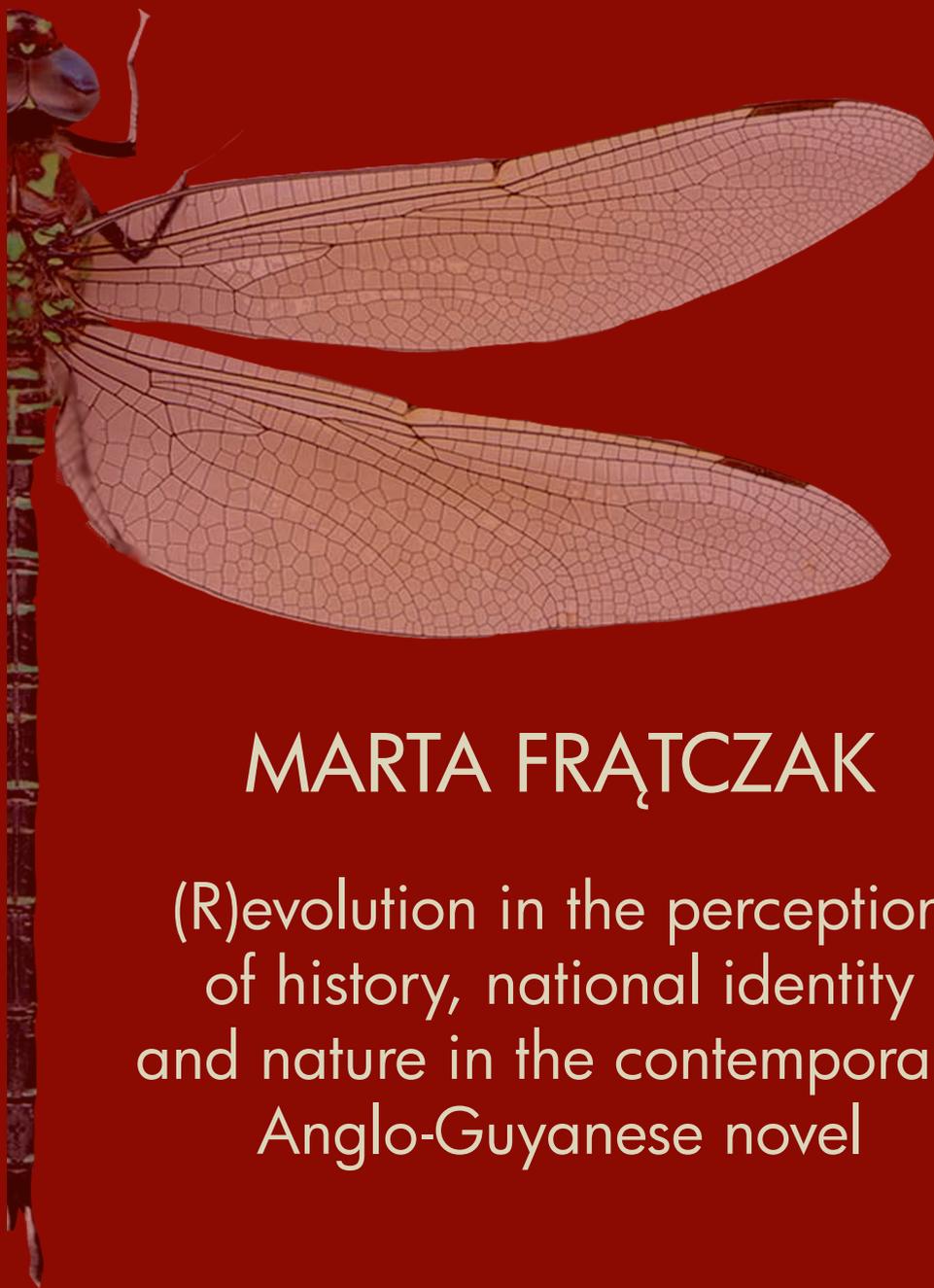


Outstanding **WA D** Dissertations

6



MARTA FRĄTCZAK

(R)evolution in the perception
of history, national identity
and nature in the contemporary
Anglo-Guyanese novel

WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UAM

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FACULTY OF ENGLISH
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ

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Poznań 2016

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The book presents an analysis of selected Anglo-Guyanese novels with a view to drawing a map of the Anglo-Guyanese fiction. The main aim of the monograph is to show the Anglo-Guyanese fiction as an intriguing literary discourse that deserves a separate place within the so called Caribbean literary canon. The book touches upon such topics as the relationship between History and historical novel, the impact of the novel on shaping the Guyanese national identity and the original eco-critical dimension the Guyanese discourse of Nature. The monograph may be of interest to those working in the fields of the Caribbean and postcolonial literatures and cultures.

KEY WORDS: Caribbean fiction, Guyanese fiction, postcolonial studies, eco-criticism

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Introduction

A Polish traveller, Arkady Fiedler, claims that the creation of Guyana resembles the story of Creation itself. In the beginning there was the Word, the marvellous story of El Dorado told to the English by Sir Walter Raleigh¹, but borrowed by him from the Spaniard named Juan Martinez² (Fiedler 2010: cxcvi). The real story of Guyana, however, does not begin with Sir Walter Raleigh; he was not the first European to come to the country and he was by no means the one to have *discovered* its existence. As Jamaica Kincaid wrote, the New World was new only to the Europeans since “it had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before [they] became aware of it” (Kincaid 2011: 19).³ Nevertheless, Raleigh continues to linger in the Western collective imagination as the *discoverer* of Guyana and the history of Guyana itself

¹ Raleigh came to Guyana twice. The first journey took place in 1594 and resulted in the publication of his *The discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful empire of Guiana* (1596); the second he undertook in 1616 and it ended in a total fiasco, bringing the death of Raleigh’s son, Walter (Ishmael 2013: 39-44).

² Juan Martinez was probably a lone survivor of the expedition organized in 1530 by the Spanish and led by Don Pedro Malaver da Silva. The name da Silva has been also frequently used by Wilson Harris to name the protagonists who were to serve as the allegories of the colonizers pursuing El Dorados. Martinez could have also been part of the 1531 journey organized by Don Diego de Ordas. According to his own story, Martinez met the Caribs and begged them to save his life and then lived with them for around ten years. When he managed to escape by the Essequibo river and emerged in the regions of today’s Venezuela, he kept telling the story of having lived in the golden city near the lake Parima in the Guyanese Rupununi savannah. Thus he gave birth to the story of the Guyanese El Dorado, pursued not only by Raleigh but also by the Spanish in the three expeditions of 1584, 1585 and 1591 (Ishmael 2013: 37). More on Raleigh’s journeys may be found in V. S. Naipaul’s *The loss of El Dorado* (1969) reprinted in 2001 by Picador.

³ The first migrations into the Caribbean islands began seven thousand years ago and the people came from the continent, South America, and specifically from the areas of today’s Guyana. The second wave of migrations began around two thousand and five hundred years BC and it marked the beginning of the Ceramic Age, bringing the people from the regions of Orinoco and lower South America, who already practiced sedentary lifestyles, farmed land and produced pottery (Heuman 2014: 1-11). Basil Reid in *Myths and realities of the Caribbean history* (2009) claims that the theories of migrations are now being disputed as the scientists and anthropologists put forward the thesis that the people of the islands whom Columbus met on his first journey did not come from the continent but were native to the islands themselves (2009: 58).

remains a testimony to the tangible power of words, myths and dreams, the three great creative forces which, at the same time, proved to be three great curses of the Guyanese history. First they drew to Guyana the Europeans hungry for adventures and the riches of this Earthly paradise and then the pragmatic settlers and planters who quickly realized that in Demerara – how Guyana was often called – the land is the true gold. V. S. Naipaul even wrote that in British Guiana⁴ “[t]he land required the latifundia; the latifundia created Bookers” and though they were “unimaginative employers” they “could not help being”, as that was the predefined course of the Guyanese history (1999 [1964]: 145).⁵

Similarly Rahul Bhattacharya, a contemporary Indian traveller and writer, claims that Guyana has a taste of the “accidental place” moulded by the uncontrollable forces of history. The Guyanese are the people of all possible cultural backgrounds who came to the obscure corner of South America from all the possible ends of the world. They are separated by the ocean from the Caribbean islands and by the primeval forest from the rest of the continent and “[o]n the ramble in such a land you could encounter a story every day” (Bhattacharya 2011: 4). As a matter of fact, the history and cultural diversity of Guyana is far from accidental. It is a result of the ages of meticulous social engineering, environmental exploitation and ethnic policy devised and executed by the colonial authorities on the living Guyanese organism. Therefore, there is absolutely no understanding of Guyana, of Guyanese stories, not to mention Guyanese literature, without briefly familiarizing oneself with the legacy of colonialism and colonial ideology.⁶

⁴ Guiana or British Guiana is the colonial name of the country, which has been changed on independence (1966) to Guyana. The colonial spelling ‘Guiana’ is used in the present book where necessary to stress the difference between the country from before and after the political independence.

⁵ The Bookers were a business corporation led by the Booker brothers. The company’s headquarters were in London but it held vast estates across the Caribbean and most of the Guyanese land and small business belonged to them. Therefore the country has been called “Booker’s Guyana” and the employers of the Bookers comprised the urban middle-class (Ishmael 2013: 368). The Bookers were expelled from Guyana in 1970 by the nationalist government led by Francis Forbes Burnham (Clochester 1997: 42). It is somewhat ironic that in 1968 they founded the Man Booker Prize which has been awarded to many a postcolonial writer.

⁶ Guyana has been explored since the end of the sixteenth century; already in 1580 the Dutch founded there two settlements known as Nieu Middleburg and Nova Zelandia. In 1600, they settled in Kyk-over-Al in Eussebio, where in 1616 they constructed the first stone fort, which till today remains the symbol of their power. In 1621 they established the Dutch West India company, which in the same year imported African slaves to the country. In 1627, they founded the colony of Berbice. In 1742 the Dutch granted a legal concession to the English settlers allowing them to claim land and own slaves. From that moment the number of the English in the colony progressively increased, effectively changing Guyana

Barbara Higman (2011: 53) states that the most powerful thing the European colonists brought into the Caribbean was their cosmology, the “ideas about what it means to be human”, which lay at the core of all the other political, social and environmental changes inflicted on the colonized lands and which determined the shape of today’s Caribbean. In Guyana, the beginning of such symbolic colonization has been recorded by the already mentioned Raleigh for the sake of his English readers. In *The discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful empire of Guiana* (1596) Raleigh describes the seminal, but politically inconsequential, moment of claiming Guyana on behalf of Queen Elizabeth by showing her portrait to the Amerindian Indians. According to Raleigh, the Amerindians unanimously acknowledged Elizabeth’s divinity and accepted her as their rightful monarch:

And by my Indian interpreter, which I carried out of England, I made them understand that I was the servant of a queen who was the great cacique of the north, and a virgin, and had more caciqui under her than there were trees in that island (...) I shewed them her Majesty’s picture, which they so admired and honoured, as it had been easy to have brought them idolatrous thereof. (...) [Now] in that part of the world her Majesty is very famous and admirable; whom they now call EZRABETA CASSIPUNA AQUEREWANA, which is as much as ‘Elizabeth, the Great Princess, or Greatest Commander’ (Raleigh 2006 [1596]).

In the quoted passage Raleigh not so much describes the Amerindian others as, indirectly, denies them the very right to their own civilization.⁷ In other words, he implicitly suggests that, due to the lack of their own culture, they should automatically accept the superiority of the Western civilization (Greenblatt 1991: 21). Thus, such early colonial texts record the imposition of the Western heritage of representations, which may be traced back to Herodotus and Mandeville, on the New World and thus they are the texts of Western cultural imagination (Greenblatt 1991: 23).

The reasons why Raleigh refused the Amerindians the right to civilization resulted from the fact that he, as a European, cherished some very particular ideas on what it means to be a civilized man. Basil Reid in *The myths of Caribbean history* (2009) writes that “[civilization is] a society in an advanced state of social, economic, and political development” (Reid 2009: 121) and the Europeans for whom the emblems of the development were the great cities and the ability to integrate the people into the large political

into an English country under the Dutch rule. Hence, though officially it became British in 1803, in the popular British imagination Guyana already was English (Ishmael 2013: 1-180).

⁷ The Amerindian is an inclusive adjective that encompasses all the tribes native to South America and the Caribbean, who varied between themselves in terms of their culture and languages, but maintained cultural relations and knew about each other’s existence (Heuman 2014: 1-11).

organisms (Levi-Strauss 2011 [1955]: 299) were hardly impressed by the Amerindians living migratory lives in the primeval forests. In *The clash of civilizations* (2007), Samuel Huntington states that the idea of civilization as we understand it today has been a discursive means of differentiating Europe from *the other* – the barbarian societies. Civilized society was “settled, urban, and literate” and it entailed goodness, restraint and morality (Huntington 2007 [1996]: 41). Especially during the nineteenth century, the colonial golden age, “the Europeans devoted much intellectual (...) energy to elaborating the criteria by which non-European societies might be judged sufficiently ‘civilized’ to be accepted as members of the European-dominated international system” (Huntington 2007 [1996]: 41). Therefore, in order to fully understand the Western idea of civilization, and the true implications of its forceful imposition on the New World, one must first closely examine its antithesis – the barbarians.

The concept of the barbarian in the Western culture is usually traced to ancient Greece, where it was a category close to today’s notion of the foreigner. The barbarian was the one ignorant of the Greek language, or the one who spoke it badly, and who thus was not a citizen of Greece and could not claim the rights resultant from that privilege (Todorov 2010: 14). In *Learning to curse* (2007) Greenblatt writes that an association between language and civilization lay at the core of colonialism as for the European “to speak is to speak one’s own language, or at least a language with which one [the European] is familiar”; the unfamiliarity of the Indians’ speech, then, marked them as barbarians in the European eyes (2007 [1992]: 24-25). In another of his books, *The conquest of America* (1987), Todorov asserts that the stereotype of the Amerindians as devoid of civilization and history is a direct implication of their lack of writing. More precisely, the Amerindians had the pictograms, mnemotechnical use of braided cords and rudimentary phonetic writing, which they used to preserve memory and experience. What they did not have, however, was the system of symbolic representations that comes with literature and historiography and it made them unable to symbolically inscribe *the other* into the linear and logical (hi)story of their culture’s development (Todorov 1987: 81-83). The Renaissance Europeans, in turn, were the people of books, convinced that those who “possess writing have a past, a history [which] those without access to letters necessarily lack” (Greenblatt 1991: 12). The lack of the letter signified also that the Amerindians could not produce the evidence corroborating the fact that they actually had a history or culture, transmitted by literature for example (Greenblatt 1991: 10-12).⁸

⁸ This sense of history-less-ness ascribed first to the Amerindian will later be used in a similar way in reference to the African slaves and the illiterate East-Indian workers to justify

Paradoxically this inability to produce the written evidence of the past contributed also to the creation of the sentimental vision of the New World as more authentic and closer to nature. Jacques Derrida noted that there exists a peculiar and dichotomous narration of writing in the Western culture. Writing, as it developed chronologically later than speech, was by many thought a less perfect form of expression by virtue of its separation from the original thought. Later such thinkers as Jean Jacques Rousseau, and anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss, came to perceive the imposition of writing on the New World as its separation from the state of nature and natural innocence (Derrida 1997 [1976]: 7-8). In *Tristes tropiques* (2011 [1955]) Levi-Strauss outwardly argues that writing corrupted the native man and that writing is the beginning of the cultural manipulation. He illustrates his views with a famous story on how the chief of the tribe he was visiting asked him for his writing pad and together they practiced some scribbles. Levi-Strauss' conclusion on the writing lesson was that the man instantly sensed "that writing could increase his authority thus grasping the basis of the institution without knowing how to use it" (Levi-Strauss 2011 [1955]: 294-304).

Nevertheless, the ruthless colonial machine cared little about such sentimental views and it forcibly introduced the illiterate others into its linguistic system based on the written word and thus subjected them to the domination of the Western civilization (Kortenaar 2011: 9).⁹ Simon Gikandi in *Maps of Englishness* (1996) says that "to become readers the colonized were required not only to acquire literacy but to adopt Western values, vocations, modes of dress, and a European demeanour. For my Giku ancestors, then, the acquisition of literacy and civilization become one and the same thing" (Gikandi 1996: 34). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012: 63) in "The oral native and writing master" claims even that the colonial conviction of the oral culture's inferiority to the written one lingers in the Western cultural imagination; the cultures are still being placed in a hierarchy "where the oral, even when viewed as 'more authentic' or closer to the natural, is treated as the bondsman to the writing master".¹⁰ Such tensions between the world of stories and the

the European domination based on the idea that the people "without history" are to be ruled by the people who make history (Kortenaar 2011: 13).

⁹ In his book *Postcolonial literature and the impact of literacy* (2011) Kortenaar describes the struggles of postcolonial writers with the written word – literature and history – and tradition of orality. He inter alia uses the example of V. S. Naipaul, who himself praised the supremacy of the written word and of codified history, and Chinua Achebe, who tried to reconcile the two.

¹⁰ In the essay Ngũgĩ shows that even in the European culture orality has not always been perceived as inferior to the written world, and its dominance only came with the printing press, capitalism and colonization, which codified the other as "the possessor of deficiencies", including the language. He also comments on the famous writing lesson

world of the codified history signal the problems that permeate the postcolonial literature, including the Guyanese novels, where the authors are continuously trying to strike a balance between their *unwritten* and written heritages.

However, it would be a major simplification to claim that the barbarian other was distinguished from the civilized man only by linguistic strangeness. Though it is impossible to pinpoint the precise moment when the Western culture started to associate barbarism with savagery, there is no doubt that it ultimately became the vessel into which the West poured its uncanny ideas on the physical and moral otherness. Todorov (2010: 15) seeks the roots of such thinking already in antiquity and he substantiates his claims with the quote by Euripides, who puts such words into the mouths of one of his characters as: “[n]ot even a barbarian would have dared to do that [kill his mother]!”. Most researchers, however, link the idea of savagery with the medieval vision of *the others* as non-Christians, unfamiliar with the word of God and the notion of sin. Medieval imagery is full of visions depicting heathens, usually Muslims, with the devil, black bodies, horns and other dehumanizing attributes symbolically removing them from the category of the civilized people (Cohen 2003: 190). Regardless of where one places the line, the barbarian is the one who “transgress[es] the most fundamental laws of common life” and is naturally prone to the most grievous sins such as matricide, infanticide or incest. The barbarian also has no shame and no sexual restraint, s/he goes naked and even “when performing the most intimate acts (...) ignore[s] the fact that they may be visible” (Todorov 2010: 14-16). Broadly speaking, the barbarian is the embodiment of the darkest fantasies and unexpressed desires of the European, who only by delineating who the civilized people are *not*, could determine who the civilized people truly *are*. Such a negative differentiation from *the other* is “the most intrinsic, most essential part of civilization” (Kristeva 1994: 41-42).

There is yet another side to the imperialist imagination of the other; namely, the Indians described by Raleigh, though uncivilized, do not confer to the image of the absolutely dehumanized barbarian known from the medieval visions of the Muslims. They are rather an intermediary between the savage and the civilized man – the noble savages – who are inferior to the European but nevertheless adaptable to the European values and world order. Barbara Higman maintains that the category of the noble(r) savage was necessary to translate the unknown world into the familiar Christian categories of absolute good and evil, and thus to justify the two faces of the colonial mission, namely the brutal conquest of the New World and its gradual subjugation in the form

described by Levi-Strauss in *Tristes tropiques* and he sees it as an uncanny reflection of the lessons Robinson Crusoe was imposing on Friday (2012: 63).

of the gentle civilizing activity (Higman 2011: 61). Peter Hulme draws his readers' attention to the fact that such a dichotomy is fundamental to comprehending the place the Caribbean occupied in the Western colonial imagination. The two most famous Amerindian tribes, which appear in almost every text about the exploration of the region, the Arawaks and the Caribs, are the perfect examples of the noble and, as White called it, "the ignoble savages" (White 1986: 131). The former are palpable, welcoming and friendly towards the colonizer, thus implicitly suggesting the possibility of conversion to the Western ways, and the latter are the bloodthirsty cannibals, whose annihilation is both just and moral (Hulme 1992: 45-86).¹¹ The various renditions of noble savagery found its way into many a colonial text, for example into *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn, where she described her journey to Surinam – the neighbouring region of today's Guyana – and her meeting with the African prince Oronooko. It is also present in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe where Robinson meets the Amerindian boy Friday whom he educates into the European ways (Hulme 1992: 176).¹² Significantly enough, both of these cross-cultural meetings take place in the Caribbean and they both have been later used to mediate the socio-political issues connected to the global discourse of the African slavery.

¹¹ The terms 'Arawaks' and 'Caribs' and the associations brought about by them are "so constitutive that it would be impossible not only for an anthropologist to give an account of Amerindian society but even for Amerindians to make sense of their own lives without using the terms" (Hulme 1992: 66). Yet there is no evidence whatsoever that the notions were known to the natives before the European presence in the region (Hulme 1992: 62-66). The names and stereotypes we operate by today come from the accounts of the first European journeys to the region, but they have been solidified in the nineteenth century, which was an intensified period of scientific and missionary activity, especially in Guiana. For example, W. H. Brett, the missionary and amateur anthropologist, wrote a book entitled *The Indian tribes of Guiana* (1851) where he names the tribes living in Guyana as the Arawaks, the Warau, the Acawoios, the Macusi, the Wapisiana, the Arecunas, and the Caribs. He also ascribes to all of them distinct features of character and physical looks and also repeats the stereotypes, writing that "the Arawaks have always been noted for their mild and peaceable disposition" (1851: 97). From his research we know also that the names he has been using have not been devised by the natives themselves, as the Arawaks, the Caribs and the Acawois named themselves respectively Lokono, Carinya and Kapohn, which in all their languages means "the people" (Brett 1851: 97-107; Ishmael 2013: 3).

¹² In the collective Western consciousness, Friday is registered as a black boy and *Robinson Crusoe* is somehow removed from its immediate Caribbean context. However, as Peter Hulme reminds in his *Colonial encounters* (1992), Robinson's island is situated in the estuary of Orinoco somewhere near Trinidad. Friday, in turn, is a native of the Caribbean, an Amerindian and, more specifically, a Carib. Thence originates also the stereotype of native cannibalism repeated by Defoe, which is connected to the Western ideas on the Caribs whose very name was an allegory of cannibals (Hulme 1992: 176).

All these, oftentimes incoherent images, essentially served a single discursive function – the justification of the European domination over the New World, its land, its resources and its inhabitants (Said 1994: 9). Especially in the nineteenth century, the missionary age, the colonizers progressed from the status of the only civilized beings to the bearers of a culture associated with progress, development, education and literacy. “In its imperialist vision, ‘civilized’ Europe, bearing the torch of reason, had a duty to enlighten the rest of the world, conquering wildness and bringing order and rationality to ‘uncivilized’ peoples and nature”, write Adams and Mulligan (2003: 3). A famous Victorian critic, Matthew Arnold, wrote even that culture is an antithesis of anarchy and defined culture as “the best what has been thought and said in the world (Arnold 1869: viii), “the study of perfection, general perfection and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something” (Arnold 1869: 14). Culture seeks to make “all live in the atmosphere of sweetness and light and use ideas (...) to be nourished and not bound by them” (Arnold 1869: 49). As Robert Young claims, Arnold’s thesis was constitutive of the British colonial intellectual formations (1995: 53), and Bill Ashcroft sees in it, and especially in Arnold’s claim that one acquires culture by reading, the seeds of the British imperial drive of educating the other into the English culture through spreading literacy and the systemic state education (2001a: 10).¹³

In the world of colonial culture, then, nature became relegated to the raw material from which culture is being produced and, as such, it also became automatically subordinate and inferior to the civilizing abilities of man (Haraway 1989: 13). In its most basic understanding the word nature comes from the Latin *nasci* (to be born) and it is simply *not* the product of human actions; nature comes to being and perishes by itself while culture is being produced by conscious design (Krebs 1999: 6). Already Aristotle differentiated between the things that exist “by nature” and those derived from other causes: “[b]y nature the animals and their parts exist, and the plants and the simple bodies (earth, fire, air, water) (...) each of them has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration)” (Aristotle as quoted by Krebs 1999: 7). Medieval Europe borrowed from the ancients the broad ideas on nature as antithetical to culture and, most importantly, the idea of natural order, *scala naturae*, which it adapted it to its ideological needs. It

¹³ Nowadays, we understand culture differently in many of its aspects. Using the definition of Raymond Williams, culture is “a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values”, it is also “the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which (...) human thought and experience are variously recorded” and “a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (Williams 2001: 57).

“arrange[d] everything in nature hierarchically in its appropriate niche, from the angels through humankind (in some versions with Europeans before Asians, Amerindians, and Africans and men before women) to the higher mammals to the lowest insects”, with the white man being placed unquestionably at the top (Preece and Fraser 2000: 251). Preece and Fraser note that the *scala naturae* operated in the Western culture until the late eighteenth century and it was an intellectual cornerstone on which the Age of Reason constructed the secular vision of nature as a logical system where every unit had its proper place dependent on its generic features and not on God’s order (see also: Foucault 2006 [1970]: 245-46; Haraway 1989: 10)

Such prevalent ideas defined the colonizers’ approach to the cultivation and exploitation of the New World, which they saw as naturally subordinate to the European man and his agricultural and economic plans. Thus, the colonizers had little moral reservations as to their claiming land from the local Amerindian populations whom, due to the Amerindian migratory lifestyle and lack of the European sense of land ownership, they hardly considered the rightful heirs of the Amazonian forests (Spurr 1993: 31). This fundamental difference between the Western and non-Western perception of land and nature, which so powerfully clashed during the first encounters, derives from the fact that, unlike the Europeans, the Amerindians do not differentiate between culture and nature. They perceive man as an equal, and by no means privileged, part of the holistic construct of Nature¹⁴ (Whitehead 2003: 149) and therefore they have never devised a system of symbolic and physical domination over nature and they do not long for progress, self-bettering and profit in the way the Western culture does (Sikorska 2012: 14-15; Greenblatt 2007: 33). Such a fundamental ontological difference between the two worlds of the Europeans and the Amerindians lies at the core of the contemporary Guyanese debates on the moral right to explore and exploit the interior of their land, which is being advocated in the name of the Guyanese national economic development (Hyles 2014: 134).¹⁵

¹⁴ Whenever Nature is capitalised it is understood as an abstract and metaphysical entity.

¹⁵ Even the characteristically Western longing for the tropical Arcadias is predicated on the aforesaid disparity between culture and nature. From the late eighteenth century, the Westerners, inter alia due to the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, reversed the traditional binary definition of culture and nature, placing the latter above the former. They begun to perceive nature as uncorrupted by civilization and all the evils resultant from the broadly defined progress, industrialization and capitalist expansion. In his treaties, especially in *A discourse on inequality* (1984 [1754]) Rousseau argued that the development of humanity came at the cost of modern man’s alienation from nature and the natural state. In *Emile* (2011 [1763]) he said that every human being is born good and only by the contact with civilization, which puts social restraints on the true nature of man, does one steadily become corrupted. Therefore it was in the natural man that Rousseau saw the reflection of the best

The colonial discourse of nature as antithetical to culture had a profound effect not only on the land, but also on the colonial societies and cultural identities. For ages the colonizers chiefly used the discourse of natural differences to deny some people the right to being called human. Colonial racism appropriated many of the earlier beliefs and stereotypes about the barbarians as living *beyond* culture and civilization, and thus in the world of nature (Williams 1944: 19; Howlett-Hayes 2013: 1-16). One set of the racist theories stemmed from the European perception of the tropics as an intemperate climatic zone, which reached Europe through the first descriptions of the hurricane on which Shakespeare based his *Tempest* (1611) (Hulme 1992: 94). The tropical areas changed into the proverbial zones of imbalance, where the abundance of natural life translated itself into the “hot-blooded” unrestrained natures of the people, who were thus ‘naturally’ more promiscuous, lazy and violent than the restrained Europeans (Said 2011 [1978]: 311). The climatic claims have been endorsed also by philosophers who used them to explain the differences in national and racial characters. For example, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) wrote that “[t]he peoples have certainly by diversity of climates acquired different natures, from which have sprung (...) many different customs (...) [and] many different languages have arisen” (1948 [1744]: 133). Voltaire (1694-1778) in “Of the different races of men” claims that the human races might have enjoyed fairly the same duration of life on the planet but that by no means belongs to one species what “none but the blind” could advocate (Voltaire 2000: 5-9).¹⁶ Even Immanuel

possible state of human life. With such claims Rousseau sparked the Western dream of the utopian retreat to the tropics as situated beyond civilization, though he himself never advocated abandoning civilization in favour of the primitive lifestyle (see: Lovejoy 1923: 165-186). The echoes of the dream he sparked, however, still linger in the tourist industry, which is selling the Caribbean as the chance to elope from civilization into the controlled and safe tropical environment. For example, the Guyanese Ministry of Tourism offers the unforgettable “Amerindian Guyana tour” which would temporarily take one away from the chaos of the Western world to the harmony of the Amerindian one (“Amerindian Guyana”, 2014). Many critics and anthropologists claim that such sentimental tourism is a peculiar fusion of the Western primitive dreams and the colonial exploitation of the tropical lands (Urry 2011; Whitehead 2003).

¹⁶ The belief in the climatic theory was so widespread that already in the eighteenth century the public worried about a possible man-induced climate change that would heat the earth and thus “cause a transformation or even degeneration in man himself”. As the Europeans were known to have problems adjusting to hot climates, “there was no guarantee (...) that white Europeans could, in the long term, survive the climate of the tropics”, which could lead to the degradation of the whole human race (Grove 1996: 14). Similar beliefs became part of the popular cultural imagination; for example Thomas St. Clair, an English officer residing in British Guiana, presents to the potential readers of his travelogue his own theory “of a field-officer, if the reader would like to peruse them”. He claims that “[a]n African becomes black owing to the burning climate in which he lives”, and he writes, “[t]he

Kant (1724-1804) in his “Physical geography” claimed that people are shaped by the climates in which they live and that “great cold seems to have the same effect [detrimental] as great heat” on one’s body and thus the temperate zones are the only balanced regions (Kant 2012: 572). “In the torrid zones”, Kant says, “humans mature more quickly in all aspects than in the temperate zones, but they fail to reach the same [degree of] perfection. Humanity has its highest degree of perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a somewhat lesser talent. The Negroes are much lower, and lowest of all is part of the American races” (Kant 2012: 576).¹⁷

Roughly from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the sources of natural differences began to be sought in human biology. One of the most famous pseudo-scientific theories was presented in *An essay on the inequality of the human races* (1915 [1853]) by Arthur de Gobineau. He argues that people are divided into races and the Aryan race, the race of the creators and conquerors, which is naturally superior to all the others. The revolutionary character of de Gobineau’s thought lies in the fact that he ultimately separated race from the environment and he argued that the idea of race is the key to the understanding of the rise and fall of civilizations; namely, the more the “error[s] in blood” (de Gobineau 1915: 6) caused by the unfavourable interracial unions, the more morally corrupted the civilization and the closer to the ultimate fall (de Gobineau 1915: 10-12; Beasley 2010: 44). Edward Beasley in *The Victorian reinventions of race* (2010) indicates that de Gobineau’s ideas paved the way towards the organized, state racism of the twentieth century (Beasley 2010: 6) and that they influenced the reading of Darwin’s theories, even though contrary to their author’s wishes. Darwin believed that we all have a common ancestor, but throughout his writings he continued to refer to humans in the category of races. Most importantly, however, he linked physical inheritance to cultural inheritance, suggesting the continuity of race on the physical and mental levels. Hence, though he himself was not a racist, his ideas were adaptable to the racialist ideologies of the times (Beasley 2010: 97-111).

Indians of South America, who live under the same degree of latitude, receive this wind refreshed by the Atlantic Ocean; and (...) their complexion is less dark (...)”, while the European, in turn, who “resid[es] within the temperate zone, does not receive heat enough to give his complexion so deep a hue” (Clair 1834: 275).

¹⁷ Kant claimed that the Africans are born white but for their reproductive parts and the area around the navel. When they burn themselves, they go white. He knew that the black and white races could interbreed producing mulattoes, but he distrusted biology as the sole source of colour. Instead he said that “[t]he fact that it is the temperature of the region, rather than a particular parental lineage, that is responsible for this can be seen from the fact that, in the very same country, those who live in the plains are much blacker than those who live in the higher areas” (2012: 575).

Such racialist ideology tangibly shaped the intricate ethno-class structure of the Guyanese society, the vestiges of which continue to differentiate Guyana among other Caribbean countries. Along the Guyanese coast, the urbanized region where the Dutch located their cities and established plantations, there developed an intricate system of class and colour dependencies. Initially, it was devised to strengthen the European symbolic and physical domination over the African slaves.¹⁸ With time, due to the significant number of children born from the European men and African women, it was obvious that the absolute racial separation is but an illusion (Glasgow 1970: 30). Hence, from the end of the eighteenth century the Guyanese society became progressively creolized but every colour group had its proper class place delineated, cruelly as it sounds, by the colours of their skins. The unwritten rule said that the further one could situate oneself from the African ancestry, the better place one occupied on the social ladder, and many coloured Guyanese actively pursued the chance to whiten their genetic pool (Glasgow 1970: 30). Under the British administration (1803-1966), the Guyanese society underwent another seminal socio-cultural change, which ultimately determined its present multicultural shape. In 1838 the British brought the first East-Indian indenture workers to Guyana as the substitutes for the slaves freed in 1834 (Newman 1964: 49-50; Samaroo 1987: 45). Across the 1840s, they opened their borders to the Portuguese workers from Madeira (Rodway 2005 [1912]: 184) and, in 1851, they procured the Chinese indenture workers (Ishmael 2013: 188).¹⁹ In this way, across the nineteenth century Guyana changed into a very diversified society which was nevertheless based on the firm domination of the European culture and the white race and where the British purposefully hindered the interaction between the Afro-Guyanese and the newly arriving groups (Ishmael 2013: 314).

Once one realizes that the Guyanese society was the artificially collected *mélange* of the various ethnic groups forcibly placed within the borders of a single colonial state, it is less surprising that the Guyanese did not define themselves as a nation until the 1950s. Only when the decline of the

¹⁸ The first slaves were brought to Guyana in 1621 and slavery lasted until its official abolition in 1834. The numeric disproportions between the Europeans and the slaves were great, and for example in 1763, and only in the Berbice province, there were 346 white people, including the women and children, ruling over 3,833 African slaves working on the plantations (Ishmael 2013: 106).

¹⁹ An interesting perspective on this largely unknown side of Portuguese colonial history may be found in the book by an anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida entitled *An Earth-coloured sea: Race, culture and the politics of identity in the post-colonial Portuguese-speaking world* (2004), where he describes the problems encountered by the Portuguese in Trinidad, the only other British colony where they came to as workers.

colonial rule was foreseeable, did there erupt the surge of nationalist enthusiasm and the “[i]ndividual frustrations [of the Guyanese] began to take on a sense of meaning within the framework of a national point of view” (Despres 1967: 5). In 1953, they organized the first national general elections, which were initially approved by the British authorities. When the leftist People’s Progress Party led by the East-Indian doctor Cheddi Jagan won, the British suspended the constitution, delegalized the newly elected government and deployed their troops to Guyana. From this moment, the Guyanese struggle for independence was to be marked by the British military presence and the active role of the CIA, which silently supported the supposedly less communist Afro-Guyanese lawyer, Forbes Burnham, for fear of the Cuban scenario repeating itself in Guyana. In 1955, Burnham organized the ethnic split in the PPP and united his Afro-Guyanese supporters in opposition to the Indo-Guyanese; however, he lost two successive elections to Cheddi Jagan, in 1961 and 1964 respectively. In reaction to his second loss, he incited racial riots and in 1964 gained power by force. In 1966, it was Burnham, the undemocratically imposed ruler of Guyana, who proclaimed the Guyanese independence from the British. Ironically, Burnham proved to be a stern communist, who ruled until his death in 1985 with a peculiar version of national communism based on Afro-Guyanese support, and the subjugation of the Indo-Guyanese majority (Ishmael 2013: 470-473, 498-499, 591-593).

The political independence did not bring any simple antidote to the internal economic, ethnic and political problems of the Guyanese, which resurfaced in the newly independent country. The colonial politics of non-integration between the two greatest Guyanese ethnic groups, the Afro-Guyanese and the Indo-Guyanese, proved deadly and it enabled the post-independence politicians to easily set them against each other in the bloody civil struggle for the political domination over their single nation-state. Till today some researchers hold nationalism, understood here as “a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 2009: 1), responsible for the eruption of ethnic violence in such postcolonial countries as Guyana.²⁰ Nonetheless, the association of nationalism with the cause of ethnic violence is not entirely fair as nationalism was first and foremost a reaction against the centuries of colonial rule. Edward Said wrote that “[i]t is a historical fact that nationalism (...) [as] a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination everywhere in the world” (Said 1994: 218). In his

²⁰ The struggles for independence, and then over the political rule, indeed brought to light the ethnic animosities in many newly established postcolonial countries like Guyana, or Trinidad and Tobago, in the Caribbean or Ghana and Nigeria on the African continent.

opinion, the negative attitudes to colonial nationalism stem from a “discomfort [of the West] with non-Western societies acquiring national independence, which is believed to be ‘foreign’ to their ethos” (Said 1994: 216). In *Nations and narrations* (1990), Simon During also writes that nationalism should not be confused with imperialism and that the former colonies have the right to use nationalism and national discourses to redefine themselves (During 1990: 138). In the same book, Timothy Brennan argues that, after the long period of colonial rule, nation as an idea and the nation state as a unit of political organization constituted a natural basis for fighting the colonial dependency. Postcolonial nationalism, then, was a force directed at rebuilding the community within the boundaries allowed and determined by the forces of history (Brennan 1990: 58). As such, nationalism enabled the Guyanese to regain their sovereignty, even if it brought to light ethnic and racial prejudices accumulated over a period of at least one hundred years.

There is no denying the fact that race and ethnicity still play a significant role in the Guyanese political discourse, but, in the twenty-first century, it is obvious even to the Guyanese that “the country’s disparate ethnic groups have come to resemble one another culturally, and even physically, more than those of their countries of origin” (Hyles 2014: 122). The Guyanese are learning to effectively share their national space and rule the country together, not against each other. They more and more often act unanimously on the pan-ethnic national matters such as the economy, education, immigration policy or the exploitation of the Guyanese natural resources (Hyles 2014: 134). Such a change is visible not only in the Guyanese fiction or on the political scene, but also in its popular sphere. The country’s main internet portal *Stabroeknews.com* is prolific with articles and posts by the country’s journalists, and the ordinary Guyanese, that emphasize the value of their common national identity. For example in one of the long posts tellingly entitled “Who are we?” the author claims that:

For many younger Guyanese ‘of mixed blood,’ our African and Indian heritage are points of interest, not points of identity. This does not make them less Guyanese. It makes them, perhaps, more complex. (...) This is not to deny or detract from the value of the work, art, music and scholarship that has emerged from a close examination, appreciation and conceptualization of the experiences of African slaves and Indian indentured labourers in the history of our nation. *These two dominant influences should not be allowed to overwhelm our identity or diminish its complexity* (Stabroeknews.com, August 2013; emphasis mine, MF).

Moreover, in 2000, the Guyanese established also the Ethnic Relations Commission, the credo of which is promoting harmony and good relations in-between ethnic groups, and they are actively fighting any instances of racial discrimination in the public sphere.

All the presented intricacies of the colonial and postcolonial Guyanese conditioning are more than enough to become fascinated with the country, which has been the embodiment of the Western dream of golden cities, the homeland of the great Amerindian civilization, the silent witness of the Middle Passage, the *kala pani* and the overruling of the imperial order.²¹ All the stories these uncanny experiences have been changed into have, in turn, been translated into the original body of the Guyanese literature, which is a testimony to the complicated (hi)stories of the Guyanese people. Recognising the unique value of the Guyanese literary discourse, the present monograph may be called a case study in the Guyanese fiction, which, despite being part of the Anglo-Caribbean canon, is still a significantly unexplored field. In 1992 one of the greatest Guyanese writers, Roy Heath (1926-2008), said that whenever he tells people in Britain that he comes from Guyana, “nobody knows what that is”. This is all the more regrettable, Heath adds, as “[t]here is a very rich Guyanese literature” worth recognizing (Jusuwalla and Dasenbrock 1992: 139). The situation has not changed much and even in the recent critical studies on the Caribbean literatures, the Guyanese fiction is mentioned almost exclusively only in connection with the most renowned Guyanese author – Wilson Harris (b. 1921).

Such a singular focus may be a result of what Alison Donnell calls the homogenization of the Caribbean canon, by which she means a prevalent academic interest in the landmark figures of the Caribbean boom generation represented *inter alia* by George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul and the aforementioned Wilson Harris. They are still thought to be the fathers and the paradigms of the Caribbean novel, but such an approach is essentially incomplete and it no longer reflects the actual complexity of the Caribbean literature (Donnell 1996: 5; Donnell 2006: 2). The relative unpopularity of the Guyanese fiction may also stem from the fact that it is difficult to classify accordingly to the readily available criteria. Depending on the writer, it is either approached as a slightly awkward rendition of the Latin American marvellous poetics or the uncharacteristic manifestation of the wider Caribbean trends (Bowers 2013: 56-57; McWatt 2014: 34-42; Delbaere-Garant 1995: 253). However, the major cause of the apparently unremarkable status of the Guyanese literature within the Caribbean canon derives from the fact that, for decades, the prevalent focus in the Caribbean literary studies has fallen on the regional, rather than national, literary poetics.

²¹ The Middle Passage is an allegory for the transportation of the African slaves across the Atlantic, and *kala pani* is the analogous term describing the East-Indian journeys from India to the Caribbean plantations of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. The idea of *kala pani*, and the myths connected with it, are presented in Chapter two.

The supremacy of regional Caribbean poetics over national discourses is predicated on the belief that the Caribbean is a holistic cultural construct differentiated only by its particular linguistic traditions. This line of thinking may be traced back to the colonial imagination, when the Spanish colonizers first used the term West-Indian to tell apart the new lands discovered by Columbus from East-India; gradually it grew to embrace the whole region nowadays known as the Caribbean, including Guyana which geographically belongs to the South American continent. As Sam Selvon jokingly said, the Caribbean got discovered by mistake and this accident is coded in the peculiar evolution of terminology used to describe the place. “Christopher Columbus must be killing himself with laughter”, Selvon says, if he knows that, into what he thought was India, and was named West-India, the British brought the actual Indians – named there East-Indians – who, in turn, became the citizens of the new world, changing into Indian Trinidadian [or Guyanese, MF] Westindians (Selvon 1987: 20-21).

The term West-Indian gained yet another meaning when, in the seminal year 1948, the ship ‘Empire Windrush’ docked at Tilbury and brought the first of many Caribbean immigrants to Britain, changing into a symbol of the post-war immigration (Philips and Philips 1999: 1-7). For the British, since the majority of the newly arriving immigrants were Afro-Caribbeans, a West-Indian became synonymous with the black immigrant (Hall 2003: 34). For the immigrants, in turn, it changed into a marker of their newly discovered cultural identity. In *The pleasures of exile* (2002 [1960]: 214) Lamming writes that “no islander”²² from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. It was only when the Barbadian childhood corresponded with the Grenadian or the Guianese childhood (...) that the wider identification was arrived at”. Within the realms of the same essay, however, Lamming already distances himself from the term West-Indian due to its colonial connotation, and he names himself Caribbean. Stuart Hall, who also claimed to have discovered his West-Indian identity in the metropolis, likewise preferred the word Caribbean over West-Indian (1985: 110).²³

²² It is curious to note that when Lamming writes of the islanders’ identity he mentions Guyana as one of his examples, while Guyana defines itself strongly through its continental positioning. The mistake is oftentimes repeated and even the recent travelogue *The sly company of people who care* (2011) reports a comic incident during the public reading of the official regulation on the HIV virus, which angered the Guyanese: “[t]he issue was that Guyana was referred to as an island. The report had been reprinted from “The Nation of Barbados” and as one of the men in crowd said to the author “[t]he problem with island is they form I-land,’ a man with hair buns remarked. ‘Is only I they understand, not you or we” (Bhattacharya 2011: 13; emphasis in the original, MF).

²³ Within the present monograph the term Caribbean is consequently used above West-Indian though the two still co-exist in the scholarly writings. The reasons for such a choice

Across the 1960s and 1970s, the term West-Indian began to be additionally associated with literature, especially the novel, written by the first wave of the émigré writers such as George Lamming (b. 1927), V. S. Naipaul (b. 1932), Wilson Harris (b. 1921), and Samuel Selvon (1923-1994).²⁴ Yet in the 1950s, when “West-Indian” first appeared in reference to fiction, it did not represent any coherent “anti-imperialist sentiment or vision of a pan-Caribbean culture”. Soon, however, “a profusion of articles began to appear in which the term ‘West-Indian’ was used in order to explore the possibilities for a unified regional identity” (Donnell 1996: 4). This sentiment was strengthened by the political project of the West Indies Federation (1958-1962),²⁵ a temporary political union between the Caribbean countries. The union was dismantled by the surge of nationalism in Jamaica and Trinidad, which struggled to “re-establish a sense of individual literatures” (Donnell 1996: 5). The Caribbean unity was also advocated by the main regional

are similar to the ones mentioned by Hall and Lamming, namely the wish to avoid the colonial undertones connected to the term West-Indian.

²⁴ Of course, there is no clear point from which one may truly delineate the beginning of the Caribbean literature but most of the critics agree that it should be placed in the decade across the forties and fifties of the twentieth century. *The Cambridge history of African and Caribbean literature* (2004) presents the first generation as “Lamming’s generation”, into which it invites the émigré writers born across the 1920s like Samuel Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, C. R. James or the aforementioned George Lamming, and so does *The Routledge companion to the Anglophone Caribbean literature* in the chapter entitled “The foundational generation” (Gikandi 2004: 723-724; Edwards 2014: 111-123). The conviction that one should associate the beginnings of Caribbean fiction with the aforesaid names comes from George Lamming himself who in 1960 said that “the West-Indian novel is only twenty years old”, and who named Edgar Mittelholzer and V. S. Reid as its fathers and originators (Lamming 2000 [1960]: 42). Some critics, however, struggle with the idea of such a classification and one of such was R. O. Dathorne who in 1966 wrote that “West Indian literature is at least one hundred years old and goes back to the eighteenth century” (1966: 3); Dathorne included into the Caribbean canon such works as *Thoughts and sentiments* (1787) by Cugoana or *Interesting narrative* (1789) by Equiano. A similar proposition is to be found in the anthology by Thomas Kirse entitled *Caribbeana: An anthology of West Indian literature 1657-1777* (1999) where he expands the Caribbean canon to embrace the early colonial writings on the West Indies by the Europeans, the slaves and the coloured authors. Also David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tague claim that the first examples of the West Indian writings may be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though the twentieth century boom truly defined its shape and discourse (1997 [1987]: 13). Despite such debates, one needs to agree with Lamming that it was the first postcolonial generation of the Caribbean writers who shaped not only the metropolitan vision of the Caribbean literature but also the Caribbean cultural identity; therefore, also the present book by the first generation Caribbean writers understands the first postcolonial generation in Guyana associated with Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965).

²⁵ Guyana has never been part of the West Indies Federation and its cultural and economic contacts with its Caribbean neighbours are rather cautious. The country is economically and politically steered at the cooperation with London (Hyles 2014: 129).

journals, including the Guyanese *Kykoveral*, and the pioneering publications on the history of the postcolonial literature in the Caribbean, such as *Caribbean narrative: An anthology of West Indian writing* (1966) by O. R. Dathorne, *Caribbean verse: An anthology* (1967) also by O. R. Dathorne, or *The West Indian novel and its background* (1970) by Ken Ramchand.²⁶

Nowadays, the idea of the Caribbean as a united literary and cultural area is contested by the critics as it implicitly silences the ethnic and national peculiarities that more and more visibly inform the Caribbean literary discourses. It does not mean, however, that the Caribbean-oriented research disappears, but only that it is becoming more diversified and singular. In 2014 the new paperback edition of *The Routledge companion to the Anglophone Caribbean literature* (2014) was published and, in the “Introduction”, the authors note the Caribbean criticism is undergoing a significant change in the twenty-first century, resulting inter alia from the expansion of the Caribbean canon, which necessitated adding seventy new, more particular entries in their book (Bucknor and Donnell 2014: xxiii-xxx). Such a progression may be observed also through two other examples; in *Reader’s guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*, published in 1987, one may read that “it is still possible to talk in general terms of a West Indian literature of English expression. The common history of colonization, displacement, slavery, indenture, emancipation, and nationalism has shaped most West Indian environments, creating a unity of experience that can be identified as particularly West Indian” (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 1997 [1987]: 13). However, in the relatively recent *Critical perspectives on Caribbean literature and culture* (2010), the project which originated from the conference on the possibility of erasing the borders in the Caribbean, one reads that “[w]hile it is still possible to speak of Caribbean experience or identity as a whole, it is also necessary to be aware of the nuances of each specific group and its unique experiences and implications” (Smith, Tagirova and Engman 2010: 2).

²⁶ The theory of Caribbean poetics and identity was strengthened by Derek Walcott who in 1992 has been awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Walcott deliberately avoided any clear delineation of national identity and associated himself with Odysseus – ‘no man’ – whom he oftentimes used as the allegory of the Caribbean man. In the book *Nobody’s nation: Reading Derek Walcott* the author scrutinizes Walcott’s embrace of the West Indian identity and he claims that Walcott’s concept of the West Indian belonging originated in the face of the judgemental writings of V. S. Naipaul, for example, who doubted the possibility of the region becoming a distinct and independent cultural body. Hence, the term is “empty, derivative” and artificial. Furthermore, since the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1961, Derek Walcott with his hope for the inclusive West Indian concept is an exception and thus literally part of “nobody’s nation” (Breslin 2001: 2).

The departure from unity towards diversity is being noticed also by those writers and critics who have previously endorsed its claims. For example, the Jamaican writer Mervyn Morris (b. 1937), in *Making West-Indian literature* (2005) writes that people born in the Caribbean before the 1950s were raised in the similar political systems and social values which instilled in them awe towards English culture. As he says: “[m]ost of us born before 1950s have been trained to genuflect before the European Great Tradition or standards established or promoted by those in the metropole”. This, in turn, “can sometimes determine not only what we value but the terms in which we talk about what we value (...) cultural confidence develops only slowly” (Morris 2005: 5).²⁷ Kenneth Ramchand, the author of the aforementioned *The West Indian novel and its background* (1970), in the new Preface (2004) admits that at one point in his life he was “inspired and ennobled by the notion that the English-speaking territories (...) could unite and form a nation to stand up in the world with pride” (Ramchand 2004: xxix). Today, however, he recognises that the West Indian ideology is being progressively invalidated by the ethnic and national sentiments operating within the particular Caribbean countries (Ramchand 2004: xxx).²⁸

It is indisputable that in the twenty-first century the Caribbean nation-states remain in force and, at least in the foreseeable future, there are no plans for a pan-Caribbean political union. Also the broadly defined Caribbean literature remains visibly invested in reclaiming (ethno)national histories and coining solidarity within the particular “imagined political communities” (Anderson 1991: 21). With the benefit of hindsight, it is all the more interesting to remind oneself of the words recorded in 1966 by O. R. Dathorne in the introduction to the first anthology of the West-Indian

²⁷ To describe the essence of this generational experience, he uses V. S. Naipaul’s memory from his visit to British Guiana where Naipaul met a certain older lady who never linked the word “jasmine”, which she learned at school, with the same flower which grew around her house, but was referred to differently. Morris himself remembers a similar history from his sister’s life and uses it as an example of the impact the English education had on his generation, alienating them from their very own national spaces (Morris 2005: 5-6).

²⁸ In *Empire Windrush* (1998), Onyekachi Wambu says that “[t]he Empire (...) defined us all, both periphery and centre, bonded us together in a sometimes exploitative and strained relationships. We shared ‘dreams’ (...)”, which no longer are the same dreams cherished by the younger writers (1998: 23). Nonetheless, Wambu notes that even at the time of the greatest enthusiasm for the Caribbean unity, internally the literary diaspora varied considerably. There were the people like V. S. Naipaul, “conservative partitian[s]”, who believed in the possibility of the Caribbean rebirth through the English culture. There were also the “Jamesians”, from C. L. R. James, who were gentle nationalists and stark anti-imperialists (1998: 27).

literature published in London. Dathorne writes there that “Andrew Salkey [the Jamaican author, MF] once said to me that there was no such thing as West Indian literature; Denis Williams [the Guyanese writer, MF] affirmed that it is a province of English letters. They would both argue that it has still to attain a certain definite identity before it can acquire nationality” (Dathorne 1966: 2). The argument of the present monograph is that the Caribbean literature has acquired both, identity and nationality, and therefore the research presented in the following chapters follows the lead of such critics as Stephano Harney, Ralph Premdas, Helen Scott or Shalini Puri, who most significantly reclaim the national perspective in the Caribbean studies.²⁹

The aims of the present monograph are multilayered; firstly it strives at reclaiming the Guyanese fiction as a unique body of literature within the Caribbean canon and, secondly, at showing the (r)evolution of its poetics that has taken place across only two generations of the Guyanese writers. It also aims to collect a relatively significant part of the Guyanese fiction within the realms of a single, yet hopefully comprehensive, literary study where the Guyanese novel is not mentioned incidentally as part of broader studies on the Caribbean literatures. Last but not least, it tries to develop an original postcolonial interpretative matrix specifically crafted for the new reading of the Guyanese fiction, as some of the methodological tools widely used within the Caribbean scholarship seem inadequate to convey the true character of the Guyanese writings. It is especially timely to propose such a study now when, thanks to the exquisite work of a single publishing house located in Leeds – Peepal Tree Press, one may gain easy and wide access to the so far

²⁹ Stephano Harney in *Nationalism and identity: Culture and imagination in the Caribbean diaspora* (2006 [1996]), meticulously explains why he insists on working on the national culture and literature of Trinidad and Tobago, and not on the Caribbean experience. He says that the most obvious reasons for choosing the national perspective is “that the nation-state (...) is a central fact of modern life, and no other form of socio-political organization in the Caribbean appears likely in the near future”. Whenever “the contemporary critics and pan-Caribbeanists speak of a regional struggle [one must] insist on a concrete historical analysis of these islands now incorporated into a pan-Caribbean vision”, says Harney (Harney 2006: 21). Ralph Premdas is another prominent scholar of Caribbean identities who questions the existence of Caribbean unity and who names “all encompassing Caribbean identity” a fantasy (Premdas 2011: 815). Similarly, Helen Scott in *Caribbean women writers and globalization* (2006) places every analyzed literary piece in its national context and she does not ignore, nor belie, the obvious national sentiments of the particular Caribbean writers, and most notably the Guyanese female writers, whose novels “are distinctively Guyanese even as they are global, and [which] variously give voice to the specific historical and political conditions” (Scott 2006: 99). Shalini Puri’s views on nation and nationalism in the Caribbean are discussed in detail in Chapter two (Puri 2004).

marginalized Caribbean novels. The reprinting of the works by such Guyanese writers as Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965), Denis Williams (1923-1998) or Jan Carew (1920-2012), forces one to rethink the shape of the twentieth century Guyanese and Caribbean literature (Bucknor and Donnell 2014: xxiv).

The monograph consists of the Introduction and four chapters which are followed by the Conclusion. Chapter one presents an overview of the literature and theoretical background of the following analytical parts of the monograph and it provides the reader with an essential insight into the development of the Caribbean and the Guyanese novel. Subsequent analytical chapters present the three main areas of the Guyanese writers' interest: history, national identity and nature. Within every thematic field, each analytical chapter discusses two characteristic veins of the Guyanese novelistic writing and compares two novels written by the first generation Guyanese authors with two written by the second generation writers. The aim of such juxtapositions is to provide the readers with a cross-generational and possibly broad perspective on the evolution of the Guyanese literary poetics which has taken place from the moment of its emergence in the fifties of the twentieth century. The analytical part of the monograph opens with Chapter two which discusses the relationship between History³⁰ and the Guyanese historical novel, showing the historical fiction as an apt tool for negotiating the Guyanese colonial past. It differentiates between the two veins of historical writings present in the Guyanese historical fiction, the plantation narratives and the (neo)slave narratives,³¹ and it aims to show how their quarrels with history have allowed the Guyanese to reclaim their historical roots.

³⁰ Whenever History is capitalised it does not denote historiography or documented history, but an unstoppable process of temporal change experienced by all human beings, yet differently conceptualized by various cultures.

³¹ Plantation narratives are here understood as the fictional representations of the lives of the individuals trapped within the socio-cultural system created by the plantation economy that may be written from the viewpoint of both the colonizers and the colonized. The term 'plantation narrative' is not any official classification of the historical novels and it is used here in reference to the theme, rather than narrative construction, of the particular Guyanese historical novels. The main aim of the plantation narrative is to represent the lives on the plantation and thus plantation narratives do not shun from showing the cruel, violent and sexualized reality of the colonial times. The earliest example of such a tale in the Guyanese literature is *Those that stay in bondage* (1988 [1917]) by A. R. R. Webber, and the trend has been continued for example in *The counting house* (1996) by David Dabydeen. Neo-slave narratives, in turn, engage with the theme of slavery and allude to the tradition of the eighteenth-century testimonial slave narratives; they are defined as "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (Rushdy 1999: 3). For this reason, neo-slave narratives are burdened with specific expectation of the readers, namely writing on behalf of the silenced,

Chapter three investigates the formation and renegotiation of the Guyanese national identity at the individual and communal levels. It discusses fictional life narratives written by male and female Guyanese writers, which closely reflect the enunciation of their national identity before and after the political independence (1966). These novels are not read through the prism of gender studies, and the clash of male and female voices serves solely the purpose of gaining the broadest possible insight into the topic.³² Chapter four scrutinizes the discourse of Nature, understood as both the landscape and the ontological order, and it differentiates between the trope of wilderness and the trope of the pastoral as the two modes in which the Guyanese authors mediate their relationship with Nature. In the broader context, it scrutinizes how the Guyanese reverse the inherently anthropocentric Western philosophy that relegated Guyana to a secondary position in the worldwide (post)colonial profit-generating policy. Notably, Chapter four brings into discussion eco-critical theories as a possible new strategy of reading the Guyanese fiction of Nature. The conclusion briefly summarizes the results of the analysis and puts forward potential new directions for the researchers interested in the Guyanese fiction.

The choice of the writers and works included in the monograph is not arbitrary, though – due to limited space – by no means absolute or exhaustive. The collection of the analyzed material was dictated by the wish to remain selective, but representative, of the main trends, tropes and themes characteristic of the Guyanese fiction. The novels have been grouped thematically, and not, as it is usually being done, chronologically, accordingly to the dates of the publication; the best argument against the chronological approach may be derived from *A history of literature in the Caribbean* (2001) where the authors included Beryl Gilroy (1924-2001) into the “younger” wave of the Guyanese writers (Kutzinski 2001: 15). It is also vital to stress that the novels have been juxtaposed with no regard to the authors’ ethnicity. The ethnic lens in the Guyanese literary studies is fallible as the ethnic affiliation of the authors not always, or even rarely, overlaps with their artistic interests. For example, Roy Heath, who was a Guyanese Creole of African provenance, wrote on the East-Indian discovery of the national identity, as he did on the Afro-Guyanese and the Amerindian experiences. Fred D’Aguiar, a writer of mixed British origins, comments on the African experiences, but also the specifically

dispossessed and marginalized; as such, they have played a significant role in American struggles for racial equality (see: Rushdy 1999: 4).

³² The definition of the life-narrative has been adopted from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001: 3), who distinguished between life writing, which is “a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject” and life-narratives “as a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing” like autobiographies or semi-autobiographies.

Guyanese socio-political reality; while David Dabydeen, who is an Indo-Guyanese, writes extensively on the Afro-Guyanese experience, incorporating into his fiction the elements of Hindu culture. Therefore, what links them all is their Guyanese provenance and their investment in the representations of Guyana and (re)shaping of the Guyanese history, identity and nature.

As it has been mentioned, the monograph aims to provide the readers with an insight into the (r)evolution of the Guyanese fiction and thus the adopted research perspective may be called cross-generational. The assumed demarcation line between the first and the second generation of the Guyanese writers runs roughly parallel with the independence, dividing the writers into those whose formative years fell on the times before and after the 1950s – the seminal decade for the Guyanese national self-definition. The first wave of the Guyanese authors is within the monograph represented by Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965), Roy Heath (1926-2008), Beryl Gilroy (1924-2001) and Wilson Harris (b. 1921), the names which largely defined the boundaries of the Guyanese novelists discourse.³³ Due to limited space, other writers, such as Jan Carew (1920-2012) or Denis Williams (1923-1998), are by necessity omitted, but their novels are brought into discussion as points of reference at appropriate moments. Also, the decision to include two novels by Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965), in chapter two and chapter four respectively, is not by chance. Such a choice was dictated by the wish to restore him to his proper place as the father and the precursor of many of the trends now present in the Guyanese fiction and for years marginalized in the mainstream, or and even Caribbean, criticism.

The only first-generation writer who may seemingly not confer to the adopted temporal classification is Denise Harris (b. 1950), provided as an example of the first generation of the female Guyanese writers in the chapter devoted to the formation of the national identity. However, the auto/biographical female writing emerged in Guyana in the late eighties and entered the Guyanese fiction with Grace Nichols (b. 1950), the author of *Whole of a morning sky* (1985), and Jan Shinebourne (b. 1947), the author of *The last English plantation* (1988). Thus this sole aspect requires pushing the assumed

³³ As Roy Heath claimed: “I am the product of all the influences to which I was exposed, that came to the fore in the aftermath of Guyana’s independence when I begun writing my first novel” (2014 [1987]: 172). Moreover, for their definition as a single generation it is not without significance that they all knew each other closely and exchanged ideas and inspirations. Wilson Harris, for example, married the sister of the Guyanese novelist Jan Carew (1920-2012), and Roy Heath in his memoir describes their wedding he attended with his girlfriend. Heath remembers that “Aunt Ethel’s eldest daughter was marrying Wilson Harris, who became our most distinguished novelist. (The bride’s brother, Jan Carew, was also destined to be a novelist, as was his daughter, Lisa St Aubin de Teran)” (Heath 1990: 201). Beryl Gilroy, in turn, shared her immigration and professional experiences with E. R. Brathwaite (b. 1920) (Cudjoe 1990: 371).

boundaries and presenting Denise Harris (b. 1950) as part of the first wave of the Guyanese female writing. The decision to include her over the aforementioned authors is also motivated by the fact that she is hardly mentioned by any critical study, though her novel of national self-discovery, *Web of secrets* (1996), was widely popular and awarded the Guyanese Prize for Fiction.

The second generation of the Guyanese writers is represented within the monograph by such authors as David Dabydeen (b. 1955), Fred D'Aguiar (b. 1960), Ryhaan Shah³⁴ (b. c. 1950), Oonya Kempadoo (b. 1966) and Pauline Melville (b. 1948). Though some interesting names are by necessity excluded from the list, like Narmala Shewcharan (b. c. 1960) for example, it is believed that the selection allows the reader to comprehend the shifts in the generational debates on history, national identity and nature. These second generation authors display the cultural confidence that Mervin Morris claimed his generation lacked, but they are also the ones who “had to contend with the disappointment of the independence movements” (Wambu 1998: 28). As a consequence of their different generational experiences, their fiction is significantly less “black and white” in describing the difficult and dark parts of the particular Caribbean histories (Wambu 1998: 19-29). Noteworthy, David Dabydeen resurfaces as the most prominent and critically acclaimed figure of his generation. He is unsurpassed in terms of the elasticity and versatility of his writings, and his literary output ranges from academic books, exceptional ekphrastic poetry, to historical novels. He is also the most innovative among the Guyanese writers and the one who sets the new paths for others to follow. On this account Dabydeen is granted more space within the monograph and two of his novels are included in the study, respectively in chapter two and chapter three.

Last but not least, in the “Introduction” to *Twentieth century Caribbean literature* (2006) Alison Donnell ponders on a question she, as a British researcher, has been oftentimes asked: “Why was it that I was studying Caribbean writing when I was not linked to the region by birth, geography or ancestry?” (2006: 2). She claims that the true answer has been dawning on her only gradually and today she would say that she wanted “to look away from those writers and texts that were already receiving critical attention within the academy and whose value was understood as given and stable” (Donnell 2006: 2). Donnell is well aware that the perspective of a non-Caribbean critic is different from the Caribbean one, and it is both a curse and a blessing for anyone trying to study such cultures essentially different from one’s own. She hopes, however, that she has “some added insights of an

³⁴ She has not revealed her actual date of birth, but from the dates of her education and travels one may deduce that she was born after 1950.

outsider's eye" that may prove useful not only to the Western academia but also to the Caribbean people themselves (Donnell 2006: 2). One should add yet another fundamental aspect to Donnell's divagations, namely that opening oneself towards a new and unexplored literary discourse forces one to redefine the familiar routes of thinking, challenge the stereotypes and all-too-easy cultural assumptions and, in the end, to learn more about one's own cultural positioning. Therefore, sharing Donnell's aspirations and fears, I also hope that my own investigations into the Guyanese literature would bring, even if in a limited way, the "added insight of an outsider" to the Guyanese culture; most importantly, however, I hope that they would bring the Guyanese culture and literature to those outsiders ready to appreciate its complexity and beauty. After all, despite the fact that postcolonial literatures have become a solid part of academic literary canons, the literary map of the world requires constant revisions so that it could forever remain fluid, preserving blank spaces for the new areas to be discovered.

Chapter One

Towards the postcolonial poetics of the Guyanese fiction

Before venturing into a more specific discussion on postcolonial studies and the Guyanese fiction, it is significant to say a few words on the novel and the role it has played in the formation of the Caribbean postcolonial consciousness. The choice of the novel as the subject of literary investigations for the current work is by no means fortuitous and it is predicated on the belief that the novel provides one with a broad insight into the socio-cultural conditioning of a particular national and cultural community. The flexibility of the genre to reflect the problems of modernity was noticed already by Mikhail Bakhtin, who wrote that “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” (Bakhtin 2010: 3). The novel, unlike the epic or tragedy, was born and nourished in the new era of history and it remains in a dynamic relation to the reader and the reading process; for example, the protagonists in the novels have the potential to change and evolve, which “keeps the genre from congealing” (Bakhtin 2010: 27, 39).¹

In *Nation and the novel* (2006), Patrick Parrinder writes that the traditional paradigms of the novel, such as its supposed objectivity, realism and verifiability, come from (pre-)Victorian writers and theoreticians, for example Walter Scott. Scott clearly differentiated between the novel, which was a modern and rational way of describing history and reality, and the folkloristic forms of literary expression, which were uncoded, fluid,

¹ For Bakhtin, the novel is also inseparable from heteroglossia – “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin 2010: 310). David Lodge and Nigel Wood write that heteroglossia is “characteristic of any national language” and fundamental for the understanding of the modern novel. In its form and language, the novel reflects “the struggle between two tendencies in the languages” – one towards centralization and the other towards decentralization placing itself “on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia” (Lodge and Wood 2008: 252).

unverifiable and thus inferior to the novel (Parrinder 2006: 10).² Such was the vision of the novel passed on by the colonial authorities to the colonized subjects in the process of the institutionalized education. Education in the Caribbean was compulsory from the 1870s onwards, in Guyana from 1876, and, at least in theory, available to all children (Bacchus 1980: 67). Reading was one of the obligatory subjects and literature was one of the primary tools of instilling respect towards the English culture (Ramchand 2004 [1970]: 8, 42; Lamming 2000 [1960]: 39). It is all the more astounding, then, that once the Caribbean writers took to writing novels, they not so much imitated its traditional paradigms as stepped beyond their limitations. Not only have they reincorporated into the novelistic discourse the legacy of folklore, orality and communal memory but also used it as a tool of their individual and communal postcolonial identity negotiations.

The groundbreaking significance of the novel for the Caribbean self-definition is best illustrated by George Lamming in “The occasion for speaking”. Lamming says that there have been three significant stages in the development of the West Indian history: first, the journey of Columbus, in consequence of which the old and the New world collided; second, the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the East-Indians, which once again mixed the worlds and cultures; and third “the discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West-Indian community” (2000 [1960]: 41-42). The historical significance of the moment is not always fully acknowledged by the metropolitan audience, for whom the novel is three hundred years old. Thus it is vital to remember that:

Mittelholzer and Reid and Selvon and Roger Mais *are to the new colonial reader in the West Indies precisely what Fielding and Smollett and the early English novelists would be to the readers of their own generation*. They are the first builders of what will become a tradition in West Indian imaginative writing: a tradition which will be taken for granted or for the purpose of critical analysis by West Indians of a later generation (Lamming 2000 [1960]: 42; emphasis mine, MF).

² Such views on the novel are also part and parcel of the eighteenth century debates on novelistic convention and may be found *inter alia* in *Tom Jones* (1749). The conviction that the novel is separate from folklore and orality persevered into the twentieth century and it led Walter Benjamin to complain that the emergence of the novel entailed the death of “the art of storytelling”. The novel, Benjamin said, is “neither com[ing] from oral tradition nor com[ing] to it” and reading, unlike storytelling, is an individual experience (Benjamin 2009 [1936]: 362-378). Even for Benjamin, however, the novel has one major advantage, namely it presents highly relatable experiences and it is a flame “which consumes [but] yields us the warmth which we never draw from our fate” (Benjamin 2009: 373).

The novelistic work of the first generation of the Caribbean writers, then, is the source from which the following generations drew their own sense of cultural uniqueness. Their work is also a testimony to the already mentioned flexibility of the novel, which proved accommodating enough to reflect the Caribbean experience – so essentially different from that of the metropolitan.³

It is also not without significance that the Caribbean novel originated roughly in the times when the Caribbean countries started to define themselves as national bodies. The interest in the theme of national identity is prominent in the works of many first-generation Caribbean writers and the connections between the novel and national identity formation has been emphasized by many critics, and most famously by Benedict Anderson, who saw the nation as the “imagined political community” that came into being around the eighteenth century with the birth of print culture in the native languages.⁴ Furthermore, the novel is somewhat generically predisposed to taking up the national themes as it centres on ordinary characters who entangle themselves in the public world and whose lives are somehow representative of the experience of the readers, creating the sense of national belonging (Parrinder 2006: 11). The novel is also intricately woven into the

³ In his lecture on the novel, Roy Heath reports that the novel “has become a comprehensive form into which a variety of inventions can be poured. (...) *Any literate culture may borrow the novel and make of it what it will*. On the one hand it has re-absorbed poetry and drama, history and myth, and on the other it has been fractionalized into numerous genres” (Heath 2014 [1983]: 154; emphasis mine, MF). To give one example of the early Caribbean experiments with the form one may note Denis Williams, a Guyanese painter and archaeologist, who wrote a surreal piece *Other leopards* (1963) in which he describes the national and cultural identity negotiations of Lionel Froad. Froad is an Afro-Guyanese archaeologist delegated to work in Sudan, where he confronts himself with his African and Guyanese roots, trying to determine where he truly belongs. Despite such allegorical construction of the early Caribbean novels, R. O. Dathorne warns against a common misconception that the novel in the Caribbean originated from poetry. Dathorne argues that these are two disparate discourses, and the fact that some of the Caribbean authors were also poets is a mere accident (1966: 1). As if to confirm his thesis, the supreme novelist Wilson Harris was a mediocre poet and his poetic work was refused by the publishers (Jefferson-Miles 2014 [1987]: xi).

⁴ Anderson argues that, due to imposing arbitrary links between the events and protagonists, and producing a sense of simultaneity among the readers, the novels and newspapers facilitated the sense of national solidarity among the people, who would never know themselves face to face (Anderson 1991: 21). Anderson’s claims were criticized by, for example, Anthony Smith in *Nationalism and modernism* (1998); Smith reports that the theory of nations being artificial constructs does not explain the passion that they evoke in both the intellectuals and the “poor and unlettered” (1998: 130). Also Jonathan Culler in *The literary in theory* (2007: 43-72), lists possible pitfalls of Anderson’s theory, such as his too homogenous a vision of the reading public or his a priori assumption that all novels are national narratives. Nevertheless, despite its many shortcomings, Anderson’s work is indispensable part of any inquiry into the relationship between the novel and the nation.

discourse of the discovering of one's identity, which operates on the individual and collective – national – level. In such novels as *Jane Eyre*, *Kim*, or *Women in love*, the protagonists continuously ask themselves “who am I” and the answer seems to be come from both their internal self (re)definition and the society (Parrinder 2006: 28). Timothy Brennan called this phenomenon “one, yet many” – signifying the hero who becomes a synecdoche of the national experience (Brennan 1990: 49).

In the context of the still ambiguous attitudes to Caribbean nationalism, it is vital to underline that the connection between the novel and the nation does not imply that the novel serves the nationalistic cause by definition. Jonathan Culler writes that the novel has the potential to affirm, but also to question the homogeneous idea of a nation and national belonging. Going back to the original thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, he underlines the fact that the nation may be imagined as “the community without unity”, comprising the autonomous singular individuals defining themselves against the others, who are equally singular and independent (Culler 2013: 44; Culler 2007: 64). Homi Bhabha shares such views but he sees nations as “narratives (...) [that] only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye” and which are being constantly negotiated in-between “transitional histor[ies]” and “conceptual indeterminac[ies]” (Bhabha 1990: 1). In this way, to use Kristeva's words, the nation is a “paradoxical community made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners” (1994: 195). Such heterogeneous nature of national discourses is especially observable in the contemporary Caribbean fiction, where there is no possibility of inventing the voice that would speak for all the readers and protagonists who are parts of the nation.

Hence, calling the Caribbean novel national does not imply its inclusion into the nationalist agenda, but it allows one to take account of the national sentiments displayed by such authors as Naipaul or Selvon, who have first seen as their task to re-imagine Trinidad and only later to re-imagine the Caribbean (Harney 2006: 25).⁵ By the same token, the Guyanese writers wrote predominantly on, and about, Guyana. Roy Heath openly admitted that he disliked the ‘Caribbean label’ and saw it as a way “of denying us our

⁵ Stephano Harney argues that the primary aim of Naipaul, Lovelace, Chen, or Selvon, was to “make it [Trinidad] visible to its people” (Harney 2006: 25). Nonetheless, the postcolonial literary criticism linked them to “the high aspirations of the English-speaking Caribbean and its struggle for independence and identity” (2006: 4). According to Harney, such a strategy allowed the critics to avoid the uncomfortable nationalist label and it was an expression of the optimistic belief in the possibility of the Caribbean regional unity. It was also a logical choice taking into account that at that time the sole number of the published Caribbean writers was not prolific enough to talk about the national fictions (Harney 2006: 25).

nationality” (Jusuwalla and Dasenbrock 1992: 119). “[F]irst of all”, Heath once said, “I want to be known for what I am, a Guyanese writer. And in a larger way a West Indian writer, and in a yet larger way a South American writer” (Jusuwalla and Dasenbrock 1992: 120). The same may be said of Edgar Mittelholzer but even Wilson Harris, most commonly deemed the universalist Caribbean writer, always claimed to have been moulded by his specifically Guyanese experiences (Boxill 1988: 188).⁶

Nevertheless, the novel in the Caribbean was not only a means of shaping national identity; after years of having been denied decisive power over their nation-states and their (home)lands, it was also used by the writers as a tool of reclaiming symbolic authority over History and Nature. As C. R. James⁷ argued, in the world without castles, cathedrals and monuments, History emerges from the novel. He once said: “on our writers and on the work that we are doing today, there is concentrated an enormous amount of West-Indian history” (1989: 49). Poignantly, Edouard Glissant asserted that “as far as we are concerned, history as consciousness at work and history as lived experience are (...) not the business of historians exclusively”. This “literary’ implication”, in turn, “orients the thrust of historical thought, from which none of us can claim to be exempt” (Glissant 1999: 64-65). Similarly, Wilson Harris believed that “the philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of imagination”, be it limbo dancing or voodoo practices, and that it may be accessed and made available to the public through the novel (Harris 1999: 151).

An analogous phenomenon may be observed through the relationship between the Caribbean novel and Nature. Land and landscape are in the Caribbean inseparably connected to history, being physical embodiments of the traumatic historical experiences resultant from the ages of colonization. At the same time, they are sole links to the pre-Columbian heritage, Amerindian mythology as well as sources of the pan-ethnic and distinctly Caribbean identity. Such a multilayered symbolism was critically important to all the first-wave Caribbean writers. They, as well as many ordinary Caribbean people, were only

⁶ The allegorical *Guyana Quartet*, a collection of the four most famous non-realist novels by Wilson Harris written across 1960-1963, may be read as a story about the Guyanese national identity negotiations in-between the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Guyanese heritages.

⁷ C. R. James wrote one of the most famous narrative histories produced by the Caribbean historian entitled *The Black Jacobins* (1938), and devoted it to the Haitian Revolution, which he placed in the context of the French Revolution. It is a typical narrative historical book and its revolutionary character lies rather in James’ depiction of the colonies as rightful participants and active agents of the colonial history. James elevates Toussaint to the level of a colonial and European revolutionary hero and writes that “Toussaint L’Ouverture [is] one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men” (1989 [1938]: x).

just beginning to shape their sense of loyalty towards their (post)colonial homelands and it was in nature that they saw a promise of reconnection with their pre-colonial and colonial past (Harris 1999: 41). For this reason, nature emerged as a “full character” in all the early national Caribbean fictions (Glissant 1999: 105-106) and the landscapes were oftentimes imagined as “the essence or heart of the nation” (Phillips-Casteel 2007: 5). Even today, any “engagement with the environment [in the Caribbean novel] means an entanglement with the history of empire and post-colonial nation building” (DeLoughrey et al. 2005: 5).

One may thus conclude that the novel in the Caribbean not only reflected, but also tangibly shaped, the Caribbean postcolonial consciousness and its vision of history, national identity and nature. Therefore, the thematic focus of the current monograph reflects the characteristic themes observable in the Caribbean novel from the beginning of its birth in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century. It is being argued here, however, that due to the original way in which the Guyanese authors approach and redefine the aforementioned areas, the Guyanese literature deserves a separate place within the Anglo-Caribbean canon, and a special methodological space in the Caribbean scholarship. As it will be shown, if approached as a national literary discourse and not forcefully inscribed into the predefined frames of pan-Caribbean poetics, the Guyanese fiction proves a challenge to the well-established theoretical paradigms and emerges as an endlessly creative and valuable subject of literary and cultural studies.

1.1. Beyond postcolonialism: The methodological framework of the monograph

The methodological framework of the monograph may be broadly delineated as a part of the postcolonial studies, which “[have] proven to be one of the most diverse and contentious fields in literary and cultural studies, a field of apparently endless argument and debate” (Ashcroft 2001a: 1). Despite their omnipresence in the contemporary literary and cultural criticism, the beginnings of the postcolonial studies are by no means easy to pinpoint. Neil Lazarus and Bill Ashcroft et al. argue that postcolonialism emerged around 1945 as a contestation of colonialism and colonial capitalism. Up to the 1970s, it has not been a coherent academic field but a loose collection of ideas and literary works which were merely deemed postcolonial for the sake of periodization. Lazarus and Ashcroft link the progressive solidification of the movement with such critics as Edward Said, especially his *Orientalism* (1978), and Homi Bhabha (Lazarus 2011: 8; Ashcroft et al. 1998: 186). Nonetheless, there is no denying the fact that such a classification is arbitrary and by no

means universally applicable to all the postcolonial states. It seems reasonable, therefore, to repeat after Ania Loomba that postcolonialism did not emerge in any specific moment since different colonial societies turned towards postcolonial thinking at various points of their history. As she says: “[it is] more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba 2005: 16).

Coining a single definition of postcolonialism may be equally problematic. In view of simplicity, one may claim that postcolonialism is an intellectual and literary trend that “deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies” (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 186). Nevertheless, such an explanation is hardly exhaustive since nowadays the postcolonial critique is a far more heterogeneous discourse. Over decades it grew into a movement directed against any form of oppression, and especially against “uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (Bhabha 2004: 245). Also Robert Young in *Postcolonialism* (2001) defines it more generally as a “critique focuse[d] on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain” (Young 2001: 11). Hence, postcolonialism may be best understood as a tradition of critical thinking that came to being through the vast body of critical and theoretical works “attempt[ing] to break with the colonialist assumptions”, but which since then has stepped beyond its anti-colonial dictum (Hulme 2008: 388). What remains indisputable is that in all its various meanings postcolonialism is rooted in the tradition of post-structuralist thinking, which has allowed the postcolonial scholars to successfully dismantle discriminatory discursive practices.

The primary analytical framework for such postcolonial investigations has been provided by Michel Foucault, who first described the production of *meaning* not in terms of language, but discourse. According to Foucault, discourse is “the set of rules and procedures for the production of particular discourses”, which comes to being through “violence that we do to things or, at all, events as a practice we impose on them” (Foucault 1981: 54). Discourses, in turn, are the “sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think” (Mills 2004: 15). Throughout history, the ideas that transgressed the normative frameworks of particular discourses have been effectively silenced. To better grasp his reasoning, one may refer to *The archeology of knowledge* (1969) where Foucault writes that history should be viewed as a discursive formation of ideas governed by a set of rules beyond the

human consciousness; the historian is but an archaeologist who examines their logics (Foucault 2002 [1969]: 7).

One of the milestone works heavily indebted to Foucault's theories is the already mentioned *Orientalism* (1978). Within its realms, Edward Said famously deconstructs the Western discourse of the Orient as observable in historiography, science and fiction. Also in *Orientalism*, he comes up with the idea of representation understood as the discursive deformation of the particular subject. "In any instance of at least written language", Said writes, "there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little (...) on the Orient as such" (2011 [1978]: 21). In other words, how a given idea is being represented in discourse has nothing to do with its objective qualities and everything to do with the complicated network of discourses in the context of which it is being represented. Thus the primary area of postcolonial investigations, associated for example with such critics as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, has been the rereading of the colonial texts with a view to dispelling the various myths of representations (see: Spivak 1985: 243-261).

However, in the Introduction to *Postcolonial studies and beyond* (2005), the authors observe that postcolonialism in its orthodox deconstructive version has somehow exhausted itself. They suggest that postcolonial studies should become more engaged in the socio-cultural life and go beyond its usual post-structuralist focus. More precisely, postcolonialism should embrace new areas of investigations such as the natural environment and reconceptualise such seemingly well defined notions as globalization, nation-states or the transoceanic history; in other words, it must open itself to the *beyond* in order to regain its former opinionating place (Lomba et al. 2005: 1-40). In considering such opinions, one should be aware that placing one's research within the tradition of postcolonial studies, heterogeneous as they may be, does not exempt one from searching new ways of reading texts and adjusting one's research perspective to the challenges of the continuously changing world. As Peter Hulme says, "postcolonial theory may not be a wonderful term, but [it is] a perfectly adequate starting point (...) to do as much as one could reasonably expect a single term to do" (Hulme 2008: 388).

Therefore, the present monograph treats postcolonialism as a perfect starting point for the literary and cultural investigations into the Guyanese fiction. Nevertheless, it accommodates postcolonial theories to the specificity of the Guyanese conditioning in all three areas of the presented investigations. Moreover, it at points will reach *beyond* the postcolonial studies since the Guyanese literary discourse requires to place oneself in a polemical position towards the well-grounded postcolonial theories. As John McLeod aptly notes, not all postcolonial discourses are postcolonial in the same way, even if their

interests circulate around the issues of race, ethnicity, cultural identity or nationalism (McLeod 2000: 2-3). The awareness of such internal differences is especially significant in the Caribbean, which in itself is an exceptional postcolonial area, “a mélange of European, and native Indian, African and Asian”, and the site of the confrontation of the old with the new (Chamberlain 2002: 4). To use the words of Edouard Glissant, “[w]e [the Caribbean people] are the roots of a cross-cultural relationship (...) floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches” (1999: 64). In such a place, “no discourse [even postcolonial] (...) can claim to embody a genuinely native point of view” (Hulme 2008: 394) and no researcher may truly claim to determine all the intricacies and cross-cultural influences that have shaped the Guyanese literary discourse. It does not mean, however, that such an effort is not worth undertaking.

1.2. The historical novel or meaningful visions of the Guyanese past

The controversies surrounding the historical novel as a possible mode of the Caribbean history's representation stem from its association with narrative realism and the realist colonial historiography. In *The historical novel*, Georg Lukács put forward the thesis that the Western historical novel was born from the socio-political changes of the post-revolutionary France. The French Revolution (1789) triggered the new ‘mass’ historical sensitivity when, for the first time, the masses became conscious of the historical process, and of the possibility of historical change, exemplified by similar events taking place all the world (Lukács 1962: 23). For Lukács the first true writer of historical fiction who was both able to convey the newly discovered sense of history and the authenticity of the particular historical moment was Sir Walter Scott (1962: 15). Scott's aim was “not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events”. He also offered the understanding of history to the reader, through a “re-experience[ing] of the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality” (Lukács 1962: 42). Therefore, the historical novel was to evoke a sense of affinity between the readers and the presented events and its success lay in its ability to emanate historical faithfulness and be relatable for an average individual.

The historical novel, then, achieved its apparent objectivity and reliability through a strict adherence to realism, understood here as a narrative technique based on the idea that “truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” (Watt 1957: 11). In this understanding, realism

is but “the sum of literary techniques” – the aim of which is “to give a full and authentic report of human experience” (Watt 1957: 30-33). In his essay “Realism in the balance”, Lukács argues that only realism enables the writer to render the “objective social context” and to depict and understand the social reality. As he says:

[I]f we are ever going to be able to understand the way in which reactionary ideas infiltrate our minds (...) this can only be accomplished by hard work, by abandoning and transcending the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality. In short it can only be achieved by a deeper probing of the real world (...). [T]he major realists of our age have consistently shown their ability to undertake this arduous task (Lukács 1987: 37).

It is, nevertheless, instrumental to note that such objectivity was a mere illusion as, along with the realist novel, “the new king” was born – the narrator – who possessed the power to quote the voices of the protagonists and thus represent a particular version of reality; as such, realism operated also beyond literature in other narrative fields such as historiography, psychiatry or pedagogy (de Certeau 1988: 154-164)⁸. In this understanding, then, realism is both “a rhetoric and an ideology” (Duncan 1992: 6) and the realist orientation of the historical novel bound the genre to the realist colonial novel, like for example *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and later to the realist nineteenth-century historiography, which, written in the realist-empiricist paradigm, promoted the idea of history as a linear movement towards progress (White 2009: 23).⁹

⁸ The idea of the quoted voice may be traced to Bakhtin, who observed that in the public sphere, and in literature too, we have more to do with the quoted voice of the stranger than the direct voice or even our own (Pomorska 1984: ix).

⁹ “[T]he majority of English historians (...) [were loyal to] the idea that the empirical physical sciences constituted the paradigm of all knowledge”, writes Hayden White. The paradigm he has in mind is most tangibly associated with Hegel, who claimed that history is a universal story encompassing all the people and ordained by God, a linear movement towards a clearly defined goal, which is a state of absolute freedom. Hegel divided history into four stages and ascribed every civilization to a particular stage of historical development, for example the East was “the childhood of History” and the most advanced stage was reserved for Germany where “freedom has found the means of realizing its Ideal, its true existence” (Hegel 1914: 111-150). Hegel openly declared that Africa has no history and relegated the Caribbean to the pre-historical age (Glissant 1999: 98) but, as Robert Young wrote, Hegel “wasn’t inventing things” (Young 2004 [1990]: 34) but merely repeating the stereotypes that circulated with the colonial discourse. Interestingly enough, the discriminatory potential of Hegel’s views was already recognized by Friedrich Nietzsche, who deemed Hegel’s approach to History as “monumental” and said that “it inspires the courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism” and that this kind of history “in the hands and heads of gifted egoists and visionary scoundrels” may lead to “empires

Since in Guyana, as in other places in the Caribbean, the sense of historical exceptionality and national history originated from the contestation of the colonial realist historiography, for decades the historical novel has been the ugly duckling of the Caribbean scholarship. The main focus of the critical writings was the imaginative, and above all non-realist, works of such authors as Edouard Glissant or Wilson Harris, who were treated as the paradigms of the Caribbean historical imagination. For example, in the first comprehensive study of the Caribbean literature entitled *The West Indian novel and its background* (2004 [1970]), the author claims that the historical novel, the aim of which is the veritable recreation of the conflicts of the past, would unnecessarily antagonize the Caribbean audience, forcing it to take sides. He then praises the fiction of Wilson Harris as an example of the historical imagination that avoids the potentially troublesome areas (Ramchand 2004 [1970]: 136).¹⁰ In the seminal study that truly opened the debate on History and the Caribbean novel, *Myth and History in Caribbean fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant* (1992), Barbara Webb silences the historical novel and claims that realism has compromised itself as a form of historical representation in the Caribbean literature (1992: 3). A little later, in *Historical thought and literary representation* (1998), Nana Wilson-Tagoe notes the existence of the historical novel, exemplified by such writers as Edgar Mittelholzer, but she does so with visible reluctance. She deems Mittelholzer's attempts at constructing the Guyanese national history as nationalistic and, even, most unfairly, places them in one line with such works as Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774) (1998: 41). Thus, though the mentioned studies are noteworthy works for anyone interested in the

destroyed, princes murdered, wars and revolutions launched" (Nietzsche 2007: 71). Bertrand Russel saw Hegel's writings as a potential justification of internal tyranny and external aggression (Russel 1945: 724).

¹⁰ Neither Glissant nor Harris engaged themselves in the dialogues with colonial historiography and they rather focused on myths, which they saw as gates to the pre-Columbian Caribbean history. Indeed, if one takes Wilson Harris as the paradigm of the historical writing in the Guyanese literature, the historical novel, realist narration or any realist retelling of the Caribbean history would seem impossible. In *Palace of the peacock* (1960), the novel frequently provided as the example of Harris' historical writings (Donnell 2012: 421), Harris describes the allegorical journey of Donne, who is the proverbial colonizer, the embodiment of the power of imagination and an allusion to John Donne (Maes-Jelinek 2006: 34). Donne is accompanied by his crew which comprises the protagonists representing various parts of the Guyanese society and they go upwards along the river towards the heart of the interior. During the journey Harris deconstructs the temporal divisions, showing the past as the eternal present in which the history of the Amerindian, European colonizer and the slave mixes into one timeless body of experience. This awareness is mediated onto Donne through Nature and thus it is predominantly the novel of the living landscape and natural history, while its historiographic and realist element is absolutely overshadowed by the contemplative rhetoric of the imagination.

Caribbean historical imagination, they nevertheless provide one with practically no insight into the Guyanese historical novel.¹¹

It has to be noted that the critical disrepute of the historical novel had its reflection in the authors' own distrust of the genre. From around the 1960s to the 1990s, the Caribbean authors produced no historical novels and even before this time their number is hardly impressive.¹² This phenomenon may be perfectly observed through the example of Guyana, where, in 1917, A. R. F. Webber wrote a historical romance entitled *Those that be in bondage: A tale of Indian indentures and sunlit western waters* (1917), set between the years 1890-1913; the novel is a historical plantation narrative, the first ever to document the plights of East-Indian indenture workers (Cudjoe 2009: 5). It is at points a sexually explicit tale which shows the unjust, violent and racist construction of the Guyanese society – steered at the exploitation of the East-Indian workers, and especially women. It was largely forgotten by the Guyanese critics and readers, only to be rediscovered in 1988 by Selwyn Cudjoe (Harris 1990: 147).¹³ Then, in 1952, there appeared Edgar Mittelholzer's *Children of Kaywana*, followed by two other novels to form *The Kaywana trilogy* (1952-1958). The trilogy is a sensationalized depiction of the Guyanese plantation life and an uncanny continuation of the historical sensitivity displayed by Webber; it even suffered a similar fate, as it was either silenced or disfavoured by the

¹¹ The historical novel is understood here as a piece of fiction centred on the specific historical detail “crucial to plot or character development”, aimed at constructing a relatable vision of the historical process, and “differentiat[ing] itself from other discourses of various generic kinds that attempt to give a name to history” (Elias 2001: 4-5) such as the imaginative novels of Wilson Harris.

¹² In the aforementioned period, the Guyanese and Caribbean authors wrote realist novels which, due to their archivist-like ambitions, do have a taste of historical fiction and are oftentimes provided as the examples of non-allegorical history-oriented fiction (Donnell 2014: 422-432). Among such one could enumerate Roy Heath's *The shadow bride* (1988), *The Armstrong trilogy* (1979-1981) or V. S. Naipaul's *A house for Mr Biswas* (1961). However, their inclusion in the historical novels would be controversial as the authors never intended to engage themselves in dialogues with colonial historiography, but to realistically represent the Caribbean experience (Heath 1992: 121; Donnell 2014: 422).

¹³ Selwyn Cudjoe describes the life and achievements of Webber in the book *Caribbean visionary: A. R. F. Webber and the making of the Guyanese nation* (2009), which is a great testimony to the life of a man who was one of the first to struggle for Guyanese self-determination. Webber was born in 1880 in Tobago, but emigrated to Guyana in 1899, where his father and uncles have been stationed. There he settled and, between the years 1899-1915, studied the history of Guyana, its interior and economy, which he later translated into his fictional and non-fictional writings. Webber was also the author of the historical book published to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the abolition of slavery entitled *Centenary history and handbook of British Guiana* (1931) (Cudjoe 2009: 20).

critics.¹⁴ Therefore, the claim by Benedicte Ledent that “without unduly generalizing” the historical novel has been absent for decades from the Caribbean writings but for such “atypical” examples as Edgar Mittelholzer, is by no means an exaggeration (Ledent 1997: 271).

Indeed, from the 1990s, one may observe the steady return of the historical novel. In the already quoted article, Benedicte Ledent claimed that the new historical fiction, by which she meant the novels by David Dabydeen, Fred D’Aguiar and Caryl Philips, are “the emerging tip of a body of historical fiction to be published in the years to come” (Ledent 1997: 272). There is no denying the fact that Ledent is right, but till today the genre and its role in the shaping of the Caribbean national histories has hardly been at the centre of the critics’ attention. The scholars predominantly focus on the Caribbean historical novel in the context of the Black British memory of slavery, and they use the Guyanese authors as their steady points of reference. One of such examples may be the book *Ghosts of slavery* (2003) by Jenny Sharpe, where Beryl Gilroy, David Dabydeen and Fred D’Aguiar are deemed “British novelists” invested in the British Atlantic history (Sharpe 2003: xiii).¹⁵ One of the noteworthy exceptions is a PhD thesis “Genealogy and decolonization: The historical novel of the twentieth-century Caribbean” written at New York University in 2007 by Carrie K. Baker, in which she focuses on the Caribbean historical novels, especially

¹⁴ Despite such unfavourable opinions predicated on the general critical rejection of the national perspective in the Caribbean studies, Mittelholzer’s novels have been widely read by the Guyanese public and they have exerted a great effect on the Guyanese historical imagination; nowadays he is elevated to the status of the Guyanese national writer (Seymour 2014: 10). It is also worth noting that Mittelholzer was not a singular writer invested in the national historical novels in the pre-independence Caribbean. For example in Jamaica there were V. S. Reid, who wrote the historical novel *New day* (1949) and H. G. de Lissner the author of *Morgan’s daughter* (1953).

¹⁵ Other examples of this kind are *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the poetics and politics of literary memory* (2006) by Lars Eckstein, where the author is especially interested in Dabydeen’s use of ekphrasis, or *The British slave trade and public memory* (2006) by Elizabeth Wallace, who also uses the examples of Dabydeen and D’Aguiar as the two authors making the memory of African slavery exist in the British public sphere. Similarly in *Transatlantic engagements with the British eighteenth century* (2007), Pamela J. Anders analyzes how the novels stylized on the eighteenth-century slave or travel narratives engage in a dialogue with the eighteenth-century documentary history. Though she includes two Guyanese writers in her study, Beryl Gilroy and David Dabydeen, she nevertheless does not analyze them in the context of the Guyanese historical novel. One also needs to mention the critical work of Benedicte Ledent, who wrote prolifically on the comparative poetics of Caryl Phillips, Fred D’Aguiar and David Dabydeen (see: Ledent 1997, Ledent 2005). Dabydeen’s historical imagination is also analyzed in the collections of essays devoted specifically to his work, for example *No land, no mother: Essays on David Dabydeen* edited by Kampta Karran (2007), or *The art of David Dabydeen* (1997) edited by Kevin Grant. Fred D’Aguiar, in turn, is a primary example used by Ian Baucom in his book on the Caribbean allegorical sense of history entitled *Spectres of the Atlantic* (2005).

historical romances, written in the Spanish, French and Anglo-Caribbean around the time of independence, with a view to examining their relation to decolonization.¹⁶ She makes it plain, however, that she “[does not] attempt to trace the evolution of the historical novel” in the Caribbean (2007: 13), which would be a tremendously difficult task in such a varied environment of such multi-lingual countries.

It is possible and tempting, nevertheless, to trace such a (r)evolution in the specifically Guyanese context, looking simultaneously at both the evolution of the genre and historical representations coded across the two generations of the Guyanese writers. The significance of such a study is predicated on the assumption that the historical novel, with its own complicated history, is crucial for understanding the Guyanese struggles with their colonial history and the (ethno)historical discourse.¹⁷ Not only has the historical novel been the first manifestation of the Guyanese national historical sensitivity aroused by decolonization, as Carrie K. Baker aptly noted (2007: 12), but throughout the decades it has evolved to reconcile the need for the realist representations of the colonial history with the essentially allegorical perception of History characteristic, for example, for Wilson Harris. However, faced with a significant critical void, one is forced to draw a methodological framework suitable for the analysis of the Guyanese historical novel from the broad critical discussions on the disparities between the postmodern and postcolonial conceptualization of History, which translate themselves directly into the divergent methodological tools applicable for the study of the postmodern and the Caribbean historical fiction.

¹⁶ Another noteworthy example, though not connected to the Caribbean fiction, is a study by Doris Sommers *Foundational fictions: The national romances of Latin America* (1991). Within her book, Sommers investigates the connection between nation-building and Latin American historical romances; even though her research is not directly translatable into the Caribbean context, it nevertheless validates historical romances as means of moulding the (post)colonial national consciousness (Sommers 1991: 5-6).

¹⁷ Ethno-history (Smith 1990: 127-137) is an attempt of a particular ethnic group to legitimize its pursuit of political domination in a long, preferably documented, history, showing its historical presence and agency on a particular terrain. Ethno-history is always invented and selective, coined for political purposes, and it usually refers to some sacred ‘national’ territory, poetic landscapes and heroic past; its aim is to trigger the national awakening that may, but does not have to, change into nationalist or separatist claims (Smith 1990: 127-137). In Guyana the discourse of ethno-history is very specific and the Afro-Guyanese “anchor their claim [to political power] on being in the Caribbean prior to the arrival of the East Indians” and the Indo-Guyanese “underscore their claim to superior economic contribution in the building of the homeland, even suggesting that this is a more substantial and important basis for defining the rights of full membership and citizenship”. Hence, “the relative degrees of suffering and victimization in slavery and indenture are catalogued and entered in the ledger of claims and counter-claims” (Premdas 2011: 815).

Postmodernism is oftentimes referred to as “The end of history”¹⁸ (Fukuyama 1989), meaning the process of historical change, or the end of meta-narratives – the narratives that explained other narratives like the Hegelian paradigm of universal history (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Jean-Francois Lyotard, the author of the latter definition, claimed that the era of great voyages, great heroes and great histories, has exhausted itself and nowadays history is both unattainable and irrepresentable (Readings 1991: 82). In *Heidegger and “the jews”*¹⁹ he describes his views on the example of the Holocaust, which is by definition impossible to represent; any attempt at so doing would inscribe it into the present, which may result in its trivialization and actually facilitate forgetting. “It is to be feared that word representations (books, interviews) and thing representations (films, photographs) (...) turns [the Holocaust] into an ‘ordinary’ repression. One will say, it was a great massacre, how horrible! (...) [f]inally, one will appeal to human rights (...) [and] it is taken care of” (1990: 26). Though Lyotard placed his investigations in the context of the European history, slavery and the trauma of systemic colonial abuse are the potentially ‘irrepresentable’ categories. In this context one may also mention Jacques Baudilliar, another postmodern thinker, who claimed that the “telling [of history] has become impossible because that telling (re-citatum) is, by definition, the possible recurrence of a sequence of meanings”. Postmodernism is an “impulse for total dissemination” where “every event is granted its own liberation; every fact becomes atomic” (Baudilliar 1997: 39). Hannah Arendt too in “The modern concept of history” thought of the Western crisis of history in terms of our losing faith in the possibility of truth that lay at the core of the nineteenth century’s historiography. She linked the crisis of the historical imagination with the ultimate divorce between science and history. Since the nineteenth century, progress and development have been the two common denominators for history and science, and nowadays they are only the attributes of science. This demise of the empirical history led also to the general distrust in the humanities, which can no longer render absolute meanings (Arendt 1958: 571-590).

Such philosophical deliberations ran parallel to the literal deconstruction of the realist historiography performed in the spirit of post-structuralism. Roland Barthes, for example, observed that the specific realist narrative techniques, applied to the telling of the Western history, suggested to the reader that the events were talking about themselves, with no emotional presence of the author, while in fact the author organized them into meaningful messages (Barthes 1981: 7-20). However, the real breakthrough in

¹⁸ Fukuyama based his claim on the belief in the universalism of the Western liberal ideas in the post cold-war world.

¹⁹ The word *jews* is not capitalised by the author himself.

the thinking about the relationship between history and literature came with Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White. Though they were not the first ones working on this connection, they were first to have comprehensively linked literary theories with the historical material (Carr 1991: 8). In *Time and narrative*, Ricoeur recognized that history is essentially a narrative both on the level of content as well as construction. Though history draws from the events that have taken place, and not those invented by the author, it is organized accordingly to the rules of narrative time, and thus subject to ‘emplotments’ resultant from this fact. Furthermore, history and literature share intentionality, which makes them both stories with quasi-plots, and quasi-protagonists, where by *quasi* Ricoeur means analogous to the narrative (Ricoeur 1984: 91-92). Hayden White transported Ricoeur’s findings on the grounds of the nineteenth-century historiography and disproved the objectivity of history as a scientific discourse.²⁰

The philosophical atmosphere of postmodernism, and the aforementioned struggles with realist historiography, exerted a great effect on the postmodern historical novel, which served as both a mode of history’s presentation and a tool for disseminating the postmodern sense of history. Most famously, Linda Hutcheon in *A poetics of postmodernism* (1988) argued that the postmodern crisis of history found its way into the novel, and specifically into historiographic metafiction. Broadly, historiographic metafiction is a postmodern take on the historical novel, which arises from “the epistemological and ontological consequences of the act of rendering problematic that which was once taken for granted by historiography—and literature” (1988: xii). Hutcheon defines the historiographic metafiction as the “well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet *paradoxically* also lay claim to historical events and personages” (1988: 5, emphasis mine, MF); as such, they characterize themselves with a “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” (Hutcheon 1988: 5)²¹. Amy Elias, the author of *Sublime desire: History and post-1960s fiction*

²⁰ Some of Hayden White’s studies worth mentioning in this context are *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (1973) and *The content of the form* (1987). They both are inquiries into the form and content of historiography and historiographic narration as supposedly an objective scientific discipline, which thus differs from literature. The differentiation between history and literature was performed on the grounds that the former deals with “impersonal [historical] processes” and the latter with fiction and imagination (White 2009 [1990]: 33). Hayden White disproves the difference and claims that the nineteenth-century historiography, much like fiction, depends on tropes and story-types and, structurally, is an allegory (White 2009 [1973]: 43). However, the claim that the Caribbean authors derived their sense of history as allegory from White and Ricoeur’s findings would be ungrounded.

²¹ As the perfect example of the trend she provides *The French lieutenant’s woman* (1969) by John Fowles.

(2001), claimed that Hutcheon went a step too far in her definition of the genre and she proposed her own term – “metahistorical romance” – which places the postmodern historical novel in an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, relation to the nineteenth century historical fiction. The metahistorical romance “reverses the dominant focus of the classic historical romance genre from history to romance” and “it turns from belief in empirical history to a reconsideration of the historical sublime” (Elias 2001: xi).

What differentiates Elias’ approach from Hutcheon is her belief in the historical sublime, namely a sense of history as a coherent narrative of which one dreams of attaining, but which one may never grasp.²² Elias as if echoes the views of Terry Eagleton, who said that the very act of denying history confirms its existence (Eagleton 1996: 30). However, in a recognizably postmodern way, Elias perceives the desire for History in somewhat derogatory terms as “a kind of warmed up or negative idealism” (Elias 2005: 160). Nonetheless, one needs to note that Elias has an inkling that the postmodern and postcolonial senses of history are not entirely compatible, and she differentiates between two veins of historical writings, which she calls post-structuralist and ethical. She associates the ethical vein with the postcolonial fiction, but she nevertheless argues that “[b]oth kinds of postmodernist historical fiction return to history with a vengeance, and they do so because their writers hail from countries that have experienced the postmodern crisis of faith in the historical narratives and values that had traditionally defined them” (Elias 2005: 163). Hence, though her approach seems more reconciliatory than Hutcheon’s, it is nevertheless predicated on the postmodern rejection of History, and thus inapplicable to the poetics and aesthetics of the Guyanese historical novels.

More precisely, though the Guyanese writings may indeed have turned with a certain dose of vengeance toward colonial history, they never did so towards the Caribbean History.²³ Besides, the belief that postcolonial people experienced the postmodern loss of faith in realist historiography in the same way as the metropolis did, implies that they had such faith in the first place. In

²² In point of fact, what Elias calls a metahistorical romance is nothing but a typical postmodern historical novel that “repeats the contemporary [postmodern, MF] debate about history in historiography” and “morphs the historical romance genre into a literary form that is able to encompass the historiographical debates of its own time” (Elias 2005: 163).

²³ A valid comment on the incompatibility of the postmodern historical sublime advocated by Lyotard and Elias with the postcolonial sense of the past may be found in an essay written by Alleid Fokkema on Dabydeen’s historical poetry; the author states that “[e]ven the postmodern revival of the sublime, as introduced in the early 1980s by Jean Francois Lyotard, would appear to be no option [in interpreting Dabydeen’s poetry, MF]: it is all about the unrepresentable, about ‘impart[ing] no knowledge about reality’, and that would seem to be light years away from the struggle over the representation that characterizes the postcolonial arena” (Fokkema 2007: 19).

White mythologies (1990), Robert Young outwardly claims that the postmodern end of history is merely “European culture’s awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world” rooted in “the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History” (2004 [1990]: 51). Edouard Glissant too writes that “History [with a capital H] ends where the histories of those people once reputed to be without history come together” and by the end of History he means the end of its Hegelian paradigm. Like Wilson Harris or Derek Walcott, he sees a redemptive potential in the imaginative renditions of Caribbean History, which may provide the Caribbean people with a historical continuity and rootedness in their pre-Columbian pasts (Glissant 1999: 64; Walcott 1974: 1974: 36-64; Harris 1999 [1970]: 151). An important claim comes also from Dipesh Chakrabarty who worked on (post)colonial history in Indian contexts. Chabakarty says that:

it would be wrong to think of postcolonial critiques of historicism (...) as simply deriving from critiques already elaborated by postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers of the West. In fact, to think this way would itself be to practice historicism, for such a thought would merely repeat the temporal structure of the statement, ‘first in the West, and then elsewhere’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 6).

By the same token, the imposition of such labels as historiographic metafiction or metahistorical romance on the Guyanese historical novel is tantamount to saying that history has been first dismantled by the Western novel, and then passed on to the Caribbean novelist. In reality, the Guyanese allegorical perception of history, and its inseparability from literature, resulted from their inherently different experience of history.

Postcolonial criticism has always been aware of such essential differences and it has initiated debates on the purely postcolonial, or even specifically Caribbean, sense of history and historical representations. In *Post-colonial transformations* (2001), Bill Ashcroft writes that in the Caribbean the experience of time and history is purely allegorical. What he means is that it is “conflated with the present” and the Caribbean writer “must continually strive to capture [such temporality]” (Ashcroft 2001: 104). Furthermore, the Caribbean people, “robbed of a prehistory, taken out of their own histories” have for centuries lived as the allegories of the colonial history (Ashcroft 2001: 104). At this point, it is necessary to underline that allegory is here understood not so much as a literary device but historical experience and a strategy of constructing and reading Caribbean novels.

The former definition comes from Walter Benjamin, who described allegory as experience, which “arises from an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent, as passing out of being” (Osborne 2005: 57). Benjamin claimed that everything “untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful” in history has

been expressed by the means of allegory. Ruins, for example, when one looks at them represent history, and “[a]llegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things” (Benjamin 2003: 178). In other words, the allegories allude to history, but their meaning may be decoded by associations with other images or fragments. Therefore history / allegory is not linear and progressive – like in the historical materialist paradigm – but it exists outside the chronological movement of time (Benjamin 2003: 178-179; Tambling 2009: 155-156). Paul de Man, in turn, described the process of reading in a way analogous to Benjamin’s vision of history, claiming that every text is an allegory of its own reading and that the act of interpretation is also allegorical (de Man 1979: 300-301). More precisely, one may never reach the absolute, or even the intended reading, as “any reading (...) will produce not only something that the narrative does not say but also something that the reader does not mean to say” (McQuillan 2001: 34).

Such an allegorical construction of History and the historical narrative keeps History from congealing. Therefore, it is precisely this Benjaminian dimension of the historical experience that Ian Baucom has in mind in *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005). Baucom writes that the Caribbean people, from the moment of their forceful introduction into the Western history, remain in an allegorical relation of cultural and economic exchange with the metropolis. Hence, the historical time does not pass there, but accumulates, creating a multi-layered allegorical construction of the lived continuous historical reality. Most importantly, Baucom argues that this allegorical relationship did not end with colonialism, but rather continues in the postcolonial world that is still predicated on the capitalist paradigms (Baucom 2005: 24). The allegorical construction of the postcolonial fiction about history, in turn, has been noticed by Stephen Slemon inter alia through the example of Wilson Harris (1988: 157-168). The idea that a single text may be both historical and allegorical is not new; in fact, it may be traced back to the Bible, which is “at once an historical account of the patriarchs, and at the same time the subject of allegorical interpretation” (Davis 1996: 159). What is significant, however, is that Slemon perceives the construction of the postcolonial novel in a way similar to Paul de Man and he defines allegory as “the structuring principle of the fictional work of art” in which “a literary text is interpreted against a pre-existing master code or typological system” (1988: 162). For him, the postcolonial allegories are the contestations of the imperialist master code, which first used “a similar process of interpreting signs” as a “way of speaking for the other”. Most importantly, however, Slemon says that the postcolonial writers use allegory as a specific technique of writing history, which comes into being during the act of reading and refers the reader to other images or associations; it is thus inseparable from the

fictive text and as such it corroborates the aforementioned arguments by Harris, Glissant or James that in the Caribbean literature *is* history.²⁴

Slemon makes yet another significant claim, namely that “[p]ost-colonial allegories are concerned with neither redeeming nor annihilating history, but with displacing it as a concept and opening up the past to imaginative revision” (Slemon 1988: 166). Thus they have never been premised on the postmodern historical irony and the true debate in the field of the Guyanese and Caribbean fictions was not on the (im)possibility of history, but on the permissible and ethical means of its representations. Therefore, in Guyana one could observe a seemingly irreconcilable divergence between the two schools of the historical representation – the radically allegorical, and thus incompatible with the paradigm of the historical novel, pictured by Wilson Harris, and the realist, embodied by Edgar Mittelholzer. Paradoxically though it may seem, the recent Guyanese historical fiction seems to prove that the two aesthetics may be reconciled in the form of the historical novel which is both allegorical and realist at the same time.

The fusion between allegory and realism in the realms of the postcolonial historical fiction has been recently suggested by Hamish Dalley in *The postcolonial historical novel* (2014). Within the book, Dalley coins an original, and very useful in the Guyanese context, critical paradigm of reading the postcolonial historical fiction. He claims that the postcolonial historical novel is based on the “realist imperative”, by which he does not mean the direct return to the eighteenth and nineteenth century novelistic conventions, but their revisions (Dalley 2014: 7). In other words, he claims that the postcolonial historical novel may be viewed as an evolutionary stage of the paradigmatic historical novel described by Georg Lukács, but with a very important provision that one adjusts his assumptions, and the traditional narrative modes of historical representation, to the specifically postcolonial sense of History. As he says: “while the postcolonial historical novel shares common aesthetic roots with the eighteenth and nineteenth-century forms (...) it is transmuted by its application to different kinds of postcolonial history” (Dalley 2014: 15-16).²⁵

²⁴ One needs to be careful not to fall into the trap, as Frederic Jameson once did, of claiming that all third-world novels are national allegories. The storm that resulted from Jameson’s essay in which he voiced such a claim is a good lesson to any critic that one cannot approach the postcolonial fiction, or even Caribbean, as a monolith (Lazarus 2011: 96). Therefore, I do not wish to imply that all postcolonial texts are allegories, or even that all Guyanese novels are allegorical by definition, only that allegory is the most common, and the most creative, tool used for the representation of the historical experience in the Guyanese novel.

²⁵ Dalley devised his own division of the historical novels into transnational narratives, settlers’ allegories and historical trauma narratives. As Guyana has never been a settlers’

To capture the spirit of such transmutations, Dalley links the realist aspect of the postcolonial historical novel with allegory, and thus coins the term *allegorical realism*, by which he means the specific aesthetics of the postcolonial historical novel and postcolonial historical representation.²⁶ In his understanding, realism is by no means limited to the narrative convention but it exemplifies also the sense of “epistemological seriousness”, which differentiates the postcolonial historical fiction from the postmodern novel. Consequently, the postcolonial historical novels are the “serious interpretations of the past” (Dalley 2014: 14) which aim to describe and interpret, but not to deconstruct, the presented historical reality. To Dalley’s conception of realism, one may add the investment in the pedagogical, commonly associated with the nineteenth-century historical novel (de Groot 2009: 29), and clearly discernible in the Guyanese historical fiction. Hence, allegory and realism “come into alignment when the conceptual frameworks needed to produce realist representations of historical change become allegorical in their own right” (Dalley 2014: 36).

If read in a broader context, Dalley’s book may be inscribed into the changing atmosphere around the realism of historical representations noticeable in postcolonial studies and literatures. For example, Frederic Cooper in his essay “Postcolonial studies and the study of history” warns postcolonial scholars against too strong an attachment to ahistorical post-structuralist practices, and indicates that their reluctance to directly engage with the colonial historiography resulted in “obscure[ing] the very history whose importance it highlighted” (Cooper 2005: 401). Cooper as if twists Chakrabarty’s argument, saying that “reducing the non-Western history to the lack of what the West had is the assumption that the West actually had it itself” (Cooper 2005: 401) while, in fact, the Western history, especially after the French Revolution, is a record of discontinuities (Cooper 2005: 403).

colony – like Australia or New Zealand – I retain the term plantation narrative plantation narrative, which in fact is analogous to his definition of the historical transnational novels (Dalley 2014: 14). Historical trauma narratives, in turn, are a broader category encompassing also slave narratives, but in the Guyanese context it is better to maintain the term slave narratives, which is used by the Caribbean critics, and which alludes to the eighteenth-century novelistic traditions.

²⁶ The major premise of the allegorical realist novels is the representation and interpretation of the historical reality. Allegorical realism has a potential to link imaginary and magical phenomena with historical reality, while its inherently allegorical dimension “invite[s] intertextual dialogue[s]” within and outside the text (Dalley 2014: 14). Therefore in a Benjamin-like way “[t]he fictional dimension of the historical novel [is] not simply an illustration of documented historical events or processes but rather as operating in an ambivalent metaphorical association with them” (2014: 31) through which, nevertheless, a meaningful and relatable image of the historical experience is being produced. Hence, not all magical realist novels are by definition allegorical realist texts, but all allegorical realist novels are the historical novels.

According to Cooper, the postcolonial study of history should centre on showing “how people confronted the forms of [colonial] power they faced” so as to help them judge their own part in history, of which they were not only passive subjects, but also active agents. Resultantly, “we are not faced with a dichotomous choice of practicing history in one way or rejecting historical scholarship (...) [and] a critical and sensible critical practice can help us retain our focus on the possession of political imagination and on the importance of accountability for the consequences of our actions” (Cooper 2005: 417). Bill Ashcroft too claims that the role of postcolonial literature and historiography is “not simply to contest the message of history, which has so often relegated the post-colonial world to a footnote to the march of progress” (Ashcroft 2001: 92) but to “turn its status as a record [of colonial experience] to the task of self-determination and cultural empowerment” (Ashcroft 2001: 92).

As it will be shown, the Guyanese historical novel is more than a perfect example of the abovementioned tendencies observable in the postcolonial discourse on History and the historical novel, namely it exemplifies the evolution of the discourse of historical representations from realist to *allegorical realist* paradigms. Moreover, it aspires both to represent a relatable image of the past, on which the Guyanese may further construct their common national identity, and to reconcile realist representations of historical reality with the spirit of the Guyanese historical experience. In a broader context, it proves that the historical novel, despite its unavoidable connection with realism, is perfectly capable of “produc[ing] knowledge of the past” (Dalley 2014: 13), which is both informative and faithful to the allegorical spirit of the Caribbean history. Taking everything into account, it is important to reclaim the historical novel as a separate and original genre within the Guyanese writings, especially that it is becoming a major way through which the Guyanese negotiate their (ethno)histories, but also represent their History to the outside world.

1.3. (Trans)formations of Guyanese national identity

The Guyanese literature has always differentiated itself among other Caribbean fictions with its almost obsessive focus on the theme of national identity (Arnold 2001: 99). Roughly from around the year 2000, when the idea of pan-Caribbean identity began to be seriously questioned, one may observe a renewed critical interest in the topic.²⁷ Among many interesting studies of the problem, there are

²⁷ The nineties were the last moment of general enthusiasm towards the idea of Caribbean identity and Caribbean literary poetics. In 1997, for example, Silvio Torres-Saillant published his *Caribbean poetics* (1997), which remains the most radical proposal of Caribbean unity, namely across all the linguistic sub-regions. As he claims, “Caribbean literary texts, at least since the early twentieth-century are linked amongst

three noteworthy books of literary criticism: *Mythologies of migration, vocabularies of indenture: Novels of the South Asian diaspora in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific* (2009) by Miriam Pirbhai, *Searching for Mr. Chin: Constructions of nation and the Chinese in West Indian literature* (2010) by Anne-Marie Lee-Loy, or *Caribbean women writers and globalization: Fictions of independence* (2013) by Helen C. Scott.²⁸ Although the Guyanese fiction constitutes a notable part of the abovementioned investigations, the critics nevertheless predominantly emphasize the singularity of ethnic or gender experiences within the body of the Guyanese society; thus they do not, as the present study is trying to do, delineate common (trans)generational grounds on which the Guyanese of all provenances construct their sense of national identity.²⁹

The primary emphasis in Chapter three falls on how the concept of national identity evolved across the two Guyanese generations and therefore the adopted research perspective implies the rejection of postnational theories based on the claims that ethnic loyalties and cultural hybridity invalidate national belonging in the Caribbean. The theory of postnational ethnic solidarity is most outwardly associated with pan-Africanism, endorsed by Stuart Hall, his student Paul Gilroy, and a famous Caribbean author Caryl Philips, but an analogous dispute has concerned pan-Hinduism among East-Indian Caribbean diasporas (Samaroo 1987: 43-60).³⁰ Stuart Hall (1992: 4)

themselves by an aesthetic kinship born of the more or less common experience lived by Caribbean societies" (2013 [1997]: 11).

²⁸ Other noteworthy studies are: *Gender, ethnicity and place: Women and identity in Guyana* (2002) by Linda Peake and Alissa Trotz, *New homelands: Hindu communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji and East Africa* (2009) by Paul Younger or *Politics of identity in small plural societies: Guyana, the Fiji Islands and Trinidad and Tobago* (2009) by Stacey Ann Wilson.

²⁹ Whenever the words race and ethnicity are used in Chapter three they are understood as cultural constructs; in this understanding race is "the socialized perception of phenotypical characteristics" which "constitute[s] only one of the features recognized and used for human classification" (Alleyne 2005: 13). Ethnicity, in turn, is a sense of 'sameness' with the people with whom one shares language, customs, blood and a historical past. It is the "intellectual construct" or "social construct" or "cultural difference", which comes most visibly into light when people unite under fighting for their ethnic self-determination (Fenton 2010: 3).

³⁰ Caryl Philips (b. 1958) comes from St. Kitts and is one of the notable Caribbean writers of the younger generation who is openly associated with pan-Africanism. One of his novels *Crossing the river* (1993) dramatizes the assumptions of Gilroy's theory and draws parallels between the African historical experiences across the Atlantic ocean. The traces of pan-African interests are also observable in the Guyanese fiction and poetry, for example in the novel written in verse by Fred D'Aguiar *Bloodlines* (2000) or his other historical novel *Feeding the ghosts* (1997). Pan-Hinduism is a less recognisable phenomenon; first because the East-Indians arrived at the Caribbean later than the African slaves and second because

claimed that cultural identity is “a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall 1992: 224). Cultural identities “provide us (...) with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning”, which Hall associated with the African roots of the Afro-Caribbean people. Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness* (1993) solidified Hall’s belief in the new diasporic consciousness of the African people, which binds them to the African culture like a symbolic “redemptive return to the African homeland”. Gilroy opposed both “nationalist and ethnically absolute approaches” and he wished to construct “a new topography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and presuppositions of the nation state have been left behind because they are seen to be outmoded” (Gilroy 1993: 16); his theories have allowed many to study Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American cultures as essentially one ethnic and cultural body.

However, the Hall-Gilroy model seems inapplicable to the Guyanese context, where the African diaspora is not a dominant ethnic group and where ethnic belonging does not preclude national sentiments. Even in the chapter tellingly entitled “The crisis of Guyanese national identity”, Shona Jackson does not suggest the annihilation of national identity in favour of ethnicity, but the competition between the Asian-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese over the shape of the concept. The best exemplification of their dispute is a heated debate whether the symbol of the country should be rice or sugar (Jackson 2005: 85-120)³¹. The imperfections of pan-Africanism have been noted also by the people working outside the Guyanese context. Robin Cohen in “Cultural diaspora: the Caribbean case”, claims that pan-Africanism openly favours the African-Caribbean experience and silences the Asian presence. It also obscures the centuries of cultural creolization between the various groups and thus leads to the misleading association of the Caribbean with pure African

they were transported almost exclusively to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago; more on this phenomenon may be found in the book *India in the Caribbean* (1987) edited by David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo. Moreover, it seems vital to stress that the present monograph does not argue that the sense of pan-African or pan-Hindu solidarity does not exist in Guyana, but only that they may not be approached as the dominant strategy of the Guyanese identity formation.

³¹ Shona Jackson’s main argument is that ethno-national identity in Guyana is tangibly linked to class identity and class struggle. The Asian plantation workers who started coming to Guyana in the nineteenth century were from the beginning in an unfavourable economic and social position in comparison with the Afro-Guyanese. Nevertheless, the East-Indians triggered the economic development of Guyana after the decline of the sugar industry, and rice was one of the goods grown and sold by them in great quantities. Inter alia on this fact they base their argument that their contribution to the construction of the country has been as significant as that of the Afro-Guyanese (Jackson 2005: 85).

culture (Cohen 2002: 31). Furthermore, it implies the non-existent cultural solidarity between the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Americans who, in truth, are very competitive. The research conducted on the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in the USA indicate that the immigrants are perceived by the Afro-Americans as intruders and “Jewmaicans”, which is an outwardly derogatory term (Cohen 2002: 23). By the same token, the theory of pan-Hinduism is deficient in all the above mentioned aspects.

Once one rejects the pan-ethnic perspective, the creolized nature of the Caribbean societies and identities comes most prominently to light. Creolization is here understood as the process of a continuous cultural exchange between the various groups living within the body of the colonial society, which has led to the creation of the wholly new socio-cultural organism (Brathwaite 2005 [1971]: xxxi). As an analogous process has taken place in all the Caribbean societies, the advocates of the postnational Caribbean oftentimes use creolization as an argument against the national and ethnic particularities in the region (Nibblett 2012: 22). For example, in his essay “Creoleness: The crossroads of a civilization”, Wilson Harris claims that the creolized nature of the Guyanese society made him “aware of the complex [universal] labyrinth of the family of humankind” (Harris 1999: 238). Harris saw in creolization a possible common ground for the negotiation of an inclusive Caribbean identity based on a common creolized history, and one negotiated beyond any ethnic or national divisions (Harris 1999: 247).³² Under the effect of Homi Bhabha’s famous *The location of culture* (2004 [1994]), the Caribbean critics have started describing the said phenomenon as cultural hybridity and they have used Bhabha’s framework of *nations as narrations* to undermine the nation-state as a valid unit for literary analysis (Nibblett 2012: 13).³³ Correspondingly, they used Bhabha’s theory of individual hybridity defined as the state of identity where a (post)colonial subject is situated in the liminal position in-between the colonizer and the colonized

³² In the Caribbean scholarship the term cultural creolization continues to co-exist with cultural hybridity, but Chapter three preserves the term hybridity in order to differentiate it from the historical meaning of Creole used in Chapter two denoting the member of the European ruling class born in the colonies.

³³ Somewhat paradoxically, Bhabha never questioned the validity of national identity. Instead, he wrote that “people are neither the beginning or the end of the national identity” (1990: 297) and he differentiated between two polarities of national narration: its “pedagogical value” and the performative reality of the nation lived by the people (2004: 2-3). For Bhabha, writing the nation resembles the enunciation of the narrative identity in-between the two concepts. Hence one needs to be careful not to treat Bhabha’s essays as a rejection of the national identity or of a nation since Bhabha only suggests that nations “need to be imagined in new ways”, or rather rewritten, as literature plays a vital role in shaping the sense of the national identity and everyday reality of the national life (Huddart 2006: 70-71).

cultures, being neither one nor the other. In such a hybrid subject, akin to the hybrid society, “cultural differences are not simply there to be seen appropriated” (Bhabha 2004: 163). Bhabha’s thought may not have been revolutionary, as he revised and expanded the ideas already operating in the postcolonial discourse,³⁴ nonetheless it has been viewed as a perfect rendition of the inherently fluid positioning of the Caribbean people. Therefore, Bhabha remains a significant name in the Caribbean critical debates and also present study does not ignore his theoretical input.

From today’s perspective, however, one may no longer endorse Harris-like hopes for a hybrid pan-national unity in the Caribbean. It is more than apparent that in Guyana national identity and hybridity co-exist and one does not preclude the other. Such an observation is corroborated by one of the most comprehensive studies on the relation between hybridity and national identity entitled *The Caribbean postcolonial: Social equality, post-nationalism, and cultural hybridity* (2004) written by Shalini Puri. Within its realms, Puri argues that in the Caribbean cultural hybridity does not invalidate strong national sentiments, and she declares “the prematurity of declarations of the demise of the nation-state and the error of many accounts that press cultural hybridity into the service of a post-nationalist agenda” (Puri 2004: 6). Puri places herself firmly within the transnational persuasion and by transnationalism she understands a study of those “aspects of human experience and societies that cannot be contained within the boundaries of a nation-state” but which, as she firmly highlights, do not imply the annihilation of the nation-state or national identity (Puri 2004: 6). A very similar claim is made by Michael Niblett (2012: 22) in *The Caribbean novel since 1945: Cultural practice, form, and the nation-state*, where he writes that, despite the arguments that national identity is “increasingly obsolescent in a postnational, globalized world”, it still remains a valid point of reference in the Caribbean literary studies.

³⁴ Bhabha revised the ideas of Franz Fanon, who was the first to describe the destructive effects of cultural imperialism on the identity formation. In *Black skin, white masks* Fanon shows how the colonized grew up to absorb the negative representations of their own culture to the point where they were willing to deny their own cultural roots (Fanon 2008 [1952]: 9-16). Soon V. S. Naipaul initiated a lasting debate on mimicry, which he presented in the novel *The mimic men* through the example of the people of the fictional island of Isabella whose main characteristic was their mindless acceptance of the colonial cultural patterns. Nevertheless, he missed a significant aspect of such a superficial acceptance of the colonial imperialism, namely its subversive and empowering potential, which has been described by Homi Bhabha, for whom hybridity and mimicry are the strategies of resistance and survival (Bhabha 2004: 85-90; Cudjoe 1988: 139). Another noteworthy study on hybridity, racial misagenation and its role in the shaping of the identity of the colonizer – Englishness – can be found in Robert Young’s *Colonial desire* (1995).

Puri's and Niblett's viewpoints overlap with the one adopted in the present study, namely that, instead of rejecting their national identity, the Guyanese authors undertake considerable efforts to reconcile the national with the hybrid and the universal; this phenomenon places the Guyanese fiction at the forefront of the contemporary debates on national (non)belonging in the fluid world. The co-existence of nationality and hybridity finds substantiation also in the socio-cultural research conducted on the Caribbean diasporas. For example, in *Caribbean diasporas* (2002) Mary Chamberlain calls the Caribbean men "transnationals", freely trafficking through cultures, and she highlights that, despite the testimonies of the famous "no-nationals" like Derek Walcott, the Caribbean people still operate within the realms of the nation-state and negotiate their identities in-between such concepts as Jamaican, British or American. They also cherish strong national sentiments, which translate themselves into the high return rate recorded among the Caribbean diasporic communities (Chamberlain 2002: 1-19).³⁵

Yet the strategies the Caribbean people employ to negotiate between their national belonging, ethnic loyalties and the fluid condition of the postmodern globalized world, vary. In the Guyanese life-narratives one may observe two main trends: transculturalism and hybridization. Transculturalism is closely connected to transnationalism, and it is "a specific task in identity-forming" based on "the integration of components of differing cultural origin" (Welsch 1999: 194-213). It does not imply the permanent fusion of various cultural elements into one seamless body, as hybridity does, and it also does not demand loyalties to a single nation-state; at the same time, however, it does not deny the existence of national identities and cultural differences (Berg and Niigeartaigh 2013: 11).

³⁵ Mary Chamberlain writes that "return is now a significant and remarkable feature of the Caribbean migrant communities (the Jamaican and Barbadian communities have declined by 17 per cent between 1981 and 1991, much of it the result of return migration to the Caribbean)". She adds that the declining costs of travel home, combined with cheaper and easier communication with family and friends, somehow decreases the return rate but its effect is not as significant as to invalidate national identity and national sentiments (Chamberlain 2002: 7). Their persistence is corroborated by the Guyanese authors themselves who in the interviews oftentimes stress their attachment to the concept of national belonging (Stein 2004: 229-236). The pervasiveness of national sentiments has been noticed also by those from outside the Caribbean; for example Julia Kristeva in *Nations without nationalism* (1993) argues that when identity is fluid and the world unstable, we long for (re)claiming national identification as the provider of both belonging and rootedness. Such a regressive movement towards nations triggers the exclusivity of national discourse towards the other – a foreigner or immigrant – which may be observed worldwide (Kristeva 1993: 1-7). Similarly, Anthony Smith argues that "[a] growing cosmopolitanism does not in itself entail the decline of nationalism [and] the rise of regional culture areas does not diminish the hold of national identities" (Smith 1990: 161).

The term hybridization is borrowed from an Indian critic, Tabish Khair, who in the book *Babu fictions: Alienation in contemporary Indian English novels* (2001: 90) claims that hybridity in its traditional understanding is not universally applicable to any postcolonial conditioning; for example, it fails to grasp the socio-cultural complexity of such Indo-Caribbean writers as V. S. Naipaul. This insufficiency results from the fact that the very term hybridity suggests that identity is a state, implying the existence of two hybridized elements. Nowadays, however, it is widely recognized that identity is the constant state of becoming; to use the metaphor of Zygmunt Bauman from *Liquid modernities* (2000), identities are not concrete states but “[they] are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set” (2000: 83). Therefore, seeking better framework to capture various shades of Indian-English identities, Khair fuses Bhabha’s theory with Bauman’s ideas on the fluidity of belonging and contrasts the term hybridity with *hybridization*, claiming that “hybridization is an active term that connotes an on-going process, while the hybrid ... is a static description. The hybrid is; it is not the endless process of *becoming*” (Khair 2001: 90). Indeed Khair’s views on hybridity as unwittingly simplifying the postcolonial identity discourse proves useful in the Guyanese context and it somehow resembles Derrida’s hope for heterogeneous identity that would “open [our static identities] up to difference”, but which would be rooted in our national and cultural heritages (Caputo 1997: 114).

Last but not least, the reason why one may study all the above mentioned cultural aspects of the national identity formation through the prism of a literary text is premised on the assumption that the narrative we produce about ourselves is our identity (Ricoeur 1992: 124)³⁶; correspondingly, any literary life-narrative that centres on *the self*, both autobiographical and fictional, is, at the same time, the story of identity construction (Smith and Watson 2003: 1). Presently, literary studies do not differentiate between the fictitious and true stories of identity formation, meaning autobiographies and

³⁶ The thought may be traced back to Paul Ricoeur and his *Time and narrative: Volume III* (1988: 244-249) and *Oneself as another* (1992: 124). Ricoeur writes there that our identity is a narrative and that it consists of two elements he calls *idem* and *ipse*. *Idem* is like one’s fingertips that remain unchanged over time. *Ipse* is *not* sameness, but selfhood is also characterized by a certain permanence in time tantamount to the logics of *keeping one’s word*. If we make a promise to do something or behave in a certain way in the unknown future, we make a promise to achieve a certain continuity and predictability in time; (Ricoeur 1992: 124). Narrative identity comes in-between *idem* and *ipse*, where “the sameness of character [is opposing] the constancy of the self” and it is the fullest development of the dialogue between selfhood and sameness, and the answer to ‘who’ we are and ‘what’ we are doing. If one loses one of these elements, *idem* or *ipse*, the narrative of the self disintegrates and so does our identity (Ricoeur 1992: 124).

novels, as it is commonly accepted that any narrative we produce about ourselves is fictional. In this context it is worth mentioning two studies, *The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative* (1994) by Ulrich Neisser (1994: 2-20) and *Living autobiographically: How we create identity in narrative* (2008: 60-86) by Paul Eakin, both of which emphasise that the construction of our identity, and the way we remember and reconstruct the past, is at the same time the act of fictitious self-creation. Therefore also the Guyanese novels of self-discovery presented in Chapter three are not approached as verifiable and objective accounts of the authorial selves. Their fictitious status nevertheless does not undermine their being valuable sources of knowledge about the Guyanese socio-political reality and Guyanese national identities.

It is also significant to note that the process of narrative identity negotiation is here understood not only as self-formation, but also as self-reconstruction; such a definition enables one to include in the study also the narratives of individual and collective trauma. Self-reconstruction is inseparable from trauma narratives which, as Lauren Vickroy in *Trauma and survival in contemporary fiction* (2002) claims, engage not only the storyteller, but also the reader, in (re)building of the narrator / protagonist's narrative identity (Vickroy 2002: 27). Thus it invariably dramatizes the "dynamic relationship between individual and collective memory", and the individual's personal and public history fragmented by slavery, colonialism and ethnic violence (Vickroy 2002: 33). Discussing such relationships, almost every theoretician at some point refers to *Unclaimed experience* (1996) by Cathy Caruth and *Trauma and recovery* by Judith Herman (1997), and the present monograph will be no exception. Both studies, though the former draws from a Freudian background and the latter from Herman's own therapeutic experience, conclude that trauma disintegrates our identity and makes it impossible for us to tell a coherent story of the past, and thus the fragmented narration reflects the fragmented *self* of the narrating subject (Herman 1997: 37; Caruth 1996: 3). In addition to Caruth and Herman, Chapter three brings into discussion another milestone work *Writing history, writing trauma* (2001) by Dominick LaCapra where the author analyzes the mechanism of "founding trauma[s]" that "become the basis for collective or personal identity, or both" (2001: 81). LaCapra argues that the so called secondary witnesses, the people who gain access to traumatic experiences from secondary sources like family tales or even fiction, may not only empathize with, but be affected by, the communal and familial traumatic memory. Later they oftentimes embark on the process of *working through* their historical traumas, the result of which is the (re)construction of their narrative identity in its individual and collective dimension (LaCapra 2001: 47). As such, also the Guyanese testimonial trauma narratives may be

approached as both the communal and the individual's tales of (national) identity reconstruction.

One may thus note that the literary investigations into the Guyanese life-narratives with a view to analyzing their authors' conceptualization of national identity require the fusion of methodological tools from various disciplines concerned with the process of cultural, national and individual identity formation. First of all, the wide thematic range of the Guyanese life-narratives force literary researchers to confront themselves with the broad and complex Caribbean debates on ethnicity, cultural hybridity, and (trans)nationality. Second of all, one may not remain impervious to the fact that life-narratives are first and foremost literary texts, which need to be filtered through narrative theories of self-formation and self-(re)construction. For this reason, the theoretical spectrum presented above is not imposed authoritatively, but necessitated by the complexity of the Guyanese identitarian discourse, which emerges as an equally heterogeneous field of critical enquiry as the Guyanese discourse of History.

1.4. The aesthetics and ethics of the Guyanese landscapes

In terms of its conceptualization of Nature, Guyanese literature constitutes a unique discourse among the Anglo-Caribbean literatures. This exceptionality is outwardly noticeable even for someone who casts only a cursory glance at the Guyanese novel. While in the islander Caribbean literatures there dominate the motifs of gardens, plantations and cultivated land, the Guyanese fiction is permeated by the imagery of the wild (Tiffin 2005: 199-201). The pervasive association of Guyana with wilderness reverberates already in the colonial fiction, and especially such works as *The lost world* (1912) by Arthur Conan Doyle, *In Guyana wilds* (1899) by A. E. Rodway, or the *Green Mansions: A romance in the tropical forest* (1904)³⁷ by W. H. Hudson. It is worth mentioning that Rodway's novel, the publication of which coincided with Conrad's *Heart of darkness* (1899), is the first one to thematise the ventures into the Guyanese wilderness as both a physical and "consciousness-changing" journey (James 1999: 78). As such, the Guyanese wild has found its way into the Guyanese postcolonial novel³⁸ and the common recurrence of the

³⁷ In 1959 the novel was adapted into the movie *Green mansion* directed by Mel Ferrer with Audrey Hepburn as a leading female role.

³⁸ Apart from the novels presented in Chapter four, the various renditions of the trope of wilderness may be found in Jan Carew's *The Black Midas* (1958), Wilson Harris' *Guyana Quartet* (1960), Churaumanie Bissundyal's *Whom the Kiskadees call* (1994) or David Dabydeen's *Our Lady of Demerara* (2004).

trope lead Tobias Döring to deem Guyana “The ‘Congo’ in the Caribbean” (2002: 85-106).³⁹

However, the Guyanese interest in the wilderness does not preclude the existence of the pastoral⁴⁰ and the two coexist in the Guyanese fiction. The pastoral, broadly speaking, is the “stylized representation of rusticity in contrast to and often in satire of urbanism” (Buell 2005: 144) where the rural is usually described in idyllic, or even Arcadian, tones. In the Caribbean literatures every engagement with the pastoral acquires a symbolic meaning, because the colonial texts extensively used the pastoral mode to misrepresent the tropical landscapes as passive, bountiful and welcoming, unaffected by the colonial exploitation. Already Raymond Williams in *The country and the city* (1975) observed that in the British imperial imagination the colonies became rural Arcadias to which one could escape “from debt and shame” and which “offered an opportunity at making a fortune” (Williams 1975: 285). Similar observations on colonial pastorals, and their effect on the postcolonial fiction, have been made by more contemporary critics such as Lawrence Buell (2005: 144), Beth Fowkes-Tobin (2011: 17), Sarah Phillips-Casteel (2007: 9) or Kevin Hutchings (2009: 75).⁴¹ Somewhat simplifying the matter, the postcolonial pastorals challenge the colonial ideology of progress (Williams 1975: 285) and travesty colonial anti-conquest imagery that for ages symbolically denied the colonized subjects agency over their own land (Pratt 2007 [1992]: 7).⁴²

³⁹ In his book *Caribbean-English passages* (2004), Döring discussed the imagery of the Guyanese heartland on the chosen examples from Wilson Harris’ fiction and he shows their intertextual relationship to Conrad’s famous *Heart of darkness* (1899). In truth, Conrad’s novella reverberates strongly in the works of many more Guyanese authors, both preceding and coming after Wilson Harris, and it could in itself constitute a topic of a separate thesis.

⁴⁰ Whenever the term pastoral is used within the book, it is understood as a literary mode of the landscape’s representation that contextualizes the tensions between the rural Arcadia and the urban. This understanding of the pastoral is derived inter alia from Paul Alpers’ *What is pastoral?* (1997), where he writes that the pastoral is a subjective authorial attitude towards nature and not a specific literary technique of its description (Alpers 1997: 44).

⁴¹ Peter Hulme claims that pastoral imagery was part of the popular colonial imagination and many colonists truly believed that one may “lay back and let the abundance of the tropics fall into their laps” (1992: 173). As if to confirm his thesis, Arthur de Gobineau writes that “[a]mid the varied and tropical vegetation of the Antilles, the American negro would find the necessities of life yielded him in abundance and without labour by the fruitful earth” (de Gobineau 1915: 51).

⁴² One of the most known Caribbean literary texts of this kind is *A small island* (1988) by Jamaica Kincaid where the author describes the consequences of the pastoral imagery which painted her home island – Antigua – as a tourist heaven. Kincaid opens her novella with an invocation to an unnamed Western tourist who worked hard in cold and dark Northern American or European lands to come and taste the sunlit rural arcadia. The tourist nevertheless cares little about the true costs of his or her holidays and the broad

The Guyanese novel, however, translated the contestation of the symbolic and physical exploitation of nature, customarily associated with the postcolonial pastorals, also onto the grounds of wilderness; hence, without unduly generalizing, one may claim that any involvement with nature in the Guyanese fiction entails an engagement with the ethical. More precisely, not only do the Guyanese authors paint the veritable images of the primeval forest or depict the clash between the urban and the rural, but they also associate the two Guyanese spaces, the coast and the heartland, with the two environmental sensitivities – Western(ized) and Amerindian – and two philosophies of life based on disparate attitudes to progress and self-improvement (Dabydeen 2005: 59).⁴³ Therefore, it is being argued that only eco-criticism, with its predominant focus on environmental justice and the ethics of progress, allows one to fully comprehend the complexity of the Guyanese discourse of Nature. It also enables one to fully appreciate the potential of Guyanese fiction to redefine the dichotomous concepts on which European cosmology has been constructed: nature and culture, civilization and bestiality, human and animal (Higman 2011: 54).

The idea of reading the Guyanese texts through the lens of eco-criticism is not revolutionary and the Guyanese literature is being mentioned in eco-critical studies, though almost exclusively in connection with Wilson Harris (Tiffin 2010: 118). Even *Caribbean literature and the environment: Between nature and culture* (2005), the first comprehensive study of the eco-critical discourse in the Caribbean culture, presents the Guyanese fiction through the prism of Wilson Harris and his poetics of the living landscapes (Maes-Jelinek 2005: 247-260). Other noteworthy eco-critical readings of the

system of exploitation he or she takes part in. Kincaid is equally harsh on the Antiguan government, which she sees as driven by the desire for profit and, thus, with full awareness of the consequences, selling the island to the foreigners.

⁴³ The pastoral novels are even more numerous in the Guyanese literature than the tales of the wild. To name just a few examples of the pastoral texts that emerged among the first wave of the Guyanese writers, one may resort to Edgar Mittelholzer, especially his *Croyentyne thunder* (1941), which shows the rural life of the Indo-Guyanese cattle-herder, Ramgolall, who arrived in the colony in 1898 and from then lived on selling milk to the town people (Mittelholzer 2009: [1941] 21). The novel contains beautiful descriptions of the Guyanese landscapes and outward allusions to the Pastoral Symphony by Beethoven on the five parts of which, as Juanita Cox argues, the very structure of the work is predicated (Cox 2009: 13). Another of such examples is *The wild coast* (1958) by Jan Carew, a Bildungsroman novel tracing the adventures of the city boy sent away to a remote village in the wild Canje region of Guyana where he grows up in accordance with natural rhythms and laws, only in the end to face the choice between his village and city life. Similar undertones may be found in Peter Kempadoo who described his own experience of growing up on the sugar plantations in *Guyana boy* (1960) and then painted a nostalgic image of the old planter whose agricultural methods and life-style cannot withstand the clash with modernity in *Old Thom's harvest* (1965).

Guyanese fiction have been performed by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, for example in her exquisite essay “Quantum landscapes” (2009: 63-82) devoted to Pauline Melville and the challenges her fiction poses to the Western discourse of natural science, physics and astrology; nevertheless till today the Guyanese fiction has hardly been the subject of any broad environmental readings. Therefore, it seems apt and timely to propose a study into the aesthetics and ethics of the Guyanese environmental literature that, though limited in scope, steps beyond the works of a single author and juxtaposes the two said tropes: wilderness and the pastoral.

Eco-criticism, as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” which “takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty 1996: xvii), is a relatively new discipline but it has been becoming an increasingly popular tool of (re)reading the colonial and postcolonial texts of nature. The term was coined in the late 1970s but the academic discipline originated in the 1990s (Buell 2005: 1) and in his book *The future of environmental criticism* (2005), Lawrence Buell writes that “[t]he environmental turn in literary and cultural studies emerged as a self-conscious movement little more than a dozen years ago” (2005: 1).⁴⁴ Eco-criticism is inseparably and intimately linked to literature and it should not be confused with ecology, which is the study of biological organisms; its aim is not to examine the physical environment itself, but its representation in the text, and it is based on the belief that the texts reflect and tangibly shape our ecological practices (Hutchings 2009: 5). Moreover, eco-criticism is inseparable from environmental ethics and based on the belief that the preservation of the planet is a truly universal problem that goes far beyond national or cultural borders. As an eco-critic Kevin Hutchings writes, “all people, regardless of their personal and cultural backgrounds, can find

⁴⁴ While the beginnings and trends of eco-critical studies in the academia are relatively easy to pinpoint, the debates where one may place the beginnings of the eco-critical sensitivity in the Western culture are far more controversial. Most critics agree that the Romanticism proves especially potent ground for eco-critical revisions (Buell 2005: 5). They base their claims on the Romantic distrust of the Enlightenment, especially its enchantment with progress, which triggered the contemplative (re)turn to Nature. However, it seems somewhat unfair to dismiss the Enlightenment as entirely devoid of environmental sensitivity. It was through such treaties as *A discourse on inequality* (1984 [1755]) or *Emile* (2011 [1762]) by Jean Jacques Rousseau that the sentimental vision of Nature has been constructed. Also the idea of the sublime later used by the Romantic poets may also be traced to the Enlightenment and the philosophical treaty by Edmund Burke (1757) where he differentiated between the beautiful – aesthetically pleasing – and the sublime, as overwhelming and, potentially, a destructive feeling (Burke 1824 [1757]: 111). Richard Grove, in turn, claims that eco-sensitive thinking was born within the colonial system, which made the West realize that “people, and Europeans in particular, could transform and destroy the natural environment” (Grove 1997: 1).

common ground in an unmediated experience of the non-human world” (Hutchings 2009: 8) and all are equally responsible for its well-being. Eco-critical texts, then, may be both contemplative and activist, and the latter trend is probably a reason for its frequent confusion with the ecological movement.⁴⁵

It also needs to be clearly stated that eco-criticism is by definition an interdisciplinary field which prominently steps *beyond* the usual focus of the postcolonial studies. Its methodological inconsistency lies at the core of the heated debate whether the movement should be even known as eco-criticism. In *The green studies reader* (2000), Laurence Coupe declares that he dislikes the term ‘eco-criticism’ and he proposes his own – “green studies” – which he sees as more inclusive towards other non-literary disciplines. Nevertheless, he admits that eco-criticism “has the advantage of reminding us to register the ‘critical’ quality of these times” (Coupe 2000: 4). Similarly, Lawrence Buell argues that ‘eco-criticism’ “implies a nonexistent methodological holism” while eco-criticism is rather the issue-driven “concourse of discrepant practices”. Buell proposes to use the term “environmental criticism” or “literary-environmental studies” (2005: 12). Though all these terms function interchangeably, eco-criticism remains the most recognizable and therefore it is being consequently used within this book.

This characteristically eclectic methodology translates itself directly into the ambiguous place eco-criticism occupies within the body of postcolonial studies. Some critics place eco-criticism firmly within postcolonialism, like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial ecocriticism* (2010), or Bonnie Ross and Alex Hunt in *Postcolonial green: Environmental politics and world narratives* (2010); others, however, still

⁴⁵ Lawrence Buell argues that the primary understanding of environmental criticism as a practice of reading and deconstructing texts must be broadened to embrace the production of environmentally and ecologically conscious writings. Buell (2005: 7: 15) proposes a classification into the first and the second wave of environmental criticism and he not so much means the temporal progression from the older to newer texts, though it is very often the case, but the variations in the attitude to the presented topic. The first wave texts, he says, centre on Nature as a subject of philosophical, aesthetic and spiritual contemplation of the author, who praises and admires its perfection, usually by contrast with the corruption of the man-made environment. The second wave treats Nature more holistically, questioning the very boundary between the natural and man-made environment, which nowadays are barely separable. The second wave also more decisively calls for “environmental justice”, including the protection of the indigenous minorities, and advocates the change in the global economy steered at their exploitation. Buell described his differentiation through the example of Rachel Carson, an American biologist and environmentalist, who evolved from the contemplation of nature, precisely the behaviour of fish in her book *Under the sea wind* (1941), to her conscious anti-pesticide statement in *Silent spring* (1962).

have doubts. For example Rob Nixon (2005: 233-251) in “Environmentalism and postcolonialism” suggests that postcolonialism and ecocriticism disengage in four significant points. Namely, postcolonialism foregrounds hybridity, centres on displacement, is critical of nationalism and excavates marginalized histories. Eco-criticism, in turn, engages with the discourse of purity, exemplified for example by the motif of the “virgin wilderness”; it also gives priority to the literature of place, favours the national over the hybrid and represses history in favour of the timelessness of Nature. Despite such disputes, the example of the Guyanese literature shows that the two may be compatible. The Guyanese authors do engage with their national nature, but this landscape is essentially and vitally hybridized in consequence of the ages of colonial agricultural domination; furthermore, history in Guyana is literally rooted in the landscape, which is a monument to the past experiences of the Amerindians, African slaves and East-Indian indenture workers. However, it is still safer to say, using the words of Elizabeth DeLoughrey et al., that “ecocriticism overlaps with postcolonialism” in many important points (2005: 5); but the determination of its ultimate place among the critical theories remains far beyond the humble scope of the present monograph.

As one may thus note, any eco-critical readings of (post)colonial texts necessitate the fusion of methodological tools derived from various humanistic disciplines. Such a need is especially visible in the context of the wilderness, which only now is being discovered as a fully-fledged subject of eco-critical investigations. As Greg Garrard writes in *Ecocriticism* (2004: 59), any eco-critical study of wilderness “might easily count as intellectual history or philosophy, thus stretching the bounds of traditional literary criticism”. The source of its complexity derives from the fact that the wilderness has always occupied a peculiar and contradictory place in the Western imagination. The word itself “derives from the Anglo-Saxon ‘wilddeoren’, where ‘deoren’ or beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation”. With time it became a self-explanatory term used to delineate the spaces, places and creatures residing outside the realms of human civilization and control (Garrard 2004: 60). Following the Western confrontation with the New World, the wilderness acquired an almost sacred status of “a state uncontaminated by civilization” (Garrard 2004: 59). It came to “hold out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility” (Garrard 2004: 59). Hayden White in *Tropics of discourse* (1986: 150-180) discusses the said evolution of the trope of wilderness from the meaning mentioned by Garrard – the uncivilized space inhabited by the barbarous wild man – through the enchantment with the noble savage – the free wild man – to the wilderness inherent in human nature, against which one continuously struggles, the proverbial heart of

darkness. He links the alternations in the conceptualization of the wild with the socio-cultural transformations taking place in the West and, in a way, he treats the wilderness as a symbolic record of Western cultural evolution.

For this reason, the wilderness manifests itself as an unimaginably complex ground for literary criticism. Also the literary investigations conducted in Chapter four will draw from broad and interdisciplinary debates on nature, culture, bestiality, civilization, Western utopian imagination and the legacy of Jean Jacques Rousseau's philosophy of natural men, which largely defined the sentimental vision of the tropics (Rousseau 1984; Lovejoy 1923: 165-186; Dash 1998). It also brings into discussion posthumanist theory, which is one of the intellectual trends associated with the eco-critical field. Posthumanism is not a simple extension of anti-humanism, though anti-humanism is one of the sources of post-humanist thought (Braidotti 2013: 25).⁴⁶ The main difference between the two stems from the fact that posthumanism not so much deconstructs the category of 'human' as tries to redefine it:

Posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives. The starting point for me is (...) the decline of some of the fundamental premises of the Enlightenment, namely the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of reason (...). The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man (Braidotti 2013: 37).

Cary Wolfe in *What is posthumanism?* (2010) likewise argues that “when we talk about posthumanism, we are not just talking about a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates” but “we are also talking about *how thinking confronts that thematics*, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges” (2010: xvi; emphasis mine, MF).

The term posthuman, then, is used in the monograph has a denominator of the trends observable in the Guyanese literature that strive towards the redefinition of human as *not* species-specific. To explain this line of reasoning, I refer to such leading thinkers as Jacques Derrida, Donna

⁴⁶ Anti-humanism is a philosophical movement derived from the crisis of humanism in the post-war Europe. It is mostly associated with post-structuralist thought of Michel Foucault and other thinkers who later became famous as the “post-structuralist generation” (Braidotti 2013: 35). Braidotti claims that anti-humanism was based on the belief in “[t]he ‘death of Man’” as an epistemological and moral category; thus anti-humanism is less focused on the pursuit of the alternatives to the (hu)man category and more on dismantling the post-Enlightenment humanist thought.

Haraway, Erica Fudge, Mary Midgley or Val Plumwood, who have based their ideas on the anti-humanist foundations, and who went on to explore the alternatives in the conceptualization of human. Derrida in his lectures published under the title *Animal therefore I am (More to follow)* (2008), was one of the first to systematically challenge the Western philosophy from Genesis to Lacan as unabashedly human-oriented. As he says, “everything in what I am about to say [in the lecture] will lead back to the question of what ‘to follow’ or ‘to pursue’ means (...) I move from ‘the ends of man,’ that is the confines of man, to ‘the crossing of borders’ between man and animal” (Derrida 2008: 3). Donna Haraway in *Primate visions* (1989: 9) deconstructs the discursive representations of the great apes which, as she believes, have been a reflection of the human desires and fantasies about the animal other, analogous to what Said described in his *Orientalism* (1978). Symbolically, she grants them the agency to exist outside the discursive representations of the (hu)man world. Similar philosophical attempts have been undertaken by Erica Fudge in *Animal* (2002), and Mary Midgley in *Beast and man* (2002 [1979]); also Val Plumwood in *Environmental culture* (2002) describes the possible implications of the anthropocentric philosophy as inflicted not only on the animal, but also on the land and the landscape. Most interestingly, she argues against “deep ecology”, which simply humanizes the landscape and therefore still operates by the binary categories of human and non-human (Plumwood 2002: 197).

Nevertheless, it has to be clearly stated that though such theories are most helpful in eco-critical readings the wilderness, they are not universally applicable to any literary text. More precisely, the wilderness and the pastoral occupy two disparate places within the eco-critical discourse and therefore they require the application of absolutely divergent analytical tools (Garrard 2004: 33). Consequently, also within the present monograph the ethics and aesthetics of the environmentally conscious pastoral fiction is contextualized separately from the wilderness and placed within the context of post-pastoral theories. The utility of post-pastoral philosophy for the analysis of the Guyanese pastoral novels⁴⁷ has been briefly suggested in *Postcolonial ecocriticism* by Helen Tiffin (2010: 118), but it remains largely understudied, as the majority of the writings on the Guyanese pastoral texts have been, and still are, performed in the spirit of the marvellous realist poetics (Delbaere-Garant 1995: 253; Lingunati 1999: 245; Bowers 2013: 56-57). The term post-

⁴⁷ The pastoral novel is here understood according to Alpers’ definition as “a piece of fiction (...) where its author – for whatever reason, with whatever awareness, and concerned with whatever subject or theme – has recourse to usages which are characteristic of older pastorals and which in turn make a tale or novel pastoral in mode” (Alpers 1997: 376). In a way analogous to Gifford’s definition, within the pastoral novelistic discourse, one may distinguish pastoral, anti-pastoral and post-pastoral modes of nature’s representation.

pastoral emerged from Terry Gifford's long research into Western pastoralism during which he noticed that 'pastoral' is being used as an all-encompassing notion embracing any literary works that place rural landscapes at the centre of their narrative focus. He also determined that the available classifications of the pastorals into complex and simple⁴⁸ are no longer sufficient to grasp the wide range of the pastoral texts, which actually display radically different attitudes to the presented rural spaces (Gifford 1999: 148-149).

To capture such essential incongruencies, Gifford differentiated between three basic meanings of the word pastoral. First, pastoral is "a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into drama and more recently could be recognized in novels", the premise of which is the contemplation of the rural landscape; second, the pastoral is "any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban"; and third it may be a derogatory term "implying that the pastoral vision is too simplified" (Gifford 1999: 2-3). From these three disparate meanings of essentially the one term Gifford developed his own classification of the pastoral into pastorals, anti-pastorals and post-pastorals.⁴⁹ Putting it simply, post-pastoral texts are environmentally conscious renditions of the pastoral convention, which are by all means aware of "the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised", but which nevertheless find "a language to outflank those dangers" and create "a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language" (Gifford 1999: 149).

In order to make his term less ambiguous, Terry Gifford delineated six major features differentiating post-pastoral texts within the pastoral discourse. Firstly, they strive to evoke "awe in attention to the natural world"; secondly, they present Nature as an endless creative–destructive continuum; thirdly, they show the relationship between inner human mental states and external nature; fourthly, they question the dichotomy between culture and

⁴⁸ The idea of complex and simple pastoralism comes from *The machine in the garden* (1964) by Leo Marx. Simple pastorals convey a slightly naive belief in the possibility of an absolute escape from the city and technology and they are a "romantic perversion". Complex pastoralism contrasts the proverbial machine in the garden, be it a literal machine or simply the evidence of industrialization, with the idealized rural image, weakening the power of the potentially naive pastoral vision. Neither simple nor pastoral veins imply the outward criticism of industrialization, being merely two modes of the rural landscape representation (2000 [1964]: 25).

⁴⁹ Traditional pastoral texts are for Gifford the celebration of rusticity; anti-pastorals, into which he inscribed for example Patric Kavanagh or Cormac McCarthy, are those that consciously refuse to idealize the landscape. They may show Nature as a cruel field of the struggle for survival or deconstruct a particular aspect of the pastoral convention. The first example of the anti-pastoral text Gifford finds in *The thresher's labour*, written in 1736 as "a worker's reply to the eighteenth-century idealization of the reaper" (1999: 120).

nature; fifthly, they move one's eco-conscience; and, lastly, they indicate that "the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities" (Gifford 1999: 149-165). An environmental critic, Dominic Head, writes that post-pastoral theory has grown to occupy a steady place in the field of eco-critical studies and it "represents a challenge to alienation from the non-human world, as well as enlightened engagement with the Real" (Head 2002: 194). Head notes also "an intensification of post-pastoral concerns" in the contemporary British and postcolonial literature, evoked by the progressive urbanization and industrialization of the capitalist world (Head 2002: 194). Such a tendency is visible also in the Guyanese literature which, as it will be elaborated on in the analytical part of this book, proves such a perfect embodiment of Gifford's theory that it could be used as a handbook example of post-pastoral poetics.

One may thus observe that though the monograph oscillates within the thematic interests characteristic of the broadly defined Caribbean literature, it seeks a fresh perspective on the specifically Guyanese renditions of the seemingly familiar themes and tropes. It takes into account all the peculiarities of the Guyanese conditioning resultant from its history, nation-building and natural environment, and it pursues the most suitable methodological matrix for the new, twenty-first century readings of the Guyanese fiction. Significantly, the presented methodology has been derived from the careful readings of the Guyanese fiction, which naturally forces one to rethink the assumptions of the postcolonial literary theories and the ideas circulating within the Caribbean studies. The underlying aim of the presented critical and theoretical investigations is the wish to prove that the Guyanese fiction is an intriguing and singular example of the national literary discourse within the Caribbean world, and a subject very well worth exploring for all those willing to acquaint themselves with its original and intellectually challenging discourse.

Chapter Two

From realism to allegorical realism: The (r)evolutions of the Guyanese historical fiction

What to call the thing that happened
to me and all who look like me?
Should I call it history?
If so, what should history mean to someone like me?
(...) is it a moment that began in 1492
and has come to no end yet?
Jamaica Kincaid, "In history" (2011: 18)

The voice of passion is better than the voice of reason.
The passionless cannot change history.
Czesław Miłosz, "Child of Europe" (1979 [1949]: 63)

In *Muse of history* (1974: 36-64), Derek Walcott claims that in the New World there are two general approaches to History; the first one is "recrimination and despair", displayed by those for whom the Caribbean history seems only oppression and ruin and for whom language itself is a prison in which they are shut for life, being forever cursed, like Calibans, to challenge the master in his own language. The second approach he calls 'Adamic', where the New World is a world "without monuments or ruins" – and thus without progressive and linear history – where myth permeates reality and gives the hope for rebirth. In another of his essays, which he wrote as an answer to V. S. Naipaul's infamous words that "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (1999 [1964]: 27),¹ Walcott ironically

¹ Naipaul's whole comment on the nature of history and historical representation in the Caribbean is as follows: "How can the history of this West Indian futility be written? What tone shall the historian adopt? Shall he be as academic as Sir Alan Burns, protesting from time to time at some brutality, and setting West Indian brutality in the context of European

agrees with Naipaul, saying that “[i]n the Caribbean history is irrelevant”, and so is the Western idea of progress and invention. What matters is “loss of history, the amnesia of the races” and “what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention” (1974a: 6).² Thus he places himself firmly in the Adamic vein and he sees it as his poetic duty to give the History back to the Caribbean people, but avoiding the reproduction of its colonial patterns.

Wilson Harris, another of the famous figures who shaped a vision of the Caribbean history, also argued that in the Caribbean “a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination” (Harris 1999 [1970]: 151). “In a society which has been shot through by diverse inter-racial features and inter-continental thresholds”, Harris writes, “we need a philosophy of history which is original to us and yet capable of universal application” (2005: 180). This philosophy is for him coded in the carnival, the limbo dance, myth and landscape, rather than in historiography in its traditional Western understanding. Edouard Glissant was a bit more cautious in his rejection of linear history; in “The quarrel with History” he writes that the people in the colonial Caribbean existed in “nonhistory”; namely, they refused to absorb the history of the colonizer, but also have not constructed their own “dialectical whole that informs people’s consciousness” like, for example, a mythical chronology of their own land. After decolonization they started noticing the presence of their past, which came to light with great unexpectedness, but which, as Glissant says, was not yet history. “The duty of the writer”, he adds, “is to explore this obsession” in a way that is neither “a schematic chronology” nor “a nostalgic lament” but a creative and “*prophetic vision of the past*” (1999: 64-65; emphasis mine, MF). Such a dichotomous vision of historical representations as either realist and colonial or mythologized and redemptive, for years determined the Caribbean reluctance to write historical novels, which by convention demand a direct engagement with colonial historiography and narrative realism (Webb 1992: 5; Ramchand 2004 [1970]: 136).

brutality? (...) The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies” (1999 [1964]: 27).

² Walcott was not absolutely consistent in his rejection of linear colonial history, which manifests itself in the series of plays he wrote on the order for the West India Federation, like *Drums and colours* (1958), where he rewrites the most significant events from the colonial history as milestones also in the history of the West Indies, namely the discovery of Columbus, the journey of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Haitian Revolution or the abolition of slavery. John Tieme draws attention to the fact that, to cope with the theme, Walcott resorted to the means of historical allegory, which only confirms the thesis the allegorical realist nature of the Caribbean historical representations (Thieme 1999: 11).

This *prophetic* view of history has beyond doubt been inherited by the younger generation of the Caribbean writers, who nevertheless do not shun from continuing the realist traditions of the Caribbean historical fiction and thus engaging themselves in dialogues with the linear colonial history. Fed D'Aguiar, the author of two historical novels *Feeding ghosts* (1994) and *Longest memory* (1997), says that (post)colonial history should not be “a cure” or “a site for instruction” but “a provocation” for the living to critically assess their past (Dickow 2014). Caryl Phillips, a writer from St Kitts and the author of such novels as *Crossing the river* (1995) or *The nature of blood* (1998), sees the colonial history as a way to understand who the Caribbean people are and where they are going to (Low 2007: 204). Andrea Levy, the Jamaican author of *The long song* (2011), says that turning towards the historical novel was her conscious choice as she wanted to tell her *history* “in a book which will, inevitably, be thought of as a ‘historical novel’”. “Many of such novels start from history, and place their characters as witnesses or participants in the events (...) that we know about from our history books” (2011: 414), she says, but her aim was to “put back [history] in the voices of everyday life for black Jamaicans” (2011: 414), delivering the empowering narrative of “a totally unique society that developed about a giant, brutal island factory and survived” (2011: 410).

What is new in their approach is the belief that the Caribbean authors may not only creatively engage with their colonial history, but also write historical fiction and simultaneously give voice to the Caribbean philosophy of history “buried in the art of imagination” (Harris 1999 [1970]: 151). As such, the historical novel is a unique medium through which one can trace the specifically Caribbean path leading from the imitation of the colonial narrative paradigms to their reconciliation with the characteristically allegorical perception of being in History. The Guyanese literature emerges as an intriguing area of such investigations; in Guyana the first realist historical novels appeared in the early fifties and, after decades of non-existence, the new generation reclaims the historical novel and draws from both branches of the Guyanese historical imagination: realist and allegorical. Chapter two aims to provide the reader with a close insight into such literary and historical evolutions by juxtaposing four Guyanese historical novels – two plantation narratives and two neo-slave narratives – through which the Guyanese meditate their colonial experiences. The novels in question are *Children of Kaywana* (1952) by Edgar Mittelholzer and *Weaving water* (2013) by Ryhaan Shah as well as *Stedman and Joanna: A love in bondage – Dedicated love in the eighteenth century* (1991) by Beryl Gilroy and *Johnson's Dictionary* (2013) by David Dabydeen.

2.1. Guiana – a (home)land of plantations in *Children of Kaywana* (1952) by Edgar Mittelholzer

Children of Kaywana (1952) is the first installment of Mittelholzer's series of historical novels, known as *The Kaywana trilogy* (1952-1958), which in total represents the history of Guyana from the seventeenth to the middle of the twentieth century. *Children of Kaywana* is the first piece of historical fiction written by a postcolonial Guyanese writer and the first to dramatize such a broad scope of its colonial history.³ Putting it simply, the novel is a plantation narrative, which depicts the origins of the colonial economic and social system in all its cruelty and complexity. It shows the beginnings of Guyana and its racial(ist) politics through the prism of the van Groeneweg family, a Dutch-Amerindian clan of landowners, placing special emphasis on the true nature of the interracial contacts between the Dutch, the English, the natives and the Africans. Therefore, despite its critical disrepute, *Children of Kaywana* is worth recognizing as a brave and unprecedented attempt at showing the history of Guyana in the realist historical novel, which ultimately proved unsuited for capturing the essence, and not only the facts, of the Guyanese history.

The narrative structure of *Children of Kaywana* resembles a traditional historical romance⁴ and thus it is unusual in the context of the

³ Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965) is commonly referred to as the first professional Anglo-Caribbean writer and the first to set the path of professional development for the Lamming's generation. He is also a tragic figure as his life ended in suicide caused, as rumour has it, by his frustration at the unfavourable critical response to his novels. All his life Mittelholzer struggled to prove that the Guyanese author may be equal to the great masters of the English novels but, most paradoxically, his best and critically acclaimed works are those where he did not try to copy his masters. Juanita Cox, a critic of Mittelholzer's works, claims that "Mittelholzer's novels sometimes became the prototype of what not to write; in this particular case helping to inform the growing consensus that West Indian writers should endeavour to produce material that was uniquely West Indian in character" (Cox 2008). Frances Williams notes that "the community condemns Mittelholzer to his life's task – of proving that, though he has black blood, he is also white – and his painful quest in search of his identity and, more important, his desire to be accepted as equal by the white literary world, commence on the banks of Berbice" (2001: 131). In *The pleasures of exile* Lamming describes his own fascination with Mittelholzer and his decision to become a professional writer and then to emigrate to England (1960: 39-40). After Mittelholzer's death in 1965, the Guyanese government established a series of lectures in his name "on themes of contemporary Guyanese or Commonwealth Caribbean writing or aspects of the relationship between thought and history and the emergence of creative writing in the Caribbean area", the aim of which was "to promote a sense of national pride and help keep Guyana in the forefront of the new nations" (Lindsay 2014: xviii).

⁴ The historical romance is here understood as a subgenre of the historical novel; the historical novel, referring to the already quoted definition by Amy Elias, is any type of the

Caribbean approach to history, which has been predominantly allegorical. Nevertheless, if one looks at the novel through the prism of the genre, one may try to understand what Mittelholzer wanted to achieve and why he failed to render the authentic vision of the Guyanese history.⁵ Conventionally, historical romance combines “the archetypal episodes of romance” with “the [typical] presentation of history”. Plots in historical romances are dynamic, full of conflicts, adventures and surprises, and special significance is given to “family life, self-fulfilment and the distribution of power and wealth in society” (Hughes 2005: 17). They place the individuals and their passions as superior to the analysis of the historical process, though they offer “a good deal of historical details”, which implies that the novel is “the result of indefatigable scholarly research, and so—of course—true” (Hughes 2005: 18; Duncan 1992: 8). At the same time, historical romances, especially those written after the Second World War, depart from any excessive stylization of language as the main aim of the narrative is to “give the impression that the reader is actually experiencing what the main character is said to be feeling” (Hughes 2005: 20). Thus, historical romances propagate a certain vision of human nature “as having an unchanging unified core beneath surface appearances” (Hughes 2005: 17). Last but not least, historical romances link the public sphere, especially the national history, with the private, being potential means of reclaiming the national histories on which the sense of national identity and exceptionality may be constructed.⁶ For all these

novel which places history as its main subject and which thus differentiates itself from other novelistic attempts at giving a name to history (Elias 2001: 4-5). The historical romance, which many theoreticians derive from the medieval romance, is a type of the historical novel that characterises itself with adventurous plots and fast narrative pace (Duncan 1992: 8).

⁵ If one was interested in the analysis of Mittelholzer’s trilogy as a whole, one could link its emergence with the post-war return to the novel of sequence that, as Steven Connor, writes may be both “a sequence of novels” or “a single novel lengthened and diversified into a sequence” (2001: 136). The plot is stretched to embrace more than one novel which progresses to show the development of the character, its family and which presupposes the presentation of the “real” world and contains an abundance of narrative details, authenticating the presented experience. Modelled on the Victorian realist novel, the novel of sequence strove to provide the “illusion of solidity and coherence of history attributed to Victorian history” and centre on the interdependence between the public and the private spheres, restoring human agency to history (Connor 2001: 138). In a broader context, it was trying to reclaim history as logical movement and thus restore a sense of continuity in the world, torn apart by the Second World War (Connor 2001: 136-137).

⁶ Historical romance is generally associated with Sir Walter Scott and such novels as *Waverley* or *Ivanhoe*, which were deeply submerged in the Scottish national context and which validated the Scottish language and Scottish heritage. Therefore, as Harold Orel in *The historical novel from Scott to Sabatini* (1995) claims, the legacy of Sir Walter Scott as a writer and a man should be viewed dualistically, namely in his immediate historical context and beyond. In his times Scott bound the historical novel to the politically marginalized

reasons, romances tend to resurface in times of historical instability and provide their readers with a logical vision of history based on the impression that one may fully comprehend the people from the past, the decisions they made and their impact on History.

All the aforementioned features and premises may be found in *Children of Kaywana*. The novel was written at the dawn of the postcolonial world and it was to provide the Guyanese with a sense of historical continuity, distinct national identity and sense of logics in the essentially illogical Guyanese history. A friend and a literary critic of Mittelholzer's works, A. J. Seymour, said that through *The Kaywana trilogy* Mittelholzer "had helped to give a sense of identity, value and importance to a body of people who share a land and a culture of their own" (2014: 10). He argues that the *Kaywana trilogy* successfully "project[ed] the image of his nation" even if Mittelholzer needed to compromise on facts:

I have been privileged to see a draft that Edgar made of the history of Guyana at the request of a publishing house. It was not a good draft, since Edgar is not a historian. He is a novelist, and he was able to forge the elements of his own creation according to the gifts of his nature. The historical student, searching through the pages of the Kaywana series, will find all the proper landmarks of history, but Edgar's main purpose as a writer was to delight and entertain (...). He is a fine story-teller and it is no accident that the Kaywana books, particularly *Children of Kaywana* have been translated into many different languages and brought delight and entertainment to thousands of readers in many parts of the world (Seymour 2014: 46).

Hence Seymour argues that the story (romance) is more important than history, repeating the arguments used by many a writer, including Scott himself (Orel 1995: 9). He also claims that the primary significance of the trilogy lies in its national spirit, which came "to serve it [the national cause] and his own country eminently well" and which "suggests that Mittelholzer (...) had recognized the importance of providing for the region documented records of the regions socio-cultural past and present" (Seymour 2014: 20).

subject, reclaimed and dignified the Scottish language, and created the romanticized version of Scottish history, which inspired and fascinated. Orel claims also that Scott "saw himself as spokesman for his age" and "he tried to demonstrate connections between 'the opinions, habits of thinking, and actions (...) in an earlier age and those of his own'". He also believed in the "missionary role" of literature and the historical novel (1995: 12). For those who followed his example in literature, Scott defined the boundaries and conventions of the historical novel and the historical romance as the genre and the rules of historical representation. For example, defending his novels against the antiquarians, he admitted that "complete accuracy in historical novels was impossible to attain" as the novels are predominantly about human place and human agency in history, than about the unquestionably verifiable accounts of the events past (Orel 1995: 9).

Therefore, *The Kaywana trilogy* may be interpreted as an early attempt of changing the historical discontinuity of Guyana into the national history. Imperfect as it may be, it needs to be acknowledged as a milestone in the development of the historical novel and the sense of national history in Guyana. Even Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1998: 41), who cruelly points out all Mittelholzer's mistakes, admits that "continuity embedded in *The Kaywana trilogy* [is] an affirmation of a Caribbean experience of history (...) [and it] did show a certain understanding of the social forces at work".⁷

The main narrative oscillates around the van Groenwegel family, comprising the Dutch tradesmen and settlers, who grew to the level of plantation aristocracy.⁸ Van Groenwegel's adventures are sketched across the background of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Guiana was a playground for European forces struggling for domination in the region. At that time, not only the Dutch, but also the French, the Spanish and the English, penetrated the country and the colony oftentimes changed hands; such events as the Spanish invasion from Trinidad (1613), the English invasion from Barbados (1665-1666) and the successful French attack (1709-1712), are used to authenticate the narration, being at the same time a pretext to show the history of the family, torn by love, desire, jealousy and personal ambitions. The pace of the narration is characteristically fast and it goes from one major adventure to another, covering more than a century of complicated colonial history within three hundred pages. The opening scenes are used by the author to explain the origins of the van Groenwegel family and the novel proper opens in medias res during an intimate encounter between Kaywana, the titular Amerindian mother, and her first Dutch lover, August Vyfuis.

The meeting takes place in 1613 and is literally interrupted by the attack of the Spanish fleet launched from the nearby Trinidad directly on the Dutch fortifications and their coastal settlement. When August hears the familiar sounds of the cannon attack, he instinctively runs to help his friends, leaving Kaywana alone in the jungle and, almost immediately, he is killed by a Spanish musket. After the attack, the Dutch realize that their interests in the colony require military protection and they send there the young and

⁷ It is all the more surprising that *Children of Kaywana* has been for years misread as a failed attempt at providing the true account of the trauma of African slavery, while slavery is only a background for the actual story. One of such examples may be Benedicte Ledent who mentions Mittelholzer's saga in the context of neo-slave narratives as a failure in representation of African slavery (1997: 272).

⁸ Mittelholzer came from a prominent Swiss-German family, which has been present in Guyana since the beginning of its origins, thus the poignancies between his own family history and the novel are by no means accidental (Seymour 2014: 27-28).

ambitious man, Adriansen van Groenwegel,⁹ who is to become the new Comandeur of Guiana and the main protagonist of the novel. At that point, Mittelholzer shows Kaywana as the active agent of their relationship; the moment she lays her eyes on Adriansen, “a tall young man of about thirty-five with yellow brown hair – something like August’s”, she knows that “this new August would be a great man” (CK¹⁰, 13). Being an attractive and clever woman, she quickly seduces him and together they give the beginning to the Guianese branch of the van Groenwegel family, which is destined to reshape the history of their land. In a sense, then, Mittelholzer depicts van Groenwegel as Guyana’s founding family, and Kaywana as a metaphorical mother of the nation, in whose body the Amerindian and Dutch heritage unite.

As the story unfolds, Mittelholzer places great emphasis on the role played by the individual van Groenwegels in shaping the history of Guiana – the role to which they are predestined by the blood running in their veins. Indeed, they themselves believe that their personalities are a result of the mixture of European and native elements; for example their excessive family pride and passionate character are thought to come from Kaywana and their ambition, economic flair and pragmatism from Adriansen (CK, 62). Furthermore, the decisions they make in their private lives are shown as seminal for their country, though they themselves are not always aware of the fact. For example, the Indian mutiny (1628) is attributed to Adriansen’s excessive reliance on reason, which leads him towards a misjudgement of human nature. As a pragmatic merchant, Adriansen becomes an advocate of the Dutch opening up towards the English, who settle in the nearby Caribbean colonies. When in 1627 hunger strikes Barbados, Adriansen sends them food, seeds and befriends Arawak Indians to teach the English how to plant cassava; hence, he saves them from starvation and their colonial mission from failure.¹¹ He even defends his decision against Kaywana, who accuses him of naivety: “[i]t’s a gesture – a generous gesture towards the English settlers. The short-

⁹ Adriansen is modelled on Adrian Groenwegen, a captain of the Dutch army, the governor of the Eussebio region and its defender against the English invasions (1616-1624) (Ishmael 2013: 48) He was also the pioneer of interior exploration, and the father of the clan which for years “lived on friendly terms both with the natives and with the foreigners, especially English traders” (Ishmael 2013: 48). His name in the version used by Mittelholzer is derived from the English documents, where it was misspelled by major John Scott in his reports on the invasions of Guiana.

¹⁰ All the quotations come from Mittelholzer, Edgar. 1952. *Children of Kaywana*. London: Secker & Warburg, which is henceforth indicated as CK.

¹¹ Historical records confirm that van Groenwegen was a close friend of John Powell, an English officer who settled in Barbados in the 1620s, when the Dutch were already well established in Guiana. In 1627, Powell is reported to have sent to Essequibo for help, and Groenwegen to offer him food supplies and seeds, as well as dispatch a group of his friendly Arawaks to teach the English all they taught the Dutch (Ishmael 2013: 68).

sighted dullards of this settlement may not be able to see it as I do, but in years to come they will thank me for extending a friendly hand to settlers in neighbouring colonies” (CK, 39). He also says that “[the English] promised me faithfully to treat them [Indians] well and give them food from quarters. They won’t be flogged and they will be paid (...)” (CK, 39).

All this is contrary to what he hoped, for Adriansen’s decision backfires immediately as the English enslave the Indians, which turns the local Guianese tribes against Adriansen, shaking the fragile peace of the colony. In 1628, the Indians orchestrate a mutiny during which they plan “to kill out all white men” (CK, 46) and as part of their revenge on the English. On the night of the rebellion, Adriansen delivers a powerful speech to the Indians and he tells them that “I [Adriansen] am your friend. I have always been your friend. But for me you might have been made slaves as the black men from Africa (...) The English have broken faith with me (...). Tomorrow there will be gifts for everyone” (CK, 52). Adriansen is well aware that “without the cooperation of the natives in any land newly discovered the pioneer would be at great disadvantage” (CK, 16) and his behaviour echoes the early settlement strategies based on diplomacy and agreements rather than outwards conflicts (Greenblatt 1991: 108-109). The Indians, in turn, seemingly impressed by Adriansen’s words, drop their weapons and declare themselves the friends of the Dutch; however, they do not conceal the fact that they expect proper gifts in exchange for peace. Their behaviour is historically accurate as, against the pervasive stereotype of Amerindian docility, they were actively negotiating the boundaries of their contacts and they demanded the gifts guaranteed by the Dutch also from the British administration (Menezes 1977: 44-72). Therefore, in a single seemingly innocent scene, Mittelholzer emphasises the Amerindian part in the creation of the country and shows the birth of the Dutch-Indian cooperation, which lay at the very core of the Dutch colonial success.¹²

¹² Guyana’s colonization would not have been possible were it not for the cooperation between the Amerindians and the Dutch, as the latter desperately depended on the natives for their survival in the vast Amazonian jungle. The Amerindians – the noble(r) savages – were officially situated beyond the plantation system but practically, in exchange for gifts and a non-invasive colonial policy, they cooperated with the colonizers. V. S. Naipaul writes that “[e]veryone knows that [in British Guiana] Amerindians hunted down runaway slaves; it was something I heard again and again, from white and black; and on the Rupununi, and wherever one sees Amerindians, it is a chilling memory” (1999 [1964]: 91). Jim Gimlette claims that even in today’s Georgetown the Africans and the Amerindians cherish lasting negative stereotypes about their respective groups and rarely interact (2011: 210). Under the British rule, the position of the Amerindian changed; after the abolition of the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1834), the British no longer depended on the Indian minority, but they made them instead the objects of their civilizing and educational endeavours. In other words, the British developed an intricate system of missions and mission schools dotted all

Indirectly, he also strips the European colonial mission from its benevolent dimension, showing it as a set of hypocritical rules the aim of which was but to ensure survival and prosperity.

Such negotiations of boundaries are visible not only in the public but also in the private sphere, which suggests that the two are inseparably bound. When in the early seventeenth century Adriansen was taking Kaywana as his mistress, the possible incompatibility of their worldviews, religions and traditions was never mentioned. As a European, Adriansen naturally assumed that she, an Amerindian, would adapt to the rules of his world which were undisputedly superior (Greenblatt 1991: 9). Indeed she does so but, with time, certain disparities start coming to light. For example, when Wakkatiki, a tribal chief acknowledged by Adriansen, poisons Adriansen's and Kaywana's child, Adriansen sides with Wakkatiki and discourages Kaywana from taking any action against the man.¹³ To justify his decision, Adriansen employs the argument of Christian mercy, a notion unknown to Kaywana, who lives accordingly to the Amerindian rules where vengeance is a duty one owes to the clan. "I [Kaywana] care nothing for your Christianity", she says, "I only know that when anyone loves me I give my love in return (...) and when anyone hates me I hate in return (...) I don't give them fine presents and say sweet things to them" (*CK*, 42). Adriansen, however, accuses her of barbarism: "[i]f you care to live according to the laws of the beasts, then you must do so and suffer as beasts do" (*CK*, 43).

At this point Adriansen changes from Kaywana's husband to the colonizer, who resorts to the familiar rhetoric of relegating the other to the position of the barbarian, unfamiliar with the Christian way of life. However, the reader is steered towards asking oneself a question about which act is more bestial, Kaywana's murdering the girl or Adriansen's "making gifts to a man who has hurt your [his] own child" (*CK*, 45). Mittelholzer gives no outward answer and he justifies none of his protagonists. What he seems to be saying, then, is that such moral ambiguity, displayed by both the Amerindians and the Europeans, lay at the core of the Guyanese colonial system. Most tellingly, Adriansen's docile policy that ensures the peace in the colony brings about the death of Kaywana herself. When on the night of rebellion he manages to placate the majority of the Indians, Wakkatiki nevertheless attacks Kaywana's household. There, he encounters a fierce opponent in Kaywana, who "fight[s] savagely" for her family and her own life (*CK*, 55); though she dies, she manages to save her children. As a result, she turns into a myth of

over the interior and they started educating the Amerindians into culture, civilization, literacy, trying to convert them to Englishness (Menezes 1977; Henfrey 1964).

¹³ The chief punishes Kaywana for not showing him respect and not recognising his authority which, as he believes, is a result of her pride of being the white man's mistress.

the nation, the embodiment of the violent struggles that are to be faced by the Guyanese and the martyr mother of the Guyanese people; her children and grandchildren oftentimes evoke her name in times of struggle against the English or the French, stressing that they would never forsake their heritage as they are the children of Kaywana: "We're not running. We're going to face up to whatever physical dangers we encounter. (...) We're fighting. We are van Groenwegels. Your grandmother was Kaywana" (CK, 75). It is as if through her body and her blood the van Groenwegels are bound to the colony – their motherland – the defense of which is their duty.

In addition to such attempts at constructing the national myth of origin, *Children of Kaywana* is also a priceless repository of cultural knowledge. As Seymour claimed, through the novel Mittelholzer tried to understand both the origins of the Guyanese class-colour system and his own accidental racial ancestry (Seymour 2014: 28). From Mittelholzer's autobiography, tellingly entitled *A swarthy boy* (1963), one learns that one of his major complexes was that of race. Born a recognizably coloured child in a creolized Swiss-Guyanese family that for generations has tried to erase their African blood, he was a visible sign of the unpredictability of the racial roulette. "For my father", he writes, "it [his birth] was an occasion of momentous disappointment, I turned out to be a swarthy baby!" (Mittelholzer 1963: 17). Consequently, *Children of Kaywana* is the (hi)story of many racially mixed Guyanese families but some critics hold a prevalent focus on race against Mittelholzer. Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1998: 42), for example, writes that "Mittelholzer's obsession with racial purity and family strength in *The Kaywana trilogy* (...) presents a limited New World philosophy by applying the distorted bias of pureblood and ancestors to the reality of a New World situation". This limited philosophy, however, would be difficult to defend in the context of Mittelholzer's personal history and his other novels, in which he acutely analyzes the typically Guyanese nuances of the socio-political reality. Besides, if one looks closely at *Children of Kaywana*, one may notice that the discourse of race is used there for a very particular purpose; namely it shows the moment of historical change in the perception of race in Guyana and the origins of the racial complex displayed by the Guyanese Creole class determined Mittelholzer's father's scorn for his own son. In so doing, the novel lays bare the hypocrisy and cruelty of racial discrimination and by no means propagates the racialist vision of the past.

To understand the said dependencies, one must briefly move back in time to the beginning of the novel and the scene when August Vyfuus is trying to convince Kaywana to have a sexual intercourse with him. Kaywana's initial response to his proposition is that "[her] people won't like it". The argument is quickly refuted by August's, who brings up Kaywana's own racial impurity, which situates her as if in-between the two orders, and which is her asset and

not a curse: “They won’t mind. You’re a half-breed. Your father is English – an English sailor. You aren’t a pure Indian, so it won’t matter” (CK, 8). Such an opening already thematises Guiana as a space of frequent interracial contacts, and shows that colonial society has not always been divided into the white dominating class and the racially impure rest. As Katherine Howlett-Hayes (2013: 1-16) writes, racially separated histories of the colonizers and the colonized are but a myth and the seventeenth century was the time when the first settlers frequently adapted to the rules of the new world, since the official socio-political organization of overseas dominions was yet nonexistent. At that time such categories as class, religion and race were incoherent and still open to negotiation; in Guiana the Dutch merchants commonly took Indian concubines and gave beginnings to multicultural and multilingual families. The phenomenon was quite unique in the Caribbean region since, in the other Caribbean territories, the Amerindian population was almost extinct by 1630, which “shifted the demographic balance to people of European and African descent” (Higman 2011: 81). In Guiana even in the early nineteenth century, the British noted the frequent presence of Dutch names among the tribal Indians and their ability to speak Dutch Creole, which was a living testimony to the nature and frequency of the Dutch-Indian contacts (Menezes 1977: 42). Indeed, in *Children of Kaywana* various protagonists even brag about having a drop of Indian blood running in their veins. Willem, Kaywana’s son, continuously repeats that “[he is] proud of [his] mother”, her Indian heritage, and thus he “venerates her memory” (CK, 62). He also instills a similar pride into his grandchildren, saying that “[w]e come of tough stock. Fighter stock (...) your grandmother was Kaywana. Fire-blood. Fire-blood” (CK, 63, 75).

The era of strict racial(ist) policy dawns on the colonies and the metropolis with the introduction of African slavery, and it takes place simultaneously at the level of representations and social structures, situating the Africans lower on the evolutionary and social scale (Holwett-Hayess 2013: 7). From this moment, race is viewed as the *lack* of “a Christian soul, capability for civilized behaviour, intelligence, evolution” (Holwett-Hayess 2013: 7), but also an excess of sexual appetite attributed to oriental and radicalized bodies (Said 2003 [1978]: 167). Such a paradoxical perception of racial difference placed the West in a somewhat schizophrenic position towards the colonial other, who was simultaneously the object of its contempt and desire. As Homi Bhabha (2004: 96) writes, *the other* embodies both the “desire and derision” of the colonizer and Robert Young (1995: 9) claims similarly that “theories of race were thus also covert theories of desire”. In *Children of Kaywana*, Mittelholzer captures not only the exact moment when African slavery and racialism enter Guiana, but also shows how the desire for *the other* displayed by both parties – the colonizer and the colonized –

contributes to the creation of a complicated colour-class structure of Guianese society (Glasgow 1970: 30).

Robert Glasgow notes that one of the most difficult truths about the colonial past for the Guyanese to accept is the fact that “[t]he whole colour-class system was dependent upon (...) ‘the willing submission’ and the almost universal acceptance of white superiority and black inferiority” (1970: 30). Paradoxically, it was guarded not only by the plantocracy but also by the coloured population, which jealously safeguarded their position of superiority towards the field slaves for example. The unspoken rule was that the further from African ancestry and colour, the higher the social position and social prestige (Glasgow 1970: 43). Such a colour-class scale was omnipresent, but not coherent across the Caribbean, and “[t]he same person could be considered “white” in the Dominican Republic, [and] trigueno in Puerto Rico”, but everywhere “white was the ultimate position” and every “notch [on the colour belt] mattered profoundly” (Carrion 2005: 29). In his *Journal of West India proprietor*, Matthew Lewis writes that in the Caribbean “the females [of colour were] generally preferring to live with white men, and the brown men having thus no other resource than black women” (1833: 172); hence, *Children of Kaywana* is a crude, unembellished, and at times violent historical account of such unbelievably discriminatory policies being imposed on the country by the colonial authorities, but also internalized by the Guianese themselves.

Tellingly, the novel narrates the very first transportation of the African slaves organized by the newly established Dutch West Indian Company in 1621, which sealed Guiana’s fate as an exploitative colony.¹⁴ The seminal first transportation is depicted as a scene of excitement, fascination and curiosity when Kaywana’s oldest son, August, demands a visit to the port, where he heard that the slave-ships are docking. He welcomes the slaves with such exclamations as “[b]lack people! I never knew there were black people” (CK, 30) and then he goes on to “inspect” their bodies, willing to learn something more about such ‘unearthly’ creatures. Unlike the protagonists, the reader knows that this seemingly innocent scene is the beginning of a whole new era in the history of Guiana. Mittelholzer says:

[t]hat was not the only day they saw black men. There were many other days when they stood and watched them sweating in the fields. Black bodies with muscles that rippled. (...) Men of Africa, thick-lipped and thick-skulled. They looked oft-

¹⁴ The procurement of slaves started in 1621, but developed on a mass scale across the 1630s when the Dutch introduced sugar cane into the Eussebio plantations, which generated the so far unprecedented need for a cheap, but strong, workforce. This, in turn, triggered its economic transformation into an “exploitation colony”, a typical form of colony in the Caribbean, specialized mostly in the production of one export good, here sugar, and otherwise dependent on the metropolis (Glasgow 1970: 8).

times like beasts out there, toiling in the noon. *But when you looked closer you were startled, for you could glimpse the flame of humanity like magnificent lightning in their blood-shot eyes* (CK, 31; emphasis mine, MF).

What one may observe in the above quoted passage is how the author strives to recreate the colonial way of thinking about the African other, exemplified by the exotic and unfamiliar body. The men are “thick-lipped and thick-skulled” and they look like “beasts”. Their eyes, nevertheless, indicate humanity and understanding, which breeds uneasiness among the planters, aware, much as they would like to suppress the feeling, of the injustice of the colonial system. “The presence of large numbers of slaves had always evoked fear and impelled measures of precaution on the part of plantocracy” (1970: 28), writes Robert Glasgow, and this fear is observable in the references to the African bestial look of violence that could be directed against the colonizer.

Within less than a generation from this first meeting in the port, van Groenwegels become a typical example of the Creole family, torn in-between the desire and contempt for the other, allowing some representatives of the slaves to lay claim to their familial legacy. The very embodiment of such contradictory forces is Lauren, Willem’s son and Kaywana’s grandson, who implicates himself in a relationship with his cousins, Katherine and Hannah, both illegitimate children of his uncle, August, and slave women. The racial love story between Lauren and the two half-sisters is a peculiarly colonial example of a semi-incestuous love triangle, where the white planter is being tormented by the desire for the exotic bodies. As Lauren says, “I tell myself sometimes that it must be the colour in them; I must have an instinctive partiality for coloured women” (CK, 105) and he never conceals that his fascination is purely physical; at some point he is even reported to declare that he “only wants [their] bodies” (CK, 129). Furthermore, his longing for an exotic body is mingled with a dose of cultural domination over the other and “[a]t times he [feels] a sense of elation at his superiority, his being better than they” (CK, 115). Hence, Lauren is a perfect example of colonialism as “the desiring machine” and the embodiment of the stereotype that the white men long for domination and possession of the black women’s bodies, repeated in many a colonial text (Young 1995: 98).¹⁵

¹⁵ John Stedman in his journal mentions that in Surinam almost all colonial men had ‘coloured’ mistresses or maintained loose sexual contacts with many slave women. There are even descriptions of peculiar practices when the planters forced their slave female servants to serve nude above the waist or, in the case of the prettier black girls, completely naked (Stedman 1790: 284). Thomas St. Clair in his Guianese journals devoted a whole section to “Native mistresses of the Europeans” as a common phenomenon. He writes that “[t]wo of our officers were living in barracks with two of these girls; one in Demerara, Lieutenant Myers, had a beautiful young mulatto, and Lieutenant Clark, in Berbice, had with him a fine

In the same vein, Katherine and Hannah are nothing but stock figures symbolizing a particular strata and behaviour patterns characteristic of the colour-class society. More precisely, “Katherine is fair and has lovely wavy brown hair” and she is “a quadroon”; Hannah, in turn, “looks as if she’s half and half. Her hair is very curly, and she has an olive complexion” (CK, 71). Naturally, then, Katherine appears far more attractive to the colonizer’s and Hannah is described as “not very pretty”, having “inherited her black mother’s broad features” (CK, 71). This peculiar perception of beauty as dependent on race was a common enough phenomenon; Thomas St. Clair, for example, writes that “in regard to the American, the African, and the European (...) [I] cannot form an opinion which is best for natural purposes; though I adjudge the decided superiority to the European in point of personal appearance and outward beauty” (Clair 1834: 276). Hence, what may be most striking for the reader is not the colonial beauty canon as such, but the fact that the girls are perfectly aware of its rules, and the possibilities it provides them with. Though they are half-sisters, they instantly become rivals to Lauren’s heart as they both see some potential benefits of the interracial union. Hannah, for example, wants to become the mother of Lauren’s child, knowing that it would elevate her social position (CK, 113).¹⁶ Katherine strives for an excuse to escape from work and, just like Hannah, for social prestige: “[i]f Masa want me I must glad take him, because he’ll treat me good and not give me plenty work (...) [a]ll other slaves got to treat me wid respect if Masa make me his woman” (CK, 113). Katherine also cruelly uses her racial superiority against Hannah, telling her sister that “[y]our [Hannah’s] skin dark. Mine fair like his (...) My hair long and smooth and glossy like his (...) Your hair curl up and short and black” (CK, 121).

Furthermore, the sisters conform to the colonial stereotype of unrestrained sexuality ascribed to oriental and black bodies (Said 2000 [1978]: 165). Hanna, the darker of the two, is shown as sexually loose, while Katherine is still a virgin. In one of the scenes they debate their sexual attractiveness for the white man and Katherine says that “I hear white massa like girls better when thay not sleep wid no other man”; Hannah, however, argues that this is “stupid” since “[g]irl who never slept wid man before not as nice as girl who sleep wid plenty man” (CK, 121-122). Katherine’s lighter colour and sexual restraint become her undisputable advantages in the struggle over Lauren; she proves not only better versed in the rules of colonial

handsome black woman” (Clair 1834: 113). He also confirms the practice of the nude servant girls as the planters’ perversity.

¹⁶ The benefits of having a white father were very tangible. For example, as Matthew Lewis writes, by custom mulatto children were never delegated to field work and were trained solely for domestic duties and sometimes educated to perform more complex and worthy jobs (1833: 109).

society but also biologically predestined to succeed over Hannah. More precisely, Hannah is barren and, when Katherine gets pregnant with Lauren, she drowns herself from grief.¹⁷ As a result, Lauren, touched by Hanna's fate and by the responsibility for the child that would have a drop of Kaywana's blood, decides to marry Katherine. Interestingly enough, the toughest opponent of his marriage he finds in his own father, Willem, who, excessively proud of his Amerindian heritage, cannot stand the introduction of slave blood into the family. The longish descriptions of Willem's reactions to his son's will to marry Katherine most tangibly highlight the fact that race and racialism in Guiana was primarily a socio-cultural construct, which had nothing to do with predetermined, biological differences.

Willem's reaction is all the more peculiar as Katherine and Hannah's provenance as the daughters of his brother, August, is openly acknowledged; yet even in view of this indisputable blood bond, Willem refuses to accept the girls' right to claim van Groenwegels' name, solely due to their inferior social position as slaves. "They're slaves. So far as I am concerned, they have no connection with us whatever and I hope that will be clearly understood by everyone in this house. Don't let me hear referring to them as your half cousins" (*CK*, 70-71), he says. Even the fact of his own racial impurity and illegitimacy does not make Willem sympathize with Lauren's plea. "Men can say we're van Groenwegels with the bar sinister", he says, but "not a mortal can drain the blood of [Adriansen and Kaywana] from my veins" (*CK*, 62); slave blood, nevertheless, would be a stain on the family's name. The most interesting moment comes when one of Willem's friends, an old planter like himself, decodes the irony of strict adherence to racial and social conventions in Guiana:

Sir I'm aware that you hold strong views on this question of your blood, but if you may permit me to say so, we in this small colony should not put too much importance on matters of blood and lineage. We are still pioneers. (...) It's true in your homes you live magnificently in your own way – what with your deer and fowl and duck and turkey and pigeons, not to mention your gin and mum and wine and brandy (...) Well why fuss over family ties and blood! This girl Laurens want to marry is a slave but she's three-quarters white, reckoning her father white, which he was not; he was a quarter Indian, like yourself (*CK*, 146-147).

¹⁷ The moment itself does not undermine the eighteenth century stereotype of mulatto's selective barrenness repeated inter alia by Edward Long in his *The history of Jamaica*. Long claimed that "the Mulatto" is of a "mule-kind" but incapable of producing children with others of their kind. With the white or the black it is possible and offspring is numerous; even though Long claims that there might be some exceptions to his rules, he himself has never heard of two "Mulattos" producing offspring that would live to maturity (1774: 335-336).

What manifests itself most prominently in the quoted passage is the fact that the man clearly places the roots of racial prejudice in the socio-cultural, rather than biological, context. Since the country is relatively young, they may still push the borders of race and class, allowing for small exemptions from the rules; with no real aristocracy, there will be no one to question the legitimacy of Katharine's child, as there was no one to question Willem's. Under such logical arguments, Willem agrees to tolerate his son's choice, but never to endorse it: "I'm a disappointed man. (...) I shall never be converted to the belief that our family has not been tainted. I shall never be reconciled to this slave-blood which Laurens has seen fit to introduce into our family" (CK, 147). His reaction may seem to the reader ridiculous as the girl is "three-quarters white", raised in the European manner and familiar with European customs and thus more adaptable to the European framework than his own mother, Kaywana, ever was. Ultimately, even though Lauren manages to marry Katherine, the atmosphere around his formal marriage is far more stigmatizing than around Adriansen and Kaywana's cohabitation, whose mixed-blood union was accepted by both Dutchmen and Amerindians and from which Willem inherited his father's name and estates.

Another significant commentary on the formative power of the colonial ideology of impure, and potentially questionable, racial background is embodied by Hendrickje, Katherine and Lauren's daughter, who bears no mark of her mother's tainted blood, closely resembling her Dutch ancestors. In spite of her physicality, she is an exemplary case of "Creole anxiety", a state which, according to Keith Sandiford, best describes a certain schizophrenic conditioning of the raising colonial Creole class. Sandiford analyzed the early colonial texts produced by the colonials and plantation owners, determining that they all invariably contain "connotations of conflict and struggle" and show how a Creole identity was being coined in-between the inferiority complex towards Europe and superiority towards the slaves (Sandiford 2003: 7). In other words, the metropolis looked down on the colonialists, stereotyping them as pretentious nouveau riches with potentially impure blood. The Creoles, in turn, struggled "to win a tenuous and elusive legitimacy for an evolving ideal of the Creole civilization" (Sandiford 2003: 3). The European disregard for the Creole was in fact an uncanny reflection of the racial stereotypes directed at the African slave. T. Lothrop Stoddard, for example, writes that:

in spite of the conformity of origin, colour and interests, the whites from Europe, and the white Creoles, form two classes, which, by their mutual pretensions, are so widely sundered that necessity alone can bring them together. The former, [are] with more breeding, more politeness, and more knowledge of the world (...) [y]et, if the Creoles were a little more cautious than they are at present in their too early

connections with women (...) I am persuaded, I say, that all the advantages would be on their side (1914: 19).

Stoddard reverses the old colonial conviction of the inseparability of climate and character, claiming that “[b]oth in mind and body the Creoles showed the influence of their tropical environment. Physically they were tall and slender (...) [i]n character they were generous, warm-hearted (...) reckless, frivolous, (...) while their indolence usually hindered the development of their talents”. He sums up that “[t]he two main causes of the Creole’s special nature were climate and slavery”, and that they are erratic and cruel people (1914: 26-27).

The Creoles, just like the African slaves, are well aware of the racial stereotypes directed against them and thus they display an obsession with racial “purity and pollution” (Sandiford 2003: 4), trying to symbolically set themselves apart from the coloured and slave populations. Abner Cohen notes that the pressure to maintain racial purity was especially harsh on the Creole women who, due to their reproductive potential, were in themselves a collective symbol of the continuity of European values and the white race in the colonies. They embodied “the mystique and cult of eliteness” that must be preserved and passed on to future generations (1981: 82). Hendrickje, then, perceives her role as a Creole woman accordingly to the rules of both the Creole anxiety and Creole eliteness. Herself being a daughter of a slave, she is an example of the obsession with family blood and ‘proper’ reproduction, which Wilson-Tagoe ridiculed in her review of the novel (1998: 42). From her early teens, Hendrickje was determined to marry her cousin, Ignatius, “[t]o keep the blood together” and she never “want[ed] to marry outside of the family” (CK, 156).

Her primary goal in life is spreading the blood and everybody knows that “[s]he is determined we [the family] must spread” and she wants everyone “to have a lot of children” (CK, 156). She partially fulfils her dream and gives birth to two sons, Cornelis and Adrian, but all her other pregnancies prove unsuccessful, which makes her even more obsessed with the inability to produce children, and excessively cruel to her two living sons. They even call her a “terrible black, dirty beast”, toying with the supposed relationship between race and barbarity, and openly admit to their desire of killing her (CK, 244). Ultimately, Hendrickje becomes a caricature of the Creole aristocracy and the apotheosis of the colonial complex, which, just like the colonial desire, was a cornerstone on which the oppressive nature of the colonial system was built. It is by no means accidental, then, that the novel closes with an allusion that Hendrickje might have forced an incestuous relationship with Adrian, her younger son, and thus crossed the ultimate line separating the civilized (wo)man from the barbarian (Todorov 2010: 14). In the second installment of the trilogy it is even suggested that she has been

murdered by the slaves, who could not tolerate her bestial cruelty. Hence, her barbarity stems from her refusal to accept her own impure racial legacy which, as Mittelholzer seems to suggest, made the planters excessively cruel to the slaves, who were the living embodiments of their own inferiority. Though the novel by no means justifies Hendrickje, or the class she represents, it nevertheless indicates that violence and racial discrimination were common historical experiences of all the Guyanese. Paradoxical as it may seem, they were the formative forces of the Guyanese nation whose earliest history was determined by the rules of the thoroughly unfair colonial system.

Taking all such aspects into account, *Children of Kaywana*, regardless of its questionable literary quality, remains an interesting example of a creative approach to the earliest colonial history of Guyana. It provides the reader with a detailed vision of the Guyanese past, which offers one a semblance of an understanding of the inherently illogical colonial and racial history of this deeply fragmented country. Mittelholzer by no means idealizes the Guyanese history and he shows how they all – the Amerindian, the African and the European – contributed to the creation of the colonial system and, in a broader perspective, the Guyanese nation. He also tries to explain the origins of racial inequality, Creole brutality and the Guyanese own anxieties connected with their origins. In so doing, he takes up a difficult topic that only now, sixty years after the publication of his novel, the Guyanese seem ready to face. It is also not without significance that he constructs his novel on stock characters who, though they fulfil their discursive functions, are nevertheless difficult to empathize with. Therefore some of his deficiencies in retelling the Guyanese history are difficult to defend. However, they do not stem from, as Seymour claimed, the novel's necessary compromise on the historical data, the accuracy of which is in fact impressive; instead, they result from the novel's failure to procure the allegorical sense of the Guyanese historical experience.

In other words, trying to coin the myth of Kaywana, the mother of the nation, as well as the founding colonial family trapped in the paradoxes of the Guyanese history, Mittelholzer simply replants the realist romance paradigm onto the grounds of Guyanese history. In a country where the legitimacy of the colonial aristocracy was at best questionable, placing them at the heart of the narration undermines the primary function of the historical romance, namely showing the relatable national history. Furthermore, his fierce adherence to the realist paradigm of narration and linear time, which theoretically should ensure historical reliability (Lukács 1962: 25), makes his tale essentially inauthentic to the average reader. In Guyana, historical sensitivity aroused in a radically non-Western and non-linear conditioning and the true histories of the Guyanese people are rarely to be found in the libraries and archives, where Mittelholzer sought them. Moreover, his vision of history as a progressive

cause-and-effect process is but an imitation of the colonial paradigm and the novel, as the whole trilogy in fact, is both an archivist success and a storytelling failure. Juanita Cox argues even that Mittelholzer contributed to the Guyanese authors' long reluctance to directly engage with the colonial history and the historical novel, unwillingly emphasizing all the possible pitfalls of the genre (Cox 2014). It is all the more intriguing, then, to set his tale against the latest plantation narrative, which finds a happy middle ground between history, ethno-history and the story.

2.2. History running like water in *Weaving water* (2013) by Ryhaan Shah

Weaving water (2013) is set on the Guianese plantation among the East-Indian community at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is both a historical plantation narrative, which allows one to place it in the context of *Children of Kaywana*, and a novel about history, which adheres to the allegorical realist paradigm of the historical representation. Broadly speaking, the novel dramatizes the fates of the people who embarked on the very last ship carrying workers from India to Guiana and then it proceeds to depict their lives in the colony. It also asks questions about the role they have played in (re)shaping the Guianese society and the national responsibilities they have acquired towards their new homeland. The narration is divided into the realist depiction of the historical experience of the plantation life and the allegorical depictions of History as an abstract, uncontrollable but meaningful force, shaping their collective and individual lives. For this reason, it is an interesting example of a fusion between the realism of the historical novel and the allegorical sense of historicity characteristic of the Caribbean History.

Weaving water is also a very tangible example of the possible pitfalls inherent in the classification of the Caribbean historical novels. Namely, it is being advertised as a magical realist novel, which makes it immediately familiar to an average reader and potential buyer, but such a classification unwillingly obscures the novel's serious, and at points even moralist, investment into the representation and interpretation of Guyanese history.¹⁸ It

¹⁸ In *Ordinary enchantments* (2004) Wendy Faris defines magical realism through five major elements: “[f]irst, the text contains an ‘irreducible element’ of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity” (2004: 7). Magical realism, then, is not the aesthetics reserved for the historical fiction, but in *The historical novel* Jerome de Groot provides Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie as the

additionally places the novel in the context of the works of such authors as Wilson Harris, whom some still wrongly deem a magical realist writer, and it suggests the nonexistent continuity between his abstract and imaginative fiction on history and the Guyanese historical novel. Furthermore, *Weaving water* may trigger the associations with historiographic metafiction, and especially *The passion* (1987) by Jeanette Winterson, as in both novels one of the protagonists is a mermaid-like creature magically connected to water. Nevertheless, *Weaving water* is by no means compatible with Winterson's message of "Trust me, I'm telling you stories" as its serious approach to History denies the ironic postmodern notion of historical representation. In other words, in *Weaving water* History is equally important as (hi)story, even though the novel is not obsessively centred on the realist notion of time and linearity as Edgar Mittelholzer's was. Therefore, it is being argued that it should be approached as a postcolonial historical novel invested in the allegorical realist description of things past, the particular subject of which is Guyana and the Guyanese historical experience.

The historical frame of the novel is the last journey of the ship known as *S.S. Ganges* from India to British Guiana, which took place in 1917. It brought to Demerara 437 immigrants, including 39 children, and was the last ship to seal the era of indentured labour, which begun in 1838.¹⁹ On the deck

examples of magical realism being used for the representation of history, which in his eyes testifies to the elasticity of the mode as the possible means of historical representation (2010: 128). De Groot, however, does not write anything on the allegory in the historical fiction and, but for *Wide Sargasso sea* (1966) as the rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, he does not mention the Caribbean fiction at all. One could even argue that Marquez and Rushdie differ in their thematisations of the past but, as such deliberations are beyond the scope of the present thesis, suffice it to say that the comparison of the Latin American marvellous poetics to the Guyanese writings has always been problematic. Wilson Harris many times said that the poetics of Marquez is not compatible with the Guyanese experience of history and fictional discourse; he saw the term as meaningless and imposed on all beyond-realist works produced by the postcolonial writers (Meas-Jelinek 2006: xvi). Despite such claims, in *Routledge companion to postcolonial studies* (2007) one may read that "Caribbean writers whose work can be situated in the Latin American tradition of magic realism are the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier and Guyanese novelist and poet Wilson Harris" (Otto 2007: 106). Besides, Hamish Dalley himself claimed that allegorical realism is not antithetical to the techniques used by magical realism, especially its resistance of linear historicity and unreal occurrences. The major difference between the two, then, is the serious and moral investment in the historical representation and the interpretation of the colonial history that is an obligatory part of the allegorical realism and not so much of magical realism (Dalley 2014: 12). It is undeniable that *Weaving water* does contain some marvellous elements; however, it is necessary to stress that it is essentially a historical novel, very visibly invested in the (re)writing of the Guyanese histories and the realist description of History and the historical experience of the Guyanese East-Indians.

¹⁹ Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), the well known Victorian novelist and traveller, writes that in Guiana in the nineteenth-century, just after the abolition of African slavery, there

of this historical ship the reader meets the fictional figures of Rampat and Parvati, a young married couple who, unlike Mittelholzer's protagonists, are fully relatable individuals. At the same time, they are also typified representations of their generational experiences and of the East-Indian rite of passage to Guiana. The reader quickly learns their stories, which provide some answers as to why they decided to embark on the journey into the unknown. Rampat and Parvati escape the Indian reality of caste stratification, where, according to the strict rules of the Hindu religion, their marriage was a misalliance settled against the will of Rampat's family. Traditional Hinduism recognizes eight types of marriage, including a love marriage entered into with no knowledge of the parents, but only the marriage arranged and blessed by the elders earns the bride the respect of the groom's family (Klostermaier 2003: 155). Therefore, in India Parvati is openly disregarded by her mother in law and the wives of Rampat's brothers. What makes matters worse, she cannot conceive a child, and the goal of the Hindu marriage is "to enable a man to offer to the gods and to beget a son who will ensure the continuity of the sacrifice". This gift is significant not only for the well-being of the father and the family on Earth, but also for the spiritual peace of the ancestors (Klostermaier 2003: 155). Therefore, her mother-in-law does not even try to conceal her disappointment, telling Parvati that a "barren woman is worse than mud" (*Ww*²⁰, 16), and thus Parvati's failure to produce a child is a curse hanging upon her marriage, which at some point becomes impossible to bear.

Suffocated by the atmosphere of his household, Rampat is an easy prey for a colonial agent employed to recruit plantation workers. In other words, he sees emigration as an answer to all his problems: "And it was then (...) when

was an "ample scope for sugar and ample room for Coolies" and Demerara planters were awaiting them with great anticipation (1860: 136). Trollope reports how one of them asks to "[g]ive me my heart's desire in Coolies" with whose help we would "make you a million of hogsheads of sugar" (Trollope 1860: 137). The procurement of East-Indian workers as a replacement for freed slaves began in 1838 and they first docked in Guiana on May 5th brought by two ships *Whitby* and *Hesperus*. The difference between East-Indian indenture and African slavery lay in the fact that, technically, the East-Indians were free people who signed the contract for ten years, after the fulfillment of which they had the right of claiming the paid return to India. In 1869, however, when around thirty thousand East-Indian workers became entitled to their passage back home, the authorities realized that the government could not easily bear such costs and they enticed them to stay by granting pieces of land; many indeed decided to stay in the colony, becoming a legitimate part of the Guyanese society (Ishmael 2013: 172-177; 206-209; 215-216). From 1851, the British authorities procured also Chinese workers who came, though in small numbers, and were more interested in small business enterprises than working on sugar plantations (Ishmael 2013: 188). The stories of the Chino-Guyanese are preserved in the semi-autobiographical novels by Jan Shinebourne, such as *The last English plantation* (1988) or *Timepiece* (1986).

²⁰ All the quotations come from Shah, Ryhaan. 2013. *Weaving water*. Croydon: Cutting Edge Press, which is henceforth indicated as *Ww*.

he felt that every door was closed to him, that Rampat heard the *arkati* speaking in the market about the Demerara, about the golden sugar lands in the new world” (*Ww*, 19). The agents employed by the British are selling Guiana as the land of sugar and gold, an El Dorado, infecting the East-Indians with Raleigh’s disease. They promised “[s]uch easy work, a child could do it” and a “good pay”, “liv[ing] in nice quarters” with “[s]un and sweet sugar”. It is to last only “five years” and then they will “sail back home rich as maharajahs!” (*Ww*, 19). For Rampat their words “were magic” (*Ww*, 20) as they offered an “escape [from] all the troubles and [they could] come back to a free India” (*Ww*, 20). Gaiutra Bahadur, the American journalist who decided to write down the histories of her own Indo-Guyanese ancestors, claims that “[i]n the tales of leaving India handed down through generations, chance encounters with recruiters who exploited misfortune feature regularly (Bahadur 2013: 38); she even mentions an East-Indian folk song where the recruiter is presented in such words: “Oh the recruiter your heart is deceitful. Your speech is full of lies” (Bahadur 2013: 38).

The escape from India was also a possibility of reinventing oneself outside the rigid structure of the Indian society. For example, many Hindu women willingly embarked on the ships heading towards Guiana, having previously declared themselves unmarried. They were using the passage as a chance of running away from their husbands and the procedure was so common that in 1833 the Indian government passed a law to oblige the recruiters to verify their passengers’ actual marital status (Bahadur 2013: 16). Furthermore, “[t]o leave [India] was to cross *kala pani*, “the dark waters” of the Indian Ocean and therefore to lose caste, according to the scriptures of Hinduism” (Bahadur 2013: 19).²¹ In Guyana, then, the old caste divisions did not apply and therefore they all could seek their happiness in the new country on an equal footing. This promise of self-reinvention outside the caste lures the third main protagonist of the novel, Billa, the future neighbour and friend of Rampat and Parvati. Billa, as the representative of the lowest Indian caste, sees in Guiana the chance of bettering his material well-being. The reader learns that, when he was barely six years old, he left his home and started living on the street, wishing to spare his parents another mouth to feed. He was fetching and carrying luggage in the bazaar but it soon occurred that he was a talented boxer and he started earning money through illegal fights. His career ended the night he was attacked and severely cut with a knife. Deprived of his only source of income – the boxing matches – he seeks “a ship [that]

²¹ The phrase *kala pani* derives from the Sanskrit word ‘kal’ (death) and its meaning is close to *water of death*, though it is often being translated as the Black Water (Murthy 2011: 41-43). East-Indians use it as an allegory of their crossing the Indian Ocean, and it signifies not only their physical journey but also their rite of passage into the new world.

was going to sail soon to the new world of the west” (*Ww*, 145). The passengers of *S.S. Ganges*, then, are the last representatives of a transitory generation, which has tangible memory of India and which partakes in the experience of Indian (e)migration.

The idea of them being a bridge between the two worlds is noticeable even in “[t]he very name of the ship the S. S. Ganges”, which “had been a comfort, an omen even” (*Ww*, 16). Symbolically – like the Thames in *Heart of darkness* – it links the two worlds, but it has no negative connotations and it offers them a sense of continuity and familiarity. The two worlds are additionally linked by Neela, a child born to the travelling mother on the deck of the ship, whom Billa perceives as the symbol of the new beginning. For him she is “the baby born out of the belly of the sea”, a liminal child of her two motherlands and two (hi)stories, which she will grow to embody. It is also vital to mention that Neela is a gift and an emblem of the new life for Parvati and Rampat when her birth mother dies and Parvati claims the child as her own. The story of the birth and sea is in fact part of the collective historical memory of crossing the *kala pani*, preserved by the Indo-Guyanese. Gaiutra Bahadur mentions similar stories told by the first generation immigrants; as she writes, “[t]he Hindu god who destroys in order to create (...) did not forget the ‘tween decks. Four percent of emigrant women arriving in Georgetown in the dozen years before Sujaria did give birth abroad ship” (2013: 62). One of the women she interviewed was actually born on the ship and she describes her coming to the world in such words: “[o]n that mad ocean, when all was tossing (...) on that mad ocean I was born, on that mad ocean I came to life” (Bahadur 2013: 62). To summarize the tale, Bahadur beautifully notes that “*she could have been telling the creation story of our people, mine and hers*” (2013: 62; emphasis mine, MF) and indeed this is how Ryhaan Shah presents the story of Neela and her adoptive parents – as a creation story of her people – alluding to the actual inseparability of historical facts, familial memories and the metaphysical experience of History.

Weaving water codifies also other events and fleeting sensations connected with the Indian rite of passage, for example the shock of arrival in Guiana and the confrontation with the structure of the post-abolitionist society. When Rampat and Parvati finally reach Guiana what staggers them most is the sight of the Afro-Guyanese people: “when they arrived at the British Guiana (...) [they’ve] seen, for the first time, African people with their matted hair” (*Ww*, 37). But for such cursory remarks, there is hardly any interaction depicted between the two groups. Namely, the East-Indians and the Afro-Guyanese live side by side, on the two neighbouring plantations and they belong to two disparate social classes. The free Afro-Guyanese are now employed by the colonialists as overseers for the East-Indian plantation workers and, as Rampat and Billa testify, they do not spare the whip, as if

replaying their own traumas of slavery on the newcomers (*Ww*, 79). The depicted situation is typical and historically accurate, since the Guyanese colonial authorities purposefully reorganized the post-abolitionist plantations to set the two groups against each other.²² A similar phenomenon took place in Trinidad and Tobago, the other Anglo-Caribbean society with a great African-Asian disparity, and in both countries the colonial policy translated itself into a peculiar ethnic dynamics of non-interaction between the two groups; more precisely, “Indians and blacks each felt superior to the other, and created a number of [ethnic pejorative] myths and stereotypes of each other” (Alleyne 2005: 212). This phenomenon was enhanced by “residential segregation between Indians and Africans that was instituted on the plantations during indentureship continued in the form of Indian villages in the post-indenture period” (Alleyne 2005: 212). In the places where the number of East-Indians was less significant, like Jamaica, they became absorbed into the mainstream society, but in Guyana they formed a separate social class.

Hence, but for sporadic occasions, neither the East-Indians nor the Afro-Guyanese display much interest in each other’s lives, traditions and (hi)stories. For Billa and Rampat the breakthrough moment comes when the giant African overseer Sampson, vilifying the East-Indian workers, is challenged by Billa, a still agile boxer, and defeated in a David versus Goliath confrontation. Thus Billa earns great fame as the East-Indian hero, but also Samson’s respect (*Ww*, 52). From this moment Billa and Rampat become friends with Sampson and the only members of their community to actually visit the African part of the village. They slowly become aware of the complexity of the Afro-Guyanese pasts, the history of Guiana and the true affinity of their – African and Indian – experiences. Billa, for example, recognizes that Guiana is built on violence, which is part of all their lives and which may, one day, repeat itself: “[T]he place had bled and taken slaves and lives (...) [and] in such a place (...) nothing much existed beyond the present

²² The similar descriptions of plantation life and the relationship between the two groups may be found in the historical novel *The counting house* (1996) by David Dabydeen. Similarly, Dabydeen describes the East-Indian passage to Guyana including the same elements as Shah does, namely the promises sold to the potential workers in India and then the confrontation with the reality of the plantation life, and racial animosities. The aesthetics of Dabydeen’s novel, especially the crude descriptions of living conditions and racial struggles, echo the brutality and sensuality noticeable also in the historical writings of Harold Sonny Ladoo (1945-1973) and A. R. Webber (1880-1932), and of course Edgar Mittelholzer. Gail Low claims that *The counting house* shatters all the ethical or moral expectations one might have had before reading it (Low 2007: 205-218). The implications of the historical Afro-Guyanese and East-Indian animosities may be also found in Dabydeen’s *Disappearance*, where the Afro-Guyanese engineer has significant difficulties in gaining the respect of his East-Indian workers.

and a brief brutal past, that the ground could shift from under them at any moment" (*Ww*, 155). Rampat also "liked to bother his head with those things, about knowing Georgetown and all its streets, and finding out about Sampson and how they lived and how they had come to the colony" (*Ww*, 119).

Billa and Rampat, then, know that the Africans "have stories too" and they too "have feelings" and memories, which are no less true, and no less traumatic, than those of their own. After all, the East-Indians "were never bought and sold in the marketplace like goods" as the Africans were (*Ww*, 61), which does not diminish their own suffering as indenture workers.²³ Furthermore, they also recognize the fears of the other side, sensing that "[t]he Africans feel entitled to this land, they feel that [we]'re taking it away from them" (*Ww*, 60), literally claiming the plots offered by the government in exchange for staying in Guiana after the period of indenture. All the other East-Indians dismiss their uncanny interest in history as having no connection with their present lives. "This time is longtime", Parvati says every time Rampat rambles about "the country and its history, and the politics of the place, of the coming changes" (*Ww*, 119). This ignorance of history, Shah seems to be saying, is one of the many underlying reasons for the ethnic misunderstanding in Guyana.

In a broader context, Shah not only explicitly warns her readers against ignoring history, but also against changing their legacy into the rigid frames of ethno-histories, which may then be used in the political struggle against *the other*. She shows the older generation – Rampat, Parvari and Billa – as the last living link in-between the old and the new world and the younger generation – embodied by Billa's son Kirsh – as the critical historians of their parents' pasts, who construct an ideologized version of the East-Indian past (see: Smith 1990: 127-137). The conflict may be read in terms of the struggle to translate the legacy of a collective memory, which is naturally uncodified, into the written history. Collective memory, as Maurice Halbwachs wrote, is a social phenomenon deeply rooted in the act of collective telling and remembering of the past within familial or private circles. The remembered past is reconstructed in view of the present and for the purposes of the present (Halbwachs 1992 [1914]: 40). Hence, it does not last in an unchanged form and it does not make claim to objectivity. It also ends where history begins, namely with the death of the witness (Halbwachs 2007: 139). Paul Riceour, in turn, claims that the collective memory and history co-exist and the role of the

²³ Bahadur mentions that the comparisons between the Middle Passage and the *kala pani* are part of the everyday conversations. She diligently notes that coolie vessels were four to five times larger than the African slave ships, but the journey from India took three times longer and, in the end, the death rate was equal on both, as was the suffering experienced by the two groups (2013: 62).

former is to countervail the latter. As he says, the collective memory “ensures temporal continuity, by allowing us to move along the axis of time; it allows us to recognize ourselves and to say *I, my*”; history, in turn, “contributes something other than the feeling of belonging (...) through its recourse to documents that have been preserved in a material form” (Ricoeur 1998: 124). This materiality of history has its obvious benefits, as it enables one to gain an access to the past to which one is not directly connected, but it also freezes the memory in a certain “state”; therefore the aim of the collective memory should be to “counterbalance the tendency of history to render official a certain state of memory, an ideological memory” (Ricoeur 1998: 124).

Such counterbalancing tendencies are emphasized by Shah, who shows how personal experiences evolve into the collective memory, and then how they translate themselves into history. She also decidedly shows how important it is to be able to strike a balance between the two. More precisely, Rampat and Parvati, from the moment they arrive in Guiana, “never talked of returning any more”. India and their past slowly changes into silence and Rampat even “did not know whether Parvati in her quiet moments thought of her family, of the busy bazaar and the friends she had left behind” (*Ww*, 22). Parvati initially does think of sustaining some links with India but, faced with Rampat’s reluctance, she eventually gives up: “So many times she had asked Rampat to write to their families (...) but the time never came for the truth was that he did not know what to say to the family he had broken with to flee to the other side of the world” (*Ww*, 78). Besides she had her own reasons to forget and she “never wanted to remember the birth, and the death, never wanted to remember that the baby [Neela] was not hers”. Such deliberate forgetting – or rather moulding of the past to fit the present – was their common experience as they all, including Billa, edited their memory of “the sailing across the *kala pani*” (*Ww*, 28). They wanted to remember it as a story of success, and not trauma, which in the end gave them their new lives. Rampat, for example, finally gets his piece of land from the government, which makes him “feel like the big and important man he thought he was” (*Ww*, 25). Though in India he was a rich city-man, he now “like[s] the idea of his rice being cooked and eaten by people he would never meet” (*Ww*, 47). Billa, in turn, prospers in business and even establishes his own shop that elevates him to the position of the leader of the Guyanese East-Indian community, which never would have been possible in India. Looking back at his life he admits that “[it] was more than he had ever imagined possible (...) [t]hey had managed (...) to make a future out of nothing, out of nothing but crumbs and broken promises, and small coins saved up one bit at a time” (*Ww*, 150). Ultimately, then, Guiana proves to be their promised land, their own version of the El Dorado myth.

In this empowering and unstigmatizing form, they pass on their Indian and their Guianese past to their children. Parvati tells of how “[u]ncle Rampat fetched down a golden sunset from the sky to make a bright sari just for you [her]” (*Ww*, 98) and they become “the real-life prince and princess (...) [in] a country of palaces and crowns, of silken rivers and sunsets that fell out of the sky, and like all fairy stories it did not look beyond the happy-ever-after ending (*Ww*, 95, 98).²⁴ The story “grew brighter with each telling and always restored her [Parvati’s] faith” and now she could be “generous (...) forgiving even, even about the taunts that had rolled off her sisters-in-law’s tongues” (*Ww*, 99). Rampat and Billa, in turn, “[talk] of themselves as men of adventure, as braves rushing forwards to face the unknown (...) [as] only the daring, safe in the knowledge of their own strength, could take such risks” (*Ww*, 134-35). They create stories “of gold, and of all the strange peoples they had seen on the other side of the world (*Ww*, 48), which never tell about “their slave labour, of the whip and cutlass” as “[s]uch pain and humiliation were better put away” (*Ww*, 48). It soon occurs, however, that such beautiful, but unverifiable, stories come into a conflict with the documented history and codified information that is, paradoxically, demanded from them by the very same children whom they feed the Indian dreams. Therefore, Shah shows a peculiar moment when the people “without history”, meaning without the traditional historiography, “embark on the same historical path forged by the [colonial] history-makers” (Kortenaar 2011: 13) and try to coin history, creating a certain ideologized vision of their communal past.

Rampat, Parvati and Billa are for a long time ignorant of the fact that their *S. S. Ganges* is not only part of their memory, but also the codified history of Guiana. In 1917, Shah writes, “[they] became part of history (...) recorded in books everywhere as an ending of the way things were for nearly a hundred years, as the year when the last of the indentured laborers came to Demerara sugar lands” (*Ww*, 49). “But as much as the *S.S. Ganges* closed a chapter in the history of books (...) for Rampat and Billa, and for everyone else who chose to stay, it marked a beginning of a life in the west” (*Ww* 49). Therefore, what for the historians was the end, for them was only the beginning, and thus their stories would differ significantly from the official historical records. How tangible the disparity truly is becomes clear when their own children bring home the books in which their parents’ lives are – supposedly – recorded. The obsession with history is especially strong in

²⁴ Sharon Maas, another female Indo-Guyanese author, in her novels also thematises India as the imagined fairy-tale like homeland. It is especially visible in her novel *Peacocks dancing* (2002) where she describes the life of a girl born and brought up in Guyana, who later embarks on a journey to India where her visions of the old homeland hurtfully clashes with the reality.

Kirsh, Billa's youngest son, who forces Billa to recognize himself in the strange chapters and words he puts in front of him, making his father's story crumble under the pressure of history. Kirsh deems his father ignorant and reads to him the true records of the East-Indian hardships. Billa "let[s] the boy continue with the story as it was written in the book, the story that started out with a planter back in the nineteenth century, a planter named John Gladstone who had sugar fields in the colony of British Guiana" (*Ww*, 181). John Gladstone who "was looking for cheap labour and he got the idea in eighteen hundred and thirty-six – and *here Krish pointed to the page and the date* – he got the idea of recruiting Indians" (*Ww*, 181-182; emphasis mine, MF). In this very telling scene, Krish physically uses the book to stress his authority in talking about the past and presenting the truth to his father as recorded by documented, verifiable, historical accounts.

The boy, in his hunger for knowledge, is not fully aware of the weight of his own deeds. He brings back all the suffering, humiliation and death that his father for years has tried to forget and Billa has no arguments, no dates and no figures, to suppress his boy's attack:

[h]e [Billa] started to tell the boy all that [he remembered] but he got no further than the adventure of the sea voyage before Krish cut into his story and said, 'People got sick and died on those ships and got thrown overboard, got thrown out into the sea. They're lying there at the bottom of the world, Pa.' The boy said that, told him that and Billa saw again how Tajnie, how the poor, little girl whose life had bled away (...) had been wrapped in a sheet, had been wound tight in a sheet and thrown over the rails and he remembered how long it had taken for the waters to take her down, down, down (*Ww*, 187).

What Kirsh makes him realize is that his life-story no longer belongs only to him. When memory is part of the family, of those "with whom we have established intimate links", it may be called private. However, once it is "called by the outside world", it irreversibly leaves the "intimate sphere" and "our history becomes their history" – the history of the nation, of the society and of the world (Halbwachs 1992 [1914]: 81). The boy, then, is right that "[h]is [Billa's] story of the crossing never told of any deaths" (*Ww*, 187) and that his father had no recollection of John Gladstone, nor British imperial politics; it was a private story of a man to whom history merely happened and who accidentally became part of the great process of the historical change.

Though Billa patiently listens to his son's words, and he is even ashamed of having lied to him, he nevertheless truly believes that he is entitled to forget. What he tried to do was to "put [the traumatic memory] behind him for good" and "turn it into a tale of strength and daring, (...) into a tale of good fortune" (*Ww*, 187). For Billa "[i]t was better that way" and he did it so that his boys "should not feel weighted down by that past" (*Ww*, 187).

Therefore Billa's refusal to share his memory cannot be viewed as the sign of being trapped in trauma, which the refusal to tell the story in the postcolonial novel conventionally signals. Though Billa undeniably went through a lot, in the process, nevertheless, his narrative identity is not shattered, he has a conscious and integrated memory of his past experiences (Herman 1997: 5); he is well aware of the role the crossing of *kala pani* played in his life, as well as the lives of his sons. He knows what is coming, and what Kirsh is to tell him about, and thus he symbolically tries to stop the words reaching him by closing his eyes: "when the boy reached the horror of the story" he "close[d] his eyes against the words, against the horror of what they told (...) [e]ven they, the last shipload of labourers, had the whip at their back" (*Ww*, 183) of which he need not be reminded. The most hurtful part of the whole process is the fact that the accusatory words of belying the past flow from the mouth of the one who never "had ever set foot in the canefields", had no conscious memory of what the life looked like for his father, and "Billa counted it as the greatest success of his life" (*Ww*, 183).

Through the example of this father-son struggle, Shah shows the birth of Indo-Guyanese ethno-history, which was predicated on the traumas and suffering of the generations settling in Guiana, but which has been used by their children and grandchildren as an instrument of the political and ideological struggle. The analogous phenomenon took place in the Afro-Guyanese community and "[i]n this discourse, the relative degrees of suffering and victimization in slavery and indenture are catalogued and entered in the ledger of claims and counter-claims" (Premdas 2011: 820). Using Kirsh and his generation as an example Shah ironically claims that, on the eve of the independence, the political leaders of both ethnic provenances promised to "free us from the past, from all that history and bring us to a shining world" (*Ww*, 184), while in fact they only used history for their own ideological purposes. She ultimately suggests, that one may never be free from history, and the Guyanese would never be free from it, since history is an uncontrollable and capricious force that governs our lives accordingly to its whims. The only thing we can do is to learn to live with it and to learn to tell it properly, taking into account the fact that verifiability is not the essence of History, and that forgetting is part of what the united nation is built on (Renan 1990 [1882]: 8-22). This essentially simple message she drives home using a very elaborate allegory of water.

Water is the uncontrollable element that has the power to give and take lives, as well as carry people all over the world. It was by water that Columbus reached the Caribbean, and so did the African slaves and the indenture workers. Water knows no boundaries, and thus it links the world into one, and Guyana itself, the name of which in Arawak means 'the land of many waters' (Harris 1999: 151), seems as if it was itself woven out of water; it

is the country where “[e]veryone had faith in the strip of wall (...) the Dutch had built when the colony was theirs in order to keep the sea away from the drowned port, the port which was not built on solid ground but on mudflats” (*Ww*, 43). Hence, Guiana seems an unreal, temporary and transitory, almost unearthly, place, which “could be swallowed up by the sea within minutes” (*Ww*, 44). It lacks solid foundations and thus it cannot be contained, claimed or owned by any single power, or single history. Furthermore, water may also mean historical change as “a leap into the unknown is a leap into the water”²⁵ (Bachelard 1999: 165) and in Hindu mythology water is directly linked with History, karma²⁶, death and rebirth. In other Hindu myths, it is also an allegory of time, which in its nature is not linear but cyclical, trapped in the constant circle of destruction and rebirth.²⁷ When the universe “undergoes its sea-change into each successive cosmogony (...) [it] is created anew from the waters; [a]nd so we are recreated, with no end and no beginning, constantly getting there from here” (Doniger 2014: 33). In this way, when the destiny symbolically fulfils itself, through destruction there may come the new life. This sense of history / water is decoded by Parvati, who thinks about her own place in the world in such words: “[y]ou could not hold those things back (...) [i]t would be like trying to hold onto water itself, and (...) water had a way of finding the tiniest crack, has a way of flowing on, of continuing its journey no matter how tightly you held it” (*Ww*, 93).

The mischievous power of history is literally embodied by Neela, the child born on the deck of *S.S. Ganges*. Rumour has it that Neela at night creeps out of the house and swims underwater, as if she need not to breathe. Initially people accuse her of being a water mama, the Africanized versions of

²⁵ The quote is the motto to the first part of the novel describing Rampat and Parvati’s journey to Guiana.

²⁶ Karma, oftentimes translates as fate, “is seen as responsible for enmeshing a living being in the cycle of birth and rebirth”. Only “VIDYĀ, or jñāna”, which could be translated as knowledge, could set one free from the circle. Karma has two faces, one we accumulate during our life on earth and the other “prārabdha karma” is the one with which we are born and which has to run its course. Some also believe that the intervention of God may set one free from karma and “on a popular level many Hindus are inclined to attribute everything that happens to them, fortune as well as misfortune, to their karma” (Klostermaier 2003: 95). Within the novel, history is shown as a pre-defined fate that needs to run its course and Neela is a god that may, but does not have to, break its course.

²⁷ Apart from the already mentioned symbolism it is worth noting that water, and especially the river Ganges, is also the intermediary between the world of the dead and the world of the living. Water has the power to erase sins and is connected to the figure of the Mother, as with “Mother Ganges” the life-giving force. “She is the distilled essence of compassion in liquid form” and no one is denied her blessing (Kinsley 1988: 193-194). This motherly aspect of water may be also discerned in the novel, as the waters of Guyana nourish the newcomers and guarantee Rampat prolific gain from his rice fields.

European mermaids who seduce people to follow them into the water.²⁸ Indeed, the association with a mermaid is strengthened by the scenes where Neela is said to be “sitting before the mirror and combing and combing her hair with the golden comb” (*Ww*, 125), which immediately brings to mind the image of the Lorelei;²⁹ she is also said to sing strangely alluring songs that are like “the sound of the sea, and the wind sweeping across the ocean” (*Ww*, 80). Some people saw in Neela a witch, a “reason why the milk went sour” (*Ww*, 101) and others a goddess, “a sea spirit with unearthly powers, a *devi* (...) who could heal, do miracles, cast off devils (*Ww*, 101). Just like History, then, Neela means many things to many people and the only thing they all know for sure about her is that she could never be controlled.

The very word used by Shah to describe Neela – *devi* – is a Hindu word for “goddess” and she may be the “creator and queen of the cosmos but also its destroyer as “[t]he world is said to be destroyed when she blinks her eyes and to be recreated when she opens her eyes” (Kinsley 1988: 10-11). Furthermore, Neela resembles the Lord Krishna himself, which is especially apparent in the scene when Parvati “had opened her [Neela’s] mouth and he had seen the whole world spinning around inside it” (*Ww*, 122). The moment is a direct repetition of the event from Krishna and Yashoda’s, his adoptive mother’s, life when the latter ultimately understood that her son is a god, who cannot be restrained by her authority or human laws (Jones and James 2007: 238-240, 510). Even Neela’s name, which in Hindi means sapphire blue, links her both to the sea, which “turned as blue as the sky” the moment she was born (*Ww*, 36) and Krishna who is “generally depicted with blue skin” (Jones and James 2007: 238). Due to the god-like element of her nature, Neela is shown as restless and unruly, who just like Lord Krishna loves to dance, play

²⁸ Water *mamas* are an Africanized vision of mermaids, which entered African mythology somewhere in the fifteenth century, following the first encounters between the Europeans and the Africans. Henry Drewal writes that “soon after their first fifteenth-century encounters with European visitors from across the seas, people in Africa added to their ancient pantheons of water deities a spirit that has come to be known as *Mami Wata*, pidgin English for “Mother of Water”. Such creatures are “usually depicted as half-woman half-snakes, or a woman accompanied by snakes, painted on a green or bluish background signifying her connection to water”. Water *mamas*, just like mermaids, are “unencumbered spirit[s] of nature detached from any social bonds” and though “the name “*Mami*” is usually translated as “Mother,” she has no children, nor family of any kind, but is known for her physical beauty and seductive effect on men (Dewal 2002: 197).

²⁹ The Lorelei is a water maiden known from German folklore. She is either thought to be the immortal nymph and the daughter of the Father Rhine, or the siren-like appearance of the girl who killed herself by jumping into the river. In the latter most popular version of the legend, Lorelei is sitting on the rock from which she threw herself to the water, situated in between the towns Colbentz and Mayence, she is combing her hair and singing to herself. Her song is thought to be sweet and to draw the fishermen onto the rocks (Bane 2013: 220).

jokes on people and have fun (Jones and James 2007: 238-240). She refuses to be bound to the earthly life and her lack of attachment to her earthly family is for Parvati the ultimate sign of her otherness: “My daughter would want to be married, would want to settle down but this girl, this woman here, she has her own way about her. She’s a stranger to me” (*Ww*, 123). Therefore, when Neela actually escapes her house they see her decision as a fulfillment of the fate that they all awaited.

The most apt interpretation of Neela’s presence and the role she has to play in Guiana comes from Billa, who witnessed her birth on the ship hung in-between the two worlds. The moment he saw Neela, he instinctively felt that her destiny is inseparably linked with the new life and the new land that they are all heading towards and that her adoptive parents would never be able to keep her long by their side (*Ww*, 131). Billa, however, does not see her as a curse but as a source of their strength with which they face the new and the unknown. She is the living embodiment of historical continuity:

[i]t was her karma (...) she was sent to help them survive all that lay ahead. They had need of her for they were to arrive as strangers in the new land and he could see how *she would be a continuity, a link between their two worlds and a reminder of their past, of the far stretched history that had brought them to that moment and to that journey that was taking them to the other end of the earth* (*Ww*, 132; emphasis mine, MF).

For Billa, Neela is a goddess of two worlds born out of their rite of passage, showing that they have never been history-less. She binds their fates to Guiana but also brings a powerful storm on her new homeland; namely, the moment she runs away from home coincides with the outbreak of the conflict between the Indo and Afro-Guyanese and every time something happens, be it quarrels, riots or shootings, Billa hears a mischievous laugh carried by the wind and he immediately thinks of Neela (*Ww*, 196). Hence the chaos, Billa believes, is the workings of *devi* and its eruption cannot be blamed on any of the parties as it was a destiny that could not have been avoided.

The capriciousness of History comes most fully to light when Billa himself becomes its symbolic victim. One day, when the tension between the Indo-Guyanese and the Afro-Guyanese is especially high, he thinks he sees Neela in person and decodes her presence as a symbol of peace and Guiana’s rebirth. However, when he runs to share the good news with his people who are rioting around the African plantations, he falls – killed by the bullet shot by Sampson, his Afro-Guyanese friend. Billa’s death is observed by Neela and by Krish, who then and there sees *devi* for the first time. The moment is significant because it marks the death of the intermediary generation caused by the whirlwind of history and one never knows if Sampson shot Billa deliberately, or if his bullet has been simply carried by the wind to follow its

pre-defined trajectory. The only thing one does know for sure is that it is the precise moment of Kirsh's tremendous transformation. Seeing *devi*, Kirsh finally understands that there is more to history than meets the eye and the history book; then he abandons his obsession with ethno-history and never seeks vengeance on the Afro-Guyanese for his father's demise.

In the aftermath of his father's death, Kirsh changes from a young man who sought the truth in the history books to the one who understands that imagination, myth and history are inseparable: "His stories [Billa's stories], all his stories of myth and magic, were as real and true as any that ever lived" (*Ww*, 247). Now Kirsh believes that his role is to become a (hi)story-teller, namely the one who not only reads but also creates and preserves history:

Kirsh wondered aloud whether his brothers remembered their father's words, and his many glorious stories (...) [*h*]e rediscovered all his books of history and literature, books that he had enjoyed reading as a boy (...) [*and he*] found his [*Billa's*] copy of the '*Bhagavad Gita*'³⁰ and remembered his father telling him how it was such books (...) that had made them strong, strong enough to withstand anything ... (*Ww*, 247, 249; emphasis mine, MF).

Kirsh commits himself specifically to telling the Guyanese story – "the creation story of [his] people" (Bahadur 2013: 62) – and he spreads the word of how "their *aja* had been blessed enough to see a *devi* being born, a *devi* who used to walk among them and who was sure to return to their world to make everything right again" (*Ww*, 249). Thus, just like Neela, he ultimately devotes his life to the higher cause, fulfilling the destiny coded in his name, which is an allusion to Krishna. Nonetheless, he is not a creator or disrupter of History, but a guardian of the Guyanese history.

At end of the novel, when all Krish's friends and family leave the troubled country, he refuses to even consider emigration. Instead, he changes into the custodian of their roots and their familial and private history.³¹ To those who now live in Canada, the UK or the United States, he keeps telling about Guyana, *kala pani*, his father, but what he never talks about is "the politics of the place", ethnic hatred, corruption. He "[tells] them only about

³⁰ *Bhagavad Gita* is part of the *Mahabharata* and it contains the principles of yoga, stating "the importance of developing what is called a 'steady mind,' which will prevent perturbation of mind and wrong conduct whatever course we choose to take". The *Bhagavad Gita* "was the favorite text of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the foremost proponent of nonviolence"; nowadays "[it] is memorized and chanted as an aid to the realization of the essence of the yogas detailed therein. Ideally, the entire text is committed to memory and chanted daily" (Jones and James 2007: 73-74).

³¹ We may see the (hi)storyteller – Kirsh – as Ryhaan Shah's alter ego, since she herself, after years of emigration, came back to Guyana and started telling hi-stories, all of which are deeply invested in the politics and history of Guyana.

faith and belief (...) and remembered how his father had spoken to him, to him and his brothers like that, had spoken to them about keeping faith in the world” (*Ww*, 230). Thus, he finally finds the said balance between History, story and memory, which he uses to “counterbalance” history (Ricoeur 1998: 124), which cruelly records the facts, but not the spirit of the place. His last words captured in the novel are the Buddhist peace mantra – “om shanti shanti shanti hare om” – where OM is the one word for “[t]he past, the present, the future – everything” and shanti means ‘peace’ (Jones and James 2007: 408). Kirsh, then, just like his father bound him to India, binds the Guyanese to their own country and their own history and he knows now that the sense of historical continuity and memory of one’s own roots is the primary foundation of the hopefully untroubled Guyanese future.

In this uncanny reconciliation of history and historytelling, Shah seems to be repeating the claims that in Guyana the philosophy history lies buried in the acts of imagination. Also, the very construction of her novel counterbalances the claims of Walter Benjamin, for example, who wrote that the emergence of the novel entailed the death of the story that had the ability to change with every telling, depending on time and the recipient (Benjamin 2006: 370). Shah seamlessly binds history with a story and her novel, as if following Paul de Man’s dictum (de Man 1979: 301), comes alive in the act of reading; it is constructed on the fusion of allegorical and realist elements and it remains in an allegorical relation to the colonial master code and the proverbial ruins of the Caribbean history (Slemon 1988: 162; Benjamin 2003: 178). Thus, it may be interpreted only in relation to extratextual referents, towards which the author directs the reader. Nonetheless, such an allegorical construction does not invalidate the historical *truth* of her novel.

More precisely, Shah paints the relatable image of the historical experience and never diminishes the value of colonial history, difficult as it may be, maintaining that the future of Guyana is in the smart and necessary preservation of its (post)colonial past, which would anchor all the Guyanese in time and space. As Hamish Dalley wrote, “when postcolonial novelists speak of the truth of their fictional narrative, it is to the verifiability of their allegorical referent they refer”. The emphasis is not on the factual verifiability but on the “plausibility” of the novel generated by the structure of representation. This plausibility, in turn, may be evaluated intertextually in connection with archival sources, the collective memory or other oral testimonies (Dalley 2014: 16-17). As such, the allegorical realist works are oftentimes thoughtful and profound historical commentaries that “break open our understanding of the past” by “new – and often challenging – perspectives” (Dalley 2014: 18). *Weaving water* is by all means ‘true’ in the senses mentioned by Dalley. It is plausible, relatable and serious in its depiction of history and the analogies and links to similar experiences may be

found in the historical and familial accounts of many Guyanese. At the same time, it is a deeply allegorical, multi-dimensional and fluid history, which shows that the historical novel has the potential and the ability to tell the Guyanese history.

2.3. (Re)Writing (Afro)Caribbean histories in *A love in bondage: Dedicated love in the eighteenth century* (1991) by Beryl Gilroy

Stedman and Joanna – A love in bondage: Dedicated love in the eighteenth century (1991) by Beryl Gilroy is an example of another vein of the Guyanese historical fiction which alludes to the eighteenth-century tradition of slave narratives.³² Gilroy rewrites the famous journal by John Gabriel Stedman entitled *The narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1790/1795) and she pays special attention to the ghostly presence of the African slaves largely ignored in the original narrative. *Stedman and Joanna* is also noteworthy because it is the first historical novel written by the Guyanese female writer, and the second published after Mittelholzer's *The Kaywana trilogy*. Somewhat symptomatically, Gilroy retains the narrative perspective of the colonial masters and she does not experiment with the form. In the context of the 1990s' debates on pan-African diasporic identity, it is significant to note that she is wary of engaging into the Guyanese national history and, instead, she centres on the Black Atlantic, signalling the inseparability of History into the histories of the colonizer and the colonized.³³

In *The women's historical novel* (2005), Diana Wallace writes that the female relationship with the historical novel is significantly different than that of the male writers. For years Sir Walter Scott was thought to have defined the

³² The term is used purposefully though Gilroy does not give voice directly to the slaves. She nevertheless retains the confessional diarist form of a testimony and rewrites one of the generic abolitionists texts considered part of the slave narrative tradition (Thomas 2003: 4).

³³ Gilroy wrote two historical novels and in both she tries to paint universal histories, pan-African in *Stedman and Joanna* and pan-Caribbean in *Inkle and Yarico* (1996). Though she is considered a Black British novelist, oftentimes quoted as a predecessor of Caryl Phillips, in most of her other, non-historic pieces, Guyana and her Guyanese experiences feature prominently. One of the examples may be her novel *Gather the faces* (1994), which is a story of a young Guyanese girl who, though largely raised in England, discovers her Guyanese background, marries a Guyanese man and decides to go back and stay in the country which, despite its internal difficulties, provides her with a sense of belonging she never had in England. Another example may be *Sunlight on sweet water* (1994), a semi-autobiographical piece, in which Gilroy paints an idyllic image of Guyana and her growing up in the Afro-Guyanese community, where people remembered slavery as if it was a feeble dream from the distant past.

genre for his male, rather than female, followers and therefore the history depicted within historical novels was predominantly male history, based on male authority and male adventure.³⁴ Also, mainstream criticism of the genre long silenced female voices and Georg Lukács, for example, by his choice to exclude female historical writings from his analysis deemed them unworthy of serious critical attention (Wallace 2005: 1-24). Nevertheless, as Wallace herself admits, female writers turned towards the historical novel relatively late, mostly after the First World War, when they elicited the sense of history, historical progress and being part of history which Lukács associated with the French Revolution (Wallace 2005: 25). Despite this late start, “the historical novel has been one of the most important genres for women writers and readers in the twentieth century” (2005: 3) and female historians, for lack of documentary sources, oftentimes turned to writing novels and reimagining the lost female histories. The genre, then, started to be viewed as “feminine” and “popular” and thus not noble enough for the ambitious literary expression. Indeed, with the first wave of serious politicized feminist writings across the 1960s and 1970s, Wallace notes the decline of the interest in the genre, which only came back in the following decade (1980-1990) (2005: 176). As she writes, “[t]he impetus towards the historical novel can be linked closely to the project of recovering women’s history, rather than the deconstruction of history associated with male authors such as Fowles” (2005: 177). Thus, the relative lack of experimentation with the form of the historical novel should not be held against the female authors, as they used it primarily as the vessel to present herstories, and thus not always shared the postmodern irony of historical representation characteristic of historiographic metafiction or metahistorical romances.

This general introduction is to signal that Beryl Gilroy should be placed in both traditions, namely the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean struggles with History and the feminist ambitions to recover herstories. Gilroy was one of the first feminist Caribbean critics and authors, who saw her writing as a mission to fight racial prejudice and female marginalization; she extensively wrote on the question of identity, race and (non)belonging as experienced by the first post-war wave of the Caribbean immigration to the metropolis. In her essay “I write because...” (1990), Gilroy mentions the unprecedented opportunities the post-war change of order provided the coloured females with, but also the many problems they were to face. She came to England in

³⁴ Ian Duncan in *Modern romance and transformations of the novel* (1992) claims that Ann Radcliffe was the immediate precursor of Walter Scott in the British literature. Scott, then, not so much created the genre of the historical romance as the masculine literary discipline, but he reclaimed it from Radcliffe. As Duncan writes “Scott’s recovery of romance for the representation of a public, national life involves at once it thoroughgoing historicization and its redefinition as masculine” (Duncan 1992: 13).

the early 1950s and quickly discovered that she was a non-belonger; in Guyana her choice to acquire an English education was scorned, while in England she was an outcast. Furthermore, she had an acute sense of marginalization in the British society and thus a sense of pan-racial solidarity with other females:

I was given the opportunity to observe these women patiently engaged in the traditional jobs that the powerless and oppressed must perform. Alongside them were the Irish who had not yet learned to be “white” and were just as happy to do the menial work the war had spawned. But they too were so prejudiced they looked wholeheartedly for scapegoats among us. And when like other black women I was mocked, jibed at, and deliberately used as the butt of British humour, I learned to understand my own legitimate feelings of resentment and aggression and to understand theirs (Gilroy 1990: 196).

In addition to the social realm, Gilroy was also sensitive to the discrimination of the female experiences in the literary field, which was dominated by the male voices of Lamming, Naipaul or Harris. As she says, “I decided to set the record straight. There had been Ted Braithwaite’s *To Sir with love* (1959) and Don Hinds’ *Journey to an illusion* (1966) but the woman’s experiences had never been stated” (1990: 190); in 1976 she published her autobiography *Black teacher*, which codifies her own experiences as an Afro-Guyanese teacher in England and which runs parallel to the semi-autobiographical novels of her fellow teacher, friend and countryman, Ted Braithwaite, *To sir with love* (1959) and *Paid servant* (1962).

Therefore, Gilroy’s turn towards the historical novel may be seen as congruent with Diana Wallace’s critical observations that in the 1980 / 1990s the historical novel was a primary means of excavating the marginalized histories from the depths of silence. Even though Gilroy’s history, like the original journal, is narrated by Stedman, its true protagonist are the African slaves, and especially Joanna, his mulatto lover and the mother of his son. The novel is divided into three parts entitled “Before Joana”, “Joanna, My Love, My Life” and “The Sea Change”, alluding to Stedman’s departure from Surinam. The first part is devoted to Stedman himself, who takes the opportunity to introduce himself to the readers and to show the journey he had to undertake before reaching the shores of Surinam. Stedman starts his story from stating his name and year of his birth – “I, John Gabriel Stedman, was born in 1744” (*SJ*³⁵, 3), and he presents himself as a true Scot by birth and

³⁵ All the quotations come from Gilroy, Beryl. 1991. *Stedman and Joanna, a love in bondage: Dedicated love in the eighteenth century*. London: Vantage Press, which is henceforth indicated as *SJ*.

choice, the middle-class man of a strict Protestant background.³⁶ On the very first page he tells the reader that he has always cherished an untamable will to travel, much to “dissensions within [his] family”, he “has longed [for adventures] (...) ever since reading of the colonization of the intrepid James Cook in the Pacific” (*SJ*, 5). Cook’s voyages inspired him “not only [because] of his conquest over the minds or natives, but also of his securing fresh lands for civilization”, which should bring to readers’ minds *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). The mode of the narrator’s self-introduction is Gilroy’s literary invention and it deliberately places the novel in a dialogue with a very particular Western narrative tradition, associated with the first colonial and realist novels.

In *Factual fictions: The origins of the English novel* (1996 [1983]), Lennard J. Davis writes that the way the author positions herself towards the fictionality of the novel, whether she denies or embraces it, is a direct result of how she wishes to position herself towards the truth outside the novel. If, for example, Daniel Defoe claimed to be the editor of *Robinson Crusoe*, he implicitly detached himself from the story, and placed Robinson as the ultimate source narrative authority. He, then, denied his authorial creative role and tried to move the novel from the discourse of the imagination towards the factual fiction associated with journalism (Davis 1996: 43). Everett Zimmermann adds that the eighteenth-century was enchanted by the possibility of providing “a documentary foundation” for the creative process and thus it abounded in “the editorial fiction”, which gave creative writing “a status of event” and, implicitly, history (Zimmermann 1996: 52). In an analogous way Beryl Gilroy hides herself behind Stedman and his diaries but, unlike Defoe, she never openly calls herself the editor. Her role may be deduced when, at the end of the novel in “Afterword”, she briefly comments on the incidents from Stedman’s life that have not been mentioned in the novel. Hence, just as Defoe “saw himself as primarily an historian and not a poet” (Davis 1996: 33), she also compromises her imaginative power in favour of the illusion of historical verifiability offered to the reader by the historicized fiction.³⁷

³⁶ The opening is stylized by Gilroy and only loosely based on the 1790 version of Stedman’s memoir, which also alludes to Cook but is far more factual and begins from background information about Surinam (Stedman 2010 [1795]: 27). She introduces many other narrative changes to the original story, which visibly shows that her novel is an adaptation, and not an imitation, of the original texts.

³⁷ The eighteenth-century fiction is not yet historical fiction but it is *historicized*, which means that it does not lay claim to depicting the historical facts but to crafting its narration in such a way so that the novel would seem a reliable account of the past. It rigorously obeys the rules of probability by specifying the narrative situation, the narrator, the authenticity of

However, Gilroy does not embrace the convention of the editorial fiction uncritically and she is well aware of the fact that the modern reader recognizes that all fiction is history and all history is fiction (Davis 1996: 214). In this way, she relies on the insightfulness of her readers in decoding the paradox of her novel's narrative construction. For her, the editorial mode is merely a pretext to present the history veiled under Stedman's eloquent narration. In "The quoted voice" (1988: 154-166), Michel de Certeau argues that Daniel Defoe invented a new mode of literary narration – "theoretical fiction" – characterized by a departure from a direct voice on which the tradition of storytelling and drama relied. From now on, the voice began to be quoted by "the new king" – the narrator – and thus separated from the speaker. The narrator, then, became "an imperceptible master" who singlehandedly shaped the story, and the voices of his subjects, which became "the central and silent strategy of new history". "[T]he savage, the madman, the child, even woman" become part of "their [the masters'] history" including the masters' discourse of their civilizing mission, colonization, psychiatry or even pedagogy. Nevertheless, they were only theoretically "excluded from the written" as they, unaware of it themselves, "continue[d] to speak" in the stories of their masters as ghosts haunting the authoritarian narrators. As an example de Certeau provides the scene when Robinson discovers Friday's footprint in the sand, becoming aware that he is not alone on his island and in his story (de Certeau 1988: 154-164).

Such a ghostly voice of the slaves accompanies Stedman from the beginning of his narrative as the first journey related to the reader is his visit to London directly before his departure to Surinam. The London journey is another of Gilroy's literary additions (Sharpe 2003: 89) through which she struggles to make her readers sense the omnipresence of the African other in the European metropolis. Stedman seems literally puzzled by the sheer number of the slaves that surround him and the necessity of acknowledging their existence where he was not expecting them;³⁸ a telling incident takes place during Stedman's visit to the King's Picture Gallery where he suddenly notices that "[t]here were black servants in many of the pictures, and this made me keen to notice people of different races" (*SJ*, 24). He is also exposed to slaves' stories told by abolitionists, for example Mr. Granville Sharp, an "avowed friend of the slaves in captivity in the Caribbean colonies" (*SJ*, 24).

the narrator's relationship to the story, and the intentionality of the narration – all of which it shares with the documentary inquiry into the past (Zimmerman 1996: 51-52)

³⁸ The late eighteenth century is the peak of the slave trade. "Between 1680 and 1810 the Empire's black population rose elevenfold", Philip Morgan writes, and "[b]y the latter date, almost 1 million blacks lived in British territories, in spite of the loss of the 500,000 blacks who in 1776 became residents of the United States" (1998: 86). As it will be mentioned later, the interest in the silenced black presence in the metropolis defined also the interests of David Dabydeen.

He also hears the narratives of the middle passage; for example he learns the story of Patrasso, the “one armed giant” who jumped into the freezing water to save his master but, as the current proved stronger, his mistress amputated his arm for his negligence (*SJ*, 23). Another of the slaves, Gronniosaw, claims to have been the son of “the king of Zarra” whom “the ivory merchant (...) sold for two yards of cloth” (*SJ*, 23). The last night in London Stedman spends at the christening of Harold, a freed slave, “who was much admired for his knowledge of mathematics and music” (*SJ*, 29), which Stedman accepts with a certain dose of surprise. His last reflection, “Before Joanna”, is his contemptible commentary on London, on its slums, drunkards and slaves. The city stands on social inequalities and does not stand up, as Stedman himself says, to the standards of “the Age of Reason” (*SJ*, 32): “the poor are not able to imagine a thought other than their own and believe the gentry to be a species far beyond their call” (*SJ*, 32). As one may thus note, not only does Gilroy use the London episode to emphasise the black presence, but also to suggest to the reader that Stedman is a proper sentimental man of his age, sensitive to the plights of the underprivileged.

Therefore, in order to fully comprehend Gilroy’s play with the eighteenth-century narrative conventions, one must place her novel also in the context of sentimentalism. David Denby names sentimentalism the project of the Enlightenment, inextricably bound to “the emergence of new social forces, their increasing self-awareness as actors on the social and historical scene” (Denby 1994: 3), which somehow resembles Lukács broader views on the birth of historical awareness in the West. In literature, Denby defines the movement as a narrative strategy centred on the happiness and misfortunes of the protagonist, where reality is not only represented but also interpreted by the narrator, who displays a certain code of conduct known as “sensibility”, or “the act of being moved”.³⁹ Indeed, Gilroy’s Stedman shapes himself for a clichéd sensitive bourgeois gentleman of his age, who displays a superficial interest in such fashionable figures as William Hogarth (*SJ*, 14), William Blake (*SJ*, 16) and Jean Jacques Rousseau, especially his treaty *Emile* (*SJ*, 13), “a manifesto of sentimentalism” (Boulukos 2008: 26), which he considers a formula for a happy and fulfilled life. Most visibly, he continuously claims to feel deep compassion and empathy towards the slaves and the poor.

One, however, should not be deceived by Stedman’s outbursts of seemingly genuine feelings towards *the other*. In his book *The grateful slave*

³⁹ Denby claims that sentimentalism challenges the authoritarian dichotomy between Romanticism and Enlightenment, especially in terms of its sensitivity to Nature, but also such sentimental passions. *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), for example, displays traces of the Romantic sensitivity and exemplifies the fluid, if not unnecessary, boundaries between the epochs.

(2008), George Boulukos claims that sentimentalism gave the origins to the specifically eighteenth century narrative representation of the African slave, which he deems the grateful slave. The trope arose, he says, from the need to reconcile the emerging humanist ideals with the reality of slavery and it entailed the “emotional response to oppression and torture” as a technique to shun responsibility for the acts of cruelty (Boulukos 2008: 14). Sentimentalists contextualized the slaves as emotional human beings, who were attached to their masters, and reacted with an excessive display of gratitude to the goods and graces bestowed on them. Boulukos, then, sees sentimentalism not as a liberating force but another way of taming the African other; the sentimental imagery suggested inter alia that there existed a state of “voluntary slavery” understood as an “emotional relationship” with the master (2008: 2). This aspect has been especially stressed in the post 1780s fiction, where the slaves were shown as “sharing in human emotions” but nevertheless “less rational and more emotional than whites”. As such, they needed guidance due to their “childlike dependence” on the European (Boulukos 2008: 141-142). The true purpose behind the sentimental narrative was that of amelioration, not abolition. Amelioration “recognize[s] slavery as a problem, but seeks to solve the problem through reform rather than more extreme measures such as emancipation” (Boulukos 2008: 10). It emphasizes the cruelties and inhumanity of the system, but proposes to reform the slave trade and the plantation life, “deny[ing] that slavery is inherently problematic by imagining it can be made acceptable, or that the African can be understood as suited to it” (Boulukos 2008: 10).⁴⁰

Gilroy’s unsentimental dialogues with sentimentalism are very visible in the second part of the novel “Joanna, My Love, My Life”, which opens when Stedman sets foot in the exotic colony of Surinam. There, he immediately reports to his regiment, led by fellow Scotsman, John Stuart, and learns that

⁴⁰ A play with sentimental conventions may be found in the novel *Cambridge* (1991) by Caryl Philips. The similarity has been noted for example by Jenny Sharpe in *Ghosts of slavery* (2003), where she writes that Gilroy’s novel and *Cambridge* are the “two British-Caribbean novels that rewrite colonial accounts of slavery in order to give black people greater visibility in Britain’s national past” (Sharpe 2003: 88). The differences in their conceptualization of the theme “might be explained by the generational differences of each of their authors” (Sharpe 2003: 89), which only further corroborates the validity of cross-generational readings of the Caribbean literature. In her analysis of Gilroy’s narrative, Sharpe claims that Stedman sees African slavery as if he was a nineteenth-century abolitionist’s gentleman and she argues that Gilroy actually grants voice to Joanna in the passages where Joanna informs Stedman that slavery makes it impossible for her to enjoy domestic happiness. Sharpe emphasises also that Joanna is restored to her “proper” place as wife and all that shapes the “utopian vision of what could have been” between the European man and a slave woman (Sharpe 2003: 95-105). Sharpe’s reading of the novel at points seems far too optimistic.

“[t]he slaves have revolted and have been destructive and barbarous, as only heathens can be, to their true and rightful owners” (*SJ*, 36); in other words, he meets the *ungrateful* slaves. From this moment, Stedman starts negotiating his own vision of the colony, trying to compromise between the obvious ingratitude of the slaves, the cruelty of their Dutch masters and his own sentimental worldview derived from Rousseau’s teachings. It is by no means an easy struggle as Stedman becomes suspended in-between an absolute disillusion with the system and the implicit will to preserve the old, and seemingly safer, order.⁴¹

Despite his previously declared empathy towards the African other, Gilroy is careful not to give her readers a false impression that Stedman is a revolutionary. He is well aware of the racial stereotypes imposed on the slaves, some of which he himself shares; for example he firmly believes that christening bestows a soul on a black man, which – unlike the white man – he is not born with (*SJ*, 29), he claims that black skin does not feel as much pain as white (*SJ*, 55) or that the “African as the child of nature is not responsible for his deeds” (*SJ*, 55) and needs to be taken care of by the white man. He also

⁴¹ Though Boulukos narrowed his investigations to fiction, one may notice the similar attitudes in non-fictional texts produced by those who lived off slavery but who tried to reconcile their progressive humanist worldviews with this indisputable fact, like the mentioned Matthew Lewis or the non-fictional John Stedman himself. Marry L. Pratt claims that Stedman’s original journal is “a romantic transformation of a particular form of colonial sexual exploitation” (2007 [1992]: 95), where Joanna and Stedman are “imaginary substitutes for Friday and Crusoe” (2007 [1992]: 97). None of today’s critics have doubts that John Stedman himself was not an abolitionist and such intentions have been imposed on his narrative much later. The journal was rather intended as a Robinson-like story of adventures in the colonies and it is a voluminous work that combines various genres like the travel narrative, romance, adventure story or memoir. Since the general interest in colonial matters was significant, it became a massive success already at its publication in 1796 and, from that time, it has been translated at least into twenty languages (Price and Price 2010: i-xvii). The first draft prepared in 1790 by Stedman’s editor methodically silenced all the controversial passages, including Stedman’s own sexual adventures, reshaping the original manuscript to such an extent that it was unacceptable even for the author himself. The two-volume edition released in 1796 was a result of a compromise between Stedman and the publishing house, and thus between the two radically different worldviews operating in the then Europe (Thomas 2004: 125; Price and Price 2010: xiii-xcvii). The story of Joanna was a vital, but not the most important part of his original work, and only later it was cut out from the journal and reprinted as an abolitionist narrative. Hence, Stedman’s narrative was used to prove many, oftentimes contrastive, claims from the necessity to protect the old order to the immediate freedom for the slaves. The latter interpretation was aided by the fact that William Blake was one of the authors of the engravings for the text and he not only suggestively depicted the horrors of slavery but also officially endorsed the abolitionist claims. From today’s perspective, Stedman’s journal is nothing but a literary narrative permeated by a significant dose of authorial self-fashioning and catering for the tastes of its readers.

never conceals that he has been employed to track and haunt the revolted Negroes, which he does diligently and with the help of the local Indians. Nevertheless, he does not shun from depictions of the Dutch cruelty and confirms the stereotype of “the Dutch nation [being] reputed to be the most barbarous in its suppression of the slaves”; he ascribes cruelty also to the Dutch women, who even “excelled the men in the design and application of torment upon the helpless!” (*SJ*, 36-37), though he claims that the heritage of the Dutch violence runs also in his own veins. Stedman’s late Aunt Hilde, who years ago emigrated to Guiana, “did not spare her slaves” and family stories tell even of her having “drowned a baby for crying too loudly” (*SJ*, 37).⁴²

In similarly ambiguous terms, Stedman describes the rules governing plantation life, admitting that “[d]eflowering and cohabiting with slave girls – especially the most beautiful ones – was a kind of sport that even the most conservative and godly men found themselves engaged in” (*SJ*, 47), but he refuses to suggest his own participation in such practices.⁴³ On other occasions he presents the stories of unimaginable cruelty exercised by the planters on the slaves, one of the most memorable incidents being the detailed description of rib-hanging:

The other day, sir, I saw with my own eyes an African suspended alive from gallows by the ribs, between which an incision had been made to accommodate the hook. He hung alive for three whole days, sipping only the water that ran down his face from the merciful rain (...) He never groaned or shed a tear, but said that no evil of the European was strong enough to make him weep (*SJ*, 55).

Many of the Africans are reported to “bear suffering as Christ bore his, only the Heavenly Father is unknown to them” (*SJ*, 55), but such striking and compassionate descriptions intertwine with stereotypical accounts of savages’ barbarity and their stereotypical lack of restraint. For example when after the death of a young Lieutenant, Stedman visits the cemetery, he is shocked to see the inappropriateness of the African behaviour, which justifies his theory that they are less civilized than the Europeans: “[i]magine my surprise – nay, my

⁴² Stedman’s journals contributed significantly to the prevalent conviction that the Dutch were exceptionally cruel towards their slaves which, implicitly, served the purpose of presenting the British as morally superior. To my knowledge, the episode of Aunt Hilde was not mentioned by Stedman in his diaries, but the aspect of English-Dutch competition in cruelty is a steady motif in the Guyanese fiction, mentioned for example by Edgar Mittelholzer in *Shadows move among them* analyzed in Chapter four.

⁴³ Stedman’s personal notes contain the descriptions of other’s sexual experiences and causal references to his own sexual adventures. They were later successfully edited out from the following editions of his work. As Richard Price and Sally Price note, Stedman “minimized the frequency of everyday, quasi-commercial sex between white men and slave women and strongly romanticised his own relationship with Joanna” (Price and Price 2010: xxxiii).

shock-to see the captured Africans gleefully clanking their chains (...) on the sepulchres of those brave Europeans who had been sacrificed in the struggle against them" (*SJ*, 54). Hence, Stedman never directly questions the very right of the white race to dominate the black and even displays some kind of admiration for the cleverness of the Europeans who purposefully procure slaves from different parts of Africa so that they could not outwardly communicate and plot against their masters (*SJ*, 99).

Stedman's benevolent and hypocritical perception of the colonial other finds its full manifestation in his sentimental love for the beautiful mulatto slave girl, Joanna. Sentimental love was a conventional part of the eighteenth-century sentimental narratives and it was understood as "the spontaneous experience of the heart, dictated by nature", usually "pitted against the social prejudice which sets obstacles of birth and fortune in its way" (Denby 1994: 13). The implied reader's identification was "on the side of the victims" and the misfortune of the lovers was part of "the whole process of sentimentalisation", which aimed at triggering "the sense of protest or outrage" against the unfairness of the society; therefore sentimental love plots are invariably and "firmly embedded in the discourse about society" (Denby 1994: 13). In point of fact, already introducing the reader to his and Joanna's story, Stedman deems himself "a desperate lover" (*SJ*, 42); his desperation results from the fact that Joanna is a slave, which makes their union fashionably impossible according to the paradigm of the sentimental love. As Joanna does not even once speak in her own voice, being the "vehicle of the dominant language" (de Certau 1988: 155), she is also seamlessly inscribed into his narrative paradigm as a grateful slave and passionate and devoted lover.

According to Stedman, Joanna is an exquisitely beautiful mulatto girl, well educated by her late European father (*SJ*, 43), properly humble and refined, and she would constitute a good companion for any European man. Thus, she is crafted to resemble both the exotic Venus and the eighteenth-century ideal of femininity as natural and innocent (Sharpe 2003: 52-56). When Stedman first sees Joanna, "[r]ound her neck, her arms, and her ankles she wore gold chains, rings, amulets, and medals" (*SJ*, 44), which symbolize the golden chains of slavery, though Stedman interprets them as a symbol of her material worth. She "read fluently in Dutch and German and spoke heavily accented English as well as Surinam Creole" (*SJ*, 45) but "[f]or fear of being accused of forgetting her station, she was careful to conceal her accomplishments" (*SJ*, 45). He even argues that she cherished her inferiority, addressing him, even in everyday conversations, per "my friend, my master" (*SJ*, 45) despite his insistence to be called by the proper name. Furthermore, on his suggestions that she may become his equal, Joanna displays an exceptional acceptance of her low status; "Captain Stedman", she is reported

to say, “I was born a low, contemptible slave. Were you to treat me with too much attention, you must disgrace yourself with all your friends and relations”. However, as a proper sentimental heroine, she also knows that she “[she has] a soul” that is “not inferior to any European” (*SJ*, 45-46).

It is symptomatic that Stedman sees their relationship as his personal rebellion against the established order, which breeds his, and his readers’, expected outrage on the society based on unnatural inequality.⁴⁴ He collects the money to buy Joanna’s freedom and, when he decides to marry her in a Suriname marriage,⁴⁵ he sees his actions as an absolution from the sins of European cruelty; he literally claims to “[feel] cleansed of all the evils that, as a European, my race had initiated” (*SJ*, 52). Furthermore, blinded by his sentimental love, he makes a brave and benevolent offer to take Joanna with him to Europe. However, when it comes to his departure, it is Joanna who refuses to follow him. Reportedly, she was “afraid of the world and [she] would be enfeebled by anything that was more demanding than the life she had always known” (*SJ*, 129). He says that “[h]ope [for freedom] had died within her” (*SJ*, 72) and quotes her admitting that she cherishes her status as a Surinam slave. “Among your people”, she supposedly says, “I would be Joanna the rescued slave girl, shunned and despised by your friends and family” (*SJ*, 105).

Hence Joanna is the perfect embodiment of what the ancients called the “natural slave” – the one born to bondage – and one unable and unsuited to life in the state of freedom (Garnsey 1996: 35-52). It is all the more ironic that Stedman, who shares such a belief, claims to be offended by her decision: “I felt rejected and hurt, for I had sincerely believed that she loved me” (*SJ*, 146). As one may notice, Stedman is exclusively focused on his own emotional turmoil and the authoress tries to convince the reader that Joanna’s decision was sudden and contrary to his own wishes and desires. Thus, seemingly independent from her master’s will, Joanna in fact confirms the established social order; such a behaviour of the female heroine Helen Hughes sees as

⁴⁴ Here one may see the traces of Rousseau’s *A discourse on inequality*, where, as the title suggests, he differentiated between two types of inequality among human kind; the first one he called natural, as it found its source in nature and resulted from such aspects as physical features, strength, illness or disability. The second was the unnatural privileges such as income and class, and the aim of the perfect society would be to strike a better balance between the two (Rousseau 1984: 77). If Stedman claims not to be a racist, or at least not towards Joanna, he sees her bondage as unnatural and therefore imposed as unfair on her and on nature.

⁴⁵ The colonies, and especially Surinam, were liminal spaces – hung in-between the two orders – where the Europeans could enjoy their passions with no consequences to their European lives. There operated even an institution known as the Suriname marriage – a semi-marriage valid only in the colony between the European and the slave (see: Hoefte and Vrij 2005: 155-156).

typical in the early historical romances, where the heroine attempts “to overthrow masculine power in one way, while succumbing to it in another” (2005: 17). Joanna’s decision, then, conventionally sets Stedman free from the problems that her coming to Europe might have caused.

There is no denying the fact that Stedman leaves Surinam relieved. Within a year, he settles in Holland and marries a proper Dutch lady and, from his Dutch home, he from time to time sentimentally mentions Joanna, convincing himself that she would not feel good in Europe. His belief is all the time predicated on the idea that Joanna is a natural slave: “Joanna could never have understood the life of a woman without the supports of her tribe and her community, against which she would place the framework of her decisions” (*SJ*, 156). The British reading public seems to have accepted similar mitigations written by Stedman in his official *Narrative*; in an introduction to its newest edition, Sarah Pierce cites one of the eighteenth-century critics who said that “the tale in particular of Joanna, and of the author’s attachment to her, is highly honorable to both parties”, as the very offer of taking her with him to Europe made Stedman a proper sentimental gentleman (Price and Price 2010: xi). Moreover, their love story found a properly sentimental ending; namely, having received the news of Stedman’s marriage, Joanna died aged only twenty-four from, as some believed, a broken heart and thus she ultimately changed into a semi-real romantic heroine.

The official *Narrative*, both the shortened two-volume version published in 1795, and the long original draft published only in 2010, but dated for 1790, close with Joanna’s death. Gilroy nevertheless does not finish her novel at this point and she consciously breaks the sentimental convention, introducing into the third part of the story, “The Sea Change”, Stedman and Joanna’s son – Johnny.⁴⁶ In 1784, following the demise of Joanna, Johnny arrives in Holland to live with his father. Johnny’s intrusion into Stedman’s ordered life tangibly shows that his coloured son is an undesirable addition to his family, and the passages describing Johnny’s stay in England are noticeably less sentimental than those from Surinam. Convincing himself how accepted, awaited and loved Johnny was, as the one who “reminds [him] of people and places [he] once truly loved” (*SJ*, 171), Stedman does his best to belie the reality, which nevertheless proves extremely difficult to silence. The heart-rending scenes of younger siblings lovingly accepting Johnny as their equal beloved brother are contrasted with Stedman’s wife, Adrianna, treating

⁴⁶ Gilroy incorporates the parts mentioned in Stedman’s private journal never intended for publication but released in print in 1962, especially the part entitled “England, 1784-1797” (Stedman 1962: cf. 234). The original text is fragmentary, composed of scribbles, bills and personal notes, and Gilroy’s descriptions of Stedman’s or Johnny’s thoughts are her authorial additions.

Johnny as if he was her plantation slave. Furthermore, Johnny's descriptions as a grateful and happy child clash with the scenes when he makes his father promise that he would not dispose of him as a slave (*SJ*, 169) or him outwardly calling Stedman a liar when he tries to convince the boy that Mama – Stedman's current wife – loves him as her own child (*SJ*, 170). The emotional tension reaches its peak when Johnny "swallows a pin an inch and half long" (*SJ*, 172) and, in consequence, is close to death; even though Stedman seems convinced that it was a mere accident, the reader may wonder if Johnny's actions were not deliberate.

At this point one may wonder why, despite such problems, Stedman decides to keep Johnny, pay for his education in the boarding school and, after, support his military career. The paradoxical explanation seems to lie in the eighteenth-century obsession with passing on one's bloodline, which could either degrade or ennoble one's offspring. Helen Thomas in *Romanticism and slave narratives* (2004), emphasizes exactly this aspect of Stedman's original *Narrative*, claiming that his text "provides a fitting precursor to an analysis of the theories of racial difference and similitude prevalent at the time and to the narratives produced by the slaves themselves, accounts which delineate the emergence of a culturally hybrid consciousness of the black diaspora" (Thomas 2004: 133). When Stedman's family first learned of Johnny's existence, they reacted accordingly to the circulating stereotypes of accusing Stedman of "degrading the blood" (*SJ*, 160). Nevertheless, the very fact of him having a drop of Stedman's blood makes him an indisputable part of their family, "contaminated or not" (*SJ*, 160). For these reasons, Stedman feels responsible for the boy and he arranges for Johnny's future as a soldier in the colonial army. Ironically enough, one of the last scenes of the novel mentions how the boy boards the ship *Amity* going to Jamaica. Hence, symbolically, he switches sides in the colonial machine but quickly perishes in a storm somewhere near the shores of Jamaica.

From a cultural viewpoint, the figure of Johnny testifies to an important socio-cultural change of the late eighteenth-century. Namely, he is a symbol of the emergence of the new class of Creoles, who saw themselves entitled to both European and African heritages and who actively shaped and reshaped the colonial history. Johnny may be called an early example of creolization, no longer understood as a term exclusively applied to the Europeans born and raised in the colonies, but an inherent quality of the Caribbean history. This shift in the meaning of creolization is attributed to Braithwaite, who saw it as the process of constant mutual exchange between the dominant and the dominated cultures that in itself produced a 'new' cultural value. Creolization, then, is not a state of identification or race but a "cultural action-material" placing the groups involved in the situation of a constant cultural exchange that goes both ways, affects both groups and

contributes to the establishment of the ‘new’ socio-cultural body – the creolized society (Brathwaite 2005 [1971]: 296); it is a “way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole” (Brathwaite 2005 [1971]: 307).

One of the most seminal historical implications of the process was the rise of the Creole class in Haiti, who almost at the time of Stedman struggling to publish his *Narrative*, based their claims for freedom on their right to share in the European ideas of liberty and equality (Heuman 2014: 77-86).⁴⁷ In *Caribbean migrations*, Robin Cohen (2002: 26) writes that “the famous founding president of a free Haiti, Toussaint L’Ouverture,⁴⁸ was as much Jacobin as African” and “many Anglophone Caribbeans displayed a remarkable loyalty to Britain in both world wars and showed a fierce adherence to British educational, social and political institutions”. Such a vision of history as a cultural and intellectual exchange is shared also by Said, who writes that:

the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community (Said 2012: 9).

Johnny, then, is the living testimony of the actual inseparability of the colonial and metropolitan worlds, the relationship between which was by no means one-sided. However, the very fact that the histories of both are inseparable

⁴⁷ The Haitian Revoution “was the most successful rebellion of enslaved people in the world history”, writes Higman; it brought the end of slavery and the birth of the first “black” state in the Americas (2011: 146). However, to grasp the specificity of the event one needs to realize that Haiti was somewhat unique in terms of its social construction as it hosted a large group of freed people of African descent. This community was considerably wealthier than in the other part of the Caribbean and they themselves were slave owners and it was their money that organized the rebellion. Gad Heuman (2014: 180) distrusts their noble intentions, claiming that they strove to secure more land and power in the absence of the white class, but regardless of how one interprets their motives, there is no doubt that the event changed the course of history. The leader of the Revolution was Toussaint Louverture, nicknamed the Black Napoleon, whose actual role in the rebellion is debated, but there is no doubt that he is its symbol. Toussaint was an educated man and, significantly, a Creole born on a sugar plantation, most probably in 1743, who claimed affinity to the ideas of the French Revolution and so the abolition of slavery was one of his major goals. In 1794 he made an alliance with the now republican France, which agreed to abolish slavery, and when Spain gave Santo Domingo to France he became the governor of the large colony. Though he died in 1803, Toussaint’s legacy lived on and in 1804 Haiti became a republic and in 1825 the British and the French recognized its independence.

⁴⁸ To describe an analogous process Paul Gilroy used the example of Frederick Douglass (1993: 13).

does not mean that the participation in the public sphere was equally granted to both parties. In *the Afterword* Gilroy informs the reader that in the official genealogical records of Stedman's family "neither she [Joanna] nor Johnny had been shown" – as if they never existed (*SJ*, 181).

One may thus note that Gilroy's novel is a rather traditional and restrained take on in the 1990s still emerging form of Caribbean neo-slave narratives. Gilroy does not experiment with the linearity of time, or the allegorical construction of the presented historical experiences, but she consciously travesties the eighteenth-century narrative conventions and their power to manipulate the reader, bringing to the forefront the Afro-Caribbean experience of subjugation and silence.⁴⁹ Most importantly in the context of the presented investigations, Beryl Gilroy emerges as a precursor of Caribbean neo-slave narratives and as a singular example of the first generation of Guyanese female writers who claimed her right to engage in direct dialogues with the colonial historiography, or even particular colonial documents; thus she implicitly suggests that the colonial historiography is as much part of her heritage as it is of any European, and that it contains a grain of truth about the Afro-Caribbean historical experience. Therefore, though *Joanna and Stedman* is not directly dedicated to the Guyanese history, it remains an important work exemplifying the Guyanese struggles with a realist historical representation. One may look at the novel even more broadly and read it as part of the 1990s disputes over the primacy of the pan-African over the Guyanese national history and historical experience, published only two years before Beryl Gilroy's son, Paul Gilroy's, seminal book *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Hence the novel remains an important contribution to both the Caribbean and the Guyanese literary disputes on history, though it may definitely disappoint the readers who would expect Beryl Gilroy to give a voice back to Joanna, and thus construct a more feminist-like rewriting of the colonial journal.

2.4. Universal Guyanese history in *Johnson's Dictionary* (2013) by David Dabydeen

David Dabydeen, with his undying interest in colonial history, is undeniably the most prolific and significant Guyanese writer of the historical fiction and historical poetry. On the map of his writings *Johnson's Dictionary* (2013)

⁴⁹ Jenny Sharpe argues that "[a]lthough Joanna never made that fateful journey to Europe except in the imagination of abolitionists like Lydia Child, her story can be read as an allegory for the postwar migration from the West Indies to England" (2003: 87). One may extend Sharpe's claim and treat Gilroy's novel as a record of the universal feminine experience of being denied voice and agency by male authority.

emerges as a peculiar narrative in which he brings his two inspirations – the national and metropolitan history – together, fusing the neo-slave narrative customarily used for advocating the plights of African slaves with the typically Guyanese cultural tradition derived from Indian, African and European heritages.⁵⁰ Within the novel, he additionally negotiates between the allegorical and realist modes of historical representation and the Western and Guyanese senses of history. Hence, though he places his novel in a similar historical context as Beryl Gilroy, their visions of the form, the role and the content of the neo-slave narrative are strikingly different. Therefore, *Johnson's Dictionary* is an interesting example of the (r)evolution in both: Dabydeen's historical writings and the Guyanese historical novel.

On the very first pages of the novel Dabydeen openly admits that his work is an allegory, both on the level of its content as well as form. There are three mottos that precede the text, the first by Samuel Johnson, “metaphors are anklets to art, they hobble the flow of reality”, the second by Shelley, “a metaphor does not run on all four legs”, and the third, the most significant, by Wilson Harris: “Legba: the lame voodoo priest stumbling towards the gates of higher truths”⁵¹. As such, Dabydeen openly alludes to the allegorical construction of the Caribbean history, historical time and the Guyanese legacy of the allegorical novels about history, which he fuses with a dose of realism and presents within the historical novel. The novel is divided into four parts, all of which could be read separately, but only together they are a truly meaningful description of Demerara and its people. Furthermore, already at the very beginning of the novel Dabydeen invokes the allegorical image of Manu, the Hindu deity, who is being commanded to the task of telling the story: “only he, Manu, originator of life, could read the scroll of light (...) it was his task to bear this knowledge, inherited from his master” (*JD*⁵², 11). To himself and to the reader, Manu declares his will to go on the mission to find “Someone “[who] is born afar and name it” (*JD*, 13). Manu's declaration is an allusion to the awaited birth of the prophet, and the novel is an allegorical

⁵⁰ His previous neo-slave narrative *Harlot's progress* (2000) is a deconstruction of the form of slave narratives where the narrator produces a story of his life to please the abolitionists, rather than give a true account of his life.

⁵¹ The figure of Legba, a Haitian voo doo spirit, is an intermediary between the world of humans and the world of higher spirits. He as if stands at the crossroads between the two worlds and is granted the right to speak with the two. He is used by Wilson Harris as an example of the creolization and the allegorical nature of the Caribbean history. Legba originated in Africa, but has been reshaped in Haiti under the significant effect of the French and their culture. Thus, Harris believes that the figure of Legba embodies the history of Haiti and its people (Harris 1999: 242).

⁵² All the quotations come from Dabydeen, David. 2013. *Johnson's dictionary*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, which is henceforth referred to as *JD*.

pilgrimage across the land of Demarara, where at the end one finds a promise of spiritual rebirth.

The figure of Manu in Dabydeen's writing is in itself a fascinating motif. Manu is a mythical figure from Hindu mythology "the law-giver and god of deluge in Vedic scriptures" (Darroh 2009: 138); simplifying matter to its core, Manu is a figure poignant to Noah, the only man warned by Vishnu of the preceding Great Flood, and its only survivor, who "became both the progenitor of the new human race and the first lawgiver" (Klostermaier 1998: 69). In *Memory and myth* (2009), Francis Darroh distrusts Dabydeen's previous declarations that he had no intention of ascribing any ethical or religious dimension to the name 'Manu' he is consequently using to name his protagonists, and which he simply claims to have "plucked out from memory" (2009: 138).⁵³ Even if Dabydeen's incorporation of the myth in his previous works like the narrative poem *Turner* (1994) or the neo-slave narrative *Harlot's progress* (2000) has indeed been unconscious, it was nevertheless very telling for the reader.⁵⁴ Namely, both times he used the Hindu deity to tell of the horrors of African slavery, "captur[ing] the intricate details of the ancestral union that form the Caribbean experience and memory" in which "the African history of slavery [is forever mixed] with Indian indenture via the vehicle of Hindu mythology" (Darroh 2009: 162). In *Johnson's Dictionary*, Dabydeen once again uses the figure of Manu but now he, for the first time, openly acknowledges his mythical and moral, or even didactic, dimension and makes the reader seek clues to his intricate narrative on the material and metaphysical levels.

In terms of the allegorical structure of the novel, it is also significant to note that in *Johnson's Dictionary* capitalism plays a very specific role. Capitalism created the conditions of cultural and economic dependency that contributed to the creation of the characteristically allegorical sense of Caribbean history, the process which Ian Baucom, in his book *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), described on the example of the infamous Zong massacre (1781). Baucom claims that the Atlantic slave trade changed the slaves into the allegories of well-being, financial prosperity and security of the metropolis. In the process, the slaves earned the allegorical view of history, which could be

⁵³ Dabydeen is generally known for his public declarations that art has no moral obligations. However, the topics he engages himself with are the most difficult ones in which to avoid questions about the ethical and moral value of his testimonies, which are beyond doubt present in his works, even if he claims not to write them for that purpose (Eckstein 2006; Low 2007).

⁵⁴ In his epic poem *Turner*, Manu is the slave thrown from the ship, whose head is visible on the painting, and who in Dabydeen's poem retells the story. In *Harlot's progress* he appears on the ship with Captain Thistlewood and he is thrown out from the ship and, as he opens his mouth to tell the story, water silences him (Dabydeen 1999: 97-99).

treated as analogous to Lukács claims on the Europeans discovering their historical awareness in the French revolution. Most importantly, this sense of time and history, as well as the intricate web of capitalist interdependencies, did not end with colonialism and it is as much a part of the colonial history as of the present, since time in the Caribbean “does not so much continue but repeat” (Baucom 2005: 24, 31; Tambling 2010: 155-156). Similarly, Bill Ashcroft claims that the sense of the past in the Caribbean is “conflated with the present” and thus the writer must “continually strive to capture” this present / past interdependency (2001: 104). One may clearly note that such a vision of history as invariably conflated with the present permeates *Johnson’s Dictionary*, which may be read dualistically – as a novel on and about history, set in the particular time of the historical change – but also as an elaborate commentary on the (non)passing of time and (non)changing of history in the Caribbean.

Johnson’s Dictionary, then, is a complex tale of earning the sense of being a part of the capitalist system of exchange and signification, and seeking the proper words and means of conveying such a fluid and unstable historical heritage. It is symbolically set in the late eighteenth-century Demerara,⁵⁵ which at that time was a capitalist heaven and a meeting place for the people of all classes, religious and races, who are driven to this El Dorado in pursuit of gold and the possibility of self-(re)invention. There one meets the narrator of the story Francis, who is the first to comprehend the complexities of the country’s history and the economy. From Francis’ relatable, and at points moving, tale one pieces together the larger picture of Guyana and Guyanese history. The reader learns that Francis was bought by a rich Demerara landowner, Dr Gladstone, whose name is an allegory in itself as it alludes to John Gladstone (1764-1851), a Scottish tradesman and planter in the West-Indies already mentioned by Ryhaan Shah, who owned vast estates in Demerara and advocated against the abolition of slavery. When he lost the battle, he was the first to procure the indentured East-Indian workers to work

⁵⁵ Demerara is here used to refer to Guiana, as it was frequently done by the colonizers stressing its connection with sugar. Under the Dutch and the British, Demerara became the most famous sugar plantation region of Guyana and its name may sound familiar even to the readers unacquainted with the colonial history, because of the famous Demerara sugar. Demerara sugar was the most ‘noble’ and expensive kind of sugar produced in British Guiana. With time, however, the name became adopted by other brands that had little, if anything, in common with the original product. Michael Blakeney in *Extending the protection of geographical indications: Law and practice* describes the struggles in the British Parliament over the brand, which was successively becoming corrupted due to its unlawful use (2014: 345). On a somewhat humorous note, Sharon Maas, a Guyanese author who visited Poznań in 2013, determined that the varieties of brown sugar available in the Polish shops under the said brand of Demerara sugar have nothing in common with what she knows under the same name.

on his Demerara estates, ensuring the continuity of the colonial capitalist economy (Williams 1944: 89). In fact, Francis' life and tale may be divided into two stages, the golden age of him being under the protection of Dr Gladstone, and the times of chaos, which descend on Demerara after Gladstone's death.

The fictional Gladstone was, as Francis says, "the inheritor of his father's fortune in Scotland – a tea merchant" who "instead of lavishing it on porcelain", "trained as a surgeon". He is said to have "abandoned Edinburgh for Demerara, his only motive being piety" (*JD*, 59) and thus from Francis' story Dr Gladstone emerges as a symbol of benevolent care for the slaves and the embodiment of colonial order – a proper master of "the grateful slave". Francis' gratitude seems to be genuine as at that time he does not see the whole picture of the colonial interdependencies, but knows only that the Doctor elevated him above the position of the field slave. The Doctor was also the first to acknowledge him as a human being and name him, which for the reader is a colonial act of possession, but the boy sees it as his master's grace: "I was a child of eleven when he bought me. I know because tallied my teeth and told me: 'You are eleven, young Francis,' not only giving my age but also my name" (*JD*, 59). Francis remembers also that "Dr Gladstone would give [him] a few coins which [he] stored in the wooden Scottish box"; he also appreciates that "Dr Gladstone would not have me lying on straw, allowing me my own room, with bed, table, wardrobe and mirror" (*JD*, 65). He even allowed him to "eat whatever [he] wanted from the kitchen" (*JD*, 65), letting him share the food with less fortunate plantation slaves, for which he never punished him.

Such acts of good will change Gladstone into a god in Francis' eyes: "Dr Glad One was like Jesu to me; he died when I was eighteen, the seven years in his presence like seven days, too-too brief" (*JD*, 60). Most importantly, however, Gladstone is the one who, though unwillingly, first teaches Francis about the existence of the external and intricate system of worth, signification and exchange, into which he has been already inscribed. The moment of epiphany is symbolically represented by the scene in which Gladstone presents Francis with "the receipts from various massas [given] to dr Gladstone when he purchased me" all locked in "a pretty wooden box". "It was a gift of myself on paper", Francis says, "I could read what I was worth, what monies exchanged hands (...) A shilling and three pence it amounted to, all I was worth in the world" (*JD*, 64, 66). Through his benevolent gift, Gladstone makes Francis realize how much he is actually worth, how comfortable his life is in comparison, and how quickly it could be lost. Furthermore, he immediately grasps that Gladstone is also an allegory of his own material well-being and at this point from an innocent boy he turns into a cynic in the Žižekian understanding of the word, namely the one who is "aware

of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask” (Žižek 2008: 25).

Therefore, when Gladstone dies Francis consciously and deliberately seeks close relationships with the owners of capital, knowing that they may guarantee him the better life. Hence, he becomes the most faithful servant to lady Elizabeth, a young widow whom Gladstone married late in his life and to whom he left his fortune. Elizabeth is oftentimes referred in the novel as Moll, which brings to mind Hogarth’s *Harlot’s progress* and Dabydeen’s *Harlot’s progress*, where Moll was one of his main protagonists.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in *Harlot’s progress* Dabydeen used the image of a black slave boy – Mungo – who accompanied Moll and made him her companion also in his novelistic rendition of the story. In *Johnson’s Dictionary*, the part of Mungo is played by Francis, who becomes Elizabeth’s servant and companion in the ‘progress’ towards her moral and spiritual corruption. Unlike Hogarth’s Moll, Elizabeth is by no means an innocent girl ruined by money, but a smart woman who sees in Gladstone her chance for overturning her luck; she never belies the fact that she married him for his fortune, being ready to “tolerate his Scottish speech, barbarous as it was” as she has always wanted to be “a merry widow” (*JD*, 52). Indeed, as Francis claims, within six months she manages to ruin Gladstone physically and financially and thus she contributes to his death within a year. Even though Francis hates the woman, by the time she arrives he is already well educated in the rules governing plantation life and he knows well that his position depends solely on his good relations with the capital owners. Therefore he goes on to embrace his predefined role of a Mungo and becomes an attentive and loyal servant to lady Elizabeth.

Along with the new mistress, Francis earns also an arch enemy, a young penniless Jew, Theodore, who enters the colony with great ambitions of social progress and quickly becomes Elizabeth’s lover. Theodore himself is an allegory of the unstoppable historical change that was slowly sweeping through the eighteenth-century Europe, bringing the redefinition of the master-slave relationship. What we know of Theodore is erratic, but his family is claimed to have owned “several estates in Russia and Poland” (*JD*, 118) from which, as one may infer, they have been exiled.⁵⁷ Theodore seems an

⁵⁶ It is also an outward allusion to Elizabeth’s past outside Demerara, where she, just like Hogarth’s Moll, was working as a prostitute for a Jewish master.

⁵⁷ Theodore sees Guyana quite literally as a chance for a new life, as he says “[w]hen I left Poland it was to pursue a new calling, it was as if God had given me a new name and promise of another reputation” (*JD*, 195). It is interesting that Dabydeen, showing the possible future fate of Theodore, suggests that, should he come back to Poland, he runs the risk of being killed. Thus Dabydeen draws the Poles as anti-Semites, alluding to religious, rather than racial roots of the animosities. As one may read, “I can tell you Theodore go back to East, Poland or whatever it call: he does wear rose to remind him of how, over there,

idealist and economic reformer enchanted by the ideas of economic liberty and, initially, the reader is guided into thinking that he is indeed motivated by a wish to secure freedom for the slaves. Soon, however, it occurs that all he cares about is an increase in the plantation profits, that would not only translate itself directly into his own salary but also enable him to defraud a substantial amount of money, allowing him to win back his lost position of a land owner. What differentiates him from Gladstone is the fact that he no longer wishes to take care of the slaves but to teach them to fend for themselves, and thus generate even more profit, incurring no obligations on the master's part. The premise is based on Adam Smith's credo that "[t]he man who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly not only preserves his health the longest, but (...) executes the greatest quantity of work" (2012: 69).

As soon as Theodore employs himself as an accountant to an old planter, Mr Basnett, he convinces him that multiplying income requires the reorganization of the plantation and in no time he starts putting Adam Smith's ideas into practice, introducing New Order onto the Demerara plantations. The effects of his actions are paradoxical; on the one hand he truly improves the lives of the slaves, but on the other he triggers in them the awareness of being part of the capitalist system which, just like in Francis, deprives them of any illusions they might have harboured about their pre-determined place in history. On the practical note Theodore restores the lunch break, gives the slaves a free Sunday, cuts an hour from their work day and allows the slaves to "tend allotments they were permitted to use adjoining their lodges" and "[he] instruct[s] them that day in Gospels (though as he divulged to me [Francis] later he was Jewish by birth and an atheist)" (*JD*, 124).⁵⁸ Theodore is looked upon as a mad man, by both the slaves and the masters, as he "confounded all (...) in equal measure" and he makes some of the slaves feel that they are cheating on their masters. They even collectively agree to give back one free Sunday a month and an hour of their newly acquired free time (*JD*, 125). As expected, the other planters quickly recognize the revolutionary potential of Theodore's ideas and deem him, and his Adam Smith, "a felon, a foul felon, a fiend, a familiar, a fallen angle, a fliggertigibbet". Though they launch "[a] full crusade (...) [against the] smutty

his life was once all sparke and play. But as soon as he land back home, somebody will stab-stab-stab he, and Theodore bleed to death. (...) Pole-folk don't make jokes with Semites" (*JD*, 199).

⁵⁸ Thomas' actions bring to mind the reformatory zeal described by Matthew Lewis in his journal from the West-Indies where he went on two subsequent visits and devoted himself to bettering the slaves' conditions by banning the use of the whip for example; nevertheless, Lewis was not an abolitionist and his journal is permeated by a significant dose of the imperialist worldview (Terry 1999: i-xvii)

Smithian ideas and practices put in place by Theodore that threatened the sanctity of the colony” (*JD*, 149), the ideas he planted in the slaves’ minds cannot be eradicated.

The slaves quickly read between the lines of Theodore’s reforms and preaching, and they learn the basic rules of the system he is trying to impose. As one of them says, “Dr Glad One give you all title; he call you Billy and you Cato and you Alice and you Dido, but he shoullda name you after how you serve sugarcane: boilerman, weedboy, puntman...” (*JD*, 87). The others quickly reassesses their value, saying that, “men were costed as three hundred and thirty pounds each (a the start of the year)” and thus they should “save their value by guarding against whiplash, disease, scarring when the cutlass slipped because of slackness of attention, and the hundred other dangers to their wellbeing” (*JD*, 130-131). Such allegorical relations between the slave’s body and value bring to mind Foucault’s deliberations on the nature of money. Foucault argued that gold and silver gain their value only in the process of their coinage into money, which furnishes the metal with the allegorical power of the goods that they symbolize (Foucault 2006 [1970]: 190). In other words, money would not be money if it did not signify wealth (2006 [1970]: 194) and slaves would not be slaves if they did not signify the wellbeing of the planters since their value stems from in their function and utility on the plantation.

The only one to fully comprehend the true role of Theodore is Francis. He deems him a “rapist” in disguise of the liberator (*JD*, 171) and he tells the reader that the moment the field slaves have learned to “value themselves”, their lives have been forever changed, with no return to the bliss of ignorance (*JD*, 130-131). Indeed, the moment they become aware of the symbolic nature of value, and the fact that the whole Western world is governed by the same rules, they start perceiving slavery in terms of a class-struggle; now they know that “[t]he English were worse than cannibals. A select group fattened on the labour of the rest of their tribe, reducing hundreds of thousands to beggary and bone” (*JD*, 90). Abolition, then, suddenly becomes a threat and they, just like Francis, seek the ways to actually benefit from the colonial system. On the event of its change, they themselves “must demand compensation for being made redundant: a slave was equal to so much tonnage, whereas a free man was worthless” (*JD*, 131-132). Francis, nevertheless, has the awareness mentioned by Baucom of time *not* passing, and he knows that even abolition is an illusion as there is no freedom within the body of the consumerist machine governed by money. Paradoxically, the only people freed by the abolition of slavery would be the capital holders, now absolutely unaccountable for the well-being of their stock. “A free man gained a wage and nothing else”, Francis says, “[h]e was expected to conduct this or that act of service. If he was diligent, he was kept on; if not, he was dismissed and swiftly replaced. Massa or Missie did not invest in him emotionally” (*JD*, 172). A slave, however, “was

longed for from the very beginning. Massa having to place a non-refundable deposit to secure him, the rest payable when he was delivered from Africa to the colony, inspected passed” (*JD*, 172).

Francis based his radical views on his long and acute observations of the colonial order as part of Elizabeth’s household; more precisely, he saw how Elizabeth, though technically a rich widow, still caters for the male attention that for her is a promise of another good marriage and continuous material well-being. Thus Francis knows that her independence is illusionary and that “both of us were slaves to men’s appetites. My Mistress and me: planter and slave at one in the same time, like the sun and moon sharing an (un)common sky” (*JD*, 109). They both, then, are ‘goods’ and the relationships between them and those who yield power reflects the social relations within the colonial system itself and thus may be deemed commodity fetishism (Žižek 2008: 18-23). As Robert Young writes “the forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both mirrors and consequences of the modes of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations” (Young 1996: 181). Elizabeth herself perfectly knows the rules of the game and she tells Francis “you Francis, and I, are worth seven hundred pounds a year (...) you must learn henceforth to act in a seemly manner, in dress and deed” (*JD*, 98). Such and similar claims may bring to mind Dabydeen’s inspiration with Hogarth, who, as Dabydeen himself wrote, “grope[d] towards an understanding of the female (black and white) experience of subjugation” and senses “a solidarity between blacks and lower-class whites which overrides racial division”, and both are “victimized by an economic system controlled by the moneyed class” (Dabydeen 1987: 132).⁵⁹

In a moment of rage and resignation, when he exhausts all his ideas of how to get rid of Theodore, Francis destroys Theodore’s “handbook for the future governance of the wide world” (*JD*, 143, 191) and starts plotting his

⁵⁹ Despite such claims, one should not misinterpret Dabydeen’s novel as a praise of slavery or a communist manifesto, as he neither gives straightforward advice to the rich or the poor of today’s world nor sketches any utopian community. He also does not propose any tangible economic solutions to the problems of today’s capitalist world but only signals that seeking alternatives to capitalism is a necessity. In November 2014, *the Huffington Post*, quoting the Reuters and Global Slavery Index, wrote that “[a]n estimated 35.8 million people are enslaved worldwide” and modern slavery is nothing but an economic dependency that “is defined as possession or control of a person that deprives them of their rights with the intention of exploiting them” (Goldsmith 2014). The process is supported by great corporations as well as third world governments, which allow them to operate within their countries with no control and oftentimes without limits, lured by the promise of profit and gain, the very essence of (post)colonial capitalism. Dabydeen’s novel, then, may be inscribed into a post-capitalist debate on the flaws and possible reforms, or replacement, of the system of global capitalism, which acts as a force homogenizing economic and structural inequalities (Bauman 2007: 5).

death. He undertakes a long journey to find Miriam, the plantation witch, known as obeah,⁶⁰ and to procure from her the poison with which he would end all his problems. However Miriam, who knows well why Francis came, refuses to grant him the mixture and instead offers him a prophecy and a purpose in life (*JD*, 191-194). She tells him that he is too weak to stop or change history by killing Theodore, who himself is but a meaningless part of the same narrative. She also foretells that the present order of Demerara will not last long, but for now she evokes for Francis the image of the Fisher King, waiting on the shore for his saviour, who is not there yet to be seen on the horizon.⁶¹ Then she renames him to Manu and thus links him with the Manu who opened the story, and the Manu from Hindu myths, whose role was to give the new beginning to the world, and also with the Manu from Dabydeen's other works, the one whose aim was to tell the African histories. Manu who in *the Prologue* set out on his journey to name the prophet now finds himself in Francis, whose mission is to name and preserve the past and thus change and affect the future. Hence, though Francis cannot stop history, he nevertheless may represent, imagine and preserve it, thus fusing his disappointment with his place in the history built around capitalism with the ability to rewrite and recreate it.

To understand the gravity of his transformation, it is imperative to go back to the beginning of the novel and to remind oneself of the fact that Gladstone plays also the role of Samuel Johnson and the titular *Johnson's Dictionary* serves as an allusion to Francis' role as a storyteller.⁶² When one summer the fictional Dr Gladstone ordered *the Dictionary* from Scotland, he was spending long hours reading it in his room and he deemed it "the most valuable commodity in the civilized world" and in the whole of Demerara (*JD*, 64). On the said *Dictionary* he taught Francis reading and the meaning of such words as – possession, beauty imagination – "the power of forming ideal pictures; the power of representing things absent" (*JD*, 67). Remembering this part of his life, Francis says that "[w]ords were more delicious than food" and

⁶⁰ Obeyah is most commonly defined as a witch, as a kind of shaman-lady, who is able to cure illnesses, chase away evil spirits, cast spells and so on. The word is often traced to obayifo or bayi, meaning witch or wizard, from the Twi language of West Africa, or to the Efik word ubia, which refers to elements of a charm intended to inflict harm, as the derivation of the word indicates (Edmonds and Gonzalez 2010: 122-126).

⁶¹ The Fisher King is the symbol from Arthurian legends; he is an impotent and wounded king guarding the Holy Grail, whose body is an extension and a metaphor of the state of his kingdom. Here it could signify the dying and corrupted system of colonialism and colonial capitalism awaiting its rebirth.

⁶² Francis bears poignancy to Francis Barber (1735–1801), the actual black servant to Dr Johnson and his assistant during the production of *the Dictionary*. One may say that in the novel he symbolizes the inseparability of the two worlds, showing that the African man was present at the birth of the English language.

each and every one of them opened his eyes and his senses towards new experiences and new phenomena, all of which he saw but could not name and describe without the words (*JD*, 67). Thus Dabydeen seems to repeat the claim of Benjamin that full human understanding, expression and experience are essentially linguistic phenomena (Benjamin 1996 [1918]: 62-74). Francis remembers that his learning the words was so intense that he ascribed magical powers to the *Dictionary* and believed it to be an extension of Gladstone's own body. When one day he tore three pages from the book to "keep his words with him", he thought he caused Gladstone's illness: "I have brought sickness unto you. I tore three pages from the *Dictionary*, it's true" (*JD*, 94).

The more Francis read and the more he learned from the books other than *the Dictionary*, the more the books were losing their magical dimension. As he remembers, Elizabeth "purchased books to stuff my shelves – on fashion, cooking, and the arts of conversation" and "[a] tutor gave me daily lessons in Latin and in modern poetry" though "being a rare creature of learning in the colony, he charged a fortune" (*JD*, 105). Thus, thanks to the books, Francis becomes a living testimony to his lady's own refinement which, as Dabydeen himself wrote, was a frequent role played by the slaves in the eighteenth-century (Dabydeen 1987: 88). However, Francis was by no means a passive object of such teachings as he himself quickly learned how to use language to his own gain. For example, he started selling his poetic skills to Elizabeth's suitors, who pay well for the subtle and intelligent love poems authored by the slave. In one of the moving scenes, Francis, aware of how much he owes to language, kneels on Gladstone's grave to thank him for the gift of the word: "The money mattered to me but the playfulness of words more, for which I knelt at Dr Gladstone's grave (...) I lived on – the *Dictionary*, the Classics and French cuisine my consolation for his loss" (*JD*, 140) and indeed he quite literally *lived* on the word, which was his primary source of income.

The sense that he is not using Gladstone's gift in the way he should have does not leave him, and only after his meeting with Miriam does he regain the passion and the true love for the words he lost in seeking a comfortable place in the colonial system. In the very last scene Francis / Manu is once again standing on Gladstone's grave and looking at the sea-wall which separates the Guyanese shores from the endless oceans. He now realizes that he himself is responsible for preserving the history of his people – that would be the story of their lives and experiences, and not of the capitalist exploitation. "I looked out to the sea (...) by the time [the ship he looks at] reached England there would be no trace of me, only the story of El Dorado, story done-done tell a thousand times, about Raleigh and all them, so who will remember, much less record nigger-me?" (*JD*, 205). Thus, just like Krish from *Weaving water*, he becomes aware that he himself is the only one who may

preserve and shape the past. He then makes a promise to himself, and to the reader, that he will keep History alive and that he will “*persist with learning to write*” and “*grow old slowly to become massa to the craft (...) for I is Manu, you hear (I shout after the ship)*” (JD, 205). He also promises to teach the field slaves the language, and thus share with them Gladstone’s gift, preparing them for the new world: “*I will prepare them for freedom by teaching them the Dictionary, starting with A for abacus to encourage counting and calculated thrift, aby by year-end wthey will go to Z for zeugma, so they will encounter the mystery of language*” (JD, 205).

Francis’ most important and seminal declaration comes when he utters a very significant sentence concerning the role of the postcolonial (hi)storyteller and his / her struggles with language, tradition and history, all intimately connected to language. He does so mixing the proper English with Guyanese-Creole, which makes his message all the more powerful. “*When our tongue become bond-slave to English*”, Francis says:

[we] baptize and yield in worship to it, then it is we done cuss, done bad-talk massas, beshrew missies. *When all that badam-bam and bruk-up spirit leave us like legion, the first light of freedom will fall on our forehead like fresh expression.* Blessed be blackman, he will describe the earth anwe and share it with lion and lamb, fish and fowl and whitefolk (JD, 205; emphasis mine, MF).

In other words, it is time to end both worshipping the English language and cursing it, as it does not deserve neither of these mutually exclusive positions; instead it is time to use it to recreate their very own histories as only then would they be truly free and able to cross their designated place as part of the historical-capitalist allegory of the West. When Francis utters these words all three traditions that shaped the Caribbean are already united in him. He is Francis / Manu, blessed by Miriam who stands for the Virgin Mary,⁶³ and therefore, just as in *The waste land* Eliot hoped for the rebirth of Europe in the East, Dabydeen seems to be hoping for the same in the fusion of all the traditions and histories that shaped Guyana and the wider Caribbean. The power of the moment is acknowledged even by the dead Dr Gladstone, whose grave is said to “*crack open, new life come*” (JD, 205).

In *The pleasures of exile* Lamming wrote that the moment Prospero taught Caliban to speak, he entered into an irreversible contract with him and from then on every encounter with Caliban was also an encounter with

⁶³ Miriam’s name alludes to the Virgin Mary and the association is corroborated by the fact that her prophecy in the book is set against Dürer’s image of *Virgin and child and monkey*. Miriam is also the name oftentimes used by Wilson Harris to name his female protagonists, for example in *The whole armour* (1963), which invariably suggests the possibility of the Caribbean rebirth.

himself. Simultaneously, Prospero's books become Caliban's own legacy (Lamming 2002 [1960]: 15). In *Johnson's Dictionary* Dabydeen seems to say that now it is time not only to claim the colonial history – the proverbial colonial books – as Beryl Gilroy already did, but also their brighter and darker truths, being at the same time fully aware of what it means to be a writer of history in such places as Guyana. Namely, like Shah, Dabydeen does not forsake the legacy of the historical imagination. On the level of his novel's construction as well as content, he manages to preserve the specifically allegorical sense of being in history rooted in Guyana's capitalist relationships with the metropolis. Besides, he confirms Shah's claim, though using different narrative tools, that in Guyana time does not pass in the same way as it does in the West. Last but not least, through the figure of Francis he suggests that the Hindu and the African elements of the Guyanese culture and history are inseparable and that the future of Guyana lays in the reconciliation with its colonial history. Even more broadly, the novel is a perfect and ambitious example of the elasticity of the historical novel as the genre that is by no means antithetical to allegory, realism, imagination, creativity and, first and foremost, the specifically Guyanese experience of history.

One may thus conclude that the historical novel is far more complex a genre than the prevalent critical focus on the neo-slave narratives and their reconceptualization of Black British history would suggest. It deserves to be appreciated as a separate discourse within the body of the Guyanese writings and it cannot be equated with the allegorical novels about history, which tried to break the ties with narrative realism and the colonial historiography. Instead, it should be placed in the evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, relationship to the realist historical pieces written by the first-wave authors who experimented with content, but not yet with the form. As such, it seems one of the most interestingly developing genres in the Guyanese literature. Additionally, the historical novel provides one with an unprecedented insight into the history of the Guyanese identitarian discourse. After the first highly controversial attempts of Edgar Mittelholzer to coin the national Guyanese history, one notes a departure from the national towards the history of Black Atlantic diaspora exemplified by Beryl Gilroy. The recent novels by Shah and Dabydeen, in turn, do not shun from depicting particular ethnic experiences but they simultaneously reconcile the ethnic with the national, the Caribbean and the universal. To borrow the words of Helen Scott, their novels are “distinctively Guyanese even as they are global” (2009: 90).

Chapter Three

Becoming Guyanese: Literary quests for (trans)national (non)belonging

There is no one national tradition among British West Indians. Each island or territory developed socially in accordance with the strongest of the conflicting European influences at work within it. Thus St. Lucia is markedly French (...)

Trinidad is strongly Roman Catholic (...) British Guiana should be Dutch in outlook but British ideas swamped those of the Dutchmen, and the result was something British but not quite, for, again, the influx of East-Indian, Portuguese and Chinese tended to create modifications
Edgar Mittelholzer, *With a Carib eye* (1958: 186)

Guyana climbed from my colonized bed,
Blindly stuffed feet into my leather slippers
And ambled towards kitchen and coffee
Fred D'Aguiar, "Continental shelf" (2009: 131)

Edouard Glissant sees the clash between the old and the new world as the clash between Sameness and Difference. Sameness, understood as the imposition of homogenous cultural identities, "began with expansionist plunder in the West, Diversity came to light through the political and armed resistance of peoples" (1999: 98). Every nation, Glissant argues, has a right to "self-assertion", that is tantamount to "the need not to disappear from the world scene" but "to share in its diversification" (1999: 99). However, so as not to reproduce Sameness, a new national literature has to combine mystification with demystification and the local with the global. "Such is its analytical and political function which does not operate without calling into question its own existence" (1999: 101). Hence, narrating new nations, to paraphrase Homi Bhaba's words, is writing against sameness and towards difference, but at the same time providing one with a sense of rootedness in

the global(ized) world. A coinage of individual and national identity that would encompass varied civic and ethnic loyalties, imagined communities and cultural identities is an onerous and multidimensional enterprise, which manifests itself perfectly in Guyanese literature. Guyana is called the land of six peoples – the Amerindians, Africans, East-Indians, British, Portuguese and Chinese – but such a description hardly exhausts its actual complexity. James Rodway, a colonial historian of British Guiana, wrote that:

the people of Guiana are probably more varied than those of any other country in the world. Every race is represented – the European and Indo-European, the African negro, the Chinese, as well as people from Anam and Java, and finally, the true American. Besides these there are mixed breeds in all proportions – white with black, negro with East-Indian, and white with East-Indian, Chinese and American. To the ethnologist these must necessarily be interesting (Rodway 2005 [1912]: 186).

For years the Guyanese defined themselves through the prism of their imaginary homelands, with the colony being nothing but a temporary settlement. Henry Kirke in his memoir *Twenty-five years in British Guiana* (1898), observes that “one of the most touching incidents of colonial life” is the usage of the word *home*, even after long years of living in the colony: “A colonist never says that he is going to England or Scotland, as the case may be; he always says he is ‘going home’” (1898: 52). For others – slaves, indenture workers or half-breeds – home was a far more contested space. Some of them chose to associate the homeland with Africa or India, others with the metropolis;¹ none of these strategies, facilitated their self-definition as Guyanese. “A nation exists, so to speak, when the people of a state express the conviction that they constitute a nation” (1967: 11), claims Despres, and in Guyana it was not until the early 1950s that the pan-ethnic will of national belonging was born and, ultimately, led to political independence in 1966. In point of fact, this seminal historical moment marks only the beginning of Guyanese identity struggles. Till this very day, writers and poets seek to understand what it means to be a Guyanese and if national identity may co-exist with Diversity.

A writer and a novelist Fred D’Aguiar in his poem *English* (2013) beautifully illustrates the complexity of Guyanese identity negotiations: “In

¹ A good illustration of how unclear the notion of home could be in the colonies is observable in Kirke’s further comment: “this [talking of home] assumes a somewhat ludicrous aspect when you hear these phrases from the mouths of black and coloured people, who, in many cases, have never even visited any part of Europe”. Kirke quotes a joke he and his friend played on a certain coloured youth, who claimed to be going home to Europe. “Oh, you are going home, are you? And what part of Africa may that be?” (1898: 52-53).

the other capital where / English / fits me, tailor made, I am told / to go / back home. But they call me / English / there, I protest” (D’Aguiar 2013). Across a few verses, he codes his double *non*belonging; first to the category of Englishness, to which he does not wish to lay claim, and then to his homeland, where due to his long emigration the unwanted label follows him. For D’Aguiar the way out of this deadlock lies in “moving freely between places” with “no name strong enough to stick to my skin except sea”, which in academic terms could be called a liquid identity (D’Aguiar 2013).

In the age of mass migration, globalization and the Internet, such ambiguity of belonging is becoming part of the universal experience. Therefore the inquiry into the Guyanese national identity, that for years has been shaped on the crossroads of cultures and traditions, is a fascinating and valid topic that may provide one with some particular, but also universal, answers as to the place of national identity in today’s world. The present chapter, then, investigates the (re)constructions of national identity as contextualized within the Guyanese novel which, from the time of its emergence, has been intimately linked to the Guyanese identity negotiations. In so doing, it juxtaposes the four fictional life-narratives: two thematizing growing up before political independence, when nationhood was seen as a possible alternative to imperialism, and two after decolonization, when the failure of national(ist) ideology necessitated the redefinition of national belonging. Seeking poignancies and discrepancies between the novels, the chapter additionally scrutinizes how the very concept of national identity evolved across two generations of male and female Guyanese writers and if their generational experiences affected their perception of their national identity. The analyzed works are *The shadow bride* (1987) by Roy Heath and *Disappearance* (1993) by David Dabydeen, followed by *Web of secrets* (1996) by Denise Harris and *Buxton spice* (1999) by Oonya Kempadoo.²

3.1. Forging a hybrid national identity in *The Shadow Bride* (1987) by Roy Heath

The shadow bride (1987) by Roy Heath reflects the birth of national consciousness among the Guyanese East-Indians during the 1930s and 1940s. It contextualizes a crucial moment of their progression from a sectarian identity to a more inclusive, national identification in a country that is just

² The reflections on Denise Harris and Oonya Kempadoo’s writing, with some necessary but significant shortenings, were published in the collected monograph entitled *Curators of memory: Women’s voices in literature in English* (2015). Poznań: Wydział Anglistyki.

about to experience the era of nationalist enthusiasm. The novel shows all the strata of the East-Indian community from the poorest East Indians, who live and work on the sugar plantations, to their richer compatriots, who are already small estate owners and who can afford to educate their children at the foreign universities. For both groups, their integration into the Guyanese mainstream was by no means smooth; more precisely, due to their rather poor English and broadly disdained “coolie behaviour”, East-Indians were being discriminated against by the Afro-Guyanese urban middle-class (Newman 1964: 49-50), and many of them were silently hoping for a return passage to India (Samaroo 1987: 45). It is a common misconception that all East-Indians transported to Guyana or Trinidad decided to bind their lives with their new homelands; as Robin Cohen writes, it is “simply not true” and “[a]t the end of the period of indenture about a quarter of the Indo-Caribbean returned to India” (Cohen 2002: 22). Some of them later returned to the colonies, others tried to rebuild their Indian lives, but generally speaking the choice between their new and old homeland was very tangible. What additionally hindered their integration in the new world was their internal division into the more progressive Hindu majority and the more conservative Muslim minority.³ *The shadow bride* brilliantly thematises all these tensions and shows how, out of seemingly irreconcilable elements, a common national denominator is being born.

The novel’s main protagonist, Betta, is both a repository of Roy K. Heath’s own generational experiences and a typified Guyanese man, whose road towards national self-definition is thorny, but unavoidable. Before focusing directly on the novel, it is worth mentioning that Roy K. Heath himself most evidently contributed to the shaping of the Guyanese national identity; it by no means implies that other writers of his generation did not venture into the national topics, but only that he was the most adamant in declaring his national, and not Caribbean or Commonwealth, belonging. Though Heath left the country in 1951, aged twenty-four, the country never left him and all his novels are set in Guyana and all touch upon the characteristically Guyanese themes. As he himself once said “all my dreams are set in Guyana” and “[I am] trapped in my Guyanese skin” (McWatt 1986: 205-216). Heath’s novels are realist sketches of the Guyanese society and Guyanese socio-political problems, modelled on the great European realist

³ Roy Heath writes about Muslims in Guiana in such words: “Recognizably Guyanese by their language and accent and their preoccupation with Guyana as the country in which their consciousness has been formed and fostered, they compromise their principles only to the extent they believe such compromise essential to their survival” (Heath 1990: 36). In *The shadow bride* he depicts them accordingly as a more conservative part of the East-Indian community.

masters.⁴ At the same time, they remain distinctly Guyanese as Heath never shunned from the veritable, or even crude at points, literary insights into the Guyanese life. *The shadow bride* is not only Heath's most acclaimed novel, awarded the Guyana Prize for Fiction and nominated for The Booker Prize, but also his most intimate one, finding many parallels in Heath's memoir from Guyana entitled *Shadows round the moon* (1990). After all, as Roy Heath himself said, life and writing are inseparable:

Some authors openly proclaim their intention of writing an autobiography, while others are convinced that their fiction is a made-up story. But neither autobiography nor fiction is what it seems, for the first is all too often an apologia festooned with inventions, and the second an invention anchored to a solid raft of truth (Heath 2014: 155).

Thus, also in *The shadow bride* one finds "a solid raft of truth" about the pre-independence Guyana, Heath's own worldview and the rough path towards the Guyanese national identity.

The novel's main protagonist, Betta, is a member of the higher strata of the East-Indian community who lives off the estate and money left by his late father. He is also the first member of his family born in Guyana and the decision to stay in the colony was made by his widowed mother, against the wish of all his father's relations. Betta's mother was driven by the typically Hindu attachment to land that made her refuse to leave the place she gave birth in, even though she was "saddened immeasurably by the realization of her exile" (*SB*⁵, 101). In Hindu culture one's relationship with the motherland is sacred; whenever a child is born, his or her naval cord is buried in the soil to emphasize their physical, but above all, spiritual connection (Bahadur 2013: 46). Therefore, Betta's mother was somehow forced to compromise between

⁴ *The murderer* (1978), his second novel, is an intricate study of the psyche of a man who, broken by a difficult emotional and financial situation, kills his wife; both in style and in theme it brings to mind Dostoyevsky's *Crime and punishment*, but the action is set in Georgetown, which is depicted in a very believable manner. His other great novelistic achievement is the so called *The Armstrong trilogy*, which as Heath himself claimed, was to be a chronicle of the twentieth-century Georgetown and its people. It consists of the three realistic novels, *From the heat of the day*, *One generation*, and *Genetha* that document the rise and fall of the Armstrong family, sketching their experiences from the twenties to the sixties of the twentieth century, across the wide panorama of the Guyanese society. In his other novel *Orealla* (1984), Heath displayed an interest in the Guyanese clash of civilizations between the coastlanders and the Amerindians, describing the story of Carl, a Macusi Indian, who comes to Georgetown from the titular Orealla, the mission village, and cannot adjust to the city life, which is governed by a set of rules alien to him.

⁵ All the quotations come from Heath, Roy. 1987. *The shadow bride*. London: Flamingo, which is henceforth referred to as *SB*.

her own roots, and her son's, ultimately choosing Guyana. However, it was in the preservation of the memory and tradition of India that she saw the very sense of her existence in exile, and she raised her son in orthodox, or even fanatical, adherence to Hindu traditions. She literally sheltered Betta from any influence of the outside world, including public education, which at that time was widely available and compulsory in Guyana.⁶ Her decision to home-school him came naturally, but, ironically enough, for lack of proper Hindu tutors, she needed to improvise and employ a Muslim East-Indian teacher, Mulvi, who, despite his religious strangeness, seemed less dangerous for Betta's identity formation than the racially mixed public school system.⁷ Hence, even though born in Guyana, Betta grows up a Hindu and an East Indian. This comfortable and unambiguous sectarian identification is nevertheless severely challenged when, still a young man, he leaves home and is forced to reassess his ethnic and cultural loyalties.

The conscious process of Betta's self-(re)construction is triggered by emigration to the metropolis and his university education, which was an ambition of his mother willing to change her son into a respected man, equal in learning and status to the white men of the colony.⁸ For her young and clever boy, she envisioned a medical career, the most profitable and prestigious in the colonial country.⁹ Betta's journey abroad, however, was by

⁶ Education in the colony was obligatory since 1876 but practically enforced from the beginning of the twentieth century. Until 1933 it exempted East-Indian children born on the estates, which strengthened the gap between the rich and poor East-Indians and especially affected East-Indian girls whose education was seen as unnecessary (Peake and Trotz 2002: 47). Interestingly enough, education was the only pan-ethnic and pan-tribal phenomenon, but its contribution to the creation of Guyanese national consciousness was by no means deliberate on the colonizers' part.

⁷ In Guiana, Betta could be home-schooled by a Muslim East-Indian. In this country, Hindu and Muslims were far more unified on both social and political levels than they were in Tobago, the only other British colony with such a significant number of East-Indians (Smith 1965: 11-12). Also his fate of isolation is very typical as it was shared by many "decent" Guianese children, including Roy Heath himself, who were kept safely within the realms of the households and familial groups (Heath 1990: 25).

⁸ The importance of education in the East-Indian community is also prominent in other books about the period. For example *Guyana boy* (2002 [1960]) by Peter Kempadoo set in the plantation community of the 1940s shows the efforts of his East-Indian family to educate him and his siblings. For his parents education equalled freedom and equality to white people: "You get all the opportunity that we never had. You had better take them and make yourself a better man and not have to grow up and take orders from all them white people" (*Guyana boy*, 86)

⁹ Due to the malarial climate, doctors were much in demand in Guiana. As Henry Kirke jokingly admits in his diaries, the sole number of doctors in Guiana per capita meant that they were the best medically attended to people in the Empire. The Guianese doctors were also one of the best paid in the colonies, as at the beginning of the 20th century a doctor could earn 3000 pounds a year (Kirke 1898: 31, 32). However, the archives show that in

no means a simple fulfillment of his mother's expectations, namely a Fanon-like strive to educate oneself into whiteness (Fanon 2008: 10-11). The breakthrough moment came when, after some years spent in Dublin and London, he fully realized the impossibility of his belonging to the white men's world: "he never got to know Dublin, despite the year's internment that followed, the long brilliant summer, the easy public-house acquaintanceships. He was to have the same experience in London" (*SB*, 9). The sense of strangeness deepened even further when it dawned on Betta that he comes from a world that is literally beyond the limits of the metropolitan audience's imagination: "he [Betta] realized how little relevance his London stay had for his own experience. The London School of Tropical Medicine was preoccupied with disease found in Africa and the East (*SB*, 10)". In this way, Guyana occurs to be a periphery of the periphery, a land unfamiliar even to the Tropical Medicine experts, whose visions of the colonial margins were shaped by Orientalist fantasies.¹⁰

Such an acute sense of otherness does not leave Betta even when, after seven years of emigration, he arrives in Guyana. His friends and acquaintances immediately deem him "a stranger" (*SB*, 11) and his strangeness manifests itself physically, in a somewhat Conradian manner, as after his stay in the white man's world, he seems darker. To quote one of his mother's servants: "He skin so dark (...) They say something does suck your blood over there" (*SB*, 15). Contrary to what could be expected, Betta does not display "the newcomer" syndrome; he is not one of those who, having spent some time in the metropolis, willfully separates himself from his native culture, having acquired the Westernized view of the world (Fanon 2008: 13). In Betta's case, homecoming triggers the sense of irretrievable loss:

He had *lost* the art of meeting people and would be intimidated by the greetings and admonishing of strangers, the excessive respect shown by the poor and the curiosity of his mother's hangers on [...] [a]s a student in Ireland, he had been *robbed* of a certain awareness, something indefinable, that could be only expressed by its loss, and that it had been replaced by an obsession with clocks and passage of time (*SB*, 11, 78; emphasis mine, MF).

Betta claims to have been 'robbed' or to have 'lost' something that eludes simple definitions. This may be read dualistically – as his awareness of being

1904 there was only one registered doctor of Indian origin based in New Amsterdam (Bahadur 2013: 77).

¹⁰ Said wrote that the imperial orientalist imagination has been predominantly shaped by the Western perception of Islam and the Arab world (2003: 17), and though in *Culture and imperialism* he mentions Guiana in the context of tropical voyages and Wilson Harris' fiction (1994: 257), one may safely say that for a general member of the British public in the first half of the twentieth century it was terra incognita.

alienated from the East-Indian community as well as the recognition of his inner strangeness. From now on, he sees disparate elements of his identity and fears the impossibility of compromise between them. At this point he sees himself as a freak:

I don't know whether I'm an Indian or a Guyanese. When the Mulvi Sahib wanted to teach me Hindi script you [Betta's mother] stopped him, yet you filled me with stories about India. You wouldn't let me go to the public school and did all you could to prevent me mixing with other children and now I'm a *freak*..." (SB, 57; italics mine, MF).

Betta is desperately torn between his internal differences and, to use Homi Bhabha's idea, he finds himself in the liminal position, being neither the European nor the East-Indian. This very condition is a perfect definition of hybrid identity, which is the new construct born of the two exclusive cultural patterns (Bhabha 2004: 37). Bhabha described hybridity as a strategy of resistance and survival within the body of the colonial system, but before Betta is ready to discern this empowering aspect of his inherently hybrid positioning, he desperately tries to escape the uncertainty. First he wills to become *like* the poor East-Indians, and then *like* the Europeans; as one may surmise, both these strategies are doomed to failure.

Desperately seeking a cure for his *non*belonging, Betta throws away the prospects of a profitable career in private practice and becomes a plantation doctor, willing to better the fate of the East-Indian plantation workers. In such a (re)connection to the poorest strata of the East-Indian community, he tries to *unfreak* himself. His apparent selflessness is immediately decoded as false by his teacher Mulvi, who diagnoses Betta's zeal as an insecurity of belonging: "If you were confident about belonging to the Indian community you would not need throw away your prospects by working among the poorest of the Indian poor" (SB, 59). Mulvi distrusts Betta's altruism and he is more than right in his diagnosis. It soon occurs that Betta's professional sacrifice, instead of bettering the workers' lives, uncovers yet another impossible contradiction – Betta's being a plantation doctor and an advocate of the East-Indian poor. The more he tries to empathize with the workers, by excepting them from field work for example, the more scorn he earns from his European employers. Slowly it becomes more and more clear that Betta is not whom he thinks he is. Namely, he is not so much the East-Indian doctor working for the benefit of his community as the coloured doctor working for the benefit of the colonial administration and his own peace of mind.

Though Betta never uses the precise words, one day it dawns on him that for a long time he has been a "mimic man" of the Empire in Naipaul, and not yet Bhabha's definition of the phrase. V. S. Naipaul in *The mimic men*

(1967), a fictional memoir of the Caribbean politician Ralph Singh, the surname Betta himself is carrying, describes his compatriots from a fictional island of Isabella, which may be associated with Trinidad, as the people devoid of any creative energy and authenticity, merely mimicking the colonizers. To better illustrate his unfavourable views it is useful to remind oneself precisely of the words he used: “[they] spent their leaves in England and sent their children to English schools; they sought to keep their complexions clear and their hair straight by selective marriages” (Naipaul 1967: 210).¹¹ Initially indeed the reader is steered into thinking that Betta is the literal embodiment of Naipaul’s mimicry, seduced by the prospect of being *like* a Western doctor:

He, like other doctors, drove around in cars, wore fine suits and had even learned a special doctor walk (...) Like a tree denying the existence of its roots because they were invisible, he concentrated on the contemplation of his public conduct, the trunk and the leaves that shook when the wind blew (*SB*, 31-32)

From the quoted passage one may infer that Betta honestly believed that his public conduct and professional identity may substitute for all his conflicted affiliations. This façade collapses however, following his realization that he will never become a legitimate part of the East-Indian plantation community, and is only strengthened by a hurtful confrontation with a plantation manager who spells it out for Betta that he will never be equal to the white men ruling the colony.

When one day Betta gets “a curt letter summoning him to the estate manager’s office” (*SB*, 109), he is yet unaware of the effect the conversation will exert on him. The manager asks Betta for a visit to forbid him from issuing, as he believes, the excessive amount of health certificates for the plantation workers, and the crude and standoffish manner in which he talks to the doctor triggers Betta’s transition from a Naipaul-like mimic man to what Homi Bhabha described as mimicry. This moment proves to be a turning point in Betta’s life, and thus it is necessary to turn an analytical eye to their conversation. Entering, the manager’s house, Betta immediately notes that “[the manager] was so certain that his authority was going to elicit a subservience corresponding to the lowly status enjoyed by someone born

¹¹ Selwyn Cudjoe, commenting on Naipaul’s perspective on mimicry, says that it is superficial and steered at emphasizing the negative implications of the colonized adoption of the Western behaviour patterns. According to Cudjoe, Naipaul refused to contemplate the phenomenon on the more complex social and physiological level and therefore his conclusions are unfair towards the Caribbean people (Cudjoe 1988: 139). Naipaul, however, was well known for his harsh judgement of the Caribbean that manifested itself in many of his novels as well as travelogues, most famously in *The middle passage*, oftentimes quoted within the present book.

locally that he dispensed with the need for preliminary remarks” (*SB*, 109). Soon the man intuitively picks up on Betta’s unclear position as a coloured professional employed by the colonial order: “You are a dangerous man, Singh, because you see yourself as a saint ... Oh, don’t be offended. I don’t dislike you; it’s just that one of us should not be here ... You people! We give you an inch and you take an ell” (*SB*, 129). In this way, the manager voices a certain paradox of positioning, which is only beginning to dawn on Betta. Namely, even though they both are employed by the same regime to do the same job – generate profit from the plantation – they have completely disparate motivations and goals. Thus the plantation manager sees Singh as a “dangerous man” whose very presence constitutes a threat to himself and to the colonial order; in his eyes, Betta is the mimic man of the Empire, but in Homi Bhabha’s understanding of the phrase. For Bhabha, unlike for Naipaul, the colonial subject, through adopting certain patterns of the colonizer’s culture, becomes “almost the same but not quite” as the colonizer (Bhabha 2004: 127). In other words, the colonized is not only partially ‘tamed’ by the colonizer, and thus inscribed into the colonial order, but also, paradoxically, s/he gains ‘presence’ within the colonial discourse and thus agency to challenge the colonial authority. As such, the colonial subject’s desire of being *authentic*, here displayed by Betta’s will to be the Western(ized) doctor, in the end proves subversive to his identity construct and to the colonial order (Bhabha 2004: 85-90). The colonizer, in turn, sees the reflection of himself in *the other*: “[t]he observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (Bhabha 2004: 127).

Hence, the moment of Betta’s quarrel with the manager is the seminal scene when the duality of colonial authority discourse comes most sharply to light. Putting it simply, the manager sees in Betta the reflection and subversion of the colonist, the colonist’s traditions and ambitions, and thus recognizes his potential to contribute to the dismantling of the imposed order, which he knows deep inside to be unfair and discriminatory. In order to strengthen his authority, he symptomatically evokes the timeless discursive strategies of the colonial domination, namely the assumed barbarity and brutality of the *colonial other* who, for time being, is contained by the civilized European authority: “There’s always the fear at the back of my mind, he went on, that one day I will fall into your [the colonized] hands” (*SB*, 129). Simultaneously, the manager is well aware that Betta embodies a change that cannot be stopped; the birth of a ‘new man’ who would finally grow to self-determination. He asks himself rhetorically: “Did this Indian doctor represent a new breed of blacks or was he simply a foolhardy upstart whose stay abroad gone to his head”? (*SB*, 129). At this point in the novel the answer to this question is not yet clear.

After the conversation with the manager Betta ultimately resigns himself to the realization that he will never be equal to the European colonial man; such a disappointing conclusion forces him to seek his *self* in-between other denominators of the collective identity available to him in the Guyanese society, among which religion is one of the most powerful and lasting. In the colonial Guyana, one's religious belonging was by no means a private matter and the line of religious differences usually overlapped with ethnicity; the Portuguese were the Roman Catholics, Indians were Hindu or Muslims, and the English were Protestants. The Afro-Guyanese, in turn, adopted the Protestant Christianity, the religion of their former masters, as did many who aspired to a higher position within the colonial society. Christianity, then, was synonymous to "power and prestige and progress" (Naipaul 1999 [1964]: 196) but also oppression as under the British colonial administration the "Indo-Guyanese were required to convert to Christianity and change their names if they wanted to qualify for jobs as teachers and clerks" (Peake and Trotz 2002: 47). Therefore, one's religious belonging could either strengthen one's bonds to a particular ethnoreligious community or be pragmatically utilized as a means of social progression. For this reason, it is not surprising that Betta's doubts concerning his religious allegiance come to the forefront when he is in the most dire need of belonging to any community: "he was suddenly afraid that he adhered to no religion, that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim, nor Christian. (...) [T]he belief in an afterlife, in a Muslim hell, the offerings to Ganesha (...) meant little to him, no more than his shadow or the hair cut" (*SB*, 170).

One of the most seminal moments on the path towards his religious self-definition comes when Betta decides to discuss his doubts with Mulvi Sahib, his Muslim teacher. In expectation of a fierce opposition that would somehow answer his questions, he provocatively asks a devoted Muslim if there is any point in religious belief: "[d]o I need to install it [religion] in my house, like a radio or a piece of furniture?" (*SB*, 177). In response, Mulvi admits that he does not have a good answer. "I thought you had definite views on religion (...) I'm not certain but were always definite about things", states Betta (*SB*, 177). Mulvi admits that his adherence to Islam has little to do with conscious choice and he quickly decodes the real motivation of his disciple. "Isn't it the fact that you are thinking of becoming a Christian?" (*SB*, 177). Needless to say, this is exactly what Betta, as many other East Indians from his generation, is thinking of. As a young and ambitious East-Indian, he no longer sees place for himself in the ethicized model of East-Indian religious discourse: "I can't revert to Hinduism, neither can I become a Muslim" (*SB*, 180). Consequently, conversion to Christianity seems a pragmatic decision and even Mulvi absolves Betta from the guilt of his possible conversion: "If I

were you I should become a Christian and not bother to find excuses to justify my conversion” (*SB*, 182).

It is vital to stress that in their conversation Christianity is understood as an emblem of Betta’s social status, which results from the fact that the colonial ideology linked moral progress – conversion to Christianity – with material benefits. “Religion, education, and the law were seen as the principal elements in the dissemination of enlightenment” and enlightenment meant not only bringing the natives railways, houses or schools, but also Christianity (Nayar 2012: 167). Such a vision of progress was based on some well known principles, namely “the hierarchy of human races and cultures”, which defined the Europeans as morally and culturally superior, and on “the myth of integrity and determination of the colonial gentleman”, towards which every educated colonial man strove (Nayar 2012: 167-168). Therefore Betta, who wishes to call himself a modern man, cannot revert to Hinduism or Islam, which would imply his social and moral regress. However, he is also unable to commit himself to Christianity as it would imply his acceptance of the colonial rule; besides, were he to choose one particular religious denomination, it would bind him again to the closed ethnoreligious community from which he has tried *unfreak* himself in the first place. For all these reasons, he makes a seminal decision of placing himself outside all the religions and he declares himself an atheist.

This episode in Betta’s life may be intriguingly read against Roy Heath’s own experiences, namely his East-Indian friend’s conversion and his own atheism. Heath describes his childhood friend “educated into an admiration of Western values”, who gradually “isolate[d] himself from the influence of the Hindu masses” and “chose to become a Catholic” (Heath 1990: 214). This, for Heath, embodied a negative effect of the rigidly stratified Guyanese society that favoured colonial standards. Repressing one already limiting aspect of his identity, his friend accepted an equally rigid, and foreign, alliance with the colonial order. His friend’s conversion overlapped with Heath’s own crisis of faith as Heath, after some time of trying to find his place in various Guyanese churches, ultimately refused to compromise, and consciously pronounced himself an atheist. As he writes in his memoirs:

In the years following my abandonment of religion I was all but overcome with fear about the inevitable emptiness that would follow. Nevertheless my loss of interest provided a sufficient guarantee for the success of my resolve [to be free] (...) Perhaps my religious faith died in town, the graveyard of all cultures (Heath 1990: 215).

Though atheism seemed initially tantamount to emptiness and alienation, religious allegiance embodied the much more serious constraints of the imposed cultural identification. In his decision not to convert, Betta becomes

the allegory of Heath's own doubts, and his refusal to take up any religious practice may be interpreted as a symbolic liberation from any sectarian construct of identity, be it Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Most significantly, however, from this point both Betta and Heath start to look with hope at the newly constructed concept of the Guyanese national identity as the only pan-religious and pan-ethnic construct.

It is not surprising, then, that on the final pages of the novel Betta grows into national self-determination, which fully encompasses his inherently hybrid positioning and all his conflicted loyalties. Literally, the term *nation* derives from a word *nascor*, with its primordial meaning "to descend from". Its later Latin form 'natio' combined three meanings: a nation, people and race. In other theories, 'natio' means "a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (Brennan 1990: 45). Ernest Gellner differentiated between two major approaches to a nation; the anthropological and the consensual (Gellner 2009: 5-8). As he writes, the men are of one nation "if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations" or "if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation". Benedict Anderson conceived of nation as the "imagined political community" (1991: 21), while Ernest Renan (1990 [1882]: 19) saw nations as spiritual solidarity and Homi Bhabha as "narratives (...) [that] only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1990: 2). Anthony Smith, in turn, disliked the theories of Anderson and Hobsbawm, and argued that nation is not an artificial intellectual construct but the sum of national sentiments experienced by both the intellectuals and the "poor and unlettered" (Smith 1998: 130).

Regardless of how many definitions and theoreticians one brings into the discussion, there is no one satisfactory way in which one would fully capture the complexity of a nation. What binds all the definitions, however, is their emphasis on the subjective sense of being part of a community built on some common denominators, which furnish one with the sense of national identity. In the colonies, where the colonial authority forced people of various ethnicities, oftentimes hostile to one another, into a single nation-state, such a binding factor was to be found in the shared national territory, land and landscape (Smith 1990: 39). Therefore, in the Caribbean scholarship one may encounter a hybrid term "civic territorial nationalism", which is understood as the attachment to the country of one's birth, for example Guyana, and the opposite to ethnic nationalism, which means the identification with the place of one's cultural origin, like Africa or India (Carrion 2005: 27-29).

One also needs to be aware that the declaration of one's civic territorial belonging was a controversial and difficult process, which Roy Heath shows through the example of the East-Indian community as late newcomers to the colony. Ethnic nationalism sustained the East-Indians

through the difficult times of plantation work and racial abuse and their identification with Indian culture provided them with “a feeling of reassurance, security and comfort” (Samaroo 1987: 46). An open declaration of allegiance to Guyana would symbolically cut them off from these semi-mythical lands and stress their ultimate alienation from their ancestors. One of the most telling scenes that illustrates the complexity of the compromise between ethnic and civic ties takes place at the end of the novel, during a wedding feast celebrated by the whole East-Indian community. It is there that Sukrum, a former cane plantation worker, unexpectedly exclaims: “I’m a Guyanese!”. His revelation is sudden and immediately challenged by Bai, his friend: “You’s a East Indian’ Bai protested”. Sukrum, however, is adamant: “You’re Guyanese too (...) ‘You born here! (...) We all born here. How we goin’ be East Indian wen we born here?” (*SB*, 292). Thus Sukrum places emphasis on the common denominator, their common place of origin, which is not India, but Guyana. Therefore he somehow corroborates Smith’s claims that a nation derives not so much from imaginary, as emotional, bonds (Smith 1998: 113) and Sukrum who was symbolically closest to the Guyanese land on which he worked is the first to gain the sense of national belonging, which he only passes on to the higher class represented by Betta and Mulvi. “When most East Indians still see themselves as Indians and not Guyanese Sukrum shouts he’s Guyanese. (...) And it sounded like a cock crowing in at the morning” (*SB*, 294), claims Mulvi.

Faced with Sukrum’s sudden outburst, Betta finally allows himself to recognize and name the feelings he has been experiencing ever since he left Guyana. It finally dawns on him that his identity is woven out of uniquely Guyanese experiences, including that of the landscape: “This was the land in its primal state where long distances could be measured with the eye and even houses and trees were diminished by its immensity. Wherever he went he was *haunted* by that landscape, obsessed by its absence” (*SB*, 232, italics mine, MF). Hence, Betta’s continuous sense of displacement may be now renamed as a sense of being haunted by his land and only now he admits to Mulvi that he has other similar memories:

B: When I was abroad, said Betta, I missed the trenches, How can you miss a canal you never noticed before you went away? On my first day back I kept saying foolish things like, ‘even the gutters are beautiful’. (...)

M: That’s the voice of our new generation. Your ‘even the gutters are beautiful’ means the same thing [as Sukrum’s shouting], don’t you think? (*SB*, 303-305).

The only difference between him and Sukrum is the fact that Sukrum earned this sense of familiarity and oneness with the Guyanese land much earlier. Initially Betta saw Sukrum’s attachment to the land as strange: “[t]here was something odd about the people like Sukrum, who chose to lie under the

massive saman tree and fall asleep in its shade” (*SB*, 232); now he finally discovers the inseparable relationship between the sense of belonging and the land, which has been oftentimes emphasized by theoreticians interested in Caribbean identity (Premdas 2011; Glissant 1999: 105-106).

As one may thus note, despite economic and class differences, Betta and Sukrum both are a part of the new nation, established by virtue of them sharing the unique experience of the Guyanese landscape. Finally Betta’s *not* being an Indian, *not* being a Hindu and *not* being a Westerner may be transformed into a coherent, construct of belonging. “A sense of national identity,” Anthony Smith writes, “provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know ‘who we are’ in the contemporary world” (1990: 17). At the end of the novel, then, Betta finally locates his individual self in Guyana and he eventually discovers who he really is: a Guyanese whose identity is a new hybrid state of belonging coined out of two seemingly exclusive concepts – his ethnic and national heritages. In the broader context, his figure visibly proves that in Guyana cultural hybridity has always coexisted with national belonging and that the two were never exclusive by definition.

Last but not least, Betta’s national awakening coincides with a few seminal events in his private life, which suggest that he has a potential to become a pillar of the new national community. Firstly, he loses his position as a plantation doctor, which marks the end of his struggles with the manager. Secondly, his mother dies, which Josephine Arnold (2001: 102) in her interpretation of the novel reads as a metaphorical death of Betta’s relationship with India and she draws attention to Betta’s final words: “Her death was his doing. But he could not have acted otherwise” (*SB*, 376). In fact, there is yet another death that could be interpreted similarly, namely that of Betta’s father-in-law, which is described in such words: “One of them saw Meena’s [Betta’s wife] father’s death as the demise of the old breed of second generation immigrants, who had not entirely come to terms with their identity as Guyanese, but thought of India as no more than their religious home” (*SB*, 376). Significantly, Beta’s mother was Hindu, but Meena’s father a devoted Muslim, so along with them there dies the generation of the immigrant Guyanese, who never cut their symbolic naval cord linking them to India (Bahadur 2013: 46). Likewise, there disappears a religious division within the East-Indian community itself since now now Betta, a Guyanese atheist, becomes the representative of the oldest generation, which may fully absolve itself from the sin of betrayal towards its imagined homeland – India – and devote its efforts to the construction of the new collective national

consciousness. This promise of development manifests itself also in Betta's hopeful question then the country is going to have its own university.¹²

The whole complicated process of Betta's self-(de)construction finds its happy fulfillment in the coinage of national identity, which is neither ethnic, nor religious or colonial. It seems to accommodate Betta's inherently liminal positioning in-between the conflicted legacies of the Guyanese people, which foresees their unification under the banner of a common national cause – liberation and the development of Guyana. As such, Betta embodies the hope of Roy Heath's generation for a non-sectarian national identification, free from colonial divisions, that would enable the harmonious rule of the country after its separation from the Empire. Beyond doubt, the 1940s and 1950s were the times of national enthusiasm across the colonized world and at that time some honestly believed that nationalism might constitute a legitimate response to colonialism (Despres 1967: 10). Nonetheless, Roy Heath was writing his novel in the 1980s, and though he personally never lost faith in the power of the Guyanese national identity, the ending of his novel is disharmonized by the mentioning that Betta's daughters – the next Guyanese generation – left the country to become medical doctors, but decided to stay in Canada. Though Betta's daughters never earn their own voices, their experience of emigration corresponds to David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*, which makes it even more intriguing to investigate how Heath's vision of a pan-ethnic national identity sustained the challenges faced by the young(er) Guyanese.

3.2. Hybrid(ized) identity negotiations in *Disappearance* (1993) by David Dabydeen

Disappearance (1993) by David Dabydeen opens where *The shadow bride* closes, namely at the point where a new Guyanese – an educated free man – enters the postcolonial world. Its main protagonist earns an engineering degree at Guyana Technical College in Georgetown, established after Independence, and when he leaves Guyana for England he seems a self-conscious individual with a firmly defined sense of identity as an Anglo-Guyanese man, raised in respect towards the English culture. Nevertheless, it is in England where he discovers that, for the English, he is a stranger and his

¹² The question is asked on page 191. The University of Guyana was established in 1963 under the rule of the East-Indian communist leader Chedi Jagan; it started with 164 students and three faculties – Arts, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. Forbes Burnham and his followers called it mockingly “Jagan's Night School” as classes were held in the evenings (Balkaran 2012: 88).

claims to the English heritage are questionable, if not ungrounded. Therefore he starts reassessing his ethnic and national loyalties, only to turn towards Guyana as the only place where he may truly be himself. The present chapter investigates Dabydeen's protagonist's quest for (non)belonging that begins from his negation of the very idea of national identity developed by Betta's generation. *Disappearance*, then, is a literary commentary not only on the place of Guyanese national identity in the changed socio-political reality but also on the illusory nature of liquid belonging and hybridity in today's world.

Disappearance is one of Dabydeen's most popular and widely analyzed novels. It is often compared with V. S. Naipaul's *The enigma of arrival* in terms of its landscape imagery as well as the Caribbean migrant experience of travelling (back) to the metropolis (Stein 2007: 162-180). Numerous critics praise its deep intertextuality that operates on many levels and the author's conscious play with (un)realist convention (Mitchell 2007: 144-161). Its countless interpretative dimensions make *Disappearance* an endless source of academic inspiration.¹³ Some, however, hold this multidimensionality against the novel. Mark McWatt, for example, accuses it of being a cliché of postcolonial theories. "Perhaps it is preferable for the reader to apply the theory to the text", he writes, "rather than have the text apply it to itself. Perhaps, too, this could be Dabydeen's point: that there is little substance at the centre of the self-consciously post-colonial text" (McWatt 1997: 121). Even though the novel may indeed seem formulaic, it is by no means devoid of substance. In fact, rereading consciously postcolonial texts may, using the words of Mirosława Buchholtz, "reveal the tricky side of the numerous treats [and tricks]¹⁴ offered by postcolonial studies" (Buchholtz 2014: 20). The present analysis, then, does not wish to prove that *Disappearance* is an exemplary postcolonial novel, but at the same time it does not forcibly separate it from its postcolonial background. Rather it places the novel within the purely Guyanese context and simultaneously asks a

¹³ The novel is also read against Wilson Harris due to its focus on the landscape, the protagonist's profession of an engineer and the name Fenwick being reused in the novel (see: McWatt 1997: 111-122). Originally, Russell Fenwick was the protagonist of Wilson Harris' *The secret ladder* (1963), a leader of an expedition into the interior of Guyana, an engineer-surveyor, making measurements for new plantations' watering plan. His crew was multi-racial and its composition reflected the complexity of the Guyanese society. It could be also successfully juxtaposed with *Other leopards* (1963) by Denis Williams, showing the authors' common, though not identical, struggles with cultural hybridity.

¹⁴ Treats and tricks, if I understand correctly, are such comfortable illusions offered by the postcolonial studies as facilitating variety, annihilating cultural borders or binary oppositions. If postcolonial scholars accept them as given, and thus no longer question or challenge their own assumptions, postcolonialism may not only lose its opinionating role but also, paradoxically, it runs a risk of transforming itself into a homogenous and totalizing discourse (Buchholtz 2014: 19-40).

question if Dabydeen's ponderings on (non)belonging may reveal any universal, rather than postcolonial, truths about identity formation in today's world.

Therefore, *Disappearance* is being read as a voice of Dabydeen's generation, just like *The shadow bride* was of Heath's. Mark McWatt, the already quoted critic and a friend of David Dabydeen, in *Suspended sentences: Fictions of atonement* (2005) writes that when the country gained independence he was nineteen years old, seven years older than Dabydeen himself, and three older than the main protagonist of *Disappearance*. McWatt remembers his and his friends' enthusiasm for the country's liberation. At that time they were all young, intelligent, ambitious and went to good Georgetown schools, which made them the elite of the nation. In 2005, decades after the political change, McWatt gathered his old colleagues from Guyana, most of whom are now important people in the important Western institutions, and asked them to finish their teenage project of each writing one short story on the occasion of Guyana's independence, describing what Guyana means to them. Regardless of the stories' literary value, and the collection is indeed very interesting, McWatt bitterly concluded that their writing was a homage to the country that all had "abandoned" and which nowadays "seems in worse shape than it was at independence" (2005: 18). Dabydeen, though not part of McWatt's group of writers, is nevertheless one of those émigré Guyanese intellectuals of the post-1950s generation who left the country, but ultimately decided to engage himself more actively in the Guyanese political and social life.¹⁵

This longish digression signals two important things, namely that emigration to the metropolis and the struggles with national identity were not an exclusive experience of the first postcolonial Guyanese generation, and that the Guyanese conditioning may correspond to that of many people leaving their homelands and seeking their places in the globalized and theoretically border-less world. Such a universalist perspective is not ungrounded, as the main protagonist is left unnamed, which makes him a contemporary Everyman. However, if one looks closely at the novel, one may find many allusions to Dabydeen's own life. He and his protagonist are both born sometime before political independence, they are both raised by single mothers and their formative years are overshadowed by ethno-national(ist) tensions. Though Dabydeen left Guyana as a boy, a few years earlier than his protagonist, they both emigrate to England where they try to find their professional identity, Dabydeen as a professor and his protagonist as an engineer. In the context of the Guyanese cross-generational dialogues one

¹⁵ Dabydeen for a few years was a Guyanese ambassador to UNESCO and, since 2010, he is a Guyanese ambassador to China.

may also note undeniable poignancies between Dabydeen and Roy Heath. To illustrate this uncanny relationship it is worth quoting one of Dabydeen's interviews conducted by Mark Stein:

MS: I remember Roy Heath, the Guyanese novelist, saying that although he has been in Britain for forty-five years he still dreams about Guyana and writes about Guyana and he can't write about England. (...) Is that the same for you?
 DD: Yes. I think of Guyana constantly. I've just come back from Guyana. (...) I spent thirteen years there. Those are the experiences that form your character. Some people say writing is just about explorations and re-explorations of childhood experiences. So in a sense: yes, I feel Guyanese.... (...). But then one can't have these easy dichotomies either; but you know what I mean, there are grey areas as well (Stein 2004: 232).

Therefore the novel, despite its seemingly clichéd postcolonial construction, is first and foremost an intimate account of personal, collective and universal identity struggles and an intriguing portrayal of a contemporary Guyanese man trying to reconcile many of his conflicting loyalties into one hybridized body.

Dabydeen's protagonist's critical investigations into his identity are, like Betta's, triggered by a sense of alienation from his own community. In his case, however, they are not so much a pursuit of a hybrid identity that would accommodate his ethnic and civic loyalties as an escape from any solid identification. From the very beginning, the unnamed protagonist is well aware that he is a cultural hybrid; even though he is part of the Afro-Guyanese community, he never calls himself an African or displays any ethnic loyalties. Like Betta, he is being raised by a single mother but he is sent to an ethnically mixed public school, and then to the newly established state college, where he is brought up in the appreciation of English culture. Therefore from the beginning he calls Guyana "our country", but he is also aware of its inferiority towards England. The desire of going abroad is shared by many of his compatriots, including a local drunkard, Alfred, who is a father-figure for the boy. "You does feel as if you got more than one life when you go abroad" (*D*¹⁶, 48), he preaches. Furthermore, despite major political changes, Guyana still appears a country torn by negative differences. It is there that he first learns the power of stereotypes and the unfairness of classification. He perfectly remembers a moment when his teacher called him a *nigger*, as well as when he himself used a word *coolie* "a reminder of [East-Indian] lowliness" (Bahadur 2013: xx) against his school friend.

¹⁶ All the quotations come from Dabydeen, David. 1994. *Disappearance*. London: Vintage, which is henceforth referred to as *D*.

It is in escaping Guyana, then, that he sees a chance of escaping the atmosphere of sectarian divisions. When, still as a young boy, he commits himself to emigration he sees England as a solid alternative to his homeland, a land without the legacy of violence and hatred, where he could become everything he wanted: "... if there was a god he had long abandoned our land and gone abroad or back to England. I suddenly knew that I too must voyage abroad as soon as I grew up and could fashion a boat, even though I was not wholly convinced that such a place existed" (*D*, 62) As Julia Kristeva in *Nations without nationalism*, argues: "[t]hose who repress their roots (...) fuel the same hatred of self [as those who are nationalist] but they think that they can settle matters by fleeing" (Kristeva 1993: 3) and Dabydeen's protagonist does exactly that, namely he tries to resolve his identity problem by running away from the country. When he finally arrives in his dream (Eng)land, despite his black skin and exotic national affiliation, he does not see himself as a foreigner but as a transcultural being who can claim place anywhere in the world and across any categories (Berg and Niigeartaigh 2013: 11). Nonetheless, this illusion of belonging is quickly shattered when England makes him acutely aware of both his internal as well as external strangeness.

The first one to make him realize the falsity of non-belonging is Mrs Rutherford, his landlady, who utterly and intuitively ignores Julia Kiristeva's rule of the privileged status of a foreigner, who "is from nowhere, from everywhere" and should never be sent back to his origins (Kristeva 1994: 30). Instead, Mrs Rutherford immediately inscribes him into a coherent and solid category of belonging, showing vividly that identity is by no means our independent choice, but rather a constant struggle against the representations. Stuart Hall claims that identity cannot be separated from our cultural positioning, existing power structures and discursive formations; we are born into lasting frameworks of discourse and therefore "[c]ultural identities (...) have histories", being the "names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 1992: 225). Here Mrs Rutherford, drawing from her own cultural positioning, singlehandedly gives the name and the identity to her guest. Her house is filled with African masks she collected during her travels and she naturally imposes an African(ized) identity on the black engineer. She even expects him to manifest his attachment to Africa and, handing him the artefacts, she awaits some display of passion and recognition, none of which he really feels:

'I know nothing about art,' I said, when I meant to say was that I knew nothing about Africa. She looked at me as I returned the carving, seeing a Negro, his large black hands carefully holding up a sacred bowl (...) I was no African though, and my fetishes and talisman were spirit-levels, bulldozers, rivets. I was black West-

Indian of African ancestry but I am an engineer, trained in the science and technology of Great Britain (*D*, 7).

Though the scene may seem overdramatic, many a Caribbean immigrant was a victim of such an imposition of identity. "Receiving societies in North America and Europe" associate Caribbean people with "natural characteristics of being black" (Olwig 2007: 13) and thus they naturally define them as Africans or, in the USA, as Afro-Americans, being ignorant of the actual complexity of the Caribbean culture.

The most important thing to notice in the above quoted scene is the fact that such an inclusive Africanized category offered to the guest, is by no means liberating for Dabydeen's protagonist. To quote Stuart Hall's words once again, cultural identities "provide us (...) with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (Hall 1990: 223), which he described through the example of 'oneness' felt by the Afro-Caribbean people with their African heritage. Also Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) saw the transnational solidarity of the African diaspora as an answer to the fragmentation and the ethnic and national(ist) struggles. He claimed that their identities are a result of transnational exchange and that the common experience of slavery and transatlantic Middle Passage unites the Africans into one cultural body (Gilroy 1993: 4). However, as Charles Piot (2001: 155-170) claims, Gilroy saw Africa as a passive contributor to the formation of the black Atlantic identity and in Gilroy's study "Africa bears little more than passing reference, and then, notably, only Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Southern Africa (...) [s]imilarly, in Hall's important work on diasporic identity, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' Africa figures only as an imagined presence for Afro-Caribbean peoples" (Piot 2001: 155). Therefore, the true Africa, embodied in the novel by the masks, bears no affinity to the guest's cultural identity and triggers no emotional response. Significantly enough, Mrs Rutherford is also conditioned by the Gilroy-like assumption that her guest would be happy to claim his African heritage. The guest, however, is more than positive that he is "no African", the closest acceptable denomination being a "black West-Indian of African ancestry" (*D*, 102). Initially, then, the term West-Indian seems a good compromise between her African expectations and his Guyanese experiences, but soon it too proves not adequate to capture his self-positioning.

West-Indian as a category was first a geographic denominator used by the Spanish to describe the location of the Caribbean. With time it was applied to the native inhabitants of the islands and only later to the people living and born in the region. Lamming writes that the term is not indigenous to the Caribbean, as they never thought of themselves in such inclusive regional categories; he learned its meaning when he arrived in England, where there

arose as the new immigrant category in the British society the need to describe themselves, as well as be described. From the 1950s, the term became for the British tantamount to the immigrant (Hall 2003: 34; Lamming 2002 [1960]: 214). Therefore, it is paradoxical to note how Dabydeen's protagonist is trying to use the purely colonial and homogenizing term to describe a completely new, truly fluid, identity construct he feels entitled to. For him, West-Indian is a signifier of freedom from the burdens of the old world: "I was a West-Indian, someone *born in a new age for a new world*. (...) I was always present. I was always new" (*D*, 10; emphasis mine; MF).

It soon occurs, however, that his vision of his West-Indian identity is dangerously close to a simple imitation of Englishness and English ways. This truth dawns on him only gradually when Mrs Rutherford starts alluding to his excessive admiration of English tradition brought, after all, from a country forcibly subdued to the domination of the English culture. Much, then, as the infamous manager from *The shadow bright*, she acts as a catalyst dismantling her guest's illusions as to his role within the postcolonial system; in a Conrad-like manner, she reverses for him the categories of master/savage and gives him various evidence of English 'savagery', that could be realized only outside the tight grip of English civilization. The English, for fear of their own 'hearts of darkness', did their best to "domesticate" the others (Bhabha 2004: 154), which the English-like figure Guyanese engineer so flawlessly embodies. "I must admit that when you first came here I looked upon you suspiciously and a robot – something we had created (...) a black man with an English soul" (*D*, 104), she says. Finally her guest starts recognizing analogies between his desire of coming to England and his formative years spent in Guyana overshadowed by his beloved college professor, Fenwick, who appeared to him a paragon of Englishness in its most noble understanding. "When I grew up", he says, "I wanted to believe that professor Fenwick was the true Englishman (...) [his] influence on me was total" (*D*, 81-82). For years, then, he has been fuelled by an unexpressed desire to be like Fenwick – an Englishman raised and shaped in a country unburdened with colonial violence and racial prejudice. The ultimate and irreversible collapse of Fenwick's authority comes when Mrs Rutherford turns out to have known the man as a simple crook, who ran to Guyana to escape from justice.¹⁷

¹⁷ Raymond Williams in *Politics and letters* (1981), talks of his experiences of enchantment with the English culture as the paradigm of civilization brought about by the English education that he received. He says it caused "a rejection of my Welshness which I did not work through until well into my thirties, when I began to read the history and understand it" (1981: 25). Williams, just like Dabydeen, claims that only with time and growing understanding of history did he learn to appreciate his Welshness, and thus their experiences as two intellectuals from the margins are very compatible. They may be read even more broadly in the context of the Caribbean mass migrations to the West and the

At this moment, along with Fenwick's reputation, there collapses the façade of English ideals he embodied; in consequence, there collapses also a hybrid West-Indian identity, which invariably situates a postcolonial Caribbean man in relation to the metropolis and metropolitan culture (Puri 2004: 8). Consequently, the protagonist decides to change himself into an engineer, the seemingly least constraining concept: "I'm me, not a mask or a movement of history. I'm not black, *I'm an engineer*" (*D*, 102; emphasis mine, MF). This brief statement hides within itself a plethora of meanings and allusions. Firstly, it is predicated on the belief that one may exchange one's cultural belonging for an unburdened, but utterly rootless, identity that would not necessitate his confrontation with the past:

I was seduced by (...) endless transformations, which promised me freedom from being fixed as an African, a West-Indian, a member of a particular nationality of a particular epoch. (...) When Mrs Rutherford asked me why I became an engineer I couldn't answer, but deep down I knew a dam was my identity, and obstacle I sought to put between shore and sea and to assert my substantialness, my indissoluble presence, without reference to colour, culture or age (*D*, 132-33).

The above quoted words may be read also as a somewhat desperate attempt at keeping a promise of non-belonging that he has made to himself when still in Guyana, and which has already been broken twice: first by Mrs Rutherford's forceful imposition of a diasporic African identity, and then by her decomposition of Englishness. In *Oneself as another* (1992), Paul Ricoeur claims that our narrative identity is the full realization of the dialogue between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). *Idem* answers a question "who" we are in our life-story and it is like one's fingertips, meaning a feature that remains unchanged or insignificantly changed, over time; *ipse*, in turn, answers the question "what" we are doing in our lives and it is tantamount to the logics of *keeping one's word*. If we make a promise to do something, or behave in a certain way, in the unknown future we are making a promise to achieve a certain continuity and predictability in time; *ipse*, then, "stand[s] as a challenge to time" and it is "a denial of change" (Ricoeur 1992: 124). Therefore, in light of the failure of his West-Indian selfhood, being an engineer is the guarantee of his sameness and thus the coherence of his

clash of the idealised vision of the metropolis with reality. In his book *West Indian in the West* (2001), Percy Hintzen presents case studies of Caribbean immigrants coming to the United States. Before their arrival, they all admit to having been fuelled by "idealistic expectations of easy wealth and abundant opportunities, generated by movies, television and stories about America". Later, they admit to disappointment by both the living standard and by the unfairness of the American law. As the Caribbean migrants, they also face double non-belonging; first to the mainstream American culture and then to the American vision of blackness – tantamount to the Afro-American community (Hintzen 2001: 163-165).

narrative identity – he is and always will be an engineer, and thus he will belong to the broad and undefined category of the engineers, even if he refuses to be African or West-Indian.

At this stage, it is well worth remembering that when Betta committed himself to being a *doctor*, his choice masked his guilt of his lost connection to the East-Indian community and his desire to belong to the colonial professional class. Correspondingly, Dabydeen's protagonist's self-determination as an engineer is fuelled by both his yet unexpressed regret of breaking his ties with Guyana, and his silently harboured wish to not be marked out as a foreigner in England. Such a paradoxical position somewhat resembles a universal postmodern dream of being and of not being fixed at the same time, which has been beautifully presented by Zygmunt Bauman in his metaphor of contemporary culture as a department store. We are all cultural consumers who may freely choose the constituents of our identities but the freedom such a choice guarantees is illusionary (Bauman 2011: 16). It undermines our sense of solidified identity and facilitates our fears of rejection due to cultural difference as well as losing our individuality, and yet strengthening our wish to belong to the coherent community (Bauman 2011: 20). The unnamed engineer's choice, then, is his last desperate attempt at finding his place in England, but even in a seemingly tolerant metropolis the idea of being a nation-less and race-less black engineer is impossible to defend.

One of the seminal moments on his path towards such a realization is his meeting with Christie, the manager of the building site, who, after long years spent in England, introduces himself in the following words: "I'm a foreigner from Ireland" (*D*, 109). This declaration comes to the engineer as a shock since Christie looks like an Englishman and thus less of a foreigner than the engineer himself. Soon, however, it occurs that cultural otherness is by no means restricted to bodily strangeness and Christie's stereotypical Irishness comes fully to light literally the moment he opens his mouths: "He replied in a tongue I couldn't follow, an English so mangled and accented that I knew immediately that it was Irish" (*D*, 109). Here Dabydeen indeed resorts to a (post)colonial standard as in Christie's strangeness our main protagonist recognizes his own (hi)story. First of all Christie "mentioned the traumas of being Irish" so poignant in relation to those of being a Guyanese; namely, subjugation, fighting for their own identification and roots. He also shows Ireland as full of superstitions, believes in the supernatural and a deep spiritual connection to the land, which is part and parcel of Guyanese and other colonized life: "from what Christie says Dunsmere might as well be a village in the Congo" (*D*, 117). In a more economic context, the Irish still remain dependent on the centre, England, working 'miracles' for them: "[t]he only ones who work are the Irish. They've been at it for centuries, they're the leprechauns of England, the ones who get things done by miracles" (*D*, 113).

As such, a Guyanese engineer and an Irish manager, both foreigners, are linked in their otherness. Even in their strangeness, however, they are not equal.

Though the dam builders subordinate to Dabydeen's main protagonist accept Christie's leadership, they nevertheless have some reservations as to being governed by a 'black man'. Furthermore, some of his new neighbours in the village display an unhealthy interest in their 'black engineer' guest sharing a house with an eccentric widow, Mrs Rutherford; ultimately, the growing tension is difficult to ignore and one day an unknown man approaches the protagonist and, referring to the stereotype of English tolerance, clearly delineates his place on the social ladder: "In America they'd string you up for peeping under a white woman's skirt. We do things differently here, but *you're still black so don't forget it*" (D, 128; italics mine; MF). The fact that his professional identity will never erase the blackness of his skin may seem obvious enough to the reader, but the difficulty in accepting his foreignness in England is by no means immediately transparent for the protagonist. It may be fully understood by comparison with another of Dabydeen's literary forefathers, E. R. Braithwaite, who described his own struggles with otherness in his autobiographical piece *To sir with love* (1959); Braithwaite was a man born in British Guyana, a devoted member of the RAF ready to "lay down his life for the preservation of the ideal which had been my lodestar" and a colonial child raised in the appreciation of English culture. Nevertheless, the moment he left the RAF and decided to stay in England it turned out that, for the British, he is a foreigner who has no moral right to identify himself with the English culture. Such a racist message was never spelled out for him but merely suggested by the jobs he did not receive, the condescending looks on the streets and the difficulties in renting a flat. Furthermore, like an already quoted man from Dabydeen's novel, Braithwaite too draws a parallel between the American and the British racism, saying that in the US the prejudice is open, but it also means that it may be openly challenged, while in Britain it is converted into a polite "British Way of Life", thus even more destructive and pervasive (2005 [1959]: 34-37). "Yes, it is wonderful to be British – until one comes to Britain", Braithwaite concludes (Braithwaite 2005 [1959]: 35).

Consequently, the moment the protagonist is called a foreigner is tantamount to saying that he has no right to the English part of his cultural heritage and that his stay in England is both temporary and conditional. Even in the theoretically globalized world, residence in a certain country does not make one its rightful citizen. Moreover, despite the length of one's stay in one place, the immigrant is thought of as a foreigner whose right to stay is legitimate only if s/he contributes to the wellbeing of the receiving society (Hizten 2001: 163-164). Indisputably, Dabydeen's protagonist fulfils the latter

criteria as he is a legally employed professional, but it also means that his stay in England is sanctioned only by the work he is capable of doing and not by his rightful claim to the English nation-state. Such a positioning echoes the observations of Derrida who reminds us that the status of a foreigner is that of blood and birth (Derrida 2000: 87) and as such it cannot be easily shed. A foreigner enters the world of the host on the host's rules and, if one outstays one's welcome, one may be inscribed into the category of "undesirable foreigner" and, finally, "an enemy" (Derrida 2000: 55). Moreover, in the age of the "selective globalization" of trade, capital but also weapons, terrorism and violence, the West runs on the fear of the *other*, "arguably the most sinister of the demons nesting in the open societies of our time". This fear fuels the rejection of migrants, who are thought to destabilize the Western order and "against whom the modern state (...) promises to defend its subjects" (Bauman 2007: 5-26). For this reason, the chances of being harmoniously accepted into the receiving society without the stigma of foreignness are slim, of which he finally becomes fully and only too painfully aware.

Eventually, then, it is the label of a foreigner, and not of an African or West-Indian, that forces the protagonist to critically rethink his national belonging. As Kristeva once said, "[l]iving with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of being *an other* and makes oneself other for oneself" (Kristeva 1994: 13). She adds also that only outside the borders of one's country, may one fully assess the condition and the value of one's native culture while such a perspective is unattainable for those who never transgress national boundaries (Kristeva 1994: 134). The foreigner, then, leaves his land "only to return to oneself and one's home" (Kristeva 1994: 133). As if to echo her words, when the protagonist finishes the sea-wall, and thus closes his period of legitimate stay in England, he decides to go home. Ironically enough, as Mrs Rutherford observes, his stone construction makes him forever part of England: "You've shaped something in stone which will be here for a long time, if not for ever. And you've done it in England, so you've carved your name in our history" (*D*, 177). Paradoxically, the very fact of being part of English history does not make him part of the English present and now, for the first time in years, he starts thinking of Guyana as home:

I would leave both of them [Mrs Rutherford and England] and return home. Guyana had its own legacies of deceit, and cruelty, but there was space to forget. The land was vast and empty enough to encourage new beginnings in obscure corners. I had to believe this, otherwise there would be nowhere to go and nothing to do but act out ritual public disputes (*D*, 179).

Only in Guyana, despite its complicated heritage, will he not be a foreigner. Memory, both individual and communal, determines our sense of identity and belonging; no culture and no nation can be memory-less, claims Anthony

Smith (Smith 1990: 159). Guyana, however, has “no burial grounds holding the bones of slaves, no old sugar mills where they worked, no letters, no books that they left behind, no carvings” (*D*, 15) and it is one of a few places built on a truly non-codified, and thus flexible, memory, which opens endless possibilities of self-invention that could restore one’s rootedness in time and space, while not forcing one to choose from the limited array of available and pre-defined patterns of identification.

Due to such awareness of fluidity, Dabydeen’s version of national consciousness is by no means tantamount to the one developed by Betta; it is far more complex than a hybrid identity negotiated in-between the individual’s ethnic and civic loyalties, which is an indirect result of the fact that, unlike Betta, Dabydeen’s protagonist, even before he embarked on his path of self-definition, was well aware of the fact that he is a cultural hybrid. Later he merely tried to reconcile his hybridity with other, more or less constraining concepts, that ultimately directed him back towards national identity and national belonging. Such an inherently fluid, yet rooted, identity construct resembles the hybridized identity described by Tabish Khair, which seamlessly binds hybridity with fluidity and does not demand questioning any of one’s cultural loyalties, while not fixing the postcolonial subject in a constant binary position to the metropolis (Khair 2001: 90). In a specifically Guyanese context *Disappearance* proves that hybridity and fluidity – two defining features of the Caribbean world – need not preclude national identity and national loyalty. Simultaneously, the right to claim national belonging may be redemptive for a Caribbean man trapped in the paradoxes of the global(ized) world and having nothing in common with declaring nationalist sentiments.

All things considered, at the end of the novel the engineer changes into a *hybridized Guyanese* who seems reconciled with his impossible Englishness, cosmopolitan ambitions, and Guyanese nationality. It seems worth noting that an interesting voice in such theoretical ponderings comes from Samuel Selvon who, describing his identity adventures both in Trinidad and abroad, concludes that his native Trinidad is a “shadow” that follows him anywhere he goes and proves that his “roots are the same as a mango tree or an immortelle” (Selvon 1987: 24). As a transnational traveller, Selvon stresses the need of national heritage and identity being part of the broader Caribbean identity and our constant process of becoming, as only reconciled with *oneself* would one be able to face the challenges of the global(ized) world. Thus the ultimate positioning of the unnamed Guyanese engineer resembles the one described by Selvon; Guyana occurs to be an inseparable part of his identity, though at the beginning it seemed a burden from which he wanted to run away. In the end his obscure country, torn by internal problems and racial tensions, proves the only place where he can truly re-invent himself. The

reader does not know if Guyana is the last stop in the protagonist's journey, but one may hope that it is a beneficial and empowering return from which he would emerge anew, hybrid-ized and stronger.

David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*, then, is a commentary on the formation of contemporary Guyanese identity after decolonization, when the formerly colonized could come to the metropolis as equals. The novel lays bare the falsities of such equality, as well as those of transnational and liquid belonging, and contextualizes the struggles of an immigrant from an obscure corner of the world, who finds himself at its centre – the West. With his deep disillusionment and sense of displacement, the protagonist's experience of England bears much poignancy to other Guyanese, or Caribbean, experiences of migration and it shows that there is no escape from such categories as a citizen, an immigrant or a foreigner. However, the antidote to such struggles with difference does not seem to lie in the adoption of the national identity developed by previous generations. Instead, there is a dire need for a new *hybridized* concept that would allow for the national identity's incorporation into the constant state of self-becoming. Faced with the regressive movement towards homogenous and sectarian identity patterns across the world, such an inclusive and flexible identity pattern could prove a true alternative to what Glissant called Sameness.

3.3. Reconstructing oneself, reconstructing the nation in *Web of secrets* (1996) by Denise Harris

Web of secrets (1996) by Denise Harris is a semi-autobiographical piece depicting the process of growing up and maturation in Guyana directly before political independence.¹⁸ Through a history of a single Guyanese family, their private and public traumas the author / protagonist shows the process of individual and national identity reconstruction. The route to reclaiming her sense of rootedness in time and space leads through the confrontation with

¹⁸ Denise Harris is the daughter of Wilson Harris and the niece of Jan Carew. She has travelled extensively, has been a journalist and a photographer, and currently works for UNICEF in New York. She herself, as the Peepal Publishing House, describes the novel as a fictional autobiography and the claim has never been disproved, neither by her, nor by her father or their extended family. However, the Harrises are very private people so most of the facts mentioned in the novel remain unverifiable; nevertheless, at least at a few points one may find indisputable correspondences with their real lives. For example the fifties, the times the novel is set in, are the times when Wilson Harris left his first wife and daughter, and soon after left Guyana, and went to London where he lived with his second wife. This chain of events corresponds to Margaret's – the protagonist's – descriptions of her father and her family life. Also the fictional surname of the grandmother, Harriot, brings to mind Denise Harris' own family.

the silence that for ages has woven itself around the family and formed the titular web of secrets. Under the pressure of the changing world, which is unavoidably heading towards postcolonial nationalism, Margaret starts discovering secrets from the past, mostly the traumatic history of her female ancestors, in which she finds the history of her country. Hence, *Web of secrets*, despite its somewhat predictable plot structure, proves a significant literary testimony, the aim of which is both to digest the personal and public traumas of the Guyanese people and to solidify the sense of national identity and national belonging in today's Guyana.¹⁹

Web of secrets emphasizes the inseparable connection between the ability to narrate one's past, to face one's history, and to (re)construct a coherent narrative identity. Such an intricate relationship between the self and the narrative is not a revolutionary idea and it has been emphasized by many researchers. Paul Eakin, for example, argues that the self does not exist without the narrative; it is formed *before* language, but performed in it (2008: 60-86). Ulric Neisser claims that self-narratives "are one way of defining the self" and humans are beings 'extended' in time "into the past via memory and into the future via anticipation". This "sense of being in time" is the essence of humanity (Neisser 1994: 2, 16). Any life-narrative, then, "engage[s] the past in order to reflect on identity in the present" (Smith and Watson 2001: 3). Therefore the self, individual and collective, is shaped within the narrative that, in turn, is rooted in the past. Traumatic memories shatter one's narrative identity, and resist linearity, temporality and linguistic expression; as such, their incorporation into any life-narrative is by no means natural, but without confronting them one is frozen in time and there is no chance of healing ever taking place (Herman 1997: 8).

Denise Harris seems to be well aware of all the aforesaid premises and she allows the traumatic story to be told, but she makes one feel how difficult narrating the past can be. Margaret, a main protagonist and a storyteller, initially is present only in other people's conversation as the one who is "returning... after all these years... after all these years..." (WS²⁰, 11). When she gains her own voice, she deems herself a mere eavesdropper: "Hello I am Margaret Saunders, the eavesdropper" (WS, 30). Indeed, the term very well describes her role as the narrative is a combination of dialogues caught *in medias res*, rarely leading to a conclusive ending and oftentimes interrupted or hushed. The story is also full of silences; silence, as Lauren Vickroy (2002:

¹⁹ Similar experiences are thematised by female Guyanese writers; for example in semi-autobiographical pieces like *The last English plantation* (2001 [1988]) or *Timepiece* (2000 [1986]) by Jan Shinebourne or *Whole of a morning sky* (1986) by Grace Nichols.

²⁰ All the quotations come from Harris, Denise. 1996. *Web of secrets*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, which is henceforth referred to as WS.

187) writes, “can represent a traumatic gap, withholding of words because of terror, guilt, or coercion; it characterizes traumatic memory as wordless, visual, and reenactive (...) when facing the unspeakable”. In *Web of secrets* silence is present both visually and contextually. Some chapters are only half-a-page long and the author’s use of ellipsis is excessive. Margaret also openly complains that pieces of information are being withheld from her: “She [the grandmother] doesn’t talk... doesn’t explain things...If she did it would help me...” (WS, 63). From the beginning, then, it is apparent that the novel is a postcolonial narrative of trauma that, by definition, does not “just concern individuals but also the individual as representative of a social class of a group” and which makes the reader also responsible for assembling the coherent story-line (Vickroy 2002: 187).

In the context of the novel being the narrative of national traumas, it is significant to stress that a trauma which one did not experience directly, but which is part of one’s communal or familial memory, may exert a tangible effect on the individual’s narrative identity. Dominick LaCapra calls this process “secondary witness[ing]” and describes it through the example of the Holocaust, but also the readers who claim to be truly affected by the memoirs or images of trauma (LaCapra 2001: 47). Somehow naturally, in *Web of secrets* such historical traumas derive from the ages of colonial rule, racist politics and ethno-national tensions, and thus they are, at least to a certain extent, relatable to all the Guyanese. Moreover, as the recovery from any trauma, be it personal or historical, “can take place only in the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (Herman 1997: 133), *Web of secrets* is very visibly placed within a familial context. Already during her self-introduction the main protagonist / narrator describes herself through the prism of her family and her relations: “I am the eavesdropper, a sister of Adrienne and Guy Saunders, daughter of Stephanie Sheila Saunders and Charles Armenius Saunders, niece of ...” (WS, 30). It is more than obvious, then, that to reconstruct herself, Margaret needs other people, who would fill in the gaps and reveal the history of her family and her homeland.

The main symbol in the novel is that of a house and the narration opens at the moment when Margaret’s grandmother, Kathleen, starts seeing cracks in the walls of their perfectly maintained home. Conventionally in the postcolonial novel, and correspondingly in *Web of secrets*, the house is a symbol of the colonial subject’s marginalization from the public sphere as well as a repository of individual and familial identity (George 1999: 19). Gaston Bachelard famously writes that “a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability” (1994: 17). “[It] is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, dreams of mankind. (...) [w]ithout it man would be a dispersed being” (Bachelard 1994: 6-7). A house, then, is inseparable from memory; its disintegration or ruin, would make one

an incomplete being. Writing on postcolonial homes, Rosemary George argues that Bachelard's theory does not accept any ambiguity inherent in the postcolonial condition; postcolonial literature consciously challenges the order of the domestic space, which is associated with colonialism and, through its apparent disintegration, changes chaos into resistance (George 1999: 21). The disorder, then, is only superficial, as it allows traumas to resurface and marks "the need for postcolonial identity to also be rooted in a tangible space" (Upstone 2009: 115).²¹ Such reversed symbolism is visible in *Web of secrets* and the novel leads the reader through the process of acting out traumatic experience, when the trauma is "performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present" (LaCapra 2001: 70), towards working through the trauma, which "brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in (...) life" (LaCapra 2001: 66); these two stages correspond to the metaphorical collapse of the domestic space triggered by Kathleen, and to Margaret's attempts at putting her shattered house back together again.

The multilayered symbolism of the house is only deepened through its intimate connection with Kathleen's madness. Female madness in the Caribbean fiction usually "signifies a crisis of identity for both the female subject and, symbolically, the nation" and it starts manifesting itself "when female characters find themselves most vulnerable and are forced into a direct collision with colonial values" (Ashworth 2014: 209).²² In *Web of secrets*, both Kathleen and her nation are at a very vulnerable moment when the world

²¹ It is interesting to note that Sarah Upstone provides Wilson Harris as an example of the successful reversal of the symbolism of the home as the female space in postcolonial literature (2009: 36). In his daughter's novel, as well as in many other Guyanese writings especially by females, such a change is not visible as for them the Guyanese home was, and still is, a heavily female space. Such observations are also not corroborated by the socio-cultural research conducted on Guyanese women (Peake and Trotz 2002), which once again proves that Wilson Harris' fiction may not be approached as a realist reflection of the Guyanese socio-political reality against which even Harris himself warned, stressing that he works within the realms of the imagination and that he imagines the things possible, not recreates those that are (McWatt 2013: 34).

²² Similar symbolic of female madness as a means of confronting traumas directly connected to Guyana's independence movement is shown in *A silent life* (2005) by Ryhaan Shah. The main protagonist of the novel is a political activist raised in a traditional, Muslim-Guyanese family. She is also a symbolic inheritor, just like Margaret, of her grandmother's traumas connected to colonialism and the period of the East-Indian struggle for independence. The narrative is also fragmented and one of the very telling symbols is the silence of the grandmother, who is thought to have lost her ability to speak, but in reality is consciously refusing to tell her story. The only person she communicates with is her granddaughter, who gradually completes the narrative and reveals the complicated history of her family and her country. At the end of the novel, after a long time spent abroad, the granddaughter, like Margaret or Shah herself, comes back to Guyana determined to change her homeland for the better.

outside starts spinning towards a change which cannot be stopped and which necessitates confrontation with the past. Consequently, also Kathleen's madness is presented dualistically as a matter that is of private and public concern. It is also telling that her neighbours immediately locate its source in the house and its unnatural relationship to the past:

I still feel it was that house. There were always rumours and strange stories about that place. There was never any record of Kathleen Harriot's grandparents burial... the only record was a verbal one of them fading fast (...) no one, no one, could ever remember an actual funeral taking place (WS,13).

Hence, Kathleen's madness could be anticipated and its onset seems by no means destructive for her family. Paradoxically, it opens a possibility of the past once lost to reappear and, putting it metaphorically, to complete the world of the living; it also makes Margaret's discovery of her familial traumas possible and triggers the process of her self-definition.

Significantly enough, Margaret herself utilizes the space of the house to both understand what is happening to her grandmother and to locate the true source of Kathleen's disquietude. Margaret hides "under the dining table listening to every word", waits in the corners or listens through the walls so as to reconstruct a coherent familial narrative (WS, 40). Furthermore, she is physically bound to the house's lost history. It is in her, that Kathleen sees the ghost of her dead sister, Iris, literally coming back to haunt her. Just like Iris, Margaret is a loner who walks her own paths, reads far too many books and even her skin is dark, the feature she undoubtedly takes after Iris, who was always "called the dark one" (WS, 86). This physical darkness is symptomatic as it makes Margaret the beneficiary of the family's dark secrets and the African blood that runs in their veins. Therefore Kathleen knows that the girl will be expecting answers from her: "the old woman knows the child's eyes are focused on her. Lately the child has been following her (...) Iris's eyes, the child eyes..." (WS, 87, 88). The house, then, is a monument to frozen memory that now demands recognition, and the cracks in its walls signify repressed memories and people forcibly excluded from the domestic space and the family's memory: "...break...crack... (...) the wall... mother... father... web... now what in the world brought on all that...*things that were long done with*" (WS, 26; emphasis in the original, MF).

From the beginning of her illness cracks appear with great intensity and the more Kathleen tries to cover them up, the more they reveal themselves; eventually, the woman decides not to fight the inevitable and she gives herself fully to her illusions. Therefore the novel purposefully blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal, resorting to the convention of magical realism, which opens the house to marvellous possibilities and enables the traumas of the past to resurface and thus be confronted (Upstone

2009: 137).²³ Rebecca Ashworth adds that the Caribbean novels about female madness through “[r]ejecting classical realism (...) challenge the Western hegemonic epistemology” and thus the legacy of the colonial ideology (Ashworth 2014: 209). The technique is by no means peculiar to Caribbean fiction, it is part and parcel of female postcolonial trauma narratives (Vickroy 2002: 173) and, as such, it is probably most commonly associated with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), where the domestic space is disharmonised by a marvellous presence of a ghost and *Beloved* herself. In *Web of secrets* Kathleen challenges her traumas as well and her memories also come back as ghosts who speak to Kathleen and thus, through her incoherent mumblings, to Margaret. Such a construction of the presented reality makes the reader wonder if what one is observing is real, of if the cracks were only imagined by Kathleen. There is no doubt, however, as to who Kathleen believes she sees, and the two main ghosts who enter the house through the cracks are Hope, the one responsible for the family’s disconnection from their African roots, and Iris, the one whom Kathleen herself silenced and whose vengeance, as she believes, is the primary cause of all her problems.

The bits and pieces of Kathleen’s memory that reach the reader through Margaret’s relations allow one to form an image of Hope, Kathleen’s mother. Hope was born in 1850 and christened “hope of their race” (WS, 20); she was a miraculous child that could pass as a white, and in the Guianese “caste system” where one’s skin tone had a direct effect on one’s social standing her skin was her future (Glasgow 1970: 29-31). For this reason, “[t]he moment the white people kept mistaking her for a white and assuming her mother to be nursemaid” (WS, 20), Hope’s parents decided not to tamper with her chances of getting properly married and they became invisible. They acted like her servants and occasionally presented her to eligible white men as their mistress. Despite their personal sacrifice, Hope shattered their dreams by marrying Alfred Fred Robertson “a negro man (...) who dared to remove and marry the woman who could pass for a white” (WS, 19). Alfred was the one who made Hope realize that race²⁴ is an “ineradicable sign of *negative*

²³ It is vital to stress that in this context magic realism is understood as an epistemological and not ontological phenomenon. Namely, the epistemological strain of magic realist poetics is dependent on individual perception and interpretation of the supernatural phenomena – like ghosts in *Web of secrets* or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) – and the ontological is more in accordance with Carpentier’s definition of the marvellous as an inherent quality of space (Faris 2004: 27).

²⁴ The word race is used here accordingly to how it was understood at that time, namely as a biologically determined set of predetermined characteristics. Even today when race is perceived as a purely cultural construct, in Guyanese society the “individual is taught or even coerced into accepting the static racial category thrust upon him/her” (Karran 2000: 64-66).

difference" (Fanon 2008 [1952]: 72). "Is hardly likely any white man will ever marry you" he told her, "no marriage can remove your history, no matter what they tell you. (...) Better to marry me, a negro man, than to die in that room for the sake of an illusion" (*WS*, 23-24). Glasgow (1970: 32) writes that in the colonial society "the individual Guianese had a self image which was positive or negative" depending on its relation to "race, colour, and creed"; hence, Alfred utterly shatters Hope's identity by making her realize the discord between her race and her parents' ambition. "Passing does not make me white" (*WS*, 25), she says and, driven by resignation, she makes a final decision to marry Alfred. At the ceremony she is veiled in a "web of crochet", the only thing she manages to take from the house, which is a sign of both her separation from the world as well as the silence that veils her own origin. Hope never knew that her mother was raped by a passing white man "that no one ever cared or bothered to put a name to" (*WS*, 155). Her ennobling whiteness, then, was born in violence and sin, and once she took away her parents' hope for changing it into a positive force, they made a seminal decision never to meet her again.²⁵

The next of the entering ghosts is Iris, whose repression from the family memory is the result of both her grave sin and Kathleen's own doings. Namely, Iris had an incestuous relationship with her brother, Stan, from which she had a son, Compton. The boy was raised by Kathleen as her own, and was her only son and the child she openly favoured over her own daughters. However, her firm denial of her sister's existence, even after Iris' death, was not only a result of her jealousy over whom Compton will call his mother, but also of her personal guilt. More precisely, Kathleen firmly believes that she, having entered into a contract with God, traded Iris' life for Compton's; when the boy fell seriously ill, she prayed for Iris to die in his place: "take Iris in exchange for his life...take Iris...a shamed woman, a damned woman in the eye's of God and man...One life in exchange for the other" (*WS*, 154). Thus Kathleen sees herself as responsible for Iris' demise and this awareness lies at the core of her madness. Now Hope and Iris are coming back to her and reclaim their place in the story; one may surmise that the aim of the former is to reconnect the family to its African roots and the latter to restore coherence to their family narrative. Hence their house, which from the beginning was seen as uprooted from its dead, metaphorically opens its door to them, enabling the living to regain their wholeness.

²⁵ Their reaction could be predicted since in Guiana it was customarily acknowledged that those of lighter colour should always marry a higher colour than themselves. If they failed to do so, "[they] are considered as degrading the family" by "demeaning it by coming down towards the Negro" (Rodway 2005 [1912]: 190).

The present and the past intertwine in the novel on yet another dimension, and Margaret's own process of self-determination, which after all constitutes the main axis of the novel, is triggered not only by her grandmother's embrace of the past but also by her most personal and delicate traumatic experience – the death of her mother. This unexpected blow forces Margaret's reconciliation with Kathleen and it binds them on both real and marvellous levels. There are two versions of Stephanie's demise, one recognized publicly and the other known only to Kathleen and Margaret. From the medical point of view, Stephanie dies due to malignant breast cancer, but Margaret sees her illness as something evil that "crawled into my mother's body" (WS, 147). Since neither her mother, nor grandmother, ever talk to her about cancer she automatically assumes the fault of a baku, the creature she brought home some time before her mother's illness, and which she wanted to bribe in order to ensure prosperity for her family abandoned by the father and their main bread winner. To Guyana the stories of baku came from Suriname and, before that, from Africa with the slaves. Baku in West-African languages means short human or little brother, but the term may also have been derived from *bacucu* (banana). Baku is a "nocturnal gremlin-like spirit", who looks like a small human being, and reportedly lives on bananas and milk. Customarily bakus are sealed in bottles or pots, but once the lid is removed, they may become dangerous (Plantenga 2003: 152). In Guyana, the maliciousness or benevolence of a baku is thought to depend on the body it once inhabited (Leid 2014) and it is believed that the baku may either bestow wealth and health on its owner or, should he feel neglected, exercise vengeance (Lewis 1991: 180).²⁶

Through blaming the baku, Margaret recognizes her own agency in the tragedy which seems to her a result of her own negligence. Being deeply ashamed of her deeds, she confides in her pet bird, Arabella, a parrot brought from the bush whom Margaret keeps in a cage placed in her room and who, as she believes, understands her every word and answers some of her questions. Margaret discloses all her secrets to Arabella, including her continuous sense of strangeness; as she says at some point: "Would you believe, even though I

²⁶ The word may be also spelled as 'bakoo'. An interesting short story "Alma Fordyce and the bakoo" by Valmiki Madramootoo is part of the already mentioned collection *Suspended sentences* (2005) edited by Mark McWatt. It tells about a bakoo bought by the owner of a Georgetown pub to attract the clients and guarantee his financial success. Indeed, the trick works and the owner earns a lot of money not only on beer but also on showing the bakoo and his tricks to the clients. One day a respectable old lady, Alma Fordyce, drawn by insatiable curiosity, starts frequenting the bar and for the first time in her life experiences sexual awakening as the bakoo starts coming to her at night in her dreams. Ultimately she leaves all her regular life behind and disappears; as the bakoo also escapes his confinement, it is widely believed that they eloped together.

was born here I feel I'm just as much a stranger as you are, Arabella... [I] only gradually came to realize that, so it must be even more difficult for you" (WS, 96). Now Margaret once again opens up to the bird, saying "[h]ow was I to know he would act so quickly...Oh I certainly underestimated him" (WS, 147). What Margaret is not aware of is the fact that the presence of the baku is perfectly known to her grandmother. Kathleen is informed of the baku's existence by the ghost of her dead husband, John, who warns Kathleen of an ugly little creature that lives under their stairs and who may bring only bad luck. Hence the reader knows that Margaret and Kathleen are bound in their secret knowledge of each other's sins, which they nevertheless do not share for quite some time, until the seminal moment of Margaret's self-revelation.

Following the death of her mother, burdened by the weight of her unexpressed guilt, Margaret starts acting strangely. People say that she has been poisoned by her grandmother's madness and she even has similar visions of her house being consumed by wood ants; in a rare moment of lucidity, she herself realizes that her illness must be inseparable from her grandmother's, and then she finally turns to Kathleen and tells her everything she has eavesdropped, heard or deduced during her investigations. The healing power of such a disclosure is immense. In their traumatic memory, they become one body, linked by the sound of the beating heart:

My grandmother didn't laugh (...) she listened, taking it all in (...) she smiled... a crack of a smile broke across her face (...) then she cradled my head on her chest of bone and held me against her as if I were her child, as if I were her daughter. I could hear the drumming sound beating against her bone chest (WS, 168).

The grandmother's initial reaction to the truth being spelled out is physical, rather than verbal. Cathy Caruth writes that the body is linked with history and that it has the ability to bridge the gap between the living and the dead, it may betray our "*not knowing* the difference between life and death" (Caruth 1996: 37). Furthermore, some histories may only be recreated within the realms of meaningful relationships. Their value lies not so much in the act of empathy or understanding as in providing the impulse and safe space to finally tell the story (Caruth 1996: 41-42).

By the same token, the history of Margaret may be only told in relation to her grandmother, who is her gateway to the past, history and truth. The womb-like symbolism of the scene suggest that new life is to be born from their reconciliation with themselves and their pasts; it is also the first moment when Kathleen directly addresses Margaret, giving her a blessing:

You Margaret will go with my blessing...You may not understand everything I have to say (...) but one day you will (...) you are a daughter...the wheel...for that is what it was...the terrifying wheel that broke into and cracked the walls of my house has

come full circle (...) All your conversations with Arabella (...) may yet free you from bondage to the terrors of the witch-craft of the past (WS, 168).

At this point, as Kathleen is well aware, Margaret may not be able to understand everything she heard or went through. Nonetheless, from now on she has the ability to make *herself* whole, like the wheel, and be free from the burden of the past. Her freedom, however, just like her house, has to be firmly rooted in the past and its dead, if it is to be empowering and redemptive.

In one of her final speeches directed at Margaret, Kathleen tells her that “houses are sometimes self-made prisons, unhappy cages” but “when the web breaks nothing is too trivial (...) Or too terrible for that matter” and every aspect of the past that one discovers enables one to go “very deeply into the mystery of *self-knowledge* (WS 175; italics mine, MF). The initial cracking of the house, then, was a necessary step for both Kathleen and Margaret, on their path towards regaining a coherent narrative identity rooted in the linear history of her family. It is symptomatic, then, that Margaret gains her own adult voice on the last page of the novel where she fully discloses the empowering dimension of her working through her personal traumas: “there is something marvellous in us that can change...the bleak messages of the past into a rich foundation of truth... and... and ... maturity” (WS, 173). The reader learns also that after her mother’s death and in connection with her grandmother’s illness, Margaret was sent to the United States to regain her mental stability. She nevertheless carries within herself the self-knowledge she earned in Guyana and ‘after all these years’ she finds the strength to go back home and tell her story.

Though Margaret’s pursuit of *herself* finds its happy ending in her reconnection to her grandmother, the analysis of the novel would be essentially incomplete without taking into account the clearly national message of Denise Harris’ literary testimony. More precisely, the disintegration of the domestic space may be read also as the symbol of the country cracking under the burden of its silences, and Margaret’s pursuit of narrative identity finds its equivalent in the nation seeking ways of self-determination. In her study *The politics of home* (1999), Rosemary George writes that “homes are not neutral places. Imagining home is as political an act as is imagining a nation” (George 1999: 6). Especially in times of political turmoil the “home becomes a contested ground (...) either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage or at the interpersonal familial level” (George 1999: 18). As it has been already mentioned, the novel’s time of action covers the decade of nationalist turmoil across the fifties and early sixties; though the exact year is never stated, it may be inferred from such remarks as “the soldiers are coming from England to save the country. The soldiers are coming to save God and the Queen” (WS, 103). The British

soldiers intervened in 1953, to restore the suspended colonial constitution, and then again in 1962, to pacify racial riots. What is more, the country itself is yet name-less:

We should've given this county a name... this would've helped... A place without a name can't come to terms with itself. All that burning and looting and slaughtering of each other because of affiliatshuns to diff rent political parties might never have started in the first place if we could only have put a name to it... (WS, 14).

This name-less-ness may be read dualistically. Firstly, up to 1966 the country was named, rather than named itself, and the act of naming was at the same time an act of violence and possession. 'Guyana' was a colonizers' version of an Arawak's word for the 'flooded country' derived from *wina* or *guina* (water) (Rodway 2005 [1912]: 26) to which, in the early nineteenth century, the possessive adjective "British" was added. One of the first decisions of the new administration after the independence was to drop the "British' moniker and change the country's name into its indigenous spelling – Guyana" (Hyles 2014: 105). The unnamed country brings also to mind the un-speak-ability of traumatic experience, signalling that the individual process of confronting a trauma will be repeated on the national level. After all, it was a seminal decade for many Guyanese who were forced to answer a seemingly simple question 'who are we as a nation' and to decide whether to stay or leave the country that was disintegrating in front of their eyes.

The atmosphere of instability is very tangibly present in the novel and the anti-communist propaganda directed against the main pro-independence People's Progressive Party permeates the middle-classes, including Margaret's family and friends. Margaret repeats what she hears at her Catholic school: "So many girls I know are leaving. (...) They tell me parents told them that communists will take over, [they] will take all property away from their owners (...) They will handcuff God and take Him away..." (WS, 90). For some, like Aunt Eileen, Kathleen's sister, the communists appear worse enemies than the British: "I would also leave if I had a chance (...) Can you imagine those people ruling the country? No, let me remain under the British..." (WS, 91).²⁷ Therefore, the condition of pre-independence Guyana closely resembles

²⁷ At that time there emerged three major political leaders who represented three sections of the Guyanese society; Dr Cheddi Jagan, an East-Indian dentist supported mostly by the poor East-Indian population, Forbes Burnham, the Afro-Guyanese lawyer who had voters among the urban Afro-Guyanese, and Peter D'Aguiar, the businessman of Portuguese origin who was associated with small business holders and the more politically reserved middle-class (Ishmael 2013: 406). In 1950 Jagan and Burnham together established the said People's Progressive Party (PPP), which stood for "self-government, economic development, and the creation of a socialist society" (Ishmael 2013: 407). They quickly earned a 'communist' label and were unanimously condemned by all the conservative wings

that of Margaret's house; in other words, the country is mad: "Dhe people gone mad. If yuh see dhem wid pointer brooms wavin' in dhe air right and left bawlin' out, sweep dhe British away, sweep dhem away. A frighten when a firs' see dhem movin' dung dhe streets (...) pure madness" (WS, 64).

Also, the symbolism of the house as a repository of collective identity that needs to be forced into connection with its historical roots is repeated on the collective level. This assumption is predicated on a simple enough conclusion that, in colonial nation-states, the ties between one's private home and one's homeland were not passed on from generation to another. Instead they needed to be "learned, created, recalled and/or forgotten in the everyday history" around the political independence (George 1999: 17). Needless to say, the coinage of an emotional bond with one's (home)land invariably necessitated one's confrontation with the uncomfortable legacy of colonialism and conflicted political loyalties operating within the Guianese society.²⁸ However, what Denise Harris seems to be saying is that, though the coinage of national identity was a difficult and onerous task, it nevertheless had to be undertaken as without it the Guyanese would once again be swept by the forces of History, denied their own place in the world and thus their roots and identity.

In this inherently fragmented novel also the national message is offered to the reader in small bits and pieces that need to be collected while reading. Firstly, the nuns from Margaret's Catholic school warn her that she is too dark-skinned for emigration: "There you are either one or the other, there are no *in-betweens*..." (WS, 93). In other words, the West does not accept hybridity and there she will be degraded from her social position. A similar message comes from her other aunt: "Do you children know I once went to live in America? (...) I was made to sit at the back of the bus" (WS, 138). Also Margaret's mother, Stephanie, is well aware of the risks connected to emigration:

What would we do in those countries (...) End up as second-class citizens with very few rights, if any at all. (...). She [Stephanie] says that she was born and here she will die, that this place is a little paradise but we don't even realize it, that living in England or America is no paradise, but people are foolish enough to think so, that's it's all a myth, that she loves this country even though unnamed, that this is her home, that we should stay and work things out (WS, 91).

in Guyana: the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church as well as Hindu and Muslim spiritual leaders (Ishmael 2013: 407).

²⁸ It is interesting to note that Denise Harris, just like Shona Jackson (2005: 85-120) in her sociological studies, not so much links the struggles over the definition of a nation and national belonging with ethno-national discourse as with class differences between the rural East-Indian majority and the urban Afro-Guyanese minority.

Stephanie is defending her right to be part of the national community, united by virtue of common origin and place of birth. She knows that only within the realms of their nation-state can they fully belong, with no stigmatization as foreigners or immigrants.

A similar message comes from the world of the marvellous and is meditated through Margaret's bird, Arabella, and Kathleen herself. The author / protagonist oftentimes underlines that Arabella's beautiful colourful plumage does not match the grey interior of her cage and that it signals the existence of some glorious past where Arabella was absolutely free. One day, at the moment of her mental weakness, Margaret opens the cage and lets Arabella out; the bird's majestic flight symbolizes her personal, as well as national, self-liberation:

[F]or a moment I thought her wings had been clipped for too long, she had been caged for too long, she no longer remembered how to fly. But then she steadied herself and slowly lifted her wings once again and in the lifting rose up... up... into the air, a wheel of colours bedazzling the eyes (...) Now she's soaring up again in her strike for freedom, in her strike to return to El Dorado, a faraway, ancient place as old as the hills, as old as Arabella... (WS, 165)

Arabella is returning to El Dorado, a semi-mythical heart of the new Guyanese nation, and the national myth on which the national Guyanese identity is to be constructed. As Shona Jackson writes:

At independence, the myth of El Dorado was incorporated into nationalist discourse, its generative capacity transformed. It became central in facilitating a transition from colonial narratives of exploitation and domination to one of national destiny. The myth continues, in the hands of Guyana's new nation builders, to produce the landscape as postcolonial, national space (Jackson 2005: 85).

The true national significance of Arabella's escape is immediately grasped by Kathleen, who renames her "a bird of time" and sees her flight as a fulfillment of the destiny that could not be prevented. "She's escaped through the cracks (...) it has all come full circle" (WS, 166), claims Kathleen. The message is clear also to the reader; namely, just like Arabella, the country will finally break its cage and the moment of its liberation will also be a moment of its national self-definition.

The scene of Arabella's flight towards freedom is all the more significant as it makes Kathleen understand that her madness is more than the revenge exercised on her by her personal ghosts. In other words, she has a mission and, in a blink of an eye, from a mad woman she changes into a mother of a nation, whose task it is to symbolically and emotionally bind her community to the Guyanese land. One of her visions is worth quoting at length:

[She was] hearing voices that were telling her all sorts of things about her family long dead (...) making Kathleen Harriot reclaim (...) the history of this unnamed country (...) recalling a time when our great great great great grandparents were ambushed and violently shackled and collared and dumped together like heaps of blind coal, all chain bound, all slave-bound, but some also *fear-bound, hate-bound, suicide-bound, slaughter-bound, sullen-bound, survive-at-all-cost-bound, blank-look-bound, blank-out-bound, despair-bound, amnesia-bound* (...) but all chain-bound, all slave-bound, *bound to the point of no return* on ships stirred by men who lacked colour (...) because of their stained skins [they were] sold at a place no one could ever put a name to (WS, 170; italics mine, MF)

The ghosts bring back the communal memory, repressed truths, that may become a foundation on which the new nation will be built; they remind of the ancestors transported to the point of no return – colonial Guyana – of slavery and violence, as well as of the fact that they are irreversibly ‘bound’ to each other and to the place – their new country Guyana. Though slavery is the Afro-Guyanese founding trauma, Kathleen’s vision is by no means an attempt at constructing the Afro-Guyanese ethno-history in its pejorative nationalist understanding.²⁹ Such a potential is shattered by the indirect presence within the novel of Guyana’s only truly legitimate group, the Amerindians, who are part of the national story and without whom one may not compose the myth of El Dorado, whose roots reach far back into Guyana’s pre-Columbian past. For example, during one of her longish monologues directed at Arabella Margaret says such words:

Aunt Eileen says you’re [Arabella] straight from the bush where Granny Irma went armed with her Bible to work with the buck people (...) that who she calls buck is the Amerindian who lived in this country even before the white or Black or Chinese or Portuguese or East Indian and they have more right to be here than anyone of us (WS, 44).

The East-Indians have their traumas of indenture, as do the Portuguese and Chinese. The Amerindians, however, render all their claims to historical exclusivity void, as Guyana is the land of the newcomers, brought to an obscure corner of the world because of colonialism. None of these groups has more right than the other to be in the country, but they all are inseparably bound to one another through their traumas of the colonial past and their hopes for a better future.

²⁹ LaCapra defines founding trauma as “the trauma that paradoxically becomes the basis for collective or personal identity, or both. The Holocaust, slavery, Or apartheid (...) can become a founding trauma. Such trauma is typical of myths of origin and May perhaps be located In the more Or less mythologized history of every people” (2001: 81).

Kathleen's prophetic vision of the past, to paraphrase Glissant, is literally carried from her house to the streets by Gladys Davis, Kathleen's best friend, who passes it on to her husband George. To comprehend the significance of George one must for a moment move back to the very first pages of the novel where George is referred to as the one who in the early fifties came back from England, the world of order, to Guyana, the world of intensity and imbalance. First learning of Kathleen's madness from his wife, he declares that "the place can affect a person's life more than we think" (WS, 8) and he sees Guyana as the agent of Kathleen's madness:

Relentless heat, and intensity of colours, down-o-urs of rain (...) So when it all happened, you know, with my old friend Kathleen Harriot (...) Geor-r-ge wasn't at all surprised (...) [he] felt that most of what happened was connected to this place with its history and legacies. After he returned he would insist that it is ha-a-rd to achieve a fine balance here, taking into account the imbalance that surrounds you (WS, 10)

George is one of a few who, instead of attributing the cracks to Kathleen's personal history, sees their source in the country. However, the more intense Kathleen's visions become, and the more he learns about them from Gladys, the more George progresses from the disdain he felt towards Guyana to valuing his national legacy of discontinuity and loss. Finally, just like Margaret and Kathleen, he is able to grasp its full picture: "after he began to hear from his wife of what had been taking place...and of Arabella's flight...for him it all symbolized a breakthrough from the ambush of colonial history...It made him begin to see his unnamed country's legacies in a new, liberating, terrifying, sobering light..." (WS, 172-173).

At this point George understands that the change cannot be stopped and the country will grow to self-determination. Nonetheless, the light he sees his country's future in is sobering and terrifying. He is well aware that it is a 'terrible beauty' that is being born, but he shares the enthusiasm of the national liberation; he knows they all live in the moment when Guyana faces a "fiery baptism that brings a name to the land of our birth, and that name is written in our hearts" (WS, 69). Hence, as Kathleen embodies the national past, George embodies the national consciousness awakened by it. Needless to say, only together can they constitute a nation. As Ernest Renan³⁰ wrote:

³⁰ Renan in his famous essay "What is a nation?" scrutinized particular elements that should help one define a nation, namely a common dynastic rule, race, language, religion, common interest and geography. He concluded that none of these provides a full answer as to why people feel themselves of one nation and that, apparently, the nation is "a soul, a spiritual principle". This soul is rooted both in "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" and "a consent [and] the desire to live together [and] to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received" (Renan 1990: 8-23). The national legacy, in turn, is

The nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form (Renan 1990 [1882]: 19)

Within the novel, then, one may observe the birth of national Guyanese identity that is rooted in a common legacy and memory and united by a common goal – liberation from the yoke of colonialism. It displays a conviction that, at that time, there was no other choice but national self-determination and no other place but Guyana where the Guyanese could be truly themselves. If the novel concluded at this point, it could be called a conventional postcolonial home-nation narrative since, as Rosemary George writes, its expected ending is “the newly independent nation” (1999: 13-14). *Web of secrets* undoubtedly fulfils this criteria but, like in *The shadow bride*, its careless happy ending is somewhat disharmonized by an inclusion of a seemingly negligible commentary on the state of the already independent national body.

More precisely, the frame of the novel is provided by Margaret, and the novel opens and closes with detailed descriptions of people’s reactions to her return, as well as her own adult reflections on the condition of Guyana. Looking at her country now, twenty years later, Margaret sees that, having won their Independence, the Guyanese are starting to forget the madness that once consumed their country. Margaret’s return drags to light the history of their national struggle, which some believe should better be forgotten: “for years people seem to faget and now here we are bringing up that ole story jus’ because Kathleen granddaughter Margaret returning...” (WS,14). Others still see what happened as a redemptive result of the years of colonial oppression, but have doubts if anything was truly learned from the experience: “[if] something can be learned from it, then I would say it was not wasted...But was something learned? That’s my point...am...” (WS, 13). This very question remains unanswered as the discussion triggered by Margaret’s return is not concluded in the novel. What it signals, however, is the need to remind the Guyanese of the value of their freedom and to spark a critical revision of their national(ist) lesson. Hence, the novel seems to go contrary to Ernest Renan’s other argument that nations are built on collective forgetting (1990 [1882]: 11)

invariably constructed through violence exerted on others in the name of the national principle as well as suffered by the people in the name of their nation. Hence, the nation unites itself in the memory of common suffering for the national cause and common forgetting about the suffering inflicted on others. “[T]he essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things” (1990: 22), writes Renan.

and it suggests that they are constructed in the constant process of remembering and working through their traumas. Moreover, Margaret's return 'after all these years' is symbolic on yet another level. Showing her choice to come back to Guyana, the novel implies that true reconciliation with oneself and one's past is possible only within the realms of the Guyanese nation. This ultimate message seems to be directed both at the older generations, wondering if freedom brought a change for the better, and the younger generations, pondering if national identification is at all necessary in today's world.

Web of secrets, then, may be called a postcolonial narrative of (national) trauma that encodes hope for a successful *working through* of the past and defends the idea of national identity and national belonging as two powerful sources of one's personal and collective identity. Depicting the most difficult period in the Guyanese history, that of national and private madness, it nevertheless points to its invaluable result – national and personal liberation. The novel is by no means free from a moralizing dimension, pointing out that the legitimate place of the Guyanese is in Guyana, with which they are inextricably bound by the power of memory and legacy. The strength of national identity, in turn, lies in bridging differences, recognizing common national heritage and reminding the people that the ability to claim a coherent narrative identity based on an unambiguous, though at points difficult, history is a privilege, and not a burden. Therefore, despite its dark atmosphere, *Web of secrets* embodies a hopeful enthusiasm of belonging to a unique socio-political body that may be called a Guyanese nation; as such, it is even more intriguing to set it against the works of Oonya Kempadoo, the representative of the youngest generation of female Guyanese writers, in whose writings such an enthusiasm is nonexistent.

3.4.(Trans)national identity or running away from the past in *Buxton spice* (1999) by Oonya Kempadoo

More or less twenty years after Margaret from *Web of secrets* started first discovering her self-identity, Oonya Kempadoo's main protagonist, Lula, embarks on a similar journey in the now independent Guyana. *Buxton spice* (1999) is her semi-autobiographical novel of growing up in the country, which turned into a communist hell and where the people cherish the vision of emigrating to Europe or America more than ever before. The time presented in the novel corresponds with the years spent by the Kempadoos in Guyana across the 1970s, when the father of the author, a writer and journalist – Peter Kempadoo (b. 1926) – was working in the emerging Guyanese media (Donnell 2006: 26). Oonya / Lula's growing up in the country, torn by political and

ethnic struggles, translates itself into the (r)evolution of her rigid national and ethnic belonging towards the fluid, or as some say rootless, identity construct, beyond any fixed or constraining categories of identification.

Buxton spice, just like *Web of secrets*, is a novel about (dis)covering secrets by an inquisitive girl, who out of snippets of information reconstructs the world she lives in and grows to understand her own liminal position within its realms.³¹ The novel opens with a promise to the reader “I got to know all the secrets of the house – like I knew all the trees in the yard” (*BS*³², 3) and gradually Lula discloses what she has learnt about herself, her family and homeland. Just like Oonya’s, Lula’s family is of mixed East-Indian provenance and her father, “a Dark cool Madrasi (...) [f]ollower of Mahatma Gandhi” (*BS*, 27), a writer and a reporter, is a close reflection of Peter Kempadoo. Guyana from Lula’s memory is not a land of national(ist) enthusiasm but that of unstable political construction, whose people are torn between claiming their national belonging and escaping it. Even though Lula’s domestic space does not disintegrate like Margaret’s did, it is tellingly marked by absences: “This table [family table] used to hold more of us but the two eldest girls had long left home – gone back to England” (*BS*, 26). The motif of emigration, enigmatically called “going Away”, permeates the novel, and gives Guyana a sense of temporality. Every family either has someone who emigrated, or is planning to do so. “Having connections with people from Away” (*BS*, 120), is a source of pride, respect and income and the very fact that Away is consistently capitalized gives off its mythical aura. Within this already ambiguous world, Lula’s family occupies an unclear position. They may be Guyanese but contaminated by foreign ways; for instance, Lula’s father’s discipline methods are a laughing matter across the neighbourhood: “We got put up in our room for punishment and the whole village thought this was ridiculous, a joke” (*BS*, 121). Besides, they are overeducated, which

³¹ Many critics argue that the exceptionality of the novel in the field of Caribbean writing lies in its vivid description of sexual experience on the brink of adolescence and adulthood. For example, in the book *Caribbean women writers and globalization* (2006), Helen Scott reads the novel through the prism of Lula’s sexual development, her discovery of orgasm and masturbation, her sensualising of the Guyanese landscape and her discovery of shame and violence that are inextricably linked with desire (Scott 2006: 114-116). The political violence depicted in the novel, Scott argues further, may also be read from the feminist perspective as the “institutionalized brutality” of men against women that derives from their own sense of frustration and “powerlessness” (2006: 117). Being well aware of the significance of sexual(ized) readings of the novel, the present chapter nevertheless wishes to pay more attention to Lula’s self-development in the context of her identity formation as a Guyanese.

³² All the quotations come from Kempadoo, Oonya. 1999. *Buxton spice*. London: Phoenix, which is henceforth referred to as *BS*.

alienates them from the real world: “Education, dat’s what happen to them. Too much. Look at all dem books dey have in de place!” (*BS*, 70).

However, the major reason for their incompatibility lies in their mixed racial origin. Though the father is clearly East-Indian, the mother has a “strong European nose, flat forehead, and the curve of her Creole lips” (*BS*, 27). To makes matter worse, Lula’s father comes from an East-Indian plantation family³³ but her mother is called “bourgeois” (*BS*, 27), which situates them somewhere in-between the classes. Besides, they do not claim any clear religious allegiance and, tied to political opposition, they remain outside the dominant party known as PNC – the People’s National Congress. In this liminal positioning, Lula seeks her own belonging to Guyana. To this purpose, she employs the help of a semi-real listener who, due to his timeless nature, is supposed to make sense of the chaos that surrounds her. The listener is Buxton spice, the titular mango tree:

I knew it could hear things going on everywhere in Guyana. Sounds that went on in Berbice Mad House, New Amsterdam Town Hall, the President’s House in Georgetown, Linden Bauxite Workers Union. It could hear the sugar cane being crushed through the big iron rollers in Enmore Estate (...) all these things and more. All the horrible dark-road secrets, the plotting ach scheming. But it wouldn’t tell me things (*BS*, 34).

The tree, by virtue of its rootedness in time and space, is thought to hear and know more about the history of the land than it wishes to disclose. It is Lula’s link to the outside world and a repository of all the dark secrets which she wishes to learn about. With its aid, she embarks on a mission of discovering the truth, in which she could anchor herself.

The dark secrets Lula grows to learn are those of racial violence, sectarianism and her own impossibility of a clear self-definition according to the homogenous categories of belonging. Initially, as a liminal being, she is sensitive to any promise of a coherent identity construct. In a country where ethnicity overlaps with political allegiance, it is first offered by the East-Indian national narration and second by the leftist ideology. Born into a mixed East-Indian family, she naturally shapes her identity within the existing discourse of difference between East-Indians and Afro-Guyanese. As Stuart Hall (1992: 4) famously claimed: “[i]dentities are constructed within, not outside, discourse (...), produced in specific historical and institutional sites (...) by specific enunciative strategies”. Though Hall does not dispute that they have “conditions of existence (...) outside the sphere of the discursive” it is “only

³³ Oonya Kempadoo’s father, Peter Kempadoo, is the author of the first novel ever written by an East-Indian in Guyanese literature. His *Guyana boy* (1960), is an autobiographical account of his growing up on the estate in the 1940s.

within the discursive” that they can be “constructed within meaning”. In other words, identity is shaped within the power-related structures of representations, through which it produces meaning as well as gains it. Writing about the persistence of ethnic identification in Guyana, Ravi Dev observes that “the ethnic group (...) is tied up with the individual’s conception of ‘self’. An individual’s personality of self is a construction, and almost a reflection, of his social world” (2000: 106).

In consequence, the primary construct of identity Lula is offered by the Guyanese society is a rigid ethno-national narration. Lula lives in the village where, after the racial riots of the 1960s, East-Indians are now in a minority: “Tamarind Grove was black race people, strong PNC party people. Dads, Bunty family and Aunty Babe was the only East Indians. And my family was mixed – Indian, black and white” (*BS*, 49). Hence, she naturally shapes her identity against the other – the Afro-Guyanese. When she describes the coast of Guyana she does so in such words:

Black people lived in one village, Indians the next. Black, Indians. So it went, all along the coast of Guyana to Mahaica. Even if you didn’t see people, you could tell which village was black, which was coolie. Blacks had unpainted houses and clap-hand churches; Indians paint, front gardens, mosques and temples. Was always people lining on the road in a black village. Mothers and children out till ten at night. Not so in an Indian village. But all had Catholic churches and rumshops by the main road (*BS*, 50).

Lula is visibly fixed on minor differences³⁴ that separate the two groups and she does not hide her disregard for “their” way of life. In short, the Afro-Guyanese are less ordered, lazier, noisy in their clap-hand churches and they raise children contemptibly. What manifests itself in this passage is Lula’s emotional attitude to difference. As Slavoj Žižek claims, there is an unavoidably passionate element to any ethnic and national identification as the ‘other’ embodies threat to our ways. “What really bothers us about the ‘other’”, writes Žižek (1993: 202), “is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the “excess” that pertains to this way: the smell of “their” food, “their” noisy songs and dances, “their” strange manners, “their” attitude to work”.

Lula’s *disidentification* with the Afro-Guyanese is also deeply rooted in the political discourse, namely the country is being run by the PNC, which is an Afro-Guyanese organization. In repeating the colonial stereotypes about

³⁴ Minor difference is understood here accordingly to Vamik Volkan’s definition: “when the neighbour is our enemy and is tinged with our unwanted parts, we do not want to acknowledge any likeness to us. Therefore, we focus on minor differences – or create them – in order to stress dissimilarity and the existence of a gap between us” (1988: 105).

the Africans, she indirectly disclaims their right to wield power and implicitly contrasts them with *autostereotypes* of the East-Indians.³⁵ In other words, she inscribes herself into the East-Indian ethno-narration. Needless to say, the Afro-Guyanese disidentified themselves from the East-Indians in analogous ways. In the 1970s the process of urbanization facilitated competitiveness on the labour market and the so far dominant Afro-Guyanese middle class – teachers, clerks, policemen – felt threatened by the rapidly growing number of educated East-Indians. The consequence was “the uncovering of old prejudices” in an attempt to protect their domain (Alexander 2000: 70). In such a sectarian world, they nevertheless, as Lula notes, all have Catholic churches and rumshops in the villages, which is an unmistakable evidence of their colonial legacy and an allusion to many cultural elements that in fact unite them into one national body. Paradoxically, them becoming similar in many respects under the colonial rule, yet strengthens their desire to preserve their distinctness from *the other*. As Vamik Volkan argues when cultural or social rituals that allow for peaceful maintenance and replaying of minor differences cease to effectively contain aggression, then comes the outburst of violence (1988: 103). The traces of past madness surround Lula. For example, during her raids across the neighbourhood she encounters “the ruins of an old mosque [that] wasn’t ancient ruins, just a few years old, looked like it was half built and then something had bumped into it (...)”. From her mother, she learns their provenance: “Mums said it was Riots made it so (...) [f]ires and bombs chasing Indians out” (BS, 49). The ruins are a physical manifestation of Guyana’s traumatic past.

It is interesting to note how Lula replays scenes of violence in her mind, making them unreal, almost cinematic: “[it] was difficult to imagine this broken mosque full of Indians praying and living in Tamarind Grove. Seemed to me, the only way a building could get like this was like in a war movies” (BS, 50). The moment violence loses its elusive quality comes during her excursion to the mosque, where Lula meets Mrs Mohammed. The woman’s face was scarred by “a glass bottle full of fire” and, in consequence,

³⁵ Both terms disidentification and autostereotypes are borrowed from the book *Ethnic conflict and terrorism: the origins and dynamics of civil wars* (2005) by Joseph Soaters, where he describes identification as a bond with those whom we consider being like ourselves and disidentification as seeking differences between ourselves and our enemies: “identification is the emotional pendant of group formation; people identify with, feel one with, the members of their own group. Disidentification is the instinctive expression of the exclusion of others, the people of the outgroup, those whom one is not allowed to pity” (2005: 82). From these, there ensue autostereotypes that are positive stereotypes about the group itself, which are shared and propagated within this particular group, and heterostereotypes that are negative stereotypes about the group’s enemies (Soaters 2005: 79).

her and her husband's house is now changed into a prison: "Now wire meshing covered the windows from the sills to the edge of the roof. Mr Mohammed said even the roof was burglar-proofed and not a black man would mess with him again" (BS, 52). Soon enough, Lula earns her own memories of violence when "plenty PNC people [were] running down the streets with flames in bottles (...) The silence made my parents say nothing. Close the windows and hold us. Hearts galloping" (BS, 50).

Contrary to what one may expect, her personal experience of racial violence inflicted on the East-Indian community by the Afro-Guyanese does not make Lula uncritically accept the East-Indian identity and fight against her African enemy. Instead, it triggers a yet deeper sense of *nonbelonging*, leading Lula to doubt her own place in this binary world. Her family's racial ambiguity protects them from being direct victims of the attacks, but it does not help her understand the logics of racial discrimination. Thus, she turns for help to the mango tree:

Why you don' tell me nothing? (...) Race Riots. You know about dat. You know dat Burnham cause dat. You must know he well – Our Leader Comrade Linden Forbes Burnham. Yes. He have bug-eye just like you. And he always hearing everyt'ing like you (...) He make black people hate Indians. He take everyt'ing de Indians had an say is government own (...) You must'e see all dat. You is a black Buxton Spice or what? If you know so much, *how come, we is par coolie an we living in Tamarind Grove? And DeAbros is Putagee, an they living here too?* (BS, 59; italics mine, MF)

They, as "par coolie" do not fit in with the sectarian picture of Tamarind Grove and so do not other families, especially the Portuguese, who elude any possible classifications. The Portuguese came to Guyana in the 1840s from Madeira; their poverty placed them in one line with the East-Indian and Chinese indenture workers, and their Roman Catholic denomination outside the dominant colonial class (Rodway 2005 [1912]: 184). The British did not even include the Portuguese in the category of Europeans (Devi 2000: 105); as Lula writes, they are 'Putagee': "all the Portuguese families in Guyana was related: Fernandez, Rodriguez, Gomes, DaSilva, Deguiar, DaCosta, DeAbro and others. Some of them got rich (...) but they were still 'Putagee', not even local whites" (BS, 65). Such and similar racial and cultural inconsistencies, both serious and funny as when her Roman Catholic neighbours tried to employ obeah, prove that sectarian ideology is illogical and unfair even in racial discrimination.

Since Buxton Spice has no answers to Lula's uncomfortable questions concerning the illogicality that surround her, she turns for coherence towards the dominant political ideology. The state promises her a pan-ethnic unity that would make her part of the dominant order and would answer all her

identification dilemmas. This unity is symbolized by the uniforms put on by more and more young people in the neighbourhood. Lula truly envies Mikey, her older friend, who has joined the paramilitary People's Militia and "got a brown uniform with a broad black canvas belt and black Army boots and was training to use a gun" (*BS*, 163). Hence, when school offers Lula a chance to also get uniformed, she is more than happy to embrace it:

When I entered Secondary School at thirteen, it was the first time in my life I wore a uniform. All the years being taught at home, it was the thing I had envied most (...) I going to be just like every other child in the school. We the uniformed ones, would be invincible, a clan, a force to be reckoned with. I going to belong and it don't matter if I Indian, black or Dougla, if I fat or fine, that uniform would make me one of them (*BS*, 164).

For the first time in the novel Lula uses the collective pronoun *we* to describe her allegiance to the only available all-inclusive category of belonging – the communist nation – that seems a proper alternative to her fragmented identity. What manifests itself in her emotional declaration of allegiance is a simple truth of extremism. Namely, with no stable sense of belonging, Lula could be an easy prey for any ideology that would explain everything what Buxton Spice could not. As Hannah Arendt wrote: "an ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea. (...) [i]deologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future – because of the logics inherent in their respective ideas" (Arendt 1979: 469). Ideology, be it political or religious, offers an illusion of absolute identification that invites no hybridity or ambiguity and thus binds people together and *disidentifies* them from their imagined enemies. In the Guyana of the 1970s, the country riddled with socio-economic and racial differences, such a unifying ideology is provided by Forbes Burnham, the leader, who uses the rhetoric of national progress, common good, a better future to unite the Guyanese under the banner of the communist dictum. As he is reported to say: "You all have to pay for schoolbooks? No. Soon you wouldn't have to pay for school uniforms, *that's* what I doing for you – providing a future" (*BS*, 90; emphasis in the original, MF). In this glorious national future, even an East-Indian of mixed origin, with no clearly defined class belonging or religious allegiance, can fully belong. Now Lula knows that her enemies are not her Afro-Guyanese neighbours but those who oppose the state. Paradoxically, however, the moment Lula puts on her dreamed-of uniform her hope of belonging is utterly shattered.

Contrary to Lula's expectations, her uniform, instead of sameness, only highlights her difference. More precisely, it occurs to be more red than brown, and earns her nicknames such as "Crispy Biscuit". This moment of

hurtful disillusion is also a moment of epiphany when she starts seeing her school reality as a state-within-the-state where their headmaster, Mr Brown, is the equivalent of Forbes Burnham. The PNC teachers abuse those who do not belong to the party and the children are raised in an atmosphere of absolute obedience to one line of thinking. Furthermore, the idleness she at the beginning read as a negative and inbred feature of the Afro-Guyanese community, now is part and parcel of her school-life and, by extension, the whole country. Its source lies not in one's ethnicity or race, but it is provoked by the system:

We had everything – the land, water, equipment, seeds – but no expertise or desire. Like in the nation, productivity was zero. It was one of our small triumphs. Even the teacher didn't want to produce. None of us would benefit even if we did. (...) We wasn't any different to the government workers – like Guyana Electricity Corporation men (*BS*, 165-166).

The choice not to produce and not to contribute is a triumph against the system and a sign of resistance. In other words, Lula, in somewhat Žižkan terms, becomes the one who 'knows too much' and thus "pierce[s] the true functioning of social reality". This reality, then, "dissolves itself" (2008 [1998]: 15) in front of her eyes. Moreover, ideology feeds on "discordance between what people are effectively not doing and what they are doing" and it is fuelled by the "false representation of [the] social reality to which they belong" (2008 [1998]: 27). Here false representations may be paraphrased as the falsity of unification and absolute belonging, which is nothing but illusionary. Ethnic divisions, colonial stereotypes, and political conflicts run in Guyana so deep that their eradication seems almost impossible. Even if the Guyanese resemble one another more than they resemble the people from the countries of their origin (Hyles 2014: 122), in the novel they are still fixed on proving their minor differences. The last touching scene testifies perfectly to the above-mentioned observation.

The novel concludes in a seemingly insignificant incident when Lula's close friend, Judy, a Portuguese girl, is caught with Andre, an Afro-Guyanese boy. The exposure of their teenage affair is far from innocent and it changes into a display of racial hatred. It causes the literal panic of Judy's mother, who is disgusted equally by her daughter's shamelessness as by her being with a black boy. She tries to make Judy publicly admit that she was raped: "Judy ... watch me. He beat you to make you not talk? Judy jerking still. Is rape, you know. Black man does rape... *but he can't rape you if you get away to go an' take it!*" (*BS*, 181; emphasis in the original, MF). Judy's mother, herself not-quite-white Portuguese, is trying to actively use the stereotype of African's excessive sexual appetite and their implicit desire to rape white women that may be traced back to the story of Caliban and Miranda. This attempt at

changing the reality to fit stereotypes is alarming and testifies to the persistence of the colonial representations that are only masked by political ideology. Even though they are neighbours, at this particular moment it occurs that there is practically no true and profound pan-ethnic dialogue in the Guyanese society. The demise of colonialism, then, did not annihilate the racial stereotypes, which signals that in Guyana, even living door to door with each other, it is impossible to live outside the constraining categories of ethnic divisions.

Therefore, when the reality of leaving the country forever catches up with Lula, her loss of the place she wished to belong to mingles with her longing for freedom from any imposed categories. On her final day, she addresses Buxton Spice for the last time, seeing its rumbling as a sign of protest:

What de hell you grumblin bout? We have British Passport, *we don't have to stay!* All dese years we here, you know bout t'ings and wouldn't tell me nothing. You the one always spying. Well we goin now! You could stay and watch people suffer more. You could take over de whole house. Spread out yuh fat feet and break open de septic takn! (*BS*, 164; emphasis in the original, MF).

In her words “what de hell you grumblin bout” one may read both a desire to run away and a sense of guilt that they chose not to challenge the reality and actively fight for liberation within the body of their own nation. Passports, along with flags, anthems or monuments, are traditional marks of national belonging and national identity (Smith 1990: 77). Here the British Passport is a mark of citizenship, but it does not imply Lula’s self-definition as British or English; it only enables her to transgress borders and to claim civil rights that should be guaranteed by any democratic state. As Sajna Ivic indicates: “[p]ostmodern citizenship, perceived as based on the postmodern notion of identity, is not defined by nation or culture. It is a state of mind, a mental construct, which is founded on the subjective feeling of belonging” (Ivic 2011: 9). For this reason, Lula’s subjective feeling of belonging, or non-belonging, does not deter her from claiming rights from Britain, the former colonizer, that are not guaranteed at home. As Oonya Kempadoo puts it in another of her novels, one should “work and participate and carry on as normal, and not feel like an illegal island immigrant” in any country in the world (Kempadoo 2013: 5-6). Her attitude, then, reminds of the transnational approach as defined by Shalini Puri; namely a common strategy of fluid belonging when one is not physically and mentally confined to a single nation-state, but which does not imply that the nation-state is a point of reference – and that the primary source of the political, economic and social organization ceases to exist (Puri 2004: 4). In *Nations unbound*, Linda Bash adds that transnationals “take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and

identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (Bash 1994: 7), which does not mean the world without nations, only the possibility of crossing borders.

Such a choice may be also described in terms of a transcultural identity that eludes any rigid, or even hybrid, concept of rootedness. The term is associated with Wolfgang Welsch (1999: 194-213) and his claims that *transculturality* is “a specific task in identity-forming” based on “the integration of components of differing cultural origin” in a world where we all are essentially cultural hybrids. Transcultural identity responds to the situation of many a migrant or global traveller who nowadays participates in various cultures. As Wolfgang Berg and Aoileann Niigearthaigh argue “transculturalists (...) date and marry outside of their race or religion; they date and marry inside of their gender; they travel in a whim and venture into faraway lands; (...) they live in areas from which their parents were once barred”. However, they do so “without losing their own individuality and cultural heritage” (Berg and Niigearthaigh 2013: 11). Transculturality, then, just like transnationality, does not imply the annihilation of the differences between cultures, but only the possibility of integrating certain foreign cultural elements into one’s cultural identity. Hence Lula’s unclear national, ethnic and cultural self-positioning from the beginning of the novel remains unchallenged; at the end of the novel, however, non-belonging to any clearly defined ethnic or national group is her privilege, rather than a burden – as she initially perceived it.

Such ‘transnational and transcultural’ conclusions are corroborated by Kempadoo herself, who declares that she sees her writing as a struggle against any binary divisions, sectarian identities and racial stereotypes, which is a direct result of her own, Guyanese experiences (Kempadoo 2013a). However, as Ralph Premdas claims (2011: 815), “it is easy to assert a Caribbean identity if [one] does not have to meet his/her compatriots and has no hope of this ever happening”. At least for now, Kempadoo does not declare her will of going back to Guyana, but her recent novel *All decent animals* (2013) shows the initial signs of a disillusionment with transcultural and transnational identification. Its main protagonist, Atalanta, a young writer-to-be, comes to Trinidad and Tobago from an unnamed Caribbean country, which the reader may associate with Guyana. Ata describes herself as “[a] nonbelonger. Unrooted in place and race and in herself” (Kempadoo 2013: 8). Over time she is forced to redefine her initial assumptions, which is most tellingly signalled by the failure of her transcultural marriage to a Frenchman, Pierre. On the last pages of the novel Atalanta recognizes that there have been some major cultural and racial differences between her and her husband she had tried to ignore and of which she was literally unable to talk about with him and their friends (Kempadoo 2013: 211). Her final decision is to take up writing, which

is to help her express her thoughts on race, culture, and national identity and to reconcile herself with the very notion of *difference*.

One may thus conclude that *Buxton spice*, though contentwise similar to *Web of secrets*, leads one towards divergent conclusions. Unlike *Disappearance* or *Web of secrets*, it does not end with return, but with emigration; the ending nevertheless contains no absolutist message and thus it, metaphorically, leaves the door open for Lula. Moreover, *Buxton Spice* provides one with a broad socio-cultural perspective on why Oonya Kempadoo places herself in-between nations and does not display an exclusive loyalty to any particular national identity. Her choice is not based on a feeble hope that Caribbean cultural hybridity would erase national borders, as it was in the case of Wilson Harris or Derek Walcott. She also does not argue for a pan-ethnic Indian solidarity that, like pan-Africanism, would bind all the East-Indians into one diasporic body. Somehow resembling Dabydeen's protagonist, she escapes the memory of ethno-national struggle that followed the Guyanese independence as she does the sectarian divisions, racial stereotypes and cultural differences. Oonya / Lula still cherishes hope, lost by Dabydeen's engineer, that uprootedness, as Kempadoo herself called it, is a viable option for the Guyanese in today's world. In light of her recent works, especially the mentioned *All decent animals*, it is all the more interesting to trace Kempadoo's forthcoming novels and to see if Lula / Oonya's identity struggles would, in the end, bring her home.

The primary conclusion ensuing from the analyzed works is that national identity remains a significant topic for the Guyanese authors and a fruitful subject of their individual and collective self-investigations. The new readings of Guyanese life-narratives corroborate the thesis that in Guyana cultural hybridity and ethnic sentiments do not preclude national belonging. Nevertheless, one may observe significant disparities in the conceptualization of national identity between the two Guyanese generations. For Roy Heath, the hybrid national identity situated in-between the colonial and the ethnic is a tangible alternative to sectarian divisions. Denise Harris shares his hopes and shows that the right to claim unambiguous national identity is a privilege worth the communal healing. Dabydeen and Kempadoo, in turn, place emphasis on the fluid character of the national belonging. Though eventually they choose different paths, leading them back to and away from Guyana, both their novels highlight a need to liquidize national identity so that it would allow for the harmonious accommodation of difference, without triggering a regressive movement towards ethnic radicalism. At this point it is worth reminding oneself of the words written by Neil Lazarus (1999: 143) that the main goal of responsible literature and responsible criticism in today's world lies in "retain[ing] the categories of "nation" and "universality" so as to "construct a standpoint (...) from which it is possible to assume the burden of

speaking for all humanity". Though speaking on behalf of humanity is utopian, and so is speaking on behalf of the whole nation, David Dabydeen and Oonya Kempadoo prove that the attempts at the reconciliation between the national and the global are, nevertheless, worth the effort as they truly reflect the situation and dilemmas of many a postcolonial and postmodern Every(wo)man.

Chapter Four

“Remarkable wilderness”¹ and exotic Arcadia: Investigating the Nature of the Guyanese fiction

[F]or us European earth-dwellers, the adventure played out in the heart of the New World signifies in the first place that it was not our world and that we bear responsibility for the crime of its destruction; and secondly, that there will never be another New World.
Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (2011 [1955]: 393)

It turns out Planet of the Apes
Is our own planet Earth
“Big Twist”, Paul Muldoon (2014:9)

Sir Walter Raleigh in *Discovery of the large, rich and beautiful Empire of Guyana with the relation of the great golden city of Manoa* (1596), depicted Guyana not only as a possible El Dorado but also as truly untouched, yet welcoming tropical space, abundant in natural goods, ideal for “hunting, hawking, fishing, fowling, and the rest”, inhabited by the timid savages (1886 [1596]: 36). Though the factual knowledge of Guyana among the British imperial audience was slight, the myth of Raleigh’s journey and his image of Guyana sustained its memory until the nineteenth century. When in 1803 Guyana was claimed by the Crown, it came to the centre of colonial attention as Raleigh’s tropical El Dorado and its uncivilized wild interior made the hearts of many an adventurer pound harder (Burnett 2000: 14). The echoes of this renewed interest may be found in the works of sir Charles Watertone, a British explorer and taxidermy enthusiast, who in *Wanderings in South*

¹ The phrase comes from Wilson Harris’ essay “The music of the living landscapes”.

America (1839) recorded his ventures into the interior of Guyana, depicting its primeval jungle and wildlife so convincingly that as a consequence he greatly inspired Darwin. As the story has it “Watertone was the most talked about traveller of the moment [the early nineteenth century]”, who claimed to have walked the jungle like “no Englishman before”, bareheaded and barefooted. Through his stories praising his own courage and the “freedom of the savage”, he made of “the wilds of Guyana the most familiar terra incognita” (Desmond and Moore 2009: 23).

The first actual visual representation of Guyana was offered to the British public by Sir Robert Schomburgk² in his pamphlet *Twelve views into the Interior of Guyana* (1840). It was a Humboldt-like sentimental, pastoral vision of the wilderness, and the first illustrated book on Guyana read by the Queen herself (Burnett 2000: 126). It contained the picture of a famous flower discovered by Schomburgk in 1837 and named by him *Victoria regia* (Burnett 2000: 83), which he then – as the queen among the flowers – offered to Queen Victoria as a symbol of her rule over Guyana and the kingdom of nature. The flower was later displayed in London and reprinted on Guianese postal stamps and thus became the key symbol of the country (Burnett 2000: 154-156; Mittelholzer 1958: 180). Guyana inspired also socio-economic visionaries, like the medical doctor John Hancock, who wrote a book *On the climate, soil and production of British Guyana and on the advantages of emigration to and colonizing the interior of that country* (1840). There, he presents Guyana as an immigrant heaven, with a mild climate and rich soil which could easily accommodate and feed Britain’s surplus population, making Guyana an antidote to all the British economic problems (Hancock 1840: 6-7). Such a pseudo-

² Robert Schomburgk (1804-1865) was German by birth but British by choice and he is now recognized as one of the most famous and accomplished British explorers. He was not only to describe the Guianese wildlife but also to explore the Brazil-Guiana border, the delineation of which at that time was a thorny political issue; the border conflicts have not been resolved even today, though no military actions are undertaken by any of the sides (Ishmael 2013: 512). Schomburgk was consciously using the myth of El Dorado devised by Sir Walter Raleigh to present himself as his intellectual and moral successor. He reedited Raleigh’s famous narrative from Guiana, adding copious explanations and notes, which has been reprinted by the Hakluyt Society in 1848. In the editor’s preface he states that, as a foreigner, he may seem unsuited to the task of editing the works of the British hero but his ultimate aim is to confirm the accuracy of Sir Walter Raleigh’s descriptions and observations and to cleanse his memory of the dark legend. In the introduction he suggests that he and other Victorians are the successors of the Renaissance period that was “distinguished (...) in the new projects of colonization” (1848: vii-xiv; xv). Therefore, Burnett in his book *Masters of all they surveyed* (2000: 45) argues that Schomburgk was not an innocent traveller but the employee of the Empire, whose aim was to sustain the imperial legend and the imperial interests. Schomburgk is also the author of *A description of British Guiana geographical and statistical* (1840).

scientific and agricultural interest in the country has been carried well into the twentieth century in the works of Walter Roth and Vincent Roth, as well as many a travelogue inspired by the ventures into the tropical unknown.³

The colonial perception of Guyana, then, was dualistic and one may clearly discern the two trends of its representation as a primeval wilderness and as an idyllic pastoral. The wilderness carries within itself a dichotomous imagery of the space situated *beyond* civilization and “uncontaminated by the civilization” (Garrard 2004: 59). Thus it confronts one with the animalistic in (human) nature, but also “holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth” (Garrard 2004: 59). On this seemingly uncivilized ground, the colonizers imposed their utopian dreams of either going back to nature or civilizing the barbarous world. The former inspired many people who sought temporary or permanent refuge from the real world, like Evelyn Waugh – who went to Guyana to recuperate after his divorce.⁴ The latter drew to the country missionaries and social reformers, such as William Brett, who bravely ventured into the wild to build schools and villages enticing the Indians to abandon their migratory lifestyle and thus fulfil the imperial mission of progress.⁵ Hence, the Guyanese primeval forest – which stood for the

³ Walter Roth (1861-1933) was an anthropologist working on the Amerindian myths and mythological systems. He wrote a book *An introductory study of the arts, crafts, and customs of the Guiana Indians* (1924), which is oftentimes cited in the chapter. His son, Vincent (1889-1967), is the author of two volumes of his memoirs from Guiana where he came as a young boy to join his father. The memoir is a naturalist and quasi-scientific account of the interior and the coast of Guiana, mingled with Vincent’s own opinions and worldview imposed on the country and its people; they have been reprinted by Peepal Tree in 2004 as *Vincent Roth, a life in Guyana: Volume 1: A young man’s journey 1889-1922* and *Volume 2: The later years: 1922-1936*, and they could be an interesting point of reference for anyone interested in the relationship between travel narratives, natural science and colonial imagination.

⁴ Waugh went to British Guiana in 1932 and later described his experiences in a travelogue entitled *92 days* (1934).

⁵ W. H. Brett (1818-1886) was a famous missionary in British Guiana known as the apostle of the Indians. He was famous for his undying Christianizing energy and belief in the Gospel as the highest civilizing power; he is oftentimes jokingly mentioned as the one who clothed the Indians due to his stigmatizing approach to their nakedness. Brett was also an amateur anthropologist and a linguist and the author of several illustrated books, such as *Mission work among the Indian tribes in the forests of Guiana* (1881), *Legends and myths of the Aboriginal Indians of British Guiana* (1880), or *Indian missions in Guiana* (1851). As he himself wrote, he not only taught his Indians English but also translated prayers and parts of the Bible into the native languages, which “had been printed in those two languages by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, on a sheet with an illustrated border, representing, in small medallions, some of the chief events of the Old Testament history and the life of our Lord” (Brett 1881: 263-264). He also described the customs of particular tribes, contributing to the pervasive stereotype of cruel Caribs and gentle, more civilized, Arawaks. Another of such famous missionary figures was reverend Thomas Youd, who built

antithesis of civilization and culture – accommodated all the paradoxical shades of the Western conceptualization of the wild (see: White 1986: 150-180).⁶

The descriptions of British Guyana left by Robert Schomburgk or Anthony Trollope have little in common with the wild and the untamed. Based on Schomburgk's pictures, Guyana seems "pleasingly British while at the same time piquant with exotic touches" (Burnet 2000: 124), a welcoming, passive, rural and domesticated space awaiting the colonizers. Anthony Trollope, in turn, deemed Guyana "the Elysium of the tropics – the West Indian happy valley of Rasselas – the one true and actual Utopia of the Caribbean Seas – the Transatlantic Eden" (Trollope 1860: 173), though what truly enchanted him was not so much the beauty of the landscape as its potential for the production of sugar. In other words, Guyana emerges as countryside of the Empire, which contains a promise of tropical bounty, where the earth yields fruit easily and with no effort (Fowkes-Tobin 2005: 11). Such images are as if an "anti-conquest" postcard sent from the New World to the metropolis, "whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (Pratt 2007 [1992]: 7), and the choice of such associations is by no means accidental. The colonial discourse consciously shaped Guyana as a viable alternative to the industrialized West and, in so doing, it belied the true costs of its development, implicitly suggesting that progress does not affect its virgin landscapes. Because of such manipulative potential Greg Garrard claims that "[n]o other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture [as the pastoral]" and so "infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions" (Garrard 2004: 33).

The baggage of colonial representations somehow naturally defined the interest of the postcolonial Guyanese writers who wished to symbolically reclaim

a perfect Victorian mission in the middle of the Guyanese jungle known as Pirarra, which was visited by Robert Schomburgk during his excursions in 1838. Youd's life was recorded inter alia in *Ten years of mission life in British Guiana: being a memoir of the Rev. Thomas Youd* (1869). More on the role of particular missionaries, as well as differences between missions and denominations, may be found in the book by Mary Noel Menezes entitled *British policy towards the Amerindians in British Guiana 1803-1873* (1977). There existed yet another vein of missionary activity in Guiana of those preaching among the slaves and thus contributing to the spread of literacy and their ambitions of self-liberation. One of such people, and the martyr of anti-slavery movement, was a Guianese preacher John Smith (1790-1824), sentenced to death by the British authorities for his alleged enticement of the Demerara rebellion in 1823.

⁶ One of those enchanted by such a utopian dream was the poet Samuel Coleridge who, together with another poet Robert Southey, dreamed of going to North America and to establish there a utopian community ruled by the system of their own device known as panistocracy. The journey never took place but a Northern Irish poet Paul Muldoon based on it his collection of poems *Madoc: A mystery* (1992).

their national lands, both the wild and the rural, from the domination of the colonial imagination. For them, the discourse of nature was far more complex than the colonial descriptions of the Guyanese land would ever suggest. It was their history, memory, identity and myth; it reminded them of all the forced physical changes inflicted on the New World by the colonizers. It preserved the individual and collective traumas of the African slavery and indenture. Even the omnipresence of water symbolized the Middle Passage and the *kala pani*. The wild interior, in turn, stood as an allegory of the Amerindians, who were the only rightful indigenous masters of the country, and it is was a symbolic gate to their pre-Columbian past, Amerindian ontology and natural mythology. Therefore, the Guyanese poetics of nature is not a simple revision of colonial representations, but an attempt at devising new ways of thinking about nature, which first would allow the Guyanese to regain the sense of harmonious coexistence with their (home)land and, in a broader perspective, to spread their environmentally sensitive philosophy of life across the Western world.

The present chapter is a cross-generational comparative reading of the two dominant tropes of nature's representation in the Guyanese fiction – the wilderness and the pastoral. It pursues the broadest possible, at least within the realms of the present monograph, perspective on the Guyanese literary conceptualization of nature and on its evolution across the two waves of the Guyanese writings. Its more particular aim is to scrutinize how the first wave authors responded to, and reconceptualised, the colonial heritage of Guyana's representations and how the younger generation follows the paths delineated by their literary forefathers, simultaneously accommodating the Guyanese fiction to the new challenges of the globalized world. The chapter opens with the juxtaposition of *Shadows move among them* (1951) by Edgar Mittelholzer and *Children of paradise* (2014) by Fred D'Aguiar, the two novels deconstructing the Western imagination of the wilderness, and then it proceeds to *Heartland* (1964) by Wilson Harris and *The ventriloquist's tale* (1997) by Pauline Melville, which engage with the motif of Guyana as the *unurbanized*, domesticated rural space – the exotic pastoral.

4.1. Primeval utopia in *Shadows move among them* (1951) by Edgar Mittelholzer

*Shadows move among them*⁷ (1951) is a literary discussion with a pervasive motif of Guyana as the primeval wilderness in which the Westerners strove to

⁷ Seymour (2014: 12) claimed that the novel was inspired by Mittelholzer's journey to the Guyanese province of Berbice, which he undertook in 1933. Indeed, if one looks closely

realize their utopian ambitions of either reconstructing the civilized world or escaping it. Many a traveller and missionary shared a paradoxical dream that, in the lands forcefully subjugated to the will of Europe, it is possible to leave behind the imperfections of the old world, erase the centuries of the Western civilization and start anew. Mittelholzer's narrative comments on the power of this Western illusion as imposed on the Guyanese tropical forest and it oscillates around two male protagonists, pastor Harmston, an authoritarian spiritual leader, and Gregory, an English artist, both of whom come to Guyana to realize their utopian dreams. Using them as allegories of the missionary and the escapist, Mittelholzer travesties the Western dream of *going back to nature* and signals the power of the Guyanese wilderness to trigger one's spiritual renewal, which for ages has been silenced by the colonial civilizing project.

Already Adam Smith (2012 [1789]: 553) in *Wealth of nations* had deduced that, unlike Greek and Roman colonization, European expansion to the New World "arose from no necessity" and thus it cannot be fully understood without taking into account the power of the dream; the colonial dream had various shades from gaining profit, political domination, new territories, to constructing a utopia – a perfect community and a new social order devoid of the imperfections of the Western world. The term 'utopia' was coined by Thomas More and it may be translated as "no (or not a) place" (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 1) and the word itself contains a grain of truth about the very nature of the utopian dream. Namely, it "arose out of nothing in language" and is used to designate *nothing*, meaning an ideal that, by definition, cannot exist (Nancy 2012: 3). Though utopianism understood as "social dreaming" (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 1) may be traced back to Plato's *Republic*, one nevertheless needs to keep a distinction between pre-modern and modern utopias, as the origins of the latter are very tangibly linked to the actual New World discovered for Europe in the Renaissance. The modern utopia, Bauman argues, is nothing but a name given to our universal longing for stability and predictability, born in times when the natural order started giving way to the chaos of modernity (Bauman 2007: 96).

This chaos of modernity was connected to the rapid pace of social changes in Europe, but also to the European colonial expansion, which made the Europeans realize that there are places where, from their viewpoint, one could start the project of 'civilization' from scratch. This dependability is perfectly observable in the example of More's *Utopia* which, though a covert commentary on the (re)organization of the English state (Boesky 1996: 2-5),⁸

at the Mittelholzer's travelogue *With a Carib eye* (1958), one may find the parallels in his descriptions of the Guyanese jungle (1958: 134-144).

⁸ The birth of English utopian thought and writing may be also linked to the emergence of the new ideas on the English nation-state and national identity, which first came into

was inspired by “the letters (...) [of] Amerigo Vespucci, Christopher Columbus and Angelo Poliziano” and crafted against the otherness of the New World (Veira 2010: 4). Soon enough, the idyllic New World found its way into literature, for example into *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn, which projected the elements of the Western utopian imagination on Guyana’s neighbouring colony – Surinam (Pohl 2007: 22);⁹ as such, Behn’s novella is one of the earliest examples of the colonial dream being intertwined with utopian imagination (Pohl 2007: 22).

In the eighteenth century utopian narratives, understood as “fictional construct[s] depicting an ideal society located in space and time” (Blaim 1997: 4), became part of the mainstream literary discourse. They combined “the voyage to distant lands and continents with narrations of the best governments possible” (Blaim 1997: 39) and their relative popularity may be connected to the growing interest in travel literature (Blaim 1997: 38). Nicole Pohl perceives the change in terms of evolution from “geographical utopias”, like the said *Oroonoko*, to “ethnological utopias”, more politically oriented texts premised on “comparisons between European and non-western societies” (Pohl 2010: 63). Ethnological utopias were crafted either to highlight the achievements of the Western civilization or to “idealize the ‘state of nature’” (Pohl 2010: 63); thus they either “reinforced the superiority of the ‘Old World’” and “naturalize[d] the extensive appropriation and colonization of the ‘New World’” or promised “the regeneration of society to its original state of innocence and peace” (Pohl 2010: 63). The former trend derived from the Western sense of superiority and the latter from the sentimentalist philosophy of the late Enlightenment, most commonly associated with Jean Jacques Rousseau.¹⁰ As Michael Dash (1998: 21-42) poetically put it, Crusoe,

being in the Renaissance. In *Founding fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* (1996), one may read that “[u]topian discourse rose alongside the emergent institutions: the new schools, laboratories, workhouses, theatres and colonial plantations” (Boesky 1996: 3) when the power slowly flowed from the church to the state. In other words, the English utopias may be seen as covert tips on how to organize the state, which becomes the primary and ultimate source of power. Boesky links the return to utopian writings in the seventeenth century with another wave of the state’s reorganization connected to the Reformation, which even more significantly altered the power-structures in England. Thus she combines the development of the utopian discourse with the birth of nationalism and claims that utopias are the English “imaginary communities” and as such it was imposed on the New World (Boesky 1996: 2-5).

⁹ Nicole Pohl writes that though Behn’s novella is “not a utopian fantasy comparable in completeness to either More or Cavendish”, her “voyage to the new world invokes historic colonies and slave trading as part of the investigation of otherness”, against which she defines herself and the West (Pohl 2007: 22).

¹⁰ The tendency may be discerned in *Emile, or A discourse on inequality*. *Emile* opens with a well known sentence that “God makes all things good; man meddles with them and

who saw the island as a place to re-plant Western civilization, has gradually evolved into a lost modern man, who in the Americas sought a refuge from civilization. The colonies, then, became the utopian “elsewhere” where one could “begin anew” (Dash 1998: 42).

The Caribbean has occupied an even more specific place in such a mental framework and it is still viewed as “a perpetual Garden of Eden in which visitors can indulge all their desires and find a haven for relaxation, rejuvenation, and sensuous abandon” (Sheller 2003: 13). To capture such innuendos, one must broaden the original meaning of utopia as a perfect community to embrace a less systematized aspect of the utopian thinking, namely utopia being a an escapist dream of abandoning the world one lives in, into the proverbial nowhere, beyond the constant pressure of progress and self-development. This escapist side of utopianism as antithetical to the reconstructionist utopianism was noted by Lewis Mumford in his classical book *The story of utopias* (1922). Mumford differentiated there between the utopias of reconstructions and the utopias of escape. His utopias of reconstruction “are roughly synonymous with ideal communities” (Levitas 2010: 18). They are the “vision[s] of a reconstituted environment which is better adapted to the nature and aims of the human beings who dwell within it” (Mumford 1922: 24). Utopias of escape, in turn, are our universal dreams of escaping the imperfect into the world in which “our sufferings could be purged or our delights heightened” (Mumford 1922: 20).¹¹ Since then, the lead

they become evil”, which sets the tone for the further deliberations on the proper balance between nature and society in the process of the socialization and development of a child. Contrary to popular misconceptions, Rousseau never opposed the idea of education and socialization and he wrote that “[p]lants are fashioned by cultivation, man by education” (2011 [1763]). Similarly, in *A discourse on inequality* which is yet to be discussed in details, he never advocated the running away from civilization but merely striking a better balance between nature and culture.

¹¹ The fact that utopia is not only a place, but also a desire for a better world, was noted also by Ernst Bloch, who considered utopian dream a positive driving force that pushes one forward to seek a better future and thus venture beyond the limits of the real. For Bloch, traces of utopias may be found in all aspects of human cultural production from literature through art to political thinking; he even says that humans have “a utopian function – a forward-dawning projection of ourselves towards a self-chosen and hoped-for future” (Gunn 1987: 95; see also: Levitas 2001: 27; Dos Reis 2010: 44). Nonetheless, in the novel the utopian dream does not bring any change or contribute to any kind of creation; therefore Bloch’s paradigm is not easily translatable into Mittelholzer’s text. As such, the choice of Mumford’s paradigm for the analysis of the novel seems most accurate and it is not based on any ideological predicament; rather it serves as a frame that enables one to capture the dichotomous nature of some particular utopian dreams produced in the West and imposed on the tropics. To illustrate Mumford’s point, it is worth quoting one of his passages: “In its most elemental state, this utopia of escape calls for a complete breach with the butcher, the baker, the grocer, and the real, limited, imperfect people that flutter around us. *In order to*

has been followed by other theoreticians. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, maintains that “[though] [s]emantically, escape is the very opposite of utopia (...) [nowadays it is] its sole available substitute”. In other words, Bauman claims that in our “individualized society of consumers”, one no longer hopes to radically change the world one lives in, but instead one tries to buy, albeit temporary, escape from it (Bauman 2011: 104). Likewise, Lucy Sargisson (2010: 140) indicates that utopias need not signify ideal worlds but may be understood as the “spaces in which we can be different”, where “we can begin to think differently, play with alternatives, explore ideas to their limits”. As such, utopias may be “theoretical, fictional or lived” (Sargisson 2010: 142) and, additionally, they have the potential to restore the sense of existential harmony through transgressing the boundaries between the Self (the human being) and the Other (Nature) (Sargisson 2010: 140).¹²

Edgar Mittelholzer places his novel in a dialogue with both aforementioned traditions of the utopian thinking, though he translates them into the specifically Guyanese context. Namely, he sends his main protagonist, Gregory Hawke, an embodiment of the Western escapist dream, into the middle of pastor Harmston’s utopia of reconstruction where Gregory confronts himself with the pastor’s vision of the perfect world and the power of Nature. The novel opens when Gregory, “an aloof Englishman; a man from the north with a superior, self-sufficient air” (*Sh*, 39), embarks on a journey to British Guiana, which is part of his project of running away from the world. He seeks refuge from the traumas of the Spanish War, his failed marriage, failed artistic ambitions and, broadly speaking, his own life. Thus he gets on the steamer going up the Berbice river towards the heart of the Guyanese jungle, where he hopes to find a space beyond civilization and away from all his personal problems. His journey “occurs simultaneously in time, space and social hierarchy” (Levi-Strauss 2011 [1955]: 85) and prepares the protagonist and the reader for the encounter with the new world. It also implies a detachment from the West, or any other political unit, the proximity of which could potentially undermine the status of the community he is about to encounter as a perfect form of social organization (Porter and Lukermann 1975: 202).

The opening descriptions of the novel are those of a vast river, surrounded by the impenetrable forest and the slow moving boat whose rattling engine is the only sound reaching the passengers’ ears. The deeper they venture into the jungle, the more the water ceases to be “amber and

make it more perfect, we eliminate the butcher and baker and transport ourselves to a self-sufficient island in the South Seas. (...) Out of such fantasies of bliss and perfection, which do not endure in real life even when they occasionally bloom into existence, our art and literature have very largely grown” (Mumford 1992: 20-21; emphasis mine, MF).

¹² For some additional perspectives on utopianism see: Goodwin, Barbara. 2010. *The philosophy of utopia*. London: Routledge.

muddy in look and become[s] black and evil” (*Sh*¹³, 38); Gregory notes also that “the shadowed spaces made by the low hanging foliage momentarily seemed to gather a deep gloom and to glow with the sullen menace of many watching eyes” (*Sh*, 38). Even the constant throbbing of the engine ceases to be comforting and it makes Gregory uneasy; as he says, it causes “the endless waves [to be] swelling off from the bows and undulating towards the darkness under the overhanging foliage” (*Sh*, 38). Indisputably, the scene is uncanny, and thus the reader has an unsurpassable feeling that the further Gregory ventures into the forest, the further he is moving away from civilization into the darkness. Ironically enough, Mittelholzer mixes such imagery with a somewhat light-hearted suggestion that Gregory knows nothing about Guyana and probably he himself would not be able to tell it from Conrad’s descriptions of the Congo. As Andrew Seymour (2014: 21) argues, he is “a symbol of the English reader” potentially ignorant of Guyana’s existence, but nevertheless susceptible to the seductive effect of the utopian dream.

Tellingly, then, despite his lack of factual knowledge about the country, Gregory knows exactly what he expects to see there. Guyana is to be the land, “unspoilt by the amenities of big cities” and inhabited by people “touched, but not irrevocably poisoned by civilization” (*Sh*, 39). For him, like for a proper colonial gentleman, Guyana is the land *without* history, civilization, big cities and noise, but at the same slightly touched by the English influence and thus not entirely barbaric. From such a viewpoint, Guyana indeed seems a perfect utopian setting. Utopias, to be believably constructed, require their *uncivilized* lands (Porter and Lukerman 1975: 202), which in other words means uninhabited by “a society in an advanced state of social, economic, and political development” (Reid 2009: 121). Such a narrative construction absolves the writer from the need of setting one’s ideas against the other previously successful socio-political orders operating in the utopian space; therefore it is by no means accidental that both More and Bacon placed their utopias on islands and that Shakespeare did the same in *The tempest* (1611), using to this purpose the proverbial elsewhere in the Caribbean seas (Viera 2010: 7; Hulme 1992: 89). Mittelholzer, then, consciously travesties such colonial assumptions about Guyana as a remote, history-less and uncivilized land, as well as some of the conventions characteristic of the generic literary utopias.

If the reader trusts Gregory’s initial vision of the Guyanese jungle as dark and gloomy, one may react with a certain dose of incredulity to the condition of the commune he finally arrives at. Instead of a primeval wilderness, Gregory finds a properly organized and decently developed

¹³ All the quotations come from Mittelholzer, Edgar. 2010 [1951]. *Shadows move among them*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, which is henceforth indicated as *Sh*.

mission settlement known as Berkelhoost, run by his uncle, pastor Harmston, and his family. The first descriptions draw the reader's attention to a wide sun-lit yard at the centre of which there is "the wooden church painted blue", serving also as a school for the natives. The Harmstons live in "the two-storied house", nicely, though modestly furnished, on the walls of which Gregory sees Victorian photographs, decorative lithographs as well as shelves stocked with books, newspapers, and gramophone records; there is even a bathroom with a water tank and the new septic tank. The steamer boat comes to the mission twice a week, bringing stocks, mail and the newspapers and thus the life there is very comfortable, even according to the English standards (*Sh*, 50-55). The description of the place under Harmstons' rule, its symmetry and order, ensure associations with the ideal utopian community and the perfect Victorian missions at the peak of their civilizing activity. It stands in stark contrast, however, with the pastor's teaching, which is steered at proving the corrupting effect of the Western civilization.

Pastor Harmston claims that Guyana is a place where he can bring to life his vision of the perfect society based on natural law and unrestrained freedom. The reader acquaints themselves with Harmston's theories simultaneously with Gregory, whom the pastor wishes to educate in their way of life, and in his descriptions of his ideal community he continuously compares it with its antithesis – the barbarian civilization – the seed of which is Europe.¹⁴ The underlying premise of Harmston's teachings is the conviction that Western civilization is the source of corruption due to its egotism, preoccupation with material existence and hypocritical moral codes. Thus Harmston preaches the "life of cultured simplicity" (*Sh*, 211) and humility, and he believes that the excessive comforts of the Western world have only a corrupting effect on humanity. "[H]alf of the happiness we've achieved in this wilderness – and we have been happy – is due to our not having had enough money to enjoy all the amenities of civilization" (*Sh*, 130), he says. He believes in the supremacy of nature and natural law over the man-made rules, and freely interprets the colonial categories of barbarity and civilization. He also twists the ideas on natural slavery and says that man is a slave when one tries to combat the natural urges, and not when one gives oneself to them. As he says, "we have no cramping, barbarian taboos here (...) We are very sincere in wanting to live sane and healthy lives. (...) We believe that natural urges must of necessity be normal and healthy or they wouldn't be natural" (*Sh*, 283). Moreover, the pastor has a non-stigmatizing approach to nudity (*Sh*, 223),

¹⁴ The existence of the perfect community necessitates the existence of its antithesis and therefore the utopian writings are commonly constructed on the binary contrasts between the ideal community and the barbaric civilization, the latter usually represented by Europe (see: Blaim 1997: 147-148).

pre-marital and inter-racial sex (*Sh*, 174) or children born out of wedlock, which, if viewed through the lens of the colonial ideology of moral progress, makes his community a barbaric, rather than Christian, paradise.¹⁵ More peculiarly, though, he is a pastor who does not advocate “overdoing religion” but he firmly believes in the view that “idleness eats away the mind” and he prescribes “creative work” to combat melancholy (*Sh*, 250). As he says “[the] ideal I aim at in my work in this jungle [is] the ideal that every missionary of the Brethren of Christ [is what] the man strives after. Civilization without cynicism” (*Sh*, 130).

For Harmston, then, Gregory is a barbarian enslaved by civilization: “You (...) are a good example of the misery and emptiness of your pseudo-civilization. Look at you! Rudderless, unhappy, cynical. And look at us in contrast” (*Sh*, 251). Cynicism and moral corruption are for the pastor direct results of man’s progressive departure from nature, which found its culminating point in the twentieth century when even Christianity succumbed to such a corrupting effect: “The honest, down-to-earth myth-scheme with which Christianity started out was obfuscated by ritual – a ritual which became more and more elaborate until now it is merely symbolical and, to the majority of people, meaningless” (*Sh*, 317). In this way, the pastor places himself firmly against any ideology or social convention: “[n]o really civilized man can be religious or patriotic. There’s nothing that limits your range of thought – and your enjoyment of life, as a result – more than religion and patriotism” (*Sh*, 253-254). As one may infer, metropolitan life, unlike natural life, shrinks our horizons and cannot guarantee happiness. Hence, the only way to achieve the state of harmony is to abandon the particularities that define the Western way of life and “to forget (...) that we’re serious, intellectual, noble creatures – and just live our lives: enjoy the sunshine and the trees, and anticipate rain and thunder” (*Sh*, 257). Despite such a dictum, pastor Harmston never lies to Gregory that his life in Guyana is easy, but he none the less promises it is worth the effort: “You [Gregory] think we don’t miss England? Of course we do. But this work must go on (...) We are making two hundred-odd people happy as human beings should be happy – that’s our consolation” (*Sh*, 284).¹⁶

The philosophical assumptions according to which Harmston organizes his commune are an uncanny reflection of Rousseau’s *A discourse on inequality*

¹⁵ The pastor’s approach to nudity travesties also the prevalent association of clothing with civilization cherished by missionaries and forcibly imposed on the Amerindians (Menezes 1971: 126).

¹⁶ Harmston fashions himself for both the benevolent father and moral sovereigns of his people, which was a common enough strategy among the colonial missionaries. Twelles argues even that the missionary movement contributed to the creation of an enduring imperial pattern of “masculine practice and identity” central to evangelic theology and the British imperial identity based on the ideal of the benevolent father (Twelles 2007: 154-161).

(1984 [1754]). Rousseau wrote that the best condition of humanity fell on times before modern civilization, when humans lived in harmony with nature; such unity has been lost with our gradual progress towards a more complex social organization (1984: 79, 109). Harmston's arguments reflect also Rousseau's pondering on why savages reluctantly embrace civilized lifestyle, while many a missionary and a traveller longs for time spent in the wilderness. Rousseau's conclusion was that happiness is not a matter of rational choice between comfort and discomfort, which would push everyone towards the Western lifestyle, but a subjective sense of harmony, peace and spiritual fulfillment which is easier to find in the wilderness than in the city. Hence, for Rousseau, just like for Harmston, happiness is possible to achieve only through the abandonment of the constant worry for the "commodities of life for oneself" (Rousseau 1984: 169). However, Rousseau never advocated abandoning Europe and moving into the New World. Instead, he advised the reorganization of the Western society to strike a better balance between culture and nature. It is paradoxical, then, that the more the European exploitation and industrialization of the colonies progressed, the more actively people sought a tangible alternative to the world of civilization, misinterpreting Rousseau's ideas as the direct call for *going back to nature*. In the essay "The supposed primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on inequality*" (1923: 165-186), A. O. Lovejoy famously disproves a common misconception that the philosopher advocated the abandonment of civilization. According to Lovejoy, the confusion arose from the misleading term "state of nature" as a perfect state of existence, which some explained as a "pre-political stage" instead of one of the stages of culture, as Rousseau intended. From such misreading there arose the movement customarily known as primitivism, which actively sought alternatives to the burdens of civilization, of which Pastor Harmston is a perfect example.

Since the term has many definitions, it is essential to state that at this point it is understood as an ideological movement steered at building a perfect society devoid of the vices of modern civilization. Primitivism is premised on the idealization of pre-civilization times, when people lived in true harmony and social equality, and it sets them against the present state of the world (White 1986: 179). Not only does it "seek to idealize any group yet unbroken to civilizational discipline", but it ties to put its ideas into practice, being an essentially radical doctrine directed against "the imposition of [any] social restraints". Primitivism, then, advocates the absolute reorganization of the Western world, and Hayden White saw the French Revolution (1789) as a failed attempt at constructing such a primitivist utopianism (White 1986: 171). Pastor Harmston tries to realize his own primitivist project in Guyana, where he believes that, due to the assumed lack of any previous political order, it may be brought into existence. Ideologically, he places himself somewhere in the middle between Rousseau's original thought and the radical primitivist ideology;

namely he does not reject civilization's superiority over nature, but he rejects the Western version of civilization.

Such an ambiguous positioning was not uncommon among the missionaries, most of whom had a problematic relationship with the Western discourse of civilization and progress. On the one hand they advocated life away from the corrupting effects of the colonial centre, but on the other they themselves imposed "a Western sense of order and form upon the native cultures" (Nayar 2012: 163). The telling illustration of this colonial ambiguity is Harmston's approach to his Amerindian parishioners, who are naturally inscribed into the category of gentle barbarians, who need guidance.¹⁷ Though Harmston's tribe is not named, it confers to the lasting colonial stereotype of the docile Arawaks; the missionaries customarily divided the Amerindian tribes living in Guyana into the Arawaks, "[s]pecifically Caribbean noble savage[s]", and the Caribs, the belligerent, barbarous man-eaters, whom not only the Europeans but also "the Arawaks dreaded" (Hulme 1992: 47). Pastor Harmston's tribe is open towards his civilizing endeavours and he himself perceives them as gentle "human beings like us" (*Sh*, 63). Most paradoxically, then, his dream is to teach the Amerindians how to be happy in their natural state, through exposing them to the effects of civilization: "I take pride in these children. I want them to grow up into men and women with rich minds. And I want them to live full but quiet, natural lives in this their jungle home" (*Sh*, 112).

The main way through which he wants to achieve his goal is education, and his schooling is a travesty of the official British system directed at the Anglicization of the natives.¹⁸ Mary Menezes in *British policy towards the*

¹⁷ For primitivism, the noble savage became the "possessor of enviable freedom" living his life outside the oppressive political systems. With time it transformed into a Western fetish, the embodiment of its political and sexual fantasies, as well as the justification of the benevolent civilizing mission directed at the native other. The stereotype coexisted with the vision of the "ignoble savage", a lustful and undisciplined barbarian, who served to justify the slave trade (White 1986: 191).

¹⁸ One of the major goals of the missionaries was the education and spiritual development of the native population, which was to bring them closer to embracing the Western lifestyle. Officially, it was done for the common good of humanity, and the missionaries were the supermen of the colonial world (Ferguson 2004: 123). In Guiana, the education they offered was invariably close to "Anglicization"; the missionaries taught the English language, English literature and history, symbolically making the native part of the Empire. The process bred among the Indians a previously unknown sense of cultural inferiority and allowed the colonizers to wield the most enduring form of symbolic power – that over their cultural imagination (Henfrey 1964: 61). From today's perspective, the role of the missionaries is difficult to assess, as noticed even by the usually critical Edward Said (1993: 166). Since there was no possibility of stopping the colonizing machine, they partially contributed to improving the Indians' chance of survival by, for example, imposing a vaccination policy or protecting them against settlers and their land-grabbing ambitions. In *Froudacity: West Indian Fables by J. A. Froude* (1889), a book written by John Thomas in

Amerindians in British Guiana 1803-1873, wrote that “it seemed that the missionaries sought to make their savage brethren into the image of the English Christian gentleman” (Menezes 1977: 251), and pastor Harmston is one of the most devoted to this task. At the heart of the jungle, he gives the native Amerindian population lectures on Restoration, he teaches them “fine writing” (Sh, 111) and makes them memorize and recite passages from textbooks on English history covering the stories of The Plague and medieval wars. He also organizes musical ensembles, playing on an old gramophone fragments of *Moonlight sonata*, and encourages them to paint so as to give vent to their artistic inspirations, as well as to learn to control and express their feelings. He also acquaints them with a peculiar mixture of biblical parables, folklore, myth and gothic tales and, instead of from the Bible, he reads to them from *Selected tales of terror and supernatural* (Sh, 162) to enlighten their imagination.

Most ridiculously, he organizes for them screenings of “travel and education films” (Sh, 262) and claims to be “giving them an education they could never have hoped to get from the government”, through showing them how “to be disciplined and to be satisfied with a simple life and yet to be appreciative of arts (Sh, 211)”. A special place in this peculiar educational scheme is occupied by Shakespeare, whose plays Harmston directs and the natives stage for him (Sh, 260). At this point the reader may no longer ignore the pervasive association between the pastor and Prospero, who was an absolutist ruler of his own utopian island.¹⁹ Like his symbolic predecessor,

response to Froude’s most discriminating account of West-India, one may read that Christianity and missionary activity was after all a driving force behind some positive changes in the colonies and it led the “holders of slaves” to “recognize, and endeavour to their best to give effect to, the humane injunctions of Bishop Las Casas”. On the other hand, Christianization performed in mission schools brought irreversible and unbeneficial changes to the traditional Amerindian communal order, their sense of self-worth and forever placed them in an inferior position towards European culture and economy, leaving them either to imitate the colonizers or completely withdraw from the colonial world (Herney 1964: 61).

¹⁹ As some may argue that *The tempest* is not a traditional utopian text due to its ironic treatment of utopian discourse it is well worth stressing that the utopian nature of the play is being understood here through the prism of Prospero’s struggles to dominate over the world of Nature and Caliban’s sentiments for his pre-colonial utopia. Richard Grove in *Green imperialisms*, for example, writes that *The tempest* may not be a handbook for constructing socio-political utopias, but undoubtedly it is a place of literary debate on the (im)possibility of attaining utopian harmony (1996: 33-34). After all, Caliban longs for perfect co-existence with Nature refused, in turn, by Prospero, who clearly places himself as part of *culture*. Besides, Prospero himself is an exile on the island, which pushes him towards the dreams about alternatives for the lost world where he is both the ruler and giver of the law. Similarly, in the article entitled “The utopic structure of *The tempest*”, Thomas Bulger (1994: 38-47) argues that the play reflects all the aspects of the Renaissance utopian thinking, showing not only the ideal

Harmston is a master of his tropical utopia that, though “not insular in the world”, is insular “in relation to the world”, namely “a virgin and protected land where one staged the possibility of a new world”; as such it fulfils all the criteria of an island utopia (Nancy 2012: 5). This association is also somewhat ironic as Guyana’s remoteness, the omnipresence of water and its inclusion into the Anglo-Caribbean naturally ensues associations with an island and many a colonial traveller mistakenly described it as such (Burnett 2000: 125). Moreover, as in Prospero’s kingdom, Harmston’s power derives from his subjugation of the rightful inheritors of the Guyanese land, the Amerindians, and especially his Caliban-like house servant, Logan, who is a direct antithesis of the noble Amerindian other – an ignoble savage.

Logan is a very specifically Guyanese rendition of Caliban, the embodiment of the inherently mixed Guyanese society, “half Indian, a quarter negro and a quarter Portuguese” (*Sh*, 60); significantly enough, “his mother was the Buck²⁰” (*Sh*, 60), which suggests his rightful claim to the land. In *The tempest* Caliban is crafted as a proverbial wild man, “ugly, devilish, ignorant, gullible and treacherous”, and thus impossible to convert to the Western world order (Hulme 1992: 108; Higman 2011: 53, 61-63).²¹ The paradoxical message of the play, however, stems from the fact that Prospero cannot exist on his island without Caliban. As Peter Hulme puts it “[Prospero] can do anything at all except what is most necessary to survive” (Hulme 1992: 128), which is a reflection of the colonial situation where the white minority depended for survival on the native and slave populations (Hulme 1992: 128-129). Symbolically, Logan is a house servant responsible for the wellbeing of the Harmstons and he occupies a privileged position among the servants. Not only does he fend for the family’s most dire needs, but also he alone was “adopted as an orphan” by the pastor and has lived with the family since he was eleven years old (*Sh*, 68).

world (through Miranda and Ferdinand’s relationship), but also the illusion of utopian dreams (through Gonzalo’s speech and Prospero’s imperfect order).

²⁰ *Buck* is a derogatory term for an Amerindian.

²¹ Peter Hulme argues that *The tempest*, first performed in 1611, is “emblematic of the founding years of English colonialism” and it shaped the colonial imagination of the New World, just alongside the story of Pocahontas, first told in 1624 (Hulme 1992: 90). Ever since the publication of Lamming’s *Pleasures of exile* (1960), it is also associated with the paradoxical conditioning of the Caribbean man entitled to both heritages: Prospero’s and Caliban’s. It is then interesting to note that in *Pleasures of exile* Lamming mentions Edgar Mittelholzer as one of his role models. Lamming claims to admire Mittelholzer for his novel *Corentyne Thunder* (1941), the first ‘real’ novel produced by the native Caribbean writer, and to perfectly understand his life choices, namely emigration to the metropolis, which many other Caribbean writers followed; as he says “He [Mittelholzer] made the decision, before anyone else, to get out” (Lamming 2012 [1960]: 39-41).

Logan is not only aware of his privileged position but he is consciously using it to challenge the pastor's authority. For his continuous insubordination he is severely punished, either by flogging or by shackling, and there are descriptions of how he is chained in the yard, howling whole nights, or mercilessly whipped. Such displays of cruelty not only violate the illusion of utopian order in the reader's eyes but even make the pastor's youngest daughter, Olivia, plead with him: "Please, Daddy, I beg for him. Don't beat him any more" (*Sh*, 57). Though sensitive to his pain, Olivia nevertheless does not understand Logan's obstinacy: "Never mind poor Logan. But you must obey. Why don't you like to obey when Daddy tells you anything" (*Sh*, 57). Logan's position in the community is all the more peculiar since, according to the rules, every fourth transgression should be punished by death; the reader knows that the rebelled natives have already paid with their lives, and are even now facing trial for disobedience (*Sh*, 210). Logan and the pastor, then, are clenched in the uncanny relationship where Logan "enjoys being flogged" (*Sh*, 58) and Harmston enjoys flogging him. Their mutual dependency may be read in Freudian terms as the externalization of the constant conflict between the id and the superego – civilization and barbarity.

"Shakespeare sets Caliban, the incarnation of libido and possessor of an unquenchable desire for freedom, over against Prosper the magician, the quintessence of civilized man, all ego and superego, learned and powerful, but jaded and captive of his own sophistication" (1986: 173), writes Hayden White. Terry Eagleton also notes that culture "cannot thrive without a degree of subjugation of nature" and it constantly guards itself against the return of the barbaric with the aid of symbolic and physical violence (Eagleton 2005: 11, 14-15). What Mittelholzer signals, then, is that Harmston's apparent return to nature is in fact its subjugation to the forces of civilization and his own reaction against barbarity inherent in his own nature. This idea briefly crosses Gregory's mind when he likens the mission to other oppressive ideologies of the twentieth century, but this association is quickly refuted by the pastor's son: "I've read about your Fascist and Nazis. They're beastly, I know – but I can't see how you can liken our methods to theirs. (...) We don't try to terrorize anyone, or try to force any fanatical doctrines down people's throats" (*Sh*, 326). It is ironic that both the mentioned ideological movements rooted their claim of domination over *the other* on their civilization's superiority (White 1986: 174), as did the English colonizers, and all three were in this claim unquestionably barbaric.

Therefore, it is by no means fortuitous that a similar struggle between civilization and barbarity is taking place in Gregory's mind, as if creating a

subplot to Harmston's main narrative.²² The very same uncivilized wilderness, which in the pastor triggered barbaric and tyrannical powers, leads Gregory to a reconciliation with the true and uncontrollable power of Nature. Louis James in *Caribbean literature in English* (1999: 78) writes that, after *Green mansions: A romance in the tropical forest* (1904) by W. H. Hudson, *Shadows move among them* is the first novel that, through the example of George, describes the encounter with the Guyanese wilderness as a consciousness changing experience. It is also the first novel in which one may observe the traces of the radically different ontological construction of the Guyanese interior, which would later become an emblem of the Guyanese fiction. More precisely, just like Prospero's island was full of noises "[s]ounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" (III.ii.130–138), the mission is full of shadows, or rather ghosts, silently moving among the living. The ghosts are harmless and they are openly acknowledged by the inhabitants in everyday conversations; they are part of what the Harmstons call "local influences" (*Sh*, 210), the creatures living on the verge of the dream world who are part of Nature. Gregory, whose perspective the reader somehow naturally accepts as most objective, is the only one who never openly confirms their existence, but also never denies it. Once, "[m]ore in the corner of his eye than not he thought he saw a shape move" but when he tried to pierce the darkness he could not trust his senses (*Sh*, 69). Nonetheless, the sensation of reality being but a cloak for the Real does not leave Gregory and, though the existence of the shadows is never confirmed, there is no doubt that, if they are real, they are connected to the land, which is a repository of memory and the history of the country.²³

The mission literally stands on historical ground; it is situated on the lands of the old Dutch plantation destroyed during the Berbice slave rebellion (1763). One day Gregory encounters an old Dutch cemetery where he "had a sensation of having drifted back on a ripple of time to the eighteenth century" (*Sh*, 91). Olivia, the pastor's daughter, tells that he was not mistaken and the place is full of "psychic phenomena"; it "teems with cruel, passionate spirits"

²² Seymour claims that in the figure of Gregory one may find the traces of Mittelholzer's own artistic and personal struggles.

²³ One could argue that in the novel one may observe the traces of the marvellous realist poetics described by Alejo Carpentier and characteristic of Latin American literatures. Carpentier wrote that the Latin American space is ontologically different from the West and therefore it requires an original poetics of representation that violates the rules of realism, but is not tantamount to surrealism or other narrative experiments of the Western literatures (Carpentier 2005 [1949]: 75–88). Nevertheless, I am purposefully avoiding the imposition of the marvellous realist label on Mittelholzer's text so as not to create a false impression that the author, who rarely departed from the rules of realism, is to be thought of as part of the early Latin American tradition.

and “the whole neighbourhood bristles with the residual effluvia of past violence” (*Sh*, 94). Though she tries to convince Gregory that only the Dutch are responsible for the existence of the ghosts, he disproves her argument saying “[i]t wasn’t only the Dutch who were cruel” (*Sh*, 94), thus alluding to the English part in the colonial history of Guyana and questioning the benevolence of the British civilizing project. Hence, the moment Mittelholzer incorporates this historical digression, he allows the past to enter the present and he ultimately shatters the illusion of ahistoricity on which the utopian illusion is premised. The event has also a decisive effect on Gregory himself, who now becomes more attentive to what he cannot see and starts slowly opening himself towards nature and its healing power.

When Gregory first arrived at the Berkelhoost mission his thoughts were dominated by death. He admits that “[i]nnumerable times he had pictured himself breaking up into so many pitiable bits, and the anxiety that closed in around him would seem like the neutral ways of terrifying limbo” (*Sh*, 41). He was also unable to establish any contact with another human being, having “no desire to talk or to be talked to” (*Sh*, 39). Furthermore, he abused alcohol which, as he says, was his only medicine. Coming to Guyana was to be his escape from the real and his personal demons and, indeed, the jungle helped him to overcome his problems, though not in the way he expected it to. The forest proves by no means a mere shelter into which he withdraws from the world, but an active agent of his change, which triggers in him the process of a mental change that may be described as “the rite of passage” from civilization to Nature. Rites of passage accompany “every change of place, state, social position and age” and comprise three stages, separation, transition and reincorporation (Gennep 1909 as quoted by Turner 1977: 93-94). Translating this process into the novel, Gregory literally separates himself from the old world in coming to Guyana, where he experiences a moment of transition, only to be reincorporated into the world of civilization.

It is significant to note that Gregory is led into the transitional moment of his journey by Nature itself, which seems to anticipate and project his states of mind. For example, humidity, a simple enough phenomenon, seems an animated force that symbolically devours and calms him:

The humid palpable air did not oppress him, nor create in him – as it should have done – a feeling of terrifying solitude. On the contrary it seemed to weave continually about him, out of its moist miasma of decay, a protective web so that he could view himself as the life within a cocoon, secure from billed foes (*Sh*, 136).

The humidity offers itself to him as a protective cocoon in which, like in the womb, he may hide himself from the world. The reader may observe many similar episodes when the sunlight or wind seem living entities too that try to communicate with Gregory; this tension resolves itself during one of many hot

and suffocating Guyanese nights that customarily accompany periods of droughts, and which result in violent summer storms. On one of such nights Gregory starts sleepwalking and he kills a chicken, slitting its throat with a razor and leaving drips of blood all over the yard. Though when he regains lucidity he hardly remembers the incident, the fact that he holds a dead bird in his hand is an indisputable evidence of his agency. Through such an irrational and unsettling behaviour, he replays his (self)destructive drives and begins to regain a grip on his life.²⁴

Gregory has no doubt that his moment of madness was caused by Nature, which “seems to have set something ticking in [him]” (*Sh*, 153). There is also no denying the fact that now he feels more comfortable with himself and free from the burdens of his past. He even “believe[s] [he is] on the way to recovery” (*Sh*, 155), and following the incident he is gradually becoming more and more mentally stable. The moment he feels cured coincides with thunder and water falling from the sky, which stands for mental rebirth and which washes off the past: “Bits of dry leaves, the dung of birds, pollen dust, dead insects, all must be mixed together in the turgidity of this water – the accumulation of a week of dry, blazing days ... It could be the dross of my own spirit I’m watching being washed away... (*Sh*, 265). What Mittelholzer seems to be conveying through Gregory is that the wilderness is not a place but a state; we all carry within ourselves a seed of “the wild man”, a proverbial barbarian, against whom we need to constantly struggle to stay civilized (White 1986: 151). Placing Gregory physically in the middle of the wilderness, which for ages operated as a cultural symbol closely related to madness, heresy and lawlessness (White 1986: 151), Mittelholzer twists its symbolism and shows that the source of Gregory’s newly born and regained inner restraint is nature itself. Hence, Nature is no longer shown as the simple antithesis of culture, but as an independent, self-regulated and living force from which one may derive restraint, peace and calmness of mind; indirectly, Mittelholzer, through invalidating the stereotype of the wilderness being barbarous and unordered, undermines the very point of the civilizing mission, so effectively imposed on Guyana by the West.

At this point in the novel, Gregory finds himself in a utopian state of mind where he transgresses the Self and unites himself with the Other – Nature (Sargisson 2010: 142). “Deep ecological approaches to Self-Other relation are surely Utopian”, Lucy Sargisson says, “but not perhaps in wholly unproblematic sense”. “Utopianism has its dark sides”, she adds, “[t]here are

²⁴ Liminality, or the threshold moment of transformation, “is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness and to the eclipse of the sun and moon” (Turner 1977: 95). All these symbols and associations precede the moment of Gregory’s transformation.

dangers in assuming total access to the Other, especially such a large and generalised Other as 'the environment': dangers of misrepresentation and appropriation (Sagrisson 2010: 148). As if to confirm her words, Gregory's sense of unity with Nature is but a moment that heals him, but does not translate itself into any tangible change. In the last pages of the novel the author clearly shows to the reader that Gregory's utopian dream has no tangible power to challenge Harmston's social order; following his revelation, the Harmstons easily manipulate Gregory into believing that his outburst was normal and the expected result of "psychic influences" (*Sh*, 153) that should be rather attributed to the effect of the mission and its order, rather than to nature. It is all the more intriguing to note as their initial reaction to Gregory's sleepwalking clearly signalled that they have never witnessed anything similar in their own lives. One of their house helpers, Ellen, literally "panick[ed] when she saw the blood" and rang the bell to wake up the whole household (*Sh*, 151) and later the family frantically questioned Gregory why and how he actually killed the rooster, only to resolve among themselves that their guest is mad (*Sh*, 151-155). Nevertheless, they use Gregory's weakness as a pretext to prove to themselves that now, having experienced what they all have seen, he is a true and legitimate part of their community, regardless of any doubts he might have had about the organization of their mission. At this moment his rite of passage symbolically fulfils itself, making him part of the Berkelhoost community.

Hence, it comes as no surprise to the reader that at the end of the novel Gregory is no longer willing to go back to Europe or to his previous life. Now the Harmstons appear to him the guarantee of his happiness and the source of what he was missing most, namely acceptance and genuine human contact. At the beginning of the novel he said that "there was a space in him waiting to be filled with someone's pity and love" (*Sh*, 40) and this space is now to be filled by his relationship with Mabel, the pastor's older daughter, into which Gregory is manoeuvred by the family. The novel, like *The tempest*, closes with a suggestion of an oncoming wedding and, in sign of his absolute recovery, Gregory regains the ability of artistic creation. When Harmston asks him if he will "bud forth into a sort of Gauguin of the Guyana jungle?", Gregory does not dislike the idea: "Oh I mean I do a lot of painting. The mood is on – but for my own pleasure solely, not for fame, I want to paint. I – you're right about the world. It's sick, beastly. *I do not want to go back*. I prefer to die here unknown" (*Sh*, 319; emphasis mine, MF). Therefore, Gregory fully compromises his previous life and he finds his escapist utopia in Guyana, where he probably will devote the rest of his life to painting.

The comparison between Gregory and Gauguin is not accidental and it makes the novel an elaborate literary critique of the ideology of primitivism and utopian escapism imposed on Guyana. Artistically, Gauguin is considered

the father of visual primitivism, who represented the romanticized and sentimental tropics crafted for the Western eyes²⁵. Ashcroft et al. (1998: 196) write that the Western artists “often deliberately sought to reproduce the innocence and ‘child-like’ qualities of primitive art”. Their main aim, however, was “a repudiation of their own culture and [it] did not necessarily involve an affirmation of the validity and difference of cultures they employed as signifiers of the liberating force of the primitive”. Moreover, “even during his lifetime Gauguin was associated with the [literal] flight from (...) ‘civilization’. But no less mythically important than the things he escaped are the things he sought – the earthly paradise, its plenitude, its pleasure, its alluring and compliant female bodies” (Solomon-Godeau 1986: 314). Gauguin’s life, then, is the “paradigm for primitivism”, understood as the “Western and predominantly male quest for an elusive object whose very condition of desirability resides in some form of distance and difference, whether temporal or geographical” (Solomon-Godeau 1986: 314). In the novel, he as if an extratextual example of the tangible power of such dreams, which have truly drawn the Westerners to the *uncivilized* tropics. As one may thus note, Mittelholzer sketches the Western utopian dream in a way analogous to Mumford (1922: 22) as a potentially harmful “projection of desire without the consideration of limiting conditions” that “indulge egocentric fantasies of private, personal fulfillment” (Levitas 2010: 19). Ultimately, then, Gregory’s escapist dream and Harmston’s primitivist project, though realized through radically different means, truly prove the two shades of the very same utopian dream.

Such an ending of the novel may be read as a suggestion that both kinds of an essentially single utopian dream are harmful illusions crafted in Europe and then imposed, both physically and symbolically, on the New World. Gregory’s utopia of escape proves a feeble dream – the realization of

²⁵ Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) in 1891 sailed to Tahiti, where he lived until his death. As Mark Hudson jokingly admits: “Railing against the baleful effects of “civilisation” in all its forms, he was dependent on the daily postal service to maintain vital contact with friends and colleagues. Had Tahiti had an internet café, Gauguin would have been continually in and out of it” (Hudson 2010). Hence, his dream of natural life, like in many other foreigners, was underpinned by surprisingly European habits. As has been mentioned, Gauguin’s works are commonly thought of as examples of primitivism, which in simple words means enchantment with the exotic and its sensualisation but also devotion to the simple, natural form and shape. Nowadays the assessment of his life and work is no longer black or white. For example, in *Representing the Pacific: Colonial discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (1997), Rod Edmond argues against the pervasive claim that Gauguin was a painter of imperial dreams and erotic fantasies. He sees him rather as a pursuer of harmony, unity and spiritual syncretism, as exemplified by his fascination with androgenic figures and religiosity in various forms (Edmond 1997: 126-164). An interesting illustration of Gauguin’s life may be found in the novel by Maugham entitled *The moon and sixpence*.

which serves but egoistic purposes and does not contribute to any change, be it positive or negative, to the established order. Moreover, Harmston's utopia of reconstruction is also remote from the social ideal he advocated, being nothing but a realization of his tyrannical dreams of absolute power over nature and *the other*. Most importantly, in the end the very existence of the utopian dream which drew Gregory and Harmston to the jungle remains unchallenged. Gregory ultimately succumbs to the pastor's power and he repeats Gauguin's pattern of reproducing the clichéd image of the tropics as an escapist paradise. Thus the Guyanese wilderness remains a primitivist heaven and, as one may infer, it will continue to attract people into its impenetrable heartland. What Mittelholzer seems to be saying, then, is that the power one exercises over dreams and the imagination is the most enduring form of domination; how chillingly apt his conclusion truly is, may be observed through the example of Fred D'Aguiar's recent novel *Children of paradise* (2014).

4.2. (Post)Human paradise in *Children of paradise* (2014) by Fred D'Aguiar

Children of paradise (2014), is a continuation of the Guyanese literary discussions with the wilderness which, like *Shadows move among them*, deconstruct our universal utopian longings for bettering the world we live in or escaping the civilization that shaped us. The novel's message is all the more meaningful as D'Aguiar narrates the real attempts at building a utopian community undertaken by a group of American citizens led by a charismatic pastor, Jim Warren Jones (1931-1978). The group came to Guyana in 1974 and, in the very heart of the Guyanese jungle, they established an agricultural commune known as the Temple. The story found its tragic end in their mass suicide, which briefly drew the whole world's attention to Guyana. *Children of paradise*, however, is not a faithful rendition of the factual events, but their imaginative and allegorical (re)vision – with Jonestown being but a pretext for the elaborate critique of anthropocentrism and the Guyanese passivity in accepting its unfavourable consequences.²⁶

To truly realize the scale of Jonestown's tragedy it is worth reminding oneself that, up to September 11, the group suicide committed by Jones' followers was the most deathly event in American modern history, greater

²⁶ Jonestown is the theme of D'Aguiar's narrative poem *Bill of rights*. Another rendition of the theme, similar to both Mittelholzer and D'Aguiar, may be found in *Jonestown* (1997) by Wilson Harris, where he uses Jonestown as an allegory of how all the civilizations, be it Western or Mayan, are constructed on a barbarian subjugation of nature and thus they all carry a seed of evil in themselves.

even than the Oklahoma city bombing (1995).²⁷ Reverend Jones and almost a thousand of his followers started coming to the country in 1974 and lived there for four years, building a utopian community in the middle of the jungle, more than two hundred kilometres away from Georgetown. To this purpose, they cleared three thousand acres of the tropical forest, on which they constructed their agricultural mission. Reading the survivors' memoirs, one may notice that for them Guyana was not so much a real country as an exotic, unfamiliar and wild place, which carried a promise of a new life (Scheeres 2012: 1). In other words, it represented their tropical utopia, ahistorical, a past-less and uncivilized space, guaranteeing an absolute escape from the West and all it represented; it was "an alternative to the established social order, a nation unto itself" (Reiterman 1982: 5). Such words as if confirm the claim by John P. Clark (2013: 134) that "the lure of escapist utopianism is great for those who profess a certain idealism, but who have been frustrated in their efforts to realize their dreams". Thus, quoting Fred D'Aguiar, "[i]f the commune located beyond the reach of history sought to give history the slip and start from scratch, there could be no better setting than a realm where myth rules the order of night and day" (*CP*²⁸, 119).

Guyana was also comfortable for reverend Jones because of political reasons. At that time it was run by the communist leader Forbes Burnham, who welcomed Jones' anti-American and anti-capitalist ideology. Today it is no secret that Burnham and his people accepted substantial bribes from Jones and that they maintained intimate contacts with Jones' followers, who were Jones' agents in the capital (Reiterman 1982: 171-179). In this way, Guyana fulfilled all the reverend's requirements and Jones himself called it "The Promised Land" (Scheeres 2012: 24). To some the commune indeed could seem a paradise; it had a basic medical and schooling system and thus it met all the basic needs of its inhabitants. As one of the survivors writes, "Jonestown might well have seemed better life than in America, especially for southern blacks who came via the ghettos" (Reiterman 1982: 347). It is also interesting to note that Jones' earthly paradise was ruled according to a peculiar version of primitivism and Christianity he called "divine socialism" (Scheeres 2012: 24). According to primitivist dictum, Jones honoured the no class divisions and praised the simple life with no unnecessary comforts; he detested disobedience, which was severely punished, and established his own

²⁷ The Oklahoma City Bombing was the biggest act of terrorist violence on the US soil except for September 11. It was inspired by a novel, *The Turner diaries* (1978) by William Pierce (under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald), a fictional diary of Earl, a participant of the Great Revolution, in which he justifies the need to purge the American society of all the coloured, immigrants as well as other disruptive elements (see: McAlear 2009: 192-202).

²⁸ All the quotations come from D'Aguiar, Fred. 2014. *Children of paradise*. New York: HarperCollins which is henceforth referred to as *CP*.

moral codes directed against the “egoistical and hypocritical” rules of the corrupted Western civilization (Reiterman 1982: 173).²⁹ Simultaneously, he made himself the only source of spiritual and secular authority and some of the followers honestly believed that Jones was a god (Reiterman 1982: 348).

As such, Jonestown is a tangible example of how the Western perception of Guyana as a tropical utopia, combined with a dose of primitivist and religious ideology, may truly affect the minds of Westerners. Fred D’Aguiar himself claims that he has always been intrigued by the story and the plethora of associations it evoked; it brought to mind Kurtz’s physical and metaphorical journey into the unknown, exemplified the thin line separating civilization from barbarity and forced one to ask the question why the Westerners longing for tropical utopias, when they finally find themselves in the middle of the Amazon paradise, start forcibly reshaping it to the point where it no longer resembles their original dream³⁰ (Dickow 2014). The eco-critical background of the novel, then, derives from D’Aguiar’s environmental sensitivity and his investment in nature, especially the Guyanese landscapes, which is close to his heart (Dickow 2014). Therefore, any reader who expects a veritable rendition of Jones’ story would be thoroughly disappointed. *Children of paradise* is by no means a detailed depiction of the life at the commune, or even the psychological analysis of Jones’ criminal mind. Instead, in a similar way to *Shadows move among them*, it demythologizes the Western dream of escaping civilization.

The fictional Jonestown strikes familiar tones with pastor Harmston’s ideas and Gregory’s longings. Reverend Jones is fuelled by a desire to build a new world from scratch, free from the imperfections of the Western civilization, and his followers pursue their escapist paradise lured by the

²⁹ Just like pastor Hamstron, Jones thought of sex as of a natural urge that should be satisfied freely, not burdened with sinfulness. Jones also encouraged interracial marriages, but stigmatized childbearing as selfish in the already overpopulated world. He also used sex to control his followers and tried to project their sexual desire on himself as their primary and divine sexual object. However, he was not stable in his views and is known to have experienced periods of celibacy, intertwined with displays of homophobe behaviours and homosexual contacts (Reiterman 1982: 171-179).

³⁰ The environmental philosopher, Mary Midgley, asked herself the very same question but on the example of Robinson Crusoe’s relationship with his island. In her article “Duties concerning islands” she asks “what happens (...) when you are shipwrecked on an entirely strange island” and writes that the history of colonization points out towards the tendency “for people so placed to drop any reverence and become more exploitative”. She argues, however, that such an exploitative impulse is not “irresistible” and with time it may be transformed into the relationship of care and tenderness. In a broader context, Midgley argues that we have duties not only towards other human beings but also towards nature and inanimate objects. Nonetheless, she does not humanize nature, or argue that we all – humans and animals – have equal rights, but she is adamant that all entities deserve respect in their differences (1983: 36-43).

reverend's tales of a better, natural life. Jones promises his followers that through downplaying their material comforts they might enrich their quality of life. He warns them against the excessive preoccupation with the material and the physical, which obscures their vision of what is truly important. He teaches them that "Paradise is all this [the commune] and more, everlasting life" (CP, 27) and shows them a gate towards an "eternal life free of want and pain" (CP, 63). As a typical missionary, he makes himself as a father-figure for his community, claiming that "no man on earth would do for them what he has done" (CP, 93). The two values he cherishes most are trust and discipline and he tells his people "not [to] blame yourself if you doubt, but blame yourself if you doubt me" (CP, 67). Hence Jones, like Harmston, is an absolutist ruler of his utopian kingdom and, as it soon occurs, his power likewise derives from his ability to control Nature, which is nevertheless not embodied by a proverbial Caliban but by Jones' pet gorilla, Adam.³¹

Curiously enough, Adam is by no means a secondary character in D'Aguiar's novel, but its main narrator, and one observes Jonestown through his eyes. The story opens in medias res and in the very first scene the reader is confronted with Adam looking through the bars of his cage at the compound and dreaming of his mother who, were she there with him, "would scream at somebody to unlock his cage" (CP, 14). It soon becomes clear that Adam is equipped with consciousness and compassion, capable of abstract thinking and critical judgement. The name is also an obvious link to the Garden of Eden and the biblical story of man's origins. Such an allusion is by no means fortuitous since many an environmental philosopher claims that the roots of the Western ideology of man's inbred superiority over nature should be sought in the Bible, which placed men at the very centre of the universe. In *Animal*, Erica Fudge (2002: 13) argues that, though the West has become progressively secularized, Christianity nevertheless defined the majority of its social and political institutions that still ensure human domination over nature; as she writes "we, or so we argue, have access to a truth, knowledge, reason and order, into which we place animals" and this powerful idea is the very foundation of our world order (Fudge 2002: 8). Jacques Derrida too seeks the roots of human-animal disparity in the story of Creation and the act of naming creatures, which for him is also the act of symbolic violence. Derrida dismisses even the very word and category of the animal as "absurdly

³¹ Gorillas are not native to the Americas, their native habitat is Africa. In a novel entitled *The Timehrian* (2002), another Guyanese writer, Andrew Jefferson-Miles, uses the argument that the apes and, consequently, humans are not native to the region as a pretext to discuss the effect of the man induced changes on the Guyanese landscapes. As he says Guyana's "landmass forests [is] a laboratory of Man, the non-native species, a biosphere of induced humanity" (2002: 13-14).

reductive” (Derrida 2008: 13).³² He, however, does not limit his observations to the Bible, and he accuses the whole of Western philosophy of being a human-centred system based on “a thesis regarding the animal [as] deprived of the logos, deprived of the can-have-the-logos (...) [and] maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Levinas and Lacan” (Derrida 2008: 27). Thus, already in his choice of narrator D’Aguiar suggests that his novel would constitute a challenge to the Western anthropocentric worldview and, indeed, he proceeds to deconstruct the very premises on which the European cosmology has been constructed.

Within the Western philosophy of nature the apes, as the non-human creatures most closely related to humans, occupy an especially ambiguous position. They embody bestiality, but bear traces of humanity; their very existence challenges the thesis of man’s divine origin, but their inferiority to humans somehow confirms our natural superiority over other species. Thus the way we define ourselves against the apes is telling in terms of how we position ourselves towards nature and our own (non)human origins. Donna Haraway reports that the father of modern science, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), who first placed homo sapiens in the same taxonomic order as other primates, never intended to question the anthropocentric order of the world. He even put himself, she says, in the position of the biblical Adam, who had the ability of naming and thus ordering beings on an authoritatively chosen scale (Haraway 1989: 9). Similarly Rousseau, the proponent of natural perfection, never equaled man with beasts, claiming that the major difference between the two lies in the fact that when nature speaks, beasts obey and the man may resist; this consciousness of freedom is for Rousseau the emblem of humanity. At one point, however, he has some doubts concerning the most advanced apes, who, theoretically, could be part of the human species at a very early stage of development, yet in the “primitive state of nature” (Rousseau 1984: 88, 155). It is more than apparent, then, that since the Enlightenment the studies on the non-human world, and especially on apes, are essentially the studies on the origins of man; this trend culminated in Darwin’s theories of humanity’s possible close evolutionary relation to the apes and other mammals (Beasley 2010: 100).

However, in the colonial world such scientific inquiries were never innocent; putting it simply, they have been used by the colonial machinery to ensure the European domination over *the other*, whose assumed closeness to

³² Derrida writes that “[a]nimal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give (...) as if they had received it as an inheritance”. Into this single world the human race relegates the countless diversity of species with no regard to their internal differences. Thus he even invents the word ‘animot’, “which, when spoken, has the plural animaux, heard within the singular, recalling the extreme diversity of animals that ‘the animal’ erases” (2008: 13).

the world of nature relegated him or her to the status of a non-human creature. A good example of such a manipulative thinking may be found in De Gobineau who wholeheartedly rejects the theories that “[between] human races and the larger apes there is only a slight difference of degree” (de Gobineau 1915: 73). For ideological reasons, it was instrumental to sustain the binarity between the (hu)man and the ape; therefore Donna Haraway claims that the primates, just like people, became the prisoners of representations, and primatology has been governed by rules of simian orientalism, which is analogous to Said’s *Orientalism* (Haraway 1989: 9-11).³³ From such a perspective, D’Aguiar’s decision of choosing an ape as the narrator of the reverend Jones’ story, and placing them both in the primeval wilderness – a symbolic Garden of Eden – not only questions the legitimacy of man’s central position in the world, but also the legacy of colonial cosmology imposed not only on the Guyanese forest but also the whole wide Caribbean.

It is not surprising, then, that the familiar interplay between culture (civilization) and nature (bestiality) constitutes the main axis of the novel and that it is shown very literally through the example of Jones’ relationship with Adam. It is signalled even spatially as Adam’s cage is placed right across Jones’ quarters and thus they continuously see and control each other. Moreover, Adam is an attentive listener of all Jones’ sermons and thus he is well aware of the role he is to play in Jones’ spiritual plan. He mentions for example having heard the readings from *Genesis* where “his place in the world is narrated in the creation stories read aloud by the children seated in a semi-circle in front of a teacher and sheltered from the flames of the sun under the inclusive canopy of tree” (*CP*, 59). Thus, Adam knows that for the creatures who surround him he is but a beast, and such an impression is consciously enforced by the revered himself, who uses Adam as a prop in his performances. One of such is depicted already on the opening pages of the novel when Adam, longing for the touch of his mother who “would scratch his back with more affection and accuracy than the preacher” (*CP*, 14), tries to hug a little girl, Trina, who plays close to his cage. His grip is too strong and the girl faints, which makes Adam immediately release the hug; though Adam is distorted and terrified thinking that he might have killed her, Trina soon regains consciousness (*CP*, 16). The preacher immediately seizes the opportunity to confirm Adam’s bestiality and his own supernatural abilities posing, like Jesus, to have brought the girl back from the dead. As only Trina, the preacher and Adam know that his actions have been a hoax, there and

³³ Haraway sees man’s rule over nature in terms to colonization by culture: “[n]ature is only the raw material of culture appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism” (Haraway 1989: 9).

then Adam realizes that his and preacher's fates are inseparably bound; "their fortunes are intertwined", he says, and "only the preacher's actions can alter [his] fate" (*CP*, 17). In other words, as long as Jones keeps the people under his spell, Adam remains a beast.

Soon, many more similar performances follow, and with time they become a stable point of the communes' life, each and every time watched with great awe by all of Jones' people:

The power of the preacher's command over the beast intrigues them more than the threat of imminent violence against one of their own, in part due to their desire for further proof of their leader's supreme ability to control events, from the smallest pleasures and luxuries of daily life to the ultimate promise of salvation. The mercy that the preacher talks about, and the commune's sole focus, is his magic hold over the gorilla (*CP*, 165-166).

As one may observe, the ability to control the wild beast, just like Prospero's ability to control Caliban, is for the commune the evidence of Jones' supernatural designation to rule over them, over Nature and, by extension, the whole world. Mary Midgley (2002: 18) notes that the stereotype of the man "being an island of order", and the only "restrained" creature, is but a discursive construct that has nothing to do with the verifiable research into the animal behaviour.³⁴ She adds that "[m]an, civilized Western man, has always maintained that in a bloodthirsty world he alone was comparatively harmless" and she corroborates the claim with the example of Victorian descriptions of the African jungle where "[t]he hunter assumed that every creature he met would attack him and accordingly shot it on sight" (Midgley 2002: 21). Jones uses Adam in the very same way, suggesting that the commune needs guarding against the beast he himself invents. However, the more Jones tries to dehumanize Adam, the more Adam is determined to "prove destiny wrong" (*CP*, 69); thus begins their journey, during which Adam will elevate himself to the position of the preacher and Jones would change into a beast.

The conflict between Jones and Adam is more than just a simple struggle for domination as D'Aguiar raises it to the metaphysical level and uses it as a pretext to ask the most fundamental questions on what it means to be human. Adam carefully follows Jones' preaching, and he unmistakably

³⁴ Midgley writes that "[g]orillas in particular are peace-loving beasts; George Schaller visited a tribe of them for six months without receiving so much as a cross word or seeing any quarrelling worth naming. In this case, and no doubt in others, Victorian man was deceived by confusing threatening behaviour with attack. Gorillas do threaten, but the point is precisely to avoid combat. By looking sufficiently dreadful, a gorilla patriarch can drive off intruders and defend his family without the trouble and danger of actually fighting. The same thing seems to hold off the other simians, and particularly of howler monkeys, whose dreadful wailing used to freeze the white hunter's blood" (2002: 6-7).

notices when it becomes apocalyptic and when Jones starts using the words “death”, “die”, and “resurrect”. The gorilla instinctively senses that these are the signs of the oncoming disaster and he even tries to cover his ears not to hear the words: “he retreats to his corner, plants his hands over his ears, and rock backs and forth” (CP, 230). Nevertheless, there is no escape from one’s destiny and when Jones starts organizing sacrificial vats from which the people are to drink poison, Adam decides it is time to help the children, and especially Trina for whom he now feels responsible, to escape death. His first attempt at rescuing her is chaotic and impulsive, and triggered by him seeking the girl trying to sneak away from the compound. The scene is described in such words: “[Adam] sees the girl in distress and the guards in search of her (...), [he] dashes to the back of his cage, determined to help her, no matter the consequence” (CP, 303). After while, Adam breaks the cage and carries Trina away from the armed men and, for the first time, “Trina and Adam [are] hugging each other” (CP, 303). The moment is telling for yet another reason because it signals that Adam has taught himself to control his grip and that Trina no longer fears him. When the word of their escape spreads, the reverend starts doubting his own judgement of Adam and thus, implicitly, his right to rule over him. “He wants to know, if Adam truly understands his sermons, how could the gorilla attempt to escape?” (CP, 309), he ponders. However, as the guards manage to capture Adam and Trina, Jones dismisses the thought as a mere fantasy.

Though Jones refuses to acknowledge that Adam knows more about him than he would ever wish to disclose, the reader is already well established in one’s belief that Adam is able to understand not only words, but also metaphors and allusions. As such, D’Aguiar challenges also the pervasive conviction that understanding the language is an exclusively human faculty. Stephen Greenblatt writes that already the medieval association of the wild man with the beast, which has been later adopted by the colonial ideology, probably originated from the observations of the great apes, which were almost like men, but with no language (Greenblatt 2007: 31). Such a conviction has been shared by many, including the influential twentieth-century thinkers; for example Martin Heidegger, who organized his ideas on ‘being’ according to a progressive scale resembling a *scala naturale* (Meyer 2013: 77), thought that the animals communicate through a system of signals, but they do not have language; even if they *respond* to a stimuli, they may never *react*, just as they may *pretend* but not *deceive*, which would require consciousness (Heidegger 2011: 71-75). Lacan, whom Derrida extensively quotes as a negative example, shared the prejudice that “man is an animal but a speaking one and he is less a beast of prey than a beast that is prey to language”, which according to Derrida is a dominating but fallible view (Derrida 2008: 121).

The twenty-first century gradually decomposes such assumptions. As far as today's science allows us to determine, homo sapiens indeed is the only primate that may be deemed "homo fictus (fiction man)", meaning "the great ape with storytelling in mind". The ability to tell stories, in turn, creates our identities and, to put it briefly, makes us human (Gottschall 2012: xiii). It does not mean, however, that all the other creatures are deprived of the ability to understand, or even create language, as more than a set of signals. By no means does it also justify man's superiority over the animal kingdom based on linguistic superiority, as it once did in the European encounters with the Amerindian other. In fact, the linguist and biologists are now in a quandary as they can neither prove nor disprove the animals' ability to understand language; even the primates' inability to utter sounds similar to humans is no longer easily explainable in terms of the differences in their larynx.³⁵ What D'Aguiar seems to suggest, then, is that linguistic difference may no longer be used as the source of the binary difference between a man and a beast.

Such a conclusion is only strengthened by the events following Adam's first failed escape and leading towards his final sacrifice. More precisely, Adam's true and final escape takes place on the very day of reverend Jones' deathly performance. This time it is not impulsive but planned by Trina and her mother, Joyce. Joyce was responsible for dealing with the reverend's administrative cases and thus, as one of a few women only, she was allowed to leave the commune and travel to the capital. Because of her journeys she developed a significantly more critical vision of the preacher and quickly realized that her and her daughter's future is threatened. While crafting the plan of their release, she takes account of her daughter's stories of Adam's intelligence and she assigns him a very particular role in their design. Due to the fact that Joyce wants to save as many children as possible, she decides to trick Jones into believing that she is organizing a parade for the kids, while trying to lead the colourful procession straight into the jungle. Hence, she dresses Adam as a king with "a crown made of calabash cut to resemble a castle with an elastic strap under his chin; a velvet cloth partly covers the crown and partly hangs around the sides of it" (*CP*, 344) and makes him a leader of the parade. The scene vividly resembles a Bakhtin-like carnival performance as a moment of "oppos[ition] to official culture", which through laughter and irony temporarily lifts the official authority (Pomorska 1984:

³⁵ The question of animal language has not been determined and the only thing we know for sure is that the animals, but for grey parrots, do not use the vocal channel to express their language; however some believe that bonobo are capable of limited vocalization. The truly vital research question to ask, however, is how closely can the mental lives of the human be compared to the mental lives of the animal (see: Hillix, William and Dunae Rumbaugh. 2004. *Animal bodies, human minds: Ape, dolphin and parrot language skills*. New York: Kluwer Academic).

x).³⁶ As such, the reader is guided into noticing that Adam, dressed like a king, temporarily takes over Jones' role. Nonetheless, once the preacher realizes the true reasons for his uncanny performance, the illusion breaks and the apparent festivity gives way to death and horror; now Joyce is perfectly aware that Adam is their only hope: “[s]he walks to Adam, takes his face in her hands, and begs him to do something, anything, to delay the guards and save the children from lining up to drink from the vat. Adam nods” (*CP*, 348).

The last pages of the novel depict the confrontation between Adam and the guards. Adam blocks their access to the children and, armed only with his bestial body, a calabash crown and a stick, to stop the guards he resorts to the most human of all human faculties – speech. He interchangeably voices two words “stop” and “God”, which for the people chasing him is nothing short of a miracle. Initially they “hear and do not hear”, they “register the word, and because it eludes logic, many refuse to believe their ears” (*CP*, 349). “God is speaking to them through Adam”, some of the guards think, but their sense of duty and misguided loyalty to the reverend prevails:

They lift their rifles and steady them at Adam and pray for forgiveness for what they are about to do. Adam closes his eyes. His body leans on his stick, but his mind propels him from a sprint along a forest floor to a miracle of legs running on air up among the trees, a headlong sprint, a blur of speed, a figure in the distance waiting to greet him whose open arms will be his finish line (*CP*, 352).

The association between Adam and the innocent death of Jesus Christ is by no means far-fetched. The guards kill Adam, symbolically crowned in his ‘crown of thorns’, though they are aware that he is innocent. Through his death, there comes life for Trina and other compound children and the allusion to “a figure in the distance waiting to greet him” implies the possibility of his salvation and thus having a soul. Adam the gorilla, then, proves capable of pure altruism in the form of self-sacrifice.

Consequently, D’Aguiar breaks the ultimate differentiation between the animal and the human based on the belief that the animals are not capable of “death” as such. The already mentioned Heidegger claimed that the animals come to an end but they do not die as they exist, but not live, “only man dies, [t]he animal perishes”. Therefore only humans may be called mortals because only humans are “capable of death as death”, meaning that they understand

³⁶ For the reader familiar with the history of the carnival in the Caribbean, it may bring to mind the association with a temporary contestation of the colonial oppression, as has been the unwritten function of the Caribbean carnivals in the slave societies (Heuman 2014: 191). It is also interesting that the tradition of the carnival is in itself a great example of creolization as it has been adapted by the slaves from the Europeans and changed to a characteristically anti-establishment tradition aimed as a contestation of the imposed order (Heuman 2014: 191).

that they would cease to exist (Heidegger 2011: 176-177). Also, in the Christian interpretation of the world, the noblest human deed and a paradigm of humanity is a selfless sacrifice of one's life in exchange for another, exemplified by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. "For Christian theology", writes Terry Eagleton (2010: 21), "it is the moment of death itself, when you discover whether you have enough love inside you to be able to give yourself away with only a tolerable amount of struggle". Death, then, may be the ultimate act of love and humanity, but also the ultimate act of selfishness and barbarity.

All these various shades and meanings of death are mixed in the novel. Adam is aware of the price he is to pay for his help, as he is conscious of death as an abstract idea. Moreover, he lays down his life in exchange for the lives of others, while it is the reverend Jones who commits suicide, which is egoistic as a superhuman act. "By presiding ceremonially over [one's] own death, becoming both priest and victim, the protagonist succeeds in overcoming his own mortality", claims Terry Eagleton (2005: 39), and the pre-defined aim of Jones' actions is to ultimately manifest his dominance over nature. Thus he tries to elevate himself to the position of God, who Himself is essentially amoral. What Eagleton means by God's amorality is that he is placed above the law, which does not imply that He is immoral or that He rejects the moral law, but only that He Himself is a source of the law and morality which binds the people, and which does not bind Him (Eagleton 2010: 24, 102). Jones singlehandedly places himself in the same position – he is the source of order, law and morality; instead of a God, however, he becomes a reflection of Satan, "the pathologized image of God cultivated by those for whom love is an intolerable weakness, and who need to think instead in terms of power and sovereignty" (Eagleton 2005: 29). Most strikingly, he expects no forgiveness, even from the Devil himself: "Devil, do not show me mercy. I do not want your mercy. There cannot be room for mercy if this world of mine is to work for everyone in it. World without end. El Dorado" (CP, 340). Such a quasi-theological interpretation is corroborated by the motto the author chose for his novel: "[a]nd now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (Corinthians 13:13). Also the association of Jones the generic tragic hero would not be ungrounded as Jones' death, both actual and fictional, resembles a performance of which he himself was the director and the main actor.

In the end, then, D'Aguiar twists the seemingly predefined order of the world and puts an ape in the place of a saviour. In so doing, he not so much changes Adam into a human being, and he does not argue that he is *just like a man* in all the aspects of his Creation, but instead, he attributes some features traditionally associated with human beings to the ape, signalling that the line differing the two is by no means easy and that all the binary differences so far used to that purpose are fallible, if not unjust. To understand the point of such a particular narrative choice, it is useful to, once again, refer to Mary Midgley:

the various things that have been proposed as differentia for man—conceptual thought or reason, language, culture, self-consciousness, tool-using, productivity, laughter, a sense of the future (...) [cannot] monopolize it or freeze it into finality. (...) What would we say about someone who had all the characteristics just mentioned, but none of the normal human affections? (...) Because of this sort of thing, it is really not possible to find a mark that distinguishes man from “the animals” (...) The logical point is simply that, in general, living creatures are quite unlike mathematical terms, whose essence really can be expressed in a simple definition (2002: 144).

As if following Midgley’s words, D’Aguiar does not reject the philosophical and cosmological category of the human as tries to redefine it. He shows Adam as a conscious creature, equipped with the faculties one would customarily deny an ape, who does not wish to imitate the commune’s leader, and who is a counterbalance to Jones’ self-destructive instincts. Therefore, one may inscribe the novel into the post-human trend embodied by the aforementioned thinkers such as Derrida, Haraway or Fudge, for whom “the question of the animal is as important as the question of the machine” (Tiffin and Huggan 2010: 207) and who struggle to reconceptualise the transcendental category of what is human as not species-specific.³⁷

At this point it is instrumental to stress that posthumanism does not end with the question of the animal or the machine, but it stretches to embrace the discourse of land and landscapes. As Braidotti in her book *The posthuman* writes, the idea of “[s]pecies equality (...) does urge us to question the violence and the hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism”; thus she divides the post-humanist theories into “becoming animal”, “becoming machine” and “becoming-earth” (Braidotti 2013: 86). Like the already presented question of the true nature of the animal, *becoming-earth* does not merely humanize the landscape as it shows that anthropocentrism is ungrounded and it does not justify nature’s subjugation to man’s interests (Braidotti 2013: 67). In challenging anthropocentric theories, literature plays a very significant role as the posthumanist struggle to change the way we think about nature entails a confrontation with the ageless heritage of representations, tantamount to the postcolonial decomposition of colonial illusions. Therefore Val Plumwood, a famous eco-philosopher, outwardly argues that today’s Western approach to the non-human world is a direct evolution of the colonial domination over nature, with which we for ages have been “walling ourselves off from (...) in order to exploit it [nature]”

³⁷ One may find poignancies also between *Children of paradise* and such posthumanist pop-cultural phenomena as the series of movies *Planet of the Apes*, which originated from the science-fiction novel by Pierre Boulle *Planet of the Apes* (1963).

(Plumwood 2002: 97). Furthermore, like colonialism used to be, anthropocentrism seems so natural that for an average man it is transparent and this transparency is still being achieved through “creating a false universalism in culture” where “the experiences of the dominant ‘centre’ are represented as universal, and the experiences of those subordinated in the structure are rendered as secondary or ‘irrational’” (Plumwood 2002: 99). As such, anthropocentrism promotes “ecological denial” and “damaging forms of epistemic remoteness”, resulting in our inability “to situate ourselves as part of it”. In the long run it may lead to an ecological catastrophe in which not only the non-human, but also the human, will die out (Plumwood 2002: 98).

Significantly enough, *Children of paradise* proves the ideal example of the posthuman philosophy in both the said dimensions. However, if one reads it through the prism of the *becoming-earth* theory, it is more than clear that at this level D’Aguiar directs his words not so much at a universal Western reader, as at a Guyanese one, criticizing the anthropocentric thinking adopted by the coastal Guyanese, who either perceive the interior in terms of profit and gain or display the environmental ignorance mentioned by Plumwood. This veiled message is available to those familiar with another side of Jonestown’s history, namely its connection to a massive deforestation for which the Guyanese do not feel responsible. Even though they vividly remember the tragedy, their assessment of its causes and effects is at best ambiguous and they see themselves as passive and innocent witnesses. In 2012, John Gimlette wrote that “[b]ack in Georgetown the events of 1978 still had people swooning with denial”, even eye-witnesses dismiss it as “an American matter (...) nothing to do with us” (Gimlette 2012: 82). Yet the tragedy proves difficult to bury, and every year *Stabroek News*, the country’s main newspaper, unearths it as if “the readers needed reminding that the Temple was part of their story” (Gimlette 2012: 82). Thus, in the novel Jonestown becomes an allegory of their lack of affinity with their homeland caused by the years of colonial rule and still observable among the postcolonial generations who adopted the Western(ized) perspective of their own land (Tiffin 2005: 201).

It is telling and symbolic that D’Aguiar devotes considerable space to descriptions of technicalities, namely the way in which Jones builds his pig farm and clears the land for settlement. The building and construction of the commune is not shown from the perspective of particular individuals, the so called pioneers who built the Temple, but rather in impersonal and mechanized terms as part of Jones’ grand project, which immediately brings to mind the practices of contemporary corporations. More precisely, he orders heavy machinery from the US and “clears so many trees so fast that they create massive dead zones in the forest” (*CP*, 284). The jungle, which first offered itself to him as his shelter, now tries to fight against Jones, but their chances are never equal: “[t]he jungle fights against being cleared according to

his settlement plants, though the success of the settlement makes the jungle an ideal location and adversary” (*CP*, 72). On the forcibly cleared land, Jones establishes a pig farm that, in turn, pollutes the nearby river to a previously unimaginable extent. Expectedly, he remains ignorant of the Amerindians’ pleas that the river, a life-giver, should be treated with respect (*CP*, 123). When they decide to send tribal representatives to Jones, they meet with the reverend’s fury; he claims he “did not come all the way out into the wilderness of the Amazon to be dictated to by primitives”, who “have owned all this land for centuries and done nothing with it” (*CP*, 126).

At this point in the novel, D’Aguiar touches upon the timeless conflicts between the Western and non-Western sensitivity to nature and presents the mechanism described by Plumwood – dismissing the non-universal environmental claims, here displayed by the Amerindians, as irrational. It is an old argument that echoes through many a colonial text that the Amerindians’ refusal to gain profit from their rich lands is one of the emblems of their civilization’s inferiority. “The colonizing imagination takes for granted that the land and its resources belong to those who are best able to exploit them according to the values of a Western commercial and industrial system” (1993: 31), claims David Spurr. Also Helen Tiffin writes that the Westerners understand “relations between themselves and ‘their’ land as one of ownership (or, at best, stewardship)” and the natives see “their humanness as constituted and expressed through it, rather than, as in post-Enlightenment Western philosophies, against it” (Tiffin 2007: xiii). In this context, it is worth reminding oneself of Anthony Trollope who quoted one of the colonists in British Guiana enthusiastically describing Guyana as “[f]lourishing, sir! If you want to make money, here’s your ground!” (1860: 170). D’Aguiar suggests that such an attitude has not perished with colonialism but transformed itself into the capitalist dream of profit; indeed, though Jones himself comes from the new world, America, which is also a new economic and cultural Empire, his vision of the tropics is strikingly Victorian. He has great dreams of “what he could do with a big country like this if he held the reins. The vast forest overflowing with minerals, precious metals, diamonds, and timber” (*CP*, 110). Like the American Cecil Rhodes, he dreams of “build[ing] a road through the jungle to connect every country on the continent, from the top to the bottom (...) linking all the nations and uniting them under one flag” (*CP*, 110). He perfectly knows that “[i]f he gouged deep holes in the landscape to extract minerals, there would be no delegation (though one would be justified)” (*CP*, 110), as in today’s world one may buy anything, even the jungle.

This clash of the Western and non-Western perception of nature manifests itself also in Jones’ boastful attitude to Adam, whom he presents to the chief of the local Indian tribe as the “commune’s little attempt at a zoo” (*CP*, 122). The leader responds that “the whole rain forest is a zoo and all the people,

the commune included, are in it" (*CP*, 122). From the Amerindian viewpoint, humans and animals occupy the same space by equal right, while Jones even in the heart of the Guyanese jungle would love to place the wilderness in a zoo and rule over it. Erica Fudge writes that zoos first emerged in Europe as the "evidence of the West's 'conquest' of the 'barbaric' world" with animals safely displayed and contained for the entertainment of the masses (Fudge 2002: 15). *In twenty-five years in British Guiana* (1898), Henry Kirke, the Victorian governor of Guyana, described his own adventures with establishing the very first zoo and botanical gardens in Georgetown in 1895. His descriptions and motivations clearly show that it has been a purely colonial Europe-fathomed enterprise, the aim of which was to entertain the colonist with a safe and elegant display of the wilderness.³⁸ It is symptomatic, then, that the motif of the zoo resurfaces when the leader of the country, Forbes Burnham, advertises Guyana to the Americans as a civilized, attractive and worthy tourist destination; one of its greatest asset, he says, is the fact that the country has a zoo and botanical gardens – symbols of its progressiveness and westernization: "We have a zoo with the largest collection of anteaters on the continent. Our botanical gardens abound with *Rafflesia*, the largest single flower on earth [*Victoria regia*, MF], some opening only once every twenty years" (*CP*, 288).

D'Aguiar, then, links the instrumental approach to nature directly with the Guyanese themselves, accusing them of environmental ignorance and selling their land to the Westerners. Therefore, the most seminal question of the novel is

³⁸ The Guyana Zoo was officially opened in 1952, but it operated as a botanical garden with some exotic animals on display from 1895. The idea of opening the zoo was fathomed by the said Henry Kirke and initially his ideas were enthusiastically accepted. He says that the animals "poured in upon me in embarrassing profusion", but then as he was temporarily appointed an attorney general of Jamaica he could no longer take proper care of his project and the first batch of animals died, ran away or was sent to England. In his memoirs Kirke gives a detailed list of all the creatures purchased by him and presents humorous descriptions of his and his family's struggles with the zoo:

When we had a large python in a tub under the house, an ant bear in the stable, a hacka tiger in the scullery, and several small evil smelling mammals all about, my wife began to object, as she was persuaded that the python would arise some night in his might and make a meal of one of the children, and the small mammals were disgusting to her olfactory nerves. An armadillo that I bought dug a hole in the garden and produced a litter of five young ones. They were the most comical little beasts just like grey india rubber dolls, and when you squeezed them they squeaked in the same way. A Brazilian porcupine got away one night; the next morning I saw an excited crowd in the next street, and a black boy rushed in to us, exclaiming, 'Please, sah, they be find your pimplerhaag' (prickly pig).

Though the zoo was a failure at that time, they "kept some interesting animals in the gardens" and gave the beginning to the Guyana Zoo (1898: 59-65).

“[h]ow (...) a group of almost one thousand foreign nationals could end up with permission to clear three thousand acres of prime jungle and build on it and do whatever they want?” (CP, 105). One of the unnamed Guyanese says even that it must have been a “mind-control experiment” or government conspiracy because “how else can so many Americans commandeer so much of our land and do whatever they please without any inquiry from the government?” (CP, 321). Such words signal the actual depth of the Guyanese denial of their own part in the endeavour and thus D’Aguiar’s allusions may be at best uncomfortable for his Guyanese readers. Jonestown was established in the seventies when the country was run by the communist government of Forbes Burnham, who won his power with the significant help of the CIA. He then nationalised the resources, including the land and the forest. Officially, no foreign investment was allowed into the country and no private initiative tolerated. Unofficially, money could buy anything and it was the time of an “elitist state capitalism” where “the ruling group continued to profit, essentially unchallenged, from the process of capitalist accumulation” (Clochester 1997: 36).

After Burnham’s death in 1985, the Guyanese wanted to quickly revive the economy and they opened the borders to foreign capital once more and based their budget on foreign investment. This, in turn, gave birth to a new kind of voluntary colonization that profoundly threatened the survival of the country’s most viable heritage – the interior (Clochester 1997: 42-44). Presently, Guyana is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world and its resources are of great interest to Brazil and Venezuela, two countries struggling for domination in the region, who demand the opening of the Guyanese borders to mining and construction. “However one interprets Guyana’s past”, writes Joshua Hyles, “its future lays in the hands of those who manage its natural resources and whose interests they serve” (2014: 134). D’Aguiar, then, does not draw a line between Western and non-Western environmental sensitivity along geographical borders, but he shares the blame for the interior’s exploitation equally between the Westerners and the Guyanese, implicitly suggesting that only together may they save it from extinction.

One may thus conclude that *Children of paradise* is a philosophical posthumanist novel with a very practical environmental twist. It questions the anthropocentric philosophy constructed on the binary distinction between the categories of non-human and human worlds and demystifies the human moral sovereignty over nature. It also plays with the pervasive vision of the Guyanese primeval forest as an uncivilized utopian space and with the stereotype of the barbarity inherent in nature, which still serves as the pretext to tame, or rather exploit, the interior. Thus, D’Aguiar’s novel may be read as a positive example of the progressing reconceptualization of the anthropocentric philosophy that for ages defined the image of the Guyanese wilderness for the West, and now continues to define it for the Westernized

coastal Guyanese. However, much as *Shadows move among them*, it may be also read as a pessimistic voice indicating how much we all still depend on the seemingly compromised colonial illusions of the New World underpinned by the dream of the earthly paradise. It is intriguing to investigate, then, if similar environmental rhetoric informs the Guyanese pastoral fiction.

4.3. (Post)pastoral landscapes in *Heartland* (1964) by Wilson Harris

The reasons why one may discuss Wilson Harris as an environmentalist pastoral writer are numerous. Firstly, Wilson Harris' works have been mentioned as the response to the traditional colonial pastoral poetics already by Raymond Williams in his famous *The country and the city* (1975: 285), which truly opened critical discussions on the (post)colonial pastorals. Secondly, the main theme of all of Harris' novels is the metaphysical contemplation of the landscape and therefore many of his works may seem slow and inconclusive. However, such an effect is intended, as Harris' major aim is "the creation of a community" and not producing a dynamic narration (Meas-Jelinek 2005: 258). Thirdly, against the common misconception, his original imagery of the landscape is not purely abstract but derived from his personal ventures into the Guyanese interior, his contacts with the Amerindian population and his observations of the two Guyanese spaces: the rural interior and the urbanized coast (Boxill 1986: 187-197); hence, it is "inspired by concrete reality" and aimed at "awakening the dense inner life of the natural environment in close relationship with all living persons and creatures" (Meas-Jelinek 2005: 258), which makes all his novels environmentally conscious texts.

Taking such arguments into account, it is truly intriguing to turn an analytical eye to one of Harris' early pastoral novels, and a typical example of his literary poetics, in the context of the newest developments in the eco-critical literary criticism and post-pastoral theories. The novel in question is *Heartland* (1964), an intermediary work that is "an epilogue or postscript to *Guyana Quartet*", and a prologue to Harris' following novels. *Heartland* may, but does not need to, be read in connection with Harris' previous novels, and it may be successfully interpreted a separate literary commentary on the Guyanese interior (Gilkes 1989: 5). For this very reason, it is used here as a perfect example on which, without an extensive analysis of Harris' philosophy, one may observe how his fiction mirrors the premises of the post-pastoral poetics and transgresses the limits of the traditional pastoral mode defined as the celebration of rusticity.

Even though the assumptions of the post-pastoral theory have been presented in Chapter one, it is worth reminding oneself of the six basic features of post-pastoral writings. The primary aim of post-pastoral texts is to trigger the readers' awe towards nature and touch one's eco-conscience, forcing one to reconceptualise one's relationship with nature. Moreover, it is to deconstruct the nature / culture dichotomy, show nature as the continuum of existence, indicate that our internal state of mind is bound to nature and, lastly, emphasize that the exploitation of the land is inseparable from the exploitation of the minorities (Gifford 1999: 149-155). Terry Gifford claimed that "all six qualities cannot be expected to be present in every text of a post-pastoral writer and will be found together in one remarkable text only rarely, but they will all be a part of the vision represented in the best work of a post-pastoral writer" (Gifford 1999: 150). Beyond doubt, Wilson Harris is one of the best examples of the post-pastoral writers as all the six features delineated by Gifford are to be unmistakably recognized in his fiction.

Broadly speaking, *Heartland* is yet another of the Guyanese novels oscillating around the motif of the consciousness-changing journey. It leads the protagonist, and the reader, towards the rediscovery of an environmental sensitivity and metaphysical connection with the land. The main protagonist, Zacharias Stevenson, is a generic city man, born and raised on the Guyanese coast, who accidentally finds himself in the interior, where he grows to revalorize his perception of Nature. The novel may also be read as the fictional rendition of Harris' own travels, which he was undertaking steadily in the period between 1944 and 1959, and when he "became intimate with the forests and rivers and with the Amerindians" (Boxill 1988: 188; Harris 1999: 40). At this point, it is vital to stress that in the coastal Guyanese imagination the interior plays not only the role of the proverbial wilderness but also the rural heart of the country, where it is possible to move back in time to pre-Columbian Arcadia (Harris 1999: 40-41). The discrepancies between the coast and the heartland are not merely symbolic and Guyana is defined by "coastland and hinterland, with other juxtapositions of feelings, sensibility" (Dabydeen 2005: 59).

Somehow expectedly, in its representation of the Guyanese Arcadia *Heartland*, like other novels of Harris, is a challenge for the reader. It opens in medias res, making one responsible for completing the life-story of the main protagonist. All we know at the beginning is that Stevenson is working in the Guyanese forests as a watchman for a timber company. As the story progresses, one learns that on the coast he was a rich and carefree son of a successful Guyanese businessman, but he implicated himself into an affair with their accountant's wife, Maria. When the accountant fled with the company's money, followed by Maria, Stevenson was on the verge of being accused of complicity. He was saved by his late father who repaid the money

and thus, symbolically, took on the blame for the whole incident. The father died soon after in some unclear circumstances, which allude to suicide. Tormented by self-pity and shame, rather than by pangs of conscience, Zacharias decides to abandon his coast-life and hide for the time being in the interior, away from everyone who knows of his spectacular failure. Therefore he accepts the first available job offer and, unexpectedly even to himself, he lands up in the country. Soon it occurs that Stevenson's journey is merely a pretext to present the novel's true protagonist – the titular Heartland – and that Stevenson is merely a vessel through which the power of the landscape may fully reveal itself.

Initially, Stevenson in his attitude to the natural world may be described as a typical coastlander, who perceives it as passive and submissive. Even when confronted with evidence to the contrary he tries to suppress the overwhelming premonition that the landscape which surrounds him is alive, and he draws comfort from brief moments when it seems lifeless: "His mind began to clear under his own tide of suspension and self-rebuke and his spirit lifted, restoring to the world the convention of perfect lifelessness associated with the landscape of the earth" (*H*, 21). His reactions resemble those of many a traveller, like for example Levi-Strauss, who wrote that "[t]he European traveller is disconcerted by the landscape which does not correspond to any of his traditional categories. We are not acquainted with virgin nature since our landscape is manifestly subservient to man" (2011 [1955]: 93). The clash between Stevenson's expectations and the reality, is played in the novel on yet another level. Namely, Stevenson occupies the function of a watcher, employed to guard his company's timber and keep an eye on vast, and largely unpopulated, spaces. The irony of his position is spelled out for him by Keiser, the bush storekeeper, whom he briefly meets during one of his excursions. As Keiser says: "I mean how you come to be sure you ain't standing alone in this forest of a world – as you're already inclined to suspect – and no one's there in person – truly good or bad – for you to watch?" (*H*, 28). Thus, his job is at best redundant, if not ridiculous, since the only person Stevenson is actually watching is himself. To make matters worse, he soon starts to sense that he himself is being "studied and watched..." (*H*, 55) by the invisible forces of nature. The wordplay between watcher-watched implies the shift from Stevenson's illusion of control over nature to it keeping him under close surveillance. It marks also the beginning of his road towards what Gifford called the evoking of humility and awe (Gifford 1999: 149).

Very soon the landscape starts to anticipate, or even project, Stevenson's states of mind and it becomes literally impossible to delineate where his thought ends and nature's begins. The novel, then, blurs the boundaries between the protagonist's state of mind and physical reality, making the reader recognize that "the inner is also the workings of the outer,

that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature” (Gifford 199: 156). More or less half-way through the novel, Stevenson himself starts noticing the uncanny affinity between his thoughts and the landscape. “The fear of every strange outpost of the mind”, he says, “became concrete (...) since it involved a corresponding station where the spirit of the seasons was single and changeless (...) stripping one down to the nakedness of reality” (*H*, 58). Harris pushes Gifford’s observation even a step further, showing that nature is capable of moral judgement. The first signs of the coming change are to be noticed when Stevenson starts to critically think about his past and recognize his contribution to his father’s death. “How could he be absolutely certain he had not contributed to a network of conspiracy like a spider’s web on which light and shade danced together like etchings within a phenomenal mirror of wood” (*H*, 36), he asks himself. In the city, he believes, he lost the ability to differentiate between good and evil and he knows that the journey could be his atonement: “[w]ould this come to mean to him in the future the accumulative fulfillment of all the blind folly of the past, or would it bring him the conscious reality of a true grain of wisdom?” (*H*, 31).

Nature becomes not only an extension of Stevenson’s mind but it also has an ability to affect his consciousness, stimulating him to discover the naked truth about himself. It sees through him, beyond masks or falsities, and it “[reduces] every vestige of the man-made environment, the former accumulation of longing and excess (...) to the grandiose whim of nature” (*H*, 58). The more Stevenson opens himself towards nature, the more it leads him towards an epiphany, described as “*breaking through* beyond oneself” (*H*, 58-59). During one of his naps, somewhere on the verge of dream and reality, he has a vision, which allows him to see his past life, especially his affair with Maria, in all its sincerity and cruelty;³⁹ he admits to himself, and to nature, that he has sinned with pride, which clouded his judgement and, even after his father’s death, made him selfishly afraid of being “ashamed and exposed” (*H*, 60). This confession is immediately followed by a scene of hunting, which may be read as a trial to which the forests puts Zacharias, before giving its absolution.

Willing to test the newly acquired “sensual spirit of collaboration” with nature (*H*, 63) Stevenson, by means of his own breath, calls to the forest and the forest responds to his needs. It sends him “a brown creature like a rabbit with the soft eyes of a fable of a forest” (*H*, 64) that Stevenson sees as “a fresh meat

³⁹ Hena Meas-Jelinek describes *Heartland* as a novel about loneliness, emphasising Stevenson’s hunger for true human contact that led him astray in the first place. She interprets his epiphany as an ultimate revelation of his hunger for affinity and unity with another human being. She also draws attention that other protagonists mention being alone or lonely and seek an antidote to their state, which shows yet another interpretative path (2006: 129-138).

for his pot". The creature is undoubtedly feminine and she triggers in him all the negative emotions he originally felt towards Maria. His chasing the rabbit is described as a display of "cruelty in the grotesque heart of love" (*H*, 64). In other words, the forest, out of love, has offered him sustenance to satisfy his hunger, but the reasons for which he wants to kill the creature have little to do with the necessity of survival. After a longish moment of tension, Stevenson suspends his knife. In letting the creature live, he ultimately accepts the superiority of nature, with which he now strikes a special connection, becoming its physical part. From this moment he may be said to acquire certain features of the Amerindian worldview, which is based on "the symbiotic relationship between man, nature and the gods". Amerindians "worked along with nature to produce the crops and claim the fish needed for welfare of the community", but they did not disturb it without need (Paravisini-Gebert 2005: 183). Thus, Stevenson's refusal to kill out of cruelty, pushes him towards a far more mystic, and immaterial, experience of the natural world.

The Amerindian link finds its way into another aspect of *Heartland's* post-pastoral poetics; namely, the breaching of the binary relation between nature and culture (Gifford 1999: 149). In fact, the novel annihilates the gaps between culture, civilization, myth and history, showing them as rooted in the same timeless source – nature. For Harris, the landscape is a living entity and a "theatre of memory" (Harris 1999: 40), which preserves and defies temporal divisions. If one, by means of the imagination for example, learns to decode its alphabet the landscape makes it possible to see the past and present as part of the natural cycle of death and rebirth (Harris 1999: 39). Harris draws from the Amerindian conception of the landscape as a repository of historical and cultural knowledge, the source of the so called natural history. Across the Americas, various groups of Indians ascribe "transcendental reality to particular elements of the landscape", through which they "recall past events" and in which they preserve their cultural memory; they read the landscape like a history book in which their past has been written (Vidal 2003: 35). In South America "[h]istorical consciousness is (...) present in a landscape" and so is memory and culture (Whitehead 2003: 60). The whole of Amazonia, Neil Whitehead states, should nowadays be seen as a "cultural artefact", and not a "pristine wilderness" (Whitehead 2003: 61).

Wilson Harris creatively employs such beliefs into his fiction and even names Amerindian the "host consciousness" of the Caribbean, through which the Guyanese may reach back into pre-Columbian times, their golden age, which, in turn, may become a foundation of their present identity. What Harris suggests, then, is that the interior possesses human faculties, namely it remembers and replays the past. Those born out of "the spirit of the place" (Harris 1999: 40), the Amerindians, are the living embodiments of such a continuity. Therefore, Stevenson's journey is also a journey in time and space,

during which he truly recognizes the world he comes from. Moreover, the moment Stevenson enters the bush, he is no longer only Zacharias Stevenson, but an allegory of all those travellers who long before him made the same journey (*H*, 40); hence, he not only enters a physical space but also “the climate of the mind” (*H*, 40) and a state of existence which eludes divisions into the real and the unreal. The former travellers, as Harris writes, failed to “catch the unreality of themselves which they encountered in the rude nomadic tribes they came to rescue and civilize (...) born of the spirit of place, [more] than any a human conqueror could devise” (*H*, 40). Now Stevenson, who knows that the space he visits is a monument of pre-Columbian civilization, has the potential to become one of the first new men to acquire the mystical qualities of the Guyanese landscape.

Such an ultimate truth dawns on Stevenson during his uncanny meeting with Petra, an Amerindian woman, whom he sees for the first time as if emerging from the land, of which she, as a representative of the native minority, seems to him an inseparable part (*H*, 73; cf. Gifford 1999: 149). On her face, Stevenson reads the history of Guyana, and of the world, the endless cycle of the birth and fall of civilizations, as if captured in a photograph:

Every strange, even tortured, mask of civilization she had acquired along the way from brutal tribe to the dreaming constellation of humanity, from animal servitude to bearing the burden of the world’s need for love (...) [her] faintness was akin to a constellation of renewal and rebirth appearing, for this age and time, in the underworld sky of the jungle, and upon the horizon which coincided with the end of empires when the darkness of rule becomes the absolute light of consciousness (*H*, 73, 76).

Petra, then, embodies the human (hi)story from brutal tribal life and servitude to complex civilizations and religions – their subsequent deaths and rebirths – that are also cycles of nature. Her presence in the novel “for this age and time” suggests also that she is the mother of the new age, which is to come with the end of yet another empire – the British Empire. Describing the scene, Hena Meas-Jelinek draws attention to the authorial choice of the name – Petra – which may be an allusion to Peter – a rock on which Christ chose to build his church (2006: 133).

It is also telling that Petra may be compared to Mary,⁴⁰ the mother of Jesus, through whom the new world is to be born. Namely, the moment she meets Stevenson, she is heavily pregnant and soon, assisted by Stevenson, she

⁴⁰ Meas-Jelinek claims that in Petra Stevenson sees also his own mistress, Mary, which yet again inscribes his personal story into the broader context of Guyanese history (2006: 135). In fact, Harris uses biblical imagery in many of his novels, inter alia by naming his protagonists Mary or Miriam.

gives birth to a boy. The symbolism of the scene is multilayered, with Stevenson signifying the Guyanese coast, and the child the future to come that could link the two spaces into one harmonious whole. Furthermore, in the boy's blood, as a son of a Portuguese Guyanese man working in the interior – DaSilva – and Petra who herself is half-Amerindian, there runs the very creolized legacy of Guyana, which cannot be atomized. In "Tradition and the West-Indian novel", Wilson Harris wrote that for him the ultimate role of Caribbean literature should be the reconciliation between the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian past, which may be achieved by means of creativity and imagination (1999: 142). *Heartland*, then, seems to suggest that such a reconciliation will not be born on the coast but in the interior, which is the beating heart of the true Guyana. Needless to say, the meeting with Petra triggers Stevenson's final epiphany from which there is literally no going back to his previous life.

In the final scenes Stevenson changes into a prophet-like figure, who preaches that the true perfection of the world finds its ultimate manifestation not in the man-made civilization, but in nature. He recognizes that nature is built out of two harmonized entities: order and diversity, and that these, in turn, are "the serial creation of one agent or person", which he calls the "Unmoved Being" (*H*, 135).⁴¹ Regardless of whether one interprets Stevenson's revelation in a religious vein, or if one sees it as a belief in an undefined higher order, in both dimensions the novel stresses human frailty and the sanctity of nature. Through Stevenson, Harris also sends his ultimate message to the readers, namely that to achieve the state of absolute harmony, one needs to make proper use of the greatest human power – the creative mind. Imagination is "the greatest capacity for prejudice and error" but also "the greatest opportunity and privilege to invoke the endless subject of reason in responsibility...." (*H*, 96). Hence, it may be used dualistically; either to perpetuate stereotypes or to construct a new sensitivity that would be based on responsibility for the surrounding world. In the end, Stevenson chooses the latter path and he physically dissolves himself into the landscape, achieving

⁴¹ The idea of the Unmoved Being, also known as the Unique Spiritual Being, is also taken from Amerindian mythology. The Unmoved Being was the only creative mind in the universe; his story is part of the so called first cycle of the creation of the world. The Unique Spiritual Being was "the epicentre of big emptiness" in which there was no place or space or time, "and everything was in silence". The silence was known as Makuku and Makuku began the creation of life by dividing space from time. Hence, the former created order and the latter division, which are inseparably bound. Makuku was also the one who gave voices to humans and animals and, once he had spoken, he became a Dukuku. Dukuku's speech, in the form of thunder, further divided the universe, which took part in six subsequent stages (Vidal 2003: 33-58). The Superior Being is also mentioned by Walter Roth as an extraordinary story, but it did not bring him to change his mind that Amerindians have "no worship other than nature" (Roth 1913: 1-2). It also testifies to Harris' holistic approach to spirituality, which allows him to link various mythologies and traditions.

the permanent state that may be associated with the sublime (cf. Kant 2007: 75). As Wilson Harris himself said the landscape “[is] the threshold of what I would call ‘wholeness’; a wholeness which one could never hope to structure absolutely but which is there nevertheless and which enriches partial approaches to it” (D’Aguiar 2004: 34). The ultimate image recorded in the novel is that of a road leading in an unknown direction and Stevenson following it, even though he “[did] not know where the road led” but “only knew it was there” (*H*, 97).

From the *Postscript* one learns only that Zacharias Stevenson disappeared somewhere in-between Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela and that some of the pork-knockers, Guyanese gold-diggers, found his unfinished letters to Maria and a few poems, inter alia one dedicated to the Amazon and as the “world-creating jungle” (*H*, 103). His death, however, is never suggested and he is thought to simply sink into the land, which testifies to Gifford’s final observation that post-pastoral texts challenge even the ultimate boundary between life and death.⁴² For this reason, one must agree with Hena Meas-Jelinek that the ambiguous endings of Harris’ novels do seem deliberate as their aim is to trigger (eco)critical reflection on the readers’ own relation to nature, rather than provide them with stories of adventures. The novel’s primary aim is to exemplify the landscape’s human-like faculties and its semi-mystical attempts to preserve history, to subvert the standardized definition of time, space and the (im)materiality of existence. Hence, *Heartland* is not so much a novel about a hero as about the landscape – the Guyanese heartland – and as such it is a typical example of Wilson Harris’ literary style which, at the time of its emergence, was beyond doubt a revolution in the Guyanese fiction. Even today Harris remains a steady point of reference for many Guyanese writers, not only those invested in the pastoral discourse.

4.4. The (eco)pastoral reading of *The ventriloquist’s tale* (1997) by Pauline Melville

The ventriloquist’s tale (1997) by Pauline Melville is one of the most popular novels written by the second wave of the Guyanese authors and, due to its familiar aesthetics, most often classified beside Wilson Harris as an uncharacteristic rendition of the Latin American marvellous realism (Bowers

⁴² In *Heartland* the discourse of death as life is very vividly present as at various points death coincides with life and is referenced to as life-giving force or life-giver. One of the seminal scenes of this kind is the long description of the unexpected death of the dog belonging to one of the protagonist’s – Da Silva – through which the living force comes back to Da Silva himself, who was already dying from malaria, and thus restoring the energetic balance of nature (*H*, 87).

2013: 56-57). For someone acquainted with the Guyanese context, it is nevertheless apparent that Melville contextualizes typically Guyanese urban and rural tensions and that her contemplative approach to nature derives from her Amerindian legacy that is inseparable from the Guyanese vision of the rural Arcadia. Furthermore, *The ventriloquist's tale* is by no means a mere imitation of Harris' poetics, but rather its new rendition in the face of the progressive urbanization of the Guyanese interior. Therefore, it is being discussed here as a new face of the Guyanese post-pastoral mode of nature's representation that confronts Wilson Harris' ideas with the reality of postcolonial socio-economic progress.⁴³

Like *Heartland*, Melville's novel is the tale of journeys made between the two Guyanese spaces, the urbanized coast and the rural heartland. It is predominantly set in Rupununi, the savannahs region of southern Guyana, which is the agricultural centre of the country and its idyllic countryside. Rupununi is famous for cattle herding and it "hold[s] a special place within the Guyanese imagination, as well as the imagination of many Westerners who chanced to visit or travel through this remote area over past centuries" (Riley 2003: 143). It represents the "dead opposite of what is considered to be the normative, civilized and conforming" urbanized lifestyle (Riley 2003: 143) and even Melville describes it as a place so remote that even "law didn't really reach there" (VT⁴⁴, 49). In the popular Guyanese imagination, Rupununi

⁴³ The post-pastoral poetics and the inspirations with Wilson Harris are to be found in the *The Timehrian* (2002) by Andrew Jefferson-Miles, which is an even more outward rendition of Harris' legacy. In the *Prologue* Jefferson-Miles claims that the manuscript has been handed to him by a distant relative and that it is a work of their distant cousin whom they thought dead in the flood that swept the Guyanese coast. As it occurs, the man has survived and lived in the interior. The story proper centres on the figure of Leon-Batista, a coastlander, a main protagonist and a narrator who survived the said flood and then retreated inland to recuperate from his experiences (2002: 25). He describes his adventures as part of the expedition organized by a city anthropologist, Laban, who embodies the Westernized perception of nature and whose task it is to do research on the Amerindian culture as part of "a global research project in the definitions of culture". Leon also meets there Elizabeth, an Amerindian woman, who teaches him, and implicitly the reader, about the possibility of true empathy with those species other than human and with the world of nature (2002: 28). In consequence, Leon, like Stevenson from *Heartland*, changes his perception of nature and his philosophy of life and his words are said to have a great impact on the author himself, who is now passing his story to the readers. Pauline Melville's novel is predicated on the very same assumptions, but it has been far more popular due to its intertextual interpretive framework and oftentimes used in the debates on the marvellous realism in the Guyanese fiction. Thus it is purposefully used here to show the possible different strategies of its reading and comprehending of its unique aesthetics in the characteristically Guyanese contexts.

⁴⁴ All the quotations come from Melville, Pauline. 1997. *The ventriloquist's tale*. London: Flamingo, which is henceforth referred to as VT.

belongs to the tribal Indians, living their lives according to pre-Columbian rules, and cowboys, *vaqueros*, who care little for the benefits of civilization (Riley 2003: 143-150). As such, it has been represented by many a travelogue ranging from the *West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1860) by Anthony Trollope, *92 days* (1934) by Evelyn Waugh, *Guyana: I met the happy Indians* (1965) by Arkady Fiedler to recent works like *Wild coast* (2011) by John Gimlette. In *The middle passage* (1964), V. S. Naipaul beautifully captured the spirit of the savannahs, saying that “Rupununi is not a land so much for the pioneer as for the romantic. The pioneer wants to see cities rise in the desert; the romantic wants to be left alone. The Rupununi settlers want to be left alone; though they depend on Georgetown” (Naipaul 1999 [1964]: 118). Melville sustains the stereotypical image of Rupununi and she contrasts its harmony with the hustle and bustle of Georgetown, Guyana’s capital city, which for her is a seed of industrialization, rapidly and irreversibly affecting the Guyanese heartland.

The ventriloquist’s tale opens in the late 1990s at a rural community of the Wapisiana Indians.⁴⁵ The reader observes an everyday scene from the lives of Chofy and Marietta, a middle-aged married couple, Bla-Bla, their son, and their old auntie Wilfreda. Melville paints a nostalgic, melancholic scene, which nevertheless contains the unsettling images of the intrusive modernity, suggesting the omnipresence of progress. The reader enters their household through a gate which has “long fallen down” (VT, 13) and sees Marietta is “splashing water from the rinsing bucket over *the plastic plates*” (VT, 15; emphasis mine; MF). She is surrounded by the “dust-layered shelves”, which are “crammed with cartons, old tins, tissue boxes, jars, one or two old Marmite bottles” (VT, 16). The walls are adorned with “the jaguar skulls (...) alongside other knick-knacks and a hanging sifter decorated with feathers” (VT, 16). The room is lit by “kerosene lamps” (VT, 18), but “Chofy’s bows and arrows lie next to his shotguns and a new set of hunting knives” (VT, 17). Hence, during his traditional hunting excursions he not so much hunts as “shoots deer” (VT, 15), but in his free time he carves turtle shells and wood in the traditional way his father taught him (VT, 15). Auntie Wilfreda, the oldest member of the family, farms the small garden in which she cultivates the “plants to clean out the stomach, plants to stop girls getting pregnant, plants to keep angry people away from the house, plants to make a man hard” (VT,

⁴⁵ The Wapisiana is one of the Amerindian tribes of Guyana also stereotypically known for their amicability towards strangers. It is also one of the tribes described by W. H. Brett in *The Indians of Guiana* where he presents them in a characteristically paternalistic tone: “The Wapisianas are more athletic, and darker in colour than the Macusis. Their females are often good-looking, and staid and puncture. The skin round the mouth is an elliptical form. Their language is very peculiar, and stands isolated among those of the tribes who dwell near them” (1868: 498).

16). However, when the vampire bats attack Marietta's father's cattle, they pay someone "with DDT and spray" (VT, 24) to deal with the problem.

The clash between tradition and modernity translates itself into Marietta and Chofy's marriage. Marietta likes her slow-paced life, but Chofy is tormented by the yet unexpressed desire for change. They often quarrel over petty things and one night she finds pieces cut out from *Time* magazine hidden in Chofy's drawers, which is a sign of his dreams of another life. Indeed, the monotony of their existence starts to terrify Chofy, who knows that in the savannahs nothing is "going to change or improve" (VT, 15). As an Amerindian he is nevertheless terrified of changes actually taking place. He remembers the old Indian truths that "any change was the beginning of disintegration" (VT, 15), bringing "[b]ad luck – usually wished on you by some enemy" (VT, 15).⁴⁶ Thus, on the one hand, "like many others, he resented the increasing number of alien coastlanders and Brazilians who were invading the region to settle here" (VT, 14).⁴⁷ He also hates the Amerindians' growing dependency on money, which runs contrary to their ideas of self-sufficiency: "[w]hen he was a young boy growing up, money had rarely been used (...) [b]ut these days cash was increasingly necessary" (VT, 22). On the other hand, he longs for any progression in his life: "[h]e belonged in the savannahs (...) [he was] tied into the landscape (...) [b]ut recently he had felt a small worm of

⁴⁶ The Amerindians are known for their dislike of changes, especially in the context of the Western idea of progress, which for them "is just an illusion". Such an attitude directly translates itself into practical difficulties of truly reaching into their world. Pauline Meliville, though herself of Amerindian descent, remembers her own failed attempts at writing a Wapisiana dictionary; the Indians refused to cooperate as both they did not need the book and feared losing a part of their culture (Sikorska 2012: 14-15). Greenblatt reminds us of the first Spanish colonial accounts of the Indian reacting with anger towards writing, which they interpreted as sorcery aimed at making them perish in the Spanish books (Greenblatt 2007: 33). Also in many missionary accounts one oftentimes encounters complaints on the Indians' reluctance to abandon their migratory life-style and convert to Christianity, which was far easier to impose on the African slaves. Such travellers as Waugh and Naipaul mention the secretiveness of the Amerindians but they do so in an outwardly contemptible tone. Naipaul, for example writes that "I had tried hard to feel interest in the Amerindians as a whole, but I failed. I couldn't read their faces; I couldn't understand their language, and could never gauge what level of communication was possible" (Naipaul 1964: 123).

⁴⁷ At that time, the road that was to connect Guyana and Brazil straight through the interior was being built. In 1989 the Guyanese authorities broke under the pressure from Brazilian businessmen and agreed to the construction. The enterprise resulted in an uncontrolled flow of Brazilians into the country and them taking over Amerindian lands with no consultation or compensation. To imagine how rapid the progression invoked by such economic changes really is, it is essential to realize that since the early 1990s Rupununi is being progressively industrialized. New houses with electricity and running water, even in the most remote villages, are becoming an everyday commodity, and in 1998 an internet transmitter has been installed in St. Ignatius, the former mission village, literally connecting the Amerindians to the world wide web (Clochester 1997: 53; Riley 2003: 120)

dissatisfaction with his own life (...). It made him want to get away” (VT, 14). This sense of dissatisfaction comes from Chofy seeing the Westernized lifestyle as a possible and easy alternative to his own. Hence, when his father-in-law’s cattle are attacked by the vampire bats and his family cannot, or wish not to, survive without a steady income, he is by no means reluctant to “go to Georgetown and try to dig a job somewhere. Mining maybe. Or logging” (VT, 24). When the moment of departure actually comes, “despite his recent feeling of dissatisfaction” Chofy feels unhappy (VT, 24); he senses that the departure from Rupununi may prove “the undoing of everything, the unfastening of ties, a harbinger of chaos” (VT, 24).

Melville’s introduction brings to mind the aesthetics of the complex pastoral described by Leo Marx in *The machine in the garden* (2000 [1964]). Marx defined pastoralism as the subjective feeling that the people have towards the rural countryside and he differentiated between simple pastoralism, a slightly naive “felicity represented by the image of a natural landscape, the terrain either unspoilt or, if cultivated, rural” and complex pastoralism, which counterbalances the romantic vision with the presence of the proverbial machine in the garden that disturbs the illusion of idyllic rurality (2000 [1964]: 9, 25). Melville’s meticulous descriptions of the utensils used by the McKinnons, as well as her direct references to the proximity of the alternative, modernized world, are the said machines in the gardens. Faced with their presence, the reader may not escape into the naive pastoralism and believe that the lives of the Amerindians remain undisturbed. Nevertheless, Leo Marx thought of the complex pastoralism as a mode of representation that captures the image of the changing garden, but does not engage in a direct dialogue with modernity; thus he does not take into account the possible eco-critical dimension of the pastoral discourse, which very clearly manifests itself in Melville’s novel.

Terry Gifford noticed this missing link in Marx’s theory and argued that since “our lives now lack a separation between urban and rural existence” there exists a “continuing need for a literature that explores our impulse towards retreat and return” (Gifford 1999: 173); however, nowadays simple pastoralism has exhausted itself and complex pastorals no longer reflect the complexity of today’s world. Therefore, complex pastoralism is “tak[ing] the form of post-pastoral literature” (Gifford 1999: 173), which struggles to explain the “dialectical experience [of modernity]”, through showing “how we can take responsibility for it” (Gifford 1999: 173). Such post-pastoral undertones are visible in Melville’s novel, the aim of which is not so much to depict the intrusion of modernity into Rupununi, which is indisputable, as to initiate a discussion on its consequences, our common responsibility for the Amerindian lands, as well as on the need to redefine the relationship between culture and nature in the postcolonial world. *The ventriloquist’s tale*, then, is

a new, less allegorical and far more accessible variation of the characteristically Guyanese post-pastoral poetics of the landscape.

The main axes of the novel are Chofy's forced migrations between Georgetown and Rupununi, which uncannily reverse Zacharias Stevenson's own peregrinations. When Chofy gets to the capital for the first time, he quickly gets a job in the city library and he starts to carefully observe the city life and its rules.⁴⁸ As a man from the interior, he is sensitive to the effects the city space exerts on his mind and his body. The usual organization of the day goes contrary to the natural rhythm of the night and day, and the very idea of employment, and thus being absolutely dependent on a stranger, terrifies him. The duty of working indoors in Guyana's hot and wet climate makes him feel "imprisoned and breathless" (VT, 32) and he feels surrounded by "numerous pairs of eyes watching him" (VT, 32), which finds its direct analogy in Stevenson's sense of being watched by nature. It is especially intriguing to pay attention to Chofy's detailed descriptions of the city landscape:

From his first visit as a young boy, the city had made him uneasy. It was not just the geometrical grid of the Georgetown streets, the parallels, squares and rectangles which disorientated him after the meandering Indian trails of his own region, but as he walked over the dry brown clumps of grass along the verges, he experiences the unaccountable sense of loss that hung in the spaces between buildings renowned for their symmetry and Dutch orderliness (VT, 34).

One may observe that the geometrical order seems unnatural to the genius loci of the country and Chofy's own spirit, born and shaped in the Guyanese heartland. As Melville poetically puts it, "[i]t was as if the architects and builders had attempted to subdue that part of the coast with a geometry to which it was not suited".⁴⁹ Hence, Chofy's experience seems an ironic reversal

⁴⁸ Chofy does not understand the division between the work and leisure. The Amerindian lack of regular time intervals between periods of activity and rest quickly changed into a stereotype of their laziness. Evelyn Waugh, for example, is very contemptible of the Amerindian rhythm of the day – that he interprets as their inborn laziness and reluctance to do any work at all (1987 [1934]: 89). Similar observations are made by Roy Heath in his novel *Orealla* (1984) (Heath 1984: 93).

⁴⁹ Pauline Melville writes more about Georgetown. There are passages describing Chofy's wanderings along the streets and having an impression that St. George's Cathedral, the city's landmark, every time leads him in a different direction. Elizabeth DeLoughrey interprets such a toying with space as Melville's conscious dialogues with Western science, especially physics and the order of geometry, namely her departure from Euclidean geometry towards Einstein's unity of space and time (2009: 63). Following the lead of Levi-Strauss, one may also interpret such games in a somewhat Freudian manner. More precisely, Levi-Strauss noticed the cities are developed and organized in a similar way in many cultures, which he read as a manifestation of the human collective subconscious and the effects of nature. He also uses Euclid as his point of reference: "however hostile our

of the generic Western traveller who finds themselves in the middle of the alien, tropical landscape and who, used to man's command over nature, loses his grip on reality (Levi-Strauss 2011 [1955]: 93).⁵⁰

It is not surprising that Georgetown changes Chofy, much as the interior changed Zacharias Stevenson, and that finally Chofy gives in to his long harboured desire of becoming a modern man. In his endeavours he is aided by Rosa Mendelson, a literary researcher investigating Evelyn Waugh's stay in the colony. Rosa seeks contact with the McKinnons, who met the great European writer travelling through Rupununi sometime in 1932. Her sources lead to Chofy, but their encounter does not end with her collecting the notes on Waugh; instead, it changes into a passionate affair that for her and for Chofy is at the same time a controlled experiment in a different way of life. Rosa likes "a degree of orderliness and rationality" (*VT*, 43), but she is willing to try being crazy for a while, and Chofy is euphoric that a real Western woman found him attractive (*VT*, 52). Thus, risking his previous life with Marietta and Bla-Bla, he opens himself fully to the new affair and transforms into a completely new man, who pays attention to his looks, frequents elegant parties, and advocates education and change for the Amerindian community.

Despite their mutual fascination, the reader may not suppress the feeling that Chofy and Rosa's worlds are essentially incompatible and that, sooner or later, their relationship is doomed to failure. Though Chofy tires to ignore their differences, his fellow Amerindians are outwardly expressing their dismay at him bringing a stranger to their world. During one of their excursions into the interior, Chofy introduces Rosa to Tenga, a man approximately his own age, who pities Chofy as a victim of Rosa's temporary fascination with the exotic. He spells out for Chofy all the problems their community is facing because of the foreigners lured by the desire of the authentic exotic experience. "It's like a zoo here. (...) We smile and give them gifts, little pieces of craft and so. (...) We don't show them what grows fastest here – the children's part of the burial ground" (*VT*, 53-54). The foreigner's invasion does not end with tourism, but it involves "big companies [which] come to mine gold or cut timber", and aid agencies, which officially are there to improve the Amerindian lives, but only "come and interfere with us" (*VT*, 54). They do not even exercise control over their own culture, since scholars, like Rosa, "come and worm their way into our communities, studying us and

Euclidean minds may have become to the qualitative conception of space, we cannot prevent the major astronomical and meteorological phenomena conferring almost imperceptible but ineradicable properties on certain areas" (2011 [1955]: 122).

⁵⁰ The similar effect of the Guyanese rural landscapes on the mind and consciousness are elicited by Evelyn Waugh when he describes his own unfortunate adventure of losing his way in the Rupununi savannahs and his miraculous rescue by the local Indians (Waugh 1987 [1934]: 106-129).

grabbing our knowledge for their own benefit" (VT, 54). Thus Chofy becomes the devil's advocate, claiming that "[w]e must get educated" (VT, 54) so as not to stay behind the rest of the country. Without development, he argues, there will be no Amerindian future. Tenga refuses to acknowledge his point and distances himself from Guyana as a political unit: "I'm not Guyanese. I'm Wapisiana" (VT, 54).

Tenga's words are a complex commentary on the place of the Amerindian minority in the Guyanese society. First of all, he alludes to the mechanism known as the tourist gaze, which is a paradoxical situation when the native groups are selling the various versions of their native culture, reshaped to cater for the Westerners' tastes, to the tourists who want to get a real taste of the exotic. The process not only commodifies their priceless native heritage but also makes them dependent on the income from tourism and, indirectly, the global economy. Even if it is the natives who occasionally benefit from such exchanges, in the long run it does not better their economic and social situation. Furthermore, any objections to the tourist industry voiced by the natives are automatically interpreted as irrational and detrimental to economic progress (Urry 2005 [1990]: 9, 52-54). Such words find corroboration in anthropological research; Neil Whitehead (2003: 74), for example, writes that "Guyanese coastlanders such as miners and soldiers, as well as foreigners" have a destructive effect on the native way of life. Tenga claims also that, as a Wapisiana Indian, he does not feel an affinity with coastal Guyana, steered at gaining profits from tourism and natural resources. Another anthropologist, Mary Riley, reports that the Amerindians situate themselves beyond the *one people, one nation, one destiny* motto and they do not accept the Guyanese national identity, feeling that Guyana's progress is being achieved largely at the expense of their own lands (Riley 2003: 142). Indeed, the year Melville published her book nine million hectares of the rain forest, an area the size of Portugal, had been granted by the Guyanese costal authorities to the foreign corporations (Clochester 1997: 1; Riley 2003: 141-159).

The conclusion ensuing from Tenga and Chofy's conversation is a tragic suggestion that the Amerindian world is tangibly threatened with extinction. Indeed, already in 1964 a British traveller, Colin Henfrey, was alarmed that "the Amerindian way of life is dying out" and "no real substitute has been offered"; the Indians are "caught in a vacuum, a semi-citizen of two worlds – one which he no longer respects and another that he barely understands" (1964: 21). In such a dead-end situation, Pauline Melville places herself firmly on Tenga's side and she emphasizes the potentially deadly results of violating the Amerindian Arcadia. In other words, she makes Chofy pay dearly for his infatuation with progress, and his actions lead to the death of his son, Bla-Bla, which is an allegorical punishment for tampering with

nature's ways. More precisely, as a Westerner Rosa is unaware of the Amerindian taboo concerning proper names and she reveals Chofy's full name and its hidden meaning – Chofoye “explosion of rapids or fast-flowing waters” – to one of her colleagues, doctor Wormoral (*VT*, 40). The ‘name-taboo’ is a well known fact among the Indians, the missionaries and the anthropologists, and the reason why the Amerindians usually adopt fake names in their contacts with foreigners. Claude Levi-Strauss reports even how some of the Amerindian children were whispering to his ear the full names of those whom they wanted to play an ill trick on (Levi-Strauss 2011 [1955]: 279).

Once Chofy's name is revealed, the wind – “the harbinger of chaos” (*VT*, 24) – carries it back to Rupununi, where it is used against Bla-Bla, who is playing on the American mining site nearby his house. The two Americans responsible for watching the place, having no idea that the boy speaks English, want to warn him against going in any further and they shout the first Amerindian word that comes to their minds – Chofoye. They are convinced that it means something akin to ‘be careful’, but the boy interprets it as a sign that his father has come back home and he runs straight into the mine, symbolically laying his life at the altar of the Guyanese progress. The boy's death marks the end of Chofy's Georgetown life; Rosa, resigned that their affair would never work, embarks on a plane to Europe. Marietta, in turn, refuses even to consider burying her boy in the city. “We could not leave him to bury here”, she says, “[t]his town has nothing to do with us. We do not belong here. He will come home with us” (*VT*, 346). Bla-Bla's burial takes place at Rupununi at the back of their own house, among the McKinnon family. Sad as the occasion may be, it nevertheless breaks the spell which has lingered upon Rupununi ever since Chofy left home (*VT*, 348). Drought gives place to rain, and death to life, signalling that “life [is] coming back after all [their] problems (...) [f]ertility and growth. Food too. It means hope and coming back to life” (*VT*, 352). At the end, then, it occurs that through Bla-Bla's death there came life to the community and that Chofy is inseparably connected to the savannahs and his happiness is possible only at Rupununi – the last bastion of rural tranquillity and harmony.

The environmental message of this part of Melville's novel is clear enough, and congruent with Terry Gifford's post-pastoral theory, namely the exploitation of the earth is inseparable from the exploitation of native minorities and death is part of the cycle of nature that, paradoxically, brings life. Similar environmental undertones are recognizable when Melville moves her story to the Rupununi of the 1920s in order to depict the very beginnings of modernity in the savannahs and to show the roots of their present liminal positioning in-between the old and the new world. To this end, she uses the history of her own (in)famous ancestor, Alexander Melville, veiled in the novel as Alexander McKinnon, the father of Rupununi's industrialization, who won

a fortune through his beef contracts with the British army (Farage 2003: 110). Melville was a son of the Scottish deacon working on Jamaica who decided to retreat into the Guyanese interior hoping for both a more natural way of life and profitable trade with the local Indians. He started coming to Guyana sometime in the 1880s, and during one of his excursions he was rescued from malarial death by the Wapisiana Indians and decided to stay in one of their villages – where he lived for almost thirty years, married two of the Wapisiana sisters and conceived at least ten half-Amerindian children. “Rupununi’s twentieth-century history is rich in Melvilles”, writes Gimlette, “[t]hey crop up in all the books: Waugh, Attenborough and Durell” (Gimlette 2011: 182-184). In 1969 they even organized a coop and lead their own Wapisiana army to fight for Rupununi independence from the Guyanese coastal government. The rebellion was quenched within three days and it is nowadays jokingly referred to as Melvilles’ one-day republic (Farage 2003: 107-120). Nonetheless, the Melvilles are still treated as the Guyanese aristocracy and they still live in a properly “Melvillian splendour” (Gimlette 2012: 124-131).

It is interesting to note that Pauline Melville uses Alexander McKinnon as a negative example of the Westerners’ invasion of the interior, which brought about irreversible changes to the Amerindian land and society. In the novel, Melville is shown as a typical Westerner, who tries to convince everyone, including himself, that he is living an authentic rural Amerindian life; yet he insists on having newspapers sent to him from the coast, he uses cutlery, the constant washing of which enrages his wives, and he maintains a vivid business exchange with the coast. He also singlehandedly decides to send his children to the Georgetown high-school, despite the scorn of the other members of the community, who see it as an attempt at changing them into “coastlanders” (*VT*, 134). The descriptions of the school-life as experienced by the young McKinnons tangibly exemplify the physical and mental disparity between the coast and Rupununi. To reach the school, the children “travelled with their father for six weeks by bullock cart, on horseback and on river” (*VT*, 137) and when they finally arrived they were “sick in the pit of their stomach” with fear and longing for home (*VT*, 137). The sense of otherness never leaves them and, just like Chofy, they are unsuited for the life in the city. Accustomed to the freedom and carelessness of the savannahs, they can never accept the rigorous discipline methods of their Georgetown convent, just as they cannot comprehend the obligation to wear uniforms and shoes (*VT*, 137).

Furthermore, as half-Amerindians they literally confuse the strict colour-class classification of the coastal society; their association with the European places them at the top of the scale, but with the Indians at the very bottom, and it brings them the scorn and disrespect of the other school children (*VT*, 139). To make matters worse, when they finally go back to

Rupununi, it occurs that now they themselves are the coastlanders. Though the oldest of the boys, Danny, ties to resume his usual duties as a fisherman and hunter, the oldest of the girls, Beatrice, admits that she has “forgotten how to work” (*VT*, 158). Besides, her female friends have moved on with their lives, they have married and have children, and she is a non-belonger, who is not sufficiently educated to lead a successful professional life in Georgetown, but too Westernized to be a proper member of the Amerindian community. Her situation is analogous to that of many of the young Amerindians who, due to their Westernized education became ashamed of their traditional role in the community, but were equally unable to adjust to a fully Westernized life. Hence, they remained in a sort of cultural limbo, which caused generational rifts and the disintegration of the traditional community (Henfrey 1964: 52).

Such socio-cultural alienation of the young McKinnons, brought about by their own father, is being counterbalanced by nature that, just like it did with Stevenson, assigns Beatrice and Danny a special role in its timeless spectacle of death and rebirth. Here manifests itself yet another layer of Melville’s story; not only does she move the readers’ eco-conscience but also she triggers a sublime awe and humility towards nature which, much as in *Heartland*, appears a conscious and living entity (Gifford 1999: 149,174). More precisely, Melville uses the example of the said siblings who are to replay the incestuous relationship of the mythical Nuni and the Moon, and thus enable the eclipse to come and restore balance to the savannahs.⁵¹ Incest, according to the Amerindian mythology, is part of the everlasting cycle of life and it signals the oncoming transformation of nature. The eclipse, in turn, is the moment of such a transformation and it quite literally has two phases; after the initial moment of silence – the symbolic death – there comes a moment of clamour and noise – which signals rebirth (Levi-Strauss 2012 [1955]: 213). In Melville’s description “the forest became as quiet as death. Then bats began to squeak. A night-hawk, that usually remained immobile on a branch all day, took off and flapped overhead (*VT*, 203); hence, Danny and

⁵¹ Claude Levi-Strauss describes one of the versions of his incest myth in *Mythologies*. It tells the story of two brothers living with their sister. One of them falls in love with her and lays with her every night without revealing his true identity. When she gets pregnant, the other brother advises her to smear the face of her lover with genipa juice, which would betray him in daylight. She does as instructed, and when the brother notices that he has been exposed, he runs to the sky with his sister. However, soon they quarrel and he pushes her down to the earth on which she fell like a meteor and turned into a tapir, the animal symbolizing incest. The brother stays in the sky and becomes the moon, into which the other brother shot arrows and makes him bleed. “Women, who wiped themselves with upward movement became more susceptible to the moon’s influence. Moon’s blood was also a source of colours and plumage of the birds” (1967: 312), writes Levi-Strauss.

Beatrice are to become part of this cyclical spectacle, orchestrated by the forces beyond human control.

Melville's novel faithfully mirrors the pattern of the original myth and Danny starts coming to Beatrice at night, not revealing his true name. When she finally discovers whom her lover really is, they escape together, following the path of the mythical Nuni and the Moon, who eloped into the sky. Beatrice and Danny's union is visibly sanctioned by nature, which offers them its bounty: "There was an abundance of food. They lived well on fish, nuts, fruit and game" (VT, 196). It is also nature's pre-defined scenario to lead the lovers towards the harmless resolution of their union that would take place in the eclipse: "All this had already happened. Everything around her [Beatrice] seemed startlingly familiar as if she had done it all before, as if she could anticipate everything that was about to take place" (VT, 197). The actual moment of the eclipse, then, is the resolution of tension accumulated in nature and the fulfilment of Danny and Beatrice's destiny. Its true meaning, however, may be decoded only by those who are open towards the truly transcendental, non-Westernized experience of reality.

One of the people who reads the events in their proper context is Maba, Beatrice's biological mother, who sees Beatrice and Danny's behaviour as the manifestation of nature's power: "The eclipse had both disturbed her and settled something in her mind. (...) what they [Danny and Beatrice] were doing was more understandable in relation of the eclipse" (VT, 208). She also knows that incest "is not the worst thing in the world. It's happened before. It's just fate" (VT, 215). Alexander McKinnon, in turn, regards incest a transgression of the natural order and he is terrified by what he cannot understand or control: "He had felt nausea at the news. In part it was because he felt foolish for not having guessed. But part of the shock came in realizing that he did not know his own boundaries" (VT, 208). The conflict between the spouses exemplifies the clash between the two philosophies of life.

In *To have or to be* (1993), Erich Fromm writes that the predominant attitude to nature in the Western culture is the mode of "having nature". As an example he gives Tennyson's poem "Found", where the poet reacts to the beauty of the flower with a desire to "pluck it" and then he speculates on the flower's possible function as an object of his aesthetic pleasure. For Fromm, Tennyson may be compared to a "Western scientist who seeks the truth by means of dismembering life" (Fromm 1993: 15). Such an attitude to nature is intimately connected to the discourse of knowledge. "The difference between the mode of having and the mode of being (...) is expressed in two formulations", Fromm writes, "'I have knowledge' and 'I know'" (Fromm 1993: 24). 'Having knowledge' is "taking and keeping possession of available knowledge" in the form of information so as to better understand and control

the world. *Knowing*, in turn, does not mean striving for the absolute truth but only the pursuit of its roots, understanding and harmony.⁵²

To translate his dichotomy into the novel, Maba proves to be in the 'being mode' and she does not crave neither physically nor symbolically to tame nature and she accepts the impossibility of learning the absolute truth about nature's ways. McKinnon, in turn, is so deeply engrossed in the idea of having knowledge and having nature that he is ready to destroy his own family in order to possess them. Acting on his selfish wish to subdue the uncontrollable, he, so far priding himself on his libertinism and disregard for religion, employs a Jesuit, Father Napier, to put an end to Beatrice and Danny's relationship. Father Napier is himself a morally ambiguous figure and Melville takes much space to describe his unhealthy interest in the young Indian boys. It is paradoxical, then, that when Napier finally finds the lovers, he is using the notion of sin, understood as the transgression of the natural order, to bend Danny and Beatrice to his will. Ultimately, Napier manages to convince Danny to go back home, implying that he has been led astray by Beatrice who, as a woman, is naturally sinful; Beatrice, afraid to be left alone, has no choice but to follow the two back to the village (VT, 150). As such, Father Napier embodies the symbolic triumph of Christianity, understood here as an ideological tool to control *the other* (Bhabha 2004: 154), over the supposedly immoral nature. In his Western arrogance, just like Alexander Melville, Napier believes that he can "stand between the sun and the moon" (VT, 240).

Despite such hopes, the conclusion of this layer of Melville's story is perfectly consistent with Chofy's experiences and nature once again exercises

⁵² To ridicule the Western way of thinking about nature and natural science even more, Melville places in her novel the actual parody of Claude Levi-Strauss whom she codes under the figure of professor Wormoral. Wormoral is the author of the paper entitled "The structural elements of myth" predicated on Stephen Hawking's assumption that "[w]e live in a universe governed by rational laws" (VT, 81); he believes that he "knows more about the Indians than they know about themselves" (VT, 81) and he arrives in Georgetown to teach the Guyanese about the Amerindian myths. In a brief moment of self-criticism Wromoral says that "[w]e Europeans have access to all the books and documentation that they lack. And what do we do with it? I became a professor and enrich European and American culture with it" (VT, 79). He, then, has knowledge, which is "the new gold" (VT, 80) but for him, just like for Levi-Strauss, a myth is nothing but a story that may be analyzed and explained with the tools of Western science. In *Myth and meaning*, Levi-Strauss wrote that indigenous natural mythology – devised to explain the rules of nature – is in itself a perfect cause-and-effect system. Its infallible logics, however, testify to the "totalitarian ambition of the savage mind" and stand in stark contrast with science, through which one may truly achieve the understanding and "mastery over nature" (Levi-Strauss 1995: 17). Wormoral and Levi-Strauss, then, are the emblems of the Westerners' desire of having nature and having knowledge and such an approach has dominated the West since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Foucault 2006 [1970]: 136-139).

its vengeance on those who were trying to tamper with its ways. This time revenge takes the form of *kanaima*, the spirit of revenge which originates from nowhere and melts into the landscapes of the Amazon. Walter Roth (1913: 354) associated *kanaima* with personified revenge, which could take the form of a human, spirit or an animal. An individual may act under the influence of *kanaima*, not being fully responsible for his or her actions. It may also be transferred by touch or poison and, when the affected individual becomes ill, no ordinary remedy may help. Evelyn Waugh in *92 days* writes that “[a]ll unexplained deaths are attributed to *kenaima*, certain places are to be avoided on account of *kenaima*, strangers may be *kenaimas*, people can set a *kenaima* on you, you are in danger of *kenaima* if you associate with men of another tribe. It is certainly something malevolent and supernatural...” (Waugh 1987 [1934]: 132). In *The ventriloquist’s tale*, it is suggested that *kanaima* takes over Beatrice who wishes to exercise her revenge on Father Napier whom she blames for breaking her union with Danny. However, as the workings of *kanaima* are mysterious, the reader may not be sure if Beatrice actually poisons Father Napier, or if she only intends to do so, but never truly gets her chance. The only verifiable fact is that Beatrice procures poison from the bush witch and that, sometime later, Father Napier goes mad and is exiled from the colony. The interpretation remains ambiguous and one may well assume that nature itself contributed to Napier’s demise, punishing him in the name of Beatrice and the abused Amerindian boys. At least, Maba seems to believe so, and her conclusion is that nature’s vengeance proved “more terrifying than incest” (VT, 266).

Taking such a bleak conclusion into account, one may note that *The ventriloquist’s tale*, despite its undeniable idylization of the Amerindian way of life, is far from the naivety associated with simple pastoralism. By the same token, it is not a mere description of modernity’s invasion into the Guyanese Arcadia, but an environmentally conscious commentary on the destructive effect of progress on the Amerindian world. Melville seems to share the conviction that “what we call globalization” is merely an extension of colonial exploitation, “shaped by Western ideology (beliefs, values and lifestyles) and an economic system that originated in the political-economic relations of colonialism” (Medina 2003: 3). What makes matters worse is that the coastal Guyanese themselves, enchanted by the promises of economic development, contribute to the demise of their most valuable national heritage. Thence, unlike Harris, Melville does not believe in reconciliation between the coastal and Amerindian sensitivities and none of her non-Amerindian protagonists finds Harris-like wholeness with nature. Furthermore, even though Melville’s nature is capable of taking its revenge on particular individuals, it is too weak to defend itself against the systematized industrialization that has been steadily devouring the interior since the beginnings of European colonial

expansion, and continues to do so in postcolonial Guyana. What Melville seems to be saying, then, is that Rupununi's protection against any foreign invasion, both physical and symbolic, may be the only chance for its survival.

As Mark McWatt once said "the landscape in the daily experience of the people, certainly shapes and conditions the response of the imagination – and this would be true of anyone, though only the writer expresses it in the form of literature" (McWatt 2008: 133). By the same token, the peculiarity of the Guyanese fiction derives from the Guyanese authors' own experience of nature. Guyana is defined by the clashes between the vast heartland, which comprises the primeval jungle and the rural savannahs, and the urbanized coast. Resultantly, the Guyanese literary struggles with the wilderness and the pastoral thematise poignant journeys to and from the interior. In so doing, however, they challenge the divergent symbolic legacies imposed on Guyana by the colonial machinery of representations. The trope of wilderness, exemplified here by Edgar Mittelholzer and Fred D'Aguiar, demythologizes Guyana as an *uncivilized* tropical utopia and shows the true, exploitative face of the common enough dreams of *going back to nature* that still hold a tight grip on our imagination. The works by Wilson Harris and Pauline Melville, in turn, are exquisite examples of the original post-pastoral poetics of the Guyanese landscapes. Not only do they convey the tension between rural and urban spaces, but also reverse the colonial conviction of the landscapes' passivity and respond to the deep environmental concerns of today's world. Nevertheless, one may not remain impervious to the fact that the environmental image of Guyana that emerges from the analyzed novels clearly suggest that the exploitation of the heartland is still being justified based on colonial misrepresentations and stereotypes; this process, the Guyanese authors seem to suggest, will not be reversed unless we all, Westerners and non-Westerners, redefine the way we think about our own place in nature. For all these reasons, the claim that any involvement with nature in the Guyanese fiction invariably ensues an engagement with the ethical – the morality of progress, Western anthropocentrism and Amerindian philosophy of Nature – is by no means ungrounded and it further corroborates the choice of eco-criticism as a main reading strategy in Chapter four.

Conclusion

One of the protagonists of Mark McWatt's story entitled "The celebration", which alludes to festivities around Independence (1966), utters the following words to his fellow Guyanese: "you've had your fun, asserted or celebrated your independence and realized, I hope, that, whether you're in a gang of eleven or a country of seven hundred thousand, there is no such thing as absolute independence" (McWatt 2005a: 237). Indeed, the failure of nationalist projects in the Caribbean confirms that absolute independence is an illusion but, as the complicated history of the region proves, absolute dependence, whether cloaked under the banner of colonial, Western or pan-Caribbean discourse, is by no means a perfect alternative. One of the people who were well aware of this fact was Edouard Glissant, who hoped that giving every Caribbean nation a chance to define its original sense of collective identity, while celebrating their common Caribbean or even postcolonial heritage, is a possible way out from the polarity of Sameness and Difference. He professed that, "Western literatures (...) will become again a part of the world, symbolic of many nations – that is, a cluster of narratives" (1999: 102) and nowadays his words prove right as the demise of colonial domination in politics, history and literature, followed by the brief eruption of nationalist ideology, has ultimately brought the rebirth of varied postcolonial national literatures. The Guyanese fiction is beyond doubt one of such original discourses which celebrates its Difference, while being well aware of its place within a broader scheme of the Caribbean, postcolonial or global(ized) world.

The present monograph strove to prove that the Guyanese literature, though indisputably part of a broadly defined Anglo-Caribbean canon, may be, and should be, successfully studied within its national context. Such a national viewpoint is even outwardly suggested by the Guyanese authors, who set their novels in the specifically Guyanese framework of cultural and historical associations, as well as tackle the specifically Guyanese social and economic problems. Such a turn towards national diversification, already noticed by some of the Caribbean critics (Harney 2006: 18; Puri 2004: 7), testifies to the fact that it is no longer justifiable to sustain the Caribbean unity of experiences and literary poetics as an *a priori* assumption in the Caribbean criticism. Based on the tendencies operating in the Guyanese fiction, one may argue also that pan-national diasporic perspectives should

not obscure particular national conditionings. Especially the second wave of the Guyanese authors, even if treating about specific ethnic experiences, nevertheless visibly direct their stories at the Guyanese of all ethnic persuasions. It is observable especially in the historical novels, which struggle to provide meaningful, informative, and at points even moralist in tone, images of the Guyanese pasts, and which call for stepping beyond one's ethno-history and acknowledging the poignancy of the Guyanese national experience. The national perspective is obvious in the novels predicated on the Guyanese self-discovery, but even the novels of nature, much as they are universal and philosophical, are also steered at sparking the sense of environmental responsibility among the Guyanese themselves. Nevertheless, such a calling for a centralized national focus in the Caribbean studies does not preclude its potential for comparative, pan-Caribbean or even broad postcolonial readings. It only makes such studies more challenging on the critics' part as one is obliged to account for the singularities of the particular Caribbean national conditionings.

In addition to such general observations, the presented literary investigations provide one with an insight into the evolution of the Guyanese fiction sketched across the changing socio-political background of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. The Guyanese dialogues with the colonial history, national identity and nature place the Guyanese fiction at the forefront of the contemporary postcolonial and philosophical debates that force one to open up the Caribbean literary criticism to some new research perspectives and, at points, to step *beyond* postcolonial studies. The Guyanese historical novel is a good example of the said evolutions on the level of the form and the mode of the Guyanese history's representations. Against the prevalent assumptions of the historical novel's incompatibility with the Caribbean historical experience, the genre has been present in the Guyanese fiction since the first half of the twentieth century and it returned in the nineties to claim its place in the body of the Guyanese writings. The Guyanese authors do not shun from depicting the difficult colonial history and engaging themselves in the dialogues with the realist colonial historiography. Especially the second wave writers, to use the words of Onyekachi Wambu, seem ready to "separate reality from myth" (Wambu 1998: 28) and face the colonial past more openly than ever before.

At this point it is useful to remind oneself of the question asked in *Writing postcolonial history* (2010) by Rochona Majumdar if globalization leads to flattening our historical differences or polarizing them; Majumdar's conclusion is that the two drives, towards singularity and universality, are not mutually exclusive and globalization forces one to search for "a deep sense of locality within the global space" (Majumdar 2010: 11). As if to confirm her thesis, the recent Guyanese historical novel tries to reconcile such seemingly

paradoxical phenomena as: locality with universality, realism with allegory, and ethnic differences with national histories. Such tendencies are congruent with the critical voices calling for a more direct confrontation with the colonial historiography (Cooper 2005: 401), for a discussion on allegorical realism (Dalley 2014) and for seeking historical singularity in the global(ized) history. One may even risk a statement that it is in a sense a fulfillment of what Dipesh Chakrabarty prophesied some time ago in *Provincializing Europe*, namely redefining the heritage of European modernity, stepping beyond the Euro-centric discourse of the universal historical changes based on capitalism, with the simultaneous acceptance that the European legacy will forever remain part of the postcolonial history (Chakrabarty 2001: 9). Despite such interesting changes, the Guyanese and the Caribbean historical novel is a rather neglected field, but for the inquiries into the memory and historical trauma of African slavery. Therefore, it stands out as a potentially fruitful area for future critical investigations, which would inscribe themselves into the voluminous chapters on the complicated Caribbean dialogues with the colonial history and historiography.

The Guyanese struggles with national identity are in a sense a continuation of their dialogues with history, but mingled with a debate on diasporic loyalties, cultural hybridity and nationalism. The Guyanese novel provides one with an insight into the political and identitarian changes that took place in Guyana across the forties and fifties of the twentieth century and which, ultimately, led to the birth of the independent nation-state. The process was by no means easy, and it forced the Guyanese to abandon their imaginary homelands and hopes for an ethnic universalism stretching across the national borders. Nowadays, one may notice that, against the prevalent belief in the post-national character of the Caribbean, the nation remains a powerful provider of collective identity. Nevertheless, the hybrid idea of national belonging developed by the generation raised in pre-independence Guyana, the aim of which was to provide an unambiguous answer to the question *who am I* in the world, seems insufficiently responsive to the challenges of the new era. Thus, among the second generation of the Guyanese writers, one may note the tendency towards *hybridization*, transculturalism and transnationalism (Khair 2001: 90; Kempadoo 2013a), all of which, unlike post-nationalism, do not deny the existence of cultural differences, nation-states and national identity; they nevertheless place the Caribbean in a fluid relation to the various cultural elements that are operative within the Caribbean and globalized world. Most significantly, they are directed at one's reconciliation with the ambiguity of belonging while providing one with the sense of rootedness and wholeness in the inherently liquid world, without the risk of being fixed in ethno-national discourses. Such a tendency, born from an unimaginably complex history of the Guyanese nation-building, seems a

positive, and hopefully lasting, force that may help counterbalance the regressive movement towards nationalist ideology recently observable across the world.

Last but not least, nature resurfaces as probably the most intellectually challenging field of critical investigations presented in the monograph. With its undying investment in dismantling the pre-defined cultural assumptions about Guyana, its pristine wilderness and rural Arcadias, it is also the most progressive of all the three thematic fields. The Guyanese literature invariably links the particularly Guyanese context of environmental justice with the universal ecological problems of today's world. Furthermore, any involvement with nature in the Guyanese context brings to the forefront its pre-Columbian history, Amerindian natural mythology and the European cosmological order based on the Western anthropocentric philosophy, and the dichotomous relationship between nature (bestiality) and culture (civilization). Also, within the Guyanese fiction of nature one may observe a certain evolution from the contemplative rhetoric of nature, associated by Lawrence Buell with the first wave of the environmental writings (2005: 9) and exemplified by Mittelholzer or Harris, to the more activist environmental discussions of today. In other words, the younger Guyanese authors openly call for the national responsibility for their (home)land, of its natural resources, and they try to delineate the place Guyana should (not) occupy in the global economic schemes. All these efforts, in turn, push the Guyanese fiction to the forefront of the recent postcolonial, posthumanist and eco-critical debates. Thus, the Guyanese literature has the potential, and aspirations, to become one of the major areas of eco-critical investigations if the eco-critical theorists, so far focused predominantly on the Northern American landscapes, will recognize it more broadly and restore it to its rightful (eco)global place.

Therefore, the critical ventures into the Guyanese fiction are both local and global in scope and they may be a fruitful starting point for the many further critical and comparative readings, provided one takes account of the specificity of the Guyanese conditioning. Hopefully, the future critics of the Guyanese fiction would avoid the usual focus on the marvellous realism and pan-Caribbean discourse, which have so far informed the critical readings of the Guyanese fiction, and they will seek the new and original interpretative approaches outside the well-trodden paths. As Alison Donnell said, the primary challenge of the contemporary Caribbean studies is the overcoming the domination of the first wave Caribbean authors, in Guyana represented by the prevalent focus on Wilson Harris, and opening the canon towards the new voices and new critical perspectives (2006: 6). In a yet broader perspective, Neil Lazarus (2011: 22) advocates that the postcolonial studies themselves should break the domination of the so called critics' favourites, for example Salman Rushdie, and reincorporating the less known Guyanese novels into the

mainstream postcolonial criticism could be a beginning of such new openings. After all, postcolonial studies should remain a heterogeneous field where all-too-easy assumptions and critical perspectives are, and forever will be, continuously questioned. It is all too often forgotten nowadays that the role of literature, and broadly the humanities, is not to render ultimate unambiguous meanings, develop universally applicable theories or to split the atom as Hannah Arendt once said (1958: 590). Instead its strength and power lies in its constant mutability and its undying potential to gain new meanings in the eyes of the critics, the writers and the readers – a process in which the Guyanese fiction may still have its role to play.

(R)ewolucja postrzegania historii, tożsamości narodowej i natury we współczesnej powieści anglo-gujańskiej.

Streszczenie

Od początku dwudziestego pierwszego wieku, zarówno wśród pisarzy jak i krytyków literatury karaibskiej można zauważyć rosnące zainteresowanie tematyką narodową. Nie oznacza to bynajmniej powrotu do dyskursu nacjonalistycznego, a jedynie sygnalizuje odwrót od tezy o istnieniu spójnej karaibskiej tożsamości i karaibskiej poetyki literackiej, forsowanej przez krytyków od lat pięćdziesiątych ubiegłego wieku. Mimo oczywistych podobieństw między krajami regionu wynikających z historycznych i społeczno-kulturowych usytuowań, obecnie coraz śmielej podkreśla się różnice między ich poszczególnymi narodowymi doświadczeniami. Republika Gujany jest ze wszech miar wyjątkowym miejscem na mapie literatur karaibskich i postkolonialnych. Mimo tego, że kulturowo i politycznie uznawana jest za część anglojęzycznych Karaibów, położona jest w Ameryce Południowej. Co więcej, oficjalnie częścią Imperium Brytyjskiego została dopiero w roku 1831, wcześniej przez wiele lat znajdując się pod panowaniem holenderskim, co znacząco wpłynęło na kształtowanie się gujańskiej tożsamości. Gujana jest także jedynym anglokaraibskim krajem gdzie do dziś mieszka znacząca populacja amerindiańska, której obecność nie pozwala Gujańczykom zapomnieć o dziedzictwie przedkolumbijskiej cywilizacji. Obok Trynidadu i Tobago jest ona również najbardziej etnicznie podzielonym krajem regionu, gdzie potomkowie afrykańskich niewolników i hinduskich pracowników kontraktowych przez długi czas walczyli o wyłączne prawo do rządzenia krajem. Jednakowoż w wyobraźni Brytyjczyków Gujana zawsze była częścią świata angielskiego, a przekonanie to wynikało z pamięci o angielskim podróżniku, Sir Walterze Rayleighu, który wyprawiał się do Gujany w poszukiwaniu mitycznego El Dorado i pozostawił po sobie słynne wspomnienia zatytułowane *Odkrycie bogatego, pięknego i niezmiernego imperium Gujany wraz z opisem wielkiego i złotego miasta Manoa, które Hiszpanie zwą Eldorado* (1596).

Jeśli wziąć pod uwagę wspomniane czynniki, jak i wiele innych aspektów wyróżniających Gujanę na tle innych karaibskich państw, okazuje się być ona fascynującym i nadal nie do końca odkrytym terenem dla badań literackich i kulturowych. Niniejsza rozprawa doktorska jest więc w całości poświęcona

powieści gujańskiej i oscyluje wokół trzech głównych obszarów zainteresowań postkolonialnych pisarzy gujańskich: historii, tożsamości narodowej i natury. Przedmiotem rozważań i analiz są zarówno powieści autorów, których osobowość kształtowała się w Gujanie przed uzyskaniem przez nią politycznej niezależności (1966), jak i twórców wychowanych w niepodległym, choć targanym niepokojami etnicznymi, kraju. Dla możliwie szerokiego zaprezentowania tematu każdy rozdział przeciwstawia sobie dzieła tak zwanego pierwszego i drugiego pokolenia twórców, traktując ich twórczość jako odbicie społeczno-kulturowych zmian, które zaszły w Gujanie od momentu uzyskania niepodległości. Tak przyjęta perspektywa badawcza pozwala ukazać literaturę gujańską jako osobny i oryginalny dyskurs literacki, który zasługuje na odrębne miejsce w ramach szeroko pojętego kanonu literatury anglokaraibskiej.

Dysertacja składa się ze wstępu, rozdziału teoretycznego, trzech rozdziałów analitycznych i konkluzji. Jej podstawowe cele to: ukazanie oryginalnej poetyki, nowych dróg interpretacji gujańskiej fikcji oraz prześledzenie zmian w gujańskim postrzeganiu historii, tożsamości narodowej i natury na przestrzeni ostatnich sześćdziesięciu lat. Rozdział pierwszy przedstawia i uzasadnia wybór metodologii i wprowadza Czytelnika w zawilości studiów nad literaturą karaibską, kładąc nacisk na dyskurs historii, tożsamości narodowej i natury w kontekście karaibskim i gujańskim. Obrana metodologia wpisuje się w nurt studiów postkolonialnych, choć nie zamyka się w ich ramach, sięgając miejscami poza utarte ścieżki i wytyczone drogi interpretacyjne, włączając do dyskusji między innymi teorie ekokrytyczne. Rozdział drugi podejmuje problematykę powieści historycznej i wyodrębnia jej dwa główne rodzaje: opowieści o plantacji (*plantation narratives*) i opowieści o niewolnictwie (*neo-slave narratives*). Pokazuje on drogę od pierwszych nieśmiałych i incydentalnych prób pisania powieści historycznych, podejmowanych przez pierwsze pokolenie twórców, do pełnego zaangażowania w narodową i kolonialną historię, która wymusiła przededefiniowanie roli i formy powieści historycznej. Rozdział trzeci skupia się na ewolucji pojęcia tożsamości narodowej, które w Gujanie narodziło się w latach pięćdziesiątych dwudziestego wieku. Przedmiotem badań są tu cztery opowieści o życiu (*life narratives*) autorstwa dwóch pisarzy i dwóch pisarek gujańskich. Ich tematem przewodnim jest kształtowanie się tożsamości jednostki i tożsamości narodowej przed uzyskaniem politycznej niepodległości i po jej uzyskaniu. Zapisane w nich zmagania z tożsamością narodową pozwalają prześledzić proces tworzenia się narodu z pozornie niepołączalnych grup etnicznych i religijnych, siłą wpisanych w granice jednego państwa kolonialnego. Rozdział czwarty obiera za punkt wyjścia dyskurs natury, który w Gujanie niezmiennie wymusza dialog z kolonialną historią, mitem postępu i supremacji kultury nad naturą. Analizowane powieści, oparte zarówno na motywie dzikości (*wilderness*), jak i sielanki (*pastoral*), wyraźnie pokazują, że w Gujanie estetyka natury jest nierozzerwalnie związana z etyką środowiskową (*environmental ethics*).

Wnioski wynikające z przeprowadzonych badań dotyczą zarówno miejsca gujańskiej literatury w karaibskim kanonie, jak i ewolucji poszczególnych motywów i tematów podejmowanych przez gujańskich twórców. Po pierwsze, studia nad literaturą gujańską w jej narodowym kontekście wydają się nie tylko możliwe, ale wręcz sugerowane przez poszczególnych pisarzy, którzy w sposób jasny, momentami wręcz moralizujący, podejmują tematykę narodową i angażują się w narodowe debaty nad historią, tożsamością oraz odpowiedzialnością za narodowe dziedzictwo Gujany – naturę. Po drugie, ich zaangażowanie w sprawy narodowe nie ujmuje ich utworom wartości uniwersalnej, jako że problemy, z którymi zmagają się współcześni Gujańczycy – negocjowanie historii etnicznych i narodowych, masowe migracje, globalizacja, degradacja środowiska naturalnego – w większym lub mniejszym stopniu dotyczą każdego z nas. Po trzecie, powieść gujańska okazuje się być dynamicznie rozwijającym się dyskursem literackim, który łączy wpływy europejskie i karaibskie z dziedzictwem poszczególnych grup etnicznych, powodując, że literatura ta jest nie tylko ciągłym wyzwaniem dla krytyka, lecz także niegasnącym źródłem inspiracji dla czytelnika.

Wyżej wspomniany rozwój i kulturowy eklektyzm powieści gujańskiej można zaobserwować w ramach ewolucji jej poszczególnych obszarów tematycznych: historii, tożsamości narodowej i natury. W powieści historycznej, po pierwszych nieudanych próbach stworzenia mitu założycielskiego i czasowym odwołaniu od wątków narodowych w stronę historii diaspory, można zauważyć jak młodsze pokolenie pisarzy stara się łączyć wątki narodowe z etnicznymi i uniwersalnymi, by stworzyć taką wizję narodowej historii, która łączy Gujańczyków ponad pochodzeniem i klasą. Co ciekawe, ewolucja tematyki pokrywa się z ewolucją formy narracyjnej. Najnowsza powieść historyczna łączy zaangażowanie w realistyczne przedstawienie historii z alegorycznym poczuciem *bycia w historii*, tworząc oryginalne i intrygujące powieści *alegoryczno-realistyczne*, które przedstawiają historię, ale nie pozwalają zamknąć się w sztywnych entohistorycznych czy nacjonalistycznych ramach. Powieść historyczna jest więc gujańskim sposobem wyleczenia się z traumy kolonialnych i postkolonialnych podziałów oraz pozwala mieć nadzieję na przyszłość opartą na dialogu i wzajemnym zrozumieniu Gujańczyków, których wspólna przeszłość może łączyć, a nie dzielić.

Dyskusje nad tożsamością narodową są niejako przedłużeniem debaty nad historią i zapisem intymnych poszukiwań siebie (*self*) pomiędzy (nie)przynależnością etniczną, religijną i kulturową. W dziełach pisanych piórem pierwszego gujańskiego pokolenia tożsamość narodowa jawi się jako wartość sama w sobie, która pozwala jasno odpowiedzieć na pytanie: „Kim jestem we współczesnym świecie?”. Powieści pisane przez młodszych twórców sygnalizują ważną zmianę dyskursu narodowościowego ku hybrydyzacji (*hybridization*), transnacionalizmowi (*transnationalism*) i transkulturowości (*transculturalism*). Jednak wbrew sugestiom wielu krytyków, że

kulturowa hybrydyzacja oraz postępująca globalizacja przyczyniają się do upadku koncepcji narodu i tożsamości narodowej, młodzi gujańscy pisarze poszukują sposobów na połączenie dziedzictwa postkolonialnego, etnicznego oraz religijnego z tożsamością narodową, nie zaprzeczając istnieniu żadnego z tych czynników. Taki ruch w stronę płynnej przynależności, która jednak daje człowiekowi poczucie zakorzenienia w czasie i przestrzeni, może okazać się alternatywą dla coraz bardziej widocznej regresji w stronę radykalnych dyskursów przynależnościowych, czy wręcz nacjonalistycznych.

Ostatnim analizowanym obszarem jest dyskurs natury, który łączy w sobie elementy historyczne, tożsamościowe i ekologiczne. Gujańska literatura podejmuje tematy wyznaczone przez kolonialne sposoby przedstawiania Nowego Świata jako dzikiej, tropikalnej utopii i egzotycznej Arkadii. Błędem jednak byłoby sądzić, że powtarza jedynie kolonialne wzorce, gdyż w rzeczywistości radykalnie zmienia ich wymowę z usprawiedliwienia kolonizacji w stronę sprzeciwu wobec kapitalizmu, globalizacji i eksploatacji gujańskiego interioru. Co więcej, dyskurs natury wymusza niejako zaangażowanie etyczne i moralne ze strony twórców i czytelników. Wplatając w swe powieści elementy amerindiańskiej kultury, wrażliwości i mitologii, pisarze gujańscy zmuszają czytelnika do przewartościowania swojego spojrzenia na naturę, kulturę czy nawet transcendentalną kategorię człowieka, który w myśl zachodniej filozofii nadal pozostaje w centrum wszechświata. Najtrafniejszym więc narzędziem interpretacyjnym w tym obszarze okazała się ekokrytyka, a w szczególności teorie posthumanistyczne i post-pastoralne, które łączą w sobie dorobek krytyki literackiej, filozoficznej i studiów środowiskowych (*environmental studies*). Pozwalają one również zauważyć, jak stopniowo, wraz z intensyfikacją rozwoju ekonomicznego kraju, gujańska powieść natury przechodziła od kontemplacji dzikich i arkadyjskich przestrzeni do radykalnego dyskursu proekologicznego. Obraz kraju, jaki wyłania się z analizowanych powieści, sugeruje, że jeśli nie wpłyną one na zmianę sposobu myślenia o Gujanie, zarówno wśród zachodnich korporacji, turystów, naukowców, jak i nawet samych Gujańczyków mieszkających wzdłuż zurbanizowanego wybrzeża, tropikalne utopia i egzotyczne Arkadie pozostaną jedynie literacką fantazją.

Niniejsza rozprawa przybliży więc Czytelnikowi zawiloci gujańskiej literatury, pokazuje ewolucję gujańskiej powieści oraz wskazuje nowe możliwości czytania gujańskich tekstów, które pozwalają zrozumieć specyficzny kontekst, w którym zostały stworzone, jak również otwierają drogę do szerokich postkolonialnych i ekokrytycznych studiów komparatystycznych. Dlatego też gujańska powieść może być intrygującym przedmiotem badań nie tylko dla osób zainteresowanych literaturami karaibskimi. Powieść ta może być również punktem wyjścia dla wielu kolejnych projektów mających na celu wypracowanie nowego spojrzenia na najbardziej palące problemy współczesnego świata, które wciąż odsyłają nas do fundamentalnych i nieodłącznych elementów, wobec których kształtujemy swą tożsamość: historii, narodu i natury.

(R)evolution in the perception of history, national identity and nature in the contemporary Anglo-Guyanese novel

Summary

From the beginning of the twentieth century, among the Caribbean writers as well as the critics of Caribbean literature, one may observe a growing interest in Caribbean national themes. By no means does it imply a return towards nationalist ideology, but merely it signals a departure from the assumption that there exists a single Caribbean identity and Caribbean literary poetics – a thesis favoured by the critics since the fifties of the last century. Despite the obvious similarities between the particular Caribbean countries resultant from their common historical and socio-cultural conditionings, nowadays their ethnic and national particularities are more openly highlighted. Indisputably, Guyana occupies a special place on the map of the Caribbean and postcolonial literatures. Even though it is considered part of the Anglo-Caribbean region, geographically it belongs to South America. Moreover, Guyana was ruled by the Dutch from the end of the sixteenth century until 1831, when it officially became part of the British Empire, and such a mixed political heritage exerted a great influence on the formation of the Guyanese identity. Guyana is also the only Anglo-Caribbean country where one may still meet a significant Amerindian population, whose presence does not allow the Guyanese to simply forget about their pre-Columbian past. Beside Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana is also the most ethnically divided country of the region, where the descendants of the African slaves and Hindu indenture workers have been struggling for the exclusive right to rule the nation-state. In the cultural consciousness of the British, however, Guyana has always been part of the English-speaking world; such a belief deriving from their vivid memory of the English traveller Sir Walter Raleigh, who in Guyana sought the mythical El Dorado and left behind his famous travelogue entitled *The discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful empire of Guiana with a relation of the great and golden city of Manoa that the Spanish call El Dorado* (1596).

In consideration of all the factors mentioned above, as well as many other features differentiating Guyana from among the other Caribbean countries, Guyana proves to be a fascinating and still largely unexplored field for literary and

cultural studies. The present monograph, then, is exclusively devoted to the Guyanese novel, and it oscillates around the three main areas of the postcolonial Guyanese writers' interests: history, national identity and nature. The subjects of the following literary analyses are novels written by the authors whose formative years fell upon the times preceding the political independence (1966) and those raised in the already independent country, though still torn by ethnic unrests. For the sake of the extensive presentation of the topic, each chapter juxtaposes selected novels by the aforementioned first generation with the second generation writers, and their works are treated here as providing a reflection of the socio-cultural changes that have taken place in Guyana since it gained political independence. Such a wide scope allows one to show the Guyanese literature as a singular and original literary discourse, which deserves a separate place within the body of the broadly defined Anglo-Caribbean canon.

The monograph comprises the introduction, one theoretical chapter, three analytical chapters and the conclusion. The major aims of the monograph are to show the original poetics and some new interpretative routes of the Guyanese fiction as well as to trace the changes in the Guyanese perception of history, national identity and nature that have taken place across the last sixty years. Chapter one discusses the methodological framework of the monograph and introduces the reader to the intricacies of the studies on the Caribbean and Guyanese novel, placing special emphasis on the discourse of history, national identity and nature. The chosen methodology may be described as part of the postcolonial studies, though at points it will reach beyond the well-trodden critical paths or even postcolonial theories with, for example, the inclusion of the eco-critical theories. The analytical part of the monograph opens with Chapter two which focuses on the historical novel and its two main subgenres operative in the Guyanese literature: plantation narratives and neo-slave narratives. The analysis here traces the change from the incidental attempts at writing realist historical novels to the full engagement with the national and colonial history, which necessitated a redefinition of the role and form of the historical novel. Chapter three centers on the evolution of a national identity, the notion of which in Guyana has been formed in the fifties of the twentieth century. The analysis centers on four life narratives, written by two male and two female Guyanese writers. The main theme of all the novels is the shaping of their national identity before and after the country's independence. The struggles with national (non)belonging captured within their realms allows one to observe how the Guyanese nation emerged from the seemingly irreconcilable ethnic and religious elements forcefully inscribed into the borders of a single colonial state. Chapter four deals with the discourse of Nature, which in Guyana entails dialogues with the colonial history, the myth of progress and the supremacy of culture over nature. The presented novels are based on the trope

of the wilderness and the pastoral, and they visibly show that in Guyana any engagement with the aesthetics of Nature is inseparably connected to the environmental ethics.

The conclusions ensuing from the conducted research apply to both the place of the Guyanese fiction within the Anglo-Caribbean canon as well as the evolution of the particular motifs and themes in the Guyanese novel. Firstly, the studies on the Guyanese literature in its national context are not only possible but suggested by particular writers who clearly, at times even in a tellingly moralist tone, take up the national themes and engage themselves in national debates on history, identity and their common responsibility for the Guyanese national heritage – Nature. Secondly, their involvement in their national themes does not diminish the universal value of their works as the problems faced by the contemporary Guyanese – negotiating ethnic and national histories, mass migrations, degradation of the natural environment – to a greater or lesser degree apply to us all. Thirdly, the Guyanese novel proves to be a dynamically developing literary discourse, which merges the typically European and Caribbean cultural elements with the legacy of particular ethnic groups, changing the Guyanese literature into a constant challenge for the critics, but also an endless source of inspiration for readers.

The aforementioned development and complex cultural background of the Guyanese novel may be best observed through the evolution of its particular thematic fields: history, national identity and nature. Within the historical novel, after the first unsuccessful attempts at coining the national history, and then a temporary departure from national to diasporic histories, the younger generation of the Guyanese writers tries to link the national, ethnic and universal threads so as to create such a vision of the history that would link all the Guyanese beyond their ethnic provenances or class. Moreover, the evolution of the theme overlaps with the evolution of the narrative form. The newest historical novel fuses the engagement in the realistic depiction of history with an allegorical sense of being in history, creating original and intriguing allegorical realist novels, which represent history, but do not let it congeal into rigid ethnic or nationalist histories. The historical novel, then, is a Guyanese way of healing the colonial traumas and postcolonial divisions and it allows one to hope for a future built on dialogue and mutual understanding, where the Guyanese are linked, and not divided, by their common past.

The debates on national identity are somehow a natural extension of the discussions on history. The novels presented in Chapter three are literary records of the intimate process of a searching for oneself between ethnic, religious and cultural (non)belonging. In the works written by the first generation authors, national identity manifests itself as a value per se, which enables one to clearly answer the question “Who am I in the contemporary

world?”. The novels written by the younger writers signal a significant change towards the hybridization, transnationalism and transculturalism. Nevertheless, against suggestions that cultural hybridity and progressive globalization invalidate national belonging, the second generation authors seek ways of fusing their postcolonial, ethnic, religious and postcolonial heritage with the notion of national identity, not precluding the existence of any of these sentiments. Such a turn towards a more fluid identity, which nevertheless provides one with a sense of rootedness in time and space, may prove a positive alternative to the currently worldwide regressive movement towards radical nationalist discourses.

The last analysed area was the discourse of Nature, which combines the historical, identitarian and ecological elements. The Guyanese literature takes up the tropes determined by the colonial representations of the New World – the wild tropical utopia and the exotic Arcadia – but it by no means repeats the colonial patters, rather redefining their dictum from the justification of colonisation towards a profound criticism of capitalism, globalization and exploitation of the natural environment. Moreover, the discourse of nature necessitates an ethical and moral engagement on the part of the writers and the readers. Interweaving into their novels the elements of the Amerindian culture, sensitivity and mythology, the Guyanese writers force the reader to reevaluate one’s perception of nature, culture or even the transcendent category of the human being, who according to the Western philosophy still remains at the centre of the Universe. For all these reasons, eco-criticism, and especially its posthumanist and postpastoral veins, have proved the most accurate interpretative tools to capture the essence of such debates. It has also allowed one to observe how gradually, with the intensification of the economic development of the country, the Guyanese novel progressed from the contemplation of its wild and Arcadian spaces to a far more radical pro-ecological discourse. The vision of the country that emerges from the analysed novels suggests that, unless they truly change the way the Western corporations, tourists, scientists, or even the Guyanese who live along the urbanized coast, think about the interior, the tropical utopias and exotic Arcadias may indeed remain only in our literary fantasy.

As one may thus observe, the present monograph acquaints the reader with the intricacies of the Guyanese literature, it exemplifies the evolution of the Guyanese novel and sketches new ways of reading the Guyanese texts, which allow one to grasp the specificity of the Guyanese conditioning while opening a way towards broad postcolonial and eco-critical comparative studies. Therefore, the Guyanese novel may be an intriguing research subject not only for the people interested in the Caribbean literatures but also for those who are willing to form a new perspective on the most dire problems of the contemporary world, which keeps sending us hurtling back towards the indispensable elements shaping our identity – those of history, nation and nature.

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