



Un/belonging in Diasporic Cities: A Literary History of First-Generation Caribbean Women in London and Toronto

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Abstract: Through close readings of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996), Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985), and Makeda Silvera's *The Heart does not Bend* (2003), this article offers a comparative literary history of Black¹ Caribbean women's experiences in London and Toronto in the mid-twentieth century, from the 1950s to the 1970s. By foregrounding the novels' forgotten female characters, the article examines Caribbean women's migration stories as a narrative of un/belonging, marking their distinctive relationship to the settler colonial state and the British empire as an ongoing search for independent self-actualization. The article argues that the incongruity between Caribbean migrant women's dreaming of a romanticized home/coming and the reality of recurring traumatic loss creates a constant dystopic tension that plays out in the novels as a struggle between an imagined be/longing and familial, national and cultural disarticulation. This tension between a "post-diasporic" desire for national be/longing and a diasporic reality of displacement and loss also implicates the novels' characters in the designs of empire. Characters' movements away from the hegemonic nation and toward a diasporic condition, therefore, mark a journey toward a more critical self-awareness in which they develop a greater capacity to both critique colonial imperialism and the family as the bedrock of the Caribbean nation, and to articulate non-hierarchical terms of community be/longing.

Keywords: Be/longing; un/belonging; diaspora; post-diaspora; literary history; Caribbean women migrants; Windrush Generation; Beryl Gilroy; Joan Riley; Makeda Silvera

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Introduction

This article traces a comparative literary history of Black Caribbean women's experiences in diaspora in the post-war period from the 1950s to the 1970s when Caribbean families migrated in large numbers first to England and then to Canada and the United States.² Foregrounding the forgotten female character as a symbol of Caribbean women's double marginalization as racialized migrants and women, the article draws on Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996) set in 1950s and 1960s London; Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) set in the 1960s in London and its surrounding areas; and Makeda Silvera's *The Heart does not Bend* (2003) set in the late 1960s in Jamaica and 1970s in Toronto. The novels detail the disconnect between Caribbean migrants' assumption of British subjecthood and their estrangement from their wider societies because of their seeming racial, gendered and cultural differences as a tension between a "post-diasporic" desire for national be/longing and a diasporic reality of displacement and loss. The novels' forgotten female characters, written out of the triumphant myth of empire, struggle in every instance to articulate/negotiate the terms of their *being* in alien landscapes with no existing maps, no navigable routes demarcating their right to be/long. By reflecting critically on Caribbean women's hopeful arrival in the UK and Canada and their immediate and systematic disenfranchisement, the article thus narrates their search for new geographies of be/longing (McKittrick 2006) as a critical practice of survival in unwelcoming diasporic cities in which they face an ongoing climate of anti-blackness (Sharpe 2017) and in which they are positioned always as external to dominant national and patriarchal cartographies. In addition, Silvera's queer characters challenge the terms of social and cultural citizenship in Caribbean nations, suggesting that re/turn is impossible. In the face of frustrated national desire and the impossibility of re/turn, these novels engage in a productive critique of the family as the bedrock of the Caribbean nation, while contesting British imperialism and the settler colonial state. In reaching past the death and despair that haunt Black and Caribbean communities in the aftermath of slavery and colonialism, the novels' characters search for a sense of be/longing beyond Black death, struggle and loss.

In writing from the unique location of their characters' multiple intersectionalities (Crenshaw 1991) and in their interventions into questions of family and citizenship, Gilroy, Riley and Silvera allow us an important re/turn to a specific moment in British and Canadian histories. Such a re/turn is significant for a number of reasons. This article's reflection on the experiences of first-generation Caribbean migrants³, indeed, appears at an important juncture in the history of Caribbean diasporic communities. June 22, 2018, marked the seventieth anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks in England, a milestone that was widely acknowledged and celebrated. Those celebrations, however, also took place in the shadow of what has been dubbed the Windrush scandal, resulting from reports that British government agencies wrongfully detained, and denied jobs, benefits and healthcare to approximately five thousand British subjects who had arrived in the UK (most of them as children) as part of the Windrush generation. These migrants, who had lived their entire adult lives in the UK and who contributed to the development of post-war Britain, found themselves cast as "illegal immigrants" and facing the threat of deportation (Serhan 2018). While the British government has since apologized and pledged to address these errors, this scandal demonstrates the peculiar ease with which the histories of Caribbean and racialized people go missing in European and North American national narratives, and functions as one concrete example of the tenuousness of their be/longing in "neo-imperial" nations (Alexander 2005). This article thus serves as an intervention into the practices of cultural amnesia routinely deployed against minoritized populations in North America and the UK by deliberately re-centering the literary histories of early Caribbean migrants to England and Canada.

In addition, the article chooses to highlight the experiences of women and girls, a unique group among these early migrants, who face double erasure as migrants and women. The "arrival story" of post-war Caribbean migrants to England, for example, continues for historical and political reasons to be largely "memorialised as masculine," foregrounding the 492 Jamaican men who disembarked from the *Empire Windrush*, even though their number was less than half of the people who landed at Tilbury in 1948 (Courtman 2012, 86). Indeed, of

the 941 adult passengers who arrived, “257 were women with 69 of them accompanied by their husbands and 188 travelling alone” (Courtman 2012, 87). As Courtman correctly contests, “the *Windrush*’s multiple narratives of class, race and gender are occluded within the [singular reporting of] ‘492’ male Jamaicans” (87). This repetition and emphasis allowed the media and British officials to exacerbate concerns about Black male migration and its potentially contaminating effects on white women (Lindsey 1992, 66). This over-emphasis on the arrival stories of Black men that centred their relationships with white women, combined with a bias in the British publishing culture of the 1960s in favour of male writers, effectively erased the presence and significance of Black migrant women from the public discourse (Courtman 2012; Gilroy 1998). For these reasons, Samuel Selvon’s body of work, most notably the *Moses* trilogy,⁴ and Austin Clarke’s impressive *Toronto* trilogy⁵ have long stood as foundational literary representations of early Caribbean experiences in London and Toronto. While recognizing the importance of these contributions, this article seeks to expand our understanding of first-generation migrants in these two cities by focusing on the often-overlooked fiction of a less recognized group of Caribbean women writers. Gilroy’s and Riley’s novels are among the earliest literary contributions by women of Caribbean descent in reimagining the histories of migration experienced by Caribbean communities in London. Silvera’s novel published almost two decades later, reconsiders first-wave migrant experiences from a Canadian perspective, offering a nuanced reflection of Caribbean people’s multiple locations and dis/locations in North America. In its reading of these novels as a chronological history of Caribbean communities in London and Toronto between the 1950s and 1970s, the article re-narrates the challenges Caribbean women faced in the establishment of first-generation migrant communities during a period of unique resettlement and extreme social and cultural alienation. The article reads Gilroy’s and Riley’s identity quest narratives and Silvera’s semi-autobiographical first novel, therefore, as a new kind of female trilogy, offering a layered and comparative representation of early Caribbean migrant experiences in two metropolitan cities.

This article pays tribute precisely to the women of the Windrush generation who “disappear[ed] without trace into traumatised post-war Britain” (Courtman 2012, 87), as well as the women whose voices went missing from the early telling of Caribbean life in Canada. In re-inserting these women writers and their forgotten female characters into the national histories of Canada and the UK, I draw on a specific understanding of be/longing to mark their distinctive relationship to the nation and ongoing search for independent self-actualization. In this regard, I use the intransitive verb be/long and the noun be/longing to register Black Caribbean women's multiple exigencies in historical time and place: as in, the need to *be*, to exist without fear, to be accepted across our differences; and the *longing for* recognition, the longing for a moment beyond struggle and loss. Un/belonging correspondingly denotes the absence of certain *being* in time and place, the frustration of the urgent desire to live beyond loss. The incongruity between Caribbean migrant women's dreaming of an ideal and romanticized home/coming or re/turn and the reality of recurring traumatic loss creates a constant dystopic tension that plays out in the three novels as a struggle between an imagined be/longing and familial, national and cultural disarticulation. I register this tension between desire and lived experience further in the use of the term “post-diaspora” to mark first-wave Caribbean migrants' sense of connection to Britain and Canada and their often willing complicity in the designs of empire. In these novels, characters' movement away from the hegemonic nation and toward a diasporic condition marks a movement toward a more critical self-awareness in which they develop a greater capacity to critique colonial imperialism and the settler colonial state and to articulate non-hierarchical terms of community be/longing.

The sense of imagined be/longing I signal in the term “post-diaspora” was powerfully foregrounded in first-generation Caribbean communities' sense of affinity to Britain. In the selection and reading of the three novels, the article focuses on Canada and England precisely to demarcate the Commonwealth relationship between the two countries and the former British colonies of the Caribbean. Caribbean migrants who chose to relocate to England and Canada in the post-war years relied on their understanding of this

Commonwealth relationship and a sense of imperial kinship to facilitate their cultural crossings (Bidnall 2017; Foster 1996). All major institutions—the school, church, criminal justice system, and family—had carefully inculcated in Caribbean populations in the 125 years after the abolition of slavery an ideology of British cultural paternalism. As Bidnall (2017) explains, “Britain’s prestige value” was considerable given its reputation for educating the Caribbean elite and the British style, structure and curriculum of Caribbean education (27). The sacrosanct images of Great Britain and British Canada in the post-war years could, thus, easily be elaborated through historical and contemporary constructions of British liberalism and cultural elitism, and Canadian democracy. The British, after all, had abolished the slave trade, and Canada, with its historical Black populations carefully out of view, had managed to avoid the widespread public accusations of racism levied against the United States during the struggle over civil rights in the middle of the twentieth century.

Post-war Caribbean migrants in England did not immediately see themselves, therefore, as displaced diasporic subjects—they were rightful heirs of the British Empire travelling to the mother/land on British passports. In the opening scene of Beryl Gilroy’s novel *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996), the protagonist, Melda Hayley, stands in Paddington Station “unbelieving, yet conscious of a boundless joy” (9). Identifying London as a metaphoric lover with whom she is finally reunited, she narrates her arrival as a triumphant rite of passage: “At last I’m here! I’ve come! We’re together, London and I” (9)! Many first-wave Caribbean Britons, like Gilroy’s character, indeed, considered themselves first as British or English and only secondarily as Black and geographically as Caribbean or West Indian (Bidnall 2017, 35). Similarly, Foster argues that Caribbean and African migrants to Canada “sold themselves into colonialism” (23). Arriving from countries in a prior colonial relationship with Britain, they “subconsciously agreed to live, although perhaps for not too long a time, in a colonial relationship in their adopted country” (23). By prioritizing their Britishness as a sign of shared cultural imperialism over their Africanness as a sign of subjugated and traumatic chattel slavery, Black Caribbean migrants thus, imagined themselves largely as “post-

diaspora" British subjects and saw their arrival in England and Canada as a natural and rightful result of long and intimate colonial relationships.

This sense that their cultural and historical relationship to Britain guaranteed their acceptance within British society was seemingly confirmed by the enactment of the 1948 British Nationality Act that granted all Commonwealth citizens not only the right of entry and settlement, but also the same legal rights as British citizens, a right that would last until 1962 when the Act was replaced by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (Thompson 1990).⁶ This sense of Commonwealth fraternity combined with intense post-war patriotism preceded any serious debates over Caribbean political and economic independence and cultural autonomy from Britain, which would not take place for another ten years. England as the "Mother Country" and Canada as a "big sister" with no discernible neo-colonial designs of its own (Foster 1996, 46), promised loyal Caribbean subjects, many of whom had faithfully served Great Britain during the war, a cultural kinship they could draw on to navigate the uncertain terrain of first-wave migrant resettlement. High unemployment and limited opportunities for post-secondary educational improvement in the Caribbean and a corresponding demand for labour in the UK and Canada further strengthened the lure of migration, which promised a better life and new possibilities not only for the Caribbean middle classes, but also for the first time for the working poor (Byron and Condon 2008). It was this new demand for mobile labour and the reassurance of cultural familiarity that encouraged the large outflow of Caribbean migrants especially from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and British Guiana (later Guyana) to work in post-war industries, as well as in healthcare, education, and domestic service in the mother and sister countries. Caribbean migrants initially saw themselves, therefore, less as newcomer immigrants and more as migrant "settlers" (Bidnall 2017, 21); less as displaced and exiled diasporic subjects and more as emergent "post-diasporic" citizens.

Despite this narrative of be/longing, it is noteworthy that Canada only became a default host nation for Caribbean migrant workers after the UK was no longer

available as a preferred option. Five years after the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act publicly challenged the discourse of shared Commonwealth citizenship by curtailing post-war migration opportunities for Caribbean workers to the UK, Canada introduced a new points system that provided an unexpected outlet for Caribbean migration. Prior to the 1960s, Canadian immigration legislation had prioritized newcomers based on race and country of origin, explicitly favouring immigrants from Western Europe and Euro-Americans, who were considered more likely to assimilate into British or French Canadian society (Walker 1997). This selective admission strategy meant that very few racialized people, even those from former British colonies (including Black people from the United States, the Caribbean and continental Africa) could migrate to Canada (Ash 2004). Motivated, like the UK, by demands for post-war labour, as well as by increasing national and international pressure to redefine Canada's global image in response to anti-racist and political liberation movements in the Global South, Canada began a long-overdue process of immigration reform (James and Davis 2012). Post-1960 immigration laws, in particular the 1967 points system, offered aspiring Caribbean migrants, now shut out of the UK, access to Canadian economic and educational opportunities alongside the old promises of cultural familiarity. In addition, Canada appeared to practice a subtler and more controlled form of racism, offering greater security for an aspiring Caribbean middle class away from the overt racism and escalating racial tensions in the United States and the UK in the mid-twentieth century.

Like the UK and the United States, however, Canada was/is not without its racial tensions. Canada preserves its global image as a welcoming liberal democracy precisely by employing "the obfuscation and justificatory arguments of democratic racism... to demonstrate continuing faith in the principles of an egalitarian society while at the same time undermining and sabotaging these ideals" (Henry and Tator 2009, 6). The problems of racism, xenophobia and classism operate as deep barriers to the education, employment and well-being of racialized and poor citizens. The fantasy of Caribbean people's be/longing in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, as it had been for post-war migrants in Britain

before them, was short lived, replaced by the swift and deliberate transformation of their status from welcomed colonial migrants to unwanted Black immigrants, from “post-diasporic” to diasporic subjects (Henry 1994; Thompson 1990). The better life Caribbean migrants imagined in both England and Canada, in short, was a dystopic nightmare. Their very presence in these societies increased public animus against them, fuelling expressions of anti-black racism and xenophobia (Henry 1994) and even calls for “repatriation” (Lindsey 1992; Thompson 1990, 66).

An important quality that distinguished first-generation migrants in England and Canada from those in the United States was, indeed, the particularity of their raced construction in countries that saw themselves overwhelmingly as homogenous and white (Fleras 2004; Foner 1998). In the United States, the presence of a large resident and historical African American population provided an important foil for Black Caribbean immigrants arriving in the 1960s through a new immigration system that prioritized advanced education and skilled labour. The new communities when measured against older African American communities tended to be viewed more favourably by white Americans as ambitious, hard-working and well educated (Foner 1998; Jones 2008). On the other hand, while both England and Canada also had historical Black communities, their relatively small size and profound marginalization served to absent blackness from the public discourse (Olusoga 2017; Walcott 2003). First-generation Caribbean migrants in London and Toronto, particularly Jamaicans who made up the largest percentage of new arrivals, represented for the first time a visible and culturally influential minority that could be made to bear the full weight of British and Canadian anti-Black racism (James 1993; James and Davis 2012). The tendency toward a homogenization of blackness (that in England also included South Asians) marked the host societies' increasing sense of cultural distance from *all* their racialized and still colonized citizens and a deliberate re-constitution of their collective identity not as desired settlers but as undesired immigrants (Foner 1998, 50). The dilemma for Caribbean diasporic communities in Canada and the UK involved knowing how to balance the desires of a better future with the frustration of daily living. Faced with the

disillusionment of poor housing conditions, racism in the workforce, and the overall micro-aggressions of living in a raced, classed and sexist society, Caribbean migrant communities struggled, and continue to struggle, with what it means to actually live in historical time and place.

These tensions over place and be/longing for Caribbean migrants have been played out overwhelmingly in large cities where migrants congregate in search of jobs, the cultural familiarity of the past, and the anonymity necessary for the reimagining of new futures. Anonymity, as Brand's narrator explains in the novel *What we all Long for* (2005), "is the big lie of a city. You aren't anonymous at all. You're common, really, common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt, so many atoms of materiality" (3). Tasked with holding the past at bay, migrants in a big city are surrounded by the spillage their daily lives produce—the past constantly pressing into the present:

All the lives they've hoarded, all the ghosts they've carried, all the inversions they've made for protection, all the scars and marks and records for recognition—the whole heterogeneous baggage falls out with each step on the pavement. There's so much spillage. (Brand 2005, 5)

A relentless repetition of past and present failures—the unavoidable "spillage" of the migrants' unfamiliar body and rhythms and language and history—exposes their fantasy of a romanticized future and frustrates their dreams of big-city life.

In England, first-wave Caribbean migrants congregated their hopes and dreams, as well as their failures, in the large metropolitan centres where jobs and substandard housing were more readily available. The British conurbations were not only experiencing high labour demand, but the local white population, rejecting this badly paid and overly demanding labour, was also abandoning the urban areas in which they were concentrated (Byron 1994; Peach 1998). The Caribbean, as Peach (1998) explains, "was a geographical as well as an occupational replacement population" (206). This spatial redistribution based on race, ethnicity, immigrant status, labour and class is articulated powerfully in

Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) in a scene in which the protagonist, Hyacinth, returns to the Highfields area where she first lived with her father and stepmother. Her re-acquaintance with "the shabby streets...the poverty smells, the old familiar dread" collapses into memories of her abusive father "returned to haunt her" (89). So preoccupied is she by the memories of the past that it takes her a while to recognize the changes that have taken place: Indian smells were replacing West Indian smells; Eastern Caribbean accents had replaced Jamaican inflections (89). Still the poverty and neglect are constant: "The streets looked seedy and blighted as she wandered along, and there was something eerie about the silent rows of condemned and boarded up houses, doors hanging off their hinges where vandals had forced their way in" (89). Riley's verisimilitudinous portrayal of both the stagnation and evolution of the Highfields area captures the disparity between Caribbean migrants' desires and their actual daily lived experiences, exacerbating Hyacinth's feelings of cultural estrangement and strengthening her resolve "to never end up here again" (89). The sharp contradictions of Caribbean life in England—the unexpected disconnect between the imagined and real circumstances of Black migrant workers—were thus made explicit in the social, cultural, and physical places they occupied.

Hyacinth, having come to England as a child to a father she does not know and cut off from the nurturing past, experiences her arrival in London very differently from Gilroy's protagonist in *Praise of Love and Children* (1996): "There had been a sea of white faces everywhere, all hostile. She had known they hated her, and she had felt small, lost and afraid, and ashamed of her plaited hair as she looked enviously at the smooth straightness of theirs" (Riley 1985, 13). Like Riley's character, migrants and their children found their conditions of daily living marked by an immediate and sustained environment of hardship in which their Black bodies, skin and hair were anomalous and out of place; their alien and alienating bodies had to be carefully managed and contained by cordoning them off into select communities (Peach 1998; Richardson 1989). Still, as James (1993) explains, the sense of familiar community and mutual dependence made possible in poor segregated neighbourhoods was also vital for Asian and

Caribbean communities in the early years of migrant resettlement. Policies of “black geographic dispersal” after the 1958 Notting Hill and Nottingham disturbances—aimed at “de-ghettoization” and “integration”—in effect undermined the sustaining possibility “of black communities in the making” (262).

Cities, however, regardless of their physical conditions, are not only the sites where newcomers converge for the perceived rewards of labour and the desired “safety” of community. They are also the places to which they go in search of Brand’s anonymity, to deliberately escape the past, to re/imagine a future in the shadow of loss. In Gilroy’s *Praise of Love and Children* (1996), it is, indeed, the smallness of Melda’s past and the inherited pain of familial un/belonging that delineate the difference between her initial unconditional embrace of London and Hyacinth’s terror. London—large enough and far enough away from the painful memories of an abandoned and abandoning Guyana—offers her an unexpected opportunity to rearticulate her life story, to rewrite her traumatic history:

I drew my resolve about me as if it was one of those beautiful coats in a clothes' shop window. I was going to prove myself by my work, as generations of black women had done. My worth would be reflected by useful deeds for this great country. I could feel it in my bones. . . . I was far from home and free of those invisible cords that had bound me. I felt freedom for the first time in my life. (14)

Melda’s desired freedom, however, never materializes despite her careful espousal of Black respectability politics. Smith (2014) explains that “respectability politics evince a distinct worldview: marginalized classes will receive their share of political influence and social standing not because democratic values and law require it but because they demonstrate their compatibility with the ‘mainstream’ or non-marginalized class” (np). Melda’s belief in the infallibility of British cultural values and her commitment to prove her worth through respectable gendered behaviour are predictably quickly and systematically undermined:

In the space of six months of teaching, I had begun to understand how the class to which you belonged fitted you into the jaws of the system. West Indians, being thought of as foreigners, were condemned always to stand on the fringes. Ma and Pa, who believed in Queen, Country and Empire, would not have been able to understand that those of us who dared to claim our colonial inheritance had to plead or even grovel for a hearing. (61)

The sense of homelessness and maternal abandonment Melda experienced in the Caribbean, thus repeats in her experiences of rejection in England the “Mother Country,” entrenching her sense of historical and contemporary un/belonging.

In Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2003), Toronto city life fails similarly to provide the main female characters, Maria/Mama and her granddaughter Molly, with any sense of freedom or self-actualization. Migrating to Canada from Jamaica in 1971 under the family reunification programme, they find themselves imprisoned within Toronto's large high-rise apartment buildings, struggling to navigate an alien environment. The cramped, confining apartment and incomprehensible and hostile landscape replace the lush garden on Wigton Street in Kingston and rob Mama of her will to dream: “Many evenings that winter, Mama looked out at the snow and sighed, complaining about the dampness in the apartment, conveying her disappointment in Freddie and her difficulties with Glory” (111-112). Maria, the family's matriarch, having temporarily abdicated her physical freedom and economic and emotional control to her children who “sponsored” her to Canada, experiences a new kind of vulnerability, a new kind of loss. In Toronto, she must learn both to “act her age” (140) and to act appropriately in space: “Mama, please, remember we have neighbours, dis is not Wigton Street” (127). The choice between poverty in the Caribbean and “a better life” and social respectability in England and Canada is always complex. The past, Molly admits, is “where we lived and dreamed our lives to perfection” (88); we cannot easily abandon it. The repeated desertion of the dead-end street in Kingston “to seek opportunity, to get an education, to better [one]self” (12) demands in each instance, in each

generation, a certain kind of self-abnegation. This loss echoes in the novel in Maria's plaintive rendering of the Scottish folk song, "My Bonnie lies over de ocean." In her reconstitution of the traditional folk song into a new ballad of diaspora loss, she mourns the emotional and physical abandonment of her children while marking diaspora loss as an inevitable and repeating condition of life for people of African descent. Her rendition of the song in Jamaican Creole importantly registers both her mastery of and distance from the British culture of the Caribbean and Canada in which she has been trained, but from which she has always been alienated.

In the representation of extreme alienation in the three novels, the environment, indeed, often functions like an oppressive character. The unrelenting cold in *The Unbelonging* (1985), for example, subsumes every aspect of the traumatic physical, emotional and psychological environment in which the protagonist, Hyacinth, lives. Coldness, clamminess and dampness are repeating metaphors in the novel symbolizing the stages of her extreme physical and emotional estrangement from London and her desperate longing to re/turn to an imaginary Jamaica. In the first half of the novel when she is still living with her father, the competing sensations of warmth and cold are associated with the nocturnal enuresis she experiences during each of her dreams in which she seeks to escape to the idealized island home of her childhood:

Coldness enveloped her, clammy cold fingers dragged her back to consciousness.

Her mind struggled in confusion, unable to grasp the change for a few, endless seconds.

'You wet the bed again!' (10)

The relentless cold thus becomes immediately symbolic of her intense emotional trauma and physical and cultural dis/ease: "Her third winter in England and she wanted to die. She was so miserable, so unhappy, and so cold – always so cold" (37). The violence of family life, the hostile authority of the school, the threatening images and sounds of the playground and the streets together

create a pervasive and inescapable climate of un/belonging and impending annihilation.

In her discussion of Black life in the aftermath of chattel slavery, Sharpe (2016) draws on the trope of “the weather” as a condition of *being* that I find useful in the reading of the climate in Riley’s novel. Sharpe identifies the weather literally as “a condition of the atmosphere” and figuratively as a “state of mind” (102), both meanings converging powerfully in the physical and emotional alienation of Riley’s young protagonist. The weather, Sharpe argues, for Black people in historical and contemporary time and place represents “the totality of our environments”; it is “the total climate; and that climate is antiblack” (104). But the weather, she also suggests, “necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies” (106). Thus, Sharpe asks, “When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of anti-blackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?” (106).

In this article, I am interested finally, therefore, in thinking about how these forgotten female characters negotiate the shifting and unexpected climate of anti-blackness in London and Toronto in the mid-twentieth century. How do they perform the kind of “changeability and improvisation” (Sharpe 2016, 106) that might allow them to be/long, to exist without fear beyond Black death? How might they realize a sense of be/longing beyond struggle and loss? In exploring these questions in the remainder of the article, I am interested in the novels’ representation of heteronormative violence as a product of the hegemonic nation and the ways in which Black female characters negotiate the demands of family, race, class, and immigrant status in the face of overwhelming capitalist patriarchy. I am interested, further, in how these novels, by exposing the nation—both in the Caribbean and the metropolis—as flawed, might productively critique Black people’s settler desires in colonial imperialist polities like Britain and settler colonial states like Canada. I am interested finally in queer

characters' negotiation of alternative citizenships, the desired but impossible re/turn to the past, and how characters articulate new geographies of belonging (McKittrick 2006).

For the female protagonists in the three novels, the symptoms of Black death do not only originate from the violence of the external white environment, but even more dangerously they are precipitated by internal contestations within Caribbean families and communities over gender, sexuality and Black women's *being*. Diaspora communities everywhere, Hua (2005) explains, are "not exempted from sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, [and] ageism" (193). Amina Mama's 1993 study details the widespread conditions of domestic violence experienced by Caribbean, Asian and continental African women in first- and second-generation immigrant communities in London. The factors precipitating abuse as enumerated by the women participating in the study are varied but repeatedly linked to other experiences of racism, classism and sexism in the wider society and their subsequent convergence and expression in the family. The impact of the external factors of racism and classism, "such as bad housing and economic stresses," on intimate family life (Mama 1993, 129) becomes even more exacerbated in first-wave migrant communities. In these communities, migrant men not only experience new and unfamiliar forms of oppression, which then get expressed as violence toward women and children, but racialized women are also more likely to be rendered powerless by their alienation and to distrust authorities and agencies put in place to protect white women. The chain of violence against racialized women, Crenshaw (1991) argues, however, cannot be explained simply through the lens of racism and its effect on patriarchy:

Racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy. When violence is understood as an acting-out of being denied male power in other spheres, it seems counterproductive to embrace constructs that explicitly link the solution to domestic violence to the acquisition of greater male power (1258).

While it is important to understand racialized women's experiences at the intersections of race, class and gender, therefore, it is also important to insist that they not delay their own well-being at the expense of men; to demand that "women of color need not await the triumph over racism before they can expect to live violence-free lives" (Crenshaw 1991, 1258). Caribbean communities and metropolitan governments must acknowledge that racialized women face exceptional challenges as they struggle "with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of old and new patriarchies" (Clifford 1997, 259) and must envisage ways of addressing these challenges that recognize women's intersectional pain.

Queer identities likewise constitute a fraught site of struggle in Caribbean migrant communities. Claims to cultural "authenticity" and appeals to fundamentalist Christianity as an integral component of national identity work to reproduce understandings of "home" that are really meant to entrench old patterns of oppressive heteropatriarchy. These attempts to re-articulate specific nationalist discourses in new geo-political contexts demand an unquestioning loyalty to the tyrannical past and encourage new and existing hegemonic and homogenizing narratives about Caribbean cultures and cultural identities (Davis 2006, 25). As Walcott (2016) explains, two parallel streams of oppression operate against queer members of Caribbean migrant communities: "queer homonormative racism and Anglo-Caribbean homo-hatred" (132). These dual oppressions, both internal and external to Caribbean communities, operate like heteronormative violence against women to mark the multiple ways in which race, class, sexuality, religion, language and region converge in the preservation of patriarchy, national hegemonies and neo-liberal capitalism.

In each of the three novels, the family is the site in which heteronormative violence as a symbol of the hegemonic nation is expressed. In this way the family functions as a metaphor of first-wave Caribbean migrants' conflicted relationship with their new host societies and the ones they left behind. The novels thus explore what it means to be trapped between worlds—imprisoned

between the desire for be/longing and the repeating reality of loss—rejected by both the irretrievable Caribbean home and the betraying mother and father/land.

In Gilroy's novel, *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996), the extreme trauma experienced by the protagonist Melda originates, as it does in all three novels, in the Caribbean and not in the metropolitan city. As the illegitimate offspring of an unspoken sexual encounter between her father and his wife's younger sister, she is forced to negotiate a fraught relationship with an unforgiving step/mother half-mad from the grief of betrayal and siblings who exploit her guilt-laden penance in tortured childhood abuses. Her step/mother's eventual recovery from insanity, her education with the help of her teacher Mrs. Penn, and the opportunity to migrate offer her some distance from her painful past, although her craving to be/long still leaves her searching for a meaning of family she can trust.

The theme of maternal abandonment that frames the novel importantly mirrors the abandonment and guilt experienced by first-generation Caribbean migrants in London. Betrayed by the economic, social and emotional disappointments of the Caribbean home they once loved, they came seeking a "better" life in the mother/land, their hopes wrapped in cheap suitcases, as quickly discarded as their dreams. Faced with a different kind of un/belonging in London, where racism and class prejudice are experienced through a series of "of course" situations—"clear for all to see beyond a doubt" (50)—Melda, like many of these migrants, swiftly abandons her dreams. Long past the days of her unqualified, expectant first arrival, she is forced to accept her transformed social position, not as a rightful settler, but as an undesired immigrant. Migrant workers, she explains "went from having a firm identity – of family, village, island or religion –to having only a nominal one: foreigner" (86). While her own history of familial dispossession and childhood abuse challenges this automatic claim to family and identity and suggests that the past can be as terrifying as the present, her current experiences of racism, classism and sexism encourage the

reifying of a patriarchal notion of family, nation and religion. Melda's reluctance to accept a position as foreigner and immigrant outsider also paradoxically denies her the ability to critique the nation's imperialistic designs, to contest the colonial authority of "Queen, Country and Empire" (61). In addition, her critique leaves patriarchy unchallenged. It is surprising that Melda never blames her father for his infidelity or even his inability (or refusal) to protect her. Throughout the novel, her father as symbol of Caribbean patriarchy and Mrs. Penn as symbol of Black middle-class womanhood remain as the idealized figures of her childhood. Coming to terms with the hurt and hurting working-class mother—"what made Ma the way she was – so cruel, so violent, like slave days?" (28)—is too difficult a proposition that would demand an examination of the deep historical and contemporary sources of Black women's pain, including her own.

Still, in the necessary quest for "changeability and improvisation," for "new ecologies" (Sharpe 2016, 106) that can move us past death, Melda continues to search for new ways to adapt to the metaphoric mother/land that has rejected her. She eventually finds a measure of healing and balance by creating her own community of care. Melda mediates the pain of her childhood abuse not through marriage and nuclear motherhood, but by rescuing and healing abandoned Caribbean children in the foster care practice she establishes in the house she resourcefully purchases from her inheritance from Mrs. Penn. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Melda begins some of the difficult work of re-imagining Caribbean familial relationships from a woman-centered rather than a patriarchal perspective: "We had sung in praise of Pa's love for his children, but what of Ma?" (108).

The ongoing struggle between desire and rejection, as dramatized at both the national and familial levels, is also represented in the novel in the relationship between Melda and her sister-in-law—the blond, blue-eyed East German refugee, Trudi. Trudi's extreme whiteness, her suspect ethnicity, and her exaggerated claims over her Black Caribbean husband (animated ironically by her own wartime suffering) prevent both women from acknowledging their

shared pain and using it as a bridge across which to transcend their historical differences. As Gilroy explains in an interview with Bradshaw (2002):

The change that must occur in these ladies is that they have to develop new forms of philosophy. New forms of belief, self-belief, relationship to the world that is different for both of them and a different moral vision, a different form of communication pattern. (384)

This knowing how to negotiate and honour difference is at the heart of both the family's healing and the ongoing decolonial project. The death of Melda's father ultimately heals the breach between her and Trudi, joining their families across their differences and multiple continents in one final act of mourning, thus, opening up possibilities for healing on many levels. In this novel, family and be/longing are thus re-articulated in subtle but necessary ways. Across deep divisions and pain, Melda finally learns to enlarge her definition of family and explore new definitions of self:

For me, perhaps, the search was coming to an end, and my whole scrambled world was swinging into clearer focus. The clouds were breaking up. My wounds were healing. I saw a beautiful and happy girl smiling up at the sun from the bottom of the rainwater barrel. (148).

The novel's ambivalent ending—with Melda making plans to leave London for New York to care for her brother Arnie—suggests nonetheless that there still remains a fundamental disconnect between Black women's desire to be/long to place, family, and community and their dreams of self-actualization. While Melda rediscovers her family, she has yet to fully find herself.

Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985), like Gilroy's novel, explores the young protagonist's experiences of intense abuse within the framework of the family. Forced to leave her aunt in Jamaica at age eleven to join a father she does not know in England, Hyacinth conjures up memories of an idyllic childhood to shield her from the unrelenting cruelty of her new stepmother and her father's physical and sexual violence. While Hyacinth's stepmother functions like Melda's

unforgiving mother in *Praise of Love and Children* (1996), it is the terror of heteropatriarchy that is the primary theme of Riley's novel. As a harsh and emotionally damaged character, the father's notion of masculinity is distorted by his inability to exercise power in a society where he is estranged from white male economic and political control. His working-class authority as father and husband is thus expressed through the physical and emotional abuse he unleashes with impunity against his daughter and wife.

The father's ability to exact complete control of his daughter importantly depends on both the physical and violent torture of her body and the psychological control he exerts over her mind. The father's greatest control over his daughter, therefore, operates in the skilful way he abuses her racial and gendered positionalities in a society she does not understand and in which she exercises no power either as a young woman or a Black person. The father's careful reading of the society thus allows him to deliberately exploit his daughter's "intersectional subordination" (Crenshaw 1991, 1249). His constant inventory of the terror of whiteness and the violent effects of racism exacerbates his daughter's gendered and raced oppression. In this way, "the consequence of the imposition of one burden" (child abuse, sexism, misogyny) interacts "with pre-existing vulnerabilities" (fear of racism and self-hate) to create new layered dimensions of gendered disempowerment (Crenshaw 1991, 1249). Hyacinth's conviction of Black death, her deep sense of racial inferiority and her growing gendered self-hate are her father's greatest weapons against her, trapping her in a cycle of abuse that ensures his power and impunity and critically delays her attempts at escape: "She felt sick with fear, trapped, sandwiched between the hate and spite of the white world and the dark dingy evil that was the house of her father" (51). Indeed, Hyacinth's fear of whiteness becomes inseparable from the fear of her physically and sexually abusive father:

She tried to banish her fear, fear of the white world juggling with the horrible images of that swollen exposed lump. 'I don't want to die,' she moaned, teeth chattering. 'Please don't let me die. I want to go home to my auntie.' She was immersed in her fear, huddled and

shaking with the horror she had left and the one her imagination conjured up. (64)

Like one of Melda's abandoned, homeless and abused children, Hyacinth finds reprieve only when she is forced to confront her dual fears, escapes from her father and is transferred into foster care.

Still, the constant reminder of her physical and cultural differences leaves her vulnerable and permanently alienated, struggling with self-hate even into her adulthood. In the search for physical and emotional self-correction, Hyacinth employs a different version of respectability politics by deliberately cutting herself off from other Black people: "She always made a point of ignoring the black students, lifting her nose high when they came close to her, feeling the need to establish herself as different in other people's minds" (81). Her burden of Black shame, complete self-abnegation, and simultaneous fear of and desire for whiteness lead to her permanent and absolute isolation and renders the healing of the traumatic past impossible.

Rather than confronting the past, Hyacinth hides instead in the fantasy of the dream world she creates. By reimagining her childhood in Jamaica in a series of dreams and daydreams, she succeeds in constructing a picture of an idyllic but deceptive past. These dreams, which occur routinely after a traumatic event at home or school, conjure up memories of a triumphant, newly independent Jamaica, a nurturing and comforting Aunt Joyce and sustaining childhood friendships. In this way, her dreams come to represent a parallel reality—an imaginary sanctuary in which she can seek protection from the harsh truths that circumscribe her sad and ordinary life. The fact that her own mother goes missing from the narrative is telling. Her dreams are also always a precursor of a new bout of trauma. Since each of her early dreams end in an episode of enuresis, the fantasy of childhood bliss is always followed by her father's abuse and the personal conviction of her growing shame.

After her separation from her father, as she struggles to accept her body and becomes exposed to new political ways of thinking about the world—including critiques of her beloved Jamaica—Hyacinth's dreams become increasingly disturbed. It is in these dreams turned nightmares that the painful secrets of the past begin to emerge. The two dreams, which bookend the novel, portray this deep dichotomy between the reality and duplicity of the past. The first dream recalls a triumphant independent Jamaica, while the other unearths the forgotten horrifying death of her childhood friend Cynthia. It is only at the end of the novel, then, that readers discover that Hyacinth's trauma originates in the Caribbean. It is out of her desire to be/long somewhere and for love and forgiveness, that Hyacinth has had to reconstruct Jamaica as a preferred mother/land framed by the substitute maternal relationship with Aunt Joyce. Like Melda's family in Guyana, however, the Jamaican "home" is in reality a place of unforgiveness where women go half-mad from grief and children die abandoned in fires. Hyacinth's absolute detachment from reality is reinforced in her friend Florence's harsh indictment at the end of the novel of her abandonment of Aunt Joyce: "yu neva even sen somting fe pay docta bill" and "is when yu neva rite that she start drink de wite rum" (141). Florence's accusations fail, however, not only to recognize the damaging extent of the institutional racism Hyacinth experiences in England, but also the extent of her childhood trauma and psychosis originating in their friendship. The reality is that Hyacinth never feels any sense of adult responsibility for her aunt, and can never develop any meaningful adult relationships of her own, because she remains trapped in childhood, still searching for adult love and protection, still searching for the mother she cannot find.

Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2003) appears initially to shift the focus of the family away from the power of patriarchy by centring the lives of five generations of Jamaican women. At the head of the family is the indomitable Maria, who is both Mama and great-great grandmother. In this representation of the Jamaican mother, Silvera deliberately "disrupts the common belief that woman-headed households are powerless" by depicting an alternate representation of Caribbean family (Beckford 2011, 227). By

portraying Maria as an overbearing, unforgiving matriarch who sacrifices her own life and dreams for those of her children, the novel is also concerned, like Gilroy's novel, however, with the burden and pain of motherhood. The crushing weight of motherhood, which overtakes each generation of female characters, stymies their dreams of the future and leads to repeated patterns of familial neglect and failure and abuses of maternal power. As Beckford (2011) explains, "the contradictory and oppressive side of the grandmother, as a product of a patriarchal, seemingly religious society, has been shaped by the [very] gender system that informed her characterization as a matriarch" (250). Patriarchy remains, therefore, at the heart of the decisions that animate this matrilineal household.

It is noteworthy that it is the failure of heteropatriarchy's promise of marriage and motherhood as the ultimate achievements of Black middle-class womanhood that combine to mark the deepest failures in Maria's life:

A nuh likkle try mi try wid all mi pickney dem. Mi really try. An' de second man mi fall for was Oliver, and him worse. De only thing him ever give me was a wedding ring, which mi had to sell, fi feed de pickney dem. (63)

Yet, despite her failed relationships, Maria's ultimate conviction in the validity of patriarchy remains intact, played out in her obsessive relationships with her sons and her final blind obsequious dependency on her grandson, Vittorio, to whom she bequeaths her entire estate. Her deep disappointment in each of her children, particularly her male children, and her husband's multiple abandonments, produce in her a harsh and necessary strength, but also translate ultimately into an unshakeable sense of her own failure. Her inability to succeed in the socially valued roles of wife and mother dislocates her sense of self, resulting in successive drunken binges that mark each of her personal betrayals. The harshness of Black women's lives—poverty, demands of single parenthood, and repeated male abandonment—leads to a kind of self-inflicted cruelty, a ruthless unforgiving love, a heart that breaks but cannot bend (Beckford 2011).

The novel's critique of the overbearing and unrelenting family is also made explicit in its portrayal of Caribbean queer subjectivities. The novel's expressions of "Anglo-Caribbean homo-hatred" (Walcott 2016, 132) confirm the role of fundamentalist Christianity as a by-product of hegemonic patriarchy. While Maria frames her opposition to her son's and granddaughter's gay and lesbian relationships as an expression of maternal care and protection—"Den yuh nuh 'fraid a de talk, unnu nuh 'fraid people shoot unnu? Or a unnu so powerful? A unnu so bold-face" (229)—her actions are primarily motivated by a sense of Christian middle-class respectability. She importantly understands the performance of this respectability as another extension of her "proper" role as a mother and wife, a performance she encourages Molly to emulate: "Molly, yuh have a daughter. Think 'bout her, if yuh won't think 'bout me" (186). While Molly, indeed, sacrifices her "quest for individuation" to the demands of family (Beckford 2011, 258), Mikey refuses this project of self-annihilation, articulating an alternative path to family and citizenship:

Mama, ah love yuh, but a lot happen over de years since yuh left mi, and mi survive without any help from de family.... Mi not walking and begging on de streets. Me nuh wear tear-up clothes and mi nuh walk and holler and mi nuh tief. (230)

By naming his independence as separate from the family and nation, Mikey reminds Maria of her own abandonment of him and critiques the nuclear family as an infallible model of love and security. His exemplary, but unrecognized, citizenship also indicts the Caribbean nation for its abject rejection of its queer subjects. In the end, Silvera's novel challenges not only the patriarchal nuclear family but argues for a more redeeming, sustaining definition of community that can supersede both the demands of the Caribbean "home" and the colonial settler state.

The Heart Does Not Bend (2003), like Gilroy's and Riley's novels, also explores the desired but impossible re/turn to the past. Female characters' search for family, home and be/longing demands the multiple negotiation of physical and emotional detours between the Caribbean "home" and its metropolitan

diasporas. Seeking to escape the socio-economic “dead-end street” (256) which characterizes life in urban Jamaica, and subsequently disillusioned by life in Canada, Maria and her children and grandchildren undertake, like Gilroy’s characters, multiple migrations first to Canada and later to the United States and Europe. As in England, Canada’s promise of upward mobility and financial and educational success is never realized, initiating for Maria’s children and grandchildren a new set of journeys in search of new horizons, and for Maria herself the final, fated return to Jamaica. Ostracized by the changing circumstances of her class from the now-abandoned house on Wigton Street, she ends her final days not in an island paradise but in an “iron coffin” (11) where she dies of a broken and unforgiving heart. Maria may have returned to Jamaica to die but, like Gilroy’s and Riley’s characters, she has yet to find her way “home.”

Since the “home” to which one re/turns always exceeds nostalgic memory, final re/turn, for Maria, as it is for Caribbean migrants in London and Toronto, is ultimately impossible. The painful disillusionment with the dystopic present is confounded by the knowing that “place is always bound by time” (James 1993, 248). It is not that the returning immigrant is simply a foreigner in her own country, “it is that [s]he has no country at all and is a foreigner everywhere ‘an eccentric at home and exile abroad’ a citizen without a nation” (James 1993, 248-249). Melda explains this dilemma in *Praise of Love and Children* (1996):

I had now spent nearly twelve years in Britain.... Every bad winter, every ice-cold spring or so-so summer, I had vowed, ‘This is the last’, but here I was still in London, not yet able to understand the country. I accepted my given synonyms: foreigner, immigrant, dark stranger. As long as I lived here, that was what I would be. (99)

In finally accepting her status as immigrant, Melda comes to understand diaspora be/longing not as neo-colonial resettlement but as a process of self-recognition. Diaspora re/turn as another kind of arrival is never useful in and of itself.

In *The Unbelonging* (1985) the desire for re/turn and its resolution are more complex. The novel suggests that the “better life” Caribbean migrants entered was a dystopic nightmare they may have survived by developing strategies of “deferred gratification” in which they transposed their failed emotional, social and economic desires back onto a Caribbean “homeland” (Thompson 1990, 49-50). But the homeland they constructed was invariably one to which re/turn was impossible. The Jamaica Hyacinth remembers—fixed and frozen in time—does not exist in reality. Home is an unrealisable, romanticised fiction that cannot be re-inhabited again. While physical re/turn may take place, emotional and psychological re/turn are impossible in all directions. At the close of the novel when Hyacinth physically returns to Jamaica, the image of the romanticized Aunt Joyce as metaphor for the idealized maternal home/land fragments into a terrifying nightmare:

The double bed she had shared with her aunt was gone, in its place a broken-down single one. On it lay a withered old woman, covered with a torn and grimy sheet.... Hyacinth stared at her in horror, frozen with shock and disbelief.... The bony body shifted uncertainly on the bed, feet moving with painful deliberation.... Then it was standing, swaying uncertainly, movement unsure as it started toward her. (139)

“The horrifying maternal body,” and not just the patriarchal father, is at the heart of women’s pain in this novel (Hoving 2001, 63). While the father’s betrayal symbolizes the violent duplicity of the colonial mother/fatherland with its false promise of economic and social advancement and its historical abuse of colonial power, it is the inability to return to the actual mother, symbolized in the image of the idolized Caribbean island “home,” that cuts Hyacinth off from any sustaining sense of the future. The de-mythification of Hyacinth’s “desperately desired ideal, motherly, Jamaican home, as a soothing contrast to the cold, destructive, male world of England” (Hoving 2001, 65), forces her to confront “the full horror of both (surrogate) mother- and fatherland” (66). Her dreams, thus, come apart in the final pages of the novel in the face of Florence’s nationalist directive: “Go back whe yu come fram. We noh like farigners ina J.A.” (142). Still, perhaps in destroying the fiction of “home”—in the recognition

that “home” is simultaneously “a place of safety and terror” (Brah 1996, 177)—and in the disrupting of the myth of the nurturing nation, Hyacinth may have discovered the point at which healing may begin.

As Caribbean migrants disillusioned by their coming “home” to the mother/land and as Caribbean nationals desiring a triumphant return to a past both fixed in and altered by time, the novels’ characters must eventually come to understand diaspora be/longing not as neo-colonial resettlement but as “a homing desire” (Brah 1996, 177). This desire for be/longing, as Brah (1996) explains, “is not the same thing as desire for a ‘homeland’” (177), which is always a desire for post-colonial repossession and new hegemonic relationships. Not all diasporas, in fact, “inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’” (Brah 1996, 189). What happens “when one cannot or does not want to look back for political or economic reasons” (Braziel and Mannur 2003, 9) or when queer diasporic subjects and women reject the desire to look back to nations marked by patriarchal and heteronormative violence (Hua 2005)? In Riley’s *The Unbelonging* (1985), re/turn to the family and nation opens up a wound that bleeds. Their necessary unmasking, however, provides a tentative opening that may lead to self-recognition and release Hyacinth into the freedom to live independently beyond fear. *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996) ends with a departure rather than a re/turn. Melda’s productive critique of the nation gives her a more expansive vision of the world. As she faces outward, she reaches toward familial be/longing, even as she is still searching for autonomous being. *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2003), of the three novels, points most resolutely toward a future based on new articulations of citizenship. The path to the future, significantly, is left in the care of Maria’s great-grandchildren, the second and third generations born in Canada. Precisely because these new generations, cut off from Jamaica and permanently marooned in Canada (Brand 2001), do not know how to look back—“This? This? This is the house all the fussing was about?” (258)—they are best positioned to critique both nations and delineate a new map toward a different kind of future.

In the readings I have offered of the three novels by Gilroy, Riley and Silvera, I have suggested a new kind of female trilogy that might help us reimagine Caribbean women's post-war experiences in London and Toronto. The novels' critique of the patriarchal family and their representation of heteronormative violence as a product of the nation reveal the unique ways in which Caribbean women might have attempted to negotiate the demands of new migrant communities and new and old patriarchies. The novels' demarcation of the need for new geographies of be/longing (McKittrick 2006) ultimately unmasks the pretense of the "post-diaspora" subject even while they contest the notion of the innocence of family, memory and nation. In their rejection of any simple and singular return to the Caribbean "home" and in the articulation of alternative strategies of "changeability and improvisation" in the metropolitan city (Sharpe 2016, 106), these texts also explore the terms through which their characters might enact new imagined communities and futures beyond the imperial colonial nation and the settler colonial state. In this way, the novels re-narrate new possibilities, no matter how tentative, for Caribbean women's *being* in historical time and place and begin to articulate new possibilities of be/longing beyond erasure and loss.

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¹ The author's decision to write the word Black with an uppercase B serves as a linguistic re-assertion of the humanity and agency of people of African descent in societies where that humanity and agency have historically been, and continue to be, under attack.

² The article's use of the term Caribbean refers exclusively to the Anglophone Caribbean, specifically the former colonies of Great Britain in the region. Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and British Guiana / Guyana were among the most significant sources of migrants to the UK and North America during the post-war period. For a breakdown of migrants by island between 1955 and 1961, see Byron (1994, p. 79).

³ I use the term "migrant" to denote a sense of autonomy in Caribbean people's choice to relocate to the UK and Canada in the mid-twentieth century. Their decisions to migrate were not only based on strategic educational and economic choices, but also on cultural and political considerations (Bidnall 2017). Later in the paper, I use the term "immigrants" to designate the raced and classed re-classification of these communities that stripped them of any social and political agency and saw them only as economically and culturally "backward" newcomers who contributed little to the overall well-being of the societies in which they were situated. The transformation of status from migrant to immigrant also makes possible, however, important critiques both of the neo/colonial nation and the Caribbean home/land. The article also signals the tension between migrant and immigrant in the use of the term "post-diaspora" as a marker of Caribbean immigrants' deceptive desire for full national recognition in the UK and Canada.

⁴ Samuel Selvon's trilogy includes *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *Moses Migrating* (1983). The novels offer the first comprehensive treatment in fiction of Caribbean migrant life in London, but do so almost exclusively from the perspective of the protagonist Moses and the other male characters with whom he interacts.

⁵ Austin Clarke's Toronto trilogy includes *The Meeting Point* (1967), *Storm of Fortune* (1973), and *The Bigger Light* (1975). Like Selvon's work, the trilogy, set in the 1950s and 1960s, offers an indispensable portrayal of the complexities of Caribbean immigrant experience in the post-war period. Clarke's novels differ from Selvon's in their treatment of the lives and friendships of a group of Caribbean domestic workers in Toronto.

⁶ Ironically, the 1948 British Nationality Act was a response to Canada's decision in 1946 to declare separate citizenship from Britain, thus, ending the common status that all British subjects shared and necessitating a new way of maintaining commonality across Commonwealth territories. See Bryon and Condon (2008.)