "father tongue" because it was brought to the Caribbean by male colonisers. Her native language is deterritorialized and she is reterritorialized in the language of the colonizer. In her essay "Why do I Write?" Harris writes, "Africans in North America and Europe have suffered a traumatic loss" (Morrell 29). When Africans were deterritorialized they lost their identity and territory as well as their language and culture. They are reterritorialized in Canada where they are identified as "visible minorities" or "Others". Therefore Philip says, "Africans have been weaned for ever on the milk of otherness" (*Frontiers* 23).

Africans in North America and Europe long to be reterritorialized in their own land and language. Deterritorialization of Africans originated from what Europeans thought of the inhabitants they encountered during their voyages. They considered the others barbarians, savages and monsters and hence an inferior status was assigned to them. Blacks are made to undergo inhuman and unkind treatment. In *Closed Entrances: Canadian Culture and Imperialism*, Arnold Itwaru describes an incident in which a European taxi cab driver in Toronto pronounces the word "Zoo" looking at him. Itwaru responds to the driver thinking that he was asking for direction. But the cab driver tells Itwaru that he should be in the zoo (64). For such people the Blacks are not part of the society of human beings. They want the Blacks to be deterritorialized from the land they (Europeans) occupy.



But Caribbean women writers in Canada write back to the centre "Frontier". According to Philip, people like her are on the "frontier" and not in the "margin" because the marginal culture would get absorbed in the dominant culture, whereas "frontier" will resist the dominant culture. George Lamming in his lecture "Concepts of the Caribbean" argues for a Caribbean Frontier: The Caribbean may have been seen as an imperial frontier by the Empire. According to Lamming a Caribbean world exists in many metropolitan centres in Europe and North America. These centres comprise what I call the external frontier and this frontier, particularly the visionary progressive elements within it, has very decisive role to play in the future cultural and political development of the Caribbean" (Birbalsingh 9). According to Philip when the Africans were deterritorialized, they were also deterritorialized from their language, religion, culture, customs, and traditions, social and family patterns. In fact Canada belongs to its Native people who settled there about 4000 years ago. Philip writes, "The only peoples who be(truly)long here – who be long here [. . .], are the Native peoples" (Frontier 22). Brand explains how the Native Indians were deterritorialized in their own country through false treaties and forced annexations in colonial Canada. When the Europeans found the Native Indians were not useful any more, they took away the land occupied by them.

Nourbese Philip talks to Janice Williamson about placing the 'center-piece' of the poem in "Discourse on the Logic of Language" between a short story and historical edicts. There is a short story of a mother blowing words into her newborn daughter in the left margin and the historical edicts about the mutilation

and hanging of the tongues of slaves for speaking in their mother tongue in the right margin (*She Tries Her Tongue* 56). This is an example of physical mutilation and linguistic deterritorialization. When one gets her mother tongue from the left margin, it is deterritorialized, mutilated or destroyed when it reaches the right margin. Ironically Philip makes it clear that when some other languages are written from right to left, the English language with its killer instinct as in the edicts, is written from left to right. The edict of the removal and hanging of the tongue is in the right margin. Ironically also the English language moves from top to bottom to reterritorialize Anglo-Saxons symbolically on top and to deterritorialize Africans actually to the bottom in the classification of human beings.

Though their mother tongue is not English Harris, Philip and Brand pursued their studies in English. The English language is the language of the British Empire. These Caribbean women writers write in this language and also express their dissent of the language. English is the imperial language and has its centre in Britain. These women from the British colonies write back to the centre in the language of power that subjugated them. According to Gobard, human beings communicate at four levels. The *vernacular* is the language of communication in any society; the *mythic* language is sacred because it is the bridge between man and God. The third is the *referential* language in which a nation writes its literature and the fourth is the *vehicular* language, which is non-territorial and is used for global communication. The *vehicular* language is non-territorial and

belongs to those who use it anywhere in the world. The *vehicular* language is the high language and language of power that belongs to the metropolis.

Caribbean women writers in Canada write in the *vehicular* language that is both the language of their erstwhile colonizer and also the colonizers of Canada. But when they have to present their native experiences as well as the past and present torments of colonizers, they find the English language inadequate. Philip feels alienated from the language of the colonizer because it is also the language of the oppressor. However, the language of colonization and oppression has encroached upon the *vernacular* as well as the *referential* languages and deterritorialized both the languages. Thus the *vehicular* language has become the language of the metropolis and it is the language that is understood within and outside the territory as well as outside the region and the nation.

Africans were deterritorialized from Africa both territorially and linguistically during the colonial rule. Slaves were not allowed to speak in their languages. In fact the slave trader forced his own language upon the slaves. Slaves were strictly warned against the use of their native tongue. The slave trader reterritorialized the slaves in the colonies of America or Canada. The people of African origin were deterritorialized and the colonizers made the English language the ruling language. In this way the language of the colonizer became the language of the colonies. When the colony became a nation, the colonizer's language became the language of the nation and subsequently the language of power and authority.

The empire controlled their colonies through their reign and language. Harris, Philip and Brand have ventured to deconstruct the language imposed by colonizers by introducing indigenous words, phrases, expressions and structures. They reveal their disregard for the prosodic features and punctuation marks in the writings. They ignore the conventional length of lines in their poems. There are gaps between words and phrases that express their silence and the agony they suffered silently. Sometimes their poems fill the page with the left alignment for a few lines and with the right alignment for other few lines with scattered words and expressions in the centre of the page. Harris, Philip and Brand mix their writings with short sentences, incomplete expressions, and long sentences covering the whole page and in between they also use capital letters. Lines from *Dipped in Shadow* quoted above reveal very clearly the linguistic dissent of these writers. In this way Harris, Philip and Brand are able to expose the sufferings meted out to them by the colonizer because of the colour of their skin and the “silence” they observed in their writings in the language of the colonizer. Morrell quotes Leslie Sanders as saying that according to Claire Harris the English language is inimical to black people and women, and thus in her poetry she works to reverse customary connotations and meanings. Sanders believes that most of the black women writers write to create a language which illuminates the complexity, richness, and variety of people and worlds which the English language customarily negates or marginalizes (15). There is disharmony in class and colour, culture and gender as well as in language and geography. *Drawing Down a Daughter* is an example of collages of languages, genres and the disharmony that Harris is talking about. Philip uses the English language in different ways to

effectively convey her ideas, feelings, and more importantly dissent. In *Looking For Livingstone*, Philip is concerned about the loss of silence of the African people and the continent. In very powerful words she expresses her dissent: “bruised by tongue/ of silence (8).

In the section where Philip discusses the creation in *Looking For Livingstone: Odyssey of Silence*, she says that God created silence first and thereafter man, woman and other creatures; they all lived happily because there was silence and there was no spoken word (11). Silence was broken when man sinned and this caused a surge of words. Here language is seen as the primordial sin; it is the language that brought the differentiation and discrimination in the face of the earth; the spoken word also fractured human beings and deterritorialized them.

The female protagonist of *Looking for Livingstone* travels through seven lands where she meets seven tribes of people whose names are the anagrams of the word *silence*: ECNELIS, SINCEEL, LENSECI, SCENILE, CESLIENS, CLEENIS, and NEECLIS. “The names I’ve given them are all anagrams of the word *silence*” (Janice Williamson 240). “In her book *Writing from the Borderlands* Carmen Cáliz – Montoro writes, “the choice of number seven is also related to the readable anagrams that can be formed with the jumbled syllables of the word *silence*” (115). Philip has managed the seven letters of the word ‘silence’ in different orders to express her dissent of the English language that enables her to play with its letters and allows her to create different words to mean the same. Seven is a Biblical number. There are over 70 references to the number seven in the Bible. Seventh commandment ‘You shall not steal’ (Deuteronomy 5: 19) is

also significant here. One of the accusations leveled against Europeans is that they plundered Africa, stole her possessions and people and kidnapped Africans into slavery. Arnold Harrichand Itwaru and Natasha Ksonzek argue that Europeans have always justified “the violation and robbery of hundreds of millions of people in their own lands”(Closed Entrances 6).

In an interview Brand tells Makeda Silvera that she wrote her *No Language is Neutral* “in the language that I grew up in” (*The Other Woman* 366). Philip talks to Janice Williamson about her *Harriet’s Daughter*. She says that the entire book is in a ‘metalanguage’. According to Philip “writers coming from the Caribbean inhabit a spectrum of language – Caribbean English. It’s neither dialect nor standard English . . . various characters in the book speak in various registers and styles ranging from the very stiff, staid kind of English that I learnt when I grew up back there to ‘dialect’, what I now call demotic language” (*Sounding Differences* 227).

In *No Language is Neutral*, Brand makes it clear that the colonial language is spun of the syllables of cruelty. The colonizer’s language is murderous. Reality is hushed up when the mainstream writers write in their own language. But Brand analyses the language into its components and identifies every component with the colonizer’s weapons of torture. The English language in which Brand writes is able to express her dissent of political, social and linguistic discrimination in Canada. The poet’s dissent of the English language is apparent in the expression “how to balance basket and prose reaching for/ murder.” (*No Language is Neutral* 23). She is conscious of the past of her race. Slaves had to learn to

'balance basket' of burden on their heads to escape the torture of slave masters. Similarly the poet has to work hard to 'balance prose' because the mainstream critics lie in wait to brand the language of 'others' as nonstandard.

With their powerful language Harris, Philip and Brand resist the majority community's designs to marginalize them. The Anglo-Saxon authorities are capable of dumping the writings of the 'others' as substandard and not Canadian and causing the minority writers humiliation and mental tormentation. However, these Caribbean women writers deconstruct the colonizer's language with new metaphors, strange words, and a syntax and semantics of a different kind. They make English behave like African languages by using verbs as nouns and nouns as verbs. Brand makes use of the auxiliary verb "do" with verbs by making them behave like nouns. The following examples are from *No Language is Neutral*: "silence done curse god", "people does hear things" (23). Though 'curse' and 'hear' are verbs, Brand uses them as nouns. Brand also uses the word 'rudiment' as a verb in "falsettos of whip and air/ rudiment this grammar" (23). Philip emphasizes this point when in her "Introduction" to *She Tries Her Tongue...* "Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; ..." (17). African languages like the Indian languages use words like 'do' with nouns to form verbs. For example in Hindi verbs like 'kam karna' (to work), 'snaan karna' (to bathe), 'bath karna' (to speak) are formed with a noun and the word 'karna' (to do). This reveals the linguistic affinity of African and Indian languages.

In her "To Dissipate Grief" (*The Conception of Winter* 34) quoted in the third chapter, Harris sets two poems in left and right margins of the same page. "Of

Iron, Bars and Cages" (*The Conception of Winter* 43) consists of three poems on one page; poems in the margins are in italics and have from one to three words whereas the centre poem is in longer lines with six to nine words. By juxtaposing two or three poems on one page, the poet attempts to bridge two landscapes: the physical Canadian and the psychological Caribbean. By adopting this kind of typography, the poet attempts to balance the inherent tension of her predicament. These examples reveal how dexterously Harris handles several levels of language, mind and experience in her poems.

Harris, Philip and Brand use various techniques to disclose their dissent. The English language is like "stone" and the mainstream writers have challenged them to make "bread out of stone". In the New Testament of the Bible, it is the devil that asks Jesus to make bread out of stone (Mtt 4: 3). Just like the devil, the mainstream writers also ask these Caribbean women writers to make bread out of stone. Caribbean women writers accept the challenge. They make the English language pliant in response to the temptation of mainstream writers. Europeans create circumstances that are not conducive to writing and publishing for others. Claire Harris tells Janice Williamson what one of the publishers spoke to her, "I don't care how you write, but the book has to be set in Canada" (*Sounding Differences* 120). Nourbese Philip speaks to Williamson about the response of publishers to her *Harriet's Daughter* "they weren't interested in work with Black kids. They didn't even want to read the manuscript" (*Sounding Differences* 237). Brand was asked to prove "universality" in her writings. But these women of grit

have succeeded in moulding the language of their prose and poetry and have sculpted a literature of difference.

For a researcher what is important here is that the disharmony in the Canadian Diaspora has produced a kind of literature, which makes a difference. People who have experienced discrimination in the Canadian mosaic have poured their heart out in a language that appeals to both heart and soul. The kind of prose and poetry created by Caribbean Women writers in Canada like Harris, Philip and Brand are enshrined in a language of dissent which has given rise to a new metaphor and a morphology as well as a new semantics and syntax in the English language. The synthesis of English and African languages gives a different touch and a native vitality to the writings of Harris, Philip and Brand. The study of African languages and the specific meanings and references these women writers imply in their writings can encourage new research in this field. A comparative study can also emerge from the writings of immigrant ethnic writers who find Canada conducive to creative ventures and for others who see Canada as a dreaded place because of the prevalent racist and partisan ambience that produces disharmony, discrimination and discontent.

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