

**Transforming Conflict through Learning:
Negotiating the Worlds of Indo-Caribbean Individuals living in Canada**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze external tensions and internal conflict in the context of Indo-Caribbean individuals living in Canada. Differing identities of multiple generations of post-colonial Indo-Caribbean peoples affect and challenge the relationships not only between members of this group, but also the relationships that individuals of this group have with themselves. Rather than offering a comprehensive strategy for dealing with internal conflict with one's multiple worlds, this thesis represents a preliminary mapping of a few key issues, thereby allowing for a more nuanced engagement with alternate ways of constructing knowledge and mediating conflict. Applying a law and literature lens with theories of critical difference, I gather "data" from two sources. First I consider the experiences of the characters within Neil Bissoondath's fictional novel, *The Worlds Within Her*. Second, I juxtapose this critical literary analysis with my own experiences as a second generation Guyanese female. As such, both the feminist and postcolonial methodology of "story-telling" will be employed to better understand and explore the experiences of Indo-Caribbean identity and internal conflict with colliding worlds. I posit that both fictional and autobiographical stories point to the potential of critical pedagogy to strategize culturally appropriate ways of ameliorating conflict and to negotiate identity as minorities within minorities in 'multicultural' Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

[Ash] "I ain't know if I could do it."

[Yasmin] "What?"

"You know. Livin' in a white man's country."

She weighs his words, wondering from which vision they have issued. "From the sound of it you aren't exactly thrilled about living in a black man's country either...."

[Yasmin] "Look here, Ash, I belong to where I live –"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Citizen o' Canada, the world, the whole fockin universe.... You foolin' yourself, you know," he continues...

"You've been to Canada?"

"No. But almos' every plane that land here bringing back somebody they deport. Besides, is not the point. Point is, I know where I belong, I know my people, I know my history. Our history. All the years of oppression."

"The oppression. You feel oppressed, Ash....By..." Her palms flutter open in interrogation.

"You know by who. They always tryin', you know." His lips hint at a smile.

"But is not jus' today. Is yesterday, too. All that humiliatin' history. We have to get rid of it, you know. We still live in chains" – His fingers jab at his chest – "even if we ain't know it. Even if we think we made it big somehow. Here" – his gaze sharpens at her – "or in other people land."

"But as I understand it Indians were never slaves." She glances at Cyril – her knowledge is patchy and superficial—and he nods in confirmation.

"Slaves. Indentured labourers. Is jus' a name, man. Our people had contracts, eh, but that contract was jus' a form o' ball an' chain, to take us away from the homeland and keep us there. That contract make all of us weaker. It steal the lifeblood from Mother India, and it turn us into little people." His vehemence thins his voice into that of an angry boy. "Little people.... Maybe you're some kind o' TV star up there in Canada but it really have no big difference between you, me and all them people breaking' their back in the cane fields jus' like our great-great-grandparents did."¹

On a regular Sunday afternoon, my family and I sat at Nanny's (my mother's mother) lunch table licking our lips in eager anticipation of the meal to come. Piping hot chicken curry, dhal, rice, roti, chutney, and of course, hot pepper sauce – the aroma arousing our senses even before entering the door. As we begin scarfing down the delectable meal, Nanny notices the empty plate of her young granddaughter, Shanti. "You nah eat?" she asks Shanti. "I'm probably going to grab a burger at the mall..." her granddaughter replies. Before Nanny can respond,

¹ Neil Bissoondath, *The Worlds Within Her* (Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 1998) at 236-237.

Shanti's mother insistently chimes in: "she doesn't really like "spicy" food. We don't really eat much of it at home". Under her breath and distracted by the clicking of cell phone buttons, Shanti's mumbles do not go unnoticed, "Ya, and then I wouldn't have to worry about smelling like it when I go to the mall..." Sunday lunches at Nanny's house are always satisfying, but on this particular occasion, Nanny provides the family not only with a scrumptious meal, but with words to think about: "already I mek Canadian food for those of you who don't eat *our* food, but soon we'll lose not only our culture and traditions, but our cooking too...". I am not sure if Shanti's next comment was intended to comfort or refute Nanny's claims: "but, we can get curry from the Indian restaurant down the street". We all stand corrected as Nanny rightly points out that "the Indian restaurant serves Indian food. We are Guyanese. I serve Guyanese food".

The passage above quoted from Neil Bissoondath's novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, and my own anecdotal account share an intercultural revelation: individuals who occupy multiple cultural worlds find their identities in conflict with one another. Bissoondath's quote signifies the historical trauma that continues to affect Indians in the Caribbean (Indo-Caribbeans) or Indians from the Caribbean who have immigrated to North America and Europe. It also delineates a conflict between the perspectives of an Indo-Caribbean family and their niece/cousin who has lived the majority of her life in Canada. My family's story treads along the same lines, but deals with conflict at a more pragmatic level – day to day activities that symbolize similar underlying tensions between individuals who share an Indo-Caribbean history but whose lived reality differs in many respects. For example, having been born and raised in Canada, it can be said that the coupling of different taste palettes and the fear of smelling like 'ethnic' food for Nanny's grandchildren clashes with Nanny's efforts to maintain her culture through the food she prepares. For Nanny, Guyanese cooking provides a positive cultural connection to the Guyanese

homeland. However, for a second generation Indo-Caribbean-Canadian, negotiating an adequate space for her multiple identities generates a constant internal battle. I have lived in Canada where my parents and grandparents emigrated from Guyana. Apart from my Guyanese family's nostalgic stories about "back home", members of the family who have been born and raised in Canada, like myself, know little about the traumatic experiences – and the trials and tribulations – of my grandparents and parents when they lived in the Caribbean. Conversely, the older generation has been unable to grasp that having been born or brought up in Canada will lead to a different sense of self. This thesis posits that as a result of her or his occupation of multiple post-colonial worlds, the second-generation individual living in Canada experiences internal conflicts with the formation of her or his identity.

In this thesis, I analyze the ways that internal conflict is implicated for post-colonial Indo-Caribbean peoples and, in particular, how their differing identities affect and challenge the relationships not only between members of this group, but also the relationships that individuals of this group have with themselves. Although there are existing studies that address identity conflict generally, I posit that internal conflict manifests differently and perhaps to a heightened degree when it is structured by the culture clashes faced by minority within minority communities in Canada, such as with Indo-Caribbean Canadian people.

My data is comprised of Neil Bissoondath's novel, *The Worlds Within Her* (1998), and my own experiences as a second generation Indo-Caribbean female living in Canada. This data will provide insight into the colliding worlds within the personal, cultural, and communal identity of myself and Bissoondath's main character, Yasmin. In gathering the data, I seek to research, analyze, and formulate a preliminary framework to theorize internal conflict with multiple worlds amongst minority within minority members. I chose to analyze Bissoondath's

novel, *The Worlds within Her*, as a basis to explore internal conflict that the Indo-Caribbean living in Canada experiences for several reasons. Primarily, Bissoondath tells an outstanding story of colonial history, culture, family, conflict and oral tradition that is remarkably similar to my own lived story. Bissoondath effectively demonstrates the importance of understanding the history of colonial indentureship and diaspora of the Caribbean as it impacts the post-colonial identity formation of Indo-Caribbean peoples today and their relations to one another. The resulting conflict between the various social worlds of members of Indo-Caribbean families reflects the struggle of hybrid, conflicting and multiple identities.

In Bissoondath's novel, he chooses not to name the specific Indo-Caribbean land that is referenced in his story. Perhaps Bissoondath did not specify the region because he is asserting a shared Indo-Caribbean reality. But it is also possible that Bissoondath recognizes that his setting is, ultimately, a fictional place or an "imaginary homeland". In his essay, 'Imaginary Homelands' (1991), Salman Rushdie invites the reader to visualize an old photograph of his childhood house in India. For Rushdie, this house symbolizes "home", and so by extension, he perceives his present home in the West as "foreign".² Rushdie admits that his recollections of India are a creation of his own memory constituted by his own personal standpoint. Similarly, for Bissoondath, having lived in Trinidad and Tobago before settling in Montreal, Bissoondath presents an image of his 'imaginary homeland' as his *own* truth. For me, having been born and raised in Canada, with roots in Guyana, my anecdotes of internal conflict situations will reflect my own truth, and my own constructions of both Guyana and India as imaginary homelands. Our truths are neither objective nor reflective of each Indo-Caribbean individual's reality.

Bissoondath is an Indo-Caribbean author living in Canada writing a fictional depiction of Indo-

² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991) at 9.

Caribbean experiences, while I am an academic writing about my own reality as an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian – simultaneously, we are both engaging with our respective imaginary homelands.

Having said this, I am aware that anti-essentialist critics are sometimes wary of the writers who depict stories of the “oppressed” - they question what qualifies an individual to speak on behalf of a historically subjugated group if she or he is allied with privilege or status (eg. wealth, comfort, ability) that is often characteristic of a ‘dominant’ group.³ I recognized from the beginning of this research project that I am approaching this thesis from a relatively privileged position. I am a Canadian born, young, educated woman who has lived my entire life in metropolitan suburban areas of Canada. I am also born to parents who had the privilege of education abroad and settlement in middle-class areas of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Although I am an insider to the view of a second generation Indo-Caribbean living in Canada, I am in some ways, an outsider to the community that I wish to represent. However, as Rushdie asserts, there is value in these fragmented accounts that result from engaging with a homeland from the outside:

It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country...may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal.⁴

In this same vein, Patricia Williams, critical race scholar, urges legal scholars to recognize that storytelling plays a significant role in theorizing legal dilemmas. Specifically she argues that stories wrestle with notions of objective and subjective truth, of culture and race, and of the

³ Sherene Razack, “Story-telling for social change” (1993) 5 *Gender & Education* 55 at 59.

⁴ Rushdie, *supra* note 2 at 12.

dynamics of identity as they reflect on conflict situations.⁵ My thesis uses Williams' argument to compliment Rushdie's notion of 'imaginary homelands' by reinforcing the ways that counter-storytelling attempts to challenge dominant truths without asserting a transcendental or essential truth. After all, Angela Harris warns us that reinforcement of the authentic woman or raced individual tends to essentialize differences and prescribe a normative evaluation of the group.⁶ The same can be said about the authentication and potential of essentialization of racial categories.

While one always hopes that one's work will have universal appeal, it is my hope for this thesis that drawing on Bissoondath's fiction and my own memory will specifically provide insight on the subject of internal conflict experienced by individuals who straddle multiple worlds. This insight will be relevant to other Indo-Caribbean communities in Canada who are struggling with their own imaginary homelands and their impact on identity formation. Hence, like Rushdie who is compelled by the belief to reclaim his city and past, I too, along with fellow Indo-Caribbean individuals, am convinced that the country of my ancestors, its history, and its culture, in some sense requires 'reclaiming' - a term which may generate different meanings for someone like me than for my parents or older generations.

METHODOLOGY

This section will lay the foundations for my thesis project by outlining (1) the sources of evidence, (2) the theoretical background and literature review which includes: (a) the method of analysis and (b) the two-lens framework.

⁵ Patricia J. Williams, "Gilded Lilies and Liberal Guilt" in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (United States: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1991) 15.

⁶ Angela Harris, "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory" (1990) 42 *Stanford L Rev* 581.

Sources of Evidence

This is a qualitative and analytical research essay that involves three kinds of data collection: historical accounts of the creation of Indo-Caribbean nations, my own experiences as an Indo Caribbean Canadian experiencing internal conflict with my multiple worlds, and those of the characters in Bissoondath's novel, *The Worlds Within Her*. The decision to incorporate these stories serves multiple purposes. My aim is to (1) historically contextualize Indo-Caribbean diasporic discourse with a focus on the way history has impacted the experiences and identity construction of first and second generation Indo-Caribbean members; (2) discursively analyze and deconstruct the stories in order to attempt to understand how social actions and hybrid identities are being performed in a Canadian 'multicultural' space; and (3) excavate the socio-political implications of a historically silenced and marginalized group who experience conflict with their multiple identities and have been subject to a justice system that employs essentialist techniques that often overlook the complexities of difference.

The reason some of my data comes from unconventional sources is both epistemological and practical. On the practical front, there is little current social science research on the Indo-Caribbean community and with the experience of conflict with multiple worlds that an Indo-Caribbean living in Canada may encounter. Current research on the Indo-Caribbean community is limited to literature, dating between 1980 and 2009, that has been written on Indo-Caribbean identity formation, Indo-Caribbean history, Canadian immigration, and Canadian immigration as specific to Indo-Caribbean migrants. Although this literature is important in providing the historical context and background for the community under investigation, it does not adequately provide workable data for my research project. Scholars such as Frank Birbalsingh, Neil Bissoondath, David Dabydeen, and Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, to name a few, have written extensively on Indians in the Caribbean. This literature addresses general issues amongst

the Indo-Caribbean community without specifically addressing the issue of internal conflict amongst members of the community. Apart from those scholars researching the Indo-Caribbean experience, scholars writing in the fields of critical race theory, conflict, the histories of Indian migration to the Caribbean, and critical difference sometimes do not consider the ways the theories interrelate and influence each other. My methodology seeks to identify how different concepts and theories might relate to one another from an intersectional perspective. Moreover, my thesis seeks to demonstrate that examining stories that articulate internal conflict with multiple worlds within the Indo-Caribbean community can have legal implications for how we might address such conflicts in real life and the ways in which theory, including that of post colonialism, post modernism, and critical race, can provide a way to understand the development of and subsequent solution to the problem.

As a result, my first task involved finding a way to generate data for my project given the lack of attention and research allocated to the Indo-Caribbean community's experience with conflict with plural identities. Primary data collection in the form of personal interviews was unfeasible and undesirable because of the taboo of openly examining conflict, the trauma of recounting the conflict, and the possible invasion of privacy that it would entail. Moreover, I anticipated that because of my position as a young, second generation, Canadian-educated female, I would encounter resistance when interviewing members of the community who may be suspicious of my motivations and/or are older, male, or hold attitudes/beliefs that conflict with my own. Indeed, my questions themselves could provoke an incident of tension or conflict instead of fostering a positive interaction from which to gather data.

Furthermore, on an epistemological front, I believe that storytelling as a source of data offers new ways to understand conflict. Through a researcher standpoint, I am involved in the

development and application of a two-lens framework for studying the epistemological benefits of my project. The first lens incorporates a law and literature methodology in order to critically analyze and interpret the stories specific to the literary novel. A law and literature lens points to the value and importance of novel-reading in acquiring alternate forms of knowledge and understanding counter-realities as opposed to the hegemonic constructions of reality that dominate our culture. The second lens, identified as a personal storytelling lens, reflects on my own experiences. By employing a storytelling methodology, I am suggesting that my own narrative may provide insight into the subject position of second generation Indo-Caribbean females living in Canada. Each lens will be expanded and described in more detail below.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Method

In 1973, James Boyd White published his groundbreaking book, *The Legal Imagination*, a significant milestone that served as a catalyst for the law and literature movement. Known as the ‘father’ of law and literature, White contends that the literary imagination offers a way to integrate the language of law into the language of the community to better understand notions of social justice. White begins his conceptual journey by asking the legal student to try “to imagine as fully as possible how it might be said that law is not a science – at least not the “social science” some would call it – but an art”.⁷ While the medium of the painter’s art is paint, brushes and canvas, the medium of the lawyer or legal theorist is language and rhetoric, as well as rules, regulations, and procedural guidelines. The art of each profession then relies on facilitating artistic and imaginative ability through use of the prescribed medium. Under these

⁷ James Boyd White, *The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973) at xxxiv – xxxv.

parameters, the study of literature provides a creative and imaginative angle to approach legal discourse and in effect offers an important and nuanced approach to understand legal dilemmas.⁸

In speaking to the value of imaginative literature, White affirms that:

It is not that literature has nothing to teach us about the world or about the analysis of texts, but that it teaches in a different way: it expands one's sympathy, it complicates one's sense of oneself and the world, it humiliates the instrumentally calculating forms of reason so dominant in our culture (by demonstrating their dependence on other forms of thought and expression), and the like.⁹

Through literature, White engages in a critical and progressive examination of past and current injustices existing in our society as a result of the histories of racism, inequality, and discrimination.

Expanding on some of White's notions, feminist law and literature scholar, Martha Nussbaum, reconstructs White's ideas with a focus on the feminine legal implications of law and social justice. According to Nussbaum, literary texts have made a significant contribution to understanding and answering questions about human existence and life.¹⁰ Without intending to disrespect formalized applications of law, Nussbaum urges that "thinking about narrative literature does have the potential to make a contribution to the law in particular, to public reason generally".¹¹ Nussbaum examines the ways in which literary texts facilitate learning about the role that emotions play in public life such that one can imagine the situation of someone other than oneself. In response to the accusation that the law and literature movement is unscientific, less detached, and less rational, Nussbaum counters that there is a strong and vivid relationship between the literary imagination and public reason. The literary imagination is an essential

⁸ *Ibid.* at xxxv.

⁹ James Boyd White, "Law and Literature: "No Manifesto"" (1988) 39 Mercer L Rev 739 (HeinOnline) at 740-741.

¹⁰ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) at 5.

¹¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1995) at xv.

component to an ethical awareness of people different than ourselves and allows one to engage his or her emotions in the discovery of others. Nussbaum believes that cultivating the imagination through literary texts becomes a necessary bridge to social justice. Further, Nussbaum argues that legal scholars should look beyond formalized or legal precedents and instead consider our cultural heritage which is ethically infused and holds compassionate knowledge, or what she has termed “Love’s Knowledge”.¹²

I situate law and literature as the overarching method throughout this research paper. To the criticism that legal fiction cannot find a place in the actual practice or reform of the law, I counter that the value of literary sensibility and comprehension enhances our engagement with the legal imagination. According to Jane Baron (1999), offering literature as an addition to viewing law as an autonomous field beckons acknowledgement of alternative methods to “supplement, enrich, or correct the law”, while also supplying moral value to the application of law that can only be received “outside” of the analytic, scientific, and technical conceptualization of law.¹³ Moreover, a law and literature method reinforces the notion that stories, whether narrated through fictional literature or through biographical accounts, bring valuable and implicit knowledge to us as socio-legal thinkers. Accordingly, I am making three claims by introducing a law and literature approach to my research. First, that it provides insight into conflict amongst the Indo-Caribbean community; second, that it contributes to the development of a more culturally attuned framework to deal with the problem; and third, that “story telling” knowledge provides a useful challenge to standard and official legal evaluations and responses to these experiences of conflict. Here, I embrace Martha Nussbaum’s reflection on the productive value

¹² *Ibid.* at xiv-xviii.

¹³ Jane Baron, “Law, Literature, and the Problems of the Interdisciplinarity” (1999) 198 Yale L J 1059 at 1075-1078.

of studying literature: “[they] will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to a vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision”.¹⁴

Two-Lens Framework

(1): Legal Implications of Law and Literature

The law and literature approach to methodology situates itself within two types of scholarship: law *in* literature and law *as* literature. In defining the underpinnings of law as literature, Binder and Weisberg (2000) identify this scholarship as employing practices of legal criticism and theory to interpret and appreciate legal language, writing, and socio-legal practice. Law as literature uses literary theory to analyze legal systems and ideologies that are constituted by legal language and practice.¹⁵ My thesis focuses on the law *in* literature branch which embraces criticism and history of fictive legal literature that are relevant for legal theory or practice. As I mentioned with White and Nussbaum, advocates of law in literature believe that literature has the potential of having a humanizing effect on the reader.¹⁶

The novel is thus recognized as a site of knowledge production particularly when examining identity construction and contestation. As a brief summary, *The Worlds Within Her* addresses the multiple worlds, roles, and identities that the main character, Yasmin Summerhayes (previously Ramessar), encounters as an Indo-Caribbean residing in Canada. The novel situates the experiences and history of Yasmin against that of her recently passed mother, her native Indo-Caribbean uncle and aunt and cousin, her white-Canadian husband, and her young mixed-race daughter. Through the characters, the conflicts, and the juxtaposition of Indo-Caribbean history with ‘Canadian identity’, the narrative explores issues related to culture,

¹⁴ *Ibid.* at 12.

¹⁵ Guyora Binder & Robert Weisberg, *Literary Criticisms of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) at 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* at 3-4.

intercultural relations, and self-identification. Using post-colonial and post-modern theories, I will analyze the legal and social implications of Bissoondath's novel to decode Indo-Caribbean diasporic subjectivity in order to understand the nature of identity conflict for members of this community.

In defining the scope of my project it is important to consider how situations of internal conflict with one's multiple worlds amongst Indo-Caribbean-Canadian people today is intertwined with a colonial past and an on-going post-colonial process. In order to historically contextualize the relevance of the novel to the historical reality of Indo-Caribbean populations, it is important to foreground the history of imperialism. The experiences of colonization, displacement and hybridity have had a significant impact on the racialization of Indo-Caribbean identity as a minority within a minority group in Canada. Indians were brought to the Caribbean as early as the 1830's when British colonists began sending them as indentured labourers to supplement the newly freed African slaves. Indians continued their migration to the 'West Indies' until the early 1920s. Since this time, Indo-Caribbean people have learned to create a hybrid identity that considers aspects of their Indian ancestry and Caribbean geography. Post-independence, many people with Indian origin living in the Caribbean have felt compelled to immigrate to the West with the hope of achieving a better life. A key question that this thesis explores is how the additional transition to the 'western' world has affected and continued to affect these individuals and their struggle with and amongst each other.

(2): Legal Implications of Autobiographical Storytelling

In addition to a law and literature methodological component, my decision to compare and contrast my own experiences and story to the novel also incorporates a 'storytelling'

methodology. The epistemological premise of autobiographical storytelling rests on the notion that the personal is political. When subjugated identities recount their own subjective experiences, they are engaging in political dialogue. An investigation into why members of different groups see the world from a particular vantage point is an important discussion.

My storytelling methodology is an attempt to dramatize the complexities and intricacies of racialized identity as it pertains to conflict between members of the Indo-Caribbean community. Critical race theorists have argued that personal storytelling by marginalized subjects can be a powerful tool of perspective and persuasion in relation to racialization and justice. Critical race theory also situates personal storytelling as a key site of resistance to hegemonic epistemologies, especially when they involve racialized communities. Critical race theorists including Derrick Bell, Angela Harris, Kimberle Crenshaw, Robert Delgado, and Mari Matsuda understand that racism is a normal and essential component of North American society. While some theorists believe that the law has the potential to eliminate racism overtime, there are many critical race theorists who believe that formalized law, under the pretence of equal opportunity, can only address the most blatant forms of racism. The critical race movement has maintained its position as the parent movement, but more recently in the early nineties, offshoots have developed such as Latino Critical Jurisprudence (LatCrit), Queer Crit, and movements that recognize Asian Americans. These writings emerged as groups with special interests: they understood critical race theory to largely focus on Black identity and insufficient attention to the issues facing other minority groups. Lat Crit theorists such as Mari Matsuda, Ian Haney-Lopez, and Richard Delgado critique the binary paradigm of race in which issues are

framed in two categories such as white/black, while also addressing issues that are distinctly related to Latina/Latino identity.¹⁷

Many authors have noted that acknowledging racism as a cultural problem is an inadequate descriptor of systemic issues. Racism is more adequately equated to a power struggle. This idea is consistent with Razack's assertion that "...emphasis on cultural diversity too often descends, in a multicultural spiral, to a superficial reading of differences that makes power relations invisible and keeps dominant norms in place".¹⁸ In critiquing society, critical race theory makes use of narratives and storytelling as a way of constructing an alternative social reality to dominant narratives.¹⁹ I believe this is essential to my research as these stories not only encapsulate the ordinariness of conflict amongst minority within minority groups, but also point to ways of thinking about appropriate social and legal responses. Thus, part of my task is to create and advance a critical Indo-Caribbean narrative in the thesis. An Indo-Caribbean narrative provides a way to encourage readers to construct their own social reality, which in turn, influences their construction of identity. Critical race theorist Mari Matsuda (1993) illustrates how the impassioned contribution of outsiders (she refers to this knowledge as an 'outsider jurisprudence') challenges established notions of abstraction, neutrality, and objectivity.²⁰ Understanding the current discourse of social reality forms a critical basis for understanding how law, racism and white supremacy are infused to contribute to the disenfranchisement of minority within minority groups.²¹ Critical race theory is also useful in explaining how immigrants are

¹⁷ Mari Matsuda, "Outsider Jurisprudence" in Mari Matsuda et al, eds, *Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (United States: Westview Press, 1993) at 18-20.

¹⁸ Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1998) at 9.

¹⁹ Adrien Katherine Wing, "Introduction" in Adrien Katherine Wing, ed., *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) at 1-4.

²⁰ Matsuda, *supra* note 17 at 18-20.

²¹ *Ibid.*

often denied a voice in the legal ramifications of Canadian laws that directly affect their everyday lives.

Critical race theory proponents suggest that individuals of the dominant racial group may not occupy a 'double consciousness' in which they can view themselves from a non-dominant or non-white perspective. Therefore storytelling can open a window into ignored or alternate realities. Similarly, fictional literature can open this window from a law and literature perspective.²² My story and the stories of the characters in the novel represent an alternate method of knowledge creation, in contrast to knowledge acquired through empirical data and purported objective investigation. Richard Delgado elaborates:

Most who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counterstories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live.²³

Traditionally, those who tell stories as a challenge to academic culture are largely members of what Delgado defines as an 'outgroup' – groups constitutive of an outsider consciousness as a result of their oppressive or marginal status in relation to the dominant, mainstream perspective. Stories, for these groups, represent a form of dialogue amongst members of the particular community, while also facilitating shared understandings and values. Storytelling then becomes a form of strengthening power within the group. According to Delgado, the creation, circulation, and appropriation of said stories become a counter-reality. On the other hand, the 'ingroup' or dominant group also engage in a process of story creation. However, the ingroup tend to position their reality as objective truth while alternate realities are characterized as subjective at

²² Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

²³ Richard Delgado, "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative" (1989) 87 Michigan L Rev 2411 at 2414.

best, invalid at worst. As a result, stories told by the outgroup that insist upon the validity of marginalized perspectives serve an important function – the subversion of ingroup reality.²⁴

Individual storytelling is not only a way of making sense of one's own world, but it is also crucial to one's identity. Moreover, the way in which stories are told belongs not only to the individual telling the story, but also reflects the way the stories are shaped by the perspectives of the community(ies) to which the individual belongs. Therefore, narratives become a space where human agency can interact with social structures, thereby shedding light on the social context from which the narrative originated.²⁵ Stories of a silenced group that are often untold requires a researcher to develop a theoretical sensitivity: "the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't"²⁶ while also bearing a level of cultural intuition which considers the experience, history, and narrative of the collective community.²⁷

For members of the Indo-Caribbean community, conflict between members is often premised on a number of threats or fears. Some of these threats or fears include the loss of culture, the inability to identify a core definition of home, the separation of Indian-Caribbean-Canadian patriotism, inadequate spaces to assert and interact with Indo-Caribbean peoples, culture, or history, feelings of being cast out, and/or feelings of having to choose between identifying and belonging to the loosely defined and sparsely populated Indo-Caribbean family or the more dominant 'Western', 'Canadian' culture. More importantly, for the Indo-Caribbean

²⁴ *Ibid.* at 2411-2413.

²⁵ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *Handbook of Feminist Research: theory and praxis* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007) at 184-185.

²⁶ Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory procedures and techniques* (California: Sage Publications, 1990) at 41-42.

²⁷ Daniel G. Solorzano & Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research" (2002) 8 *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 at 33-34.

community, insight into theories of critical difference, supported by an exploration of critical pedagogy, strategizes a process that acknowledges their struggles with identity.

I will borrow critical pedagogical insights to nuance the premises of a critical difference approach to understanding conflict. Sherene Razack urges the reader to understand that “critical pedagogy has to pay attention to how we know, hence the context in which we tell and hear stories.”²⁸ I understand critical pedagogy in conversation with critical difference theories as both discourses encourage all parties to engage in a process of learning and teaching in order to raise critical consciousness regarding oppression.²⁹ Critical pedagogy involves critically reflecting on and understanding the interaction between teaching and learning. Critical pedagogy is concerned with different arenas of learning: learning, relearning, and unlearning. This process involves re-evaluating that which we know about our histories and in turn, through this new consciousness, we can engage in rewriting our worlds. Critical pedagogy informs us that our personal discovery and awareness is made more apparent and vivid through a recognition of our lived realities.³⁰

In the face of a justice system that perpetuates a cycle of unrecognition and othering for those who do not reflect dominant modes of knowing and being, mechanisms that are attuned to the structural barriers that minorities within minorities face, become a practical way of addressing the complexities of post-colonial identity. The inclusion of alternate realities, through narratives and storytelling offer an alternate way of addressing the limitations of our current adversarial system. Our justice system operates in a reactionary pattern to infractions and behavior that are deemed immoral and criminal. Under such parameters, law is understood as merely a system of rules and guidelines that prescribes enforcement through instituted practices and structures. However, law, in essence, should provide mechanisms to understand and address

²⁸ Razack, *supra* note at 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Joan Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: notes from the real world* (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005) at 67-68.

conflict situations that occur outside of the parameters of mere enforcement schemes and application of formalized law. Accordingly, this thesis understands law from a broader perspective, to uncover the cyclical patterns of colliding multiple identities amongst minority groups and offer a way of ameliorating the interactions between individuals of the community through processes of learning, relearning, and unlearning. If culturally attuned, a critical pedagogy methodology nuanced by theories of critical difference can allow for a stronger cohesion and better communication not only between members of the group, but with one's own multiple worlds.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Thus far, the introduction to the research project has used theory to define the problem of racial categorizations and internal conflict that is experienced as a result of the multiple colliding worlds of members of the Indo-Caribbean community. The following chapters seek to understand the problem of conflict amongst and between Indo-Caribbean members by asking: given that minority within minority group members are individuals who straddle multiple worlds across both time and space, how does subjectivity get negotiated and contested within oneself? Chapter one begins with a brief overview of the history of Indo-Caribbean diaspora by contextualizing the ways Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity has been shaped and affected by the trans-migration patterns from (1) India to the Caribbean and (2) the Caribbean to Canada. This chapter continues by reflecting on the ways internal conflict situations manifest for individuals who belong to a minority within minority space. Providing a brief historical reflection of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora will provide the context to pinpoint and begin analyzing conflict situations. Chapter one will use post-colonial theory, critical race theory, post-modern theory,

and theories of identity politics to identify and illustrate what is at stake in each of these conflict situations.

Chapter one sets the foundation that leads to chapters two and three, which jointly provide an analysis of how the experiences of the characters in the novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, and my own story help to frame the problem of second generation Indo-Caribbean individuals struggling to form an identity that considers their multiple worlds. Using White and Nussbaum as my theoretical guides, chapter two analyzes Yasmin's internal conflict situations dramatized in Bissoondath's novel through the perspective of postcolonial intercultural relationships within the Indo-Caribbean community. Reading through the eyes of law in literature, I will engage in an analysis of the ways in which the characters in Bissoondath's novel are implicated by their Indo-Caribbean subjectivity and play out conflict between the individuals around them as a result.

Chapter three juxtaposes the experiences of the characters in the novel with my own autobiographical account of my experiences with inner conflict resulting from the tensions that surface between myself and various members of my Indo-Caribbean community. Guided by critical race theory's emphasis on the importance of outsider storytelling, I will attempt to both share and deconstruct my own experiences of internal conflict situations. The majority of the thesis analyzes how the history of Indo-Caribbean peoples, Bissoondath's novel, and my own storytelling can provide useful insight into better strategies for dealing with conflict.

The thesis concludes by highlighting how the insights from the conflicts explored in chapters one, two, and three, engage in a critical pedagogical experience of learning, relearning and unlearning. Given the shifts in colonial imposition and subsequent identity formation of various generations of Indo-Caribbeans, the different post-colonial identities of these individuals

bring with them different world views that exhibit both similarities and differences. After canvassing the nature of these conflicts as articulated in the examined stories, critical pedagogy is offered as a possible tool to encourage individuals who experience their multiple worlds in conflict to understand and appreciate these conflicts as necessary process. Intercultural conflict between members of the hybrid community becomes necessary in the development of a learning and teaching dynamic whereby individuals can better understand the relationships they have with the differing identities of members of their own community.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

CONTEXTUALIZING INDO-CARIBBEAN DIASPORIC IDENTITY

“Our people? Hah! That, my dear, is one of those mischievous questions. We – those of us who belong by birth – have always instinctively known who our people were, we have never had to define...”³¹

What does it mean to identify as Indo-Caribbean? Although usage of the term only began to appear during the 1980s, many, including myself, have adopted the identifier as a positive claim to identity. Yet in my experience, many who share a diasporic identity, where their roots can be traced through the migration from India to the Caribbean to North America, choose not to identify as Indo-Caribbean, but may choose to identify with more conventional terms such as Guyanese, Trinidadian, or West-Indian. The decision to employ the term “Indo-Caribbean” as a method of identification serves multiple purposes for the scope of this paper. A historical reflection of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora addresses two important migration movements – the first migration constituting the crossing of the *Kala Pani* (dark waters) from India to the Caribbean islands between the 1830’s and 1920’s and the second migration involving the post-colonial passage from the Caribbean to North America and Europe that occurred shortly after World War II and continues to the present. Sean Lokaisingh-Mieghoo (1998) suggests that the dual-diasporic relationship that is portrayed in the historical reflection of the term, Indo-Caribbean, is also conveyed in the linguistic combination of “Indo” with “Caribbean”.³² A deconstruction of this compound term further serves to enlighten the complex nature of this identity. The prefix *Indo-* supposes the pre-identity formation stages (defined by

³¹ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 247.

³² Sean Lokaisingh-Mieghoo, “The Diasporic Mo(ve)ment: Indentureship and Indo-Caribbean Identity” in Patrick Taylor, ed., *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean* [forthcoming in 1998] at 9.

Merriam-Webster as earlier than or prior to³³) of a partly Indian identity (the home that was left behind) and the suffix *-Caribbean* re-moulds the Indian identity vis-à-vis the migration of indentureship and the settling in the Caribbean (the new home). Indo-Caribbeans have learned to create a hybrid identity that considers aspects of their Indian ancestry and Caribbean geography. How the additional transition to the 'western' world has influenced these individuals' identity and given rise to the conflicts between the identity of their children and grandchildren is worth investigating. Tinker (1989) identifies that even within modern day discourses of colonized peoples, the West Indian culture is one to which there has not been much self-examination or historical enquiry.³⁴

First Wave Migration

*"Unlettered, I would say, by the tens of thousands. And physically wasted, by all that badly compensated labour in the sugar-cane fields and rice paddies. Bound together by alienness and religion – and defined, yes, by race and a shared if false notion of a larger belonging, for we believed ourselves to be still of India – unlike those with whom we shared the island, those whom slavery had severed from their homeland."*³⁵

1838-1917, Indian Indentureship

May 5, 1838 marks the date of the first two British ships to arrive from India to the soils of British Guiana, currently known as Guyana. The *Hesperus* and the *Whitby* departed from Calcutta, India transporting an estimated³⁶ 414 indentured Indian labourers, 8 of whom were

³³ Merriam-Webster, online: An Encyclopedia Britannica Company: Merriam-Webster <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pre->>.

³⁴ Hugh Tinker, "The Origins of Indian Migration to the West Indies" (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 63.

³⁵ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 247- 248.

³⁶ Due to an inadequate and inaccurate data collection system, these numbers may appear plus or minus the number indicated depending on the source.

women, and 18 of whom died during the voyage.³⁷ Under British colonial power, workers in India, termed “coolies”, a pejorative label used to describe manual labourers at the lower end of the labouring caste, were recruited to work in the Caribbean sugar estates as indentured labourers. During the indentureship period, from 1838 to 1917, 238, 960 Indians migrated, many by force or coercion, to British Guiana.³⁸

Guyana, formerly British Guiana, is a small country located at the northern tip of South America. Its Caribbean Island neighbours, which include Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, are relatively small in comparison. During the early 1600’s-1800’s, when the geographic regions first became occupied, due to the location and size of land (1,750 square miles along the coast of the 83,000 square mile country was cultivated), British Guiana was prone to flooding from the neighbouring sea and heavy rain.³⁹ As a result, the European colonizers found it essential to keep the plantation land properly drained. Maintenance of the land was essential to the cultivation of sugar, plantains, coconuts, rice, and other agricultural and natural resources exclusive to the Caribbean islands.⁴⁰ In order to properly labour the land and reap the benefits of the agricultural production, the colonizers required intensive manual labour – a need that was filled first by slaves from Africa and second by indentured labourers from India.⁴¹

The abolishment of slavery took place between 1834 and 1863 in the British, French, and Dutch colonies of the Caribbean. Prior to abolishment, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, African slaves were brought to the Caribbean plantations to work and maintain the sugar

³⁷ Ron Ramdin, *Arising From Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 53.

³⁸ Harry Persaud, “Formative Years of the Rice Industry in British Guiana” (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 170.

³⁹ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 51.

⁴⁰ Frank Birbalsingh, “Introduction” (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

economy (later other agricultural economies began to flourish) for the colonial administrators. In British Guiana, although slavery was abolished in 1834, the ex-slaves were bound to the plantation estates until 1838. During this period, there is evidence that the treatment of the plantation workers was comparable to the slave period itself.⁴² Therefore, in 1838, upon receipt of their “free” status, many former slaves who chose to live on the estates only worked as much as needed to provide for themselves, or opted to move out completely to the surrounding “free villages”.⁴³

On the announcement of cheap labour being provided to Mauritius from India, British businessmen did not hesitate to request such labour in the British West Indies as well. The language of the recruiters and the indenture contracts was often misleading, creating the façade that some Indians were given “free choice” to voyage miles and miles away from their homeland, while taken away from their culture, religion, language, traditions, and family. Pressure from colonial businessmen had forced the British colonial powers in India to implement a system of recruiting Indians into the Caribbean.⁴⁴ The indenture contract consisted of three major stipulations. First, “each ‘indentured’ was made to serve on a particular sugar estate for a specified pay for a specified period; second, the duration of the contract was for five years; and third, the plantation owners had to pay for the return passage to India at the end of their contract”.⁴⁵ The recruiters employed sly methods of trickery to target and entrap many unsuspecting Indian labourers.⁴⁶ The recruiters painted pictures of a better life in the tropical lands that would provide economic relief against the poor, impoverished, oppressed lives they

⁴² Tinker, *supra* note 41 at 65.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 18-24

⁴⁵ Gulcharan Mohabir, “INDIAN INDENTURESHIP: The New Slavery of British Capitalism” *Why We Left*, online: Indo-Caribbean Heritage: Dedicated to preserving and strengthening the heritage of the Indo-Caribbean Community in Canada <<http://www.indocaribbeanheritage.com/content/view/16/37/>> .

⁴⁶ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 18-24.

led in India. Moreover, many Indians living at the bottom rungs of India's caste system were compelled by the opportunity for economic sustainability abroad. The hope of providing for their mothers, wives, and children in India coupled with a false understanding of their labour contracts was enough to lure the prospective labourers away from their homes in India.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, although abolishment eradicated the institution of slavery, a similar type of colonial victimization took place for the indentured labourers from India who were used to fill the labour shortage. Unlike the previous slavery system where Africans⁴⁸ were completely stripped of their entire African identity, Indians arriving in the Caribbean were theoretically "allowed" to practice their religion and culture.⁴⁹ However, such a 'privilege' had many consequences for the Indians. Upon their arrival to the Caribbean Islands:

the coolies were totally marginalized, their old culture ignored, rejected in ignorance by their masters, while they were excluded from the social system into which they had been plunged. Their religion, their marriage ritual, and of course their language were all denied validity. Their only strength lay in their growing number where, as in British Guiana and Trinidad, they became a sizeable element in the population.⁵⁰

Dr. Kusha Karasingh, a professor at the University of the West Indies identifies the indentured labourer situation on the plantations as a 'system of interlocking incarceration'.⁵¹ This term suggested that a labourer could always be found working on the plantation, but if not there, would be found either in a hospital or in jail. Moreover, the web of the system often restricted movement within and beyond the estates. The web also pushed many indentured labourers into

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ I will interlude here to identify that although the ex-slaves did originate in Africa, their African culture, language, and traditions were all eradicated in favour of an all-encompassing British, English-speaking, culture. As a result, the resounding culture of the Caribbean began to associate individuals by colour or region – the inhabitants therefore were referred to as white or British, African, or Indian. Therefore, I have chosen to use the language of the Caribbean people themselves and employ these labels in my representation as well.

⁴⁹ Tinker, *supra* note 41 at 69.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* at 69-70.

⁵¹ Basdeo Panday, "Trade Unionism, Politics and Indo-Caribbean Leadership" (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 56-57.

heavy debt through the inflated prices of store rations. In addition to the poor living conditions and high risk of disease, organizing for better working conditions was a difficult task. Even after the workers were freed, the mere presence of indentured labourers made resisting the economic conditions and bargaining for free labour exceedingly difficult.⁵²

In addition the new arrivals faced difficulty in adapting to the land, environment, and labour intensiveness - none of which were mentioned to them prior to making the journey. As mentioned earlier, the uncertain and challenging living conditions of the land – persistent flooding and drought – not only preoccupied the time of its inhabitants, but strained the lives of labourers and farmers, many of whom were unfamiliar with problems of drainage, irrigation, and defence against the disasters of the sea.⁵³

Furthermore, Indians arriving to the Caribbean were faced with another harsh reality: the treatment of racial differences in the new land. The hierarchical class chain reinvented itself with the white British men still at the top, newly freed African slaves now occupying the middle class, and the indentured Indians at the very bottom. Generally, the colour of one's skin dictated a person's class status. Paradoxically, an Indian's brown skin could also work to access middle class status, below the whites, and above the Africans. However, the Indian social traditions and religious affiliations not only made them geographically separated but also culturally estranged.⁵⁴ There is no doubt that during the slave period, Africans suffered gross human rights violations. The superiority complex of the white colonialists did not disappear after abolishment. However, it is important to understand the specificity of different racial hierarchies in the context of the Caribbean. In the British colonies, Africans were recognized as British subjects while Indians were not. Before the Indians arrived, British colonial power had also ensured the

⁵² *Ibid.* at 56.

⁵³ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 51.

⁵⁴ Persaud, *supra* note 45 at 173.

assimilation of most African migrants: most Africans were Christian, were schooled and churched by the missionaries, and could speak, read, and write English. While it should be recognized that forced assimilation is another form of colonial oppression, nonetheless, attaining a middle-class status after the abolishment of slavery was easier for many Africans than for those coming from India. Migrants from India were usually Hindu or Muslim, were often unable to communicate in English, and had no experience working on plantations under such strict conditions.⁵⁵ Indians in the Caribbean thus faced systemic barriers and prejudice that were unique to their social position.

Although growing concern had arisen as early as 1840 until around 1900 regarding the Indian indentureship system, the system was somehow maintained with little to no modifications made. However, towards the end of the 1800s, Indian emigration to the British colonies became highly disputed. With the turn of the twentieth Century underway, campaigns and protests began to emerge protesting an end to the indentureship system.⁵⁶ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, an Indian lawyer trained under the British system, supported the anti-indenture efforts in his activism which recognized the inferior position of Indians on their own homeland. Gandhi was prolific in fighting for an end to the system and spreading word about the detrimental effects of such a system on the Indian population.⁵⁷ In 1917, the system of Indian Indentureship ended. However, although recruitment had ceased, many Indians were still bound under indenture contracts both in the Caribbean and Africa. Like the abolition of African slavery, the abolition of Indian indenture, in theory, ended systems of labour control that subjected vulnerable and defenseless individuals to inhumane treatment and hardships. Coupled with the humanitarian concerns, the insistence, resistance, and constant revolt and protests of the Indian people (as was

⁵⁵ Tinker, *supra* note 41 at 70.

⁵⁶ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 142-143.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* at 148-151.

with the African people) were integral mechanisms to bringing the system of Indian indentureship to an end.⁵⁸ As George Lamming mentioned, “we know now, to a degree we didn’t know some decades ago, that African[s] and Indian[s] have a remarkable record of resistance to the same force of domination which sought to appropriate their future, and to define for all time what should be their destiny.”⁵⁹

Between 1880 and 1917, many Indians living in the Caribbean went through a shift from serving as indentured labourers, to becoming property owners. This shift constituted a new era where Indians in the Caribbean began obtaining some degree of wealth.⁶⁰ At the end of their 5-year term under the indenture contract, many Indians did not leave the estates. Instead, the freed Indians became a commodity on the estates as their labour was still in high demand. Freed labourers became more attractive to estate owners than indentured labourers because the freed had acquired superior skill and knowledge in the fields, while their now strong physique enabled heavy and difficult labour.⁶¹ Now having control of their labour power, freed Indians could demand higher wages,⁶² better living conditions, and begin carving a new Indo-Caribbean identity.

Education

In the earlier years of the indenture period, efforts were made by the estate owners to discourage Indian parents from sending their children to school. For the estate owners, Indian children supplied good labour production and like their parents, were not seen as worthy of education. Moreover, denial of education offered a means of isolating the Indian labourers from

⁵⁸ *Ibid* at 150-151.

⁵⁹ George Lamming, “The Indian Presence as a Caribbean Reality” (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 53.

⁶⁰ Ramdin, *supra* note 44 at 115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

the outside population, where wages and working conditions were much better. One way to discourage thoughts of educating children was to deny Indians jobs outside of sugar estate labour. Jobs outside of the estate required individuals to have a formal education. This precarious method of control meant that at the end of the Indians' indentureship contract, they could only choose between re-indenturing themselves (the only job available to them in the Caribbean) or choose to return to India with the return passage that was promised to them in their contract.⁶³

At the same time, closer to the end of the indenture period, when there was more pressure on the government to enact compulsory education legislation for all children, Indians were opposed to the education system in place. Primarily, as a result of the denial and lack of acceptance of Indian culture, traditions, language, and religion by the British and Africans when the Indians arrived to the Caribbean, Indians attempted to establish an identity separate from a British or African identity. Since Indian status and humanity was often denied and ridiculed, the idea of sending children to English speaking Missionary schools was highly objectionable. To accept the dominant system, where the result was assimilation without equal treatment and representation, would severely compromise the existence of Indian-ness in the Caribbean.⁶⁴ In addition, the purpose of education under British cultural imperialistic thought employed more than assimilationist notions of control and occupation. The British had an agenda to *use* educated Indians in the service of colonialism. Lord Macaulay exemplified this English-imperialist perspective when he explained:

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seat of Government. It is likely to become the language of

⁶³ M.K. Bacchus, "The Education of East Indians in Guyana" (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 160.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* at 162-163.

commerce throughout the seas of the East....We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern...a *class of person, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in moral, and in intellect.*⁶⁵ Although education patterns began to change quite drastically after the indenture period,

Indian children still did not comprise a large proportion of the students in attendance. There were many factors that impinged on an Indian family's decision to educate their children. First, the cost of education meant that parents had to make difficult decisions about which child to "invest" in. This meant that their resources, few and far between, and extremely hard earned, were only invested in the child(ren) who showed high levels of return by performing well in school. Parents could not afford to send children to school who, they believe, would not reap the benefits of high status and financial return. Thus, children were coerced into acquiring high status occupations, which at the time consisted of jobs in the fields of medicine and law.

The Politics of Racial Divisions in the Indo-Caribbean

The creation of ethnic divisions and the residing racial conflict was an inevitable result of the unequal division of labour on the plantations and differential treatment appropriated to the whites, Indians, and Africans. As was inflicted on the Africans prior to abolishment (still in existence but not quite to the same extent after the Indians began to arrive), nonwhites were subjected to racist regimes.⁶⁶ As opposed to the white immigrants who arrived from Europe or the South and were integrated into the white upper class society, Indians arrived at the bottom of

⁶⁵ Andra Thakur, "British and Dutch Colonial Policies in Guyana and Suriname" (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 116 [emphasis by Thakur].

⁶⁶ Cheddi Jagan, "Indo-Caribbean Political Leadership" (Paper presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, July 1988), in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) at 16.

the hierarchy as indentured labourers.⁶⁷ The Indian migration for employment indicated that those who resided on the land, including the freed slaves and Amerindians⁶⁸ were not willing or could not be enticed to do the same jobs.⁶⁹ Cheddi Jagan wrote that the Indians “inherited an inferiority complex” resulting from the fact that “they were not only exploited but also despised – because they brought a culture alien to Western customs and values”.⁷⁰

Even after Indians began improving their economic position in British Guiana and Trinidad and Tobago, racial rivalry and confrontation ensued. For example, as briefly mentioned earlier, while the Indo-Guyanese were still relegated to the plantations, the Afro-Guyanese had re-located to the downtown Georgetown core (Guyana’s capital city), where they could occupy middle-class working positions “in the docks, transport, postal services, stores and middle-class positions in the professions and in the lower ranks of the civil service”.⁷¹ Many Indians began to resent Africans for their monopoly over the estates, local jobs, and politics – a reflection of the African motivation to never be dominated by another ethnic group after they were freed from their three hundred years of slavery. Upon the arrival of the first ship of indentured labourers from India, there is some evidence that many Africans perceived these new migrants as a threat to African security, opportunities, wages, and resources.⁷² Aggravated by British strategies of ‘divide, conquer, and rule,’ the ensuing tension between Indians and Africans in the Caribbean would continue into the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Refers to the native occupants of the land.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* at 17.

⁷² Dr. David Dabydeen, “Preface” in Dr. David Dabydeen & Dr. Brinsley Samaroo, eds, *India in the Caribbean* (London: Hansib Publishing Limited, 1987) 10-11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Two main political parties dominated the political arena in Guyana: the Afro-Caribbean dominated People's National Congress and the Indian-dominated People's Progressive Party. The People's National Congress (PNC) was under the lead of Forbes Burnham, during which time Indians in Guyana were formally and systemically denied opportunities and resources on account of the racist ideologies of the political regime. This party was dominated by people of African descent, and through controlling the military and rigging the local and national elections, continued its reign over the entire country. During the 1960's, Burnham's African supporters slaughtered Indians in the Guyanese cities of Wismar and Demerara.⁷⁴

Dr. Cheddi B Jagan (1918 – 1997) founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in Guyana in 1950. The intention of the PPP was to unite the Guyanese people in the fight for national independence, his task was not only to confront the arising turmoil between the Indians and Africans on the sugar estates by uniting the different races of peoples, but also to mobilize the working class – peoples who were without any political power and controlled completely by their plantation employers. Jagan's efforts to confront these problems have become an important milestone in Indo-Caribbean history.⁷⁵

In British Guiana and Trinidad, Indians began to establish themselves as a separate and distinct community. David Dabydeen acknowledges that equal agency from both the Indian and African community can facilitate a positive move towards community rebuilding and collaboration. As Dabydeen explains,

An urgent priority in Guyana, and the rest of the Caribbean today, is the working out of sensible methods of power-sharing whereby all the ethnic communities are allowed to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* at 10.

⁷⁵ Persaud, *supra* note 45 at 31.

participate equally in the remaking of their societies. The alternative is ethnic tyranny, moral and economic backwardness and perpetual Third World status.⁷⁶

Second Wave Migration

“You once asked me...if I intended ever to return to my island. Do you remember that? One is often asked that question here, particularly by those like yourself, who were born and raised in this country. As if you cannot quite believe that this country is worthy of a greater loyalty from those born elsewhere. Or perhaps as if you cannot quite believe in the reality of the country and, so, of yourself. Does that sound harsh? I suppose it does, doesn't it...”⁷⁷

The majority of British controlled Caribbean colonies gained independence between 1958 and 1962, during which time many Indians living in the Caribbean entered a second migration to developed countries including Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Prior to the 1960's, Indians who had entered into their first migration to areas of Africa and the Caribbean had formed an Indian diaspora that would again change during the second migration (post - independence) to form an Indo-Caribbean diasporic identity⁷⁸ – an identity that is shared between Yasmin, myself, and many Indo-Caribbeans living away from the Caribbean.

Similar to their ancestors 150 years prior, in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic situation in Guyana and Trinidad had prompted many Indians to immigrate to Canada, the United States, and Europe. Also by this time, there is evidence that some Indians living in the Caribbean began feeling isolated and regulated due to the social ostracism apparent as a result of the

⁷⁶ Dabydeen, *supra* note 66 at 11.

⁷⁷ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 300.

⁷⁸ Frank Birbalsingh, *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: NEIL BISSOONDATH Indo-Caribbean-Canadian Diaspora* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2005) 114-115.

predominantly African - or creole, as it is often referred – cultural environment.⁷⁹ Another reason why some Indians chose to migrate was due to the heightened political tensions that had arisen as a result of the racial segregation between the Indians and the Africans. Apart from the heightened racial divisions, Caribbeans were also faced with newfound poverty, unemployment and inflation due to the implementation of organizational policies by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund.⁸⁰ Many Caribbeans addressed the economic crisis by going abroad or immigrating to ‘foreign’ countries in hopes of seeking employment that would allow them to send money back home to their families.⁸¹

Evidently, the second migration, like the first, was also prompted by the hope of a more economically viable future. There is no way to quantify the exact number of Indo-Caribbeans living in Canada, particularly because our way of classifying people (as per Statistics Canada) has not accounted for an “Indo Caribbean” category of individuals. Individuals from the Caribbean are instead classified by the Caribbean country from where they have emigrated.⁸² This way of classifying Indo Caribbeans has contributed to the dilemma of identification for this group of individuals.

Canada’s current immigration policy and related decision making trends date back to the time of colonialization. In the name of nation-building, Canada’s immigration policy has, in turn, effectively hindered the entrance of immigrants from third world countries.⁸³ Ethnocentric critics of current immigration policy “charge that these newcomers threaten Canada’s social harmony and challenge its cultural identity and that the country faces unprecedented economic

⁷⁹ Charmaine Crawford, “African-Caribbean Women, Diaspora and Transnationality” (2004) 23 *Canadian Woman Studies* 97 at 97.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Frank Birbalsingh, *From Pillar to Post: the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1997) 211.

⁸³ Sunera Thobani, “Sponsoring Women’s Inequalities” (1999) 19 *Canadian Woman Studies* 11 at 11.

and security problems because of uncontrolled immigration.”⁸⁴ After WWI, quotas were implemented to restrict immigration across the globe, especially into Canada and the United States. Immigrants were housed into categories of ‘preferred’ and ‘non-preferred’ immigrants, thereby giving immigration access to individuals of only certain regions of the globe. However, after WWII, Immigration standards in Canada became less stringent, making room for foreign individuals to enter the country. This is precisely the time that the Immigration Act of 1952 came into being.⁸⁵ In 1955, the Government of Canada ventured into a cooperative arrangement with the English-speaking Caribbean countries by implementing the Domestic Immigration Scheme. Under this arrangement, women were recruited from the Caribbean as domestic servants or maids.⁸⁶ For a second time, individuals in the Caribbean were finding themselves recruited to fill a labour shortage. For individuals sharing an Indian diaspora, the system of immigration in Canada may be reminiscent of the system of indentureship endured by their ancestors, suggesting that that the Canadian policy can be read as a continuity of colonial relationships.

In 1966, the Immigration Act underwent significant amendments. Sponsorship emerged and a point system was established to override the system that excluded individuals on the basis of ascribed characteristics.⁸⁷ Despite the notion of a “Canadian mosaic” that purportedly allows immigrant groups to retain their unique culture while still staking a place in the Canadian community, many scholars have pointed out that there is a strong pressure to adopt Canadian

⁸⁴ John Herd Thompson & Martin Weinfeld, “Entry and Exit: Canada’s Immigration Policy in Context” (1995) 538 *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 185 at 185.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Agnes Calliste, “Canada’s immigration policy and domestics from the Caribbean: the second Domestic Scheme” in Jesse Vorst et al, eds., *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers*. 2nd ed (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991) 136 – 168.

⁸⁷ Thompson & Weinfeld, *supra* note 75 at 185-196.

values and cultural practices.⁸⁸ This ideology of ‘Canadianization’, in the form of ethnic or cultural assimilation, shines light on the processes of integration that an immigrant should undergo before achieving Canadian nationality.⁸⁹

However, immigrating to Canada has not been an easy transition for some members of the Indo-Caribbean community, as evidenced in their experience with barriers to integration. The reasons for those who freely chose to emigrate from the Caribbean to Canada are similar to those of other immigrant groups – an uncertain political situation, racial persecution, and the hopes of better opportunities for work and education. However, the Indo-Caribbean community was often stereotyped as a result of their historical experiences or the dynamics between their home country and Canada. Some individuals coming from an environment where they were expected to work in the estates and did not receive proper education were illiterate and spoke a patwa dialect of the English language that made communication difficult. More so, finding a larger community circle where they could interact with people like themselves was difficult at first and difficult for Indo-Caribbean individuals settling in certain areas. For instance, appearing South Asian often meant that they were grouped with South Asian individuals, yet South Asians speak different languages, dress differently, and have different belief systems. Recognizing the hardships of their ancestor’s migration only generations prior, many Indo-Caribbean individuals also faced a fear of immigrating to a new land. It was also common for Caribbean immigrants to experience isolation from their family as many had to leave loved ones behind. The coupling of an Indo-Caribbean historical past with entering a foreign environment

⁸⁸ Himani Bannerji, “Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation” in *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2000) 63.

⁸⁹ Birbalsingh, *supra* note 73 at 209.

and facing the difficulties of integration provoked conflict to arise in and out of their homes in a way that is unique to the Indo-Caribbean experience.⁹⁰

When it comes to identifying a “home”, some Indo-Caribbeans believe that they are still caught between a rock and a hard place. The Indians who first arrived to the West Indies did not see British Guiana or Trinidad as their permanent home. Scholars have identified that many Indians had travelled to the Caribbean under the agreement of improving their economic and financial conditions with the intention that they would one day return to India and reunite with their ‘home’ and family.⁹¹ It is possible that through their engagement in processes of economic development, Indians in the Caribbean transitioned from feeling like temporary residents to accepting the Caribbean as home. However, for many Indo-Caribbeans in North America and Europe, life in the Caribbean was understood as a necessary and integral settlement, one that has evidently shaped the formation of Indo-diasporic identity today.

SITUATING CONFLICT

The ways the worlds of ‘Indo-Caribbean’ in a ‘Canadian’ multicultural space generates internal conflict for individuals who straddle these multiple worlds

In the following section, I use the historical background illustrated above as the contextual bedrock to provide a brief illustration of how second generation Indo-Caribbean-Canadians may experience internal conflict through their occupation of these multiple, colliding worlds. Although a detailed and applied analysis of the conflict situations is reserved for the

⁹⁰ Claudette Crawford-Brown & J. Melrose Rattray, “Parent-Child Relationships in Caribbean Families” in Nancy Boyd Webb, ed, *Culturally Diverse Parent-child and Family Relationships: A Guide for Social Workers and Other Practitioners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 107-130.

⁹¹ Panday, *supra* note 51 at 56.

chapters two and three, this section outlines that internal conflict situations manifest itself through a reflection of the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian's cultural past, present, and future. While the following section identifies how the past, present, and future cultural world of the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian manifests in internal conflict situations, chapters two and three will contextualize these conflict situations through an analysis of *The Worlds Within Her* and my own stories. Post colonialism, post modernism, and critical race theories will guide my reflection on the ways in which post-colonial Indo-Caribbean individuals occupy fragmented, contradictory, and conflicting worlds within themselves. I will further demonstrate how Indo-Caribbean-Canadians construct their identities in contrasting ways, which can lead to conflicts within and amongst the relationships they have with themselves, their family, and their Western cultural environment.

Critical race theory, particularly laterit theory, warns of the dangers of categorizing groups into larger group classifications because it becomes an "easy" or identifiable way of recognizing difference. Laterit cautions that understanding race through the lens of racial binaries such as white/black, white/other, an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian may find her or himself trying to fit into a prescribed binary.⁹² Such a binary is virtually impossible for a group whose hybridity extends to several branches that cannot coexist without the existence of all branches. For instance, an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity incorporates the Indian and African cultures in the Caribbean with the Canadian culture. An already silenced group becomes further silenced when individuals who belong to a hybrid group are painted by one or the other hybrid component by individuals who do not claim membership to an identified group. In this light, an Indo-Caribbean identity risks melting into an either-or categorization of Indian or Caribbean as opposed to the hybrid of Indo-Caribbean.

⁹² Matsuda, *supra* note 17.

For the purposes of my research project, theories of post modernism, post colonialism, and critical epistemology should not be looked at as mutually exclusive terms, but rather as interrelated theories that render an overlapping goal: the unearthing of subjugated knowledges. These theoretical knowledge systems posit ways of reconceptualising, and broadening the perspectives in which things were once viewed. For those who occupy a marginalized position, be it because of race, gender, or any other marker of difference, their scholarship and perspectives are often discounted because they conflict with the knowledge set out by European cultural hegemony.⁹³

Ruminations of Inner Conflict Situations: Past, Present and Future

(1) The Indo-Caribbean-Canadian within Her or His Present World

Many young Indo-Caribbean-Canadians are confronted by multiple worlds by virtue of being born to immigrant parents and living in a Western environment. Despite living in ‘multicultural’ Canada, as members of a minority within minority group, Indo-Caribbeans are often faced with challenges of cultural imperialism within Canada. Cultural imperialism deems one culture as the dominant culture through universalization of this group’s culture, language, traditions, beliefs, and thus establishes this culture as the norm to which other cultures are compared. As a result, cultural imperialism manifests in creating a “double consciousness” for many individuals belonging to the Indo-Caribbean group in Canada. The multi-dimensioned post-colonial identities of Indo-Caribbean peoples in Canada demonstrate how their identities interact and nonetheless find their Indo-Caribbean cultural identity in conflict within the broader spectrum of “multicultural” Canada, and vice versa.

⁹³ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 43-44.

The differing and multiple post-colonial realities and experiences of Indo-Caribbean individuals living in Canada may foster feelings of belonging or not belonging to specific locations. For instance, first generation Guyanese parents may experience both an insider and outsider reality in Canada, whereas second and third generation Guyanese children may feel like an insider to the “Western” reality and an outsider to the Caribbean home that their parents or grandparents identify with. For younger generation immigrant individuals, the process of acculturation may help bridge the gap between their colliding cultural worlds.⁹⁴ However, such a process may give rise to internal tensions.

(2) *The Indo-Caribbean-Canadian conflicting with the World of Her or His Past*

Analyzing the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian’s past identifies that her or his Indo-Caribbean cultural heritage is an important site of contestation, evidenced primarily in the relationships these individuals have with their Indo-Caribbean family members. Some family members may sometimes carry with them traditional belief systems that impacted their identity while they resided in the Caribbean. Of importance here are the ways an Indo-Caribbean identity struggles to maintain a cohesive but unique identity that has been trying, both historically and presently, to incorporate elements from African and Indian culture without being absorbed by either identity.

An Indo-Caribbean cultural past identifies that for many immigrants in general, expectations of their new home is very much related to and shaped by their ideas of the limitations of their past and the home they have left. However, for first generation Indo-Caribbean individuals who arrived to Canada, their ‘emigrant’ identity is specially linked to their identity as an ‘immigrant’. Only a few generations prior to emigration from the Caribbean, this community was displaced and again facing an immigrant reality in a new land. Even before the

⁹⁴ Crawford, *supra* note 72 at 98.

inception of the Indian indentured labour system, British imperialism had rendered an entire group of individuals subjugated to colonial rule. Emigration from India to the British colonies under British colonizing authority contributed to feelings of social dispossession, alienation, and exile from land and culture. Indo-Caribbeans who arrived in Canada were also aware of the struggles of their ancestors to adapt to a new land where their culture, language, religion, and citizenship were in constant flux due to many factors. These factors include but are not limited to the mingling of African Caribbean culture and a social status order that forcibly denied Indians in the Caribbean opportunities to climb the social ladder until much later in their settlement. Although Indians in the Caribbean created and worked hard to maintain a new hybrid culture in the Caribbean, some individuals particularly of the older generations believe this hybrid culture is a fragile identity that risks annihilation in Canada. Thus, an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian individual's identity via her or his colonial and doubly diasporic history, and evolution of culture and traditions, not only sets them apart from many other minority groups who have immigrated to Canada, but also sets them apart from an African or Indian cultural label to which they are often mistaken to belong. An Indo-Caribbean may maintain pockets of South Asian culture and a sense of Caribbean culture generally, but their identity as a post-colonial Indo-Caribbean also recognizes the molding of their Indian and Caribbean culture. This Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity can manifest differently for younger generations of the community who bring with them the addition of a post-colonial reality much different than the post-colonial reality of older generations of the community.

(3) Understanding the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian and Her or His Future World

The future world of the second generation Indo-Caribbean individual living in Canada, although still to be determined, is a fragile world. The fragility of this future world is influenced by the complex identities offered from a reflection of the past and present worlds, which themselves are in an ever changing, sometimes conflicting and fragmented state of flux. Interactions between the post-colonial realities of Indo-Caribbean individuals are implicated as a result of the conflict that arises due to the tension between having a doubly diasporic identity and of the hybrid components of Indian and Caribbean in Canada. Some individuals of the community may find it difficult to communicate with other members of the community whose post-colonial culture and identity is largely shaped by their Western environment. However, integration and cohesion should not be mistaken for homogenization. An analysis of the ways the multiple worlds of an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian individual provides insight into the ways these worlds create internal conflict. Thus, a discussion of the future is important in acknowledging that these multiple worlds exist and offer ways to deal with the internal conflicts that manifest as a result. Under this lens, an exploration of the internal conflicts with multiple worlds that Indo-Caribbean-Canadians experience may be an effective mechanism in understanding oneself within the wider world. By engaging in the worlds of their past and present, individuals who belong to minority within minority cultural groups can advocate their own agency to identify with all, some, or none of these worlds. While some Indo-Caribbean-Canadian individuals may continue to internalize the tensions they experience by virtue of occupying a pluralistic identity, their choice reflects a resistance to living within the multiple worlds of the self. Instead, they may adapt to a somewhat assimilationist perspective which encourages a belief that they need only to identify as Canadian within a 'multicultural' Canadian landscape.

On the other hand, through understanding internal conflict situations with one's multiple worlds in the past and present, individuals may recognize conflict as a necessary and effective mechanism to bring about change in the future. Inner reflection becomes a form of informal education which may be a useful tool to withstand the pressures and processes of hegemonic essentialization. More so, through exploration and discussion of an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian's internal conflict, she or he may engage in a process of learning and education whereby they may gain historical and experiential knowledge about their family and culture. Most importantly, an exploration of internal conflict allows individuals to realize that as Indo-Caribbean-Canadians, we can carve a space for ourselves that does not posit one world or the other. Experiencing internal conflict and confronting these conflicts can be an enriching experience that asserts that an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity deserves recognition. As future generations of the Indo-Caribbean community in Canada, asserting a critical sense of identity can tell a story not just about our individual selves, but about our families, our rich heritage, our unique culture, and the importance of all of these worlds within the self.

CHAPTER 2

LAW IN LITERATURE: A MEANS TO UNDERSTAND CONFLICTING IDENTITIES IN A MINORITY SPACE

LITERATURE AS DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION

Regret begets regret.

[Yasmin] regrets that her memories come in bits and pieces – sound bites of the mind. What she wants, what she yearns for, is memories that unroll like film: a long and seamless evocation of mood and nuance.⁹⁵

Storytelling has a long tradition in Indo-Caribbean history, bequeathed from the times of slavery and colonial domination. For the Indo-Caribbean community, fiction plays a central role in cultivating a cultural and geographic awareness and in confronting the emotional, cumulative experiences of colonialism, mistreatment, and migration. For centuries, stories were maintained through an oral tradition that fostered the development of Caribbean novels. Similar to the two-stage migration process that Indo-Caribbean peoples living in North America and Europe have endured, Indo-Caribbean fiction follows this dual discourse, as evidenced in the shifts in theme and content. The first major Indo-Caribbean fictive writing was written in the early 1900s by men in Trinidad and Jamaica, and addressed themes related to the idea of the Indian in the

⁹⁵ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 31.

Caribbean transitioning to an autonomous Indo-Caribbean sub-culture. In the 1960s, stories were becoming more available and began being published as novels or West Indian anthologies. Writing during this period looked more closely at the complexities of race within the Indo-Caribbean community and its influence on the Indo-Caribbean individual. One common theme during the post war period looked at the idea of exile for West Indian immigrants living in metropolitan communities, particularly in Britain. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Indo-Caribbean literature experienced yet another shift. Writers began unearthing the traumatic legacy of slavery and colonialism, exploring how an understanding of one's history could lead to forms of healing and cultural restoration. Much of this literature was penned by writers who had been born in the Caribbean but had settled abroad and addressed the impact of displacement on Indo-Caribbean identity. The Indo-Caribbean society's experience with conflict related to racial, sexual and cultural dynamics still remains among one of the most explored areas.⁹⁶

Neil Bissoondath's writing adds an additional lens through which to view Indo-Caribbean literature in the twenty-first century. One of the most popular Indo-Caribbean writers in Canada today, Bissoondath emigrated from Trinidad and Tobago. He arrived in Canada in 1973, where he studied at York University. After graduating, he began to write short stories and novels, some of which depict the identity struggles of first and second generation Indo-Caribbean-Canadians. Unlike other Indo-Caribbean-Canadian writers, Bissoondath thinks of himself as a Canadian rather than Caribbean writer, as he suggests that the reference to a Canadian writer should accommodate any individual residing in Canada.⁹⁷ Bissoondath, and other immigrant authors voice their individual and community's right to draw on his/her/their own individual identity through their literary explorations of what it means to live in "multicultural" Canada. However,

⁹⁶ Bénédicte, Ledent, "West Indian Fiction" in (Brian W. Shaffer, general ed.), John Clement Ball, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, vol. 3 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

⁹⁷ Birbalsingh, *supra* note 84 at 142-143.

Bissoondath has further made comments that challenge the idealization of multiculturalism discourse.⁹⁸ Bissoondath believes hyphenated terms such as “Indian-Canadian” or “Jewish-American” barricade individuals either symbolically or intellectually. His point is that hyphenated identifiers assume more than one homeland and can therefore alienate an individual from the mainstream Canadian society.⁹⁹

Generally, Bissoondath’s writing depicts a process of Indo-Caribbean families immigrating to Canada, where the primary goal is to find better opportunities in education and work. Later in the stories, individuals begin experiencing feelings of fear, cynicism, worry, and a need to find a safe and permanent home for them and their families.¹⁰⁰ In terms of style, Bissoondath’s ability to explore different outsider realities through the wide array of characters he presents in his novels serves multiple benefits. In *The Worlds Within Her*, Bissoondath incorporates the perspectives of women – Yasmin, Shakti, Penny, Charlotte, and men – Cyril, Ash, Jim, Yasmin’s father – as they interrelate with the conflicting perspectives of Indo-Caribbean individuals living in the Caribbean, and first and second generation Indo-Caribbean individuals living in Canada.

The rest of this chapter will apply a law and literature framework to explore issues related to displacement, historical trauma, identity and conflict in Bissoondath’s novel, *The Worlds Within Her*. Although there is little social scientific attention given to identity and inner conflict within the Indo-Caribbean community specifically, Indo-Caribbean fiction offers us an

⁹⁸ Although reference to the notion of multiculturalism is important for the work of this thesis, particularly to illustrate Bissoondath’s perspective in writing *the Worlds Within Her*, a larger discussion surrounding the multiculturalism debate is not the focus of this thesis. For a greater reflection of discourses of difference and sameness as viewed through the paradigm of multiculturalism, refer to Neil Bissoondath’s *Selling Illusions*, Charles Taylor’s “The Politics of Recognition,” in Amy Gutman (ed) *Multiculturalism and the “Politics of Recognition”*, and Phil Ryan’s *Multicultiphobia*.

⁹⁹ Birbalsingh, *supra* note 84 at 104-105.

¹⁰⁰ Birbalsingh, *supra* note 82 at 213.

opportunity to explore this issue through characters who are struggling with their own and their family members' post-colonial identities since their migration to North America and Europe.

Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her: the context*

The Characters, the Setting, the Plot

Charlotte said, "Wha'cha looking at?"

Yasmin's fingertip pressed at the tiny island, hiding it. "That's where I was born," she said.

Charlotte moved her finger away and stared intently at the pinprick of green on the blue sea. "Gee," she said, "I don't think of you as a foreigner."¹⁰¹

The Worlds Within Her centres on Yasmin Summerhayes, a Canadian woman with an Indo-Caribbean background who journeys back to the Caribbean to dispose of the ashes of her late mother, Shakti Ramessar. The story is largely told through the third person narration of Yasmin Summerhayes, but the novel is punctuated with flashback conversational sequences narrated by Yasmin's mother. Through the story of Yasmin's first trip back to the Caribbean since her immigration to Canada, the novel explores the implications of Yasmin's relationships on her multiple identities. The intermingling of Yasmin and Shakti's narratives connects the past with the present allowing the reader to gain knowledge about the characters' family history and the underlying fears and concerns that may influence the internal conflict situations between Yasmin, as an Indo-Caribbean female living in Canada, and her multiple identities as a mother, wife, daughter, and outsider to both the Indo-Caribbean and Canadian community simultaneously.

¹⁰¹ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 20.

Yasmin was born in the Caribbean and brought to Toronto at the young age of four by her mother, where she has few connections to her Indo-Caribbean culture, traditions and family. Upon her arrival to the Caribbean, Yasmin becomes reacquainted with members of her father's family who have lived in the Caribbean all of their lives and to whom she has not spoken since she immigrated to Canada. During her trip and in her conversations with her Caribbean family, Yasmin engages in a life altering experience where she learns about her birthplace, which had been, up until that point, experienced as foreign to her. Further, she begins to realize how the history of the land, its rich culture, and its impact on her family, have in some way, shaped the person she has become.

Deconstructing the WORLDS within HER (title)

Cyril says, "You think you might come back one day? For a visit I mean.... You must come back. After all, you're one of us."

His words send a chill through Yasmin. This world – the world of her mother and father – is undeniably part of her. But his words force her to acknowledge a greater truth. "I don't know," she says, "what it means to be one of you."¹⁰²

The significance of the title of the novel is worth mentioning not only as an exploration of an integral theme of the novel, but also as it conveys the multi-dimensional consciousness of similar, but quite separate worlds that inevitably collide. Yasmin occupies multiple roles that construct the multiple worlds in which she must live. Vis-à-vis her forefathers' migration from India to the Caribbean and her mother's migration from the Caribbean to Canada, Yasmin is part of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora in Canada. Her already multi-racial identity becomes implicated further as it mixes with the metropolitan-Canadian life that she leads. Despite Yasmin's self-identification as Canadian in almost all respects, her racialized appearance sets her apart in Toronto. Yasmin's job as a news anchor makes her recognizable when she walks down the

¹⁰² Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 350-351.

street, evidencing her assimilated and privileged status. Yasmin's worlds - the world of her parents, the world of her family in the Caribbean, the world of her white husband and biracial child in Toronto, the world of her middle class life are all simultaneously occupied, no matter how different, isolating, or inter-connected they may be. Her multiple worlds not only collide within herself but collide with the people whose worlds she shares, leading to both internal and external conflict.

Ruminations of Conflict: An exploration of Yasmin's Inner conflict

The Worlds Within Her highlights Yasmin's inner conflicts that are manifested through confrontation with the plural identities she encounters in her life. Yasmin occupies multiple spaces which draws attention to the ways in which her Indo-Caribbean background is affected by her Canadian identity and vice versa. Yasmin's experience with internal conflict addresses how her strained relationships are rooted in differences in culture, belonging, and location of different generations of the community. Many of the inner conflicts that Yasmin experiences occur as a result of the different worlds of her family members living in the Caribbean (Cyril, Penny, Ash, Ram), her mother in Canada (Shakti), her white Canadian husband (Jim) and white best friend (Charlotte), and her mixed race daughter (Ariana). The following analysis draws attention to the construction of internal conflicts within Yasmin, a second generation Indo-Caribbean woman. Such an exploration understands Yasmin's inner struggles in relation to her mother's identity and the subsequent relationship that has formed as a result.

Chapter one identified that the second generation Indo-Caribbean individual living in Canada experiences inner conflict spawned from a reflection of her or his cultural past, present, and future. The following analysis identifies specific internal conflict situations that Yasmin experiences through an exploration of the relationships that affect her cultural past, present, and

future. Yasmin's present identity is implicated by her marriage to a white Canadian and her affiliation with a Canadian culture that she experiences as in tension with her Indo-Caribbean culture and family. An analysis of Yasmin's past identifies that her Indo-Caribbean cultural heritage is an important site of contestation for an Indo-Caribbean individual living in Canada, evidenced primarily in her relationship with her Indo-Caribbean family members who still reside in the Caribbean. Of importance here is the ways an Indo-Caribbean identity struggles to maintain a cohesive but unique identity that has been trying, both historically and presently, to incorporate elements from African and Indian culture without being absorbed by either identity. Yasmin's future, manifested through her relationship with her third generation daughter, Ariana, arouses the inner conflict Yasmin experiences in trying to raise her mixed-race child in multicultural Canada. Thus, through an analysis of Yasmin's relationship to her past, present and future, we can see how internal conflict is manifested in an individual who struggles with an occupation of multiple worlds.

Inner conflict manifested through an understanding of Yasmin's Present

Yasmin's relationship with Jim

Yasmin is married to Jim Summerhayes, a white Canadian, who sees Yasmin as somewhat assimilated into the Canadian culture. Through the life provided to her by her mother and her surroundings in urban Toronto, Yasmin appears socialized into the Canadian mainstream. Although her birth abroad would suggest a first-generation immigrant status, Yasmin has virtually no recollection of her birth place and so is better situated with a second generation identity¹⁰³. Living in 'multicultural' Canada, whereby individuals can maintain

¹⁰³ There is much debate surrounding who qualifies as a first or second generation immigrant. Although the terms can be used to differentiate an immigrant as an individual who first immigrates to Canada from a first generation

pockets of their cultural identity, the marriage between Yasmin and Jim suggests, what Leeds-Hurwitz (2006) terms, a 'tapestry'. According to Leeds-Hurwitz, a tapestry acknowledges "not only that each group maintains some of its original character, but that when added together the component parts present a new, complex whole".¹⁰⁴ Her marriage to Jim reflects not only on Yasmin's identity as a 'Canadianized' Indo-Caribbean, but also reflects her move away from a traditional Indo-Caribbean identity. Thus, Yasmin's choice to marry a white Canadian man accordingly contributes to Yasmin's inner conflict as she finds that her spousal identity not only implicates her understanding of herself but also affects her relationships with members of her Indo-Caribbean family.

Yasmin's relationship with Jim represents Yasmin's present world. This world is a world where she does not have an Indo-Caribbean family network or any engagement with her Indo-Caribbean culture. As reflective of Yasmin's present identity, her marriage to Jim draws attention to Yasmin's internal struggles and insecurities. For instance, prior to marrying Jim, Yasmin is presented as resistant to the normative social order of the nuclear family. However, sometime after their marriage, it comes as a surprise to both Yasmin, and her close friend, Charlotte, when Yasmin not only moves to the family-orientated suburbs, but becomes pregnant. Charlotte brings to Yasmin's attention that, "This area. This house. It's all so...safe." Yasmin had to agree, it was indeed safe and conventional, but she comforts herself by adding:

it was spacious, and not without possibilities. Besides, [Yasmin] said, acquiring it had made Jim feel more anchored.

immigrant who is born of an immigrant, I have employed a different definition of the terms for the purpose of this thesis. An immigrant label would theoretically consider both my parents and my grandparents as immigrants and myself and Yasmin as first generation. However, as a way of differentiating between the identities of my parents and grandparents, whose experiences and identities are shaped much differently given their age and period of migration, I consider the generation of my parents and Shakti as first generation and the generation of Yasmin and myself as second generation.

¹⁰⁴ Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, "Introduction: Maintaining Cultural Identity Over Time" in Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, ed., *From Generation to Generation: Maintaining Cultural Identity Over Time* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2006) 1 at 3.

“And you?” [Charlotte says]

“You know me, Charlotte.”

Charlotte had nodded, not in approval but in confirmation. “You’ve found another slipstream,” she said.¹⁰⁵

Charlotte’s final comment suggests that she perceives Yasmin is unsure of which way her life should proceed, so tries to follow upon the momentum of her husband’s preferences. Yasmin thus sees Jim as the anchor which secures her to her present world. This is evidenced when Yasmin first arrives in the Caribbean Island and contacts Jim to let him know that she arrived safely: Yasmin thinks, “even though he is thousands of miles away, he knows where she is, and this makes her feel somehow anchored. It soothes her fear of disappearing.”¹⁰⁶ Yasmin’s fear of disappearing from the world that she knows with Jim into the world of her family, culture, and history demonstrates her internal tension that arises as a result of having to negotiate the world that is familiar to her with the world that is undoubtedly a part of her, yet paradoxically alien to her at the same time.

Yasmin and Jim have a daughter, Ariana. Sadly, Ariana died in a car accident when she was only four years old. During Ariana’s short life, and even after her death, Yasmin has found that her present world with Jim has been implicated through the ways they chose to raise their daughter. The product of an interracial couple, Ariana’s racial identity is a hybrid of her parents’ unique racial backgrounds. Thus, Yasmin’s relationship with Jim also manifests in Yasmin’s inner conflict with her multiple worlds as she believes their rearing of a mixed-race child causes tension with members of the larger white western society, as evidenced in the attitude of Jim’s white-Canadian family. Within the confines of their relationship, both Yasmin and Jim have embraced a colour-blind approach to their interactions with themselves and their family members. However, despite Yasmin’s performance as a “Canadian” in most regards, as a visible

¹⁰⁵ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 157-158.

¹⁰⁶ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 22.

minority in Canada she still faces discrimination. This is most apparent in the reluctance of Jim's parents to accept the marriage of their son to a non-white woman:

[Jim's] parents had welcomed the news, his mother quickly hatching plans on the telephone for a wedding in Montreal...

A week later she had called back to express concern over the cultural differences between her son and his fiancée.

Jim said: what cultural differences?

You know, she replied. Stop being obtuse. And besides, think of the children, *half-breeds* – Jim was staggered by the word – society would never accept them.

Jim said: Mother...and then he used the word *racist*.¹⁰⁷

While Jim's mother may be pointing her finger at Jim for being obtuse, suggesting an apparent intolerance among some older generations of white Canadians towards race-mixing, her statement is worth evaluating. Despite Yasmin's relationship to the Caribbean and her Indian appearance, she along with Jim both identify her as simply Canadian. In doing so, they may consciously or unconsciously disavow the influence of race on their relationship and the influence it could have on their children. The attitude of Jim's mother also suggests that Yasmin's appearance marks her as an 'other', especially to those who live and believe they 'belong' in the mainly white homogenous culture.

Yet conversely, there are several moments throughout the novel where Jim takes an interest in learning more about Yasmin's family history and cultural roots. After first meeting Shakti, Jim confesses to Yasmin that her mother is not what he expected. Yasmin's response reveals a suspicion that his expectations were coloured with exotic stereotypes: "You expected a woman in a veil and sari, I suppose. Serving you hand and foot."¹⁰⁸ Her inference sparks Jim's curiosity to find out more about the history of her Indo-Caribbean family. Yet Yasmin's urgency to change the subject suggests her discomfort in discussing a history that she not only knows little about but that implicates her difference as a product of the Indian-Caribbean-colonial

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* at 122.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* at 76.

British hybrid. According to Martin Genetsch, “Hybridity undermines the monolithic character of colonial discourse and turns it into a form of heteroglossia. Hybridity can become a source of resistance because in its ambivalence it precludes to draw clear-cut positions between coloniser and colonised.”¹⁰⁹ Yasmin’s attempt to deny her own hybridity at this point in the novel reveals that she is struggling with the ambivalent influence of her Indo-Caribbean roots and her mother’s British identification on her sense of self.

Although Jim’s character represents a stable entity in Yasmin’s fluctuating understanding of herself, the novel depicts their marriage in several stages of transition where the reader sees their individual worlds fusing through integral moments such as: their first meeting, introductions to their parents, marriage, having a child, and dealing with the loss of their child. These moments are invoked through Yasmin’s memorial representations, where she reflects on the past through incidences that occur in the present. These incidences occur and exist within the intersectional categories of race, gender, and the struggle with belonging that engulf Yasmin’s identity and ultimately affect the way she understands her relationship with Jim. Through Yasmin’s narrative, it becomes apparent that her struggle to deal with and understand the external circumstances of her world with Jim becomes internalized, inevitably stirring inner tensions within their marriage. Understandably, Jim too experiences an internal struggle with the circumstances of his marriage, particularly in understanding the dynamics of his relationship with Yasmin after the passing of Ariana. Yasmin recalls that Jim turns to his professional career to fill the void of his pain:

She wondered at times how much he cared: Did the domestic matter less to him than the professional? Or was it that the domestic mattered so much that he feared engaging a path that could, if followed to its logical conclusion, lead to irreparable schism?...She

¹⁰⁹ Martin Genetsch, *Difference and Identity in Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Fiction: M.G. Vassanji, Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry* (Ph.D. Thesis, Universitat Trier & University of Ottawa, Philosophy, 2003) [unpublished] at 40.

glimpsed at such times the insecurities he shared with her in carefully apportioned pieces – fears that remained unresolved within him like a hidden paralysis.¹¹⁰

Yasmin and Jim's internal struggles affect the relationship they have with each other and with their individual selves. While the passing of their daughter is a pivotal instigator in their progressively insecure relationship, Yasmin's thoughts highlight that their relationship will remain unchanged unless they each allow themselves to confront their internal struggles. Evidently, Yasmin's internal struggles, which are sometimes shaped by the dynamics of her present world, manifest in somewhat detached worlds between Yasmin and Jim. However, the future of a stable marriage between Yasmin and Jim is highly dependent on their ability to confront the fears of their past to live comfortably in the present.

It is particularly interesting that Bissoondath begins the novel with Yasmin preparing to journey to the Caribbean Island with her mother's ashes. Although Jim offers to join her, Yasmin adamantly rejects his offer. There may be several reasons to Yasmin's refusal to allow Jim's accompaniment on her trip to the Caribbean. Such possibilities may include: Yasmin not wanting her husband to accompany her due to their unsteady relationship, Yasmin's fear that Jim will not adapt to the surroundings and lifestyle of the Caribbean Island, or Yasmin's own realization that she is entering another world where she somewhat belongs but feels displaced from. This last reason requires that Yasmin journey to her birthplace to find answers to the many lingering questions that have prevented her from living peacefully not only within her marriage but more generally, *within her present world*.

Yasmin's relationship with Shakti

¹¹⁰ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 167.

Shakti Ramessar immigrated to Canada with her daughter, Yasmin, when Yasmin was only four years old. The novel takes an interesting approach to depicting Yasmin and Shakti's relationship as the narration never blends the perspectives of the mother and daughter; rather each character tells their own story which depicts their multiple worlds as both relational and self-contained. Although Shakti has immigrated to Canada from the Indo-Caribbean, she has embraced a British sensibility. It is important to understand how Shakti's individual identity has shaped Yasmin's identity and the worlds that she lives. In depicting her image of her parents to her husband, Yasmin confides that "[her father] became an Anglophobe, [her mother] became an anglophile."¹¹¹ Vijay Mishra points out that for individuals who have not experienced either themselves or through their family members, the effect of British imperialism on their post-colonial identities, it may be difficult to understand how the identity of an Indo-Caribbean woman, is so profoundly shaped by an English sensibility.¹¹² In a conversation with Mrs. Livingston, Shakti reveals that she is aware of her image of herself, just as clearly as others believe she presents her image: "The Englishwoman, they call me behind my back...this shaping of the self was the only one available to people of my generation rising out of that backward colonial society. Some of us, it is true, surrendered our selves whole, but every struggle has its casualties. I have struggled not to be a casualty."¹¹³ Shakti's tendency to camouflage into the image of the colonizer can be said to reveal the ironic compromise of a post-colonial identity in a state of flux, referred to in post-colonial literature as 'colonial mimicry'. According to Homi Bhabha (1994), colonial mimicry entails "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* at 76.

¹¹² Vijay Mishra, "The familiar temporariness' – Naipaul, diaspora and the literary imagination: a personal narrative" in Rajesh Rai & Peter Reeves, eds., *The South Asian Diaspora: Transnational Networks and Changing Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 193 at 196.

¹¹³ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 360-361.

subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (emphasis by author) and becomes “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power.”¹¹⁴ The pattern of mimicry employed by some immigrants in the “Western” world is, in effect, a strategy that attempts to manipulate stratified relations of power and race.

Shakti’s colonial mimicking image affects her relationship with Yasmin and the image that Yasmin forms of herself. It can be argued that as a result of Shakti’s experience with racial difference which viewed British culture as racially privileged, Shakti’s migration to Canada allowed her to engage in the coloniser’s culture without having to conform to family or cultural pressures around her, which was the case when she lived in the home of her husband’s family in the Caribbean. Shakti orients her own and her daughter’s reality against the backdrop of British inspired representations and laws within Canadian society. However, in doing so, Shakti and Yasmin’s relationship remained confined to a silent space where Shakti’s past life and cultural experiences were not shared. At one point in a conversation with her uncle, Cyril and cousin, Ash, Yasmin confesses that “mom...never told me much about anyone,”¹¹⁵ reflecting on her realization that “her mother’s stories were few and distinctly undramatic.”¹¹⁶ Apart from the refusal to engage in open dialogue with her daughter regarding their Caribbean family and roots, Shakti also does not participate in an Indo-Caribbean culture through cooking, keeping in regular contact with her Indo-Caribbean family, or partaking in customary traditions. Furthermore, she does not inform Yasmin about her father. In a conversation with Mrs. Livingston, Shakti also confesses to the emotional divide between her and Yasmin facilitated by Shakti’s choice to bring

¹¹⁴ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” in the *Location of Culture* (Great Britain: TJ International Ltd., 1994) 121 at 122.

¹¹⁵ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 134.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* at 88.

up Yasmin with minimal reflection of their home in the Caribbean: “We mothers are rather curious creatures at times, don’t you think, Mrs. Livingston? We gauge the risks we would have our children take by the intuitive understanding we have of them – and so we can never fully explain why we advise of a particular action....So we wound them instead with our silence. Damned if you do, damned if you don’t.”¹¹⁷ Thus, Shakti’s decision to raise Yasmin in such a way impinged upon the relationship they could have with one another. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, Shakti’s engagement with colonial mimicry implicated the relationship Yasmin develops with Indo-Caribbean culture and her family in the Caribbean upon her journey to disperse her mother’s ashes.

Despite Shakti’s image as an anglophile, her stories to Mrs. Livingston, which depict Shakti’s experiences living on the Caribbean Island with her husband and his Indo-Caribbean family, demonstrate her acknowledgement of her multiple identities and her decision to embrace only one of her many worlds in raising Yasmin. Shakti believes that the employment of this parenting strategy would protect Yasmin from the complexities, tragedies, and disappointments of her family’s hybrid past. Although Shakti acknowledges that she has failed to impart knowledge about Yasmin’s birthplace and Caribbean family, she does not regret having only provided the barest minimum to her daughter, acknowledging that “it [was] also [Shakti’s] gift to her.”¹¹⁸ In fact, Shakti reveals to Jim that “events change everything”,¹¹⁹ suggesting that despite being born into an Indo-Caribbean geography, culture, tradition, and religious atmosphere, Shakti believed that their migration required the formation of an alternate identity. Shakti tells Jim, whom she refers to as Mr. Summerhayes (evidencing her British mannerisms), why she has forged and embraced this alternate identity:

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* at 86.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* at 366.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* at 402.

“This is why I foisted on her none of the strictures I accepted for myself”the world to which [Shakti] had brought Yasmin was a vastly different place, with new imperatives requiring new responses. [Yasmin] would have to seek out her possibilities unhindered by the limitations of her mother’s time and place. “This is the reason, you see, Mr. Summerhayes, that I learnt to make hamburgers and to cook steaks. For her.”¹²⁰

Due to the fact that Yasmin and Shakti’s identities have been shaped so differently by their postcolonial environments and circumstances, their identities not only conflict with each other intergenerationally, but also cause internal conflicts in the ways these individuals understand the shaping of their own identity. For Shakti, such an internal conflict compelled her to remain silent about her experiences and family in her communication with Yasmin and instead shares them only with Mrs. Livingston. The result is a disconnect between Yasmin and her mother about significant issues including Yasmin’s family and cultural history and Shakti’s motives for resisting a traditional Indo-Caribbean identity and embracing a British sensibility in bringing up Yasmin. All of these factors have an impact on Yasmin’s post-colonial identity in Canada. Metaphorically, the gap in narrative voices between Shakti and Yasmin represents a generational gap as well as a knowledge gap between mother and daughter. The reader, on the other hand, possesses an awareness of events, emotions, and histories that neither Shakti nor Yasmin share with each other. These issues also highlight how Yasmin and Shakti’s relationship manifests in two silos that neither understand nor communicate one perspective with the other, resulting in colliding and conflicting worldviews. Yasmin’s internal struggle becomes one of negotiating the world of her mother, which is itself a complex identity, and her own world living as a Canadian, against her Indo-Caribbean world, which is not only foreign to her but detached from her understanding of herself.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* at 402-403.

Inner conflict manifested through an understanding of Yasmin's Past

Yasmin's relationship with her Indo-Caribbean family in the Caribbean

Upon her arrival to the Caribbean Island Yasmin instantly feels out of her element, away from the world that she knows. In becoming reacquainted with the Caribbean Island and her father's family who have lived in the Caribbean all of their lives, Yasmin experiences her familiar world conflicting with the worlds around her. Although Yasmin's mother maintained some minimal correspondence with her in-laws in the Caribbean, Yasmin has not spoken with her biological family since she immigrated to Canada. Moreover, Yasmin has little recollection and knowledge about her father, the late Vernon (Ram) Ramessar. This gap in knowledge is significant because in contrast to her mother's 'colonial mimicry', Yasmin's father was a political leader in the Caribbean who defended the rights of the Indian population during a time of deep political turmoil. Prior to Shakti and Yasmin's migration to Canada, Ram was assassinated in what was understood to be politically motivated (a common fear of political figures in the Caribbean at the time), leaving his wife and young daughter in the Caribbean to live with his family. Cyril is Ram's brother who, after returning from England with his British wife where he was studying to become a lawyer, becomes the 'manager' of the family's plantation land. Yasmin's aunt (her father's sister), Penny, has become the woman of the estate, and is not ashamed to point out the differences between Yasmin and herself, particularly as she insinuates that just because Yasmin has gone abroad, does not make her better than the family members who have "chosen" to stay in the Caribbean. Yasmin also finds herself in confrontation with her adopted cousin, Ash. Ash, a young teenager, participates in a cult-like glorification of the Indian motherland, at one point pushing for Yasmin to recognize her roots that stem from

India. The following analysis depicts Yasmin's inner struggles as she orients herself in the worlds of her Indo-Caribbean family. Of importance is how Yasmin's Canadian identity conflicts with the cultural, racial, and historical experiences of her Indo-Caribbean family and how these external conflicts manifest in Yasmin's internal struggle with her multiple worlds.

Yasmin and Cyril

"What would you like me to call you?" Yasmin says....

"Well, it'd be nice if you call me uncle, but I guess Cyril is probably the best idea. Or Manager."

"I prefer Cyril."¹²¹

Unlike her other family members in the Caribbean Island, Yasmin and her uncle, Cyril, develop a significant bond during her stay. Their introduction suggests Yasmin's reluctance to participate in a token performance of a familial relationship with someone she feels little connection. On the other hand, Cyril does not assume the same understanding of the meaning of family; to him, blood kinship does not waiver with distance or the reforming of cultural identities. His openness to accepting Yasmin into his home and life may reflect an empathetic appeal towards Yasmin's experiences with race, culture, and difference. Although they had very different upbringings, Cyril shares a hybrid background with Yasmin, as he had spent a significant portion of his youth outside of the Caribbean Island. While studying law in England, Cyril marries Celia, a white-British woman who comes from a fairly traditional British home. Unfortunately, his experience with hate-crime and discrimination in England prompts his return to the Caribbean Island. The dynamics of the Ramessar family home change significantly when Cyril moves back to the Caribbean with his British wife to live with his mother, Vernon, Shakti, and Penny. During a conversation with Mrs. Livingston, Shakti recalls that "Celia...was white,

¹²¹ *Ibid.* at 77.

and therefore intimidating to [Shakti's] mother-in-law, or perhaps even an object of secret veneration. I believe the explanation was simpler. I believe that, because she was not of our world, Celia in any important way did not count."¹²² The inference to the internal hierarchy of racial categories within the Ramessar home may reveal a prevailing cultural stereotype: the interracial marriage between an Indo-Caribbean individual and a white individual did not receive the same treatment from the family as did intra-cultural marriages. Thus, like Cyril, Yasmin faces an inner tension with the ways their interracial marriages are viewed. While they may perceive their marriage in race neutral terms as the union of two people in love, within their cultural community their marriage is instead regarded as the relationship between an Indo-Caribbean insider and a white cultural outsider. In other words, to marry outside of the community, suggests that an entire world gained through marriage becomes invisible, insignificant, and on some basic level, does not count.

However, Yasmin understands Cyril's attachment to family and his notion of the Caribbean as home as tainted by unrealistic expectations. During one afternoon while reminiscing about the family's past, Yasmin comes across a photo of Celia and noticing Celia's apparent alienness amongst the Indo-Caribbean backdrop, Yasmin asks whether Celia enjoyed living there. Diverting the question, Cyril replies that "it was her home....We were her family." When Penny chimes in that Celia "wanted to be one of us", Cyril asserts that "She *was* one of us."¹²³ Cyril's adamant inclusion of his wife within the term of belonging "us" does not convince Yasmin. Instead, the novel suggests that Yasmin understands that for Celia, like for herself, the Caribbean will always be more foreign than familiar for those who were brought up in the West.

¹²² *Ibid.* at 96.

¹²³ *Ibid.* at 355.

Yet Cyril's persistence in trying to reconnect with Yasmin reflects a fear of a growing generational and cultural gap between those who have returned to live their life in the Indo-Caribbean and those who have immigrated permanently to the West. Cyril expresses a particular fear that individuals of the younger generations do not understand the history and struggles of their parents' or grandparents' generation. Such a fear is evident in conversations between Yasmin and Cyril, who voices his displeasure with the way values are interpreted or reconstructed by younger Indo-Caribbean individuals: "Yasmin, it have people who trying to take all those things my generation saw as vices and turn them into virtues".¹²⁴ From within the novel, it appears that members of Yasmin's family, particularly Cyril, may believe that beyond her assimilation into a middle-class Canadian education, lifestyle, and culture, she is actively resisting Indo-Caribbean values, identity and connection to the rich heritage.

Yet, Yasmin's internal conflict spawned from her and Cyril's opposing belief systems never actually resolves itself. In her interactions with Cyril, however reluctant, Yasmin experiences Cyril's persistent attempts to break down the wall that separates her Canadian world from her Indo-Caribbean world. On the day before her return to Canada, Cyril takes Yasmin for a drive into the Caribbean Island where he points out locations, including the site of her father's assassination, with the intention that uniting the physical land with personal memories would open Yasmin's eyes to the world of her past. Cyril's hopeful intentions are evidenced in the conversation they have on their ride back from their excursion:

Cyril says, "You think you might come back one day? For a visit, I mean. Maybe with your husband?"

[Yasmin] "I can't think that far ahead."

"But you must. This trip – is not really a visit, if you know what I mean. You must come back. After all, you're one of us."

His words send a chill through Yasmin. This world – the world of her mother and father – is undeniably part of her. But his words force her to acknowledge a greater truth.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* at 337.

“I don’t even know,” she says, “what it means to be one of you.”

“Is –” He sighs, and in the darkness she sees that he is exhausted. “Is to share flesh and blood, and to understand things without all the words. Is to know that you’re home.”

“Cyril...” She is grateful he does not see the shake of her head, for she would rather not tell him that by most of the definition, she is not one of them.¹²⁵

It appears that the drive does not have the intended effect on Yasmin, but instead amplifies Yasmin’s internal conflict. While the drive unearthed several stories about Yasmin’s Indo-Caribbean family and her cultural past, Yasmin remains resistant to these worlds. Her concern that Cyril will be hurt by her disagreement is prompted instead by her own reluctance to define for herself an identity that belongs to all of her multiple worlds.

Yasmin and Penny

Although Yasmin and her uncle, Cyril, develop a seemingly respectable familial relationship, Yasmin and her aunt Penny’s relationship appears turbulent from the start and does not seem to resolve itself even at the end of Yasmin’s trip. Their unsettled relationship is evidenced upon Yasmin’s arrival to the Caribbean when Penny picks Yasmin up from her hotel. Yasmin asks,

“What should I call you?”

“Penny will do. Nothing else really fits, eh?”...

Yasmin gazes through the tinted window....And she, neither resident nor tourist, aid worker nor investor, senses herself distanced from it all...But she does not wish for greater involvement with, or even greater knowledge of, the world she sees through the window. She is here, she tells herself, to fulfill an obligation. And then to leave.¹²⁶

Yasmin’s uncertainty of what to call Penny, and her uncertainty of what identity she occupies when she is in the Caribbean leads to further conflict, both within herself and with her aunt.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* at 350-351.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* at 51.

A major contributor to Penny's resentful attitude towards Yasmin is due to Penny's past experience of lost love because of her family's objection to an interracial marriage. The reader learns that in the past, Penny wished to marry an African-Caribbean man, but her family pressured her not to. The idea that interracial marriage and race mixing threatened the core identity of the Indian in the Caribbean stems from the ideological segregationist vision operating in the Caribbean. It is possible that by virtue of living in the Caribbean with her family, Penny's first-hand knowledge of the ways her family would be implicated by the relationship to a black man given the clashing, competitive, and gruesome history of the Indians and Africans in the Caribbean, would have influenced her life decisions. It would appear that Penny believes she sacrificed her opportunity for love, happiness, and a family of her own, while she believes Yasmin to be so infiltrated into the Canadian world that she takes for granted the sacrifices the generation before her had to endure for the betterment of younger generations.

Moreover, Penny's view of Yasmin's marriage to a 'white' may be informed by post-colonialist constructions of the relationship between coloniser and colonized. Stuart Hall argued that white colonisers justified their actions by labelling indigenous peoples as primitive: meaning uncivilised and lacking in culture. These erroneous ideas allowed white people to see themselves as civilisers, bringing progress to 'backward' peoples.¹²⁷ As a victim of the legacy of colonization, Penny would be aware of the hegemonic notion of white superiority that has infiltrated post-colonial spaces. In this way, Yasmin marrying a Canadian White man is coded differently than Penny wishing to marry an African Caribbean man, even though technically, they are both "outsider" choices. Moreover, as Yasmin assimilates more and more into Canadian culture, her Indo-Caribbean family may see Yasmin as engaging in the culture of the colonizer

¹²⁷ Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity" in Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 595.

(similar to Shakti) as a way of absolving her relationship to the Indo-Caribbean culture, which was historically viewed as inferior to the British culture. Exploring Penny's past experience with an interracial relationship and its impact on Penny's understanding of Yasmin's interracial relationship will demonstrate how conflict manifests itself within Yasmin's understanding of Penny's world and her own world.

Through Shakti's narrative with Mrs. Livingston, the reader learns about Penny's past relationship with Zebulon Crooks, a pleasant and attractive African-Caribbean man living in the Caribbean. However, when Penny and Zebulon planned to marry, Ram convinces his sister that she would be betraying her family if she went through with it. Although Ram and Penny are siblings, it is standard tradition for Ram, as the eldest son, to take the position of 'man of the house' after his father passed. Ram's political embroilment with the rivalry between the Indian and African population is used as his main argument in convincing his sister that such a marriage would not only make Ram a laughing stock, but would diminish the values of the Ramessar home. It is ironic that Ram would embody a colonialist spirit and a missionary-type mentality in his attitude of exclusion towards an 'other' given the motivation of the British colonists to "other" all non-white persons in the Caribbean. Shakti enlightens Mrs. Livingston about the conversation that took place between Ram and Penny upon news of the marriage:

What he said was: *Penny* – or he may have said *My dear Penny*, I don't remember – *you know I am fond of our African compatriots, and I will not insult you by pretending that I am not personally aggrieved by the feelings you have developed for this man.*¹²⁸

Shakti describes a conversation where Ram wishes Penny well and if she chooses to marry Zebulon, he promises to fulfill his rightful duty as her brother and respect her decision. However, Shakti highlights that he goes on further to say:

¹²⁸ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 336.

*Penny...there is something else for you to consider: Understand as you go rightfully after your happiness that your marriage to this man would effectively end any hope I have of political success. You know my constituency, Penny, you know the loyalties on which my support is based. Your marriage to a black man would make me a laughing stock.*¹²⁹

Zebulon Crooks was a well-known preacher, suggesting at first that beyond the racial difference, Zebulon was also an enthusiastic Christian. That Zebulon employed tactics to arouse his audience and was successful in his persuasion accounted for Penny's realization that "his religious act bore some resemblance to [Ram's] political one."¹³⁰ Religion, however, was not the largest factor impeding the relationship between Penny and Zebulon; after all, the Ramessar family had converted, as a matter of convenience, to Presbyterianism under the Missionary conquests only a few decades earlier. Shakti recalls that despite Penny's being so deeply smitten by Zebulon, and her belief that the marriage would have fulfilled Penny's desire for happiness later in life, "the problem, you see – as [Shakti] knew immediately it would be, as Penny knew – was Zebulon's race"¹³¹ Ram's plea to Penny to resist a marriage to a black man not only reflected his selfish commitment to cater to the prejudices of his political constituencies, but also suggests his sly method to control the racial 'authenticity' of his family. It was a common belief amongst Indians living in the Caribbean that by marrying a black man, an Indian woman would be giving up her high upbringing.¹³² Lamarsh Roopnarine writes about the sacrifice and survival of Indo-Caribbean women and acknowledges the mainstream attitudes of an interracial union between an East Indian man or woman and an African man or woman. Speaking specifically about the period of 1838-1920, he argues that even during the indenture period when East-Indian women were few, it was rare for an East-Indian woman and African man to be in a sexual relationship. If an East-Indian woman and African man had children, they would be "viewed

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* at 336.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* at 335.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Paula Morgan, "With a Tassa Blending: Calypso and Cultural Identity in Indo-Caribbean Fiction" (2005) 3 *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies J.* 1 at 13.

with contempt and even with a sense of utter shame, particularly in the East Indian communities. For example, a child from an African/East Indian union is still called a *doogla* (hybrid) in the British Caribbean and is considered to be an outcast in mainstream Caribbean East Indian communities.”¹³³ Penny understood that she would be giving up the only potential chance she had at love and true happiness by denying herself a marriage to Zebulon. However, Penny had little choice in the matter. It was apparent that the pressures from her older brother and mother would make it impossible, or overwhelmingly difficult, for Penny to marry and have a relationship with the man she loved.

Penny’s past experiences explain, in part, her coldness towards Yasmin. When Yasmin is about to depart her family’s home in the Caribbean to return home to Canada, Yasmin exchanges a few words with Penny:

Penny waits for Cyril to begin making his way down the stairs with Yasmin’s suitcase before saying, “So.”

“So.” Yasmin repeats the word, accepting the segue to summation. “I’m a stranger here.”

“You’re not like us.” Penny’s agreement is immediate.

“You don’t like me, do you, Penny?”

“I don’t know you.”

“You don’t want to know me. Or to like me.”

“Well, now,” Penny says quietly. “Maybe you gone and put your finger on it.”¹³⁴

Evidently, Yasmin’s Canadian identity, and Shakti’s way of raising Yasmin, results in Penny subtly rejecting her niece as part of her community. In many ways, Yasmin’s Canadian persona and inability to connect with her Indo-Caribbean culture results in Yasmin’s realization that she is a stranger to the world of her Indo-Caribbean family. Beginning with Shakti’s choice to discontinue communication between Ram’s family and Yasmin, and Yasmin’s choice to resist the culture of her family, results in the colliding worldviews between Yasmin and Penny. When

¹³³ Lamarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838-1920* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2007) at 101-102.

¹³⁴ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 407.

Yasmin is leaving her relatives home on the island to go back to Canada, Penny gives Yasmin an obligatory kiss on the cheek. Yasmin thinks: “Lips, lipstick: she has been branded – but temporarily”. Instead of wiping away the lipstick mark, Yasmin decides that “She will leave it, for now. She will let it fade by itself. As it will. Naturally.”¹³⁵ As their relationship demonstrates, the ultimate consequence of Yasmin’s internal collision with her world and Penny’s world where she sees situations that do not resolve itself, is severed ties, the casting out of Penny from Yasmin’s world and Yasmin from Penny’s.

Yasmin and notions of the authentic Indo-Caribbean

Yasmin’s late father, Ram, and her adopted cousin, Ash, share the belief that the Indo-Caribbean individual, whose ancestry stems from India, must preserve her or his authentic Indo-Caribbean identity. Ram’s political platform sought to promote the rights of the Indian in the Caribbean as he believed that the African community in the Caribbean often undermined opportunities for Indians, both in the workforce, schools, political arena, and rights to plantation land. Ram’s political career as special advisor to the Island’s delegation required him to travel to London, England with his wife Shakti. While the issue of identity on the Island was largely about ensuring rights and responsibilities for Indians, so that the community would not be dominated by African culture and people, the issue of identity became even more complex in the larger urban cities outside of the Island. In a conversation with Mrs. Livingston, Shakti recalls her and her husband’s experience with mistaken identity in London. On this occasion, Ram takes Shakti and a few friends to a prestigious restaurant which had a tradition of presenting the bill at the end of the meal under the flag of the country where they believed was the guests country of origin:

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* at 407.

“Our bill arrived under the flag of India. My husband raised his eyebrows in amusement but said nothing, and interrupted a member of our party as he was about to protest. When the waiter left, my husband explained that if we were to tell them where we were from, it would just confuse the poor people. Then we’d have to explain not only where our island was, but also how we – evidently Indians – had ended up there. The history and geography lesson would hardly be worth the trouble.”¹³⁶

Shakti’s memory highlights that group identity markers can easily be misinterpreted by non-group members who have never had the opportunity to learn the difference. For Ram, it appears that it has become a somewhat tedious task to explain his complex identity to those outside of the community. His resistance to correcting the waiter as a way to lessen confusion reflects on the way Indo-Caribbean individuals are perceived by non-Indo-Caribbean members to belong to an Indian community, suggesting that a South Asian appearance is interpreted as a definitive sign that one must hail from India. The tendency in the western world to identify Indo-Caribbean individuals as Indian instead of Indo-Caribbean erases the diasporic relationship to the Caribbean and the ways an Indo-Caribbean identity thus differs from an Indian identity. To be grouped as South Asian or Caribbean threatens the survival of an Indo-Caribbean identity. Thus, Yasmin’s Indo-Caribbean family may believe that in order to maintain both a group and ethnic commitment to an Indo-Caribbean identity, Yasmin should try to preserve the traditions and customs of her family’s culture, which risks becoming invisible due to classification that group individuals from the community as Indian or Caribbean. Ironically, the issue for Yasmin is not that she is losing her identity as Indo-Caribbean under the larger labels of Indian, South Asian, or Caribbean, but rather that her self-identification as Canadian disavows all of the tangled roots of her diasporic identity. Thus, Yasmin’s resistance to any affiliation with an Indo-Caribbean identity ignores and discounts the fears of some members of the larger Indo-Caribbean community.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* at 196.

Ash is Yasmin's adopted teenage cousin who lives under the care of Penny and Cyril. Ash's belief system, similar to Ram's ideological perspective, exemplifies some individuals of the generation of Indo-Caribbean Hindus living in the Caribbean and opposed to the mixing of races. As illustrated in the opening paragraph of the thesis, Ash defines himself in relation to Hindu fundamentalism and his Indian ancestry. Ash's fundamentalist ideals construct his idealist beliefs that India, as the motherland of Indo-Caribbean peoples and structured by its ancient but highly developed Hindu civilisation, is culturally superior to the Caribbean.¹³⁷ By advocating his fundamentalist beliefs and resisting integration into the larger Caribbean society, Ash furthers his essentialist thinking that home is a fixed location that cannot be changed with migration or through the development of affection across ethnic difference. Ash's preoccupation with Hindu fundamentalist discourse forwards the idea that an authentic Indian Hindu culture should be maintained even in the Caribbean. In this regard, Yasmin's world – which includes her marriage to a white Canadian, mothering a mixed-race child, and a resistance to her Hindu roots and Sub-Indian culture - undermines the racial purity that Ash believes can only be maintained through birthright. In many ways, it could be said that Yasmin's rejection of a supposed authentic Indian culture reflects the choices of those who immigrate to Canada and integrate into a broader Western culture. However, Ash may not see this broader Western culture as respecting Indo-Caribbean cultural values.

Ash's belief in an authentic cultural identity and a preoccupation with blood kinship is in tension with social constructionism¹³⁸ which approaches identity as a "construct" reified through discursive mechanisms. From this perspective, identity is built through interactive processes, both with one's family and with the larger society. Individuals learn initially to construct their

¹³⁷ Genetsch, *supra* note 110 at 129.

¹³⁸ Leeds-Hurwitz, *supra* note 105 at 8.

identities through “families that provide a clear framework for making meaning of the world, whether through stories, rituals, or other methods...”¹³⁹ As individuals mature, they move away from meaning that is made by the family to making meaning that is fused with the meaning provided by others in the wider world which may include friends, neighbours, school mates, peers, etc. but may also go on to include strangers. Under this light, Yasmin may believe that her life is largely constructed by her social surrounding in Canada and less by her blood relation to the Caribbean. As the novel explains, Yasmin “has no belief in the romance of family ties. There is to her no point in comparing the thickness of blood and water: with time, with distance, with no network of shared experience, blood might as well be water.”¹⁴⁰ Yasmin perceives her relationship with Charlotte, her white Canadian best-friend, as more precious to her than her relationship to Penny or her family in the Caribbean. Although Yasmin’s cultural image demonstrates a loss of her Indo-Caribbean culture, which her family in the Caribbean find somewhat offensive, Yasmin embraces her Canadian identity, implying that the Caribbean world is not her primary place of identification.

Yasmin opposes the assumption that an authentic identity is possible or even valuable. This realization becomes more apparent to the reader when it is understood that Yasmin is really the child of Amie, the servant in the Ramessar family home. The moment when Amie tells Yasmin the truth about Yasmin’s conception and birth, Yasmin feels the ground beneath her shift yet again as her “world shudder[s] on its axis. Senses unshackle: a deflation of flesh and bone.”¹⁴¹ Amie’s story reveals that Yasmin’s conception is the product of her father, Ram, raping Amie. Her father’s family kept the conception a secret in fear that the news would destroy Ram’s political career and put the entire family to shame. Instead, the family invents a

¹³⁹ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 8.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* at 139.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* at 382.

story of Shakti's pregnancy and passes Yasmin off as the child of Shakti and Ram. Despite feeling both horror and hysteria when learning the truth of her conception, "unexpectedly, Yasmin finds herself soothed."¹⁴² The realization that Amie is Yasmin's birth mother suggests that Yasmin's socialization and identity construction is largely a product of her relationship with Shakti and less a result of her blood relation to the Caribbean. It could be said that by finding out the truth about her birth mother, Yasmin is soothed that she can now understand more about her relationships with her mothers, both Shakti and Amie, and her feelings of (not)belonging. While Bissoondath devotes little space in the novel to the crucial revelation of Amie as Yasmin's biological mother and its effect on Yasmin, this turning point in the story adds several layers to Yasmin's already complex identity. On one level, the truth of Yasmin's birth in some ways explains her Indo-Caribbean family's lack of acceptance. Furthermore, the revelation complicates the esteemed image that Yasmin had of her father. Ram's image becomes distorted for several reasons. Earlier, it was mentioned that Ram forbade his sister, Penny, from marrying a black man in fear that it would threaten his career. Yet, he deceives his wife, his family, and his appearance as protecting the racial and upper class purity of his family, by raping Amie, his servant. As a result, parts of Yasmin's identity becomes falsified as her lived reality is based in part on the knowledge of her parents, their histories, their class and its impact on Yasmin's upbringing. Moreover, Yasmin is confronted with the trauma of being the product of a rape. The trauma associated with her violent conception and the risk of her and her birth mother being ostracized as a result, is a heavy weight on Yasmin's shoulders. However, having been shared the truth of her birth, Yasmin may realize that beyond the love, support, and care bestowed upon her by her adoptive mother, Shakti, Yasmin has been given an opportunity to understand their complex relationship through a lens that she never possessed. In other words, Amie's revelation

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

of Yasmin's birth provides insight into Yasmin's past relationships with Shakti and her Canadian identity, while bridging her identity closer to an Indo-Caribbean association by virtue of Amie's representation in the Caribbean. Evidently, Amie's story adds a new dimension to Yasmin's identity and her internal battle with her multiple worlds. The moment however, fosters a crucial epiphany in Yasmin's understanding of herself, her birth mother, and her place of birth: "worlds meeting in a dissolution of time."¹⁴³

Inner conflict manifested through an understanding of Yasmin's Future

Yasmin's relationship with Ariana

Yasmin, a local news anchor and Jim, an architect, live a comfortable middle class life in the suburbs of Toronto. Shortly after their marriage, Yasmin and Jim have a daughter, Ariana. The novel draws attention to the evening that Ariana was conceived: "[Yasmin] had the knowledge now: of his hands, of his flesh. She knew him to be a man of sensitivities and of passion savagely edged. This knowledge was, she knew, the stirring of an entire world within her."¹⁴⁴ The quote is both literal and symbolic: literally, her communion with Jim has created a new life inside of Yasmin, and symbolically this communion resonates as a realization that Jim's world is fusing with her own world to generate an entirely new world that Yasmin will soon embrace, whether she is prepared for this new identity or not – the world of a racially visible mother raising a child in Canada. Sadly, their happy home comes to a halt when prior to the passing of her mother, Yasmin and Jim had to cope with the death of their four year old daughter, who died in a car accident. While children normally represent notions of "the future", in the case of Yasmin, her child has died, thus throwing Yasmin's future into confusion. Ariana

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* at 386.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* at 105.

represents a hypothetical world, a world that could have been, but is not. Furthermore, Yasmin and Jim's union has resulted in a child who can claim a third generation Indo-Caribbean-Canadian status, prompting attention to the ways that Ariana's life has been implicated by Yasmin's Indo-Caribbean ethnic background, whether Yasmin acknowledges it or not. As will be demonstrated, Yasmin's identity as a mother and her choice to resist affiliation with her cultural background sparks an internal conflict as she realizes that her choice to resist parts of her multiple identities influences Ariana's normative cultural consciousness.

Similar to Yasmin, Ariana is born to parents who share a rich historical and geographic background. As a result, Ariana's identity is a hybrid identity that shares her mother's and grandmother's Indo-Caribbean ancestry and her father's British-Canadian culture. Even as young as 4-years old, Ariana is aware of her difference as compared to her friends in class and startles Yasmin with her queries about her own identity:

"Mummy, what am I?" The question was posed with great seriousness.

"What do you mean, honey?"

"I mean, where am I from?"

"You mean what place?"

"Well, Gino's Italian, and Eduardo's from South America, and Nadia's from Egypt."

"Who are Gino and Eduardo and Nadia?"

"They're friends in my class."

"I see. Well, you were born in Canada, so you're from Canada."

"Mo-om, they were born here too. That's not what I mean."

"Okay. What do you mean?"

"I mean, what am I *really*?"¹⁴⁵

In her response, "Isn't it enough to be Canadian?", Yasmin finds her answer uncomfortable. Just like Ariana's friends in school, Ariana and Yasmin are visible minorities in a society that foregrounds national origin for those who may appear different from the implicitly white norm. Ariana's inquisition suggests her interest in learning about her family's cultural lineage and the

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* at 238.

importance of understanding one's roots to a land outside of Canada. Kamala Jean-Gopie, an Indo-Jamaican-Canadian writer and scholar, posits that most second generation immigrants in North America face the collision of two worlds (like Yasmin) – the world that is familiar but left behind, and the new world where they are being socialized in order to fit in. She highlights the difference between the second and third generation in Canada whereby “the third generation often attempts to make connection with its heritage – that which the second generation has discarded.”¹⁴⁶ While Yasmin does not take an interest in her cultural heritage and chooses to ignore any engagement with her immigrant identity, she cannot escape her affiliation with an Indo-Caribbean culture. In a ‘multicultural’ society where cultural identifiers play a large role in constructing one's identity, Ariana may be unable to see beyond the barricading walls of her mother's state of denial towards ethnic and racial difference.

Until Yasmin can accept a place that straddles her multiple worlds, the worlds of her daughter are undeniably affected too. In another instance, Ariana sees a woman sunbathing and inquisitively asks her mother what the woman is doing. Somewhere in her reply, Yasmin explains that the woman “wants to get brown”. “Like me?” Ariana asks. To which Yasmin replies, “Like you.” Moments later, after some thought, Ariana declares: “I'd like to be white some day.”¹⁴⁷ In another instance, Yasmin affirms that Ariana can be anything she wants to be when she grows older, and to her surprise, Ariana says that's she'd “like to be a man.”¹⁴⁸ Ariana's statements reveal her understanding that a racial and gendered hierarchy, which associates privilege with one colour or gender over others, has somehow worked its way into the conscious mind of Ariana, only a four year old child. Ariana's statements provoke Yasmin to

¹⁴⁶ Kamala-Jean Gopie, “The Next Indo-Caribbean Generation in Canada” in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indo Caribbean Resistance* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993) 62 at 65.

¹⁴⁷ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 200.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* at 225.

feel shame, which “arose from her own fear of the reaction of others: What in the world, they would wonder, had Yasmin been teaching her daughter?”¹⁴⁹ Or, a better question might be: how does Yasmin understand her own identity and how is this communicated to her daughter? Growing up in a middle class family home that replicates the homes of other families in her area, Ariana might be aware that the only difference that sets her apart from these families is her skin colour. However, Ariana’s confusion with identity may also be a product of Yasmin’s debate with unanswered and unexplored questions that have impacted on Yasmin’s own identity formation: “the heart of her reaction lay a grand hypocrisy: Why was it acceptable for that woman to dream of being brown, but not so for her daughter to dream of being white?”¹⁵⁰ It appears that the problem resides in the fact that since her mother does not acknowledge cultural traditions or even talk about her and Ariana’s cultural relationship to the Caribbean, Ariana has no understanding of why she appears different than white individuals or where her family has come from. In effect, Ariana is growing up alienated from her Indo-Caribbean culture and this awareness facilitates Yasmin’s inner conflict which presents itself in the form of shame and uncomfortable discussions with her daughter.

Yasmin’s internal conflict manifested as a result of her relationship with her daughter takes a different form after Ariana’s death. During Ariana’s short life, Ariana’s world often created conflict within Yasmin’s own world as Yasmin realized that the ways she asserted her identity affected Ariana’s identity formation in unexpected ways. However, Ariana’s death proved to be a significant turning point in Yasmin’s life. Through her relationship with her daughter, Yasmin began exploring areas of her own identity that for many years had remained unexplored because they seemingly did not matter to her. Ariana’s birth opens up a new world

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* at 220.

for Yasmin, compelling her to question the choices she's made and the identity she has carved out for herself. Understandably then, Ariana's death prompted a whole world inside of Yasmin to freeze, a world which influenced her other multiple worlds. In one conversation with Mrs. Livingston, Shakti confessed that she witnessed "a part of [Yasmin] freeze solid when her daughter died...and it has never unfrozen. I expect it will be so forever. It is a way of surviving, you see: freezing within ourselves things that would otherwise kill us."¹⁵¹ Yasmin's future would remain frozen until she could once again engage in the journey that her daughter prompted her to begin, a journey where she could explore more fully her internal questions and tensions as a way to understand the relationship and necessity of the plurality of her multiple worlds.

Revelations of Yasmin's internal conflicts with her multiple worlds

Towards the end of the novel, Yasmin fulfills the obligation she has set out in journeying to the Caribbean: to disperse her mother's ashes in the waters of their homeland in the Caribbean. The act prompts Yasmin's realization:

In the holiness of the act, she feels the distance between herself and her mother close forever.

For the first time in many years, she cries for her daughter, hot tears not of despair but of release.

She cries for her mother, hot tears not of longing but of farewell.

And she cries for herself, hot tears not of fear but of relief.

Thus she knows her journey may continue.¹⁵²

The novel concludes with Yasmin's return to Canada where the reader has the knowledge of Yasmin's trip enlightening her in many ways. She not only understands more about her past through the eyes of her Indo-Caribbean family members, but gaining a deeper understanding of this world has allowed her to deal with the passing of her mother (symbolizing the world of her

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* at 275.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* at 394.

cultural past) and the passing of her daughter (who stands as a symbolic representation of Yasmin's future world). Her internal conflicts with these two worlds have ultimately prevented her from living comfortably in her present world. In many ways, Bissoondath's personal multiculturalist perspective, which values an umbrella Canadian identity for all individuals, is not only conveyed in his characterization of Yasmin. It can be said that Bissoondath's perspective is communicated in the way he authors the reconciling of Yasmin's conflicting worlds. The novel proposes that Yasmin's inner conflicts, which manifests through the clashing worlds of her cultural past and future, can be relinquished through deeper reflection and understanding. Thus, for Bissoondath, Yasmin's journey facilitates her transition to be at ease with the worlds that conflict with her present world, a world which requires her to engage with a Canadian identity that deemphasizes cultural affiliation and messy identities. In returning to Canada, Yasmin is returning to her Canadian identity, where her affiliation with her Indo-Caribbean world will soon fade into the background of her Canadian world.

Towards the end of her stay with her Indo-Caribbean family, Yasmin begins to realize the effect that her western identity and her performance as a westerner has on the Indo-Caribbean population. While Shakti and Yasmin are viewed as transitioning away from any maintenance of an Indo-Caribbean culture, their Indo-Caribbean family also views their migration as a fortunate opportunity not available to all individuals. However, for many the opportunity to migrate to engage in the socio-economic possibilities available through education and careers in the West, does not necessarily mean that one should lose their cultural identity in order to conform to the norm, as it may appear with Yasmin. While Ash is preoccupied exhibiting his hope to return to the Indian motherland, Yasmin realizes that for some living in the Caribbean, her identity has given her access to power, a realization that she would not have understood before her trip to the

Caribbean Island. Her realization is evidenced in an encounter with Ash during one of his ceremonies.

Yasmin and Ash face each other in the cult. He pushes a gun against her temple and out of anger, not fear, she pushes it away. Ash says: "What else you expect me to do? You going back to your nice peaceful country tomorrow – and I stuck here. No way out. You understandin' me? No way out." ...Yasmin "feels for the first time beyond her fear of him: feels the depth of his despair"...she "lets his tears dampen her fingertips." And as she does this she is overtaken by the thought of her daughter and drying her tears after she had fallen from her bicycle.¹⁵³

Yet this knowledge is a significant turning point for Yasmin. In the paralleling of her affection towards Ash to the affection she had once shared with Ariana, Yasmin may realize that her identity as a mother was not completely lost by Ariana's death. Her world as mother, the world that Shakti implied had frozen, is beginning to melt, as she begins to open up to the possibilities of connecting her past, present, and future. Thus, while it appears that Yasmin intends on letting her relationship to her family and the land in the Caribbean Island fade away, like Penny's lipstick, Yasmin may not have fully realized the effect of her journey on the relationship between her identity and the Caribbean. Once Yasmin arrives back in Canada, her car ride home with Jim unveils several key moments which point to the development of Yasmin's ability to reconcile her inner conflicting worlds. For instance, in alluding to the possibility of sponsoring Ash by asking Jim whether he is aware of "how immigration works", Yasmin demonstrates her ability to reconcile the past. Yasmin becomes reunited with her marriage in her present world when Jim, compelled by his emotion, tells Yasmin that he loves her. Furthermore, Yasmin realizes that her future will be shaped differently upon receiving news from Jim that Mrs. Livingston, who no one thought would survive, except Shakti, has awoken from her coma after years of lifelessness. In these pivotal moments of revelation, it is apparent that Yasmin has set the stage to begin to engage in and understand all of her worlds so that she can live comfortably in the present:

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* at 367.

“Yasmin holds out her palm and waits patiently until, with delight, she feels his words, their warmth and their weight, alighting.”¹⁵⁴

As will be demonstrated in chapter three, Bissoondath and I do not share the same view of how a multicultural identity should be represented. I find value in wearing cultural identifiers that speak to a cultural time, space, and history, particularly when such a culture exists within a family network and is at risk of being lost. In my reading of Yasmin’s journey to the Caribbean Island, her new found knowledge has both stirred and regenerated her inner tension with her cultural past and future in a way that allows these inner conflicts to exist, but without hindering her life in the present. In this sense, Yasmin’s inner conflict with her multiple worlds is necessary in order for her to find ways to explore and learn about the worlds that make up her present world. It can be said that gaining a greater understanding of her inner conflicts helps her to ‘be at peace’ with her past and future. These multiple worlds are ultimately a part of her and in many ways, by resisting these worlds, she resists the beauty of a plurality of identity. Thus, her return trip to Canada represents another journey, where she is able to understand and appreciate her multiple worlds and engage in her present world without a feeling that she has derailed the possibility of fully understanding it. Her journey to the Caribbean represents a critical pedagogical experience whereby she begins to understand how to live in her present world simultaneously with her surrounding multicultural and cross-generational worlds as well. Yet ultimately, Yasmin’s sense of self transcends predetermined identity. In Shakti’s words: “we inhabit a world that has made a fetish of identity....We are who we are, individualized creatures of history, society and family. To listen to your heart, to accept its complexity, is to know yourself. It is to recognize your identity in all its glorious absurdity.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* at 416-417.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* at 361.

CHAPTER 3:
STORYTELLING AS AGENCY:
APPROPRIATING THE PERSONAL AS POLITICAL

*Legal storytelling is an engine built to hurl rocks over walls of social complacency that obscure the view out from the citadel. But the rocks all have messages tied to them that the defenders cannot help but read. The messages say, let us knock down the walls, and use the blocks to pave a road we can all walk together.*¹⁵⁶

This chapter is informed by a critical race methodology which posits narrative storytelling as a way of constructing an alternative social reality to that which is often presented in society.¹⁵⁷ The stories told from the point of view of my personal experience engage in the process of learning and performing an Indo-Caribbean cultural identity in a Canadian space. My task however is to use my personal experience as a framework to explore the dynamics of internal conflict spawned from tension with multiple worlds, within the larger context of the Indo-Caribbean community in Canada. It requires looking back at my life from the time of childhood to describe the critical points and people that have fashioned my socialization process. Such a task embraces the dynamics of a family whose socialization has been affected by the post-colonial identities of first generation Guyanese immigrants and the post-colonial identities of subsequent generations. An autobiographical depiction is important for this type of research because it reflects on the interplay between exposing the self and being a spectator to my own life and the lives around me. As James (2001) highlights, “the home is an important research site...precisely because it does not easily lend itself to the more fluid ethnographic techniques of participant observation, especially in Western urban contexts where the ‘black box’ of the family

¹⁵⁶ Delgado, *supra* note 23 at 2441.

¹⁵⁷ Wing, *supra* note 19 at 1-4.

remains a largely privatized social space.”¹⁵⁸ Moreover, by engaging in an autobiography, I endeavor not only to relay my personal story, but also to reveal important insights about the social world that I live and perhaps also about the cultural community that has shaped my experiences.

I also engage with the notion of ‘memorial reconstruction’, a concept spawned from Shakespeare criticism, and what I believe helps to theoretically frame this chapter. In the context of postcolonial theory, memorial reconstruction refers to reading about the colonial literary imagination and recognizing the dialectic link between “a colonial education and the aesthetic” or more specifically, “a trauma about belonging...and ownership of a language not one’s own.”¹⁵⁹ Adopting a memorial reconstructive methodology is appropriate, as I experience the Indo-Caribbean diasporic culture as both a space of belonging, and a space of alienation. My task is two-fold in appropriating an autobiographical storytelling methodology in this chapter. First, I seek to memorially reconstruct my ambivalent lived reality involving internal conflicts between myself and the relationships I have developed with members of the Indo-Caribbean community. Second, I seek to critically engage with the issues *as a scholar*, contextualizing my emotions and experiences within the larger thematic framework of multiple and colliding worlds and situating personal conflicts in relation to the historical texts and literary imagination of Neil Bissoondath’s Indo-Caribbean literature, *The Worlds Within Her*. This unconventional undertaking requires subverting the limits of academic judgement by embracing the extremely personal as an epistemological source.

¹⁵⁸ Allison James. “Ethnography in the Study of Children and Childhood” in Paul Atkinson et al., eds., *Handbook of Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001) 246 at 254.

¹⁵⁹ Mishra, *supra* note 113 at 193.

JUXTAPOSING FICTION AND REALITY

While chapter two engaged almost exclusively in an analysis of Neil Bissoondath's novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, this chapter analyzes my own life story as I have experienced and witnessed internal conflict with my multiple worlds. These internal conflict situations are often spawned through external conflict situations within and amongst my own family and community. While incorporation of the novel is still important for advancing the analysis of this chapter, especially in juxtaposing the experiences of the characters in the story with members of my own family, there lie important differences in the novel and my own life. Most significantly, I found that Bissoondath's personal 'multicultural' standpoint is replicated in his characterization of Yasmin. As mentioned in chapter two, I interpret Bissoondath's view of multiculturalism as being primarily assimilationist as opposed to mine being one primarily based on the multiplicity of identity. For instance, I identify as Guyanese-Canadian and I wear my hyphenated identity with pride. Bissoondath, on the other hand, finds hyphenated identities 'clumsy' add-ons to a Canadian identifier, arguing that a multicultural Canada should identify citizens as 'Canadian' regardless of their ethnicity and culture. Bissoondath's view is reflected in his protagonist's choices; even after engaging in and coming to understand her multiple worlds, there is a sense that Yasmin still ultimately subordinates the Indo-Caribbean world to the Canadian world within her psyche. Understandably, Yamin's worldview affects her interactions with members of her Indo-Caribbean family members in a somewhat different dimension than my own interactions, resulting in different manifestations of conflicting multiple worlds within her life and my own.

Furthermore, I noticed that Bissoondath's depiction of the Greater Toronto Area, where Yasmin and her mother reside, does not include descriptions of its multi-ethnic demographic character. The characters he illustrates, despite their cultural background and immigrant status,

in most senses, conform to his mould of what it means to be a “Canadian”. I recall other writers referring to Toronto as the quintessential diasporic city, however, in his novel, Bissoondath rarely provides background description of Indo-Caribbean cultural signifiers, such as representations of cuisine, music, or festivals. I recall only one point in the novel where Shakti engages in an explicit cultural practice, when she offers Indian sweets to Jim when they first meet. However, it could be suggested that Bissoondath chooses to construct Shakti’s lack of engagement with Indo-Caribbean cultural dynamics to illustrate the characters’ alienation from their Caribbean homeland.

Comparing an analysis of personal inner conflict within my own life with the characters in *The Worlds Within Her* provides multi-dimensioned perspectives of conflict situations as it affects the multiple and colliding worlds of Indo-Caribbean individuals in a post-colonial context. Moreover, the multiple vantage points illustrated from the experiences of Yasmin and her family, and myself and my own family engage in a replicating pattern whereby conflict is linked to colonial trauma, historical/contextual (mis)communication, and misunderstandings of being born into and living in different post-colonial worlds.

Situating my epistemological standpoint: My story

I am the second child born to my parents. My older sister, two younger brothers and I were all born in the Greater Toronto Area and have lived the majority of our 17-25 years in Oakville. My parents, on the other hand, were both born in Guyana. My mother emigrated from Guyana in 1974 to pursue post-secondary studies in Canada’s East Coast. My father emigrated a few years earlier, in 1968, upon the insistence of his parents to escape the political strife and instability in Guyana. When my father and his first four siblings were old enough, his parents

facilitated their conversion to Catholicism in order for them to live in the convents of England. Neither my mother nor father immigrated to their respective new 'homes' with their parents or larger extended families. My grandparents arrived to Canada several years later. My parents' and grandparents' migration allowed them to later settle in the Greater Toronto Area where they could participate in Canada's immigration program of sponsorship to help bring some of their family members, which may have included their parents, siblings, and other family, over to Canada.

My parents have made a home for my siblings and I here in Canada, a place I could call home, and a place they would also call home, but a perception of home different than my own. I know no other home. My parents however, have had many homes. The identities of my grandparents' generation, my parents' generation, and my own generation are fused with a rich history, cultural pattern, and varying experiences. We admittedly share similar patterns of identity but our identities are shaped quite differently vis-à-vis our varying ideas of home and the resulting embedded values, morals, and customs that play into our ways of thinking, acting, and being. Thus, an understanding of my own world has become increasingly concerned with how I relate to the home(s) of my parents and my Indo-Caribbean family. It is no wonder that I find the many worlds around me coming in tension with each other, resulting in inner conflict situations that are manifested through straddling multiple worlds.

Ruminations of Conflict: An exploration of inner tension manifested through conflict with my multiple worlds

[Shakti] “We all have the right to prune our worlds, and those aspects of our lives that will survive us.”¹⁶⁰

Chapter two was informed by a law and literature methodology which employed Neil Bissoondath’s novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, to analyze Yasmin’s internal conflict situations as an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian struggling with her multiple, colliding worlds. The analysis was structured using the preface acknowledged in chapter one that a second generation Indo-Caribbean individual living in Canada experiences inner conflict situations spawned from tensions with her or his cultural past, present, and future. The chapter two analyses identified specific internal conflict situations that Yasmin experienced through an exploration of the relationships that influenced her cultural past, present, and future. Chapter three, informed by an autobiographical storytelling methodology, situates itself using the analysis from chapter two, and continues the exploration of internal conflicts that a second generation Indo-Caribbean female experiences as a result of tensions with her multiple worlds. The analysis is structured similarly to chapter two as it involves an exploration of the ways I have personally experienced internal conflict resulting from the numerous complex worlds that compromise my individual identity, understanding that these worlds often come in tension with each other. However, throughout this chapter, drawing on my assertion that there is no generalizable identity for individuals who have a diasporic relationship to the Caribbean and India, I will illustrate different incidences of internal conflict than were demonstrated in chapter two. The conflict situations that I illustrate from my own life exemplify incidences that occur at a more pragmatic level in which conflict occurs in the course of day to day life.

¹⁶⁰ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 202.

An exploration of my present world acknowledges that as a second generation Indo-Caribbean living in Oakville, I have experienced and witnessed multiple levels of conflict with (1) the culture of my Indo-Caribbean family and (2) my Western surroundings, which result in inner conflicts with my multiple worlds. These conflicts become apparent through my relationships with my Indo-Caribbean family members, who themselves occupy post-colonial identities that are in a state of flux, and with interactions with individuals who see themselves as assimilated into the Western environment. A reflection of my present world sheds light on the ways the internalization of a Western sensibility undertaken by a second generation Indo-Caribbean living in Canada comes in conflict with other members of the community who believe their culture risks loss due to the lack of awareness of Indo-Caribbean history, experiences, and culture. As comprising of multiple post-colonial identities, the individuals of my family are located not only within their specific social surroundings, but also within specific historical periods. Thus a look into how the worlds of my cultural and historical pasts affect my present highlights how the differentiated understanding between me and my Indo-Caribbean family members, or lack thereof for some, results in a cultural divide that inevitably causes external tension that becomes internalized as I begin to question to what community and space I belong. A look into how my cultural past affects my present brings to light an important site of cultural conflict for members of the Indo-Caribbean community: how their complex identity finds itself conflicting with historical racial systems and subsuming cultural labels. Furthermore, my present world affects the world of my future. Chapter two suggested that Yasmin's future is hypothetically represented by her relationship with her daughter, illustrating the accumulation of three generations of female worlds (Shakti, Yasmin, and Ariana) inflicting different and complex dimensions of internal conflict for Yasmin. My future is largely represented through the ways

my identity as a second-generation Indo-Caribbean female comes in tension with the post-colonial image of the Indian woman in the Caribbean, highlighting the ways my relationships with my female family members, particularly my Nanny (grandmother) and mother, are implicated as a result. Explorations of the relationships I have with my female family members provides insight into the ways they have been involved in processes of reinventing an Indo-Caribbean women's identity and thus, encourage me and other second generation women to continue reevaluating the role of the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian women into the future.

Experiences of Inner conflict in my present world

The relationship of identification of "home" on informing inner conflict

I come from a fairly large Indo-Caribbean family. While members of my larger extended family reside throughout the world, including the Caribbean, England and Canada, the majority of my immediate family now lives in Canada. At one point there were four generations of my mother's family living in close proximity to each other in Canada. Not surprising, having lived on multiple occasions with extended family members who emigrated from Guyana, my brothers, sister, and I were very fortunate to have been brought up in a rich culturally attuned home, fostered by a large network of family members and close friends. Living in suburban Oakville meant, however, that outside of our home, exposure to Indo-Caribbean 'culture' in any relevant form was virtually non-existent. The words of K. E. Supriya (2006), when describing her family living in a predominantly white American state, resonates with the experiences of my own family living in Oakville: "we appear chromatically and physically different as a family from the racially homogenous, sedentary, automobile-centered, and introverted culture that envelops

us.”¹⁶¹ When I was growing up, I recall Oakville as a predominantly white, middle class neighbourhood. Being Roman Catholic (my father never converted back to Hinduism) meant that my sister, brothers, and I were among a handful of visible minority students in our Catholic schools. Every time I stepped outside of the safety net of my home, as a member of a visible ethnic minority group, I was always conscious of my status, both within white spaces and minority spaces. Questions of race and culture rarely entered the conversation in school, possibly because the complexity of the topic would be difficult to teach and understand in a white dominated space. Recognizing my difference from my friends in class, I would sometimes run to my parents looking for answers, but most often, I kept silent regarding my discomfort and confusion, as I did not want to confront the idea that my friends were identifying me as ‘foreign’. I was often asked whether I was Indian – evidently I appeared so – and I would reply, “well, I am born here...,” “Ok, but your parents, they are from India?” “No, they are from Guyana”. I struggled with having to repeatedly answer the same sequence of questions, the same delineation of having to differentiate between my appearance and my diasporic ancestral roots. Although I was born and brought up in the same Western cultural space as those who would point out my difference, the colour of my skin somehow racialized my status. I stood out as ‘different’ from the hegemonic norm of the community to which I supposedly belonged.

On the other hand, every day when I crossed the threshold into the homes of my Indo-Caribbean family, I was engulfed in a space imbued with cultural traditions, beliefs, smells, tastes, and stories. Demonstrated through my Nanny’s bountiful lunch table that was described in the introduction, my family members, particularly those of my grandparents’ and some of parents’ generation, have preserved many of the traditions and customs of their Indo-Caribbean

¹⁶¹ K.E. Supriya, “Mommy, I Like Hamburgers and Indian Food: Good Parenting and the Limits of Identity Politics Discourse” in Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, ed., *From Generation to Generation: Maintaining Cultural Identity Over Time* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2006) 269 at 277.

culture from 'back home'. While I can look back now and understand the value of my parents' and grandparents' finding ways to hold on to even tidbits of our Indo-Caribbean culture within the home, there were many times when I felt the socio-cultural environment of Oakville impeded on the ability of my siblings, cousins, and I to understand and engage in the Indo-Caribbean parts of our identity. For instance, where my uncles engaged in the sport of cricket, my brothers would rather play European soccer with their friends and wind-down to Sunday night football, what I would view as the epitome of a distinctive North American heteronormative culture. I recall significant holidays where my Hindu family would light diyas during Diwali (the festival of lights) or throw white baby powder on each other during Phagwah (known as Holi in India or the festival of colours), celebratory traditions that many would partake in Guyana, regardless of one's religion. Yet my siblings and I were reluctant to participate, not only because we were involved in a Roman Catholic education and religious system, but also because we understood little of the customs and their importance to a distinctive Indo-Caribbean identity. Generational conflicts as a result of cultural differences also surfaced in regards to education and career choices. Stemming from the historical preoccupation of career orientated education for children in the fields of medicine or law as a means of gaining socio-economic status for the entire family, even in Canada, older generations of my community still privilege careers in law or medicine. It is often a struggle for children to convince their parents to allow them to choose their own field of study. When children do not follow the occupational choices of their parents, we feel we are not holding up to the prestige and respect that our family wishes of us. Apart from this, as Shanti demonstrates in the opening paragraphs, I recall times when I would feel ashamed to leave my house after my parents prepared a meal doused with the rich aroma of curry. I never wished to be anything other than a Guyanese Canadian. There were times when I

felt ashamed of how my culture, my appearance, my traditions, and my upbringing ‘othered’ me in a society that was unaccustomed to anything that faltered from the hegemonic norm. While I recognize the importance of preserving factions of our family’s cultural heritage, there were times when my siblings, cousins, and I would internalize Western judgements that portrayed Guyanese cultural traditions as ‘other’.

And such was the beginning of the internal battle with my multiple worlds – the world inside my home made me different from the world outside of my home, and my integration into the world outside my home made me different from the world inside my home. In most cases, the inner conflict that I experienced took the form of external intergenerational conflict that became reflected in my inner consciousness, influencing how I engaged with identity.

Evidenced in the struggle between children, parents, and grandparents of a minority within a minority culture is the recognition that many children born to the North American sub culture are continuously struggling “to preserve a sameness and continuity in his [or her] life, absorbing and celebrating the values of his family, his culture, and his own past; on the other hand he [or she] attempts to make “a selective repudiation...of childhood identifications,” rejecting those values that will bind him [or her] to an identity not wholly his own.”¹⁶² The task here is a difficult one: how can one maintain a balance of the multiple worlds to reflect an inner surety of one’s belonging to these worlds? Or, is an answer to this question even necessary?

Understanding the role of the unique world of my father and mother in shaping my multiple worlds

Inside the walls of my home, adding to my already complex cultural identity, I was often perturbed by the realization that the world of my parents was different than my other family

¹⁶² Roger J. Porter & H.R. Wolf, *The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1973) at 174.

members. They spoke clear, eloquent English, while my grandparents and some of my other surrounding family members spoke with a broken English style, evidencing their migration from the Caribbean. I believe Bissoondath's characterization of the individuals in *The Worlds Within Her* is emblematic of individuals of different generations of the Indo-Caribbean community who have migrated to North America and Europe. Shakti's character was described in chapter two and for those whose identity does not share a diasporic relationship to a community outside of Canada, it may have appeared that Shakti's character verged on a type of fetishization of the British. When I read Bissoondath's depiction of Yasmin's view of her mother, "Defying expectation, being an original, was her mother's way of defeating stereotype, her personal theatre a response to challenge: She would force others to see her image of herself and not their image of her."¹⁶³, I was instantly reminded of my parents. My parents both speak a language that points little to their Guyanese home. Having spent their teenage years in England and Canada, it could be said that my parents' post-colonial identities are shaped not only by their Guyanese place of birth, but equally or even more shaped by their post-Guyanese migration spaces. Moreover, as Vijay Mishra points out, Indians living in Guyana were becoming alienated from traditional Indian culture and lifestyles, whereas, the culture of the British had become commonplace, especially the language, education, and religion. According to Mishra:

In Trinidad, in Guyana, in Fiji, in Mauritius, in Suriname especially, in South Africa perhaps only marginally, the old diaspora informed the nation and affected its social structures. And since this was a peasant diaspora, largely illiterate and without any understanding of a pan-Indian culture, it internalised the discourses of the master, created a surrogate motherland (England, France, Holland) and mimicked her cultural norms as if these were its own. When trouble began in these half-baked post-colonial societies...the diaspora migrated to either the land of their imperial masters or to white settler nations. Except for a few members of the comprador class, no one returned to India.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 194.

¹⁶⁴ Mishra, *supra* note 113 at 196.

In this citation, Mishra points to the result of “a borrowed sensibility”, which the Indo-Caribbean diaspora “internalised in a very unselfconscious fashion.”¹⁶⁵

However, it has never been indicated to me that my parents’ association with the British culture and the Canadian missionary school system had a negative effect on their lives. While Guyana is still understood as the ‘home’ of my parents, when my father speaks candidly about his family, their relationships with each other, and the culture that he grew up in, it reminds me of how the fictional character Shakti narrates her own life history. And like Shakti, I have come to notice the sort of calm that comes over my father as he discusses these memories and stories as occurring in the past. Like Shakti, I believe my father would not choose to return to the Caribbean given the life he has built in “the West”. My mother and father are both strong figures who, through healthy relationships with their children, have provided a positive teaching and learning environment for my siblings and me. My parents’ post-colonial identities are comprised of multiple changing worlds – and these worlds are also, to some extent, contained in my own world. Unlike other immigrant parents, my parents embodied a double or even triple cultural sensibility which allowed me to relate to them at a level that many second generation children may have difficulty with. In understanding my own relationship to the worlds of my parents, it must mean something that my parents and Shakti have chosen to bring up their children in Canada. Yasmin, my siblings and I are a product of both the home we were brought up in as well as the environment that we are exposed to outside of the home. And so, while my parents encouraged the Indo-Caribbean culture to remain an integral part of our lives (through family networks, food, music, weddings, festivals, etc.) they are also aware that outside of our home, in Oakville, my parents and their children also embrace in part a Western sensibility just like other Canadians.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Time, space and location: implications for Indo-Caribbean-Canadian generations

My world in Oakville, Ontario, has had a significant impact on my internal struggles with my multiple worlds. However, other second-generation Indo-Caribbean individuals may have a completely different experience with the conflict of cultural worlds because they may reside in communities populated by large numbers of Indo-Caribbean families. Growing up, I remember hearing stories from older family members of neighbourhoods in cities such as Scarborough, Markham, and Brampton that experienced changing demographics. While those neighborhoods were once primarily made up of European immigrant population, the dynamics of these neighbourhoods changed around the 1960s and 1970s when many Indo-Caribbeans (from Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname) began settling in increasingly large numbers in these areas. Unlike areas such as ‘little Italy’ or ‘Little India’ there is no space identified as ‘Little Guyana’ or ‘Little Trinidad’. However, there are a few areas where the population of Indo-Caribbean community members has grown and members have begun to establish identity markers, such as Indo-Caribbean grocery stores, restaurants, and shops. In such areas, individuals belonging to the Indo-Caribbean community, both young and old, are exposed to bits and pieces of the culture through the smell of dhal, curry, pepper pot, etc. in local stores and restaurants, the sound of chutney, calypso, and soca, and the sight of tropical Caribbean fruits. However, given that large numbers of Indo-Caribbean members also settled outside of these areas in Scarborough, Markham, and Brampton, constant exposure to Indo-Caribbean culture and communities is not available to all, or even most of us. At times, I succumb to the optimistic belief that exposure to such a community could bridge the divide between younger generations who are removed from identifying with the Indo-Caribbean culture and older generations who feel younger generations are adapting to the surrounding ‘Western’ environment). However, other times I realize that

given the geographic size and differing socio-economic strata of the Canadian environment, it is not feasible and unrealistic that *all* Indo-Caribbean families should resituate to such areas.

Creating familiar spaces and networking arenas where cultural connections are rather scarce relates to the idea of the first generation Indo-Caribbean as a transmigrant. Unlike other immigrants, scholars have pointed to the Indo-Caribbean individual as encompassing the title of 'transmigrant'. Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1995) define transmigrants as "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state."¹⁶⁶

Indo-Caribbean individuals living in Canada bring with them a diasporic relationship to both their Indian heritage and Caribbean culture. Acknowledging Indo-Caribbeans as a transmigrant group within the loosely defined category of 'immigrant' points to the need to redefine and amend stereotypes and/or conceptual understandings of an immigrant group's individual experience.¹⁶⁷ Mary Chamberlain argues that when transmigrants can sustain social and familial contact over time and across borders suggests the inhabiting of transmigrants in a "transnational social field."¹⁶⁸

While my parents emigrated from Guyana at a young age and engaged in migration routes that influenced their integration into their surrounding culture, they have encouraged an appreciation of our family roots in Guyana. However, as I have noticed with the perception of some of my friends, many may not see my parents as fitting into the typical image of the first generation immigrant. In saying so, I believe my mother and father have embodied a transmigrant status through their ability to sustain historical and cultural roots despite their early

¹⁶⁶ Nina Schiller, Linda Basch, & Cristina Szanton Blanc, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration" (1995) 68 *Anthropological Quarterly* 48 at 48.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Mary Chamberlain, *Migration and the Anglo-Caribbean Experience: Family Love in the Diaspora: Memory and Narrative Series* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2006) at 92-93.

migration and adaptation to cultures that fall out of their culture of birth. For instance, when I was younger, I remember driving into Scarborough (about an hour's drive away from Oakville) with my Mom, sister, and brothers to assist my Dad in his business, a West-Indian grocery store. Both of my late Grandfathers made their mark as successful owners and operators of produce grocery stalls in one of Guyana's largest markets, Stabroek Market. I recall my Dad telling stories of his days as a young boy charged with the duties of helping his father run their family business. Thus, it was a significant landmark for my father, my mother, and our immediate family to sustain the traditions of our Indo-Caribbean family through business, bringing together the roles of my past grandfathers, Nana and Grand Dad, with their children and grandchildren. Appreciating that the experience of working with my father at his West-Indian store business was a fruitful and life-changing cultural and learning experience, the opportunity also made me realize how scattered and complex my worlds are. I often felt that I was unable to relate to the customers, many with roots to the Caribbean themselves, and internally accused my Oakville upbringing as the culprit for making me feel like an outsider to the community where my roots belonged. In the day to day life activities of my present world, including those times when I am fully immersed in the closest space to an Indo-Caribbean habitat outside of the Caribbean, I am still constantly involved in an internal wrestling match of inclusion/exclusion with my multiple worlds.

How my present world faces inner conflict as a result of my cultural past

As a second generation Indo-Caribbean living in Canada, I have contemplated my allegiance to the multiple hybrid components that comprise my cultural identity. As I had mentioned earlier, I was fortunate to have been surrounded by a family network that engaged in

activities that strongly connected them to an Indo-Caribbean culture. The engagement with my family encouraged a passion for cultural activities, and so, like other second generation Indo-Caribbean individuals, I looked for ways to participate in cultural activities, communities, or events outside of the home. Not surprising, it was difficult for me to find such opportunities in Oakville. Ironically, while having tried to assert my identity by engaging in cultural activities, which is one way to resist assimilation, I unknowingly fostered tension amongst some of the older members of my family. Stemming from their experience with racial stratification in the Caribbean and their knowledge about Indo-Caribbean history, some members of my family hold strong beliefs about the way racial classifications have influenced and/or hindered the formation of an Indo-Caribbean cultural identity. Although the external conflict between family members took the form of uncomfortable discussions and interactions, the conflicting dynamics have led to an internal conflict with the ways I choose to engage in my culture and understand my identity.

Caribana: a positive claim to identity or a homogenizing representation of Indo-Caribbean heritage?

Toronto's Scotiabank Caribbean Carnival, or Caribana as it is most widely known, is not only one of North America's largest street festivals, but also North America's largest Caribbean festival. Since its inception in 1967, Caribana continues to invite all people, many with ties to the Caribbean, to engage in the parading dance of the Caribbean Carnival, which consists of steel pan, soca, carnival costumes, and jerk chicken, to name a few.¹⁶⁹ Partaking in the activities of Caribana brings me closer to an Indo-Caribbean tradition as it represents a customary practice in

¹⁶⁹ "Introduction" *Toronto Caribbean Carnival (Caribana) Info*, online: Caribana.com <<http://www.caribana.com/index.html>>.

Caribbean regions, especially Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, to name a few. Because I am not generally exposed to an Indo-Caribbean culture outside of my home, Caribana provides a link to the world of my parents and grandparents. It is one of the few times that I, along with other second or third generation Indo-Caribbean individuals, can represent our ancestral home, waving our Guyanese or Trinidadian flags in pride. On occasion, I have attended Caribana with my immediate family, where participation was, at times, hesitant and/or unsatisfactory for some. When I was younger, I recall other times, despite my intense desire to engage in the music, dance, and festivities of the event, where I was reluctant to attend Caribana for different reasons. On the one hand, it was apparent that some of my family members were opposed to attending the event. On the other hand, by virtue of living in Oakville, some of my Indo-Caribbean family or friends who were similar in age were unacquainted with the event and showed little interest in engaging in the music, food, and dance, much of which was foreign to them. Also many of my school friends were white Canadian and appeared both unfamiliar and uncomfortable with such an event.

Although I may find participation in events like Caribana to be a positive claim to identity and performance of West Indian culture, some members of my family are opposed to the carnival scene because it not only represents the forging of African ancestral lore with Indian ancestry, but it becomes represented as a “creole” cultural event. The roots of carnival - the style of dance, costumes, and parade - can be traced back to Africa. While there are few festivals and popular events that signify traditions from the Caribbean, Carnival, according to Anton Allahar, becomes a portrait identifier of the Caribbean.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, in writing about creole ethnicity, Percy Hintzen identified that “the ‘Afro-creole’ (what is popularly considered ‘black’ in the

¹⁷⁰ Anton Allahar, “Identity and Erasure: Finding the Elusive Caribbean” (2005) 79 *European Rev of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 125 at 130.

region)...is the embodiment of the (changing) representations and practices of descendants of enslaved populations transported from West Africa for plantation labor.”¹⁷¹ Indians, however, had no place in the spectrum of creole identities; they became outsiders exacerbated by the racialized division of power and privilege between Creoles and Indians. Thus, to assert that the tradition of carnival is a national Caribbean marker but is also defined within the confines of traditional African or creole culture implies that Caribbeans who fall outside of the African societal order, for instance Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, or other such descents, cannot be fully represented through carnival. Anton Allahar posits that there is a common academic and political assumption that Caribbean refers to English speaking countries.¹⁷² The same can be said about the academic inclination to assume that ‘Caribbean’ is a subsuming category, without appreciating the different cultures that comprise a heterogeneous Caribbean sensibility.¹⁷³ This definitional problem of who is Caribbean and what identifiers classify one as Caribbean becomes a significant instigator of identity conflict amongst members of the Indo-Caribbean community. Members of the Indo-Caribbean community, particularly members of the older generations, who may have been involved in or witnessed the harsh turmoil between Indians and Africans, may understand Caribana as signifying the privileging of African over Indian traditions, notwithstanding suggestions that identify Caribana as the forging of the two cultures. Therefore, when younger members of the community engage in Caribana, older generations may worry that the specificity of Indo-Caribbean culture may be lost in favour of a homogenizing Caribbean cultural label. Thus, an event that I thought would have fostered an opportunity for all people of

¹⁷¹ Percy C. Hintzen, “The Caribbean: Race and Creole Ethnicity” in Prem Misir, ed., *Cultural Identity and Creolization in Nation Unity: The Multiethnic Caribbean* (Lanham: University Press of America of the Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group) [forthcoming].

¹⁷² Allahar, *supra* note 171 at 126.

¹⁷³ In my research, a key word search of “Caribbean” generally returned searches comprising of African-Caribbean. When I adapted my key word searches to include “Indo-Caribbean” or “West-Indian” or similar terms, information would be returned pertaining to the Indo-Caribbean exclusively.

my community to come together in a Caribbean cultural space, often resulted in tensions and resentments, particularly for those of the older generations.

The fear of losing one's culture relates back to the reoccurring theme of the importance of identity and the risk of an Indo-Caribbean identity becoming erased, ignored, or rendered invisible by others. According to Anton Allahar, the "initial trauma of forced removal from their ancestral lands has led to a spiritual yearning for rootedness and symbolic return to *home*...it is only at *home* that one supposedly finds the acceptance and security from which to begin to negotiate one's way in the world."¹⁷⁴ In the case of second generation Indo-Caribbean individuals who participate in the cultural event of carnival, they may not understand the concerns of their family members who feel that the Indo-Caribbean hybrid culture that they have struggled to create in the Caribbean and maintain in Canada, is becoming lost by (1) a perceived notion that Western culture does not recognize the specificity of Indo-Caribbean culture (2) the younger generations' lack of knowledge of the rootedness of carnival and this lack of knowledge translating to a perception that these younger members of the community are erasing, ignoring, or rejecting fragments of their own culture.

An Indo-Caribbean hybrid identity in tension with a South Asian classification

In some ways, it appears that the world of the Indo-Caribbean living in Canada is being voiced through stories of the African Caribbean in Canada or the South Asian Indian in Canada. As indicated, members of the Indo-Caribbean community may fear loss of their unique identity through Caribbean events that privilege an African ancestry. On the other hand, members of the Indo-Caribbean community may also fear loss of their culture due to a western tendency to

¹⁷⁴ Allahar, *supra* note 171 at 128.

generalize that individuals belonging to the small Indo-Caribbean population can be classified into the larger group of South Asian or Indian. Hence, my world as a second generation Indo-Caribbean in Canada becomes further complicated as I need to consider not only my western identity against the Guyanese identity of my cultural background and family, but also the risk that my Guyanese identity will be absorbed into larger cultural labels. Having a historical, cultural, linguistic and ancestral lineage stemming from India, it is inevitable that parts of the Indian culture are integral in Indo-Caribbean identity formation. From my experience, I can point to many similarities and borrowed sensibilities between the two cultures. However, an Indian cultural identity differs in many ways from an Indo-Caribbean cultural identity; hence, to be mistakenly grouped into the larger category of “Indian” in Canada de-emphasizes the importance of a unique Indo-Caribbean cultural world.

When I was growing up, I recall many of my friends practicing forms of dance like ballet, tap, jazz, and other dance forms that are offered at most dance schools in urban areas. Realizing that it would be hard to ‘fit in’ at the local dance schools, but also realizing that I was not drawn to these artistic forms, my mom and I searched for a type of dance that resonated with my own sense of culture. This was a daunting task, but eventually we managed to find a prestigious dance school outside of Oakville. Although there is no identifiable form of dance representative of the Caribbean, borrowing from our Indian ancestry and the popularity of Bollywood¹⁷⁵ within the Indo-Caribbean community, I thought participating in classical Indian dance, called bharata natyam, would provide a possible bridge to the cultural affiliation that I lacked but yearned for. The dance form was enjoyable and rigorous. However, almost immediately, I experienced myself as an outsider to the Indian community, almost as much as I was an outsider to the Western ballet culture. While I appeared South Asian Indian, I was not

¹⁷⁵ Refers to the film industry in India, mainly Hindi-speaking.

Hindu, nor did I speak Hindi or engage in cultural activities exclusive to the Indian community. I was not foreign to the religion however, as I mentioned earlier, my father's family is a Hindu practicing family aside from the few children that were baptised prior to migrating to England to live in the Catholic convents. Research on the dance form points to Bharata Natyam as an ancient form of classical Indian dance known as the Cosmic Dance of Shiva¹⁷⁶. As the latter name would suggest, the dance form incorporates a spiritual element, stemming from its origins in South India as a traditional dance performed in Hindu temples by priestesses.¹⁷⁷ Suffice to say, I was unaware of the spiritual and historical component of the dance when I began. Moreover, despite the support of my immediate family, it was apparent that my engagement in Bharata Natyam was not received as well by members of my larger family.

Understandably, members of my Indo-Caribbean family may have been resistant to a cultural practice that was so heavily defined by Hindu-Indian distinctiveness. There may be several reasons for this attitude of resistance. Having lived in Canada themselves and experiencing the relationship between Indo-Caribbeans and Indians, members of my family may have understood, more than I would have at the time, that due to our hybrid culture, some members of the Indian community sometimes treat members of the Indo-Caribbean community as though we are somehow "less than" the "pure" or "authentic" Indian. Ramabai Espinet contends that under Hindu belief, those who crossed the "Kala pani" or black water suffered pollution of their pure Indian culture and lost their caste. Espinet furthers that had many of the indentured labourers from India recognized the significant implications of their separation from

¹⁷⁶ Shiva is a Hindu deity who is also known as the destroyer of evil. Shiva is often depicted as the 'Lord of the Dance' in the popular statue of the Nataraja.

¹⁷⁷ *Bharatanatyam*. Online: Bharatanatyam dance <http://bharatanatyam.bharatanatyam.cn/bharatanatyam.html>.

Indian culture and land, it is possible that they may not have made the journey at all.¹⁷⁸ Also by virtue of living in the Caribbean and either experiencing or witnessing stories of family members from the Caribbean returning to India only to return back to the Caribbean as a result of a lack of acceptance of their own people, some members of my family may perceive the treatment of their Indo-Caribbean forefathers as a form of excommunication from their Indian land and people. Thus, my experience in Classical Indian dance classes prompted internal feelings of disloyalty towards my Indo-Caribbean family. When told by dance instructors or fellow dance mates that I would be unable to properly wrap a sari or communicate the language of a Hindu dance because I was not Indian, I felt like an outsider to the South Asian world of my ancestors. However, the experience made me realize that while the world of our Indian ancestors is undeniably a part of the Indo-Caribbean world, an Indo-Caribbean identity in Canada deserves its own recognition.

Apart from the racial division that resulted between the Africans and Indians in the Caribbean, some second generation Indo-Caribbean individuals like myself, face an internal struggle with the way our identity is implicated by racial difference specifically with three significantly larger groups in Canada: white European, African, and Indian. As I battle with my internal conflicts with these multiple cultural racial worlds, I fear that the underlying feelings of some of my Indo-Caribbean family members towards these racial communities may result in serious external conflict situations. For example, my internal fears may manifest itself through a non-acceptance of interracial relationships on the part of older generation members.

¹⁷⁸ Ramabai Espinet, "Representation and the Indo-Caribbean Woman in Trinidad and Tobago" in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indo Caribbean Resistance* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993) 42 at 56.

How my experiences with inner conflict in the present affects my future

My future world is an open diary waiting for words, experience, and knowledge to fill it. My future is largely premised on my ability to understand my multiple worlds appreciating that each faction of my present world, which itself is influenced by the worlds of my past, has a role to play in affecting the way I assert my prospective identity. Do my choices to understand my internal conflict with identity have the potential to influence lasting change personally and socio-culturally? More importantly, how can my role as an Indo-Caribbean- Canadian female facilitate the creation of a new paradigm of women, where women like myself, who struggle with multiple identities in conflict, can produce our own definition of the self. Thus far, I have given little attention to the ways the world of the female Indo-Caribbean subject has been produced throughout the course of their history. In his novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, Bissoondath's writing, similar to many of his Indo-Caribbean male predecessors, perpetuates stereotypes of the Indo-Caribbean women as evidenced in his representation of female characters. For example, in his portrayals of the relationship between Shakti and her mother-in-law, Penny's obedience to the wishes of her family, and Shakti's composed image as the wife of an Indo-Caribbean politician, Bissoondath perpetuates the actions of these female characters as submissive to the dominating male presence. While Bissoondath provided a diversity of female characterizations, some of the actions of his female characters demonstrate the power imbalance between men and women, particularly within the household.

This thesis appropriates a critical race perspective to consider the voices of subjugated identities in a socio-legal field that has historically produced scholarship through white-male hegemony. However, understanding the role of the female subject within these relations of critical difference is important as it implicates the identity formation of an Indo-Caribbean

female. While the Indo-Caribbean subject has been captured in writing over the past few decades, there has been a historical absence of the female voice within this literature. Where the Caribbean female has been represented in literature, their insight on important issues such as “slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women’s rights and more direct social and cultural issues” has been left absent.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, in my research, I have found that many female writers articulating the Caribbean experience speak from an African-Caribbean perspective. This is an incomplete picture as an Indo-Caribbean female’s experience, although similar to the African-Caribbean female’s perspective, has been shaped differently. This issue is particularly important in describing the ongoing process of identity formation and negotiation of multiple spaces that second generation Indo-Caribbean females engage.

My family members have different beliefs about the traditional role of the female subject, resulting in colliding understandings of the gendered division of roles. Some Indo-Caribbeans may believe that the traditional role of the female, stemming from the gendered division of socio-religious positions of Hindus in India, was transferred to the Caribbean space as well. As a result, the ways some of my community members, particularly older generations, understand the role of the female – how they dress, speak, and carry themselves both in the private and public sphere – conflicts with the ways I believe females should assert their identity and conduct themselves within a multicultural, cosmopolitan space. Although the identities of my grandmother, mother, and female family will always be comprised within me, their values, most of which have become internalized, may not be consistent with the development of my own values. Thus, in speaking of the world of my future, my focus largely engages in an understanding of the ways internal conflict with my multiple worlds is spawned with a focus to

¹⁷⁹ Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) at 11.

how my identity as a female implicates and is implicated by the relations of race, post-colonial generations, and identity for a second-generation Indo-Caribbean individual.

Understanding the historical position of the Indian female in the Caribbean

In employing a gendered transnational approach to understanding Indian diasporic identities, Monisha Das Gupta draws attention to the ways knowledge is produced for these communities. In so doing, Das Gupta unmasks the supposed authentic character of Indian ethnic practices, arguing that as Indians have crossed borders, these ethnic practices and beliefs have become unquestionably destabilized and transformed. Thus Guptas's suggestion raises questions about the processes through which knowledge is acquired and reminds individuals to pay attention to the influence of the contextual past of the storytelling in framing stories.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, in his study of the ways Indo-Caribbean individuals tell stories about their religious histories, Paul Bramadat identifies that the "stories [he] heard comprised memories an individual had about his or her own life, but more often individuals were conveying stories they had received from their friends and family both distant and proximal."¹⁸¹ For minority within minority communities, whose history becomes retained through oral tradition and narratives, knowledge is produced and reproduced in part through the memorial constructions of group members.

Given the historical position of women who were brought to the Caribbean as indentured labourers, many independent women without husbands, fathers or brothers, Indian women in the Caribbean already began challenging the traditional Indian gender hierarchies that were present

¹⁸⁰ Monisha Das Gupta, "'What's Indian about You?': A Gendered, Transnational Approach to Ethnicity" (1997) 11 *Gender and Society* 572 at 572-574.

¹⁸¹ Paul Bramadat, "Religion, Race, and Remembering: Indo-Caribbean Christians in Canada" (2011) 79 *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 315 at 317.

during the time period. After all, traditional Hindu custom, dating back to 510 AD, encouraged the practice of *sati* whereby the wife of a dead husband would burn with her husband under the funeral pyre.¹⁸² The main purpose of the practice of Sati was two-fold: Sati would discourage both the possibility of a widow disgracing her husband's family and getting a share of the family's property.¹⁸³ Although Sati was outlawed not long after the practice began, the custom points to the Indian patriarchal system which viewed women and her reproductive capabilities under the ownership of men. Also, stemming from Hindu religious discourse, women earned their exalted place in society and in their homes through representations of virtue.

However, our understanding of the position of women in India as stemming from traditional Hindu Indian patriarchal ideals becomes complicated when we consider how the dynamics of colonialism influenced and reinvented India's gendered social order. During British colonialism in India, the British forwarded the belief that they could cleanse the backward and irrational Hindu systems through the purported enlightenment of their Christian colonizing mission. Between 1772 and 1947, the British enacted several laws, which they believed pointed to the liberalization of women within the Indian state. These laws included forbidding sati, child marriage, and female infanticide, to name a few.¹⁸⁴ While the British enactment of such laws in India offered the illusion of progression for Indian women, the British also enforced Hindu law. Liddle and Joshi identify that Hindu law was "based on custom, flexibly interpreted in line with prevailing opinion, and embodying a vast diversity of approaches according to cultural, regional and caste differences. Most law was unwritten, except that of the Brahmins."¹⁸⁵ The problem with enforcing the application of Hindu law to *all* Indian women was that much of this law was

¹⁸² Roopnarine, *supra* note 134 at 88.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* at 88-89.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* at 522.

¹⁸⁵ Joanna Liddle & Rama Joshi, "Gender and Colonialism: Women's Organisation Under the Raj" (1985) 8 *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 521 at 522.

traditionally only applied to the Brahmin or upper class of women. Thus, the result of the British imperial project in India unified Indian law to the past, and reverted the evolution of Indian women as they began to conform to changing custom. In effect, although the British had outlawed traditional Hindu practices that were detrimental to Indian women, such as sati, their colonial domination reinforced economic and legal measures that destroyed the progress of Indian women. For instance, British enacted laws “destroyed the structure of the matrilineal family, removed the women’s sexual rights, abolished collective ownership of property and dispossessed the women from their inheritance.”¹⁸⁶ This history, which points to the reinvention and reformulation of patriarchy in India through British colonialism, is often forgotten.¹⁸⁷ However, the ways in which the colonial mission in India impacted the second stage of British colonialism for Indians, particularly women, is important in understanding the complexity of identity formation for Indo-Caribbean women today.

The colonial inspired Indian patriarchal system manifested itself in various ways in the Caribbean. One example identifies that women often draped a light piece of cloth over their head and face, called an ‘ohrni’, signifying the separation of the woman from men. It was believed that only a husband was intended to “see” and interact with his wife. Covering the face stood as a metaphor for the ways Indian habitual customs could be articulated in the Caribbean as well.¹⁸⁸ Ramabai Espinet contends that the “prototype of the Indian woman is that of a family-oriented docile creature of decorum and modesty.”¹⁸⁹ However, Espinet cautions that this

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* at 524.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* at 523.

¹⁸⁸ Ramabai, *supra* note 179 at 43.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* at 47.

prototype is an inadequate and incomplete image of Indo-Caribbean women, as these women have yet to sufficiently carve out their own image for and by themselves.¹⁹⁰

My great great grandmothers, and subsequent generations, including my Nanny, had to sustain wage labour, often in the rice or cane fields, for their families' economic survival. According to Lamarsh Roopnarine, "Indo-Caribbean women used the Third Space between European imperialist patriarchy, at the top, and East Indian patriarchy, at the bottom, as a place of agency to articulate and maintain their cultural identity."¹⁹¹ Although the traditional Indian family was reconstructed in the Caribbean to account for the tailored performance of gender roles, many families still attempted to conform to the patriarchal home that was established under most Indian custom.¹⁹² Thus, to illustrate, while my Nanny encourages all of her children and grandchildren to pursue an education and attain well-paying jobs, grounded in the belief that all individuals have a responsibility for the economic and financial wellbeing of their family, she still upholds the ideas of the rightful place of the women with respect to her elders, men, and the general society.

Understanding the relationship if Indo-Caribbean women in the present to adequately carve out a space of representation for the future

My Nanny stands at the head of our family. Since her husband, my Nana, passed away in 1991, my Nanny's role has been one of caretaker and overseer of the entire family. Although she has six children and fifteen grandchildren of her own, she also accepts the role of mother and grandmother to many of her nieces and nephews and their children respectively. My Nanny has forged an exceptional role in the lives of her children, grandchildren, and surrounding

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Roopnarine, *supra* note 134 at 87.

¹⁹² Chamberlain, *supra* note 169 at 188.

community. In her research of the relationship of the Caribbean family who have migrated abroad, Mary Chamberlain engaged in an ethnographic study which employed personal stories and narratives of members of Caribbean families. She posits that the narratives pointed to two recurring images of the role of the grandmother in the typical Caribbean family: “Grandmothers are invariably described in terms of endearment, frequently couched...in spiritual metaphors. In parallel with these images are notions of strength. Grandmothers are as frequently described in terms of being a “strong woman,” a “hard worker”.”¹⁹³ My Nanny not only fits these descriptions of the Caribbean grandmother, but can be described in a multitude of other ways as well.

To a high degree, my Nanny has preserved her cultural and family values, and continues to try her best to instill the same values in the future generations of her family. However, while Nanny’s intentions may be to preserve her Indo-Caribbean cultural values and traditions for fear of loss of culture, there are times when Nanny’s opinions clash with the opinions or choices of her children or grandchildren. One such specific conflict that I have both experienced and witnessed relates to Nanny enforcing many traditional Indo-Caribbean gendered ideals, including a belief that a woman should dress, speak, and act according to the proper dictates of (her understanding of) femininity.

For instance, on a Saturday evening, my friends, siblings, cousins, and I would often prepare for a night in the town. Behind Nanny’s face of disgust and disbelief in the ways her granddaughters were dressed, she could not hide her words of displeasure which pointed to her belief that the revealing clothing represented Western values which conflicted with the traditional ways of viewing the woman’s body that she had been brought up with. Similarly, she often expressed distaste in my leaving my hair open and untied, alluding to such behaviour as

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* at 121.

representing promiscuity. While the Indian woman's style of dress changed significantly when she began living in the Caribbean, understanding that the labour involved in 'cutting cane' and 'manning rice paddies' required alterations in Indo-Caribbean women's attire, Nanny's ideas of the way women should present themselves are exemplary of the metaphor of the 'ohrni' described above. On occasion, I have witnessed my female family members wear an ohrni at Hindu religious events. While it can be said that with the migration from India to the Caribbean, the symbolic meaning of veiling by wearing an ohrni brought with it traditional Indian patriarchal ideologies, it could also be suggested that Indo-Caribbean women have resignified the meaning of the ohrni. In the Caribbean, the ohrni became a modified garment to the traditional Indian sari or dupatta, which is normally used to cover the woman's head. Thus, in Canada, when I attend Hindu functions held by my family at the temple or in their homes, Indo-Caribbean women may often be identified by their wearing of the ohrni while Indian women tend to wear sari's or garments with a dupatta. From what I have witnessed from within my Indo-Caribbean family in Canada, while figuratively, the ohrni symbolizes a woman's honouring of religious and cultural spaces, as revealing the body is deemed disrespectful in these circumstances, it also represents the Indo-Caribbean woman's retention of Indo-Caribbean cultural attire. In my case, while I always felt that my wardrobe reflected a balance in respectable attire and Western appeal, Nanny's ideas that the women's body should be covered to resist unintended male interaction contributed to a feeling of self-consciousness. I felt torn between wanting to wear stylish western clothes while not bringing shame to my culture and family.

Along the same lines, I have experienced internal conflict situations whereby my belief that women should rightfully express and assert their opinion comes in tension with the beliefs of

some of my female family members who are invested in a gendered social order. There have been many times when my opinions have clashed with those of some of my family members. On certain occasions, when I have confronted the opinion of male members of my family, particularly older males including my father, my Nanny has pulled me aside and scolded me saying “yuh musnt do that. Yuh mus respect your father and your brothers”. Evidently, the manner in which I assert my opinion in a public space is viewed as inappropriate to my Nanny who believes that a respectful woman demonstrates virtue when she defers to men. Thus, while I feel I may have important insight to offer even in a casual family conversation, I sometimes find myself biting my tongue, as I fear that my Nanny will feel that I am disrespecting both her and my family and also dishonouring her wishes.

These situations suggest that the traditional role of the Indian woman in the Caribbean is framed under the assumption that the position of woman is fixed, reinforcing a static conception of Indo-Caribbean women since their arrival to the Caribbean. Moreover, that many Indo-Caribbeans may not understand the ways that British colonialism influenced patriarchal systems in India reinforces the destructive power of colonialism in destabilizing Indo-Caribbean ancestral relations. While my Nanny may convey an Indian traditionalist mind-set, the way she has represented her image as an Indo-Caribbean female is anything but fixed. Her concern in the way her granddaughters dress, act, and speak, may allude to her fear that her granddaughters’ absorption into the surrounding Western environment compromises the image of the ‘virtuous’ Indian woman that her family and culture instilled in her. Yet, I also feel that my Nanny has constructed an image of herself, based on her lived reality, that falls outside of a standard Indian patriarchal system that she feels guides the way women should act. The cultural conflicts that manifest between Nanny and I, while frustrating at times, has also highlighted how similar we

are. Through understanding my internal conflict with the multiple roles of the female subject in multicultural Canada, like my Nanny, I have a significant role to play in understanding and defining my identity as an Indo-Caribbean woman who straddles these multiple worlds. We are both fighting to protect and hold onto our cultural identity, while also realizing that the migration to Canada has allowed opportunities that would not have been possible had she or our family members remained in Guyana. In my Nanny and my mother, I see two women who represent independence, strength, and resistance who have negotiated their place vis-à-vis the world of their Caribbean home. The internal conflicts I experience with my multiple worlds, including the world of my Nanny's beliefs, has bridged the realization that my identity and the identity of my mother, grandmother, and my female family is often essentialized, homogenized and subsumed under a monolithic categories that negate the complex and nuanced experiences and identities of Indo-Caribbean females. These labels reify our existence which in turn distorts our lived reality and unique individuality. However, my Nanny demonstrates that her unique identity deserves recognition and deserves a space that defines the Indo-Caribbean female subject from within the worlds of Indo-Caribbean females. Post-colonialist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that the native or 'other' woman has been silenced by the liberal feminist who, through use of labels such as the 'third-world woman' and articulating their assumption of such a position, confuses the actual lived realities and historical presence of the woman being referenced.¹⁹⁴

Further, feminist postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak, acknowledges that

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is

¹⁹⁴ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourse" reprinted in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 196.

the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation.¹⁹⁵

Spivak's main argument is that the woman other, or "subaltern", becomes invisible because her voice is heard through the voices of others, who claim that they can represent her experience and identity. However, Spivak urges that the 'gendered subaltern' subject can reflect her own meaning in speaking about herself, yet this task can be difficult when this subject has often been "the medium through which competing discourses represent their claims."¹⁹⁶ Thus, Spivak's theory can be read in conversation with my grandmother and mother's claims for identity: my future requires that I understand my complex identity and allow myself to define and articulate this identity instead of allowing outsider voices to define and articulate this identity for me. An exploration of my inner conflict with my multiple worlds reveals that like my female family members, I am on a continuous search for the place of the Indo-Caribbean female in the Western world.

Revelations of my personal stories which highlight my experience with internal conflicts resulting from my multiple worlds

Both my life experiences and Yasmin's story demonstrate that there is no single typology of the Indo-Caribbean-Canadian female. Indeed, the fact that there is no generalized account of the Indo-Caribbean individual in Canada sheds light on the complexity of culture and how it influences the evolution of Indo-Caribbean identity markers as migration has taken place. My family home is a space of plural identities rooted in a complex intermingling of diverse cultural heritages that can be strengthened by connections to cultural support systems and institutions that

¹⁹⁵ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?", 1988 at 306, cited in Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) at 89.

¹⁹⁶ Gandhi, *supra* note 94 at 90.

are of Indo-Caribbean culture. My grandparents and ancestors have been involved in a process through which they have modified key elements of their traditional Indian culture to consider their Caribbean lineage. My parents and my generation are now modifying key elements of our ancestor's traditional Indo-Caribbean culture to incorporate pieces of the Western Canadian environment in which we now live. It has been a challenge for my parents' generation to successfully maintain a sense of security and ethnic pride amongst the multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and religions that comprise multicultural Canada. From my experience, I have found that it is possible for members of my generation to consider the boundaries of minority cultural identity within a globalized space. Mishra highlights that Naipaul's Indo-Caribbean literature forwards that understanding difference in the modern world is one way of critiquing postcolonial scholarship which resisted a critical understanding of difference. In speaking of Naipaul, Mishra posits:

For...what the old Indian diaspora has always stood for (which is so different from the difference –based, multiculturally inclined new Indian diaspora of late capital) is a willingness to intervene into the grand narratives of Empire and declaring that they, the plantation diaspora, too are a part of that narrative; it is theirs too not through any racial connection but by right of vision."¹⁹⁷

Given the space where we live, my parents and grandparents have effectively promoted for my siblings and I an admirable balance that oscillates between an Indo-Caribbean cultural world, considering the boundaries of traditional roots both from the Caribbean and India, and the North American world. Through my experiences with my relationships with my Indo-Caribbean family members, I have come to understand that our multiple post-colonial worlds are in an ever evolving state of flux, whereby an exploration of the experiences of internal conflict allows for deeper learning and appreciation of our culture and heritage. I believe that in a willingness to

¹⁹⁷ Mishra, *supra* note 113 at 200.

understand one's internal conflicts with one's multiple worlds, it becomes apparent that these internal conflicts, while sometimes unavoidable, are an important and inevitable site of identity formation for individuals who straddle multiple worlds. Understanding that conflict with my multiple worlds exists within myself, has pointed to the realization that these conflicts may not necessarily need resolving. Rather, these conflicts point to a difference in post-colonial identities and world views that should be negotiated, and even celebrated.

David Dabydeen acknowledges a harsh reality for many Indo-Caribbean peoples; he posits that the Caribbean "home" has transformed since the 1960's-70s when mass migration of its people took place. As a result, for him and many Indo-Caribbean peoples who have emigrated from the Caribbean, "there is no going back home because there is no home to go back to."¹⁹⁸ However, like my parents and extended family who may themselves recognize that they have no home to go back to, and have reconstructed their home in the Greater Toronto Area, it is still valuable to study one's Indo-Caribbean origins. Dabydeen reaffirms Naipaul's assertion which calls "for more scholarship of Indo-Caribbean peoples, arguing that if people don't know their past, they cannot profit fully from their present, and indeed have no secure future."¹⁹⁹ In a society that gratifies change and flux, there is a certain degree of encouragement for the young person that they will eventually disengage from their previous modes of identification where they would accept certain identities and reject others. Part of the critical pedagogical appreciation of education, growth, and development supposes that in appreciating history, one can break away from a fixed historical way of identifying in the past, and that the coming to terms with one's past, present, and future, requires a loving struggle which allows one to define

¹⁹⁸ David Dabydeen, "Indo-Guyanese Resistance" in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indo Caribbean Resistance* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993) 27 at 28.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

oneself through one's participation in multiple worlds, and separation from a past world which rejects that such a change is necessary or even possible.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Porter & Wolf, *supra* note 163 at 175.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES IN A MINORITY WITHIN MINORITY SPACE

[Shakti] *I am not a final product....I am a process. As are you. As is everyone. It is to me the most unsettling, and most reassuring, truth about what young people today call "identity." My dear, I haven't got an identity. None of us does. What a great tragedy that would be, don't you think?*²⁰¹

On a regular Sunday afternoon, my family and I sit at Nanny's lunch table in eager anticipation of a scrumptious meal and enjoyable company between family and close friends. Nanny's children and grandchildren arrived early to help her in the kitchen. Today, the meal consists not only of Nanny's traditional Guyanese-style cooking, but is accompanied by Western-inspired dishes to compliment the taste buds of all family members. During the last week's family meal, Nanny began telling a story about her childhood growing up in the Caribbean, and as she observed the reflective smiles of her children, who themselves recall similar experiences growing up, and the attentive gaze of her grandchildren, she was compelled to reveal more about her past. On this occasion, her family arrives anticipating that the story of Nanny's past, and simultaneously the story of their own history, will be continued. While the narratives of Nanny and her children unravels like the film of a movie, younger generations of the family, who have different childhood experiences growing up in Canada, are mystified by the revelations. I recall hearing depictions of my parents' experiences growing up in Guyana, however, the opportunity to reflect in greater detail on the life and times in Guyana with multiple generations of family members is particularly fulfilling. The table is inviting, comfortable and an open forum for all individuals to openly converse with each other. Members of the younger generation demonstrate their interest in knowing more about their Indo-Caribbean history by

²⁰¹ Bissoondath, *supra* note 1 at 417.

asking a multitude of perturbing questions: why did you immigrate? How do the lives of our family members who still reside in the Caribbean differ from our own? How has life in the Caribbean changed since you left? When can we visit?

The situation I have illustrated complements the story reflected in the introduction. While evidently hypothetical, the above narrative is a metaphoric representation of the powerful influence of pedagogical education in the lives of individuals who straddle multiple worlds. The multiple vantage points of the varying post-colonial identities of individuals in my family provides for a complex learning environment through which the development of individual identities and cultural worlds takes place. While the worlds of individuals in my family are numerous, different, unique, and often collide with each other, opportunities like these provide a forum for worlds to meet, negotiate, and understand their relationship to one another. Although the experiences of conflicting multiple worlds is unsettling at times, I, like Shakti, am reassured that my experiences with colliding identities has, at the very least, provided insight into the importance of each of my worlds.

Throughout this thesis, I have analyzed the ways internal conflict is manifested for individuals who straddle multiple worlds in both time and space. In particular, I have excavated the socio-cultural-legal implications of second-generation Indo-Caribbean-Canadian females whose already complex identities find themselves conflicting with individuals who occupy their multiple worlds. Informed by the two-lens methodology – a law and literature approach in conversation with autobiographical storytelling - this thesis concludes with the guidance of a critical pedagogical methodology to explore how internal conflict with one's multiple worlds can lead to learning, relearning, and unlearning. While critical pedagogy is most often concerned

with the process of teaching and instructing through curricula, the following discussion employs the mechanisms of critical pedagogical methodology to understand internal conflict. It has been demonstrated that the past, present, and future experiential spaces of inner conflict demonstrated through Yasmin and myself has indirectly prompted us to learn more about the ways our multiple worlds affect each other and impact on our overall identity formation.

Critical pedagogy advocates assert that the imagination has a key role in offering alternatives to modes of learning. Critical pedagogy theorists acknowledge that “to imagine is to understand the present social order in terms of its historical development, to believe in the possibility of a different and more fulfilling social order, and to harness human agency towards the realization of this possibility.”²⁰² Exploring the imagination provides a framework to understand how processes of learning can be mediated. As a result, the imagination becomes a place to construct alternate learning processes. In chapter one, while historical data provided the analytic framework to understand the contextual past of the Indo-Caribbean culture, authors writing on the Indo-Caribbean historical experience recognized the importance of learning mechanisms in reimagining how Indo-Caribbean postcolonial generations can respond to difference, multiple identities, and identity formation. Chapter two explored Neil Bissoondath’s novel, *The Worlds Within Her*, and guided by Salman Rushdie’s theory of imaginary homelands, a law and literature approach to understanding conflict is mediated by Bissoondath’s own colonial imagination through which he portrays his characters. Similarly, chapter three acknowledged that my own stories, which employ notions of critical difference, can facilitate processes of learning, particularly as it related to the construction of alternate realities. Yasmin and my own phases of learning, relearning, and unlearning, employs our postcolonial

²⁰² Yatta Kanu, ed., *Curriculum as Cultural Practice: Postcolonial Imaginations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) at 6.

worldviews and the colonial imagination of our family members in order to harmonize our differences and establish a worldview that recognizes our multiple selves within the larger communities to which we “belong”.²⁰³ This conclusion, which revisits the conflicts explored in the previous chapters through a critical pedagogical methodology, understands that the cultural knowledge gained through the experience of internal conflicts with one’s multiple worlds has epistemological value. Critical pedagogy understood through an exploration of one’s collision of worlds, recognizes that mediating internal conflict is a complex process that is often unarticulated, particularly for members who belong to minority within minority communities.

Critical Pedagogy: Learning, Unlearning, and Re-learning

The term ‘critical pedagogy’ has been ascribed multiple and varied definitions within critical theoretical literature. While some theorists, such as Cummins (2001) have pointed to critical pedagogy as transformational education, others describe critical pedagogy as a process that encourages individuals to critically identify, understand, and act.²⁰⁴ More recently, critical pedagogical literature examines the influence of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism on theory and practice. These postdiscourses can assist in the development of critical pedagogy theory through their exploration of the role of hegemonic power in applying research and producing knowledge.²⁰⁵ In her guide to applying a critical approach to the interaction of learning and teaching, Joan Wink provides a simple yet practical definition of critical pedagogy in practice:

Critical pedagogy means that we see and articulate the entire critical context of teaching and learning. We are not afraid to say what we see, and we move to take action. Critical

²⁰³ *Ibid.* at 6-7.

²⁰⁴ Wink, *supra* note 30 at 67.

²⁰⁵ Mary Breunig, “Teaching For and About Critical Pedagogy in the Post-Secondary Classroom” (2009) 3 *Studies in Social Justice* 247 at 249.

pedagogy is teaching and learning that transforms us and our world for the better. Critical pedagogy gives us the courage to say what we have lived. Critical pedagogy challenges us to question our long-held assumptions.²⁰⁶

Critical pedagogical insight, which can be related to the insight approach to mediating conflict,²⁰⁷ asserts that through teaching, we engage in a process of “rethinking our histories and rewriting our world”.²⁰⁸ As a form of conflict resolution, insight mediation incorporates processes of transformative learning. Transformative learning is a belief that we interpret the events of our lives through development of our knowledge and perspective. These perspectives provide a framework for understanding ourselves and our world. The perspectives may also operate subconsciously to influence our experiences and our interpretation of others and ourselves in relation to each other.²⁰⁹ Teaching by informing others about our lived realities and inner struggles, allows one to learn more about oneself in the process. Under this light, teaching *is* learning.²¹⁰ Moreover, by employing a critical pedagogical methodology in understanding the world we live, we are engaging in social justice processes.

A final analysis of the data collected in this thesis is explored through a critical pedagogy methodology which employs the three arenas of learning: learning, relearning and unlearning. Individuals engage in learning through various means which may include “reading, talking, writing, listening, experiencing, engaging, interacting, solving problems, posing problems, and taking risks.”²¹¹ The learning process, however, can be very challenging. For instance, at times, learning can be accompanied by resistance and denial. Learning is continuous and often leads to relearning. Relearning involves a shift in learning methodology whereby individuals revisit the

²⁰⁶ Wink, *supra* note 30 at 67.

²⁰⁷ Kenneth R. Melchin & Cheryl A. Picard, *Transforming Conflict through Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

²⁰⁸ Wink, *supra* note 30 at 67.

²⁰⁹ Melchin & Picard, *supra* note 207 at 18-20.

²¹⁰ Wink, *supra* note 30 at 67.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* at 18.

knowledge they have acquired through prior learning stages. Through additional forms of knowledge acquisition, which may alter and/or add to an individual's perception, relearning allows an individual to expand their understanding of previously acquired knowledge.

Relearning often takes place when our socio-cultural environments transform and an individual's needs change. Both processes of learning and relearning prepare individuals for unlearning.

Unlearning involves "a shift in philosophy, beliefs, and assumptions."²¹² Unlearning can be particularly difficult as it not only challenges previously held assumptions, but it also requires individuals to let go of knowledge that was knowable, comfortable, and consumed as tacit truth.²¹³ While the thesis writing process itself has provided me with a critical pedagogical

learning experience, the chapter developments highlight that in understanding and evaluating our worlds in conflict, Yasmin and I have independently engaged in the critical stages of learning, relearning, and unlearning. The concluding remarks told through the critical pedagogical learning methodology analyze three categories of data: Yasmin's struggle with her internal worlds, my own experiences of conflict with multiple worlds, and my experience writing this thesis as a particularly enlightening critical pedagogical encounter in learning about my worlds.

Learning

Chapters two and three recognize that as second generation Indo-Caribbeans, Bissoondath's fictional character, Yasmin, and I are particularly influenced by the Western cultural environments where we have been brought up in as a result of our families' settlement since their migration from the Caribbean. Yasmin's initial learning is informed primarily by her experiences, many of which are characterized by her assimilated status into the Canadian

²¹² *Ibid.* at 19.

²¹³ *Ibid.* at 18-20.

mainstream. Yasmin learns about her Indo-Caribbean family, culture, and place of birth through the stories that her mother, Shakti, has shared with her. However, the knowledge Yasmin has acquired from her mother further complicates Yasmin's understanding of her multiple cultural worlds as Shakti not only chooses to reveal as little as possible about Yasmin's Indo-Caribbean past, but also demonstrates a British sensibility and a lack of Indo-Caribbean culture in raising Yasmin. The majority of Yasmin's learning about her Indo-Caribbean culture, land and family occurs during her trip to the Caribbean, where she journeys on obligation to disperse her mother's ashes.

Similarly, my learning environment growing up was influenced by my education and predominantly white-Canadian dominated Oakville space. However, unlike Yasmin, I was given opportunity to learn and engage in my Indo-Caribbean culture within my home as I was surrounded by an Indo-Caribbean family network that encouraged cultural traditions, practices, and beliefs. During my childhood in Oakville, where the majority of my fellow students were white and middle class, institutional narratives tended to forward dominant discourses, particularly within the scope of socio-cultural-legal narratives. Despite Canada's legacy as progressive in forwarding a multicultural image, the vast majority of the Canadian education system continues to deny the representation of racially oppressed groups in its institutionalized curricula. Narratives that incorporated the voices of traditionally silenced groups were virtually unheard of and as a result, the knowledge I gained about my world from my education system was fairly one-dimensional. It became even more challenging when curricula began to incorporate theories of difference, but within this language of diversity, representation of minority within minority groups such as the Indo-Caribbean community, became homogenized into larger group categories. The knowledge I gained about my worlds in my initial stages of

learning reduced the complexity of my identity to representation of dominant perspectives that rendered the importance of my multiple worlds invisible and somewhat meaningless. Thus, a transition from learning to relearning my cultural place would teach me that in order to be represented, minority group members need to negotiate their place within dominant structures. Not only have dominant structures become their space of knowing, but it is from within dominant structures that a minority voice can begin to challenge the prevailing discourses.²¹⁴

However, outside of the classroom, my experiences with the conflict of multiple worlds have encouraged me to think deeply about the juxtaposition of others' perceptions of my identity against my own imagined reality. For instance, when a white person sees my colour first, they may be surprised at my appreciation for the European arts or at my belonging to and knowledge of the Roman Catholic religion due to my Catholic school upbringing. On the other hand, individuals who themselves encompass an immigrant identity due to the migration of their parents or grandparents to Canada, may not trust my abilities as an Indo-Caribbean woman to successfully perform tasks within the Western institutionalized spaces of public social service jobs or post-secondary education. At times, the attitudes of some of the individuals who belong to my individual worlds threaten my sense of security and the freedom to evoke an identity that is representative of plural worlds. Instances like these contribute to constant internal debates with belonging to separate worlds.

Yasmin's and my own stories highlight within them the lives of our family members and through interactions with our family, we learn about the Caribbean world that is known to them. Our family members' understanding of their Caribbean world, however imagined, also problematizes the notion of Indo-Caribbean individuals reproduced as colonial subjects. The

²¹⁴ Wendy S. Hesford, *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1999) at xx-xxi.

majority of the stories I hear from my family members relay positive experiences about the period during which they and their families were products of the British colonial system. The stories instead paint pictures of the racial stratification, which often presented itself in hostility, between those who originated from India and those from Africa. The juxtaposition of my family's stories against the depictions of a similar history exposed in the historical accounts of Indo-Caribbean literature reassert that in telling stories, "individuals retain an enormous amount of autonomy in the way they interpret and personalize the stories they hear from pulpit, minbar, and bima, *and* those they hear from less formally accredited authorities such as parents and grandparents."²¹⁵

As an overall learning journey, this thesis project has provided an opportunity for me to analyze conflict from within the experience of the self. Through experiencing and learning, I have transformed my understanding of my internal colliding worlds and have gained deeper insight and appreciation for the Indo-Caribbean cultural past which has affected the post-colonial identities of my family members and therefore on my own identity as well. My learning experience, although continually changing and developing as I grow older, also has the power to inform my relationships with individuals who inhabit my multiple worlds and particularly facilitate a deeper understanding of the perspectives of my family members.

Relearning

The critical pedagogical journeys that Yasmin and I have engaged in learning about our conflict with our multiple worlds have been shaped most significantly in the relearning stage. According to insight theorists Melchin and Picard, initial learning provides the knowledge for

²¹⁵ Bramadat, *supra* note 182 at 316.

individuals to begin formulating questions about their identity.²¹⁶ Questioning one's identity and one's relationship to her or his multiple worlds facilitates learning and allows one to gain insight about complexities of the worlds within. In the relearning stage, one gains insight through exploring and engaging with their questions²¹⁷ of identity. Yasmin's journey to the Caribbean Island where she interacted with her Indo-Caribbean family and land facilitated Yasmin's relearning about her relationships, her past, her family's history, and her understanding of her Indo-Caribbean culture. Yasmin's fictional character began questioning the relationship she had to her multiple worlds even before journeying to the Caribbean. However, throughout her time in the Caribbean, as Yasmin explores her internal struggles, simultaneously the reader gains insight about Yasmin's battle to understand the many worlds within her. Most significantly, Yasmin relearns that the Indo-Caribbean world that had been constructed through her mother's stories in Canada is in fact a very real part of her and of her family's present reality and past history. In relearning about her father's political career and death, and subsequently, her family's internal conflicts over racial divisions, Yasmin realizes how the history of the Indo-Caribbean peoples as a group has influenced her mother's motives to migrate and settle in Canada. Thus, with this new knowledge, Yasmin has a new found appreciation and understanding for her mother's British sensibility and the choices Shakti has made to raise Yasmin the way she did.

Yasmin also relearns and revisits much of the knowledge she has been provided about her Indo-Caribbean family members and the relationships they have with each other and with herself through the eyes of Cyril, Penny, Ash, and Amie. While it appears that Yasmin is being taught about her unexplored and misunderstood cultural world from her Indo-Caribbean family

²¹⁶ Melchin & Picard, *supra* note 207 at 57.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

members, she also engaged in teaching them about her experiences outside of the Caribbean.

Through this learning and teaching dynamic that Yasmin encounters by virtue of interacting with her Indo-Caribbean family members and simultaneously revisiting incidences that have occurred in her recent past, such as her marriage to Jim and the death of her daughter, Yasmin learns and relearns more about her individual self and her relationship to her multiple worlds.

Learning and relearning how I can be represented amongst my multiple worlds, some of which I have been taught are dominant over others, has been a difficult struggle given the environment that I have lived. My pedagogical journey, which understands the development of my past, present, and future within the realm of Canadian education, has reinforced the need for me to represent my identity as belonging to multiple worlds, including the world of a minority within minority group. Moreover, on a theoretical level, while I began this thesis project with a critical eye to proponents of critical race theory as tending to universalize the 'coloured woman's perspective' in relation to the white woman's perspective, processes of re-learning facilitated a greater appreciation for the ways critical theories acknowledge difference and can be read in conversation with each other to account for the intersectional categories of difference. Critical theories, particularly critical race and lat-crit, considers the legal, social, and cultural implications of applying Western theories to matters of internal minorities within the larger realm of cultural or religious minorities. Although critical race theorists appear to criticize the tendency of white legal scholars who present their experiences as universal to all individuals, critical race scholars themselves tend to speak on behalf of a category of people. While it could be argued that critical race scholars are themselves essentializing the experiences and histories of certain categories of individuals, particularly women, to other non-white categories of women, processes of re-learning have fostered my understanding that what critical race scholars are

engaging in is a process of understanding and presenting difference to the world. Understanding the role that intersectionality plays in the formation of normative values given to gender relations and race relations was particularly insightful in analyzing this project data. This thesis is but one means of reappropriating my learning within an institutionalized space of education to understand my multiple consciousnesses not only through the eyes of others, but more importantly, through my own eyes as well. This thesis encouraged reflection of the Indo-Caribbean individual experiencing conflict from the inside. While hegemonic knowledge systems create the self as the object of the gaze, which tends also to discount the value of experience in informing discourse, this thesis reverts the perspective of the gaze from the outside to the inside. Thus, as the researcher of this project, I became the key informant in acknowledging the multiple experiences of my data participants (fictional Yasmin and I) in shaping our own identities.

Through a combination of initial learning and relearning, I gained knowledge about the life of my ancestors, many indentured labourers who arrived in Guyana between 1838 and 1917. Relearning knowledge about my own family members was particularly traumatic at times. While I had some knowledge of the history of my ancestors through the stories told to me by my surrounding family members, my research on the history of Guyanese settlement reveal the appalling conditions given to disease, poverty, and the uninhabitable conditions that many Indo-Caribbeans were made to live through. For instance, I hear on countless occasions that my Nana (my mother's father) survived a childhood living in the "logies" in Guyana to become a successful businessman. David Dabydeen acknowledges that Reverend CF Andrews, special advisor to Mahatma Gandhi, had written about the plantation conditions of Indians. His writing reveals that he had witnessed the living quarters of Indians who had migrated to various parts of

the world, but he had yet to see conditions “so disgraceful and filthy” as those in Demerara, also identifying the “logies” in Guyana as “death traps”.²¹⁸ While relearning the conditions of my grandfather’s childhood, I recalled moments of my own childhood where I walked hand-in-hand with my Nana down the streets of Oakville and danced hysterically to his old Indian music as he clapped along to the tune. My memories of my grandfather vary considerably from the knowledge I now have of the history of his generation. I felt both saddened and fortunate at the juxtaposition of these two varied knowledges – only two generations before me, my grandparents’ childhood was based on survival, and it is in large part from their hard work and good fortune that their children and grandchildren have been afforded the opportunities we have today.

Evidently, through engaging with this project, I have learned that while the acquisition of knowledge about my historical past fulfills a desire to gain insight about the way an Indo-Caribbean history influences members of my community today, acquiring such knowledge was, at times, emotionally riveting. Throughout the researching and writing process, learning also facilitated my feelings of confusion, anger, sadness, disgust, guilt, hurt, and shock on one hand and feelings of gratitude, appreciation, awe, pride, and euphoria on the other hand. These emotions, though ranging from happy to sad, helped drive my thesis process, as these feelings encouraged me to learn more and realize the need to acknowledge and tell this story. On a personal level, I did not realize the emotional journey I would be endeavouring by re-visiting issues that I had learned to cope with or that I had hidden away so as not to discuss them. This thesis process encouraged me to bring up personal issues, events, and stories that I had been struggling with my whole life – and now I need not only identify them, but analyze them so as to understand them better. At an even more personal level, I am very close and connected to my

²¹⁸ Dabydeen, *supra* note 198 at 28.

family, and so including a discussion of my relationship with and to them was particularly difficult. I feared that I would capture a history from a perspective that would offend some of my family members, as their experiences and knowledge about the Guyanese culture and land is very real to them. The history that I have received from my family about the life and times in Guyana has been willingly provided, but mostly the information is scattered and provided through an oral history that at times did not afford a comprehensive depiction of the past. Thus, in reading historical texts about my Indo-Caribbean history, I realized that there was much to my history that was untold, or that had been somewhat distorted during the passing of oral history. My task in this thesis was to narrate my own story, and employing the historical stories that I recall hearing from family members supplemented by texts on the history of my people, I hoped to capture a more accurate account of the Indo- Caribbean experience.

However, through telling personal stories about my family and the history of Guyana, I not only recalled memories about the relationships to my family members, but the experience also prompted me to reflect on my trip to Guyana. I took a trip to Guyana seventeen years ago with my Nanny and my sister. I remember little of my trip as I was very young. However, reminiscing about my time in Guyana follows with a sense of gratification. It was gratifying to visit the birthplace of my parents and to visit the little church where my mother attended or the shop where my father worked with his father as a child. I also remember visiting the rice fields where my great-great grandparents worked long days so they could afford to feed their families and save enough to educate their children. The juxtaposition of the memories I have of my trip to Guyana with the knowledge I have gained through this project, provides me with an even deeper sense of pride in my Guyanese culture, history, and family. For the second generation individual living in Canada, to acknowledge and have the opportunity to visit the birthplaces of

our parents can be a fulfilling learning activity that allows us to see into their world and a world that also belongs to us. At times it may be extremely difficult to feel like I can belong to multiple, colliding worlds harmoniously, but in the end the complexity and struggle of belonging to these multiple worlds make up who I am. For me, to lose a piece of my Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity would also mean that I would lose a piece of myself, of my family, and of my rich cultural history.

Unlearning

Yasmin's journey of learning, relearning and unlearning experienced through her interaction with her Caribbean place of birth culminates with Yasmin's understanding of herself and her identity as part of her Indo-Caribbean family instead of in comparison to them, as it appeared when she first arrived on the Caribbean island. However, Yasmin's critical pedagogical journey manifested in her processes of unlearning is particularly important in Yasmin's personal understanding of her multiple worlds. To illustrate, chapter two highlighted Yasmin's inability to understand her mother's identity against Shakti's Indo-Caribbean upbringing and British persona or to understand her daughter's cultural identity against the ethnicity of Ariana's school friends. Yasmin's relationships with Shakti and Ariana showcase her own internal struggles with identity and in order to understand these struggles, she would need to unlearn parts of her relationships with them. By virtue of going to the Caribbean and interacting with Amie, the servant girl of the Ramessar home, Yasmin unlearns her blood connection to Shakti and relearns that Amie is instead her birth mother. This stage of unlearning further affects Yasmin's collision of multiple worlds, especially as she deals with the doubly traumatic experience of learning that her birth is the product of a rape between her father and

Amie and that Shakti had refrained from revealing this knowledge to Yasmin. However, it appears that this realization also facilitates Yasmin's appreciation for and of her connection to her Indo-Caribbean family, culture, and land. At the same time, in learning this knowledge, it appears that Yasmin gains a deeper sense of respect and acknowledgement for the role that Shakti has played throughout her life, not just as a mother but also in providing Yasmin with the many worlds within her.

Furthermore, as indicated in chapter two, Yasmin's relationship with her dead daughter, Ariana, metaphorically represents Yasmin's future. Many of the narrative pieces which flashback to Yasmin's life in Canada indicate that a key result of Yasmin's internal battle with her multiple worlds in the past and present is Yasmin's "frozen core". Yasmin's experience in the Caribbean prompted Yasmin to unlearn that she had lost her identity as a mother and her ability to use the opportunities that Shakti has bestowed upon her through migration to understand the role she can have in helping future generations of the Indo-Caribbean community. Towards the end of the novel, several events highlight Yasmin's reuniting of her past, present, and future worlds. In comparing her experience of drying Ash's tears to drying Ariana's and in her questioning the prospect of sponsoring Ash to enable him to come to Canada, Yasmin has unlearned that she lost her identity as a mother because she portrays her ability to mother Ash. Yasmin's critical pedagogical reasoning may have inspired her to understand herself through the world of Shakti and adopt an image of "mother" in her contemplated sponsorship of Ash. In so doing, Yasmin illustrates that there is no authentic essence that prescribes how she should identify, rather she constructs for herself an identity that acknowledges her presence in her multiple worlds.

Apart from the unlearning highlighted in the experiences of Yasmin's fictional character, chapter three highlighted that my own experiences with internal conflicts and the process of researching and writing this thesis has facilitated my own development of unlearning. For instance, particularly important to me and this overall thesis project, through the process of unlearning, I have re-evaluated my understanding of the historical subjectivity of Indo-Caribbean women. In writing about the relationship between the past and present in women's history, Joan Scott (1996) asserts,

I think of [women] as sites – historical locations or markers – where crucial political and cultural contests are enacted and can be examined in some detail. To figure a person – in this case, a woman – as a place or location is not to deny her humanity; it is rather to recognize the many factors that constitute her agency, the complex and multiple ways in which she is constructed as a historical actor.²¹⁹

Positioning women as “sites” becomes a method for interpreting their history and understanding that they have had to overcome many external forces in order to achieve any level of self-determination. Women's stories, which provide insight into their history and the ways their own knowledge was produced and learned, highlight the fragmentation and multidimensional layers to a woman's identity²²⁰ that is further complicated when she belongs to a minority within a minority group. Avigail Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev (2005) emphasize that individual autonomy as theory requires a need to look at the degree to which community membership is voluntary. They caution that individuals may listen and follow what is preached by their culture or religion because they are obliged to do so, not because they have made a decision to do so.²²¹ The imagined sensibility that Indo-Caribbean women have occupied has taught them that the

²¹⁹ J. Scott, *Only paradoxes to offer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) at 16.

²²⁰ Margaret Smith Crocco, Petra Munro & Kathleen Weiler, eds., *Pedagogies of Resistance: Women Educator Activists, 1880-1960* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999) at 6-7.

²²¹ Avigail Eisenberg & Jeff Spinner-Halev, *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Right, and Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) at 10-11.

accepted role of the female stems from traditional Hindu Indian culture. However, I have unlearned this knowledge, and re-learned how British colonial imposition in India re-invented patriarchal gendered stereotypes amongst the Indian community. Indo-Caribbean women subjects have been involved in an evolving process of reinventing their identities. It is from within the site of the community and the home that Indo-Caribbean women have both taught and learned the importance of independence and resistance.

Furthermore, while there is much truth to the imagined stories I have heard from my family members and within Indo-Caribbean literature about racial difference, the chapter analyses highlighted that even after receiving independence from British, French, or Dutch colonization, many of the Caribbean lands to which indentured Indians settled, became highly stratified by race and/or class. Ethnic inequality, particularly between the indentured Indians and the freed slaves from Africa, pervaded within the public realms of education, work, and politics. Of importance for Indo-Caribbeans in Canada is the assertion that an Indo-Caribbean cultural identity is constantly resisting subsuming cultural labels that suggest these individuals belong exclusively to the larger South Asian community or the Creole Caribbean community. While members of my own family reject a "Creole" identity, suggesting that it forwards an African identity, through research I unlearned the suggested meaning of the term, learning instead that a creole society in the Caribbean emerged out of colonial representations and institutions creating a spectrum of creole identities with African-creoles on one end and White-creoles on the other. Similar to the patterns of unlearning, I engaged in understanding that the patriarchal ideal placed on Indian women was a legacy of British colonialism, unlearning provided me the knowledge that the idea of creolization encompassing a Eurocentric distinctiveness, was a legacy of colonialism as well.

Through processes of learning, relearning and unlearning, I gained insight into the history of my Indo-Caribbean family members, which at the forefront included a fight for resistance. My Indo-Caribbean history tells a story of individuals not only resisting colonial education, religion, language, and practices, but resisting subsumation into an African creole culture or traditional Indian culture to which they are connected but do not exclusively belong. What they have instead created is a hybrid culture that considers parts of the British colonial characteristics, parts of their traditional Indian identity, parts of the existent African Caribbean identity present in the Caribbean to mould together into a very unique Indo-Caribbean identity. The integration of these ethnic groups to form a unified Indo-Caribbean cultural identity presents a false reality for many individuals of this community as each ethnic group would suffer cultural loss as a result. However, from my experience and research, individuals of this community are not rallying for a unified identity. Rather, these individuals recognize that an Indo-Caribbean culture should recognize the coexistence of many ethnic communities. This idea is captured creatively in the chutney song, “Jahaji Bhai”²²² by Trinidadian calypso artist Brother Marvin.²²³ A popular and rhythmic song, I not only recall hearing it growing up, but I still have the song included in my music library. Through the catchy calypso rhythm, Brother Marvin sings a story about his “unique heritage” stemming from the migration of his great great Ajah²²⁴ from India who settled in the Caribbean. Through his intermingling of Patwa English and Hindi, Brother Marvin sings:

*...The indentureship and the slavery
Bind together two races in unity
There was no more Mother Africa
No more Mother India*

²²² In Hindi, the term “jahaji” refers to individuals who work on boats. “Bhai” refers to brother. Thus in the context of Brother Marvin’s song, “Jahaji Bhai” may refer to the brotherhood of individuals who traveled by boat to the Caribbean, see *infra* note 223

²²³ Majid Khan & Majumdar, “Jahaji Bhai” online: ProZ.com: The translation workplace <http://www.proz.com/kudoz/hindi_to_english/art_literary/5903-jahaji_bhai.html>.

²²⁴ In my family, “Ajah” generally refers to the title of an individual’s father’s father.

*Just Mother Trini...
 Whether you're Hindu, Muslim or Christian
 Let's walk this land hand in hand...
 If yuh want to know de truth
 Take ah trip back to your roots
 And somewhere on that journey
 Yuh go see ah man in a dhoti²²⁵
 Sayin he prayers in front of a jhandi...
 O mera dost mera saathi²²⁶
 Chal tahalna ek matta²²⁷ ...²²⁸*

Brother Marvin's lyrics read in conversation with Indo-Caribbean subjectivity suggests that within Canada's multicultural society, Indo-Caribbeans are participating in the formation of an individual and group identity that recognizes the ever evolving plurality of an Indo-Caribbean-Canadian identity. As Paul Bramadat articulates, "identity is conceived as an often shifting constellation of a generally finite number of subjectivities."²²⁹

FINAL THOUGHTS

According to Kamala Jean Gopie, "The future is a fulfilment of past hopes and dreams, combined with present actions aimed at achieving those dreams."²³⁰ As other Indo-Caribbean writers have suggested, Gopie also points to the need to gather and collect information pertaining to Indo-Caribbean peoples in Canada, in the Caribbean, and in India. Gopie emphasizes that

If as a people we don't know where we have been, it is unlikely that the next generation will know where it is going. The next generation will need not just the financial and

²²⁵ A dhoti is a traditional garment that is typically worn by men in India. The garment is worn by wrapping a large piece of cloth around the waist and tying with a knot in the front.

²²⁶ Translates to "O my friend, my companion", see *infra* note 228.

²²⁷ Translates to "Let's stroll together", see *infra* note 228.

²²⁸ "Jahagi Bhai – Brother Marvin" *Islandmix Forums*, online: islandmix.com <<http://www.islandmix.com/backchat/fl6/jahagi-bhai-brother-marvin-184001/>>.

²²⁹ Bramadat, *supra* note 182 at 319.

²³⁰ Gopie, *supra* note 147 at 63.

material means of going into the future: it will need a cultural road map and some psychic sign posts to chart the trip successfully.²³¹

Thus, Indo-Caribbean-Canadians can play an active role in shaping our future which considers our cultural past and an engagement with cultural activities and identifiers in the present. Second generation Indo-Caribbeans face conflicts of identities that are similar yet very different from our parents. What concerns do our parents have for their second generation children? Perhaps they fear loss of culture as a result of the second generation losing a connection to their Indo-Caribbean roots and assimilation into a western culture that some individuals of this generation believe lacks connection to outsider cultures, religions, and identities? Do members of our Indo-Caribbean family understand that as second-generation children, we face marginalization both within and outside our homes resulting from conflicting cultural spaces?

However, the result of the varied post-colonial world views of Indo-Caribbeans in Canada is conflicting understandings of one's identity and relationship to one's Indo-Caribbean world. Yasmin's story about her return trip to her Caribbean place of birth and my own stories about my experiences growing up in Oakville highlight that through communication with the individuals of our Indo-Caribbean families, we can engage in a deeper understanding of our cultural worlds. The identities of our Indo-Caribbean family members – our parents, our grandparents, our extended family who still reside in the Caribbean, etc. – are diverse and carry multiple histories of migration, adapting to new lands, and recollections of racial and socio-economic differences in the Caribbean. Both Yasmin and my own feelings of conflict with our multiple worlds carried the hidden narratives of our family. Such narratives indicate that they fear a cultural loss of future generations who lack knowledge and understanding of their Indo-Caribbean cultural past. Therefore, at times our worlds may collide and miscommunication may

²³¹ *Ibid.* at 65.

become a reflexive response. Yasmin and my own life story reflect our inner struggles with identity formation as a result of our multiple worlds, but also that these inner struggles become heightened as a result of a lack- or mis-communication of cultural issues between individuals belonging to the Indo-Caribbean community. However, as our lives demonstrate, individuals who themselves are implicated by the value narratives of those around them may “not know what these value narratives were, where they came from, or how they were driving [our] li[ves].”²³² Thus, through exploration of internal conflict with our multiple worlds in Yasmin and my own life, we can better understand the external conflict that manifests with our Indo-Caribbean family members. The Indo-Caribbean community, imbued with a strong and rich culture, deserves recognition as a community. Individuals in Canada who belong to this community also deserve their own recognition as they own a complex identity.

Embarking on this journey has not been easy. However, this journey has imparted invaluable knowledge and experience through pedagogical learning about conflict with one’s multiple worlds. Identity conflict experienced by individuals who belong to a minority within minority community can be negotiated through an internal interrogation of our relationships to these worlds. While I believe that internal conflict experienced by individuals who occupy multiple worlds in space and time is inevitable, I am also convinced that through re/un/learning and education, we have the ability to understand these worlds as complementary rather than colliding in conflict.

I am inspired to continue this critical pedagogical journey. To every individual involved in the relationships that comprise of my worlds: thank you.

²³² Melchin and Picard, *supra* note 108 at 109.

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