

1. Introduction

- Don't you know that what I fear most is my words floating separate from my body? You there with that tape recorder is the scariest thing!
(Sheila Heti 2014: 59)

There are some good reasons to begin this book on Caribbean diaspora writing with a quote cited from the autobiographical novel by Jewish Canadian author Sheila Heti. For one, and this refers to the author's biography, Heti was born to Hungarian parents in North America, thus her family's history is one of migration as is also the case for the four Caribbean writers I engage with here – two of whom are also citizens of Canada. Likewise, they share a history of displacement and diasporic dispersal as well as of being attributed a constructed ethnic identity that is used as marketing tool for their literary output. Lastly, the quote from the novel itself is telling for bringing the body into focus. This sentence is uttered by Sheila's friend Margaux during a conversation that Sheila wants to record to help her write a theater play she is struggling with, which Margaux, however, feels is scary, because she risks losing control over her own words and body. The idea that one can separate an utterance from its source – the mouth and body – by recording it is interesting, but it makes one think about the actual inseparability of the body and the text: Through recording and writing down Margaux's words they might be materially detached from the body, but they indeed become durable, fixed; they are "floating" no longer, as the character fears. To record words (whether on tape or as text) in fact means to document this body's history and make it accessible for others. It is not owned by the individual alone any longer, which might be the source of Margaux's fear and which brings me to ask whose histories and whose bodies are we actually talking about? In the context of the literature investigated here, there is nothing to be feared. The literary record creates durability in the unity of word, body, and existence. Those words being recorded in the novels in fact may be thought of as a process of becoming, of writing Caribbean bodies back into being.

1.1 Women's Fiction of the Caribbean Diaspora

Caribbean diasporic women's writing in North America, usually conceived of as part of immigrant fiction and ethnic literature, has gained increasing importance since the post-1960 social movements in the context of identity politics and the emergence of post- and decolonial theory since the 1980s. The 1990s in particular mark the beginning of a new period in Caribbean women's writing, especially in the emerging field of Afro-Caribbean women's fiction and poetry.¹ This period manifests itself on the basis of a wide range of topics and genres, diverse lived experiences that the writers cover, new contexts, facilitated access to publishing opportunities and distribution channels – the latter being a development in the metropolitan centers of the global North in particular. The founding of alternative publishing houses like Peepal Tree Press in Leeds or Sister Vision Press in Toronto, publications of influential anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (1981), Selwyn Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writers* (1990), and Carol B. Davies and Elaine S. Fido's *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), or the institutionalization of Caribbean studies at North American and British universities² have created new spaces for literary voices which have been or continue to be marginalized. This development, paired with the huge success of some authors, has often been related to affirmative action and multicultural policies particularly in the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, the increasing global reception of the mostly diasporic Caribbean literature is attributed to an educated, mostly white, middle-class reading public's demand for a 'true' ethnic story, preferably disguised as a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story, 'authentic' for sure. The authors of ethnic, migrant fiction are put in the position of 'ethnic advocacy to adopt Arjun Appadurai's term (cf. 2008: 300). Zadie Smith, as well, feels bur-

1 The 1960s mark the beginning of the early Women's Movement in the Anglophone Caribbean (cf. Narain 2001; 2007). Since the 1970s, according to Jana Gohrisch (2007), a critical woman's perspective increasingly enters the Caribbean literary scene. But, it is only since the late 1980s that the field has started to pay attention to Caribbean women writers and their literary output. Caribbean women's writing as a serious field of study has emerged since the 1990s in literary and postcolonial studies (cf. Narain 2007: 224; Torres-Saillant 2013a: 89), thanks as well to international conferences on Caribbean women's fiction, the publication of anthologies (such as the seminal *Out of the Kumbla* by Boyce Davies and Savory Fido in 1990), and a variety of published critical articles (cf. Anim-Addo 1996; Cudjoe 1990).

2 For example, the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at the York University, Toronto, or the Caribbean Studies Program at the University of Toronto.

dened by the “responsibilities of representation” along with the market pressure for authenticity, as she puts it:

The thing that can be challenging in fiction is allowing people to exist imperfectly. There is perhaps an added pressure if the author belongs to a group that feels itself burdened by what I want to call the responsibilities of representation. [...] I want to write without shame or pride or over-compensation in one direction or another. To write freely. (Smith 2013: n.p.)

The burden of representing the “single story,” as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says (cf. Adichie 2009), the grand narrative of a whole community, region, or even continent, often determines the topics writers of Color must engage with to get published and achieve global recognition.

Now, “Caribbean literature written by women authors is embracing the global community,” Florence R. Journey writes in her monograph on women-authored fiction from the Anglo-, Hispano-, and Francophone Caribbean (2009: 1). The 1990s, indeed, as scholars on Caribbean literature like Alison Donnell note, mark “a critical moment [...] through the articulation of sexuality within Caribbean writings” (Donnell 2006: 9). Former taboo topics related in particular to the female body, active sexuality, homoerotic desire and love, but also physical violence are increasingly engaged with in creative ways. A new generation of writers explores ethnic and diasporic identities in transition along with queer subject positions or fluid gender constructions. Underlying their creative work is almost always an understanding of embodied subjectivity as entangled with other social factors of gender, sex, race, and class and the resulting hierarchies and effects on citizenship. The strong presence of women’s voices both in the literary field as well as in the literature itself goes hand in hand with a recovery of marginalized identities and silenced histories, and this without being essentialist. Rather, I take this as a strategic move of a politically engaged writing to give privilege to formerly and still excluded subjects as part of a larger emancipatory agenda against colonial dominance, the literary legacy of the European canon, as well as a Caribbean literary scene that for a long time has been dominated by male writers. At the same time, women writers in the field make a legitimate claim for inclusion within the mostly patriarchal anti- or decolonial nationalist movements of the twentieth century and cultural diaspora discourses of the twenty-first century.

Far from being a uniform phenomenon, Caribbean literature is a multifaceted, heterogeneous formation reflecting on the ethnic, social, and cultural diversity in the region. It is further diversified through (transnational) global connections and diasporic processes, which makes it an excellent object for

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comparative study. What needs to be mentioned at this point is that a rather recent addition to the field of Caribbean literature is the fiction authored by Caribbean women of Indian descent (cf. Mahabir/Pirbhai 2013).³ While the literatures produced by African and Indian-descended Caribbean writers share many thematic concerns, they are still investigated separately by literary scholars who adopt usually an either-or-perspective. This separation in Caribbean research reflects their separate ethnic identities or group consciousness not only on a national level, enforced by colonial authorities and upheld ever since by post-colonial processes of ‘ethnopoliticization,’ but also with regard to community building in the diaspora (be it in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, or France). This study seeks to overcome this artificial separation by its selection of a heterogeneous corpus reading Indian- and African-Caribbean diasporic novels next to each other. Moreover, a mono-linguistic focus on Caribbean literature is still discernable in literary scholarship, meaning a focus on only one linguistic area, either on the Dutch, Hispano-, Franco-, or Anglophone Caribbean, owing this both to traditional area studies as well as to the outdated notion of a national literature (and surely also to the literary scholar’s own language competence). While it is crucial to take note of the particularity of each nation state and the cultural plurality within the region, similarities do exist in the historical, political, and economic development, the fact of colonial occupation, and neo-imperial dependency capitalism. A fruitful discussion of Caribbean literary and cultural production in the Americas that potentially crosses borders will take into consideration their sameness in difference, not as artificially separated but on the grounds of what they share being as they are embedded within intra-regional and transnational circulations of people, capital, culture, and knowledge – an approach undertaken particularly in Inter-American Studies and one that moves beyond a restrictive focus on a national literature.⁴

In the second, revised edition of *Caribbean Poetics: Towards an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (2013a [1997]), Silvio Torres-Saillant includes *en passant* the idea of a diaspora poetics as a necessary addition to a regional Caribbean poetics that he defines in the first edition, but does not offer a comparably

3 See especially Ramabai Espinet’s criticism of the absence of Indian women characters and female agency in Caribbean literature (cf. 1996).

4 The ‘New World approach’ as promoted by Michael Dash, “is also being proposed against the background of a still prevalent tendency to fragment the Caribbean into zones of linguistic influence or ideologically determined categories. [...] To force a national model onto a literature that often identifies itself with larger regional and ideological entities would be a misleading simplification” (Dash 1998: 3). See also the recent publication by Elena Machado Sáez (2015).

systematic approach to the texts and themes. I propose a *Caribbean diaspora poetics* in tandem with the generic mode of the coming of age as structuring principle, and thus extend Torres-Saillant's concept of a Caribbean poetics that, according to him, is defined amongst other things by the condition of marginality. In terms of marginality, some shifts are observable: Indeed the literature has moved from the geographic and economic periphery of the Antilles to the so-called literary metropolitan centers in the North. Caribbean-descended authors receive international acclaim, like Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, or Marlon James; diaspora literature, similarly, has found a niche in academia and in the literary scene. The problematic issue is that what has come to be defined as Caribbean literature in general is mostly the product of Caribbean writers residing in the diaspora at the expense of the regional literary scene in the Caribbean. Without being too strict on artificially separating 'island' from 'diaspora writings,' we should nevertheless acknowledge local authors, their different national belongings, as well as publication barriers and the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital.⁵ But still, the increased engagement with Caribbean diaspora writers may contribute eventually to the visibility of the literature also from the region.

The coming-of-age novel is one of the most prevailing generic formations in Caribbean fiction having emerged from the *Bildungsroman* tradition to depict individual and community development. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the contribution of four authors, namely Makeda Silvera, Ramabai Espinet, Edwidge Danticat, and Angie Cruz, hailing from various parts of the Caribbean and different diaspora locations, to the formation of the coming-of-age genre and a women-centered (literary) history as well as an emancipatory body politics in the Caribbean and diaspora. The study discusses the multiple ways these writers negotiate the complexities of Caribbean life and individual migrant experiences, thereby disclosing the discriminatory practices of racism, sexism, and classism challenging the normative functioning of the underlying social categories. I illustrate how corporeality and multiple forms of embodiment are dealt with through the mode of the coming-of-age narrative. An underlying thesis is that the novels' focus on the adolescent and adult female body and the processes of 'becoming woman' can be read as a subversion of Eurocentric models of the *Bildungsroman* and, on a larger level, as criticism of

5 I will return to this aspect in the conclusion reading Ifeona Fulani's concept of "literary anancyism" (2005) along with Marc McGurl's criticism of "high cultural pluralism" (2009) and Elena Machado Sáez' "market aesthetics" (2015).

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hegemonic formations.⁶ The four writers selected here make strategic use of a dominant literary tradition from a minority perspective in an attempt to decolonize the genre and the ways of reading it. Nevertheless, one should be cautious not to apply a one-sided reading that, on the one hand, neglects the market mechanisms of the literary field, and, on the other, presupposes that all texts claim to be politically subversive or depict resisting subjects.

This study's concern is two-fold: It deals with the omnipresence of the body in and its construction through the text, while also being concerned with the "enduring power" (Bolaki 2011:10) of the *Bildungsroman* or the coming-of-age novel, a category that some deemed a long lost "phantom" (Redfield 1996: xi). The *Bildungsroman* is traditionally regarded as the novelistic genre that most fully reflects, according to Joseph Slaughter, on the "normative process of human personality development" (2007: 43) and is "most intensely concerned with the problematics of socialization" (92). The majority of literary scholars will certainly agree on this broad definition. However, there is – and I shall return to this point later on – no consent on terminological choice, the least when it comes to those literatures that accommodate minority voices and are political in intention. Moreover, whereas some literary critics and scholars claim that the *Bildungsroman* is dead or at least unpopular and outdated, this does not hold true for coming-of-age narratives – especially when these narratives recount marginalized histories, non-normative embodiments, or queer desire. This shows not only in literary fiction but also in contemporary cinema. Barry Jenkins' award-winning coming-of-age film, *Moonlight* (2016), for example, which is based on the semi-autobiographical piece *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, offers a story about, amongst other things, the (forbidden) homosexuality of the African American protagonist. It deals with integration and social exclusion on the one hand, and, on the other, with sexual development, the negotiation of gender roles, as well as hegemonic masculinity and Blackness. Similarly to the novels that will be discussed in the following chapters, the film clearly shows the fictional, medial representation and construction of the body via the text, or the coming-of-age narrative.

Moreover, the approach to the literary diaspora of the Caribbean in North America undertaken here, what I refer to as a *pan-Caribbean diasporan perspective*, aims to be more inclusive in covering multiple experiences of displacement

6 Such a reading is certainly influenced by postcolonial studies, its 'empire criticism,' and the paradigmatic 'writing back'; see also the approach by Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker in *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, (2010) and the chapter "Talking Back to the Bildungsroman" in MacDonald-Smythe's monograph *Making Homes in the West/Indies* (2001).

and several linguistic areas.⁷ It allows including authors of multiple positionalities, coming from different parts of the Caribbean region and residing in the diaspora location of Canada and the United States. Acknowledging a shared history of traumatic experiences of uprooting, it accounts for a cultural, geographical reality of dispersal and fragmentation as a result of global movements in tandem with the emergence of transnational networks. Although the novels can be counted among North American immigrant fiction and although the migrant experience is central in these novels, the denomination of diaspora literature is preferred here over immigrant fiction to indicate their connection to a Caribbean literary tradition and compare them on basis of their diasporic connection and idea of a transnational yet diverse *Caribbeanness*. I agree with Brinda Mehta on the productive use of “Caribbeanness as a site for interracial collaborations, gender negotiations and the affirmation of negated identities” (Mehta 2004: 65).⁸

1.2 “In Search of Itself”: Caribbean History and Migration

A thorough reading of the novels selected for this study necessitates a likewise thorough contextualization of the history and geopolitics they emerge from. At this point a brief overview of a few cornerstones of Caribbean history as well as migratory movements shall suffice to better frame the different theoretical approaches combined here, and, on the other hand, point out the books’ common grounds.

The Caribbean archipelago is usually singled out for its exceptional cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. The widely discussed idea of creolization is linked directly to the region’s colonial history, the encounter of indigenous, African, Asian, and European cultures, as well as to constant migratory

7 I should note, however, that all four writers discussed here write and publish in English due to their situatedness in Canada and the United States which slightly weakens the argument of the linguistic diversity of the text corpus but not of the authors’ backgrounds. Supporting my argument of linguistic richness, however, is the inclusion of Afro-Caribbean proverbs, Hindi terms, Dominican-Spanish sentences, Jamaican patwa, or Haitian kreyòl in the narratives.

8 See also the publication by Rebecca Fuchs (2014) in which she contours *Caribbeanness* as a global phenomenon investigating the literary production of three Caribbean writers, namely Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat, and Cristina García, residing in the diaspora.

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movements within and out of the region.⁹ The Caribbean has never been a geographical space only “but a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, languages, communities of people” (Boyce Davies 1994: 13). Creolization, migration, and subsequent diaspora formations have further extended the Caribbean to a transnational “contact zone” (Pratt 1991: 34). Ever since its ‘discovery’ it has also been a site of imagination and consumption for the Western world on which erotic fantasies and the desire for possession continue to be projected (cf. Sheller 2003). The imaginary of the exotic, paradisiac Caribbean promoted by multinational tour operators but also by local tourist boards is to be seen within an exploitative regime of the global economy with often disastrous effects on individual lives.

Carine Mardorossian describes the encounter of different people, cultures, religions, and languages in the Caribbean as “transnational and cross-cultural processes of intermixing and transformation” (Mardorossian 2005: 4), a creative, enriching process that is most prominently theorized by Kamau Brathwaite’s notion of creolization. This celebratory ethos of a ‘happy hybridity’ should by no means extenuate the fact that the “history of the Caribbean has been a violent one,” as Selwyn Cudjoe puts it (1980: 1). Cross-cultural mixing and miscegenation have been enforced in the cruelest ways possible by European colonialism, starting with the conquest of the so-called ‘New World’ in 1492 and the subsequent quasi-annihilation of the indigenous population through the hands of Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. The seventeenth century, then, marks the beginning of the era of colonialism and slavery in the whole area of the Greater Caribbean. The British, French, Dutch, and Danish crown joined the two other European powers on Caribbean soil to compete for hegemony. Accompanying European mercantilism, a highly profitable plantation system, and a triangular transatlantic trade of humans and goods were introduced, during which approximately ten million people were taken forcefully from Africa across the Atlantic and enslaved in the Americas – a devel-

9 Geographically, the Caribbean archipelago consists of the islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. The Greater Caribbean additionally includes Guyana, Guiana, and Surinam, and the Caribbean coast of Venezuela, Columbia, Central America, and Mexico on the grounds of shared historical, cultural, social, economic, and geopolitical characteristics. These characteristics pertain, for instance, to insularity, proximity to (other) Caribbean islands, their sharing a Caribbean coastline, the colonial history and role of the former colonizing powers, i.e. “the distribution of the plantation economy, [...] replacement of native peoples with African slaves, development of an export-based monoculture of sugar, cotton, cacao, or other cash crops, absentee ownership, [etc.]” (Elbow 1997: 14). They also share a history of anti- and decolonial struggle for independence as well as the persistence of asymmetrical power relations and a racially stratified society.

opment which also paved the way for global capitalism and is inextricably linked to modernity and industrialization in the colonial motherlands.¹⁰

The systematic exploitation of human life and labor continued along with constant resistance on part of the colonized – most notably the successful Haitian Revolution and independence in 1804 – until the 19th century. When revolts in the colonies occurred more frequently and effectively, and the support of anti-slavery movements and abolitionism rose on the continent, slavery was officially abolished.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite abolition, the economic situation of the formerly enslaved persons did not improve significantly; citizenship rights were only granted on the grounds of land ownership that the majority did not have. To meet the labor shortage on the plantations, the colonial administration, especially the British, installed a system of indentureship, ‘importing’ labor force mainly from India, but also China, Syria, or Portugal. The disenfranchised Black population at the bottom of the social hierarchy found themselves competing with the newly contracted workers from the Asian continent. White and creole elite rule on the one side and precarious conditions for the masses on the other continued; despotic leaderships were firmly in place as was social and racial stratification.

The 20th century, a time of political upheaval, nationalism, and socio-cultural transformation, witnessed not only the emergence of the middle-class, which cemented its power in the moral code of respectability. More significantly, the formation of distinct national identities and rising political consciousness eventually led to formal independence of most of the island states.¹² Curdella Forbes pointedly summarizes this period:

10 On the interdependence of global capitalism, colonialism, and modernity see, for instance, the works by Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano; on the strategic, geopolitical role of the Caribbean, see Ana Esther Ceceña’s *El Gran Caribe: Umbral de la geopolítica mundial* (2010).

11 The transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans was banned first by Denmark in 1802; by the British in 1807; the U.S. followed in 1808; the Netherlands in 1814; France in 1831; Spain in 1845 (cf. Blouet 2007: 38). The British government passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, followed by France in 1836 and Spain in 1864 (cf. Knight 1997: 326).

12 Here, I am thinking about Garveyism in Jamaica and his early promotion of Black pride, for instance, or Haiti’s strong emphasis of its status as first free Black Republic. The Dominican Republic, on the contrary, has always emphasized its European heritage and the Spanish origin and pride in light skin color. Trinidad and Tobago is an interesting case, first because the ethnic composition heavily changed with indentureship, and second the island possession changed colonial hands quite frequently before Britain secured the rule (see in particular chapter 5).

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The era of West Indian nationalism may be traced in two phases: first, the drive towards self-government in the first half of the century, and second, over at least the next three decades, the independence and post-independence struggles against the colonialism which after independence still dominated the territories in all but political name. The West Indies in this period may be described as a region in search of itself, so that the crucial issues as seen by intellectuals were freedom, identity, race, class, colour, society. (Forbes 2005: 4)

Forbes addresses important issues in this brief summary of the 'long century.' The Caribbean as a region is shaped by the persistence of colonial structures, economic dependency, social inequality, and racial hierarchies.¹³ By means of omission, Forbes also points out the apparent insignificance of the issues of gender and sexuality for anti-colonial and independence movements, which were patriarchal in nature, and which especially local feminist movements have been addressing at least since the 1970s.

Moreover, throughout this period especially in the Anglophone Caribbean, in Trinidad and Guyana in particular, East Indian ethnicity needed to be accommodated within a nationalist body politics that has officially been promoted as pluralist but has been internally divided along the European and African descendants and excluded the Indian and indigenous population. This division, enforced by British rule and postcolonial governments, has paved the way for ethno-political struggles that have not ceased to exist in the twenty-first century, as Patricia Mohammed makes clear with respect to the citizenship status of the Indian population: "In particular, Indians in Trinidad, collectively if not individually, and perhaps especially those belonging now to an age group over fifty, view themselves as an ethnicity under siege, occupying a second-class status in the society and having less claim to the state's resources" (Mohammed 2009: 59).

Throughout the century, enthusiasm for independence was always weighed against severe living and political conditions. Neo-imperial intervention by the U.S. (in Haiti or Grenada), dictatorships (in the Dominican Republic or Haiti), gang violence and garrison politics (in Jamaica), dependency on the IMF and World Bank along with the disastrous outcomes of structural adjustment measures, dominance of multinational corporations, and finally natural catastrophe and chaos boosted by foreign aid have all contributed to economic and political instability in the region. Asymmetrical power relations continue to

13 These conditions and societal structures and restrictions are most pointedly summarized under what Anibal Quijano describes as the "coloniality of power" which is a global phenomenon and not limited to the Caribbean or the Americas (cf. Quijano 2000, 2007).

shape Caribbean societies until today. The circumstances of poverty, unemployment, economic hardship, political unrest, and lack of opportunities have forced many citizens of Caribbean nation states to leave their countries.

As a result, migration, according to Laurence Brown, “has been one of the most significant forces defining and shaping [Caribbean] island societies” (Brown 2004: 118; cf. Bonnett 2009: 7).¹⁴ North America, especially the United States, has always been attractive as a destination because of its geographical proximity, linguistic similarity (at least for those from the English-speaking Caribbean), the perceived wealth, and the prospects for upward mobility. In the second half of the 20th century, large scale emigration took place from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad to the main hubs Toronto, Montreal, New York, and Miami.¹⁵ Looking at the profile of the immigrant population throughout the decades, there is a discernible shift in class, education level, and gender. For instance, while the aforementioned reasons are predominantly economic, work-related that have motivated ‘labor migration’ increasingly since the 1970s, the earlier ‘political migration’ movements were often caused by persecution under dictatorial regimes that forced many intellectuals and middle-class members of the opposition into exile.

14 The movement of people within the Caribbean region long precedes large-scale outward migration to the European continent and North America. Between the 1880s and the first decades of the 20th century, the first migratory movements were directed from the Caribbean core to the fringe and periphery areas. The main causes were the introduction of indentureship and economic crises in the sugar industry of the British West Indies. Sugar estate owners laid off a high amount of workforce, cut wages, and reduced production not only due to the cheaper beet sugar from the European continent, but also because the United States closed its market to West Indian sugar in order to protect the sugar imports from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (cf. Moya Pons 2007: 299-303). The construction phase of the Panama Canal (first phase from 1881 to 1891 by France, second phase 1904 to 1914 by the United States) offered new employment opportunities and attracted many workers especially from the British Caribbean (Jamaica, Barbados). From there, many moved on to Honduras and Costa Rica to work on banana plantations. In the second and third decade of the twentieth century, immigrants from Barbados, Jamaica, and Haiti went primarily to Cuba, whereas a considerable number of Puerto Ricans moved to the United States after having been granted citizenship in 1917.

15 Circular movements between these localities have led to the formation of new “contact zones” (Pratt 1991: 34) which unsettle national borders and engender new definitions of Caribbeaness. Questions concerning citizenship, (un-)belonging, race, or cultural and ethnic identities were and still are reformulated and complicated in the wake of transnationalism and the emergence of diasporas in North America and Europe.

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The first notable move from the Caribbean to the U.S. occurred throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The majority –among them migrants mostly from the nearby islands of the Bahamas and Cuba – took up residence in New York City, others settled in Florida (cf. Brown 2004: 130; du Bois 2011: 584). The first attempt by the government to slow down immigration, which also affected Caribbean migrants, was the Immigration Act of 1924. The rise of anti-immigration movements after the First World War triggered this development, fueled by “suspicion of anything foreign” within a highly segregated society and white American’s anxiety for “Anglo-Saxon superiority” (Castles/Davidson 2000: 161-162). To keep the “undesirable aliens” (ibid.) out, immigration quotas according to national origin were imposed and the possession of a visa became mandatory. In 1952, immigration from the West Indies to the States was radically reduced with the introduction of the Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter Act), motivated also by isolationist and xenophobic sentiments (cf. du Bois 2011).¹⁷ A new quota was laid down which only tolerated as few as 800 entries from the West Indies. The 1960s and the rise of the Civil Rights movement eventually brought about more liberal and

16 A census report dating back to 1880 “cited 14,017 foreign-born black” (Thorington Springer 2011: 8) mostly from the West Indies. Immigration during the time from 1900 until the Great Depression brought more than 150,000 Afro-Caribbeans to the country, which led to the creation of the first “island diasporas” (Brown 2004: 130; cf. Bonnett 2009: 11).

17 The field of transnational American studies (irrespective of its seriousness and potency), as outlined, for instance, by Donald E. Pease (2011) or Winfried Fluck (2011), engages with the periphery of minority and migrant cultures ‘produced’ by U.S. imperialism, migration policy, and border control, and critically investigates U.S. hegemony and its “state of exception” (cf. Pease 2011: 20-23). It also takes issue with identity categories, cultural identification, the significance of national belonging, borders, and citizenship (cf. Pease 4-5). I would argue that much of transnational American studies’ ethical, political, and theoretical impetus is, and arguably so, a reproduction (not to say mimicry) of the concerns of post- and decolonial studies. Pease describes how a transnational focus may successfully ‘recover’ what he calls the “disavowed underside of exceptionalism” (2011: 27). This “underside” are the “excepted peoples” (29) or ‘abjected bodies’ who inhabit the territories once under imperial rule of the U.S. The margin thus becomes the center of enquiry disrupting this binary logic. He argues thusly: “When transnational Americanist scholars recovered the memories of the peoples who were the victims of Euro-American colonialism on these sites, they retrieved an imperial legacy that American exceptionalism had disowned. [...] Transnational Americanists’ newly imagined territorializations of these excepted regions from the disavowed underside of exceptionalism brought into stark visibility the national shame – slavery, white settler violence, the forcible depopulation and genocidal extermination of native populations, internment camps, transfer stations – that U.S. exceptionalism had disavowed” (Pease 2011: 28).

open migration policies. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Cellar Act), Basil Wilson suggests, “completely changed the complexion of American immigration and allowed an influx of Caribbean workers to seek occupational upliftment in a highly industrialized America” (Wilson 2009: 33). Since then, the major part of out-migration from the Caribbean has been directed to the United States.¹⁸

One of the earliest migratory movements between the West Indies and Canada was initiated by Presbyterians in the 19th century. While some Canadian missionaries went to Barbados and Trinidad, a few West Indian churchmen came to Canada (cf. Page 2011: 37). Joseph Mensah emphasizes the long-standing history of Jamaican migration to Canada: “[O]ne of the first large groups of Blacks to enter Canada was the Maroons of Jamaica, who landed in Halifax in 1796. Also, during the First World War, Jamaican Blacks were among those recruited to work in the coal mines [...] and the shipyards” (Mensah 2002: 98). However, unlike the United States, where immigration from all over the world has been flowing persistently in great numbers since the 19th century, Canada had trouble attracting prospective citizens due to domestic conflicts and imperial dependence. Internally, the country was split in a French dominated Quebec (formerly New France) proud of its French distinctiveness and a larger English Canada keen on retaining its white British national character. Additionally, employment and economic perspectives were not perceived as attractive by newcomers, which was partly due to unfavorable conditions for agriculture and construction.

As Reg Whitaker explains, migration policy in Canada was dominated less by the government, which “was very reluctant to assume a strong role in shaping and directing policy” (Whitaker 1991: 5). Rather, private economic interests, especially railway companies that profited from national development, were

18 Another crucial factor that contributed to the increase in the flow of migrants northwards was the changing immigration policy of the UK. After the Second World War and with the introduction of the British Nationality Act in 1948, an “open door policy” was established; this policy declared citizens of the Commonwealth as British citizens by law. As such, they were permitted to enter the country without major difficulties. The majority of those who arrived from the West Indies served in the British army during the war, and they were now hoping for a better social and economic future. Whereas annual migration from the Caribbean numbered approximately 25,000 during the 1950s, this figure quadrupled by 1961 and 1962 (cf. Brown 2004: 128). This development was understood as a threat to the social, ethnic composition of the country and to political, cultural, and economic advances. As a consequence, the ‘mother country’ effectively shut its doors with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962. Under this law, immigration was controlled and dramatically reduced.

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“the main instrument of immigration and settlement. [...] The state, having set the framework for development, was then content to leave much of the actual process of immigration to private companies and market forces” (ibid.). This changed in the first decade of the 20th century: Canada’s new liberal government adopted a more open policy and curtailed the political power of the private industrial sector. In 1910 and 1919, conversely, an “exclusionary authority” was re-enacted and “draconian measures”, such as “medical and character checks” (Whitaker 1991: 11), were adopted in amending Immigration Laws enforcing racial and ethnic discrimination.¹⁹ World War I and II as well as the recession period added to xenophobic sentiments and stiff regulation in Canada’s migration policies. It was not until the late 1950s that the government implemented schemes to pull in foreign workforce to stimulate economic growth. Amongst others, the 1955 Household Service workers scheme was introduced, which brought mostly young women from the Caribbean to Canada and was also an important factor in the emancipation of Canadian middle-class women.²⁰ Further, the newly implemented point system attracted a larger number of skilled labor introduced in the late 1960s. The government’s implementation of the federal multiculturalism policy under then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1971 was probably the most progressive move at the time. This political ideology was seen as an attempt to recognize Canada’s social reality and the many different cultures that exist next to each other (in contrast to that, Quebec is supportive of interculturalism).

The communities in the metropolitan centers both in the U.S. and Canada continue to grow, while there is also a notable number of those who return to the Caribbean. The newcomers have always made use of and expanded the existing networks within the minority communities, which are often perceived as an important source of social cohesion, self-preservation, and identification. They also continuously transform the composition and make-up of and in interrelation with their social environments. Both countries’ governments have adapted their immigrant policies and legislations in their attempts to deal with and integrate the increasing number of people of diverse backgrounds. The different approaches range from assimilation, acculturation, or Anglo-

19 “The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, created as a national police force in 1920, immediately commenced surveillance of ethnic organizations. Immigrants of certain origins [especially Ukrainians, Russians, Finns, and Jews] and those holding certain political opinions (mostly left-wing) were marked as potential enemies by the Canadian state” (Whitaker 1991: 11).

20 Earlier in the century, French Canada put a similar plan to action. “1910-11 saw the first Caribbean Domestic Scheme, when 100 Guadeloupean women migrated to Quebec” (Burman 2010: 86).

conformity, to multi-, inter-, and transculturalism, ethnic pluralism paired with affirmative action policies, and so forth. However, the harmony indicated by terms such as the ethno-cultural mosaic, salad bowl, or melting pot that have come to symbolize the respective policies should not belie discriminatory practices that are often contained therein. As a matter of fact, “[p]opulations have become more heterogenous and culturally diverse. Cultural difference and social marginalization are often closely linked, creating ethnic minorities with disadvantaged and relatively isolated positions in society” (Castles/Davidson 2000: 8). A major point of concern with regard to Canada’s diversity policy is put forward by Mensah who indicates that “multiculturalism simplifies, commodifies, and devalues ethnic cultures and ultimately reinforces cultural stereotypes” (2002: 227). Inherent in constructions of ethnicity, e.g. through census data and in part through affirmative action policy, are processes of racialization that determine a (visible) minority in a binary relation to a racially unmarked, dominant white mainstream society. Racialization is understood as a “social process whereby groups are singled out for unequal treatments on the basis of real or imagined phenotypical characteristics” (Li 1990: 8).²¹ According to Leo Driedger, based on such “social construction[s] of race [which are enforced] by those who have power and authority” (Driedger 2003: 4), members of minority groups are often systematically disadvantaged and/or individually discriminated.²² In this context, minority cultures and ethnicity come to be seen as commodities “that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold or forgotten” (qt. Neil Bissoondath in Mensah 2002: 227). If we talk about ethnic literature, it is this power dynamic of racialization that needs to be taken into consideration and renders the literary works under this label always already a political issue.

21 Cf. also Cornell/Hartmann 2007: 34.

22 Systematic and individual discrimination is subject of Critical Race Theory, which in Germany is commonly known as the quite controversial Critical Whiteness Studies. “Critical race theory calls attention to the relevance of, and the circumstances and cultural contexts, by which race is made consequential in individuals’ interactions and experiences” (James 2009: 93). Processes of racialization and the production of ethnic categories (which is the case with multiculturalism) are inextricably linked to hegemonic formations meaning one group’s “power to define one culture against the other” (Cornell/Hartmann 2007: 28/29).

1.3 Theorizing Diaspora

Numerous publications, ongoing discussion in academia, and the launch of various diaspora studies programs at university level are proof of the popularity of the terminology and prominence of diaspora theories in recent years. Increasingly, issues of post-/colonialism, transnationalism and transculturation, globalization, as well as discussions on migration, race, and ethnicity are being incorporated in this field. In the context of geographic dispersal and postmodern understandings of subject fragmentation, the term diaspora has been redefined and applied as an analytical tool to describe “new cultural geographies and flexible identities” (Ha 2011: 584; my translation).²³ It encompasses the creation and development of transnational communities and networks beyond the political influence of the nation-state, which, in theory, share a common sense of belonging based on origin, imagined homelands, and/or a shared history of displacement or ethnic and racial exclusion. In the case of the contemporary Caribbean, Brian Meeks elaborates that

populations are increasingly mobile and transnational. The physical and virtual movement between Kingston and Miami, Santo Domingo and New York, Bridgetown and Toronto are rapidly changing the rules of engagement of Caribbean political economy. Nation, if it was ever the case, can no longer be confined to territorial space. (Meeks 2001: xiii)

Meeks’ vision of a complete territorially unbound nation state may be debatable especially when considering the factual existence of legal citizenship, but transnational mobility certainly exposes the limits of territorial sovereignty and borders. Also, the composition of the island territories themselves is transformed through the cultural, political, and economic influence enacted by the Caribbean population of the diaspora, especially through the high amount of remittances sent; in turn, the Caribbean communities have a significant impact on the host countries in North America or Europe.

Theorizing diaspora provides the space for the consideration of movements to and from the Caribbean, the manifold interactions and interconnections between the region and the global North, as well as accompanying societal and economic changes. Tracing those migratory movements through which diaspo-

23 The term diaspora derives from Greek *diaspeirein* – meaning to scatter about, to disperse – and originally denoted the banishment of Jews in religious history and later also the forced eviction of Armenians from their home lands (cf. Brazier 2008a; Cohen 2008; Safran 1991).

ra formation has been made possible in the first place brings into focus colonial histories of transoceanic passages, the mostly forceful ‘deterritorialization’ of bodies, and subsequent ‘reterritorialization.’²⁴ For Stuart Hall, the Caribbean, a diaspora in and of itself where “everybody there comes from somewhere else” (Hall 1995: 6), is the prime example of a modern diaspora, “the first, the original and the purest” (ibid.). He argues, that the indigenous population, such as the *Arawaks*, *Caribs*, and *Taino*, were after all displaced peoples, as were those from the African and Asian continent; and neither did the Europeans originally ‘belong’ there. Importantly, Hall connects a sense of loss, rupture, and emotional fragmentation to diasporic dispersal (cf. Hall 1990, 1995). The often traumatic experiences of such violent displacement in connection with a sentiment of loss, the fear of forgetting, or sometimes the wish to erase the past or its idealization are common features of diaspora and frequently evoked in fictional writing. The trauma of forgetting is substantially explored, for instance, by Trinidadian Canadian writer Dionne Brand in *The Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), a non-fictional, personal account in which she muses on routed belonging and the impossibility of return in the case of the African history of enforced displacement. The Black diaspora is thus build on a shared sense of loss and the idea of a place of origin which for Brand is “the place which holds the before of history. [...] I cannot go back to where I came from. It no longer exists. It should not exist” (Brand 2001: 89-90). Diaspora identity may thus be formed on the premises of memory and forgetting, imagination and the myth of origin and return.

Literary scholars frequently turn to the numerous theoretical approaches to diaspora, identity and subject formation in order to link the large, equally dispersed body of Caribbean literatures. These approaches reach from a more categorical, systematic theorization, as put forward by William Safran (1991) or Robin Cohen (2008), to those that are based on cultural consciousness and transnational connections, suggested, amongst others, by Paul Gilroy (1993) or James Clifford (1994) who emphasize routes and travelling cultures to counter ethnic absolutism and essentializing identity categories. Cohen, in drawing from Safran, proposes a checklist of several features that define the specificities of diaspora, the usefulness of which is certainly debatable (cf. Cohen 2008: 6-

24 In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987[1980]) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate on these concepts that especially anthropologists refer to in order to describe the relation of and weakening ties between culture, people, and place in the context of globalization and (forced) displacement. Here, it means the transplantation of the subject from one geography to another and her re-rooting in the new location.

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8).²⁵ While he terms the African diaspora as “victim diasporas” (39)²⁶ and the Indian as “labour diaspora” (125), with reference in particular to the history of enslavement and indentureship respectively, he describes the dispersal of the people from the Caribbean territory to North America and Europe as a “deterritorialized diaspora” where cultural elements are retained to a certain degree (cf. 130). In fact, Cohen’s notions are reminiscent of Gilroy’s conceptualization of the Black Atlantic. This indicates that another diaspora can emerge out of a preceding one, as is the case for Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese in Canada and the U.S. who become doubly diasporized (hyphenated) subjects, which is first and foremost a theoretical possibility of constructing and defining an ethnic identity and may not match to the same degree the lived experience and self-designation of those it seeks to define.

For Cohen, as for Hall, the dispersal from the original homeland is not necessarily a forced one but may also happen voluntarily based on work-related or other personal motives. He also amends “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen 2008: 17).²⁷ These last points add a positive connotation, moving away from defining diasporic consciousness solely in terms of loss and mourning but rather in terms of transformation, possibility, and difference. Living in multiethnic societies, such as Toronto and New York, the diaspora experience is by necessity heterogeneous, diverse, and hybrid, as Hall claims (cf. 1990: 235).

25 In short, Safran identifies the following commonalities: being dispersed from the homeland; sharing a collective memory; being foreign and not accepted; experiencing alienation in the host country; idealizing home and a desire to return; retaining close relations to the homeland (cf. Safran 1991: 83-84). Cohen adjust these features, adding a conflicting relation with the host society, a strong group consciousness, and a sense of solidarity for co-ethnic members, and the likelihood of an enriching, creative life in the host country. Importantly, he adds, the “term ‘diaspora’ can be used to describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility even where historically exclusive territorial claims are not strongly articulated” (Cohen 2008: 7-8; italics omitted).

26 Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin understand diaspora as a “historical fact of colonization” (1998: 68/9) and state that due to diasporic movements cultures or cultural practices become creolized forming part of a celebratory ethos of diasporic identity. They continue that the “development of diasporic cultures necessarily questions **essentialist** models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, ‘natural’ cultural norm, one that underpins the **centre/margin** model of colonialist discourse” (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 70; emphasis in original). It is remarkable, however, that the authors do not use the term Black diaspora, and neither do they refer in particular to the dispersal of people from the African continent to the Americas (the African diaspora) in the course of colonialism.

27 The openness to cultural pluralism is the vantage point for pluralist and multicultural approaches in, e.g., Canadian immigration policy.

Caribbean diaspora poetics, the term I have chosen for this study to describe the textual aesthetics and performance of identity formation and subject development, may give the misleading impression of what is adopted here is a homogenous monolithic construction of a collective Caribbean diaspora identity, which obviously does not exist. This, too, is a major point of critique made by Jana Evans Braziel with regards to Silvio Torres-Saillant's approach to the concept of diaspora:

I find particularly troubling and problematic Professor Torres-Saillant's overly optimistic valorization of the Caribbean diaspora to inculcate, reform, and correct corrupt homeland Calibans. Caribbean diaspora, as an organizing rubric, not only obscures nationality, class, race, gender, sexuality, and political economy as striating diasporas and diasporic communities, but it also smacks of naïveté given several undeniable facts: there is not *one* Caribbean diaspora but many; one cannot properly speak of *the* Caribbean diaspora but must necessarily talk about the Haitian, the Dominican, the Cuban (experienced less as diasporic arrival and more as exilic displacement), the Trinidadian, the Bajan, the Antiguan, the Jamaican, the Curaçaoan, and so forth. (Braziel 2008b: 154; italics in original)

Braziel's criticism is certainly valid and I agree with the shortcomings she identifies in many theoretical approaches to diaspora in particular with regard to its homogenizing tendency as well as the often neglect of gender and sexualities.²⁸ Nevertheless, I see the productivity of the term in the analytical framework thus established; this framework renders possible a comparison of similar yet diverse literary and cultural productions across the many diasporas of the Caribbean. Instead of a meticulous search for the many fractures and differences, it seems indeed more productive to point out the commonalities that bring writers and intellectuals together; this approach makes possible the use of the cultural and academic capital associated with the concept of diaspora and can therefore produce a notion of pan-Caribbean solidarity on the literary level, without, of course, losing sight of existing historical particularities and cultural specificities. Here, I add to recent scholarship on Caribbean women's writing such as Odile Ferly's *A Poetics of Relation* (2012), in which she applies the rhi-

28 See Virinder S. Kalra et al. on the limits in diaspora studies with regard to gender and sexuality. Their points of criticism relate to the common omission of these categories from diaspora theorization or the ways women's bodies often figure as the bearers of 'home' culture. They furthermore highlight the connection of diaspora studies to queer theory as both "fundamentally question [...] the idea of settled and normative notions of home. For the diasporic individual, home is an unsettled category due to migration; for the queer, home is unsettled because of normative heterosexual expectations" (Kalra/Kaur/Hutnyk 2005: 63-64).

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zomatic root system of the mangrove as analytical framework to connect Caribbean (diaspora) literary production by women writers across geographical distance and linguistic variety. To Ferly, the mangrove, “an area with no clearly defined boundaries, [...] like the Caribbean, is an open, dynamic space that can expand or contract, a space that reinvents itself” (152). In a Glissantian fashion, she places the “archipelago and diaspora in dialogue” (130), highlighting “Relation” and connection over origins; thus the mangrove, like a diaspora poetics, “may help solidify a pan-Caribbean consciousness” (136).

In focusing on the multiple migratory routes while also acknowledging a certain degree of rootedness, theorizing diaspora attempts to overcome postcolonial paradigms that reinforce the binary of the center and periphery along with its debilitating discourse of victimization that keeps the former colonies in an ever subordinated relational position to the colonizing West. Braziel and Anita Mannur argue that similar to concepts of cultural and ethnic identities in the Caribbean, such as “the critical terms *rhizome*, *créole*, *creolization*, *hybridity*, *heterogeneity*, *métis* and *métissage*, then, diaspora has emerged as an internal critique of the binarisms [...] that circulated and found currency within colonial discourse and that persist even within some spheres of postcolonial studies” (2003: 4). Nevertheless, Caribbean diaspora studies, emphasizing more the transnational entanglements in the Americas, frequently refer back to other ideological binaries, namely those of home/foreign, local/global, regional/transnational, or of Caribbean backwardness and diasporan modernness, as for instance in Hall’s “postmodern New World nomad” (1990: 234), a notion from which this study seeks to depart.

Where Caribbean literature and culture are investigated with the focus on the Caribbean region’s transnational entanglements and embeddedness in the Americas, Rosamund S. King wishes to coin the term “Caribglobal” (2014) to account for global and intra-regional mobility that also encompasses experiences within the Caribbean and diasporas. The strong emphasis on the global seems an unnecessary amendment. For one it makes Caribbeanness appear as a uniform, corporate brand; on the other hand, diaspora includes already by definition a global dimension especially if we understand the Caribbean as “umbral de la geopolítica mundial,” as the threshold of global geopolitics (cf. Ceceña 2010). In this regard, Kezia Page offers a productive multidirectional investigation of the literatures of the Caribbean diaspora through a “two placed gaze” thus “avoid[ing] the imbalance by which the diasporan swallows up the ‘local’ or the local and the diasporan are seen as exclusive categories with the former as a disreputable [...] or obsolete voice on the margins” (Page 2011: 1). The novel by Makeda Silvera, for instance, shows that the Caribbean ‘local’ space

remains the main reference point and entangled with the diaspora setting. Toronto as the present setting where a Jamaican family migrated to is hardly mentioned as a physical space. The dominant perspective of Maria, the matriarch who looms over all characters and embodies the Jamaican home, constantly shifts the “gaze” to the Caribbean local, not “swallow[ing]” it, thus unsettling the binary of center and margin through a transnational back-and-forth.

Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic” (1993), which he originally proposed as an alternative to nationalist and ethno-centric models of identity, offers a still useful conceptual background to see how cultural artefacts, music, literature circulate transnationally and transmit Black diaspora identity. He points out the common history of colonialism and modernity shared by the colonizing West and the colonized world in the course of which new contact zones have emerged.²⁹ Rather than being bound to a concrete territorial rootedness or an essential core, he identifies diaspora as a relational network that engenders cultural exchange to define identity and belonging. In *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy adds that diaspora is “radically gender-specific” (126). He specifies diaspora as relational network “which contributes to the analysis of intercultural and transcultural processes” (123). Importantly here, Gilroy differentiates the locations of residence from the locations of belonging (cf. 124): The latter in particular is detached from a geographically fixed territory thus complicating both the idea of rooted origin as well as the strict binary of the regional and the transnational. In addition, drawing attention to the ways diaspora consciousness troubles and is being troubled by the concept of the nation state and national citizenship, it opens up alternative spaces for subject formation and/or alliances. This idea makes Gilroy’s a productive concept to frame and unify Caribbean literature emerging from multiple diaspora locations, forging local and transnational connections.

Where Gilroy’s diaspora concept falls short – especially with regards to aspects of gender like Torres-Saillant –, Carole Boyce Davies offers a more nuanced perspective on the role of gender in the negotiation of identity in relation to place and the dissemination of Black diaspora culture in and through fictional literature.³⁰ She proposes the term “migratory subjectivity” (Boyce Davies 1994: 4), a terminology both resisting and diasporic, that emphasizes movement

29 The shortcomings of Gilroy’s idea have been frequently addressed pertaining to his one sided-focus on British cultural studies, the too narrow geographic focus excluding, for instance, Canada, and most prominently his neglect of gender difference, sexuality and queer subjectivity (cf. Walcott 2011: 499).

30 Boyce Davies’ book, too, does not fall short of a criticism of imperialism and related forms of domination (cf. 25).

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so as to refer to, bring together, and compare Black women's writing in multiple places throughout the Americas and the African diaspora:

In other words, there are Black women writers everywhere. [...] If we see Black women's subjectivity as a migratory subjectivity existing in multiple locations, then we can see how their work, their presences traverse all of the geographical/national boundaries instituted to keep our dislocations in place. This ability to locate in a variety of geographical and literary constituencies is peculiar to the migration that is fundamental to African experience as it is specific to the human experience as a whole. It is with this consciousness of expansiveness and the dialogics of movement and community that I pursue Black women's writing. (ibid.)

Declaring exile and migration as fundamental aspects of being, rather than national affiliation, Boyce Davies understands Black women's writing "as a series of boundary crossings and not as fixed, geographically, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (4) that enables a "more trans-cultural/trans-local awareness of Black women's writing communities" (128). In the chapter "Writing Home," she elaborates on gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity as co-constitutive of Caribbean migrant identities in the U.S. – which can easily be extended to the Canadian context. What I find particularly relevant is her observation that the *Bildungsroman* of writers like Jamaica Kincaid are best described as narratives of a "coming of age to sexuality and place" (125), thereby interrelating a notion of home with sexual identity and gender. Although her approach engenders "cross-examination" (128), unfortunately, in her study, Boyce Davies neither includes writers of the Hispano- or Franco-phone-Caribbean nor does she critically engage in a reading of texts by those who reside in Canada, although she acknowledges the emerging body of work by Black women writers like Dionne Brand or Claire Harris.³¹ Nor does she open up the possibility of connection to Caribbean women authors of Indian descent, partly due to her decidedly Black feminist stance, thus risking an ethnic absolutism which Gilroy, for example, is critical of.³²

Caribbean diaspora poetics, in order to be more inclusive as framework and make visible ethnic identities that have been marginalized (as the Indo-Caribbean has been) in theoretical discourse, needs to be extended by what I call the '*kala pani* continuum' (see chapter 5). Here, this study builds on Brinda

31 Marlene Nourbese Philip's work on language may be the exception. Also, one of Makeda Silvera's anthologies is mentioned but relegated to a footnote.

32 The same can be said about the racial-cultural identity concept of *négritude* put forward by Léopold Senghor or Aimé Césaire and its counterpart of *coolitude* for the Indian diaspora identity coined by Khal Torabully in 1992.

Mehta's work. Mehta, in contrast to Boyce Davies, although primarily concerned with "Indo-Caribbean diasporic dislocations," as suggested in her monograph's title, recognizes the commonalities of experience shared by women of African and Indian Caribbean descent. Mehta takes up Boyce Davies' idea of migratory subjectivity: "The *kala pani* is a discourse of rupture that initiates transgressive boundary crossings through creative (self-)assertion in literary production" (2004: 4) and "promote[s] a sense of multiple consciousness" to create "diasporic solidarity" (11). Her approach attempts to disrupt both racial categorizations as well as the separation of feminist movements and the literary production of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women. She suggests the *kala pani* discourse as

a model of hybridized feminist awareness that includes a sense of participatory ownership among all communities of women in the Caribbean, most of whom share a common heritage, of *kala pani* crossings on the 'black' Atlantic, in the form of Asian indenture, African slavery and Middle Eastern commercial enterprise. In this way, *kala pani* hybridity could offer a solution to the problematics of naming and to the privileging of particular ethnic experiences. (15)

What seems paradox is that although Mehta rightly notes the politics and exclusionary potential of naming, she nevertheless chooses an ethnically defined term as *kala pani*, which originally denotes the culturally contaminating crossing of the ocean by Hindus (see chapter 5), to be all encompassing of Caribbean diaspora experience. Actually Boyce Davies' rather 'untainted' migratory subjectivity is much better suited to accomplish this task if opened up.

A pan-Caribbean, diaspora approach neither considers groups of people as 'ethno-racially' separated units nor defines subject-hood on a clearly marked cultural essence but rather recognizes plurality and difference (cf. Khan 2015).³³ As an analytical category it brings together literary production over large distances into a metanarrative on racial and body politics, ethnic identities, economic instability, and a historical continuity of both exploitation and resilience. By necessity it must be gender-sensitive and pay attention to sexualities as well as multiple embodiments to make visible newly emerging subject positions from which to speak. A gendered reading of diaspora is a way of interpreting literature that deals with women's lived experience in multiple locations and conditions, transgresses real and imagined boundaries, and unsettles asymmet-

33 This perspective, furthermore, is open to the possibility of transcultural processes of exchange both on the intra- and extra-textual level, which in the Caribbean context are known under such diverse concepts as *creolité*, *métissage*, or *douglarization* or *douglar poetics*.

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ric hegemonic structures that are organized along intersecting lines of gender, race, sexuality, class, nation, and heteronormative social codes.

1.4 Bodies Matter

This study is located in the fields of Caribbean diaspora and literary studies and the area of body studies, hence the focus on body politics and on how subject development is narrated. Recent research, such as the publications by Nadia Celis (2015), Tanya Shields (2014), Donette Francis (2010), or Brinda Mehta (2009), proves the significance of the body and sexuality for feminist scholarly work on Caribbean literature.³⁴ Herein, the body is conceived of as a multidimensional research object being approached as such in its materiality, discursivity, productivity, and symbolism. The authors convincingly demonstrate that historical transformations are inscribed on and retraceable through the body.

Since the emergence of the field of body studies in the 1980s – the assumed “body turn” in the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies (cf. Gugutzer 2006: 9) – the body has received a high amount of scholarly attention.³⁵ Sociologist Chris Shilling attributes the prominence of the body in various

34 Further publications that deal with women bodies in Caribbean literature are, for instance, Anatol (2015), Borst (2015), King (2014), and De Ferrari (2007). The book-length study *La rebelión de las niñas* (2015) by Celis offers a focus on the female body, embodied subjectivity, and girlhood in Hispano-Caribbean coming-of-age novels. She investigates the symbolic signification of the body and the formation of the characters as a corporeal process which is usually “problematic and unfinished” (30).

35 This pertains to the rise of the field especially in European and North-American scholarship. While Bryan Turner observes that a general theory of the body has been missing in the early 1980s (cf. Turner 1984), there is now a large body of literature on corporeality and multiple forms of embodiment, even an over-theorisation of the subject, thus a risk to lose sight of what academics actually mean when engaging in a discussion on the body (cf. Bynum 1995; Shilling 2005, 2007). Aleida Assmann, too, confirms an inflationary boom when it comes to the use of concepts related to the body (cf. 2011: 89). A MLA-search on books and articles that contain the subject ‘body’ in the main title for the years 2014 and 2015 reveals body studies as a multi-dimensional field, exploring the body in its various dimensions, for example, as in “Gendered Bodies,” “Monstrous Bodies,” “Leaky Bodies,” “Uncanny Bodies,” “Melting Bodies,” “Bodies in Pain,” “The Female Suffering Body,” “Bodies on the Line,” “Desired Bodies,” “Bridges, Border and Bodies,” “The Displacement of the Body,” “Conflict Bodies,” “Conspicuous Bodies,” “Body Technologies,” and so forth.

disciplines to the rise of consumer culture, second wave feminism, an interest in governmentality and bio-politics, as well as to technological and medical advances (cf. 2005: 2-5).³⁶ Also, the linguistic constitution of the body that post-structuralists in particular have detected urges body theorists to investigate the production of the body through language and enunciation. Most of the studies share two things: the body is multi-dimensional and over-whelming in its complexity. Judith Butler, too, in the preface to *Bodies that Matter* (1993), admits the challenge to unveil the numerous layers of the body and that she “kept losing track of the subject” (ix). As source and effect of socio-cultural practices and performances relating to multiple interdependent societal factors, the body is regarded as a medium for subject formation and constitution of lived experience. The body matters as site of political conflict manifested on which are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that interrelate, for instance, with the status and practice of citizenship.

The study’s focus on bodies in a migratory context is political and of high contemporary relevance. Although travelling bodies are certainly not a new phenomenon of our immediate present, the ways these bodies come to matter within a transnational context have been shifting, taking into consideration the contemporary paradox of seemingly borderless global markets and free-floating capital but increasing control of certain bodies at quite real national borders. In addition, the ways some bodies are positioned outside of a national imaginary as well as the degree to which racially marked bodies (meaning *non-white* bodies) are subjected to state-enforced violence, public scrutiny, and discrimination have reached an alarming level.³⁷ In the context of the #Blacklivesmatter activist movement, for instance, Butler explains in an interview with George Yancy how the public mourning over certain dead bodies reveals the extent to which some bodies are trusted while others, black bodies, bodies of color, are suspect:

36 The quantity of published readers and monographs that discuss the body from various perspectives in recent years is certainly proof of the subject’s prominence in contemporary scholarship (e.g., Howson 2013; Fox 2012; Moore/Kosut 2010; Blackman 2008; Fraser/Greco 2007; Atkinson 2005; Brook 1999; Price/Shildrick 1999; Conboy/Medina/Stambury 1997). On the body in literature, see also the recent *Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* (2015) edited by David Hillman and Ulrike Maude.

37 Here I refer to the killings of Black persons like Trayvon Martin or Tamir Rice in the U.S., the so-called refugee crises in Europe in 2015/2016, or the withdrawal of legal citizen status of Dominicans of Haitian descent as just a few, very diverse examples to illustrate how individual subjects and collectives become marginalized, even murdered, based on the misperception and racial ‘phobia’ related to their ‘Other’ bodies.

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If black lives do not matter, then they are not really regarded as lives, since a life is supposed to matter. So what we see is that some lives matter more than others, that some lives matter so much that they need to be protected at all costs, and that other lives matter less, or not at all. And when that becomes the situation, then the lives that do not matter so much, or do not matter at all, can be killed or lost, can be exposed to conditions of destitution, and there is no concern, or even worse, that is regarded as the way it is supposed to be. (Yancy/Butler 2015)

What Butler describes here is a racialized body politics revealing how mechanisms of exclusion function via the body and corporeal inscriptions and ascriptions. Here the thusly embodied subjects by way of their intersectionally defined positionality are perceived as more worthy or come to matter less.

It is crucial for investigations of the body from a feminist literary studies perspective to include intersectional thought not solely as a methodology to point out moments of discrimination and thus risking to reduce it to an empty signifier. Rather, it shall function as framework of knowledge to grasp the interdependence of simultaneously operating inequalities and their complexity, to reflect one's own positionality (and privilege) in relation to the subject of investigation (cf. Roth 2013). The transversal axes, or overlapping social categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability determine the lived reality of each and every individual in different ways. However, the possibility of overcoming them should not be foreclosed and be realized through acts of solidarity and coalition building. Here, I draw from relevant approaches of Black and Caribbean feminism. For instance, Consuelo Lopez Springfield's *Daughters of Caliban* (1997), a collection seminal for Caribbean feminist thought, analyses the intersecting patterns of discrimination, along with multiple overlapping forms of resistance. In the title, she furthermore hints at a colonial legacy of inequality and difference (evoked is Caliban and Prospero, prosperous culture and the cannibalized other as well as indigenous identity); she points out how slavery as a corporeal history shapes women's lived experience until today – a point made, too, by transnational and Third World feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty or María Lugones. Based on this, the collection then suggests the female body as a material and discursive site of resistance. Other Caribbean feminists, like Eudine Barriteau, expressly draw from U.S. Black feminism and intersectional approaches as defined and put forward by the Combahee River Collective, Barbara Smith, Kimberly Crenshaw, Angela Davis, or Patricia Hill Collins.³⁸

38 “A foundational contribution of black feminist scholarship is its exposure and problematising of race/racism as a social relation, which simultaneously complicates

In the same vein, this study here is concerned with the modalities of social inequalities and multi-axial forms of oppression, struggle, and resistance (cf. Stam/Shohat 2014: 82). These are made explicit by four different writers of the Caribbean diasporas, as the following chapters will show, who critically examine inscriptions and ascriptions in, on, and to the body in migrant or minority contexts to unveil hierarchies of power that produce and normalize bodies as white, black, *mulata* or latina, or as hyphenated ‘Afro-’ and ‘Indo-’ while these bodies shape and appropriate these categories on their own terms. Authors of fiction from the Caribbean and its diasporas as well as literary scholars turn away from negative, stereotypical representations of Caribbean women’s bodies. Ferly confirms that “[w]ith the irruption of new female narratives from the 1970s across the region, positive self-images became more frequent, and the long-lasting depiction of Caribbean women as exotic, erotic, and alienated was challenged more systematically” (Ferly 2012: 23). While women’s bodies, sexualities, and agency are celebrated in its myriad dimensions, both fictional and critical works do not conceal the discrimination and oppression enacted on, with, and through these bodies. J. Michael Dash, for example, is concerned with Caribbean bodies being “filtered into America’s consciousness” (Dash 1997: 137). He traces the ontological roots of the conflicting relationship between Haiti and the United States through the perceived deviance of the Haitian body prevailing the literary imagination of the 19th and 20th century. “Images of the rebellious body, the repulsive body, the seductive body and the sick body,” according to Dash, “constitute a consistent discourse that has fixed Haiti in the Western imagination” (ibid.), which writers like Edwidge Danticat seek to unsettle (see chapter 6).

1.5 Outline

This study offers a comparative perspective on the coming-of-age novel in Caribbean women’s writing of the diaspora. The following chapters investigate a pan-Caribbean selection of texts and distinct diasporic locations and define

and is complicated by other social relations of domination. The intellectual and activist work of black feminists reveals hierarchies of power within categories of race, class, gender, patriarchal relations, sexuality and sexual orientation” (Barriteau 2006: 15). As early as 1851, in her famous speech “Ain’t I a woman?” Sojourner Truth comments on gender equality and how race and class status, i.e. enslavement, affects being a woman.

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the *Caribbean-diasporic coming-of-age novel*, opting for this terminology to decolonize the narrative convention of the *Bildungsroman*. This approach takes into account the writers' attempts to "negotiate the double-bind of responding to or critiquing European norms while also working in a genre defined traditionally by its Eurocentricity" (Chancy 2011: 24). Myriam Chancy, in this quote, points to the ideological baggage the genre comes with, implying that an alternative genre may be more suitable to capture the non-hegemonic identity formation envisioned in these novels. It is not my intention to squeeze the selected texts into an already existing, narrow definition of the genre. The novels resist easy categorization as they cannot be easily subsumed under the label *Bildungsroman*. Instead, in narrating singular coming-of-age stories, they suggest alternative visions of womanhood and conviviality.

The text corpus consists of four post-1990 novels to stress the period that Alison Donnell marks as the turning point in Caribbean women's writing in terms of a more open discussion of sexuality and body matters. These texts are the literary debuts of Makeda Silvera (*1955), *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002), Ramabai Espinet (*1948), *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Angie Cruz (*1979), *Soleidad* (2001), and Edwidge Danticat (*1969), *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). All novels are set in the second half of the twentieth century and provide a two-placed gaze between the Caribbean and its diaspora in the North. This selection covers not only three linguistic areas of the Caribbean, with Espinet and Silvera from Trinidad and Jamaica respectively, Danticat from Haiti, and Cruz being of Dominican descent, but also the two major diaspora locations of Toronto and New York, proving that there is not only one but many stories to be told about the Caribbean and its many diaspora communities.

Chapters two and three provide the theoretical and methodological groundings for the four subsequent analytical chapters. The next chapter "Routes of Development: Coming of Age and Caribbean Diaspora Poetics" discusses the genre development from *Bildungsroman* to *coming-of-age novel* to emphasize the necessity of a certain terminology with regard to the literary output of Caribbean women writers resident in the diaspora. Among the features I detect that define the diasporic coming-of-age novel are the hybridity of the genre, the privileging of women's voices, retrospective narration, transgenerational conflicts and interrelated life stories, the importance of the women-centered community, journeys and healing, a concern with the sociohistorical circumstances of being, and, most importantly, a commitment to the female body, embodiment, and sexuality. I build on various studies for example by Geta LeSeur (1995), Julia Kushigian (2003), Christy Rishoi (2003), Mark Stein (2004), Joseph Slaughter (2007), Lucy Wilson (2008), Yolanda Doub (2010), Stella Bolaki

(2011), or Birte Künstler (2012). What these studies show is that the genre has changed considerably and is productively adapted to discuss individual lived experience in migrant contexts as well as mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion that either support or inhibit personal development within seemingly predetermined power structures. Moreover, they all juxtapose specific types of and alternative terms to the *Bildungsroman* with an analysis of intersecting social factors such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, age, colonial status, and cultural ‘difference’ in a *white*, Western mainstream culture. The chapter then summarizes major points of criticism of the term *Bildungsroman* as voiced amongst others by feminist and postcolonial literary scholars arguing for the appropriation of the genre by marginalized subjects to “demonstrate[...] the gender, racial, ethnic, religious, class, and other ‘minority’ biases and exclusions that are institutionalized in the historical world of convention and [...] constitutive of [...] the liberal public sphere’s hegemonic functioning” (Slaughter 2007: 182). This hegemonic functioning, I argue, is a continuation of colonizing processes which manifest themselves in particular on and through women’s bodies.

Chapter three, “The Making and Remaking of the Body,” takes issue with the body, embodied subjectivity, and lived experience first from a theoretical and second from a literary studies perspective. The reading of the body as suggested throughout this thesis is based on a variety of feminist, sociological, and philosophical investigations. Agreeing that the body has a materiality, I also argue that bodies are socially constructed and simultaneously productive of socio-cultural, political conditions. Insisting on the agency of the body, its performative, discursive power, as a kind of textual script testifying lived experience, I argue that the characters in the novels challenge normative views on the gendered, sexualized, and racialized body at the same time as they imply a critique of colonial constructions of the body, its objectification and fetishization, and the often stereotypical representation of the ‘Other body’ within hegemonic Western knowledge production. In addition, I borrow the term corporeal narratology from Daniel Punday (2000) to emphasize the bodies’ relevance for the narrative, opting for a systematic analysis of the body and embodiment in fiction in general and in coming-of-age novels in particular. There is an analogy of the body written in fiction and the understanding of the body as text: I regard the body as a palimpsestic entity that can be inscribed, rewritten, and overwritten, thereby storing memory, or recording it.

The four analytical chapters will show that due to migration – meaning shifting cultural and socio-political value systems – the self- and social perceptions of the body are subject to change. Chapter four “Erotic Power and Moth-

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erly Bodies” offers a close reading of Makeda Silvera’s *The Heart Does Not Bend* read alongside her non-fictional contribution to Black feminism in Canada. The novel not only portrays immigrant women’s lives in Canada, but also discloses limitations of existing gender and national discourses in Jamaica. In its depiction of non-normative subject formations (as a queering of the genre), the novel challenges the heterosexual imperative for woman- and manhood and citizenship built on ‘respectability’ as pillar of the postcolonial, creole multi-racial state. Importantly, Silvera breaks the silence surrounding homosexuality in a Jamaican community, ascribes sexual agency to the maternal body, and rewrites Black lesbian bodies as erotic, sensuous, and desirable placing it in opposition to a destructive masculinity.

In chapter five, “Dirty Skirts and the Other Body,” I discuss Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*. The novel retraces the ancestral lines of women who have come from India to Trinidad, and later moved to Canada, thereby recovering the marginalized history of indentureship in the Caribbean and of those bodies that for a long time have not been accommodated within the dominant national, cultural ideologies of creolization. Investigating colonial structures and horizontal racism among the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian population, Espinet discloses how ‘ethno-racial purity’ is preserved through the female adolescent body. This very same body is disciplined through patriarchal violence and Presbyterian respectability, both of which are challenged by the ‘Other’ body of the emancipated woman and homosexual man. The analysis, furthermore, reveals a nomadic diaspora identity, ‘unhomed’ bodies, and racialized subject positions which are, however, swallowed up by multicultural identity labels in Canada.

The much acclaimed novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, subject of the sixth chapter entitled “Bodies in Pain,” is most explicit in its representation of female corporeality and embodiment. The novel depicts not only virginal, shamed and violated, terrorized and terrorizing bodies, but also the painful and racist stigmata associated with the Black Haitian body in the West. Set against the Duvalier dictatorship and forced migration to North America – which are defining moments for Haiti’s society – it chronicles the personal and political implications of colonial and postcolonial state violence as well as the U.S.-invasion. Danticat complicates too easy separations of the local and diaspora as she makes clear that history and memory are stored within the body and travel with the migrating or exiled subject. Further issues that foreground the body’s centrality in the narrative are Danticat’s depictions of a society’s obsession with class and sexual purity, the inheritance of individual trauma,

along with strategies of survival and resistance found in the healing power of Vodou and storytelling.

The final reading, “The Incarcerated Body,” focuses on Angie Cruz’ *Soledad* and the intertwined coming-of-age story of a mother and her daughter in New York and the Dominican Republic. The precarious economic conditions on the island and desire for upward mobility as hoped for in the U.S. are focused on in this text. I highlight the novel’s criticism of the neo-colonial consumption of Caribbean bodies through prostitution of under-age women, while also commenting on the psychological effects that both sexual labor and the patriarchal violation of women’s intimacy may have on the individual. Moreover, while loneliness is a central motive that interrelates with migration and assimilation, Cruz, I argue, like the three other authors, makes clear that family, the community, and belonging are crucial for a wholesome subject formation and ethnic identity. This process of becoming subject however is bound to gendered socialization practices – in particular the performances of *machismo* as hegemonic Latino masculinity that needs to be negotiated between the legacy of the virility cult of the Trujillo dictatorship and survival in the streets in the Dominican *barrio* in New York City.

The close reading of the four selected novels is context-oriented. Correspondingly, each chapter starts with the historical and socio-cultural background of the respective Caribbean island nation, namely Jamaica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, including the migratory movements to Canada and the United States. In order to situate the novels and their authors, a brief overview of the respective literary history follows. On a context-oriented close reading, Myriam Chancy comments that “[by] necessity, the cultural or literary critic must engage such texts not as empty artistic vessels standing outside of time, but as political manifestoes emerging from distinct spatial and geographical locations” (1997: 9). Thus, I wish to propose a reading of the four novels within the frameworks of their and their authors’ activist practices and political engagement with the minority community they explicitly identify with.

The texts depict “[s]ubjects dwelling on multiple margins” (Stam/Shohat 2014: 81) who nevertheless unsettle gendered and racialized body politics of ‘respectability’ and hyper-eroticism. In different ways, they criticize patriarchal social structures as well as the negative effects of global capitalism on Caribbean subjects. Questions underlying the analysis are: How is the genre of the coming-of-age novel considered to be a medium that offers emancipatory potential? How do sexism, racism, and heterophobia come to determine women’s subject positions? How do they potentially reproduce the same (patriarchal)

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mechanisms of power and exclusion? How is agency exercised with or through the body? Although the novels are quite explicit in disclosing the hegemonic normative structures that privilege certain subject positions while they at the same time discriminate against individuals and collectives who do not fit these normative conceptions, one should be cautious and avoid a too deterministic reading or regard the protagonists only as victims of violence.