

APOCRYPHA OF NANNY'S SECRETS

APOCRYPHA OF NANNY'S SECRETS: THE RHETORIC OF RECOVERY
IN AFRICARIBBEAN WOMEN'S POETRY.

By

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AMISEERE/ (DEDICATION)

N boarang na de a gban nga N nang di dogee sɛgi baare ko Ng
poga Hawa, aning te biiri: Mwinidiayeh, Angtuongmwini,
Delemwini, aning ba nabaale nang ba la kyebe--Matiesi
Kuwabong. Ka ba anang da ba are N puoreng a puoro kpiangaa
yaga kora ma, N ba teɛre ka N danaang tuong baare a toma
nga. Le zuing, N de la a tiizis nga puore ning ba bareka.

(I wish to dedicate this work to my wife, Hawa, and our children:
Mwinidiayeh, Angtuongmwini, and Delemwini, and their grandfather who is
no longer alive--Matthais Kuwabong. If they had not stood solidly by me,
and constantly prayed for me, I would not have been able to complete
this thesis. On account of that, I offer the thesis to them).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hau do I talk when there are no words say it again
spicy words ride on spicy sounds say it again
and there are times for such feasts but not today
for now I surrender to what I have done but so have we
this thesis treats unsalted words boiled on stones of herstory
given on the day of sound starvation amidst drums of power
this thesis feeds on bleeding words of sisters of the sun
without whose pain i have no re-membering negations
to them I offer thanksgiving for lending me their sighs
but una mot bear wit mi. no tire yet.

For ai wan tek wan marti salut wit bokuu respekt trowey for una,
Plofesa Lorraine York. Na yu com save mi from bakyad wahala, wei i
no sabi find leg put for ground in de tizzis. And den yu naaaa, yu
liid mi to dis brait spot. I no shame at all at all mek yeye all
de taim about hau yu gib mi korage, darektion, and ekseelent
supervion all de way. To yu also, Plofesa Donald
Goellnicht! Na yu mek reada namba 1 kpatakpata. For de wey yu tek
taim com read all drafts of de tiizis wit nice nais nais
commentary, na yu I de salut woo. Mek I no kuku forget
Plofesa James Dale. Ha! ha! how yu run comot retirement sign
papers mek I finis, I say barka yaga. Last but not little,
Plofesa Jefferey Donaldson, I tank yu for taking mi tru de ealy

stages of dis wahala tiizis.

Nuns and Priest, Trinidad, Brickdam Cathedral, Guyana,
Plofessas Jnae Bryce, Edward Baugh, Mervyn Morris, Mark McWatt,
etc etc, all dem UWI librarians, writers, in de Caribbean,
RedCloth Sisters, I salut una yu all. McMaster University and
Ghana Government, tank yu for supporting mi financially. To all de
rest, I trowey wan maiti salut woo.....

September 1997.

Dannabang Kuwabong.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study of four Africaribbean women's poetry: Marlene Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, Cynthia James. It is also a study of what it means to be a minority writer who happens to be female and Black in Canada. I look at how various factors affect the way these poets use language to develop an Africaribbean/Canadian feminist rhetoric of recovery, not only for themselves as individuals, but also for Africaribbean group healing and growth. The thesis is divided into five chapters and a tentative conclusion.

In Chapter One, I address the various theoretical locations or un-locations and paradigms of Caribbean literary and critical history in order to contextualize my reading of the work of these poets. I discuss the salient issues of silence, voice, marginality, language, and audience. Chapter Two takes me through an exploration of the evolution of voice in Marlene Nourbese Philip's poetry within antagonistic yet receptive Canadian literaryscale. I explore her work through theories and practices of deconstructing and deterritorializing the imperial father tongue--English--in search of a lost mother tongue. Claire Harris

developments through high modernist, feminist/postcolonial territories become the framework for my examination of her poetry. But this examination is also done within the background of prairie culture and Canadian political of multiculturalism. Her treatment of Africaribbean femininity, gender relations, race, mother-daughter relations through a collage of linguistic paraphernalia and literary models is traced and explained.

In Chapter Four, I compare the politics of cultural location that produce the discourse of contestation in both Philip and Harris with Lorna Goodison's exploration of Africaribbean culture, and religions from her Jamaican location. I opined that Goodison unlike Philip and Harris to some extent is not very concerned with contesting any dominant group for space and audience, but searching for an ideology of healing the wounded souls of her people. In Chapter Five, I study Cynthia James's poetic of healing in a Trinbagonian society. My central concern here is how James makes use of innovative collages of Trinbagonian traditional belief systems, cultural musical productions, and religious and literary traditions to get her people to move from moaning ground to heartease.

I arrive finally at a tentative conclusion which stresses a transnational, inter- and intra-theoretical, paralinguistic, and multicultural reading of any of these poets.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING AFRICARIBBEAN¹ RHETORIC OF RECOVERY: OPENING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS.

Africaribbean literature originates from a desire to recover the Africaribbean personhood from the history of slavery and colonization. I see in Africaribbean literature a search for a rhetoric that can facilitate that recovery. In saying this, I do not imply that the concept of recovery originated among Africaribbean people, nor do I wish to suggest that it is the only preoccupation of Africaribbean writers. Let me state here then that the concept of recovery is fundamental to all communities that have undergone dramatic or cataclysmic changes in history. The rhetoric of recovery can take several forms, including literature, language, politics, cultural revivalism, religion, and remigration to a homeland from exile. The urgency of the rhetoric is proportional to the magnitude of the interruption of the community's history and patterns of life. Thus a displaced people, such as Africaribbeans, who have lost a significant part of the original mother tongue(s), cultural ethos, cosmological space, religion and land, have a greater urgency in developing a rhetoric of recovery. Africaribbean people have had their histories distorted, denigrated or denied for so

¹ I use the terms Africaribbean, Afrisporic, Africentric, in the thesis because they are more gender neutral terms than Afro-Caribbean, African-Caribbean, Afra-Caribbean, Afrocentric, and Afrosporic. My terms remove the sense of hyphenation and male biases that the other terms suggest.

long that there is an urgency in their desire to develop a rhetoric of recovery without the agency of an original mother tongue. In this thesis, I analyse the various paradigms that have been used by four Africaribbean women poets--Marlene Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, and Cynthia James--to contribute to an Africaribbean rhetoric of recovery.

Starting with figures such as Claude McKay, A. J. Seymour, Vic Reid, Paul L. Dunbar, Una Marson, and Louise Bennett, through to Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, linguistic creolization has been the most important asset for Africaribbeans in their resistance to European cultural domination on slave plantations. The preoccupation of Africaribbean writers with the question of language should not, however, be read as a new age post-colonial strategy for recuperation. It is not the same type of nostalgic poetics engaged in by settler colonists, but a continuation, consolidation, and expansion of a historical legacy of struggles against Euro-American domination. George Lamming brilliantly explicates this position in his review of Caliban's situation in *The Tempest* in his book *The Pleasures of Exile*. Taking a poststructuralist stand on language, Lamming contends that language, for the Africaribbean individual and community, extends beyond the colonizing European tongue into an act of "speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way" (109). Thus in spite of whatever codification that Africaribbeans may engage to exclude the European "Other," they still remain subjects of the European language and are, therefore, always constituted by it.

Like their prototype Caliban, they remain captives of the rules, nuances, and consequences of that European language (109). I discuss this point further in Chapter One.

Most Africaribbean poets recognize their personal levels of entrapment in this problematic of language. They make use of this predicament by exploiting it for consciousness-raising, however, and as Wilson Harris in *Tradition, the Writer & Society* says, to "literally rediscover and reinform" themselves in "the face of accretions of accent and privilege, the burden of 'sacred' usage or one-sidedness" (64). The ability of Africaribbean poets to turn captivity in a language into a site for recovery and freedom, comes from their awareness that language can be both the medium and the message, and thus the poet's epistemology can transcend emotional, intellectual, or informational functionality (21). To Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, then, the medium of Africaribbean language generates a vision that leads to a conscious deconstruction of Euro-American concepts of uniform significations in order to create spaces for the development of a recovery rhetoric. This "vision of consciousness" further contends Wilson Harris, "is the peculiar reality of language because the concept of language is one which continuously transforms inner and outer formal categories of experience," without which the individual or group experience becomes written over and spoken out of existence in the master discourse (32).

Creole language, as a site of resistance to Eurocentricism in the Caribbean, becomes the epiphanic shout of recovery of their submerged voices out of the silences created by patriarchy and Eurocentric

epistemology and historiography. Creole provides them with the ability to perform what Derek Walcott defines in "What the Twilight Said: An Overture" as an Adamic task of renaming. Creole, writes Walcott, enables Africaribbean people to transcend derivation and rise "beyond mimicry, [in] a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, and which began to create an oral culture" (17). But Walcott is careful to note that this act of renaming is a psycho-spiritual and racial rememorialization: a "return journey with all its horror of rediscovery, . . . the annihilation of what is known" (17) within an ideology of materiality and corporeality, and thus all the "variety of styles and masks" (17) in the Caribbean must be negotiated. These styles and masks include the literary debris and heirlooms of Africaribbean orality, history, and gendered spaces within a colonizing Euro-American literary discourse praxis.

The development of a lasting rhetoric of recovery by Africaribbean people is underscored by the practice of what Aaron David Gresson III calls the "deconstruction of the oppressed" (6), which involves the appropriation by some student, feminist, and white power movements (6-16) of Afrisporic rhetorics of recovery developed out of the history and experiences of slavery, internal colonization, racism, and marginalization in North America (6-16). The consequences: a denial of Afrisporic people's special moral or historical authority in the history of struggle, and further peripheralization of Afrisporic people in the West and North. To Africaribbeans, therefore, the concept of recovery rhetoric implies the construction of a new tongue from the memories of

the roots of the old tongues from Africa blended with the newly acquired European language(s). This is not always an easy task. None the less, it is a challenge that is taken up seriously and effectively by Africaribbean poets. The rhetoric of recovery, for these poets in this case, then becomes a language of desire in which they seek to reconnect with, regain, or reclaim personal/group power through what is imagined to be, or as in reality is, an original or ideal state of being, a relationship, a personhood, a voice.

The centrality of recovery rhetoric to the Africaribbean poet becomes a cultural, racial, religious, and a historical bond to a collectively shared set of ideals that govern Africaribbean social relations. Obviously, for this project to be effectively started and sustained, the Africaribbean poet, like other recoverers, develops and engages narrative(s) and rhetoric(s) of being that best suit his or her particular vision, location, and community. Furthermore, her or his narrative and rhetoric of being must be articulated within the specifics of setting, which then aim at conveying a historical narrative(s) that approximates his or her agenda. But it is obvious that in this endeavour, differences in approach, articulation, and vision among Africaribbean poets in general, and between Africaribbean male and female poets in particular, will arise. These differences, as I shall discuss shortly, are conditioned by the social consequences of slavery and colonization that have created complexities of gender, of geographical and social location(s) between men and women in the Caribbean. An example of such a complexity is the patriarchal structure of

Africaribbean societies in which most households are headed by women. This role of females, as explained by several sociologists, is due more to the absence of the men than a desire of women to head the families. The women in these double roles develop multiple voices and strategies to achieve a balance in the society.

Accordingly, Africaribbean female poets, as participants in these complex roles, engage multivocality as an enunciatory strategy, a poetic and dialectic, specific but not limited to Caribbean history and location. Multivocality enables them to explore multiple dimensions and interpretations. It also provides the spaces for them to communicate not only through words, but through other nonverbal means such as dance, art, and dress modes. These non-verbal communication strategies are fused with Africaribbean orature(s) and Euro-American literature(s) to create a non-hegemonic vision of recovery. This combination of the aesthetics of Africaribbean oratures and Euro-American literatures also facilitates a movement of a plethora of visions and symbols towards a mythic convergence in language, religion, cultural productions such as music and literature, and recovery aesthetics. I explore how Africaribbean women poets engage the linguistic, religious, musical, and historical paradigms within (post)neo-colonial contexts to construct resistance and difference, negotiate silence, identify locations, articulate voice, and define personhood in their poetry. As Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* contend, "the most interesting feature of [language] use in post-colonial literature may be the way it also

constructs difference, separation, and absence from the metropolitan norm" (44). For Ashcroft et al. the site for these new constructs of subjectivity is characterized by an "abrogation of the essentialist assumptions of that norm [language] and a dismantling of its imperialist [patriarchal] centralism" (44).

I choose women poets because until quite recently studies of Africaribbean literature along these lines have been grounded disproportionately on male texts. But recent studies show that Africaribbean female writers, including Marlene Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, and Cynthia James are providing what Edward Kamau Brathwaite has called the necessary feminine dimension to the development of a true Caribbean aesthetic. These four poets, in their various locations and rhetorical strategies, seek to recover their Africaribbean female voice and identity within Africaribbean history and language. This thesis charts and interprets some of the rhetorical strategies which Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James engage in within a plethora of variables to articulate Africaribbean woman's voices of recovery and identity. In the chapters that follow, I examine how issues such as class, race, gender, location, language, and culture influence each poet's development of her concept of recovery.

Marlene Nourbese Philip was born in Moriah, Tobago, in 1947 as Marlene Irma Philip. She later dropped the Irma and then took the Binni (Nigerian) name Nourbese as her middle name. She obtained a bachelors degree in Economics at The University of the West Indies in 1968, and emigrated to Canada the same year. In 1972 she obtained her Master of

Arts degree in Political Science, and in 1973 a Doctor of Law. She then practised immigration and family law from 1975-1978, but soon gave it up in order to concentrate on her writing.

Her first collection of poems, *Thorns* (1980), shows Philip [re-]exploring her colonial Trinbagonian childhood and adolescence, her growing awareness of her African self, her calling and position in a world governed by Euro-American imperialism and patriarchy, and her developing feelings about the issue of language which blooms into *She Tries Her Tongue Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989). *Salmon Courage* (1983) followed *Thorns*. In *Salmon Courage*, Philip showed signs of her confrontational stand against dominant Euro-Canadian discourse and culture. In *She Tries Her Tongue* (1989), which won the Casa de las Americas prize for poetry in manuscript form, and the Guggenheim Award for poetry in 1988, Philip is a mature poet, revolutionary, experimental, deconstructive, contestatory, post-modern, theoretical, and prayerful. Her novel *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) made it to the finals for the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award for Children's Literature. She has also won the Max and Greta Ebel Memorial Award, and the City of Toronto Arts Award. Her fictional narrative, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), is a post-modern and anti-colonial epic in which she uses the genres of travelogue, history, satire, and poetry to invert theories of silence and coming to voice in feminist/post-colonialist discourse. Her book, *Frontiers:*

Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture (1992) is central to any study of Africaribbean women's poetry and to Canadian minority writing.²

Claire Harris was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1937. She obtained her bachelor's degree in English and Spanish at the University College of Dublin, Ireland. Then she went to Jamaica where she obtained a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education from the University of the West Indies and then emigrated in 1966 to Canada. In 1974-75, Harris took a course in Mass Communications at the University of Nigeria, Lagos. It was while she was in Nigeria that she met J P. Clark, a celebrated Nigerian poet and dramatist, and she answered her calling to be a writer. She wrote her first poetry in Nigeria and began publishing in a local university magazine.

Like Philip's, Harris's writing has earned her an enviable place, not only in the Caribbean literary world, but also within the British Commonwealth of writers. Her first book *Fables from the Women's Quarters* (1984) won the Americas division of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1985. Then came *Translation into Fiction* (1984), which was quickly followed by *Travelling to Find a Remedy* (1986). This won her the Writer's Guild of Alberta Award for Poetry, together with the first

² Philip's work has also appeared in numerous books, journals, and literary magazines such as *Borderlines*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Matrix*, *Women and Words: The Anthology* (1984), *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* (1986), *Imagining Women* (1988), *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (1986), *Poetry by Canadian Women* (1989), *Singularities* (1990), *Feminist Measures* (1993), *Daughters Of the Sun Women of the Moon* (1991), to mention but a few. Right now she is working on a novel with a central African location (telephone conversation with Kuwabong May 1996).

Alberta Culture prize for poetry in 1987. She then published *The Conception of Winter* (1988), which also won an Alberta Culture Special Award in 1990. It is pertinent to note that all these works were done within the discourse praxis of Euro-American high modernism. But even as her style appeared to veer closer to Euro-American high modernism, Harris kept her head clear as to what her vision and direction should be ("Why do I Write" 31). So in 1992, after having initially denigrated Caribbean demotic and called it a sloppy and secretive language unfit for poetry (120), she engaged it in *Drawing Down a Daughter* (1992)--short listed for the Governor General's Award in 1993--to reinscribe her Africaribbean personhood into the Canadian literaryscape.³

Lorna Goodison was born in Jamaica on August 1, 1947. The eighth of nine children, Goodison demonstrated an early predilection for articulating her Africaribbean identity through poetry and art. As she puts it, at the tender age of 7 or 8 she rejected the Eurocentric image of herself when she painted a portrait of herself as an Africaribbean in colours that best reflected her Africanness. Unlike Philip and Harris, however, Goodison did not relocate to the borders of Euro-American

³Like Philip's, Harris's work has appeared in several anthologies, journals, and magazines including *Dandelion* (1981-1989). She was the brain behind and co-founder of *blue buffalo* 1984-which she managed and edited until 1987. She is published in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (1986), *Imagining Women* (1988), *Displaced Persons* (1988), *Poetry by Canadian Women* (1989), *Celebrating Canadian Women* (1989), *Kanada* (1991), *Daughters of the Sun Women of the Moon* (1991), *Canadian Writers of African Ancestry* (1990), *Fireweed*, *Kitchen Talk* (1992), *Grammar of Descent* (1994).

centers of imperial dominance such as Canada. She even abandoned the periphery of Euro-American metropolitan culture--Kingston--and like her Maroon ancestors, took to rural Jamaica. This deliberate act of relocating to rural Jamaica, as I shall show later, influences her poetry in *Heartease* (1989).

Her books include *Tamarind Season* (1980). In this collection Goodison tells us she attempts to release "some of the ideas and experiences that had been backing up on me in my late teenage years. Many of those poems are a crying out" ("How I Became a Writer," in *Caribbean Women Writers* (1992)). Her second collection, *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986), (also available on video cassette), deals with some issues that frequently confront most Africaribbean women in their Caribbean locations--their relationship with men, with other women along class, colour, and ideological lines, and the valorization of the Africaribbean woman through the process of recovery of ancestry through the uterine line. This collection won the Americas division of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. In *Heartease* (1989), Goodison engages the African aspects of the cultural and religious foundations of Jamaica as a basis for initiating a call for collective self-recovery and healing of the wounded psyches and spirits of Africaribbeans. Her excellent collection of short stories *Baby Mother and the King of Swords* (1990),

also establishes her as one of the foremost Africaribbean writers who is making the voice of women audible.⁴

Cynthia James is a relatively younger poet but her poetic output is as prolific as the others. She was born [she refuses to give date of birth] in Sangre Grande to teacher parents. James's She was raised in the countryside at a place called Salybia by the sea, and therefore, like Goodison, claims a rootedness in the Trinidadian folk landscape. education up to 1995 was all in Trinidad. She attended St. George's College, Barataria. She obtained a bachelor's degree at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad, in French, Spanish and English in 1969. She also has a Master of Arts degree from the University of the West Indies together with university-level courses in Mass Communications and Playwriting.

As a result of her involvement with carnival programmes and live cultural performances she developed the urge to write. In 1979, she won the first Trinidad and Tobago play writing competition with the play entitled "No Resolution" which has been produced on Trinidad and Tobago Television. For a period of three years after this, she won government-organised competitions for her short stories and poetry. Her first book was a collection of short stories with the title *Soothe Me Music, Soothe*

⁴ Goodison's work has appeared in several magazines, anthologies, and books: *The Heineman Book of Caribbean Poetry* (1992); *Voice Print* (1989); *Crossing Water* (1992); *West Indian Poetry, New Edition* (1971, 1989); *Creation Fire A Cafra Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry* (1990); *Hinterland : Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (1989), and more recently in *Sisters of Caliban* (1996).

Me (1990). Here she assumes the personalities of eighteen different characters to study the shifting identities of the Trinbagonian person across class, gender, generational, and community lines. In the same year she published her first collection of poems, *here my love* (1990). This is poetry of love to celebrate the diversities and contradictions of being a Trinbagonian. *La Vega and Other Poems* (1995), and *Vigil* (1995) were published almost simultaneously. In *La Vega* James undertakes a revisitation to her beginning--the village where her parents reside--in order to find direction. In *Virgil*, she celebrates the birth of herself as a poet through the rubrics of West African funeral wake and religious songs and rituals. Here she perfects her multifaceted style of lamentation and creativity, as she celebrates the undersides and upsides of Trinidadian and Tobogonian independence and cultural revivalism.⁵

In spite of the differences in geographical and socio-racial locations of these poets, there are several things that bind them together, and make them act within a collective ethos. The first cords that bind them are the similarities in the histories of Africaribbean people in all the Caribbean including Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. These histories are marked by slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. On a secondary level, they are bound by the similarities of the colonial education they received, in which everything European and male was highlighted and valorized as the standard, while everything African and

⁵ James's poetry has also appeared in *Crossing Water* (1992) ; *Washer Woman Hangs her Poems in the Sun* (1990); and *Creation Fire A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry* (1990); *Sisters of Caliban* (1996).

female in the Caribbean was denigrated, elided, or downplayed in the curriculum. So for them, poetry became a way of recovering the African and womanist aspects of their lives. Third, as pointed out above, they have had to struggle as Africaribbean women against the dominant discourses of patriarchy and Euro-American imperialism in the arts. Fourth, they share a strong claim to poetic mastery of a collective ethos and aesthetic in which the mixing of codes in a shared repertoire becomes a bond as each of them searches for non-polarised approaches to an Africaribbean aesthetic.

None the less, these areas of collusion neither imply a sameness in voice articulation, nor in the paradigms engaged to create that voice. For instance, both Goodison and James, because of their primary location in a dominant Africaribbean cultural site, do not face the same dilemmas about language choice, audience, or location polemics that confront Philip and Harris in their predominantly Euro-Canadian location. Goodison and James operate more or less in their own cultural and linguistic milieux and questions of dominance/marginality and linguistic choice do not rise to confront them.⁶ At the same time,

⁶ I am aware that the histories of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago differ quite a lot beginning from the 1830s when thousands of indentured East Indians were imported to Trinidad and Tobago. This has created a more diversified racial mix and presently, there are slightly more Tinbagonians of East Indian origins than of African origin, yet the cultural power lines are still drawn in favour of the Africans even though the East Indians wield a greater economic power. This creates racial tensions between the two races in politics and social relations. These tensions influence the poetry of Cynthia James because of her location. Philip and Harris seem to have escaped from these tensions because of their Canadian locations. Also, from the situation in which James works, there is a marked difference between her and Goodison whose Jamaica is approximately 99%

location similarities, as I will demonstrate, do not imply a sameness of voice between Goodison and James, or Philip and Harris. Thus, while Goodison adopts, to a greater extent than the others, a religious paradigm, derived mostly from Africentric religions such as Rastafarianism, Kuminaism, Myalism and Zion Revivalism, James's paradigm is constructed along materialist-cum-religious (Spiritual Baptists, Shangoism) lines. Similarly, Philip's poetic differs slightly from Harris's based on the way each of them constructs a difference from, yet linkage to the dominant Euro-Canadian patriarchal and feminist discourses, particularly in relation to the politics of language, multiculturalism and marginality in Canada. On the other hand, Philip and Harris come closer to James because of their Trinbagonian origins and education, and the views they have on multiracial living.

This brief background explains my choice of the four poets. Second, I believe that the geographical spread of the poets strengthens my choice as it gives the study wider geographic scope, a scope that enables me to capture the diasporic spread of Africaribbean people. Moreover, my choice of only women writers is a response to Brathwaite's advocacy, in his introduction to Hazel Campbell's *Rag Doll and other Stories*, for the inclusion of the maternal influence on Caribbean

Africaribbean, and has therefore a greater cultural and racial homogeneity than Trinidad and Tobago.

There are also some differences between Philip and Harris because of their locations in Canada. Philip's location in Toronto, English Canada's cultural heartland, provides her the site for the development of a more combative poetic. Harris's location in Calgary, a place euphemistically called the hinterland of English Canada, enables her to develop a slightly different approach to the issues of language, racism, and gender.

literature studies. For him, "the intransigent and feminine specific: domestic eye, domestic sense, domestic domination" (vi), this marginalized aspect of Africaribbean literature, must be acknowledged and welcomed into the center of a maturing Africaribbean literary tradition. Furthermore, and in spite of Brathwaite's error in seeing Africaribbean women writing within only a domestic sphere, he, nevertheless, is right in describing it as literature that exhibits "a complementary sense of community which cuts across the ego traps [of men] and weaves us back into the whole" (vii). His argument relies on Africaribbean male writers' inability to extricate themselves and their egos from what he labels "the male principle [which] by itself cannot conceptualize tomorrow" (vi). Above all, Africaribbean males, he argues, are stranded in the historical periodization and thus, fixated on some primordial location where they are "dominated by the aggressive sun, embattled by the wind of *isms*, finding romantic solace in the *id*: witch moon, night prostitute, the jasmine of the Other, 'Reality' is therefore too much noon or passion flower sunsets" (vi). This fixation in the past has caused Africaribbean male writers to perpetuate the negation of Africaribbean women as the inferior "Other." The reasons enumerated above also clarify the fact that Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James enrich Africaribbean recovery rhetoric in the way they adopt different paths to demonstrate a collective vision.⁷

⁷ These four poets achieve in their poetics the type of creative marriage between Europe and Africa in which neither is so privileged as to obliterate the other. This is advocated in different ways by both Derek Walcott in "The Muse Of

THEORETICAL INTERSECTIONS

At this point, I want to trace my theoretical location(s) or dislocation(s) or intersections: post-(anti-) coloniality/modernity (neo-modernity/coloniality) and feminist-womanism/womanist-feminism. I use these undefinable trajectories because I am dealing with the intercultural polylogism in which Africaribbean literature situates itself. Any assumption of a unifocal location then becomes precarious, if not superfluous. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to indicate that these existing theoretical abstractions and intersections in which I find myself are necessary for an understanding of any assumptions I make in my reading of these four poets. Moreover, the slight differences among these poets in ideological, class, geographic, and a theoretical praxis and locations demand multiple theoretical approaches to their work. For instance, I am not so sure whether the various hypotheses/theories on post-coloniality, particularly as they are propounded by descendants of settler colonists or by indigenes in former colonies, fit the Africaribbean situation. My uncertainties arise from the fact that both the descendants of settler colonists and indigenes of former colonies do not share the same historical experience and cultural dislocation with Africaribbean people. Second, debates about the diasporic person have never seriously considered the complexities and histories of the

History" (3-15) and "What the Twilight Said: An Overture" (8-10), and Edward Kamau Brathwaite in *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (1984).

Africaribbean female. Finally, even feminism(s) as constituted by dominant discourses (both Euro-American and African American women) cannot without qualifications be applied to the female Africaribbean situation. I make these observations because of the neo-colonial and still marginal statuses of Africaribbean female communities in these discourses, unless as tokens to appeal to an essentialized form of 'universal' struggle against hegemonies. Moreover, the relocation of Philip and Harris indirectly confers on them a type of secondary diasporic and colonial status in Canada. Thus their struggles directly originate from this new type of colonialism.

In this study, I try also not to engage in the description of only linguistic and narrative discursivities so abundant in the poetry of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James. This is not to say I do not engage any of these positions in my study. Rather, I engage them by working them out from the texts themselves as and when any of them seems most applicable. Besides, as Margaret Homans (73-94) says, a decision to concentrate on the epistemological moves in the texts rather than force the texts into well-worn frames, enables me to resist the temptation, though not completely or successfully, of fixing Africaribbean literary praxis within dominant Euro-American theoretical postulations. Evelyn O'Callaghan makes the same argument in *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* when she cautions the reader to be aware of the political, ideological, cultural, and historical origins and locations of most of these theories (99-108). In addition, I

try to avoid what in *Return to My Native Land*, Aimé Césaire calls the alluring possibilities of "assuming the [any of the omniscient] sterile attitude[s] of the spectator" (60), because as Césaire warns, "life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear" (60-61). Similarly, Isobel Hoving warns that situating one's reading in theoretical absolutes fixates one in the stifling intersections of "dominant scholarly discourses on different forms of post-modernist, post-colonialist and feminist writing" (31). Not to be aware of these problems, therefore, would mean a precipitous fall into self-contradiction and narrowness of interpretation.

Fredric Jameson writing in (66) calls this kind of critical practice the race for the power to interpret and control the cultural productions of the emerging "post-colonial" societies without a willingness to unpack the cultural baggage that the Euro-American trained critic brings along to such a literature (66). Similarly, Edward Said, in *The Third World, the Text, and the Critic*, advocates an awareness of the realities of power and authority, and the socio-cultural modes of resistance to that power, in order to generate reasonable foundations for the objective study of such resistance and recuperation art (5). When this is done, the danger that Ann duCille calls the "color line and intellectual passing within and around the academy" in which "black culture is more easily intellectualized (and appropriated) when transferred from the danger of lived black experience

to the safety of white metaphor" is avoided ("The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanour and Black Feminist Studies" 600).

I have sought to avoid this danger by adopting a reading that recognizes that marginal/post-colonial literature, such as that of Africaribbean women, which according to Peter McLaren (17), is contextualized, gendered, and historicized in the language that describes their experience. In other words, I take a position that shows an understanding that Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, as "women writers also note how race and class inform socialization into gender, and what problems result" (O'Callaghan 3). I then organize my interpretations around, not through, theories of personhood as polemicised and articulated by post-coloniality and feminist(s)/womanism(s). Such a move enables me to see how these poets operate in what Simon Gikandi calls the "integrated discourse of self" through a "negotiation of a historically engendered split between the self and its world, between the self and the language it uses" (18). Such negotiations of their "historically engendered split," for Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James then become the selective engagement of creolized brands of feminism, post-colonialism, and post-modernisms to articulate their creolized personhoods. In other words, Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James evoke protodialectical counter-discourses to resist given meanings and appropriations. In this way, their poetics erupts into what I call metonymic and historical corporealities.

Metonymic corporeality refers to the appropriation of the enslaved, colonized, written over, negated, essentialized African female

bodies collective as the major site of deconstruction of dominant Euro-American patriarchal discourses. But whereas non-Africentrist appropriators cite this body as a token in their feminist discourses in order to essentialize and "universalize" their denunciation of Euro-American patriarchal hegemony, Afrisporic feminist and post-colonial discourses do not always necessarily engage the Afrisporic female body for such purposes. It is engaged to contest, resist, and negotiate ways through the endemic violence done to Afrisporic people in Euro-American culturescapes. Thus, as I try not to be limited by the politics of current theoretical, political, linguistic, and cultural paradigms available to me, in order to enter and explore the worlds of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, I am none the less aware that no meaningful reading of these poets can occur in a vacuum. Thus, the huge shadows of competing and complementing discourses of post-colonial, post-modern, and feminist debates become the backdrops against which I situate my readings.

This problematic of the competing and complementary discourses, and the dangers in choosing any one of them over the others, calls for an omnibus--eclectic--theoretical approach. An omnibus approach can and does accommodate most of the theoretical and ideological locations these poets work within and through. It also enables me to contextualize paradoxes and contradictions as I deal with issues of difference and similarity among these poets. Limitations of this approach may lie in its inability to allow me to do more close textual readings of the poetry. But I believe every reading is more of an exploratory discovery

rather than a dissection, a description and explication. So in spite of this limitation, the omnibus approach best matches the multivocal and multifocal worlds of these poets. Moreover, the omnibus approach prevents my reading Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James purely within limiting frames such as what June Bobb refers to as the "themes of alienation and dispossession without admitting that alienation and dispossession are necessary steps on the journey to reconstruction and the establishment of a personal and national identity" (12). In like manner, this approach enables me to conceptualize and contextualize the emergence of an Africaribbean rhetoric of recovery as a process of negotiation with uncontainable Caribbean female multiplicities.

The process of negotiation interests both post-colonial and feminist/womanist discourses on marginality as structural and theoretical fulcrums of resistance and self-empowerment. Gloria Anzaldua suggests that only marginal theories that "are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference . . . theories that overlap many 'worlds'" may best be able to explicate the experience articulated in the works of marginalized/colonised writers such as Africaribbean female poets (xxvi). Anzaldua further rightly contends that marginal writers, in articulating new non-Eurocentric positions in their "in-between" worlds, "recover and examine non-Western aesthetics while critiquing Western aesthetics; recover and examine non-rational modes and 'blanked-out' realities while critiquing the languages of the dominant culture" (xxvi). My reading is thus contextualized within this

partially inside and partially outside poetic which originates in the Africaribbean Creole female voice.

LANGUAGE IN AFRICARIBBEAN POST-COLONIAL POETRY

The languages of imperial Europe have been the instruments of colonization of non-European communities from Africa, Asia, "the Americas", Australasia, and the Caribbean. In the history of modern colonization French, Spanish, English and Dutch have stood out as the most resilient languages of European colonization in the Caribbean. Thus for decolonization to be effectively carried out, language, whether the imperial one or a native one, must be engaged as a tool. In this case, the imperial language, according to Bill Ashcroft et al. (38-77), must either be replaced or re(trans)formed into a discourse suitable to the new location (37). Replacement in this case is synonymous with what has been defined as abrogation, in which the original mother tongue(s) of the colonised replace the imperial language. Re(trans)formation, on the other hand, implies a subversive kind of reconstitutive use through appropriation. The former is possible in Africa, Asia, and among the remnants of the indigenous peoples of countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The second type occurs mostly among the diasporic communities from Africa and Asia in the Caribbean, but it is also found in Africa and Asia where many other cultural traditions, languages, and literatures operate within and outside the former colonial literary traditions and languages. Of course Ashcroft et al.

fail to mention a third type of converting the imperial language of power into a natural poetic. Here, the process of decolonization is not really a cultural redefinition of self, but a process which involves a conscious consolidation of an older definition of an imperial self within extended dimensions in new geophysical locations--what used to be settler colonies such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South and North America, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

In this process of decolonization as expressed in post-colonial literatures, Ashcroft et al. document three types of language situations. They locate resistance discourses within monoglossic, diaglossic, and polyglossic locations. They rightly identify the Caribbean linguistic situation as polyglossic, and thus it presents the most complex case of the struggle within an imperial language for self-actualization (39-40). The complexity comes out of the history of slavery in which the Africans, brought over as slaves to the Caribbean, were forced to abandon their mother tongues and to adopt the enslaving languages--French and English. Over a period of time, these Africans submerged their original mother tongues in the imperial discourse. These submerged mother tongues, none the less, still strongly influenced the way Africaribbeans use English or French: with heavy African inflexions. The result is the development of Creole/Nation language/Caribbean Demotic. It has also led to calls for the recognition and acceptance of Creole as the site for the development of a Caribbean aesthetic.

It is, therefore, not surprising that debates (at the beginning of the development of Africaribbean writing) raged between those who wanted

to pursue the path of developing a Caribbean aesthetic by abrogating English while adopting Nation Language, and those who thought Nation Language was not developed enough to be used as a medium of decolonization, except among the unlettered. These debates were academic quarrels between the middle class Africaribbean intelligentsia, and overstated the case either for or against it. I do not wish to replay these debates.⁸ They are dated, argues Jean D'Costa, because there is a consensus in the Caribbean today that Creole indeed provides the base of the polydialectical continuum in which Caribbean writers operate (252). The irrelevance of these debates was also brought home to me in my discussions with other Caribbean writers: Edward Baugh, Mervyn Morris, and Mark McWatt (Interviews with Kuwabong, June 1995). The rise of nationalism and the gaining of political independence in the Caribbean have also given the Caribbean Demotic a recognition and status in Africaribbean life and letters, and thus demobilized the forces for and against Creole in the debate. Whatever form an Africaribbean writer's poetry engages, then, there is always at the background the Creole presence, particularly as it is manifested in a highly developed Africaribbean folk tradition.

⁸ The retired/main players of these debates Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Pauline Christie, Gordon Rohlehr, Velma Pollard, Jean D'Costa, Edouard Glissant etc.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF CREOLE IN POETRY⁹

I have indicated earlier that Creole has been the most useful instrument in the world of Africaribbean poets in their struggle against Euro-American colonization. Thus, poets such as Claude McKay, Una Marson, Vicky Reid, A. J. Seymour, and others have facilitated its engagement not as exotica, or purely in the name of cultural nationalism, but as a bona fide language of the Caribbean which is capable of carrying the weight of Africaribbean experience. But this would not have been possible in verse, as O. R. Dathorne asserts, without "[the] folk tradition which is to do with a new way of seeing as well as of hearing," and of being (3). Carolyn Cooper in *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* states that oral tradition is a praxis that transcends the "narrow taxonomy of verbal techniques," and includes the "broad repertoire of themes and cultural practices" such as "obeah, myal, ettu, revival, kumina [pocomania], spirit possession; entertainment /socialization practices - children's games, story telling rituals, tea meetings and social dance" (2). Cooper enumerates some of the verbal pyrotechnics that abound in orature, but which carry the weight of "social stigmatization to which the practitioners of afrocentric ideology in [the Caribbean] are continually subjected" (2).

⁹ Lloyd Brown in *West Indian Poetry* devotes a chapter on the importance of Creole to the development of Caribbean poetry. He praises Claude McKay and Louise Bennett for their roles in this. Likewise, Ansel Wong (109-122) sees Creole as a language of empowerment and group solidarity among Africaribbean youth in Britain.

Stigmatization means that Euro-American cultural definitions, including aesthetics and language, become the standard measures of Africaribbean "neo(post)-colonials" as they gain social mobility upwards. Thus, anything African or belonging to the predominant Africaribbean community becomes an unwanted embarrassment as "upward social mobility . . . requires the shedding of the old skin of early socialization: mother tongue, mother culture, mother wit - the feminized discourse of voice, identity and native knowledge" (3). Creole, the Mother Tongue, then, so central to the debate on Africaribbean recovery rhetoric, was (is) an embarrassment. So most Africaribbean poets still struggle between accepting it or standard English as the language of Africaribbean art expression.

But, as I indicated above, the importance of Creole as language of resistance and recovery has never been in doubt. Thus Walter Jeckyl in the Introduction to Claude McKay's *Constab Ballads* sees Creole as "the feminine version of masculine English, pre-eminently a language of love, as all will feel who, setting prejudice aside . . . " (5). For Jekyl, Creole smooths over the harsh edges and negative attitudes of colonial Europeans to Africaribbeans. Jeckyl then defends Creole's roles, first, as the instrument of subversion, and second, as a substitute language of identity formation. For instance, in the poem "Cudjoe Fresh From De Lecture" (*Songs of Jamaica* 55-58), McKay uses Creole as a linguistic and dramatic site to critique both the religious and scientific theories that have been used to justify the oppression of Africans. After narrating how the buckra lecturer dismisses the Bible myth of Noah and

Ham, as an untenable justification for the enslavement and colonization of African peoples, Cudjoe then innocently, but ironically, presents the new theory--Darwinism--which is equally as racist in its application to Africans:

No 'cos say we get cuss mek fe we 'kin come so
 Buit fe all t'ings come 'quare, same so it was to
 go: Seems our lan' must ha' been a bery low-do'n
 place,
 Mek it tek such long time in tu'ning out a race

 Yet both horse partly runnin' in de selfsame
 gallop,
 For it is nearly so de way de bukra pull up:
 Him say, how de wul' stan', dat right will neber be,
 But wrong will eber gwon till dis wul' en' fe we (56-58)

McKay was able to use Creole for very serious issues. It is on account of his pioneering role in legitimizing Creole as a literary tool that Wayne Cooper writes that "Claude McKay [was] among the first to embrace the dialect as a legitimate means of literary expression" (1972). Cooper rightly points out that both *Constab Ballads* and *Songs of Jamaica* represent a bold experimental and assertive negotiation of recognition for his people's way of enunciating their vision and version of reality. Similarly, Paula Burnett notes that "McKay was also . . . the first poet [with the exception of Moreton, a white Creole] to bring the vernacular into the literary tradition, making the first move in the search for a poetic language which could bear the full weight of the Caribbean experience" (li). This search, contends Burnett, is an attempt to "weave into Caribbean poetry the strand of North American experience which has come to dominate the diaspora in more recent years" (1.i-ii).

In a similar tradition, Louise Bennett engages Creole very effectively as a medium for social commentary. A good example is her famous poem, "Jamaica Oman" (*Selected Poems* 21-23). In this poem, Bennett traces the origins of the independence of women in Jamaica, from the legendary Nanny to the present. Her poem rejects the images of the oppressed and helpless Africaribbean woman, constructed by people unaware of the real place of the Africaribbean woman, in Caribbean society and history:

Jamaica oman cunny, sah!
 Is how dem jinnal so?
 Look how long dem liberated
 An de man dem never know!

Look how long Jamaica oman
 -- Modder, sister, wife, sweetheart --
 Outa road an eena yard deh pon
 A dominate her part!

From Maroon Nanny teek her body
 Bounce bullet back pon man,
 To when nowadays gal-pickney tun
 Spellin-Bee champion

.....

An long before Oman Lib bruck out
 Over foreign lan
 Jamaica female wasa work
 Her liberated plan! (21-22)

Bennett goes on to show how these women strategize to achieve their liberation through the adoption of voluntary silence, first to deceive the males into thinking men are in control, and second, to give the males a chance to appreciate the worth of the women in the struggle for selfhood. Bennett's power of utterance goes beyond her satirical tone.

Her constant engagement of proverbs, the meta-language of philosophy used by Africans in their daily discourse, enables her to concretize through sensuous imagery abstractions like luck. For example, she uses this proverb, "But as long as fowl a scratch dungle heap / Oman luck mus come!" (23), to emphasize the difference in approach to gender equality between Africaribbean women and Euro-American women. That difference lies in the patience of the former and the impatience of the latter.

It is on account of the use of Creole by almost every poet from the Caribbean¹⁰ that Jeckyl then rejects the definition of Creole as a surrogate language, or even a derivative of a superior language--English. Because of its use as a tool for positive self identification, Jeckyl goes further to call Creole the language of love, a definition that suggests possibilities for the users. None the less, this dichotomization of the language problematic in Africaribbean discourse is rather simplistic and fails to deal with the complexities of Africaribbean language. It also inadvertently re-endorses a concentric view of language in the Caribbean with the imperial English, Dutch or

¹⁰ Major poets that use Creole include Una Marson, Derek Walcott in his "Tales from the Islands"--a sonnets sequence--, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Grace Nicols, Mevyn Morris, David Dabydeen, etc., and a host of younger poets popularly lumped together as dub poets: Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mickey Smith, Mutabaruka, Jean Binta Breeze, to mention a few. Two of the best collections of poems in this style is *Voice Print* (1989), edited by Stewart Brown, Mervyn Morris and Gordon Rohlehr, and Paula Burnett's edition of *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* (1986),--this gives a more historical survey of the development of verse in Creole.

French being the core while Creole becomes the revolving periphery, smoothing out the hard edges of the core.

The complexity of Creole is well captured by Gikandi in his notion that Creolization represents the Caribbean contribution to [post] modernism through which Africaribbean people resist "the colonizing structures through the diversion of the colonial language and still manages to reconcile the values of European literacy with the long-repressed traditions of African orality" (16). As indicated above, the Creole language in the Caribbean--Nation Language, Caribbean Demotic, Patois, Jamaican, Caribbean Creole-Continuum--originated in slavery. Edward Long writes that the slaves who came from different communities in West Africa needed a common tongue to communicate between themselves and with their European masters and mistresses (426-7). Like Caliban, they developed a survival language that grafted European languages, vocabulary, and syntax to inflections of African languages. This, argues Harry Hoetnik, resulted in codification of the master discourse (27-29), a necessary and productive way to develop a recovery rhetoric. But this kind of codification is what Edouard Glissant calls forced poetics as opposed to natural poetics (120-121). Natural poetics, writes Glissant, is "any collective yearning for self-expression that is not opposed to itself either at the level of what it wishes to express or at the level of the language that it puts into practice" (120), while forced poetics is the "collective desire for expression that, when it manifests itself, is negated at the same time because of the *deficiency* that stifles it, not at the level of desire, which never ceases, but at the level of

expression, which is never realised" (120). Glissant locates this difference between the two poetics in the ability of natural poetics to offer effective recovery rhetorics in a community whose foundations are superficially threatened, and the inability of forced poetics to initiate a determined move towards recovery in a community whose foundation has been destroyed through forced translocation and colonization. He then locates Caribbean Creole in forced poetics because of its inability to offer Caribbean communities any effective tool of self expression. In another sense, however, Glissant is hopeful. He recognizes Creole's ability to help develop a natural poetic in its initiatic rite to collective self-expression: "transforming a scream (which was once uttered [but silenced in slavery and colonialism] into speech that grows from it, thus discovering the expression . . . of a finally liberating poetics" (133).

Similarly, in "Aspects of Caribbean Literature," A. J. Seymour (5) recognises the political nature of Africaribbean literary language. For Seymour in *Images of Majority*, Africaribbean rhetoric of recovery began in an instant of a verbal utterance in which Africaribbeans--the former slave/colonised person/other--seized the "flash of [his/her] creative imagination in their speech and demeanour," actions which earlier on would have earned the individual "swift retaliation and even death, because it was unthinkable for the master to tolerate the expression of creative imagination dwelling in the slave" (1978). Seymour also writes that Vic Reid before independence was "forging a literary instrument in the Caribbean use of English, quite different from speech in Mayfair,

attempting to develop a mode of writing based upon the Morant Bay speech of peasants and fisherfolk purified for the page but alive with Jamaican physical idiom" (*Main Currents in Caribbean Literature* 1-2).

I discuss in Chapter Two how Philip captures this fact extremely powerfully in column three of her poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language," subtitled "EDICT II". For Seymour also, language, style and theme go together in a combined effort to throw some positive veneer over centuries of negations of the Africaribbean person. Given this historical context in which the Africaribbean rhetoric of recovery in poetry originated, I am constrained to agree with those post-colonial theorists who read Africaribbean through Euro-American materialist discourses, and see this writing basically as a "material practice [which then] . . . is determined by a complex weave of social conditions and experience" (Ashcroft et al. 41). To them, material practice is aided by the functionality of language. Language, argues Hortense Spillers, is used in response to the "living conditions of the social subject," and becomes the site of negotiation and transformation of negative social circumstances into positive self-asserting realities (246).

Brathwaite's work on the need to break with the colonizing English pentameter in Africaribbean poetry, and the arguments he advances to explain the development of Creole, and its efficacious use in a developing Caribbean aesthetic, also underscores these arguments. In *History of the Voice*, he explores how Africaribbean writers have developed an alternative mode to express themselves--Nation Language,

the language of the "submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people" (13). He argues persuasively that Nation Language raises the people's awareness above the caricature state of mimicry, into a reclamatory rhetoric in which "the submerged area of that dialect . . . is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience" (13). Nation Language may resemble English in its lexicon, but it is so heavily influenced "by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage" (13) that it no longer is English or even a dialect of English in relation to its "syntax . . . its rhythm and timbre, its own sound explosion . . . its contours . . ." (13). Brathwaite's list of the characteristics of Nation Language which includes calypso, kaiso, reggae/dub, blues, pan, steel band, robber talk, grounations, folktales, jazz, ritual forms such as Rastafarianism, Kuminaism, Shangoism, Zion Revivalism, shows his acute awareness of the steps toward the deconstruction and rejection of Eurocentric Caribbeanism for Africentric Caribbeanism. In stressing also that Nation Language is an act of total expression, he is able to include all the tonal and code switching, the bodily movements, audience participation, and untranslatable noises that are so ingrained in Afrisporic oratures. Brathwaite is aware of the lack of literary tradition in this form in the Caribbean, but he fails to explore in depth the living oral tradition that gives birth to the few literary experiments he singles out for praise. He also fails to cite obvious female poets as harbingers of such a literary development. But poets

like Una Marson in the 1930s and Louise Bennett since the 1950s stand out as early examples and foremothers to Africaribbean female poets in this area.

Una Marson, writes Rhonda Cobham and Merle Hodge, engaged Nation Language as "a pioneer for her time in the search for an authentic literary style: a style that could reflect and utilize the heritage of those half-forgotten voices, skills and gestures" (7). A good example is the use of the voice of lamentation about the African's lot within the dominant Euro-American concepts of physical beauty. She mourns the unresolvable fix into which Africaribbean women have been pushed, in regard to how they are made to view themselves, within racial and cultural definitions of beauty. She also critiques Africaribbean men for their acceptance of Euro-American negation of Africaribbean females as subjects of aesthetic and sexual desire. Caught in the dilemma of negations, Africaribbean women are compelled to self-caricature in order to satisfy the requirements of someone else's definition of how they must look:

Gwine find a beauty shop
 Cause I ain't a belle.
 Gwine find a beauty shop
 Cause I ain't a lovely belle.
 The boys pass me by,
 They say I's not so swell.

.....

I hate dat ironed hair
 And dat bleaching skin.
 Hate dat ironed hair
 And dat bleaching skin.
 But I'll be all alone
 If I don't fall in. ("Kinky Hair" 158)

The poem ends with a trip to a salon to press the kinky hair and to bleach the black skin.

Una Marson and Louise Bennett are the most important literary foremothers for Africaribbean women literary poets, both in the use of language and in the search for space, voice, and Africaribbean female personhood that is not antagonistic to Africaribbean male personhood. Marson's historical location at the genesis¹¹ of the move to validate Caribbean demotic as a legitimate mode of creative Africaribbean rhetoric, and her determination "to fashion her own definition" of being both African and female through her art has been echoed down the generations of Africaribbean female writers to our four poets in this study, write Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins (3). Marson, contends Cobham and Collins, saw poetry as a tool for critiquing the inimical patriarchal socio-economic structures that peripheralized African peoples and further marginalized the females in that group into only one narrow space--marriage/motherhood. She critiqued the mechanisms that control and curtail the creative and independent spirit of women, and then "insisted on the creative freedom and an authentic sense of racial and sexual identity" (3-5) for everyone. In exploring the same issues as Marson, Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James seize the inter-generational bonding between Marson and themselves, and the sisterly bonding among them. Marson engaged Africaribbean-American music rhythms and tones as

¹¹ Of course, the writing of Mary Seacole, Florence Nightangels's co-founder of the nursing profession during the Crimean war, who never gets mentioned because of her race, predates Una Marson and Louise Bennett.

"a means of approaching issues which in her opinion had more than regional significance, or for which, as, yet, she could locate no precedent in the Caribbean literary tradition" (Cobham 7). Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James engage and expand this method in their poetry.

Similarly, Louise Bennett's role in making the world accept the Caribbean demotic as a literary medium¹² also ensures for her a niche as a foremother for Africaribbean female poets. Her position has been convincingly demonstrated by her wide acceptance, and by critical acclaim. For instance, Mervyn Morris in his assessment of Louise Bennett's poetry, shows the rich complexities of Bennett's Jamaican language poetry (III-XIX). Similarly, Gloria Feiman Waldman affirms that Bennett's poetry creates in both the Caribbean and elsewhere an appreciation "of the richness and depth of" Africaribbean culture in (7). She sees a connection between Bennett and other female Caribbean poets in Bennett's advocacy for a "return to authentic national models; in this case Jamaican, rather than the imitation of foreign forms. Also like them she celebrates life as manifested in the multiple creative expressions that generate from the people" (37). Thus the

¹² James Berry devotes two paragraphs in *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of Westindian-British Poetry* to show Louise Bennett's contribution to the acceptance of Jamaican as fit poetic medium (xv-xvii)

influences of Marson and Bennett, latent as they may be, are obvious in the works of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James.¹³

Consequently, for Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, this search begins, as Alfred Arteaga contends, in their acceptance that the dynamics of language are especially foregrounded in verse and in the subjectification of Nation Language (13). Writing within the Africaribbean context, whether in Canada or Jamaica, or Trinidad, means writing in a linguistic matrix that I referred to earlier as multivocal, or heteroglossic. Their poetry is thus contextualized by the "interlingual and interdiscursive factors" (13) that they inherit and

¹³ I am aware that my limitation of literary foreparents to only Africaribbeans is problematic. I do not deny the validity as forerunners of pre-emancipation Euro-Caribbean writers such as Louis Simpson, Phillis Allfrey and Jean Rhys who pre-date Marson. Paula Burnett has traced their efforts in this area briefly (xxix-xxxviii), and Evelyn O'Callaghan has argued powerfully in *Woman Version* (17-35) for the inclusion of white creole women novelists in the club of foremothers of Caribbean literature. Belinda Edmonson makes the same argument (109-119). But since the scope of my study does not extend to a general Caribbean literary and historical situation, but specifically deals with Africaribbean female poetry, I do not find their complicated and sometimes contradictory arguments necessary or relevant to my purpose. Moreover, as David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe have pointed out, white creoles belonged to the dominant privileged European minority group with rooms of their own "and economic power to create a 'creole' literary tradition, but often weakened by their cultural allegiance to the metropolis and by an ambivalence towards the islands . . . the poetry of the period fared even worse in social awareness" and vision (*A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* 13-14). In addition, O'Callaghan's position becomes problematic because she accepts Hazel Carby's delineation of the historical origins of differences between Euro-American and African American concepts of womanhood in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (20-39). She further weakens her argument with her acceptance of the racism, the lack of responsibility, and the sense of direction towards developing a Caribbean tradition by white creole women (21-34). For contrary arguments on this see Simon Gikandi's recent revised position on this area *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the culture of Colonialism*.

operate in, such as hybridization. Hybridization for them, as well as for all Africaribbean poets, originates in and is situated in desires to overcome marginality by using the multiple nature of Africaribbean cultural heritage for subjectification. In the Africaribbean sense, argues Seymour, subjectification begins as self-interrogation, exploration, and explanation, and a refusal to be legislated further as the "Other" by outsiders. Self-interrogation seeks to answer questions such as "where am I? Who brought me here? Why am I here? What is this here and now which contains me? Do I like it? If I must like it here and now and sing its praises so that I can be proud of my surroundings, what shall I praise and celebrate?" (Seymour 246). Personal questions are linked to questions of how to celebrate the community: "And the people around me, how shall I mirror all our failings, where can I look for our possible and future successes? Who am I" (246). For Afrisporics such as Philip and Harris these questions become more complicated, as I will show in Chapters Two and Three.

Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, then, like their literary forebears, are engaged in retrieving and renurturing the transplanted, submerged, and the not-so-submerged African selves. These acts go beyond a simplistic mimicry of African elements in Africaribbean life. Retrieval poetics becomes a platform also for what I call insurrectionist poetics. Insurrectionist poetics involve the creation of what Carol Boyce Davies labels "uprising textualities" (*Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the subject* 88) within the spaces of multiple negations and silences. It is, as Gordon Rohlehr puts it, an

act of "ongoing self-affirmation" (*The Shape of That Hurt* 3), a constantly energized "negation of a process of [their] reification" (1). In the face(s) of rigid and sometimes amorphous contours of oppression (patriarchy, neo-colonialism, internal-colonialism, racism, sexism, and classism), insurrectionist poetics becomes the site for the development of viable rhetorics of recovery for the Africaribbean female poet.

Insurrectionist poetics also engenders a discourse of trans-reformation. Trans-reformation creates spaces for the deconstruction, recuperation and remythification of what has been denied, constructed, denigrated, and negatively mystified. Trans-reformation discourse seeks not just to overhaul systems broken down by legalized negations, in order to reconnect with them, it also seeks to rehabilitate and change the system in order to claim a non categorized selfhood. In trans-reformation discourse there are some given prerequisites, however. These include: transmutational locationalities, locutionary mobilities and transitory reconfigurations of fragmented agents of such trans-reformations. In some aspects of trans-reformation discourse, some of these elements may appear static but assume revolutionary dimensions in the way they recover old nuances of performability. Considered this way, trans-reformation discourse is the *modus operandi* of Africaribbean poets as they battle for new sites for self and community definition.

However, trans-reformation is complicated further for Africaribbean female poets by the marginalization of their voices by patriarchal discourses, and Euro-American liberal feminism which seeks to blindly label all women under the category of the oppressed in spite

of locational and historical differences among women and among men. These complications are further exacerbated by the cultural vacuums created during the middle passage, and retranslocations, and by the Eurocentric educational structures in the Caribbean. Consequently, the desire for any realistic self and group representation, first as Africaribbean people, second as Africaribbean women, and third as women becomes exasperatingly difficult in the writers' attempt to escape appropriation and silencing within the matrix of competing dominant discourses.

SILENCE

In this matrix of a dominant discourse praxis, and notwithstanding the gradual rise in critical interest in Africaribbean women's poetry, it still is crucial that any studies of Africaribbean female poetics examine the issue of female voicelessness. Voicelessness, write Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, is the multidimensional elision of the textual representation of the Caribbean female's voice and position on all major Caribbean issues including "slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues" (*Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* 1). They further contend that voicelessness includes the "inability to express a position in the language of the 'master' as well as the textual construction of woman as silent" (1). This definition, however, is problematic. It echoes Jeckyl's ideas about Creole, and feminizes the

inability to express the female self in the language of the master. This invariably privileges the master's tongue over the mother's tongue. They are, none the less, right in interpreting the inability and/or reluctance of the critical media to engage Caribbean female texts for the development of a Caribbean aesthetic as another evidence of voicelessness (1). Conversely, "it is out of this voicelessness and consequent absence that an understanding of [female] creativity in written expression emerges" (1). As indicated above, therefore, any pretence "to operate within the same intellectual constructs which have long served male control of the world" (Preface. *Out of the Kumbula* ix) becomes a disabling act of self-effacement. Such a move only intensifies the "prejudices, ignorance and resentment which seek to silence our voices and prevent our development" (ix).

On another level, what Davies and Fido theorize as voicelessness can be read as evidence of the syndrome of strategic self-silencing, or the exploitation of imposed silence for subversive purposes by the oppressed. Seen this way, voicelessness as silence is a sought for objective as it becomes a strategy of space clearing. Here, externally imposed voicelessness is converted into psycho-spiritual migratory/nomadic spaces through which the silenced undertake counter-historical journeys from suffocating epistemology into provinces of silence. This is evident in the work of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James. The protagonists in some of their works all undertake some form of exploratory journeys into the frontiers and interiors of the gaps and silences of dominant and minority discourses. This form of silence

becomes a "language of its own" writes Trinh T. Minh-Ha (8). It is the tactical withdrawal from, and the subversive exploration of, patriarchal and Euro-American defined "context of Absence, Lack, and Fear (as Feminist Essence)" (8). Subsequently, the Africaribbean female's silence can be read as both a voluntary and an involuntary act of inviolable space creation. The silence of Africaribbean female poets may therefore be a rejection and withdrawal from the negative epistemology that surrounds their colonized subjectivities, (Ashcroft et al. 141-143), as is the case with the protagonist in Philip's *Looking for Livingstone*. They differentiate their silence from that of other post-colonials and feminists who journey to a selfhood from forced "silence or unauthentic speech, through an intermediary zone of madness, silence or inarticulation, to full speech," argues Hoving (296).

The play with silence by Africaribbean women poets such as Philip, Goodison, Harris, and James collapses the dichotomization of the subject as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (271-313), in which she argues that the subaltern cannot speak within the same language and discourse of the dominant Other and still claim to be self-enunciatory; and Benita Parry's Fanonian response that contends the "Native Other" can and does speak from a position of a unified oppositional self to colonialism within the colonial and neo-colonial center/periphery (27-58). Both these positions are limiting. They do not take into consideration questions of continuous fluidity, heteroglossia, hybridity, silent nuances, and what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson calls speaking in tongues (16-37). These modes of enunciation can be

interpreted as glossalalia, a system of simultaneous articulation found in the works of African American women writers. In these modes, African American women speak simultaneously to, with, and about the "other" and to, among, and about themselves. Within these modes of enunciation African American, as well as Africaribbean, women engage both competing and complementary discourses (23) as a way of demystifying both themselves and the "prejudices, ignorance, and resentment" (Davies and Fido ix) shown in the study of their literatures.

VOICE

From what I have said above, any programme designed to dismantle these "prejudices, ignorance, and resentment" (Davies and Fido ix), generated by Africaribbean women's experiences, needs to reject simplistic and stabilizing binary divisions. In defining how experience is articulated, McLaren's summary of Roger Simon's and Donald Dippo's ideas on experience are revealing. For them, writes McLaren, the voices of experience are "a way in which individuals [or groups] confront the contingency of the present, the inevitable alternation of oppression, and the politics of daily living" (15). McLaren does not discount the validity and importance of non-discursive experience, but his main stress is for a greater recognition of how experience is constructed, regulated and articulated. For him "experience is largely constructed linguistically as a continuing interpretation of a concrete engagement with social practices, symbols, and forms" (15). To be able to construct

experience then, a certain type of voice articulation is necessary if the mason is to avoid falling into theoretical scaffolding of containment through generalization and binarisms.

Moreover, Philip's, Harris's, Goodison's, and James's voices of experience transcend essentialization. Their voices are empowered by parodic experimentation, and this blends with corporeal referentiality, producing a discourse that aspires to recuperate what Claire Harris calls the "authentic" African womanhood ("poets in limbo" 120). This "authentic" African womanhood, writes Olive Senior, is defined by new approaches to the issue of Africaribbean motherhood, wifehood, daughterhood, and sisterhood (485). The subject of "authentic" African womanhood is quite problematic in light of recent positions taken by Africaribbean lesbian women writers such as Audre Lorde and Dionne Brand. Any discussion of womanhood in the Caribbean must, therefore, take into consideration this other voice which resists silencing by heterosexual feminist discourse.¹⁴ This tells us then that sexual orientation cannot be the only prevailing factor that questions the notion of an "authentic" Africaribbean womanhood. Other variables such as class, bi- or multi-racial background, education, and political ideology all work against any notion of a totalizing authentic Africaribbean female experience. Thus, there cannot be a single

¹⁴ Dionne Brand talks of this in her book *Bread Out of Stone* where she takes up the issue of Africaribbean lesbians at the First Caribbean Women's Conference. She discusses the rejection Africaribbean lesbians experience within Africaribbean culture, and shows how there is a concerted effort by heterosexists to silence the voices of lesbians in Africaribbean society.

definition of Africaribbean womanhood. My purpose, moreover, is not to enter into any intra-feminist debates about sexuality among Africaribbean women, but to examine the texts of these four poets to show how they articulate their experiences and perceptions of what it means to be an Africaribbean woman. I have indicated earlier that the voices of experience pertain to the positive deconstruction of the epistemology of negation and diminishment of the Africaribbean "Other." It is a system in which the internal mechanisms of a dominating language and culture are demystified to create space for a remythification for community healing, reunification, and direction. In consequence, voice is structured around the struggle against the alluring call to amnesia, to sameness by one brand of feminism/post-colonialism or the other, and the absence of a historically structured literary collective from which she can construct her own harmony.

The incidence of a struggle in voice articulation makes Glissant define voice in Africaribbean literature as "at once struggle, aggressiveness, belonging, lucidity, distrust of self, absolute love, contours of the landscape, emptiness of the cities, victories, and confrontations . . . our eruption into history" (100). Davies, likewise, in responding to the scramble by Euro-American coached intellectuals to compartmentalize Afrisporic female voices that resist their theoretical categories, refers to them as "uprising textualities" (108). Voice for these writers, Davies then contends, is defined more by their resistance to any uniformity, and in their energetic mission to "destabilize the established knowledge/authoritarian bases. It . . . eschews colonial

borders, systems, separations, ideologies, structures of dominations . .
 . [and] signifies resistance, reassertion, renewal, and rethinking"
 (108).

But voice in the Africaribbean context is not just limited to these anti-hegemonic anti-essentialist manoeuvres. It is also a textual response to the "language, innovation and energy of Rastafari, which identifies action and meaning with a certain poetic intent, on the one hand, and a literalization structured in words, on the other" (109). As R. B. Le Page and Andree Tabouret-Keller observe "Rastafarians have provided an alternative model" to educated Caribbean English, and thus to the tyranny and Eurocentricism of the educational system (73). Furthermore, voice, as a formulating device in reconstructive textualities, involves the two types of recovery poetics that Glissant identifies: Natural Poetics and Forced Poetics. Even though Glissant treats them as distinctive manoeuvres, I believe for the Africaribbean woman, they conjoin to form two phases of a movement out of obliquity to ubiquity: out from the "constricted and submerged spaces" (Davies 108) to a "creative movement outward and upward" (108). The idea of submerged spaces and movements raises issues of location in Africaribbean female poetry.

LOCATION/PLACE

I use the terms location and place interchangeably and in a deliberately guarded manner. Location as a concept in post-colonial, feminist, and post-modern discourses, is directly related to the

problematic of placelessness/voicelessness/silence/voice. Dionne Brand has noted poignantly that, "notions of voice, representation, theme, style, imagination are charged with these historical locations and require rigorous examination rather than liberal assumptions of universal subjectivity or downright denial of such locations" (153). Thus for me, location politics become a method of examining what Caren Kaplan in "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice" calls the "productive tension between temporal and spatial theories of subjectivity" (118), in order to understand the complexities of Africaribbean female subjectivities from multiple perspectives. Thus, my notion of location is not a topographical fixation, nor is it based on any notions of primordial identities. It enables me to understand the affiliations, differences, and coalitions among these women (118-119). As I argue in Chapters Two and Three, location is a process of becoming through writing and journeying. It also echoes and adopts Michelle Wallace's idea of schizophrenic unlocation that engages "more than one process, more than one location, perhaps three or four, none of which necessarily connect in a self-evident manner" (49). Also, because Africaribbean women poets in both the Caribbean and Canada are considered as marginal poets by both patriarchy and Euro-Canadian's reluctance to accept non-Euro-Canadian women's poetry as Canadian enough, I embrace bell hooks's identification of location politics with the politics of marginality. In Chapters Two and Three, I take up this point as articulated by Philip and Harris and contrast what location means to them with Goodison's and James's sense of location in Chapters

Four and Five. Thus my idea of location tries to avoid the flaw of plural relativism, under which differences are dismissed under the rubrics of a unitary formulation of containment, in the name of a vague Africaribbean womanhood.

Thus all in all, it is Chandra T Mohanty's definition of location as an all-inclusive term to articulate "historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition and self-definition" (31), in addition to Audre Lorde's advice to include age, race, class, and sex (114-123) that inform my discussion of location in the poetry of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James. Location is also to me the readership, and the site of control of the production and dissemination of knowledge. In connection with the last point raised, Brathwaite delineates two historico-cultural phases that define Africaribbean literary locations. First, the exile mentality of the middle class Africaribbean artist/intellectual caused by a fragmented culture; second the location of healing in the mentality of the under classes who have accepted the islands as their permanent home ("Timehri" 29-31). As a result, Africaribbean writing has always been preoccupied with this concept of placelessness and fragmentation of vision and voice, of journeys and homecomings, in search of an identity.

Daryl Cumber Dance points out how this search of an identity, and the language with which to express it, take the form of multiple journeys through various physical and metaphorical locations (7). This quest leads the writers and their characters to undertake the journeys

that start with a trip to Europe or to the United States or Canada: "the journey in other words into the White Western world . . . [which] reinforces the fact that the cold and alien land is not home and that the traveller must divest [herself] of [her] Europeanisation or [her] Westernisation" (7). The second journey is to Africa or India to discover roots, which is in turn completed by the third journey back to the Caribbean, but many never seem able to make this third journey because of their alienation from their Caribbean roots. This alienation may be caused, first by the Eurocentric education they receive and, second by economic forces. These journeys, write Mordecai and Wilson, are also a "spiritual/psychic search in which one of the things which the writer may put at hazard is the owning of his/her language" (xvi). The journeys, moreover, imply the search for place, for location, for space, for rootedness. Place in this context is also a site of narrative reinscription of self, of voice articulation. It can be the mediated location within the unrestricted dimensions of the oral histories of Africaribbeans. It is a site to review the "pleasures of exile" as both "alienation and reconnection" (Lamming ix). To Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James, place can be read as all these multiple settings. Existence, for these poets then becomes nomadic both in real and metaphorical terms. Thus to understand their sense and use of location/place one must invoke some theories of nomadology in a non-romanticized way. In this, I am instructed by critiques of Western academic feminists (both Black and White) and post-structuralists' appropriations of nomadic existence to theorize on nomadology as a transnational feminist, post-modern, and

post-colonial practice without including the people whose existences provide the fodder for such theorizing (Caren Kaplan.

"Deterritorialization: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western feminist Discourse" 187-198).

Nomadology, as propounded by Giles Deleux and Felix Guattari in "Nomad Thought," is a means of reading minoritarian literatures within the European canon, has now become an acceptable way to theorise about the alternative hermeneutics and borderland textualities of both feminist and post-colonial writing. Recently, therefore, readers of post-colonial and diasporic literatures have looked to Deleuze's and Guattari's propositions on nomadology to discourse on the problematic of shifting subjectivities. Nomadology has also provided the site for the formulation of anti-domesticity by western feminists such as Lucy Irigaray and Teresa de Lauretis. I find nomadology, therefore, a reasonably useful tool in my study of Africaribbean women poets: they actually live and experience the lives of modern nomads.

Consequently, movement, travel, exile, herstory, homelessness, participation and community all come into play in the study of their aesthetic. Nomadology also helps to explicate the issue of location or dislocation as defined above. In nomadology, location as a concept becomes merely a transitory point in a perpetual journey. Location thus is deconstructed and liberated from any historical and geographical periodization. Thus, for the Africaribbean female writer, place is a constant re-journeying across Euro-American constructs of spatial and temporal and conceptual borderlands in search of their imagined or real

African and female heartlands and borderlands. Such re-journeying is a form of nomadology, and it undermines the hegemonic fixations of place, time, and discourse. For instance, discourse is dislocated in the constant code switching and temporal slippages in their poetry. Incidentally, because place is linked to the question of representation, Africaribbean female writers engage multi-vocality to deconstruct multiple negative representations of themselves by the dominant "Other." Multivocality, as said above, is located in the Caribbean-Creole continuum. Thus place and voice are united in each poet's work.

However, there are differences in how individual location influences the way voice is tuned towards action. Philip and Harris seek a more individualistic yet collective voice, deconstructive, bellicose, and experimental as they contest for space and resist insidious, multiple, and more complex marginalization and silencing in their Canadian multi-cultural landscape. Their responses are influenced by their minoritarian locations in Canada, which then creates in them a type of neo-negritudinism and the poetics of nostalgia. In contrast, Goodison and James use their majoritarian location to seek a language of healing for the "shapes" that hurt their communality. Their experimentation lies in using the spiritual, musical, linguistic and all other available cultural resources in their Caribbean locale to motivate a movement toward a utopian ideal. These apparent differences in no way imply a lack of unity in vision concerning language, race, gender inequality, silence, and marginality as I will show in succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

"Silence / welcomes the hungry / Word": Marlene Nourbese Philip's Rhetoric.

For the many like me, black and female, it is imperative that our writing begins to recreate our histories and our myths, as well as to integrate that most painful of experiences--loss of our history and our word.

(*She Tries Her Tongue* 25)

The poetry, prose, and poetic drama of Marlene Nourbese Philip are preoccupied with a troubling search for ways in which she can develop a rhetoric of recovery, a voice in which she can reclaim and express her Africaribbean personhood. This search for Philip is an obsessive exploration of the structures of the language in which the ideologies used to justify her people's enslavement and subsequent colonization, and then to establish the negation of her own personhood were, and are, constructed. The deconstruction of the master's discourse, or what Philip calls the father tongue, is paramount in Philip's poetic agenda. Language was/is a powerful tool for the negation of her people's personhood. It is, therefore, logical that she sees the liberation of her people through language.

Philip's position on language, and that of the other poets in this study, is strengthened by recent theories on the role language is made to play in the struggle for decolonization. For instance, in *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. discuss the relationship between language and effective colonization, and prescribe oppositional linguistic

strategies. They contend that "the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of that centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). They investigate two relational linguistic strategies normally engaged by post-colonial writers to this end: first the rejectionist ideology which involves writers who have recourse to existing pre-colonial mother tongue oratures that survived the ravages of colonialism. For example, writers from Africa such as Ngugi wa Thiong'O, D. O. Fanguwa, and Thomas Mafolo are among those who reject the use of colonial European languages in their creative work.

While acknowledging this first option as the more revolutionary pragmatic, Ashcroft et al., and other descendants of those colonising cultures (together with the "lost tribes of Africa"), see more political advantage in aligning their own theoretical and creative agendas for cultural definition with a less radical positionality. This neo-colonialist gradualism, or more probably a kind of profectitious colonial legacy, is given valency by writers such as Chinua Achebe (82-83), Onwuchekwu Jemie Chinweizu and Ihechukwu Madubuike (9-14), and Derek Walcott ("What the Twilight Said: An Overture" 31). They advocate "the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre . . . to new usages, [making] a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (Ashcroft et al. 38). By gradualism I mean the reluctance of writers of post colonial nations, such as those in Africa, to use their native languages for creative work. One argument often used is that the

colonial language(s) have greater universal validity, and will give their work a wider market. But they never tell us that most of them cannot write in their mother tongues. Second, to be very erudite in the master's tongue is to be invited to and patronized at the master's table as an "improved specimen" capable of arousing some exotic interest. It also implies a certain degree of power conferred on the individual through his or her mastery of the master's tongue, and his or her ability to contribute to the improvement of that tongue.¹⁵

Philip positions herself between the radical rejectionists and the cling-on gradualists. For her, the Africaribbean writer's duty is to "heal the word wounded by the dislocation and imbalance of the word/i-image equation" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 19). The quester in the search for this balanced equation has become "weary / with the conviction of word" and the heavy "gravity of silence," each pulling her in different directions; she dreams of the time when she can achieve the balance:

sharing the pull in attract
Word
and Silence

¹⁵ I wish to state here that I belong to the crop of African writers against whom my criticism is leveled. I do creative and critical writing in English. But I also write creatively in Dagaare, my mother tongue. I am aware of the richness of the texts produced by people like me. I am not oblivious though to the way my continuous creativity in English helps to enrich the English language and its literature, while contributing very little to the development of the literature and language of the Dagaaba. I am by my act helping to perpetuate the myth that one language is "universal" while another is not, and therefore, if I write in that "universal tongue, I will be accepted. My actions, interesting and exciting as they are to those who would want to understand me from their own imperial location, becomes a kind of auto-colonialism.

balance in contradiction
Silence and Word
harmony of opposites
double planets
condemned
to together (*Looking for Livingstone* 34)

To effect this she must necessarily and consciously engage in the "restructuring, reshaping and, if necessary, destroying the language" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 19) of emporiums: English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, German (67). Philip's inclusion of five other European languages as targets of deconstruction stems from an acute awareness of the historical roles the nations to which these languages are native have played in the dislocation and "detonguing" of the diasporic African. This move, argues Philip, is an enabling restorative act of the lost balance and unity between word and i-mage. It is also agency for the inclusion of the African Caribbean subject in the positive fullness and wholeness of the language (19). It creates the necessary but not sufficient atmosphere for making that language their own. This philosophy is tenable because "the experience of the African in the Caribbean and the New World is now, however, as much part of the English collective experience as England is part, for better or worse, of the African experience" (20). This is not a new awareness for any person of African Caribbean origins. However, no other writer has been able to articulate this cross-cultural hybridity as graphically and spiritually as Philip in both her theoretical and literary pieces. One good example is found in the quester's narration of her dream orgies with Livingstone.

FOR EXACTLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS NOW I HAVE BEEN HAVING THE
SAME TWO RECURRING DREAMS--SOMETIMES ON ALTERNATE NIGHTS,
SOMETIMES ON THE SAME NIGHT--

HE - LIVINGSTONE - AND I COPULATE LIKE TWO BEASTS - HE RIDES
ME - HIS WORD SLIPPING OUT OF THE WET MOIST SPACES OF MY
SILENCE - I TAKE HIS WORD - STRONG AND THRUSTING - THAT WILL
NOT REST, WILL NOT BE DENIED IN ITS SEARCH TO FILL EVERY
CREVICE OF MY SILENCE - I TAKE IT INTO THE SILENCE OF MY
MOUTH - AND IN A CLEARING IN A FOREST HE SITS AND WEEPS AS
STANLEY COMFORTS HIM - (*Looking FOR Livingstone* 25)

Livingstone is complaining to Stanley about the impotence of the
former's word. Livingstone's agenda is to conquer and to convert Africa
into his idea of what Africa should be.

Ironically Livingstone is not even aware that his word has taken
root in the womb of the quester--the diasporic African, and left her
with a pregnancy that cannot totally mature into a baby to be delivered.
Hoving rightly reads this as a consensual ordeal between the male
colonizer and the colonized female; an encounter that results in the
castration of the colonizer. She sees the episode as a "rigorous
rewriting of a history of victimism" in which the victim mother
transforms the boastful, aggressive male child, seeking recognition from
the patriarchal system that he associates with, into an emasculated
whining boy. Through castration Livingstone is made to see his
relationship to the silence he sought to create in others with his word
(*The Castration of Livingstone* 315). Livingstone is not allowed to enter
into the symbolic world of silence that the female traveller moves
freely in. He becomes the symbolic "Other," but a necessary and
desirable one that allows the female traveller to recognise the source

of her own empowerment (315-316). Hoving fails, however, to see this relationship also as a nightmarish one. Only the dreamer knows about this nightmare and its consequences for her "AS I STRUGGLE TO BIRTH . .

. THE MONSTROUS PRODUCT OF HIS WORD AND MY SILENCE - CONCEIVED IN THE SILENCE OF MY OWN, MY VERY OWN WOMB" (*Looking For Livingstone* 26).

Livingstone may be castrated, but not before he has penetrated, raped, and planted his unregenerative word in the womb of silence. Thus all the various theories about parsing, and how not to get raped, become post-coital attempts at repair: "**Parsing** -- the exercise of dis-membering language into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member" (66). This is Philip's method of splitting the symbolic image into I-mage in order to create a semiotic space for re-ordering of the violated self. Parsing for the sake of deconstructing the language of oppression alone is not enough; it must go beyond revenge motive into a creative motive. Parsing alone can lead to another silence; what is needed is a language that refuses to be circumscribed, a hybrid language re-membered after the dismemberment of the old one. For she asks:

How parse the punish	in Silence
	-Noun
	-Verb
absent a Grammar	
how surrender to within	
that without	
	remains
Silence	
	demands the break
the die	
	in release
in life	(59)

The issue of parsing is taken up again much later in my discussion of Philip's engagement and deconstruction of Noam Chomsky's notions of deep structures of power in language use.

Thus, Philip's split of the word "image" into I-mage makes sense. (1): Through the separation of the "I" from the "mage," Philip is able to incorporate the Rastafarian concept and practice of self validation in which Rastafarians tend to replace certain initial sounds of certain words or prefix certain words with the "ai"--I-- sound as demonstrated by Velma Pollard in *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* (7-9). Pollard argues that the "sequence /ai/ continually recurs" to function as pronominal, initial consonant replacements, in extended Rastafari discourse ("Dread Talk - The Speech of the Rastafarians in Jamaica" 37-38). This not only deterritorialises, deconstructs and reconstructs meanings, but creates new words that are capable of carrying the weight of meaning that the users want them to convey. (2): In splitting the "I" from the "mage" Philip helps us to understand the logic of her argument. The letter "I" stands as a subject of the word "i-mage" in which the "mage," meaning conjurer, a magician, a learned person, a person of infinite wisdom, becomes the defining object that validates the subject I. We can then read the word not just as a playful intervention into the English word image, but as Philip's own testimony of her attempt to become the creator of her own personality, not other people's construction of her--that would then be image. In this sense the word as used by Philip means I- the-mage. When Philip then talks of searching for a language to effect a harmony between the word and I-mage, she is

talking about a language created by her out of the same words that truly represent her.

There are unquestionable merits in this evolutionary processing of colonial languages of negation and objectification of the colonized "Other" into one of positive subjectification. The shortcoming of this approach, however, is the falsity of the major argument advanced in support of this "cling-on" gradualism which modifies Walcott's extreme position. Walcott *inter alia* contends that the languages of the colonized are not developed enough to express serious thoughts in literature. Based on this notion of language, Walcott in "The Muse of History" rejects Creole as a language for serious poetry and accuses Caribbean writers who "continue to fiddle with the obvious limitations of dialect because of chauvinism" (15) of aesthetic myopia. He argues that Creole has "no words for some [abstract]. . . concepts, there are no equivalent nouns for its objects, and because even if these were suddenly found, they could not be visually expressed without the effort of an insane philologist" (15). Walcott's position emanates from the neo-colonialist's ambiguous position of love for Euro-American discourse of dominance, and admiration for radical post-colonials who seek to disorient that discourse in order to "record the anguish of the race" (5). His impatience with the radicals originates in an idealism, for Walcott seeks "a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things" (17) in the new world of the Caribbean. Walcott asserts that it is better and easier for the Caribbean writer to use the dominant discourse of the imperial or

neo-imperial center without sacrificing the experiential differences between her/him and a writer from that centre (9). Walcott's dismissal of the racialist poets and intellectuals of the Caribbean deriving from his assimilationist ideological standpoint, blinds him to the dangers of appropriation by Euro-American hegemonic mono-lingualism--a privileging discourse in which Euro-Americans set themselves up as the standard of measuring "Other selves." And as Gayatri Spivak argues, it is within the literary text that the Euro-American ideology of dominance becomes more destructive of the "Others'" identity and integrity, and that language becomes the vehicle of power structures and play--"the self at play with other selves" (78). Nourbese Philip does not endorse Walcott's reactionary positionality in these arguments, but as I will show very shortly, she does recognize the problems and the merits in them.

But how can the Africaribbean reconstruct the negated personality within an ideology of defeat and assimilation and through the extension of the linguistic boundaries of the dominant discourses that exclude her? The answer lies in what Josephat B. Kubayanda says: "if Blacks are to be freed from internalised oppression and epistemological biases, they must first liberate language, which conditions knowledge, thought, society, and culture (183). This recipe advocates the localization of the hegemonic language through the refashioning of meanings, the conjuring of vernacular idioms, superimposing syntactical substructures and other modes of enunciation from the erstwhile submerged language(s). The product is Creolised Standard Caribbean English, excellent as an emancipatory counter-discourse, a collective intervention against both

colonial logo-centrism and post-modern hierarchist dichotomies. Peter Trudgill articulates this well when he writes that "language is a very important factor in group identification, group solidarity and the signalling of difference especially where the group is under attack from outside" (24), as the Africaribbean community has always been. Creole, Caribbean demotic, Nation language, and Patois all perform this act of group solidarity and validation. Maximilieu Laroche also sees Creole as an "army on the battlefield" (113), still contesting and winning spaces to resurrect the historical selves and find a cultural identity as Marva L.Lashley states in "Identity as Ideology in the 'Dialect' Poetry of Bruce St. John" (122).

The question of language in Philip's poetry is tied to the issue of an audience within the context of Caribbean poetics. What happens to writers who seek to break the yoke of colonial language and yet retain an audience that is polarized for obvious historical and linguistic reasons? What effects do discourse adjustments and their concomitants of marginalisation, isolation, humiliation, and the terror of anger have on content, style, and audience receptivity of the Afrisporic writer in Canada? How does the diasporic writer like Philip contextualize her poetry without being swallowed by the impulse to respond through the discourse of "documentary contestation" that Dionne Brand talks about (273-74)? What language does an Africaribbean writer use to avoid being appropriated by Euro-American discourses of existentialist-universality asks Lynette Hunter (279)? These problematics are well articulated by

Philip in her discussion of language and audience for the diasporic Africaribbean writer:

language has been . . . a significant and essential part of the colonization process [of the Caribbean]; the choice between Caribbean demotic and standard English becomes, therefore, more than choice of audience. It is a choice which often affects the choice of subject matter, the rhythms of thought patterns, and the tensions within the work. It is also a choice resonant with historical and political realities and possibilities. (*Frontiers* 37)

She echoes Wilson Harris's idea of the 'radical aesthetic' (*Explorations* 135) with its concomitant spirit of tolerance and renovation of both the traditions of the imperium and of the colonies. This renovation seeks to harmonize the competing tensions of the existing dialectics of post-colonial literatures (135).

Viewed this way, the problem of language and audience for the Africaribbean writer living in Canada goes beyond the basics of selectivity. It enters into a discourse of inclusivity that shows "an understanding of many of the traditions, history, and culture [of the Caribbean] which contextualize [their] work" (37). Philip epitomises this by drawing an analogy between the experience of Afrisporic people in Canada and that of Jesus's disciples who are "filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with tongues . . . and every man heard them speak in his own language" (Acts. 2: 4-6 quoted in *She Tries Her Tongue* 91). As Ken Paradis argues, it is this problematic that Philip's poetry and criticism engage,--the passionate "investigation of language's relation to the construction of women and African-Caribbeans as

minorities, and language's potential as an agent of the erosion of that minority relation" (10).

Philip documents a kind of support for this interpretation in the following conversation with Janice Williamson:

I never seem able to write anything through . . . without interrupting it somehow by some other discourse. Some other voice is continually interrupting. That's the historical and the social matrix from which my writing is partly coming. These interruptions can be seen as part of the African musical tradition, particularly jazz, where you might have the main riff going and the musician interrupts and goes off on another musical path.

("Writing a memory of losing that place" 230)

A person may argue that "interruptions" are not necessarily original and limited to "Afrosporic" poetics, that Euro-American modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and others have also made use of interruptions in their work. But, as I will argue further on in this chapter, there is a marked difference between what Europeans and American modernist poets mean by interruptions and what Philip means. Philip's sense of interruption goes beyond stylistic expediency and carries the weight of historical acts committed by Euro-Americans that have defined, interrupted and distorted her people's life for more than four hundred years. Through interruption Philip also hopes to "destroy the lyric voice, . . . [with the] ideological baggage" it brings along (*She Tries Her Tongue* 4). It is a strategy used against the voice of authoritative pontification that the lyric voice traditionally possesses and which the unscrupulous poet-artist uses "to set himself up as the voice of the people" (4). To achieve this, Philip engages a discourse of inclusivity in which multiple incomplete voices interact, perform and

complement each other without necessarily completing each other or themselves. This strategy is a poetic dramatization of the alternative truth arguments advanced by post-colonial theorists. Philip believes her strategy will destroy the authoritativeness of the lyrical voice, and achieve a demythologization of discourses of dominance without establishing an alternative hegemonic discourse.

But a discourse of inclusivity poses a looming problem of assimilation, or appropriation by dominant Euro-American monologic discourses. Brenda Carr recognizes this when she interrogates the possible consequences of the "staging of Philip's intervention in Western disembodied discourses" and asks whether such a staging by a privileged middle class white feminist critic would not disconcertingly "reinsert [Philip's] texts within a neo-colonial framework and deploy her racially marked history as an enabling category for my Western critical formations" (77). Carr's concerns are well founded when one considers Paradis's project of reading Philip's poetry using only the Deleuzian paradigm of minoritarian oppositionality without any attempt to contextualize Philip's work within an Africaribbean, feminist, post-colonial, and Canadian aesthetic. Philip herself is conscious of the appropriative but exclusionary nature of dominant Euro-American discourses. She is wary, therefore, of using them as the only framework to read her works, works that contest the validity of that discourse's "universality." This is much more so particularly where the supposed centre is a periphery of the imperial canonical centre, as in Canadian literary circles. This is explicit in Barbara Godard's description of

contemporary Canadian "women's writing [as] especially [being] characterized by strategies of textual (and political) subversion, strategies of decentering and deflective irony which are the classic strategies of the colonised" (57). She furthers this concern by stating the ex-centric nature of marginalised writings in which the "bizarre, fantastic, unconventional, incomprehensible" (58) become the governing inspiration. D. M. R. Bentley locates these qualities also in his study of Western Canadian writing. He sees it as frontier literature originating from opposition between a hinterland poetics of "process, openness, chance, and uninterrupted experience" (6) and a base land poetics of closure. Meanwhile Robin Skelton, borrowing from Wilson Harris, sees the most endearing yet frustrating appeal of hinterland eccentricity as the quality of numinousity and psychicality (6). All these are modes of marginalized interventions and contestations of heartland discourses originated by colonised races but now appropriated and redistributed as universal paradigms of literary endeavour. Stanley McMullin means exactly this in the following statement:

when the heartland rationalises the hinterland experience, it will fit into the imperial design and no longer be eccentric. The centre will do its best to rationalise the magic realism and then sell them back to the hinterland as an imperial judgement. (21)

Judging from these theories, the dominant establishment in Canada has already begun the appropriation of the voices of the marginalised by claiming an analogy between the specificities of post-colonial reconstructive strategies such as "magic realism" and white feminist deconstructionism.

I am not arguing against the similarities without first acknowledging the contextual differences and functional roles these stylizations enable the art to perform in society. We need also to establish differences between the agendas of anti-patriarchal power-seeking Euro-American liberal feminists, and the strategies for reclamation by Africaribbean women, not only of their subjectivity and humanity long denied by white society, but also for historical recuperation of their race. One must also establish the differences between the playful voices of the imprisoned consciousness of white women writers on the one hand, and the signifying inscriptions of the enslaved, colonized, and negated subjectivity of Africaribbean women on the other. In this case, the latter are Philip's territory, and the former is where Godard's contemporary Canadian women writers [mostly white middle class women] are emerging from.

The voices of upper and middle class European and Euro-American women writers may have been neglected, but they have never been completely denied nor erased. These women and their art have also always been part and instrument of the power structure that enslaved, silenced, colonised, and now marginalises the texts of Africaribbean personhood within Canada's neo-colonial search for her own canonical traditions. The Africaribbean, unlike her Euro-Canadian counterpart, has always been barred by both the internal and external rules of racialist social structures including the academy to keep her out and objectified as the unwanted "Other" that needs to be expunged, as Dorothy Livesay puts it

in relation to her Zambian poems *The Color of God's Face*. So while in a majority of cases the struggle of the people of the imprisoned consciousness is to slip through the prison gates and share in the legacies of the inimical structures, the colonized and negated subjectivity fights first to achieve her personhood, and second to break down the structures circumscribing that personhood. Thus while one is profectitious the other is deconstructive. These differences are well documented in the debates about racism in North American feminist movements.

The European and Euro-American woman's subjectivity in relation to race has never been in doubt. She, therefore, engages "other oppressions" and wills a rage against patriarchal discourse in order to cause fissures in the walls of Euro-American male power, and effect personal emersion based on a new consciousness about gender, class and sexual orientation. But this kind of radical Euro-American feminism still occasionally fails to address the issues of subjectivity and epistemology which concern Afrisporic feminists. However, according to Philip, because the basic humanity of the objectified "Other" has been excised from the conscious constructs of the power, she must struggle against triple marginalisation--Africaribbean woman, Canadian woman, Immigrant woman, first to be recognised and perhaps appreciated by converting "negation into affirmation" (*Frontiers* 65). This is not an easy task, nor is it a task of mere logic and words. Audre Lorde recognises the huge problems faced by the Afrisporic writer working within the dominant discourse. She postulates that for such a writer to

succeed, she must fashion tools that are as formidable as the house she seeks to undermine. She contends that it is not possible for one to use the master's tools alone to break down the master's house (110-113). There are multiple difficulties, therefore, that confront the colonized subjectivity in her attempt to break down old barriers and to build bridges to cross into her own territory. These are often exacerbated by the constant appropriation of her voice by members of the imprisoned consciousness to contest their own space within the power alleys of their dominant clansmen.

Philip's poetry demonstrates this multiple struggle of the deprived and mutilated subjectivity of the African female. For example in the poem "To My Sister Sheba, Queen of Joy" (*Thorns* 8-10), rage is the controlling vehicle of a self assertion. The Queen of Sheba seeks the legendary Solomon to test his wisdom and give freely of her love. However, she suddenly has to defend her race, subjectivity, and femininity by subordinating and objectifying her personhood within her new location. The moment she arrives in Solomon's court, she is objectified and denied. She is not seen as a queen, woman, beautiful, and intelligent, but as black and, therefore, antithetical to Solomon's other wives. But as Elaine Savory Fido rightly points out in "Marlene Nourbese Philip," Philip parabolises this biblical myth into a "defiant celebration of identity" in which she puns on the often quoted lines from the "Song of Solomon": "voicing a strong black woman's consciousness, unafraid of loving however she should determine to love" (5). Savory's reading is, however, limiting when she sees the main value

of this poem as residing solely on the orality in the rhythm and repetition, particularly in these lines:

I am black but comely
I am and black
I am black
I am black forget you...

I am black but comely
I am black and comely
I am and black
I am and one. (8)

Yes, orality is central to a full appreciation of this poem. But what is happening here, and in the works of the four poets discussed in this thesis, is what Kenneth Ramchand sees as the result of two mind sets, two traditions of literary creativity--the oral and the written (19). In this meeting, the use of mnemonic devices such as repetition, and incremental patterns challenge (19) the authoritative postures of the lyrical voice. Philip employs the two systems to assert her own uniqueness which does not need any outsider's definitions for acceptance. The tone is insistent and it engages the listener's attention. Second, the lines "I am and black" and "I am and one" signify a lot. Apart from their contestatory positioning against those who think to be is to be white, Philip also echoes the powerful Dread Talk in which the term "I and I" comes up frequently in communication rituals. She also echoes God's words to Moses to tell the Israelites that "I am that I am" has sent him. The sense of female self-completeness cannot be lost here. Philip experiences the same objectification of herself among her "learned" peers. They cannot see her as a lawyer who happens to be

Black and female. They see her only in the blurred lenses of sexist racism:

robed with rage precisely balanced
 I hold court colour blind
 With my madness brilliantly argued
 "a playful Sheba Queen of joy,
 just a sweet, sweet talkin' brown skin girl'
 white robed with knowing
 they left me bloodless gutted
 theories answering any, every and nothing
 but what is this man to you? (*Thorns* 9)

For her male counterparts in Canada who are probably mostly white, the legal profession is the wrong place for a Black woman. They see only her sexuality, and cannot disengage themselves from the stereotypical frames into which they have locked Africaribbean women. So it is understandable that Sheba's famous cry, "I am Black but comely," has become the revolutionary slogan of all Black people in a racist society where paleness is privileged above other colours.

Sheba's statement is contextualized within the historical racism that has created in the Africaribbean a doubt about her personal worth: "Beyond the pale of propriety / we were not to love / to see my blackness aged in beauty" (8). This denigration of Africanness has seen the bleaching of ancient African figures such as Moses, Sheba, Cleopatra,¹⁶ The Pharoas, Jethro, the statue of the Sphinx and many

¹⁶ I am aware of the problems Philip faces from those who deny that Moses, Cleopatra, Sheba, and other ancient historical figures of Egypt were Black. Claims like Cleopatra was Macedonian, Moses an Israelite, and Sheba not from Ethiopia, and therefore, all were white may make sense to those who want to deny that these people were as African as any African living today. If their argument is tenable, then no European can claim to be, for example,

others to whiteness through false pictorial, linguistic, literary, and historical representation with "flesh [of] startling whiteness / in a corner of time compressed" (8).

How then can these Euro-American discourses, asks Philip, that have continually de-emphasized and denied the presence and contribution of African people everywhere, and are "etymologically hostile and expressive of the non-being of the African," become the enabling framework for the recuperation and integration of the experience of the African I-mage (*She Tries Her Tongue* 15)? She hazards an answer in "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue" and "Universal Grammar," the section from *"Mother's Recipes on How to Make a Language Yours or How Not to Get Raped."*

in my mother's mouth
 shall I
 use
 the father's tongue
 cohabit in strange
 mother
 incestuous words
 to revenge the self
 broken
 upon
 the word (*She Tries Her Tongue* 82)

The rules are laid out for the Afrisporic female to enable her to assert agency and to refuse further linguistic and cultural rape:

Caucasian since the Caucasus is in India. The histories of the figures Philip is claiming are not tied to European history but African history, Philip's history. It is not their whiteness or blackness Philip is claiming, but their Africanness, their struggles against patriarchy, racism, and all forms of oppression.

Slip mouth over the syllable: moisten with tongue
 the word.
 Suck Slide Play Caress Blow--Love it, but if the word
 gags, does not nourish, bite it off--at its source--
 Spit it out
 Start again (67)

In reading this poem, Naomi Guttman calls this "a recipe for fellatio that becomes a manifesto for self defense" (54). She links this to sexual violence--rape--which in another sense is the "enforcement of the 'universal grammar,' which is that of a foreign language disguising itself as 'universal'" (54). The theme of mother-daughter relationship is further developed from the opening section--"And Over Every Land and Sea" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 28-45). The Africaribbean writer who desires to use the hegemonic language as a strategy for subjectification needs, therefore, to negotiate precariously between the ideologically and linguistically dichotomized but equally attractive audiences.

Brathwaite, in contrast to Walcott, unequivocally sheds light on this and provides a way out for Philip. Brathwaite, as I have indicated in the introduction, sees the solution to the Caribbean writer's dilemma in the use of *nation language* (*History of the Voice* 13). Brathwaite's notion of *nation language* as originating from "the submerged, and surrealist experience and sensibility" (13) gives credence to Philip's use of multiple discourses as agency. Philip contends that, for the Black female writer to be able to deconstruct, demystify and then reconstruct the lie that has been constructed of her, without resorting to the polemics of reaction, she has to adopt various modern, post-modern, post-colonial and feminist discourses:

Surrealist forms, the magic realism of Latin American writers (which those of us from the Caribbean can lay claim to), post-modernist eruptions into the text of other discourses, all offer the possibilities of embracing the unembraceable--our struggles and passions. (*Frontiers* 65)

Brathwaite's *nation language* is for Philip one such interventionist strategy. She calls it the Caribbean demotic of English. This has a slightly more democratic connotation. It signifies an acceptance of the language of the demos, of the ordinary people in ancient Egyptian and Greek civilizations, as the primary source of empowerment. It is not, as Pauline Christie has stated, an acceptance of a subordinate position to English to which Creole has been relegated (210). Thus, for Philip, Creole has a similar ontological normative as any language, and one therefore needs no apologies to use it. Moreover, the fact that it originates among the illiterate class made up of mostly women, gives Philip's position greater force. It helps clarify her definition of demotic along the same womanist lines that other critics have argued.¹⁷ Philip's zeal to contest the efficacy of standard English as a tool of self-representation sometimes drives her into the invention of "strange

¹⁷ Narrain de Abruna, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Jeckyl all link Creole to the private and feminine spheres. Narrain says women developed Creole to enable them play their role as the keepers of culture. Jeckyl calls Creole the feminine version of a masculine English language, and Brathwaite refers to the Kumina priestess, Queenie, in *The Arrivants* as the custodian of the African languages in the Caribbean Creole present, and subsequently makes her speak in Creole throughout the poems. To accept this dichotomy and/or hierarchization is to miss the absurdities it implies, and to miss the middle class origins of these definitions. The Caribbean Demotic is the language of the people and is not private or secretive, or limited to the domain of female discursive practices. It is secretive to only those who refuse to see its openness.

semantic conversions such as 'find can't'" "on the again and again / of forget" which are really "not commonly characteristic of Creole syntactic structure" argues Jennifer Rahim (299). But Philip is not really to be pigeonhole into any finite structures. Her strategy is to keep moving in her search within what she calls the "kinopoesis of African languages--language that moves with a certain kinetic energy, and that is a distinctive quality of African languages; . . . as well the various demotics of the African Diaspora" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 9). So what Philip does is to constantly look for new permutations that can best carry the varying tone and mood intensities. This may include the creation of new nouns out of words that in standard usage may never be usable in that sense (12). She writes:

MANY FACTORS AFFECT AND DETERMINE THE ORDER OF WORDS IN A SPOKEN SENTENCE: THE STATE OF MIND OF THE SPEAKER; THE GENDER OF THE SPEAKER; HIS OR HER INTENTION; THE CONTEXT OF THE SPEECH; THE IMPRESSION THE SPEAKER WISHES TO MAKE; THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN SPEAKER AND LISTENER AND' NOT LEAST OF ALL, THE CONSTRAINTS OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR (63)

Philip echoes and puns on Noam Chomsky's ideas of deep structures in languages in order to find a "deeper patterning . . . of [her] language" (23). In her search Philip reveals "the 'amnexiac' properties of a scientific discourse which upholds a constant 'logic of language" (Guttman 59). According to Guttman, Broca's experiments on people who had suffered from aphasia while alive becomes meaningful in relation to the structure and meaning of Philip's poem, in spite of Broca's proven racist and patriarchal conclusions. She writes that "in the same way as the aphasiac's speech reflects the damage and the resistance to that

damage, the 'aphasic' discourse represented in these poems embodies damage by resistance to the dominant culture" (57). Guttman is right when she says that the dominant culture suffers from amnesia as way of forgetting the pain it inflicts on the minority or colonized, while on the side of the oppressed, aphasia "acts as a metaphor for re-membering the history--hidden and disjointed (57). Philip's attraction to, and her deconstruction of the Chomskyian models of grammatical categories helps her to expose the power bases that undergird such categories. She gives the reader some examples of definitions of words such as "Parsing;" "The;" "smallest;" "cell;" "remembers;" "O--" on the first page of "Universal Grammar" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 62); and "fragments;" "tremble;" "ex--;" "man;" "again" (64). Put together as one reads them vertically on the page, they form a coherent little poem which Philip exploits later on in her own redefinitions of these words. Parsing, which normally means "the exercise of telling the part of speech of each word in a sentence" (62), is read by Philip as "the exercise of dis-membering language into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member" (66). This new reading of parsing, contends Nigel Thomas, successfully dissects and exposes "the racist, ethnocentric, and chauvinistic values for which occidental languages are a vehicle" (69). This exposure enables the poet to insert her own meanings in parentheses, and to reconstruct her own reality that has been absent. As Thomas aptly puts it, Philip's technique completes Caliban's plot to remove Prospero's books. Philip, like a sister of Caliban, or more rightly the returned Sycorax, "scrutinizes the pages of Prospero's books, begins crossing

things out and adding much that was left out" (68). It is only when this sorting out begins, that Caliban's sister/mother/daughter begins to undermine Prospero's epistemology. It also heralds the act of re-membering the African Caribbean personhood (still resident in their cell-memories):

when the smallest cell remebers--
 how do you
 how can you
 when the smallest cell
 lose a language
 remembers
 (She Tries Her Tongue 67)

This is what Philip means when she tells Thomas in an interview that a language cannot be lost if the cells remember its sonorities, its synapses. "For a while," she says, "I thought that if I could learn an African language, I could reprogramme my brain. . . . [to enable me to recognize] those old things that have fallen into disuse . . . some of those things that tug painfully, unrecognizably . . . (11).

Selewyn Cudjoe observes that "the language and speech of [African] Caribbean women had always played an important part in contesting slave and colonial domination and so was an important tool in the struggle for liberation" (25-26). This positioning of women's language in the vanguard of Africaribbean liberation is not just a feminist revisionist historicism. Claudia Jones, among others, has also indicated that the Africaribbean woman has been the "guardian, the protector, of the Negro family" in multiple ways such as "mother, as Negro, and as worker," combating the relentless onslaught against the African family in the

Americas (103-104). Deprived of means of physical liberation in both the days of slavery and post-emancipation colonialism, the Africaribbean woman had only silence and the language of the "massa" as her means of resistance. But as Philip keeps asking in both her theoretical and poetic pieces, how "can she fashion a language / using silence" ("Ignoring Poetry" 126)? Or, as she puts it much more powerfully:

how
 does one write
 poetry
 from the perspective
 of 'mastery' of a mother
 tongue--a foreign
 language
 an anguish (124)

Philip provides an answer to her own interrogatives. She argues that a poet confronted with this kind of situation does not write, but "fashions a tongue / split--two times two" (124) into what she terms:

poly &
 multy &
 semi
 vocalities (124)

One can read this as Philip's interpretation of the situation of the Africaribbean-Canadian writer who is forced by her marginalization into what Tzvetan Todorov identifies as positions of "double think" and unbounded polyphonous discourse and partial epistemological schizophrenia, as a response to the hostile literary and socio-cultural environment in which she finds herself (206).

Philip appropriates what she hears by listening to what she calls "the silence\s--the interstices of time;" ("Ignoring Poetry" 124); by linguistic filiation through transposition, innovation, and superimposition of her African linguistic patterns onto the new tongue, she makes it her own. This new creation she passes on to her descendants. Philip tries to capture this transfer of a resistant mode of communication in the way she uses the language of corporeality in "Discourse on the Logic of Language" (56-57). The mother in the vertical counter-narrative communicates with the child through body language:

WHEN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD HER NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE:
SHE BEGAN THEN TO LICK IT OVER. THE CHILD WHIMPERED A
LITTLE, BUT AS THE MOTHER'S TONGUE MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER
OVER ITS BODY, IT GREW SILENT - THE MOTHER TURNING IT THIS
WAY AND THAT UNDER HER TONGUE, UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT
CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY.

and later:

THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH -
GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE
CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS
INTO IT - HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS - HER WORDS, HER
MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR
MOTHERS BEFORE - INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH
(*She Tries Her Tongue* 56-58)

This episode of matrilineal filiation is analogous to the performative and improvisatory mediation of knowledge through orality, as opposed to, but complemented by, the fixity of the written word. Echoing Brathwaite's "Nametracks" section 7 in *Mother Poem*, Philip incorporates the voice of the ethnographer to describe the first act of acceptance and bonding between mother and child. In Brathwaite's poem the boy-man says:

me mudda
 . . .
 an she cumya to put me pun de grounn

 like she lik mih
 like she lik me wid grease like she grease mih
 . . .

 she lisper to me dat me name what me name
 dat me name is me main an it am is me own an lion eye mane
 dat whinner men tek you an ame, dem is nomminit diff'rent an
 nan
 so mandingo she yessper you nam (62)

As Rahim has indicated, naming becomes an act of empowering the child against white supremacy as represented by Ogrady. Naming for the Caribbean person is also related to the broader question of language ownership. This, posits Philip, is the basis of debate between Caliban and Miranda, and the root of Prospero's fear of Sycorax whose influence he knows still dictates Caliban's responses to his authority ("A Piece of Land Surrounded" 43). Rahim is therefore right when she contends that "Philip's concern is similar, although it is . . . female specific, an aspect which somewhat refreshes the familiar ground" (302). The "unorthodox" positioning of this section, says Nigel Thomas, (vertical but unreadable along the edge of the left page if the book stands upright, horizontal and readable if the book's spine lies horizontally), is Philip's demonstration of the mother-child bonding that includes the use of the mother tongue in a "non-occidental culture" (66). It stands also as a defiant rebuttal of "EDICT 1" which stipulates the mixing of slaves from different ethnic groups to avoid communication and bonding. The mother's action is a kind of oral poeticality that subverts our

Euro-American training about what page-bound poetry should look like. Philip's orality becomes an intervention and an agency. It is an act of resistance brought by the African mother, historically downgraded by the dominant discourses of Europe, but which has been metamorphosed into an enabling mode of space creation. It has enabled African Caribbean writers to revalue the language of Abiswa and to validate and accept it as an alternative mode of enunciation, representational of the dismemberment of the African Caribbean from her African roots, and her rejection by her filiated culture. As a resistance language, argues Kunkum Sangari, it is restless, combative, and appropriatory, making use of strategies of "assimilation, syncretisation, [and] contradiction" in an atmosphere of cultural violence (161, 158).

I have indicated earlier that Philip uses the language of corporeality as a metaphor for the brutalization of the Africaribbean female body. This is fundamental to Philip's poetry; as Michael Dash has written: "the use of corporeal imagery as a process of self-formation" (21) is "fundamental to the phenomenal reality of the [Caribbean] text. It is responsible for a system of imagery in Caribbean literature whose centre is the body" (20). To articulate the "reality of experience" is to reinscribe that corporeal entity that has been dehumanised and denied in slavery, colonialism and racism (*Frontiers* 256). A sense of that reinscription is described for us in *Looking for Livingstone* among the CLEENIS. The quester is bathed, and massaged thoroughly in "fragrant oils, . . . as their hands moved over my body, loosening tired, aching muscles, . . . [the hands] spoke a language to my body - every cell

within me released its ancient and collective wisdom" (42). The female Africaribbean probably experienced greater brutalization in the form of rape during slavery days than the male Africaribbean and, therefore, needs a slightly different language of healing. The body was not only exploited as unpaid labour in the field, but also in the master's home as Philip writes in "Dis Place" :

The Body. And that most precious of resources--the space. Between. The legs. The black woman comes to the New World with only the body. And the space between. The European buys her not only for her strength, but also to service the black man sexually--to keep him calm. And to produce new chattels--units of production--for the plantation machine. . . (289).

She supports her statement with a historical reference to records dating back to 1514 from a letter from Ferdinand, king of Spain, to Miguel Pasamonte, treasurer for the Hispaniola. Philip, therefore, insists that one needs to understand the weight of suffering and dismemberment of the female African body in the Caribbean (*She Tries Her Tongue* 56)--a weight their descendants still carry today-- before one can contextualize and inscribe poetry on it. We can accept, therefore, why Philip, like Goodison, James, and Harris, inscribes her texts on the female African Caribbean body. Philip notes that "there was a profound eruption of the body into the text of *She Tries Her Tongue Her Silence Softly Breaks*" (24). Throughout her poetry, therefore, Philip draws heavily on images of the human physiognomy--menstruation, womb, blood, tongue, genitals, brain matter, and so on, not to celebrate femininity and female sexuality, or in imitation of radical feminists "invagination" of all experience in response to phallocentrism, but to celebrate the memory

of suffering as counter history and critique of textualized historical
discourses:

```

textbody-
body as text
body inscribed
                        on text
                        on body

to interrupt
    disrupt
    erupt
the text of the new world
is a text of
a history of
                interruptions
                                of bodies

a body of interruptions
bodies of interred
                        eruptions

how to interrupt
                        disrupt
erupt
    the body
of the text
                to allow
the silence
                in erupt ("Dis Place" 307-308)

```

The African arrived in the Caribbean with only "her body, and the memory and history which the body could contain. The text of her history and memory were inscribed upon and within the body which would become the repository of all the tools necessary for spiritual and cultural survival" ("Managing" *Frontiers* 298). In the last poem of *She Tries Her Tongue*, Philip reinterprets the myth of Philomela to (1) theorize about Africaribbean women's silencing in the studies of both Caribbean literature and language; (2) theorise about the absence and sometimes deliberate silencing of Africaribbean women in feminist discourses; (3) to signify the difficulty of articulating the experience of

engagement in "dialogue with history, with literature, with the past, the present . . . expanding, clarifying, or modifying what someone has already said, or trying to say it in some new way" (*Frontiers* 64). In the poem "Three Times Deny" history is confronted: "Three times deny their existence . . . / three times deny now / as then we sell them" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 41). The denials always follow new fabrications for the purpose of forgetting the history of brutality committed against African people in the Western world, and of reestablishing old negations against them. Philip's agenda is to "subvert the inner and hidden discourse of my non-being," and to interrogate, challenge and demystify the so-called canonicity of established Euro-American poetic genres (*Frontiers* 296). This contestation assumes the form of reconstructed grammars in which both form and language become allegories of the dismembered African body, and empowering tools of resistance:

jerk it
 dove it
 stew it
 cook it
 down
 run it down
 run it down tender
 till it come to do the bid in
 we
 this chattel language o as in what am I offered for this
 babu english `lot' of slaves.
 slave idiom OW as in they faced the `shroud' of
 nigger vernacular their future.
 coolie pidgin Ol as in they paid for their slaves
 wog pronunciation with coin.
 (I say old chap how goes it, what ho?)
 this lingua franca
 arrrrrrrrrgot of a blasted soul (*She Tries Her Tongue* 73)

It is the ability to create space within a totalising discourse that is evident in the poem "Oliver Twist." Here, the black school girls are taught standard English grammar, the history and myths of Europe, and its literature without any mention of Africa. But paradoxically, as the little children march past the regal dais, their thoughts are expressed in the Caribbean demotic. The poem is an excellent example of how Philip blends the two dialects of English in the Caribbean to achieve both the subversion of the status quo she desires, and the appeal to the multiple audience that she needs:

little black children
marching past stiffly white bloused
skirted blue
overallled and goin' to one big school
feeling we self look proper --
a cut above our parents you know,
man we was black
an' we was proud
we had we independence
an' massa day done (Thorns 6)

The language of the poem slips back and forth between the standard and demotic forms of English. And this is the argot of the blasted soul. Philip, like these children, is a child of two worlds, and she recognises her double consciousness in the "photograph of the cyclamen girl" who is framed and "caught between / blurred images of / massa and master" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 38). This intensifies the fluidity of perceptions in which the individual is "double imaged / double imagined / dubbed dumb" (39). But like her compatriots, Philip cannot ignore the lure and pull of Euro-American audience and their Caribbean allies who value and use the imported Standard English of John-from-Sussex

(*Frontiers* 28-30). This is especially so for African Caribbean female writers such as Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper and others living in exile among traditions that trace their historical legitimation to majoritarian centers and cultures that have for centuries denied the African presence and subjectivity.

Language as an agency of self-inscription keeps recurring in Philip's theoretical writings and poetry. It is this that inspires Harriet (Margaret) in *Harriet's Daughter* to learn Tobago talk from Zulma (9-11). It is also the quest for a language of articulation and recuperation of centuries of forced silence that sends the quester in *Looking for Livingstone* on a surreal trip through different countries of Silence. She finally discovers that to be able to achieve selfhood in the land where she is encased in silence, she must learn not to fight the center, but to acknowledge the centrist illegitimate claims to power. After that she can then subvert that claim through a creation of a personal centre within the circumference of the obliterating power.

In the narrative, Mama Ohnce draws a circle enclosing the traveller. The traveller is given a string to measure the circle. It goes around two and half times. All the women leave her in the circle and go away in silence. She tries to leave the circle but cannot. All her linguistic, academic, social, native intelligence, sophistry and belligerence fail her. At a moment of epiphany she realises that submission to the circle while claiming a personal space within it becomes her salvatory act.

Where the thought came from I don't know--it wasn't even a thought--an impulse, perhaps--unbidden--without my willing it--but I began to trace a circle in the earth--around me--with my finger-tip--around and around--scoring the earth deeper and deeper. Now I was safe. Within my own circle--contained by theirs. And inside this circle-- the solutions to the anagrams the SCENILE had given me: SURRENDER and WITHIN . . . I got up and stepped out of my circle, gingerly walked through the larger circle, and, lifting my feet up and over the boundary stepped into the arms of Mama Ohnce and the other women, who now cried with and for me (38)

This surrealistic narrative of rebirth and independence is further strengthened by the metaphor of writing as a liberatory act. The epiphany of freedom begins in an acknowledgement of defeat. Space is created not through a destruction of the encircling power, but through a relocation to a foetal positionality within it. The bigger circle is in a sense reflective of the literary and topological confinements in which Philip and other Africaribbean-Canadian writers find themselves in the Canadian literary mosaic. Their conception and experience of Canada is of a "disorienting; if not overwhelming" location of pale cold white and boundless landscape and space beyond the colourful rhetoric of multiracial, multicultural "urbanscapes." Beyond these lies a vast untamed "wilderness" with unexplored frontiers. Philip's metaphor of space in an epic of silence, becomes a symbolic absence of any real traditions of African-Canadian literature, and the terrifying loneliness of a doubly transplanted voice, nurtured outside the Canadian clime, but having to create her own roots. The absence of "home-grown literary milieu," says Jurgen Joachim Hesse (90), both inconveniences and liberates the immigrant writer, particularly if such a writer is arriving from one of the hegemonic European centres. There are always

pockets of such Euro-Canadian traditions for Hesse's arrivants to slip into. Not so with Africaribbean writers.

For the immigrant Africaribbean-Canadian writer this absence poses a problematic which may be resolved in two ways: "The great Canadian void either swallows you whole or you come out the other side the stronger for it" (*Frontiers* 45).¹⁸ To be able to come out from the other side stronger, the writer must become a member of a tradition-creating elite, a burden which Philip identifies with all creative artists who share the duality of Abiswa and John-from-Sussex (46). Canada's "amorphous literary landscape lacking focus and ambience" (Hesse 90), and the absence of any substantive and canonical African Canadian literary culture are both daunting and liberating. They facilitate for Philip her linguistic search, and enable her to engage in "some alchemical practice a metamorphosis within the language from father tongue to mother Tongue . . . (*Frontiers* 24). It is this metamorphosis that "births" Brathwaite's nation language and Philip's Caribbean demotic. Demotic poetics demonstrate the potential in the ability to self-express, to acquire the "power to create in one's own i-mage and one's own i-mage is vital to this process; it reaffirms for us that . . . we too belong most certainly to the race of humans (25).

¹⁸ The comments about the absence of a strong African Canadian literary canon made by Philip and Harris is a serious denial of the presence of that literature in Nova Scotia and New Foundland, which George Elliott Clarke has gathered in several volumes. Perhaps what Philip and Harris are referring to is writing created by Africaribbean immigrants to Canada.

The creation of an "I-mage" which Philip traces to the Rastafarians is her technique of deterritorializing original English words (Paradis 10). I-mage may resemble its originary form, but there is a reconfiguration of meaning and word functionality in "the haecceity, the body of work, in which" it is reenacted (10). This body work is the unrepresentable force of history and experience, "the irreducible essence" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 12). The creation of the "I-mage" is, moreover, analogous to the Rastafarian explanation of their language as a process of "step(ping) up" with words as conversation flows. In this communication ritual, Alston Barrington Chevannes records how deterritorialized speech patterns among Rastafari is emerged as a way of "describing many things, or several times you have several different types of reasoning and you step up with the words...so we Rastas suppose to speak, that here, there and anywhere we find ourselves, we suppose to speak and no one know what we speak beside ourself" (34).

For Philip, therefore, all registers and variants of language, be they in the standard or demotic form, are an absolute necessity for the relegitimation and rehumanization of the Africaribbean-Canadian female. But language need not necessarily mean words. Silence is also a form of language. As Arwhal says, "silence does not necessarily mean an absence of sound" (*Looking For Livingstone* 51). In the case of the Africaribbean-Canadian females who have gone through long and varied periods of silencing, their way lies in weaving narratives of their many silences "a quilt in all the colours of my Silence--to keep me warm in my travels" (55).

In an interview with Barbara Carey, Philip further expounds the theory of the secret valency of silence--the retraction into a circle within a circle and the absence of a stifling tradition as a liberating experience. Her search is for a "language to understand what is beyond the margin . . . a language to explain or maybe to read the 'nothing' beyond the boundaries" from which she has been excluded by the traditions of Euro-centric discourse ("Secrecy and Silence" 18). The language Philip seeks, then, is engendered within the womb of the language that has historically denied her any subjectivity. Philip calls it an "anguish" "l/anguish" "english/ a foreign anguish" (*She Tries Her Tongue Her* 58). The historical role English language has played and continues to play in her people's tragedy does not invalidate Philip's recognition of it as her only language. Nevertheless, Philip does not gloss over the historical removal of the tongues of African slaves in both a physical and metaphorical sense (*Frontiers* 56):

EDICT II

*Every slave caught speak-
ing his native language
shall be severely pun-
ished. Where necessary
removal of the tongue is
recommended. The of-
fending organ, when re-
moved, should be hung
on high in a central place,
so that all may see and
tremble* (*She Tries Her Tongue* 58)

For this historical reason every inhabitant of the Caribbean was/is compelled to adopt the enslavers'/colonizers' language; first as a

father tongue in a bid for survival, and later as a kind of mother tongue in its demotic formulation. The so-called Mother tongue is the language of the marketplace and the streets. Growing up in a house where her father taught and spoke the imported standard English, Philip experienced, like Walcott ("The Muse of History" 11), the dichotomous pull of the two dialects of the language--the father tongue, the l/anguish of a language, and the mother tongue, the language of nurturing. Unlike Walcott, however, who rejects the validity of the demotic for artistic enunciation (*She Tries Her Tongue* 19), Philip accepts the demotic as a viable site to develop a rhetoric of recovery. But engaging this mode of writing accentuates the problematic for Africaribbeans, particularly if they opt to live in neo-colonial centers such as Canada. Survival and recognition become a "tightrope" crawl through innovative avantgardist positions that interlace the standards of both the centres and the margins. In the articulation of the concrete experiences of the female Africaribbean, therefore, Philip suppresses her subauditory impulses that promote the use of either the dominant discourse or the demotic discourse only, and adopts a more holistic style of enunciation.

The loss and lack of a linguistic and cultural mode of native expression is painfully recapitulated in the poem "All That Remains of Kush Returns to the desert" (*Thorns* 50). The loss and the lack lie not only in the physical separation from Africa, but also the horror of the irretrievable destruction of the linguistic bridges between Africans in diaspora and in the mother continent. For this reason the diasporic

individual is transfigured into a stranded subaltern in Africa and the world at large:

stranger shadowed in stranded struggles
of what was
to be
to speak in different tongues of ignorance
forget scattered words
shattering trees of truth on shoals of silence. (*Thorns* 50)

The loss of one's language, speech, and word is linked to the loss of effective memory that in turn produces mental amnesia (Walcott 4), in spite of what Philip calls the "scars of survival rites" so prevalent among Africaribbeans. Scars of survival also for our poet become the hybridized Caribbean culture she works in. And for the female poet, these scars are written all over the female body and psyche of the Africaribbean woman:

female body split asunder spreadeagled
softly plundered
stirrupted shorn and forced to yield
a blooded spurious victory a broken blood torn pact
an emptied womb wailing (*Thorns* 10).

This loss of articulatory power is written over the untold confusions and yearnings of Afrisporic returnees and exiles to relearn and utilise the many and varied languages of Africa:

You said good-bye
in all your different tongues
none are mine yet
all belong to me lost (51)

This loss has made the Africaribbean a "child of the wind / that mated with the thunder / under stars that went astray" (51).

In her effort to smooth out her twisted and broken soul caused by centuries of oppressive hate, Philip attempts a "written form [the

memory and shadow] of that spoken language that the people on the street nurtured--what used to be called 'bad English' (*Frontiers* 19). But the written word on a page never really is able to encapsulate all the nuances of the spoken word and the extra-linguistic elements that give definitive meaning(s) to it:

Language by the people, honed and fashioned through a particular history of empire and savagery. A language also nurtured and cherished in the streets . . . in the look she dey and leh we go, in the mouths of calypsonians . . . and the market women." (*She Tries Her Tongue* 18)

Her quest, therefore, surmounts any sensational exoticization of street lingo as poetic discourse, the type Walcott criticizes in "What the Twilight Said: An Overture" (27, 35). It is Philip's genuine endeavour, much like what Joseph Owens says the Rastafari are doing, to find and effect a transformational process of historical repossession and articulation through "the reflexication of African forms into the language of the masters" as a matter of "political necessity as well as a matter of communicative convenience" (*Dread-Talk: The Rastafari of Jamaica* vii). Like the Rastafarians, therefore, Philip, Goodison, and Brathwaite are creating a communicative efficiency that would "faithfully reflect the specifics of their experience and perception of self, life and the world . . ." (ix). To achieve this, Philip rummages through the memories of ancestral African language patterns for "deep structures of" orality (*She Tries Her Tongue* 19) upon which English semantic and lexical impositions are constructed and she discovers the demotic. These structures of orality are found in the highly audible and African tonal and kinetic structures of the Caribbean demotic variant of

English (28). It is the spirit of these strains and remnants of Africanity that inform and instruct Philip and the other writers in this study. It is also these shadows of what used to be mother tongues spoken by the slaves that Philip, Brathwaite, Goodison, and to a lesser extent Walcott and Claire Harris use to reconstruct and recuperate their African racial subjectivity in the "demi-void" created by slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The desire to use the demotic version of the colonial language for self reclamation does not just demonstrate mere experiential difference from the dominant discourse as Walcott seems to suggest ("What the Twilight Said: An Overture" 9), nor a vain attempt at a revisionist validation of a vilified people's mode of expression. It is not a deliberate construction of a minoritarian positionality for purposes of opposing majoritarian discourses that have dehumanised people, and for constructing a new territory of majoritarian positionality to define others (Paradis 18). Nor does the positioning of her minoritarian discourse within the majoritarian origin obfuscate the reality of all "oppression [as being] . . . inherent features of power structures, which will not disappear with the mere redistribution of planes of molar minority" (Paradis 19). Her convincingness lies in contesting the racist historiography and ideologies that denigrate the African, and determine the majoritarian origins of her oppression. The credibility of her position also derives from what Patricia Hill Collins defines as the African American woman's way of knowing: "concrete experience as a criterion of meaning" ("The Social Construction of Black feminist

Thought" 758). Paradis's refusal to accept the history of European oppression of the African through slavery, colonialism and neo-Euro-American political, economic and cultural dominance becomes another false historicism. The rush to equate the terrors of slavery, colonialism and post-emancipation racism suffered by African Caribbeans because of their skin colour, with other forms of structural inequalities in society, tempts Paradis into the error of reading Philip merely as a pro-structuralist writer, posturing as an anti-structural crusader. This attempt at incorporating Black experience in the New world within remnants of European feudal structures of their society, becomes an act of appropriation of both Black experience and discourse strategies.

A deep-rooted urge to sanitise the majoritarian discourse through the demotic variation co-exists with a desire to revenge, (revenge as Walcott puts it "is another kind of vision" 19), the centuries of imposed silence on African Caribbeans. But the demotic also enables Philip to seek conciliation "between the two traditions"--the traditions of Abiswa and John-from-Sussex. The demotic produces a revitalizing energy transfer from the hitherto despised and outlawed tradition of Abiswa to the senile and moribund tradition of John-from-Sussex (*Frontiers* 46). The Caribbean demotic also possesses great linguistic qualities "capable of great rhythms and musicality . . . [and] oratorical energies which do not necessarily translate to the page easily" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 23).

The Africaribbean writer desirous of utilizing this form of enunciation, however, needs to negotiate carefully the boundaries between demotic orality and the problematics of its non-standardised phonetic and morphemic structures. The writer must create on the page a poetic form that reflects both the speakerly and writerly texts in order to capture the performative "movement, the kinetic energy, the tone and pitch, the slides and glissandos . . ." (23). Without this the poetry will not rise above glib derivativeness. Philip writes that the African Caribbean writer is privileged this way:

in her attempt to translate the i-image into meaning and non-meaning, the writer has access to a variety of verbal techniques and methods--comparison, simile, metaphor, metonymy . . . all of which aid her in this process. Whatever the name given the technique or form, the function remains the same - that of enabling the artist to translate the i-image into meaningful language for her audience. (12)

This strategy mediates between the demotic and the standard forms of English usage, between Euro-American mythopoeic renditions of reality and the Afrisporic historical narratives of memory through a system of reterritorialization. She is aware, as indicated earlier, of the problematic of the "ideal audience" that feels at home in both traditions. As a by-product of both traditions, Philip knows she cannot ideologically, artistically, linguistically, or historically reject any one of them without rejecting part of her heritage. This is what Walcott means when he writes that both the names Ashanti (African) and Warwickshire (British) ("The Muse of History" 10) excite in him feelings of pride. Unlike Walcott, however, Philip does not prevaricate in her racial choices. There is no reluctant acceptance of her African racial

identity. Her struggle centers on negotiating the linguistic ambiguities to reach a varied audience. What she defines as lessons in poetic growth in *Salmon Courage*:

in sprung rhythm,
talk in syncopated burst of music,
moulding, kneading, distorting, enhancing
a foreign language. ("Sprung Rhythm" 10)

Her choices are dictated by her multiple "localities"--being an Africaribbean-Canadian female writer. These localities reflect multiple situations of alienation and exile. Writing within the so-called Canadian mosaic, Philip also faces the danger of the label of exoticism from the dominant Euro-Canadian literary establishment. Indeed, her fear of labels as disabling talismans is confessed in "Conversation Across Borders" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 258): "maybe I let labels get in the way." Her fear is well founded, for it is a fact that minorities tend to allow the negating labels of the majority to define them (*Frontiers* 258). To deconstruct the stereotypical labels and attract the interest of the ideal audience Philip uses linguistic code switching in her poetry. For example, in the poem "Dream-Skins" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 32-36), Philip transverses the European and African worlds through linguistic code switching that enfolds both Euro-American literary and Africaribbean oral/literary traditions. In her struggle to articulate the dynamics of the "acquisition of cultural identity" (Hunter 275) in a system of flux and forgotten/falsified histories, Philip amalgamates the identities of both her Black and white

ancestries: "one breast / white / the other black" in a "headless / in a womb-black night" (33).

The prodigious hybrid that emerges from this amalgamation is "neither black / nor white" (33). However, it is the blackness in her that frees her mouth which is tied into silence "with some clean white rag / she band up my mouth" (34). In this poem there is the constant reference to the white rag as the article of silencing, which makes Hunter's reading of the poem a bit problematic. Hunter fails to see Philip's recapitulation of the historical effects of enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean. The mother/daughter/narrator's lamentation glosses the loss of her people's original power of naming through writing--hieroglyphs first developed by her Egyptian ancestors--, but it is stolen and appropriated by the white mother, who uses that power now to bind her mouth: the loss of "the name of me we knew she named / the sound of song sung long past time" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 35). But the daughter does not despair of finding the African mother whose voice has been silenced by appropriation and deletion by others:

dream-skins dream
the loss
ours and ancient
.
the many-voiced one of one voice
ours
betrayal and birth-blood
unearthed (36)

So for the Africaribbean, linguistic diglossia is not a modernist demonstration of cosmopolitanism, nor a decorative device to make poetry sound different. As Rhoda Reddock has argued, it is an unpredictable

reconstruction of identity from shreds of memory in a complex paradox of linguistic juggling, using the language of the colonizer, the enslaver, and the neo-imperialist to recreate and define "our cultural autonomy" in the Caribbean (61). Moreover, as an Afrisporic woman writer, Philip's artistic sensibilities become embroiled in a death-in-life-in-death struggle with the factors of nostalgia and the demands of the exiled audience for anything that would satisfy their "starved" memories of home. This is a "starved . . . audience for anything remotely evocative of 'home' that it accepts whatever is reminiscent of it" (*Frontiers* 35). But to follow this fad means a quick liquidation of the poet's style, content, and growth. Because nostalgia has an "immediate entry into the hearts and minds of a Caribbean audience" (36), Philip knows the dangers in listening to this illusive demand of a narrow audience:

In such a context the audience is less concerned with what the artist is doing with his or her discipline, provided the need to be reminded of "how it stay" back home is met. If the artist is content with this response, then a sort of stasis results which is fatal to any growth on her part. But audience response in this context is powerful, seductive and difficult to turn one's back on for the less certain rewards of "growth" or "practising one's art seriously." (36)

The choice of language and the thoughts of the reading and listening audience(s) become, therefore, a controlling ideology guiding the articulation of content and experience. Moreover, the irony implied here indicates the equally problematic choices within the metropolitan alternativese:

If no one listens and cries
is it still poetry
If no one sings the note

between the silence
 If the voice doesn't founder
 on the edge of the air
 is it still music
 if there is no one to hear
 is it love
 or does the sea always roar
 in the shell at the ear? ("Anonymous." *Salmon Courage* 3)

This communitarian view of art is validated by art's potentially liberating and material functionality in society. These functional roles are determined by the ideological and cultural imperatives played by language in the history of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism in the Caribbean. But art's functionality is achievable only if the Africaribbean writer accepts and engages the "interrogative montage in which the multiple genres and practices of orature, lyric, life writing, and documentary" are appropriated and recontextualized together with other "cultural discourses" such as 'missionary scientific' educational, literary, and historical" discourses (Carr 81).

Philip engages the collage of representation as strategizing allegories of her fragmented, disrupted and constantly redefined "Afrosporic" subjectivity. The poem "What's In a Name" captures this constantly relabelled subjecthood very well:

I always thought I was Negro
 till I was Coloured,
 West Indian, till I was told
 that Columbus was wrong
 in thinking he was west of India -
 that made me Caribbean
 And throughout the '60's, '70's, and '80's,
 I was sure I was Black.
 Now Black is passe,
 African de rigeur
 and me a chameleon of labels. (*Salmon Courage* 28)

The fragmented personhood and the use of narrative collage is lyrically dramatized in "And Over Every Land and Sea" (*She Tries Her Tongue* 28-36). The myth of Ceres' search for Proserpine is relocated and inverted in Philip's rendering of the tale. In her narrative, it is the lost (diasporic) daughter in search of her native mother (28), and not the mother in search of a daughter as Guttman seems to read (61-62). Philip appropriates and reterritorialises a Greco-Roman mythology within the historical reality of slavery. It also mythicizes and interprets Philip's own return to Tobago after an absence of twenty years. There is the history of the de-feminization and "de-womanization" of the African female from a woman to a proliferating property of the slave owner that also informs Philip's rendering of this tale (Carr 86). It also reflects the multiple literary heritage of Philip as she engages the language and style of post-modernism in her texts:

multiply juxtaposed texts, the dialogic counterpointing of multiple voices, the metapoetic questioning of the status of historiographic documents, or the ironically reframed Western intertexts ranging from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. (Carr 81)

Hunter reads this poem as Philip's generous act of bridge building. She observes that in this poem, Philip "proffers an arching image of a parent(mother)-child connection, how to find without binding, how to leave, how to cope with the adoption of other families and not lose one's own or oneself" in the history of displacement. The constant movement of the poem from one discourse to another distributes the cultural dilemma faced by the displaced mother/daughter in the poem (275).

In reading Philip's poetry, therefore, we are reminded of what Sangari says regarding the problems of Euro-American epistemological hostilities that have, contrary to expectations, engendered the post-colonial redefinition of knowledge not as a fixed a priori factuality, but as "provisional and of truth as historically circumscribed" (161). It is this provisionality of knowledge and the mediation of truth by historical circumstances that have given rise to "different social formations that condition similar effects like hybridity, nonmimeticism, self-reflexivity, self-location, self-disruption" (181). One may add self-interrogation by the dispossessed or subaltern as another dialectic that also results in cultural and linguistic miscegenation. This in turn ruptures cultural stratifications and established hegemonies. Some critics have responded to this rupturing of circumferences by marginalised writers as a trend toward post-modernist existential nothingness (Hunter 279). Hunter's fear that the recent coming into voice by Africaribbean writers through the discourse on race, literature, language, and history is practising reverse racism, and will end in "existential nothingness" (279), is another insidious attempt at silencing Africaribbeans. What in effect Hunter is saying is that Philip and her Black sisters whose lives have been defined by Europeans through racist discourses have no right to talk race. Her prescription of conventional realism for Philip and other racially dispossessed people is a controlling compromise which will destroy the impulses for freedom and literary development in the "Other." Subsequently, Hunter fails to see Philip's poetic enterprise as an offering of "ways of reading a

range of signifying practices which give voice to material and historical specificities of Black female experiences" as Carol Boyce Davies has argued (*Black Women Writing Identity* 164). Philip fortunately is not interested in satisfying those who are not ready to wake up to the reality of the impossibility of articulating the totality of her experience, and, therefore, the unmanageability of her style. Philip is aware of both the problem of the audience, for whom she writes, and "the ambivalence, and it is a dangerous one, lies in to whom we write" (*Frontiers* 121). Philip definitely knows to whom she writes: those that seek to dismantle any form of dominance that is linked to language use. In this she is linked, not only ideologically to other Caribbean writers namely: Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Jennifer Rahim, Louise Bennett, Lorna Goodison, Claire Harris, and Cynthia James while maintaining her own stylistic peculiarities.

In this chapter, I have addressed the thematic triad of language, silence and audience as the recurring obsession of Nourbese Philip, and examined the various strategies she engages in order to address them. Some of the issues relating to the problems the Africaribbean female poet faces and overcomes in a dominant Euro-American culture are reviewed to show Philip's fierce battle against silence, and untiring search for a language to enunciate the meaning of her silenc(e)ing. I note how Philip's attempts at semantic relexification, coupled with polyphonic discourse practices enable her to rewrite definitions and concepts that best reflect her multiple heritages. I point out that it is inappropriate to read Philip's poetry and experiences using the

`universal' paradigms of Euro-American liberal feminism. Consequently, I then question the wisdom of equating Africaribbean-Canadian female experience--experience defined by victimization and marginalization because of their Africanness--with the experience of the Euro-Canadian female's imprisoned consciousness. I opine that this could be an insidious attempt, not only to appropriate the pain of Philip and her other "sisters of the sun," but to further deny them their voice. I argued, therefore, for situating Philip's dilemmas, polemics, and strategies within Africaribbean-Canadian historical and epistemological contexts. Similar historical and epistemological contexts problematize and define Claire Harris's poetics as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Claire Harris and the Rhetoric of Detoxification.

I am a black woman. Any poetry I write is black poetry. I am not prepared to surrender the truths of my particular personal history. Neither am I prepared to lose the great advantage of those who have historically been enslaved or savaged by others: the necessary clarity that ensures survival (Harris 17).

But,

Child all i have to give
is English which hates/fears your
black skin

make it

d

a

c

n

e

s

i

g

to sunlight on the Caribbean.

(*Drawing Down A Daughter* 25)

The quotations above act as a framework for my reading of Claire Harris's poetry and are not merely to decorate the issues around Harris's feminist/Africaribbean poetics. They are read against the background in which Africaribbean-Canadian writers operate--a background in which the Africaribbean personality is denied, denigrated, or silenced. Harris, like Philip, has looked everywhere in Canadian discourse for something positive about herself which is not exoticized

for mass consumption.¹⁹ She has searched everywhere, and has refused to be locked up in any enclosures, black or white. This search for a positive and elevating image of herself "from trains and buses / from carts / in films and books," always ends in the horror of discovering that that self is denied in history, and "stripped to skin and sex / the mythic / ballooning in the mud dragging at my feet" (*Translation Into Fiction* 34). With this in mind, I will read Harris's poetry as articulation of her strategies to deconstruct and contest her absence from the dominant discourse.

In Chapter Two, I addressed the thematic triad of language, silence, and audience as the recurring obsession of Marlene Nourbese Philip. I also examined the various strategies she engages to address them. I reviewed some of the issues relating to the problems the Africaribbean female poet faces and overcomes in a dominant Euro-American culture, and concluded that Philip is engaged in a fierce battle to find a language to enunciate the meaning of her silenc(e)ing, and to break that silence. I noted how Philip's attempts at semantic relexification, coupled with polyphonic discourse practices, enable her to rewrite definitions and concepts that best reflect her multiple

¹⁹ Ann DuCille in chapters 1 and 3 of her book *Skin Trade* (1996), has analyzed the commodification of racial and ethnic differences in the toy/barbie industry by which toy makers, such as Mattel, reap millions of dollars by commercializing what the industry thinks is the authentic image(s) of Africans. Her critique shows how Mattel engages in skin color politics to reap profits, while simultaneously still promoting the same old eurocentricism that reifies differences based on using "whiteness" as the standard against which all others do not measure up to.

heritages. I pointed out that it is inappropriate for Euro-Canadian feminists to read Philip's poetry, (including the works by other non Euro-Canadian writers) and experience as universal constants for all women. I then questioned the wisdom of equating Africaribbean-Canadian female experience--experience defined by victimization and marginalization because of their Africanness--with the experience of the Euro-Canadian female's imprisoned consciousness. I opined that this could be an insidious attempt, not only to appropriate the pain of Philip and her other "sisters of the sun," but to deny them their voice. I argued for situating Philip's dilemmas, polemics, and strategies within historical and epistemological contexts. It is this same kind of historicity that problematizes and defines Claire Harris's poetics.

Claire Harris, like Marlene Nourbese Philip, started her artistic career in Canada. Migrating from Trinidad already a mature person, her poetic imagination was not nurtured in Canada, though Canada gave her the space within which to become aware of, and to engage that imagination for personal, gender, and racial recuperation. Together with Philip and other Africaribbean writers, Harris hurtled herself into a Canadian literary landscape that had no Africaribbean-Canadian literary tradition within which to work. Harris, Philip and the others, therefore, have had to assume the mantle of tradition-makers, becoming literary foremothers to generations yet to come. This is a challenge that Harris and Philip have proudly taken up. As I shall argue later in this chapter, both poets have so far proven to be equal to the task, and are beginning to be grudgingly noticed even by dominant Euro-Canada.

Both Harris and Philip have stressed that the impossibility of becoming writers in Trinidad and Tobago has been one of the reasons why they emigrated to Canada--to find a space within which to realize their creative potential to the full. As Harris puts it, she left Trinidad with the hope that she would be able to weave "a new space to trap the voice / I thought I could" (*Traveling To Find A Remedy* 37). So writing for both of them is also an act of space clearing. The decision to come to Canada is a decision to escape from a limbo situation to one of marginal autonomy. Canada may provide space in terms of economic advantages, but she also forces them into racial/gender polemics that do not engage writers such as Cynthia James or Lorna Goodison writing from within the Caribbean.

The agendas of both Philip and Harris are similar, though their approaches are far from the same. Philip is concerned with issues of silence and racist epistemology. She seeks a voice by engaging post-modernist, deconstructive, post-colonialist techniques, in language and content, to create an Afrisporic literary topography that encapsulates and defines her people's past, present and future.²⁰ This does not seem at first to engage Harris in her earlier works, even though there is an undercurrent of such matters that runs beneath her verse. Harris adopts

²⁰ In the discourse of Africaribbean poetry, these stylistic and discourse strategies come in different names and forms such as "jazzoetry" (poetry and jazz), "dubpoetry" (reggae instrumentals with poetry), "Rapsoetry" (Rap, song and poetry), "poemsemble" (poetic ensemble). These stylistic features will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to the poetry of Goodison and James.

these devices in her later work such as *Drawing Down A Daughter* (1992), after almost a decade of trying to gnaw a way into the walled perimeters of high European modernist poetics. Rahim has opined that Harris's refusal at first to be drawn into issues in western epistemology is a deliberate act of self-censoring which nevertheless breaks down in her critical utterances. This is supported by Harris who says that her refusal is based on an awareness of the energy-sapping nature of having to rebut what she knows is a falsehood. Such an expense of energy would leave her with very little strength to create the positive images of herself she wants. She also does not want to be a poet of reaction but of action ("Interview" 18/07/95). Moreover, Rahim's point that this deferral of race as a poetic theme "stems from a concern for the commonality of the women's experience and the universality of the [female] human condition" (267) may be cogent in relation to Harris's earlier poetry. But it is debatable, for the issues of race, gender, and epistemology constantly recur throughout her poetry. She has said she does not spend all her time on these issues alone, but she never lets an opportunity pass that demands a commentary about race, gender or language ("Interview" 18/07/95). Anytime the chance is given, for example in "Policeman Cleared in Jaywalking Case" (*Fables From Women's Quarters* 37-41), self-censorship gives way to hard-hitting diatribes against what European Canadians do to African Canadians in their writing and in the socio-economic and political arenas. Take, for instance, the unmistakable sarcasm in *Drawing Down A Daughter*:

She have a writing plan, nothing else matter. . . . You have to remember what they teach she there. Is a big country Canada, is advanced; people there think theory matter more than human being. She learn a writer have a right to write anything, do anything for the writing. Never matter who life it bruise, who life it rough up. Is freedom of speech all the way. . . . [but] . . . words does kill, . . . [and]. . . . is so people delicate. Is easy to mangle them, and words does mangle better than iron. It ain't have no cripple like a soul-cripple, (100)

Moreover, as Harris herself has indicated in her interview with Janice Williamson, she refuses to satisfy white Canadians' desires for her to fit into their notion of what an Africaribbean-Canadian female writer should write on ("i dream of a new naming" 115-130). As I have already surmised in Chapter Two, I am wary of arguments of universality of experience; every experience is historically and racially specific. But generally both Philip and Harris work toward similar goals. They are complementary in the way they both engage personal and racial historiographies as territories of empowerment and voice.

Personal or racial/gender history, for both Harris and Philip, qualifies as material content for whatever poetic enterprise is engaged. As Mordecai and Tagoe assert, it is a history that involves a constant reworking of the generic theme of "identity and the quest for wholeness, central to Caribbean literature and a continuing preoccupation of both male and female writers" (xv). Self-identification and wholeness rest on two foundational principles: "commitment to introducing personal, private matters into the domain of [poetry] and setting them at the heart of things; second . . . exploiting the possibilities of language (xv). Harris's poetry, however, goes beyond this simplification of

Harris's displaced soul. It is the meeting point of the two seas that gird the Caribbean island nation--the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Here, Harris's soul will find definitive solace in the blending of the waters of the two oceans. First, the waters of the Atlantic will provide her with a gateway back to her African origins. Second, the waters of the Caribbean sea will nourish her newly-acquired Africaribbean spirituality and culture. Third, the borderland positioning of Blanchiseuse enables Harris to claim a position of translocality--a middle passage. Fourth, Harris may be signifying on the other meaning of Blanchiseuse:

Washerwoman. As washerwoman, Harris is engaged in washing off the dirt piled on her body and soul by the history of her negation, and purifying the only language she knows, in order to use it more positively for self recovery:

she remembers washer
 women their lives
 surrounded by water
 pounding white sheets
 against rocks worn women
 their faces gone
 mythic arms lift and fall

 their breasts sway with the effort
 to force dirt from
 their lives on the far edge
(Drawing Down A Daughter 86-87)

Harris's suspicion of the machinations of dominant discourses also includes her awareness of her separation/or otherness from the theoretical and practical perspectives by even those she shares gender with, but who do not share her history, her femininity, and her modes of perception. In "Towards the Colour of Summer" in *The Conception of*

Winter (7-9), Harris, together with two white women of non-Anglo-Saxon origins, search for new spaces. Paradoxically, their search takes them back to cultural locations that historically have denied any space for Africans. Their return to the very roots of African oppression--medieval Spain,²¹ can be understood as a journey of reentry into the old world, a return into the womb of their denigration in order to be reborn. Harris here is employing the West African cosmology in which a spirit-child is born, dies, reenters the mother's womb, is born again, dies, and the cycle repeats itself until some sacrifices are offered to the gods to make the child stay in the spirit world or on earth. In Dagaaba cosmology, this is known as the "Leowaa" myth. The same spirit-child, John Mendes explains, is known as "douen" in Trinidadian folk belief (47).²²

²¹ It is generally known by historians of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that it was Batholomeo de Las casa, moved by pity for the way Native Americans were dying from European diseases and enslavement by Spanish conquistadores, who then recommended the use of African slaves as substitute labour on Spanish colonies. This was readily accepted and enforced throughout the Americas. This began the slave trade and it also began the horrors that Afrisporic people in the Americas still suffer from.

²² Douen in Trinidadian folklore signifies the "unbaptised souls of children that live in the forest. Neither male nor female, they feed off cultivated gardens and have a peculiar liking for the water crab. Large straw hats, perched on faceless heads, cover long plaited hair. Their feet are pointed backwards.

Harris also engages the soucoyant²³ mythology to develop her theme. Harris and her co-travellers' return journey to the source of their oppression in order to shed off the stereotypes imposed on them by patriarchal ideology, is a kind of soucoyancy. Just as the soucoyant sheds her skin and becomes translucent, but returns to take up that skin again before daybreak, Harris and her friends shed their skins of colour and stereotypes. They then float as ethereal beings, unashamed of these same skins, their femininity, or origins. Soucoyancy for Harris, then, is transformed from a disablement into a space creating ennoblement. In their strange nonmaterial world they "are transformed women of myth we fly / through darkness balls happy flame / We have no fear of our skins" (*The Conception of Winter* 15). Harris's agenda here is to detoxify the language of negativity in Western epistemology through the reinterpretation of Africaribbean mythology. She intends to show that the soucoyants of the world, far from being negative beings, are actually women of exceptional psychic development, whose powers need to be harnessed for the benefits of humanity. They should be seen, more as social benefactors, than as malefactors. Majorie Thorpe addressed this issue in her keynote speech to the gathering at the first conference of Caribbean women. Thorpe contests the sexist, racist, and anti-African definition of the soucoyant in Caribbean epistemology. For Thorpe, the

²³ Soucoyant is the Caribbean word for witch, and soucoyancy is, therefore, witchcraft. It is believed that the soucoyant leaves her physical body in bed at night, and then flies as a ball of fire in search of human blood to suck. The soucoyant is not unlike the European myth of the vampire, except that in the case of the soucoyant, the attack is always spiritual not physical.

fire of the soucoyant is not destructive. Rather it is a purifying, regenerative force that can be employed to contest all oppressive structures and attitudes which combine to diminish and silence women of colour and their contributions to Euro-American cultural progress (47-51). A further reading of Harris's use of the soucoyant symbol implies the return of Caliban's mother, Sycorax, to the world and freedom which Prospero and Miranda had seized. Like Tituba in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, her return causes panic and confusion among her oppressors. Harris's soucoyancy also enables her to reconnect and build a relationship with her foremothers, and finally to seek new alliances and meanings for her life. Her resistance to the aesthetics and polemics of ancestral foremothers is a resistance to any closed endings. Harris emphasizes this point through the pregnant woman in *Drawing Down A Daughter*:

Girl i'm not going to make your grandmother's
mistakes no no
 i'm gonna make a whole
 new bunch of my own
 the most we can hope
 kid is a primal mesh
occasionally take it from me daughterhood expert (32)

Such resistance also means a refusal to make permanent choices in life. For example, she rejects the mother's request for her to choose from a rainbow of ribbons for her hair. This refusal to choose is symbolic of her general reluctance to take permanent positions on any issue:

My mother her fingers part my hair make
four neat plaits that dovetail on each side
become one that is crossed and pinned

She holds out a rainbow of ribbons says
 choose one ribbons hanging from her fingers
 like paths how can I choose when any choice
 means a giving up . . . (*Travelling To Find A Remedy* 37)

The refusal to choose also implies Harris's recognition that though her hair is parted into four neat categories/plaits, they also at the same time merge, overlap, cross, and form a complex of multiple uniformities, that give beauty to her whole being. To choose one plait would be to reject the others; they all form part of her hair. This simple metaphor of the hair,--a site of difference and denigration as far as the Africaribbean woman is concerned in relation to the dominant Eurocentric concept of female beauty--of plaits and a rainbow of ribbons, goes far to explain the position of Harris in relation to her critique of monologism. It also stresses the spirit of resistance that makes her reject the stereotypes that her foremothers have been forced to accept and live with. Even though society has told the speaker she resembles the mother and should therefore strive to live like her, the speaker refuses to be like the generic Africaribbean woman and spend "hours before the mirror / training my mouth to be different," learning ways of rejecting the mother's gift of the chalice of suffering:

For the calling her eroded hands cupped like a chalice
 she offered me the blasted world as if to say this is our
 sacrament drink I would not this is all there is I
 could not I left school I left she faded (31)

But the memory of the mother still remains as a central frame "in the discovery of selfhood" (Rahim 280). Rahim further contends that Harris's "rejection of the stereotyped images of [African] femininity involves a

process of deconstruction, in order to reconstruct a personalised version of self that does not accept sexist [racist] stereotypes" (281). This theme was earlier developed in "After Image," which recalls Philip's "Cyclamen Girl" poems. In the poem, Harris seeks to deconstruct Euro-Canadian attempts to change and frame the Africaribbean female, and neutralise any attempts by her to be herself. First, the white children who have been nurtured by the Black woman into adulthood decide to forget her name. Their refusal to talk about the subhuman conditions of existence endured by their Africaribbean Nannies, so they can enjoy a life of security and pleasure, is analogous to the silence on issues of class and racial inequalities in some white feminists' circles. Second, even when they do see her they come with already-prepared frames to fix her. They refuse to accept any other truth that contravenes their version as they "brought the same passion to this view as you / brought life always framing always testing / new angles sacrificing any truth to arrange reality," and to domicile what does not conform to stereotypes (*Fables From the Women's Quarters* 34). Harris's education frees her vision from the false perceptions of herself and history that she has been taught to believe by the dominant white world. She has arrived at a new definition of the self, and her perception of history has changed:

I am whole again
 I have assembled me from all your pictures
 I took my feet from woman outlined in
 crumpled bed my eyes from crescent whites repeated
 my breasts from whore even there no concessions (34)

It is this rearranged "personhood" that enables her to re-perceive the statues of Spanish conquistadors in "UNDER THE FEET OF HEROES" in *The Conception of Winter*:

we three stand
 you two in admiration
 in white wonder

you talk feats
 of arms and passage

I see only the dead in black
 mountains hear only

the high pitched keen
 of raped women flaming

crosses I stand under
 the feet of murderers
 of sodomites ("July 16 1984" 40)

In this episode, the other two women, Kay and Jane, who are white and share the history of Spanish conquistadors, easily forget the effects of those heroes' actions on Africans. But Harris's vision of these so-called heroes is one of horror. They are the reason for her people's and her dislocation and denigration. Their glorified history excludes Harris's history though it is built on the ruins of that history. This constant exclusion from the mainstream is demonstrated in the experiences of isolation, marginalization and contemptuous rejection of the new Africaribbean to the white world:

a stream of heads gleam in street lights
 bounce silent on drowned pavement flash
 once huge before quivering to small grins

as at a joke too rich too deep
 for sharing i move from them pale
 faces of whiskered albums once

proudly displayed : blunder
(Fables from the Women's Quarters 21)

The heroine's odyssey for a meaningful dialogue and relationship is further rebuffed when it rains and there is no one to give her shelter. People pass by with umbrellas, literally walking through her. They "toss silent giggles" and even old men shift their pace (22). These experiences are linked to the history of the slave trade in "flag ships / riding at anchor like a litany / there the Nina/Pinta/Santa Maria" (22). The names of these ships link us to the journeys of Christopher Columbus and the destructive consequences those journeys had and still have for people of African origin. It also links us back to Spain, which to Harris, represents the beginnings of the oppression of African peoples. Our arrivant's stranded face, and her exclusion from the main discourse, lend her the energy and the imagination to perform poetic acts that not only subvert but also challenge received perceptions. These actions involve making known the hidden history behind the facade of glory in a language that is plain and painful:

her stranded face opens on a ladder
 leading below deck waves slap against
 this slave ship rising
 she swallows the wail stench
 of men shackled spoon shaped
 a miasma of fear streams from all
 their orifices yet their faces
 black with refusal of such circumstance
 nevertheless smouldering eyes welcome her (22)

This meditation on the history of enslavement of her people sets Harris on a spiritual journey to roots land--Africa. For some Africaribbean-Canadian writers, this involves a really physical

translocation. For others, it involves a metaphoric and symbolic reappraisal of the relationship with Africa as ancest(o)r(ess), as alter-ego, or as sub-altern. As ancestress, the Africaribbean poet invokes the names of past African kings, queens, nations, and even gods as recuperative references. Funso Aiyejina sees this as their way of seeking "shelter in the safety of [these] historical [or mythical] African figures, whose achievements have combined to initiate series of insights into the question of ancestorhood" (104). So names such as Sheba, Nefertiti, Osei Tutu, Nzinga of Ngola, Shaka, Amina, Nanny of the Maroons, Ashanti, Yoruba, Legba, Oshun, Shango, Obatala become self-validating talismans for Africaribbean poets. Philip, like Harris, invokes these Gods and hero(in)es in *She Tries Her Tongue* without really making them into living presences, while Goodison claims them by a conscious recreation that humanizes and situates them both in the past and the present. It is interesting, as Aiyejina has pointed out, that these writers never invoke any peasant names, or African nationalities, that have not been favoured by Europeans in their epistemologies and histories of Africa. A ready answer would be that they are indulging in selective nepotism--favouring the familiar group that has been commodified for them by the master. To say this is not to deny that certain Caribbean islands were populated largely from particular communities in West Africa. For instance, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, and Brazil had concentrations of Yoruba, Fon, and Binni populations. But the complex cultural and linguistic continua in West Africa preclude any neat definitions of pre-colonial national boundaries. When traces of

West African cultures and languages in Jamaica are all, therefore, emphatically located in Ashanti without references to other groups' presence such as the Guan, who were raided incessantly by the Ashanti and sold into slavery, and who ended up in the Caribbean, the claim becomes problematic. But the Africaribbean needs the image of a community that conforms to the Euro-American definition of greatness. So they clamor for names that connote greatness--gods, kings, queens, empires. In thus celebrating only such they engage a discourse of dominance and ironically perpetuate what they fight against in their work.

As alter-ego, Africa becomes a symbolic place, or real location. Either way, Africa is often invoked and exploited either positively or negatively to establish a sense of cultural equilibrium. For instance, by invoking Africa as negative alter-ego, the Africaribbean poet can reject Africa as a possible source of any influence, remote or immediate on her personality. The differences between this particular type of Africaribbean person and Africans in the continent are theorized within concepts of negations and "Otherness." Harris flirts with this position briefly when she stresses that her sojourn in Nigeria was not meant as a trip to Africa in search of her roots, as they are deeply buried in Trinidad. However, she also asserts that this trip to Africa enabled her to break out of feelings of doubt about her poetic calling. The positivists over identify with Africa and overromanticise everything said to be African without verification, and in the process neglect their European heritage. The centrists, who include Walcott, Brathwaite,

Philip, Goodison, James, and Harris, seek to associate with the good things of Africa, though they do not shying away from critiquing the bad. They articulate a group consciousness built around an anti-hegemonic ideology that will not impose one imperial mode (African or European) on the other unless to use them as tools of examination and recuperation of a thoroughly and unique Caribbean selfhood (Aeyijina 104-105).

The journey to Africa, therefore, be it a physical translocation or a symbolic and metonymic journey of the mind, is linked to what Dance calls the secondary journey to "the abandoned country" (Harris 23). Harris visited Nigeria and studied at the University of Lagos. She has strangely, however, sought to distance and deny any links between her sojourn in Nigeria and the ideology of roots search. For Harris, those roots are too deeply buried in the Caribbean soil (*Fables From the Women's Quarters* 43). But it is also true that it is in Africa that she discovered the poetic urge and actually began to write ("Interview" 18/07/95). Her hesitation to plant her roots in Africa reveals more of the budding poet's desperation to be accepted into the domain of the dominant canon. She battered unsuccessfully at "closed doors, at accepted definitions of closure and harmony" (*Grammar of Dissent* 27). Mali and Nigeria, not Trinidad, provide her with the catalytic courage to break loose from the web of voicelessness (Interview with Kuwabong 18/07/95). Paradoxically also, Harris's liberation into voice does not mean an initial departure from the traditions of enslavement and dominance as evidenced in her integrationist rhetoric. She is proud to

be writing within a "tradition, some enterprising critics will one day discover, that is in direct descent from European Literature though it clings to what is left of the ancestral cosmos not ripped from me, even as it elaborates Africa in the Americas" (*Grammar of Dissent* 28).

Harris's "I" here is not the alienated individual of high-modernism, as expressed in the poetry of say, T. S. Eliot. Neither is it a disembodied "I" of the postmodernist Euro-American split-individual feminist without an identifiable individuality or experiential locationality. Furthermore, it is not the angry post-colonial generic "I" roaming the whole world as a nomad seeking to establish a foothold in an imaginary or real colonizer's center. As she argues, all these types of "I"--the individuated and the communalized "I"--are faulty. They fall prey to the same binarisms and negative oppositionalities that present "debilitating versions of history, in notions of power and control over both persons and nature central to modern European culture, to its cult of individualism, and to the Americas" (31). Her narrative "I" is both communal and individual. It is a poetic and historically embodied "I," the same type that Dionne Brand engages so well in *No Language Is Neutral*.

Harris's "I" narrativizes personal experiences while re-presenting Africaribbean collective racial memory and history. Here the "I" becomes both the individual Africaribbean female's body and sexuality, and also the Africaribbean's body in an historical and social context. It also connotes the idea of a collective "eye"--a communitarian vision and voice. This "I" is an empowering non-lyrical community selfhood for

those who never make it to Africa. The difficulties involved in retracing footsteps in the vast deserts of centuries of Euro-American negating historical propaganda, and the physical dislocation from Africa, are eased by the resilient spiritual bridges that persist between Africa and the Caribbean in language and culture. The ancestral African Gods still drum in Africaribbean bones, flutter in their veins, and are "fluent / on my tongue" (22). This secondary journey becomes an affirmation, a regeneration that empowers the individual to accept the facts of her Caribbean fluid identification and exile mentality. It prepares the poet for her role ahead: the "Adamic" task of naming things to challenge notions of Africaribbean non-being. There is a difficulty, however, as Harris points out. That in her location of "plateglass silence" . . . [and] between the image of the hard moment and the gut rumblings of my own indelicate existence" (*Translation Into Fiction* 39), how can she hope to "draw the precise and delicate conclusion" (39) to enable her to "catch the actual names of things" (36)? To be able to perform this role as a poet, Harris like Walcott advocates a change in language and lifestyle. The word must be liberated from the tyranny of Euro-American hegemonic discourse. It must be refashioned to be functionally relevant as a vehicle for African Caribbean selfhood. The third journey is a "pattern in the lives of many of these women writers . . . a spiritual / psychic search in which one of the things which the writer may put at a hazard is the crowning of his/her language" (Mordecai et al. xvi).

Language, as I have mentioned earlier, is not necessarily engaged in the ritual pursuit of "pseudo-feminist agendas; rather there is sufficient detachment to allow for women [poets] to make the protagonist[s] in their [poetry] male . . . as part of the creative statement" (Mordecai et al. xviii). Davies et al. contend that "for the Caribbean woman writer, the reality of absence, of voicelessness, of marginalization is linked to the necessity to find a form, a mode of expression" (4) that interrogates the structures of neo-colonialism and imperial patriarchy. To achieve this, women poets have always expropriated various stylistic and linguistic forms such as the engagement of "prose, poetry, letters, female history" and types of registers not normally associated with poetic expression. This creates an eclectic, fragmented voice that demonstrates various ways of perceiving and representing truth: "I dream of a new meaning / new words new lines / shaping a new world" (*Translation Into Fiction* 35). Harris shares a similar vision with Philip at this point. They both know the logic and strength in privileging the variant over familiar and standard notions of poetry in their search for an alternative language to unlock and articulate their African and Caribbean essence and presence (Rahim 289). They refuse to be encoded or foreclosed:

This:
 I did not close
 myself in rooms
 hurled
 in my/your circles
 I searched
 the earth
 from trains and buses

from carts
 in films and books
 to find myself
 always here
 stripped to skin and sex
 the mythic
 ballooning in the mud dragging at my
 feet
 drawn curtains/flight
 a luxury
 history denies me

(Translation Into Fiction 34)

Mae Gwendolyn Henderson theorizes that the most "characteristic and suggestive" qualities of "black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with 'other(s)', but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity" (17-18). This interlocution originates from what Henderson rightly observes as the dual "consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalised other,' " and with aspects of 'otherness' within the self. The discourse of polyphony, which is used as a device to dilute and transform a schizophrenic personality into a unified whole in Philip's poetry, is engaged by Harris also as a strategy to complicate any fixed positionality of Black women in a patriarchal and racially structured society. Black women are defined and define themselves not only as the 'Other' of a negating sameness, but also as the positive possibilities of the 'other' of the 'other(s)' (18). Henderson refers to the experience of African-American women writers, but her postulates can be extended with some modifications to read the works of Africaribbean women writers, be they resident in the Caribbean

or in exile in either the centers or outposts of neo-colonial empires of Europe and America.

Henderson's reading of African American women's writing is echoed in Fido's statement that the critic of the Caribbean woman writer must be cognisant of her multiple personalities and perceptions. For Fido, the Caribbean [female] "writer is almost inevitably a person of multifaceted experience. There is [therefore] only the choice of dealing with the experience in a[n] integrative manner, of tolerating differences within the personality, or of ignoring one or other facet of a life" ("Textures of Third World Reality in the Poetry of Four African-Caribbean Women" 30). These differences are interpreted as competing discourses nurtured by centuries of heterogeneous social voices and modes of articulation, both contradictory and complementary, which act as limitations and interventions in the writer's search for interlocutory agents to articulate her "dialogically racial and gendered voices" that have been silenced/or marginalized "to the other(s) both within and without" the centres and the peripheries of power (Henderson 18). For a writer such as Claire Harris, an Africaribbean-Canadian-Prairie female writer, her task becomes contextually problematic. She has to divorce herself from what she sees as her own intimacy with evil, to effect a management of all the "external manifestations of racism and sexism," and also to combat those self-negating consequences of the centuries of "internalised distortions" of herself, her race, her gender, her herstory--her Africanness. Her position must transcend the poetics of structural combativeness, locational polemics, which women

writers of majoritarian groups engage to seek new power relations between the genders of their race, and within their hegemonic power structures that have denied legitimacy to Africaribbean women's humanity. Claire Harris, therefore, engages a multi-vocal approach as an enabling strategy for self-recuperation and authentication in an enunciatory mode Barbara Christian has aptly described as creative dialoguing ("The High and the Low of Black Feminist Criticism" (48-49)). In doing this, Harris neither romanticizes the recuperated self, nor does she fall victim to the temptations of neo-colonial hierarchization of the post-colonial.

Harris and other Africaribbean-Canadians-- Marlene Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper, Makeda Silvera, Ahdri Zhina Mandiela, Lillian Allen, Ayanna Black, Sylvia Hamilton, Theresa Lewis and others-- writing within the Canadian mosaic, have defined their poetic manifesto as an enterprise of discovery/moulding a new language, a new way of (re)perception and (re)presentation of reality. Harris sees the challenge facing her as one of restoration of the "sense, the ability to perceive, of the real self, to use language, image and form in original ways in service of this goal" (118). Like Walcott in "A Map of Europe", (The Castaway and Other Poems 42), Harris seeks the gift "To see things as they are, halved by a darkness / From which they cannot shift" (42), and then try to construct an effective performance poetic, like "steelbands playing Bethoven" (*Drawing Down A Daughter* 81), that can best enunciate this vision. Writing, to her, becomes a way of clarifying her perception and seeking ways to avoid sentimentality, despair, or

nihilism. For her any other way of writing would be "at best to be incomplete, at worst to be false to the self. One runs the risk of becoming all that one most despises" ("Why Do I Write" 16). Poetic language, therefore, becomes her agent to articulate and give utterance to "our mumbling / life our long descent & absence / from the self" (*Translation Into Fiction* 29), particularly for those "who wander in tangled / underbrush of the mind deaf" (29). This ideology of recuperation is reasserted in "Why Do I Write": To reinscribe

Africa on the Western consciousness; secondly, .
 . . to examine what it means to be human in the
 context of the social and economic, the
 historical and environmental fractures we have
 constructed over the last 500 years. . . . to
 reveal what happens when a woman must deal with
 the realities of racial as well as gender
 subjugation . . . to find out what happens when
 people violate [the] ethical principles of Euro-
 American discourses. ("Why Do I Write?" 27)

In the search for new definitions of the world and social relations, Harris refuses to be seduced by the attractions of groups who see language as a cloak to cover the "deformed morality of power" ("Against the Poetry of Revenge" 16). Rejecting both the poetics of rage and of amnesia, Harris joins other Africaribbean writers in the production of poetry geared toward a synthesis of rage and forgiving without forgetting. It is in the same light Harris questions and rejects the politics of Canadian multiculturalism, which preaches recognition without acceptance, toleration as exoticization.

Thus, within the Canadian context, and in spite of all the propagandists trumpeting of multiculturalism, the Africaribbean writer

is yet to be accorded a central niche in Canadian literature. As Donna Bennett has observed in "English Canada's Post-colonial Complexities," the positive aspects of multiculturalism are outweighed by its limitations. Multiculturalism may promote a toleration but "it keeps cultures separate and allows them to be identified as Other" (194). Multiculturalism has been rightly defined as a political gamble to institutionalize marginality through alterity (194). The Africaribbean-Canadian female poet living and writing in the prairies, then, faces a complex problematic.²⁴ First, there is the problematic posed by the pluralized poetics of linguistic and cultural creolization and the resultant "dynamic discontinuities of poetic expression" and the creative inflexions of language," argues H. Adlai Murdock (85). These undermine the monologic absolutism of dominant discourses that perceive language as either obstacle or pure accomplishment. Pluralized poetics combines the paradoxes of possession and dispossession, langue and metalangue, to achieve a mediation of hybridity and cross cultural symbiosis. Second, there is what Dionne Brand calls the anxiety of place which is exacerbated in the case of Harris, who writes from the Canadian hinterland. She laments her multiple peripheralization as she is

²⁴ See Aritha Van Herk's "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape." The main thrust of her argument is the excessive maleness of the Western landscape of Canada. She looks at the near impossibility of being a female artist in this male landscape, and the price women have to pay as artists. In spite of the fact that she does not mention any woman of color--a deliberate act of marginalizing these other women, but what she says is doubly applicable to women of color, and who want to establish an alternative voice in which to define the west. These women of color like Harris, must not only fight patriarchy, but also racism within the women's ranks.

constantly designated a "prairie poet, or as in my case a feminist poet, a black poet, or an immigrant poet. I am all these things; but people who use these terms, consciously or unconsciously, define areas of exclusion from the mainstream" ("Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" 306).

Indeed, for Harris, multiculturalism is a smoke screen to tolerate, not accept the non-Euro-American other. It is a kind of rearguardism that publicly proclaims collectivity but secretly endorses a programme of exclusivity that prevents "the revision and reinscription of North American culture [that is] bound to follow on recognizing Africa" ("Why Do I Write" 31). Harris relies on morgue symbolism to explain this concept. Multiculturalism becomes a "cultuary" where all unidentified cultures are dumped "and you have to search through them / like a pile of old clothes" to locate your own (*Drawing Down A Daughter* 91). The fact that this symbolism is derived from a South African speaking about apartheid is enough to tell us that Harris considers multiculturalism as benign but insidious cultural apartheid. Harris, however, in pressing for "recognition and the resulting destabilization and reorientation of philosophies," engages language and art. For her, as for all mestiza-conscious poets of African descent in the West, poetry must be made to function as a restorative and recuperative agent. The language and logic of poetry should intervene to restore the "sense, the ability to perceive, of the real self" ("poets in limbo" 118). Harris's poetic language is not a strategy to substitute one type of hegemony for another. But it resonates with the passions of achieving a new balance of the tensions between those who oppress and those who suffer. There is

no place for an agenda of revenge, for revenge poetics simply is "naive and superficial" ("Against the Poetry of Revenge" 17), or what Walcott interprets as a delirium which converts the "anger of the black" artist into "entertainment, or theatre," a refashioned minstrelsy of pre-emancipation days ("The Muse of History" 18).

In saying these things, I do not in any way mean to suggest that there is neither anger nor a sense of affliction in Harris's poetry. Otherwise she would not write that "words cannot absolve / nor can / distance shelter her who" has had her sacrament of pain invented for her (*Fables From the Women's Quarters* 13). But "despite the red surge in her mouth . . . despite fury the skin alert to the body's clear voice" (12). In the poems that make up the sequence entitled, "Policeman Cleared in Jaywalking Case" (37-42), Harris explores her anger at some Euro-Canadians' racial intolerance towards Africanadians. She could have used the occasion of the illogical and racially motivated arrest of an Africanadian girl as a reason to seek revenge through language. However, what she does very well here instead is to use the occasion to assert her refusal to "blend in nor will I fade into the midget shades peopling your dream" (38). The poem also explores the problem of fear, not of policemen's brutality towards Africaribbean people, but the hidden savagery of the whole Canadian system, its history, and its epistemology:

Because I fear I fear myself and I fear your skeletal skin
the spider tracery of your veins I fear your heavy fall of
hair like sheets of rain and the clear cold water of your
eyes and I fear myself the rage alive in me . . . Even I
fear the ease you make of living this stolen land all its

graceful seductions but I fear most myself how easy to
 drown in your world dead believing myself living who stand
 'other' and vulnerable to your soul's disease (41)

Fear in this context could degenerate into xenophobia, but for Harris, this fear enables her to develop a clarity of vision. Fear becomes a site from which she partially distances herself from the stifling seductions of the system, and thus recognizes her own susceptibility to these seductions. Fear is a liberating agent; it liberates her from revenge polemics that issue from the poetics of reaction that Philip cautions against. Fear also enables her to signify and thus to claim a space for herself where she can stand and say "I am she is" (40) as an Africaribbean woman.

Instead of poetry of revenge, therefore, Harris writes that it is better to learn "how to use suffering to weave the heart's invisible tales to make out of that green boredom a home" (*Translation Into Fiction* 14). In thus deleting the poetry of revenge from her agenda, Harris finds support in the words of Benita Parry, who argues that the poetics of revenge is "reverse discourse replicating [the poetics of negation] and therefore reinstating the linguistic polarities devised by a dominant centre to exclude and act against the categorised" (28). Perhaps this is the kind of argument that Lynnet Hunter tries to make but not very successfully in her reading of Philip to which I referred in Chapter Two. Parry contends further that the poetics of revenge "does not liberate the 'other' from the colonized condition . . . [and] the founding concepts of the problematic must be [therefore] refused" (28). When this happens, the post-colonial subject can strategize and

deliberate various forms of subversion, such as the signifying that Harris engages (*Fables From the Women's Quarters* 41), and as Homi Bhabbha argues, "turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" ("Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" 173). Moreover, as Walcott says, post-colonial conditions and sensibilities are not "marinated in the past." These sensibilities have not been exhausted. "It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new" ("What the Twilight Said: An Overture" 18). All this implies that the post-colonial poet desirous of effecting a change in how reality is perceived must create a discourse of inclusivity. She must seek a kind of polyglossic discourse that takes cognisance of all the discourses that have come to make her. "Collages would have to take form, languages would have to knock against each other, genres would have to dissolve" ("Why Do I Write?" 29), in order to forge that "unity and wrench [that] new identity" Laretta Ngcobo wants among all black people (4). Any other alternative, to Harris, leads to a form of suicide: "you don't learn to swim by / swimming against the current all you learn / so is how to drown" (*Drawing Down A Daughter* 77). What this says then is that, for the Africaribbean female writer living in Canada, language appropriation must become the most sensible tool of re-presenting her hybridity and refuting what Ashcroft et al. define as "the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience" (41).

When Harris asserts that languages will have to knock against each other, she does not mean the collage of different metropolitan languages that T. S. Eliot was wont to construct. I contend this is what she calls signifying, a system developed by African Americans and Africaribbeans as a linguistic strategy of survival. Signifying as a literary and political strategy did not however originate in a socio-historical vacuum among diasporic Africans. It has its roots in African trickster tales which were carried over to the Americas by the slaves.²⁵ Harris also may be referring to the Creole continuum--a combination of overlapping levels of usage and meanings from highbrow Standard English to Nation Language, even if she has some reservations about Creole's usefulness as a tool for permanent poetic expression ("Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" 308). She calls Creole, especially the Trinbagonian dialect, a "secret, witty, vivid, inventive, but linguistically it is simply sloppy speech" ("i dream of a new naming" 121). Harris is not the only Africaribbean-Canadian female writer to hold this dangerous view about the language of her people. Dionne Brand ("In Company of my Work" 367) also reveals her initial unwillingness to engage Trinbagonian Creole as a vehicle of communication in her early writing, not because she despises it, but because, as she argues, the racist structure of Canadian society tries to push all non-white elements to the exotic margins. To write in Creole would then mean to be multiply marginalized

²⁵For a thorough discussion on signifying see Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s book, The Signifying Monkey

and exoticized. But, paradoxically, Harris uses Creole freely and effectively in *Drawing Down A Daughter* to produce what for me is her finest poetry yet. Creole, then, alone as a major option for the articulation of alterity for Harris is inadequate. It cannot help the Africaribbean-Canadian female poet to "answer the question of authenticity. [Or] how to be true to the black self; to the female self; how to reflect accurately the Canadian experience" ("poets in limbo" 116). Considering Harris's agenda, this cannot be achieved through the politics of linguistic abrogation. Writing in Caribbean demotic to her means a loss of some "universal" appeal and readership, where "universal" means Euro-American standards of literature. But she believes she can "use the tone and rhythms of West Indian speech, its elisions, its vocabulary" without a change in her lexicon to reflect the pronunciation patterns she appropriates. ("i dream of a new naming" 125).

Perhaps Harris is not seeking verisimilitude in language as much as "rhythmic fidelity" (Ashcroft et al. 71). Her form of "syntactic fusion," therefore, transcends a purely linguistic preoccupation, for her language, as I will soon demonstrate, "includes allusion, the nature of imagery, and the metaphoric orientation of the language of an oppressed people" (71). This echoes Philip's arguments in her examination of Chomskyian theories of universality of grammar acquisition and the racist and bogus pseudo-scientificism of the Brocas and Wernickes. In effect, no single dialect of the English Language is adequate for the enunciation of an Africaribbean-Canadian experience.

If it is accepted, therefore, that language is the best vehicle for the articulation of consciousness; if it is accepted also that for those whose histories have been overlapped, negated, marginalised, colonized or otherwise, such as with poets who are female Africaribbeans, it is logical then also to accept that for such poets no monologism is adequate for the enunciation of those overlapping histories that can be claimed as theirs. This is what Philip means when she argues that the histories of both Africa and Europe are equally the collective histories of the Caribbean (*She Tries Her Tongue* 20). To claim overlapping histories is also to claim overlapping consciousness or what W E Du Bois calls "double consciousness." In order to, therefore, articulate this overlapping consciousness, the poet of overlapping histories must constantly alter her linguistic variables by testing every register for its appropriateness in expressing as accurately as possible her version and vision of truth for herself and for her community. This explains why Harris and other Africaribbean-Canadian poets refuse to privilege one sociolect/dialect/register over others in their work. To do so in their "topoglossic" environment would be to contribute to self-distortion, othering, and exoticization. To write totally in Creole in Canada, as an Africaribbean-Canadian, would be buying into Euro-Canadian deliberate creolization of the African in diaspora as enunciated in the ideology underlying multiculturalism. A majority of Africaribbean writers, including Harris, Philip, Brand and others living in double diaspora in the outposts of empire such as

Canada, have heeded the advice of Fanon and resisted it. Franz Fanon writes:

No, speaking pidgin-nigger closes off the black man [and woman]; it perpetuates a state of conflict in which the white man injects the black with extremely dangerous foreign bodies. Nothing is [therefore] more astounding than to hear a black[person] express [herself] properly, for then in truth he is putting on the white world.
(36)

Fanon's idea of putting on the white world is ambiguous. It directly refers to a physical and cultural assimilation into the world of the colonizer, but it also entails a contestation of that world through the language that has been used to deny her presences. Of course, Harris is keenly aware of the equally disempowering nature of assimilation, as her experience as a Canadian writer shows. As bell hooks has warned, an acceptance of any accommodationist pragmatic becomes "disempowering . . . [a way] for people from underprivileged backgrounds to consciously censor our [writing] so as to 'fit better' in settings where we are perceived as not belonging" (*Yearning, race, gender, and cultural politics* 90). Self-censorship involves an abandonment of personal experience for the sake of dominant mythologies and aesthetics of "universality." But the Africaribbean-Canadian female poet need neither abandon the marginalised self nor reject the dominant other. Harris is painfully and finally aware, (after trying to escape in her first four volumes from her Caribbean postmodern condition--the effects of slavery, colonization, neo-colonization and exile), that for many Africaribbeans, as Gikandi has stated, "creolization has come to represent a unique kind

of Caribbean modernism, one that resists the colonial structures through the diversion of the colonial language and still manages to reconcile the values of European literacy with the long repressed traditions of African orality" (16).

Lynette Hunter holds the same position even if she fails to read Harris's modernism as originating from her creole Caribbean culture. Indeed, because of her lack of insight into the oral subtexts that inform Harris's work, Hunter is able to focus only on the European origins of Harris's style and language (263-264). She also cannot recognize that the stylistic devices she observes in Harris's poetry result from the inability of the creolized individual to select one perceptual locationality. In locating Harris's work mostly among the Romantics, Hunter fails to respond to the nature of Caribbean speech patterns that Harris refers to above. Indeed, though Hunter offers some perceptive and positive readings of Harris, she nevertheless falls victim to the contemporary tendency to appropriate everything as a figure of post-modernism "because it opposes the synchronic vision of colonial historiography with the diachronic narrative of cross-cultural imagination" (Gikandi 17). Creolization is a centre-post of modernism and postmodernism. Its hybrid origins dictate that we read poets working in it as a resistance to European modernism and its consequences for non-European peoples in the period of European expansionism and colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Marlene Nourbese Philip, in "Dis Place The Space Between," argues convincingly that postmodernist discourse is the product of resistance to Euro-American and European

postmodernist imperialism and universalist monologism, and not a new system created by displaced and alienated Euro-critics (289). Hybridity, child of creolization, is a discourse of engagement of multiple discourses by a colonised and negated subaltern to establish a personal mode of self-positioning and valorization. This involves both a conscious and an unconscious process of activating and turning the marginalised subjectivity from the objectifying gaze of the colonizer, and refocusing it upon both the self and the colonizer (Ashcroft 83). This shift of perceptions both disorients and creates an egalitarian dialectic within a discourse of appropriation.

This politics of reinscription is best achieved through a competence in the discourse of innovative appropriation of both dominant and marginal discourse strategies. A common example of the method of competent innovative appropriation for the inscription of alterity is "the technique of code switching between two or more [voices] particularly in the literatures of the Caribbean continuum" (Ashcroft et al. 72). Code switching involves several features. A narrator in a poem, novel, or drama could use standard English for reportage while engaging Creole for representation of dialogue among characters. For instance, in *Drawing Down A Daughter*, the diarist uses standard English to describe her own emotional situation, but uses Creole for reported speech in the cookery lessons section of the poem:

Girl all of us in this family know how to make float how
to make bakes the real thing and acra not even your
father's mother make so good and pilau and callaloo with
crab & salt pork . . .

Child this is the gospel on bakes (44)

There is also the whole section from 50-66 in which the story of Burri and the soucoyant woman is narrated. In that narrative we have multiple voice variations to show the diglossic nature of Africaribbean discourse:

It is a matter of fact that the girl waits till the man from the capital begins to dress before she asks diffidently, "Where you leave your car?"

Burri buttons his shirt carefully before he replies, "It on the other side, near the big house. It park round the bend near the temple. Why you ask?" (50)

The code switching is not so straight forward in the way it is split between the narrator and characters in the story as these few lines may suggest. In the rest of this section, both Burri and the girl occasionally use standard English when it suits them. But there is no neat dividing line between when standard English or Creole is used. I must hasten to stress that diglossia of this type is, however, limiting. It tends to concretize and consolidates the stereotypes that are familiar in colonialists' narratives in which the native is perpetually creolized and diminished in narrative stature. To escape this trap, Africaribbean poets such as Philip and Harris engage a more polyglossic discourse in which every register becomes an enabling agent in the representation of the totality of their Africaribbean experience.

Language, it is generally accepted, is not just a semantic representation of experience and consciousness in a linear space. It is

more of a performative act of communication involving the self and the other. It is also recognised that no artist receives lexicons in virginal form. As Tzvetan Todorov writes,

the word is always impregnated by the practical situations and poetic contexts in which [the artist] has encountered it The work of the poet . . . can only [therefore] effect a few transvaluations, a few displacements in intonations that the poet and [her] audience perceive against a background of previous evaluations and previous intonations (48-49)

I have already observed how Philip is even more keenly aware of this in *She Tries Her Tongue*. In this book, Philip has argued powerfully for the recognition of the cultural, historical and gender biases that undergird the denotations of lexicons, and the power structures those meanings and other unspecified connotations prop up. She insists that every poet is "engaged in some form of dialogue with history, with literature, with the past, the present,--even the future--expanding, clarifying, or modifying what someone else has already said or is trying to say in some new way" (64). But as Nigel Thomas states, the difference between the Bakhtinian artist (writing from and to a history of apparent monocultural perspective) and Africaribbean women lies in the nature of Africaribbean women's peripheral and shadow realities assigned to them by the dominant cultures (64). Philip's position is supported by Harris when the protagonist in *Drawing Down A Daughter* meditates on the declensions of language: "Daughter there is no language / i can offer you no corner that is / yours unsullied" (24). What is allocated to her as an inheritance is ". . . the intransitive / case Anglo-Saxon noun" (24). In the English language, the Africaribbean is a passive

object that is acted upon, written upon and against by the English. Yet the Africaribbean has no easy recourse to a mother tongue like Yoruba or Dagaare in which to retaliate against this abuse of her "personhood" in a language that has been forced on her. A partial solution lies in appropriating this master discourse and turning it into her lilt and making it chip "to the beat of calypso" and create life where only death is offered (24). This is in spite of her total lack of any cultural referents such as ancestral gods, land or "shame or any tongue to exchange for his / harsh imperatives the quick curd consonants" (25). Any study of the language of Harris's poetry would, therefore, be one sided if only the denotative implications of her lexicons are examined. What must be done, therefore, is to diagnose and analyze the development of Harris's work within competing discourses in a horizontal historical framework, beginning from an obsession with high modernist poetics to those of post-colonial post-modernist pragmatics.

In her first book of poems *Translation Into Fiction* (1982), Harris submerges herself in the world of European poetics. Her style of privileging statements by modernist European writers as supertexts to initialise her own poetry must be seen as acts of continuation and consolidation within the ambience of innovative appropriation and not of blind mimicry. But even if we take it to be mimicry, it is of the kind that Homi Bhabha (129) conceives of as harbouring a "menace of . . . its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority." Through this kind of mimicry Harris is able to tutor herself out of the dominant discourse:

*One day
 the dust began to settle
 possessed of craftsman's hands
 she furnished a Builder
 she adopted the Shadows
 of Myth the poetry of others
 till possessed of metaphor
 she found
 The word was made flesh. (15)*

In this poem Harris, as in much of her early poetry, is concerned with the relationship between the genders as metaphors for the relationships between the colonized and the colonizer. In these poems she tries to explore the tensions in this relationship through the performative positioning of the voices on the page. Apart from reflecting the dialogic relationship in her writing, she also depicts the fragmented perception of the Africaribbean in Canada. Her typographic fragmentation, as in the work of Philip, not only demystifies the linear presentation of poetry on the page, but also intensifies the uncertainties that assail the new immigrant writer of Africaribbean descent. As well, it introduces the semantic and syntagmatic qualities of the silence that create the gaps in the fragmented typology, and helps the reader to enter into the constantly shifting, overlapping and competing discourses that inform the nature of the poet's vision. Each overlapping or diversion comments on and contests or supports another. As it was observed in Philip's poetry, Harris also engages this technique of multiple revisioning to subvert the monologism of Euro-Canadian discourses, and to challenge the received notions of what poetry on the page should look like, as she has been taught in her

colonial state in the Caribbean. The ostensible binarism that monologism engages becomes subverted. The reader is made to realize the impossibility of seeing poetic thought as moving through a linear space. This fact underpins the nonlinear origins of Harris's development as a post-colonial person. Her personality is a combination of competing juxtapositions of varying antecedents engendered in the cauldron of her history. Reading the several parts of the poem, or the several poems juxtaposed with each other in a unified way is, therefore, Harris's testament to the need to seek a symbiotic relationship of all voices for a new "personhood." For example, the poem "of Iron, Bars and Cages" (*The Conception of Winter* 1989) synchronizes three poems into one, but without destroying the complete individuality of the separate poems.

in	late summer evening softens angularities	in
half light	emphasises the roundness of women and hills	the rented
pliers	we four stare through drought dried grass	room
approach	to where below us the river deepens into black	under
the hair	above the brick-red massive rise of the	half
light		

(43)

Harris does not engage only the technique of fragmented typography. She, like Nourbese Philip, has tried successfully to combine subtexts as socio-historical grounding that give testimony and agency to her poetry. This style, which borders on documentary poetics, nevertheless transcends the banality of documentary poetics. It rises into the realm of fictional biography and signification as a narrative trope. I am here referring to the poems in *Fables From the Women's Quarters* (1984). The book opens with a recounting of the stories of both

a woman and a man,--images that have been interpreted as Male=Africa, Female=Africaribbean. In this reading, promises and non-fulfilments reflect the diminished linkages between Africa and the Caribbean caused by time, external interruptions, and distance. Harris then co-opts the testimonial narrative that historicizes suffering and pain through metaphor, by Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan girl, as a supertext to signify on European histories of slavery in the Caribbean, and casts doubt on what really constitutes Africaribbean history. The horrors enumerated in the prose section subvert and validate the subtext. In using Menchu's metaphorical recapitulation of the horrors that lie beneath Puerto Rican and Guatemalan histories, Harris joins George B. Handley (71) to rewrite Menchu's story as poetry, perhaps to create an epic of pain:

Once I heard a Ladino say "I am poor but listen I am not an Indian"; but then again I know Ladinos who fight with us and who understand we're human beings just like them.

Rigoberto Manchu (Guatemala)

All night the hibiscus tapped at our jealousies
dark bluster of its flower trying to ride in
on wind lacinated with the smell of yard fowl

. . .

There leached from you three hundred years of compliance
Now I sleep with my eyes propped open
lids nailed to the brow

*After their marriage my parents went into the mountains to establish a small settlement . . . they waited years for the first harvest. Then a **patron** arrived and claimed the land. My father devoted himself to travelling and looking for help in getting the rich landowners to leave us alone. But his complaints were not heard . . . they accused him of provoking disorder, of going against the sovereign order of Guatemala . . . they arrested him.*

Ladino: descendants of Spanish Jews who came to Guatemala during the Inquisition

From the testimony of Rigoberto Manchu translated by
 Patricia Goedicke A. P. R. January/February 1983.
 ("Where the Sky is a Pitiful Tent" 21)

In reading the poem, one is constantly compelled to read the subtexts as
 validatory footnotes to the poem. The subtexts act as a qualifier to the
 poem's thematic development, and help to demystify the illusiveness, and
 unify the narrative and reflective interpretations of its various
 voices. The style simultaneously upstages the poem as a creation of both
 the imagination and historical fact, and helps to demonstrate how a
 specific reality can be turned into a universal "faction" of
 identification (25). Harris articulates this theory of 'faction' through
 the narrator in *Drawing Down A Daughter* when she says: "For one thing, I
 doubt the ability of anyone to relate a series of facts accurately. For
 another, I doubt that it is possible to consider any event a fact except
 in the simplest use of the word" (58). Facts then are facts from the
 writer's perspective. A fact is a combination of events,
 interpretations, and autobiography narrated within a cultural context.
 This discourse on the lack of boundaries between fact, fiction and
 autobiographical interpretation becomes a discourse on "marvelous
 realism." This brings me to the significance of the introductory and end
 quotations of "Where the Sky is a Pitiful Tent."

The significance of the introductory quotation, and the final
 definition of who a Ladino is cannot be lost to the informed
 Africaribbean who is aware that all oppressed people no matter their

race, creed or colour, must come together to resist their oppressors. The displacement of the girl and her family when their land is seized by the patron is analogous to the displacement of Native people, Jews, and Africaribbean people by colonizing European people. In writing the poem, Harris joins the girl to tell their stories. In allowing the girl's voice to be heard in the poem, Harris escapes the charge of voice appropriation. The poem also testifies to the similarities between what Harris is doing --speaking to a world audience against oppression--and what the girl's father does in the girl's narrative.

This poem's style is also used in "Seen in Storm light," set in post civil-war Nigeria. Here, Harris provides a double vision of Lagos and Nigeria, one in prose, the other in poetry which reflects her double response to Nigeria--as a returning daughter and as a foreigner. She challenges those critics who contend that autobiography cannot be fictional, a position Philip also takes in her writings, or engage the high modernist Eliotic ideology of dissociation of sensibility and objective correlation. The linguistic devices that become expanded in her poems have appeared in her journals, where diary entries share the same space with poetry. In short, Harris's style involves a constant self-critique, a constant questioning of the notions of genre boundaries. She displaces linear patterns of literary and cultural practice and thus "provides a basis for a discursive re-presentation of the paradoxes and ambiguities which underlie the figures of colonizer and colonized in discourse" (Murdock 88). Harris's desire is to relocate what Murdock has called the "diegetic traces of colonial encounter in a

new framework" in order to explode the pluralisms and polarities of colonial and neo-colonial authority (88).

One cannot constantly run away from one's roots. Harris has tried very successfully to integrate Euro-Canadian discourses into her poetry, but as she matures in her fifth book she realises that a reversion to her roots can strengthen her ideal and give her a much more nurturing space to articulate her particular vision. So she adapts another element of the Creole linguistic located in the art of storytelling in the Caribbean. Some critics may not see her retreat into Creole in this work beyond the spiritualization of her poetic sensibility,--a spiritual odyssey back to Africa via Trinidad. Teresa Zackodnik has read the poem merely as the African woman's perception, definition and repossession of her femininity, motherhood and mothering (16-25), which was denied her by her enslavers and colonizers, and which is separate from that of the white woman's. It is, however, I believe, Harris's testament of retreat from and attack on the major discourses that she has tried so unsuccessfully to enter. It is a will that Harris leaves for her generic Africaribbean-Canadian daughter. A will that points out what it means to be an Africaribbean and a female in both Canada and the Caribbean. A will that points out alternative counter-discourses without imposing choices. It is also "in semiotic terms . . . [an] important [move] for evoking a protodialectical counter-discourse" (Gikandi 47). This retreat is shown half way through a poem narrativized in Standard English but which moves into Creole prose narrative, from an individualized voice to a group voice and performance (*Drawing Down A Daughter* 52-58). The tonal

shifts of the old woman make her tale transcend the limited immediacy of location; "her tale is not only a small meeting: chance and the implacable at the crossroads, i.e. in the individual. Her tale is a celebration, and a binding of community. . . . There is something in the ancestral, of Africa in this" (52). The narrative also moves from discursive meditation to analytical participation (22-25), from private monologue to public dramatic dialogue (50-52, 68-71), from a setting in a room to cross boundary locations, from collective oral performance and creativity to a theory of personal writing within cultural margins (100). All these put together are Harris's attempt to resist structural identifications and meanings by asserting these alternative structures for conceiving and perceiving reality. Indeed, the language slippage, the locational permutations and transmutations, the character metamorphosis, all create a dream world in which everything becomes a montage, a kaleidoscope of meaning. The intertwining of folktale and reality blends the boundaries of the two and approximates what has been described as the quality of magic realism in literature: In magic realism two or more separate narrative modes are engaged without any achieving any ascendancy. Stephen Slemon writes that "this sustained opposition forestalls the possibility of interpretive closure through any act of naturalizing the text to an established system of representation" (11-12). *Drawing Down A Daughter* seems to support Slemon's argument in its complaint against the limitations imposed on artist through theory and genre divisions:

God dispersed
 while we
 confined by words
 trapped in numbers
 and time
 seek
 to deconstruct creation

lost the power of orbiting hips of ceremony
 and chant lost the drums that could tempt Him
 to join us in shaping a world our feet stamping
 the rhythms of life (42)

Again, such a method is a framing in which power of knowing and knowledge from any perspective is contested but not affirmed. The Caribbean world is a "world in which each fact like the legs of runners photographed at slow speeds is an amalgam of variations of itself. Myriad versions of event reaching out of time, out of space, individual to each observer" (62). *Drawing Down A Daughter*, therefore, is the culmination of all that Harris has tried to do in her earlier poetry and critical writing. It is a recall to her language (24), her self, her consciousness as a Canadian writer of Africaribbean origins contributing her part to Canada's search for a literary tradition of her own. Using the Caribbean myth of La Diabliesse,²⁵ Harris articulates her own uncertain position, and the question of truth versus fact. The myth of La Diabliesse will be discussed in further detail in Chapter four when I

²⁵ In Trinidadian folklore, La Diabliesse refers to the devil's own bride. She comes out at night to woo unsuspecting males who are also out on the prowl for women to spend the night with. She is always very attractive and wears a large hat that conceals her face, and a long dress that conceals her cloven feet, the mark of the devil. She invites the unsuspecting male to go with her to her home for the night. On the way she misleads him and finally causes psycho-spiritual and emotional harm to the man (Mendes 85).

study the poetry of Cynthia James and her use of various Trinbagonian myths to articulate her views of Africaribbean female "personhood."

To conclude this chapter, I wish to touch briefly on the topic of Harris's verse syntax. Since Harris's pursuit is for a poetic against closures, she normally rejects the use of speech markers such as periods, commas, and other punctuation. Her verse, like that of Philip's, can accurately be described as free running or trotting "proseotry"--prose poetry. This style of writing is deliberate on the part of both Harris and Philip. Harris and Philip are agents of contestations of frames and closures. They are also deconstructive reconstructionists, producing untamed, unframed verse patterns that are analogous to the mental shifts of "participactors" on the grounds of festival theatres. The stuttering permutations and realignments reflect the freedom of unexpected voice liberation and a frantic search for a rhetoric of recovery devoid of the limitations of nostalgia (*Translation Into Fiction* 42 and *Drawing Down A Daughter* 72-74; 92-94). But in this display of unlimited freedom, both Harris and Philip constantly risk misreading from those searching for identifiable frames with which to interpret their own illusions/delusions. As Rahim has argued, the removal of tone markers and rhythmic movements leaves the poems open to any reading. But if these poets are contesting the hegemony of closures, we do not expect them to fall into the same trap of writing poems that engage the techniques of closures, and othering through the use of tone markers. Moreover, since their ideology is concerned with space creation, (Harris's poetry has a lot of blank spaces interspersing the

lines), the use of intonation markers would be tantamount to a manipulation of the reader into her own particular version of truth. This supports the theory that both poets perceive the life of the Africaribbean woman as a constant and fluid movement that "resist(s) all constructions of definitions--all paradox and complexity that cannot be neatly contained, understood or represented" (Rahim 269). Indeed, it is "only a geometric arrangement of cones / cast in a suitable light" (*Fables from the Women's Quarters* 34). Harris's grammar is a grammar of the heart in which the poet lives in language examining each word for its effectiveness in inscribing her presence into the world of her exclusion, as she writes in *The Conception of Winter*:

. . . at first she examined each word
 skin peeled back green flesh squeezed between
 thumb and forefinger till she tasted sentences
 . . . waited
 for the aftertaste in sound grew in her as
 if she hummed as if humming she sang

in here i
 here i am in
 herein i am in and am
 indifference
 i differ in here
 am different her and
 in indifference am
 within difference
 am difference no
 defence with
 out herein
 i am in

in this monotony and as if she had absorbed
 the word into her blood thus it began to flower
 in silence ("A Grammar of the Heart" 52)

I have hazarded this lengthy quotation to show that Harris is as much preoccupied with the poetics of reinscription as is Philip. It also

demonstrates a common origin of their pain and their resolve to ameliorate it through language. But in the case of Harris, her journey to this point has been rather long and tortuous. The arrival at an acceptance of the Caribbean Creole continuum as a worthy mode for artistic enunciation points to what I intend to discuss in Chapter Three.

There is a link between the poetry of Harris and of Philip in their odysseys towards self and racial affirmation. Both of them are engaged in a frustrating and a painful journey to selfhood in a foreign land, doubly removed from their origins, and triply marginalized in their new location. But their discovery of the echoes of the restorative power of their native Africaribbean culture is still problematic because of their cultural relocation in Canada. Here, both Harris and Philip recognize the urgency in their new location to find/create meanings and stories to fill the vacuum that "the unstoried doom of symbol / of [their] language / stolen in the predawn" (*Traveling To Find A Remedy* 15) by Euro-Americans. They are engaged in the "search for the language to bind / [them] forever to that corridor" (*Drawing Down A Daughter* 90) where the "frail bridge / of words / . . . anchors" (*Traveling To Find A Remedy* 15) the islands in their separateness. But their minoritarian and alienating positionality in Canada prevents them from fully utilizing the rich and varied artistic media available to a writer like Lorna Goodison. As I shall show in Chapter 4, there are some differences between the poetics of recuperation that Goodison, writing from her overwhelmingly Africaribbean society in Jamaica, is able to employ, as

against the sketchiness of cultural material available to Harris and Philip in their diasporic locations. I will argue that the obstacles both Philip and Harris have to overcome in their fight for space and voice in Canada are not the same problems that Goodison faces in Jamaica. None the less, her poetic will is complementary to Philip's and Harris's in the way she transcends combativeness or assimilationist tendencies, and assumes a visionary approach towards the heartease each of these poets seeks. In a way, then, Goodison's poetic is, as I shall demonstrate, a nurturing one in which a collective consciousness and communitarian poetic becomes the rhetoric for self and collective recuperation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lorna Goodison and the Poetic of Heartease

This really was a shameful relationship, one big
negation of her humanity from beginning to end.
But she finds her voice and says, never come her
to beg you anything. . . . For me know say
retribution going to take care of you
(*Baby Mother and the King of Swords* 43)

And I have been a tightrope walker all my life
that is, tightrope has been my main occupation
In between stints in sundry fraudulent circuses
I've worked at poetry, making pictures . . .
(*I Am Becoming My Mother* 27)

what I learn can hold under the cover of one
word. **LOVE**. . . . I will tell you about it in my
songs (*Baby Mother* 17)

We've buried our hope
too long
as the anchor to our
navel strings
we are rooting at
the burying spot
we are uncovering
our hope. ("We Are the Women." *Selected Poems* 35)

I speak no judgement
this voice is to heal
to speak of possibility
.
No judgement I speak
that function is not mine
I come only to apply words
to a sore and confused time
(*"Heartease III."* *Selected Poems* 103-104)

In Chapters Two and Three, I explored the contestatory positionalities of Philip and Harris in their encounters with marginalization in Canada, and the various strategies each engages toward amelioration. My purpose in this chapter is to examine how Lorna Goodison navigates the paths of pain, born out of the history of slavery, to locations of healing from a majoritarian positionality. Her location in Jamaica, in an overwhelming Africaribbean society, creates for Goodison a more central location from which she speaks. This differs from the peripheral locations of Philip and Harris. Most Jamaicans are of West African origin and their culture is therefore closely related to West African cultures. The predominance of this African presence in Jamaica is a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade during which millions of Africans were involuntarily and forcibly transported to North and South America and the Caribbean to work on tobacco and sugar plantations. The end of the trade saw large African populations left 'stranded' as majorities on all the Caribbean islands including Jamaica.

Born in 1947, Goodison is a contemporary of Philip and Harris. Her birth coincided with the period of political agitation and the rise of recuperative ideologies such as Garveyism. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican by birth, and the founder of Garveyism, believed that the only way for Africans in diaspora to liberate themselves was for them to repatriate to Africa. To translate this ideology into action, he founded the Black Star Shipping Line to transport people back to Africa. He also founded the largest Black movement in the United States in the 1940s -- which later collapsed when he was arrested. But in spite of the demise of

Garvey, Garveyism survives in the Rastafarian religion, a religion that contributes a lot to Afri-Jamaican cultural and language revival within pre- and post-independent Caribbean societies.

Thus, Goodison grew up at a time when the central debates about independence in Jamaica also incorporated the issue of language and the place of Creole in the politics of cultural reclamation. As Le Page et al. write, the dissolution of social and racial barriers to the political, social and educational advancement of Jamaicans of African descent also meant a dramatic change in the "Linguistic situation in the island" (114). Le Page's 1960s observation has been updated and validated by Pauline Christie, who contends that "Creole has been expanding its domain" throughout the Caribbean because of the "favourable post-colonial socio-political climate in these islands" (208). Such manifestation of acceptance of Creole as an agent of progress toward collective wholeness, a transcendence of anxieties of insecurity and threats of amnesia, supports Edward Chamberlin's conclusion that Goodison's engagement of the Jamaican linguistic continuum is a playful combination of the common and the uncommon as a way of drawing attention to self. Chamberlin here implies that Goodison's style is structured within her creative exploration of the Africaribbean linguistic system, in which Creole and Standard English not only contest, but also complement each other for space and agency.

Goodison's style is a further testimony to the fact that the Caribbean language continuum is not easily dichotomised. Consequently, to call a language situation a continuum implies all kinds of

possibilities: linearity, cyclicity, and spirality. Linearity assumes a beginning that moves toward some point of departure into what is not at the beginning. Cyclicity means beginning neither from a position of superiority nor from one of subordination in the continuum, but being situated in revolutions that keep changing as options demand articulation. Spiral continuum implies a combination of the linear and the cyclical with ascendancies and declivities in voice articulation. Goodison's linguistic praxis explores all these possibilities, thus defusing any attempt to limit her poetic to any one particular category. She writes in *Heartease* (32):

But that being the spider's direction
means each day finds us further away
Dem stick wi up
dem jook wi down
and when dem no find
what dem come fi find
them blood we and say
"walk wid more next time".

So, take up divining again
and go inna interpretation
and believe the flat truth
left to dry on our tongues.
Hearteae distance
cannot hold in a measure
it say travel light
you are the treasure. ("Heartease I")

The image of the spider not only evokes the trickster figure of Anansi in both Ghanaian and Jamaican folklore, but it also conjures a powerful image of multi-directional mobility and connectedness. I say this because it also connotes the crisscross nature of the spider's web.

Goodison's poetry speaks a language of wholeness in and to a community hurting from the consequences of the historical distortions in slavery, colonialism and neo-imperialism. These divisions (which run along class, colour, and gender lines) cause psycho-emotional instabilities that drive people toward either amnesia, psychosis, or violence. Goodison believes poetry must be responsive and responsible to the aspirations of people. She also believes poetry must be so crafted that its language, imagery, emotion, and functionality can transcend effervescent catharsis and transform its rhetoric of recovery into a permanent locus of psycho-emotional and spiritual healing. Goodison, like other Africaribbean poets such as Una Marson, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Claude McKay and Louise Bennett, embraces the Afri-Jamaican linguistic continuum, together with her own experimental mythopoetics and spirituality, to strategize and realize a potential for racial and gender reclamation.

My interest in Goodison's poetics of recovery differs slightly from my preoccupations in chapters two and three. There I examined the contestatory and integrationist poetics of recovery, engaged by Philip and Harris, via postmodern theories of corporeality, epistemology, locationality, and post-coloniality. But as the first epigraph to this chapter makes clear, Goodison's project contests for neither voice, nor audience, nor space within any dominant poetic. She has locution; she has audience. She also has the instrument of resistance and healing-- Love. Love and Forgiveness enable her to negotiate the cultural, ideological, and a linguistic delta of the Africaribbean personality.

For Goodison then, as well as for Philip, Harris, James and other female Africaribbean poets, writing itself is more than a re-navigation of mapped literary landscapes; it is a re-mapping of sensibilities within entrapped, dislocated, and shifting modes of articulation that are both communal and personal.

Re-mapping is a psychodynamic restitution that is not physical but psycho-emotional and spiritual. To Goodison such restitution does not issue from vituperation, but from bisociation and a reparative conjoining of feelings, rituals, and symbols in which those differences that cause pain are reconciled. Restoration in this case then transcends the simplicity of ideological or physical endeavour. It is reparative creativity, and for Goodison, it supersedes any individual ontological insecurity. It signals the individual Africaribbean's adoption of her community's recompositions of self out of the terrifying experiences endured during slavery and colonization by imperial Europe. Reparative creativity, as has been discussed in relation to both Philip's and Harris's poetry, may involve aggressive posturing, assimilative re-appropriation, or abrogation in order to engage the discourse of negation. For Goodison, recovery poetics has one aim: flushing out the internalization of guilt and insufficiency caused by Euro-American negations of the African "Other" from the psyche of the Africaribbean before healing can take place.

But for Goodison this process entails the development of maternal impulses that initiate space(s) for healing the wounded Africaribbean personhood. These impulses establish a nurturing voice to sustain the

consciousness of healing. Goodison's poetic deceptively eschews violence in whatever form. It seeks rather to bequeath a "legacy of hope out of the depths of despair in which they [Africaribbeans] found themselves" (Chamberlin 55). Her recovery rhetoric positivizes and centers new symbols of self that defy any negating and marginalizing constructs set against them. In an interview with Anne Walmsley, Goodison enunciates this validating, self-reflecting symbolism, when she describes how in childhood, she refuses to construct herself according to European aesthetics of physical appearance:

I was at primary school, about 7 or 8, and sad to say in those days Jamaican children used to do drawings and paintings of people and they were all white people. I remember doing this painting of a lady sitting down, I remember mixing red and yellow and black together and I painted this lady a very dark brown. The children laughed and they said, "You've painted an African lady." And the teacher said to them, "But you know, that's really ridiculous, because a lot of you look like that lady." . . . It just affirmed something for me very much in my head. (232)

The difference between Goodison on the one hand and Philip and Harris on the other, lies then in the obsessional defense mechanisms engaged by both Philip and Harris to combat the marginalization and exoticization of Africanadians by the dominant Euro-Canadian literati and academia. In *Creativity as Repair*, Andrew Brink discusses creativity as "a learned self-protective style of relating to other people which originated by internalizing both accepting and rejecting aspects of the mother to reduce conflict with her" (25). Mother in this case may imply a dominant culture or language such as English in Philip's *Her Silence*

Softly Breaks. In summarizing Harry B. Levey's (later Lee) re-articulation of Kleinian psychodynamic theories on creativity as a self-healing engagement, Brink stresses this relationship between obsessionality and image creation in language which legitimates and gives a moral agency to reaction formations in a split consciousness. In people with split or double consciousness "dualisms prevail and if hostile yet desirous feelings toward an object are projected," [there will be . . .] "profound implications for imagery in the arts" (26). Brink's reference to emotional states of being, such as hate and guilt, as determinants of a moral agency to sub-defence systems in "obsessionality, reaction formation" (26) carries some validity to a certain degree in relation to the creative spirit of Philip, Harris, Goodison, and James. For instance, Brink's later modifications to his theory, to include individual responses to combined situations of rage and helplessness in oppressive relationships (67), can be adapted to account for the devastating psychosomatic effects on individuals caused by racism, imperialism, and sexism.

Racism and sexism, as I pointed out in Chapters Two and Three cause slightly different reactions in Philip and Harris in the way they relate to parent/child relationships. I argued that, whereas Philip stresses the empowering quality of the mother-daughter relationship, Harris questions such a relationship, and strategizes against its disempowering nature within inter-gender politics. The result: amnesia. The reaction: a striving in *Drawing Down A Daughter* for what Adreinne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* calls

"memory and connectedness against amnesia and nostalgia" (144-145), when just "breaking the silences, telling [their] tales is not enough" (146), but must be accompanied by "historical responsibility . . . [that] places the weight of existence on the line, cast [their] lot with others, move from an individual consciousness to a collective one" (146). This is the case with Goodison, in spite of the fact that her poetry neither contests for space nor seeks strenuously for a language and practice of deterritorialization. She writes from an Africaribbean society with a highly developed Africentred consciousness which guarantees that in Jamaica, Goodison tells Walmsley, no person of African descent grows up with the "image of being a minority . . . [or] think(s) in terms of being a minority" (51).

None the less, this does not diminish the implications of the articulatory mode(s) she chooses. She must, like Philip, negotiate between the demands of the larger non-Caribbean audience outside the Caribbean, and the smaller but nationalistic Caribbean audience, who look for a continuation of the development of Jamaican as a medium for scribal literature. Goodison tries to avoid these dichotomies by evolving a poetic of love, healing, and recuperation which precludes judgementality and revenge whether against racial bigotry or gender inequalities. I do not by any stretch of the imagination suggest that Goodison is an assimilationist. She recognises the importance of demystifying the negative stereotypes chaining Africaribbeans through language, socio-economic and political structures. But she believes that while some are recovering the mangled remains of the Africaribbean

psyche from Euro-American historiographies, others too must set to nurturing and healing these broken souls. The two roles, far from being dichotomous are in reality complementary.

Consequently, what Goodison seeks, as she says, is "space in her thinking, a place of possibility . . . a place of making a choice, . . . so that [my] eyes reflect all the light [I have] drawn into [me] and [I don't] envy anybody anything because all [my] need(s) is inside [me] . . ." (*Baby Mother* 59). Reaching this possibility through poetry is very precarious, writes Chamberlin, "when the dominions of hope and hate divide the land" (153-154). The poet in such a situation cannot be angry but must concentrate all impulses upon negotiating the fine line of the tightrope to reach Heartease. Reaching Heartease means encountering those possibilities that can generate the energy for the salvatory loosening of "the salt cords / binding our tongues" in order to release "grace rains, shower / and water the hope flower" ("Songs of Release II." *Selected Poems* 78).

But what is Heartease in the Africaribbean sense in general and to the Africaribbean female in particular? Does Heartease refer to one or all of the three geo-physical locations situated in the remote hilly countryside of Jamaica? Is it merely analogical of "places on the island with names such as Tranquillity and Content," or an allegory of what Edward Baugh in "Goodison's Road to Heartease" romantically constructs as "rural folkways, the simple strength of peasant values, . . . and the peacefulness of hill-country life [?]" (13). It is true the word Heartease refers to all these but Baugh does not analyze these external

realities and the metaphors of meaning beyond them deeply enough. I am thinking of the journey motif that Baugh suggests so lucidly without developing. For me, reaching Heartease implies a long and circuitous journey that involves a project of historical recovery of the African-Jamaican self through collective faith and a judicious combating of the negative consequences of their forced removal from Africa to the Caribbean. That journey for Goodison does not imply a physical relocation to Africa. As she says "Heartease distance / cannot hold in a measure" ("Heartease I." *Heartease* 32). It is what Edouard Glissant defines as a transcendence over the limitations of the trickster's strategies of diversion and derision, used by slave/colonized communities to subvert a dominating power, through linguistic pidginization and religious syncretism (19-22). Glissant is aware of the opprobrious nature of his position (20), vis-a-vis post-colonial theorists's excavation of such trickster tactics for concealed codes to reclaim the identities of formerly oppressed people. Glissant does not dismiss these strategies outright. His problem with them arises where diversion becomes an end in itself and not a means to an end. He sites Haiti which converts linguistic diversion into a "productive and responsible language of the people" (21), a process that has not been totally achieved in the rest of the Caribbean. Jamaica comes closer to achieving this in spite of resistance from among the Anglophile middle classes. For Glissant, therefore, a transcendence of diversion/derision involves the creation of a viable collective ethos, from the corpse of transplantation, and the eternal batteries of negations (14-16).

Glissant's theory explains the inability and/or reluctance of Philip and Harris to engage the Caribbean demotic as a productive poetic medium. Luckily for Goodison, Jamaican music such as Reggae, Rock Steady, and religions such as Rastafarianism have managed to break through international barriers and thus provide her with solid foundations on which to build an "overcoming" collective poetic.

Goodison's trip to Heartease, therefore, is a journey of transcendence over despair, not a diversion, or what Glissant calls the "parallactic displacement" of hopelessness (16). It is the development of an attitude of communal release, a collective atonement, comradeship. It involves both men and women and the philosophy is couched in the language of Africaribbean spirituality. The road to Heartease is "The Road of the Dread." On this road . . . "when yu meet another traveler / who have flour and yu have water and man and man / make bread together" (*Tamarind Season* 23). In sharing, the journey becomes light and joyous. To reach Heartease, the strategy of mobility cannot be artificially grafted onto the self from what Baugh labels the "archetypal reality in Jamaican folk consciousness" (14). It means the quester/poet must be ready to act not only as the voice of conscience, but also as performer/interpreter of the strategies and impulses of the community. Goodison enacts this communal project in the way she unabashedly engages Creole, Caribbean religious syncretism, and the mythical world of the Africaribbean.

Goodison embraces post-colonialist resistance strategies as mediations of the multiple contradictions imposed by Eurocentric

historiography, and works toward an initiation of an "affirmation of the urgency of a revaluation of the conventions of analytic thought"

(Glissant 65). Gikandi, reading Glissant reading Walcott, contends that Walcott's rejection of Africaribbean history conveyed in Europhone discourse becomes a "creative force" that negates the "European model of history anchored on notions of progress and temporal closure" (9).

Goodison, together with Philip, Harris, and James, accepts this task of converting the Africaribbean's obsession with her so-called historylessness into what Glissant has termed "the prophetic vision of the past" (64).

Chamberlin likens Goodison's "prophetic vision of the past" to Adrienne Rich's reading of Emily Dickinson. Rich in *Of Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* contends that Dickinson is one of the "witnesses, endowed to speak for those who do not have the gift of language and to see for those who are less conscious of what they are living through, a voice of hope and healing" (155). Goodison herself claims this advantage in conversation with Narain De Caires Denise, and in "Judges." She tells us that in writing *Tamarind Season*, she just needed to "cry out about a lot of things . . . about myself, about other women, about Jamaica, about the world in my own small way" (Goodison 20). In an interview with Narain DeCaires (20), Goodison goes further to state that ". . . in *I Am Becoming My Mother* I felt I had been given this job to correct some things, to write down those things, to tell stories for people, their truth, their versions . . . like my grandmother, Winnie Mandela, and so on." In "Jamaica," Goodison

recognizes her position as the scribe of the people. This is evident in her Walcottian ("Mass Man") lamentation for the grip of capitalism's consumptive greed on Jamaican society:

And mine the task of writing it down
as I ride in shame round this blood-stained town.
And when the poem refuses to believe
and slimes to aloes in my hands
mine is the task of burying the dead
I the late madonna of barren lands. (10)

However exulting this recognition of her position as community rapporteur is, Goodison does not actualize it very well until she comes to *I Am Becoming My Mother*. The later Goodison not only articulates the language of anger, but she also manages a transcendence over anger's despair by appropriating the rhetoric of female resistance. In "Bend Down Plaza" (11), "We Are The Women" (12-13), and "Garden of the Women Once Fallen" (14-15), Goodison sets the rhythm that underscores the rest of the book, a style she explores further in *I Am Becoming My Mother*.

However, I do not feel so secure, as Chamberlin does, in making the argument that Goodison is a prophet and a priest for ordinary Jamaicans. Is she not one of the "we with the straight eyes / and no talent for cartography" ("Heartease I." *Heartease* 32)? Is she not situated more as a conduit through which what these people have already known, resisted, and expressed can be made acceptable to upper and middle class intellectual and urban Africaribbeans? Are her voice and vision not directed to those perplexed by the illusion of mimesis of the European world? I suggest, therefore, even if Goodison is speaking on behalf of, and with the silent majority, her words, none the less, are

heard more by the Europhiles in the Caribbean. It is to this category of Africaribbeans, who like her, need to reach heartease via the way of the Dread. Goodison's appropriation of the world and vision, voice and aspiration, of the silent majority is, therefore, a strategy of providing instructional material to help clarify the flummoxed minds of these Europhiles. The vision and voice of the ordinary people need no validation or legitimation through identification of sameness with Euro-American discourse, a discourse that rejects and contests their very being. There is a vast difference, then, between a poet writing to express merely the "self and the forces within the self" (Rich 181) in the case of Dickinson, and Goodison's activist avantgardism for the collective cultural and historical transformation and restitution of her race. This in no way diminishes Dickinson's contribution to the world of poetry, and the way her particular talent enabled her to contest and subvert the marginalization and silencing of the Euro-American female voice within her historical and socio-cultural location. However, Dickinson's location as a white female in a historical period in an America that did not recognise the personhood of the African American woman, nor provided her any personal space in which to articulate her self, makes Dickinson an unlikely foremother to claim for Goodison. Moreover, Goodison's position is validated by the aesthetic and functional locations of the artist in post-slave, and neo-colonial societies. In these nationalities, the artist would be irrelevant if s/he produces art with no functional values as well as aesthetic pleasure for the community.

Following the reservations I have raised above, and in consonance with the politics of post-colonial discourse in former colonies (not settler ones), I want to suggest that the general consciousness of Goodison's poetic is communitarian, not individualistic. But this communitarian consciousness has shifts of focus that zero in on class, sexuality, spirituality, and location. The subtle differences these shifting focalizations may suggest are real, but they do not override Goodison's place in the general current that informs Africaribbean women's writing, a current that defines their writing as an articulation of the experiences of resistance to alienation within alienation. One example of this multiple alienation that Africaribbean women contend with daily is the "inchoate pain of women writers from the English speaking Caribbean," (Abruna 86) who since the 1830s have been speaking and writing "very fine poetry and fiction," (86) but have never been mentioned until recently in Caribbean anthologies or studies (86). So the burden on Goodison, similar to what Philip argues in her work, is for her to negotiate effectively among these sites of alienation in order to reach out in language and theme, in vision and symbol to all, but especially to middle class women. Thus, Goodison tries to avoid the politics that seek to privilege one mode of expression in the Caribbean over the other.

For instance, in "My Will" (*Selected Poems* 45-46), Goodison takes up the issue of the unnatural dichotomy forced upon the multi-filiated modes of articulation by the neophytes of Europhonic discourse practice in the Caribbean. She rejects this false dichotomization and engages the

flexibility and richly liberating linguistic continuum. This explains the rationale behind the warning by Ashcroft et al. against the blind adoption of "universalist"--Eurocentric--rules of language variance to describe the complexities of the Caribbean language/Creole continuum. The Creole continuum demonstrates complex polyrhythmic, polyglossic, syncopated, cross-rhythmic discourse practices as outgrowths of multiple languages, histories of subjugation, negation, and resistance.

Chamberlin declares that "it is in Goodison's language as much as in anything else that she combines the ordinary with the uncommon" (197). I read "ordinary" to imply Standard English, what the powerful urban Europhiles recognise as language, while "uncommon"--Creole--implies the idiom of "downpressed" Africaribbean people. Chamberlin's statement thus becomes problematic. It signifies an attempt to praise while yielding to an invitation to exoticize. So, in order to forstall any exoticization of Goodison's poetry, Chamberlin demonstrates sameness between Goodison's engagement of the Creole continuum and Euro-American literary practice of diglossia (135-137). But this is exactly what Gikandi refers to as a colonising system of reading: a way of dismissing "the tangible reality of the creole culture . . . as an unreal construct, while the fictions promoted by the colonial textbook are now adopted as the `real' Caribbean referent" (27).

Goodison's engagement with the Creole continuum liberates her and situates her within what, *In The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*, Gordon Rohlehr calls "alternative registers, tropes, modes and moulds for shaping," and helps them to reformulate their individual and

collective identities (165). For Rohlehr also, the recognition and interrogation of the absurdities created by the insistence on "non-negotiable" dichotomies between Creole and Standard English open up a "limitless range of prosodic, rhetorical, and musical shapes, which inevitably became the basis of new making" (164-165), a new aesthetic--an aesthetic continuum that subverts the theories of thesis and antithesis (60). The articulatory trajectory of Africaribbean cultural expression resides, therefore, in both a conscious and an unconscious mobility among/between competing and intersecting/complementary locutions.

But this infinite capacity for shapes and meanings that Rohlehr sees as a strength in the Creole continuum is to Glissant an unproductive and irresponsible weakness. It is a diversionary tactic in which the Creole continuum develops a "continuous process of undermining its innate capacity for transcending its [European] origins" and achieves only "systematic process of derision" for the master's language (20). So even among Africaribbean intellectuals there is no uniformity of opinion. My critique of Chamberlin here, therefore, in no way suggests the impossibility of coming to Africaribbean poetry through Euro-American theory. After all, some of these theories are based on negations of Africaribbean personhood, or are written on the bodies or cultural texts of Africaribbeans. Cases in point include aspects of magic realism, post-modernism, post-colonialism and feminism.

For instance, Evelyn O'Callaghan and Laura Niesen De Abruna have both ably applied feminist and post-colonial theories to reconstruct

Caribbean female subjectivity as found in the works of Caribbean women writers. This subjectivity, they argue, does not originate in the alienation caused by social zombification, and is, therefore, not to be conflated or confused with a Euro-modernist/feminist poetic of alienation. Caribbean female subjectivity comes across as a multi-pollinated yet integrated agent of society (O'Callaghan 69-80), and is captured in constructive inter-code mobility. This creates a prismatic scenario in which the power of self-representation is not monoglossic, nor simply diaglossic, but polyglossic and multidimensional, diffused and interlaced, thus producing a sense of collective enunciation. This nuance of collectivity is what insinuates and instigates the voice of healing in Goodison's poetry. As Goodison's engagement of the Creole continuum situates her language in the blurred boundaries of class, its achievement echoes Waugh's idea of the "collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity in relationships" (10). For Abruna, subjectification and identification of the Caribbean female are enmeshed in the tensions "resulting from a prolonged period of symbiosis between mother and [daughter] especially because the mother views her daughter as a narcissistic extension of herself" (93).

Narain Denise De Caires, writing on Nicols, Das, Goodison, and Philip, explores the overlapping terrains between post-colonial and feminist theory. She then stresses the impossibilities of female voice authentication devoid of the female body. She examines how some feminists from dominant centres appropriate the voices and bodies of

anti-colonial, neo-colonial, and post-colonial females in order to articulate their own anti-patriarchal discourses (23-35). Narain sees this as a secondary marginalization of the post-colonial female body, an addition to the silences caused by the historical peripheralization, appropriation, overexploitation, and patriarchal overprotectionism of Africaribbean woman. This double silencing of Africaribbean women results in their female poets being left with no alternative tool of constructing individuation outside corporeal referentiality.

In a contrary vein, however, Narain argues that this engagement of body as a metaphor of self-reclamation is done in an "over-determined context" of gender roles and female sexuality that are defined by Euro-American patriarchal notions of femininity (27). The cogency of her conclusion lies in her conflation of the fluidity of Africaribbean female identity with the transitoriness of the Creole continuum in which Creole has been associated with "women's language." Creole is described as the language of private discourse in which the culture of the people is created and preserved, while Standard English is seen as the language of the public sphere of politics, education, economics, high art (27). Narain's observation is interesting because of its theoretical and ideological underpinnings: Since Creole, the language of the private sphere and, therefore, of women who are the "keepers of culture" (27); and since Jekyl calls that mode of enunciation the feminine of a masculine English language, and Brathwaite makes the Kumina priestess, Queenie, in *The Arrivants*, the custodian of the African languages in the Caribbean Creole present, then it is this language of women that

provides the Africaribbean with a medium of self-articulation and revalorization, through a feminist subversion of the masculinity of the colonial master's language. In a way, therefore, Goodison has inherited what is thought of as a weaker vehicle for self-articulation, but which keeps Africaribbeans linked to a sense of place and history.

In both *Tamrind Season*, and *I Am Becoming My Mother*, Goodison deals with the category of issues problematically referred to as woman's issues: motherhood, heterosexual relationships, patriarchy, and her personal doubts about her vocation. However, because she is not a universalist feminist, she also stresses concerns about socio-economic and political injustice. In this way she links up with other feminists such as Trinh T. Minn-Ha, Arun Mukherjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri and others from other post-colonial societies who all stress the need for multiple variables in feminist post-colonial pedagogy. In this way also, Goodison, like Philip and Harris, reflects Glissant's statement that "the nature of the slave trade forces the population subjected to it to question in several ways any attempt at universal generalization" (14). In an interview with Wolfgang Binder, Goodison accepts of her bi-raciality and this gives her a political and linguistic leverage to explore every issue that threatens her personhood (57), in spite of her unabashedly Africanist stand in "Keith Jarrett - Rainmaker" (*Selected Poems* 57). In *Heartease* Goodison moves beyond the rhetoric of posturing as a spokesperson against injustice, for women and about women and to women, and shifts emphasis to an apocalyptic vision

of a New Jerusalem. In *Heartease*, she is at the crossroads inviting others on a journey to healing, a spiritual pilgrimage to *Heartease*.

Tamarind Season sets the tone and rhythm for Goodison's poetic of healing. She examines some of the issues that disturb the psycho-cultural equilibrium of Africaribbean people, and provides pointers towards the adoption and celebration of Africaribbean women as paradigms and metaphors towards *Heartease*. She also indicates the polyglotal nature of her expression, and indicates this early that she has no doubts whatever about the literary potential of Creole. In *Tamarind Season*, Goodison through "The Road of The Dread" (22) and "Sister Mary and the Devil," (15) engages Jamaican to recapitulate folk wisdom on collective survival and liberating mythology. It is important to stress that to decide to do these poems in Caribbean demotic is to accept that language's pivotal role in the development of a Caribbean/Jamaican aesthetic. Thus Goodison demonstrates a versatility and unambiguous acceptance of her Africaribbean oral roots very early in her poetic career, unlike Philip and Harris who have had to struggle through a process of decolonization to arrive at such a position. This early demonstration of Goodison's unambiguous acceptance of her Africaribbean orality comes from her location in Jamaica and not in exile.

Following this line of thinking we see how, in "Sister Mary and the Devil," Goodison subsumes the poet's voice in the voice of a female character, and identifies in several ways with the various categories of females in the poem as suggested by the word "sister." The association of "sister" with the devil has at least three areas for speculative

interpretation: nun, other marginalized women, African/Africaribbean women. These are not exhaustive, but they objectify areas of female bonding that undermine any mundane interpretation such a narrative recapitulation of Jamaican folk belief may entice the reader to make. The various strands of references interlink and reinforce each other. At the anti-climactic end, the devil, often seen in Judeo-Christian and Euro-American eschatology as a harbinger of evil, is read as the bringer of life, and is a stimulator of Mary's sexuality. He liberates her from a repressed libido caused by an extreme adherence to Euro-Christian dogma of female sexuality: "him hold mi round mi waist / and fire catch in mi body" (15-16). Of course, Mary's transformation from a timid individual with repressed sexuality is not without some initial personal discomfiture. She confesses an initial shame: "and I shame and hide mi face" (16). Mary's initial response reflects the need to liberate female sexuality from repression. The fact that Mary finds a voice to describe her experience also links sexual liberation to voice liberation and articulation.

The silence that is broken in Sister Mary by the devil is restated in the short piece "I'm In Here Hiding" (40). The poet retreats from the constant barrage of negating words, words that Philip examines in *Looking For Livingstone*. Goodison's poem is brief enough to quote in full to make the point:

I'm in here hiding from words
 they cloud my vision like wide-winged birds.
 Some darker ones harsh and crowlike
 picking issues to barebone.

I've shut my doors against them before
 but they've come tapping at the back doors
 or highpains of windows
 screaming to be let in,
 to cover quieter conversations
 with feathers and droppings. (40)

Goodison's complaint here is not against language, but against the language of denigration and the politics of confrontation. For Goodison any language that does not promote love and humanity must be avoided. Her program for a tactical withdrawal, therefore, into silence as a defence to the propaganda of hate is similar to Philip's quester's retreat/journey into silence in order to find a language of wholeness. Her defence of silence as a workable alternative is situated against the languages of European emperiums. Silence authenticates and articulates her particular experience, be it as an Afri-Jamaican, a female, a mother, or all together. Silence is fasting from words and this helps to clarify vision and initiate processes of transformation. She, however, also recognises the utopianism of her position since total silence is unachievable in a world of pain and absurdities, and bearing in mind the irony implied in the way words come "screaming to be let in, / to cover quieter conversations" (40). The physical presence of the poem itself becomes a failure of the attempt to retreat into silence, though the poem's brevity shows a partial success at withdrawal from words.

In "Ocho Rios" (50), Goodison shows the difference between words that are spoken to name things for purposes of control, and words used for elevation/recovery. The language of control and possession, is basically imperial, and is located in the world of European settlers in

the Caribbean, who tend to give European names to things that already have local names:

A conquistador hit by the muse who gives names
tongue-tied eight rivers together.

The British, recognising that the Spaniards
had the all-time hit "Arawak Genocide,"
let that name be. But wrought some name-calling
of their own. (50)

I am aware that in this poem, as in several others, Goodison engages the poetics of contestation to deconstruct the histories of the Caribbean according to European historiographers. But her contestatory poetics does not end merely in deconstructing the past to explain the present. It is a process of seeking an understanding of the past in order to move beyond the present towards a future of Heartease. In this process, Goodison does not lose sight of the way in which Europe's colonizing tendency stretches beyond mere topographic labelling, to erasure of a people's racial and historical background, through the giving of European names to the African slaves. So when Goodison in mock rage asks "so how black, black man like you and me / name Goodison and Montgomery?" (50), and makes fun of her own family name, we understand both the satiric thrust and the pain at the erasure of part of her identity. The way the Spaniards "tongue-tied eight rivers together" is not different from the silencing of Africa both as place of origin and as a metaphor of redemption, an issue Goodison further develops in "Guinea Woman" (*I Am Becoming My Mother* 39). This insidious attempt by

her great grandfather's people to erode that African presence in the children is exposed:

They forbade great grandmother
 guinea woman presence
 they washed away her scent
 . . .
 controlled the child's antelope walk
 and called her uprisings rebellions. (39)

Paradoxically, these attempts at erasure only prove further that no amount of indoctrination, denial, and renaming of Africaribbeans by patriarchal Europe can stop an uprising of Africanness in the Africaribbean person through the ghost of her West African foremother. In re-establishing the validity of her African identity through the uterus Goodison, like Philip, seeks a spiritual, racial, and gender re-energization of the self. The poem's remarkable ending echoes and critiques Walcott's early psychological uncertainty and horror, expressed in "Veranda" towards the browning--Africanisation--of his physical and literary personality, with the push towards Africanisation in Caribbean culture and literature. Goodison accepts this push as a positive thing. It reestablishes her great grandmother, and therefore, all Africaribbean women in prominence in the process of social and racial reconstruction:

But, great grandmother
 I see your features blood dark
 appearing
 in the children of each new
 breeding
 the high yellow brown
 is darkening down.
 Listen, children

it's great grandmother's turn. (40)

Goodison's spirited acceptance of the uprising of the great grandmother's blood/age/spirit in her legitimizes and gives moral agency to her recovery rhetoric. Her celebration of the great grandmother's ghostly presence in spite of centuries of negation, is symbolic of and gives credence to what Carole Boyce Davies (80) in *Black Women Writing and Identity* calls Black women's "uprising textualities." Davies's term suggests and implies a re-reading of female texts produced by women in places like the Caribbean and Africa. These societies, which she describes as neo-colonial and patriarchal in structure, are far different from the settler post-colonial societies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. As a consequence, female texts from these neo-colonial societies, she argues quite rightly then, even if they critique empire and patriarchy, nevertheless still are absent in the formulations of post-coloniality. Thus she concludes that their "work exist in the realm of 'elsewhere' of diasporic imaginings" (80), and therefore should be seen more as uprising textualities, rather than post-colonial texts.

Moreover, Goodison goes further to show how the threat to Africaribbean female personhood is not just a historical illusion, but a present reality in some Euro-American metropolitan discourses: "we're here because we didn't believe a word of it Jamaica is too beautiful the people so friendly . . . but watch that talk of equality though.) Don't watch that. Albertha baby in the green coconut hat, bless you still, but don't watch that" ("Ocho Rios II" 53). The talk about equality is the

talk about revolution, about racial retrieval, about the ability to break the yoke of silence imposed on Albertha both as Africaribbean and woman by Euro-American discourse. But Albetha baby breaks the silence in "Judges" (54-55).

Furthermore, divorce becomes a metaphor in "Judges" to expose patriarchy while arguing for women's liberation and voice. The male judge's patriarchal arrogance exposes his refusal to acknowledge women's role in the liberation of Jamaicans from slavery and colonialism. The judge's intolerance of women's liberation stems from his patriarchal upbringing and the patriarchal system he serves, which get demystified and deconstructed in an alternative, female-oriented historiography. "Judges," then, is a discourse on how to conduct an awareness of patriarchal distortions of inter-gender relationships while avoiding the use of combatant epistemology. The right words must be used at the right time if there is to be an avoidance of further alienation between the genders in this process of consciousness raising: she is "lining up words / holding them behind the barrier of my teeth" (55) and waiting for the appropriate moment to speak. Here as elsewhere, Goodison's strategy complements Philip's. Just as Philip sets out to demonstrate the hidden ideologies and power behind patriarchal, racial, and class usage of language, Goodison exposes the social material constructions erected by that usage. But in exposing these social constructs, Goodison also manages to make language recover and mend broken links along Creole and historical continuums--something that Philip and Harris succeed in

doing only partially, due in some measure to their middle-class origins, and partially to their relocation in Canada.

Goodison does not claim Africaribbean heroines in a void, or as an act of token feminist fetishism to enhance and particularize her poetic. Before she engages figures from Africaribbean *sensi communis*, she first exposes the systematic denials of the histories and mythologies of Africaribbean female resistance. She asserts her role as poet/prophet/priest/warrior/mother in this history and needs no authorization from men "with the poodlewig and Johncrow covers about [them]" (54): "And nobody told you I was a poet? / You who sit in judgement on the ones who come / moved by the nongrounds of unhappiness?" (55). Goodison situates her female revolutionaries in menial jobs such as janitors, cooks, baby sitters, jobs not usually associated with revolutionary potential in some patriarchal and liberal feminist ideologies. But it is in the silence of these women that the passion and strength necessary for revolutionary change reside. Thus Goodison's appropriation of the silence and pain of these sisters is justified because she is a female and daughter to these women, whose history of oppression and marginalization she shares.

These women slaved away to serve the wives of slavetocrats and now work for wives of post-independence nouveau riche. They bear in silence their forced conversion into sexual objects by patriarchy, and watch in horror as their pain is appropriated by the wives of these same slavetocrats, plantocrats, and nouveau riche:

They are working in your kitchen
 cooking compliments for your slow-witted wife
 They are used to biting their lips under the
 violation of your sons
 for whose first experience you chose a young
 clean maid. (54)

Goodison draws strength from the collective achievement of female warriors such as "Imogene and Joyce and Irma? / The daughters of the Loyal Levi and the Auxiliary?" (54). But though she cannot engage in physical combat like her foremothers, or Philip's Jamettes in their *bois bataille*, she nevertheless has "knife-words" to "cut loose the salt cords binding their tongues"! in "Songs of Release" (*Selected Poems* 78). Here, Goodison's confrontational positionality is well embedded in Africaribbean "contemporary popular music," which writes Maureen Warner-Lewis, "sometimes speaks threateningly of confrontation" (114). Lewis argues further that confrontational poetics in Jamaican is "not posited as much in an individualistic or anecdotal context, as in Trinidad, but rather in communal, generalized terms" (114). She points out that the socio-economic pressures in Jamaica have created a poetic environment with a "strong messianic hope, epitomized in Rastafarian belief [and where] confrontation and resolution take on visionary and apocalyptic dimensions," which differs from the "irreverence and cheerful cynicism" of confrontational poetics in Trinidad, and its West African antecedents (114). Thus Goodison's tone in the poem above, far from being combative, is rather "dinky" (elegiac) with a touch of visionary messianism.

Goodison, in "Judges" then, engages specifying (a form of poetry of abuse and challenge that is popular in West Africa and practiced among diasporic Africans) as a mode of challenge to patriarchal and racist epistemology and iniquitous social structures. Through specifying, she succeeds in reinscribing women's contribution to the histories of the Caribbean. This poem is also a chilling testimony against the role of other women in the rape, subjugation, and silencing of the Africaribbean woman, a position which differentiates her from both Philip and Harris. Just as Philip and Harris seem to lack the conviction to co-accuse women together with men for the pillaging of Africaribbean femininity, Goodison refuses to grant general amnesty to women in her denunciation of the overexploitation of Africaribbean females. She is also quick to recognise the heroic contributions of men towards the total liberation of the Africaribbean personality. In this way she is able to situate her agenda of recuperation within an exploration of the possibilities of recuperating inter-gender relationships.

In *Tamarind Season*, Goodison shows that protest poetry can and must conjoin with a program of positive self-valuation against auto-colonialism--internalized destructive self-hate. She critiques the self-abnegation in the psyches of Africaribbeans, which they enact in an absurd and slavish imitation of Europhonic aesthetics of physical beauty. "Hymn To Blanche" (66), "Blanche Replies" (68), and "She" (36) all expose the psycho-spiritual distortions that propel Africaribbean people into bodily mutilations in order to correspond to European

notions of beauty. Goodison insinuates that these European constructs are based on negations of the African as possible paradigms of beauty. "Hymn to Blanche" exposes the schizophrenic mentality of this ex-coloured Africaribbean mimic man. He mimics the language of courtship of the Moor in *The Merchant of Venice*, but without the later's racial pride and royal confidence. Living in both physical and mental darkness, he prays to God to "Let this room admit no sun / no vulgar rays of vengeance / to burn me darker" (66). Further, in desperation, he develops negrophobia and tries to bleach his skin white and mask his heritage, what he calls "that marron mint / with education's sheepskin" (66). The irony in his statement lies in the image of the sheepskin. The sheepskin image makes it obvious that education, instead of enlightening, has turned him into a zombie. The jibe against the intellectual class in the Caribbean is very obvious. But we cannot dismiss this figure as a nitwit. His actions, his negrophobia, have terrible consequences for the downpressed people as he "crushes stinking beggars / beneath my adaptable heel" (67), and refuses to acknowledge his "mother's lost descendants" (67). In his effort to inscribe his presence in the world of Blanche, by bleaching his skin pigmentation and courting mental amnesia, the man succeeds in becoming invisible to himself. Only in Blanche's response do we hope to wake up this dreamer of nightmares. Blanche wants him as he really is, not as a cheap copy of another, that is the male version of her race.

If "Blanche" is Goodison's caustic attack on those Africaribbean males who measure their humanity and Africaribbean female beauty by

Euro-American standards, the poem "She," is Goodison's critique of the radical feminist valorization of the mystique of feminist sexual masquerade as an effective subversion of patriarchy. The poem's purpose is to moralize against female seduction of males by false pretences. The voice is a bit patronizing, but it is understandable given the generational gaps and tensions that exist between the subjectified vocal self as the *beau femme_moderne*, and the objectified silent other as the *femme fatale*, whose primitivity and predatory femininity are rejected. The moralizing tone also reflects the influence of Calypso music. Rohlehr writes that "Calypso . . . had always been concerned with language as magic, ornament, sharp cutting satirical tool, and vehicle for humour of the grotesque" (29). So when Goodison unmasks the *femme fatale*, she is using language for didactic purposes:

She with the face
fresh from the apothecary
smelling like Arabia

She with the adder folded
on the floor of her mouth.
.

she bent to secure the sacles
that lock his feet
and the face fell,
revealing the maggots that writhe
in her real head. (36)

I have argued that *Tamarind Season* set the tone and rhythm for Goodison's search for a poetic of healing. I wish to show now how *I Am Becoming My Mother* provides an examination of Goodison's extended metaphors that eulogize Africaribbean womanhood. In *I Am Becoming My Mother*, Goodison investigates the implications of womanhood in the

Caribbean: what it is to be of mixed race and a female, what does motherhood mean, and what should a warrior-poet who is female do. In "For My Mother . . ." (*Tamarind Season* 61-63), repeated in *I Am Becoming My Mother* (46-48), Goodison rejects the attempts at valorizing Euro-American racist constructs of the Africaribbean woman as a powerful matriarch, good mammy, child breeder, and hyper-sexualized Jezebel. These stereotypical objectifications of the Africaribbean female, be it in North America or in the Caribbean, have been deliberately constructed as sites of abuse and oppression of "Afrisporic" womanhood. These constructions have been well examined and rejected by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (67-90). In "For My Mother . . .," then, Goodison situates the mother at the interval of the mammy/matriarch. Her interpretation of motherhood may not strictly have been constructed by slavetocracy, but it nevertheless is situated within patriarchy and the peculiarities of Africaribbean history, dipped in the experience of slavery, colonialism and neo-globalist American imperialism. Marianne Hirsch refers to this as the "complicated feelings that shape the portraits of mothers, and the tremendously powerful need to present to the public a positive image of black womanhood" (417). Of course, this attempt to present a positive image of Afrisporic womanhood to the world sets the Afrisporic daughter occasionally against the mother's ideology. This seems to be the case in Harris's maternal narrative in *Travelling to Find A Remedy and Drawing Down A Daughter*. The rejection of the symbol of the long-suffering maternal figure by Harris's character in the poem, is what Hirsch defines as the move by a

the mother in such hyperbole, Goodison veers dangerously toward desexing, dehumanizing, and desocializing the mother, and transforming her into that indefatigable and emotionless machine that Grace Nicols problematizes. Nicols rejects this type of romantic over-representation of Africaribbean women. She sees it as an interiorization of the stereotype of the "long-suffering black woman" who is so strong that she can carry whatever is heaped upon her" (284), and advocates its rejection.

Goodison, however, saves the mother from death by stereotype as she makes the mother show human emotion. She breaks down in tears and cries "For her hands grown coarse with raising nine children / for her body for twenty years permanently fat / . . . / and for the pain she bore with the eyes of a queen" (*I Am Becoming My Mother* 48). The mother also sheds tears because she loved her wayward husband, again stressing Goodison's heterosexual positionality. It also underscores Goodison's refusal to be fixated on any one particular recovery ideology, neither subscribing to the "victim mentality" nor to the vilification of men, even if she is aware of the debelitating effects of male irresponsibility on women, as several of her poems testify. Perhaps this is a reflection of the conservative position Goodison takes on several issues in her work. I am not oblivious to Goodison's awareness that her mother's body is a site of multiple mutilations, scars of silences, and oppression. Hortense Spillers calls the Afrisporic woman's body, from slavery days to the present, a locus of visible scars from the physical whip, phallogentrism, racism and rape (80). Goodison's poem ends on a

note that correlates in a weird way to Nicols's stand against the suffocating poetic of **SWTDTUBW**--See What They Done to Us Black Women.

While recognizing the history of slavery and racial oppression of Afrisporic females in the Caribbean and the Americas, Nicols is nevertheless still ready to "reject the stereotype of the 'long-suffering black woman' who is so strong that she can carry whatever is heaped upon her" (284). Her position is based on the "danger of reducing the black woman's condition to that of 'sufferer,' whether at the hands of white society or at the hands of black men" (285), as such reductionist poetics completely deny the women any agency.

Nicols's position is strengthened by Olive Senior's research into the pervasive myth of Africaribbean matriarchy and its effects on Africaribbean masculinity. The matriarch's reputed power and dominance over men are nullified in the light of the reality in Africaribbean socio-economic relations. Thus as Senior writes, while "younger, upwardly mobile women nowadays voluntarily choose single parenthood and household headship, for the older women there is usually no choice; the role is foisted on them by circumstances" (102). Consequently, Senior's research yields the unsettling fact that these "female household heads on the whole are poor, black, uneducated and in the worst paid and lowest status jobs. These women are truly working miracles, in ensuring at least the survival, and sometimes the advancement, of their families" (102). The question that arises then is how such terrible conditions of survival economics can be validating of a woman's existence. It is

tantamount to the argument that these women prefer struggle and pain to false security and pleasure.

However, as Senior found out, in spite of these women's terrible circumstances, there is one thing they all value and see as validating of their existence--motherhood. It is only motherhood that in the Caribbean is accepted by women as a validating aspect of femaleness-- a reinforcement of Goodison's concept of the good mother. It is these views of motherhood that Goodison celebrates in her own poems to her son. Goodison does not see motherhood as a male-inspired construct to bind women to biological determinism. She insists in a conversation with Narain DeCarires Narain that "this (motherhood) is an important issue. . . . I cannot see my life without mothering a child. . . . it's just something I couldn't see myself not doing because to me having a child is the key to a whole lot of things in myself" (23).

Goodison's enthusiastic generalization may not hold for all Africaribbean women, but she is supported by research findings of both Senior and Hodge. On one the hand, Senior's research on motherhood concludes that "childbearing is one of the few areas in the lives of Caribbean women that is not surrounded by ambivalence. There is an almost universal impulse to mothering. . . ." (66). She further states that in spite of the advances made in the lives of women through education, "the view persists that the real vocation for women is motherhood" (66). Merle Hodge comes to the same conclusion (41). On the other hand, both Senior and Hodge discover that motherhood is also an oppressive expectation to some other women. For instance, Africaribbean

women may actually be socially pressured to become mothers early, even when they may otherwise would have loved to pursue a career, or further their education. But what is worthy of note at this juncture is Goodison's graduation from a daughterly positionality that enables her to narrativize the mother in order to construct an authoritative foundation on which to articulate her own individual identity as a writer. As Hirsch has said, African-American daughters have the tendency to publicly celebrate "maternal presence and influence" (416). She further argues that these "portrayals of strong and powerful mothers, on the one hand, combined with the relative absence of fathers, on the other, makes this [a] uniquely female tradition . . . in which to explore issues of maternal presence and absence, speech and silence" (416).

Based on this, I want to suggest that Goodison's identity poetic is ideologically both pro-motherhood and pro-self-creation. Indeed, what she practices together with Philip and James is what I call "**MATERSUMEGOISM**," where mater=mother, sum=am, and ego=I. "Matersumegoism" encapsulates all the multiple nuances of what it is to "become one's mother." To become one's mother is to assume cumulative, repetitious, and progressive "identification[s] or bonding[s] with the mother, with [the] female" heritage of suffering, resistance, and transcendence of fixities (Baugh 2). This identification, argues Baugh in "Lorna Goodison in the Context of Feminist Criticism," "translates into a revelatory consciousness that paradoxically engenders the individuation so crucial to post-modern and post-colonial identity

polemics (2). In "I Am Becoming My Mother," Goodison, therefore, assumes the spirit of her mother both as female and as mother/wife in life.

Similarly, Baugh points out that to become one's mother implies two identities: 1) constructing a self-identity within the limits of a patriarchally constructed gender role for women; 2) taking after the mother, assuming the mother's roles and identities in a mimetic kind of way. What Baugh fails to include in his perceptive reading is the eternal process of female bonding that mothering engenders through the mother-daughter relationship. It is this bonding Harris seeks to sever in *Drawing Down A Daughter*, and which Philip endeavours to reconstruct in *She Tries Her Tongue*. In celebrating her mother, therefore, Goodison sets the tone for a revisionist historical narrative that recovers and redeems all those "Afrisporic" women who were/are vilified by some white/patrainchal historiographers, but who in Black women's memory stand tall as liberators. I must add that Goodison's revisionism is not particularly novel, as she is predated by writers such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite in both his poetry and criticism. Goodison adds a female voice to this revisionist historicism, a voice that is shared with other female Caribbean poets like Grace Nicols, Cynthia James, Nourbese Philip, and Olive Senior.

In *I Am Becoming My Mother*, therefore, Goodison's recovery poetic is not situated in abstract word play, but through umbilical reunification to her African/Africaribbean foremothers such as Nanny, Winnie Mandela, Rosa Parks, her grandmother, mother, and a mythical Egyptian. In celebrating her foremothers, Goodison also investigates and

redresses the negation of mulattas--girls of mixed white and black parents--by certain Africaribbean cultural nationalists. These nationalists see mulattas as not being African enough to join the forces in the recovery project of Africaribbean ancestry. By introducing these mulattas as positive women, Goodison contributes a new dimension to the discourse on Africanness in the Caribbean, an issue Walcott takes up very briefly in his earlier poetry. Other issues that consolidate Goodison's position as a bringer of freshness to the perpetual Caribbean theme of selfhood is her reading of the mermaid image and the invocation of the spiritual as sites for poetic activity.

Goodison's negotiation of the dangerous paths of "mulattadom" in a Caribbean locality heightens the authenticity of her voice. To be a mulatta means often to be somewhere in the middle of the racial equation. But as she claims in the interview with Wolfgang Binder, she has no split complexes about her African roots even as she makes fun of her European ones. The fact that she has Mulatta poems does not indicate a euphoric preoccupation with either self worth or self negation because of her racial mix (57). That mix enables her to sublimate individual lyric voice with its panoptic vision of truth to a collective variegated female voice. The plural point of view intersects in "we" and initiates communality of purpose. These women's identities are multiply linked: biologically, historically, economically, and sexually. Their identities are consolidated through their possession of "an apocrypha / of Nanny's secrets" (12), extreme poverty, the absence of their men, and they are resolved to secure their future for themselves now, determined not to

wait for further patriarchal promises. The poem's incantatory vocality is an assertive but non-confrontational revolutionary awakening in which the women in the poem reject the image of stoical womanhood. It is an anticipatory metaphor for "Garden Of The Women Once Fallen" (14-15).

Dialogue is effectively utilized by Goodison here as a strategy to disorganize the omniscience, omnipotence, and ubiquity of the lyrical I. The 'Shame Mi Lady' portion of the poem laments and interrogates women's silence. Opening in the tone of blues-calypso, the quester asks: "Lady, what could you have done so / to make you close in on yourself so?" (14). Silence is then dramatized in the confessionality of the speaker and the non-communication of the listener. Does the poem then set out to investigate and critique women's lack of a common language? Does it interrogate Goodison's own position, and show the impossibility of middle-class women reading the experiences and claiming the voices of under-class women? Does it not strengthen one's suspicion that in claiming to speak for others Goodison actually tells her story? These seem to be the questions that Goodison may be anticipating. Her response to these issues is not theoretical and politically motivated, but spiritually instigated. She invites the silent one to rouse herself up and bloom redemption because "now, if I can find favour (me with my bold face) / you bashful you shy you innocent lady / must/bound to find absolution/grace" (14). In spite of the reservations raised above, I see the poem, then, as a call to collective action through shared pain. But the call to action is based on the intruder's notions of what is best rather than the perception of the silent one.

The section entitled "Broom Weed" (14) uses broom as a metaphor for the drudgery that is the poor woman's lot on earth. In "Poui" (15) and "Sunflower Possessed," (15) there is a celebration of profitable and fulfilling inter-gender relationships. These sections need not blind us, however, to Goodison's critique of the arrogance of upper-and middle-class women within the feminist movement, a critique that echoes bell hooks' observation that feminism as a movement is weakened because of racism, classism, and sexism (58-61). Goodison, like hooks, testifies against elitism in women's movements, and indicates that the power these women wield in the patriarchal order of things is a divide-and-rule strategy initiated and propagated by men to prevent a feminist collective from forming:

To the ragged coterie of weeds round her
 she says, 'In my first bloom I was
 the tender honey-skinned mammy
 of that great golden one on high'.
 The ragged weeds
 never knowing glory
 (for this reason some weeds are evil)
 shiver in their rags and hiss
 'sure'
 she semaphores, hoping
 the golden circle of her unmaking
 will give her the go round once more. (15)

The monosyllabic responses by the ragged ones to the arrogant verbosity of upper class women, articulate succinctly the ragged ones' reasons for not reaching out from beyond their silences to the haughty ladies. Goodison's position advocates, therefore, the dissolution of class barriers if sisterhood among women is to prosper. The fragments of material glory and memories of power, based on women's relationship with

men and a male god, "that great golden one on high," must be flushed out before any viable sisterhood can be constructed.

Goodison's Mulatta poems, as I indicated earlier, serve as mediation for a 're-invention' of an Africaribbean femininity that recognizes the symbiosis of African and European cultural and racial miscegenation in the Caribbean. They also celebrate an independent femininity, vis a vi the type of woman feminism tries to exorcize from or assert in women's consciousness. In "Mulatta Song II" (24), the mulatta is not just a product of violence against Africaribbean women, but she is also a poet and a liberation theologian. She is the modern Penelope that both Reddock's and Senior's work describes. Goodison's celebration of the freedom of the mulatta in her trans-racial position is problematized. Liberation guarantees freedom of choice and action in relation to her sexuality, but it also paradoxically embeds the risk of marginality and loneliness. The attestation to an atmosphere of serenity and self-fulfilling creativity of pleasure ironically also connotes great losses. Only song promises amelioration in auto-stimulus-responses:

Yes this is the house
of the lady poet
she wears black and heavy silver
there is calm within
when evening comes
she offers you wine
and sometimes her smile
and sometimes herself
but mostly she sits
and sings to herself. (24)

This image of the lonely, faithful Penelope, awaiting the return of her irresponsible Ulysses, is appropriated by Goodison, translocated, transmuted, and recreated with a different political message that captures the realities of Africaribbean inter-gender relationships.²⁶ The Mulatta, as Africaribbean female, rejects the dull spirit of the European Penelope, and converts the absence of the patriarch into a moment of liberation, an emergent matriarchy:

Today we said the real goodbye, he and I
but this time
I will not sit and spin and spin
.....
till the sailor finally weary
of the sea
returns with tin souvenirs and a claim
to me.
.....
I'll sit in the sun and dry my hair. (25)

This celebration of an emergent matriarchy contributes immensely to an understanding Africaribbean feminism. It is historical revisionism and mythicization of her African progeny. Goodison's programmatic reconstructionism engages memory, and uses narrative simplicity that has invocatory and evocatory effects. Sometimes her rhetoric borders on a

²⁶ This revisioning of a Greek (European) myth by Goodison differs from Walcott's revisioning of the Odyssey and the myth of Helen as a Caribbean personality. In Walcott, Helen, as St. Lucia, is a whore, a madonna, and a wife who nurtures and destroys the male figures in his narrative. Walcott reinstates the archetypal myth of the land as both mother and destroyer. Goodison's revisit of the Penelope myth rejects the passivity of the Greek Penelope, and shows a woman capable of acting out her own life without having to wait for the return of the patriarch. Thus while Walcott shows a bonding with the Hectors and Achilles of the Trojan war, Goodison does not really feel very empathetic towards the Penelope of the Greek myth. She shows the differences between herself and the passive, even if manipulative Penelope whose salvation lies with the return of Ulysses and not through any personal act of rebellion.

kind of romanticism or diminished negritudinism. Her description of her great-grandmother in "Guinea Woman" is Senghorian in its flow of sounds and images:

Great grandmother's waistline
the span of headman's hand
slender and tall like a cane stalk
with a Guinea woman's antelope-quick walk. (39)

This femme mystique, ethereal in her physicality, with an ability to see behind her, and with a "profile fine like some obverse impression / on a guinea coin from royal memory" (39), is seduced by a European sailor on the West African coast, thus producing the brown/yellow skin color celebrated in the poem. The poem is, however, not just a romantic rememory of an African great grand mother, but an exposure of the insidious attempts to erase the African presence from European colonial narrative. This racist ideology has been perfected by Spanish and Portuguese colonists in South America into what is euphemistically termed Lusotropicalismo--transforming everyone into Portuguese or Europeans. It is also found in the French system of assimilation adopted to make natives of colonised kingdoms "real" Frenchmen/women. The poem, then, is a celebration of the eruption of the great grand mother's body into the present to challenge the attempts at her erasure. Finally, I think the poem celebrates the rupturing of the all male (and European influenced) Africaribbean canon by the uprising voices of Africaribbean women writers.

The names of Rosa Parks, Winnie Mandela, and Nanny that are invoked suggests Goodison's wide search for Africa-originated models of

rebel women. Senior writes that rebel leadership was not always found among upper-class women, but "was usually [from among] the lowest in the society, black or coloured slaves or freedwomen, later wage-labourers or self-employed women, who valued independence or justice more than 'respectability'" (151). Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Wars of Respect: Nanny and Sam Sharpe and the Struggle for People's Liberation*, and Mavis C. Cambell's *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal*, celebrate the leadership skills of Nanny. From their accounts, Nanny was like a typical Queen Mother among the nationalities speaking the Kwa group of languages--Akan, Ewe, Ga, and Guan in Ghana. Nanny, as Queen Mother of a maroon community, is said to have "led troops into battle" against the British in the numerous maroon wars. Nanny's political role in Jamaica, and her links to the socio-political and spiritual leadership of Queen Mothers in Ghana make her an icon for a gender and racial recuperation of Africaribbean womanhood. Queen Mothers are responsible for maintaining the socio-political and spiritual unity of the community, by ensuring that the cosmic laws of the state are not violated, and if they are, to lead the community to atonement and amelioration.

Brathwaite has points out that it is this combination of roles that the British deliberately misunderstood and denigrated as 'obeah'--witchcraft. He cites the legend of Nanny Pot, "a vat or cauldron of water which boiled without fire and which apparently attracted and trapped English soldiers and militiamen as they approached Nanny Town . . ." (15). Goodison's ability to humanize and give voice to "Nanny,"

then, among others, is a personal contribution to the creation of viable Africaribbean national heroines, and is situated in her rejection of prison house mentality. Her recreations transcend the politics of exoticization and transform these otherwise museumized historical icons into living presences with individual idiosyncracies. Her technique is a stepping aside for a positive reappraisal of the ghostly presences of these heroines. For instance, Nanny, according to Goodison in her interview with Binder, was no slave. She is dramatized as a messiah of hope and an agent of liberation sent to the Caribbean to lead other Africans to freedom (53-54). Her role is not thrust upon her by accident of history, force or location, nor is her strength generated from despair. Her training over, Nanny is spiritually protected with ". . . the travellers jigida" and goes into voluntary exile as a slave in order to lead her people to freedom: "I was sent, tell that to history" ("Nanny" 45). Her physical dissolution begins the spread of her spirit of liberation theology through other women: "When your sorrow obscures the skies / other women like me will rise" (45). Her dramatic monologue has as its audience not only the historical Nanny's Town people, but also all generations of Africaribbean people yearning for a leader and healer: "I was schooled in the green-giving ways / of roots and vines / made accomplice to the healing acts" (44). Nanny's preparations for departure to the Caribbean and her interpretations of the same are given in detail:

My womb was sealed
with molten wax
of killer bees

for nothing should enter
 nothing leave
 the state of perpetual siege
 the condition of the warrior. (44)

This poem explores the sacrificial roles of women such as Nanny in West Africa, generally and Ghanaian traditions specifically, and demonstrates how those roles prepare and condition Nanny, prior to her arrival in the Caribbean, for her leadership role among Africaribbean resistance fighters. Her conditioning should not be problematized and interpreted as Nanny's suppression of her femininity and sexuality in order to accept male transgression and violation of her personhood. We need to appropriated Nanny's triumphs for the feminist ideal, as Goodison is doing, while at same time being cognizant of the psychosomatic consequences of the sublimation of her libido: her "whole body would quicken / at the birth of everyone of my people's children," (44). This appropriation of Nanny, however, must be culturally situated and historically referential. We need to be aware that to the African and Africans in diaspora, the individual as the centre of the universe is inconsistent with their communitarian cosmology. Nanny's loneliness, therefore, is to be seen as originating from her desire to use her exceptional powers to liberate her people, than from any subordination of her femininity to patriarchy. Her degendering thus becomes ennoblement as she transcends all male constructs of femaleness. Her postponement of personal sexual levity typifies the way in which slavery, colonialism, and neo-imperialism have consistently impelled Africaribbean women to reject the auto-sexuality and sexualization of

every relationship propagated by some white and black middle class women. Stella Dadzie warns that any interpretation of Nanny's sexuality within recent Europhonic feminist theories of sexuality, would be buying into "contemporary [ideologies of] European males, whose racial and sexist bias served simply to confirm preconceived notions of African savagery" in Maroon societies (2).

The absurdities of indulging in theories of autosexuality to explain Goodison's female figures are tested in "On Becoming A Mermaid" (30). Baugh has eloquently argued that Goodison's rhetoric on sexuality may appear revolutionary and tempt some lesbian and radical feminists to claim her as an ally together with Edna Brodber, Audre Lorde, and Dionne Brand, to name a few. "On Becoming A Mermaid" may of course radiate a desire for self-engendering through transformation into a mermaid, but as Baugh contends, this desire is hardly equatable to a rejection of Goodison's heterosexuality (5-6). Goodison, argues Baugh from a narrow heterosexist male point of view, does not invoke the mermaid image to strategize a route of escape "from [heterosexual] entanglements, demands and frustrations. She undergoes a sea-change into something rich, strange, self-delighting and essentially, utterly female" (5). Baugh does not explain what to be "utterly female" means, but his argument does suggest that a non-heterosexual woman cannot claim complete femaleness. Goodison is attracted to the myth of the mermaid for reasons that are culturally and historically specific. In West African and Africaribbean lore, the mermaid is worshipped as a goddess. She bestows power, wealth, beauty, and hypereroticism to women. For maids of the

mermaid, relationship with men is always intense but short lived. These women are much more independent and become leaders in women's societies. They are loved, desired, and feared by men. They have a very good relationship with other women, but not necessarily in a lesbian manner. The mermaid image also recalls the middle passage in Africaribbean history--the journey across the Atlantic ocean to the Caribbean sea, from Africa to the Caribbean. All these insinuations suggest that the mermaid image is a complex of meanings, and not only what Baugh, in his heterosexual male-fantasy world about women, lists as "fertility, creativity, eroticism, succour, freedom, blessing, redemption, grace, purification," (20), death and resurrection, the island nature of Caribbean countries, liberation of Africaribbean female sexuality as observed in the mulatta poems above.

The poem, therefore, subverts literal interpretation. It is a meditation on what it would be like to seek individuation within shifting heterosexual relationships. Thus meditating on "underlife [that] idle by / you think drowning must be easy death" (30) becomes an idler's contemplation of the misery of the downpressed in society, and drowning both a physical and cultural suicide for the underbelly people. To fail to see the poem as the impossible dream that Baugh rightly points out (5), and to read it as a finite decision to privilege auto-sexuality over heterosexuality is to over-interpret Goodison's ideas on Africaribbean female sexuality. Goodison might just be critiquing the impossibility of achieving this kind of total sexual freedom and self-containment through auto-sexuality. That is why even a lesbian writer

like Edna Brodber depicts in her work very meaningful and satisfying heterosexual relationships in her fiction. It is also possible that Goodison is dreaming about the utopian Africaribbean female, whose independence W. P. Livingstone secretly admired, but had to denigrate to satisfy his Victorian audience back in Britain.

Tamarind Season and *I Am Becomig My Mother* prepare Goodison for the journey to *Heartease*. In *Heartease*, Goodison achieves a much calmer, less political, but culturally and spiritually more energetic voice. In *Heartease* also, Goodison shows a greater trust in her ability to achieve a unifying vision and voice through language--the language of spirituality. She also demonstrates a greater confidence in her exploration of the linguistic continuum. Baugh in "Goodison On the Road to *Heartease*" (20) sees this stage of Goodison's development as a sign of progress toward a fusion of private and public voice, of personal and communal pain. Baugh argues that Goodison's engagement of Caribbean demotic as an articulatory mode is kinetic. Goodison's distinctiveness, Baugh argues, lies in her ability to slide "between English and Creole, at interweaving erudite literary allusions with the earthiness of traditional Jamaican speech, images from modern technology with the idiom of pop culture" (20).

In "I Shall Light A Candle To Undersdstanding In Thine Heart Which Shall Not Be Put Out" (*Heartease* 7), Goodison unequivocally claims her role as a bringer of the light of hope: "I shall light a candle of understanding" (7) in order to "lay to rest the wounded past," (7). Her agenda evolves out of a desire to "exit, death and fear and

doubt" and transplant "(t)here love and possibility" (7). Her philosophy of forgetting in the face of continuous oppression and sexism is courageous, even if it sounds placidly accommodationist in comparison to the combative poetics of Philip. But the solidity of her stance comes from the courage to first testify against the self as a way of purification before she speaks out against oppression, racism, sexism, and negations of selfhood. She thus acknowledges and claims the negative labeling--"wild spirit / abbess / Magdalen" (8) cast upon her in "Because I have Been Everything" (8). It is only after she expunges the negative connotations associated with these words that she is spiritually prepared speak healing and "invoke transmutation / . . . [and] rains of redemption" ("A Forgiveness" 10). In this, Goodison joins hands with Claire Harris to perform the ritualistic detoxification of language for purposes of recovery of individual and group personhood. So in claiming all these negatives attributed to Africaribbean women by patriarchy and Euro-American cultural "othering" or more appropriately "neithering" of Africaribbean women, Goodison is able to overcome the type of reaction poetics that worry Philip. This clarifies her vision and enables her to perform her part as an "initiate of the order of grace / made keeper of the key of possibility" ("Because I Have Been Everything" 8). In this poem, Goodison considers the alternatives, discussed above, that are open to her as a female poet of African descent. She chooses forgiveness as her best strategy.

Forgiveness, then, becomes the tool of resistance and positive self-and-racial recovery. It implies self love and valorization. It also

means a readiness to accept the self for loving "the children of salt / who left their brine on you / so you dream always of waterfalls" ("A Forgiveness" 10). Forgiveness also implies a recognition of other people's hate, and a realization that all one can really be is ". . . witness / and love yourself now" (10). Forgiveness as a path to spirituality is synonymous with atonement. Forgiveness becomes the light that will be enough to start the new life that is ideally communitarian, because when ". . . you are lit / . . . that light will draw / more light to itself" (10). Goodison's spirituality, as I have indicated earlier, originates from syncretism, a quality much admired in African spirituality. With Goodison, therefore, we have touches of *Myalism*,²⁷

²⁷ Myalism in Jamaica has been around since the 17th century as an initiation rite into a brotherhood for purposes of racial reconstruction and recovery in the face of slavery. Myalism became the ceremony of resistance and neutralization of European witchcraft and brutality against African slaves. Thus myalism, writes Joseph Murphy in *Working in The Spirit*, was/is "concerned not only with social control, but also with the development of a spiritual sensitivity and empowerment. . . . Myal brings revelation of the invisible world" (117-122) in which present sufferings will be ended by Christ. Thus it can be seen how the basic concepts and language of dream in myalism is, its role as a religious initiation into Afri-Jamaican spirituality, and as a protective rite against the hurt of slavery and colonialism--a kind of evil European witchcraft--appeals to Goodison.

Revival Zionism,²⁸ and Rastafarianism, and some dashes of Sufism as she states in an interview with Anne Walmesley (239).

Goodison's spirituality and poetic of forgiving and forgetting also enable her to transcend "the base betrayals / stamped with deceit" (10). This idealist's spiritual orthodoxy makes her gloss over the shapes that hurt and the contesting pressures organized against the lives of her people. She advocates love, self mortification and a spiritual rebirth, as necessary ingredients for the restoration of the brutalized and dehumanized psyche and self. Through invocations, solicitations and proof, Goodison persuades me that love liberates the individual and the society from the boundaries of hate. Without love no hurt can be washed and healed, she argues in "Songs of Release" (12). They are the prayer of a priestess or neophyte before her God, ironically a stern imperial male God, seeking purification, vision, tongue, possession and authority to preach the word. The experience is

²⁸ According to Joseph Murphy, in (114-144) Revival Zion in Jamaica began to be noticed in the 1860s even though it had been a secret practice among African slaves from the 1700s. It borrows heavily from the ritual traditions of African religions in order to enter the Euro-Christian spiritual world. But Revival Zionism is deeply rooted in African religious practices. Out of the stories in the Bible, priests and priestesses could reconstruct their African heritage without drawing the wrath of the slave master as he thought they were practicing his brand of European christianity. In Revival Zionism, spirit possession during service is important. The spirit is both the biblical Holy Spirit and a particular ancestral spirit that takes possession of the priest(ess) in order to instruct her/him on the paths the community needs to take towards healing. But to be chosen by the spirit, one must be called by the spirit, journey in the spirit and travail in the spirit. In these actions the temporal and the spiritual become merged. The services are centered around a large urn of water. Music, drumming, dancing, and healing take place. Goodison has definitely borrowed a lot of the practical and spiritual aspects of Zion Revivalism in her *Hearttease* poems.

mystical, celebratory, and liberatory in its movement from an invocation of ancestral heritage, through to an ecstatic vision articulated in Amharic. The references to Rio Negro (a river in Jamaica), to Blue Nile (in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia), and Amharic (the language of Ethiopia), all link my reading of this spirituality to Rastafarian apocalyptic messianism and their attempts at reclaiming their African personhood through Jah Ras Tafari--the late Emperor Haile Salassie of Ethiopia whom they revere as God incarnate. Goodison does not seem to want to explore the relative absolutism of male power in Rastafarianism since her aim is not to dwell too much on such feminist issues.²⁹ There is a link to "Letters To The Egyptian" (*I Am Becoming My Mother* 49-50). The prayer sees past efforts at recovery as inarticulate, myopic and disruptive of positive possibilities. Goodison's prayer then is for a loosening of "the salt cords / binding our tongues" ("Songs of Release." *Selected Poems* 78) and destroying our palates and palettes. Past attempts have created only discourses of blood, discourses that drag the "old story / the rotted history" ("Songs of Release." *Heartease* 13). The ability to read the message written in an African language implies a call to prophesy love and healing based on an acceptance of one's Africanness.

²⁹ It is interesting that Goodison in these poems suppresses basic feminist concerns in order to focus more clearly on racial and cultural issues. She joins the long running debate among Black feminist scholars who insist that racism must be confronted simultaneously with patriarchy and sexism. For most Afrisporic feminists, race issues cannot be separated from issues of women's oppression. They see themselves as oppressed, together with their men in the mainstream society, because of their race, and also oppressed as "non-white" women within the women's movement. They always tend, then, to tone down on their oppression at the hands of their own men, in order to concentrate on racial issues first.

This empowerment with the voice of prophecy is also a call to journey to *Heartease*. This journey is collective and personal. As she states, in this journey, "I think I'm concerned more with re-unification than anything else. I really feel that is the paramount task of humanity: things have to be re-unified" (233).

The spiritual journey starts "In Anxiety Valley" (30). Anxiety valley is what mystics refer to as the dark/white night of the soul. At this point, the mystic undertakes a journey of reconnection, realignment with the source, and for Goodison, "whatever is going to reconnect me to the source is fine" (233). Goodison is careful to differentiate between material darkness and situational darkness. To come through this darkness of spirituality is not easy, for even there her pigmentation bars her from holding palaver with God, because the receptionist denies her that audience. The receptionist makes her wait indefinitely "where the dark matches my hair / and so they will mistake me / for a baldhead" (30). But ironically, it is the waiting that yields answers to her wishes. She gets a vision of alternative ways to reach God "in silence / or responds to drums" (31). Silence as a response to denials of the self becomes a site for resistance. Drum language, writes Velma Pollard in her review of *Heartease*, is significantly located at the end of the poem to emphasize the use of coded artifice as a strategy in recovery poetics. It also validates and empowers the folk and unlettered Afri-Jamaican use of drum music as sacred/church music (92).

"In Anxiety Valley" Goodison receives a revelation that Afri-Jamaican drums too can talk to God. "Heartease I" (32-33), then, is an

initiation of the journey to recovery if the obstacles on the way, such as cultural blindness, are overcome. Cultural blindness is symbolized in "we with the straight eyes / and no talent for cartography" (32), where cartography means the ability to decode the language of the masses in order to discover the path to Heartease. In this poem Goodison proves that Heartease is really not any of the physical locations Baugh identifies (13). It is a psycho-spiritual situs within the cultural ethos of the ordinary people. A precondition for the journey to Heartease is belief in the authenticity of the people's culture and myths. Belief enables one to intersect the images of darkness, light, and faith as visions or perceptions within the self and in the community in "Hartease II." This synthesis is the testimonial of the hope for the dispossessed:

In what looked like the black-out last week
 a meteorite burst from the breast of the sky
 smoking like a censer, it spelled out in
 incandescent calligraphy
 a message for all who had deep eyes. (34)

The message is simple and direct. A rebound to the source for the Africaribbean must originate in a kind of atonement in which the Africaribbean person initialises the cultivation of self-worth and a sincere desire for healing: "Cultivate the search-mi-heart and / . . ./ face toward Heartease" (34). In a combination of mystical steps that co-opt Africaribbean religious practices and rituals of purification, Goodison, the prophet of realignment, here assumes the voice of God to remonstrate and to comfort. She does not, for tactical and practical

reasons, find advantage in engaging the language of domination and patronage--standard English--to proclaim "the second sura of this message":

. . . the one who flung the meteor
 was in a celestial vexation
 saying, Imagine, . . . you in this most favoured place
 and look how you take it and less count it.
 Look how you root up my rarest blooms,
 look how you take my flower bed dem turn tombs,
 look how you eye red from looking over a next one
 yard
 from envying everything him have. (34)

The incantatory device engaged here stresses Goodison's point that repetition is a performative way to create something. God's own repetitiousness achieves a mollification of his anger at the way Africaribbean people have reacted uncreatively to their forcible transplantation from Africa to the Caribbean. Following this, God reestablishes a covenant with His people, showing them the rituals to salvation and recovery. This new covenantal arrangement is necessary for the uphill journey to Heartease, as already the new age begins and "we catching mercy rain in zink and tub pan" (35), a veiled reference to the large pan of water placed at the centre of Zion Revival Churches in Jamaica--the water of life:

we planting some one-love
 undivided everliving healing trees

 to extend the singing rosary of our ancestors' names
 till the veil is rent from the eyes of the sky
 of everyone
 forever and ever
 illumination. (35)

The code switching going on here is neither exotic nor theatrical. It articulates the Caribbean/Jamaican way of speaking in which the spelling of words follows standard practice, but with the superimpositions of residual African language syntax and inflexions on the sentence structures. The poem, no doubt, is heavily influenced by Rastafarian spirituality and language, especially the music of Robert Nesta Marley. A particular song, "One in Love," easily comes to mind. In Marley's song, he calls all Afrisporic people to come together in one love and everything will be all right. Marley contends in the song that the pain, the tears, and the dejection of Afrisporic people can end with love for the self and for one another.

In "In Anxiety Valley" we meet the hurting soul lost and rejected in its moment of spiritual aridity. According to the service and ritual patterns of Myalism and Zion Revival Churches, described by Monica Schuler (65-79) and Joseph M. Murphy (114-144), "Heartease I" (32-33) deals with a soul that is seized or slain by the spirit. In this state of seizure, the soul receives visions on the cultivation of simple belief and sincerity in the folkways that guide the people in their daily struggles: such as trickster (spider) folktales. "Heartease II" (34-35) begins the process of journeying in the spirit. This journeying in the spirit becomes an experience of the spirit in which ritual directions are given for the preparation of a new covenant in the language of the people. "Heartease III" (36-39) celebrates the moment of purification and final exorcism of the agents of destruction and confusion in their midst. But because Goodison is not a poet of

disillusionment, she refuses to be judgemental about the socioeconomic iniquities created by greed and moral decay. She does not say those, who cause her people's oppression will not be judged. What she stresses is that she is not coming to judge those members among her people who have become grafted to the philosophy of the oppressor:

I speak no judgement
 this voice is to heal
 to speak of possibility

 No judgement I speak
 that function is not mine
 I come only to apply words
 to a sore and confused time. (38)

Goodison's message echoes the words of Isaiah 40. It is not odd this should be the case for she accepts any spirituality that can liberate her people from both a psychological and material deprivation. She seems to be saying that if their psyches and souls are healed, and they come together as one people in love, they will be able to create material wealth for themselves. But what is paramount now is the spiritual healing necessary for the material healing. Thus, her argument does not reject certain sentiments expressed in marxist discourse--the discourse of socialist collectivism toward material well being.

"Heartease III" progresses mystically from Jamaican *dinky* (lamentation): "Crowdsapeople, crowdsapeople weep and mourn" (36), to an identification of the source of their woes, a warning against what confuses them, and a recipe for regeneration, to the poet's visions of the ecstatic homecoming that her people will experience:

Suppose we call out the

singers and musicians
 by their hidden holy names
 and then pull out from the belly
 bottom of the drum and the bass
 chords that quake evil and
 make holy spirit raise,
 while the rest of we planting the
 undivided, ever-living
 healing trees,
 what a glory
 possibility
 soon come
HEARTEASE. . . . (39)

The proposed vision recalls the several Africaribbean harvest festivals such as the Jonkonnu festival, Crop-Over, and Gombey (Bettleheim 80-100). In these quasi-religious festivals, the elements of African religious traditions in which masquerades are performed, and esoteric language and coded names are used as counter-sorcery to neutralize the bad *obeah* of the European are reflected. When Goodison, therefore, talks of calling out the singers "by their hidden holy names" (39), she is not only referring to the magico-religious symbolism of the act of renaming, but she is also engaging the Africaribbean practice of keeping their African names and cultures for use in secret rituals, while publicly displaying total submission to the European cultural ethos (Warner-Lewis 102-104).

It is, however, important to note the unease with which Goodison ends the poem. The lack of finality in Goodison's utopian dream precludes any swift eruption into Heartease. What matters is that her poetic of hope, with its suggestions of carnivals when Heartease is reached, has some positive and ameliorating impact on Africaribbeans, just like Philip's oppositional aesthetic, and Harris's integrationist

poetic. Goodison not only seeks recovery through epistemology, history, and myth, but also through an Africaribbean spirituality that seems absent from both Philip and Harris. Goodison's cultural location has given her the confidence in her Africaribbean culture which makes contestatory polemics unnecessary. Her main project is not to contest any particular positionality, but to seek atonement and healing; the victim mentality and revenge poetics become unalluring.

Goodison's retreat from judgemental poetics, a major problem that both Philip and Harris battle with, enables her to tap into the energies of co-creativity. Any programme toward healing is ineffectual without reconnection to Africaribbean spirituality and herstory. The engagement of spirituality enables her to talk back the collective ghost/psyche and hasten the progression towards intra-cultural and inter-gender healing, grounded in the present. The spirituality engaged here is not totally suffism as Baugh suggested to me (Interview with Kuwabong June 1995), but Myalism and Revival Zionism that are both "present-world-oriented" and are traceable to the African slaves' retention of their African religions as a collectivizing force against European sorcery, suffering, poverty, oppression and tragedy (Schuller 65-67). Thus through an appropriation of these religious traditions, Goodison envisions a collective strategy that Myalism, and Revival Zionism achieved in the 1830-1840 slave rebellions. This ideal of collectivization is captured in the common Afrisporic metaphor of African slaves turning into birds to fly back to Africa. It also repeats the metaphor of the imagination as a bird which travels great distances by flight: "I am told that birds

travel faster over greater distances / when they move in chevron formation" ("Heartease New England 1987" 40). Even though Pollard misreads this poem as an imagist's achievement in nothing, I see it as Goodison's final statement on the need for collectivity as opposed to individualism. The single bird gets trapped under iron girders when it tries to measure on its own "distances between columns / with its given wing span, and it fails / for being alone and not having a wing span wide enough" (40).

In reading *Tamarind Season*, *I Am Becoming My Mother*, *Heartease*, *Baby Mother and the King of Swords*, and *Selected Poems*, I have tried to show that Goodison reclaims and co-opts past and present ancestral African female figures as icons for the construction of her poetic of deliverance. I have shown that her references to her mother, grandmother, Nanny, Rosa Parks, Winnie Mandela, Maami-Water, Mulatta, and other unidentified females not only proclaim a poetic of African sisterhood, but also, as Baugh puts it, constitute "the three points of a triangle of Black experience and struggle" (16), what Paul Gilroy calls the Black Atlantic experience. These journeys, as I discussed in Chapter Two, become testimonials of roots-reconnection. Goodison, like Philip and the later Harris, undertake these journeys, whether physically or metaphorically, to Africa as a way of re-authenticating her Africaribbeanness. As Pollard has pointed out in her review of *Heartease*, Goodison is a poet of sheer descriptive power, whose "physical description as clear as in painting, and the interweaving of language codes, continue to be the hallmarks of [her] work. Standard

Jamaican English gains breadth by the inclusion of Rastafarian words slipped in effortlessly . . . [together with] Rastafarian meanings" (96). Goodison's rhetoric of recovery could, therefore, safely be situated within a spiritual or mystical territory in which she negotiates different workings of the shape that hurts through to the spirit that heals.

CHAPTER FIVE

Cynthia James: From Moaning Ground to Wholeness Songs.

Bring me the taste of triumph
in the travail of your blues
Sister, sing me a song of personhood
in your wailing ecstasy set me loose
for born woman and black
i need not bleed and bleed the
rawness of my pain
I'm tired of the sad songs
let me heal and live again
.....
uncurdle then my mother's milk
so that my children may not sing forlorn,
those same songs of inferiority
both bitter and stillborn.
("sing me a song, sister." iere my love 3-4)

I must teach my people in the streets
I must teach my daughter
to build
.....
I must teach
my daughter songs of love
to bay the mocking world ("The Covenant." Vigil 52)

I begin my examination of Cynthia James's poetry with an explanation of the words "moaning ground," a location central to James's journey to voice. Moaning ground, according to James, is the inner court of the "centre of spiritual pilgrimage for the `Shango Baptists' religion; referred to by different names throughout the Caribbean community; the rites of worship are founded in African (Yoruba)

theology" (*Vigil* 81). Right from the beginning, then, I want to suggest that James's poetic, like that of Goodison, is built mostly on Africaribbean cultural specificities. But unlike Goodison, Harris, and Philip, these cultural specificities include the contributions of East Indians in the Caribbean.

James Millette describes the Caribbean society as one that is "overwhelmingly a black society. It is a society in which ninety to ninety-five per cent of the people are black" (49), but a society that needs intellectual emancipation from basically a neo-colonial Eurocentricism. He uses the word "Black" in this context to describe a historically acquired experience and not necessarily skin coloration or topological origins. The word "Black" here, according to Millette does not refer, therefore, only to people of African descent, but also to those of East Indian descent (47-48). I recognise the bourgeois and liberal origins of this type of definition of the so-called Black race, but I am also aware that in both the Caribbean and in Britain, Black is a racial term which is used to designate all non-European communities. For Cynthia James also such a broad definition of "Blackness" is a bit tricky as it fails to take into account the degrees of differences between East Indian and African experiences in the Caribbean. James recognises these differences, but she explores the common grounds between these differences in order to create a more inclusive Trinbagonian poetic of healing. James comes to poetry in a period of political and social uncertainties in Trinidad, characterised by the

economic boom of the 1970s, the military coup d'état of the 1980s, and the economic collapse of the 1980s to 1990s.

Since 1979, Cynthia James has established herself as a major voice among Africaribbean writers. She has published a play, three books of poetry, a collection of short stories, and has two novel manuscripts ready for publication. But in spite of these achievements, she is yet to gain any international recognition except for occasional mention in local literary circles of Trinidad, and rare anthologies such as Margaret Watts's 1990 anthology of Trinidad and Tobago Women's poetry: *Washer Woman Hangs Her Poems in the Sun*, and *Sisters of Caliban* (1996), edited by M. J. Fenwick. Nevertheless, her poetry is extremely engaging and stylistically complex. She strives for a rhetoric of recovery and healing with the available creative resources and spaces in the Caribbean. The epigraphs above announce the direction of both of James's poetic and of my own reading of her poetry. These epigraphs are testaments to her rejections of the poetics of lamentation, despair, and fragmentation of the Africaribbean self. These testaments locate James at the cross-roads of self-articulation through the negation of pain. She, like the other poets, transgresses prescribed poetic boundaries defined by the memories of pain in Africaribbean historiography, and the culture of victim mentality that so often defines Africaribbean theories of recuperation. James, like the other three poets, is suspicious of the relevance of liberal feminist and post-colonial discourses in Africaribbean female rhetorics of recovery. For James, as well as for

the others in this study, there is no sameness of female experience and thus no 'universal' feminism. The cultural location and historical origins of the Africaribbean female's oppression make liberal feminism unacceptable to James, as well as to Philip, Harris, and Goodison. Moreover, for James in "sing me a song, sister" (*iere my love* 4-5), "pain is common gender / and many swans have mournful songs" (4) in her own community. bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* critiques bourgeois liberal feminism as too narrow, divisive, and destructive to women's movements to end sexism, racism, and classism (68). She observes that liberal feminism, represented and politicized in "The Redstock Manifesto," Clause III, actually tends to consolidate sexism and classism. For the Afrisporic woman, that brand of feminism fails to take into consideration the collective sufferings, hardships, and struggles women and men in their communities have faced and face together (69). So when James writes in "Rocksalt" (*Vigil* 44-47), that the Africaribbean woman has for years been "building a dreamspace / large enough for two of us" (44), she is taking the same position that hooks articulates in her writing (73-74). That is, the struggle for Africaribbean female emancipation of their personhood, must be carried out together with Africaribbean men.

This refusal by James to abstract and blame patriarchy alone for her oppression links her to Philip, Harris, and Goodison, who all in some ways locate the sources of the Afrisporic female's oppression in Euro-Americans' desire for world domination. James's poetic of recovery and healing takes cognisance of the hurt and "the loneliness of dreaming

228228228/ the rocksalt of desire / the dry slake of doubt" (45) experienced by the disempowered Africaribbean male. This awareness of the Africaribbean male as a comrade in struggle against oppression enables James to seek for a clearing in which the collective dreams of both male and female can be realised. She reaches out to the man in a voice of assurance and hope: assurance that she searches for him constantly and will not abandon him; hope in the image of the turtle's egg of life buried beside the man's dead hope. She extends a sisterly hand to the man--a gesture of familial bonding. By implication, James is suggesting that the Africaribbean male is a very hurt and depressed person, who needs the encouragement of the female. The female gives back hope to the male out of sibling bonding so that he may perform his role within the community. She searches for the brother and finds him lying "where the turtle comes up / to bury its live hope / next to your dead hope" (46). James's affirmation of bonding here between the genders, follows the position taken by Afrisporic feminists. It echoes the arguments made by Merle Hodge, Olive Senior, Alice Walker, bell hooks, Hazel Carby, and others that Afrisporic women should seek alliances with their men. James's position here is analogous to Goodison's in the later's *Heartease* poems as I have shown in Chapter Four. They both ignore the pressing issues of gender inequality in order to focus their energy more sharply on political and racial issues.

This dedicated and mature radicalism, sensitivity and prophetic vision provides James a broad framework to develop a viable poetics of inter-gender collectivity, towards a healing and wholeness for her

fragmented Trinbagonian society. Her poetics seeks to exorcise, not only the exile mentality and its induced psychological insecurities, but also to inculcate into the Trinbagonian sensibility a pride in Africaribbean cultural productions such as calypso and shangoism, and to use them as valid foundations for the project of national recuperation. Like Goodison, James examines some of the socioeconomic and historical contradictions in her society that exacerbate the paranoia of rootlessness, and explores ways to conjure up a sense of home and belonging. She refuses to indulge in the politics and poetics of scapegoating and confrontation with an external or historical enemy at these crossroads of self-identification and reinscription. This is neither a manifest lack of awareness, nor a demonstration of the type of mental conditioning that produces auto-colonization. Like that of her compatriots in this study, James's vision, writes Patricia Ismond, rests more on a pursuit of "the wholeness of her society, and [her] serious dedication to craft" (82), and for which an innovative appropriation of various Euro-American and Africaribbean discourses to articulate that vision becomes her underlying principle. Her natural instinct for the linguistic paraphernalia of her cultural location parallels Goodison's, Philip's and Harris's. They all engage overlapping communication modes to formulate, within the contexts of Africaribbean femaleness, cumulative woman-songs that are also man-songs (James vii). It is, however, true to some extent that these resources seem sublimated to the politics of racial recognition, cultural survival, and literary inclusion in the works of Philip and Harris.

James, like Goodison, does not suffer from the jigsaw-complex of marginality that engulfs the energies of Philip and Harris, who have partially left their Caribbean cultural landscape for ". . . snow-topped Alpine forest / [or for] Canadian red-heart autumn cottage" ("jigsaw." *here my love* 17). As she asserts in an interview with Funso Aiyejina, James is "firmly rooted in the Trinidadian world/landscape. . . . I grew up with a certain sense of knowing who I am. . . . there was nobody forcing me to be other than I was going to shape myself to become" (1). Even if this seems like James's refusal to examine closely the real nature and effects of her colonial education, the powerful Euro-American forces that still dominate a lot of Africaribbean life and cultural productions, and the agency of Afrisporic writers in Euro-American metropolises, we still can accept this assertion of an agency based on the facts of her cultural situatedness. Moreover, as Joya Gomez puts it, James's project facilitates the desire of Caribbean teachers to subvert the effects of their Eurocentric education (Interview with Kuwabong, July 1995). What Joya refers to here is James's ability to create poetic characters and scenes from neighbourhoods that are familiar to her readers. This is the concern of every Caribbean writer: to create poetry directly out the people's immediate cultural environment, and to make the poet a living presence among the people as expressed in "Journey Mail" (*La Vega* 61-63). James, like Goodison again, did not, therefore, begin her creative life as a warrior against triple marginalization--woman, Africaribbean, immigrant/exile--because, she tells her alter ego in "jigsaw": "It's your own landscape you work at / under the fragile

blue lampshade of the sky" (*iere my love* 17). This seems unequivocally to be limiting and critiquing the undeniable capacities of people like Philip and Harris, who, in spite of all the odds against them in their non-Caribbean locations, still manage to create recognizable female Africaribbean personhoods. But for James, who may be echoing George Lamming (50), to go into exile is to shirk the responsibility of sharing in the task of creating a vibrant Africaribbean aesthetic. It is to conjure an Africaribbean personhood that is nurtured in the uncertainties of nostalgia and fired by reaction polemics. What James seems to be missing are the realities that exile and nostalgia do bring into a sharper focus the same issues in the native land which the resident poet may be trying to articulate. Exile can generate in the exiled poet fresh ways of articulating the same concerns, fresh ways which may be difficult for the local poet to see. Viewed this way then, exile is not necessarily bad for a nation's struggle to create a rhetoric of recovery as James seems to be insinuating.

But as James laments in "*iere my love*," those who abandon the "dew-eyed mist" covered Caribbean in search of better comfort, are not only a "faithless band" fleeing "the violence of inner deprivation" (*iere my love*_17), but are also shameless in their individual pursuit of fulfilment. James's recovery poetic critiques and echoes the reasons expressed by Lamming to explain the rationale behind the Caribbean writer's exile mentality. The reasons include personal ambition, fear of non-recognition and marginalization, and pleasure (46). These same sentiments are expressed by Harris, Philip, Brand, and a host of other

translocated Africaribbean female writers. In contrast to these exile-oriented others, James's poetic can be said to evolve out of a deep love and commitment to her motherland, Iere/Trinidad/the Caribbean: "Iere my love, I'll stay with you /. . . / I know I'll never be ashamed / to tend your face which I have scarred" (17). This initial confession of absolute love and devotion provides James later with an emotional site for a new covenant with Iere. She is not weighed down with the ghosts/realities of the bitter memories of slavery, but tells Christopher Columbus that she has liberated herself from the curse of his albatross--slavery: "I shake off the albatross you slew / your yoke of sinful sorrow / of 300 years or more" ("For Cristobal Colon." *La Vega* 55). This liberation of the self from more than three hundred years of slavery and the external definition of the Africaribbean self enables her to join Philip, Harris, and Goodison in their efforts to claim an end to their lamentation and to their nomadic existence. This seizure of personal freedom makes James a companion of Philip, Harris, and to some extent Goodison, whose writings do resonate with that same assertive sense of freedom. Free from externally constructed images of the self, free from internalized self deprecation, these poets become introspective and look critically at their present locations in a historical context to see which areas need straightening out.

In James's case, it is obvious that the above generalizations point to a revolutionary poetic praxis, to the extent that it seeks to reexamine and radicalise the expectations of the people, titillated by politicians at independence, but which have remained frustratingly

frozen. James's post-emancipatory poetic moves away from what Walcott in "The Muse of History" calls the "self-torture" which "arises when the poet . . . sees history as language, when [she] limits [her] memory to the suffering of the victim" (3). Her rhetoric is aimed at honouring her people and ancestors without limiting her language to "phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge" (3). What she achieves together with Goodison, Philip and Harris is the separation of Caliban's anger and frustration from the artistry and beauty of his speech, "equal in their elemental power" (4) to those of Prospero, but which Walcott still refers to as a form of servitude (4). Nevertheless, this servitude points to a victory through a cunning assimilation of the master's world, added to the weight of the present. These manoeuvres provide the poets with a new Adamic function of new naming (renaming) of the Africaribbean self. James's poetic sensibility is, therefore, not marinated in the bitterness of the past, but is saturated with the hopes and contradictions of the present. This sublimates the limitations of nostalgia, and radicalizes the vision of the future without engaging the language of contestation with a real or imagined antagonist. As she puts it succinctly in "For Olatungii Belle," years of coercion have taught her how to talk loudly in order "to eradicate my urge to curse / . . . [and] to fashion songs instead" (*La Vega* 57) of fashioning curses as Caliban does. This is not a position we find advocated by either Philip or Harris, even as they all engage in this process of renaming.

Central to the rhetoric of recovery is the issue of racism as it is practised in the Caribbean. Racism in the Caribbean, especially

between Africaribbeans and Indocaribbeans, however, comes closer to ethnocentrism, as explained by the man in *Drawing Down A Daughter* (71). Neither the Africaribbean nor the Indocaribbean has the political or economic foundation to promote ethnic exclusivity into active racism--where racism is practised on the basis of skin colour and ethnicity is based on linguistic and cultural differences. This in no way denies the fact that for many years, until recently, political power was wielded by Afri-Trinbagonians and economic power held by Indo-Trinbagonians. In James's perceptive poem "the anatomy of race" (*iere my love* 21-23), she examines the signification of racist expletives such as "Nigger" and "Coolie" that Africaribbeans and Indocaribbeans hurl as their dialogics of oppression at each other:

when you say coolie
and I say nigger still
after all these years
of living in the same backyards
when we curse each other so
and even at times ourselves
it's hard for even us to understand
we speak the comfort of inferior anguish
we speak the history of our exploited selves (21)

For James, the issue of racial tensions between Africaribbeans and Indocaribbeans is located in their collective historical consciousness of oppression. These tensions rose to a head in the years prior to independence in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana.¹ But because neither of the two groups has power over the other, their usage

¹ David Dabydeen captures these racial tensions in Guyana at independence in extremely powerful collection, Coolie Odyssey.

of these racist expletives does not necessarily reflect schizophrenic delusions about the 'Other' as practised by their former enslavers and colonizers, and in Canada, as Philip and Harris testify. This epistemology of the oppressed becomes an ideology of tolerance on account of a collective historical awareness of the roots of their economic and cultural impoverishment. James seeks to evade the nature of the deep racial divisions in her Trinbagonian society with the trick of the pen. This is why she argues that these terms are no longer used for a negative absolute determination and domination of a racial 'Other':

"pray God we only seek to tell each other and ourselves / inspite of all of it / we have no choice but to co-exist" (22). James is acutely aware of the racist origins of these terms, but she is more concerned with qualifying and exploring the subversion of their original significations by ordinary Trinbagonians "to improve out of impoverished living" (22), and "to equalize our pains and claims / somehow for years we've used them / yet rarely seek each others blood" (22). She capitalizes on the catharsis their performance has on the Africaribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans. James sees them as negative instruments of correction and leveling among equals leased "to strip us of pretensions / whenever we see each other get uppity with ourselves" (22). It is, therefore, a given fundamental that they are spoken daily in order to prevent the total internalization of their negativity. The rejection of every attempt by political fiat to force the people to "conceal them in our breast" (22), shows the people's revelatory insight in "knowing one day when we try to curse / out will gush only fresh air" (22). The

collective identification with these terms helps exorcise their negative racist connotation, and leads to an acceptance of their rootedness in the Caribbean (23). Thus we see how a rhetoric of recovery can be developed by taking an epistemology of negation, detoxifying it, and making it serve the community. This method is perhaps a Caribbean version of the much more celebrated African American technique of "signifying" on the master through language. In spite of this conversion of the meanings of these words to suit the needs of Trinbagonians, their negative connotations are still hurtful when used by foreigners to refer to Trinbagonians. Africaribbeans and Indocaribbeans do not, therefore, encourage outsiders to engage the same words in their interaction with them. They warn "(all interfering souls beware)" (22), in spite of what Rohlehr in *My Strangled City* labels as the "limits within which Caribbean people live[d]" (1). These limits which interest groups now exploit to divide the people, manifested the "need which the dominant race, class, and civilization felt, to create and perpetuate stereotypes, systems of coercion (laws) and propaganda, which reinforced stereotypes (educational) both during and after slavery" (1). James's recovery poetics of signifying on the negation of the self is one of the numerous strategies engaged by Afrisporic communities to affirm the "validity of the submerged-self" (Rohlehr 1-4). This submerged-self materializes as several forms of not-so-submerged-selves in a post-independent era. But to achieve affirmations of the not-so-submerged-selves in a post-independent community, emergent threats to selfhood engendered in the submerged contradictions of distorted socio-economic,

racial, cultural and political systems must be exposed and neutralised. James, then, like most Caribbean poets, engages various artistic and enunciatory modes that are common to Caribbean culture to create a system that best articulates her vision for the liberation of the not-so-submerged-selves. These modes include "folktales, proverbs, rhetoric, patterns of performance, and the capacity to create style" within the Caribbean linguistic continuum and in musical forms such as Ska, "Blues, Jazz, Gospel, Calypso, Funk, Reggae" (3). Her cultural location facilitates the co-optation of calypso/soca rhythms and performatives inaugurated by her predecessors. She also creatively appropriates modernist and post-modernist aesthetics to negotiate for positions of articulation in what Rohlehr calls the dialectical collisions and opposition in the "folk/urban continuum" within the Caribbean literary tradition (3).

This co-optation of competing discourses becomes evident in *Vigil*. The collection is divided into three parts: "Lamentations," "The Vigil," and "Canticles (Iere's Song)." "Lamentations" is a metaphysical link between the oppression of the present and the oppression of the past, both traceable to the consequences of Euro-American modernism on the African in the Caribbean. In "Lamentations," James combines her triple heritage lamentation: African, Judeo-Euro-Christian, and Africaribbean. In the first poem in "Lamentations," James devotes three stanzas to the triple historical movements of the Africaribbean--slavery, colonization and independence--in the evolution of present Caribbean society in which "the Governor unplumes his hat / his palanquin has tumbled down" and

"the razor reed / no longer snaps for me . . . / nor slices salt my blood" ("Hard Times 2). But the end of slavery and colonization does not usher in total freedom. There is physical freedom, but carefully constructed obstructions defer the translation of hope into practical experience for the people:

now I pass through
honour guards
of swirling sourflies
breeding not on natural rot
but challenging
my ears my eyes
while the white blight
attacks the underbelly
of the ancestral croton (3)

This picture of the moral corruption and general poverty eating away at promises of political independence, makes James stand with Goodison. Goodison is basically a social satirist, and the political emerges from her critique of Jamaican society. James adds the political to her social critique. The unnatural rot includes the rise of drug barons, violence, and the inability of politicians to deliver what they promised at independence, which has led the country into a new state of colonization (Millette 48). In this situation of distorted socio-political aspirations, James laments the return of hard times: "land slips from grip / the river breaks its banks / flooding out my father's livestock" ("Hard Times" 3). The metaphors of landslides and floods are powerful vehicles to denote the consequences of cataclysmic impoverishment, disinheritance, and hopelessness encapsulated in the destruction of the patriarchal property. Some feminist and marxist oriented readings of this may assume that this catastrophic disinheritance of the father is a

necessary given for the beginning of a new social order, in which the genders would start off as equals. But such an argument would totally miss the historical origins of the destruction of Africaribbean manhood in slavery and colonization. James interprets the destruction of the father's ownership rights to land as a communal tragedy that has nothing to do with feminist abstractions of patriarchy. Her interpretation evolves out of a concern for the meaning of communal loss of their sense of belonging. What Caribbean people have never denied is the fact that the destruction of patriarchal authority during slavery and colonization has thrust upon the matriarch/mother a new responsibility of providing the community the moral authority and agency it needs for a definition of selfhood (Merle Hodge, "The Shadow of the Whip" 114-115; Olive Senior, *Working Miracles* 95-102; Bryan B. et al., 213-221). Knowledge of the trans-gender roles of Africaribbean women is, therefore, necessary for an understanding of James's, Goodison's, Philip's, and Harris's positions in relation to the centrality of the mother figure in their poetics.

In this recourse to the mother as the available source of moral authority and agency, James explores mother/daughter bonding as a site of nurturing a liberatory discourse. This exploration takes place in "On Moaning Ground - Dream One," "On Moaning Ground - Dream Two," and "On Moaning Ground - Dream Three." Here, James examines the mother/daughter relationship, and dramatizes the strategies both mother and daughter adopt to ameliorate community lack of selfhood in Euro-Christian and Africaribbean pantheons. In a way, what transpires in these poems,

particularly "Dream One," is the practical demonstration of what Walcott calls the adaptation of the master's language through an adaptation of his religion for purposes of renaming and resituating the self, in the new location of the uprooted self (12-13). West Africans, transplanted by the Europeans onto Caribbean soil without their Gods, had no way of reversing the historical reality of their new location. Adaptation of the master's language, and especially his religion, and synchronizing them with memories of their former cultural traditions, becomes what Edouard Glissant calls a strategy of diversion. Diversion through religious syncretism is, to Glissant, an ambiguous venture when it does not lead to the "development of concrete `possibilities'" (22). James examines this strategy of a diversion in order to show how it has developed from a pure subversive manoeuvring into areas of concrete possibilities for the Africaribbean person.

In content, the poem is a simple narrative by a neophyte training to be a high priestess of her people. Her trainer is her mother who shows and teaches her daughter the elemental rituals that must be performed on the road to prophethood. These rituals are culturally reflexive of the Africaribbean experience. The journey begins in acts of contrition and penance as expressed in "Mea Culpa" (Vigil 4). Penance involves a journey to reconciliation with their Euro-Christian personality. Mother and daughter, therefore, journey to a Catholic monastery "to get her plans / her prayerbook / and me her daughter" blessed (4). The journey also enables the mother to purchase Euro-christian objects of belief--a chaplet, "a medal of The Child of Prayer

/ to safety pin with brass / upon my chest" (4). The subdued tone of derision in these lines suggests the child's early resistance to the mother's attempt to define her through, and confine her in, European spirituality. The mother, however, has to perform this public demonstration of obedience to the Europhonic master's prescribed religiosity. The daughter exposes the presence of death in this religion: "I pass a caressing palm / the bark crumbles" (6). The monk, Brother Brown, is dead; the samaan of Indocaribbean faith is also dead. What is left is mere scaffolding. These spiritually dead religions in the Caribbean have no ritual relevance and benefit for the Africaribbean in search for identity. However, their lack of life-giving forces creates a justification for their ultimate rejection by the daughter, and enables her to find space in which to clear the path leading to Moaning Ground, the Shango religion of their African ancestry.

The necessity of the daughter becoming a prophet is heightened by another vision of death, this time of prophets of Africaribbean personhood. As she journeys toward Moaning Grounds two and three, she experiences sorrow and panic for a country without either political or spiritual leadership. Political luminaries who led the various Caribbean islands to independence, such as "Burnam, Blaize, Barrow, young Adams, / Williams . . . " ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Two." *Vigil* 30), and spiritual/cultural leaders are dead. She laments: "and all along the way the poets and the prophets dying / prematurely; Bob and Astor, Wilbert and lately / Dennis and Queen Daisy" ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Three" 32). Added to these visions of sorrow and panic is the horror of the

possibility of a nonexistent future seen in the way children die in hordes for lack of proper sustenance: "because all what we do, baby faces still sleeping in / early coffins outside pavement shops, smelling their / own filth hardening around them like cursed flowers" (33). The horror is complicated by the youngsters' enslavement to destructive foreign tastes and modes of self determination in Hollywood-style gangsterism (34).

In order to translate these visions and meditations on chaos into hope, James engages the techniques of Caribbean roots music and performance art, what Carolyn Cooper in *Noises in the Blood* defines as "oracy" in Africaribbean written poetry (81). Oracy involves the "performative transference . . . of the audio/visual/kinetic integrity" of the "relatively static . . . words on the page" (68). In "oracy" or what others have labeled orature, "the audience becomes a collective voyauditeur, enjoying the aesthetic pleasure of exquisitely recreated" conditions of being (69). In Africaribbean poetics such acts of recreation involve acts of appropriation, consolidation, continuation, and innovation of performance traditions that have hitherto been denigrated by the literary poets. Oracy, further contends Cooper, (echoing Edward Kamau Brathwaite's definition and defence of Nation language), "is not merely the absence of literacy; it is a way of seeing, a knowledge system" (81). But in order to combine the two discourses--oracy and literacy--and produce really lasting work, one must be able to "employ the conceptual conventions of both discourses" (81), and Cynthia James, like Goodison, does this very effectively. She

demonstrates a "mastery of hierarchies of knowledge: the concrete and the abstract" (81) of both discourses. It is this sophistication that Walcott calls for in his highly polemical and ambivalent positions on creolization in "The Muse of History" and "What the Twilight Said." But as I have argued in Chapter Two, Claire Harris has had to metamorphose from an initial tendency to reject Creole in her work into a mature embrace of it in *Drawing Down A Daughter*. Philip recognises her deficiency and tries in both her theoretical writing and poetry to rectify it. Together with Creole, the Afri-Caribbean poet also has at her disposal other Caribbean artistic forms such as: Calypso; Rapso; Pan; Parang; Hosay; Legend; Testimony, and Soca.

For my purpose, I intend to explore only James's adaptation of Calypso, Rapso, and Pan for her developing poetic. Calypso as it is appreciated today did not just originate in its present form. Like any developed art form, it has had to go through a history of rebirths. Rohlehr traces the origins of calypso to *kalinda, oratorical, sans humanite minor, ballad, single tone, and double tone* (*The Shape of That Hurt* 29). It has always been concerned, he argues, not only with socioeconomic and political issues but, more important, "with language as magic, ornament, sharp cutting satirical tool, and vehicle for a humour of the grotesque. . . . [It] has grown in complexity, density, and an awareness of itself as a serious form" in both style and "modes of consciousness" (29). In its development, calypso has grown to transcend the limitations of mere cynicism, and has become a vehicle for social message and direction (29). James's adaptation of calypso

reflects, then, her concern for, and involvement in the collective search for self definition and identity. James's immersion in the calypso poetic is also a way of joining the crusade to sanitize the art form and liberate it from its harsh anti-female stance (Rohlehr 2; Senior 167-168; Keith Warner 1982). In exploring the calypso form as a viable poetic, James, together with other female calypsonians are also consciously reclaiming the art's female origins. According to Hollis Liverpool alias Chalkdust, one of best known calypsonians, in an interview with me (July 13 1995), calinda chants, which later developed into calypso songs, were originally performed by women in praise of contestants in stick fights. Rudeolph Ottley (V) writes that this reclamation of calypso by women becomes an enabling factor in a redefinition of women's position in society, in which a path of just inheritance and morality is articulated. We find Philip making use of this tradition of the early beginnings of calypso in her long "dramacritique" poem "Dis/Place" which I discussed in Chapter Two.

Along with female calypsonians such as Rose, Singing Francine, Twiggy, Abbi Blackman, Natasha Wilson, to mention just a few, James seeks to develop a poetic release of the tensions between male and female. As Josyline L. Sealey contends, female calypsonians find strength in their development of "more sensitive and nurturing calypsos dealing with social problems, nation building, advice to the youth and personal relationships" (VII). For example, her poems, "Matilda" (La Vega 92-97) and "Mathilda" (Vigil 13-14), about the Africaribbean woman who is a washerwoman, market woman, a healer, and a player of many other

roles as Goodison says in "My Last Poem" (*Selected Poems* 32-33), are written as direct feminist responses to the negative images of the Caribbean woman portrayed in the male calypso called "Matilda." In "Matilda" (92-97), we are told how the male calypsonian "in his mauvais langue / even spread the rumour / she stole his money" and fled to Venezuela (94). But the poem's main thrust is to teach Trinbagonian youth to look for poetic material within their own community to develop positive Africaribbean personhoods (James, July 1995). James, in this poem, first reviews the terrible things said about Matilda, symbol of Africaribbean woman: "you do not have / to go a place to find her / she is right here everywhere" (94). In eulogizing Matilda, and therefore Africaribbean womanhood, James writes:

but don't listen to the ugly things
people who don't know better say
for her mouth they say spreads
like Mango Bascapool
and her breath
even less kindly
they say she perfumes with the juices of sours
the blank ant follows
like the light of spilt sugar
and the wings of dead candleflies ("Matilda." *La Vega* 92)

James here contests the language of denigration of Africaribbean femininity. In particular, she contests the third and fourth types of the four categories of calypso that Warner (99) has identified. The third category deals with the negative definitions of women by stereotypes, which I believe, are taken from the racist vocabulary of slavery and colonial days. Women are classified as sexually unsatisfiable, ugly, stupid, predatory, smelly, evil, dirty, and

treacherous. As J. D. Elder (25) says in "The male/Female conflict in calypso," the crudest semantic formulations to cause revulsion toward the self and generate a sense of inferiority in women are used in this type of calypso. Keith Warner also writes that this crude abuse of the female goes hand in hand with a portrayal of the woman as witch, who uses obeah to kill the man's self control in matters relating to their relationship (99).

But as Senior has observed (168), these pernicious calypsos, and the false bravado of tone in which they are performed, signify a deep male insecurity at their inability to play their roles as protectors of the tribe, and providers of food and shelter for the family. That feeling of insecurity is exorcised by attacking the closest ally in their situation of lack. This supports James's call for female sympathy for men so as to help them come out of their depression and loneliness. I will take up this issue later in the chapter. It is, therefore, not surprising that James confronts these negations of her femininity with a poem like Matilda. Aside from rejecting these stereotypes, the poem helps James to sympathize with and reach out to these anxiety-ridden males. Indeed, in spite of all the negations of Matilda's personhood, she still becomes the historiographer of the community:

she also wrote his history
perfumed him with patience
anointed him
then lifted him up by his armpits
and stood him up (95)

In "Mathilda" (Vigil 13-14), James makes use of the acoustics of song to capture the calypso tones she wants to weave into her poetry.

The use of repetition, onomatopoeia and proverb conjures and transfers the kinetic/aural energies of oral performance onto the inertia of the printed page:

shak-a-shak-shak
the scatter of the static
eating at the edges

of the song:
tak-a-tak-tak
gunfire silence

and Mathilda's little boy
lies through the night
thinking of the kite he put up

but can't take down
no joy to fly to tug to sky
the claim he made

when would joy thread again the gaping circle? (*Vigil* 14)

The question that ends the poem becomes an evocation of the bitterness of disillusion suffered by the poor and conscientious in post-independence Caribbean countries. This disillusion is metaphorically represented by the boy's kite that is stranded in the sky. The claim to independence of spirit, of body, and of property, is unrealizable in these neo-colonial and militocratic oligarchies.

The syncopated discourse between oracy and literacy, between legend and reality, in "Lament of the Midnight Warrior (for Lancelot Layne)," yields what is usually described as Robber Talk, (a system of praise poetry originating and still practised all over Africa into the African-American system of Signifying and Toasts, and Africaribbean

Oratorical and Sans Humanite).² Robber Talk, Oratorical, and Sans Humanite are all within the Calypso tradition of self identification within historical and socio-political temporalities. Robber Talk is a collage of incantation, tracing, cursing, admonition, heroic self-confidence, and occasional self doubt (22). In her poem, James uses the legendary Midnight Robber (Lancelot Layne) as a mask to announce the self with confidence, and to lament and critique the collapse of the Caribbean cultural revolution. According to James, the Midnight Robber was "a celebrated figure in the pantheon of Trinidad masquerade; a folk hero and warrior, who outlines his epic triumphs boastfully; a style captured in the work of Trinidad cultural activist Lancelot (Keebu) Layne" (*Vigil* 82). James is possessed and empowered by the spirit of the tradition started by Layne. She then uses Midnight Robber as a mask to call for an end to the kind of essentialist cultural activism that led to independence. The early nationalists, she claims, have cleared the path toward the construction of the new Caribbean person. People of the present have no business continuing to glory in these achievements, but are admonished to move forward from there. Midnight Warrior declares:

I stood in the holdings
inhaled the scents
bore the torment

² Mendes in his dictionary of Trinbagonian language defines Midnight Robber and his talk as "an extravagant braggart of fear. They wear black costumes, and [is] armed with revolvers, daggers . . . a doublet and breeches, an enormous elaborate hat with fringed brim and a crown of some creature of doom. A flowing cape with skull and `cross-bones.' Assails his victims with long winded speeches of doom and fear, monologues of empty threats" (183).

crossover lament
 the metaphor of the pain
 lives and dies with me

I bore the pain
 so you would not wear the shame
 I spread the mantle
 to make heroes from ordinary men
 I am the spirit of endeavour
 the only surrender

I am the only
 Midnight Warrior (*Vigil* 7-8)

Midnight Warrior claims all the sacrificial struggles for the liberation of Africaribbean personhood. The Midnight Warriors, masquerading as ancestral spirits, lament the betrayal of their sacrifices in the injustices they see, the thuggery, the oppression of women and children, and the perpetuation of self-doubt. The Midnight Warrior demands the return of war regalia, and a return to the spirit of racial recuperation. Again James desiresto use Robber Talk to reject the negative stereotypes given to women: "who wears my dagger / to slash the gut of women" and "parade my purse / to steal the nation's gold" (7-8). Unlike the real Midnight Robber whose bravado was to protect the community, these latter-day pretenders speak only the boasts, blow the whistle to frighten away the children (8). What pains the Midnight Warriors is the trivialization of the ancestors' struggle for emancipation.

James's inter-gender poetics becomes evident when she evokes both male and female ancestors in her desire to restore some dignity to the Africaribbean. One female ancestor is Dame Lorraine. Dame Lorraine, the

mother of Africaribbean dance, is equally evoked within the ambience of performative poetics and readerly text. The poem "Masquerade" (La Vega 14-15) valorizes Dame Lorraine, as it denigrates female dancers of the present. As a Midnight Warrior, Dame Lorraine is in total control of the audience, and also of her body. She "shakes her waist in your face / to let you know your place" (14). The dancers of today are mere puppets with G-strings shaking their "ass for stage effects / . . . for oos and aas from tourists" (14). For James, as well as for Walcott and Brathwaite, this type is not art. It is a further humiliation of the spirit of the Caribbean person: "you are the only people who work so hard / making a religion of poking fun / at your sacred things to keep one another laughing" (15). These performers for tourists' pennies have no sense of the pain and humiliation Midnight Warriors/Robbers like Dame Lorraine, Pierrot Grenade, King Pappyshow, and the others had to go through to give birth to a Caribbean pantheon of art forms such as the Limbo dance. As Midnight Warrior says, he journeyed to hell and returned "ripped and stripped of everything / the wire I bent in limbo making mas / with the heaven of my imagination" (14). Limbo³ is supposed to have originated among slaves determined to memorialize in dance form the

³ Limbo is defined as "a dance routine that involves bending over backwards, and inching one's way under a horizontal bar, (sometimes aflame) that is lowered after each successful pass to a minimum of below ten inches" (Mendes 88). The height is quite significant when it is recalled that African slaves were forced to perform a task similar to limbo. They were compelled to wriggle like snakes, but on their backs, through the narrow crevices of the ship's lower decks. They were then forced to lie flat on their backs, because there was no room above for them to even sit up. They were then chained hands and feet to each other below the deck.

manner in which they were transported in the slave ships from West Africa to the Americas. Hell then recalls those horrid conditions of the journey across the Atlantic. But now all these art forms born of suffering have been appropriated, commodified and patented for touristic purposes.

James, then, as voyeur and loquitor of the ancestors, reasons with these denigrators of her spiritual and cultural history, and warns them of the consequences of this exoticization and commodification of their culture and history of suffering. James argues that the commodification of Africaribbean culture and history is a form of recolonization. Through commodification the "white blight returns / to the underbelly / of the enduring croton" (Vigil 8) masquerading as tourism. The result: angry confrontation replaces sober reasoning as she gets frustrated with those who persist in the negative portrayal of her culture. She bursts out in justifiable anger: "is not smile I smiling / is grimace I grimacing / these irons are not playthings" (La Vega 15). The menace caused by those who commodify her pantheon made "from the liquor of my frustration" must be stopped. They should not be allowed to ". . . fuck around with it" anymore (15). The use of the Creole continuum here clearly demonstrates the rich complexities of Caribbean language, and problematizes the desire to write collective pain, suffering, and the history of degradation. Ironically, this difficulty enables James to adequately explore and encapsulate the emotional and spiritual linkages between James as poet/prophet, and James as public performer. It is

these issues that most preoccupy James in the Lamentation section of *Vigil*, and most of *La Vega*.

"Lamentation" is a period of extreme psycho-emotional and spiritual darkness and dryness for the poet. Debilitating and negative as such a period may be, it also, nevertheless, provides a foundation for the clarification of vision and message. It consolidates the poet's endurance, and enables her to transcend the extreme loneliness of the poet/prophet, especially in the case of the female Africaribbean person. In my interview with her, James emphasized the problem of loneliness experienced by female Africaribbean writers/leaders dating back to Nanny of the Maroons in Jamaica. Thus loneliness is thematized in several of her poems. It is also a foundation theme in Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue*, and *Looking For Livingstone*, and runs through all of Harris's work. I say this because the resistance to marginalization engaged by Philip and Harris is a fight for inclusion and acceptance. It is a battle against the loneliness felt by the marginalized writer in a system preaching multiculturalism. In James's poem "Veronica" (*Vigil* 15-20), Veronica is a prophet, seer, and loner. She is "this Moses woman" with a lot of pain and suffering. Veronica's loneliness is replicated in the poet. Her career as a poet of conscience creates for her a world of loneliness: "and me / now on my own / pilgrimage with pain" (19). Her friends, like her children, are all dead and she is left standing alone with nothing but bitter memories, keeping vigil, with a litany of their names (19-20).

Let me clarify what I mean by the loneliness of an Africaribbean female writer in an Africaribbean culturescape. My definition of loneliness excludes any reference to the individual sense of alienation that has been articulated by some pioneers of Euro-American high modernism. James's loneliness, as well as that of most Africaribbean writers, results from a kind of empathetic helplessness felt by the linguists of the dispossessed of the earth. It is the loneliness of the lead dirge singer, who must sift through and articulate the pain, between the silent spaces in the excesses of her dispossessed community's attempts at reversion and diversion (Glissant 14-23) to repossession. Hers is the representation of collective lamentation even if she recognises that "in this chronicle of tears / every moaner trumps / his own track" ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Two" 31). The individuality suggested here merely indicates the various strategies adopted by individuals in order to achieve a collective selfhood. For example, some make journeys back to Africa, others to India, others remain in the Caribbean, while others make explorations and discoveries of the former centres of their lives. All these combine to create the Caribbean personality. All these are mourners, and as Ramabai Espinet in Creation Fire states, mourning/moaning in the sense in which Caribbean poets engage it as strophe is "reflective and religious . . . and is concerned with reconciliation" of the excluded community from happiness, to a future of reconstruction (xvii). It is, consequently, a representation of the collective despair at "an inevitable loss rather than with grief or rage at the inevitable force of death" (xvii).

James's loneliness and lamentation also transcend the depersonalized dirge of the liberal-bourgeois-turned-radical in order to speak for the silent majority. As I have argued in chapter 4, ordinary Africaribbean people have never been silent. If anything, they have been rather loud in their protestations against slavery, colonization, and all forms of oppression through their folk literature and culture of resistance. Loneliness as location, and lamentation as utterance combine to create the turning point: "O upon this calender / of fragmented grief / I turn . . ." ("Sugar Aloes." *Vigil* 24). She turns, not away from her tradition, but toward her roots via her mother. But James's relationship to the mother is not the same as Harris's, or Goodison's, or Philip's. She does not reject the mother's definition of Africaribbean womanhood, neither does she valorise the mother's hardships, nor look for a lost mother. Her relationship with the mother is more of a spiritual one in which she seeks to be possessed by the spirit of the mother in order to gain power of speech, vision, word, and action.

In "The Vigil" section of *Vigil*, James develops a style and language that is different from "Lamentations." The language here is politically didactic, religious, supplicatory, urgent. For instance, "On Moaning Ground - Dream One" (26-28) deals with the supplication of a daughter to a mother for release into utterance. In her hyper-emotional and spiritual state, the daughter's prayer becomes tonally aggressive. She needs a radical response to her requests for guidance to the use of her tongue as an instrument of liberation. She also needs the mother's protection and clarity of vision in order to perform the role she has

been nurtured for. She requests the mother to seal her, show her the way, "wash my mouth / that my tongue / not betray" (26). It is not only the organs of speech that need ritual cleansing, but also the daughter's corporeality. The feet and hands must be washed so "that when I mark / time be light," and her writing will "serve the word / serve the deed/ serve light" (26). Here, we get a replacement of the Judeo-Christian/European spirituality in *iere my love* and its silences, with preparations to enter the spiritually vibrant world of Africaribbeans via Shangoism.⁴

Ritual cleansing of the daughter becomes an act of empowerment. The daughter seeks spiritual empowerment and moral agencies from the ancestral mother before she ventures to proclaim her vision of liberation in a word that is not hers. The prophet of liberation locates her moral authority in the socio-economic inequities that she observes around her: "for I see no sugar but my people in new plantations / grinding steel; no chains, no whips, the landlord and / the worker look alike, but tread uneven keel" (26). I will take up this point later in the chapter. Kevin A. Yelvington points out that there has been very little positive improvement for women or the poor, in Trinidad and Tobago since slavery and indenture days, in relation to power structures based on class, ethnicity, and gender (1-40). It is this lack of

⁴ Shangoism is perhaps the Trinbagonian equivalent of Jamaican Myalism and Revival Zionism. In Shangoism, Afri-Trinbagonians use the Bible as a text to retreat into their Yoruba African past in order to recover their present. Shango is the Yoruba god of thunder and creativity and is still worshiped in Nigeria and Benin today.

improvement in the lives of the people that James laments and speaks out against. This stabilizes her revolutionary rhetoric on an assessment of class inequalities and lack of social consciousness rather than on gender or racial inequality. She thus differs from Philip and Harris to the extent that their rhetoric of recovery is both gender and race specific. This in no way suggests that she glosses over gender and race-based variables in her Caribbean location. After all, she talks of the "white blight," and is the one with the poem anatomizing racial divisions in Trinidad and Tobago. Class inequality is exacerbated through political ineptness. She depicts politicians as "talking talking" mouths without substance. The absence of social awareness is worsened by visionless artists. Instead of artists becoming voices of conscience and vision, they actually destroy the little potential in the culture that could be used to recuperate the self. They are "making song and dance of helplessness; some taking up positions in foreign halls as if that is all they make of nationhood and independence" (27). No wonder that the people's feeble attempt at repossession is abortive and "the tigercat [is] let in again, this time from satellite he / grins and mocks" (27). The poet of vision in the inner court on moaning ground, is in a state of spirit possession. She rises out of her body and requests a song of release: "Mother / . . . / groan the hymn / and let me out" (28). Of course, the liberation sought here is neither a physical relocation away from the Caribbean, nor a suicide prayer. It is for a liberation into utterance in which body and spirit reunite to create a language of recovery for her people. Such a language must not just be abstract, it

must include bodily eruptions into language, as Philip contends in her poetry.

"On Moaning Ground - Dream Two" (29-31) expands the catalogue of the frustrated hopes of Trinbagonians tabulated in "On Moaning Ground - Dream One." To a neo-marxist, this panoramic overview of the contradictions and distortions in a neo-colonial state of existence is accentuated by the example of the now defunct Caribbean Community--Caricom, punned and satirized into "CARIB-COME and CARE and CARNGO" ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Two" 29). The twisted appellations reveal people's distrust and satiric interpretations of foreign-inspired and controlled economic unions. To them Caricom is a mere dumping ground for finished goods and industrial wastes from the external centers of economic and cultural power: they "dumping trash and breaking up the corals / because they think we small and can't protect our seas / and lands and our selves" ("Moaning Ground - Dream Three" 32-35). It is also a ground for cheap labour and resources for the multinational corporations, as both James Millette (54-66), and Clive W. Thomas (122-140) indicate. James interprets this pushing the Caribbean into the economic backwaters of Euro-American industry and culture, as a form of diminution of the people. This diminution of the whole emerges in the imagery of mole and cricket to denote the Caribbean people. The reduction of Caribcom into CARIB-COME, CARE and CARNGO indicates that the Caribbean is growing economically without developing: ". . . the clock strikes and / strikes yet nothing changes not even for the mouse" ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Two" 29).

This situation of stagnancy engenders exile or sit-down-and-do-nothing mentality. To justify any of these moves Africaribbeans explore the aesthetics of their oral culture. Proverbial usage, as a means of generalization and abstraction in the Caribbean, is traceable to Africa. Carolyn Cooper contends that any analysis of the Africaribbeans' predilection to proverbial usage must historicize the practice within the "complex conceptual and emotional range of proverbs in African cultures" (44). Proverbs are not just used as metaphorical escapes from unpleasant reality:

In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking; one of their most noticeable characteristics is their allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form.
(Finnegan 391)

Proverbial usage then is folk wisdom born out of generations of observation of behavioral patterns and responses to stress, translated and transmitted to the young through metaphors. Whatever the size of a cricket it still is a cricket, and its options for survival are either ". . . to hop around and forage in the / master's muddy backyard, or try to dodge the mower / on his front lawn? ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Two" 30). This reasoning may be contradicting James's constant rejection of the pleasures of exile as defended by George Lamming (50). I suggest that James's position, far from being contradictory, actualizes the neither/nor positionality of the Caribbean person in relation to her

country or to the world outside. In whichever site the Africaribbean locates herself, the threat of violent annihilation looms above her. But for James there still is the hope created through regenerative spiritual journeys back to either Africa or India. James, however, refuses to stress this journey, important and necessary though it may be, but rather stresses the journey of return back to the Caribbean soil, to share the refurbished spirit with those who remain in the Caribbean. At this point the daughter becomes the comforter to the mother. It is comforting that these descendants of Africa and India are re-empowered and returned to the Caribbean:

those who go
to India and to Africa
the ancestors welcome them
let them walk old kingdoms
feast them
drum them
bless them
but send them back (31)

The evocation of multiple hope originates in and is reinforced by the wry humour in the metanarrative of proverbs. In spite of the premature deaths of leaders, prophets, poets, and children, enough of them remain to carry on the battle for collective self-reclamation. An army of Midnight Warriors, including Dr. Bird, Dame Beryl, Sir Vidadhar, Ras Shorty I, Andre, Mungal, Boogsie, Jit, Masta Rastas, and Mother Eva are still marching to reclaim the fragmented Caribbean personhood. They sing "Om Shanti in / calypso rhythm, bringing peace and love to all the / races in the language of trinidadianism" ("On Moaning Ground - Dream Three" 32). This present breed of Midnight Warriors, including James,

does not use art to perpetuate race, class and gender hostilities and divisions in Trinidad and Tobago. James at this point does not see the future of a recuperated Trinbagonian within the political arena. She locates this liberation in her art by amalgamating differences to create a harmonious kaleidoscope of national culture and collective selfhood. For example, James writes that artists are "opening the way for Indian parang, rap and soca; / . . . / looking for new ways to bring together sitar, guitar, / lassa and steelpan" (32). This cultural synthesis is further strengthened by others who are "now writing the music of the steelband to score / so the children would have no excuse to lip-sync / heavy metal songs and do other people moonwalk" (33). Shango worshipers and the Masta Rastas also write and compose hymns of praise and protest to "help us with the wine of astonish- / ment Mother Eva say we born to drink" (33). At this point, James stresses the positives of the Trinbagonian cultural movement(s) towards a collective vision in which the various Caribbean entities will find freedom to develop, not as other cultures in relation to a dominant culture, but as co-equal cultural participants.

But how does James demonstrate this desire to create "whole songs strummed / from the frets of my hand?" This new way of fostering national culture? I think she does this well in the third part of *Vigil* she calls "Canticles." In this section, James actually writes poetry/songs set to steel band music. This is a practical demonstration of the type of roots-based poetic that she dreams of. Here is no expression of cultural essentialism or narrow nationalism. Here is a

determination to create a Caribbean aesthetic by drawing from internationally accepted Caribbean musical forms. For James, Caribbean poetry must echo "the tenorpan the cello" ("The Covenant" 54). Poetry must now be written "in notes of steel / and from our lips / the music peals" (54). Thus in "Pan Ramajay" (to steelband arrangement), James joins other pan poets such as John Agard, Lansana Kwesi, Brother Resistance, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Elsworth Keane, Joseph Cummings, Victor Questel to explore the aesthetic potential of pan, parang, and hoosay. Rohlehr has described pan poems as calypsos for steelbands written to imitate the "rhythms and idioms" of the steelbands. In pan poems, he writes, the poet experiments with "shape, rhythm, and metaphor. Its climax is a road march" (188). "Pan Ramajay" is written in the form of a dramatic performance in which all the history of cultural chauvinism and/or activism, and political nationalism are articulated. It is composed in dance movements and musical notations, and performed in a classroom situation. Here is a disorganized orchestra with the conductor busy schooling them in how to produce excellence. The whole of 1st Movement is the performance of a rehearsal:

now before we go
remember i is the maestro
we starting with some classics
and ending with calypso
put youself in my hand
i don't want no wassy wassy
when we begin the show (58)

This advances James's argument for the use of every available tool in the Caribbean to create a genuine Caribbean aesthetic. The word ramajay means "to sing sweetly; like a free bird whose diet is often the 'sikiay fig' (sucrier) a very sweet variety of the banana; to ramajay has long been part of steel band vocabulary" ("Glossary" 81). It connotes Indo-Caribbean origins, which reemphasizes the necessity of a collective interracial, inter-gender, and inter-genre construction of a Caribbean aesthetic. The rehearsal tries to show that Trinidad steelband music can and does rise to the same aesthetic heights as European classical music. As the conductor puts it in the 2nd Movement to "Mr. Baseman (to Bass backanswer solo)" ("Pan Ramajay" 64), "not all pan is bacchanal / not all pan is kaiso" (64); it can also be symphonic. There is a call not to take any more notice of the negative stereotypes about Caribbean cultural productions, but to go ahead and show the people what a real concerto is: "don't mind they think / we is still hooligan / dress up in pretty clothes" (65). Thus the orchestra combines instruments and styles from all the cultures that make up the Caribbean. However, James is not so determined to show similarity and/or equality of cultural production between the Caribbean and Euro-America that she forgets to stress the differences. For instance, in allowing the bands people to "do what allyou want now" (67) she allows them space to structure their own talent in their own way, but in such a way as to produce a syncopated, interfaced, cross-rhythmic harmony. The multi-layered nature of the language of pan music, calypso, soca, and other branches of Caribbean dance music helps to give these poems their

multifaceted particularity. This multifaceted quality is a fitting end to the journey of recovery embarked on in *Iere my love*. It relates to the action that Goodison envisions in "Heartease III." The people are pumped and thumped with the leggo, and are made to "chew wire eat glass" as an exercise to "exorcise their tabanca" and liberate them from the prison of their soulcase ("Pan Ramajay" 67). It is only after this carnival of exorcism that we "can see the culture rising" (69), and *Iere* regained.

So far, I have shown that James's assertive and positive vision of a glorious future is not built on idealism, but on the spirit of resistance to amnesia: "but nobody could take away the spirit and the blessing / from us and the children learning to create . . . " ("Dream Three" 34). Even the youth now reject the passivity of past generations, and become warriors with the people: "is so the people transform the sorrow of the passage; / no mind the memory still there, . . . " (34). James returns to the first lines of "Dream One," not to solicit the power of utterance, but to take freedom from the silent mother in order to preach her poetic of hope. The transference of power from mother to daughter seen in the ritual act of purification in "Dream One" happens here also. Purification or purgation is absolutely essential for an effective and regenerative spiritual vigil, and a prerequisite for the songs of praise in the third section of the poem. So once again she asks the mother to release her "from this inner court / to deliver up my" ("Dream Three" 35). The release sought is contingent on the cleansing of

the feet, mouth, hands, and the drinking from the bitter cup of sorrow.

This ritual bathing and drinking at the end of "Dream Three" lubricates and liberates the daughter's tongue into song. The trope of the "inner court" links the poem and the poet to Shango spirituality, and to metaphors of possession for the recovery of Afri-Caribbean culture. Carolyn Cooper, in "'Something Ancestral Recaptured': Spirit Possession as Trope in Selected Fiction of the African Diaspora" (70), defines this as the appropriation of "devalued folk wisdom - that body of subterranean knowledge that is often associated with the silenced language of women and the 'primitiveness' of orally transmitted knowledge." She sees this as the Afrisporic female's way of representing the world of cultural fluidity she inhabits. This is what James means by order in fragmentariness in "Trial" (*Vigil* 36-40). Possession as metaphoric trope also connects James to Goodison in their exploration of an Africentred spirituality to find the language of healing. The fluidity is expressed through the prosiness and abundant use of Creole in the earlier sections which give way to poetry that is socially charged in a style Gordon Rohlehr calls "talk songs," developed by "Brother Resistance . . . Lancelot Layne, Jamaican Dub, calypso and Afro-American rapping songs" (21). Before I examine James's use of this tradition, I wish to comment briefly on the last stages of her protagonist's journey to prophethood in the following poems in *Vigil*: "Trial" (36-40), "Foreday Morning" (41-43), "Rocksalt" (44-47), and "Amerindia" (48-50).

In these four poems, James traces the growth of the poet/prophet from the silence of purgatorial waiting to the finding of a tongue. In "Trial," the poet laments the socio-historical, economic, and cultural contradictions that frustrate every move by Trinbagonians to create a meaning for themselves. For her, every independence anniversary celebration, any national event, election, coup d'etat, or a party reshuffle is mere masquerading by the leadership. The people refuse to believe in the gimmicks of the politicians. They see these manoeuvres by the leaders as further torment. They do not trust any verdict of convenience for such verdicts never brings appeasement: "no profit no pain / no end to the pain" (36-37). The rest of the poem becomes a litany of prophetic warning couched in proverbs, a style that is predominantly used by calypsonians in their political calypsos. The voice and mood at the end of this section of the poem are strident and full of premonitions. For James, the future lies in a revolution, and she has no doubt at all of its imminence. She, therefore, calls on all the people, including the powerful, to "be prepared to surrender / all one owns and does not own" (37), when foreday morning dawns. The self must be surrendered for the collective good. On such a day the constancy of the vigil keeper, a woman, now grown weary and almost at the point of despair, sees the darkness sifting into a lightening dawn (40).

"Foreday Morning" does not necessarily, however, indicate an abrupt end to the despair. "Foreday Morning" is only the beginning. This beginning provides the atmosphere to break the silence; it also signals the panic that the silent one must overcome. This panic is encapsulated

in the repetitiveness of the lines, their breathless crash, one upon the other, and the constant alternating stresses laid on seemingly contradictory statements. But what is affirmed in the lines following is an awareness that the recovery and reconstruction of the fragmented Africaribbean female self must evolve out of an acceptance of that fragmentation. Reconstruction of the self cannot be achieved by foolish division of the already fragmented self. James theorises: "order lies in disorder / fragmentation in wholeness" (42). Indeed as the poem testifies, both in its own convolutions, reversals, and repetitions of rhythm word and sound, the need to rupture false and externally constructed categories of the self is an a priori condition. This rupturing, however, must not be merely dialogic in action. It must involve multiple negotiations of the various selves that make up the whole. There, then, resides the significance of the constant punning on the word "sentence," first as utterance, second, as pronouncement of punishment, third as a combination of component parts--individual words linked to make sense:

to begin in the sentence
 no beginning to the sentence
 no end to the sentence
 the only beginning
 to break all the boundaries
 the boundaries of being
 to know the order
 the disorder of things

to begin now
 enough foolish delay
 searching for order
 in the confinement of structure (42)

Rupturing the boundaries of confinement through fluidity becomes an act of breaking down barriers erected in the language of dominance, through using a modified subversive version of the master's tools. It is breaking the pentameter of language, the confining legacy left by the British in Anglo-Caribbean nations. It is creating instability in language as a site of control that female Caribbean writers like Philip, Harris, and Goodison have sought to do. It is also a device that undermines categorization. Fluidity enables them to "to be liberated from the impossible / into all that is possible" (43), and to overcome the obstacles that have destroyed so many other would-be prophets of recovery poetics. Liberation is also not just individual freedom from structural silences, but it is a rejection of the memory of pain in order to create multiple overlapping spaces and voices for a regenerative poetic. But to James, this rhetoric of liberation entails an acceptance of a rootedness in the Caribbean. Thus in "Amerindian" (48-50) James rejects the preoccupation with "fragmented poems / exercises in lament / dry sticks of verses" (49). These kinds of poems only go to stress the "disjoints of memory / blotting the page" (49). Rejecting this kind of poetry, then, James is ready to negotiate for a poetic of inarticulate wholeness out of the conflicting structures in Africaribbean culture: "I want to trade widowed poems / for whole songs strummed / from the frets of my hand" (49).

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the point that James's poetic begins with a rejection of the rhetoric of pain, moves through an examination of the contradictory omens distorting the vision of her

society, through purgation and sanctification, and ends in the ecstatic celebration of multiple discourse. Throughout the journey, James is aware of both the external and internal malefactors (including art forms like calypso) that threaten the construction of a positive, communitarian personhood. But she does not spend her creative energies deconstructing their strategies of delegitimation of her community's self-perception. Her project is to build on the foundations laid by her forebears. In this way she succeeds in arguing for a communitarian aesthetic, in which any foreign or local ideology that proselytizes inter-gender, inter-racial, and inter-generational conflict, and promotes individuality, will have no place. Thus in "Iere Regained" (70-73) and in "Blanchesseuse," (74-76) Iere (woman/land) exclaims in words of welcome to the returning male exile. She first unties the knot of separation and calls on the man to feel welcome:

the eyes that mocked
house slave and whore
no face no touch
no words except
of our Caribbean tares

that sealed my breasts
made my womb forget
are no more (70)

Forgiveness and welcome are occasioned by a dream in which they woke and found they were both "writing out the same song" (72).

The journey to recovery ends in Blanchesseuse, the meeting point of the Atlantic and Caribbean seas, the name for the washerwoman, Matilda. In "Blanchesseuse" and as a Blanchesseuse, she welcomes her male partner: "and I no longer shout / there are no men / for you have

loved me" (74). The absent or irresponsible or irksome male in Africaribbean female poetry redeems himself through the help of the female. He performs the role of the caring, loving, and dutiful patriarch that he is supposed to be: "kissed the bitter from my lips / uncovering the secrets / hidden from your unworthiness" (74). This rediscovery of a male-female equation for harmony, people-land reunion, and people-culture acceptance provides the needed emotional foundation and space for their children to romp "and roam in heritage" (75). James's prophetic acceptance of the Caribbean male is in line with some Afrisporic feminism. As Hodge points out, "the revaluation of black womanhood inevitably also implies a restoration of black manhood" (118).

My examination of James's poetry shows once again that it is not possible to generalize about Africaribbean women's search for a voice of recuperation. Their dialogics may be coterminous, but what I have so far demonstrated in this study of four poets, shows that their dialogics do not necessarily coincide. These differences enrich the revolutionary praxis of their poetic, and supports Evelyn O'Callaghan's statement that Caribbean women's writings provide "no monolithic textual discourse but rather a complex and interwoven network of discourse positions" which then call for constant qualifications and deferments of interpretive conclusions (107). My concluding chapter will argue for a continuous and reflexive critical practice that may, to some extent, reflect this constant refusal by Africaribbean female poets to be appropriated within structured frames.

CONCLUSION IN TRANSIT . . .

This work is still in transit, and, therefore, has no conclusion. I am yet to find a particular theoretical frame and language that best articulate the processes being developed by these poets for an adequate voice for the Africaribbean woman's perspective of her world and of herself. None the less, this thesis does show that Africaribbean women's poetry has come a long way in a short time. As Jennifer Rahim has poeticized in *Mothers are not the only Linguists*, Africaribbean women's poetry is not "the tied up silence / of a child's tongue grown heavy / from having neglected to rehearse" rote answers to dispel a shame of speechlessness ("Tongue Tied" 12). They have definitely learnt how to slide and strut "into the spotlighted center / serving savory sounds with a tongue / tied to the meanings of other people's words" (12). That is not what they want. That is not what they mean. They are tired "with the business of trying to find / other ways of waiting" ("Before Speech" 5) in their l/anguished silence. For in the noises of the center, the owner of the tongue hears silences of the self, sees the emptiness of the space occupied. These heard silences and seen emptiness initiate a rebellion of the tongue against itself: "and when a tongue rebels / against itself / a language is born" (6). Thus, as I have tried to show throughout this thesis, the silencing began with the middle passage, but

in the womb of that silence, that voicelessness, they have broken and spat out the cut tongues and begun to remake words that flesh them, and point the way home at the center of the crossroads that they find themselves.

Crossroads to a home that is the Caribbean, but also Africa and Europe, and Canada. Crossroads that engender a silence within the interiors of the Africaribbean female body. Crossroads to a home of their own that all began in the resilient oral and womanist traditions brought over from West Africa, synthesized through European classism, dancing experimental steps to the masquerade music of post-coloniality, feminism, post-modernism, and identity formation. At these crossroads, "The womb / Oasis of silence / Blooms" (*Looking For Livingstone* 28), as the "embryo word / clasped / clings to the surround in" the silence of their history and experiences (31). Thus, the reader cannot contain them in stabilizing categories, nor enjoy the festival of words from one angle of vision or mental state, but must, like a spectator at a festival theatre, continue to move with the performers from place to place, from theory to theory, and finally leave the ground with the performance still going on. The texts take one through territories of silences, languages, genders, sexualities, histories, desires.

Like several performers, then, at a carnival, each of these poets is slightly different in her location, costume, music, and appeal. Yet each one is similar in her contribution to the carnival that is Africaribbean women's poetry. To begin with a geophysically functional proposition: first take the spirit of national consciousness and

cultural voice of each of the four poets. Hear them each call. For example, Goodison's Jamaican national character defines her topoi, voices, and accents. James's Trinbagonian plurality defines her objectives more along the lines of multiracial coexistence in which her call to Caribbeanness and femininity echoes the multiple voices that make up Trinidad and Tobago. But their dance steps from "moaning ground" to "heartease" have the same similarities of rigor and vigour in the celebration of voice through the deconstruction and detoxification of the father's word. Philip and Harris may come from Trinidad and Tobago, but they differ from James as much as they differ from Goodison. Then they somehow differ from each other in spite of their Canadian locations. The reason: Canada seems to distance and alienate them temporarily from any immediate Africaribbean national consciousness. Then, as argued above, Philip's poetic responds to the tunes of Canadian heartland discourse praxis. Harris's poetic, in its apparent expansiveness and early largesse, is a response to her hinterland location. Here the pressures of heartland politics against minorities, for the early Harris, may have been subordinated to her desire to reach out to and merge herself with her new location. Thus Philip's perspective on matters that relate to race, Creole, and gender seems more razor sharp and pugnacious, while Harris's prairie location allows her a more generous though insidiously subversive perception of her surroundings.

I discussed how Philip and Harris demonstrate a lack of overt concern with socio-economic issues in the Caribbean. They do, however,

make some minor observations on the socio-economic position of women in the Caribbean. I stressed the engagement of Philip and Harris with Canadian politics of multiculturalism showing how they both successfully articulate processes through language and structures, and develop voices that resonate with exploratory and visionary vigour in defining their Africaribbean-Canadian woman's perspectives.

In Philip's rhetoric of recovery, developed in *She Tries Her Tongue* and *Looking For Livingstone*, I discovered that she embraces silence as her womb of space into which the Africaribbean woman takes refuge from surrounding negating epistemology. Silence is the vital site that enables her to deconstruct the father tongue and finally erupt into the mother voice. I argued that, Philip, in deconstructing this father's language, does not advocate its abolition, even if it has been used against her race, gender, and class. She only dismembers it, a process she calls parsing, in order to create a middle passage of return to the beginnings of her silence. Thus, I have shown that Philip's desire is to create a language, an i-mage that appeals to both John-from-Sussex and Abiswa. I wish to assert, therefore, that only tentative conclusions can be drawn about Philip's poetic. It will not be enough to just read her as a post-modern experimentalist without contextualizing those experimentations within the issues of a painful loss of her mother tongue, her forced acknowledgement of the inevitability of living with the father tongue that so negates her personhood, and the ecumenical prayer for a kind of rebirth and retrieval from externally constructed silence and anguish.

In Chapter Three, I explored Harris's cautionary early immersion in Euro-American modernism. I contended that this gave her an ambiguous position within that epoch, first as a consequence of that modernism, and second, as a defier of it. I argued how temporary and hazardous this location of Harris could be, yet how enabling to it was to her in contextualizing her disorienting counter-discourse and poetic within the narrow "universalism" of metropolitan Euro-American feminist discourses. This helped Harris to develop a vibrant and brilliant poetic, through an engagement with issues that concern every woman, while simultaneously conscious of differences between Euro-American womanhood, history and desires, and those of Afrisporic females until the climactic poem *Drawing Down A Daughter*. I posited that the strength of Harris's poetic does not rest on her themes but, on the way, she also like Philip, uses a collage of styles and voices to dismember the univocality and unifocality of the modernist poetic persona--I--and to capture the communitarian voice that undergirds Africaribbean oral discursive strategies.

In Chapter Four, I demonstrated the links between Lorna Goodison's confident and non-contestatory tones to her majoritarian location in Jamaica. I was able to show that Goodison is not preoccupied with contesting for a space in the racial or literary ladder, as much as Philip and Harris do through language and style. Goodison's location may then have narrowed her linguistic and poetic repertoire and reach, but her exploitation of the history of Africaribbean heroines and heroes in Jamaica within Afri-Jamaican cultural paradigms--religious, musical,

linguistic, and topography--enabled her to expose some of the underlying cultural assumptions in Philip's and Harris's poetry. It also added a refreshing, timely, and welcome dimension to the developing Africaribbean poetic. Thus, I stressed the necessity of taking a more socio-religious route to read Goodison's celebration of her Africaribbean female personhood, and to understand her call for a spiritual approach to psychic healing for Africaribbean people.

Correspondingly, in Chapter Five, I argued for a closer relationship between James's and Goodison's poetics. Both, I contended, refuse to allow the politics of race, gender, sexuality, marginality, and even language to preoccupy them. Thus, I was able to show that James is also more concerned with how best the Africaribbean poet can engage the cultural and religious paradigms available to her in the Caribbean to build a healthy Africaribbean rhetoric of recovery. What I found set James apart from the others is her politics of racial inclusiveness--Trinidad is racially more mixed than both Jamaica and Canada. She acknowledges the contributions of Indo-Caribbeans and Euro-Caribbeans--Portuguese, Spanish, English. She also examines the tensions among all the races in Trinidad and Tobago.

James's Trinbagonian location enables her to visibly and audibly engage the musical, religious, and linguistic paradigms there to develop her rhetoric of recovery. Her search is a vigil of purification on moaning ground, a vigil that yields the complex cultural frame for working out that community personhood, which recalls Goodison's envisaged carnival at the end of the journey to heartease. Her cultural

and geophysical location gives her some advantage in relation to working within and recuperating the African elements such as calypso, kaiso, pan, steel pan, and Shangoism, that Philip and Harris try to recall in their poetry. None the less, James too works out her poetic using the fluidities of cultural and linguistic paradigms that are characteristic of the Caribbean. But like Harris's engagement with Euro-American high modernism and Philip's post-modernist experimentations, James engages Euro-American musical notations to create her notion of a Caribbean aesthetic.

The four poets choose not to take clear positions in inter-gender politics as a way to articulate their womanhood. For these women, Africaribbean women's rhetoric of recovery necessarily entails a gender-inclusive rhetoric. Another area of connection among them is the issue of Africaribbean motherhood/daughterhood. Each poet, I have shown, demonstrates a yearning for the mother: mother as a person, mother as a culture, mother as a country, mother as an identity, mother as a poet, a priestess, a healer, and a warrior. Yet, as I have also argued in each chapter, there is this contradictory drive in each of them, except perhaps for Philip, not to be like their mother as they know her in the social world of the Caribbean. Language as a tool of empowerment and recovery also binds them together. In this they all agree that liberation and self authentication can also be achieved through language, even if that language is the one that had been used against them.

Consequently, each of these poets is as concerned about the issue of what language to use to construct a rhetoric of recovery in negotiated spaces between metropolitan European languages and the Caribbean demotic. Thus, for these poets, the subterranean traditions that have given birth to Caribbean Creole-Continuum, Nation Language/Caribbean demotic "allows [them as] Black agent[s] to pursue an undercover history and enunciate a subtext of counter-discourse" (Kubayanda 182). This counter-discourse becomes the territory in which epistemological biases get detoxified, deconstructed, and liberated from being used as a tool of negation and oppression. These processes are enhanced by the poets as they engage the Caribbean demotic in their poetry together with standard English. The amalgam becomes a new argot that transcends mimicry and achieves a psycho-spiritual and racial re-memorialization and recuperation of what has been submerged in the debris of Africaribbean history and amnesia.

If epistemological motifs unite these poets, the motif of a journey also unites them. The quest for identity, whether personal or communal, involves a journey, and for them that journey, whether metaphorical or physical, involves a trip to Africa. In each chapter, therefore, I discussed each poet's metaphysical journey to some temporary crossroad of selfhood as she gazes forward, sideways, and backwards, gathering any and every available evidence that become brick and mortar in the construction of a workable personhood. In this transition process towards personhood, I have amply shown and argued that location plays a crucial role in angling the perceptions and toning

the discourse of each poet. In the case of Philip, this trip becomes a reversal of the journey of exploration and subsequent colonization of Africa by Europe in *Looking For Livingstone*. This journey is also about connecting with the emasculated father tongue represented by Livingstone. Then there is the journey of rebirth in *She Tries Her Tongue*, a journey in which the mother looks for the lost daughter. Philip appropriates the Middle Eastern myth of Proserpine and Ceres for this purpose. For Harris, this journey involves a trip to Africa in *Fables From the Women's Quarters*, to Europe in *The Conception of Winter*, or a debate about returning to the Caribbean in *Drawing Down A Daughter*. In Goodison, it is recuperation of her Guinea grandmother in *I Am Becoming My Mother*, and an interior journey in *Heartease* to rural Jamaica where the remnants of African religious and cultural practices abound. For James her return journey is to the moaning ground for spiritual purification, empowerment, and visionary utterance associated with the practice of Shangoism.

To reiterate and thus not to conclude: throughout the thesis, I have drawn attention to, and focused on some of the basic uncontainable aesthetic positions, theoretical negotiations and ideological locations taken by Marlene Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, and Cynthia James as testimonies of their poetics of recovery. These uncontainable testimonies define a multilayered complexity in which individual creative energy, voice, territory, and style are convoked to deal with the question of recovery which each writer recognises to be wrapped up in issues of gender, heritage, and race (Davies 61). This

recognition, according to Roberto Marquez, is "simultaneously provoked, constrained, and challenged by a vivid appreciation of the enduring significance of their 'origins'" (294). Thus, reading these poets calls for a matching shifty and multidimensional approaches, the omnibus approach I adopt in my study. Evelyn O'Callaghan has called on every reader of Caribbean female writing to be aware that these writers are still "appropriating, echoing and subverting elements of 'master narratives' of all kinds, as versions which are not sub-anything, but rather woman-centred discourses that attend to a wide range of voices and perspectives" (97).

But in spite of, and because of their differences and similarities, their locations, their styles and approaches show a consistency that is recognizably pan-Africaribbean, a site in which their voices and styles merge with other voices and styles on issues of Africaribbean femininity; gender relations; race; history; socioeconomic relations; and language. Consequently, any inability to frame them into neat categories gives greater emphasis to their ability to celebrate survival, an "inheritance of place, tongue and tradition; the lament for the lost and the quest for identity; the championing of faith and hope in the teeth of betrayal and disillusion" (Burnett xxiii-iv). The lack of a uniform voice or rhetoric also shows that Africaribbean women see and use every location as a territory in which to construct a rhetoric of recovery. Thus as Audre Lorde (as cited earlier), Pam Modesai and Mervyn Morris have all noted that a uniform voice in Africaribbean women's rhetoric of recovery is neither possible nor desirable nor

necessary. Africaribbean women "poets cannot be said to share a programme or a limited/limiting set of attitudes. What these poets most noticeably share is a language, flexible in its range . . . (xi-xii). This flexibility, as I have been able to show, comes from the fact of female Africaribbean poetry being a part of the vast and developing spectrum of art forms from music to written work.

For a tentative conclusion, therefore, I want to say my thesis has been a primary exploration of the differences in location politics and approaches to a common dream by these poets. In this exploration, I sometimes placed these poets within transnational, post-colonial, post-modernist, and feminist critical spaces, to show how the constant presence of their racialised, nationalist, genderised, and communitarian voices make in all these theoretical locations undermine any unifocal reading position. I have succeeded in demonstrating the complexities involved in confronting the different types of post-colonial, minoritarian, and feminist discursive strategies that are engaged by Africaribbean female poets in general, and Marlene Nourbese Philip, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, and Cynthia James in particular, in their search for a viable and variable rhetoric of recovery for all Africaribbean people

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