

INTRODUCTION

Each Language draws a magic circle round the people to which it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape save stepping out of it into another.

(Wilhelm von Humboldt)

“Language of Dissent: African Caribbean Canadian Women Writers” is a study of the works of three women writers of African origin from the Caribbean islands who migrated to Canada in the late sixties. As we know that the Europeans, who enslaved Africans, colonized the Caribbean islands too. When Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand migrated from Trinidad and Tobago of the Caribbean islands to the New World, once again these three women of African descent became the subjects of their erstwhile colonizers because Europeans who had colonized the Caribbean islands also colonized Canada.

The focus of this study is on the use of the English language by Harris, Philip and Brand that makes a difference in their prose and poetry. As Carol Morrell (1994) has pointed out “they startle the reader by interrogating standard English and substituting new usages, often in the Caribbean demotic, for old ones” (10). They are able to picture the horrid past of the inhuman slave trade that dehumanized the people of Africa and their experience of racial discrimination in the land of

their reterritorialization in their dissenting use of the English language. In her "Poets in Limbo" Harris writes, "Dehumanization became an essential part of the daily life of the enslaved" (Neuman and Kamboureli 116). A successful slave state required people exiled from the authentic self. Thus laws were aimed at destruction of language and culture of the natives and slaves, victims of the worst trade in the history of human beings. These women writers speak for their whole race that suffered under the colonial rule both in Africa and in the land of their reterritorialization. Reterritorialization of Africans in Canada means that they were deterritorialized (uprooted) from their native land and reterritorialized (replanted) in Canada. Africans were brought from Africa as slaves to the Caribbean islands to work in the plantation and also to Canada to work in the vast, sparsely populated land. As these writers are from the Caribbean and are now settled in Canada, they are also the victims of the policy of multiculturalism. Therefore the thesis also takes into consideration issues related to multiculturalism, racism, deterritorialization and reterritorialization and finally the manner in which Harris, Philip and Brand make the English language "pliant" (*Bread Out of Stone* 23) to serve their goals. R. K. Narayan found English ~~so~~ 'pliant' and 'absorbent' and hence he claims it to be the most resilient language in the world (cited in Juneja 140). For Brand the English language is like stone and she has to make it pliant by kneading it with the Caribbean demotic so that it could bear her burden.

As Harris, Philip and Brand are from the Caribbean islands and they migrated to Canada, it is relevant to look at the circumstances, which prompted them to write the way they write. It needs to be emphasized here that their land of origin and

the land of migration as well as the Post-colonial experience have contributed in the shaping of their creative writing which has made a difference in the world of literature.

While writing about the Caribbean, it is important to delve into its geography and history. Geographically speaking the Caribbean is the region of tropical islands between Continental North and South America. Caribbean nations include the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Puerto Rico, The West Indies, Trinidad, Tobago and others. The West Indies and the main lands of South and Central America bound the Caribbean Sea, which is an extension of North Atlantic Ocean linked to the Gulf of Mexico by the Yucatán Channel and to the Pacific Ocean by the Panama Canal. The population of ^{the} Caribbean is about 28.8 million. The native inhabitants were Carib Indians, a group of American Indians scattered through the Amazon Basin and the Guyana. In 1493 Columbus sailed along the islands inhabited by Caribs and Arawaks. Carib-American Indian tribes also inhabited the Lesser Antilles and parts of the neighbouring South American Coast at the time of the Spanish Conquest and rule from 1498 to 1797. Hence the region gets its name from the Natives whom Columbus encountered on his second voyage to the region. Their name is also given to the sea in the region (Caribbean Sea). With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 its strategic importance increased. The indigenous Carib and Arawak inhabitants were either destroyed or exiled by European powers. The pre-Columbian population of the Caribbean disappeared as the American Indian inhabitants replaced them. Europeans brought African slaves to work in the fertile land of the region, ^{and established} ~~which abounded in~~

sugarcane plantations. The abolition of slavery created problems for the colonists.

Though Britain declared ^{*The slave trade*} ~~slavery~~ illegal in 1807, in America slavery ended in 1863 ^{*in 1834*} and it was totally abolished there only in 1865. After the abolition of slavery the colonizers had to bring indentured labour from other European colonies to the Caribbean to work in the plantations. This labour force brought to work in the sugarcane plantations of the Caribbean included Indians especially those who were taken to work in African countries by the British. Labourers of Indian origin added another dimension to the population of the Caribbean.

Trinidad and Tobago ~~of the Caribbean islands~~ are of special importance to this study because ~~the writers~~ Harris, Philip and Brand are from these islands. Trinidad, one of the most prosperous islands in the West Indies lies 15 miles northeast of Venezuela. Christopher Columbus was the first European to reach Trinidad on his expedition on July 31, 1498. The Spanish colonized the island from 1498 until 1797. Trinidad was seized by the British in 1797, but was ceded to Britain in 1802. Tobago another island of the Lesser Antilles in the West Indies was also discovered by Columbus in 1498. The Dutch settled there in 1632. The island was under the possession of the Dutch, British and French until it was ceded to Britain in 1814. In 1877 it was made a Crown colony and later it was added to Trinidad as a joint colony (Malton 344). Trinidad and Tobago were integrated into a single Crown colony in 1883. It became an independent State in 1962 and a republic on August 1, 1976 within the Commonwealth of Nations. It is an independent republic in the Caribbean consisting of the southernmost islands of the West Indies. Geographically it is an extension of the South

American main land. Islands of Trinidad, Tobago and several small islands, the largest of which are Chacachacare and Little Tobago form part of Trinidad and Tobago. Port of Spain, San Fernandoⁿ, Arima and Scarborough are the principal cities. It covers a total area of 5,128 sq kms. The emigration to North America from Trinidad and Tobago began in the sixties^{1960s} and according to Gordon Merrill the immigrants totalled 7,000 in 1967.

The new population of the Caribbean region mostly consisted of Africans, East Indians, and American Indians. Some of those who came to the new land had their roots in India. The East Indians were Hindus. Africans and the other mixed population consisted mostly of Roman Catholics. The small white population is descended mainly from Spanish or French planters. There are a few English immigrants and also Portuguese whose descendents^d came as indentured labour. About 47% of the population is of African descent. The rest are East Indians (35%), Europeans (3%), Chinese (1%) and others (14%). English is the principal and official language, but French Patois, Hindi, and Spanish are also spoken. The history of the Caribbean region became the story of the powers that brought people to work in plantations. The arrival of Europeans and the introduction of Christianity changed the religion, life and language of the people. European dominance brought European administrative and educational structure and culture in the Caribbean.

In contrast to the Caribbean, Canada is a vast country. It is the second largest country in the world after Russia the area of which is 17,075,000 sq kms whereas

Canada covers an area of 9,976,140 sq kms. Canada is thinly populated because much of its land is too cold or mountainous for human beings to inhabit. Hence most Canadians live within 300 kilometres of the south border. Western Canada has the most rugged terrain, including the Pacific ranges and the Rocky Mountains. Canada occupies all of the northernmost part of North America except Alaska in the west and small French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Canada is blessed with two principal river systems: Mackenzie and the St. Lawrence. From a primarily agricultural country famous for logging, fishing and fur, Canada has transformed itself into one of the leading industrial countries of the world.

Canada's first people arrived in North America from Asia about 40,000 years ago. John Cabot, an Italian navigator in English service supported by King Henry VII wanted to search for a western route to India. He reached Newfoundland in 1497. He was the first European to reach there. It is Cabot's discovery that helped Britain to have its claims in North America. In the struggle for power in the new land between France and Britain, the French succeeded in establishing the first European settlement in 1605 and founded Quebec in 1608. When France was trying slowly to establish in the west, Britain was fast in developing its settlements on the Atlantic coast. Britain captured Quebec in 1759 and thereafter France surrendered its Canadian claims to Britain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763. According to the Constitutional Act of 1791 Canada was divided on religious and linguistic lines. Thus Quebec opted to be French and Catholic and the Upper

Canada remained English and Protestant. It was in 1867 that the British passed the British North American Act to establish the Dominion of Canada.

Emigration from the Caribbean to other countries began after the Second World War. Frank Birbalsingh writes in the 'Introduction' to his *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* that immigrants from the Caribbean in London, Toronto and New York would today number about two million. 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. While stating the reasons for the Caribbean migration to Canada, Birbalsingh emphasizes the fact that employment opportunities, education and better standard of living were the primary motives behind the large scale immigration in the seventies and eighties. The new land (Canada) was promising and prosperous.

Clare Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand are from Trinidad and Tobago, which became independent as a single state in 1962. After Trinidad and Tobago gained Independence there were political, social and ethnic tensions in these islands. In an interview with Frank Birbalsingh Dionne Brand gives the following reasons for her migration to Canada: "I was 17, just out of high school. At that time everyone was migrating to Canada, as they had gone to England two decades before ... I think I was lucky to be born at the time I was. I left in 1970 after the uprising in Trinidad. There was a Black Power movement, and even a Black Panther party" (120 - 21). In another interview "In the Company of my

work: *The Other Woman*”, Brand talks to Makeda Silvera about her migration to Canada. She says that she came to Canada “ To run away. To escape because there were limited possibilities for a girl in Trinidad. Jobs were based a lot on the nexus of race and class, and I wasn’t fair-skinned enough to get a job in a bank, or connected enough” (361- 62). In an interview with Janice Williamson, Nourbese Philip gives her reason to leave the Caribbean: “Also growing up in the Caribbean, you grow up knowing that you’re going to leave home. For one thing, the societies are too small to absorb all their trained people, so you have to leave” (230). Harris, Philip and Brand migrated to Canada in 1966, 1968 and 1970 respectively. Harris went to Calgary to teach. Philip went to study in the University of Western Ontario and Brand went to the University of Toronto for her education.

A good number of Caribbean women who migrated to Canada, have made their mark as writers and they are acclaimed internationally. The first Caribbean woman to get her work published was Mary Prince who was a slave in the British Caribbean. Her narrative *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related By Herself* appeared in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* published in London in 1831 three years before England abolished slavery (Cudjoe 11).

African Women Writers Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand discussed in this thesis are from the Caribbean region. As they are of African origin and are settled in Canada as writers and they are from Trinidad

repeated again

and Tobago of the Caribbean, they are called African Caribbean Canadian Women Writers in this study.

Claire Harris was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1937. She had her schooling in an English medium school in Trinidad. Then she did her B. A. with major English and minor Spanish at University College, Dublin. She also studied for a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education at the University of the West Indies. Harris migrated to Canada in 1966 as a teacher of English and Drama at secondary level in Calgary's Catholic school system. Harris was at the University of Nigeria to study Mass Media and Communications during 1974 –75. She began to write for publication in 1975. In 1977 Harris published works of major Canadian poets on posters under the trade name *Poetry Goes Public*. She was a poetry editor of the literary magazine *Dandelion* from 1981 to 1989. The all-Alberta literary magazine: *blue buffalo* was the brain-child of Harris and she remained its managing editor from 1984 to 1987. She has been a member of the Writers' Guild of Alberta since its inception.

Marlene Nourbese Philip was born in Moriah, Tobago in 1947. She completed her graduation in Economics at the University of the West Indies in 1968. In the same year she immigrated to Canada. She did her M. A. in Political Science and L. L. B. at the University of Western Ontario in 1970 and 1973 respectively. She practised immigration and family law between 1975 and 1982 and then decided to devote herself to writing full time. Philip has been a contributing editor of the cultural journal called *Fuse Magazine* since 1984. She was a member of the non-

fiction jury of the Canada Council in 1989. She has taught courses in creative fiction and women's writing at York University, the University of Toronto, and Ontario College of Art since 1989.

Dionne Brand was born in 1953 in Guayaguayare, Trinidad. After her graduation from Naparima Girls' High School in Trinidad, Brand moved to Toronto in 1970. She studied for her B. A. in English and Philosophy in the University of Toronto in 1975 and took her M. A. in the philosophy of education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 1989. Brand has worked with feminist and black communities. She was the editor and founding member of *Our Lives*, Canada's first black women's newspaper. Brand also worked as a community worker for the Black Education Project, Toronto. She also worked as a counsellor for the black-West Indian community at the immigrant Women's Centre, Toronto. She was an Information Officer for the Agency for Rural Transformation, Grenada, and for the Caribbean Peoples' Development Agencies.

The term "Language of Dissent" in this study refers to the manner and style in which Clare Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand manipulate the English language to express their dissatisfaction not only with the language in which they write, but also the Federal policies of multiculturalism as well as the problems of racism in Canada. They raise their voice against the racial attitude of Europeans in Canada. Their writings reveal their dissent of the discrimination against race, colour and gender. Native Indians and ethnic groups especially those from the African region who are discriminated against because of the colour

of their skin form subjects of discussion in the discourses of Harris, Philip and Brand. As marginalized minorities, these women writers struggle hard against the odds of politics, government, society and publishers. In their writings it is clear that they want to restore the image of Africa that was lost due to colonization and subsequent de-colonization of the African continent. They also attempt to recreate the history of Africa and deconstruct the past to establish that Africa is the heart of Western civilization. They argue that the “silence” of Africans enabled Europeans who went to Africa as adventurers, discoverers, travellers and visitors to write about what they thought Africa to be and not about the land and people they saw there. They wrote about what they wanted to prove to the world that the Anglo-Saxons ranked first in the ladder of human civilization. Africa was thus construed as the “Dark Continent” inhabited by people of black skin who led a life far from human civilization and it was the mission of Europeans to civilize this savage place and people. Thus colour became a cultural/political issue for Europeans and the African identity became a stereotype of ‘skin’ envisaged by Europeans. In his article “The Other Question”, Homi Bhabha writes that Europeans recognized “colour as the cultural/political sign of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural ‘identity’ ” (Mongia 1997: 49).

Caribbean women have been writing about their encounters and conflicts as well as their accomplishments and achievements quite for some time now. However, there has been a surge of writings by Caribbean women since 1977. The first International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers that was held at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, in April 1988 brought together about fifty

Caribbean women writers and critics from various places. There were Caribbean women writers from Trinidad, Grenada, Jamaica, Belize, Toronto, Calgary, London, New York, Paris, Vermont, and California who shared their experiences under colonial rule both in the Caribbean islands and in the countries they were reterritorialized. These women came together to voice their suppressed feelings, their emotions and thus reveal their agonies and anxieties which they faced in the new land in which they were reterritorialized. Selwyn R. Cudjoe includes contributions from forty Caribbean women writers in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From The First International Conference*. Contributions of Marlene Nourbese Philip ("Managing the Unmanageable") and Claire Harris ("Mirror, Mirror on the Wall") are also included in this collection. Dionne Brand also attended the Conference. It is clear from her essay "This Body for Itself" (*Bread Out of Stone: recollections sex recognitions race dreaming politics*) where she writes "Here I listen to writer after writers talk about their work. I have plans to talk myself on 'Poetry and Politics'. It is the first Caribbean Women Writers Conference, held at Wellesley College in Massachusetts" (25).

The contemporary Afro-Caribbean Canadian women writers whose prose and poetry explode into different directions and dimensions make a difference in the literary scenario of Canada. They use the English language as a weapon in their hands to wield literary power and fight against racism, colonialism and Canadian multiculturalism.

Harris, Philip and Brand have a common objective - Return Africa to Africans. They want to write for the cause of Africans wherever they are. These women writers are also concerned with women's issues. They are pained at the unequal treatment meted out to women, particularly the black women at work places, as also in the Canadian governmental affairs. These women fight for self-fulfilment and self-respect. Black women writers are denied public grants in Canada to publish their works. They are told that their writings are not Canadian enough and hence the Canadian publishers are reluctant to publish their works. So these Caribbean women have to struggle against Canadian racism and also the male dominion of the public spaces scanty available to women writers of African origin.

Non-white women in Canada voice their experiences as women, as ^a minority community and as marginalized writers. They face race and class oppressions and also gender discrimination. As Shirin Kudchedkar writes in her paper on "Feminist Voices From India and Canada (Malashri Lal ed.), "They (non-whites) write as Native women, Black women, South Asian women for it is not only their experience as women but as Natives, Blacks, South Asians or East Asians that has shaped their lives. Race and often class oppression are as fundamental to their lives as gender oppression" (8).

Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand are Canada's popular Caribbean women writers. In her "Poets in Limbo", Harris writes, "Most black poets here are originally from the Caribbean. Dionne Brand Marlene Philip and I

come from Trinidad, the most southerly of that chain of lush and beautiful islands colonized earlier and more deeply than any other part of the world” (Neuman and Kamboureli 116). Their displacement from the shores of the Caribbean islands have strengthened them and made their writing a vehicle of dissent and protest. These women writers of the Caribbean region have succeeded in making their voices heard in the world through their prose and poetry of revolutionary ideas on racism, gender and class in Canadian society. Though their writings have universal acceptance, they are not considered mainstream writers in Canada. As marginalized writers in Canada, they do not get the same treatment as the mainstream writers do. Initially Canadian publishers rejected their writings under the pretext that their works were not “Canadian enough”. However, when they got published, they won prestigious awards in Canada and abroad like “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone” (Matt 21: 42).

In her article “Chasm and Bridge: Linguistic and Cultural Barriers Between Writer and Community” Uma Parameswaran (Malashri Lal ed.) cites Rushdie’s view as it appeared in a review titled “The Empire writes back with a vengeance”. According to Rushdie some of the best writings in English today is coming from the peripheries of the erstwhile British Empire. Rushdie talks about the writers who are from the erstwhile British colonies and not about the Anglo Saxon writers who belong to “the metropolis”, which is the centre of power and authority. Anglo Saxons, in this thesis, are the colonizers and the colonized are the visible minorities on the periphery of the erstwhile colonies. Caribbean

women writers Harris, Philip and Brand from the British colonies of Trinidad and Tobago came under their former colonizers when they migrated to Canada because those who ruled the Caribbean islands also ruled Canada. Consequently, they belong to the periphery in Canada and not to the centre. Harris expresses her displeasure of the Canadian policy of considering the Blacks as newcomers in Canada though they have lived there for decades. In her *Poets in Limbo*, Harris criticizes Canada for its unkind attitude that even after 200 years of the migration of the Black Loyalists to Canada, they are considered newcomers and are pushed to the wall: “a blatant ethno centricity (which) condemns people of colour to the sidelines: / eternal immigrants forever poised on the verge of not belonging” (Neuman and Kamboureli 115).

Though ethnic writers especially the Blacks in Canada are pushed to the margin by publishing houses and mainstream writers, writings of Harris, Philip and Brand have gained global recognition. The following works of Harris gained recognition and reputation by winning awards and prizes for her: *Fables from the Women's Quarters* won Commonwealth Award, America's Region-1985. *Travelling to Find a Remedy* won Writers' Guild of Alberta Award for Poetry –1987 and the first Alberta Culture Poetry Prize. *The Conception of Winter* won Alberta Culture Special Award, 1990. *Drawing Down a Daughter* was nominated for Governor General's Award.

Harris is hopeful of achieving her goal. For her, the pen is mightier than the sword. One day her people will be able to overcome the hardships and rise

against their tormentors and show the world that they are equal, if not superior to others in this planet. She says that her task as a writer is to return Africa to its place at the centre, the heart of western civilization. In an interview Harris tells Janice Williamson, "I want my writing to rehabilitate the black person, her beauty, her smile, her walk, her genius...his too. I also want to explore the reality of Canadian society which I must free to include me" (122).

Marlene Nourbese Philip was a member of the non-fiction jury of the Canada Council. She has been teaching courses in creative writing and women's writing at York University, University of Toronto, and the Ontario College of Art. Her writings include *Thorns* (1980), *Salmon Courage* (1983), *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989), *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), *Showing Grit: Showboating North of the 44th Parallel* (1993) and *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1993).

Philip makes a difference in poetry with her Black and female identity. She writes in a space that does not recognize either her identity or voice because she is a poet who has mastered a foreign language. But she demystifies the myth of Anglo Saxon writers whose mother tongue is English and who claim to command the English language and others by inventing a morphology that is created by them to suit their needs. Philip invents a metaphor to voice her dissent of racism and feminism in Canada. She recreates the English language to put forth her ideas, expressions and emotions. She handles the English language not only as a medium of her writing but also a vehicle to crush colonial and racial attitudes in

Canada. According to Philip, black women in Canada are at a double disadvantage as they are victims of racism and sexism: "Women as Other constitutes one of the building blocks of the patriarchy; Black as Other one of the building blocks of racist ideologies" (Scheier et al. 211).

Africans in Canada are ethnic minorities. But their ethnic character is looked down upon in Canada. They are discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. They are marginalized and treated differently. European society is not ready to accept the Blacks as partners in the development of Canada. The treatment that the Blacks receive now in Canada is not much different from that they received when they were the victims of the inhuman slave trade. Europeans just ignore the ethnic culture and its value to the Blacks. As a result the Blacks are deprived of their expressions, language, religion, education, music and patterns of family relations in Canada. These and others, which are matters close to the heart of Africans, have been made to disappear leaving no trace of their existence in Canada, which for them is a land of racism. In her collection of essays titled *Frontiers: Essays and Writings of Racism and Culture*, Philip laments how Europeans neglect Africans. Their very existence is insignificant to Europeans and it vanishes "into the pale and beyond, into the ^{nether} nether land of race" (10). Philip sent her manuscripts of *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* to a publisher in 1991. In *Making a Difference*, Kamboureli includes a few lines of the opening paragraph, which Philip wrote to the publisher when she sent her manuscript for publication:

How does one write from the perspective of one who has “mastered” a foreign language, yet has never had a mother tongue; one whose father tongue is an English fashioned to exclude, deride and deny the essence of one’s being? ...How does the poet work a language engorged on her many silences? How does she break that silence that is one yet many/ Should she? Can she fashion a language that uses silences as a first principle? (273).

According to Kamboureli the works mentioned above were rejected 25 times. However, these works of Philip gained name and fame when they were published. At the publication of *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* Philip became the first Anglophone woman and the second Canadian to win the prestigious ‘Casa de las Americas Prize’. Her novel for the young people, *Harriet’s Daughter* was rejected by Canadian publishers, but was published in England. Later it was published in Canada and was a finalist for the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award for Children’s Literature, The City of Toronto Book Awards, and the Max and Greta Ebel Memorial Award.

So there is a double standard. For no reason an immigrant writer’s works may be rejected by publishers in Canada, but when the immigrant writer receives accolades by winning awards, the publishers then claim them as Canada’s most powerful writers. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond (1990) write about the double standard of the Canadian system in the following words: “Doubleness ... is the essence of immigrant experience. Caught between two worlds, the

immigrant negotiates a new social space; caught between two cultures and often languages, the writer negotiates a new literary space" (9).

Philip wants writers to play a constructive role. They should change their "No" into "yes" i.e. "to transform negation into affirmation" and instead of reacting to their marginalized position, they should not consider themselves 'Other', instead they should reconstruct their images and identities. In her *Frontiers: Essays and Writings of Racism and Culture* Philip writes,

I consciously try to remember what did not happen to me personally, but which accounts for my being today: to defy a culture that wishes to forget; to rewrite a history that at best forgot and omitted, at worst lied; to seek psychic reparations; to honour those who went before; to grieve for that which was irrevocably lost (language, religion, culture), and those for whom no one grieved; to avoid having to start over again (as many oppressed groups have had to do); "to save ourselves". (56)

Philip is obsessed with the linguistic attitude of the colonizers. Colonizers ignore the fact that the English language is her mother tongue and it is the language, which she is able to put to creative use: "father tongue/ and english is/ my mother tongue" (*She Tries Her Tongue ...* 58). In the Caribbean islands the upper class and educated middle class people speak Standard English. The language spoken in the street is a dialect of English, which is called "Caribbean demotic". Colonizers have always suppressed the mother tongue of the colonized. They marginalize those whose mother tongue is not English and use the English

language as a weapon of authority. But Harris, Philip and Brand are convinced that they have to write in a style and syntax different from those of the colonizer. Their dissent of the English language will enable them to translate the torture of their race, their native experience, oral narratives and silences of the Caribbean as well as the racial discrimination in Canada.

Philip who is a European-educated writer is caught between the mother tongue and the dialect. In her poem "Discourse on the Logic of language", she makes her view clear. The English language is her mother tongue and father tongue at the same time. However, she finally resolves that English is her father tongue. She is of the opinion that one's mother tongue cannot be a foreign language; therefore English is not a mother tongue. For Philip writing in English is compromising with the language of the oppressors and colonizers. It is painful to work in a language that is used by the colonizer to abuse the colonized and the marginalized, to deprive them of their rightful claims and to dominate over them: "working in English is like coming to terms with an abusive parent" (Carey 19).

In her "Discourse on the Logic of Language", Philip delivers a heavy blow to the western concept of woman in a male dominated society by writing about the mother – daughter relationship in the left margin. Women are marginalized and even a girl child is marginalized. She wants to bring home the fact that not only Black women but all women are marginalized by a society in which only hi(s) story is written and 'her story' is pushed into oblivion.

Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language" has the poem that debates about the status of the English language for her in the centre of the page. There is the story of a mother blowing words into the mouth of her new born daughter in the left margin and in the right margin there are historical edicts of severing the tongues of slaves for speaking their mother tongue.

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
- a foreign anguish. (*She Tries Her Tongue* 56)
but I have
a dumb tongue
tongue dumb
father tongue
english is
my mother tongue
is
my father tongue
is a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
english
is a foreign anguish
(*She Tries Her Tongue...58*)

- Thus the existence of a slave and especially that of a black woman, is in the margin that is filled to the brim with inhuman torture. Harris writes ironically about the slave owner's authority and power in her "Poets in Limbo": "New names were imposed, languages were banned, rape and murder became normal perks of ownership" (Neuman and Kamboureli 116). However, Philip strives to come to the centre by writing in the language of the colonizer and exposing to the world the attitudes and atrocities of the western European male who wants the non-whites, the ethnics, and the blacks to be pushed to the margins. Nourbese Philip is one of the most powerful other voices in Canadian literature. Her voice rises from a space of cultural and political difference and expresses her dissent of the racist society.

In her writings Dionne Brand brings out the conflict that she has with the cultural and political conditions in Canada. A black lesbian woman writer is a controversial figure in a man's world and especially in a racist, gender biased and masculine Canada. Brand is an activist and works with community organizations like the Black Education Project, Immigrant Women's Centre, Caribbean People's Development agency etc.

Brand's writings include *Fore Day Morning* (1978), *Primitive Offensive* (1982), *Winter Epigrams: Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* (1983), *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *Earth Magic* (1979), *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (1994), *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism* (1986) co-authored with Krisantha Sri

Bhaggiyadatta, *No Burden to Carry: Narrative of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s* (1991), *Bread Out of Stone: recollections sex recognitions race dreaming politics* (1994), *In Another Place Not Here* (1996) and *Land To Light On* (1997).

Brand's *No Language is Neutral* (1990) was nominated for the Governor General's Award. Brand has been a writer-in-residence at the Halifax City Regional Library. During 1990-91 she was the writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto and she taught creative writing at the University of Guelph during 1991-92. Brand is committed to fight racism. She will not stop until blacks get their status of original owners of Canada. Brand writes in her *No language is Neutral* that Canada regards blacks as "the thin/ mixture of just come and don't exist" (29). Further in her poem she laments that though she has lived in Canada all her life, she is stateless. It has happened not only to her, but also to her race that has been in Canada for more than three centuries and yet is not regarded among the "founding fathers" of Canada. Brand feels alienated in Canada on three counts: she is black; she is a lesbian; and she^{is}_A a woman. A woman who does not need a man for her existence is insignificant, as the male dominated society does not want a woman who does not feel the need of a man.

In her poems, Brand raises her voice against her oppressors. In her 'Amelia Continued...' in *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, Brand writes that people call her 'mule' because of her 'abstentious womb':

of late I am called a mule
not for my hard headedness
but for my abstentious womb (28)

Her involvement as a social activist and one who is committed to fight against a racist culture is evident in her writings like *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism, No Burden to Carry: Narratives of black working women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*.

Brand says about the ethnic groups in Canada, “we’re now battered by multicultural bureaucracy... What multiculturalism does is to compartmentalise us into small cultural groups who have dances and different groups and Caribana. But it doesn’t address real power” (qtd. in Kamboureli 407). The majority community has cleverly designed the policy of multiculturalism to keep political and economic power with them. In her poems *Fore Day Morning, Primitive Offensive*, and *Winter Epigrams: Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* she questions power politics and the conventional concept of femininity. In her *No Language is Neutral* written as she claims, “in the language I grew up in” (Interview by Makeda Silvera, 366) she deconstructs history to dehistoricize and undo the hold of the dominant masculine and imperialistic gaze.

Writers like Harris, Philip and Brand raise their voices against those who preach multiculturalism and Human Rights. Their voice of dissent is too powerful to be contained in language and space. They find the English language in which they

write is not equipped enough to carry their objectives. They are all the time concerned about language. Harris writes in her *Drawing Down a Daughter*, “

Daughter there is no language/ I can give you” (24). In her search for a powerful weapon of attack, Philip finds English lacking in many counts to carry the dissent she wants to express. In her “Discourse on the Logic of language”, she considers herself one who has mastered a foreign language, even though she had no other mother tongue. As the foreign language belongs to the colonizer, Philip attempts to examine the racist and colonial aspects in the language of the colonizer. Similarly, Brand also expresses the limitation of the language to express her dissent. This is clear in her collection of poems: *No Language is Neutral*. It is really an experience to read some of the lines and feel how Brand plays with sound, word, syllable, morphology and syntax to express her dissent:

How to fly gravity,
how to balance basket and prose reaching for
murder. Silence done curse god and beauty here,
people does hear things in this heliconia peace
a morphology of rolling chain and copper gong
now shape this twang, falsettos of whip and air
rudiment this grammar. Take what I tell you. When
these barracks held slaves between their stone
halters, talking was left for night and hush was idiom
and hot core. (23)

Here the sentences begin from the middle of the line and also end midway to express the condition of the people who suffered colonialism. These suspended, half completed sentences symbolize the condition of the colonized, who are suspended in space and time. Often one has to read several lines to get some breathing space, a period (.) or a comma (,) like the breathing space and a pause in their torments that the run-away slaves would aspire to have so as to escape slavery and torture that they had to suffer. Nourbese Philip describes in the "Introduction" to her *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, the kind of English African writers employ in their writings is the result of the agony of slavery and colonial subjugation.

In the vortex of New World slavery, the African forged new and different words, developed strategies to impress her experience on the language. The formal standard language was subverted, turned upside down, inside out, and even sometimes erased. Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at a time; rhythms held sway. (17)

For Brand the English language that she inherited from the colonizer is 'stone' and she has to try hard to make bread out of it. It is a hard task to make 'stone pliant'. So Brand writes in her *Bread Out Of Stone...* that honest and significant writing is like "making bread out of stone- so that stone becomes pliant under the hands" (23).

It is the theory and practice in the literature of the post-colonial era that gave the impetus to writers like Harris, Philip and Brand who write to express their dissent. It is pertinent here to examine the circumstances and forces that influenced the writers in the colonies which became independent after the reign of the colonizers ceased there. Thus the literature written by the colonized are classed under postcolonial literature. In his article "The Scramble for Post-colonialism", Stephen Slemon (Ashcroft et al.) 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. According to Stephen Slemon:

Post-colonialism de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (...); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; ... as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies. (45)

In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Padmini Mongia (ed.) writes that for many critics, postcolonial theory includes different critical approaches which deconstruct European thought:

The term post colonial refers not to a simple periodization but rather to a methodological revisionism which enables a wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power, particularly those of the post-Enlightenment period. (2)

The colonial and imperial powers that brought its language and literature to the colonies also empowered the colonized to decolonize the actions, approaches and attitudes of the colonizer by writing back in the colonizer's language and 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 'decolonisation' is a process:

...it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling ... it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within and between two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world. (Ashcroft et al. 95)

The period after decolonization ushered in changes in intellectual approaches influenced by post-structuralism and deconstruction. Padmini Mongia states that the term post-colonialism “has been deployed to replace what went under the banner of Third World/Commonwealth literature for the last ten years” (2). In the article “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World” Stephen Slemon also states that the term ‘post-colonial’ is an outgrowth of what formerly were ‘Commonwealth’ literary studies. The term ‘Post-colonial’ also includes “Third – and Fourth-World cultures and within black and ethnic and First-Nation constituencies dispersed within First-World terrain” (Ashcroft et al. 105). It is under the latter category that women writers Harris, Philip and Brand fall as they migrated from the Caribbean to Canada. After the crash 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 wrote in their ‘master’s voice’. They manipulated and moulded the English language to address their dissent of the language and literature of the colonial canon and to narrate their past destroyed by the imperial power.

Edward Said (1978) while discussing the historical circumstances of European colonialism and imperialism in his *Orientalism* emphasizes that ^{the} “Orient was almost a European invention, a European representation of the Orient. European

culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Mongia 20).

Orientalism is a discourse ... by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (Mongia 3)

When the colonies became independent States, the change over to native powers destabilized the life in the colonies as^a result of political rivalries and oppositions. Consequently people from the new States began to move out in search of education, employment and ^abetter standard of living. Often the movement was to countries either ruled or colonized by their former rulers. 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 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 those in the centre and also in the frontiers. According to Mongia, "post colonial theory has been formed as a response to these pressures even as it offers a means of speaking of them" (5). Ashcroft et al. (1995) very rightly describe the kind of writing that rose from the colonized: "Literature of colonies emerged in the present form out of the experiences of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tensions with imperial power" (2). Barbara Christian in her essay "Race for Theory" writes, "our literature is an indication of the ways in

which our theorizing, of necessity, is based on multiplicity of experiences” (Mongia 155). 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. What is said about the writings of Tony Morrison and Alice Walker, is also true of Harris, Philip and Brand: “It is this language, and the grace and pleasure with which they played with it, that I find celebrated, refined, critiqued in the works of writers like Morrison and Walker” (Mongia 149).

Post- colonial literature has come from the boundaries and frontiers which European historians and philosophers discarded as uncivilized, unmanageable and subhuman. In the article “The Economy of Manichean Allegory”, Abdul R. Janmohamed writes:

Colonialist literature is an exploration and representation of a world at the boundaries of ‘civilization’ a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. The world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. Motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, language, social customs, cultural values, and modes of production. (Ashcroft et al. 19)

In her essay “Managing the Unmanageable” Nourbese Philip registers her dissent of the European thought according to which other cultures are inferior. She is

also critical about the imposition of 'his story' (European view of history) on 'Others'. It is the European attitude to other cultures that made them think that other cultures are unmanageable and for their (Europeans') good and the good of others they are responsible to manage the others. Therefore Europeans recommended the managing of the "Others": Africans, Asians and the aboriginals. "At all times they must be managed" (Cudjoe 295). Europeans felt that it was a risk to leave the "Others" uncontrolled and unmanaged. European powers destroyed or distorted ethnic people/cultures or history which they thought would be a threat to them. In the section titled "The Imperialization of Vision" in *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" as it has fondly styled, and is vital in furbishing the psychopathic egoism required to justify the violation and robbery of hundreds of millions of people in their own lands, including the slaughter of more than a hundred million of them- just within the last six hundred years of Empire glory. (6)

In their attempt to establish their power, European powers played a safe game of making the original population of Arawaks in the Caribbean disappear from the face of the earth. The very existence of a race (Arawaks) in the Caribbean whose language and culture, Europeans could not comprehend was a threat to them.

The indigenous Carib and Arawak inhabitants of the Caribbean islands were either annihilated or exiled by European powers within a short span of time.

According to George Lamming before the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean at the end of the fifteenth century, there was a vibrant aboriginal tribe that had its own culture and civilization. This aboriginal population of Arawaks and Caribs moved from the mainland of South America or through the islands from Trinidad up to Cuba. "Within a matter of twenty-five or thirty years of Columbus arrival, this aboriginal population was totally destroyed" (George Lamming in Birbalsingh 2; Edward Brathwaite in Ashcroft et al. 309). Therefore when historical events are constructed and reconstructed, the story of the aboriginal population is written by the centre of power, which is Europe by setting aside non-Europeans as 'Others'. As Rey Chow points out in her article "Where Have All the Natives Gone", that there is no witness to tell what happened to the indigenous population colonized by European powers. According to Chow "... it is the native's silence which is the most important clue to her displacement. That silence is at once the evidence of imperialist oppression" (Mongia 130). When the natives are silent, their exploitation finds no limits. History remains a silent spectator, as a result the centre of power wields its power over history. 'His (s)tory' (European story) does not account for the thousands of African slaves killed on their voyage to slave markets of Europe. Such deaths were taken as normal and the loss of human lives is considered equal to any loss in any profitable business. In Philip's story "Whose Idea Was It Anyway?" the European who 'invented' slavery speaks to his companions, "Gentlemen, we estimate that

on each voyage some of your cargo will be lost...when selecting Black ivory...be certain to choose the fittest and strongest ...to minimize your losses and maximize your profits" (Morrell 154).

The horror of ^{the} slave trade and inhuman treatment of Africans by Europeans have given rise to the kind of writing that has come from African Caribbean women writers like Harris, Philip and Brand. Their writings echo and re-echo the terror of slavery and the distortion of African history. In the article "The Muse of History" Derek Walcott writes,

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by descendants of slaves ... It (The truly tough aesthetic of the New World) refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think of language as enslavement...(Ashcroft et al. 371)

In her *Translation Into Fiction*, Harris refers to the slave trade where human beings were transported like goods and traded like animals. *The Conception of Winter* is a poem by Claire Harris is based on a journey to Spain; it is set against a background of the historical knowledge of slave ships, which set out from Barcelona. The narrator in Harris' *Drawing Down a Daughter* warns the unborn child that she will inherit an entire history of slavery. In the short story *Whose Idea Was It Anyway?* Philip claims that the European who invented the "diabolical plan" of slavery is a genius like Archimedes, Newton, Galileo, Copernicus and

Descartes and warns, "generations of sons and daughters would curse him..." (Morrell 152). Brand laments ~~at~~ the inhuman treatment of her race in her essay *Bread Out of Stone*:

Listen, I am a Black woman whose ancestors were brought to a new world lying tightly packed in ships. Fifteen million of them survived the voyage, five million of them women; millions among them died, were killed, committed suicide in the Middle Passage. (21)

Arnold Itwaru and Natash Ksonzek (1994) call the practice of slave trade involving simple, innocent, silent and defenceless people by the clever European powers of distortion and destruction, 'kidnapping'. It is an act of the kidnapping of human beings who are unable to defend themselves by human beings who claim to possess self-imposed powers of conquest and occupation:

Africans and Indians were kidnapped, bound and gagged and taken to the labour camps of Europe's and Britain's empires, their plantations of slavery and their plantocracy, peoples whose deaths are for ever blood on the hands of their torturers and killers, ... no washing, ceremonial or otherwise, will ever remove. (22)

In his essay "The Occasion for Speaking" George Lamming calls the writers who migrated from the colonies to the country or another colony of their erstwhile masters, exiles. The writings of such exiles may not have the approval of the powers of the country of their reterritorialization. "When the exile is a man of

colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonized his own history, then there are certain complications. ... he has to win the approval of Headquarters..." (Ashcroft et al. 13). By "Headquarters", Lamming means the centre of power that controls the colonies. Britain is the Headquarters for those who migrated from the Caribbean to Canada because it is colonized by the imperial power with Headquarters in England that colonized the Caribbean. This is very much true of the problems Harris, Philip and Brand faced with regard to the publication of their works in Canada. This is also true of these writers from Trinidad and Tobago because they are forced to belong to the margin in the country of their reterritorialization and are denied the opportunity to be considered in the main stream of creative writing.

It is the Euro-History that discards Africa as a Dark Continent. According to Lamming, the German philosopher Hegel has the last word on Africa in his Introduction to his book *The Philosophy of History*. Lamming quotes in his "The Occasion for Speaking" from the "Introduction" by the German philosopher, Hegel to his book *The Philosophy of History*:

Africa proper, as far as history goes back has remained ... shut up; ... The negro ... exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state ... What we properly understood as Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the *conditions of mere nature* ...(15)

Hegel's understanding of 'his (s)tory' is taken as an undisputed European view and is the premise on which the story of every other nation is based. Thus Europe

remains the centre around which other cultures only revolve without their own independent existence. Hegel's view is the product of 'EuroEgoism'. It reveals his adherence to 'Eurocentrism'. His refusal to consider that every culture has its own history is a product of his Eurocentric attitude. According to Arnold H. Itwaru and Natasha Ksonzek : "Hegel's eurocentrism is but one of the examples in whose thinking History means the history of Europe, a rationalist dream of European supremacy which excludes those places in the world ravaged by Europe" (21).

Derek Walcott, a Caribbean playwright, dramatist and poet quotes from James Joyce's *Ulysses* in his remarks at the reading of his poem "The Sea is History" recorded by Frank Birbalsingh in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (23). "History is the nightmare from which I'm trying to awake" (*Ulysses* 34). According to Walcott, in the quotation mentioned above, by 'history' James Joyce means 'the bondage of time'. The history of Africa as projected by Europeans is a 'nightmare' for Africans because it forces every African into the 'bondage of time'. Hence every African writer makes a plea to free Africa from the bondage of European history and to restore Africa to its pristine glory. In her essay "Why do I Write", Claire Harris states, "my work had to take part in the reinscription of Africa on the Western consciousness;" (Morrell 27). Europeans are never ready to accept Africa as the centre of western civilization. In his article "Africa: The Hidden History" Anthony Appiah (66) writes that until about 100,000 years ago the ancestors of all modern humans lived in Africa (qtd. in Sarvan).

The theory of 'universality' attempts to exclude the literature of the Third World countries from the mainstream writing. It is the European interpretation of the concept of 'universality' that has set the norms for others. According to Chinua Achebe the idea that 'European' equals 'Universal' is a myth. In his article "Colonialist Criticism" Chinua Achebe writes that a Western writer is not required to prove 'universality': the status of 'universality' is thrust upon the Western writer, but 'Others' have to strive for it. In the nature of things the work of a Western writer is 'automatically informed by universality'. It is only others who must strain to achieve it. Further Achebe adds,

I should like to see the word 'universal' banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world. (Ashcroft et al. 60)

Writers who write from their own native land once colonized and those like Harris, Philip and Brand who write from the country of their reterritorialization colonized by their erstwhile colonizers, write in the language wrested from their colonizer. These African Caribbean women write back to the centre of power in the language of power. They write in the language of their colonizer to register their dissent ^{from} of the English language and also to express their resentment against racial discrimination, multiculturalism and marginalization of the non-whites in Canada.

Language was power for the colonizer. When colonies crumbled under the weight of independence movements, the colonizer was forced to transfer the power of administration to the natives, but the colonizer was reluctant to transfer the power of language to the colonized. When the colonized began to write in the language of power to the centre of power, the colonizer refused to accept the language of the colonized calling it substandard because for the colonizer ~~the~~ language is the symbol of colonial control. In their book *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) write, "One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all variants as impurities" (7).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin distinguish between a standard code and a linguistic code of the English language. They call the English language that has been "transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties through out the world", 'english' (8). The conflict between the 'centre' and 'peripheries' on linguistic grounds (English vs. english) is an on going debate. However, in ~~the~~ recent years some of the most powerful writings have emerged from the 'peripheries', i.e. from the marginalized either living in their own country or in the country of their colonizer or a country like Canada, which is still under colonial rule. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) "the language of the 'peripheries' was shaped by an oppressive discourse of power" (8). But the 'peripheries' have given rise to "the most exciting and innovative literatures of the modern period and this has, at least in part, been the result of the energies

uncovered by political tension between the idea of a normative code and a variety of regional usages” (8). As stated above Harris, Philip and Brand have won awards and prizes because their writings have made a difference in the world of literature. Their innovative and imaginative use of ‘english’ which becomes a tool in their hands, has enabled them to command a coveted niche in the literary world. As long as the language is constructed and reconstructed as well as created and recreated innovatively and imaginatively, human interest in the use of language will remain. In their *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. write about the use of the ‘english’ language by post-colonial writers in the following manner:

The most interesting feature of its use in post-colonial literature may be the way in which it also constructs difference, separation, and absence from the metropolitan norm. But the ground on which such construction is based is an abrogation of the essentialist assumptions of the norm and a dismantling of its imperialist centralism. (44)

Post-colonial writers use the language of their colonizer as a tool to innovatively and imaginatively extend the horizons of the language and ‘write back to the centre’ and let the world know how and why they write what they write.

Post-colonial writers question the ‘history’ written by Europeans about the colonies. It is the Western school of thought that expects other histories to be modelled against European History. In the article “Postcoloniality and the Artifice

of History”, Dipesh Chakarbarty while discussing the dependence of other histories on European History writes:

‘Europe’ remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call Indian, Chinese, Kenyan ...There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’. (Ashcroft et al. 383)

The history of Africa written by Europeans is held in the West as the standard undisputed document. Nourbese Philip in her *Looking for Livingstone* questions the authenticity of the discovery of Africa by David Livingstone. He could write hi(s)story of Africa because Africa was a continent of silence. Her (Africa’s) story is housed in museums of silence and hence Europeans could write whatever they thought about Africa and her inhabitants. When Christopher Columbus sailed across the Caribbean he reached an island on 23 November 1492. *Columbus’s Journal* entry gives the details of Indians (Arawaks) whom he encountered there. According to the *Journal*, Columbus had some Indians with him and they were frightened of Arawaks, the native tribe on the island because “they had one eye in the forehead” and were ‘warlike’ and ‘cannibals’ who ate them. (Peter Hulme in Ashcroft et al. 366). Hulme refers to another entry in *Columbs’s Journal* made on 11 December 1492 where the earlier entry is reviewed. The latter entry describes those on the island as an intelligent race (Arawaks) who harassed the

Indians by taking them captive in their ships and as those captured did not return, the Indians believed that they (Arawaks) had eaten them (Ashcroft et al. 366).

George Lamming, the Barbados born writer whose first novel *In the Castle of My Skin* regarded as a West Indian classic, speaks about the adventures of Columbus in his lecture "Concepts of the Caribbean" recorded by Frank Birbalsingh in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. According to him the reconstruction of the history of the arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean is far from true. He questions the claim that Columbus conversed with an aboriginal Caribbean because the aboriginal could not speak any of the languages that Columbus spoke. Hence Lamming says "what Columbus did was to create what he ordered, because he represented power" (2).

This study shows how African Caribbean Canadian women writers Harris, Philip and Brand express the agony of their reterritorialization in Canada, their angry protest against the racial discrimination and the policy of multiculturalism in Canada and the manner in which they decolonize the English language to register their dissent of the colonial language. Harris, Philip and Brand have become voices of dissent who speak for their community and other non Europeans in Canada. They are the vibrant spokespersons of those who are discriminated ^{against} because of their race, language, culture and colour.

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