Always a Domestic?: The Question of Canadian Redemption and Belonging in Selected Literature by Black Canadian Writers

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Abstract: The narratives of black writers of Caribbean descent living in Canada provide a useful perspective on blacks and belonging in Canada. Their stories elevate the history and legacy of the Domestic Worker Program, which from the 1950s brought young black women from the British Caribbean to Canada. This program began in an era when Canada’s immigration policies severely restricted Caribbean people from migrating to and settling in Canada. These early immigrants were the forerunners of later streams of black immigrants from around the world. In my reading of a selection of fiction by Austin Clarke, Dionne Brand, Cecil Foster, and David Chariandy, I argue that their narratives show that while immigration policies may have changed, the social positioning and inequalities imposed on the domestics still explain the social roles and positioning of blacks in Canada. These writers speculate whether, historically, the narrative of the black female in Canada is always to be imagined as a domestic.

In November 2007 I attended an event of little national note in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. It was to celebrate the 41st anniversary of Barbados independence and to mark the 50th anniversary of the official arrival of the first women from the British Caribbean under the Domestic Worker Scheme. The celebrated women were not the first West Indians to arrive in Canada as domestics, but one of the traits remarkable about them as a pioneering group was their efforts to escape the ascribed status of domestics and to transform themselves into Canadians capable of living out their life dreams—just like ordinary Canadians. The celebration was held at the Ottawa public library, a short distance from parliament, the Supreme Court, and the residence of then Governor-General Michaëlle Jean, the first black in Canada to hold this regal position and herself a Caribbean immigrant.3

In comments to the gathering, Senator Ann Cools—like Jean another black and Caribbean woman to reach national prominence—reminded the three generations of women in the audience that although much has been achieved for blacks in Canada, the pioneering work of the early domestic recruits was still incomplete.5 She said Canadian blacks were still fighting for greater social inclusion, a sense of belonging, a challenge the keynote speaker at the event, Cecil Foster, dubbed as a struggle for recognition and
human dignity. This paper is about the story of that unfinished business, as constructed through the fiction written by Caribbean-born Canadians: Austin Clarke’s novels *The Meeting Point* (1967) and *More* (2008); Dionne Brand’s novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and short stories “Blossom” (1989) and “No rinsed blue sky, no red flower fences” (1989); Cecil Foster’s novel *Sleep On, Beloved* (1995); and David Chariandy’s novel *Soucouyant* (2007). I contend that these black writers use fiction to tell the stories of immigrants and the later generations of Canadians they produced. They articulate the experiences of the black female subject, as an outsider, sacrificing herself in the hope of a better life in a new land. Her desire, something I call a hope for Canadian redemption, is for ultimate transformation from marginal status into full citizenship.

Highly intuitive, the notion of Canadian redemption is simultaneously personal and impersonal: it is deeply personal for the individual who hopes to achieve that redemption in society, a profoundly impersonal space. In this context, I am suggesting that the notion of redemption as it traveled across time and, as made current in this fiction, now speaks of the dreams and experiences of all black females in general, both those whose status in life is still the domestic and those who work in other fields but who—merely because they are black—appear unable to escape the social positioning and stigma reserved historically for domestic workers. This analysis is about women as social agents and whether those with black skin in Canada can ever liberate themselves from the dominant perception that the color of their skin makes them good only for the social position of domestic workers.

For the black female in general, the ideal redemption painted by these writers is based on the hope of attaining subjectivity in and belonging to the Canadian nation-state. It is what the leading characters in these works perceive as a promise of a better life that would lead to social integration into the Canadian mainstream and to full attainment of all the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. This ideal goes beyond merely the economic. In an ideal world, these fictional characters experience desired redemption when their dreams are realized. As with the real life women on whom the fictional counterparts are modeled, obstacles are always in their path to this redemption. In both the fictional and the practical worlds, the obstacles to social actualization are best exemplified by the state and its seeming unwillingness to allow the women to realize their dreams. This is where so-called fact and fiction combine for a single narrative, one that is picked up in the realistic novels and short stories of the writers under review. The conflict, as depicted in these stories, is usually a result of differences in perspective on belonging, as demonstrated by the state or the female characters themselves.
For example, the Canadian government’s ideal of redemption is one of benevolence—a form of objectification of the agentless black body. Historically, the Canadian nation’s aim to ease the economic problems of the less fortunate members of the British Empire was to provide rotating, temporary opportunities of employment to selected female migrants when Canada needed a cheap supply of labor. This goal was the genesis of the Domestic Worker Program, which itself was the precursor to more open immigration by blacks from the 1960s onwards, thereby producing a black presence in major Canadian cities. The primary aim of the domestic program was not to help individuals *per se* but rather a part of the British Empire with an oversupply of labor. These individuals would be prescribed universal duties agreed to by the governments. They had to meet the needs of Canadians as domestic workers, even if it meant sacrificing personal dreams. They would be positioned in the Canadian society as itinerant economic beings with no real social attachment to the wider society.

However, for black women, redemption was something completely different. It had very little to do with their work status but more with the type of social personalities they could become after they had transitioned from their entry-level status as domestic workers. Indeed, for the women this redemption is imaginary, something that starts out as a hope in the transcendent, because, in a sense, only the women themselves can *feel* they have been redeemed. Feelings cannot be proven objectively, but, nonetheless, they can still be measured—such as how socially entrenched these women feel they have become and, perhaps even more important, whether future generations of black women enjoy social mobility, that is they are not restricted only to menial and marginal roles in the society. Thus, I turn to fiction to examine how they feel about themselves and their status.

Theorist Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001) states in *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* that the construction of stories—in this case those of the fiction genre—are how some groups damaged historically can make themselves whole. Indeed, narratives such as fiction help to locate such people in time and space. I argue that through these narratives of immigrant women, Canadian blacks give themselves a sense of rootedness and belonging—a sense of citizenship even when they might be living on the margins. This is why fiction is an appropriate genre for this undertaking, for the narrative of Canadian redemption is one of intangibles. Studying the selected fictional works allow us to analyze this desired redemption subjectively—as what the women themselves define and require. These stories place the struggle for redemption in time, for they speak of the past, the present, and the speculative hopes and dreams of their black female characters.
Fiction privileges the imaginary, merging the real and the idealized.

These authors place their characters in situations similar to those women on the scheme or holding temporary employment visas to effectively demonstrate their realization that Canadian redemption is a myth: the widely held belief that migrating to Canada would allow individuals to attain a strong sense of financial independence and to achieve upward social mobility, all the things they imagined would come with the attainment of full citizenship. When the goals of the myth are not realized, the characters remain in a social and personal void. They are portrayed as being unable to redeem the promise of redemption due to some personal “insufficiency” (King 1963). However, these women know that their failure is more socially imposed than personally inflicted.

In the authors’ telling, the sense of not belonging is germane to the experiences of the domestics. The programs that brought these women to Canada were intended to meet the continued demand for domestic workers by white Canadians. After the Domestic Worker Scheme was cancelled in 1967, Canada adopted the Temporary Employment Visa program in 1973 to which those desiring to enter Canada as domestics could apply and be admitted. However, the temporariness of this new employment visa foreclosed belonging, full acceptance, recognition, and integration. These programs were never intended to make the women feel they belonged. I mean to use the term belonging as described by scholar Cecil Foster in his award-winning book Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom (2008):

Mythologically, Western societies have been imagined as gardens of purity and enlightenment that have been carved out of a wilderness or Blackness that is the rest of humanity in its natural state. Those that belong have traditionally been imagined as White, possessing unchangeable purity, goodness, and cultural enlightenment. The primary determinant of belonging is not the outer feature, such as colour of the skin, but an unwavering and unchanging commitment and good intent to the ideals of society. Those that do not share these inner qualities are imagined as Black, as the Other. (65-66, emphasis added)

Foster’s notion of belonging highlights the problems for blacks in Canada. The ideals of black/white have been mapped to skin color, meaning whether blacks
h ave “a n u n w a v e r i n g a n d unchanging commitment and good intent to the ideals of society,” it is difficult for them to experience belonging. They will quite likely be seen as outsiders, “the stranger, the unknown, the corrupter” (Foster 66). This is the ideology that governs, objectively, the placement and position of the domestic workers on arrival, and blacks in Canada, generally. No need to spoil the mythological garden. This approach does not take into account what the women, as subjects, want for themselves.

After the Second World War, when Canadians imagined industrious black women in the Caribbean, they thought of domestic workers. Around this time, the ideal domestic worker for Canadians was white and European. It was only when efforts to attract Europeans failed, and because of pressure from the Mother Country to consider alternate supply sources, that Canada reluctantly adopted the West Indian domestic scheme in 1955. In 1967, when Canada changed its immigration policy to an individual points system rather than country of preference, the domestic scheme was cancelled. Because the new immigration policy was intended to remove racial discrimination, there was, therefore, no need for a special scheme to admit Caribbean domestics (Barber 24). In all cases, blacks were not imagined by mainstream Canadians as belonging centrally to the Canadian nation.

In considering the demand for domestic workers, Canadians were reaching back into their history when they reflected on the need for black workers. The first instance pointed to an earlier domestic workers program for women from Guadeloupe. This time, however, it went for British instead of French West Indians. Second, whether British or French, the newcomers conformed to an old stereotype of the ideal black worker as a domestic. For these reasons I find the trope of the domestic useful in this analysis: the figure of the domestic worker, what I categorize as the archetypal domestic, is part of the dominant Canadian imaginary. It is not so far removed from the mammy figure, such as Aunt Jemima and Mammy of Gone with the Wind in the North American imagination of the black female. Like the mammy, the domestic is a historical figure in black Caribbean and North American lore. It describes the black female as an outsider, even when she is physically present in a home that is not hers. She sacrifices herself in the hope of ultimately transforming herself fully into a citizen, in what is analogously the Canadian home; this is the redemption she seeks. The black female, in the language of the discourse on Canadian multiculturalism, is seeking recognition as a full human who enjoys all the privileges and rights of Canadian citizenship.

These Caribbean women, as captured in the fiction, are fighting against a fixed notion of the black female as a domestic in Canada. As I will show, it was the myth of the black
female as an ideal domestic that brought these pioneering women to Canada. Therefore, the ideal of the black female as a domestic was one that was held objectively of these women—by those who set immigration policies and who would determine what groups of people were best suited to make Canada their home. As the literature shows, even if these women were objectively domestics, they never saw themselves only as domestics or as being marginalized for long in Canadian society. As agents, they had dreams for themselves. Their aspirations speak to how these women see themselves transforming into citizens so that with time they would not be stereotypically seen as domestics.

A close reading of the works by the selected writers demonstrates how they are concerned with the picture of black women struggling over their desire to be imagined fully as Canadians. They fight against their seeming inability to escape from a wider perception that holds them fixed in the Canadian imaginary as only domestics. Worse for them, as depicted in these narratives, the generations that followed, including the children of the migrants, faced the same kinds of struggle: even though they imagined themselves socially as fully Canadian and capable of achieving any status they desired, they still felt limited in what they could make of themselves. In the minds of the new generation of black Canadians of either gender, the dominant groups in Canadian society see them as no different from the pioneers. They are always the domestics. They find themselves objectified, as historical figures in their marginalization, in what they believe should, by now, be fully home for them.

To this end, the Caribbean females arrive into a dominant myth that they hope to reshape. Indeed, they must have realized that those who arrived earlier as domestics never escaped from this ascribed status. Ironically, it is because the previous groups did not achieve their Canadian redemption that it was possible for Canadian elites to consider another generation of women from the Caribbean as ideal domestics. Therefore, attaining full citizenship was a tough task for those seeking Canadian redemption, for the myth of the proper place and position for black women in the Canadian society was already well entrenched.

In effect, the Caribbean-born authors picked up the stories of the efforts of these disillusioned women and, in a sense, continued in this vein of testing the accepted view of how the black female—this time originating in the British Caribbean—fits into the Canadian national narrative of the now expanded black community and its sense of identity, belonging, and full citizenship. For example, in her short story “For Tea and Not for Service,” Nova Scotian author Maxine Tynes alludes to the kind of world the Caribbean female would be entering. Importantly, the story gestures to the
history of blacks in Canada from its earliest beginning in the province of Nova Scotia and locates the presence of the domestic in this setting. Furthermore, it reaffirms the enduring presence of the domestic figure in the fiction of black Canadian writers, precisely because Tynes’s protagonist is black and Nova Scotian, and, therefore, provides a base on which to situate the following discussion.

Blacks have been living in Canada since the 17th century, but Tynes’s short story demonstrates that despite the longevity, black women in Nova Scotia and in Canada generally continued to suffer racism during the mid-20th century. The protagonist Celie has received international acclaim in the 1940s–1950s as a singer. The Imperial Daughters of Halifax, an elite group of white women, has invited her to have a celebratory tea. At the tea, Celie was avoided. She felt alone. No one spoke to her. Indeed, one of the Imperial Daughters “proclaimed to all and sundry that afternoon that, celebrated songstress or not, she could barely abide being to tea with ‘that gal.’ . . . In fact, as she said or boasted. ‘It was all I could do to keep from asking that gal to go down to the cellar to fetch a scuttle of coal’” (89). Only Dora, a woman from Celie’s previous neighborhood, was kind to her. As it happened, Dora was the live-in domestic, serving tea at the party. Such, then, was the social climate into which those under the Domestic Worker Scheme would be arriving.

Tynes’s story invokes three important concerns for this paper: first, the presence of the archetypal domestic worker in black Canadian literature. In the literature by black Canadian writers of Caribbean descent, this figure represents an important trope that works across generations. As a recurring device in this fiction, the archetypal domestic becomes an endearing and enduring literary figure, precisely because she symbolizes the hopes and dreams of blacks who have migrated from the Caribbean to Canada. At times she may represent the hopes of black mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers, and lovers. Too, she embodies the experiences of the black Canadian-born domestic servant who, like her, is perceived as an outsider. So her fight is the same as the domestics, who, like her, have always existed in Canada. She cannot escape being imagined as a domestic worker by white Canadians. This overdetermined identity points to a second concern: speculatively, the black female, no matter her accomplishment, cannot escape the social positioning as a domestic. The third concern has to do with the refusal of the dominant members of society to accept an accomplished black woman into their circle, clearly symbolizing the social exclusion of blacks from belonging to the nation-state and from receiving full recognition of acceptance and belonging. These concerns raise the question: Are black women in Canada always imagined as domestics even when they perform different social roles? Some
black Canadian fiction writers seem to say so, and, in their eyes, their proof is the narrative that is history.

**Historical Narratives**

The legacy of the Domestic Worker Scheme and its successor the Temporary Employment Visa Program further reinforce the positioning that situates blacks as outsiders unable to self-actualize and enjoy their accomplishments. The scheme began when Canada’s immigration policies severely restricted Caribbean people from migrating to and settling in Canada. I argue that while immigration policies may have changed, the social positioning and inequalities imposed on the domestics still explain the social roles and positioning of blacks in Canada. Therefore, to get a keener appreciation of what it means to be black in Canada today, it is useful to reflect on the legacy of this scheme.

The Canadian government considered this scheme as a “foreign aid policy” and the participants as mainly seeking relief from economic poverty and limited opportunities in their countries of origin (Silvera 1989; Barber 1991; and Calliste 1991). The narrative in a selection of black Canadian fiction tells a different story. It argues that while offering an escape from limited resources and opportunities, the scheme placed these women in compromised positions. The laws of the day did more to protect the Canadian employers than the domestic workers, most of whom were exploited and oppressed and kept in their positions by fear of deportation (Barber 24). This is a point at which fiction and non-fiction writers converge. Many black Canadian writers, such as Makeda Silvera, H. Nigel Thomas, and Agnes Calliste, highlight exploitation, sexual and physical abuse, oppression, and isolation as some of the main issues facing the migrants.

However, especially when these narratives are taken up academically, there is little discussion of why these domestic workers remained in Canada rather than return to their homelands. This is a main point I will focus on in this paper. I maintain that these Caribbean women endure this treatment by relying on the hope for *Canadian redemption*. They sacrifice their sense of self in the hope of redemption in a new social setting. I argue that evidence of this desire for *Canadian redemption* can be found in the fiction narrative. The works of several black Canadian writers, such as Clarke, Brand, Foster, Silvera, Chariandy, Tynes, H. Nigel Thomas, and, most importantly, George Elliott Clarke, a seventh generation African Nova Scotian, speak to this yearning for transformation as redemptive.  

To this end, the idea of belonging to the nation-state remains central to the hope that these women had for redemption into the Canadian garden. But, as Silvera argues, this hope was founded on a perceived promise of redemption based on false advertising that increased the number of applicants, resulting in the exploitation of the
availability of women coming to Canada on temporary employment visas, perhaps encouraging them to have false dreams. She asserts:

The misconception of Canada as the land of milk and honey is reinforced by airline advertisements, domestic agencies, weekly dramas on the television set which show North America as the land of plenty where happiness and wealth can be bought on credit and where maids like those shown on weekly sit-coms, are treated with respect and as a special part of the family. (5)

The women arrived to face a clash in perception. They came for a better life, or Canadian redemption. They encountered “widespread prejudice . . . and the racism imbedded within a system which thrives on the labour of women of colour from Third World countries, women who are brought to Canada to work virtually as slaves in the homes of both wealthy and middle class Canadian families” (Silvera 5).

With the entrenched belief that black women should be domestic workers, with the help of the laws and immigration policies, employers ensured they remained in that role. As the fiction writers suggest, in the end, all these women had left of their real selves was hope—now Canadian redemption was not only about improving themselves by coming to Canada but also about changing the Canadian social perception of the women.

**Textual Analyses: The Past Becomes the Present**

Austin Clarke’s trilogy *The Meeting Point* (1967), *Storm of Fortune* (1973), and *The Bigger Light* (1975) focuses on the issues of acceptance and belonging for black immigrant characters from the Caribbean, reinforcing the importance of their experience not only to the development of Canada but also to the legacy of later generations of blacks. For example, in *The Meeting Point*, through the black female domestic worker’s voice and presence, Clarke inscribes blackness in the Canadian literary imaginary from the perspective of a Caribbean-born writer. Clarke’s protagonist Bernice and her fellow domestic, Dots, are reminders to readers about the 1960s in Canada, the existence of the scheme, and the inability of domestics to achieve social mobility in the Canadian setting. We see Clarke return to this struggle in his novel *More*, written some 50 years later, published just after the 50th anniversary of those women who had arrived on the scheme. That picture for blacks is even bleaker this time around. Later we will return to *More*.

Clarke’s *Meeting Point* captures the lived reality of women in situations similar to that of Bernice; she remains ambivalent about the benefits of living in
Canada, while desiring the physical benefits usually indicative of belonging, such as better and more consumer products that are generally associated with living the good life. The Burrmann’s children and their friends often made Bernice feel a diminished sense of self by speaking about her in racist ways. Once the young Ruthie Burrmann had to remind the Gasstein children that “she’s our maid . . . And she’s a person” (24). The Gasstein boy remarked, “Mummy called the woman on the pancake box, Aunt Jerimima, Bernice’s sister, because she is a nigger” (24), and later he exclaimed, “She’s only a maid!” Bernice endured the taunting from this young boy, who, with his “mouth turned up in a sneer . . . his tongue hanging out in derisive contempt” sang, “And eeny-meny-miney, moe! and catch a black nigger by her toe . . .” (28). After this incident Bernice reflected on how several times over the 32 months she had been employed by the Burrmanns, she had considered leaving her employer “without notice, and with the kitchen sink full of dirty dinner dishes” (28). However, she reconsidered: “Always, her mind was changed for her by the terror of facing a Canadian winter without a job” and losing her apartment “which was part of her wages for working as a domestic. It was her self-contained shelter, against herself and other racial fallout. This apartment contained more facilities than she had ever known back in Barbados” (28). Bernice’s ambivalence reminds us that desires are always changing: the Bernice now living in Canada desires a status change; the old Bernice of Barbados within her, however, recognizes that in terms of her physical survival, she is better off in this present situation. We recognize, too, that her desires would have to be frozen in time for her now to consider her present situation as redemptive.

Although financially stable, Bernice’s position in society prevents her from enjoying the fruits of her labor and satisfying her desires. She has friends, but she does not have access to the social spaces that would make her feel she has attained her dream:

One day, in a pit of depression, Bernice went down to Eaton’s department store and brought back two hundred dollars in dresses plus a ninety-dollar swim suit. She put on the dresses; but she did not wear them out of the apartment. There was nowhere to go. And so she called her friend, Dots, and the two of them alternately dressed themselves in the dresses, and modeled the swim suit . . . . The next day, Bernice telephoned Eaton’s to pick up the clothes. . . . Dots had liked the swim suit; and wanted to keep it. But remembered in time (‘Where I would wear this thing, eh, gal?’ In the backyard in the
summer? 'Cause I have never seen one Negro person in any o’ these swimming pools they have all over this city!’ (29)

Clearly these women knew that their desire for luxury was unrealistic. The sacrifice of being the domestic without the possibility of a status change had overwhelmed Bernice, who felt taken for granted after 32 months of serving Mrs. Burrmann, who did not think twice about offering Bernice’s service to her friend in need: “I will send Bernice over,” offered Mrs. Burrmann. “She can do the work of a mule, two mules, ha-ha! and look you don’t even have to bother paying her anything. Bernice will come, darling” (8).

Throughout it all, Bernice still desires to change her status and to become a Canadian. She writes her mother: “I following the lead of my mistress, and trying to improve my mind. She gone back to school, taking lessons. . . . This lady, Mrs. Burrmann, have learning already, and money too. I don’t know yet which road to follow. But I intend to follow both; and get some of both” (30-31). Based on Mrs. Burrmann’s example, Bernice believes that education and wealth would lead to Canadian redemption. Thus she aspires to be like her employer and to enjoy the same lifestyle. Moreover, Bernice desires “whiteness” as “Canadianness,” what Karen Flynn (2003) describes as a form of privileging immigrants that Canadian officials felt could assimilate easily (252). Bernice, therefore, leaves the Toronto Negro Baptist Church to attend the Unitarian Congregation, “a cleaner, wealthier church” (29-30) that Mrs. Burrmann used to attend. In this setting she performs an elevation in status, but she can only do this in the confines of this church where “the congregation was all white — or mostly white” (30). When she leaves this environment, she returns to her real status, her position as a domestic.

Bernice’s friend Gertrude, whose social life revolved around a similar “white” church, was not as fortunate as her and Dots to be placed with employers in Toronto, where they could be part of a community of other blacks like themselves, when the performance of whiteness was over. Bernice thinks about Gertrude’s plight:

...remember, Bernice, do you remember Gertrude? And what happen to her? Never a soul with who she could exchange a word with.... Days and days pass, and not one o’ we women from the West Indies ever went up to Orillia and see how Gertrude making out....Lord, and when all of us was thinking that things up there was rosy, that Gertrude was making money like water, Gertrude, oh dear loss! flat on her back in a mental hospital. Gertrude let the
Isolation leads to loneliness, and this was Gertrude’s experience. In this figurative wilderness—ironically not a garden as in the garden of the dominant narrative—she was alienated from her self and her community, an alienation that predictably led to madness. Her insanity, then, can be understood as a result of her inability to feel a sense of belonging. As Clarke suggests, isolation and alienation become the reality for some of the migrant women whether living in the metropolis or hinterland. Bernice, however, continues her quest for whiteness, to belong to the Canadian garden. At the end of the novel, Bernice is no closer to attaining her dream.

Clarke portrays the experiences of black women living in Toronto during the 1960s, characterized as either domestic workers or nurses who, like the domestics, had social limits placed on them. In a sense, nurses were imaginatively domestics. Their desires, their failures, and their inability to overcome the limit of social exclusion and to belong are made all the more palpable during a scene, near the end of the novel, depicting a small group of black women advocating for equality:

“Some were carrying placards; some just walking. A few black persons (mostly women) were walking and holding down their heads as if they thought they should not be seen.” The placards read: “CANADA IS NOT ALABAMA,” “END RACE PREJUDICE NOW,” “BLACK EQUALS WHITE,” and “NEGROES ARE PEOPLE” (304). They had to protest for redemption sake. As the archetypal domestic, the black female is unable to escape the socially constructed role in which she is placed. Her status might change, but Canadian redemption could only be a dream, an ideal in the transcendent and beyond her reach.

Dionne Brand switches the lenses in her representation of independent black immigrant women living in Toronto. These women refuse to submit to abuse and denigration even though they are domestic workers. In her short story “Blossom,” the black female characters attempt several entrepreneurial activities to support themselves. They claim their subjectivity by refusing to tolerate exploitation by their employers, such as when the protagonist Blossom enters into private contracts as a domestic worker; the narrator explains: “Well now is five years since Blossom in Canada and nothing ain’t breaking. She leave the people on Oriole for some others on Balmoral. The white boss-man was a doctor. Since the day she reach, he eyeing she, eyeing she” (33). Wise to the doctor’s intention, Blossom waits until he sneaks up on her to “grab on to he little finger and start to squeeze it back … and he had to scream out. Blossom
sheself start to scream like all hell, until the wife and children run downstairs too” (33). Blossom embarrassed the family by exposing the doctor’s intentions to his family, the neighbors, and the police, all of whom were intimidated by Blossom’s tirade. She was not afraid to challenge the abuse and make it known. She had to claim her redemption by withdrawing from mainstream society and creating a space in which she could self-actualize. Eventually Blossom claims her redemption by turning to religion and spirit possession and using her entrepreneurial skills to start a speakeasy business supported by blacks in her community. They feel a sense of belonging in this underground enterprise—a familiar space that reminds them of back home—but a space that, nevertheless, marks them as outsiders.

Brand portrays another manifestation of the archetypal domestic in her short story “No rinsed blue sky, no red flower fences” and in her novel In Another Place. The women are illegal immigrants working in domestic or factory settings. The narratives reveal the physical and economic abuse the women suffer in these conditions, as well as what they must do to survive. For them Canadian redemption meant to legalize their status. Until then, they had to become entrepreneurs, responsible for creating employment while tolerating abusive employers and waiting for their redemption that might not be realized. Their presence lays bare society’s need for illegal workers (who otherwise would have been deported). However, though needed, their illegitimacy forecloses belonging, but their desire to be legalized fuels the condition because it is their only way of existing momentarily until they can improve their circumstances.

Such is the case in Brand’s short story “No rinsed blue sky, no red flower fences.” The nameless protagonist confines herself to her apartment out of fear of being found living illegally in Canada. Brand describes her protagonist and her charge: “She, black silent and unsmiling; the child, white, tugging and laughing, or whining” (87). After working six years as an illegal babysitter in Canada, she longs to return to the Caribbean. However, she remains, although she has a baby she sends back home because an illegal mother cannot register her baby, even if the laws require everybody be registered. She is afraid of being evicted from her apartment and of being discovered as an illegal worker. Too, she feels alienated: “She was always uncomfortable under the passing gazes, muttering to herself that she knew, they didn’t have to tell her that she was out of place here” (87). But she is trapped in this situation of living in Canada illegally and sending money back home, even if she cannot pay her bills. She lives in hope. She reflects on having painted her apartment walls from yellow to white, which symbolically suggests a transition from the sunny Caribbean to white Canada; in this sense, whiteness signifies belonging,
security, which, for her, would mean that “the creditors, the mornings full of bills, would go away or she could feel them gone in the blinding white” (85). She escapes only in her dreams at night, when she flees from the drudgery of her life in Canada and from her anxiety over her illegal status. She hopes for redemption on waking, but “[m]idday found her on the street corner, a little white hand in hers, her other hand kneading a headache from her brow” (93). The headache, a symbol of her constant psychic conflict, reveals her ambivalence toward her future; her dreams represent her desired redemption, which is just an ideal. The myth of Canadian redemption keeps her hoping for a change in status, even though she has long since come to realize it is just that, a myth.

Thus, redemption remains a hope for rebirth somewhere in the transcendent. Literary critic H. Nigel Thomas makes a similar point in his article “Cecil Foster’s Sleep on, Beloved: A Depiction of the Consequences of Racism in Canadian Immigration Policy.” Speaking about Foster’s discussion on the benefits and pitfalls of immigration in his book A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada, Thomas remarks:

That Foster recognizes this to be a manifestation of the Promised Land myth that infects us all is evident in A Place Called Heaven if only because the essays that comprise it document and analyze the various ways by which Toronto’s Blacks try to keep a step ahead of psychological and cultural death in the urban wilderness of hopelessness and contempt that the dream has brought them to. (488)

Moreover, regarding Foster’s Sleep On, Thomas explains: “the novel’s theme is that Blacks do not find in Canada the nurture they need for self-realization” (488). In this novel, the protagonist Ona, at 16 years old, has a baby Suzanne, while living in Jamaica. After the birth, she secures a job working as a clerk at the Barclay’s Bank International in urban Kingston, and leaves Suzanne with her mother in rural St. Ann’s so that she can work and provide for herself and her daughter. While in Kingston, she is nurtured and supported by her past high school teacher Mrs. Small, who was responsible for getting Ona the job at the bank, all the while encouraging her to look for more promising opportunities. Ona aspires to be like Mrs. Small, who in her eyes is the epitome of success, having received her education overseas—a measure of success in Jamaican society—as the narrator observes, “On the walls were framed pictures and paintings of scenes from overseas, along with the parchments and educational scrolls with Mrs. Small’s name on them. Those scrolls, and the experience of living abroad, were what made the difference
in Mrs. Small’s life, what gave the teacher her freedom to do as she pleased despite what others thought, a fact that Ona found impossible to ignore…” (65). It was clear to Ona, then, that if she “wanted to redeem herself, there was no doubt she had to find a way . . . . Undoubtedly, she would have to seek redemption away from St. Ann’s, or even Jamaica itself” (66, emphasis added). From Ona’s point of view, redemption had to come from another location, and based on her mentor’s image of success, it had to come from overseas; in this case redemption had to be Canadian.

Upon reading “the short item about the new Canadian immigration policy,” and that “[a]ffluent Canadians were looking for dedicated young women to work in their homes as live-in domestics” (69), Ona, at 17 years old, did not hesitate to apply and was accepted. Her mother wasn’t happy that Ona had made these plans, especially leaving Suzanne behind, but she promised to take care of her granddaughter, assuring Ona: “‘Don’t you worry,’ she said, ‘Go and make something of yourself. Whatever you do always ask the true and living God to guide your footstep’” (66). Ona left and “never in her wildest dreams did she think it was going to be almost 12 years before she set eyes on Suzanne again” (66). Little did Ona imagine she would be sexually abused, repeatedly, as well as economically oppressed, by her new employer, Kevin Jenkins, who refused to pay her the wages to which she was entitled. Ona dared not complain to the authorities. That was a luxury available only to citizens, which she was not.

Although the Jenkins’s breached the contract with her, and that should have “painful consequences” for them, it was Ona who was told by Mr. Jenkins that “[i]t could result in Ona being sent back home” (76). She was alone, knew no one in Toronto, and “the alternative, as explained by this lawyer [Mr. Jenkins], was simply unimaginable” (76). Eventually, Ona became pregnant and had to have an abortion, and one evening three months later, suspecting Mr. Jenkins’s intent on raping her again, Ona ran away and without having attained her landed immigrant status. She was befriended by an older woman, Mrs. King, who “adopted” her. Ona felt abandoned and without Canadian redemption, as Thomas put it: “That the Canadian government never thought it necessary to put in place provisions to protect the indentured workers from abuse shows that it was not concerned about the workers’ welfare. The threat of deportation, of which the employer and employee are always aware, facilitates exploitation and renders the victim helpless” (491). In fact, Ona was legally living in Canada but did not know this until she was arrested for working in a factory that hired illegal workers for pittance. Mrs. King contacted Mr. Jenkins and got him to defend Ona after her arrest by threatening to expose his earlier abuse of her. He arranged for her release from the immigration detention
center by producing her legal papers, which he had received in the mail shortly after she had run away (95-96).

While Ona was subsequently able to sponsor both her husband Joe from Barbados and her daughter Suzanne from Jamaica, she was not able to self-actualize. Suzanne was taken away from her by the Children’s Aid Society and placed in foster care. She almost lost Telson, her and Joe’s son, to a similar fate. Joe did not help Ona financially, and so her social status, rather than improving, rapidly declined. Her sacrifice was immense: separation from her daughter for 12 years, which did not allow them to bond; her enduring abuse and exploitation while working on the scheme; and her failure to transition socially even with landed immigrant status. Ona eventually suffered a mental breakdown. Struggling to survive in a strange land without social and economic support was not redemptive. As Mrs. King, Ona’s guide in this hell, put it: “I hope the day soon come when all o’them advantage-takers get what’s coming to them. I don’t know who tell them that they got any right to keep exploiting all them women from poor countries.’ . . . ‘Cause this is a real strange country for black people” (96-97).

Similarly, Clarke invokes this “strange country” in his most recent awarding-winning novel More (2008), set during the 1970s to early 1990s. He depicts the sacrifice and hope for redemption, expected by immigrant women, through the female protagonist Idora. Despite her efforts to integrate into Canadian society, she is unable to do so. Although a Canadian citizen and no longer a domestic worker, she experiences difficulty in becoming fully Canadian. Idora’s struggles to achieve social mobility powerfully illustrate the issues of identity, recognition, belonging, and self-determination that faced these women. Her thwarted efforts caused her to reflect on her reasons for migrating to Canada from Barbados in the 1970s as a domestic, as the narrator informs us: “at the time, as a bright young black woman, she knew it was the easiest—if not the only—means open to her to immigrate to Canada” (65). “You go! Go!” her Mother had said, clapping her hands in triumph when the official letter arrived bearing good tidings. “Go! And make a woman of yourself. This island has nothing for you!” (65). Her mother emphatically counsels her to leave Barbados, and Idora accepts this advice, escaping to Canada, a place that promises her, a bright woman, the desired opportunities after her domestic contract had ended; she could “go to university and make a life for herself” (65). However, when we meet Idora, she works in the kitchen at “this venerable Trinity College Dining Hall” at the University of Toronto. At this point, she can only imagine her son as a student sitting at the dining table. Like Bernice, she, too, was unable to attend university; instead she settled for attending night classes at George Brown Community College. But she attends only one class: “That’s all I think about,
night school. I am too damn tired on Fridays, when I have to get to my classes” (20). Even with the best of intentions, Idora is too tired to pursue the education status that she desires.

In his acclaimed novel *Soucouyant*, David Chariandy portrays the hope for redemption through his female characters’ desire to escape the social and economic limits imposed on women living in the Caribbean, as well as their failure to integrate in the Canadian setting upon migrating. As with the fiction of his contemporaries discussed earlier, this novel reaffirms the consequence of alienation from society through its representation of the issues arising from exclusion, loneliness, and oppression, as experienced by the protagonist Adele, who suffers the early onset of dementia. The trope of dementia symbolizes her psychological escape from reality into madness. Adele migrated from Trinidad in the early 1960s via the Domestic Worker Scheme. Like Idora, Adele believed the Caribbean had nothing to offer her. Canada was seen as redemptive; it provided a path for people like Adele to escape what she saw as “the running sores of their histories” (51) —the period in Trinidad’s history, the 1940s, when the presence of American soldiers profoundly impacted the island. And, as some argue, these soldiers commodified and possessed the bodies of many Trinidadian females, for whom prostitution became a means to survival. Adele’s mother earned a living as a prostitute, a future to which Adele did not aspire. She could escape from those “stuck back there,” and, as she reminded herself, “she’s been given a chance in a new land. She’s one of the lucky ones. She must always remember that” (51). Both Idora and Adele saw their futures mapped out in the promise of redemption in Canada, a promise that never materialized.

**Elusive Redemption: Narratives of Shattered Dreams**

Thus succumbing to the myth of Canadian redemption, the protagonists, in the texts discussed here, migrate to Canada for economic and social advancement. And while these women hope that they would be able to improve their lives and that of their children, most realize the futility of their expectations. The notion of shattered dreams is not new to Brand, who, unlike in the earlier short stories discussed, depicts this predicament in her novel *In Another Place, Not Here*. The character Abena reflects on the recurring cycle of domesticity and abuse that black women from the Caribbean suffered at the hands of their white Canadian employers. Here Brand significantly captures the disillusionment of shattered dreams as experienced by Caribbean domestic workers. They abused their own daughters, whom they sent for from the Caribbean, but when these children joined them, these mothers immediately saw their own hopelessness reflected in their children. Abena recalls:

> They sent for us, sent for us daughters, then washed our
faces in their self-hatred. Self-hatred they had learned from the white people whose toilets they had cleaned, whose asses they had wiped, whose kitchens they had scrubbed, whose hatred they had swallowed, and when they sent for us, they hated us because they saw their reflection in us, they saw their hands swollen with water, muscular with lifting and pulling, they saw their souls assaulted and irrecoverable, wounded from insult and the sheer nastiness of white words and they beat us abused us terrorized us as they had been terrorized and beaten and abused; they saw nothing good in us because they saw nothing good in themselves. They made us pay for what they had suffered. . . . They did not feel redeemed by it but they themselves had been twisted from walking in shame that they twisted our bodies to suit their stride. (231, emphasis added)

As the above excerpt demonstrates, Canadian redemption had failed those women who had landed immigrant status and who tried to claim their redemption through reuniting with their daughters. As Abena explains, redemption didn’t come from the sacrifice they made by migrating and attaining permanent residency, perhaps even citizenship. Redemption did not materialize by sponsoring their daughters to Canada for a better life. And they did not experience redemption when they physically abused their daughters. There was no redemption through these acts because they saw their past mirrored in their daughters’ futures. Brand’s representation shows the persistence of the domestic archetype of a strong woman leading her family into the Promised Land. But it also shows that they realize that, like them, their daughters would be treated in similar fashion. This insight suggests the likelihood of the black woman being perceived as a domestic or channeled into service roles that reinforced that image. Ona, in Foster’s Sleep On, experienced a similar fate because even when she and her daughter reunited, there could be no reconciliation.

Similarly in More and Soucouyant, the protagonists believe the Caribbean is not good enough for them, but they sense that white Canadians believe that they are not good enough for Canada. Thus, in Canada they are denied the social mobility they desired and became social outcasts, alienated from self and the wider mainstream society, specifically the communities in which they lived and worked. In Idora’s case she attempts to belong by trying to attain whiteness. But the closest she could come to achieving that goal was by working in the kitchen at University of
Toronto or by attending “St. James’s Cathedral” (5). When these social spaces still do not fulfill her desire to belong, she shrouds herself in a white comforter or wears a white imitation silk nightgown while in her basement apartment or clothes herself in full white and lightens her skin tone with white face powder when she goes outdoors, all in an effort to effect whiteness of the body. However, rather than achieving belonging, she ends up being a social outcast. She remains in her basement apartment, refusing to go to work during a four-day hiatus, waiting for the promised redemption that naturally does not materialize. While reflecting on her situation, Idora invokes the biblical narrative of Jonah and the Whale, a process of social withdrawal.12

Withdrawal, then, becomes an important trope to these writers. This reaction might be expected because experience was proving Canadian redemption happens only in the unreal—in the transcendent. In Soucouyant, degenerative dementia becomes Adele’s coping mechanism and represents her decision to forget her past in Trinidad and her failure to integrate in the present in Canada. In her reverie, she talks about life in Trinidad, about “shadow bennie,” about “coconut cakes,” and about soucouyants—animal spirits that roam the earth seeking to devour the young—mythical representations of social outcasts. In many ways, Chariandy’s literary treatment of Adele as a soucouyant evokes her outsider status and symbolizes her displacement and exclusion in Canada; she is unable to fully belong. We observe this exclusionary practice in a scene set in the 1970s, in which Adele, desiring a piece of pie, enters a family restaurant, a symbol of social inclusion: “She enters to the chiming of bells on the door of the restaurant and then the shushing of sound and the dead weight of disapproval in the room. She knows that there are many people sitting in the restaurant” (50). Adele takes a seat when no one offers to seat her. Mistaking her for a prostitute (society’s projection of her mother’s history on to Adele), a man embarrasses her by making an advance. The owner eventually “softly explains that this is a family restaurant and that no coloureds or prostitutes are allowed. . . . He knows of other places on another street where she would be welcome” (50). The restaurant owner denies Adele the opportunity to acquire a piece of the figurative social and economic “pie” and redirects her to a place where she can belong. This experience presents an interesting paradox: Adele leaves Trinidad to escape the life of a domestic worker or prostitute and arrives in Canada where she is received and perceived as both.

In both novels, then, the negative history of displacement and alienation looms large and provides a mirror against which both authors reflect the negative effects of racism in Canada. The black female characters, as domestic workers in Canada, had no social capital, unlike in the Caribbean where social capital was based on their idea of self and where their assumed color or racial
superiority had led them to believe they were too superior to remain there. In one scene, we observe Idora riding on the subway in Toronto. She reflects: “This feeling of being in the minority . . . of inferiority . . . not that I am inferior. . . . This feeling of segregation runs through my mind, each time I travel on public transportation” (Clarke 69, emphasis added). By feeling a sense of unbelonging in Canada in a very public space, Idora realizes that she is not the subject in this historical narrative, where she can decide that what she is “entitled” to is not good enough for her; rather in this version of history she is the object, the other in a place that, as she puts it, “makes you believe you’re what they paint you and define you to be” (69).

Adele, too, was aware of “how ever more conspicuously different she was. People everywhere would offer cold cutting glances on streetcars and sidewalks, or wrinkle their noses and shift away, or stare openly at the oddity that she had become in this land” (Chariandy 49). Crumbling under the weight of difference, both characters become the women they did not want to be: lonely, hopeless, and mentally ill. Canadian redemption, then, was not only unreal but also a matter of intuition. These writers seem to be saying that Canadian redemption will always be illusive for their characters. The reality is these women can never escape being the archetypal domestic.

Always the domestic?: Speculative Narratives of Citizenship

The writers under discussion reflect the historical tenor of the critique of the illusive Canadian redemption for black women immigrants in the narratives; all of them place the archetypal domestic as the modern tragic heroine of her/story. Their characters’ desire to escape social and economic oppression leads to a train of failed attempts at gaining agency and of satisfying their desires. Idora’s mother had continually told her to stay away from the Caribbean in blatant ways: “Go and shake the dust of the Island off your two feet, as the Bible warned you girl. . . . Do not return to this blasted island. . . . “This place don’t have one damn thing to offer you” (67-68). Clarke reveals the irony in the words of Idora’s mother, however, by critically juxtaposing a cold unwelcoming Canada with the warm and welcoming sites/sights and sounds of the Caribbean that exist in selected locales in Canada, such as the famous Kensington Market in Toronto, where Caribbean people invoke belonging. Ironically, belonging is not manifested in the right to be treated equally in society; it also is not portrayed as a shift in status as a result of movement into professional positions and being recognized as Canadian (meaning permanent status), but it is constructed in spaces of isolation, difference, and exclusion, places white Canadians, like Idora’s friend Josephine, did not even know existed.

The market becomes an important symbol to the characters’ sense of identity in both More and
Soucouyant. Thomas suggests that in an effort to maintain psychic wholeness, immigrants rely on symbols and icons that represent their homelands (489). Moreover, the presence of similar symbols and icons in these novels resonates with the use of symbols in Brand’s work: the sea, sky, and the speakeasy, as mentioned earlier, and we observe similar use in Foster’s Sleep On, “the Hole, . . . an affectionate name for the long narrow basement of St. Mark’s Church on Queen Street West . . . an informal social center, a gathering spot for West Indians and friends” (101). In More, Idora attends “St. James’s Cathedral” when she wants to feel Canadian and the black church Apostolical Holiness Church of Spiritualism in Christ when she wants to belong to a community. These symbols and icons anchor the characters, thereby allowing them to claim belonging in a society that marginalizes them. Characters in these novels are often redirected to places where white Canadians believe they belonged but places where the characters lived as if they had achieved Canadian redemption. When Idora wants to establish her identity and distance herself from having a hyphenated Canadian identity, she quickly points out that she is not Afro-Canadian or African-Canadian, as her Jamaican friends called themselves; Idora says, “Me? As I say, I am pure Barbadian. And this is good enough for me, darling” (118). A little island rivalry, perhaps, for whether Jamaican or Barbadian, they are all West Indians and domestic in the eyes of the wider society. Therefore it is instructive that she does not identify as Canadian.

Yet, the various identities often merge in shared spaces such as Kensington Market. For Idora, the market is about feeling a sense of belonging to the space, a space in downtown Toronto where the sights, sounds, and smells invoke the Caribbean. The lack of social and economic services that would allow these women to integrate in Canadian society has recurring consequences for future generations, as Brand’s mother/daughter characters in Another Place demonstrate—repeating the cycle of oppression and exclusion. Canadian redemption, as figured in the fiction discussed here is, indeed, imagined and not necessarily experienced in places viewed as traditionally or authentically Canadian.

As we have seen with the experiences depicted in some of these stories, the lack of social mobility is systemic and partially a consequence of the laws that were in place to protect the employers of migrant domestic workers and the government. A number of domestic workers lived in isolation with little exposure to mainstream society, and many succumbed to a form of madness that symbolizes the failure to achieve redemption in Canada. Loneliness stemming from isolation and the anxiety arising from fear of physical abuse and super-exploitation led to their resignation: they submit to another world, madness, where their sacrifice
and failed dreams no longer matter. This, again, raises the question of what prevented the domestic workers from achieving their dreams, those dreams for which they sacrificed their children, their family, and themselves to the hope for Canadian redemption into a better life.

Thomas points to the role of the government and immigration officials as one possibility:

Undoubtedly, one can argue that it was because they were conditioned to attach little importance to Black humanity, to discount it even, that the White Canadians who originated this scheme saw no need for a grievance mechanism. They anticipated problems from the indentured workers and stipulated the penalty of deportation for such but saw no need to envisage problems from the employers who were members of the dominant group. (492)

The threat of being deported effectively impeded the ambitions of black women who were not Canadian citizens. Most did not have the ability to become self-sufficient and to apply for permanent residency, much less citizenship status, a route toward belonging to the nation-state.

So I return to the event in the national capital and the question of the place and position of blacks in the national narrative of Canada. And here we see the enduring presence of the domestic, archetypically, as the black outsider still searching for Canadian redemption—for full social inclusion, acceptance, and a sense of belonging that are granted by full citizenship. However, it is important to consider the consequence of mainstream Canadians’ expectation of the roles for a black woman in Canada. For if her motility and affectivity are strongly linked to her working in service positions, then she becomes the archetypal domestic worker who will be seen as the outsider, the immigrant always seeking “entrance status” but often not seen as worthy of entering the Canadian garden. So while blacks, in general, form part of the Canadian society, their status remains in a precarious position in the nation-state where, permanence is overwritten by temporariness and, thus, belonging is rendered unstable. This becomes a legacy for blacks in general. I base this point on the observation that even now black women’s jobs are mostly limited to service roles, and as primarily the head of their households, they are kept in low-paying service positions significantly restricting their access to social mobility. As Carole Boyce Davies (2007) points out in her article “Caribbean Women, Domestic Labor, and the Politics of Transnational Migration”: “Since black women are often heads of households, then the poverty of black communities is assured if the black women stay underpaid and super-exploited” (129).

Yet, like the domestics of Tynes’s time,
they are the breadwinners, for as domestics they work and interact in the mainstream at levels not normally available to the men and their sons. And today, while some black women have escaped the physical trap of being limited to the role of the domestic worker and attained some prominence in society, such as Michaëlle Jean and Senator Cools, most black women remain, like Celie, outsiders unable to achieve meaningful change in social status. As an ethnic group, blacks are left holding the “bad check.”

Thus, in terms of Canadian redemption, the Canadian government should broaden its perspective, as it does for the dominant groups, to recognize in blacks “unwavering and unchanging commitment and good intent to the ideals of [Canadian] society” (Foster 66), which it sees as necessary for full citizenship. In doing so, the Canadian government could make belonging to the nation-state more accessible and meaningful, and a route to self-determination for all its citizens regardless of race.

References


---. 1999. *In Another Place, Not Here*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada.


Endnotes

1 In 1910-1911 Quebec residents recruited French-speaking women from Guadeloupe to work as domestics mainly in Montreal and other areas of Quebec. For a fuller discussion on the experience of the women who came in 1910 – 1911, see Agnes Calliste’s “Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900 – 1932,” Journal of Canadian Ethnic Studies 28 1993/1994. 130 – 48.

2 The celebration took place two years after the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first group of domestics from the British West Indies.
Although Governor-General Michèlle Jean is the first black to hold the position, it is important to note that other blacks have held the titular vice-regal positions as Lieutenant-Governors, such as Lincoln Alexander in Ontario (1985-1991) and Mayann Francis in Nova Scotia (2006-2012).

The event was a “family” affair in that it brought together some of the women who pioneered this program to celebrate with their daughters, their grandchildren, and a wider family of friends, specifically those with Caribbean roots.

Note: Jean Augustine, a former politician, arrived from Grenada as a nanny circa 1959 and was the first black woman elected to Parliament of Canada (1993) and the Federal Cabinet (2003). Note Augustine was a schoolteacher in Grenada prior to migrating to Canada (Gale). She holds the Order of Canada (2010), the nation’s highest national honor.

See Calliste’s essays “Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy” and “Canada’s Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme,” *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers*, Ed. Jesse Vorst et al., Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991 for details on the experiences of domestic workers living in Canada and the immigration policies governing them.

For a detailed study on the mammy figure, see Kimberly Wallace-Sanders’s engagement with the African American counterpart to the archetypal domestic in her book titled *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory*, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008. In the chapter “Blown Away: Gone with the Wind and *The Sound and the Fury*,” she discusses “[t]he complicated relationship that African Americans and white Americans have with the mammy symbol as an enduring memory that is social, cultural, regional, and on many levels national” (132). K. Sue Jewell’s *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy*, London: Routledge, 1993 provides an extensive analysis of the ways cultural imagery informs social policy.


George Elliot Clarke’s *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature* documents the lineage of blacks and their role in the founding of the Canadian nation-state, repairing the damage done by the selective amnesia evident in aspects of the dominant Canadian narrative. *Odysseys Home* includes a meticulous record of the contributions of blacks to the development of Canada, importantly redressing the tendency toward erasing their right to legitimacy.
Karen Flynn’s article “Experience and Identity: Black Immigrant Nurses to Canada, 1950-1980” points out that nurses were recruited from the British West Indies “to act as ambassadors of their race,” playing quite a different role in Canada than the domestics. Hospital administrators, against the will of the immigration officials, often requested them to fill the labor shortage. However, Flynn’s work also shows that nurses suffered similar expectations by Canadians. They were overworked, assigned heavier patient loads, and they worked longer hours than their white peers. They also experienced similar immigration restrictions due to the refusal by immigration officials to extend some of their contracts. They too relied on the company of their friends, the church, and their community when they desired a respite from racism. Flynn further points out that discrimination occurred more frequently than was recognized. Clarke portrays nurses, like the domestics, as empathizing and supporting the civil rights movement during the decade of the 1950s-60s.


See Hugh R. Innis’s text Bilingualism and Biculturalism: An Abridged Version of the Royal Commission Report, Canada: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1973, 140, in which he discusses the fact that the report the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-69) indicates that “Negro” women accepted domestic work as an “entrance status.”

In his “I Have a Dream” (1963) speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks about the “bad check” that African-Americans received when their dreams for “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” were denied. America had defaulted on its promise and did not fulfill its obligation to them as was stipulated in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Accessed October 24, 2011. http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm.