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## Postcolonial Identity in Poetry of Dionne Brand

(Master Thesis)

**Lenka Lisková**

(Anglická Filológia)

Supervisor: Mgr. Jiří Flajšar, Ph.D.

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**Postcolonial Identity in Poetry of Dionne Brand**

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Autor: **Lenka Lisková**

Študijný odbor: **Anglická filológia**

Vedúci práce: **Mgr. Jiří Flajšar, Ph.D.**

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Lenka Lisková

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Lenka Lisková

## **ABSTRACT**

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the postcolonial identity in poetry of the contemporary Canadian-Caribbean author Dionne Brand. The thesis tries to define what it means to be the black lesbian woman of immigrant origin in the world of Canadian modernity and masculinity. Through the analysis of the selected poetry collections, the thesis points out that the author is disappointed not only with the Canadian latent aversion to the alternative lifestyles and diversity, but above all the author is disappointed with the willingness of the black lesbian female to reject the own unique identity in order to become the acceptable citizen of the standardized society.

The first chapter comprises of the theoretical background to this topic, providing the basic information about life, work, experience, language and radical policy of Dionne Brand. The second chapter further characterizes the concept of radical policy where the contemporary postcolonial era, under the influence of author's nonlinear perception of time, experiences and continues in the colonial tradition of the unequal relationships and thus becomes the era of the new slavery and second colonization. The third chapter provides the analysis of three poetry collections: *No Language Is Neutral*, *Land to Light On* and *Ossuaries*. The goal of this particular analysis is to capture the author's progress in perception of the black lesbian identity and its possibilities in the course of three decades from nineteen eighties up to the new millennium on Canadian land.

**Key words:** Dionne Brand, postcolonial world, lesbian identity, the black heritage, the own language, female body.

## ANOTÁCIA

Táto práca sa zaoberá analýzou postkoloniálnej identity v poézii Karibsko-Kanadskej autorky Dionne Brandtovej. Snaží sa definovať čo znamená byť lesbičkou čiernej pleti a imigrantským pôvodom vo svete ovládanom modernou a maskulinitou. Analýzou vybraných zbierok sa konštatuje, že autorka je sklamaná nielen Kanadskou skrytou averziou voči rôznorodosti životných štýlov a odlišnosti, ale predovšetkým je sklamaná ochotou čiernej lesbickej ženy odmietnuť vlastnú jedinečnosť len aby splynula so štandardami spoločnosti.

Prvá kapitola práce tvorí stručný úvod do danej problematiky, mapuje život, tvorbu, skúsenosti, jazyk a vyhradené názory Dionne Brandtovej. Druhá kapitola hlbšie charakterizuje obsah autorkiných vyhradených názorov, kde súčasná postkoloniálna doba je vnímaná, pod vplyvom autorkinej predstavy ne-lineárnosti času, ako doba moderného otroctva a druhej kolonizácie. Tretia kapitola sa venuje analýze troch zbierok poézie: *No Language Is Neutral*, *Land to Light On* a *Ossuaries*. Hlavnou úlohou tejto analýzy je zachytiť vývoj v autorkinom chápaní lesbickej identity a jej možností v priebehu troch desaťročí, od osemdesiatych rokov dvadsiateho storočia až po obdobie nového milénia na území Kanady.

**Kľúčové slová:** Dionne Brandtová, postkolonializmus, lesbická identita, černošské dedičstvo, vlastný jazyk, ženské telo.

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## INTRODUCTION

The era of rapid postcolonial world, the recent social phobias, sense of disillusion, sexism, discrimination, racism and injustice, the present armed conflicts, invasions and freedom fights are the conditions that lead the Caribbean-Canadian author Dionne Brand to the conclusion that the human being without the true identity easily becomes the rag puppet in the hands of the huge machinery known as the modern world, the world that is politically and economically dominated by white man, the world that is ruled by rude managers and the world that forgets what it means to be the human. Dionne Brand as the black, lesbian immigrant believes that her possibilities in such world are considerably limited. However, her Caribbean experience together with her Canadian passport allows her to see what tries and wants to be hidden. This author sees that time is nonlinear and the modern society forgetful and therefore pervasive forces that once created the system of slavery are returning back in the form of industrial exploitation that changes the human being into the standardized identities of the capitalistic requirements. To prove that this outlook is not the mere political populism, Dionne Brand openly incorporates her innermost experience of being black lesbian immigrant on Canadian land to her whole literary, social, film as well as documentary production. The aim of this thesis is to concentrate on Brand's poetry production, more accurately on three poetry collections: *No Language Is Neutral*, *Land to Light On* and *Ossuaries*. The centre of my attention becomes the identity search when the author tries to break the silence and to give the voice to those who are often and intentionally left voiceless.

The first chapter outlines the life, production and the whole thinking of Dionne Brand. It provides the essential information of her personal life, of her poetic and political developments in the course of three decades from nineteen eighties up to new millennium. This chapter shows Dionne Brand as the ambassador of the minority voice and the opponent of injustice. Her poetry is presented as the historical poetry, where the poetic features mix together with the narrative ones and where her poetic language comes from the experience of being black lesbian woman of immigrant origin.

The second chapter analyzes the notions "new slavery" and "second colonization." This chapter shows Dionne Brand as the radical author and politician

who refuses Canadian official policy on multiculturalism and believes that this society is not as tolerant as it claims. Canadian society as well as the Canadian government is under the influence of the white man tradition and history and thus multiculturalism fails to guarantee the equal opportunities for every citizen. On the contrary, Canadian big cities, under the influence of massive industrialization since approximately nineteen eighties, have become the place of cold progress and of high concrete skyscrapers that block the human vision.

The third chapter analyzes Brand's three poetry collections. The first poetry collection *No Language Is Neutral* written in 1990 is presented as the book of youth that is full of energy to declare the own identity, where the narrator who is apparently the author herself wants to share this energy and strength with other female followers. This book might be understood as the attempt to wake the sleeping identity and preserve its uniqueness in the official postcolonial world. The second collection *Land to Light On* written only seven years later is presented as the book of regret, where the narrator, who is once again the author herself, seems to lose the previous juvenility and becomes stuck in the world of forgetting. The narrator is paralyzed by the crushing strength of the postcolonial machinery. Therefore, the narrator only waits and regrets her past decisions, her past mistakes, her previous life, her stillness and her weaknesses. Simply, she regrets everything. The third collection *Ossuaries*, already written in the new millennium, is presented as the book of atonement. The previous narrator disappears and there appears the new narrator represented by the older black woman named Yasmine. This old woman reviews her previous life and declares that she betrayed her true identity and sexuality and preferred the blind, deaf and voiceless life, the life of the materialistic gilded society.

## 1 LIFE AND WORK OF DIONNE BRAND

Dionne Brand was born on the 7th January, 1953 in Guayaguayare, Trinidad. After finishing her studies at local Naparima Girls' High School in 1970, she emigrated to Toronto, Canada where she earned her M.A. in English and in Philosophy five years later. After finishing the university studies, Brand decided to return back and travel through the Caribbean islands. In 1983, she worked as "information and communications officer for the Agency for Rural Transformation in Grenada"<sup>1</sup> until the outbreak of the political coup and the subsequent American military invasion in October that year. This experience was, according to Simona Bartacco, the crucial experience "both in terms of political commitment and disillusion, and in terms how it affected her writing."<sup>2</sup> Brand's writing has become radical. She started to pay more attention on political and social injustice of the postcolonial world where the true human identity is under the permanent attack of social phobias, intolerance and normalizing standards.

After the Grenadian experience, Dionne Brand returned back to Canada where she started with the stronger support of the Black and West-Indian minority communities. She worked and still works on numerous educational, social and health projects or programs and actively cooperates with various immigrants' and women's centres. Dionne Brand has become the voice of these minorities and uses their experience as the basic source for her writing. As Himani Bannerji states, to read Brand's work is to read "about her people, her identification with their struggles both in the metropole of Canada and in the hinterland of the Caribbean."<sup>3</sup> Dionne Brand emphasizes that the term "her people" does not represent the mere stereotypes of the contemporary world but its real unheard voices. The term "her people" presents those oppressed immigrants and those neglected females and those caricatured homosexuals whose rights have been suppressed for racist, sexist and xenophobic reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> James Manheim, "Brand, Dionne 1953–," in *Encyclopedia.com*, 2002, accessed October 8, 2014, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2873400016.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Simona Bartacco, "Imagining Bodies in the Work of Dionne Brand," *Altre Modernità* 0, no.1 (2009): 10, accessed September 16, 2014, <http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/AMonline/article/view/391/535>.

<sup>3</sup> Himani Bannerji, "Dionne Brand (1953)," in *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Daryl Cumber Dance (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 47, <http://www.questia.com/read/26280886>.

Besides the social commitment, Dionne Brand was a member of the Communist Party of Canada in the eighties and nineties. She has become very active in the feminists and lesbian politics and is classified as the member of “the black Atlantic,”<sup>4</sup> the fairly young wave of the black authors, such as Toni Morrison, Sherley Anne Williams, Caryl Phillips or David Dabydeen, which deals with the problem of Diaspora, common origin, multi-layered society and the issue of scattered black nation in all parts of the world from Americas through Caribbean and Africa up to Europe. Nowadays, Dionne Brand is perceived as the black lesbian author of the Caribbean origin who tries to speak the unspoken in order to break the silence and release the true identity on Canadian land.

Moreover, speaking and breaking silence here means not only the defence of those people whose rights have been ignored most often for the reasons of being black, woman, immigrant or homosexual but speaking here also brings the personal relief. Dionne Brand has already revealed her true identity and confessed to be the “Black lesbian in Canada.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, it is this personal directness and openness that established Brand’s reputation of being “one of Canada’s most high-profile contemporary authors.”<sup>6</sup> As well as being poet, teacher, novelist, feminist, essayist, human rights activist, Dionne Brand is also filmmaker, documentarist and the finding member and editor of *Our Lives*, Canada’s first black women’s newspaper. Furthermore, Dionne Brand actively cooperates and writes for alternative papers, journals and magazines, such as *Contrast Newspaper*, *Fuse Magazine*, *Network*, *Spear Magazine* or *Canadian Women’s Studies and Resources for Feminist Research*.

### **1.1. DIONNE BRAND IN THE COURSE OF TIME**

According to Anthony Joyette, Dionne Brand has appeared on Canadian literary scene in the breaking period of the mid-seventies and eighties when “literary groups and other movements began to influence the way black Canadians

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<sup>4</sup> Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), x, <http://www.questia.com/read/118540937>.

<sup>5</sup> Markus M. Müller, “Poets Talk: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Dionne Brand, Marie Annharte Baker, Jeff Derksen, and Fred Wah,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2006), 2013, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-2005820761>.

<sup>6</sup> Faye Hammill, *Canadian Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123, <http://www.questia.com/read/117646202>.

perceive themselves and are perceived by others.”<sup>7</sup> It was the period when the black authors were finally taken as the potential writers and their writings were no more considered to be exotic both in their form and rhetoric. Moreover, Joyette perceives those years as the beginning of “the contemporary Black Canadian literature.”<sup>8</sup> Joyette believes that this period brought the new possibilities and energy not only for the black writers in expressing their feelings, thoughts and attitudes through their writings, but this period brought the new possibilities also for the black readers who could find in the books of the black authors the new role models and heroes of similar social and racial background.

In conversation with Nuzhat Abbas, Dionne Brand confirms that these decades were prolific not only for her but for the whole black minority in Canada. In the eighties, there appeared ideologically similar “Black Arts Movement in Toronto”<sup>9</sup> as did two decades earlier in the United States. As in the United States also in Canada, optimism and the promise of adventure were in the air. The Canadian Black Arts Movement production, though still negligible to the Canadian main stream production, gave birth to a noticeable number of the potential black musicians, singers, writers and painters who actively participated on anti-racial and anti-discriminatory moods. These minority artists could be admired for their willingness to experiment and challenge the traditional way of thinking and living in order to promote their minority status and diversity.

Enoch Padolsky, however, believes that the question of race and the question of the own identity “has of course always to some extent been a factor in Canadian social discourse, but its emergence [...] as a prominent factor is a fairly recent event.”<sup>10</sup> Not the eighties but the mid-nineties became the crucial period for the marginal artists and the artists of colour. The changing Canadian demography, the increased number of non-European immigrants, the emergence of the postcolonial theory of how the Western countries dominate the Third World and the increased media attention to the problem of race diversity were the basic factors that

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic, the Emergence of Black Canadian Literature: 1975 towards the Millennium,” *Kola*, Fall 2008, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-191999979>.

<sup>8</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>9</sup> Nuzhat Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing,” *Herizons*, Fall 1999, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-413263981>.

<sup>10</sup> Enoch Padolsky, “Ethnicity and Race: Canadian Minority Writing at a Crossroads,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1996), <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-11079716>.

transformed the Canadian social as well as literary scene. Thanks to these innovative and even radical changes in thinking, the minority pride increased, the voice of the writers of colour strengthen, the professional debates on multiculturalism and diversity multiplied, the conferences for minorities such as Writing Thru Race Conference for “First Nations writers and writers of colour”<sup>11</sup> in 1994 appeared and the publications of alternative books, journals and magazines that emphasize the black and minority pride originated. In this changing climate, Padolsky believes, Canada finally showed the serious willingness to open its artistic scene for the minor stories, histories and herstories. It was exactly this era that let Dionne Brand to define what it means to be black and immigrant or in any aspect different from the Canadian white majority. Thanks to this period, the trend of being different became acceptable because this was the era of the “consciousness of race”<sup>12</sup> where the oppression, injustice, racism and the issues of gender diversity became the public and debated topics. However, regardless the period, it is once again the speaking that enables the minorities and minority writers to break the silence and openly celebrate their diversity.

However, the era of the new millennium pushed Dionne Brand too forward. According to Libe Garcia Zarranz, the influence of “transnational and globalization impulses,”<sup>13</sup> specifically the influence of September 11/2002 terrorist attacks on the United States of America, affected Canadian writing circles. The terrible Manhattan events and the following US militant policy against terrorism together with the increased social fear of Third World immigrants pushed Dionne Brand to the feministic extreme. She has become the representative of the queer black female writers whose fundamental theme is associated with the process of pervasive materialism, decay and the apocalyptical visions of the future world. On one side, Brand’s production has become even more universal, multilayered and globalized with “non-linear sense of time together with a transnational sense of space [...] across past, present, and future”<sup>14</sup> where the main characters are forced to face the pressure of the process of Western standardization all around the world from

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<sup>11</sup> Pauline Butling, “1: (Re)Defining Radical Poetics,” in *Writing in Our Time: Canada’s Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)*, (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 25, <http://www.questia.com/read/118780907>.

<sup>12</sup> Padolsky, “Ethnicity and Race: Canadian Minority Writing at a Crossroads.”

<sup>13</sup> Libe García Zarranz, “Toxic Bodies that Matter: Trans-Corporeal Materialities in Dionne Brand’s Ossuaries,” *Canada and Beyond* 2.1, no. 2 (2012): 59.

<sup>14</sup> Zarranz, “Toxic Bodies that Matter,” 60.

Americas through Caribbean up to Europe and Asia and when past events blend with the present ones. However, on the other side, Brand's literary production has become ultimately pessimistic, depicting the world that is full of fear and paranoia with "endless references to toxic bacteria, virus, disease, contagion."<sup>15</sup> This sense of dying out is even reinforced with the emphasis of the female body that is full of scars and wounds and suffers permanently under the attacks of the global white-male machinery of the postcolonial world. It is the world that perceives female body as the mere object for ensuring the biological reproduction. It can be stated that in the twenty-first century, Dionne Brand lost most of her pre-millennial hope in the human world and in the multicultural progress. The world of the twenty-first century is dominated by the mechanical creatures that are powered by money and greediness.

## 1.2 PRODUCTION

It is Brand's poetic language that caught the attention of the wider Canadian audience and likewise it is this poetic language on which her reputation still rests. However, Edward Chamberlin believes that "the range of her work is exceptional."<sup>16</sup> Chamberlin describes Dionne Brand as the universal artist who is able to move from the field of poetry to the field of prose and from the field of fiction to the field of non-fiction. Dionne Brand is the author of one short story collection: *Sans Souci* (1988), she has published the book of oral history on black working females in Ontario *No Burden to Carry* (1993) and has written one politically charged collection of essays *Bread Out of Stone* (1994). She produced three novels: *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), *What We All Long For* (2005) and ten volumes of poetry, including: *'Fore Day Morning* (1978), *Earth Magic* (for children 1980/1993/2006), *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defence of Claudia* (1983), *Primitive Offensive* (1983), *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *Land to Light On* (1997) which was awarded the Trillium Award and Governor General's Award, the most prestigious literary awards in Canada for poetry. Her twenty-first century collections of poetry include *thirsty* (2002),

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<sup>15</sup> Zarranz, "Toxic Bodies that Matter," 56.

<sup>16</sup> J. Edward Chamberlin, "Come Back to me my Language," in *Come Back to me my Language: Poetry and the West Indies* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 267.

*Inventory* (2006) and the latest collection *Ossuaries* (2010). This lifelong work is dedicated to the fight against social injustice and against violations of basic human rights. In addition to her pen-craft career, Dionne Brand co-edited *The Journey Prize Stories: The Best of Canada's New Stories* (2007) and produced documentaries of respectable prominence about the real life of the ordinary people in modern Canadian society, such as: *Older, Stronger, Wiser* (1989), *Sisters in the Struggle* (1990), *Thank God I'm a Lesbian* (1992), *Listening for Something* (1996), *Under One Sky* (1999) or *Borderless* (2006).

Despite the wide range of genre production, Dionne Brand proclaims to be primarily the poet. She simply loves poetry and has written it since she was seventeen. It is, as she emphasizes in conversation with Nuzhat Abbas, her “first language.”<sup>17</sup> Brand believes that it takes much more time and energy to write poetry than prose. As she claims: “Poetry takes longer, even though it’s shorter. It takes me longer to write. It seems to take me four or five years or so to write a book of poetry.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Dionne Brand believes that she has no intention or purpose to write elongated narratives. Her writings, whether it is short story or novel or even politically motivated papers, are influenced by poetry and by her poetic language. Even her first novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), Brand confesses, was intended to be one long poem, however, “it kept resisting [...] so I simply had to let it wander where it will. Then it moved out into prose.”<sup>19</sup> It can be stated that poetry becomes the base, the most trustful piece of literature. Moreover, Dionne Brand admits that she does not believe in such elongated narratives because in novel the author has more space to rest. The novel does not force the author to “do so many things in one line.”<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, every line of the good poem should be physical, fleshy, supple and changeable. Basically, the good poem does not let the writer to have a rest but forces the writer to be always aware of the language possibilities.

Chameleonlike how can be the good poems defined or as Himani Bannerji claims, it is “a rare breed of poems,”<sup>21</sup> the poems of various lengths from short

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<sup>17</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>18</sup> Christian Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation,” *ARIEL* 33, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-136653924>.

<sup>19</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>20</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>21</sup> Bannerji, “Dionne Brand (1953),” in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 52.

lyrics up to very long poems, with chaotic ordering, poems without titles or with roman numerals in titles instead of letters, the poems with unpredictable alteration of pace and mood, the setting of basic as well as detailed descriptions plus blending of “the imagistic, symbolic moments with narrative ones”<sup>22</sup> as if to be the poet and historian at once. These are the vital features of the good poetry collection in Brand’s perception and at the same time the fundamental features she tries to fulfil.

In addition, the distinct feature in Brand’s poetry becomes language. Maria Casas notices that Brand’s language “depends on the reader’s awareness of the difference between the usage of standard written English and that of [its] spoken”<sup>23</sup> variant that is used in her mother country Trinidad. Besides the local vocabulary and dialect, Casas states three visible morphological and syntactic differences, between Standard and Trinidadian English, which are widely used in Brand’s poetry. Trinidadian English allows the existence of “double negatives [...] a zero copula, and Creole person and number agreement.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, Dionne Brand omits “to be” structure, prefers double negatives and avoids “-s” suffix in third person singular structures. These basic features together with the specific vocabulary of Trinidadian dialect create Brand’s poetic world and thus spread her message of refusal to be adapted and tied down by any prescribed norms of the Canadian postcolonial society that is pushing the alternative writers to limit the self and to normalize the own language according to the standards of the English Language. Brand’s writing, in the same way as her identity, strives to be unique and distinct from the majority.

### **1.3 FEMALE AND LESBIAN EXPERIENCE**

Dionne Brand describes herself not only as the poet but primarily as the Caribbean-Canadian female poet. She puts woman in the centre of her attention in order to show how tough the female life and specifically the black female life of immigrant origin might be. Dionne Brand believes that the black women are considered to be the marginal characters of the Caribbean and Canadian and the whole postcolonial society. Their status is not sufficiently appreciated within the

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<sup>22</sup> Bannerji, “Dionne Brand (1953),” in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Caridad Casas, “Orality and the Body in the Poetry of Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand: Towards an Embodied Social Semiotics,” *ARIEL* 33, no. 2 (2002), <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-136653919/orality-and-the-body-in-the-poetry-of-lillian-allen>.

<sup>24</sup> Casas, “Orality and the Body in the Poetry of Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand.”

white society. Their role in the family is often underestimated within the black community and their dreams are not worth of listening. According to Charity Becker, the black immigrant woman on Canadian landscape “experiences a triple colonization,”<sup>25</sup> firstly because of her non-Canadian ancestral roots, secondly because of her non-Caucasian origin and thirdly because of her feminity. Such woman of triple colonization is Dionne Brand, who firstly left the black colonized landscape of Trinidad in which slavery became her main historical heritage. Secondly, she entered the Western world that is responsible for this slavery heritage, the world where the white is still better than the black and thirdly, she left the family that was dominated by its male members and settled down in Canada that is politically and economically once again dominated by masculinity.

Furthermore, Dawn Carter considers Dionne Brand to be one of the “black lesbian feminists waging war on oppressive conservatism.”<sup>26</sup> These radical authors point out that the subordination exists not only between genders but also within the female gender. Brand mentions that the traditional white Canadian feminists, who emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were fighting for the equality with the white man but not for the equality with the black woman. The white female activists based their beliefs on the ideas of white supremacy whereas the black women continued to be ignored. Brand emphasizes that this gap between the black and white women deepened and became more visible in the era of Canadian industrialization at the beginning of the twentieth century when the textile factories were “sought by white women.”<sup>27</sup> Thanks to this hard factory work, the white women could create stronger female unions and could advocate their basic human rights more loudly and more firmly. On the other side, the black Canadian females, mostly immigrants or fugitives of the Third World, worked mainly in the domestic spheres as maids or they worked on the rural farms. Even though this situation rapidly changed after the Second World War and nowadays the black

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<sup>25</sup> Charity Dawn Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” master’s thesis, University of Prince Edward Island, 1997, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Dawn Carter, “Another Place, Not Here,” *Women and Environments*, Winter 1997, 24, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-11186130>.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Paleczny, *Clothed in Integrity: Weaving Just Cultural Relations and the Garment Industry* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 22, <http://www.questia.com/read/109822430>.

females “form a major part of the labour force in Canada,”<sup>28</sup> Dionne Brand believes that the different development of white and black female working conditions still creates the important part of the historical heritage and thus significantly marks the whole Canadian consciousness where to be the black woman is still less that to be the white woman.

In addition to this feministic perspective, Denise Narain claims that Dionne Brand was among the first black female writers who started to celebrate her lesbian possibilities and desires. Dawn Carter perceives this celebration even as the “lesbian propaganda”<sup>29</sup> that presents the option the black female body has in the field of sexuality in order to escape the male-dominated world. Dionne Brand decided to speak up openly and thus celebrate her sexuality in April 1988 on “the First International Conference on Caribbean Women’s Writing,”<sup>30</sup> where she analyzed her short story “Madame Alaird’s Breasts” based on schoolgirls’ sexual fantasy and fascination towards their French teacher’s breasts. However, Narain explains that this celebration crossed the line and probably due to these too-sexual and too-lesbian thoughts, “Brand’s contribution to the conference is not included and its absence not explained”<sup>31</sup> in *Caribbean Women Writers*, the anthology of essays and papers from the conference that was published the following year. Narain speculates that the reason of this exclusion might be hidden in Brand’s open-minded thoughts which were unacceptable for the leading conference organizer and the main anthology editor Selwyn Cudjoe. This man accounted himself as one of the “father-figures of the Caribbean literary tradition”<sup>32</sup> and at the same time as one of the important promoters of the Caribbean female writing which he tried to keep as the sub-category of the traditional Caribbean-Canadian writing, where the question of the skin colour together with the emphasis of the ancestral traditions and customs are the sufficient factors in the identity search and where the question of sexuality and different sexual orientation is intentionally avoided.

However, according to Anthony Joyette, “with feminism and gay pride in the eighties came the question of black sexuality as an addition to the racial and cultural

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<sup>28</sup> Subbalakshmi Subramanian, Enakshi Dua, and Angela Robertson, “Scratching the Surface,” *Herizons*, Winter 2002, 38, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-348365761>.

<sup>29</sup> Carter, “Another Place, Not Here,” 24.

<sup>30</sup> Denise Decaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style* (London: Routledge, 2002), 230, <http://www.questia.com/read/108447333>.

<sup>31</sup> Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry*, 232.

<sup>32</sup> Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry*, 230.

themes of resistance.”<sup>33</sup> Sexuality becomes the sign of the identity search and Dionne Brand continued writing literature not only from the point of view of triple but from the point of view of quadruple colonization as the black female immigrant of lesbian orientation. She could be even described as anti-men writer, believing that history and the whole world is ruled and told from the male point of view and man has no intention to put woman back in his story. It is up to woman to make her story and the story of her female lovers visible in the postcolonial world ruled by masculinity. Therefore, Brand’s production is written by the black woman and is dedicated to the black woman and her fight for the basic human rights.

#### **1.4 LITERARY INSPIRATIONS**

It might be summarized that Brand’s literary as well as stylistic inspiration comes from three basic resources: Caribbean authors, Marxist ideas and Black Art Movement. The Caribbean authors are, according to Charity Becker, Brand’s fundamental source of inspiration, particularly Derek Walcott who is considered to be “an English-language poet working in the tradition of the European art,”<sup>34</sup> who interests himself in the relationship of the Caribbean and European culture and in the relationship of Standard English and its Caribbean variations. Maria Casas adds that not only Walcott’s Eurocentric views but also Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s Afrocentric views construct the basic frame of Brand’s works. However, Casas further continues that these two male authors come from the wave of the third generation of the Caribbean authors which “lasted from roughly 1965 to 1980”<sup>35</sup> and which was interested and devoted much of its literary energy to the question of being black, however not to the question of being black woman. Casas perceives that, despite Walcott’s and Brathwaite’s noticeable influence, Dionne Brand appreciates and takes much of her literary inspiration from the following fourth wave of the contemporary female authors of the Caribbean roots. In various conversations and interviews, Dionne Brand often emphasizes that the contemporary female writers, such as Rosa Guy, Jean Rhys or Paule Marshall, are those writers she reads and responds to.

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<sup>33</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>34</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Casas, “Orality and the Body in the Poetry of Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand.”

The second source of inspiration comes from the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. As it was already mentioned, Dionne Brand used to be the member of the Communist party of Canada and its ideology has become her “intellectual standpoint.”<sup>36</sup> The ideas and thoughts about equal division of wealth among people and nations, the ending of the exploitation, revolutionary mood and the vision of the society without class differences soaked into Brand’s thinking and her work. Moreover, in conversation with Christian Olbey, Brand explains that the ideas of Marxism-Leninism are the only way how to describe “the condition of Black people.”<sup>37</sup> After the Grenadian experience in 1983, Brand started to perceive the socialist ideas as the only possibility how to soothe the effects of western capitalism. Even though the slave trade and subsequently slavery were abolished worldwide more than one hundred and fifty years ago, Brand believes that its pervasive forces remained. In fact, Dionne Brand states that capitalism is the servant of the previous plantation systems “that had not been uprooted”<sup>38</sup> but survived and strives to preserve economy based on injustice and serfdom. Therefore, the perspective of perpetual colonization together with its various forms of modern slavery and exploitation become the visible features of every genre in which Dionne Brand has worked.

The last but not least inspiration comes from the thoughts of Black Art Movement that originated in the sixties of the twenty century in the United States. Dionne Brand appreciates this movement because of two distinct features. The first feature is connected with the extraordinary “vibrancy of their work”<sup>39</sup> where the language is described as the instrument that is capable of capturing the sounds and voices of the surrounding and is capable of transferring these sounds into the comprehensible words. The second feature is connected with the willingness of the writers of this movement to create “the poetry at work in the language of ordinary, struggling, Black people,”<sup>40</sup> where the direct emphasis of the black community language becomes the important feature in defending of their personal, cultural and political rights. Furthermore, Dionne Brand believes that the language of Malcolm

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<sup>36</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>37</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>38</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>39</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>40</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

X, Martin Luther King or Huey Percy Newton was and still is the „moral boost“<sup>41</sup> for both the older and the younger black generations. However, Dionne Brand also perceives that these male “great stars of the civil rights movement“<sup>42</sup> tell the black story only from their male point of views. Therefore, Brand emphasizes the work and the contribution of the black female voices such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez or Paule Marshall who make this black movement more feminine and universal.

## 1.5 LITERARY SEGREGATION

Dionne Brand belongs to the “wave of black thought”<sup>43</sup> in Canada, which refuses to be interpreted and classified according to the standards of white-man paradigm and which refuses to integrate the black literary works into Canadian mainstream. This voice, which intensified at the end of the twentieth century, is aimed to speak about the contradictions and differences on Canadian literary scene rather than its similarities. It advocates the belief that Canadian literature cannot be raceless and therefore must be separated into two independent streams, having “different approaches, forms, styles, and idioms of language.”<sup>44</sup> There exists the popular literary stream that is generally written by the white authors or by already normalized marginal writers and there exists the literary stream of the real minority, including those writers who are interested in and write about the problems of their marginal origins.

Dionne Brand is aware of the fact that her works are minority-centred and therefore not widely popular because she “does not gratify the deep Caucasian urge of the market place.”<sup>45</sup> She refuses to commit herself to a fixed status of the big publishing houses and their roles and rules they prescribe. Dionne Brand represents the artists of so called “communal choice.”<sup>46</sup> She creates literature of the black people for the black people with the black folk heroes, black traditions and morals in the centre of attention, written in “language that their people understand.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>42</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>43</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>44</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>45</sup> H. Nigel Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand,” *Kola*, Summer 2009, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-204205444>.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand.”

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand.”

Moreover, Dionne Brand writes bitter and ugly poetry in order to draw attention on the subordinated and limited identities of the black immigrants, black females or of the black homosexuals in the postcolonial world that is ruled by the heterosexual white male elite. On the other side, Brand believes that the black writer might achieve the wider popularity even on Canadian white literary scene by giving up bitterness, ugliness and aggression. However, in Brand's perception, such transformation would be understood as the betrayal and refusal of the own identity. Therefore, Dionne Brand prefers to be truthful alternative writer rather than to be the deceptive illusion of multicultural unity. Aggressive but honest or according to her words "very African American!"<sup>48</sup> is how can be Brand's effort to advocate the human diversity and its equality within mainstream society described.

However, Anthony Joyette disagrees with Brand's overemphasis of literary and cultural segregation. Black literature should be taken as the "added cannon that represent another Canadian."<sup>49</sup> Joyette refuses to put the Black and the White literature into opposition because they cannot and actually do not exist on their own within the Canadian land. Therefore, this attempt of segregation has no chance to survive. Anthony Joyette, who is also of Caribbean origin, knows the whole story of the black colonial oppression and exploitation, however, he refuses to call contemporary Canada exploiter. Anthony Joyette believes that every country has its own traditions, morals, culture and history. The fact is that the majority of Canada's grand history was shaped by the white man and therefore the majority of the Canadian white writers create their identities within these white values where the white folk heroes, white traditions and morals are in the centre of their attention. Therefore, it is not reasonable to blame the white writers for avoiding or marginalizing black characters in their works who simply did not participated on the creation of grand Canadian history. In addition, the acceptance and the respect towards the Canadian white tradition do not lead to the betrayal of the Caribbean black tradition. Joyette feel to be the black Canadian citizen who, under the influence of multicultural education, appreciates and takes inspiration from the works of many white as well as black authors.

Moreover, the Canadian radical artists who have committed themselves to the specifically black revolutionary arts cannot entirely deny the influence of white

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<sup>48</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

<sup>49</sup> Joyette, "Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic."

tradition in shaping of their ideas and thoughts. Basically, Dionne Brand cannot completely ignore her Canadian university education and she cannot deny the influence of the authors such as Margaret Laurence, Douglas Francis, Norman Levine, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood, or the first Canadian Noble Price winner Alice Munro in shaping of her perceptions. Besides these arguments, it is also important to remember that the themes of inequality, injustice and rebellion are not the black literary monopoly. A huge number of the white writings are preoccupied with the similar feelings of inequality and injustice where the main white hero is in the conflict with the society and its roles and rules it prescribes.

On the other side, Himani Bannerji believes that Dionne Brand just thanks to this diverse and radical attitude towards mainstream production is able to make the hidden history of the black women, of the immigrants from the Third World or homosexuals visible. Actually, Christl Verduyn believes that Brand's writing is essential for Canadian literary variety and has "the potential to disrupt the ideologies that dominate contemporary society in Canada."<sup>50</sup> It can be stated that the production of black poetry or prose virtually indistinguishable from the white tradition would be not beneficial even for the Canadian society and government which made multiculturalism its official policy. In addition, Charity Becker believes that Dionne Brand, due to her double Caribbean-Canadian experience, has no choice in writing and is "forced to deal with the history of slavery and blatant racism in the colonial period, and the subtle racism of postcolonial Canada."<sup>51</sup> References to racism, sexism, phobias, subordination and exploitation on Canadian land should bring the new challenge for the black writers in order to make the black community proud of its black history. In addition, such black radical writings help to preserve the history of the shameful white oppression which strives to be invisible and forgotten in the contemporary western white world of liberty and democracy. This goal of history preservation is appreciated even by Anthony Joyette who, however, remains rather sceptical towards the methods of achieving it. There exists the general agreement between the supporters of separatism and the supporters of integration to the Canadian mainstream literature that the black people should be more aware of their historical heritage in order to create firmer social and

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<sup>50</sup> Christl Verduyn, "Perspectives Critiques Dan Des Productions Litteraires Migrantes Au Feminin, Au Quebec Et Au Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1996), <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-11079727>.

<sup>51</sup> Becker, "CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE," 4.

cultural bonds that are based on the black pride, nevertheless, the supporters of integration, like Anthony Joyette, refuse to achieve this goal on the ground of aversion for the white tradition.

## 1.6 HISTORICAL POETRY

As it was already mentioned, Brand's poetry presents the specific sort of poetry where the imagistic and symbolic features are mixed with the narrative ones. Dionne Brand wants to be both the historian and the confessional poet. She combines the general facts with her innermost feelings. As Nigel Thomas states, her poetry is "her psychic and historic journey into her people's past and present"<sup>52</sup> where she tries to keep the balance between personal, public and historical. It is this sense of personal, it means giving voice to the silence while uncovering the own silence that makes her poetry trustworthy and it is the sense of history, it means "a set of complex movements that range from the past to the future, swiftly building connections between places, peoples, feelings, and times"<sup>53</sup> that makes the reading of such poem the authentic experience. It might be said that Dionne Brand wants to capture the true face of the history through her poetic lenses.

In addition, the fusion of the personal and historical makes Dionne Brand aware of her past heritage, specifically of her ancestors who suffered under the effects of slavery and for that reason she is aware of the value of freedom. Dionne Brand does not perceive time in a linear development and therefore the human freedom is not the omnipotent feature and its existence is not guaranteed forever. Brand believes that "there's a kind of forgetfulness"<sup>54</sup> in the postcolonial society where the era of slavery and the era of colonization are not the finite matters. The forces that once formed these systems were extremely pervasive and could return back and are even doing so in the form of subtle racism, in the form of various social phobias that can be seen in the western democratic countries like Canada and in the form of neo-colonialism that can be seen in the underdeveloped countries like Grenada that is dominated by American version of democracy. These new and old evil forces can easily overshadow the triumph over slavery and push back the

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas, "A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand,"

<sup>53</sup> Bannerji, "Dionne Brand (1953)," in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Olbey, "Dionne Brand in Conversation."

fragile victory over slavery into “new dark ages, new slaveries.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Brand emphasizes that every black person, man or woman, young or old, homosexual or heterosexual should be aware and proud of their “ancestral wisdom, [...] practices, and [...] black folk heroes”<sup>56</sup> and should preserve this heritage and its message for the next generations. Such knowledge makes the contemporary black people not only aware of the injustice their enslaved ancestors had to tolerate for centuries but also encourages them to stand against the modern forms of oppression and social phobias that forces people to shut up and follow the prescribed norms of the capitalistic order.

In addition, Brand’s historic poetry can be seen as “the heritage of roses and onions”<sup>57</sup> or as the heritage of grand and ordinary. The term “grand” presents the knowledge of the history and acts that are recorded in the historic books. The term “ordinary” represents the history and the acts of the real life and by real life is meant the miserable and the neglected one. As Himani Bannerji believes, Dionne Brand writes historical poetry that is “usable in the business of everyday life.”<sup>58</sup> She does not overestimate the grand acts and grand heroes because such things are usually separated from the happenings of the ordinary life. Brand’s intention is to keep the balance between the grand and the ordinary and therefore her poetry also depicts the everyday struggles of the real people in order to show what life really looks like. The capturing of such “small, ordinary things of life along with a sense of broader historical actions”<sup>59</sup> makes her poetry comprehensible and meaningful for the ordinary readers, who also struggle through their mundane lives and try to face and soothe the forces of the postcolonial world that make the living difficult and in some moments even impossible.

## 1.7 POWER OF LANGUAGE

The language in Brand’s poetry presents a very powerful tool. Marcus Müller calls it “demotic language.”<sup>60</sup> Basically, it is the Trinidadian variety of the English language where the rhythms of local folk music, culture, traditions and

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<sup>55</sup> Bannerji, “Dionne Brand (1953),” in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 48.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand.”

<sup>57</sup> Chamberlin, “Come Back to me my Language,” in *Come Back to me my Language*, 268.

<sup>58</sup> Bannerji, “Dionne Brand (1953),” in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Bannerji, “Dionne Brand (1953),” in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Müller, “Poets Talk.”

dialect pulse through the cold norms of Standard English. Dionne Brand, who comes from Trinidad and has travelled through the whole Caribbean, tries to catch these local rhythms and melodies and change them into comprehensible language as the Black Art Movement in the United States did and Dionne Brand has already appreciated.

As it was mentioned, there exist the basic lexical and morphological features of Brand's demotic, such as local dialect, double negatives, violated word order or no suffix "-s" on the verbs to indicate third person singular. However, by constant emphasis that "no language is neutral,"<sup>61</sup> Brand implies that the language, it means its composition and structure, is much more complex phenomenon. The point is that the language becomes the living being that feels and absorbs the historical happenings of its particular nation. Language is not the series of empty letters in concrete morphological and lexical order, but is the reflection of the human history that is influenced by political, social, economic and cultural developments. Therefore, Brand believes that the language can either gain the enormous power as English Standard did in the era of colonialism or the language can lose its position and thus become the endangered class on the verge of dying as happens to many Caribbean Indigenous languages nowadays.

Dionne Brand claims that her demotic reflects the battle between the powerful English Standard and the vanishing Caribbean Indigenous languages where the "history of this battle [is hidden] in its syntax, structure, idiom, and inflection."<sup>62</sup> The beginning of this battle dates back to the times of Caribbean era of colonization and slavery. Brand believes that the white colonizers could easily conquer this land because they were able to seize the local mother languages and subsequently replace them with their own ones. The local people lost the possibility to communicate their common past in their common language and they even lost the possibility to express properly their feeling and thoughts because the newly-given English, French or Spanish dominant languages were foreign for them. As Dionne Brand emphasizes, most of the following slavery revolts were unsuccessful or prevented because of the "annihilation of African and Caribbean ancestral

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<sup>61</sup> Hammill, *Canadian Literature* , 131.

<sup>62</sup> Meredith M. Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 131, <http://www.questia.com/read/117826753>.

languages.”<sup>63</sup> In addition, these enslaved people lost their personal right to give and receive names. As in any society also in the Caribbean one, the process of naming plays one of the most fundamental roles in the shaping of human psyche. The Caribbean people believe that their children are not the whole human beings until they receive names. Unfortunately, during the slavery era most of the enslaved black parents lost the privilege to name their children in their language and the names were given by their foreign-language-speaking white masters. Although explicit evidence on this issue is missing, it might be summarized that in the West Indies the “slave names were imposed or at least approved by plantation authorities.”<sup>64</sup> Without the naming possibility, most of the local simple-minded people believed that they lost their humanity and therefore became much more vulnerable and thus easily controllable for around two-hundred years. After the abolition of slavery, the naming tradition was returned back to the hands of the freed slaves. Even though the ancestral languages were not fully regenerated and the pervasive foreign languages have become the official languages of the freed regions, the Caribbean society could re-create and re-built their humiliated human identities and their humanities on the bases of their common wants in the acclimatized English language.

Therefore, Dionne Brand believes that the hybrid language, such as the Trinidadian English might be used in the postcolonial world as the language of resistance, as the “powerful weapon<sup>65</sup> thanks to which the oppressed minorities could speak up and express their feeling, ideas and beliefs openly. In this connection, Kaya Fraser claims that Brand’s demotic language “does appear to slip many of the restrictions of correct or traditional English writing.”<sup>66</sup> Canadian writers were in the past under the permanent pressure of the Standard English that forced these writers to adapt to its basic norms and rules. Dionne Brand, with the preference of its non-Standard variety, decided to resist “white linguistic and cultural norms,”<sup>67</sup> even though, there existed the reasonable fear of becoming the

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<sup>63</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 8.

<sup>64</sup> Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, “Slave Names and Naming in Barbados,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1996), 692, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://jeromehandler.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Names-96.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Gadsby, *Sucking Salt*, 134.

<sup>66</sup> Kaya Fraser, “Language to Light On: Dionne Brand and the Rebellious Word,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 30, no. 1 (2005), 292.

<sup>67</sup> Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 32.

next exotic writer who is trying to catch the attention in the huge Canadian publishing pool. However, the second half of the twentieth century brought more “anti-English sentiments”<sup>68</sup> as Dionne Brand expected. Quebec nationalism and the deepening problems between the English- and French-speaking societies caused the weakening of the dominant position of Standard English and all this resulted in the adoption of the policy on multiculturalism as the official Canadian policy in 1971. This policy helped to promote the language diversity. Canada has officially become the Anglo-Franco country. This bilingualism encouraged the minority writers such as Dionne Brand to continue expressing her minority voice through her “mother tongue”<sup>69</sup> of specifically female and immigrant experience.

Moreover, Charity Becker notices Brand’s distinct perception of the mother-tongue and the father-tongue. The mother-tongue or the Trinidadian Demotic or the hybrid language or English language variety represents the oppressed nation whereas the father-tongue or the Standard English represents the oppressor. As it might be seen, English language, regardless its linguistic form, becomes both the language of the oppressor as well as the language of the oppressed. Therefore, Becker believes that Dionne Brand perceives this stalemate as the chance and strategy to show that there “exist not one but many proper englishes.”<sup>70</sup> Brand’s refusal of writing according to the standards of the Conventional English and at the same time her courage to adapt these standards according to the own Trinidadian language experience or as Pauline Butling states, the strategy of “redefining, rewriting, reclaiming, rearticulating, reinventing, reterritorializing, and reformulating”<sup>71</sup> of the norms and rules of the Standard becomes Brand’s main goal in proving that instead of one infallible standard, there are many standards and that any mother-tongue can be equal to the father-tongue.

Méira Cook goes even further, believing that Dionne Brand wants to create in her poetry the new, powerful, hybrid mother tongue that “deepens and diverges”<sup>72</sup> from its father original. Firstly, Dionne Brand takes Standard English and the Trinidadian Demotic as two equal languages. Forasmuch as no language

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<sup>68</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>69</sup> Gadsby, *Sucking Salt*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Butling, “1: (Re)Defining Radical Poetics,” in *Writing in Our Time*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Méira Cook, “In Between: Dionne Brand’s Poetics of Love and Resistance,” in *Writing Lovers: Reading Canadian Love Poetry by Women*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 86.

remains neutral, they try to influence each other. Cook deduces that in Brand's poetry the Standard English loses its energy in favour of the Caribbean Demotic. Cook even talks about Brand's bastardization of the English Standard in order to show that even the language of minority that used to be the language of slaves can become strong enough to challenge the father-tongue on its own soil. In this case, Trinidadian Demotic challenges the Standard English on the Canadian land and it seems that the non-Standard language is able to survive and withstand the pressure of its Standard variety.

### 1.8 WORDS AND THEIR AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSION

It can be summarized that Dionne Brand depicts the Caribbean, Canadian, female and lesbian experience in her poetry. In conversation with Nuzhat Abbas, she explains that in order to capture this quadruple experience properly, it is important to find "your reservoir,"<sup>73</sup> it means the basic stock of words that will create your voice in poetry. These words should sound as the new melody, as the new love song that is capable of liberating your unique identity, as the true vocabulary that enables the true vision. In order to find such reservoir, the poet has to dive down beneath the level of the conventional vocabulary, phrases and languages. When writing, it is important to pay maximal attention on words, their choice and their placing. The language and its vocabulary is that factor that makes your writing special and memorable. This poetic skill, as Dionne Brand emphasizes in conversation with Christian Olbey, is known as the skill of "perfect speech"<sup>74</sup> and the only way how to achieve it is through listening to the sounds around you. The poetic words should be:

learned from nonverbal expressions, words that are the living language of her mother and her grandmother and her uncle, who narrates (to her) his version of the story of her mother; words that are capable and disappointing, like a lover's body.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

<sup>74</sup> Olbey, "Dionne Brand in Conversation."

<sup>75</sup> Kevin Everod Quashie, *Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory: (Un)becoming the Subject* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 134, <http://www.questia.com/read/103151815>.

Therefore, Dionne Brand feels like an observer, like a sponge that “gobbled up everything.”<sup>76</sup> When living in Trinidad, she used to observe and absorb the sounds and expressions of the cosmopolitan country where people of European, Indian and African origin encountered. When coming to Canada, she started to listen to the sound of jazz as “the sound of urban Black America”<sup>77</sup> and the sound of the newcomers from Latin America, Jamaica or Africa. Thanks to this nonverbal experience, she has become “a student of sound”<sup>78</sup> whose task is to translate these sounds into intelligible language. Brand believes that it is exactly the sound of her surrounding that creates the vibrancy of the work and the good writer is the one who is able to catch these sounds and modify them into the aesthetic experience.

On the other side, Dionne Brand believes that the production of the aesthetic experience itself is not sufficient in the era of the postcolonial world. Brand emphasizes that besides the aesthetic dimension, the good poetic language should be also politically charged and should “reject the apolitical face of academic production.”<sup>79</sup> Political and aesthetic thoughts are mutually exclusive concepts where the political view becomes the integrated component of Brand’s language reservoir. However, Brand emphasizes that this political involvement should not limit your aesthetic perspective, because politics is “about living life fully. Politics is full of pleasures and enjoyment and lust.”<sup>80</sup> Dionne Brand believes that although she is fighting for her basic human rights, she does not dream of society based on the regulation and prescription, but she dreams of society based on the pleasure and enjoyment that results from the own sense of independence and freed uniqueness.

Dionne Brand also believes that it is not up to her to decide whether the work is or is not politicized, because “all writings produced by Black writers are immediately politicized as soon as they hit the page.”<sup>81</sup> This immediate politicization is caused by the moment or period the authors are living in. Literature, essays, films or community activism is influenced by the concrete political situation because “we are living in a politically charged moment.”<sup>82</sup> Any contemporary moment is more or less influenced by racial, sexual or religious tensions that cause

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<sup>76</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>77</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>78</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>79</sup> Quashie, *Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory*, 130.

<sup>80</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>81</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>82</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

the conflict between and within the people. Dionne Brand, through her direct political thinking, believes that there is nothing wrong with reading the literature through “political lens,”<sup>83</sup> even though, she admits that not all of her readers prefer such attitude. Dionne Brand admits that there are the readers who openly and in person criticized the radical politics of her poetry. However, despite this criticism, Brand still believes that it is really essential and prolific to read not only black but any literature as politically motivated work.

## 1.9 THE FEMALE BODY

If the language and the words in Brand’s poetry present the powerful tools, the same cannot be said about her female body which she presents as the basic medium of communication and whose main goal is to guarantee the smooth connection between her inner experience and the outside world. The body is the tool. However, this tool is surprisingly described as being too weak and too fragile to survive in the contemporary world. The body is the mere object that is full of scars and wounds. It can be stated that the physical black seems to be not beautiful and powerful at all. Brand claims:

First of all my hands and my body feel like they don’t belong to me. I think that they’re only extra baggage because there’s nowhere to put them or to hide them. The truth is I begin to hate my own physical body, because I believe it has betrayed me by merely existing. It’s like not having a shelf to put it on or a cupboard to lock it in; it’s useless to me and it strikes me how inefficient it is. Because the ideal form in which to pass a war is as a spirit, a jumbie. My body is history, fossil, passe.<sup>84</sup>

Dionne Brand considers her body to be the weakest part of her whole being. She feels no protection from her body and she even hates her body, considering it to be useless, without the real power, only the source of prejudice and shame, the prehistoric fossil not worth of attention. This pessimistic view is, according to Maria Casas, the consequence of racism as the “issue of physical appearance” and

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<sup>83</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>84</sup> Dionne Brand, “I used to Like the Dallas Cowboys,” in *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1989), 128.

the consequence of sexism that “targets the female body.”<sup>85</sup> Racism and sexism are two interwoven forces that together degenerate and damage the black female body, leaving the deep scars, wounds and injuries caused by the history of the colonial and postcolonial world.

It, however, seems that Dionne Brand has no choice and is forced to use her body as the only mean of authentic communication. Despite its fragility and weakness, Brand notices that her metaphorically massacred body is in fact the authentic map and the living “symbol of history.”<sup>86</sup> Her body captures and notes down all the physical and psychical violence the black woman has to sustain in this world. Her female body is able to feel, to withstand and to remember the pain and emotions. As far as the pain, desire, anger and fear can be transformed “into bodily experience”<sup>87</sup> where the scars and the wounds become the authentic evidence of this experience, than, this weak body deserves its role in creation of the female identity.

It seems that Dionne Brand finally comes to terms even with her physical blackness. In conversation with Christian Olbey, Dionne Brand comes to the conclusion that after all, the black woman is able to “report a historical moment through body.”<sup>88</sup> In addition, this wounded body becomes the essential evidence of the black female history in the era of forgetful and male-dominated society. Dionne Brand finally understands that her female body is not as weak as she thought but can be seen together with her language as the “articulatory power”<sup>89</sup> that is strong enough to “embody a history.”<sup>90</sup> The language creates the message and the body with its scars is able to prove this message and thus become the meaningful thing in the world of confusion. Dionne Brand believes that thanks to her body and thanks to the language inside her body, the black woman can become not only the mere object in the hands of the master, but can become the concrete figure with “the ability to read her situation, and she has a language in which to read it.”<sup>91</sup> This ability to read the concrete life situation gives the black woman the possibility to control the own destiny and turn the identity that used to be the symbol of the

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<sup>85</sup> Casas, “Orality and the Body in the Poetry.”

<sup>86</sup> Katie L. Mullins, ““My Body Is History”: Embodying the Past, Present, and Future in Dionne Brand’s *Sans Souci* and Other Stories,” *ARIEL* 42, no. 2 (2011), <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-284678699>.

<sup>87</sup> Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 124.

<sup>88</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>89</sup> Casas, “Orality and the Body.”

<sup>90</sup> Mullins, ““My Body Is History””

<sup>91</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

prejudice into the symbol of pride, where the physical black can also be beautiful and powerful.

## 2 TRUE FACE OF THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

Dionne Brand writes the historical poetry where she emphasizes the importance of ancestral wisdom of her mother land, its traditions, its natural beauty and its heroes and hereby reveals the history of injustice and exploitation that dates back to the era of colonialism and slavery. Actually, the colonial history becomes the basic knowledge that shapes Brand's identity of being black female immigrant in white hostile Canada. As Dionne Brand claims, she deals "partially or exclusively with the process or effects of colonialism,"<sup>92</sup> analyzes them and subsequently applies the acquired knowledge on the structures of the postcolonial world. In addition, the personal experience of two faces of the world, it means the experience of the Caribbean homeland and the experience of Canadian exile, leads Dionne Brand to the conclusion that the Western democratic and liberal societies once again stumble and fall down into the era of the second colonization and new slavery, where the old barbarous forces that treated people as the mere property evolved into the new capitalistic forces that treat people as the mere source of labour and income. These new forces, moreover, shape the face of the society that becomes less and less human and more and more mechanical with its prescribed mass roles and standardized identities.

Enoch Padolsky claims that the general knowledge and the personal experience of the oppression force Dionne Brand to create her literary characters and their identities within the bases of two worlds: "world deriving from a history of colonialism in the West Indies and racist assumptions and practices in Canada."<sup>93</sup> The fusion of the West Indies colonial past with Canadian postcolonial present reveals the enormous economic and social differences and gaps between people and at the same time illustrates Brand's painstaking effort to condemn racism, sexism, social phobias and all of their sub-categories and sub-branches in order to create the utopian society based on freedom and equality. Brand indicates that in the contemporary Western countries, the black is not equal but only coexist and is superficially tolerated by the white. However, in case of emergency the western postcolonial system that is dominated by the white manager ceases to tolerate

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas, "A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand."

<sup>93</sup> Padolsky, "Ethnicity and Race."

diversity and becomes the “system which is indeed killing”<sup>94</sup> in order to preserve the own hegemony. Brand notices that this emergency is primarily associated with the certain economic and political motivations and reaches even beyond the boundaries of the own state as in the case of Grenadian invasion by US military troops in 1983. Even Canada has successfully completed dozens of international and overseas missions and thus has been “involved in robust multinational military interventions abroad”<sup>95</sup> in order to satisfy its economic, military and political motivations. Moreover, Canada actively interfered on the Caribbean land in the second half of the twenty century in order to keep the profits of its banks in Jamaica, Trinidad or Dominica.

In addition, Dionne Brand notices that if it is possible to take the black people as one nation than “the government of a nation was killed off”<sup>96</sup> purposely and systematically by the economic plans and white conspiracy. Taking into consideration former and later uprisings and freedom fights from Americas through Caribbean up to Africa, most of their leaders and intelligentsia, such as Martin Luther King, Maurice Bishop, Newton Huey or Jacqueline Creft were killed in order to keep the ordinary black people fragile, poor and weak. As if “they [the whites] came in and took off the heads of the movement”<sup>97</sup> and thus forced the ordinary black people to accept the foreign postcolonial visions of freedom, democracy and equality. Without the leading figures, the majority of the suppressed black society feared to become the martyrs of the desperate opposition and therefore they rather calmed down or surrendered and thus accepted the prescribed roles.

Therefore, Dionne Brand perceives herself as the leading figure of the new uprising who openly criticizes the deceptive Western policy and declares that the Western visions of democracy bear the signs of racism, homophobia, xenophobia and sexism. Actually, Dionne Brand directly points at the presence of this quadruple injustice within the heart of the democratic mosaic of Canadian multiculturalism. Moreover, Charity Becker emphasizes that Canada was a slave state. Even though this country is generally known as the shelter for refugees, there appeared the

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<sup>94</sup> Bannerji, “Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism & Politics // Review,” *Herizons*, Spring 1994, 2013, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-441789391>.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Auger, “Canadian International Military Operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Parliament of Canada*, 2011, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/cei-17-e.htm?Param=ce5>.

<sup>96</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>97</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

“Black slaves in Nova Scotia as early as 1686.”<sup>98</sup> From the seventeenth century the black slaves were imported from Africa and West-Indies and they could be bought and sold on the open markets until the abolition of slavery in 1833. Becker continues that many Black Loyalists who fled to Canada after the American War of Independence in 1783 faced the racial discrimination. Even though they were officially free, they were not treated as their White counterparts. The unfulfilled promises of equality forced many Black Loyalists and their descendants in leaving Canada for Africa. Charity Becker calls this event as the “Black Loyalist exodus”<sup>99</sup> and happened not once but twice in Canadian history in 1792 and 1880. In addition, Becker notices that the independent Black Loyalists came to Canada in time when black slavery was still allowed. Therefore, the justified white fear of spreading of too-open ideas that could violate the whole profitable system of slave labour appeared. There were even the attempts to stop the black migration to Nova Scotia by its assembly in 1815. Even though “their [Nova Scotia assembly’s] attempts failed, their attitudes were made clear.”<sup>100</sup> The tensions between the Blacks and Whites continued even after the abolition of slavery. Most of the former slaves and their descendants continued to face racism and oppression and came to the conclusion that the only difference between old and new Canada was in the written laws that theoretically but not practically guaranteed the black immigrants the equal rights and opportunities. Moreover, as it was already mentioned, Canada played its hidden imperial game even in the English-speaking part of the Caribbean land and ‘since 1960, Canada has used its military forces at least 26 times in the Caribbean to support Canadian foreign policy.’<sup>101</sup> In addition, in 1988, the local Caribbean newspapers were comparing Canadian imperial tendencies to those of the United States and Britain and called Canada the imperial exploiter who would do everything in order to protect its profitable banks on the Caribbean land. Therefore, Dionne Brand frequently depicts contemporary multicultural Canada as the place of coldness and remoteness because this country exploited the black slaves and Black Loyalists and still exploits the black immigrants and even the Caribbean land

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<sup>98</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 13.

<sup>99</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 14.

<sup>100</sup> Becker, “CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER-TONGUE,” 14.

<sup>101</sup> Yves Engler, “Canada in the Caribbean: A Hidden History,” in *Rabble.co*, last modified May 5, 2009, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://rabble.ca/news/2009/05/canada-caribbean-hidden-history>.

through the profitable banks. These assumptions lead Dionne Brand to the conclusion that Canada is not as open and tolerant as it proclaims.

In addition, Pauline Butling believes that the present multicultural Canada, in order to show the outside world that the nation has already shed its slavery and imperial heritage and has become absolutely tolerant towards diversity, supports “innovative, experimental, separatist, independent, even anarchic work as much as mainstream cultural production.”<sup>102</sup> Under the sign of multiculturalism and tolerance, “the nation foregrounds writers of colour”<sup>103</sup> who are of legible anti-governmental mood, such as Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, Jeannette Armstrong. The government, moreover, considers these radical authors to be the representatives of Canadian multi-voiced society. Butling calls this attitude as the clear strategy of “normalization of difference,”<sup>104</sup> where the government with the help of its various state-founded organizations leech off the rebellious energy of the alternative authors in order to make their thoughts general and mundane. Moreover, Dionne Brand believes that such state-founded and state-funded organizations are the “capitalistic innovations give[ing] the appearance of change but leave[ing] the basic structures firmly intact.”<sup>105</sup> This “basic structure” is dominated by the white male elite that strives to preserve its position in the society. The supporters of such conspiratorial theory, such as Dionne Brand or Pauline Butling, even believe that the state organization The Canadian National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), which is officially aimed to promote the women and their status and their positions in the society, is too willing to carry out the state policy that is dominated by the white male perspective because the majority of Canadian Parliament specifically the House of Commons is soaked with the white male politicians.

However, Anthony Joyette once again disagrees with these conspiracy theories that support the separatists’ efforts. Joyette reminds that just thanks to “the patriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982,”<sup>106</sup> the alternative writers have become visible and respectable. In this year, Canada gained Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the new Constitution that could be amended only in Canada. This

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<sup>102</sup> Butling, “2: One Potato, Two Potato, Three Potato, Four: Poetry, Publishing, Politics, and Communities,” in *Writing in Our Time*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Butling, “2: One Potato, Two Potato,” in *Writing in Our Time*, 42.

<sup>104</sup> Butling, “2: One Potato, Two Potato,” in *Writing in Our Time*, 42.

<sup>105</sup> Bannerji, “Returning the Gaze.”

<sup>106</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

year meant that Canada has finally become both politically and culturally independent of the British influence. The Canadian government, despite its gender composition, started with the re-definition of the traditional white-centred British system and put much more emphasis on Canadian diversity where the elements of the ethnicity and minority were taken into consideration. With this new trend, the official institutions, such as Canada Council for the Arts or The Writers' Union of Canada started with the major support of "non-Caucasian artists,"<sup>107</sup> such as Frederick Ivor Case, David Lazarus, Makeda Silvera or even Dionne Brand. These minority writers could move from the margins to the centre of literary scene and could speak of racism and discriminations in Canadian society and its history openly. Moreover, these alternative authors are not criticized or silenced but frequently awarded and supported for their activities and are recognized as the important contributors to the Canadian multicultural whole.

## 2.1 CARIBBEAN CONSCIOUSNESS

As Anthony Joyette claims, it was the era and the events of the mid-seventies and the eighties, more accurately the policy on multiculturalism and the new Canadian cultural and political independence of British Isles that motivated many naturalized Canadian writers in search of their ancestral roots. It was this era that motivated Dionne Brand with her West-Indies background to pay more attention on "the condition of being exiled and dislocated from their [Caribbean] cultures and traditions."<sup>108</sup> In Brand's perspective, the Caribbean land has become the symbol of the lost homeland whereas Canadian land has become the frozen place full of the cold white stares. Dionne Brand perceives these two countries as two different worlds with different traditions, beliefs and opinions. Canada is described as the modern mass society based on the indifferent capitalist order, trade and industry whereas the Caribbean land is memorable through its natural beauty, as the virgin soil "full of ocean and sky and heat."<sup>109</sup> In addition, Dionne Brand is afraid that this coldness and indifference has the ability to overwhelm and freeze the warm memories of the Caribbean natural vitality where the Caribbean rural immigrant transforms into the Canadian urban citizen. Therefore, Brand's

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<sup>107</sup> Joyette, "Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic."

<sup>108</sup> Joyette, "Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic."

<sup>109</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

production struggles to preserve the memories of the mother land, its warm weather, its blue sky and its endless ocean in readers' "black psyche,"<sup>110</sup> even though, it is extremely difficult to withstand the materialistic durables and the glitter of the Canadian mass culture. Moreover, Dionne Brand knows that the natural beauty of the Caribbean land is often covered by the thick layer of poverty and exploitation that stretches back to the era of the fifteenth century. Therefore, it is obvious that the Caribbean immigrants prefer to ignore their ancestral heritage and strive to escape the painful memories and they prefer the life in the gilded society of materialistic durables. However, Brand believes that such homeland memories, though painful, are important in creation of the own identity and consciousness.

Theo D'Haen claims that Brand's intention is to show that the black immigrants will never become the full-members of Canadian mass identity. Dionne Brand even believes that the process of Americanization is the camouflage and another attempt of the global superpower how to violate and aggravate the perception of native "place, language, identity, tradition, ethos and world view."<sup>111</sup> Brand declares that the Caribbean people will never fully amalgamate with the Canadian culture and Canadian culture will never fully accept the Caribbean people but will on purpose take them as "neither insiders nor outsiders."<sup>112</sup> Canada might proclaim to be super-multicultural, however, the power hierarchies and the feeling of white superiority remains within it. The Caribbean immigrants become the victims of one-sided deculturation, where they absorb the new features of Canadian culture but cunningly they are obliged to surrender their previous Caribbean cultures and traditions in order to become the citizens of Canadian normalized society without the own identity and consciousness.

Therefore, the true Caribbean consciousness should remember the times of Columbus discovery of America when the European nations, such as Spain, Netherland, Britain or France started to create settlements all around the Caribbean where almost nine out of ten original inhabitants, both men and women, were either killed off or became slaves of booming sugar plantations and the Caribbean become the toy in the hands of the European nations. The Caribbean consciousness should remember that during the whole eighteenth century, these black slaves believed in

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas, "A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand."

<sup>111</sup> D'Haen, *How Far Is America from Here?*, 148.

<sup>112</sup> D'Haen, *How Far Is America from Here?*, 148.

their subordination and in the white superiority. The slave revolts were often prevented or bloodily suppressed. Even though this dark period ended in the middle of the nineteenth century with the abolition of slavery and the new era of the emancipation gradually took place throughout the whole Caribbean, the typical colonial thinking of black subordination remained. The blacks, though independent, had no work, no income, no insurance and no future. The sugar plantations, the only way of previous living, started to disappear and the depression began.

The Caribbean consciousness should remember that the Caribbean ended the nineteenth century with the urgency to introduce a new way of survival and that was through the rich oil fields. Therefore, the cooperation with the new ascending global superpower began. The United States with its progressive way of thinking, open market policy, aggressive industrialization and strong individualism opposed in every aspect the traditional Caribbean preference of family and community. The era of the late twentieth century might have been the era of prosperity and growth, however, this era initiated the second colonisation. The Caribbean consciousness should remember Grenadian occupation in October 1983 as the “America’s way of showing the rest of the New World the extent to which it is prepared to go to impose its own ideology and economic model,”<sup>113</sup> where both military and economic interests prove to be satisfactory and very profitable, leaving the ruined dreams and faiths behind.

Moreover, Dionne Brand believes that her identity and the identity of the whole Caribbean nation and its immigrants is “built on those ruins. Those ruins of faith, those ruins of directions, and we are closely, closely connected with those who ruined us.”<sup>114</sup> Brand openly states that not only the Caribbean people, but all people of the Third World are intentionally kept tranquilized. It means “poor, servile, and infantile--fearful of any action Washington, Paris, or London may disapprove of.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the Caribbean consciousness should remember that the majority of the Caribbean population still remains not only without consumer durables of modern mass society but primarily without basic necessities, such as food, healthcare or education, only with the worn-out promises of the better future.

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand.”

<sup>114</sup> Joyette, “Self-Discovery and the Quest for an Aesthetic.”

<sup>115</sup> Thomas, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand.”

## 2.2 CANADIAN MIGRATIONS

Dionne Brand has come to Toronto in the time of radicalism. In her conversation with Nuzhat Abbas in 1990, she explains:

I just gobbled up Toronto at 17, and thought I was really living large! I loved this city, and still do. I arrived in the 1970's when Yorkville was still Yorkville, full of hippies, and incense, and craziness. [...] So when I came here, I began to write about the city, and specific places and specific kinds of people. There's a strange pull in this city between a kind of xenophobia and a kind of community.<sup>116</sup>

In 1970, Dionne Brand, as the newly arrived immigrant, perceived Canada as the place of the new beginning and possibility. Even though the atmosphere was already marked by the signs of phobias and segregation, Dionne Brand decided to settle down in Toronto. However, in the late eighties this city underwent the enormous industrial boom and “was becoming rough.”<sup>117</sup> The extraordinary city that used to be the place of the permanent pull between different communities and groups has become more common, more official and more hostile place and on the verge of the new millennium “the city is just debris”<sup>118</sup> of its previous version. Dionne Brand compares this modern city to the citadel, the closed and imprisoned place full of big factories, corporations and offices which took away its natural beauty and the real gloss.

Dionne Brand wants to demonstrate that the migrations to such industrial citadels are “not necessarily acts of liberation.”<sup>119</sup> She believes that the immigrants of the Third World are torn between the world of their origin and the world of their necessary escape, as being half here in Canada and half there in Caribbean. These immigrants are usually standing on the “borders [that] separat[e] and unit[e] Canada and the Caribbean.”<sup>120</sup> These borders are the results of the clash of different values and traditions of two distinct nations. Therefore, Brand's literary production depicts the immigrants as those people who are always roaming the places of the world and

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<sup>116</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>117</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>118</sup> Abbas, “Dionne's Brand of Writing.”

<sup>119</sup> Theo D'Haen et al., eds., *How Far Is America from Here? : Selected Proceedings of the First World Congress of the International American Studies Association, 22-24 May 2003* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 146, <http://www.questia.com/read/118939663>.

<sup>120</sup> D'Haen, *How Far Is America from Here?*, 146.

are unable to really settle down. They are permanently moving from one place to another but are unable to find the resting place. These characters are leaving the Caribbean land because of their bad economic and social conditions. The poverty, starvation and the physical violence force them to leave their roots, families and friends in order to search the better conditions in the countries of west. However, the western countries, particularly Canada, London or the United States, are not the ideal places either. On one side, these are the places of economic growth, fortune and success but on the other side, these are the places of starvation, alienation, exploitation and violence. The majority of the poor immigrants of the Third World remain poor even in Canada, doing the under-work, remaining at the bottom of the economic and social scale. Perhaps they are not longer seen as the slaves and servants but still they are taken as the source of cheap labour and the possible target of the physical or psychological violence. These migrants become stuck, unable to fully understand themselves, longing for their home place in Caribbean but determined to fulfil their dreams of becoming the legible citizens of the Canadian multicultural society.

However, Dionne Brand warns that these dreams will never be fulfilled because black immigrants will never be taken as the equal citizens and thus Brand's task is to "break the myth that black people have been rooted in the Canadian mosaic for more than 300 years."<sup>121</sup> Brand believes that people "arrive in the world and these myths embrace us"<sup>122</sup> and therefore it is easy to believe in them because these myths look like the general truths and facts. Moreover, Dionne Brand believes that even Canadian wilderness is the mere myth. The wilderness and the traditional Canadian preoccupation with this symbol is, according to Dionne Brand, the "total fallacy"<sup>123</sup> that persuades people that they can live in the empty and wild land. However, this place is not empty because "there are people living here"<sup>124</sup> who has already subjected the available land and built here the cities and towns. In the same way, the immigrants and newcomers believe in this myth and fallacy that there exists a piece of free wild land in Canada that is available and is still waiting for them.

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<sup>121</sup> Beatrice Watson, "We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History," *Herizons*, Fall 1995, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-625211901>.

<sup>122</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

<sup>123</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

<sup>124</sup> Abbas, "Dionne's Brand of Writing."

### **3 POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN BRAND'S POETRY**

The main aim of this chapter as well as the main goal of this thesis is to provide the analysis of three poetry collections *No Language Is Neutral* (1990), *Land To Light On* (1997) and *Ossuaries* (2010) in order to define what it means and how it feels to be the black lesbian of immigrant origin in the modern postcolonial world. This chapter further tries to find the factors that interfere with the formation of this identity and finally this chapter tries to decide whether the Canadian society is as open and multicultural as it declares. Since Brand's literary production reflects her personal experience and since she is aimed to write for her community, also these selected collections put in the centre of attention the experience of those whose rights are intentionally or unwittingly infringed. It is the poetry of the black lesbian woman of immigrant origin that is written for the black woman or for the black lesbian woman or for the black immigrant woman. Despite of the adjective, the main emphasis is always on subject "woman" and its premodifier "black."

In addition, Brand's personal encounter with the Western military interpretation of Grenadian independence and liberty assured her that any human being without the true identity becomes too vulnerable and too fragile in the huge postcolonial machinery and therefore the contemporary black lesbian woman has to dive down beneath the thick layer of racism, sexism and various social phobias in order to see the true face of the modern postcolonial world, to break the silence and to give the voice to her voiceless body. These collections combine Brand's innermost feelings with the general facts of history. The author travels through different parts of the world from the Caribbean through Europe and Asian up to Canada. She reveals the historical milestones of these places and at the same time she reveals the lives of the ordinary inhabitants of these places.

#### **3.1 NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL, THE BOOK OF YOUTH**

*No Language Is Neutral* comes from the period of nineteen eighties and nineties and thus reflects its vivid and optimistic moods. As it was presented in the first chapter these decades opened Canadian literary scene for minority authors. Therefore, this collection is full of energy and juvenility. Its title is derived from Derek Walcott's *Midsummer*, the poetry collection that reflects on the relationship between Standard English and Caribbean English. Dionne Brand get inspired with

these thoughts in her collection and perceives her mother tongue, it means Trinidadian Demotic, as the language of the own female experience. It is her female tongue where the rhythms of the Caribbean and Canadian land pulse through her vital body and her task is to convert them into the intelligible words and thus create the aesthetic experience. This natural demotic body language becomes the powerful weapon in gaining and defining of the own identity. It seems that the energy and vitality of this collection really reflects the atmosphere of the period of nineteen eighties and nineties when the alternative writers decided to experiment and challenge the standard norms of the English language. Moreover, it seems that Canadian literary as well as social scene really accepts and appreciates this diversity.

In addition, the formal structure of this collection mirrors the chameleonlike essence of Brand's rebellious passion of those years. This collection seems to be messy and untidy. There appear short lyrics and long poems. There appear poems with titles or poems with roman numerals in titles instead. These titles are with or without capitalization. Some poems like "NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL" resembles with its length the shorter narration, some poems like "Jackie" is written as one-paged long stanza without any form of indentation and the rest like "return II" is written in five-lined stanzas. All of these poems are of various line-lengths and with no rhymes at all. In addition, there appear the different font types. The language is the blend of Standard English with the strong flavour of the Caribbean tradition, however, still understandable for the ordinary reader. Dionne Brand uses words of the Caribbean dialect and region, such as "tay tay" meaning a kind of nausea, "karili" as kind of vegetable vine," "mitan" as the river, "Duenne" and "Yansa" as the Caribbean spirits, "sometimeish" meaning moody or "comess" meaning confused and noisy. In addition, Dionne Brand violates the standard world order as in "woman worried," she omits "to be" copula, as in "every eyes looking out," uses personal instead of possessive pronouns as in "she life" or avoids the suffix "-s" with a third-person singular pronoun. As it can be seen, there appears even more than three morphological and lexical features that differentiate Standard from Trinidadian English that Maria Casas states and that are analyzed in the first chapter. The language of this collection with its direct emphasis of the Trinidadian

black culture becomes the important weapon and moral stimulus in defending the personal and community rights.

From formal point of view, the collection is divided into four sections where every section unfolds the piece of the shuttered identity that at the end should create one clear picture, one whole being who is able to live and love at the same time. The central motif of the collection is associated with the sight, seeing and opening eyes in order to see the reality and to see the true face of the postcolonial world whose main intention is to limit your vision, because there is “constant veil over the eyes, the blood-stained blind of race and sex.”<sup>125</sup> In addition, Dionne Brand uses the eyes as the symbol of preservation and revelation because the eyes remember everything, the eyes remember the history the “fingers could not script.”<sup>126</sup> It might be stated that eyes as the part of the black physical body becomes the tool of communication that guarantees the connection between the inner experience and the outside world. It seems that Dionne Brand finally found in her scared and injured body the strong component that is able to authentically capture the violence the black woman’s psyche has to sustain in the course of time, as if the eyes are able to transmute the physical pain, inner desires and fear into the intelligible diction.

The first section of this collection “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL” can be described as the manifesto of being different where the narrator wakes up the nameless girl from the previous sleep and forces her to listen to the story of her black lesbian identity. The second section “RETURN” and the third section “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL” reveal the myths of the postcolonial world and the importance of the language in breaking of these myths and the last section “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL” shows the nameless girl as the already mature woman who is able not only to see the true face of the world but is already prepared to help other nameless girls who wander in the dark. Therefore, the opening poem “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL I” seems to be the reveille to wake up the sleeping identity and the rest of the collection become the series of instruction on becoming the whole woman. It can be even said that Dionne Brand and the whole collection is as adamant as nature and as pervasive as the rigid social rules in constant persuading the nameless girl to wake up and see the reality, where the author wants to “wrap

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<sup>125</sup> Dionne Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language Is Neutral*, (Toronto, Ontario: The Coach House Press, 1990, reprinted by McClelland & Stewart, 1998, page references are to the 1998 edition), 24.

<sup>126</sup> Brand, “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,” in *No Language*, 16.

myself around you here in this line so that you will know something”<sup>127</sup> and by “something” the narrator considers the true black lesbian identity.

The narrator of this collection is a black lesbian woman. Since Brand’s poetry can be described as the confessional poetry and Dionne Brand admits in conversation with Christian Olbey that “My [Brand’s] work is an ongoing conversation with myself and my time,”<sup>128</sup> it might be stated that this black lesbian narrator is the author herself. However, on the other side, Dionne Brand also confesses that she does not like certainty and taking absolute responsibility. In conversation with Pauline Butling, Brand indicates that she uses in her poetry the pronoun “you” instead of “I” intentionally in order “not taking any responsibility in the poem. Somebody else is always doing something.”<sup>129</sup> This strategy, Brand explains, provides the author the protection not to be blamed for too open and too radical thoughts and actions of her literary characters, and at the same time this strategy provides the freedom to question the pressing problems and simultaneously to propose the possible solutions that cannot be said openly.

Even though the homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 in Canada, even though the policy on multiculturalism has been in force since 1971, the cases of “the harassment, violence, physical abuse, psychological oppression and hate propaganda”<sup>130</sup> against homosexuals still existed and continued within Canadian society even two decades later in the period when collection *No Language Is Neutral* was released. Since its poems present “narrator’s love story”<sup>131</sup> that is said and written by woman and is dedicated to woman, Dionne Brand is aware of the fact that this collection might evoke the public nuisance. As she explains in the first poem of this collection:

...this is the poem no woman  
ever write for a woman because she ’fraid to touch  
this river boiling like a woman in she sleep  
that smell of fresh things and warm sweat<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL II,” in *No Language*, 35.

<sup>128</sup> Olbey, “Dionne Brand in Conversation.”

<sup>129</sup> Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, “Dionne Brand on Struggle and Community, Possibility and Poetry,” in *Poets Talk* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 80.

<sup>130</sup> “TIMELINE | Same-sex rights in Canada,” *CBC News*, last modified January 12, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516>.

<sup>131</sup> Cook, “In Between,” in *Writing Lovers*, 86.

<sup>132</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL I,” in *No Language Is Neutral*, 4.

The pivotal world here becomes “fraid.” Dionne Brand already knows the consequences of being too open, too sexual and too lesbian. As it was mentioned in the first chapter, Dionne Brand was among the first Caribbean writers who openly celebrated the lesbian possibilities and the only author who did so on the International Conference of Caribbean Women’s Writing in 1988. This coming out was, however, not appreciated by its leading founders and therefore she was purposely omitted and ignored by the official Caribbean-Canadian literary scene. Despite the fear of public ignorance and exclusion, Dionne Brand continued to celebrate her sexuality and the same amount of courage she asks from her characters and the possible readers. This collection aims to create the strong bond of trust between the narrator and the addressee in order to evoke the feeling that there exist the other person and friend with whom it is possible to oppose the postcolonial society and its public judgement and mockery.

Whereas the postcolonial society is in this collection understood as the obstacle of the true identity that blocks the true vision, the nature and landscape is depicted as its friend, as narrator’s “own romanticism”<sup>133</sup> that enables to see the reality. Faye Hammill claims that specifically the Caribbean landscape and its nature is seen as the “woman-centred experience, including lesbian erotics.”<sup>134</sup> In *No Language Is Neutral*, the nature concretely the Pilate River, the river she “never crossed as a child. A woman, my mother, was weeping on its banks”<sup>135</sup> is the river that enables the true vision. This river becomes the symbol of the potential awaking, where the girls can either come and cross the river and thus accept the true identity or can wait and cry near its banks and thus remain enslaved in the personal “fraid” of public mockery. Dionne Brand decided to cross the river and thus face and see the reality and to accept her true sexual orientation. As she claims in conversation with Pauline Butling, she perceives “the landscape of the place as having to do with my sexuality, that the landscape seemed to me to be female.”<sup>136</sup> The natural landscape is the female landscape where the female body comes from the nature and returns back to the nature and where the female body creates its basic component. Therefore, the narrator of this collection frequently connects woman

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<sup>133</sup> Nuzhat Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing,” *Horizons*, Fall 1999, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-413263981>.

<sup>134</sup> Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 99.

<sup>135</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 24.

<sup>136</sup> Butling, “Dionne Brand,” in *Poets Talk*, 80.

and her characteristic features with the nature and its features. Basically, the woman can become as strong as rock, hill road and forest or can become as free as ocean and sea breeze or can become as beautiful as pearl and lagoon. This nature seems to be the place that creates the female voice. It is the place of colourfulness, variety, joy and energy as in:

fine red tongue of flamboyant and orange lips  
muzzling the air, that green plump turning fat and  
crimson, still the crazy bougainvillea fancying and  
netting itself purple, pink, red, white...<sup>137</sup>

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, it is this Caribbean place of colourfulness, joy and energy that enables the narrator as well as the author to become the student of sound in order to absorb and capture the nonverbal expressions of this surrounding and translate them into intelligible and comprehensible message. On the contrary, it might be noticed that Canadian nature lacks this possibility of capturing and transforming the nonverbal expressions into their verbal forms. Canadian nature is overshadowed by brittle smell of capitalism and industrialisation that takes away Canada's natural beauty and forces its observers and students to see and smell the cold and harsh reality of the concrete building.

### **3.1.1 WAKE UP GIRL THOUGH IT IS "HARD AGAINST THE SOUL"**

The first section "HARD AGAINST THE SOUL" contains only one poem of simple title "I" which consists of six fine-lined stanzas, prefaced by anaphoric exclamation "this is you girl." Dionne Brand here records the moment of realization of her true sexuality. In conversation with Pauline Butling, Dionne Brand confesses that this exclamation catches the moment of the "first visceral recognition of my [Brand's] sexuality, my lesbian sexuality."<sup>138</sup> However, as it was already mentioned, Dionne Brand loves uncertainty and the exclamatory pronoun "you" can also include the other addressee, for instance the unknown black lesbian girl who strives to reveal and accept her true sexuality. In this perception, Dionne Brand

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<sup>137</sup> Brand, "return I," in *No Language*, 7.

<sup>138</sup> Butling, "Dionne Brand," in *Poets Talk*, 80.

becomes a teacher and mentor and this collection is the course whose aim is to take the nameless girl and create the whole woman who is able to recognize her real sexuality and who, in addition, perceives this sexuality as the gift of the own uniqueness and who is able to perceives herself as the strong independent beautiful woman “who looks at a woman and says, here, I have found you.”<sup>139</sup>

In order to complete this course, the nameless girl needs a reason to start, to wake up and to understand her otherness. The poem “I” offers this reason and that is highly treasured freedom and freed consciousness, because “to be awake is more lovely than dreams.”<sup>140</sup> Dreams in this case might present the myths and illusions of the postcolonial world. As Dionne Brand believes, people are born into the world and these myths basically embrace them and therefore it is not difficult to believe in them. It is exactly the dream that limits human’s vision and sight and forces people to believe in delusions as it was described on Canadian myth of wilderness in the first chapter. Therefore, the nameless girl needs to understand that the sexual identity is her innate part that is “never waning or forgetting [...] that is where you [nameless girl] make sense.”<sup>141</sup> However, this true identity is covered by the thick layer of postcolonial myths and illusions and the girl has to become strong enough to break this layer and to go beyond the unanswered questions of prejudice and ignorance and to confront the traditions and dogmatic religious truths in order to find out that she is the prisoner who lives by standards and norms of the conservative society where diversity is not accepted but normalized.

Prejudice, traditions and religion will bring the obstacles and will force the nameless girl to hesitate, not to continue in this course and her personal quest. These forces will try to normalize the nameless girl and will try to persuade her to accept the prescribed role of the weak black woman in the society. These forces will call the nameless girl “duenne” which in Caribbean religion and folklore represents the sexless, faceless creature with the backward-turned feet, the ghost of unchristened child who is fated to roam forests of Trinidad forever. Basically, these forces will try to persuade the nameless girl that to accept her lesbian orientation and to go against the traditional view of the humble and obedient woman is the same as being damned. However, in Brand’s eyes, the woman wants more than a

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<sup>139</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL X,” in *No Language*, 50.

<sup>140</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL I,” in *No Language*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL I,” in *No Language*, 4.

husband, household and children. Even though this lesbian declaration is “breaking hard against things,”<sup>142</sup> the final coming out brings the absolute relief that can be compared to grace.

### 3.1.2 BREAKING THE MYTHS

Once the nameless girl is awoken and listens to the author, the lesson can become. Dionne Brand believes that to know that you are different is not enough. It is also important to realize that this diversity is not dangerous and that this diversity will not make you “duenne” but will make you an independent human being with the own identity. Dionne Brand often emphasizes that the people are born to the world that is full of myths and illusions. Therefore, Brand’s fundamental task is to reveal and deconstruct these myths that overshadow the reality and limit the sight. Dionne Brand, as well-travelled narrator, takes the nameless girl through concrete places of the postcolonial world from Grenada through Pointe Galeote, Guayguayare, Manzinilla up to Canada in order to show their real faces, their ancestral wisdom and practices, their authentic people and their real lives. The author tries to show the true face of the postcolonial world that is not equal, not liberal and definitely not free. It is the world than can humiliate you, imprison you, enslave you or even kill you in order to keep its myths and illusions alive. Basically, Dionne Brand tries to persuade the nameless girl that the postcolonial world will never accept her diversity and uniqueness. This nameless girl in the same way as Dionne Brand is black, is woman, has slavery ancestors and is probably of immigrant origin. It means that the nameless girl is in every aspect distinct from the leading white male heterosexual elite of Caucasian origin. This collection screams: never trust the postcolonial world because this world wants to have you weak, fragile, vulnerable and easily conquerable and controllable. Therefore, the knowledge of the black past and black heritage can make the nameless girl aware of her present possibilities in order not to become the victim of the capitalistic society.

It might be said that this collection reveals three pervasive myths that strive to keep such nameless girls all around the world in the predatory claws of the postcolonial machinery. That is the myth of western dominance that jumps on girl’s slavery heritage and on her blackness and tries to persuade the girl that she is and

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<sup>142</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAINST THE SOUL I,” in *No Language*, 4.

will remain the servant because regardless regime or time the black is always black. The second myth will attack girl's femininity and will try to persuade the girl that she is too weak and too domestic to enter the big world of male politics and the third myth will try to persuade the girl that there exist the perfect place where all her dream can come true and that place is Canada.

### 3.1.2.1 MYTH OF WESTERN DOMINANCE

The black is not equal but only coexist and is superficially tolerated by the white. Dionne Brand in order to make the girl believe in this declaration shows her two places of the Caribbean land, the places of Grenada and Pointe Galeote, two places of slavery origin, two places of “the dozens of brown legs itching to run”<sup>143</sup> that are under the influence and protection of western world that believes in its political, social, economical and cultural dominance. As it was already mentioned, Dionne Brand worked as the Communication Coordinator in Grenada for a year until the American invasion known as Operation Fury. In November 1983, the western military invaders promised democracy, equality, freedom and better future for the local black people. In this collection, Dionne Brand decides to check these promises and returns back with the nameless girl to Grenada to see the reality. The very first lines of this poem disclose that Grenada is still Grenada. The gap that existed between the white oppressors and the black inhabitants still exists. There is the landscape of breathtaking virginity, however, this scenery is “white washed”<sup>144</sup> by the American democracy and the breathtaking beauty is soaked in “the hard, distinct, brittle smell of slavery.”<sup>145</sup> It seems that Grenada is not able to get rid of the shadows of slavery and inequality where the western promises of better future remain unfulfilled only as the illusions and myths of the artificial world. Grenada is the land of real “duenne” that is haunted by the phantoms of the colonial captivity. Not liberation but the red threat and commies led the American military troops with their heavy weapons, bombs, aircrafts and battleships to attack the Grenadian farmers who dreamed of better life without the handcuffs of slavery. However, it seems that slavery evolved into the new capitalistic order. This harsh reality can be not only seen in the watery and ancient eyes of the local people but can be even felt

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<sup>143</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 19.

<sup>144</sup> Brand, “return I,” in *No Language*, 7.

<sup>145</sup> Brand, “return I,” in *No Language*, 7.

from “the smell of cotton and silk,”<sup>146</sup> the smell that revives the era of field plantations where the black people were forced to work as mules for their white masters and were intentionally kept fragile and weak. Since Dionne Brand believes in non-linearity of time, the colonial era is not over and its remnants are still seen and felt in every corner of this place. The western capitalism and the past colonial order are two interwoven forces and therefore Grenada is forced to face the new elaborated slavery and second colonization.

In the same manner, Pointe Galeote faces the effects of deceptive western policy. Pointe Galeote can be described as the last jot of land in the south-eastern part of Trinidad, as the place with the richest oil and gas reserves in the whole Trinidad or as the ordinary place in extraordinary spotlight of western capitalism. Even the nameless girl gets confused and wrongly labels this place as Venezuela that is known for its large and attractive oil and gas reserves. However, the narrator corrects the girl that this land is in fact Pointe Galeote, the rich land that ended in the handcuffs of western capitalism, where the local black people dream of escape because the air is sick and intoxicated. This land provides no protection. This land is “not shell, is shackle.”<sup>147</sup> Once again, the narrator shows this land as the land of illusion and myth of western forwardness and sophistication. Since oil and gas extraction is in the hands of more evolved white foreigners, the simple local black people remain poor. Once again the white is more than the black. In addition, Brand shows that not only people but also nature of this place suffers under the heavy gas and oil extraction that causes the coastal erosions. The water has “the envied tails”<sup>148</sup> and cuts deeper and deeper into the land that is slowly disappearing and the local people become the prisoners of this land who crave to swim away “away! Far from here!”<sup>149</sup> However, they are unable to do so, always crushing and returning back. Even though, the water is traditionally described as the source of life, Dionne Brand shows that water also “explore[s] the troubled origins of Caribbean people”<sup>150</sup> and it is water that makes their suffering even harsher. Brand implies that the nature cuts the people dead and plays “sometimeish historian,”<sup>151</sup> because

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<sup>146</sup> Brand, “return I,” in *No Language*, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Brand, “return II,” in *No Language*, 12.

<sup>148</sup> Brand, “return II,” in *No Language*, 12.

<sup>149</sup> Brand, “return II,” in *No Language*, 12.

<sup>150</sup> Lucy Evans, “Tidal Poetics in Dionne Brand’s at the Full and Change of the Moon,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2009), <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-1890419071>.

<sup>151</sup> Brand, “return II,” in *No Language*, 12.

people are destroying its beauty. The narrator warns the nameless girls that this place is the place of another “duenne” where the poor people roam the scattered land and will never get free. These people remains stuck in their illusions. They even become mad here and are unable to break the myth of their own subordination.

### 3.1.2.2 MYTH OF WEAK WOMAN

The image of black woman in the postcolonial world is demoralizing. Dionne Brand believes that not only the black colour, but also female gender is under the permanent attack of the postcolonial world. The woman is too weak and too fragile as “*a small woman, small, small.*”<sup>152</sup> The woman is depicted in male eyes as the housewife who always founders, because foundering and giving up is “*in all the usual last minute domestic things a housewife has to do.*”<sup>153</sup> Therefore, the narrator wants to persuade the nameless girl that this depiction is the mere myth because the contemporary black woman has a choice. She can either give up as it is expected in the muscular world or can fight and struggle. It seems that the narrator gives the nameless girl the ultimate choice of two rivers. The girl can wait and cry near the banks of the river that is “*dead and teeming from waste and alligators*” or the girl can follow the river that is “*rumbling to the ocean in a tumult.*”<sup>154</sup> As it might be presumed the second river presents the right choice. The narrator celebrates those women who decided to follow and cross this tumultuous river, such as Phyllis Coard, Jacqueline Creft and the narrator herself who also crossed the river and has become the woman of extraordinary gift to see the reality.

All of these women decide to break the myth of weak and domestic woman. Phyllis Coard decides to enter the male-dominated world of politics and became the Minister of Women’s Affairs in the People’s Revolutionary Government of Grenada, imprisoned in 1983 for her role in political coup, released in 2000. Expectably, Phyllis was not perceived as the capable politician in the male dominated world but as the weak and fragile housewife who is destined to surrender, who is called “*hyena*” and who is considered to be the whore, because in male world “*the first thing they would jump on was the skill of your womb.*”<sup>155</sup> It

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<sup>152</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 23.

<sup>153</sup> Brand, “Phyllis,” in *No Language*, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 19.

<sup>155</sup> Brand, “Phyllis,” in *No Language*, 9.

seems that sexism is nowhere near being latent here. Explicitly, the woman is identified according to her sexual and reproductive organs but not according to her capabilities. In addition, the womb that might be the symbol of the new life becomes the source of her mockery. Despite the mockery, Phyllis does not give up. Even in prison her voice was “ringing through bars with message to keep up the struggle.”<sup>156</sup> Her strong voice seems to be her biggest weapon that is able to silence the male oppression and persuade the ordinary woman that the fight for freedom and equality is not useless.

In the same manner, Jackie Creft entered the male-dominated world. The narrator depicts Jackie as the educated teacher and strong woman who believed in freedom of her country and her people and who was able to stand against “gratuitous rain of foreign clerks”<sup>157</sup> and who was able to attract the crowds thanks to her inspiring voice and intelligent speech. She became the Minister of Education in the People’s Revolutionary Government of Grenada. Unfortunately she was murdered during the political coup when “bullets crisscrossed your temple and heart.”<sup>158</sup> However, the narrator does not let this extraordinary woman disappear and calls her Yansa, the goddess of the wind and the dark female warrior whose warlike spirit and ringing voice preserve in the wind.

The third extraordinary woman is the author herself. In poem “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater” Dionne Brand describes herself as the woman of extraordinary gift to read and see the painful memories in the human eyes. She is looking at the photograph of Mammy Prater, the black female ex-slave who was one hundred and fifteen years old when her first photograph was taken. Dionne Brand is immediately attracted by Mammy’s watery eyes, in which she reads the harsh story of exploitation and violence. Mammy Prater is the silent storyteller who is waiting for the proper being who would be able to read her story and tell it loudly. It seems that this being is Dionne Brand. She is prepared to reveal the story of the painful and desperate life of the female slave who was forced to spend her whole life on the fields, working as the mule from dawn to dusk every single day. As the narrator claims: “it would be me who would find her will, here meticulous

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<sup>156</sup> Brand, “Phyllis,” in *No Language*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> Brand, “Jackie,” in *No Language*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Brand, “Jackie,” in *No Language*, 11.

account, her eyes.”<sup>159</sup> Mammy Prater could not tell this story by herself. She could not cross the river because in her time the world could not “hold her eyes.”<sup>160</sup> The colonialism and slavery violently kept her in silence. These forces prevented her from speaking and forced her to wait more than a century until “the technique of photography was suitably developed to make sure the picture would be clear,”<sup>161</sup> to make sure that her eyes will be prepared to tell the story and there would be a person who would be able to listen to this silent story. Even though Mammy Prater was not waiting always patiently and silently and she had the ultimate taste to cross the river and to kill the white oppressor, she decided to wait or rather she was forced to wait and to stay and to cry at the banks of the river.

Moreover, the narrator claims that it is not necessarily to go to the era of slavery to find such enslaved women. The narrators very past and memories reveal three women who in the same way as Mammy Prater could not cross the river and that are narrator’s mother, grandmother Amelia and her ancestor Liney. In “Amelia still” her mother is described as the weak woman who is forced to accept her role of domestic wife in the same way as her mother did and her mother’s mother Liney did. Even though narrator’s mother tried to run away “all the way out of the hell of us [...] hunting for her heart [...] hunting, hunting her blood,”<sup>162</sup> she was unable to really catch it. She was not able to cross the Pilate River and thus she became the creature of “the oblique shape of something without expectation,”<sup>163</sup> as the powerless figure longing for better life but unable to break the myth of her own weakness and subordination. She became the woman who is always stumbling and falling. This woman was:

...a woman who  
thought she was human but got the message, female  
and black and somehow those who gave it to her  
were like family, mother and brother, spitting woman  
at her...<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Brand, “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,” in *No Language*, 16.

<sup>160</sup> Brand, “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,” in *No Language*, 16.

<sup>161</sup> Brand, “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,” in *No Language*, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Brand, “Amelia still,” in *No Language*, 13.

<sup>163</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 24.

<sup>164</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 24.

Amelia, narrator's mother and Liney are even not considered to be the human being but the mere objects. Moreover, the narrator emphasizes that Liney lived in "barracoon." This place can be described as "enclosure in which black slaves were confined for a limited period."<sup>165</sup> So the narrator compares Liney to the slave, even though, she was not living in the era of slavery but her life resembled such life. This woman lived humble and obedient life. She was not the human being but the "saddle of children given you by one man then another, the bear and darn and mend of your vagina."<sup>166</sup> The black woman, husband's servant and prostitute and that is all what can be remembered by her own people and relatives. In addition, it seems that the author warns the nameless girl that the black woman cannot trust even her close family, her brother or even the own mother because those are the members of the family who believes in the myth of the weak woman, who takes the expression "woman" and changes it into the insult. As it was outlined in the first chapter, the black woman suffers not only within the white society but also within the black community. The black woman of either immigrant or native origin, of either homosexual or heterosexual orientation suffers under the effects of multiple colonisations. She suffers because of her black skin in the white society and she suffers because of her feminity in the black community. Therefore, the narrator emphasizes that the nameless girl possesses in the contemporary world the priceless gift of choice. This girl can decide whether she really wants to obey her abusive family or whether she wants to follow her inner spirit and finally cross the Pilate River.

### 3.1.2.3 MYTH OF AMERICAN DREAM

The migrations to the western industrial citadels are not necessarily the acts of liberation. To be the black woman is really tough but to be the black immigrant woman is even tougher. Poverty, domestic violence and hunger forces thousands of black women to fleet from their motherlands and search the better lives in the Western dreamed-of countries. However, "romance only happen in romance novel."<sup>167</sup> The narrator confesses that throughout her entire childhood, she believed

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<sup>165</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "barracoon," accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/barracoon>.

<sup>166</sup> Brand, "NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL," in *No Language*, 23.

<sup>167</sup> Brand, "NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL," in *No Language*, 25.

in the myth of American dream. The narrator together with her sister Pearl refused “to haunt the beach at Guaya.”<sup>168</sup> They refused to live the miserable life as their mother and their mother’s mother lived. They refused to be the victims of the abusive husbands and refused to be the mere saddles for children. Basically, these two black women refused to be the ordinary woman “whose hand trembled at the past, then even being born to her was temporary.”<sup>169</sup> Running and escape seemed to be the best option how to avoid the destiny of these black women. Multicultural Canada should provide the shelter for their wounded bodies and their tired minds. The narrator even admits that in Canada, there is less pressure on her femininity, but subsequently adds that there is much more pressure on becoming the good citizen. As she emphasizes, it is “the envy of colony” that forces you to be “better than, brighter than, richer than”<sup>170</sup> your neighbour. The narrator warns the nameless girl that Canada lets you be the dreamer. Canada lets the black female immigrants to dream the dream of becoming dancer, but because of their blackness and because of their immigrant origin sends them to the kitchen of Grace Hospital. Canada with its cold concrete building and industrial progress overwhelms the eyesight and forces people to believe in the myth of American dream, the myth that will, however, never be fulfilled. Canada is the place of industrial development and human remoteness, only “shards, shards, shards, shards of raw glass, a debris of people.”<sup>171</sup> In addition, the narrator claims that this country took her and her sister the ability to speak: “Not a single word drops from my lips for twenty years.”<sup>172</sup> Canadian landscape and its language became cold and foreign for them. It became the place where it is not possible to smile because it is a sin, where it is not possible to play music because it is too loud. This country caused that their tongue “split in two, one branch fell silent, the other argued hotly for going home.”<sup>173</sup> They tried to live the life in between. On one side, they wanted to stay in cold Canada, work very hard and fulfil their dreams of becoming dancers, but on the other side, they wanted to return back to the mother country, the land they escaped from, the land of violence and oppression. The narrator believes that such life is “half lie and half memory, a

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<sup>168</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 19.

<sup>169</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 29.

<sup>171</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 26.

<sup>172</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 28.

<sup>173</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 28.

voice no room nowhere could believe was sincere.”<sup>174</sup> It was the life of false nostalgia. In conversation with Nuthat Abbas, Dionne Brand claims that nostalgia is “about going back to that place before [...] before the great disaster”<sup>175</sup> and this great disaster is Pearl’s death in the car accident. Pearl who left the Caribbean, Pearl who entered Canada, Pearl who dreamed of becoming dancer, working hard day and night, “dying back home in a car crash twenty years after everything was squeezed”<sup>176</sup> in these few lines. The word “squeezed” seems to be the most appropriate word how to define the rush life of the black woman of immigrant origin on Canadian landscape. It is the life of the cheater who believes to be the human being but gets the message, woman and black and immigrant.

However, it might be said that narrator’s sister Pearl, specifically her sudden death forced the narrator to break even the last myth of American dream. The narrator realizes that Canada does not provide relief either. In the Caribbean as well as in Canada, there exist the myths that embrace people and force them to accept the prescribed roles of majority. In the Caribbean, it is tough to be woman. It is the place where your true identity is overshadowed by the myth of domestic wife, where “woman and your breasts need armour to walk.”<sup>177</sup> In Canada, it is tough to remain human. It is the world of mythical dominance as “another world, and then another one inside and is so separate and fast to the skin but voiceless, never born, or born and stilled ... hush.”<sup>178</sup> In Canada as well as in the Caribbean the diversity is not accepted but normalized. It seems that the narrator and nameless girl become the victims of the multiple oppressions. The colour of their skin, their immigrant origin together with their femininity and their affection for the same sex limit their possibilities in the male-dominated postcolonial world that squeezes them and their true identities.

### 3.1.3 POWER OF LANGUAGE

“Voiceless,” “stilled,” “hush,” “squeezed” are the words that are frequently used to describe the position of the black females in the postcolonial society. Moreover, these are the words that prevent the narrator from living and speaking for

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<sup>174</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 27.

<sup>175</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>176</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 27.

<sup>177</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 30.

more than twenty years in Canada until Pearl's sudden death. The day her sister died is metaphorically narrator's own death. It was the death of her old self who could not speak, who was "biting my tongue on new english, reading biology, stumbling over unworded white facts."<sup>179</sup> On the other side, Pearl's death was as a fer-de-lance's bite. This death was the burning impulse to create the new self that will not remain silent but will speak up. Speaking helps the unique woman to break the myths that embrace her and thus keep her uniqueness in the world of official licenses, stamped forms and bureaucratic masks. It seems that the language is that tool that preserves the own identity.

As it was already outlined in the first chapter, in Brand's perception, the language is not just the mere morphological and lexical order but the living thing that absorbs the history of its concrete nation because what is said in any language "is told in faultless knowledge of skin [...] not in words and in words and in words learned by heart."<sup>180</sup> Moreover, language is unstable. The language might become powerful or can lose all its power in favour of another language. The language can silence the human being. It can erase the whole nation from the history or on the contrary, the language can help the ordinary black lesbian to definite who she is. As Kaya Fraser mentions, the language may "imprison [...] as much as it frees."<sup>181</sup> Therefore the narrator and the protagonists of *No Language Is Neutral* are either talking, having strong voice, their voice laugh and sound sweet as the voice of Phyllis Coard, their voice is ringing and preserves in the wind as Jackie's voice. However, on the other side, there are protagonists whose voice is humming and murmuring. There is the loud "shhh" and "hush" heard everywhere. There are protagonists who are voiceless, unable to speak a single word and therefore they are either crying at the bank of rivers as narrator's mother did or they are vanishing from history as Liney did or they are dying abandoned in the cold remote rooms and places as Pearl did.

It seems that the ability of becoming self is co-extensive with the learning how to speak up in English language that due to the era of colonization becomes Brand's mother as well as father tongue. In contemporary times, those people, those Caribbean people, those immigrants who still see the English language as the

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<sup>179</sup> Brand, "NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL," in *No Language*, 30.

<sup>180</sup> Brand, "NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL," in *No Language*, 31.

<sup>181</sup> Fraser, "Language to Light On," 292.

language of the foreign oppressors, as the language of “the race conscious landlords and their jim crow flats,”<sup>182</sup> as the language of “strict description and teeth edging true,”<sup>183</sup> than these people remain silent, unable to use the English language as the language of their protection. This happened to narrator’s female ancestors. This happens to Liney, to her mother and to her sister Pearl. Moreover, this can happen to the whole society and this has already happened to Manzinilla, the eastern place of Trinidad. The narrator takes the nameless girl to the final destination of Manzinilla coastline in order to see the place of language oppression. Manzinilla is described as the multilingual place of English, French and Spanish influence. However, it is the place without the mother tongue. Manzinilla was always in the hands of the foreign languages, therefore, the local inhabitants perceived this place as the place of silence. In nineteenth century, this place was the source of profitable cocoa industry where the local inhabitants or rather slaves were forced to work “a backbone bending and unbending without a word” when “talking was left for night and hush was idiom and hot core.”<sup>184</sup> In twenty century, during the Second World War this place served as the military camp for US soldiers when local people were “spitting out the last spun syllables for cruelty.”<sup>185</sup> Even though the slavery was abolished, the language oppression continued. All what could be heard here was:

a morphology of rolling chain and cooper gong  
now shape this twang, falsettos of whip and air  
rudiment this grammar.<sup>186</sup>

From this quote, it might be concluded that not people but foreign language is in charge. Non-human object becomes the living thing and cruel guard who uses the strength, “rolling chain,” “cooper gong” and “whip” to silence the local inhabitants. The foreign language seems to scream and shout whereas the local inhabitants noiselessly lament. The language slowly erases these ancestors from the memory of the world. All what remains are the shards and splinters that will never again create the clear picture. The narrator, however, believes that the present Manzinilla has the chance of choice of becoming free from the handcuffs of the

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<sup>182</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 28.

<sup>183</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 19.

<sup>184</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 20

<sup>185</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 20.

<sup>186</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 20.

language. However, it will be extremely difficult task. The ability of speaking up, of producing the “new sound forming pushing towards lips” will be connected with a lot of pain and suffering that “made to bubble blood.”<sup>187</sup> However, on the other side, the feeling of pain, of suffering and the presence of blood assure the narrator that the inhabitants are still alive, are still the human beings that can be remembered by the history of the postcolonial world. These people still have the chance to change the foreign language of oppression to the own language of resistance. These inhabitants have the chance their ancestors did not have.

The same happens, the narrator observes, with her mother, her grandmother Amelia and her great-grandmother Liney. Liney as the oldest one is even hardly remembered by anyone. All what remains is the vague memory of her ill-behaved manners. She was the whore “*a sugar cake, sweet sweet sweet. Yuh muma! that girl was a sugar cake!*”<sup>188</sup> and that is all, no more memories. Liney is slowly disappearing from the history as “a chapter yellowed and moth eaten at the end.”<sup>189</sup> Basically, Liney did not learn how to speak up and how to use the language for her protection. She remained in the silence in the same way as her daughter. However, her granddaughter broke this vicious circle and decided to speak up and use the English language for her protection. Moreover, this granddaughter feels the duty to make her story and the story of her female ancestors visible and memorable for other generations. It might be even supposed that the narrator perceives herself as the chosen one, who is able to catch the attention of the world history. As she claims:

History will only hear you if you give birth to a  
woman who smooths starched linen in the wardrobe  
drawer, trembles when she walks and who gives birth  
to another woman who cries near a river and  
vanishes and who gives birth to a woman who is a  
poet, and, even then.<sup>190</sup>

The “woman who is a poet” is Dionne Brand who tries to preserve the memory of her female ancestors in her poetry. On the other side, she knows that it is

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<sup>187</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 20.

<sup>188</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 21.

<sup>189</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 23.

<sup>190</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 23.

not possible to “save a cactus left between pages.”<sup>191</sup> Basically, she can write the poetry of these women but there will be always missing a few verses. She can see and capture the moment and the parts but will never capture the whole essence. She can see the pain and suffering in the eyes but is not able to read the whole story behind it. Great-grandmother Liney, her mother or ex-slave Mammy Prater are already washed out by the “gushing river [that] had already swallowed most of”<sup>192</sup> their essence. The majority of their stories remain the unread chapters of the book of female oppression. Therefore, the nameless girl cannot lament as Liney or Pearl but she has to speak up as Phyllis or Jackie or as Dionne Brand.

### 3.1.4 HOPE

Whereas the first half of this collection is full of narrator’s energy and boastful vitality to define the self, the final section shows much more modesty. The narrator tried to wake up the sleeping girl whereby the narrator self fell to the dreams of finding the perfect place “another place, not here, a woman might...”<sup>193</sup> be the unfinished line of endless possibilities. It seems that the narrator, under the influence of the utopian thought of Marxism-Leninism, believed in another myth of perfect place where all her dreams could come true. The narrator even calls herself imbecile at the age of thirty. When she was a child, it was easy to be nice and pretty because for an innocent girl it is enough. However, to be nice and pretty is not sufficient for the girl who is growing older and wiser. At the certain age, being nice and pretty splinters you. Even though the young woman tries to “grasp some parts” of your splintered identity, there is still “something missing like a wing, some fragment of your real life.”<sup>194</sup> In the conversation with Nuzhat Abbas, Dionne Brand explains that this missing fragment becomes her childhood memory of the old woman. Brand explains:

When I was eight, I saw this old woman sitting on the surf, on the beach at the back of the house. She was sitting there and she was stark naked and she was bathing herself. I was shocked! [...] There was this old woman with her breasts flapping, her legs in the water, and she couldn't give a shit. I recall

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<sup>191</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 23.

<sup>192</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 24.

<sup>193</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 30.

<sup>194</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL X,” in *No Language*, 48.

the moment where I thought “she is free!” [...] So I thought there is a moment when women can attain this moment, of not having to be concerned about the number of strictures against her, both said and unsaid. Both written and unwritten. A moment where you can be your complete physical self.<sup>195</sup>

This old woman becomes Promised Land of the absolute freedom. This old naked woman becomes the place and the space without rules, without standards and norms. This old woman becomes metaphorically narrator’s first lover that she refuses to leave. Here is the place of the absolute ecstasy. The problem, however, is that this place virtually does not exist and the narrator becomes overwhelmed by the search of this mythical virgin land. Dionne Brand in various interviews admits that she became obsessed with the search of absolute freedom especially after the Grenadian occupation by American military troops in 1983. She tried to find this Promised Land both in the virtual and in her poetic world. However, the longing for this land and searching of the old woman prevented her from living. As she claims she was seeing too many and too bad things when “her eyes could not close,”<sup>196</sup> therefore, she frequently ended in the empty hotel rooms with the bottle of rum in her hand and with the thoughts of perfect place in her head. She wanted to find this place, this old woman in order to escape the “gales of masculinity” only to realize that “she [the old woman] was masculine,”<sup>197</sup> too, full of prohibitions and commands how to live and who to love.

The narrator admits that in that time she became the weak woman who lost the courage to continue in the fight. She describes the era after the Grenadian occupation as the era of dying. She was dying and disappearing from this postcolonial world that “is only white history.”<sup>198</sup> It was the world in which “the police bullet glistening through a black woman’s spine.”<sup>199</sup> The narrator ceased to live and love because it was too dangerous. Therefore, it might be stated that this collection is the author’s personal hope in the progress of nameless girl who will not become the woman who cries at the bank of Pilate River, who will not become the woman imprisoned in the violence of her abusive husband, who will not end in the empty hotel room with the bottle of rum in her hand but this girl will become the

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<sup>195</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>196</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL X,” in *No Language*, 45.

<sup>197</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL X,” in *No Language*, 46.

<sup>198</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL VIII,” in *No Language*, 43.

<sup>199</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL VI,” in *No Language*, 41.

woman who would be able to see the silence that “needs words instead of whispering.”<sup>200</sup> Basically, the narrator hopes that this nameless girl will become the narrator of another story, the next mentor and teacher who would be able to save other nameless girls from becoming “duenne.” The existence of such brave girls gives Dionne Brand the hope that her words and her thoughts are not useless.

Dionne Brand tried to see the real face of the postcolonial world and she stumbled and fell into depression while seeing this brutal reality. However, she did not give up. She still believes in the humanity of the postcolonial world. She still believes and senses the presence of the nameless girls and their potential to oppose the rigid rules of the society and thus to keep the own humanity and individuality. As the narrator claims:

I suddenly sensed you  
at the end of my room waiting. I saw you back arched  
against this city we inhabit like guerrillas, I brushed my  
hand, conscious, against your soft belly, waking up.<sup>201</sup>

This sense of personal encounter with nameless girl seems to be the impulse that saves narrator’s life and helps her to understand that the Promised Land and the idea of perfect being do not exist but what exists is the chance of choice whether to surrender or to live in the postcolonial world.

### **3.2 LAND TO LIGHT ON, THE BOOK OF REGRET**

*Land to Light On* consists of seven sequences of interlinked poems. In comparison to the first poetry collection *No Language is Neutral* that can be read as the book of youth and energy to define the self, the collection *Land to Light On*, written only seven years later, represents the book of regret, the book of the everyday routine of “an office, an elevator stuffed with anger of elevator at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.”<sup>202</sup> It seems that the narrator of this collection, who once again remains the author, becomes the normalized woman of the Canadian rush society. Surprisingly, the narrator lost the hope in own uniqueness. It seems that the Canadian society only pretended its openness towards diversity and alternative

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<sup>200</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL IV,” in *No Language*, 38.

<sup>201</sup> Brand, “HARD AGAIST THE SOUL X,” in *No Language*, 45.

<sup>202</sup> Brand, “NO LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL,” in *No Language*, 29.

lifestyles. Even though race and gender equality was public and debated topic, its wider practical application was missing. This work makes an impression of much more pessimistic visions where the black lesbian identity cannot be freely released but remains the prisoner of the white male gaze. In comparison to the previous collection where the lesbian sexuality and alternative love-style was striking from the pages, this collection hardly mentions the lesbian identity. There are only few references to her female lovers, specifically there appears a woman from Uganda who runs from the arranged marriage and finds the relief in narrator's hands. As Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada states this abrupt change of mood might be caused by "despair over the worldwide defeat of socialism, ubiquitous violence, and the failure to win equality for women."<sup>203</sup> It might be presumed that this is the reason why Dionne Brand has become so pessimistic and why she has started to be more secretive about her female lovers.

This collection begins where the previous collection ended. It means in cold Canada. In conversation with Makeda Silvera, Dionne Brand emphasizes that this setting is the natural consequence of her "thinking from the end of the last book, that's how I work: I work from the end of my last book because by the end of the last book there is the beginning of another one."<sup>204</sup> It seems that the narrator of the previous collection grew older and thus lost the youthful hope in preservation of the own identity. As Sophia Foster claims, the collection *Land to Light On* "lacks the jubilation of the speaker"<sup>205</sup> from the previous collection *No Language Is Neutral*. Even though both collections talk about the issues of colonialism, sexism and racism, only the first collection preserves "a certain amount of political and personal hope"<sup>206</sup> in better future for black lesbian females. In this collection, Dionne Brand has evolved into disappointed narrator who lost the belief in the own uniqueness and has become the prisoner of the own suspicions and stream of thinking.

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<sup>203</sup> Susan Gingell, "BRAND, Dionne," in *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, edited by W.H. New (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2002), 150.

<sup>204</sup> Makeda Silvera, "In the Company of My Work: an Interview with Dionne Brand," in *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1995), 374.

<sup>205</sup> Sophia Foster, "'inventory is useless now but just to say': The politics of Ambivalence in Dionne Brand's *Land to Light On*," *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, June 2002, 161, <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/12797/13786>.

<sup>206</sup> Sophia Foster, "'inventory is useless now but just to say,'" 160.

The formal structure also evolved. On one side, Dionne Brand preserves the poem variations. There appear shorter and longer poems without rhymes. There still appear the different fonts. However, at first sign, these poems lost their rebellious and chameleonlike character. These poems become more organized and less personal. The titles of the concrete poems are the mere numbers as if to create the atmosphere of remoteness and industrial impersonality. There is even the content at the beginning of the collection as if to show the willingness of the author to accept the standardized norms where everything has its position and number. The language becomes more difficult. The Caribbean dialect remains and is even more visible than in the first collection. There is the violation of standard word order as in “is here I reach, is so things is,” there is the preference of personal to possessive pronouns as in “all of we,” there is the usage of double negatives as in “I is not nobody,” there is the avoidance of suffix “-s” as in “it seem to me,” there is the violation of number agreement as in “eyes is not.” However, it can be noticed that the narrator distinguishes between speakers of Standard and non-Standard English. Standard English belongs to Canadian citizens while its non-Standard version is used by immigrants. As if the narrator wanted to create the clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders of Canadian land. As if the author tried to create the gap between “we” the inhabitants of west and “they” as the rest of the world. Moreover, the narrator distinguishes between her immigrant’s self that still uses demotic language and her newly given citizen’s self that strives to become normalized.

Therefore, *Land to Light On* focuses on being either immigrant or citizen. It is the collection that reflects both the limiting values of the modern world and the memories of childhood and previous life but without longing for the past because such longing would be the lie. The narrator seems to assimilate with the uncomfortable values of Canadian land, with local people and their norms and standards. Brand does not want to be sweet and romantic because she “hates the romantic.”<sup>207</sup> Brand interests in the topics that make life difficult and she further develops the idea that migration does not ensure the promise of improved life. Canada is presented as the frozen country of black suffering and struggle for survival. In *Land to Light On*, Brand explores her vision of Canada whose citizens

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<sup>207</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing,”

are cold and inaccessible to diversity and where this diverse human being starts to be more aware of the public “fraid” to claim the own identity and less determined to do so. The ultimate decision is, therefore, to go with the flow and to live in the world of myths and illusions, even though, this life is the lie.

### 3.2.1 LOOSING ROADS

Whereas the opening poem of the first collection is full of energy and strength to wake the unknown girl, this collection starts as the painful declaration of surrender. The narrator is “someone without a sheet,”<sup>208</sup> someone who gets lost and cannot find the way back and therefore is “giving up on land to light on, and why not, I can’t perfect my own shadow.”<sup>209</sup> It seems that the narrator is unable to find more courage to defend her identity. As Susan Gingell states:

If the book title leads any readers to believe initially that the poems will represent Canada as a land of refuge, the opening sequence, “I have been losing roads,” will soon disabuse them of any such notion.<sup>210</sup>

Dionne Brand stopped to fight but she blends with the life in Canada that is described as the “getting used to harm.”<sup>211</sup> The ecstasy that was felt in the first collection disappeared and was replaced by the fear where “you see nothing recognizable.”<sup>212</sup> It seems that the narrator refuses to see because there is harm and violence everywhere, in every place, in every country from England, France, Netherland through Congo, Caribbean, Venezuela up to Canada. The world becomes the “museum of harm.”<sup>213</sup> The narrator is not able to smell because there is something burning in the pit, narrator is not able to speak because it is too painful and narrator is not able to hear because “all the sounds gone out, all the wind died away”<sup>214</sup> and all what remains is cold, frozen or death. The nature is frozen, language jumps on her femininity and social revolutions brought the empty promises.

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<sup>208</sup> Dionne Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I i,” in *Land to Light On*, (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 1997), 3.

<sup>209</sup> Brand, “LAND TO LIGHT ON V iii,” in *Land to Light On*, 48.

<sup>210</sup> Susan, Gingell, “Still Need the Revolution,” review of *Land to Light On*, *Canlit.com*, 2011, accessed November 13, 2014, [http://canlit.ca/reviews/still\\_need\\_the\\_revolution](http://canlit.ca/reviews/still_need_the_revolution).

<sup>211</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I i,” in *Land to Light On*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 4.

<sup>213</sup> Brand, “LAND TO LIGHT ON V iii,” in *Land to Light On*, 45.

<sup>214</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS II v,” in *Land to Light On*, 12.

The nature ceased to be the friend. Dionne Brand claims that she lost the connection with the nature “trees don’t flower and colour refuse to limn.”<sup>215</sup> The only thing she can see in Canada is the long road that is “framed and frozen.”<sup>216</sup> This road reflects the attitude and behaviour of the inhabitants of Canada who are indifferent, quiet, brittle and harsh. All these feeling are slowly swallowing her. The cold Canadian nature that became “ugly and disappointing”<sup>217</sup> is in complete opposition to the warm nature of Caribbean. Dionne Brand, however, still believes that the beauty is even in Canada but is covered by thick layer of coldness and ice. The coldness and ice are products of the postcolonial world. The only thing she hopes and believes in is the nature and her ability to destroy this artificial world that is full of myths.

The revolutionary thoughts are death and the human identity is under the permanent pressure of normalization. Under the influence of the worldwide defeat of socialism, the narrator expresses dissatisfaction with all its thinkers, re-thinkers, neo-thinkers, Marxists, neo-Marxists, new Marxists, independent Marxists and all their theories and their smartness that did not change the course of the world. The justice might pump through their hearts and veins, but the history will not remember them. They only “wasted sweat to taste sweet [...] played music for nothing.”<sup>218</sup> All the great revolutionists, such as Ortega, Miranda, Bolivar, Jose Martin are the past. They become the strangers in the new era of industrial dominance. These revolutionists tried to create the history, however, they failed. No one is going to record the achievements of these revolutionists and no one is going to tell the truth because this “civilization will be dug up to burn all its manifestos.”<sup>219</sup> Revolutionists and their ideas and manifestos will be forgotten and misunderstood by the history because they were only talking and waiting for the perfect moment, perfect signal, perfect romance until the words became too weak and misunderstood, until the “bad mind had to come,”<sup>220</sup> the bad industrial mind that used deeds not words. The revolutions are over, the world is forgetting, the neo-

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<sup>215</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 4.

<sup>216</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I iv,” in *Land to Light On*, 6.

<sup>217</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS II ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 9.

<sup>218</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III iv,” in *Land to Light On*, 16.

<sup>219</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III iv,” in *Land to Light On*, 16.

<sup>220</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV xi,” in *Land to Light On*, 37.

Marxists are still talking and the male great stars of past revolutions still do not understand what happened.

The language became too muscular. The English language could not provide protection any longer and become the language of oppressor, too vulgar, too offensive and full of insults. It is the language of the rude white masculinity, the language of the white man in his red truck on the rural road who the narrator virtually encounters. As the narrator claims:

...a white man in a red truck on a rural road  
jumps out at you, screaming his exact hatred  
of the world, his faith extravagant and earnest  
and he threatens, something about your cunt.<sup>221</sup>

These words seem to be extremely painful for Dionne Brand. She is not able to recover from these words and remains silent, without the answer, wordless and speechless. Even though she tried to react, she failed. She was just standing and staring at the snowy road like a fool. The question is why these ugly words about her cunt are different from the words about being “hyena” as in *No Language is Neutral*. The answer may be hidden in the language itself. The narrator believed that the language can either help you or destroy you. In the Caribbean, she expected the offensive side of the language. In Canada, she learnt to use language for her protection where after twenty years of silence she was finally able to speak up. However, one short moment changed all her effort. The red trucker showed her that the English language does not provide the shelter. She was not prepared for such verbal offense. The white man in a red truck on the rural road represents the Canadian voice which should be tolerant but is offensive and that surprises her. This encounter showed her that even in Canada her femininity is under the possible attack of sexism. The narrator learns one important lesson that the English language in Canada cannot be used by her, even though, it is her mother language. The English language becomes the language of white male oppressor and she would not be able to use it in her defence. It might be even said that narrator’s demotic tongue loses its power in favour of Standard English. It might be stated that the narrator is not able to create the strong mother tongue that can equal to its father version as defended

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<sup>221</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS I ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 4.

Meira Cook and Charity Becker in the first chapter. On the contrary, the mother tongue seems to be overwhelmed and silenced by the red trucker. The narrator found herself for the first time absolutely useless and fragile. Even though Faye Hammill notices that “in contrast to the opening poem in the first sequence, in which the speaker tries to hear nothing, a later poem shows her straining her ears to catch the meaning of the new place.”<sup>222</sup> Specifically in the poem “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS II iii,” the narrator tried to catch the meaning of the endless silence of the frozen and empty place. However, this place offers no answer or meaning, as if to imply “don’t expect nothing good. Quite here you reach and you forget.”<sup>223</sup>

In addition, the people of this country become the mechanical and non-living creatures with “inanimate body[s], all stone.”<sup>224</sup> The narrator notices their new industrial language that sounds unnatural and dull without “the breathful air of words.”<sup>225</sup> This language is the language of capitalism. It is the language without the beauty. It is the language that talks about the wave of takeovers, tough cutbacks and mergers, about the blue chips rally in New York, Bundesbank looms, Imperial Oil increases, and dividends and about all the words that are unnatural for the human mouth. People are becoming as cold as this modern language where “your tongue, gone cold, gone heavy in this winter light.”<sup>226</sup> People are becoming non-human creatures and robots who are unable to feel and express the passion, who becomes the rag puppets in the hands of rude businessmen who reads “the old instruction books on the care and discipline of slaves”<sup>227</sup> and who in this spirit control and lead their factories and their employees at various working lines and zones and borders in order to create the most efficient working conditions.

Therefore, the narrator starts to fear everything from birds through wood up to crush of boots because the fear is the only weapon how to survive in the hostile country. As Susan Gingell states Dionne Brand explores “what it means to live beyond the disintegration of everything on which someone has built a life.”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 126.

<sup>223</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS II iii,” in *Land to Light On*, 10.

<sup>224</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV xiii,” in *Land to Light On*, 39.

<sup>225</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III i,” in *Land to Light On*, 13.

<sup>226</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 14.

<sup>227</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 100.

<sup>228</sup> Susan, Gingell, “Still Need the Revolution,” *canlit.com*, 2011, accessed November 13, 2014, [http://canlit.ca/reviews/still\\_need\\_the\\_revolution](http://canlit.ca/reviews/still_need_the_revolution)

Dionne Brand would like to smile but she cannot offer it. She is feared and therefore is escaping deeper and deeper to the north of Canada to the cold Arctic in order to flee from the human coldness. The fear becomes her friend that helps her not to become the mechanical bloodless creature. However, it might be seen that this fear and the permanent escape made the narrator the “only substance burning in itself,”<sup>229</sup> whose body is bleeding only water and who is no more able to withstand the myths of postmodern world. She becomes not the mechanic creature of the postcolonial world but the shapeless substance who lost “the meaning of dancing”<sup>230</sup> the meaning of her permanent escape, the meaning of her fights and the reason to continue in the escape. Without the meaning and reason, she wants to forget about the history, ancestors, friends, nameless girls, her politics and she starts to perceive her life as unimportant and useless. In the past, she perceived herself as the revolutions, as teacher, mentor and the strong woman, however, what remains are the shards and fragments. In Canada, she is nothing. The flame inside of her heart is vanishing and she is slowly disappearing from the history as her ancestors humbly did. She is going to disappear from the history of Canada as its native people of Athabasca, Algonquin, Salish and Inuit origin. Her body will “submerged in its awful history,”<sup>231</sup> her spirit will be lost in the tunnels of this awful history, her photos will fade and her dreams of uniqueness remain unfulfilled.

The narrator mentions the black psychiatrist Frantz Fanon who “had it, native envy.”<sup>232</sup> In this quote, the narrator alludes to Fanon’s theory that deals with the effects of previous colonialism and slavery on the present black psyche. In the past, the black slaves lost the contact with the original and native traditions and culture. Therefore, they were forced to appropriate the culture of their colonizers. These norms were, however, unnatural for black person and made black people dependant on the white culture. Basically, the black person wears the white mask and the black person strives to be as the white person, “attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man. [...] requires a white approval.”<sup>233</sup> In like manner, the narrator decides to wear the white mask

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<sup>229</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 14.

<sup>230</sup> Brand, “I HAVE BEEN LOSING ROADS III iii,” in *Land to Light On*, 15.

<sup>231</sup> Brand, “ISLANDS VANISH XIII,” in *Land to Light On*, 77.

<sup>232</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV xii,” in *Land to Light On*, 38.

<sup>233</sup> Frantz Fanon, “*The Woman of Color and the White man*,” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 51.

because it is the basic strategy of survival on Canadian land. It is the strategy of mimesis and adaptation to the environmental conditions. It is the transformation from immigrant to citizen, from pronoun “they” to pronoun “us.” Whereas in poem “IV viii” the narrator is the black immigrant, claiming “all of us want to fly to America,” because “we’re just jealous, that’s why, we just want to steal what they have,”<sup>234</sup> in the following poem “IV ix,” she becomes the Canadian citizen who perceives the Third World nations as “old underdeveloped [who] don’t have the same level of sophistication as us. [...] don’t tell me they would vote back the commies [...] they don’t understand.”<sup>235</sup> It might be said that the narrator accepts her role and is “getting into the business of false passport and new identities.”<sup>236</sup> Dionne Brand sees that in Canada, there exists the contagious disease, the disease that affects every immigrant all around the world. It is the disease that forces to dream a dream of being American citizen. The narrator starts to dream this dream and refuses to see “dirt somewhere older than any exile,” therefore, she is giving up on land to light on and she wants to see this land “without its history of harm, without its damage.”<sup>237</sup> Moreover, Dionne Brand is glad that there exists the myth of better life because without the myths there would be nothing to love. This myth is essential for people to keep their dreams alive. In the same way, the narrator decides to give up and not to continue in the fight because such fight is useless. The narrator decides to go with the flow and to pretend that there is no harm and violence in her world, even though, she knows it is not true.

### 3.2.2 ARANI AND THE BOY IN BETWEEN

In *No Language is Neutral*, it was Dionne Brand who asked the unknown girls to wake up and to see the true face of the world. In *Land to Light On*, it is Dionne Brand who asks her old friend Arani to forget and to adapt to the normalized world. The old friend Arani seems to be the younger version of the narrator, of Dionne Brand, who is still full of energy and juvenility. This friend talks vitally about his birthplace in India, about its problems, fights, armed revolutions and coups, about the poor people and the government and its official policy. He believes that the

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<sup>234</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV viii,” in *Land to Light On*, 32.

<sup>235</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV ix,” in *Land to Light On*, 33.

<sup>236</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV viii,” in *Land to Light On*, 32.

<sup>237</sup> Brand, “LAND TO LIGHT ONIV ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 44.

armed revolutions are fighting for the ordinary inhabitants and their liberty. Arani dislikes the influence of American democracy and regrets that he cannot help his comrades in India, to participate on political coup, to fight for the poor workers.

However, for the narrator this vitality is the mere naivety. Therefore, she refuses to listen and thus to remind her lost youthful vitality. On the other side, she tries to persuade the friend that such warlike energy is useless. The narrator perceives her friend Arani as the young boy who is sitting, the nameless boy who is listening and waiting for the lesson. However, the narrator refuses to give the lesson, instead she states “Who loves a Black boy? [...] It’s not hard to abandon him, whole cities have.”<sup>238</sup> This simple statement reveals Brand’s lost belief and hope in the progress. This black boy represents the whole scattered black nation in all parts of the world that is destined to remain abandoned, as if this black boy and the whole black nation is destined to become “duenne,” the shapeless spirit that roams the arid contemporary cities forever. The human identity will be overwhelmed by commerce and business and the personal uniqueness will become “the pearl dangling on the imperial necklace.”<sup>239</sup> The narrator comes to the conclusion that the revolution is useless because there is only one ruling class that has money, that controls mass thinking and that hides behind the religion. It is the class of European neo-fascists who become “glamour boys in the *New York Times*,” or it is the class of nouveaux riches who can afford to buy “JFK’s rocking chair” for 450,000 dollars or it is the class that is able to connect religion and politics when “the pope wants to beatify Queen Isabella and has made thirty-three saints and sent hundred blessed.”<sup>240</sup> Economic strength, money and political power seem to be the factors that control the world. Moreover, as Sophia Foster notices, Dionne Brand divides people into capitalists and proletarians and she “reduc[es] each of the members of these classes to his or her economic status.”<sup>241</sup> The people become the property, the source of exploitation, the free resources and commodities as wood, nickel or water. Therefore, Brand believes that the ordinary poor mortal comrade as Arani or as the narrator herself cannot do anything with the current situation. They can only talk and wait and again talk about injustice in the postcolonial world. They can pretend to be revolutionists, but they will never be the real warriors who would

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<sup>238</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 21.

<sup>239</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 21.

<sup>240</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 23.

<sup>241</sup> Sophia Foster, ““inventory is useless now but just to say,”” 165.

have “slept on our dirty fingers and pissed in our clothes.”<sup>242</sup> If this boy is still willing to continue in chattering and jabbering and gabbling, he can because this is the democratic, civilised and liberal part of the world. However, the words of such ordinary people change nothing because the real power is in the hands of real “democrats with Miami bank accounts”<sup>243</sup> who know how to save the Third World countries, who know how to save the native lands of millions of immigrants the best.

In addition, the narrator declares that she has “forgotten how to dance with him [Arani], something heavy is all in my mouth.”<sup>244</sup> The narrator refuses to be the mentor and teacher of her friend. It seems that “something heavy” changed her thinking. It seems that “something heavy” forced her to re-consider her previous life and this “something heavy” might be the personal encounter with her pupils, the personal encounter with the nameless girls of the first collection. It seems that Dionne Brand not only senses the presence of the nameless girls in her empty hotel room but she really meets them accidentally in the middle of the Canadian traffic. She virtually meets these women, the “women, for a moment unfamiliar, not crouched with me in a hallway, for this moment unfamiliar,” the moment that, however, becomes “the moment unfamiliar and familiar,”<sup>245</sup> the moment of *déjà vu*, as if the narrator has already sensed these women in her past or in her dreams. However, this moment of encounter totally crushes the narrator and she “wish that I was forgetful”<sup>246</sup> because her course did more harm than good. The narrator wanted to create the whole women who would be able to state their identity openly, who might help the other nameless girls to search their true identity, but all what the narrator sees now are the broken women, the contemporary black women that notably resemble the narrator’s broken ancestors of *No Language Is Neutral*. One woman the narrator meets or rather remembers is already death. It is the woman who decided to follow the life of Brand’s great grandmother Liney. The next woman the narrator meets is insane in the same way as the people of Pointe Galeote and the third woman the narrator meets decided to completely ignore the

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<sup>242</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 23.

<sup>243</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 101.

<sup>244</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 23.

<sup>245</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 24.

<sup>246</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 24.

instructions on becoming the whole woman. This girl decided to live in the lie in the same way as the inhabitants of Grenada and Manzanilla did.

The first nameless girl who is already death appears in narrator's thoughts. The narrator metaphorically meets the chopped black women who gave up the search of true identity and became humble, obedient and tortured housewife. She became the prototype of the weak woman who obeys her abusive husband and lives according to the standards of her black community where woman means less than man. It is the life of miserable violence and indifference. Every day as the sun goes down and night arrives, the strange male voice is heard "baying louder than the ocean, hoarse as any desert" and "his hand brushes her mouth."<sup>247</sup> This violent scene repeats every day until the man decides to kill his wife with the old, oxidised cutlass and then tell the prayers himself and "cross his chest with the same hand."<sup>248</sup> Traditions and dogmatic rules made this husband the boastful macho who could control the life of his wife. Without reason, the husband can abuse his wife, beat his wife and even kill his wife. Actually, the humble woman is beaten than killed than chopped and thrown to the ocean as unimportant garbage and waste. Only after the death, the woman is finally free and is able to flee from the prison of her husband. This woman is finally able to see "another island clear, clear through soft Atlantic mist."<sup>249</sup> It should be life not death that allows the strong woman to be independent human being. However, in this case, it is death not life that allows the weak woman to be finally released from the male oppression of the postcolonial world.

The second nameless girl the narrator virtually meets is crazy pavement priestess. This woman also decided to live the life of the humble and obedient woman, "a steady shape as what a woman was supposed to be."<sup>250</sup> She worked very hard to bring her husband to Canada and to fulfil their American dreams of better life. As the black immigrant woman in Canada, she was treated badly. She was offensively called "bitch, black bitch."<sup>251</sup> However, she remained silent, without the single word of the own defence. Therefore, "her own habits come to haunt her."<sup>252</sup> This nameless girl was punished for her weaknesses. Her husband took all her

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<sup>247</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV iii," in *Land to Light On*, 25.

<sup>248</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV ii," in *Land to Light On*, 26.

<sup>249</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV ii," in *Land to Light On*, 26.

<sup>250</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV vii," in *Land to Light On*, 31.

<sup>251</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV vii," in *Land to Light On*, 31.

<sup>252</sup> Brand, "ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV vii," in *Land to Light On*, 31.

money and escaped from her. She became ill, insane and ignored. She became the real duenne who is roaming the streets of Canada, searching the answers in the concrete street pavements.

The third nameless girl decided to absolutely ignore her identity and uniqueness and “turn her Walkman loud enough to curdle the liquid in her eardrums that turns every music to its rightful metronome of iron foot rings, bracelets.”<sup>253</sup> This girl decides to ignore the narrator and decided to live in the world of postcolonial society, in the world of materialistic durables. The uniqueness of her identity simply passes through her, where it is possible to “read nothing in her own face now.”<sup>254</sup> Basically, this girl decided to follow the death river, the river that Brand’s female ancestors were forced to follow.

### 3.2.3 REGRET

It might be summarized that the narrator is absolutely dissatisfied with the current lives of the black women of immigrant origin in Canada. In Canada, the female immigrants suffer from the oppression and injustice. However, instead of fight and speaking up, they try to steal what Canadian normalized society has. Therefore, the narrator starts to suffer under the pressure of too much seeing and too much hearing. In *No Language is Neutral*, there existed the hope that the nameless girls will come and save the narrator from this despair, however, in this collection, the nameless girls are either death, insane or ignore the pleads of rescue. Therefore, there is virtually no one to save the narrator, who “surrenders her thoughts and circumnavigations of her skull to rum,” when “the simple dichotomies, poor, rich, black, white, female, male”<sup>255</sup> totally swallowed and overwhelmed her. Narrator’s gift to see and notice the pain and violence of the world becomes her burden. The narrator becomes the prisoner of the stream of consciousness. She repeatedly returns back to her childhood memories, to her weaknesses, to her mistakes, to her stillness and courage, to all her actions, to her imperfect mouth, language and policy. She permanently recalls the scenes of her decisions. She asks what life would look like now, if she had decided to follow the river full of deadly whiff, if she had decided to be like her weak aunts, if she had decided to be the weak woman

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<sup>253</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV v,” in *Land to Light On*, 29.

<sup>254</sup> Brand, “ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE IV v,” in *Land to Light On*, 29.

<sup>255</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 102-103.

whose “feet would be bare and cracked and walking the hot pitched road to Guaya”<sup>256</sup> with the broken face, broken spirit, with hunger in her ghostlike eyes and in the violence of her husband.

The narrator’s life becomes the series of regrets and non-regrets, of acknowledgements and of regrets of previous regrets. On one side, the narrator regrets her decision to become the unique woman. She envies her aunt Phyllis for the ability to see the glass always half full as “the sweet life to balance out.”<sup>257</sup> Phyllis was handicapped. She married the abusive and selfish husband who left her and their three children in poverty and starvation where “sleep is enough food.”<sup>258</sup> Phyllis worked very hard. She “pedalled the Hitachi sewing machine for kilometres into the cane field over the night.”<sup>259</sup> She could not earn enough money and thus was forced to become the ill-mannered prostitute, who was hunting “the best men into the dough of her skirt.”<sup>260</sup> She made more and more children, she underwent several abortions. Despite the fact that this life was full of pain and desperation, Phyllis and her smile was always wet and warming and her “both hands were small and nothing was unhappy in them.”<sup>261</sup> It seems that even the small woman can be happy.

However, the narrator abruptly changes her thoughts. She stops to crave for such small life. She does not regret her cleverness of seeing both sides of such life because this cleverness helped her to “knew something bad was waiting there.”<sup>262</sup> As the narrator was growing older and wiser, she started to notice herself, her female life and her position in the black community that was “made against you, against the shapes of your bodies, against your directions, your tongue.”<sup>263</sup> She thanks herself to be strong enough to refuse to be nice and pretty. She thanks herself to avoid the life of the humble woman, the life of the “woman sitting with her hands in the lap.”<sup>264</sup> She thanks for the moment in her life, when the adoration of her aunts changed to the blame and shame, when she refused to be nice and pretty and when she decided to escape from the village of slowness and eternal sleep, from the

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<sup>256</sup> Brand, “THROUGH MY IMPERFECT MOUTH,” in *Land to Light On*, 85.

<sup>257</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS VI ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 52.

<sup>258</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS VII iv,” in *Land to Light On*, 56.

<sup>259</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS VII v,” in *Land to Light On*, 57.

<sup>260</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS VIII ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 59.

<sup>261</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS VIII v,” in *Land to Light On*, 62.

<sup>262</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS IX ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 65.

<sup>263</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS IX i,” in *Land to Light On*, 63.

<sup>264</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS IX ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 65.

prison where she was slowly dying and pretending that her small life could be happy. Already as the adult woman, she is happy that the slowness of her childhood life is just the memory.

However, she continues in the stream of consciousness and asks where she moved from this slowness: “Out of them. To Where?”<sup>265</sup> She realizes that the feeling to leave the slowness of her family relatives was so overwhelming that she does not look where she was coming: “and like escaping one doesn’t look too close at landing, any desert is lush, sand blooms, any grit in the mouth is peace.”<sup>266</sup> The narrator again hesitates about the correctness of her decision to leave the village and the life of her female ancestors. The narrator becomes swallowed down by the endless number of possibilities. As she claims: “I didn’t want their life and I wanted their life because they didn’t know that they were living it.”<sup>267</sup> The doubts, however, continue. Her life was never stable, but full of permanent movements and escapes. She escaped from the Caribbean. She tries to escape from Canada. She escaped from her family and from her friends in order to find her dreamland. The narrator admits that she lives the life that is not the real life. She was chasing her shadows and believed in the empty promises of revolution. She wanted to wake up the nameless girls only to discover that her life is one big dream “that only wakes up when something knocks too hard and when something is gone”<sup>268</sup> and by “something” the narrator considers the death of beloved person, or the member of the family or the best friend.

The narrator reveals that she was a fool and ignorant because she abandoned her best friend Teresa, who decided to “live in the middle of race, you white, he black.”<sup>269</sup> The white friend with black partner lives the life that is too dangerous, that causes too many hateful gazes and too many improper comments. Dionne Brand decided to leave her friend because of her strict policy of black conservatism, of her overemphasis of doves with doves and blackbirds with blackbirds. Teresa seems to lose her family and friends. She was abandoned and entered the world of self-hatred and this self-hatred passed even on her daughter. Teresa died with many unanswered questions. The narrator feels sorry and regrets her adamant conviction

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<sup>265</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS XI,” in *Land to Light On*, 69.

<sup>266</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS XI,” in *Land to Light On*, 69.

<sup>267</sup> Brand, “DIALECTICS IX ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 65.

<sup>268</sup> Brand, “THROUGH MY IMPERFECT MOUTH XIV i,” in *Land to Light On*, 81.

<sup>269</sup> Brand, “THROUGH MY IMPERFECT MOUTH XIV ii,” in *Land to Light On*, 82.

not to help her friend in difficult times. However, on the other side, she hopes that this adamant stillness is not the mere stillness but has deeper justification where the life she has and the identity she chose and the decisions she made are necessary in preservation of the own existence.

Regret and non-regret, stillness and movement, fear and courage, decisions and mistakes and a lot of alcohol make the narrator the “prisoner circling a cell, cutting the square smaller and smaller.”<sup>270</sup> Therefore the narrator wants back her childhood innocence when “knowing nothing, knowing no one alive inside her after knowing nothing nothing more”<sup>271</sup> was the basic meaning of life. It seems that the narrator wants the life that could vanish as easily as it became. However, these prayers remain unanswered because “she won’t believe anyone can fix the dread her eyes bleed.”<sup>272</sup> Her great gift of noticing herself and of noticing everything and everybody around her, noticing every pain in the watery eyes of the people became burden that brought her to the state of absolute desolation where every attempt to move and step out ends with the finger on her mouth representing the clear “*shsh*” and “hush” as the warning notice of no entrance.

Therefore, the final chapter of this collection displays the narrator as the alcoholic woman who lives in the impoverished country, who is full of loneliness, regrets, debts, hatred and pain. This woman is thinking about her childhood, how innocent and beautiful she was and wants these times back. However, there is no hope to change it. She is losing the belief in life and knows that her life is over and she is going to die to “leave this place in water, in rust, in the stink of its breath, in whose mouth she shrives.”<sup>273</sup> Her body is in decay and she starts to accept that she can only wait for her fall, because she “lost the kind of knowledge that makes you last.”<sup>274</sup> She wanted to be happier but ends up crawling through the dark, sodden and humid world without beauty. This woman is defeated in the world ruled by hatred, phobias and ignorance. Even though she is conciliated with her blackness and her femininity, she knows that her life ends and she would disappear without leaving the trace, when the “mouth of the world will open yawn her in, float her like

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<sup>270</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 103.

<sup>271</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 89.

<sup>272</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 92.

<sup>273</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 92.

<sup>274</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 91.

a language on its tongue, forgetting.”<sup>275</sup> Despite the fact that she knows the true face of the history, she knows “every chapter of the world that describes a woman at her own massacre,” where every single woman is imprisoned and “draped in dictators’ dreams, in derelicts’ hearts, in miners’ lights, in singers’ shoes, in statues.”<sup>276</sup> Even though the narrator can still report the historical moment of female oppression through her body, the narrator remains silent and refuses to speak about these massacres because her language comes wordless, her voice is too weak only murmuring, her femininity is crippled by masculinity, her female lovers are the shuttered pieces of the blurring memory and her body is too massacred and is torn in “black and blood, in white and powder,”<sup>277</sup> prepared for eternal sleep in the lost tunnels of history, where she is going to slowly disappear until there will be nothing to remember only misleading shards of her existence. Basically, the narrator will end as her ancestors and she accepts it. Henceforth, it is up to “someone else”<sup>278</sup> to speak of the massacres of the postcolonial world.

### 3.3 OSSUARIES, THE BOOK OF ATONEMENT

*Ossuaries*, the twenty-first century collection, contains fifteen long poems. Together they represent the remnants of the female body as the “house skeletons and relicts of the past”<sup>279</sup> without the resting-place. The body is dying and the soul becomes “duenne.” Each poem of this collection presents the remnants of the painful past and memory for which Dionne Brand won the Griffin Poetry Prize. Dionne Brand can be perceived as the archaeologist or scientist who works with bones, fossils, skeletons and remnants of the female identity. However, Dionne Brand as the narrator of the collection disappears. *Ossuaries* is the story of the old, black, physically and emotionally drained woman named Yasmine who becomes the symbol of the postcolonial era, the symbol of the poverty, failure, abusive relationships and inability to love. The only belief is the belief in own annihilation, turning from nothing to nothing, leading to “fatal future.”<sup>280</sup> Everywhere is waste,

<sup>275</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 94.

<sup>276</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 95-96.

<sup>277</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 95.

<sup>278</sup> Brand, “EVERY CHAPTER OF THE WORLD XV,” in *Land to Light On*, 98.

<sup>279</sup> Kerry Ryan, review of *Ossuaries*, by Dionne Brand, *Herizons*, Fall 2011,

<http://www.questia.com/read/IP3-2493516031>.

<sup>280</sup> Brand, “ossuary II,” in *Ossuaries*, (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 27.

remnants of death and void. Yasmine, the super realist, looks back in anger, in regret and disgust on her previous miserable life, the life that is the series of misfortunes. As Kerry Ryan states, each section of this collection reveals:

facet of Yasmine's story, and the movement within the poem mimics her life on the run as it shifts perspective, skips through time and jumps from Havana, to New York State, to Canada and hazy half-places.<sup>281</sup>

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, the nonlinear time together with the transnational sense of space are typical features of Brand's twenty-first century production. The reader becomes a part of the movements, ranging from the past to the future where the different people and different places become the real things of the real world, evidenced by the real historical memories. The setting range from Albany through Algiers and Cairo up to Canada and the characters can travel from present to the ancient times. The present world is full of toxic air and bacteria that causes the slow and painful extinction of the human breed. The main hero is Yasmine, a rootless isolated woman who is unable to love. Her life and memories are full of poverty, abusive relationships and inability to express her feelings and identity properly. Yasmine reflects the postcolonial world that is cold, impersonal and brutal. Yasmine is just the spectator not the active part of happening. Even though Dionne Brand finally gives her nameless girl the name, this does not make here life happier. In the first collection *No Language Is Neutral*, the nameless girls were striving to name themselves, however, in the collection *Ossuaries* it seems that the own name does not guarantee the relief. It can be stated that Yasmine is not able to reveal the own identity. She is swallowed down by the postcolonial world. She goes with the flow and when her life approaches the end, she starts to review her life. All what remains is the fluid of her lonely consciousness and broken spirit. Therefore, she cannot do much more than to gaze in anger and despair. Yasmine is left alone, without mentor or teacher, without friends, without family or lovers. The narrator as Dionne Brand disappears and all what remains is the girl who chose to follow the dead river full of alligators and myths. It might be said that Yasmine resembles the nameless girl from the second collection *Land to Light On* who decided to ignore her mentor and to use Walkman music to curdle the music of the

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<sup>281</sup> Ryan, review of *Ossuaries*, by Dionne Brand, *Herizons*.

own identity. In fact, Yasmine is the only girl who survived and preserved her sanity. In the previous collection, there was the woman who was murdered by the own husband. There was the woman who became insane as the punishment for her weakness and there was the woman, the narrator who disappears. It seems that Yasmine is the only girl who survived and waits for the punishment or for the forgiveness or atonement. It might be, however, claimed that the narrator as Dionne Brand who metaphorically died at the end of previous collection still exists and returns back as the inner voice of Yasmine's conscience and for the last time asks whether the life in this death river made sense, whether this life of Canadian industrial glitter was worth of betrayal of the own identity.

From formal point of view, *Ossuaries* is written in tercets, three-lined stanzas with only one exception. The structure of this collection reveals that the main protagonist abdicated to be unique and rebellious. The poems are neatly organized, following from "ossuary I" to "ossuary XV." The only remnant of the previous rebellious energy is the usage of lines of different length with no rhymes at all. The language become difficult and with the excessive amount of specific terminology and with the excessive amount of complex words even incomprehensible, as if the author tries to catch the rapid and mechanical atmosphere of the new millennium where the human life can be squeezed in one line, where the experiences of the last thirty years can be named in order, separated by commas and ended by period. As E Martin Nolan states, *Ossuaries* is written in the language "that rarely takes its foot off the pedal [...] that is difficult to follow" because there is "the logical thread in these poems" that is very complex and "purposely broken to allow an unfettered flow of images and associations."<sup>282</sup> Therefore, this collection does not pay much attention to the vibrancy of the language that is able to catch the sounds of the surrounding and change them into the intelligible words in order to create the aesthetic experience as did the first collection because "the prepositions are irrelevant today, whichever house, which century, wherever she was."<sup>283</sup> The language became the accomplice of the modern machinery. The language is mechanical description of mass society. In the same

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<sup>282</sup> E Martin Nolan, "Life amid the Bones": A Review of Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*, *THE PURITAN* 10 (Spring 2010), accessed November 10, 2014, <http://puritan-magazine.com/life-amid-the-bones-a-review-of-dionne-brands-ossuaries/>.

<sup>283</sup> Brand, "ossuary II," in *Ossuaries*, 26.

way, the beauty of nature disappears and becomes the painful memory of the lost identity. All what remains is the stream of Yasmine's consciousness.

### 3.3.1 TOXICITY OF THE MATERIALISTIC WORLD

The narrator is death, language split in two one silent and the other gone, the juvenility is over, the body is in decay, the world is a big mechanical creature infected and infested by materialism and mass production. This is the atmosphere of the new millennium and the atmosphere of the opening lines of *Ossuaries*. It is the eleventh day of September 2002, shortly after the terrorist attacks upon the American business centre and metropolis. Aged Yasmine is sitting on the couch of her crumbled and rotten house, watching TV and seeing the Empire state buildings falling down, however she feels no regret, no pity, no compassion because these building are the symbols of and the centre of intoxicated modernity and thus the centre of evilness that reminds her weaknesses and her foundering.

The twenty-first century is presented as the era of the new slavery, because "events happening in their order a certain regularity."<sup>284</sup> It seems that this collection is Yasmine's repentance and her plead of atonement to "undo, to undo, and undo and undo this infinitive of arrears."<sup>285</sup> It is the confession of the old and broken person who looks back to the past and realizes that her life and dreams were full of prisons. Yasmine regrets that she wasted her life, that she closed her eyes and went with the flow. Yasmine is lamenting over her previous life and is asking "Venus" for forgiveness. Moreover, "Venus" as the symbol of femininity might be seen as the tribute of her true but betrayed sexuality when living in abusive marriage. In addition, E Martin Nolan states that Brand's "Venus" credits "John Coltrane's 'Venus,' amongst other songs, as a major inspiration to the collection" where Brand tries to capture the "ferocity of which jazz is capable [...] bursting with energy and freedom but are, at the same time, expertly controlled."<sup>286</sup> The word "controlled" seems to be the proper word how to define this collection. *Ossuaries* controls and limits the energy that was seen on every page of the first collection *No Language Is Neutral*.

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<sup>284</sup> Brand, "ossuary VI," in *Ossuaries*, 56.

<sup>285</sup> Brand, "ossuary II," in *Ossuaries*, 21.

<sup>286</sup> Nolan, "Life amid the Bones": A Review of Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*, *THE PVRITAN*.

In the contemporary Canada, Yasmine declares to be nothing, to be toxic skeleton, only bones thrown on a heap. As she reveals:

my chest open now,  
with a mall if I broke hammer,  
I assure you, there would be nothing,<sup>287</sup>

In this present moment, she knows that she has no more time to change her bitterness, solitude and isolation. She claims:

I've got no time, no time, this epistrophe, no time,  
wind's coming, no time,  
one sunrise to the next is too long, no time<sup>288</sup>

It seems that Yasmine is on the verge of dying. Therefore, she wants to tell her story, her version of truth because there is no more time to do so, because "I'm using up all my light."<sup>289</sup> She wants to tell the story of her life that is full of pain, without relief. The life seems to be full of cruelty. The days were "wingless" without hope for better future. Everywhere was prison, every move was painful and each square metre was full of toxic air and violence. She was too weak and too young and too naive to see the real face of the postcolonial durables. Yasmine declares that no all people are as strong as her mentor, obviously Dionne Brand, was. Not all people are able to stand against the traditions, rigid rules and religion. The fear of becoming "duenne" is too pervasive and the guilt of the postcolonial society too seductive, therefore, it is impossible for ordinary people to live and love at once. Most of the black women of immigrant origin are simple, without the gift of seeing and noticing that there is something bad with such world. For most weak women, it is either-or. Such women cannot have both. As Yasmine claims:

lived and loved common oxymoron,  
if I have lived, I have not loved,  
and if I have loved, I cannot have lived<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Brand, "ossuary V," in *Ossuaries*, 51.

<sup>288</sup> Brand, "ossuary VII," in *Ossuaries*, 61.

<sup>289</sup> Brand, "ossuary II," in *Ossuaries*, 61.

<sup>290</sup> Brand, "ossuary III," in *Ossuaries*, 33.

Yasmine declares that it is not possible to do both things, to love and to live at once. To live means to take everything from the world “to be capacious as claws, to have the most efficient knives and broken beer bottles,” therefore, in this life there is no more space for true love. The innocent love is seen as the “impediment to this hard business”<sup>291</sup> of larcenies, robberies, trespassing, loitering and intimidation, resisting arrest, vagrancy and of the fundamental existence and ultimate survival. Yasmine accepted the myth of her weakness, the strength of masculinity. She remained silent and believed in the painful words of her husband named Owusu:

You're nothing, Yas,  
I made you something by fucking you,  
other than that, you're nothing.<sup>292</sup>

These words knocked her down and remained in her mind as the pervasive “low hum, a bacteria”<sup>293</sup> that cannot be destroyed but incubates in her innermost feeling and thoughts. Yasmine, as her mother and her mother's mother and her grandmother, hates but forgives her husband and believes that “it will pass, it will pass, but of course it didn't.”<sup>294</sup> Stumbling and foundering seem to be the ultimate destiny of female's life. As E Martin Nolan claims “reading her work is like walking against a cold, stiff wind in a starkly beautiful valley.”<sup>295</sup> Reading of Brand's work is like teeth-edging truth that refused to be heard. Yasmine is the prototype of the weak woman. She humbly follows her male mentor, her comrade, her ruler and became “some receptacle for his spit, his sperm, his combed-out hair, the shaving of his fingernails.”<sup>296</sup> The male god and gorgeous comrade Owusu has the great power over weak woman Yasmine and she does everything he wants “he had uttered, she had drowned [...] until his voice seemed to come from her.”<sup>297</sup> She follows him and worships him. She even commits the robbery because this was Owusu's way how to give “power to the people.”<sup>298</sup> However, Yasmine confesses

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<sup>291</sup> Brand, “ossuary III,” in *Ossuaries*, 34.

<sup>292</sup> Brand, “ossuary IV,” in *Ossuaries*, 41.

<sup>293</sup> Brand, “ossuary IV,” in *Ossuaries*, 42.

<sup>294</sup> Brand, “ossuary V,” in *Ossuaries*, 48.

<sup>295</sup> Nolan, “Life amid the Bones”: A Review of Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*, *THE PVRITAN*.

<sup>296</sup> Brand, “ossuary VI,” in *Ossuaries*, 57.

<sup>297</sup> Brand, “ossuary VI,” in *Ossuaries*, 58.

<sup>298</sup> Brand, “ossuary X,” in *Ossuaries*, 72.

that the violence of robbery gave her the feeling of strength and importance. Yasmine with the weapon becomes “the hulk of brown rust.”<sup>299</sup> The moment of temporary strength that, however, ends with the perception of her abusive husband who offers nothing only the “brutal solitudes, ashen mirrors.”<sup>300</sup> Without weapon, she is again forced to obey and to run and to “drive, drive, drive, drive, drive”<sup>301</sup> with her disgusting husband and his boastful thoughts of the own importance.

However, it might be said that this temporary moment of hulk strength changes Yasmine’s life, at least for a while. She decides, for the first time in her miserable life, to break the vicious circle of her female ancestors and escapes the claws of the husband’s pressure. She decides to grow up, be adult and responsible as her mentor wanted. Yasmine decided to follow the voice of her lesbian identity and become “new Yas.”<sup>302</sup> She decided to settle down on Cuba where she for the first time felt “alive in this place,” where “the urban sea washed anxiety from her.”<sup>303</sup> She found a new female lover in “the green skirt, the orange dress, the errant smile.”<sup>304</sup> She tried to live and love very much at once. She was “carnivorous about love.”<sup>305</sup> This place became her personal paradise, her sweet voice, the place with blue salt water, busy birds, perfect small rooms, coral niche and mainly the beloved partner. It might be once again said that the innocent nature of Cuba helped Yasmine to open eyes and see and accept her real identity. However, this beautiful romance was just romance that lasted only ten months. The place of innocence changed its face.

the floor of oceans raked with backhoes,  
the sea beds gutted  
the sheets of coral ripped by toenails of trawlers<sup>306</sup>

Finally, this place was intoxicated and become a place without oxygen, where suns disappeared, moons left, storms ceased and the evenings lost its magic. The modernity was approaching, slowly destroying the beauty of intact nature. As

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<sup>299</sup> Brand, “ossuary X,” in *Ossuaries*, 77.

<sup>300</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 91.

<sup>301</sup> Brand, “ossuary X,” in *Ossuaries*, 78.

<sup>302</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 99.

<sup>303</sup> Brand, “ossuary VIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 65.

<sup>304</sup> Brand, “ossuary VIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 67.

<sup>305</sup> Brand, “ossuary III,” in *Ossuaries*, 38.

<sup>306</sup> Brand, “ossuary IX,” in *Ossuaries*, 69.

Dionne Brand in conversation with Nuzhat Abbas claims, modernity and industrialization exhaust:

the human effort, and then when it is not possible to take it anymore from that spot, they just lift off and fly off to some other place, to Mexico City, or Guatemala City, or some other place.”<sup>307</sup>

Cuba became the other place of growing industrialization. However, Yasmine strongly emphasizes: “do not think this of me, do not think I did not try.”<sup>308</sup> Even though it was difficult to nurture the female love in the world of male garbage and dumps, Yasmine and her female lover tried to preserve their innocent love in the cruel world where dog eats dog. She would like to “grow lilacs” or “to know the secrets of spiders.”<sup>309</sup> She would like to be innocent and love truly and devoutly. However, this is not possible in the present world. The male world taught her to be tough. The male world forced her to leave her female lover, because “eye sockets ambushed me, I slept with harassment and provocation,” therefore, she gave up her lesbian identity and was “caged in bone spur endlessly.”<sup>310</sup> The only possibility how to survive this harassment was through another escape “run, run, as after yourself.”<sup>311</sup> Here, Yasmine starts to realize that these constant escapes from one place to another, from her abusive husband, from her female destiny, from her innocent lover, from the claws of capitalism are the useless attempts to escape her own antiquity that is imprinted in the colour of the skin and in the XY sex-determination chromosomes.

### 3.3.2 PERPETUAL ANTIQUITY

Yasmine refused to be the prisoner of the constant escape, to be driving the car with endless fuel and with eternal cops behind. This is the “job of catching air, with butterfly nets, of stopping water with bottomless jars.”<sup>312</sup> The narrator refuses to be the eternal runaway who escapes from one enclosed space to another space

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<sup>307</sup> Abbas, “Dionne’s Brand of Writing.”

<sup>308</sup> Brand, “ossuary III,” in *Ossuaries*, 34.

<sup>309</sup> Brand, “ossuary III,” in *Ossuaries*, 38.

<sup>310</sup> Brand, “ossuary III,” in *Ossuaries*, 38.

<sup>311</sup> Brand, “ossuary IV,” in *Ossuaries*, 42.

<sup>312</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 100.

with “barbed wire’s twisted crosses horizontal and flimsy,”<sup>313</sup> where the thin diagonal line between then and now ensures “the fragile, fragile promise of humanity,”<sup>314</sup> where the humanists and democrats become predators. Yasmine refuses the permanent fear and regret and ultimate decisions and possible mistakes and acknowledgements and future regrets of previous regrets. Basically, Yasmine refuses to be like her mentor who “lived each day knowing some massacre was underway, some repression.”<sup>315</sup> Yasmine refused to be the person who is always standing on the wrong side where the “truth is worked and organized by some, and she’s on the wrong side always.”<sup>316</sup>

The world is a gap. On one side, there are standing those who are “privileged to enjoy freedoms” and on the opposite side there are standing those who are “haunted by the spectre of captivity.”<sup>317</sup> This world is a place of socially, economically, politically or culturally unbalanced relationships. It is the place of duality. There are those people who want to dominate and people who are forced to be dominated. According to Aline Sanfelici, such duality of the world “leads to the desire of immigrating,”<sup>318</sup> where people are travelling from place to place not because they are forced to but because they want to have better and more comfortable lives as their parents or ancestors had. Therefore, Yasmine is pragmatist and decides to have better life than her mother, better life than her female ancestors and even better life than her mentor. Therefore, Yasmine decides to settle down in Canada. She decided to live through “convergent mimesis.”<sup>319</sup> She adapted to the world around her. If she cannot be the winner, she can, at least, pretend to be on winning side. Yasmine came to the conclusion that the world forgets and makes the same mistakes again and again. People crave to be different but end up where they and their ancestors started. Even though the world moved from the era of colonialism, from the era of “starving boats and lithic frigates” to

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<sup>313</sup> Brand, “ossuary XI,” in *Ossuaries*, 87.

<sup>314</sup> Brand, “ossuary XI,” in *Ossuaries*, 83.

<sup>315</sup> Brand, “ossuary XV,” in *Ossuaries*, 123.

<sup>316</sup> Brand, “ossuary VI,” in *Ossuaries*, 53.

<sup>317</sup> Dionne Brand and Kong Sook C, “A Map to the Door of No Return,” *Herizons*, Spring 2002, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-348263101>.

<sup>318</sup> Aline de Mello Sanfelici, “No Poem is Neutral: Activists Writing in the Poetry of Dionne Brand and Jeannette Armstrong,” *Consciousness, Literature, and the Arts* 12, no. 3 (December 2011), <https://blackboard.lincoln.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/users/dmeyerdinkgrafe/archive/sanfelici.html>.

<sup>319</sup> Brand, “ossuary XI,” in *Ossuaries*, 89.

the modern world of “readjusted ankles, fenced mouths, mechanic vulva, plastic toenails, pincer knee,”<sup>320</sup> the world still remains repetitious. Firstly there are:

...expeditions,  
then travels and wonders then journeys,  
then photographs and photographs of course

the multiplications of which, the enormity of this,  
and drill-bits and hammers and again handcuffs,  
and again rope, coarse business<sup>321</sup>

Every country, village or city ends up in the handcuffs of tough business and commerce. It is the repetitious circle that started in the era of colonialism and still continues and will continue endlessly. Human beings become the “products, new widgets, human widgets.”<sup>322</sup> Every country is under the control of those who prevent the ordinary people from vision. It is “their sickness, eye sickness, eye murder, murder sickness, hunger sickness.”<sup>323</sup> Unification and normalization is visible everywhere, there are “official hammers, and corkscrew, official grass, official cities.”<sup>324</sup> Yasmine declares that it is less profitable to be unique. Therefore, it is better to go with the flow. Everything has its order in postcolonial world, people are losing their sights intentionally, the natural beauty does not disappear but is intentionally covered by the thick veil of the human ignorance, the language becomes the series of empty letters and the life becomes the football game with “a specific meter of four four two.”<sup>325</sup> Therefore, it is easier to go with the flow that to oppose it. Yasmine became overwhelmed by the glitter of the big cities, because “after consideration you will discover, as I, that verbs are a tragedy, a bleeding cliffside, explosions, I’m better off without.”<sup>326</sup> The days of her materialistic life were without care, the days of free joy, cheap alcohol, rude language and mourning, expensive jewellery, dirty dance, loud music, available mass products and fashionable gadgets, without grim and sonorous violence. She was overwhelmed by

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<sup>320</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 111.

<sup>321</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 15.

<sup>322</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 17.

<sup>323</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 17.

<sup>324</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 20.

<sup>325</sup> Brand, “ossuary VI,” in *Ossuaries*, 57.

<sup>326</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 14.

“urban quickness, their rapid knowledgeable song.”<sup>327</sup> You can have everything in life you want, if you just calm down and go blind and ignore the reality around you.

Yasmine admits that she “heard the conspiratorial water.”<sup>328</sup> She heard and noticed the dirty and gloomy atmosphere of the world around her but she did nothing. As Jim Mondry states Yasmine was “consumed by her husband [...] which she escapes only to become the consumer herself.”<sup>329</sup> Yasmine morphed herself and preferred to live in the gilted mass lie as “specimen, at the anthropometric spectacles”<sup>330</sup> of the postcolonial world full of phosphorous streets, exhibitions, zoos, electric wires parades, gray-blooded television, refusing to see its poverty, garbage and murders. She claims that “some damage” was expected and accepted but no one expected the damage and the brutality:

...of glances, of offices,  
of walkways and train stations, of bathroom mirrors  
especially, the vicious telephones, the coarseness of  
daylight, the brusque decisions of air,  
the casual homicides of dresses <sup>331</sup>

Basically, the romance is over and “no one suspected inventions”<sup>332</sup> to become the source of evilness and intoxication of the air and landscape where human being become the weird creature. Yasmine perceives herself and the rest of the society to be sick and intoxicated creatures. People are no more flesh and blood humans but creatures with “aluminium teeth,” “venomous breaths,” resembling “cluster bombs.” She compares herself to the product of the modern society. Her heart is covered with “restraining metals” unable to feel and her body is full of “some unknown substance.”<sup>333</sup> She is the prisoner of concrete walls that prevent her from seeing. However, she learned this truth too late on the verge of her dying. Moreover, it seems that not only her body but the whole human civilization is on the verge of dying. As she claims:

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<sup>327</sup> Brand, “ossuary II,” in *Ossuaries*, 30.

<sup>328</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 14.

<sup>329</sup> Jim Mondry, review of Dionne Brand’s *Ossuaries*, *Writers Festival*, Ottawa’s Festival of Ideas since 1997, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.writersfestival.org/blog/ossuaries-by-dionne-brand>.

<sup>330</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 13.

<sup>331</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 10.

<sup>332</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 113.

<sup>333</sup> Brand, “ossuary I,” in *Ossuaries*, 11–12.

tanks rolled into my life, grenades took root  
in my uterus, I was sickly each morning<sup>334</sup>

The female uterus should be the place for babies. However, Yasmine's uterus is full of grenades that are responsible for the deaths of thousands of people regardless of sex, age or race. The destroyed fertility might signal the inability to have more children. The female body is full of scares, wounds and shrapnel where the production of the new human widgets is permanently out of order. Yasmine is unable to produce more goods.

Therefore, the old Yasmine longs for rejuvenation of her numb and blood-dead body. She longs for her lost natural language, dreaming for "the deepest suicidal blue waters,"<sup>335</sup> the place that would not harm her. However, all that remains is the radio voice with "its circumference of black plastic"<sup>336</sup> that keeps the contact with the outside world. The world becomes the vicious circle. The people are born, live in prison and die, who "plunged repeatedly to our deaths only to be revived."<sup>337</sup> She compares herself to the dispensable thing, taken and thrown as one in millions. The modern world made people unimportant things. She became a robot, a pet and a shaggy doll that is obedient to the rules of the machinery because "this was the way people lived, I live."<sup>338</sup> Even though Yasmine chose this life of a gilded postcolonial world in order to avoid her mentor's life that was full of regret and uncertainty, she ends up in the similar perpetual state of uncertainty. She sits in her rotten house and her head is full of regrets and of non-regrets and the regrets of previous regrets.

### 3.3.3 CANADIAN NORMALIZATION

Nineteenth of April thirty years ago seems to be the date of ultimate surrender, when "her compass reset."<sup>339</sup> This date normalized Yasmine's life. This date made her life vulnerable and dull. As in the first collection also in this collection, the symbol of the change becomes the river, however, in *Ossuaries* it is

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<sup>334</sup> Brand, "ossuary I," in *Ossuaries*, 11.

<sup>335</sup> Brand, "ossuary III," in *Ossuaries*, 35.

<sup>336</sup> Brand, "ossuary II," in *Ossuaries*, 24.

<sup>337</sup> Brand, "ossuary I," in *Ossuaries*, 12.

<sup>338</sup> Brand, "ossuary I," in *Ossuaries*, 13.

<sup>339</sup> Brand, "ossuary XIV," in *Ossuaries*, 120.

Niagara River, as the symbol of ultimate defeat. Before entering Canada, she was at least “the woman whom the bird outside was following, call it crow, call it hawk, call it peregrine falcon.”<sup>340</sup> It seems that the previous life in Albany, Cairo and Cuba offered the possibility of choice and escape. These birds are the symbols of relative freedom. Yasmine was the bird that can fly from one place to another place. However, the day she entered Canada was the day she entered “a killing farm for chickens”<sup>341</sup> where she learned how to work with the knife, how to stand in the row and how to kill all of those migratory birds. She definitely killed her uniqueness and “lines up, as each woman does.”<sup>342</sup> Yasmine adapted to the new conditions and started to perceive the new country as the place of final destination, as the place where “it always seems to be snowing.”<sup>343</sup> Nineteenth of April is the day the birds left her, “migrating alone north.”<sup>344</sup> Yasmine settled down and her life became the ordinary routine of:

This daily killing, daily flesh eating  
  
water dripping from the tables,  
waterlogged to their feet, arthritic and cold,  
to cut a particular part out<sup>345</sup>

However, the life of everyday routine flows fast. The youth is far away, the strength disappears and the beauty fades away and the old Yasmine regrets the choice she made. She would like to write a letter to her past, to write “some good thing that would weather the atmosphere of the last thirty years.”<sup>346</sup> She would like to warn her younger self not to go through the life she has chosen, the life of “desolate cement, and no kisses,” however, Yasmine comes to the conclusion that this letter would be useless because the different life would not be perfect either because “the brilliant future doesn’t wait”<sup>347</sup> anywhere. As it might be seen, Yasmine swiftly changes her attitude and regrets the previous decision to send the letter to the younger self. Yasmine, in the same way as the narrator of the second

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<sup>340</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIV,” in *Ossuaries*, 120.

<sup>341</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIV,” in *Ossuaries*, 121.

<sup>342</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIV,” in *Ossuaries*, 121.

<sup>343</sup> Brand, “ossuary VI,” in *Ossuaries*, 54.

<sup>344</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIV,” in *Ossuaries*, 120.

<sup>345</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIV,” in *Ossuaries*, 121.

<sup>346</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 103.

<sup>347</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 105.

collection, starts to believe that the world is full of oppression and hatred: “someone goes out for milk and butter, and returns with gashed face, wrung larynx.”<sup>348</sup> Yasmine finally cease to be the dreamer and starts to perceive the harsh reality.

Moreover, it might be stated that Yasmine cease to believe in the existence of two rivers as Dionne Brand advocated in the first collection. For Yasmine, there is only one option that will always lead the black woman to the river of waste and deathly whiff. It is the world where the human being is forced to wake up early in the morning in order to feed self where “each dawn we wake up, our limbs paralyzed, shake our bones out, deliver ourselves to the sharp instruments for butchering.”<sup>349</sup> Therefore, she feels totally ripped off. She becomes the person who is totally drained, both physically and emotionally. Yasmine is the widget that can be divided and decomposed to many particles. The society:

Ripped the guts right out of me, go,  
go, my toes are eaten away by frost and rubber,  
some chemical has boiled my eyes  
  
the rest of me’s been stolen<sup>350</sup>

Yasmine is not able to hear the song of self, only the “vague music that couldn’t yet be music surely.”<sup>351</sup> She is not able to dance because there is nobody to dance with. Moreover, her honest confession of the past mistakes and foundering seems to be useless, her repentance unheard and her atonement unaccepted. It seems that there is no nameless girl, no friend, no mentor who would save her from the misery of the modern life. Useless, unheard and unaccepted are the words that push Yasmine further towards the edge where the death seems to be the final lesson of the life. Yasmine is going to disappear in the same way as the glory and the pomp of all grant ancient cities from Corinth through Syracuse up to Utica: “and this is how she disappears, this is where, into an ancient city.”<sup>352</sup> She will disappear like thousands of her female ancestors. She will disappear like thousands of nameless girls. She will disappear like her mentor. However, since Dionne Brand perceives

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<sup>348</sup> Brand, “ossuary XV,” in *Ossuaries*, 123.

<sup>349</sup> Brand, “ossuary XV,” in *Ossuaries*, 123.

<sup>350</sup> Brand, “ossuary XIII,” in *Ossuaries*, 106.

<sup>351</sup> Brand, “ossuary V,” in *Ossuaries*, 50.

<sup>352</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 91.

time nonlinearly, Yasmine is not going to be the last one. In the future, there will be the number of nameless girls who will “start this epoch again”<sup>353</sup> with the determined attempt to change the course of their life, however, they will fail to finish it as Yasmine did. They will prefer to follow the gilded lie of the postcolonial society as Yasmine did and at the end of their lives they will find themselves to be “still slaves in this old cities,”<sup>354</sup> to be the victims of perpetual colonization. At the end of their lives, they will realize the mistakes of their previous living, they will regret their decisions and they will ask for forgiveness as Yasmine does, however, it will be too late to change it.

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<sup>353</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 92.

<sup>354</sup> Brand, “ossuary XII,” in *Ossuaries*, 94.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the postcolonial identity in Brand's three poetry collections and to define what it means to be the black lesbian in the world of modernity and masculinity.

Looking at the life, experience and poetry of Dionne Brand, it can be summarized that Dionne Brand is a very aggressive but honest poet. Her personal experiences force her to perceive the modern world as the abominable supervisor that keeps people in order and in uniformity, where any abnormality tries to be suppressed. Therefore, this author craves to be unique and preserve this uniqueness even in her poetry. She writes unique poems that are moving between the field of prose and of poetry. On one side, her poems have narration, have storyline, have characters and have setting. On the other side, her poems have line structure, use various figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, alliteration, word repetition or anaphora. It might be said that her poetry is everything at once. Moreover, her three poetry collections are not written within the same poetic diction and mood. Whereas the first collection *No Language Is Neutral* prefers words that are less formal and more cheerful in creating the tone and the atmosphere, the second *Land to Light On* and especially the third collection *Ossuaries* is preoccupied with the dark mood of decay, bacteria, toxicity, death and dying in order to create the gloomy atmosphere and to capture author's lost hope in the preservation of the own identity.

These selected collections answers what it means to be the black lesbian in the world of modernity and masculinity. The first collection perceives the lesbian identity as the gift and hope to preserve the own uniqueness in the world of official hammers, grass, corkscrews or cities. The narrator, as the black lesbian female, refuses to live in the world of false myths and illusions and therefore opens her eyes in order to see the reality and to break the dogmatic norms and tradition of weak woman that limit the own identity. Furthermore, the narrator of this collection becomes the teacher of nameless girls in order to show them that it is possible to be satisfied black lesbian woman even in the world of social phobias, racism and sexism.

The second collection is, however, losing the hope and power to preserve the unique self in the postcolonial world. The narrator seems to be maturing and losing the previous energy and vitality. Ability to see the real face of the world is not gift

but the burden, where too much seeing destroys narrator's life. Therefore, the narrator becomes frustrated and bitter woman. Her painstaking effort to keep the own uniqueness is overwhelmed and crushed by the huge machinery of the postcolonial normalization. Moreover, it seems that there is nobody who properly listened to narrator's lesson in the first collection. Even though *Land to Light On* mentions three black women living in Canada who might represent Brand's former pupils, these adult women refused the gift of uniqueness and preferred to be the weak symbols of the male dominance. The postcolonial machinery becomes too strong and the narrator too weak. Therefore, she lapses into heresy and regret. The feelings of smallness and unimportance burnt into her mind and forced her to give up.

The third collection presents all that has happened since. The previous narrator disappears. The promise of uniqueness fades away and the true identity remains silent. All what remains is the old lady named Yasmine who is full of hatred and solitude and who might be the young enthusiastic nameless listener of the first collection who, however, transformed into the ignorant bureaucrat of the second collection. Therefore, in third collection, this girl or rather old woman is paying for her ignorance, is paying for her decision to go with the flow, is paying for her decision to refuse the gift to be unique and thus becomes the prisoner of contamination and intoxication. Yasmine is the old fragile woman who betrayed the own identity and sexuality, who lost the mentor, who lost the friend and who is still waiting and waiting for forgiveness that, however, never comes.

It might be summarized that with such regressive development, from identity that is awoken up to identity that is destroyed, Dionne Brand wants to emphasize that to be the black lesbian in the present world is still very difficult and unaccepted. Even Canadian multicultural society bears the signs of discrimination. Therefore, it is important not to remain silent but to scream and shout or at least to speak up and thus break the silence and see the true face of the world that will never accept difference. Basically, people were, are and will be classified according to their skin colour, their mother tongue, sexual organs and orientation. Dionne Brand believes that in the contemporary world, white is still more than black, that male is still stronger than female and that heterosexual is still better than homosexual. Therefore, racism, social phobias and sexism existed, exist and will exist forever in

the perpetual timelessness of the human breed. Even though Dionne Brand is dissatisfied with such (un)progressive development of the modern world, she is even more dissatisfied with the attitudes of the black females in Canada who are too willing to adapt to such conditions as Yasmine did. Therefore, it might be asserted that Yasmine becomes Brand's scapegoat in the last effort to wake the nameless readers and show them the true face of the postcolonial toxic world that is full of myths and illusions and that makes people the non-human creatures without the possibility of the own decisions. Moreover, it might be even said that Dionne Brand, as the narrator of the first two collections, sacrifices herself and her role of narrator in favour of the effort to wake the sleeping identity. Dionne Brand cripples herself by the end of the second collection and in the third collection she ceases to exist because she, like Yasmine, lost the courage to remain unique and to speak up in the world of normalization. Therefore, such black women do not deserve to exist in the postcolonial world until they learn to accept their true identity.

## RESUME

Cieľom diplomovej práce bolo analyzovať postkoloniálnu identitu v troch zbierkach Dionne Brandtovej a tak definovať čo znamená byť lesbičkou čiernej pleti vo svete moderny a maskulinity.

Pozerajúc sa na život, skúsenosti a názory Dionne Brandtovej, je možné konštatovať, že Dionne Brandtová je veľmi agresívny avšak priamy básnik. Jej osobné skúsenosti ju nútia vnímať okolitý svet ako ohavného strážnika ktorý drží ľudí pod uzdou a v jednotvárnosti a kde každá odchýlka sa snaží byť potlačená. Práve preto sa táto autorka snaží byť výnimočná a túto výnimočnosť prenáša i do poézie kde sa pohybuje medzi štýlom poézie a štýlom prózy. Na jednej strane, jej básne majú príbeh, dejovú líniu, hlavné postavy, pozadie. No na strane druhej, jej básne sú písané vo veršoch, využívajú rôzne rečnicke figúry ako napríklad metaforu, prirovnanie, aliteráciu, opakovanie slov alebo anaforu. Možno povedať, že jej poézia je všetko naraz. Navyše, samotne básnické zbierky nie sú písané rovnakou dikciou a náladou. Zatiaľ čo prvá zbierka *No Language Is Neutral* využíva slová, ktoré sú menej formálne ale zato viac pozitívne vo vytváraní nálady a atmosféry, druhá zbierka *Land to Light On* ale hlavne tretia zbierka *Ossuaries* je presiaknutá pojmami opisujúce úpadok, baktérie, toxicitu, smrť a zomieranie z úmyslom vytvoriť ponurú atmosféru a tak zachytiť autorkinu stratenú vieru v zachovanie vlastnej jedinečnosti.

Vybrané zbierky odpovedajú na otázku čo znamená byť čiernou lesbičkou vo svete moderny a maskulinity. Prvá zbierka vníma lesbickú identitu ako dar a zároveň nádej uchovať si vlastnú jedinečnosť vo svete oficiálnych kladív, trávy, vývrtiek a miest. Rozprávač, v podobe čiernej lesbičky, odmieta žiť vo svete falošných mýtov a predstáv a preto otvára svoje oči aby videla realitu a prelomila dogmatické pravidlá a tradíciu slabej ženy, ktorý limituje vlastnú identitu. Navyše, Rozprávač sa v tejto zbierke stáva i učiteľom pre bezmenné dievčatá aby im ukázal že je možné byť spokojná a šťastná i vo svete spoločenskej fóbie, rasizmu a sexismu.

Druhá zbierka avšak stráca nádej a silu uchovať si jedinečnosť v súčasnom svete. Rozprávač dospieva a slabne. Schopnosť vidieť okolitý svet prestáva byť darom ale prekliatím, kde príliš veľa vidieť ničí vlastný život. Rozprávač sa stáva frustranou a zatrpknutou ženou, pretože jej obrovské úsilie, ktoré ju sprevádzalo

počas prvej zbierky, je pohltené a rozmetané veľkým mechanickým kolosom neustálej normalizácie. Navyše sa zdá, že neexistuje nikto kto by rozprávača správne počúval. I keď zbierka *Land to Light On* zachytáva tri ženy čiernej pleti ktoré žijú v Kanade a ktoré môžu byť žiačky ktorým Dionne Brandtová ponúkla jedinečnosť, tieto dospelé ženy túto jedinečnosť jednoducho odmietli a zvolili si život v slabosti, život v ktorom hlavné slovo má muž. Súčasná mašinéria zosilňuje, rozprávač sa stáva slabším a práve preto upadá do beznádeje a ľútosti. Pocit malosti a nedôležitosti sa zakoreňuje do jej mysle a núti ju vzdať.

Tretia zbierka predstavuje všetko čo sa stalo potom. Predchádzajúci rozprávač mizne, ostáva len staršia pani menom Jasmina ktorá je plná zatrpknutosti a osamelosti, a ktorá môže predstavovať mladého bezmenného poslucháča z prvej zbierky, ktorý sa avšak v druhej zbierke vyvinul na ignorantského byrokrata. A preto v tretej zbierke, toto dievča či skôr starena platí za svoje rozhodnutie ísť s davom, taktiež platí za odmietnutie daru jedinečnosti a tak sa stáva väzňom zamorenia a intoxikácie. Jasmina sa stáva človekom, ktorý zapredal vlastnú identitu a sexualitu, ktorý stratil svojho učiteľa a priateľa a ktorý ešte stále čaká a čaká na odpustenie ktoré avšak nikdy nepríde.

Mohlo by byť zosumarizované, že týmto zostupným vývojom od identity ktorá sa prebúda až po identitu ktorá je zničená, Dionne Brandtová sa snažila zdôrazniť že byť čiernou lesbičkou v súčasnom svete je stále zložité a neprípustné. Dokonca i Kanadská multikulturálna spoločnosť nesie znaky diskriminácie. A preto je dôležité neostať potichu ale naopak kričať, revať alebo len prehovoriť a tak prelomiť ticho a vidieť svet ktorý nikdy neakceptuje rozdielnosť. Jednoducho, ľudia boli, sú a budú delení podľa farby pleti, materského jazyka, pohlavných orgánov či sexuálnej orientácie. Dionne Brandtová verí že súčasný svet ešte stále považuje bielu nadradenú čiernej, že svet vidí muža stále silnejšieho než ženu a že svet preferuje ešte stále heterosexuálnu pred homosexuálnu. A preto, rasizmus, sociálne fóbie a sexismus existovali, existujú a budú existovať neustále v nekonečnosti ľudskej existencie. I keď Dionne Brandtová je sklamaná s takýmto (ne)vývojom, ešte viac je sklamaná s postojom čiernych žien v Kanade, ktoré sú až príliš ochotné akceptovať takéto podmienky rovnako ako urobila Jasmina. Môže byť predpokladané, že Jasmina sa stala obeťným baránkom Dionne Brandtovej v poslednej snahe autorky ukázať skutočnú tvár súčasného toxického sveta, ktorý je

plný mýtov a ilúzií a ktorý robí z týchto ľudí neživé bytosti bez možnosti vlastného rozhodnutia. Dokonca môže byť povedané, že Dionne Brandtová, ako rozprávač prvých dvoch zbierok, obetuje seba samú a jej pozíciu v prospech snahy zobudiť spiacu identitu. Dionne Brandtová ochromuje seba na konci druhej zbierky a v tretej zbierke už nevystupuje, pretože rovnako ako Jasmina ani ona samotná si nedokázala udržať svoju jedinečnosť a schopnosť prehovoriť vo svete normalizácie. A preto, takéto čierne ženy si nezaslúžia žiť v súčasnom svete pokiaľ sa nenaučia akceptovať kto skutočne sú.

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