

Mapping the Self: The Sense of Space, Place, Home, and Belonging  
In Contemporary Caribbean Canadian Poetry

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2012

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: August 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

AUTHOR: Amanda Labelle

TITLE: Mapping the Self: The Sense of Space, Place, Home, and Belonging In  
Contemporary Caribbean Canadian Poetry

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: Department of English

DEGREE: MA CONVOCATION: October YEAR: 2012

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the dual concepts of place as home and place within the canon for diasporic communities, immigrants, and minorities within Canada. This thesis argues that a new understanding of “home” is necessary as the immigrant, forced within an in-between place of “there” (the birth-country) and “here” (the host-country), does not experience “home” as a singular, rooted location. “Home” for the immigrant is a feeling of belonging that spans multiple places simultaneously. This investigation of politics through poetics is grounded in the belief that national literature reflects national identity. As the immigrant presence within Canada has heretofore been perceived as secondary to the national identity, and diasporic and immigrant literature as other-to the Canadian canon, this thesis purposes to re-imagine that national identity in a way that includes minority literature. I focus on the work of two widely known Caribbean Canadian poets: Cyril Dabydeen (former Poet Laureate of Ottawa, 1984-1987) and Lorna Goodison (awarded the Commonwealth writer’s prize 1986, among others). Despite their popularity and the full production of their work, there is very little secondary writing about them, and these prolific writers are not yet part of the formal academic canon in Canada. My thesis aims to assist them in “making an entry” into the literary landscape, attributing to current academic discussion of the transformative climate of Canadian literary studies.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

*CS* – *Controlling the Silver* (2005)

*GW* – *Guinea Woman: New & Selected Poems* (2000)

*TM* – *Traveling Mercies* (2001)

*DJE* – *Dictionary of Jamaican English*

*OED* – *Oxford English Dictionary*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my family and friends for helping me get to this point. I would not have been able to do any of this without your love and support. I particularly want to thank my parents who always allowed me to call and complain or cry when I was stressed out, worn out, or sick, and for their constant love and attention. I also want to especially thank Danielle Loewen; your friendship kept me sane this year. I want to expressly thank Prof. Erin Wunker with utmost gratitude for all of her countless hours put in on advising this project. I am sure amidst the many conferences and multiple other responsibilities this was a lot of extra work – as well as many sleepless nights, and one crazy long-distance phone bill – but I really appreciate you taking on the responsibility anyway, and for doing such a great job keeping me encouraged and giving me great feedback. You are a wonderful professor and an asset to Dalhousie. I also want to thank Prof. Alice Brittan for all of her help and instructive comments as my second reader. Your feedback was greatly appreciated.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### The Nation and the National Literature – Immigrant Writers Revising the Borders of Belonging

In the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, which takes up the task of “thinking through postcoloniality,” all the essays center on a common theme: belonging. Editor Pamela McCallum notes that

[i]n a world that is characterized by the movement of large populations – the calculated economic migration of professional classes, the frantic flights of civilians escaping war, the desperate attempts of the poor to find work and new lives – the question of who belongs and who is shut out is indeed an urgent one.

(2)

All of these movements are movements across borders. The discussion of the movement of people, then, naturally turns to that of borders and belonging, or more specifically the nature of borders to include and exclude. In the contemporary world system<sup>1</sup> the emergence of transnational capitalism has rendered borders more porous. The contemporary economy – trade, travel, and multinational corporations—is predicated upon a global marketplace. With international interaction comes cultural integration, and countries become ever more diverse and globalized. Although globalization in the economic sense between nations usually demarcates homogenization, what I mean here

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<sup>1</sup> This term “world system” was coined by Immanuel Wallerstein in his work *The Modern World-System* (1974, 1980, 1989, 2011). The modern world-system is a capitalist world-economy; it is a world connected by relationships of economic exchange.



by discussing diversity alongside globalization is of globalization in the social sense within nations. Globalization in the context of the merging of cultures and ethnicities within a nation refers to social relations and how groups within nations relate to one another. Within Canada, the diversity spawned by immigration that has altered the social relations between groups within the nation has been framed in popular culture as a positive development through the use of buzz words such as multiculturalism and cultural mosaicism. The recognition of difference, however, does not necessarily result in the acceptance of difference and the inclusion of others within the larger society. In his essay “Rethinking the Postcolonial and the Global,” Shaobo Xie notes that “the real globality of the world today is the global confrontation between the excluded and the included” (8). Xie argues that “[a]longside a transnational capitalist class” of “technocrats” and “social elite,” there exists also a “transnational class of the dispossessed,” who are “reduced to the status of faceless, homeless, placeless, and stateless existence” (Xie 8). The state of homelessness or placelessness, here, does not insinuate a lack of a physical dwelling, but of an emotional feeling of attachment and belonging to a place – of being out of place or refused emplacement.

One’s feeling of inclusion is predicated upon the concept of place or a feeling of connection, ties, or belonging to a place, more readily conceived of as home. When first approaching this project, I felt that the concept of home and place would be very different in the work of Caribbean Canadian poets Cyril Dabydeen and Lorna Goodison because they seem to have dissimilar notions of roots and emplacement. Given that Goodison is “rooted” in Jamaica, in particular at Harvey River, and Dabydeen is “rooted” in any receptive soil, I felt that both would reveal very different notions of immigrant belonging.

After reading through a great deal of their poetry, however, I have come to a conclusion that contradicts my initial assumptions. Goodison focuses on memory and past history which informs her present concept of identity and how she experiences place. For Goodison, Harvey River is the one place that her family claimed for themselves within a long history of displacement: it is a created place in which they were able to belong. Similarly, Dabydeen also draws from past history and memory, though not as overtly as Goodison, and he too focuses on creating the self (or defining one's own identity) and creating a place in which one can belong. This revelation has led me to the hypothesis that Goodison and Dabydeen actually conceive of place and belonging in relatively the same way: one's place and where one belongs must be self-created. Goodison and Dabydeen go against socially generated concepts of belonging such as nationality and citizenship. They carve out their own paths to place, and in doing so, display belonging to place as a discursive and mobile relationship rather than as a static representation.

As a Canadian citizen born in our nation's capital I am proud to call Canada my home. It seems rather fortuitous, however, that I have the privilege to claim a status I never consciously chose, as I could not have chosen to be born here. So what is it then that really makes Canada home for me or for others? What is home, and what does this concept of home and belonging have to do with the nation? At least in Canada, the answer is right in our national anthem: "Oh Canada, our *home* and native land." Although Canada may not be the native land of immigrants like Dabydeen and Goodison, they made a conscious choice to create a life for themselves here, so what reasons are there to suppose that it cannot be home? In "Spattering Dung over Canadian Lawns: Immigrant Writing and Literary History," Chelva Kanaganayakam makes a bold statement claiming

that many immigrants write “predominantly about ‘home’ and only minimally about Canada” (162). Although Kanaganayakam’s article is directed towards redefining what Canadian Literature is – if the literature is not written about Canada, then what constitutes it as Canadian? – the division expressed by this comment indicates that the immigrant or diasporic writer’s home is in “another place not here” (Brand, *No Language* 31), and therefore that Canada is not home. By insinuating that the immigrant’s home is elsewhere, Kanaganayakam’s statement presupposes that the immigrant cannot be at home within his or her host country, and therefore cannot find a sense of belonging within that host country’s society and culture. Home, however, is not merely a location of birth or origin, but an emotional and mental place of belonging: it is “[t]he place where one lives or was brought up, with reference to the feelings of belonging, comfort, etc., associated with it,” and therefore home is “connected with the generalized or partly abstract sense, in which *home* is conceived as a state as well as a place” (*OED*). One can feel out-of-place where one was born or grew up, and one can feel at home, or as if one belongs in a foreign landscape: home is one’s emotional attachment to place.

To complicate matters further, what does it mean when home is not merely a single place? What happens when one feels connected to more than a single home and self? For Dabydeen and Goodison, home becomes an abstract concept reduced to the space in-between ‘there’ (the birth-country) and ‘here’ (the host-country) that generates a fractured identity. Their physical displacement, coupled with the inability to fully belong in the Canadian landscape forces Dabydeen and Goodison to inhabit an in-between space or a placeless place wherein they do not belong anywhere, and home remains just out of

reach. For example, in “Amazonia” (2003)<sup>2</sup> the speaker, whom we can safely assume is Dabydeen, remarks that he had been “*born in Amazonia,*” (240, his emphasis) but tells of his “home in Ottawa” (239). Although the speaker calls Ottawa home, he also mentions an onlooker who “noted our different ways / in the one place I call home,” which extends to “far more than Canadian Studies / now that we’re indeed here” (240). The “we” being referred to here is a diasporic presence, one that is altering Canadian Literary Studies, or at least has the potential to. Yet, the mention of noted difference is the phrase that ushers Dabydeen into the in-between space: in between belonging and unbelonging, causing him to “quietly wonder where is actually home” (222), but to “continue to dream about another place” (222) and to boldly declare “maybe I too belong here” (220). Moreover, calling Ottawa “home” does not sever ties or connections to Guyana, or any of the other places he has called home, for he declares that “[m]emory, indeed is / all with me in Canada” (242). His sense of place (which calls up memory) and belonging, then, is not tied to only one location.

Goodison, in contrast, rarely speaks of “home” in the present tense. She frequently uses ‘house’ or ‘dwelling,’ but when she invokes the concept of home, it is in the future or past tense: “this island was then home” (CS 11). Goodison’s speakers are frequently stuck in-between a past of belonging and a future hope of belonging again: stuck in a present of unbelonging as “homesick Africans” (CS 36). Yet, there is a hopeful note in the sense of home (or lack thereof) that Goodison expresses in her poetry, as she

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<sup>2</sup>Although Dabydeen’s collection specifies that the poems included range from his work between 1970-2002, Dabydeen dates this particular poem Aug. 18, 2003, and the collection is published in 2004.

depicts the search for home as a journey oriented towards the future, like children in transit, reciting a rhyme “all the way home” (CS 49); a journey dependent upon the “Mercy agent / seated astride her gray mule, come to ride you home” (CS 68). Home is a concept on the distant horizon, a goal that Goodison’s speakers are working towards, a hope for the future. Although home is represented in different ways by Dabydeen and Goodison, this in-between characteristic present in both of their work is a quality, I argue, which becomes generative, because it is within this in-between space of belonging and unbelonging that minority and diasporic writers can re-map the self and in turn re-write the Canadian literary landscape.<sup>3</sup>

As the terms home, space, and place are all integral to my argument, I will take some time to outline my use of these terms here. By home I am referring to an emotional attachment to place, a feeling of belonging. Because one can be attached to more than one place, home as it is discussed in this thesis deconstructs the dichotomy between home and host country, because this dichotomy presumes that the birth-country is always the home-country, and therefore that the host-country can never be home. Furthermore, this dichotomy also leaves out another integral place, albeit an imagined place, that is essential to the concept of home and identity: the places of ancestral roots or origins (India for Dabydeen and Africa for Goodison). For this reason I will be using the terms host country to refer to the landed country or country of residence, birth country, and

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<sup>3</sup> I should note here that this process of remapping has been in effect over the past 20 years in Canadian literary studies, but that it is an ongoing process. Because the selection of poetry I have chosen to focus on from Goodison and Dabydeen have been published as recently as 2002 and 2005, their poetry suggests that some remapping is still necessary.

place of origin for the country to which ties were severed through displacement. My objective is to take “home” out of the defining factors of these specific places – since home can actually apply to all three separately and simultaneously – as well as to break down linear and binary thinking of place as singular and rooted, and that which is not singular as placeless. By space I am referring to the infinite landscape that surrounds us, the space in which we move and live our lives: “space spreads out indefinitely far beyond the perceiving subject” and is “determined by landmarks and other locales in the environment” (Casey, *Smooth Spaces* 267, 268). Place, on the other hand, is more affective. Place is defined by Lucy R. Lippard as “a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar” which is “entwined with personal memory” and “history” (7). Put more simply, place is an emotional attachment to space.<sup>4</sup> Place is imbued with a feeling of belonging and

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<sup>4</sup>I have chosen to use Lippard’s concept of place, because she is not only important in the discussion of CanLit which is the focus of my thesis, but her affective conception of place is more applicable to how Dabydeen and Goodison portray place. Edward S. Casey, although very adept in the philosophical discussions of time, space, and place reduces place to a focus on location and surrounding: “Place is where a thing is – where the locative adverb ‘where’ (*pou*) has the status of a universal category. However, beyond locating (or, more exactly, *as* locating) place is something *surrounding*, with the result that a given place is coextensive with what it contains” (*Smooth Spaces* 273). What Casey does not account for, however, is the emotional component to place, for when one feels “out-of-place,” this feeling is not based on location or surroundings, but on a feeling of unbelonging. Belonging is not predicated on either location or surrounding, but is

connection; place is “latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth” (Lippard 7). Place becomes entwined with identity formation, because, as David Addyman points out, place “calls up memories” which “have a more direct influence on the sense of self” (120). And therefore, for Addyman, “sense of self is predicated on sense of place” (121). If what Addyman is suggesting is true, then when one feels out of place, one’s very conception of self is brought into question. Only when one carves out a place for oneself, or forms connections to place and re-establishes a sense of home, can one settle into the illusion of knowing exactly who one is and where one belongs.

#### Place for the Immigrant in Canada

Place and the immigrant consciousness are increasingly seen to be part of Canadian national and literary identity. According to Una Chaudhuri, place is the “location of identity” because we assign “national and ethnic identities” a “*geography*,” which is based on “race, nation, ethnicity, language – in short, all the elements that together or in part designate the notion of a culture” (3, her emphasis). If place is the location of identity, then the diversified and ever changing Canadian identity, with its proud national narrative of multiculturalism, necessarily leads to a discussion of

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internally contrived. As this thesis investigates issues of belonging, place is used to refer to emotional attachment to space, as an inward gazing concept of self, not an outward gazing concept of surroundings.

redefining place. As Chaudhuri notes, “[t]he huge movements of populations that characterize the later part of the twentieth century dictate a different relation to the category of place – to the relation of self and location” (173). These differing relations and the changing concept of place and national identity all connect with the nation’s literature in that the national literature is a medium through which the national identity is portrayed, and often reflects issues of contestation and transformation before they are collectively perceived. Put another way, our literature reflects who we think we are as Canadians and at the same time who we clearly are not. The Canadian identity, like identity in general, is an illusion susceptible to change with every new influence. This susceptibility renders the Canadian identity malleable and capable of being reformed to include what was previously excluded, and is therefore productive. In order for that which is excluded to be brought to the collective consciousness, however, the observation that something is indeed excluded must first be made. As obvious as that may sound, this observation is harder to come by than one may think. From within the national imaginary, the insiders – those who unquestionably belong to the national body – are blinded by the haze of the constructed national identity; it often takes someone from the outside looking in – one who is not afforded belonging – to be able to spot the absences and oversights. This is precisely what Dabydeen and Goodison aim to achieve with their poetry – by documenting their experiences of Canada and what this country means to them, they display a uniquely different and often overlooked perspective of Canada that should be considered when thinking of the national identity.

By writing and publishing their poetry, Dabydeen and Goodison simultaneously participate in the literary landscape and re-write it. The presence of their literature alone



changes what the literary landscape looks like, and by slowly changing what Canadian literature is, they – along with many other diasporic writers – progressively change what our nation is. Although this statement that our literature changes our country is a weighted one to make, if we agree with the claim that our literature reflects our nation (hence we call it Canadian literature), then it would stand to reason that changes in this national literature reflect changes in our nation. The main point of contestation, then, would be a metaphysical chicken or the egg question: do changes in our national literature change our nation, or do changes in our nation change our national literature? The answer seems to be that it is both and it is a dynamic process; however, this thesis will focus on the calls for change that consistently arise in Dabydeen and Goodison’s work, positioning literature in this instance as the catalyst for national transformation.

In order to suggest that Dabydeen and Goodison re-write the Canadian literary landscape, it is first necessary to explore what this landscape includes, or rather does not include. Canadian literature is a constantly shifting canon of works written in Canada or by Canadians, best defined or delimited by what is currently under consideration in schools and universities. As Smaro Kamboureli notes in *Trans.Can.Lit*, Canadian Literature is “a construct bound by the nation, a cultural by-product of the Cold War era, a nationalist discourse with its roots in colonial legacies,” and “a literature that has assumed transnational and global currency” (vii). However, Kamboureli is quick to note that this description is rather vague and loaded, and that the imaginary of Canadian literature is just that, an imaginary. Kamboureli explains that CanLit<sup>5</sup> is trying to navigate

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<sup>5</sup> Kamboureli uses the term CanLit to reference the constructed nature of the canon.

While I tend to use the term to refer to Canadian literature in general, I am using

the “complexities” present within “its own history and location” (viii). CanLit , with its “early fantasies of homogeneity, its strategic cultural and language policies, and its fetishization of its multicultural make-up” is marked with “a precariousness suggestive, in part, of the nation-state’s politics of remembering and forgetting” (viii) – specifically remembering and forgetting a colonial past. The colonial past that CanLit is grappling with is apparent in the multicultural Canadian national narrative and bilingual identity that is not adequately portrayed in our literature, for as Kamboureli states, “CanLit has, more or less, always functioned as a [reference] to Canadian literature in English” (ix). When minorities and minority literatures have been represented, it has been in a way that situates “difference and otherness [as] a Canadian trope” (Kamboureli ix). While this inclusion attests to the presence of ethnic others within Canada, it tends to do one of two things: homogenize difference through a “process whereby the other becomes the same, normative and therefore transparent” (Kamboureli ix), or highlights difference so that diasporic individuals remain other-to the Canadian national identity. And yet, this space of struggle is also a space for reinvention, as Kamboureli explains it, for within this space CanLit can both reflect and contest the state as it “boldly points beyond [the state], to an elsewhere that is not yet legible, that defamiliarizes the tropes that produce transparency and its accompanying contentment and complacency” (x). This elsewhere that Kamboureli declares is inherent in CanLit “intimates that Canada is an unimaginable community, that is, a community constituted in excess of the knowledge of itself, always transitioning” (x). By “poking holes,” so to speak, within the Canadian

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Kamboureli’s term to also evoke this canonical construction that dominates and defines Canadian literature.

national narrative and literary canon, diasporic others can create spaces for themselves, and once they fill these spaces, the “unimaginable” Canadian community transitions again.

### Globalization and the Canadian National Identity

Roy Miki also investigates the constant transition and re-definition of what constitutes Canadian literature (“Globalisation, (Canadian) Culture, and Critical Pedagogy: A Primer”). For Miki, the factor responsible for the greatest change in the Canadian literary landscape in the present is globalization. Miki refers to the fall-out of globalization as a “cultural crisis” that has “re-articulated” the Canadian national identity through the discourse of a “more mobile subjectivity” (90-91). This is a crisis, because globalization poses “a disruption that has disabled [Canada’s] narrative formation” (94). However, with any crisis comes the unavoidable confrontation with the issues that create the crisis in the first place, and this confrontation is generative, as it allows for the possibility of change and growth. Waves of immigration spawned by globalization pose a crisis for the Canadian national identity precisely because the national narrative no longer adequately represents the Canadian nation, and therefore that which is unrepresented eventually emerges and demands a re-definition of the nation. The “current interrogation” (91) of the nation’s identity, according to Roy Miki, has been brought under the microscope because of the “cultural effects of cross-border exchanges, diasporic processes, and hybrid relations” (91) that has resulted in the “‘deterritorialization’ of the nation-state” (91). The deterritorialized nation significantly transforms the Canadian

national identity, because unlike the drive during the Cold War period “to produce a Canadian national culture” (91) that required a fixed identity with defined borders, Canada’s liberal inclusion of “difference” has come to “transgress and transform its borders” (91) and has made the identity of the nation pliant. With the borders of the nation being re-defined, the nation itself and what it encompasses or includes must likewise be re-defined. Leaving behind the immobile concept of the nation, the “wake of globalization,” as Miki defines it, “brought with it a silence” evoking the realization that the “narrative of the nation had already moved elsewhere, i.e., had unravelled, and as a consequence that links between place (as territory) and identity (as a stable Canadianness) were also disarticulated in the process” (91). The nation, then, has not disappeared, but has changed shape or has taken on a new identity: it has been re-mapped.

Part of this re-mapping is due to globalization. Re-mapping has involved a re-defining of what constitutes the local, as “[a]ll of the specific sites of the urban local” were “opened to the influx of the global” (Miki 91). As globalization is a “multidimensional and multi-layered process of interactions in which local and national sites are inflected by global determinants” (Miki 92), the local, being susceptible to the global, takes on a new form of a local/global and becomes “glocal” (see Neil Brenner, “Global cities, glocal states,” 1998). The local, as Miki defines it, is “the prime site where the uneven flows of the near and the distant, the immediate and the far, are both consumed and performed in our daily interactions” (95) while the global expands past those individual and limited confines. The glocal, then, merges the individual everyday with larger global implications so that the two are no longer mutually exclusive. For

example, my decision to buy certain clothing and coffee affects others in the countries producing these commodities, in turn affecting their local lives. Although the local is a “geographical location,” it also “encompass[es] all [of] the specific events that condition our interactions with the vastly layered spaces of contemporary cultural formations that fan outward” (Miki 95). According to Miki, this shift in the concept of the local to that of the global holds the potential to generate change, because “the local, as a model of the intersection of contradictory forces, can provide the impetus for critical – perhaps postcolonial – studies that are attentive to points of intersection between cultures, creative texts, theories, discourses, and transnational movements” (95-96). This shift in thinking globally is otherwise known as cosmopolitanism,<sup>6</sup> which Nancy Cook defines as a “cultural disposition” that scholars claim can “transform subjectivities, forge bonds of reciprocal commitment and responsibility across borders and generate attachments between the local and the global” (5).<sup>7</sup> These ideas relate back to the larger discussion of

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<sup>6</sup> Cultural approaches to cosmopolitanism “foreground shifting cultural patterns of life that throw into question the territorially given nature of the social. Patterns of interest include people’s greater tolerance, empathy and respect for other cultures and values, their cultural competencies and their desire and ability to communicate cross-culturally” (Cook 5). Ideally, according to Cook, “cosmopolitanism is a vehicle for encouraging solidarity among strangers, generating cultural translatability and achieving global peace and justice” (5).

<sup>7</sup>I have chosen to quote Cook’s definition of cosmopolitanism here because unlike the Marxist concept that connotes unattachment – that the cosmopolitan intellectual is rootless and lacking in allegiances to local action and consequence – the cosmopolitan

immigrant belonging within Canada, and specifically Dabydeen and Goodison's poetry, because they highlight the global transitions that change the nation and allow for the larger discussion of cosmopolitan belonging – being at home anywhere – to enter into the discussion as well.

What is more, the intersection between the local and the global produces conflict, and therefore the overall discussion of unbelonging emerges from this phenomenon of globalization. Conflict arises as different histories and cultures mingle with each other in a space in transition, what Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones”: the “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (3). Pratt's definition of contact zones is predicated on a sense of culture and identity that bears a striking resemblance to Attridge's notion of idioculture. Attridge defines idioculture as the way

an individual's grasp on the world is mediated by a changing array of interlocking, overlapping, and often contradictory cultural systems absorbed in the course of his or her previous experience, a complex matrix of habits, cognitive models, representations, beliefs, expectations, prejudices, and preferences that operate intellectually, emotionally, and physically to produce a sense of at least relative continuity, coherence, and signification out of the manifold events of human living. (21)

What are actually merging and clashing within the contact zones are individual subjects with singular idiocultures. Put in another way, the contact zones represent a merging of

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existence that Dabydeen and Goodison portray in their poetry is an ability to form attachments anywhere, not to remain unattached.

individuals with differences (culturally, religiously, historically) that are not automatically understood by the merging parties. Ideally, in the struggle to coexist, a change in interaction develops when understanding, or perhaps more accurately acceptance and respect, is reached. As a response to the struggles of the “contact zones,” Mary Louise Pratt proposes a “systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*” which is one that offers “ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity,” and which “ground[s] rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect” (40). Within the contact zones, then, there is the initial certainty of conflict, but also the possibility for resolution, growth, and progress.

#### Identity and Writing from a Diaspora

A very obvious contact zone created through globalization is that of immigrant cultures entering host countries. In her book *Staging Place*, Chaudhuri investigates the “politics of home and [the] poetics of exile” (82) and focuses at length on two experiences that qualify this “figure of exile” (173): immigration and refugeehood. I will be speaking only about the former, for the later is subject to vastly different experiences. The immigrant experience, according to Chaudhuri, “literalizes the experience of dislocation and ill placement” and this dispossession or this “extreme *precision* of ill-placement [...] affects every part of the immigrant experience, coloring everything seen and felt, producing a sort of split self, even a schizophrenia” (173, her emphasis). Perhaps

better known as double consciousness, the immigrant experience is that of a fractured self. For Dabydeen, however, this double consciousness is not negative, but generative, as he describes this fracture as a “heterogenous,<sup>8</sup> or even a hybrid consciousness” (*Origins* 12). Dabydeen confesses that his poems “speak of loss and dislocation,” but that it is within these affective responses that he has “found [his] truest poetic self in the crossing of boundaries, and the necessity of looking in different directions” (11). This act of looking in different directions allows him to “combine [his] diasporic and immigrant selves” (11): one self that is currently Canadian, a self that is Guyanese born, and a self that has Asian roots and ancestry. It is precisely this ruptured self that has allowed Dabydeen to “[form] both an insider and outsider perspective on what [he] keep[s] confronting” (11-12) – his own identity.

In this thesis I am arguing that this ruptured immigrant experience is generative, because within the rupture is the space for re-mapping the self: for the “anxiety of immigration” is “figured as a search for a new and compelling narrative of self-definition” (Chaudhuri 175). I have chosen to focus on Dabydeen’s *Imaginary Origins* and Goodison’s *Controlling the Silver* (as well as a few poems in two other collections), because the poetry within these collections depicts a movement through space, as well as

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<sup>8</sup>Dabydeen’s use of the word “heterogenous” here could be a typo of the word “heterogeneous,” connoting diversity, or it could be the biology term meaning not originating within the body or of foreign origin – it is often used in the discussion of transplanting tissue (*OED*). As heterogenous is coupled with the word “hybrid” in the poem, which connotes the theoretical term hybridity, but is also a biology term referring to the genetic merging of species, this possibility should not be overlooked.



an investigation of place and identity. In these collections they both also engage with memory, history, and complicate exclusory concepts such as citizenship and fixed identities. Dabydeen describes his project *Imaginary Origins* as being “a retrospective collection that traces the flux of time and change” within his life and writing, and presents his struggle of “straddling past and present” in order to, as he puts it, “discover who I am” (12). At the core of his poetry “is an engagement with memory (indeed an importunate sense of origins), coupled with reflections on a changing self as it responds to Caribbean as well as Canadian temperaments and landscapes as they are internalised within [him]” (Dabydeen, *Origins* 11). Similarly, Goodison regards her poetry as conveying “journeys and journeying” (*Frontiers* 156), more specifically one’s journey to understanding the self. Goodison acknowledges that to map the self or one’s “journey through life” requires a moving through places, and that understanding the self can only come through understanding one’s relationship to place, which comes “through wisdom gained from being on the road a long time, and experiencing certain things” (157). The recurring language and imagery in both of these declarations of identity formation centre on movement. Given that self is predicated on place, it would stand to reason that if the physical landscape or space keeps changing, so too would the sense of self. This investigation into place is really an investigation into the self, then, and the space and places that Dabydeen and Goodison manoeuvre through are really internalized landscapes which are highly affective.

Put in a direct, yet simple way, affect is “where the [pathology] of a body meets the pedagogy of an affective world” (Gregg and Seigworth 12). Affect, according to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, “is found in those intensities that pass body to

body [...] in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds” (1). To rearticulate Addyman’s argument, that self is predicated on place, the affective engagement that imbues place with meaning and memory transforms it from space to place. An affective engagement with one’s surroundings connects back to the larger discussion of belonging, because, as Gregg and Seigworth note, affect “marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters” and its “*non-belonging*, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities”<sup>9</sup> (2, their emphasis). Demarcating both belonging and non-belonging, affect articulates the immigrant experience within Canada: that immigrants both belong to a multicultural Canadian mirage and do not belong to the national narrative. Living within the liminal space is an affective existence, because affect “arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” (Gregg and Seigworth 1). For Dabydeen and Goodison, and immigrant writers in general, this struggle between belonging and unbelonging is an ongoing “struggle with the problem of place,” which “unfolds as an incessant dialogue between belonging and exile, home and homelessness” (Chaudhri 15), what Chaudhuri has termed geopathology. Geopathology presupposes dislocations and, within a “geopathic paradigm

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<sup>9</sup> The word impossibilities here is the plural form of impossibility, referring to the state of being impossible, which means not capable of joint existence, or “not possible together; that cannot exist or be true together; wholly incompatible or inconsistent” (OED).

[...] supports a certain construction of identity: identity as a negotiation with – and on occasion a heroic overcoming of – the power of place” (56). The power of place within a Canadian context becomes rather difficult to negotiate with, because the immigrant does not inherently “belong” in Canada, but has simply “landed” here. Landing, according to Dionne Brand, is part and parcel of the immigrant or diasporic experience, for “[l]anding is what people in the Diaspora do. Landing in ports, dockings, bridgings, stocks, borders, outposts,” and therefore always “without destination” (*Map* 150). This tendency for the diasporic writer to drift through space while eagerly looking for a place of belonging is precisely the difficulty inherent within the immigrant experience: the immigrant is thrust into the space in-between and denied a place of belonging: “in place, one can be rooted; in space, one must be adrift” (Bourne 110). The question arises, how does one become rooted instead of adrift?

Current debate throughout 2010 and 2011 in Europe, foregrounded by the memorable speeches by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and British Prime Minister David Cameron, all declare that multiculturalism has failed. The general consensus is that multiculturalism divides more than it unifies, and instead of having a single country with one cultural mosaic, what countries embracing multiculturalism are heading for is a multiplicity of little countries separated by conflicting ideas, values, and ideologies.<sup>10</sup> Canadian Western Separatist Douglas Christie claims that multiculturalism actually “boils down to a patchwork racism” more than

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<sup>10</sup> For some of the coverage on this debate see “Inside Story,” ABC News (Oct. 18 2010), Fox News (Oct. 19 2010), BBC (Feb. 5 2011), CBN (Feb. 11 2011), and Washington Times (Feb. 16 2011).

anything else, which guarantees “ethnic conflict” (Christie, n. pag.). Although many of Christie’s claims, and those of these European politicians, are without question ridiculous, in light of this recent debate the question should be asked: if we as Canadians feel that multiculturalism is integral to the Canadian identity, should we not investigate the same issues of “failure” here within Canada? Is multiculturalism working as it is defined in the Multiculturalism Act, and are we as inclusive and accepting as we think we are? In that very statement lies the truth: that Canada accepts others into its culture, *ergo* these other people are not inherently Canadian. Coming back to the concept of literature and national identity, I argue that it is at the level of the Canadian national narrative where multiculturalism fails. Our national narrative refuses immigrants a position of belonging, according to Rinaldo Walcott, by promoting the story of “two founding peoples” – the English and the French – which “strategically denies a longer [ethnic] presence in this country” (14). By positioning ethnic difference or otherness in Canada as “a recent and urban one spawned by [...] migration” (44), the Canadian narrative refuses non-whiteness as “inherently belonging to the national body,” and therefore perpetuates the notion that members of the minority diasporas, even if they are born here, are “not-quite-citizens,” and therefore forces “them to look elsewhere [for belonging] and simultaneously locates them elsewhere” (Walcott 134). If the very national imaginary negates an ethnic presence as inherently Canadian and refuses immigrants belonging within Canada, and if immigrant populations or diasporas are to find a place of belonging within this nation, they must overturn these perceptions of Canadianness and create an identity and place that allows them to belong.

Refusing to integrate immigrant and diasporic individuals into the national narrative and their writers into the CanLit canon generates a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders (natural-born citizens and immigrants). The celebration of difference in multiculturalism actually causes those who identify with home, nation, and culture outside of Canada to be labeled as not authentically Canadian, but Canadian and other: they must navigate a hyphenated identity or citizenship. However, how one identifies with belonging to a country – one’s citizenship – is not based on “abstract notions of unitary citizenship,” as Monica Mookherjee notes, but is instead an affective citizenship, which “recognizes the emotional relations through which identities are formed” (36). Affective citizenship “presumes that citizens’ structural autonomy is formed not through just *one* set of affective bonds, but rather through commitments to multiple, interesting communities” (Mookherjee 37). Affective citizenship is integral to the postcolonial Canadian condition, because it allows for a citizen, according to Mookherjee, to have “multiple affiliations” which “unsettles both the majority and the minority’s preconceived distinctions between ‘identity’ and ‘difference’, and between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (37). These multiple affiliations, however, as well as affording diasporic individuals the ability to emotionally connect with the host country as home, also ensures that home is not in merely one place – as emotional connections to the birth country are not severed. Through engaging in affective citizenship, then, members of the diaspora are ushered into an in-between space of a divided consciousness and allegiance, wherein belonging to no specific place becomes a sort of placelessness in the conventional sense.

## The Generative In-between Space

Dabydeen and Goodison's placelessness affords them the opportunity to unsettle conventions and map a place for themselves within the literary landscape because they are caught in-between. It is only the people who live in-between who can, according to Walcott, "redraw and rechart the places/spaces that they occupy" (50). Diasporic invention, in other words, from this space of the in-between can "challenge" the borders of belonging and "continually foster the grounds" (75) for new concepts of belonging to emerge. Immigrant writers are particularly equipped to break this ground *because* they are "capable of writing from a kind of double perspective [being] at one and the same time insiders and outsiders" (19) in Canadian society. Placelessness, then, is ultimately generative because it is no longer "circumscribed and clearly defined," but is, instead, "in the crossroads, pathways, and junctions between places" and advocates for "the possibility of a *polytopianism*: placelessness not as the absence or erasure of place but as the combination and layering, one on top of another, of many different places, many distinct orders of spatiality" (Chaudhuri 138). Much like the cosmopolitan who is a citizen of the world, belonging to no specific place is not in fact being placeless, but a layered existence of belonging to everyplace. Placelessness is less a physical reality than a mental and emotional experience. For Chaudhuri, placelessness is "a precondition for self-realization" (66) and it functions in a similar way as what Attridge has defined as idioculture, which is "necessarily unstable and subject to change" (21). It is the openness of one's idioculture and the ability to become placeless that affords opportunity for change, for only when one's idioculture is "fractured and pressured and thus open to

alterity” (Attridge 83) can one engage the “other” and the new and be open for reinvention and new possibility. In order for Dabydeen and Goodison to be able to change the institutions within our country that have excluded them, they must first embrace this placelessness, their own absence within the overall Canadian narrative: they must first see and experience this absence in order to work toward filling it. Indeed this is what they are doing with their poetry; they have acknowledged a lack, they have represented it in their poetry, and they are putting their work into the Canadian literary marketplace, filling the void. It is my objective within this thesis project to display exactly how they go about doing this.

#### Chapter by Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, I discuss how Dabydeen and Goodison go about redefining the concept of citizenship. Because citizenship demarcates one’s belonging to a nation, Dabydeen and Goodison expand the national construct in a way that includes them, or allows them to belong. Because the conventional notion of citizenship distinguishes a single allegiance to a country, it is not a concept that adequately portrays Dabydeen and Goodison’s experience as immigrants within Canada. Instead, they portray a cosmopolitan citizenship that affords them belonging as well as multinational allegiance. By challenging the traditional perception of citizenship and belonging, Dabydeen and Goodison also challenge the institution of the nation and the exclusionary agenda of borders and contribute to a new theoretical framework for understanding belonging.

The second chapter expands this new concept of citizenship to a new concept of citizen, or more specifically highlights the reality of identity in transition. Yet again evoking Addyman's claim that "sense of self is predicated on sense of place" (121), the changing notion of citizenship, borders and nation – the changing concept of place – necessitates a discussion of the changing concept of self, or self in transition which is inextricably linked to place. This malleable self identity becomes a crucial part of the cosmopolitan citizenship discussed in the first chapter, because cosmopolitanism is founded on the premise that one can belong anywhere, or that one is "a citizen of the world." In order for one to truly belong anywhere, though, one must be able to adapt or change to any new environment, which in turn requires an individual capable of constant transformation. This chapter takes up identity in transformation through the metaphor of the chameleon.

The third and final chapter discusses the objective of making an entry. The reason, after all, for the redefining of citizenship and identity was to create a new discourse that would allow the immigrant or diasporic populations to be able to belong within the institutions that previously excluded them, i.e. the nation. And yet, this exclusion is necessary for the possibility of inclusion, because only in an absence is there the opportunity for something to fill that absence. How Dabydeen and Goodison go about filling that absence or making their entry is through their poetry. Because the national identity, and therefore its discourse surrounding that identity – of citizenship and national belonging – are displayed through the national literature, in participating in the national literature Dabydeen and Goodison offer an unavoidable presence with legitimate



concerns that should be acknowledged: through their poetry this absence is filled (to a certain extent) and therefore should be recognized and dealt with.

Finally, the conclusion discusses what an investigation into academic pedagogical practices of Canadian literature offers by way of changing the relationships to space, place, and belonging. Ultimately this thesis is asking what the concepts of home and belonging have to do with larger institutions such as nation and citizenship, and investigates how belonging and emplacement change when the borders of institutions are shifted or overturned, in doing so critiquing these very conventions and institutions to begin with. This project seeks to envision a new way of seeing diasporic and minority literature, as well as Canadian literature in general, and hopes to point to, if not bridge some of the gaps that remain within the study of Canadian literature, as well as Canadian societal institutions and the Canadian cultural imaginary.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Re-defining National Belonging, The Cosmopolitan Citizen

*“I am bicultural, but my biculturality is that I’m not at home in either of the places”  
– Gayatri Spivak (83)*

Gayatri Spivak underscores this in-between space experienced by members of diasporas. By stating that she is not at home in either of the places, she articulates a feeling of unbelonging that is difficult to reconcile with place. The difficulty lies in the uprooted existence of a bicultural individual. Unlike Spivak, however, Dabydeen and Goodison embrace their uprooted existence and biculturality as the very thing that allows them to create a home for themselves. As their concept of home is inextricably linked to their concepts of self, and their concept of self or identity is explored through an investigation into roots, they redefine the concept of roots to suit their lived experience. The traditional understanding of being “rooted” has meant to be “firmly fixed or established, deeply implanted, entrenched” to be “settled *within* a place,” “to have a source or basis in something; originating in, founded on,” and on occasion for a person to be “stuck in position, as if fixed in the ground; unmoving, stationary” (*OED*). However, being rooted has also meant “having been made to grow roots” (*OED*), which has the potential to be re-rooted and more mobile – a person, like a plant, can be “uprooted” or displaced and be able to again grow roots when landed or placed once again in (foreign) soil. It is this second definition of roots that both Dabydeen and Goodison convey in their poetry. In “After the Rain,” the roots of Dabydeen’s speaker “[needle] down / into the humid / evergreen world” and “shoot out” over “this soggy / face of earth” (38). These roots do not merely grow in one place, but spread out over the face of the earth. By

universalizing rootedness, Dabydeen suggests that roots can grow in whatever land will “loosen / up the soil”; however, he also states that “one’s roots are / there” – presumably one’s birth country – and “will always / be there despite / the constant blurring” that takes place “over time” (38). His being able to be rooted anywhere does not erase his having been once rooted somewhere, and therefore although his original roots begin in one place, they are capable of spreading to any receptive soil: he is still rooted, but mobile. In fact, mobile is the operative word to explain Dabydeen’s concept of roots and emplacement. In “Seeking Light” the speaker “refuse[s] to burrow, cave-world, underground/ domain, this time without light” (54); yet, as he “burrows still,” it is clear that he is not against burrowing, but against being without light. Instead, he “listen[s] to the secrets of the soil” and “venture[s] out [...] free amidst / this space, dancing in the claustrophobia / of light” (54). This burrowing depicts the willingness and ability of the speaker to root himself in this place, but his orientation toward the light is a refusal to be fixed or stagnant. Like a sun-worshipper plant that turns itself to follow the sun – seeking the light – the speaker in this poem can likewise turn, he is not stuck.

For Goodison, these roots always come back to Harvey River in Jamaica, which was “the first water boiled and cooled [she] sipped,” and was “the water source / that christened, confirmed, and baptized [her]” (CS 51). Harvey River becomes “an enchanted place in [her] imagination” (*From Harvey River* 1); a single place wherein she feels rooted. She describes the river in “Back to Where We Come From” as

approaching  
the archway of courtly bamboo,  
the family river wets the stems,

of rooted reed instruments.

Touched the lips of the wind

they pipe, 'this long time

gal me never see you'.

(CS 34)

She refers to this river in possessive terms as the “family” river, and idealizes it with the imagery of “courtly bamboo” and reed instruments being played by the wind. There is a supernatural interaction with place being depicted in this poem, as it is not just the speaker’s connection to the river and her feeling rooted in this place that is portrayed, but the river itself is almost personified, telling the speaker that it has been a long time since it has seen her. Although these could potentially be the voices of family members left behind in Jamaica, these lips of the wind humanize this place into something alive with which the speaker can interact in a specific way. Despite the fact that roots for Goodison seem to be in one place, and therefore in opposition to Dabydeen’s concept of roots, her concept of rootedness does bear similarity to Dabydeen’s “roots spreading out over receptive soil,” because these roots *have been* created elsewhere. After being displaced from their origins in Africa, Goodison’s family, when finally freed from slavery, were able to root themselves in this place that was not their place of origin, and could call it home – a place that they symbolically labelled as their own by naming the river with their family name.

Goodison refers to the past to inform her present, having been able to find a way to be rooted in the face of displacement before. The speaker, after romanticizing and idealizing Harvey River, then remarks that

[w]e had hoped that we could enter again  
into the stone and wood House of Harvey  
and sit. That relatives might bring cooling,  
four water jelly coconuts, two each.  
That we'd light the Home Sweet Home lamps.

(34)

However, the speaker and whoever these others are that constitute “we” – presumably her family – are not able to “sit on family tombs,” but “instead we are confronted with this” (34); “this” being a severed connection to a sense of home because of the violent history of displacement. The speaker and her family cannot sit on family tombs, because the historical familial ties have been severed by the vast expanse of the Atlantic, and the genealogy that does exist in Jamaica is a short one. The underlying connotations of this poem are displayed right in the title “Back to Where We Come From.” The speaker is not looking back to an imaginary origin beyond, in Brand’s words, “the Door of No Return,” but is instead looking back to the moment in history when her family created their own identity and a place of belonging for themselves – they walked through the Door of No Return and made an entry. Goodison comes from a family that claimed their own place and named their own river; she comes from a lineage of strength and agency. Now, after generations have passed, the speaker hopes that another entry can be made – the entry of the Caribbean immigrant into North American culture. Hoping that she can draw from the history of Harvey River, the speaker tries to create a new place within her new surroundings – a new Harvey River – wherein she can feel that she belongs, can sit, can entertain relatives, and most importantly, can be able to be at home.

## Citizenship Creates Borders of Exclusion

Home, as I mentioned in the introduction, is often inextricably entwined with citizenship. However, as the terms citizen and immigrant are not often compatible with each other – Lily Cho points out that “the subject of diaspora does not map easily onto the subject of citizenship” (94) – the immigrant-citizen’s ability to realize this concept of home and belonging within the host country and culture becomes a difficult task. Perhaps it is because members of the diaspora are visible minorities and do not possess the appearance or status of born citizens that they are not seen as “authentically Canadian;” their immigrant-citizen status disallows them from claiming Canada as home. This immigrant-citizen status also disallows them from creating a place of belonging within the host country, for, according to Gentles-Peart and Maurice Hall, as an immigrant

one’s country of origin, and the history of its relationship to the receiving country, always already informs how one is perceived (racially, intellectually and economically), and the place one is given in the socio-economic system of the dominant society. Immigrants wrestle with these hegemonic processes in an effort to resist marginalization and claim social and cultural agency. (4)

Race, here, becomes a marker of difference in citizenship and nationality setting immigrants apart, or rendering them out-of-place. Despite the conflict between immigrant/diaspora and citizenship, however, Cho offers some hope for resolution, which is that this “dissonance could be very productive for thinking through” the “complications

of embracing citizenship” (101),<sup>11</sup> and “for understanding the contradictions and possibilities of Canadian literature” (105). This resolution can be found in what Cho has coined Diasporic Citizenship, which offers “the shimmering possibility of something new, something that might supplant the nation as a site of citizenship and might take into account the underside of transnational mobility” (101). Cho is not depicting diasporic citizenship as “a new, shiny, improved version of citizenship that might be seen as the underside of cosmopolitan citizenship” (108), but that it explores “those messy spaces where the subject of citizenship and the subject of diaspora do not overlap, where they pull and sometimes tear away from each other” (109). The work of diasporic citizenship, then, according to Cho, is to “[dwell] in this dissonance between diaspora and citizenship in order to enable memory to tear away at the coherence of national forgettings” (109).

Indeed this division or dissonance is precisely the goal of citizenship, as concepts of citizenship and nationality are inherently exclusory because they necessitate national borders that demarcate difference. These borders usher the diaspora into this in-between space of belong and unbelonging as “immigrant-citizens,” and it is therefore borders themselves that must be redrawn for the diaspora to be able to “make an entry” into Canadian society and culture and to belong. Borders, according to Lianne Moyes, are the

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<sup>11</sup> The complications Cho is referring to are that “[w]e cannot have citizenship without its troubled legacy – without the potential anti-humanism, anti-feminism, and elitism of its origins” (105). She is quick to note, however, that we cannot discard of citizenship, but instead should “approach it [...] with skepticism even as we embrace it” (105), and remarks that “diasporic citizenship can function as a perpetual reminder of the losses that enable citizenship to flourish” (Cho 105).

“institutions of citizenship,” or “the places where citizenship is materialized and policed” (113-114); citizenship itself becomes a border, as it confines one’s identity within specific parameters. As borders are imaginary lines separating one place from another, regardless of any concept of national unity, their key function is separation and enforced distinction. Geisen, Hickey, and Karcher attest to this fact, noting that “borders become markers which distinguish groupings that are held to be socially and culturally different” (7). Ultimately, then, regardless of positively reinforced aspects of borders “affording protection and security,” in the end “[d]rawing borders” is “a permanent processes through which differences are articulated and defined,” and they “invariably operate to exclude and to isolate” (Geisen, Hickey, and Karcher 9).

Pamela McCallum offers an intriguing example of the exclusory characteristic of borders in her discussion of Doris Salcedo’s art installation *Shibboleth* in the introductory editorial material to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *ARIEL*. *Shibboleth* is “a crack in the concrete floor, extending the whole length of the gallery” (1).<sup>12</sup> McCallum analyses the piece, this crack, as representing “[o]n a basic level” the “brokenness,” or the “gap that points toward a fractured world, split less into nations than into zones of abjection [...] and zones of luxury. Read metaphorically, the fissure reminds viewers of a world divided into belonging and exclusion, into those who are included and those who are shut out” (1-2). McCallum further relates this division to borders, which “are set up to exclude, to drive a wedge between those who can cross and those who cannot” (2). Although Dabydeen and Goodison have physically crossed, there exists an exclusory wall of citizenship that they are still unable to cross.

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<sup>12</sup> *Shibboleth* was being shown at the Tate Modern gallery in London.



## Renegotiating Citizenship

The inability to fully cross the borders of exclusion into citizenship becomes cause for Dabydeen and Goodison to renegotiate citizenship. Although we generally think of citizenship as being inherent to the nation, the new concept of citizenship, spawned by globalization and transnational connections, opens up citizenship to include a sense of belonging that goes beyond the confines of the nation. Liliana R. Goldin, in her essay “Transnational Identities: The Search for Analytical Tools,” offers a very thought provoking reflection, she states that “[a]s the nation becomes redefined with the influx of new voices and the reactions from sectors of the old, one begins to wonder how pervasive, useful and whole the ‘nation’ remains in the new context” (8). Goldin is not alone in her concerns. Lily Cho suggests a similar concern with the usefulness of the nation, advocating in her discussion of citizenship, for the “[u]ntangling [of] the notion of the citizen from that of the nation” (95). Indeed, the separation of citizenship and nationalism is a productive one, for as Anthony Appiah notes, “abstraction [...] is the nation itself” (238). “[N]ationalism,” according to Appiah, “posits a relation among strangers [...] sustained by impersonal mediating institutions” (Appiah 239), and is therefore a connection that is rather arbitrary, an ‘imagined community,’ to take Benedict Anderson’s phrase. A new concept of citizenship is required then that exists independently of the outdated national construct. What Donna Palmeteer Pennee calls for, along with Smaro Kamboureli and Len Findlay, is “*critical citizenship*” (77, her

emphasis).<sup>13</sup> Critical citizenship, according to Pennee, is “produced through a critical comparative approach to both minoritized and majoritized discourses within the Canadian nation-state” (77-78). The way that Dabydeen and Goodison go about untangling this engrained concept of citizenship is, I argue, a form of critical citizenship that negates the conventional exclusory model: what Sassen Saskia has termed “denationalized citizenship” (56), or cosmopolitan citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

As “[c]osmopolitanism is often set against nationalism and understood as freedom from ties to a specific territory, language, people, or culture” (Moyes 118), the merging of the two concepts within Dabydeen and Goodison’s poetry cause all preconceived notions of citizenship and belonging to be revisited. Appiah does not agree, however, that nationalism and cosmopolitanism are on different planes, for nationalism, like

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<sup>13</sup> Despite this claim, Pennee also acknowledges that “[f]or the time being, there is no question of doing without the national; it is rather a matter of doing the national differently. For diasporas do not come from nor do they travel through and exist in thin air, nor do citizenships. They *are* grounded even if not always landed” (Pennee 83).

<sup>14</sup> In his essay “The Repositioning of Citizenship” Sassen Saskia determines between denationalized and post-national citizenship. In post-national citizenship, according to Saskia, the “emergence of locations for citizenship [has moved] outside the frame of the national state,” whereas with denationalization, “the focus moves on to the transformation of the national, including the national in its condition as foundational for citizenship” (56). Saskia is quick to point out, however, that both postnationalism and denationalism “represent two different trajectories” that are both “viable, and they do not exclude each other” (56).

cosmopolitanism, “exhorts quite a lofty abstract level of allegiance – a vast, encompassing project that extends far beyond ourselves and our families” (239). Within this concept of nationalism and patriotism is the seed of potential for global citizenship, for within nationalism is the ability to feel united and equated with complete strangers – sentiments equally held by cosmopolitanism. The defining difference seems to be place and space: nationalism occurs more or less on a local scale, while cosmopolitanism occurs on a global scale; nationalism affords a particular attachment to a specific place, while cosmopolitanism allows for attachment to all places or everywhere. The ability to feel connected to anyplace allows Dabydeen and Goodison to redefine the boundaries and borders that work to exclude them, and work to create a space where they can enter and belong.

The cosmopolitan existence that Dabydeen and Goodison portray in their work comes back to the re-defined concept of roots, as it is a form of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” to use Kwame Anthony Appiah’s term. Rooted cosmopolitanism discredits that cosmopolitanism is an existence of total detachment and instead establishes cosmopolitanism as an existence that allows one to re-root oneself; rooted cosmopolitanism regards the concepts of roots and belonging as mobile rather than fixed. Appiah acknowledges the skepticism that many scholars have for “cosmopolitanism” – that cosmopolitanism is unattainable, objectionable, a privileged position, it deracinates, it is another form of imperialism – yet he maintains the position that cosmopolitanism is overall more positive than negative. Lianne Moyes holds a similar position, noting that cosmopolitanism “holds the promise of harmonious coexistence among world citizens in spite of uneven relations and, at the same time, the promise of a meaningful ‘counter’ to

the homogeneity or seamlessness sometimes associated with globalization” (120). These sentiments were anticipated by Martha Nussbaum in her essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” (1994), as she affirms that “[t]he idea of the world citizen” functions by “inspiring and regulating moral and political conduct” (157). Indeed, for Nussbaum, world citizenship is the height of humanity, as she declares in “Kant and Cosmopolitanism,” that

we should not allow differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even of gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings. We should recognize humanity whenever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect [...] we should give our first moral allegiance to *no* mere form of government, no temporal power. We should give it, instead, to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings. One should always behave so as to treat with equal respect the dignity of reason and moral choice in each and every human being. (31)

To be a citizen of the world, therefore, is to be “concerned for your fellow citizens” and to live out this concern “by doing things for people in particular places. A citizen of the world can make the world better by making some place better, even though that place need not be the place of her literal or original citizenship” (Appiah 241). A cosmopolitan, according to Appiah, should be “someone who thinks that the world is, so to speak, our shared hometown, reproducing something very like the self-conscious oxymoron of the ‘global village’” (Appiah 217). For both Dabydeen and Goodison, their ability to be

uprooted and re-rooted, or to create places for themselves anywhere in which to belong, makes them perfect examples of cosmopolitans. Dabydeen decrees,

[h]old me to an island,  
hold me still, but keep me tied to other places:  
valleys, whole rivers,  
the streets continually  
appearing in dreams.

I am once more at it, mouth agape,  
beginning anew –  
other places that keep the imagination  
at a standstill.

(205)

This tension between staying still or being rooted in one place while also being un-rooted and mobile is constantly present throughout Dabydeen's poetry. Even the typography on the page – although imprinted on the page – does not necessarily stand still: it weaves in and out, becoming fluid like water, refusing to be stuck in one register. The speaker admits that he is “still holding [him]self to an island,” but by also being able to be tied to other places, he is not stuck; he is able to have his “feet firmly planted” while “the ground [itself becomes] topsy-turvey – / the sky merely standstill” (205). Even if the speaker is grounded and still, he is grounded in a world that is constantly moving; he is in this discursive space between these seemingly oppositional notions of rooted stasis and mobility. It becomes possible, however, if the speaker is rooted in a cosmopolitan

existence, that he can find belonging and put down roots anywhere, and therefore he is capable of being grounded anywhere, which allows him to avoid being stuck. As the speaker in “Foreign Legions” remarks, “[d]isaster comes soon after” he is “stuck in one place” (137), and for this reason the speakers in Dabydeen’s poems live “[a] life of drifting,” diligently asking “[w]here else, world, do I go next?” (176). This perpetual mobility does not mean a rootless existence of unbelonging, however, but is a rooted cosmopolitan existence best depicted by the speaker in “Living Without Pretense,” who declares: “I make the country mine each time I step” (175). Refusing to be rooted in merely one place for Dabydeen does not mean, then, that he remains out of place, for the cosmopolitan citizen can feel at home and as if he belongs wherever he treads.

A question arises, however, one that Appiah poses in *The Ethics of Identity*, if the cosmopolitan’s home is anywhere and everywhere, does that not mean that the cosmopolitan really has no home at all (218)? Although I can understand what prompts this question, the conclusion that cosmopolitanism presupposes homelessness, or more specifically that to be able to call anywhere home means that home does not actually exist, is erroneous. To be able to call anywhere home requires a new definition of home. For Dabydeen and Goodison, roots, belonging, and home are affective forms of self creation that are achieved through making a choice and making an entry. This cosmopolitan existence is not a modern trend in human progress that discards the exclusive models of nation and citizenship, but is a post-colonial reality. This is particularly evident in Goodison’s “Making Life,” wherein the speaker of the poem is faced with the question of exile and wonders

is it because we came from a continent

why we can't settle on our islands?

did our recrossing begin with deportation  
of maroons to Liberia via Nova Scotia?

Are we all trying to work our way back  
to Africa? For soon as we fought free

we the West Indians picked up foot  
and set out over wide waters

(70-71)

Although this poem speaks to the history of colonialism and slavery, the implication of the speaker's focus is still one of making a choice. Those brought to the West Indies through the transatlantic slave trade and as indentured laborers did not have a choice in coming, but now that they have "fought free," they do have a choice in leaving. In leaving and creating a home elsewhere these diasporic immigrants are not discarding roots, but are seeking to create their own identities and places of belonging. It is not even necessarily an issue of escaping one's past, but of choosing one's present and future. For this reason, the speaker makes it clear that "we never call ourselves exiles," and that they see their "sojourning as 'making life'" (71). The emphasis here is on making – this is not a passive acceptance of life the way it is, or the way one is told that it is, but an active engagement with creating one's own life, however one determines it should be. Due to these sojournings, the diaspora "remained, took their brickbats / and became Blackbrits

and Jamericans” (71); they took what they wanted and they made their entry. Although most members of the diaspora have a hyphenated identity imposed upon them – being Blackbrits and Jamericans, never allowed to simply be British, American, or Canadian – they have made their entry; the rest can be changed in time through constantly recreating this identity through political involvement, even through participating in the national literary scene. But the first step is making the entry. I will discuss this concept of making an entry in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

While Goodison wonders why these displaced peoples continue to leave their emplacements to seek out their own place somewhere else, Appiah offers an answer. Appiah argues that “[w]e have always been a traveling species” (215) and that “the history of the human species [is] a process of globalization” (216). Edward S. Casey says relatively the same thing, noting that “[h]uman beings are among the most mobile of animals. We are beings of the between, always on the move between places” (xii). Perhaps we can even consider, then, this history of colonialism as highlighted in Goodison’s poem, as dark and sinister as it was, as part of this process of globalization. This does not amend past wrongs, but merely affords an answer for present questions and future outcomes – we are moving toward mobile cosmopolitan existences not simply because of wrongs inflicted by colonialism, but because this is our human instinct. And indeed, our present transnational condition seems to attest to this fact: from the trading of goods to the merging of cultural beliefs and customs, our geopolitical reality displays that we are daily living a global existence within our local position. Due to these changes, further expedited by waves of immigration as well as developments in transportation, the local has been irreversibly changed: the local is constantly impacted and affected by the



global. I am Canadian, but my twin brother – who is also Canadian – lives in Germany and I can easily get to him within a nine hour flight, providing that I have the financial means and that my passport is valid. Moreover, within Canada I can buy coffee, chocolate, and bananas to eat – all commodities that we, due to inhospitable Canadian climates and soils, cannot produce here. The global is interacting with the local on all sides. Both examples I have given, however, resort back to money; herein lies the negative wrinkle of imperialist economic globalization – that it benefits only those who have money or financial independence. It is within the social relations aspect of globalization, then, that the positive effects which I have been discussing exist. Although there may be concerns that breaking down the concepts of national belonging and citizenship will displace people and sever ties, the reality is that transnationalism and globalization allow more ties to be formed and rather than driving us apart, pulls us all closer together. It is precisely through maintaining ties that Dabydeen and Goodison render borders as arbitrary and porous and defy conventions of national belonging. They do this not just in their initial crossing through immigration, but in their adoption of a transnational existence that expands beyond borders, defying and negating them.

### Transgressing Borders: Transnational Connections

The immigrant is by definition one who has left his or her place of birth and has made a life in another country. The immigrant, therefore, is one who has crossed borders and defied conventional notions of national belonging. What is more, many immigrants have not made only a single border-crossing, but have made a life in the face of multiple

displacements and migrations. For this reason, according to Keumjae Park, immigrant identities “cannot be captured by traditional definitions of identity constructs such as nation, ethnicity, and culture as fixed and exclusively bounded categories” (203). As “[t]ransnational identities have various dimensions and are organized diversely” (Park 203), they elude conventional definitions of identity.<sup>15</sup> In contemporary anthropological research, such border-crossing groups as Caribbean, Mexican, and Chinese immigrants, for whom “transnationalism has become a routine way of life,” are referred to as “transmigrants,” marking their “high mobility across borders” (Park 204).

Working within Michael Kearney’s definition of transnational,<sup>16</sup> Park acknowledges that transnational identities, with their “simultaneous occupancy in multiple locations crossing national borders,” generate “a subversive space whereby immigrants resist the inscription into the hegemonic structures of nation-states” (204).<sup>17</sup> It

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<sup>15</sup> The reasons for transnational existences range from personal choice, “familial obligations” or are grounded in “multi-national production work and labour relations” (Park 203). One main reason is to relocate, however, is to escape adverse living conditions elsewhere, such as poverty or political oppression.

<sup>16</sup> Kearney defines transnational as “the political, social, and cultural practices, whereby citizens of a nation-state construct social forms and identities that in part escape from the cultural and political hegemony of their nation-states” (174).

<sup>17</sup> One subversive space generated by transnationalism, according to Park, is within the field of anthropology and academia, wherein “the study of transnational identity processes is creating a theoretical space to reconceptualise and elaborate social groups,

is within this subversive space that members of the diaspora can create a place where they can belong. Because these dominant discourses work to exclude immigrants, if the members of the diaspora are to actually enter through the interstices, they cannot enter into the system that excludes them, but must change the system in a way that creates an opening. This concept of making an entry into the host-country is going to be the topic of my fourth chapter; however, because this process begins with a new concept of self and belonging, it is significant to mention within this present discussion. Moreover, this space is where the poetry of Dabydeen and Goodison falls or enters.

The ways in which immigrants “define their social locations and identities,” as Park suggests, “often transgress geographical boundaries, as their sense of belonging stretches over several *imagined communities* in the [host country] and beyond” (201). This tendency to adopt new national ties and belonging in the host country while maintaining allegiance and ties to the birth country is defined by Park as “cognitive border-crossing,” which allows immigrants to “fluidly organize multiple reference groups and sustain multi-layered allegiance” to both the host country and home country (201-202). The result of this multiplicity is a double consciousness, or in the case of Dabydeen and Goodison a triple consciousness. This fracture occurs, as Huebener notes, because one’s understanding of self is “understood in relation to place,” and therefore the members of the diaspora are faced with “a complex set of identificatory relationships with at least two places – the homeland and the hostland” (617). Dabydeen displays this dual allegiance in “Parturition,” wherein the speaker recounts: “[h]ands born there, feet

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communities, geographical units, and identity dynamics within interpenetrating local and transnational processes” (205).

sticking out / from the greenery” (62). The emphasis on the “there” and “out” suggests a connection to two places, mirroring the connection between homeland and hostland. This cosmopolitan existence – having feet grounded in one place with hands reaching out to other places – produces within the speaker the feeling that he and his people

fly again to that blessed country,

yearning for our beginnings.

We splay out our feet –

and the old mother

with hands jutting out, with elbows

bent like the crescent moon,

understands how we feel.

(62)

Being bent in two ways at once generates a fractured existence between the “here” and “there,” and results in the individual taking defining factors from each, which in turn requires a new form of identity that allows for this fracture within the self, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The best depiction of this transnational existence is that of familial ties and obligations as displayed through familial connection and remittance. Dabydeen best depicts emotional attachment and familial connection in “Spaces.” The speaker of the poem recounts “this throbbing of the heart, / and saying I love you / while we are far apart” (235). This emotional connection across distances factors into the identity of the speaker, as he declares that there is

nothing  
to say any more

save for the memory  
of who we are,  
from a far distance

if only still close-up.

(235)

The memories of the life back in the birth country are still an integral part of who the speaker is, precisely because he is still tied to that life through familial connection. In “Offspring” the speaker notes that he is “far away,” but that he returns to his country of birth “every three years” and notices “a few strange / ones around” (47). These strange ones are the children “holding on / to frocks, skirts” (47) that have been born in his absence. The speaker greets these new members of his family by “[taking] them up in [his] arms” and presenting “[s]ome storehouse of affection” (47). Because this is said to be a visit the speaker makes every three years, this visit to the birth country is a regular occurrence that is part of his life in his host country. The routine is further emphasized when the speaker states that he “will return again / after another three years / expecting more strange faces” (47). Similar sentiments of an un-severed connection to the birth country are portrayed in “Dubious Foreigner.” The speaker begins the poem by stating that “there is no doubt / where I come from” (124). Although he may call his current country home, he constantly displays his Guyanese identity to others and does not allow

himself to forget where he is from. The speaker reaffirms this connection to the birth country as being a significant part of his life in the host country when he recounts that even as “[a] dollar-value citizenship card / bulges out / against [his] hide of skin,” that he still “repeat[s] history / to [him]self / once in a while –” (124). In other words, he reminds himself of the history, culture, people, even some of the aspects of himself that he has left behind, but in remembering them, he always takes them with him in this new landscape. The official citizenship card alone cannot change his allegiance to both places at once.

Similar familial connections or ties can be seen in Goodison’s poetry as well. In “Aunt Alberta,” the speaker remarks on her Aunt who, though living “faraway from life in a sun-lit green Jamaican village” in Canada, is living “in service, taking orders; a saint remitting / money and care-parcels for an entire village” (21). A remittance<sup>18</sup> is a “sum of money or (formerly) a quantity of an item transferred from one place or person to

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<sup>18</sup> *IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development* estimates in their 2006 brochure “Sending Money Home” that remittances to developing countries were estimated at “US\$300 billion” (3) for 2006. They highlight in this brochure the growing attention remittance is gaining, and outline that “[t]oday, the impact of remittances is recognized in all developing regions of the world, constituting an important flow of foreign currency to most countries and directly reaching millions of households – approximately **10 per cent** of the world’s population. The driving force behind this phenomenon is an estimated **150 million migrants** worldwide. They sent some **US\$300 billion** to their families in developing countries during 2006, typically US\$100, US\$200 or US\$300 at a time, through more than **1.5 billion** separate financial transactions” (2, their emphasis).

another. Also: the action of transferring money, etc., to another place or person” (*OED*).

The engagement in remittance is an even stronger connection than the emotional one displayed in Dabydeen’s poem, solidified through continual visits. The financial support of family members by the money “Aunt Alberta” earns in Canada causes a solid economic connection to be formed between the two countries – the sending and receiving country. According to Steven Vertovec, transnational immigrant connections formed through remittance “are contributing to the reinstitutionalizing of local and national structures of development” (170), because, in a “cumulative way” these “migrant transnational practices” are “modify[ing] the value systems and everyday social life of people across entire regions” (152). Moreover, for the immigrant individual in question, he or she is subject to a “dual orientation” or a “bifocality” by having “a life world oriented to, or grounded in, more than one locality” (Vertovec 155). More than merely physically crossing borders, the act of remittance and transnational existence renders borders arbitrary and futile, so that the politics of exclusion inherent in borders become moot, or at least hold less power over the immigrant individual. By depicting this transnational and cosmopolitan existence within their poetry, Dabydeen and Goodison are reconceptualising what belonging to a nation looks like from an immigrant consciousness, and are exposing these constructs of nation and citizenship as no longer efficient for articulating belonging and identity in the current globalized climate.

## National and Minority Literatures

It is significant that Goodison and Dabydeen's attempts to rearticulate the concepts of citizenship, nation, and belonging are ventured through the medium of literature, for it is by deconstructing the national literature that they can get to the very root of discourses that ground these concepts. As Donna Palmateer Pennee adamantly declares, "[m]inoritized literatures remind us that nations are made, not born, and are thus open to refashioning" (78). The importance of literature in the overall discussion of citizenship and the nation is not lost on Pennee, as she notes that "[j]ust as the category of the nation remains important, so too the category of the literary remains crucial to think with as a specifically *cultural* practice" (79). Culture, and literature as a cultural practice, "represent ourselves to ourselves," says Pennee, and therefore "the literary can perform work that cannot be performed elsewhere in the social" (79). Likewise, Lianne Moyes underscores the link between nations, citizenship, and the literary, stating that literature is "a site for the interaction and regulation of citizenship," and as such, it "can reinvest the public relation and challenge the practices and discourses through which citizenship is made intelligible and thereby legitimized" (Moyes 112). Literature can also "[make] legible the inconsistencies, oversights, and injustices of state-regulated citizenship, and in developing forms of critical cultural knowledge about the relation between subject and state" (Moyes 112). However, because the immigrant is not perceived as "inherently Canadian," as was discussed earlier in this chapter, diasporic individuals and diasporic writing fall through the cracks of the national literary canon. This canon, according to Pennee, "represents an exclusionary production of majoritized, normative values," and



therefore minorities are, for the most part, “kept out of the national canon” (81). Mariam Pirbhai makes almost exactly the same claim: “like the ideological trappings of a discretely hierarchized multicultural mosaic, the [diasporic] writer is both homogenized and kept at arm’s length from the dominant culture and its literary canons” (387). Lily Cho attempts to offer a reason for why “minority literatures in Canada” are “contested sites of the uneasiness,” stating that with their “claims to specificity,” these literatures “[threaten] the coherence of the field” and deconstruct the notion of “the unified subject and [...] a unified national literary culture” (94). Yet, Cho poses this deconstruction as positive and necessary, for a homogenized national literature is not possible in Canada and a homogenized national literature does not actually reflect the nation.

Indeed, a unified national literature is undesirable, or worse destructive. As Robert Kroetsch argues in his essay “Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy,” it is precisely because “Canadians cannot agree on what their metanarrative is” that Canadian literature, in its very “falling-apart,” is what “holds our story together” (355). If there was unity there would be no room for change and development, and as Canada is constantly changing, so too must its literature be able to change with it. The fact that there are many absences in our national literature, then, is room for improvement. This is not to take the matter too lightly, however, as Cho is right to note that “[t]hese are not simply questions of inclusion or exclusion,” but are much bigger questions that probe into “the unresolved relation between minority and majority literatures in Canada” as well as “between the competing demands of citizenship and the desires of [the] diaspora” (94).

What conventional notions of citizenship demand, however, are contrary to the desires of the diaspora because those notions work to exclude diasporic individuals from

belonging in a country they call home. By redefining national belonging through adopting a cosmopolitan citizenship, Dabydeen and Goodison are able to bypass these boundaries of citizenship and belonging. Unlike citizens who only belong to one country, members of the diaspora are more open to the possibilities of space and place, for they are not confined to any one nation or place. In the end, then, the wandering cosmopolitan has a concept of home that cannot be as easily discounted or infringed upon, and by denying established boundaries, cosmopolitans display themselves as above boundaries, or at least that boundaries cannot actually fence them in or keep them out.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Chameleon Existence, Identity in Transition

*“Change if you must, just change slow”*  
– Lorna Goodison (CTS 61)

The emergence of the cosmopolitan citizen causes changes to the concepts of national belonging and citizenship. This new form of citizenship not only rearticulates conventional notions of belonging to a nation and to a single place, but also requires a new perception of identity through which to engage this un-rooted or multi-rooted existence. To be able to belong anywhere, or to be able to create a place for oneself anywhere, requires the ability to adapt to any new environment. It is this concept of adaptation and change that leads me to consider an apt metaphor for this identity in transition that works in unison with the cosmopolitan identity – that of the chameleon. Patrick Imbert regards the chameleon as a metaphor which is “replacing the metaphor of the root” (n. pag.), as the immobility of roots does not reflect emerging concepts of identity and belonging in this increasingly transnational<sup>19</sup> and globalized world. While I am unwilling to jettison the usefulness of the roots metaphor, I agree that this metaphor

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<sup>19</sup> I’m using transnational here in the way that Aihwa Ong defines it: “transnationality” being viewed as “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” (4), and “transnationalism” is defined as “the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of ‘culture’” (4).

has also transformed within our contemporary environment.<sup>20</sup> This new concept of roots, as was discussed in the last chapter, works in unison with the new identity concept of the chameleon.<sup>21</sup> One of Imbert's claims that I do strongly agree with, however, is that the metaphor of the chameleon, unlike the metaphor of roots, works to "evoke identities in permanent transition" (n. pag.). It is this notion of permanent transition, not just a single transition, that works best with Dabydeen and Goodison's poetry. From a historical forced displacement to eventual willing immigration, their diasporic identities have changed multiple times, and within their poetry it is clear that the personal identities of these two poets – displayed through animated speakers – are still in the process of transforming.

Although transformation seems to suggest instability, and becomes what Ashley Bourne regards as a "central paradox," which is that "one longs for stability, a fixed sense of place and self, but that one is also compelled to perpetual motion, seeking out those

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Clifford came up with a very useful alternative to roots in his book "Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century" (1997). Instead of being rooted, he depicted a world 'en route,' yet where he focuses on travel and translation, my focus on the chameleon is on *transformation*.

<sup>21</sup> The history of the word chameleonic refers to the animal chameleon and the plant chamomile, which are related etymologically (*OED*). The first part of both words goes back to the Greek form *khamai*, meaning "on the ground." The majority of chameleon species are arboreal – meaning that they live in trees – a fact which allows the chameleon identity to work well alongside rooted cosmopolitanism: that the chameleon (individual) is highly mobile, but still relies on something rooted and grounded for its existence.

spaces where place and self will stabilize” (Bourne 109), instability is not evident in Dabydeen and Goodison’s poetry. There is no destabilizing paradox between the desire for stability and motion (to be rooted as well as mobile) within Dabydeen and Goodison’s poetry, because they are not trying to convey a stable sense of place and self, but rather they embrace the uprooted life in constant transition. In a sense, perpetual motion is the stable element, as the one constant in their lives is change. Even if the end goal is some sort of stability or revelation that one knows one’s self and one’s place in the world, this goal is something that can never actually be reached, if transformation is the only constant. We are never done transforming until we die. The identity construction depicted in Dabydeen and Goodison’s poetry, then, is closer to what Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn calls transitional identity, or “transitoriness.” Her term “transitoriness” incorporates “‘exile,’ ‘emigration,’ ‘immigration’ and ‘displacement’” (33), and she further remarks that transitional identity “strives to reflect the chaos of states always in flux, incessantly open to the influence of motion, hence constantly modified by the experiences which act on them” (35). This life of perpetual change that the immigrant lives (although one could argue all of humanity lives a life of constant change) is the reason that Paul Huebener claims that diasporic writing “problematiz[es] the idea that identity can be understood as a pure, stable, or inwardly-generated quality by drawing attention to the ways in which identity is always negotiated, performed, or subject to transformation” (615). If one’s identity is always in a state of transformation, then it is always in the process of becoming. This process, therefore, as Keumjae Park explains it, ensures that identity formation after migration “is not an event that comes to a completion,” but rather is “an on-going process in which migrants engage in life patterns and social relationships

linking their settlements” in their host countries “and their communities of origin through routinized economic, social, and cultural connections” (201). Ashley Bourne comes to a similar realization, declaring that “the fluid process by which identity is formed and reformed [...] will never reach a final static form” (113), which ensures that “identity and place are always in a state of becoming” (Bourne 123). It is this constant state of becoming that I am referring to by the term ‘chameleon identity’ – identity in transition. This is not, however, a natural transition over the course of time, like aging and physical development, but is a transition that is consciously chosen – it is an active part of identity construction.

### Why the Chameleon?

The chameleon is the most apt metaphor of transition to use in this project because, unlike the transformation of the seasons as depicted through trees and plant life, or the transformation of life cycles often portrayed through the metaphor of the butterfly, the chameleon’s transformations are voluntary and impermanent: the chameleon is constantly susceptible to retransformation. Unlike rooted trees which are ushered into transformation by the changes in the seasons, or the butterfly which cannot change back into a caterpillar, a chameleon can change colour at a whim and just as easily change back or adopt a new hue. More specifically, the chameleon changes to suit its environment, which makes the chameleon not only capable of transformation, but also able to travel to the multiple locations to which it must adapt. It is this adaptation to an

environment<sup>22</sup> and ability to blend in anywhere that is especially appealing for this project, because it also reflects the earlier discussion of cosmopolitanism: if one can change to fit in anywhere, then one can belong anywhere. Although the chameleon metaphor can be used to refer to inconsistency and some other negative connotations of defense and survival, there is a push within Dabydeen and Goodison's poetry to see this transformation in a positive way. They do not portray speakers who are trying to blend-in to their environment so that they no longer stand out as different, but embrace transformation as a positive, generative aspect of human life: transformation for them is not about merely surviving, it is about *thriving*.

As the speaker of "Parturition" resorts to reptilian descriptions of his people – they "take turns by the charcoal- / watered creek, we slither and crawl" (62) – the metaphor of the chameleon becomes a fruitful one to use for the type of existence that Dabydeen is portraying. This connection to the chameleon becomes even more apparent in "Changing," where the speaker relates: "I gather the heat / in all my cells / I forge with every ounce of flesh" (109). The illusion of change occurring on the cellular level offers an easy link back to the chameleon, as the colour of pigmentation occurs within the skin cells. This similar imagery is evoked in Goodison's "Vincent and the Orient," wherein

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<sup>22</sup> There are "approximately 160 species" of chameleons, and their distribution has grown to include "Spain and Portugal, across south Asia, to Sri Lanka," and they have been "introduced to Hawaii, California and Florida" (*The Daily Journal*, n. pag.). Their ability to adapt and survive in these foreign regions works well to cement the chameleon as a metaphor for the displaced diasporas.

the speaker muses over the “familiar things” which “turn transcendent,” and that this process, the “transforming of elementary things,” occurs in a “flash [of] primal pigments” (*GW* 109). The mention here of pigments – like the gathering of heat in cells in Dabydeen’s poem – makes the link to the chameleon an easy one to make. The use of the word “gather” in Dabydeen’s poem also situates this cellular transformation as an act of will or purpose; the transition is a choice, not something forced upon the individual. Moving away from any negative images of defense and hiding, this transformation allows for strength and hope. As the speaker moves from reptile into bird imagery, he suggests that this transformation signifies freedom:

I moult, bird-like  
anew, as never before  
heart pulsating –  
  
my future’s self  
again aloft  
in the frenzy of breathing.

(109)

Moulting here can still refer to reptilian transformation, as most reptiles, including chameleons, moult their skin to rid them of the old skin and adopt the new.<sup>23</sup> This perpetual process of moulting, aside from the colour changes, situates the chameleon even more firmly as an animal in constant transition. It also works as a metaphor of

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<sup>23</sup> This is an ongoing process, one in which all animals partake; even we humans shed skin cells and renew our entire skin surface every 28 days.



leaving behind the old for the adoption of the new, a concept that I will approach again in the fourth chapter. By describing this constant transition as “birdlike,” the speaker assures that the element of freedom is connoted here – birds having the freedom of flight and the freedom of mobility across borders, land, and place. The mixing of the metaphor of transformation and the freedom of flight signifies that this ability to transform, like a bird’s ability to fly, affords a certain amount of freedom within the self. This freedom enters with the word “anew.” The pulsating heart and the frenzy of breathing does not signify terrified prey that must blend in to its environment for protection, but instead signifies an animated figure full of the vibrancy of life; an individual who excitedly reports: “I gather them up again / for a renewed self” (109). Much like the moulting of reptile skin, we as human beings shed aspects of our identity that no longer articulate us, and acquire new ones. This is a process, like moulting, that will occur over and over again.

The individual transformations are impossible to deny, but there are other transitions alluded to as well in “Parturition.” The reference to the “chameolonic world” – meant to evoke the word chameleonic (the spelling of the word having transitioned) – suggests a world in transition, not just individuals. Indeed our world is constantly changing, especially within our contemporary context of an increasingly globalized and transnational world. If the national structures and global interactions are all in transition, then we as participants in these national and global structures must also learn to change with them. Or perhaps, the theory should be stated the other way around: because people are in constant transition, we are causing the world and governing structures to change with us. The speaker of “Parturition” seems to be suggesting the latter when he notes that

“in the midst of more space / We take turns” (62). Although I believe the speaker is specifically referring to artists in this poem – the ones who breed change by producing art that forces the world to acknowledge it, this is true of human history in general: cultural zeitgeists become a catalyst for social change.

The same desire for change can be seen in Goodison’s “The River Mumma Wants Out.” The poem opens with the question, “[y]ou can’t hear? Everything here is changing. / The Bullrushes on the river banks now want / to be palms in the King’s garden” (54). The poem proceeds to relate the change of desires, as the phrase “no longer wants” is repeated twice. The phrase of negation is followed by a phrase of new declaration: “she wants.” The speaker opens up this concept of change to a larger group than just the folkloric River Mumma with her “fish torso” like a mermaid. Indeed, these desires of River Mumma could be shared by all immigrants: the desire to “go on tour overseas, / go clubbing with P. Diddy, experience snow, / shop in those underground multiplex malls;” it is the desire to “[g]o away” (54). Although these desires appear superficial and fantastic, the underlying sentiment is very real: humans in general have a desire for change. Whether on a small scale of everyday decisions such as food and dress, or on a larger scale such as immigrating to a new country, change is a very real part of who we are as human beings.

The first line of “River Mumma” speaks to this aspect of change being a reality of life, stating that the “Bullrushes on the river banks now want / to be palms in the King’s garden” (54). This line is preceded by the line “Everything here is changing” (54). Through the use of the word “want,” however, this change is depicted as a choice. The desire for change in the people in this poem is a conscious choice to leave the birth

country. And yet, this very declaration automatically incites the question: what about those who do not choose to leave? Goodison and Dabydeen are writing from a unique perspective, being themselves willing participants in immigration. And yet, they also come from a lineage or historical line of people that were not given the choice to leave their homelands, but were displaced by slavery and indenturship.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this “want” in Goodison’s poem can also be read as a want of agency and self identity – having been displaced, the individual is forced to discover him/herself in this new, unnatural and foreign environment.

That this “want” in the poem refers to a lack is further emphasized by the line break positioning “want” as the final word to focus on – these people want – and the elision merely connects this “want” to the artificiality of palms in the King’s garden. Being uprooted from one location and placed in another would generate a natural want in a person – not loss of identity through mobility, as I discounted in the first chapter, but the desire to discover one’s self and to be able to dictate who that self is and on one’s own terms in order to take back some aspect of power that was lost in the original

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that slavery and indentureship fall under completely the same category. As Dirk Hoerder explains it, “Indian and Chinese indentured laborers [...] from the 1830s until the 1930s were assigned to work by contract, all had to make decisions under conditions of extreme economic hardship and dependency on their masters” (18). On the other hand, “[s]laves and forced laborers lost their power to decide upon their capture” (18). Although indentured laborers did have more choice than slaves, the circumstances of their displacement were not based on free choice, and therefore both groups were displaced against their will.

displacement. Perhaps it is because of this lack of identity that many of these displaced people in the Caribbean diaspora leave to search for what will fill this absence. Unlike those who decide to regress or go back for fill this want – to re-discover history and roots, what Edward Glissant calls “Reversion”<sup>25</sup> – Dabydeen and Goodison move forward to a new destination. Canada, for Dabydeen and Goodison, is a destination arrived at by choice, while the Caribbean is a place with a history of a lack of choice. Canada, then, becomes the fruitful soil in which they can implant themselves and create an identity and a life entirely of their own choosing. This is not to say that the past and origins do not factor into this new identity, they most certainly do, but that this identity is one that is always changing and always in the process of being created: identity is always in the process of becoming.

### Historical Change, or a World in Transition

A chameleon identity is actually more truthful to the reality of human history – humanity *is* change and is constantly in flux. The transitions of human history are not big cathartic moments of obvious up-rise against injustice resulting in change for the better. Instead, they are slow, arduous processes which take place over long periods of time, such as the abolition of the slave trade or the Women’s Rights Movement, which

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<sup>25</sup> Glissant defines reversion as “the obsession with a single origin” which “negate[s] contact” (16). Instead, those who embrace reversion never create a place of belonging for themselves, and are “destined to face bitter memories of *possibilities* forever lost” (17). The focus on the past, then, is destructive and stifling.

arguably are still in the process of becoming, meaning that the ideals of these movements have still not been fully achieved. It is too soon to tell what the cultural zeitgeist will become, but I am confident that the movements towards new perspectives on citizenship or belonging and immigration is a significant issue contributing to our current zeitgeist, and is a very necessary concern for our contemporary national and global policies. And yet, to take a step back again from the larger political implications of such changes, there exists the reality of the many global changes that have impacted people's everyday lives. Much of this change can be linked back to colonial fallout, and these changes manifesting in globalization and transnationalism speak to past wrongs, present concerns, and hope for future change.

That change or transition is an innate part of human existence is evident in the changes that occur over time on a societal, cultural, and national level – changes which govern the shifting dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and belonging. It is important to note that not all change presupposes inclusion, for change assumes an adoption of the new and a leaving behind, or an alteration of the old, which necessarily presumes exclusion. What transition does suggest, however, with its orientation towards the new, is potential for positive progress. In the poem “Meeting,” Dabydeen offers a very appropriate representation of societal, cultural, and national changes that impact personal identity formation – namely that the speaker feels ‘left behind’ or excluded. The first and most immediate identity in question is that of the speaker. In the opening of the poem, the speaker recounts that he has “dated this girl / from Bombay” who assuredly declares that “she’s a Parsee; she doesn’t / blink an eye” (23). Unlike the speaker, this girl is self-assured about her identity: she does not even “bat an eye,” as the saying goes, or does not

even have to think twice about who she is. This grounded certainty of the Parsee girl regarding her identity emphasizes the contrasting uncertainty of the speaker's own identity. The speaker's disorientation morphs into disillusionment and exclusion as the connections to his origins and this part of himself are severed when

The Punjabi who has sheared  
his long hair and no longer  
wears a turban, who has since  
been to Liverpool and Dublin

informs the speaker that he is a "hundred years / behind" (23). The origins the speaker is seeking, then, are "imaginary origins," to refer back to the title of Dabydeen's collection. The speaker is seeking something that no longer exists, or for a part of himself that is not real – or more accurately, is imagined. Yet, as he "long[s] to take" the Parsee girl, "in [his] arms" (23), he displays his desire for a connection to this past history and his origins, but knows that "the Tower of Silence" (23) would come between them.<sup>26</sup> This tower of silence is the realization that different cultures, religions, and histories have separated these people: "the indentured / system has separated [them]" (23). The speaker's history is a past of indentureship and exploitation – a history that this Parsee girl does not and cannot share. The emphasis in this poem is not on the inability to connect to those who do not share the speaker's history, however, but on the way that

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<sup>26</sup> The Tower of Silence also refers to the Parsee practise of disposing of their dead by leaving their bodies on top of a tower – called the Tower of Silence – and allowing them to be eaten by carrion birds. Thus Dabydeen is also referring to the girl's religion, sense of history, and to the place of tradition and the dead in her culture.

history has separated the speaker from his origins and has created a divide that can never really be crossed. The place of origins has transitioned, and so too must the speaker's concept of his place of origins change, which in turn causes his own identity to transform as well. In the end, identity cannot be based on an imaginary origin, on a displaced birthplace, or on a foreign host-land; it must be an amalgamation of all and none at the same time. Just as the individual, with every new experience and every new encounter constantly changes, so do these identities of culture and nation. No identity is fixed; every identity is in a constant state of becoming.

As these changes cause the speaker to question his own identity, he is inflicted with a double or triple consciousness. It is within this divided self, however, or this in-between state of belonging and unbelonging that the speaker is able to transition to begin with. This fractured consciousness is depicted well in "Foreign Legions," wherein the speaker recounts:

I gather all the selves mirrored in the display  
of leaves, and one moment is more fragmentary  
than all the others, as water again scuttles,  
displaying ripples like oblivion.

(137)

The depiction of double consciousness in this poem is unlike W.E.B. Du Bois' depiction, which he describes as the tormented struggle of an individual living in "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness," and as a struggle between "two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (214-215). For the speaker in Dabydeen's poem, this "whirling

with shadows” is experienced “without anxiety” (137). The speaker regards this process as one that lets

the dreams take over, let[s] the tides  
vanquish all others while I wait  
for the rebirth far ahead –  
the moment’s mammoth start.

(138)

This “mammoth start” is the beginning of change-set-in-motion by “the desire to traverse / whole landmarks” (137). The speaker confesses that he is “scuttled or going beyond” and states: “I contain myself with a tropical burning” (137). This desire for home and place within the speaker, even while embracing his new surroundings, kindles into something smouldering and perhaps offers insight into Dabydeen himself: he too has multiple desires and allegiances aflame within him. Fortunately, through the medium of his poetry, Dabydeen does have a means of expressing these desires, and the message underneath every word holds the potential to blaze into a beacon for change.

There is no doubt that Dabydeen portrays speakers who are grappling with their identities – his own consciousness divided among his Indian origins, his Guyanese born history, and his Canadian immigrant existence – however, all of these essential aspects of his identity create a generative tension rather than a negative force. In the introduction to this collection *Imaginary Origins*, Dabydeen, remarks that this “heterogenous” or “hybrid consciousness” (12) has been experienced as a positive opportunity for self discovery, not as a victimized position of “loss and dislocation” (11). It is *through* this fractured identity that Dabydeen can find and ground himself and overcome any feelings of dislocation or



disorientation. He further acknowledges that his “truest poetic self” can only be found “in the crossing of boundaries” and necessitates a “looking in different directions” (11). This need to look in multiple directions in order to understand the self further grounds the metaphor of the chameleon, as one of the most distinctive traits of chameleons is their eyes: with their upper and lower eyelids joined, they can rotate and focus separately to observe two different objects simultaneously. They are the only reptile whose eyes move independently from each other, allowing them to see in every direction around their body. Much like the chameleon who must look in two directions simultaneously, so too must immigrants in order to see a clear picture of themselves. It is this being forced to look outward to multiple places at once and toward potential for something wholly new instead of merely looking inward at an unsolvable problem that allows for this fractured identity to be generative: within these cracks and fractures is the possibility for change or transition.

Unlike Dabydeen’s portrayal of identity that transitions always toward the new and renders some past aspects obsolete, Goodison portrays a form of transition that is not only always occurring, but that is ‘always already’<sup>27</sup> in process. This concept goes

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<sup>27</sup> Derrida uses this term “always already” in *Of Grammatology* when discussing the work of Rousseau: “[t]hat substitution has always already begun; that imitation, principle of art, has always already interrupted natural plenitude; that, having to be a *discourse*, it has always already broached presence in *différance*; that in Nature it is always that which supplies Nature’s lack” (215, his emphasis). By this term “always already,” Derrida is insinuating a state of being already in existence, for if something is always already, then it already exists. “Already” indicates that there was a time before (as already is the break

beyond the constant state of becoming, developing more along the lines of Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence': this process of becoming is coming to the realization of what always already is, and not the production of something new that replaces past aspects of identity. This is a fruitful concept because it works to preserve all aspects that have shaped the self. It also affords a sense of stability to the concept of identity, because the individual isn't merely perpetually transforming into a new person with each new encounter, but is instead reconceptualising the self with each new revelation of a dormant aspect of the self that was always there to begin with. This holds true to the chameleon metaphor because the chameleon's body never actually changes, but in adjusting to its environment, is merely engaging with what already is: the world around it and its place in it. Goodison's "In the Field of Broken Pots" and "But I May Be Reborn As Keke" together display this identity in a state of becoming. In the first, the speaker opens the poem with a list: "[w]ater goblet, bitter cup or monkey jar" (CS 58). These various containers all represent self-formed identities, as the individuals who made the pots formed them with their own hands within the span of their lives. The link to life and death is made with the reference to the West African custom or tradition to break the pots of the deceased after death:

on the day I depart,  
women will gather my clay pots in the field  
where the vessels of all departed are smashed

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into the current moment) but if you are "always already into a new state" you have always been in this state of "already-ness" and are permanently suspended in this state of having moved from before to after. The "before" is lost to you, even though you know you must have come out of it.

so that the dead are never equal to the living.

(CS 58)

This poem discusses the inevitability of change over time that plagues the human life – we must all grow old and eventually face death, and the world must go on without us, maybe having been changed by our presence, but definitely continuing to change long after we are gone. Yet, this inevitability of change can also be seen as challenging conventional concepts of identity – challenging the idea that one’s identity is a sure and fixed thing. This inevitability of change is brought to the reader’s attention when the speaker declares that “each of us has been part of one / of the above; and that in time we’re bound / to become broken down into small shards” (CS 58). As the past tense is used along with the future, the speaker suggests a temporal transition, and the physical change of state of the pots reaffirms this transition. By the speaker stating that “each of us has been part of one,” the pots then become symbolic of personal identity rather than merely material possessions. Just like the handcrafted pots, one’s identity is something that one is constantly moulding throughout one’s life; it is handcrafted by the perpetual process of change. This handcrafted element is seen in the description the speaker gives of her pots:

The plain terra cotta rounded cooking pot  
patterned with my daughter’s palm print,  
the goblet I glazed with crushed gems, then  
sketched on with thorns.

(CS 58)

These very personal hand-crafted pots display the person who made them; they are representations of the self. More specifically, within this poem, the pot with the daughter's handprint is a physical reminder of personal lineage or generations, but also positions the daughter as an integral part of the mother's identity. However, as these pots are not handed down to the daughter after the death of the mother, but are broken, the pots are reaffirmed as an expression of personal identity over familial connection. They are broken because once that person has passed away, the person is gone, and these artifacts that display that person's identity must also depart. The breaking of the pots also displays an integral aspect of the "always already": suspension. As human beings, we live a life suspended in the state of having moved from before to after, but because all that we can perceive is the present – the always already – the before is lost to us. The pots are broken, then, because they, along with the person who crafted them, are no longer part of the present, but belong to the inaccessible before. The breaking of the pots also applies back to identity, because identities are personal or are a singular creation, and therefore cannot simply be handed down, but must be self-created: the daughter must create her own pots. Through the forming of these pots, the potters create places for themselves within the society – they are a visual representation that one exists, that one is there. Similarly, the self-fashioning of one's identity – specifically here immigrant identity – must make the same statement: in creating their identity, immigrants create a place for themselves to belong.

Although the metaphor of identities as clay pots seems to render these concepts of identity and belonging as fragile – capable of crumbling under the weight of change – I argue that Goodison is displaying a quality of strength in her revised notions of identity.

It is true that in declaring that this ritual is performed to ensure that the dead are never equal to the living, the speaker is acknowledging the finality of death that has put an end to the process – the process of self fashioning one’s identity, of making pots that are easily broken and no longer usable – and yet, the speaker does not accept this finality. When the speaker states that “[o]nly weaver birds, and ants who sip raindrops / from shards, will ever drink again from my pots,” and anxiously requests “O weaver birds and ants who drink raindrops / promise you will come as guests to sip of my pots” (CS 58), she defies this finality and un-usability. This is not to say that death is not final, but as these pots represent identity, the speaker – or perhaps it is more apt here to say Goodison – is advocating for a new way to view identity. Self-fashioned as it may be, identity is not a fixed and confining container, but is malleable. The fact that the pots have been broken and therefore cannot be used the way they were originally designed to be used speaks more to the concept of transformation than it does to an end: the pots are now being used by ants and birds. The identity of the speaker has changed into something different than what she originally formed, or she anticipates that it will, but this is not an image of destruction, it is an image of a transition into something different that is equally of use and valuable. I hesitate to say new here, because the pots themselves are not new, but their use has transitioned and they are now perceived in a different way – but even this new use is a potential that always already existed in their original formation.

Leaving the poem on a hopeful note of renewed use anticipates the poem that follows directly on the next page (in fact the layout of the poems side by side suggests

that they should be read together). This next poem, “May Be Reborn As Keke,”<sup>28</sup> displays the fruitfulness, not futility, in these broken pots and the ability to generate something useful out of that which was old and broken. This not only represents the malleability of identity and the possibility for transformation, but also that transformation is necessary and is productive. Just as the cycle of life and death occurs within any human being’s lifetime, so too does the constant transformation of identity occur throughout that same lifetime. The poem reads:

Keke, piece of broken pot  
used now as base to start new pot,  
culture of clay that went to fire  
and returned to function as talisman,  
keystone, sure-fire foundation  
of new water jar; made the age-old  
walk around way. Coiling the rolls  
to make cool water hold in smooth  
cheeked monkey jar. Keke, old heart  
of used pot, cast back on wood fire  
but flame proof this time, sure guide

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<sup>28</sup>In the Dictionary of Jamaican English, the word keke is used to refer to a kind of echoic sound, or a bark, cry, scream, howl derived from a reference to a croaking-lizard, but is also used for the act of and sound created from laughing, giggling, or cackling (*DJE* 258). This relation between lizard and human makes it easy to make the link to a chameleonic existence.

of new jar, shard of which will become  
in time, keke, most kneaded clay.

(CS 59)

As the broken piece of pot is used as the base to start a new pot, the generative cannot be ignored. Transition or change, then, does not signify an end, but rather signifies a beginning. Yet, this poem complicates such binary reasoning of old and new, beginning and end. The old broken pots do not just participate in the creation of the new, because the new is “made the age-old / walk around way.” The merging of old and new in this poem actually serves to break down the binaries represented: all of the new pots are made of old pots, and therefore everything new is indeed merely a refashioning of the old. As the same base elements are merely refashioned, these clay pots represent the anti-binary thinking of the ‘always already.’ More than that, as these base elements can be returned to a malleable state through fire and re-fashioned over and over again, the very concept of a stable and fixed identity gives way to malleability: “the shard of which will become / in time, keke, most kneaded clay.” By breaking down the binaries between old and new, beginning and ending, Goodison is calling all binaries into question, for it is really the existence of binary thinking that generates the politics of inclusion and exclusion. In breaking down these binaries, Goodison subtly calls into question the other binaries impacting her identity, and that of other immigrants: namely those of citizen and non-citizen, belonging and unbelonging. Yet, as this liminal space in-between the binary is so

generative in this poem, so too can the spaces between these other exclusory binaries be generative.<sup>29</sup>

It is in the ability of Goodison's new concept of identity to refuse conventional categorical thinking that its true strength lies. The merging of old and new in the poem works to display strength through the image of the broken remains that function as the "sure-fire foundation" for the new pots that must first be put through fire. When clay is soft it can be easily moulded, but once it is put in the fire of the clay oven, it becomes hard pottery that holds the moulded shape until it is destroyed. The fire lends strength and stability to the clay. Moreover, the specific wording "culture of clay that went to fire," arouses the image of a culture and people tried by fire,<sup>30</sup> an expression derived from the

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<sup>29</sup>The significance this thesis places on moving away from binary and dialectical thinking is grounded in its argument that the diaspora inhabit an in-between space which cannot be articulated through a dialectic. It is also a desire to move away from categorization and differentiation that binarisms presuppose. This shift is upheld by post-colonial studies, specifically Homi K. Bhabha who first discussed the subaltern existing within a liminal space who "unsettles any simplistic polarities or binarisms" (53). "The *anti-dialectical* movement" is seen as a significant transition for Bhabha, because it "subverts any binary or sublatory ordering of power and sign" (55).

<sup>30</sup>The term being "tried by fire" appears in 1 Cor 3:11-15, 1 Peter 1:6-7, Psalm 66:10 (which is quoted as an epigraph to Goodison's "Controlling the Silver"), and in Zech 13:9. All of these biblical passages speak of fire as a trial which makes the people who experience it more true (or what I would like to classify as a stronger, more stable person



practice of metallurgy. On the allegorical level, this trial refers to slavery and mistreatment, and suggests that the strong defiant people who survived and thrived have been tried by fire and refined. The sentiment achieved through this comparison is that with a history such as this, there is nothing that the African diaspora cannot survive. On a more literal level, the fire's ability to render solid matter into a soft elemental state allows for the re-fashioning of the new and for the bonding and the mixing of matter that manifests as a stronger and more stable pot. More commonly known in metallurgy as an alloy, the mixing of two metals together can produce a stronger, more resistant metal than a pure one.<sup>31</sup> In the same sense, the fractured identities of Dabydeen and Goodison become a sort of alloy created through the mixing of multiple identities, which strengthens rather than weakens them. Ultimately the merging of the old and new allows Goodison to overcome binaries and displays how the victim of slavery and the victor who overcame its horrors are still one and the same person. All past histories are part of one's identity, as well as any new factors that impact transition. But this person was always already all of these things and always will be.

The concept of identity being always already in transition offers a new way of looking at belonging, because if one always already is what one transitions into, then one always already has the potential to belong, one merely has to come to the realization of who knows who she or he is), like the metallurgical process of ridding metals of impurities making the metal more valuable.

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<sup>31</sup> An alloy is stronger than pure metal because in a pure metal all the atoms are the same size and ordered, but when another element is added it shifts the atoms making the layers harder to penetrate, therefore making the alloy stronger.

this potential.<sup>32</sup> This concept of identity in transition is best depicted in Goodison's "About the Tamarind." The poem opens with stanza after stanza describing all of the different uses of tamarind – food, medicine, ritual practice: "from root / to leaf tip my every part has been employed / to meet human need" (*TM* 15). All of the different roles the tree has played display its ability to transition depending on what need must be met. The tree is a good example of the 'always already,' because it is not really that the tree is always changing into something new, but that it has always already had this potential, which is merely being realized. The tamarind tree also works as a metaphor that merges the two metaphors I have been discussing all along: the chameleon and roots. Being a tree, it must take root in order to produce the tamarind fruit; however, having also been displaced, the tree is mobile and has taken root in new soil: "Rooted first in Africa, transplanted wherever / I can thrive" (14). The tamarind tree becomes an apt representation of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora because it has also been uprooted and displaced, but has been able to flourish despite its dislocation. The fact that the tree was successful at becoming rooted again works to show the resilience of the diaspora whose members have done the same thing. The tree has not merely taken root, but it is resilient – it thrives! The speaker, the tamarind tree itself, proudly declares:

I bear. Not even the salt of the ocean can stunt me.

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<sup>32</sup>Of course this works in the abstract; however, the issue of how receptive the host culture is complicates this concept of belonging. People cannot fully belong to a place whose inhabitants actively resist and reject them. The desire of this thesis to focus on the positive potential for transition and regeneration does not intend to undervalue the difficulty involved in these imaginative acts of self-creation and belonging.

Plant me on abiding rock or foaming restless waters.  
Set me in burying grounds, I grow shade for ancestors.  
O bitter weed and dry-heart tree, wait for me to bow.  
I hope you can wait. Rest in peace, Arawaks.  
I am still here, still bearing after five hundred years.

(*TM* 16)

The tree, like the members of the diaspora, has survived the treacherous Atlantic crossing, the harsh treatment on the plantations, and eventual re-integration into a free society after abolition. The mention here of the Arawaks speaks to the violent past of colonialism and the annihilation of an indigenous population,<sup>33</sup> but it also further points to the survival of the diaspora; in the same way their own population could have dwindled to the point of extinction, but they were resilient in the face of every hardship and the fortunate were able to survive them all. After all of the turmoil they endured, they were able to create a home and a life for themselves in this foreign and blood soaked soil, and they were able to thrive. If they could accomplish this here, then they could accomplish it anywhere.<sup>34</sup> The ability to create a place for themselves, then, is always

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<sup>33</sup>The arrival of the Europeans to the West Indies was the beginning of the demise of the Arawak and the Carib people. The Europeans brought with them smallpox and other diseases from Europe, and implemented harsh policies of enslavement, resettlement, and the separation of families.

<sup>34</sup> The reason why so much literature of the African diaspora (in Canada, the UK, the US) is about alienation, racism, and the total absence of thriving is because this is a reality not yet realized, or still in the process of becoming. That alienation and racism is still a

already a part of them, a part of their identity – this cosmopolitan existence is really the only existence they know, and because historically they have overcome so much and thrived in the face of unrelenting adversity, their ability to become rooted anywhere and to thrive is a latent potential that already exists within them. The diaspora, then, already has the potential to enter into Canadian society and to belong within the nation as well as within the national literature, but in order to do this its members must first endure the often long and arduous process of transition.

If I have portrayed this process of transition as simple, I will rectify that now. This process of transition does not depict “an individual as infinitely capable of painless self-invention” (Henighan 11), for re-invention requires a “painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 63). “We *can* reinvent ourselves” claims Stephen Henighan, “but at a price” (11), and he further notes that “[a]n important part of literature’s role is to assess that price: to dramatize the making of our individuality within the context of our history, to express the emotional and psychological stresses induced by this process” (11). This change can be first set into motion, then, through literature, because it is literature that articulates the need for change. Some, like Henighan, believe that change begins with the writer, for “[e]very writer is at first a reader” and is engrained with a “genetic code” of literary memory that “mutates to cope with environmental conditions” (9) and therefore sees the absences in his or her own era. Because the writer, “[r]ather than developing into

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present concern does not discount the fact that the members of the African diaspora can thrive anywhere, it merely illuminates that much work still needs to be done for belonging to be realized.

a variant species better suited to a warmer or cooler climate,” instead “evolves in opposition to his [or her] environment,” he or she “emerges as an antagonist to or subtle dissenter from the surrounding society” and strives “to write the books that are missing from the catalogue of literature” (Henighan 9).

Indeed, change *must* first begin, for Dabydeen and Goodison, on the literary level. What they aim to achieve with their poetry is to change the depiction of the diasporas and of minority literatures that is still missing from our literary catalogue. One of the most effective ways to change the engrained depictions of the diasporas that have been backed up by years of post-colonial scholarship is to change the discourse surrounding those diasporas. For Dabydeen and Goodison, this is a conscious effort to shift away from the victimization of diasporas to a celebration of them. In an effort to change the discourse, they work to overturn conventions: once they overturn what it means to be a citizen and to belong, and the conventional views of identity, they can then overturn stereotypes of the diaspora in order for positive change to come about. Once members of the diaspora overturn concepts of belonging and identity, they can then create a new diasporic identity on their own terms, free of stereotypes and misrepresentations, and create a space in which to belong. Once this self created identity is achieved, then the members of the diaspora can make an entry into the societies and institutions that have so far worked to exclude them – redefining the boundaries means redefining what gets included and excluded. If they can get the majority to see the concepts of identity, citizenship, and national belonging differently, this can lay the groundwork for seeing the excluded differently. Seeing members of the diaspora differently is the topic that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Making an Entry, Overturning Past Representations for a Positive Future

*“Imagining our ancestors stepping through these portals, one senses people stepping out into nothing; one senses a surreal space, an inexplicable space. One imagines people so stunned by their circumstances, so heartbroken as to refuse reality. Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable space”*

*Dionne Brand (Map  
20)*

To say that the immigrant has re-envisioned outdated concepts of citizenship and identity by adopting a cosmopolitan citizenship and a chameleon identity is not to suggest that past history and roots no longer have value. Within the work of Dabydeen and Goodison history undoubtedly does factor into their poetic discussion; however, they are representing this past in a more productive way than merely stagnantly dwelling on past wrongs. Instead of surrendering to the negative stigma of the victim of colonization, a stigma that post-colonial scholarship has at times perpetuated,<sup>35</sup> Dabydeen and Goodison

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<sup>35</sup> As post-colonial studies has been invaluable to the developments in thinking integral to the arguments of this thesis, and the field of post-colonial studies has changed quite fundamentally in the last 5 years, this comment does not seek to offer a stagnant and negative portrayal. The work of Homi K. Bhabha, for example, is integral to the arguments of this thesis, as he constantly locates agency in the in-betweenness of the post-colonial subject. His collection of essays, “The Location of Culture,” explores the subversive power of the postcolonial presence, not victimization. Bhabha is the first to speak to this generative in-between in his essay “Interrogating Identity.” He notes that “[i]t is not colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between

represent the past as something that informs a part of their history and identity, but that does not define it. Both poets acknowledge the past, but represent it as something they can use to progress. By choosing to be rooted in the present, they again inhabit a generative in-between space – between the past and the future – that affords an opening for change and reinvention, or chameleonic transition. They have the ability to do with this past what they will, and what they do is create their own identities and futures: they display the creative possibility of writing from within the diaspora rather than the confines and constraints such a writing position poses.

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter from Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* touches on two concepts that I will be discussing in detail in this chapter: the past and the concept of making an entry. For Dabydeen and Goodison, this entry is into the institutions which have previously excluded them. Brand suggests that living within the diaspora means living a paralyzing existence within a liminal space;

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that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness" (45). The colonial other is "positioned in the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist" (48), but this liminal space offers "a strategy of ambivalence in the structure of identification" which "occurs precisely in the elliptical *in-between*, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self" (60). Moreover, work in post-colonial studies in the last 5-10 years has focused quite a bit on agency and the power of imagination (see John Su, *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel*, Cambridge 2011). Also, the concept of cosmopolitanism integral to the argument of this thesis is an argument that gained traction thanks to post-colonial studies (Appiah, Gilroy, Said, Spivak et al). However, this does not counteract my argument that we need to move away from binary colonial thinking.

however, it is this space that holds the potential for change: within absence lies the potential for something to fill that absence. This paralyzed existence dictated by the past is what Dabydeen and Goodison are working against in their poetry, however, and by seizing this space and making an entry, they go about moving beyond paralysis: only by leaving this liminal space – passing through the door of no return, not remaining on the threshold – can they make an entry, and therefore only by leaving the colonial past behind can they move beyond the stigma of the postcolonial victim. This act of making an entry relates back to the larger discussion of place and belonging because by making an entry into Canadian institutions – society, literature, culture, etc. – members of the diaspora emplace themselves and establish their presence; they create a place in which they can belong. This entry can only be achieved once the boundaries and conventions that have previously excluded them have been re-envisioned, as was discussed in the last two chapters.

### The Reclamation of History and Memory: Writing-Back

History itself becomes another boundary that must be overcome before entry can be possible, for history has the potential to imprison members of the diaspora in a stagnant state that stunts transition and progress. History is frequently a pressing concern voiced in West Indian literature, and is therefore naturally addressed in Dabydeen and Goodison's work. The question that should immediately come to mind is how Dabydeen's and Goodison's depictions of history differ from the reclamation and re-writing of history that is customary in other post-colonial literature. The answer is



straight forward: their references to history are not attempts at reclamation or re-writing. To reclaim or re-write history implies a holding on and a looking back – i.e. a negative in-betweenness, or paralysis. Instead, what Dabydeen and Goodison achieve within their poetry is a moving beyond the past and the old through an active generation of the new. I do not mean to suggest here that the literary endeavours invested in reclaiming history and memory that emphasize loss and grief (i.e. Brand and countless others) were futile, they most certainly were not. What I am suggesting is that there was a time for such literature and criticism, a time when such methods were indeed helpful, but now that time has passed. In the introduction to *Borderlands*, Monika Reif-Hülser notes that the reclaiming of history and memory “deals with imaginary spaces emerging from temporal transitions such as access to the past by analyzing the present as it verges on futurity” (ix), and that through this act of reclamation, “historical consciousness and a sense of belonging” can be re-created as well (x). This reclamation of history and memory is heralded in past post-colonial scholarship as an essential shift in diasporic representation. Sociologist and Cultural Studies scholar Mike Featherstone declares in *Undoing Culture* that “‘the other’ seeks to speak back to us and to challenge our particular depiction of his or her world” (82). Perhaps better known as ‘writing back,’ these sentiments were stated earlier in Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths’s *The Empire Writes Back*, a widely studied – albeit widely criticized – post-colonial landmark. Ashcroft claimed that the “rereading and the rewriting of the European historical and fictional record [was] a vital and inescapable task at the heart of the post-colonial enterprise” (196). To be sure, the practice of writing back and representing the self did serve the very important function of deconstructing colonial stereotypes and harmful misrepresentations,

particularly in the literature and scholarship produced throughout the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. As this practice works to perpetually reaffirm difference and “otherness,” however, there is a need within current scholarship to move beyond these outdated post-colonial concepts, a shift which has undoubtedly already begun.<sup>36</sup>

Given the close ties between deconstruction and post-colonial studies, binary thinking has always been rigorously interrogated by major post-colonial theorists and scholars. One such scholar, Frank Schulze-Engler, even interrogates binary thinking *within* post-colonial studies, and regards much of post-colonial scholarship and literature that adheres to this “writing back” platform to be bartering in the “alterity industry” (9) – Edward Said’s *Orientalism* among them. These texts work to, according to Schulze-Engler,

effectively stifle those other voices from among the new literatures engaged in negotiating new boundaries beyond the spaces prescribed to them by the writing-back paradigm – voices engaged in talking about violence and democracy, fundamentalism and civil society, ethnic strife and human rights, freedom of speech and social change, individual responsibility and the transformation of collective identities. (9)

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<sup>36</sup> This change in discussing alterity and the new demands of po-co studies is the focus of Shameem Black’s *Fiction Across Borders* (Columbia 2010). Black asks a prevalent question that she returns to throughout the book: can one represent alterity without “doing violence to one’s object of description” (1)? This very important contemporary concern voiced by Black is at the heart of my discussion in this chapter.

These very voices that Schulze-Engler is concerned about are the voices of diasporic individuals and writers who want to refuse this stigma of victimization and the classification as “other,” voices such as those of Dabydeen and Goodison, who are participating in the creation of new literature outside of the confines or boundaries of binary post-colonial writing. The problem with perpetuating the notion of the victimized Other is that it removes agency, particularly because the theory behind this post-colonial representation “becomes the guarantor that the Other, the subaltern, the post-colonialized, is always already disenfranchised, his or her true voice unheard in the mechanism of its hearing” (Elliott 44). I will not suggest that disenfranchisement and inequality are not still prevalent, they indeed are; however, we need to look beyond the set-backs and begin to see the successes. This sentiment is echoed by Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn, who argues that “the Fanonian *arche-trace*, has proved to be so preoccupied with giving voice to the repressed Other that it has closed its eyes to the changes time has wrought in the subject of its valorization,” and therefore, that any “resistance” within these academic parameters “continues to be seen as an opposition pole, however elusive, to the seemingly total negation effected by the colonizing gaze” (29-30). What we need, then, is not just literature that highlights, queries, and deconstructs “the self-assured assumptions of the Western canon” (Ghosh-Schellhorn 30), but we also need a new academic discourse<sup>37</sup> through which to discuss this new literature.

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<sup>37</sup>The reimagining of current academic discourse and scholarship is discussed in great detail in Daniel Coleman and Smaro Kamboureli’s *Retooling the Humanities: The Culture of Research in Canadian Universities*. All of the essays in the collection discuss “the university’s adoption of the corporate model” (22), the challenges of the intensified

In the attempt to move away from past post-colonial discourse,<sup>38</sup> Schulze-Engler refers to this “new literature” as texts in “post-colonial transition” (12). What he means by this, is that these contemporary minority literatures constitute “a shifting emphasis: from a literary practice of ‘rewriting’ or ‘writing back’ aimed at the *exposition* of colonial misrepresentation towards a critical *exploration* and transformation of the local modernities that have come into existence in the formerly colonized parts of the world” (12, his emphasis). Schulze-Engler is not suggesting that these literatures represent a replacement of, or a dramatic shift away from some of these past practices and ideals of post-colonialism, but instead that this is a “long-term process which effectively entails the withering away of the ‘post-colonial’ and a growing concern with specific, local

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culture of research capitalism, and the future of the humanities. Within this same collection, Diana Brydon states in her essay “Do the Humanities Need a New Humanism,” that humanities scholars must be invested in “chang[ing] the thinking of circulating discourses at every level on which they operate” (258). And by being open to deconstruction, the humanities “carry the potential for this kind of imaginative renewal” (258).

<sup>38</sup> In the editorial introduction to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *ARIEL*, titled: “Thinking Through Postcoloniality,” Pamela McCallum identifies that the articles in this special issue are examining “urgent issues for contemporary postcolonial studies” and invite a “thinking through [of] the resources and strategies that postcolonial studies has developed and thinking through the impasses, absences and difficulties that confront contemporary scholarship towards a productive future” (4). These essays are indeed exceedingly valuable examples of the direction that postcolonial studies is now headed in.

modernities” (12). What this process is working towards, in other words, is something entirely new that exists outside of, or in spite of, the colonial past. For Dabydeen and Goodison, this is the creation of a literature that puts aside the victimized “other” of colonialism and makes way for a new, positive representation of the diasporas in and of themselves. They move away from the postcolonial victim by shifting focus from the history of colonial mistreatment to the present, with its own challenges and concerns, and by portraying diasporic literature as a literature that is evolving.

The discussion of the past in Dabydeen and Goodison’s poetry is productive because it is invested in a movement forward. In Dabydeen’s “Letter” the speaker declares: “I do not give up / easily: remembering / old words / like salted cod / in the penury of taste” (22). He then goes on to mention the history of slavery and indentureship, highlighting the history of wrongful mistreatment:

and the dim slaves

with their leather

tongues; the indentured

also grew accustomed

to neglect

in the humid heat.

Oh your historic mind –

(22)

Ending the poem on this note of “*your* historic mind” distances the speaker from its content. If the speaker meant himself, he would have said my historic mind, or perhaps our historic minds. This distancing language becomes even more prominent with the inclusion of “oh” before the sentence in question. The “oh” holds a note of condescension or sarcasm, almost blaming the historic mind that does not belong to the speaker. To re-read the stanza with the sentiments of the last line in mind, the history takes on a more matter-of-fact, almost rehearsed tone. That is because it *is* rehearsed, or at least repeated over and over again in the literature and scholarship that dwells on the past. Just as the slaves and indentured adapted to the inevitable neglect and mistreatment, members of the diaspora have grown accustomed to being differentiated as “colonized others,” incapable of escaping this defining colonial history. The historical account above is not self-pitying retrospection, but an assertion that the diaspora now needs to move beyond that historic mind, it needs to represent itself in a new light by creating a new literature<sup>39</sup> or new words that do not “remind [them] / of that country / where they eat men” (22). They can only achieve this by dwelling on present concerns and looking forward to the future.

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<sup>39</sup> The few writers that come to mind who are attempting to do this are Rita Wong, who focuses on current Canadian concerns, – namely redress and Aboriginal rights as well as environmental and sustainability concerns – and George Elliott Clarke who in essays such as “Must All Blackness Be American?” attempts to affirm a Black Canadian presence, and in his own work adamantly portrays his Canadianess, and Rohinton Mistry, who deftly portrays the current concerns and successes of immigrant and ethnic minorities in Canada, and works to re-define what Canadian literature is.

The necessity to look forward instead of back becomes more urgent in “Aqueduct,” wherein the speaker references colonial history, but also states that “we fashion: new cities, courtyards – / ourselves like pillars of salt – / redrawing the boundaries” (217). The pillars of salt mentioned are an allusion to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Genesis, wherein Lot is told to flee from the condemned city and not look back. Lot’s wife does look back, however, and is turned into a pillar of salt. By using this allusion, Dabydeen is suggesting that looking back is counter-productive, because it merely imprisons the looker in a fixed state: like a statue or a pillar. Looking at the past, then, really disallows the diaspora to move forward. I am not suggesting that Dabydeen believes that the past and history do not factor into the present, because he definitely does, otherwise he would not reference the past at all in his poetry. What he is doing, however, is displaying the futility of looking backward when it is much more productive to look forward. If the old literature no longer adequately represents the diaspora, then a new literature is required – in fact must be created.

Creation, here, is the key word, as it is by creating this new, personally defined diasporic identity that the diaspora will be able to create a place for themselves, for just as much as self is predicated on place, so too is place predicated on a sense of self – Canada does not make Canadians what they are, rather Canadians make Canada what it is. This creation aspect enters into Dabydeen’s “Aqueduct” through the use of the word “fashion,” which displays an active engagement, and it is an engagement that is focused on generating the new: new cities, new courtyards, and new selves. If the backbone of colonialism was built upon generating difference and establishing a hierarchy between people based on that difference, the colonial “other” is merely colonial fall out. It is

imperative, then, that members of the diaspora escape this “other writing back to the centre” stereotype if they are to truly escape colonialism. They must fashion new selves. This exhausted concept of the post-colonial “other” is further validated by the references to the past in this poem being set up to appear as “out of date,” for lack of a better term:

Far-off cries: ethnics crossing,  
shiploads at a time – Romanesque too –  
others pillaging the sluiced terrain,  
fish at the end of the line;  
this hook of ancestry (if you must know),  
catchment or making amends...

(217)

This “out of date” sentiment is apparent in the second line of the stanza, as the past – the history of slavery and colonialism – is equated to a Romanesque Aqueduct. As architecture has progressed, or perhaps transformed is a better choice of word, significantly since the Romanesque period of Medieval Europe (6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century), so too must the diaspora and diasporic literature be able to progress as well. Progress is not possible if the diaspora is stuck in the past, or more specifically, if it is producing the same type of literature, theory, and criticism that perpetuates past misconceptions. In this way, history and ancestry holds the diaspora captive, like a fish hooked at the end of a line – the declaration that “the other must ‘write back’” ensures that the other is always other. The ellipses at the end of the stanza could more readily be interpreted as a question mark: is this hook of always going back to the past a way of making amends, an act of



reclaiming history and memory, or is it a snare that catches the diaspora and holds it still, unable to move forward or progress?

Like a fish dangling out of the water on the end of a fishing line, so too are the diaspora dangling by “history’s suspended memory, / mutterings of custom, heritage, other / languages we call our own, and are not really...” (217). The “mutterings” here are the calls for reclamation and writing back; the thoughts that they must look back to history to reclaim their heritage and culture are perceived as their own, but have really been engrained by a long line of post-colonial writers and scholars. Just as the English language has been adopted by members of the diaspora as their own, so too have post-colonial ideas and agendas been adopted by the “colonized.” In response, what this new diasporic literature is declaring is that it is now time for the diaspora to refuse the bait of looking back to history, for by focusing only on its history its members remain victims of that history. As immensely constructive as post-colonial studies have been in the recognition of minority literatures, it is time to move past the post-colonial, otherwise there is a risk of remaining caught in the past like fish caught in a net – the diaspora may still be in the water, but it is not capable of moving anywhere. If our discourse is still entrenched with binary classifications that require the existence of an “other” and the perpetuation of differentiation, then equality is never actually reached and colonialism is never actually over.

Similar to Dabydeen, Goodison also makes reference to the past with an underlying message of looking forward, but instead of pillars of salt or fish imagery, the immovable imagery she turns to is tombs. The relationship between the past and a tomb – insinuating something dead and gone, as well as immobile – is not an unusual metaphor.

Benedict Anderson describes looking to the past as leaning against “tombs of Unknown Soldiers” which are “saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings” (50, his emphasis). Although Goodison is not working within the same register as Anderson, his metaphor of leaning against tombs works well with my discussion of Goodison, because leaning implies immobility, and the ghostly national imaginings imply being haunted by this past. Tombs for Goodison always indicate a fixed place and a link to history. In “Back to Where We Come From,” Goodison remarks on “family tombs,” that her family would like to “sit down on;” however, “instead [they] are confronted with this” (34). The “this” referred to in the close of the poem is the history of displacement that does not allow for the sitting on tombs. Having been cut off from their place of origin and a long familial history, the link to the past – these tombs – has been severed. Being severed from the past and place of origin is part and parcel of the inability to be deeply connected to the present place, or the landed place after displacement. According to Aleida Assmann, often the significance of a place “is derived from an uninterrupted chain of generations, all family members being born and dying on the same spot. Length of time and lived experience enriches a particular spot” (60). Having not been in the Caribbean for longer than four generations,<sup>40</sup> Goodison’s family would not necessarily have felt as connected to this place, and this lessened connection is what allowed for Goodison herself to leave, and what leads her to ask in “Making Life” if it is “because we came from a continent / why

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<sup>40</sup> Goodison’s family tree or genealogy is given just before the prologue in *From Harvey River*, a family memoir, up to only four generations, beginning with her great grandfather William Harvey. If there is a longer history of her family in Jamaica, it is not recorded here.

we can't settle on our islands?" (70). This is not to counteract my argument that members of the diaspora are able to create a home for themselves anywhere and to be able to feel rooted in any new place. These two arguments actually work together, as this lack of historical connection is what allows these new connections to be made, because it evokes less of a feeling of leaving things behind and more one of moving forward. Both connections are emotional and determine belonging; however, it is actually the lack of belonging to any one specific place that allows members of the diaspora to be able to belong in any place. The inability to lean on tombs, then, can be seen as a positive aspect that propels the speaker towards a future that she creates for herself.

The resurfacing imagery of tombs in Goodison's poetry, then, is not meant to evoke sadness at the loss of familial lineage and attachment to a specific location, but is instead something positive. It is important to point out here that leaning on tombs and sitting down on tombs evoke dissimilar connotations: leaning implies a lack of strength and a need for rest, whereas sitting implies a person already at rest and at peace. The speakers in Goodison's poems can be at rest, because as Goodison herself writes these poems she is not haunted by the past, but is confident in the ability of present and future connections to be made by the diaspora – having her past connection to Harvey River to rest on as a reassuring cornerstone that if members of the diaspora have achieved it once, then they can achieve it again. As these poems convey a "want" to sit on gravestones, however, a futurity is suggested, as they are not yet sitting. At the end of "O Pirates Yes They Rob I," the speaker states that "all we want is to sit / down in peace upon our people's gravestones" (36). The focus here is not on the graves, but on peace. The speaker is longing for a peace to finally come and supplant this long history of her people

being robbed – of freedom, history, culture, religion, identity. Even within post-colonial literature that is meant to speak to these struggles, the robbery is not over, for if the perpetual victimization of diasporic individuals continues to rob them of agency and self identity, then peace cannot be reached. Part of not leaning on tombs, then – a stagnant posture with lack of strength and agency – is the need to continuously move forward in thinking and theory, which requires a continuous process of criticism and deconstruction. As theory logically comes after literature, Dabydeen and Goodison’s participation in this new diasporic literature with its contemporary concerns is a step in the right direction. “Step” being the operative word here, as the similarity in their representations of the past – allowing their poetry to work well together in my larger discussion – is based on the concept of movement. From moving across borders to identities that refuse fixed forms, immobility is not a part of their existence. So too, then, must mobility be a part of their literary present and diasporic future. They refuse to accept the way that things are or have been, and demand a moving forward to a hopeful future, calling others to join them along the way. It is important to note here that I am not portraying Dabydeen and Goodison as sole agents of instigating this change, but merely that their literature is among the precursors that advocate it.

Goodison’s call for a new representation of the diaspora is best depicted in “Tombstones.” The poem opens first with a depiction of the grave of David Harvey, who is described as being “[b]orn of African mother and English / father” (37). David is the portrait of the colonial victim, one who has been taken over by English ideology, as “his / grave, root[s] up stay weeds,” the land still demanding a “giving of himself to the last” (37). On its own, this stanza of David’s grave does not connote victimization and loss of

agency, but when contrasted with the second stanza describing Margaret Wilson-Harvey's grave, the comparison is more evident. Margaret's grave is described as being a "plain tomb" that "rejects all worthless / weeds, parasite vines do not thrive / here"; "to the end no one overruled her" (37). Unlike the stray weeds that grow around David's grave, the absence of, or dare I say refusal of, anything being able to take root around Margaret's grave affords her agency. It is the last line that is really telling, declaring that external pressures were not able to overrule her. This brings the discussion of tombs into a different light. Goodison is not declaring a longing for this history of emplacement that she can never actually experience, but is instead declaring that the diaspora should not be standing still or idly sitting on tombs. They cannot be held back or motionless by the past, but must be actively engaged and refuse to be overruled and represented as victims when they have overcome so much. And in time, when this new literature has taken some effect, perhaps the entire world will stop dwelling on tombs and start seeing the diasporas for what they really are: strong and vibrant.

### Making an Entry

To come back to the implications of Addyman's quote that I have reiterated shamelessly, if self is predicated on place then in order for this new diasporic identity to emerge, a new perspective on immigrants' place within a Canadian context must be created. However, as I previously stated earlier in this chapter that place does not just fashion the self, but that the self also fashions place, by pushing their way into Canadian institutions – by making an entry – these immigrants make this new identity visible. Once

visible, Canadian society must acknowledge this presence and make space for it. In short, the diaspora can begin to change its place within Canadian society, culture, and the overall national imaginary by first seeing itself differently, and then demanding that the rest of Canada does as well. For the diaspora to make this entry, it must actively move forward, passing through the Door of No Return, moving out of the interstices and into the place it creates for itself. This movement is one away from historical constraints. It is important to understand that while I am discussing a turning away from history in Dabydeen and Goodison's poetry, I do not mean a discounting of history. It is after all the history of displacement and immigration that have allowed for this turn in thought and the development of this new literature. For the "process of displacement, exile and settlement," according to Liliana R. Goldin,

reflect[s] the traumatic context in which individuals and communities question their allegiances, produce a framework for understanding different forms of exile and separation, construct and confirm their new social and economic networks, and define the borders of their new existence as they also formulate their political and social claims. (5)

It is because of this history, then, that members of the diaspora are able to redefine these malleable concepts such as citizenship, borders, and identity, and that they have the tools to break into the systems that exclude them and to create a place to belong. Being able to "make an entry," in the words of Dabydeen, also requires the very boundaries they are working to deconstruct in their poetry, because in order for there to be a gap or an in-between space for them to enter, there must first be boundaries between which this liminal space opens up. Coming back to Dabydeen's "Aqueduct," these spaces or gaps

are inferred right in the title, as an aqueduct is a constructed channel that serves to convey water. In the form of a bridge, an aqueduct transports water across a gap. In the same manner, Dabydeen's poem (and this new post-post-colonial literature, or this chameleon literature) is a bridge that spans an obvious gap in the literary marketplace, and works to transport essential new ideals across this gap.<sup>41</sup> Gaps and exclusions are not in and of themselves bad things, then, for an empty space is filled with the potential for the creation of the new,<sup>42</sup> the process of accessing this potential and creating the new merely requires active participants dedicated to addressing and bridging these openings.

The best way that Dabydeen and Goodison have discovered to bridge these gaps is through literature, because it is through literature that they are able to expose their still prevalent exclusion, and it is through literature that they are able to make an entry. This transgressive medium is in no way arbitrary, for if deconstructing the boundaries of nation, citizenship, identity and belonging served to transgress the marginal existence

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<sup>41</sup>In "Do the Humanities Need a New Humanism?," Diana Brydon comments on gaps created in humanities studies in Canada through misconceptions that "seem complicit with dominant orthodoxies in ways that ignore the growing gaps between rich and poor, promoting instead the revival of colonialist modes of representing the world" (242).

<sup>42</sup>This same concept of potential existing within an absence is outlined by Derrida in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature*, and Martin Heidegger in *On The Origins of The Work of Art*. All three theorists or philosophers discuss the concept of invention, the creation of art, and engaging the other as a process that necessitates a deconstruction of conventions, which then creates a gap of potential for invention or creation.

allotted to the immigrant within Canada, deconstructing the boundaries of the national literature works to the same end. Our national literature is an effective (though not the only) medium that declares our national identity, and therefore if that literature changes, so does the identity of the nation change with it. The power of literature is commented on by Monika Reif-Hülser in the Coda of *Borderlands*, wherein she states that

it is in literary texts that the particularities of historical processes are revisioned, that an awareness of the historicity of cultural manifestations is restated. But, above all, literary texts re-create the space for a sense of, and sensitivity towards, a new historical consciousness transgressing the boundaries of a particular national or ethnic history. (282)

The new consciousness that is being created within Dabydeen and Goodison's work is that diasporic and minority literature is just as much a part of Canadian literature as all of the other canonized forms, and therefore that it should be treated as such. This issue of canonization is also brought up in "Aqueduct," when the speaker mentions in the second last stanza the "still words without meaning / as we look out for laws, canon, erecting / monuments, and not recognizing our own" (217). The reference to "still words" insinuates a literary stagnancy, one exhausted of creative possibilities, and the mention of "laws, canon" and "erecting monuments," speaks to a canon in which members of the diaspora do not recognize themselves. Canons, much like nations, are spaces created with arbitrary borders. As both Dabydeen and Goodison are re-defining boundaries and borders in their poetry, as has been argued in the previous two chapters, it would seem that this canonical border is a very real obstacle. As the sentiments expressed in this stanza are that they do not recognize their own literature within the canon, this becomes a



pedagogical issue more than anything: that minority and diasporic literatures have in the past not been represented as part of the over-arching Canadian literary canon, or at least not in a way that doesn't flatten out or silo difference. Current CanLit courses are, however, working to rectify this oversight. This issue of canonical representation is significant, because if diasporic literature is not represented in the overall canon, then diasporic individuals are likewise not represented in the overall national imaginary as Canadian citizens and as part of the Canadian national identity.

If the national literature, or the literary canon, is a representation of national identity, then differentiating minority and diasporic literature from the canon further positions both literature and people as outside of the national cultural imaginary. Therefore, for Dabydeen and Goodison, being able to enter into the nation begins with being able to enter into the national literature. Just as history gives members of the diaspora the tools required to create this new literature that better represents them, the past exclusion from the canon gives them the tools required to make their entrance, and once they have entered, the ability to change the institution entered into. Dabydeen describes these absences as "entry points" (173), and "punctured/ holes, holes / our openings" (43). Because it is only in the presence of holes that the diaspora can find their openings, or their way into a culture and nation that excludes them, Dabydeen portrays in many of his poems a speaker who is adamantly looking for holes. In "Seafarer," the speaker declares: "I look for open space / with memory of oceans, / whirlpools," and that once he has found a hole, he "splay[s] out / breathing in fully / at the entrance" (147). The process of entry is one of active engagement, then, not a passive waiting for acceptance or admittance. Unlike the people hovering on the threshold of the Door of No Return, in

Brand's rendition of diasporic existence, the individuals in Dabydeen's poetry must actively and consciously step "through [the] door to make / a solid entry" (37). This quote is taken from "Poet Speaks To The House," which conveys a back and forth debate between the poet and the house. Although the argument is not specifically outlined, the back and forth descriptions of "tongues licking out" and "a hand chopping air" with "voice raised louder" (37) describe a heated argument. This argument, with bystander houses "listen[ing] to the conversation" (37), is not a simple first entanglement, but is a long discussion occurring over time; it is a

dialogue  
between words and sawdust, words  
and flame, words and trees,  
etchings on the memory –

(37)

It is a debate that has reduced timber to ash or sawdust and then the embers were brought back to a blaze of flame again. As it has created "etchings on the memory," it situates the struggle as a long ongoing process, committed to memory. And yet, the poem ends on a hopeful, not resentful note, as this long history of the same debate, "all voices, all words, tongues of fire" continues unchecked "until a man hacked his way / through a door to make / a solid entry" (37). The fight becomes a necessary element to incite the man to action which results in the entry; it is the long history of this fight that has made the entry possible.

The discussion of the past and making an entry are therefore not mutually exclusive. The past is necessary, just as the fight is necessary, to ensure that present

concerns lead to future action – action here being the key word, as the process of making an entry is active. For Dabydeen, making an entrance has a lot to do with a looking away from the past and towards the future, for him a future that includes this new home he has created for himself in Canada. In “This Is It,” the speaker, or specifically here Dabydeen, recounts his process of entry:

Entering

once more, huddling

against the cold

in northwestern

ontario

(44)

The “once more” insinuates two possible meanings. The first points to this move to Canada from the Caribbean as a second entry, subtly evoking the history of displacement – that while personally this is a first entrance for Dabydeen, it is not the first entrance his family has had to make. Yet, having successfully made an entrance in the Caribbean gives the speaker grounds for the belief that entry can be achieved again a second time in this new country. The second meaning reveals the process to be ongoing. While admittance to the country may be relatively easy, actually making an entrance into the culture, society, and identity of the nation as a whole will take a lot more effort. In *Second Arrivals*, Sarah Phillips Casteel describes this process of entry as a “motif of the second arrival,” which indicates two things: the first is “a move to the countryside that succeeds the diasporic subject’s initial arrival in the metropolis,” in a sense a moving from a place of exclusion in the search of a place of inclusion, and the second “suggests

taking a second look and coming to a new way of seeing as a result” (6). This motif is useful to my overall discussion of re-envisioning the concepts of home, belonging, citizenship, and identity, because it “breaks down the binary opposition of home and away, native and tourist, revealing arrival to be an ongoing process of becoming” (Casteel 6). What this motif reveals, in other words, is that home and belonging are predicated on emotional attachment to place, as I outlined in the introduction of this project, and therefore manoeuvring within the space of the host country does not presuppose emplacement; only the “taking a second look” and revising how one interprets belonging can do that. Making an entry, then, must be an active engagement with place; one must physically create the ties or emotional attachments that bind one to place and make it home. When one has made that commitment, as Dabydeen has done, then and only then can one further engage in making that entry matter: to emplace one’s presence unavoidably so that it must be seen and dealt with.

By ‘making that entry matter’ I mean entering into place and being able to generate a sense of belonging through this process. For both Dabydeen and Goodison, the way that they achieve an imposing presence is by pushing their thoughts and concerns into the literary marketplace through their poetry. It is actually within the literary catalogue that they establish their place and belonging in Canada – they are Canadian poets participating in the creation of Canadian literature. By contributing to the literary marketplace, however, Dabydeen and Goodison ensure that an undeniable presence exists, and that their literature must be eventually considered. For now, the very presence of this literature slowly causes the Canadian literary canon to transition. Dabydeen best describes this tactic of making an entry through literature in “As An Immigrant,” wherein

the speaker declares in the first line “I have made out of Canada” (143). Not being native to Canada, Dabydeen has the unique ability to see the institution from the outside, and once he makes his entrance and forces his way inside, he can speak from a perspective of both outsider and insider. Although I hesitate to demarcate yet another binary and boundary, the ability to see the nation from both perspectives offers Dabydeen a better viewpoint and understanding. For this reason he can “make out of Canada” or deduce something that those from the inside cannot as readily see. And it is from this unique insider/outsider perspective that he can portray his existence in Canada in a way that offers insight into the nation and its institutions. Yet, for Dabydeen this is never a project with the objective to simply critique Canada, for criticising the country he calls home is criticizing himself. Putting himself into the equation, he admits a relationship of give and take; and suggests that we must all be learning and taking from each other:

Let the beaver bring me closer

as I quarry silence and talk

in riddles that the maple leaf

itself will finally understand.

(143)

These riddles are his poetry, and just like in his poem “The Poet Speaks To The House,” this is a dialogue, not a sermon – he is asking for Canadian influences (nature, culture, and society) to teach him how to be in the space and to make a place for himself, as well as for other Canadians to acknowledge his belonging in this landscape. The country that he loves, his home, is an integral part of who he is. His hope, aside from producing

Canadian poetry and that his work will someday be accepted as, even taught as, Canadian poetry, is that this poetry will convey thoughts and experiences that “the maple leaf / itself will finally understand” (143). The maple leaf here is an obvious synecdoche for Canada at large, the maple leaf being an inseparable symbol of our nation, proudly displayed on our flag. Dabydeen, therefore, is not longing just to be able to participate in the national institution of literature, but is longing for an understanding of his poetry, of himself, of the diaspora, from his fellow citizens and this country. Making an entry into the literary canon, then, is not merely about demanding the right to participate and be given what rightly belongs to him – being a Canadian poet he should be represented as a Canadian poet – but it is a larger move towards changing the literary landscape in order to change the national imaginary, ultimately creating a place for himself within the nation that not only accepts him and understands him, but proudly and patriotically claims him as one of their own.

In contrast to Dabydeen’s desire for admission and understanding, entering in for Goodison has more to do with ensuring that a true portrait of the diaspora surfaces and is acknowledged, than with understanding and acceptance. In “Mother the Great Stones Got to Move,” the speaker declares that a “stone is wedged across the hole in our history” (*GW* 44). This stone is all of the previous misrepresentations that have lead to misconceptions of the diaspora throughout history. Underneath this stone, however, is a hole, and within that hole is the entire reason for writing: potential for change. “In this hole is our side of the story,” the speaker exclaims, “exact figures, / headcounts, burial artifacts, documents, lists, maps / showing our way up through the stars” (*GW* 44). These exact figures, headcounts, and documents are the facts and stories lost through the slave

trade, the parts of the stories that have never been told. While this poem mentions past stories that have been excluded from historical accounts, the focus here is again not on the past, but on the story itself; on the “half that has never been told, and some of us / must tell it” (*GW* 44). The telling is a present possibility, not a past entanglement, and this telling is also absorbed with the present concerns. Just as past accounts of the diaspora were lacking and exclusory in nature, so too can the present accounts be misrepresentations. Telling the other side of the story, then, is an active engagement that is perpetually grounded in the present. If presently, the diaspora does not find itself represented within the national canon of the country they call home, then there must be an active effort to change that. The only way that this stone will move is if the diaspora moves it and creates a space to enter in.

It is important to clarify that the discussion of the past and the imagery of the diaspora suppressed underneath a rock is not contrary to my previous argument about Goodison’s call for the diaspora to move away from the past and away from representations of victimization. The sentiment in “Mother the Great Stones Got to Move” is more focused on calling the diaspora to action, for diasporic members to represent themselves, than it is focused on past injustices. The way that Goodison advocates members of the diaspora do this is actually to break with the past and move towards something wholly new, or even more specifically to create the new, like “[u]ndelivered orphan children seeking birth, / engorged navel strings in need of clean-cut” (*CS* 10). Goodison actually calls for more than a cut from all past representations, and actually for the utter refusal or demise of these representations, “for only then can they die and come in again” (*CS* 10). The representations of the diaspora must be

completely new, and must be created by its individuals alone. Like Pilate in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, born without a navel, a woman who not only birthed herself but essentially created herself, the diaspora must cut the cord connecting it to any external influences imposed upon it.

### What this Diasporic Literature is Doing: Demanding Change

Although the sentiments for the necessity of change are held by both Dabydeen and Goodison, how they believe that change will come about differs. Dabydeen's desire for understanding and acceptance is not merely based on being able to make an entry, but is strategic in how he perceives that change is going to come about. In "My Country, North America, And The World," the speaker demands that others "take me as I come, / indentured or indigenous," but then the speaker brings this declaration further when he boldly asks "[w]hose world?" (139). The focus quickly shifts from the personal to the universal. The universalizing move outward from the local to the global is a gesture meant to eradicate borders and difference, placing everyone on the same level. The very title of the poem reaffirms this move outward and calls for seeing things differently – seeing country, continent, and world as one and the same. If one's home and identity is not just country and continent, but the world, as a true cosmopolitan citizen would claim, then that is the first step in breaking down the boundaries that exclude. If there are no national markers, then we all belong to wherever we feel at home, and if there are no more national markers, there is no more need for a national literature that also works to exclude. In this universalized utopia, national literature becomes world literature, or



simply literature without demarcation. Although this utopic view cannot be actualized in the near future, the sentiments are nevertheless true; if we are all citizens of the world, there should be no arbitrary borders and boundaries set up to exclude and differentiate us. This is not to say that unity must be acquired, in fact unity is beside the point, for unity means homogeneity, which is the opposite of “take me as I come.” Nevertheless, Dabydeen advocates strongly for an active connection that consciously levels the playing field, or at least includes everyone in the changing literary and cultural landscape. In “Streets” the speaker, declaring that he is “eager for it to be otherwise” (146), does not just call attention to the fact that a change is necessary, but actively calls everyone – not just members of the diaspora – to participate in that change, for the only solution for things to be otherwise is for people to change the literary landscape and the national imaginary. With this in mind, the speaker calls others to action with him,

asking that

together we haul stones, boulders; we will build

across the terrain in British Columbia

Quebec Ontario the Prairies Newfoundland.

(146)

The speaker is calling for Canadian citizens – of which members of the diaspora are a part – to not only see the transition or change that has occurred and is occurring, but also to embrace this change and to stand up for this change as a good thing. If we all work together to “haul stones,” or to change the national narrative to include those we firmly believe are inherently or essentially Canadian, then we collectively build something stronger, reinforced by the collective agreement of all who work to change it. If the

national narrative is created or written by people, then only people have the ability to re-write it. The possibility to re-write the national narrative is depicted in the typography, as the physical spaces represented on the page not only display the physical distance needed to be bridged across a vast nation, but are the gaps within the national narrative and the national literature wherein the diaspora can make an entry. They are the absences that demarcate that change is possible.

For Goodison, however, as much as she may agree with Dabydeen, this change must first begin on a smaller scale before it can expand outward. For this reason, Goodison calls for the unification of the diaspora, with the specific call to self representation. Indeed, if the diaspora is still excluded in Canada, then perhaps the world is a little too far off a goal to strive for just yet. In “Dear Cousin,” the exclusion of the diaspora in Canada is highlighted as the speaker tells the cousin inferred in the title that “[w]e might not reach in time to de-ice you / into renew. You lie in the foothills / of Calgary” (CS 5). The image of being caught in ice, much like the pillar of salt in Dabydeen’s poem, is an image of a figure frozen or stuck in place. The speaker continues:

They packed you in ice early up north  
where you plied your wordsmith’s trade,  
rubbing the salve of convince on dry tongues  
which became then sure and swift of speech.

Your own tongue aches from tip to root;  
you want to assuage it with water coconut.

(CS 6)

Placing the blame on “they” marks this icy imprisonment as being the fault of another party, not of the cousin. The mention of her “wordsmith’s trade” as well as the “dry tongues” and the “swift speech” all suggest an attempt to express herself. In Canada, this Caribbean born cousin was trying to speak, to tell, to write, but was met with merely cold indifference, and therefore her words were stifled. Or perhaps it is a step beyond indifference, as the use of the word “packing” implies some sort of action, like the packing or packaging of minority courses that subsequently keep minority literature on the periphery and out of the dominant Canadian canon. As the cousin’s tongue aches from root to tip and longs for coconut water, the speaker is implying a longing for the opportunity to identify the self, the coconut here being a reference to her Caribbean self. The coconut water is a soothing salve to her dry tongue, because it is a reminder of who she is, as it is an undeniable part of who she is; a part which should work in unison with her Canadian identity, not set her apart from it as other-Canadian. These same sentiments are echoed in “Excavating,” wherein the speaker states, “[c]ome in cousin / from the cold: there are times a one has to / seek succor under own vine and fig leaf” (CS 7). The “own vine” here is like the coconut water in the previous poem, a connection to the self, which can be both Caribbean and Canadian. The speaker is telling her cousin to seek succor in what she knows to be true – how she sees herself, not how other’s see her. Once she is self assured of who she is, or perhaps more accurately, once she decides who she is or fashions her own identity, she can “come in from the cold.” This coming in is another sort of making an entrance, but it is an entrance into the self – a form of self realization. This declaration then is more significant than just the cousin being told that she does not

really belong, but is a call for others of the diaspora to make an entry – first into themselves and then, by representing this truth, making an entry into the institutions that exclude or misrepresent them.

The call to self representation is connected to the larger discussion of place and making an entry, because once members of the diaspora achieve the first they will be able to achieve the second, and once they make their entry, they will be able to cement a place of belonging for themselves. The call for self definition is paramount for Goodison. In “Jah The Baptist” the speaker boldly commands that the diaspora

[p]lay not

by the rules of their game, for they detest the dark

of your skin, the thick of your lips, the wool of your hair.

Strive not to imitate Babylon, become your own man and woman.

(CS 16)

The reference to ‘detesting’ creates an obvious link back to colonial history and the imposed hierarchy because of racial discrimination. However, it also highlights the fact that just like individual identity and even national identity, racial discrimination has also transformed with time and by the imposition of other influences and pressures. Currently, that discrimination is working to imprison members of the diaspora in the status of victim and to constantly differentiate them as other. If they continue to play by the rules, even of post-colonial studies, they are imitating roles still defined by racial difference. They need to move beyond differentiation imposed upon their identities, and create their own identities on their own terms. Once they acknowledge that this must be done, or even that

it can be done, they regain the agency that has been stripped from them for far too long.

The speaker in “To Become Green Again and Young” instructs the diaspora to

toss old year’s errors

griefs and mistakes into the accepting waves.

Begin again fresh and new

when the year turns to become

green again and young.

(*GW* 112)

Not only is the same argument about turning away from focusing on the past reiterated in this poem, but implications of both green and young infer the possibility of cultivation and thriving. Once members of the diaspora have done this, then they can “name [their] place, / [their] own spot to cultivate / a small start-over Eden” (*TM* 10). The difference of this starting over and making an entry from those of the past is that it would be the diaspora’s decision this time and on its own terms.

By redefining the constructs that exclude them, such as citizenship and national identity, Dabydeen and Goodison break down the boundaries that refuse them belonging, and by redefining personal identity as something fluid rather than fixed, they set up the possibility for national identity to be also fluid, and therefore susceptible to change. Ultimately, all of the overturning of boundaries works to achieve this one end goal: to be able to create a new perspective of the diaspora, to be able to represent themselves, and to be able to participate in the overall national identity – to allow the diaspora to enter into the cultural imaginary as well as the national literature.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Where Canadian Literary Studies Should Go From Here

*“This may be no place to end but it may be a place to begin”*  
—Homi K. Bhabha (65)

The question I am left with is ‘where do we go from here?’ If absences and oversights have been brought to our attention, how do we go about rectifying this? I argue that thinking changes at the level of teaching, and therefore forward movement may well come from a turn to a revision of pedagogical approaches to Canadian literature. This shift from poetic criticism to pedagogy is not arbitrary, as it is within the classroom that the majority of this work is encountered. The questions that Lily Cho poses in her article “Diasporic Citizenship” speaks to this CanLit pedagogical concern of how minority and majority literatures are discussed. Cho asks:

At the practical level, what does it mean to teach a course or do research in Asian Canadian literature, as opposed to Canadian literature with an emphasis on Asian Canadian? What does it mean to argue for a separate course on Black Canadian literature or to publish as a Native Canadianist? [...] These are not simply questions of inclusion or exclusion. They are questions that point to the unresolved relation between minority and majority literatures in Canada and [...] between the competing demands of citizenship and the desires of diaspora. (94)

To be sure, there has been a need for these separate areas of study within CanLit in order for marginal voices and texts to be given a place in which to enter into the discussion of our national literature. The question that arises, however, is: does this separation continue to help, or has it become a hindrance? Does not the continued separation of minority literatures merely work to reaffirm difference or “otherness” and continue to situate these

minorities and texts outside of the Canadian canon and therefore as literature other-to Canadian literature?

Perhaps in order to include minority literatures more effectively within the Canadian canon, we must first redefine what Canadian literature is: if it doesn't have to be written about Canada,<sup>43</sup> what are our qualifications that offer literature this national title? We also need to answer a question that is also posed by Lily Cho in her article: why are these differentiated minority literatures “not ‘obviously’ CanLit” and, if we are going to say that they are, why must “these differences [...] be registered[?]” (97). Only by

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<sup>43</sup> A lot of Rohinton Mistry's work is based abroad (in Bombay), and the same is true of Nino Ricci and Shyam Selvadurai, and there are therefore some challenges to their work as being 'Canadian.' In his collection of essays *When Words Deny the World*, Stephen Henighan argues that the majority of Canadian literature in the 1990s was not inherently Canadian, because it was not set in Canadian settings, or those that were set in Canada were either set in the past, or “the setting remained deliberately repressed [...] assiduously unevoked [...] obstinately anachronistic [...] or assimilated into the free trader's homogenized ‘North America’” (180). Henighan further remarks that “[t]he pungency of the best writing of the 1960s and 1970s with Canadian settings, its evocation of people, place and language, had disappeared” (180). What remained, in Henighan's opinion, was a literature that did not represent Canada. He further notes that “only writers from Atlantic Canada – Wayne Johnston, Alistair MacLeod, David Adams Richards – still wrote Canadian novels; this may help explain the surge in these writers' popularity” (180).

overturning discourses that reaffirm difference can we discard this exclusory tendency. The existing borders of exclusion are a pedagogical concern, because the packaging of minority literature courses perpetuates the hyphenated identities of diasporic minorities within Canada, and therefore works to exclude even as it works to include these minorities within class discussion. Diasporic writers like Dabydeen and Goodison “are included as part of the literary curriculum only in their representative capacity as ‘immigrants,’ ‘minorities,’ or, more generally, ‘postcolonial’ subjects” (Pirbhai 399). Diasporic writers are therefore pigeonholed into the allotted homogenized space of discussion that is not of their own choosing; a space that oversimplifies diasporic identity and experience and “hems in the unfolding fabric of [...] cultural and literary production” (399). The “theoretical containment” of diasporic writing, according to Mariam Pirbhai, exists “at the expense of a more cross-cultural view of Canadian, and by extension, English literature that arrests the literary curriculum within a seemingly essentialist and national discourse” (399). Until specialized courses dissipate and Canadian literature courses integrate minority texts more effectively, we cannot move away from the minority/majority binary thinking and the diaspora (and diasporic literature) will continue to inhabit this in-between space of belonging and unbelonging, inclusion and exclusion.

Indeed, as this lexicon of minority, immigrant, even diaspora, although it is “meant to foster constructive discussions of identity politics,” is “defined by a yardstick of comparison that is strictly posited in relation to North American constructions of difference, which are themselves lingering vestiges of Eurocentric cultural and racial norms” (Pirbhai 387), there is a definite need for a new discourse through which to discuss this paradigmatic literature. We do not discuss Margret Atwood’s race when we



discuss her literature, though we frequently do discuss her gender, while when discussing Marshall McLuhan's work, neither gender or race enter into the conversation. What we need, then, is to generate a discourse that no longer has cause to differentiate and segregate based on race, gender, and sexuality. Yet, understandably, this may not be possible at present when discrimination of these identifying factors is still rampant, and therefore when they factor into literature they do so in a politically motivated way that must be discussed.

It is through the discussion of literature, however, such as the poetic criticism that this thesis undertakes, that these issues of exclusion and a segregated canonical discourse will be addressed and changed. In their poetry, Dabydeen and Goodison display a belief that if we begin now to make the conscious decision to change the discourse, larger change will result from this change in years to come. How we discuss this literature, then, and the larger political issues it addresses, within our literary classrooms *now* will impact future generations of thought. Moreover, what literary discussion and English Lit pedagogy offer by way of changing the relationship to space, place, and belonging is the ability to change boundaries of exclusion and the discourses and thinking associated with these boundaries. Once these boundaries have been redrawn, members of the diaspora can make their entry and finally belong; this emplacement of the diaspora will in-turn demand recognition from its fellow citizens who can then begin to see diasporic individuals as not minorities, but as authentic citizens participating in a wonderfully diverse culture and society that is definitively Canadian.

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