

# ALTHEA PRINCE'S *LOVING THIS MAN*: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION, GENDER AND RACE POLITICS

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## *Abstract*

This article provides an intersectional analysis of *Loving this Man* (2001), the first novel published by Caribbean-Canadian writer and sociologist Althea Prince. The analysis approaches different aspects tackled in the novel, mostly connected to the complexity of the migration experience and to gender and race politics in the different contexts where the story is set, namely, an unnamed Caribbean country and Canada. *Loving this Man* revises the vital experience and the achievement of a sense of identity of Sayshelle, a young Caribbean woman who migrates to Canada at the end of her teenage years. An adult Sayshelle narrates her life, beginning with her childhood and early adolescence in the Caribbean to, in the second part of the novel, delve on her early youth experiences in Canada. Both periods and contexts are strongly influenced by gender and race politics: in the Caribbean because of the continuance of social structures inherited from colonialism and with a strong patriarchal component, and in Canada because Sayshelle arrives there precisely at the end of the 1960s, when the social mobilization of the Black population, as it happened in

## *Resumen*

El artículo lleva a cabo un análisis interseccional de la novela *Loving this Man*, publicada por la escritora y socióloga canadiense de origen caribeño Althea Prince en 2001. El análisis consiste en una revisión de diferentes aspectos abordados por la novela, en concreto problemáticas relacionadas con el hecho de la migración y con políticas de género y raza abordados desde los dos contextos en que se sitúa la novela: el caribeño y el canadiense. *Loving this Man* gira en torno a la peripecia vital y el desarrollo de un sentido de identidad de Sayshelle, una joven caribeña que emigra a Canadá al terminar la adolescencia. Una Sayshelle adulta relata su experiencia vital, revisando primero su infancia y adolescencia en algún país del Caribe, y después su juventud en Canadá. Ambos periodos y contextos están fuertemente marcados por la influencia de los mencionados aspectos de género y raza: en el Caribe por la pervivencia de estructuras sociales heredadas del colonialismo y con un fuerte componente patriarcal, y en Canadá porque Sayshelle llega allí en un momento histórico, el final de los años 60, en que los movimientos sociales de la población negra cobraron especial vitalidad,

the US, gained strength and momentum. In definitive, the novel is structured following a traditional pattern of migration narratives (here *vs.* there), while migration remains the vital experience which articulates the tale and leads it towards its conclusion, when a mature Sayshelle is finally seen to have achieved a sense of identity and belonging.

*Keywords:* Caribbean-Canadian fiction; migration narratives; intersectional analysis; gender politics; race politics.

como sucedió en Estados Unidos. En definitiva la novela se estructura siguiendo un modelo clásico en las narrativas de migración (aquí *vs.* allá), siendo la migración la experiencia vital cuya exploración articula el relato y lo dota de dirección hasta que una madura Sayshelle alcanza un sentido de identidad y pertenencia.

*Palabras clave:* narrativa caribeño-canadiense; narrativas de migración; análisis interseccional; políticas de género; políticas de raza.

## INTRODUCTION

The first novel published by Caribbean-Canadian sociologist and writer Althea Prince *Loving this Man* (2001) offers a critical examination of gender and race politics in the different contexts involved. These issues are framed in the detailed poetic account of the migration experience of a young Caribbean woman, Sayshelle, who is born in Antigua and moves to Canada in the late 1960s. This paper reads Prince's novel as an exploration of these aspects, which are interlaced in different ways.

A recurrent structure in migration novels, *Loving this Man* is divided into two parts. Book One is entitled "Reevah's Song", and it focuses on the lives of Sayshelle's mother and father and their closest relatives in the Caribbean. Book Two, "Song of Sayshelle", focuses on Sayshelle's experiences in Canada. My discussion begins with an approach to the issue of migration as a main concern in the story and the overarching plot which shapes it, trying to briefly unpack the specificity of this multiply-shaped experience in this particular work. I shall then proceed as the novel does, surveying first the Caribbean context in which the protagonist grew up, and moving then to Canada, where she spends the second half of her life. Gender politics figures prominently in both parts, while the concern with race politics gains relevance in Book Two. The ultimate goal of the article is to show how the migration identity constructed through the narrative cannot be disentangled from the gender, class and race politics of the social context in both home and host societies. I thus intend to respond to Floya Anthias' claim for an intersectional approach that responds to the:

need for transnational migration studies to be framed within a contextual, dynamic and processual analysis that recognises the interconnectedness of different identities and hierarchical structures relating to gender, ethnicity, “race”, class and other social divisions at local, national, transnational and global levels. (Anthias 2012: 102)

Anthias, like other scholars before her such as Brah (1996) among others, has remarked that the specificities of gender should not be disregarded when studying migration.<sup>1</sup> And gender is but one of the many variables which affect human lives, either real or, as in this case, fictional. *Loving this Man* claims for such intersectional analysis.

## A MAP OF THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

The structure of *Loving this Man*, one half set in the Caribbean and the other half in Canada, reproduces at a textual level the split sense of identity of the recent immigrant (Anthias 1998: 556). We read about this caesura now and again after Sayshelle, the protagonist, arrives in Toronto:

The essence of my life had been inexorably changed; it was forever divided into two halves: “before I left Antigua” and “after I came to Toronto.”[...] My life had other defining moments, but none could compare to the hollow in my heart that had been made by immigration. I told myself that that was what it was: a big hole that nothing could ever fill up again. (136)<sup>2</sup>

“I sought, but could not find, a way to reconcile how I was living with who I knew myself to be” (155), writes a nostalgic Sayshelle just arrived in a predominantly white Canada. At this stage in her life, then, and for a long way to come, Sayshelle still perceives herself in the terms of a dichotomy: the person she “knew herself to be” has all referents in the Caribbean, but they are blurred through time and distance in an alien environment she must find ways to negotiate with. At this point she finds herself in that limbo situation that marks the beginning of change in the migrant’s psyche right after having lost immediate contact with all her cultural and emotional referents (Alonso-Breto 2012). The recurrence of this situation in contemporary times is noted

<sup>1</sup> “[T]he literature on transnationalism fails to take into account ‘how these structures operate in gendered ways’. The transnational experiences of men and women are qualitatively different because women do not always have access to mobility and because their movements are framed within a set of normative and culturally gendered rules” (Anthias 2012: 104).

<sup>2</sup> When quoting from the novel, page numbers will be provided without further reference.

by Iain Chambers, for whom “[t]he migrant’s sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of [the] (post)modern condition” (Chambers 1994: 27). Predictably, as time goes by Sayshelle will undergo a process of adaptation whereby she will become someone different, yet, remarkably, still maintaining a strong sense of homeliness in her place of birth: “I was coming home. After all this time, I was coming home” (200), we read on occasion of her first trip back to Antigua after ten years in Canada. And whereas not long after her arrival in Toronto Sayshelle inherits a house there, she always refers to it as either “Aunt Helen’s home” or as her *house*, never as her own home. The meaning of the concept of home remains troubled for the migrant subject, who is uncertain as to where home is, and for whom, according to Brah, “[o]n the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire ... In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality” (Brah 1997: 192). For Sayshelle, it will take some time to find the manner to conciliate these two conceptions of home.

Sayshelle’s story expounds crucial psychological dimensions of migration, of which the text debriefs causes as well as consequences. The pattern of migration from the Caribbean northwards, either to the US and UK or, later on, to Canada, is a landmark in the region’s life. While migration is often associated with a drive towards economic improvement, migration sociologists Castles and Miller remind us that there are more reasons for migration than the merely economic, when they state that “migration is [not] something new –indeed, human beings have always moved in search of new opportunities, or to escape poverty, conflict or environmental degradation” (2009: 2). Actually, Sayshelle’s particular migration experience recalls Robin Cohen’s warning that it is often “difficult to separate the compelling from the voluntary elements in the motivation to move” (2008: 2). Certainly, Sayshelle’s reasons for leaving her place are complex. Nonetheless, the process is certainly spurred by the prospect of reaching educational and social standards above the ones she might attain in her place of origin. This is, again, a common cause for many if not most decisions to leave one’s place of origin. As we read in the story: “Every time my aunts or Mama Reevah spoke of my migrating to Canada, they said how good it was that I would be ‘bettering’ myself. They all described ‘bettering’ myself as going to school and getting a good job” (116-117). And on arrival in Canada, her receiving relative, Aunt Helen, interviews the young woman as to her goals in moving there, appearing to be satisfied with the girl’s repetition of her mother and aunts’ ideas about education and job opportunities.

As to the consequences of migration, once this option has become a reality, homesickness soon makes an appearance. And this happens in spite of the social possibilities the city can offer, at least in theory, and of the “glamour” of urban life. However, Sayshelle’s perception is that in the city people do not walk about, but

rather spend hours talking on the telephone. And in spite of the bounties of modern life and of the prospects of economic prosperity, the newcomer misses her family and friends, as well as the familiar noises and smells back in Jamaica. Soon her prevalent mood is marked by estrangement and melancholy, feelings that arouse the reader's compassion. The comforting fact of female bonding, a survival strategy which in this particular case has its roots in the strong sense of women's solidarity of Caribbean societies (Senior 1991), plays a crucial role for Sayshelle at this point. Yet it doesn't suffice to appease the young woman's spleen:

A lot of women from the Caribbean had come to Toronto [...] Their presence, like Aunt Helen's, eased my feelings of being ungrounded and dislocated from my centre. But I could not duplicate all that my heart longed to hear, all that my eyes yearned to see. I did have memories *longer than who* and I called back as much as I could from the corners where I stored them for safe-keeping. It was a way to manage newness, loneliness, the cold, and the blues that had begun to seep into my life and take up residence deep inside of me. (124)

Beyond the extended pattern of female bonding in traditional societies, the novel illustrates the fact that often in the diaspora a feeling of solidarity arises towards people in a similarly lonely situation. As Steven Vertovec writes, "the awareness of multi-locality stimulates the desire to connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there' who share the same 'roots' and 'routes'" (Vertovec 2009: 6). The other immigrants gain, in Sayshelle's nostalgic and alienated perception, a ghostly quality, whereby their existence reminds the narrator of her own but, at the same time, remain distant in an uncanny way, which leaves her all alone again, as we read:

All around me, I saw other people who looked as if they were having some version of my experience. They had said good-bye until eternity and were as far away from their families as I was. They, too, sought ways to live without their Mama Reevahs, their Papa Emmanuels [...] Like Aunt Helen, they faced being buried here, far away from the land and the sea and the sounds that they held close in their hearts [...] still, after so much time. (31)

These feelings of loneliness and familiarity, fear and ensuing solidarity, often result in the search for shelter in "hastily constructed 'replacement families'" (154) in the new environment which, like Sayshelle's own later on, do not always work.

After a period of adjustment, features of a new identity start emerging in the diasporic subject. In the case of Sayshelle, this surfacing is closely connected to her awakening to a race consciousness she had not had before. Only in Toronto does the young Jamaican woman realise that she is Black. She gains this consciousness from two different sources. On the one hand, from the books Aunt Helen pressures her to read from her very first day in Canada, namely the works of Franz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and C.L.R. James. On the other hand, and importantly, she also learns blackness through the racist attitudes she perceives all around, not only in newspapers headings, but also in her everyday dealings, when

people “sidle away” (132) from her in public places like subway trains or supermarkets. Belonging to a new category identified as “Black”, which includes dark-, brown-, and light-skinned people, that is, which encompasses all shades of non-white skin colour, is new to Sayshelle. By contrast, in the Caribbean, the “othered” group was that of white people: “in Antigua, there had been white people and there had been all of us. I never knew I was Black” (126).

Only when the narration approaches its end does Sayshelle come to terms with her situation as a black migrant who needs to accommodate and integrate in Canada. It is a moment of epiphany bedecked in poetic tones:

Wisdom came at night, pretending to be a thief, so that I hardly noticed its arrival. And when the sweet joy of morning came, I was ready, my mind wide open and clear. I no longer wavered back and forth, my emotions strung out between Antigua and Toronto, my Spirit still in Antigua. I learned to call my Spirit back from people and places. (191)

Abstraction from a real sense of place (and people) appears to be the right springboard for Sayshelle to slowly come to terms with her condition of immigrant,<sup>3</sup> as it is from this moment that she accepts herself as having what has been defined as a diasporic “multiple identity” (Vertovec 2009: 6). The accommodation between who she was and who she has become comes about as the young woman realises the relevance of memory “to keep her whole” (213), that is, the capacity of her own memories to provide her with a coherent and sustained sense of identity. Eckstein *et al.* (2001: 442-447), among many, have pointed to the role of memory in the configuration of identities. Thus, while Aunt Helen had already warned her that “the present can take you over” (213), for Sayshelle the present, although inescapable, is unreliable, yet the past remains and is reassuring: “I use the memory of things past to imagine that I make flowers on the bank of East Pond and spread them over my whole existence” (213). Through this poetic image, Sayshelle conveys her efforts to bolster a precarious sense of present on the more solid basis of the memories of the past. However, fully integrating the past with the present remains difficult for her, and the novel thus problematizes easygoing versions of hybridity, repeatedly celebrated or questioned by critics (see Bhabha 1992, Welsch 1999, and Hall 2005, among others).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In the final pages of the novel it becomes obvious that Sayshelle entertains an idyllic relationship with her birthplace, which in turn acquires a mythic dimension (213).

<sup>4</sup> Welsch’s notion of transculturality consists of “cultural fertilization at several levels, from the macro-level of society –whose cultural forms take more and more different, complex and hybrid internal shapes—to the micro-level of individual experience, where personal and cultural identities do not completely coincide with civil or national identities, but are instead marked by multiple cultural connections” (Welsch 1999 as referred in Brancato 2004: 2; my translation).

Another metaphor contributes to this argument in the shape of a tree which after massive rainfall has had its roots weakened and eventually falls (water and rain being a recurring cleansing trope throughout the novel). Surprised by a crashing sound at night time, Sayshelle awakens to see that a load of tree branches has fallen against the roof of her new house. The tree now rests on her window glass “as if looking at [her]” (212). The tree dis/location mirrors Sayshelle’s, her necessity, despite reluctance and difficulties, to accept her own story of displacement and to make a conscious effort to adjust.

## POLITICS, RACE AND GENDER IN THE CARIBBEAN

With her decision by the end of the novel to join the Black Power Movement in Canada, Sayshelle culminates her political education, a sequence which had started way back in Antigua. The figure of her father, a victim of his country’s government’s politics, occupies a central position in the first part of the novel, which explores some complexities of Caribbean socio-political realities. Here, Antiguaners are presented as aware of their rights even if they do not make use of them, as shown in the fact that “everyone knew that they had the right to be consulted about the renaming of their street” (12) yet nobody cared to complain when the street name was changed without their consent; and as politically concerned, as seen in Rommel’s resentment at his companion Sage’s sympathies towards the opposition party, which he does not support (42-43). Of all the characters, Papa Emmanuel, Sayshelle’s father, seems particularly sensitive to the misdeeds of the party in power and, in general, to all injustices.

Papa Emmanuel is accorded a heroic stature which finds explanation, it is suggested, in his having “only pure Carib and pure African blood [...] in his veins” (21), which underscores and celebrates the racial and cultural syncretism which is the landmark of Caribbean cultures.<sup>5</sup> This part of the story digs in colonial history and its legacy of injustices: Papa Emmanuel’s misfortunes began in the colonial period, when as a state policeman he disobeyed orders and refused to shoot at the people during the riots against English colonialism. The police superintendent would never forgive him for disobeying his orders and disrespecting his authority, and would try to

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<sup>5</sup> In many senses, it seems to me that the figure of Papa Emmanuel stands as a condensing symbol of Caribbean culture, as explained in the following quote through the definition of its literature: “The literature from the Caribbean [...] reveals that the history of the region is not only one of dispossession, economic exploitation and cultural damage, but also one of resistance, creativity and self-determination, and that it is marked by colonialism, imperialism and racism as well as by revolt, reconstruction and hybridisation” (Brancato 2005: 18).

take revenge on him over and over again even after the country's release from the Empire. The obvious inference is that the power structure emerging in independent Antigua was merely a replica of the colonial one in terms of nepotism and abuse. Papa Emmanuel's downfall evolved at two levels: the personal, since his superior made a personal enemy of him, tried to get him murdered and, failing in his attempt, hampered his promotion in the police corps and condemned him to ostracism (35); and the political, since Emmanuel was exceptionally active in politics and was highly critical of the Antiguan government of the period. Indeed, the political situation in Antigua as depicted in the text is disheartening.<sup>6</sup> While in the rest of the world countries keep progressing, the narrator discloses how Antiguan politicians are so corrupt and ineffectual that the degrading situation can only be described as a horror movie: "Our own private horror movie. If only it would stop, then we could build our country in some small and some large ways; but these people make new horrors every day" (20).

When he was alive, Papa Emmanuel complained that no effort was made to improve the lives of the islanders so that they could give up being the servers of tourists, and that, instead, the land was being sold off to foreign powers, so that a lot of environmental harm was being done (19). Yet, unfortunately, Emmanuel "say too much to too many people and it get back to those in power" (37), and he ended up being a nuisance for the government. The personal (his superior's harassment, which on the other hand originated as well in a political issue) and the political (government persecution) eventually collided in Emmanuel's being spied on by a fellow policeman under suspicion of political sedition, and eventually resulted in his losing his job when euphemistically forced to an early retirement. As a retirement gift, he was given a cigarette lighter in the shape of Winston Churchill's bust. Irony works here at two levels again: the personal, because at that point Emmanuel is ill of dying of lung cancer after years of smoking; and the political, because he was always strongly "against those colonial white people in England" (40). Later on, through her Canadian adventure, Sayshelle will be the second case in point to illustrate the idea that the personal and the political go closely hand in hand.

Family life is affected by Papa Emmanuel's engagement in politics. Out of respect for her husband, Reevah gives up wearing red to any public gathering, since although it is her favourite colour, it is the colour of the party in power. She also gives up the red hair cloth she used to wear by night, as her husband cannot stand the colour. In contrast, he has several blue shirts, blue being the colour of the opposition

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony P. Maingot recalls Eric Williams's claim that in the 1960s the Caribbean region lacked an intellectual autochthonous structure wherein to debate current problems, and that, for him, V.S. Naipaul was completely right in defining it as a place of "mimic men" lacking roots and sense of history (Maingold 2002, 163; Williams 1981; Naipaul 1967). Papa Emmanuel may be seen as an exception to this general rule, hence his unfortunate fate.

party, which he wears to political meetings of both parties, either to support or to show his firm opposition.

Sadly, Papa Emmanuel is defeated both at the political and personal levels. He had promised not to cut his hair until the party in power was replaced by the opposition, but he did not live long enough to see that changeover. Hope vanished when once again the national elections gave the party in power as winners, which for the majority came as no surprise. Most islanders considered elections a waste of time, and did not care to vote: “so it was only the government supporters who vote in any large numbers. And as you know, people say the government pay them in one way or another for their support” (21). After this, Emmanuel’s terminal cancer, which he had somehow managed to put off until the election, grew quickly worse. Completely beaten, “he felt as if he kept himself alive just to witness the collapse of his dream” (25). At Reevah’s initiative, his corpse was shrouded in the colour of the party, “so he went to meet his Maker framed in the colour blue” (31).

Already a teenager, Sayshelle takes on the burden of exonerating her father’s memory. On her last visit to the cemetery before leaving Antigua for the first time in her life, she caresses the inscription on his tomb and secretly whispers: “I am going away Papa Emmanuel. [...] I will make you proud. As you always said: ‘From my loins, I will be vindicated’” (120). Her father’s political commitment surely inspires Sayshelle’s final decision to become a member of the Civil Rights Movement in Canada so as to fight for the rights of Black women. But his example is not the only one; As relevant as her father’s example of political activism is her own perception of gender bias in the Caribbean. Already a member of the Civil Rights Movement, her later realisation that women are subordinated to men in the group (which brings about a new awareness of the possibilities of women), can only be understood through an examination of the relationship between women and men in her childhood and teenage context.

Sayshelle’s mother and her two aunts provide contrasting examples in this connection, but it is to note that the spectre of patriarchy underlies every relationship Caribbean women have with men (see Senior 1991, esp. 82-101 and 166-179). Reevah’s marriage appears as a cocoon of perfection, a completely harmonious match full of tenderness and trust, and this is the atmosphere in which Sayshelle grows up. Yet, as we have seen, Reevah gives up her favourite colour so as not to annoy her husband, even if she doesn’t really care about those formal aspects. This is just one example of her devotion to her man, whom she treats and speaks of as a revered idol. In Toronto, Sayshelle will make a very conscious effort not to reproduce her mother’s submissive role before any man (145) –altogether ineffectual, as will be discussed.

The story of Sage, one of Sayshelle’s maternal aunts, is one of fall and redemption. Of the three sisters (Reevah, Sage and Juniper Berry), she is the one who has to struggle harder to find a way out of gender oppression and degradation. To

begin with, her teenage marriage ended in a not uncommon way in the Caribbean area, when her husband emigrated leaving her on the island with their new-born baby, never never to be heard of since. Sage was obliged to raise their daughter Joyling all by herself, quite a common pattern in the Caribbean. As Senior remarks, “the paradigm of absent father, omniscient mother, is central to the ordering and the psyche of the Caribbean family” (1991: 8).<sup>7</sup> Later on, having found a job as an agricultural worker, Sage was systematically raped by Dimitrius Rogain, her employer’s son. She was afraid to deny him access to her body under menace of being sacked, despite the fact that her salary was mince. Then, as soon as Sage got pregnant with the raper’s baby she was fired, besides being verbally abused and accused of being a whore. Of Arabic origin, the Rogains were fair-skinned, thus the colour politics of the slavery period are seen to be prevalent in the Antigua of the 1960s.

Years later, the child born from this pregnancy, Seleena, dies drowned in a gutter. Seleena reads as a powerful symbol of social inequalities in the Caribbean, conceived in a situation which encapsulates endemic class, race and gender oppression. Seleena’s spirit accompanies her cousin Sayshelle in her migration (121) and we shall see that her corpse is only retrieved and properly buried on Sayshelle’s return to Antigua after ten years, as if to metaphorically support Sayshelle’s imminent decision, at that time of her life, to join the Movement and fight to redress injustice against women.

We are spared the relationship Sage must have had with the fathers of her two smaller daughters, Ruth and Noemi, yet we read about her last misadventure with men. A mother of four children from four different fathers, and weary of the false promises of love, Sage meets Rommel, a grocery clerk who seems to entertain the promise of a better future. But unfortunately, Rommel soon starts beating her cruelly. Sage then becomes an addict to alcohol and, against the odds, to Rommel himself. She gives up her children to different families and entangles herself further in a painful and humiliating relationship.

Sage only starts her slow way out of hell when, back from a trip to Canada to visit his sister, Rommel shows her the macabre present he has brought for her: a bull-pestle. She is shocked on hearing his deadly warning: “If you bother me, Ah going to beat you senseless with this!” (43). Now finally Sage starts planning to leave this vicious lover, and she does it when the right moment arrives. But she can only put in practice her decision to leave Rommel when her hip pain, which has assaulted her periodically since the distant day of her marriage, recedes momentarily. Sage’s hip pain has something in common with Emmanuel’s cancer: they exemplify ways in

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<sup>7</sup> Among others, also Silvera 2002 illustrates the pattern of teenage mother with baby abandoned for good by a migrating father, in the characters of Monica and Fred.

which the body is affected by events and situations and reacts accordingly.<sup>8</sup> A bodily symptom of her emotional recovery, Sage's hip pain heals when she abandons Rommel, gets her daughters back and starts a new life far away from men and professionally independent. Her hip pain, thus, symbolises the hampering role of men in women's lives, in the novel attested both in the Caribbean and in Canada.

In the figure of Mrs. Rogain we find another illustration of patriarchal maltreatment in the shape of infidelities and lack of prophylactic care:

She knew that [her husband] and his brothers routinely raped their father's female agricultural workers [...]. She therefore insisted, despite his protest, that he use condoms [...]. She felt sure that she took her life in her hands every time she allowed him to touch her, because she did not trust her husband to use caution in his liaisons with women. She was sure that he was full of life-threatening organisms. (58)

All in all, the sentimental education prompted on her by these social mores weighs on Sayshelle as she struggles to survive in her new immigrant context. The values she internalised as a child and youngster, which include the vision of love as either romantic or depredating, are not easy to remove. In Canada, after the fiasco of not choosing the right man to love and as she starts feeling the urgent need to go back to Antigua, she is willing to report to her aunts on her love misadventure, because she knows that she will be understood: "I needed to look into Aunt Sage's eyes and say in my heart, even if my lips could not form the words: 'I understand who you are now, more than ever. I have loved a man in just the same way that you loved Rommel and rum'" (199).

There is an exception to the submissive female standards so far presented: that of Juniper Berry. Reevah and Sage's younger sister is a woman of great courage and ambition. Married very young like her sisters, she abandons her husband as soon as he starts being unfaithful to her and even boasting about his sex with other women. Juniper Berry's valiant reaction is exceptional in so far as infidelities, as Mr Rogain's attitude attests, are a common practice among men in the Caribbean. As Senior documents, women are well used to putting up with it (1991: 171). Juniper Berry breaks nonetheless the unspoken rule of infidelity acceptance, which is but a sign of the connubial submission demanded by patriarchy. In her view, man-woman relationships are only worthy if held between equals:

Juniper Berry told her sister Reevah that she was not searching for a man to look after her; but also she did not want a man who expected to be looked after. [...] "I want a man who is respectable and who has self-respect [...] most of all, I need to be able to talk with him about the things that matter." (76)

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<sup>8</sup> Another character in the novel, Mabelay, develops a uterus cancer out of sexual repression after she gives up all carnal relations with her husband when she becomes a religious bigot (77).

Juniper Berry challenges the established order and manages her life by herself, not allowing any man to control her. And it is interesting to note that this attitude may be relieving for men as well as for women. On occasion of her first date with Clifford, who will become her second husband, we read the following exchange:

“When can I see you?” [Clifford asked her]

She shot back at him: “Right now!”

He was taken aback, but rose to the moment: “Okay. In a half-hour? I’ll pick you up; where do you live?”

“Slow down,” she chided him. “I’ll pick you up in one hour. How’s that?”

He liked her take-charge attitude and her complete comfort in driving him. (85)

Juniper Berry and Clifford’s relationship will grow into real caring, mutually nurturing love, much in the like of Reeveh and Papa Emmanuel’s but without its imbalance and its romantic overtones. All in all, Juniper Berry turns into Sayshelle’s definitive tutor in love matters: while it is Juniper Berry who gives Sayshelle the best advice as to how to love a man, it is only to her that, on arrival back from Canada, a disenchanted Sayshelle dares to report completely on her failed relationship.

Felicitously, by the end of the novel Sage has also completely regained her self-esteem. On occasion of her daughter Seleena’s funeral, Sage

looked regal in a beautiful, softly flowing white dress. It was not just the lines in her face that had softened [...] Her eyes were clearer and she walked around with a smile on her face, greeting everyone as they came into the church. Her hair was plaited in “Congos” that met at the top of her head, and she had pinned a white frangipani over one ear. [...] It showed [...] that she had really reclaimed her life. (202)

Indirectly, then, also aunt Sage will in the end become a positive model for Sayshelle, all the more so because she has seen herself through real trouble with men, like her niece in Toronto, and has been capable of standing up against them and fighting for herself.

## GENDER, RACE AND POLITICS IN CANADA

Sayshelle’s familiar history and her rearing in a Caribbean context account both for her involvement with a man who fails her and for her final decision to start fighting in earnest for the rights of Black women, when, as she puts it, she hears the “call to integrity” (193) that had beckoned her parents and her mothers’ sisters. But this is not a hurried decision; rather, it takes her many years of close contact with

radical politics without yet full involvement. The decision to fully commit herself to political activism is fully mature and conscious.

The ideology of the Black Power Movement is virtually forced upon Sayshelle not long after arriving in Canada (137), yet she feels that she is not ready to undertake radical activism: “Being a part of the Movement would have been the natural thing for me to do, as natural as my parents’ engagement in Antiguan politics. But my heart beat to a softer drum than that” (138).<sup>9</sup> However, she is not completely indifferent to the events of the moment, and she collects newspaper clippings about Black people in the USA and Canada, thus becoming increasingly aware of the troubled situation: “Beaten. Assassinated. Arrested. Threatened. Killed. Spied on. Spat on. Lied to. Hiding. Invaded. On trial. Jailed. Tired” (139).<sup>10</sup> In spite of her peaceable character, these headings annoy Sayshelle and inspire her spirit of revolt.

In her essay “Racism Revisited: Being Black in Toronto in the 1960s,” Althea Prince recalls the events in her life on which she draws to write the novel. In 1965, the year of her arrival in Canada, the echoes of the Black Power Movement were still “only dimly heard in Toronto” (Prince 2001: 58). But the Black community was already very active, as was the reduced Black community at York University -in 1969 she was one of six Black students at York, as she reports in Prince (2001c: 55). In “Racism Revisited” she recalls how in that period she would attend lectures and public meetings of outstanding Black leaders, not only from the Black Power Movement but also from other groups and spheres: “We focused on our situation as Black people who were *doing life* in a white cultural hegemony. Pan-Africanism was the wider, global context for the building of community and making spaces for us in the academy and in the society” (Prince 2001c: 58; author’s emphasis).

In a few years, though, the Movement would gain momentum in Canada, as Dionne Brand, another Caribbean newcomer at the time, recalls:

In 1970 Bathurst subway was filled with dashikis, African wraps, gold big-hooped earrings, Panther blue shirts, black leather jackets, Black Power fists raised in greeting and the murmur of sister this, brother that, the *salam aleikum* of the Nation of Islam. We memorised Malcolm X’s autobiography, heeding his hard lesson, and Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* we quoted with biblical humility. We were lucky that year to have the Movement [...] we were living it, the Movement I mean. (Brand 1994: 29)

<sup>9</sup> She relates her own attitude to politics to her father’s legacy on several occasions: “Some of my friends watched this war and filled their hearts and their tongues with it. I realized that I was not prepared to fight to the bitter end like Papa Emmanuel, my hair grown long on my head in protest, my comrades in arms, dead around me” (138).

<sup>10</sup> For a quick survey of the move from Civil Rights to Black Power Movement in the USA, see Brown Tindall and Shi (1992: 1353-1358).

After 1970, though, the Movement lost its impetus north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Sayshelle recalls how “as suddenly as the storm of voices was raised in anger and heat, shouting down Jericho’s very walls, so it rapidly turned to a calm numbness” (139).

As has been pointed out, since her arrival in Canada the narrator starts noticing that she is perceived as a racialised subject. From “Sayshelle” or “Caribbean Sayshelle” she shifts to being perceived as “Black Sayshelle,” or, more often that not, as merely “Black” (195). Antigua-born Canadian dub poet Clifton Joseph recalls his own experience in this connection:

In my case, I didn’t learn any/thing about being Black as an idea/concept/consciousness (in/school) in Antigua. Yes, I learnt about the slaves and the slave trade but that didn’t seem to be relative to me [...] I wasn’t learning any/thing Black (but British & European-history, mostly). Blackness was a concept we’d soon be pushed to understand. (Joseph 2001: 14)

Racism, in conflating all dark-skinned individuals in a single political category, favours a feeling of community among those individuals, so much so that Black people in Toronto would all speak to each other in the street, regardless of whether they knew each other or not, and forgetful of their having different places of origin. As Clifton Joseph recalls, “we didn’t know about each other. It was the first time I was meeting people from many of the islands” (Joseph 2001: 15). Yet for these newcomers “the fact of Blackness” (Fanon 1952) pervaded daily life. “My life,” writes Sayshelle, “was not longer my story; it was a political entity, a beast which had to be fed” (145). Caribbean Sayshelle, in definitive, had become part of “The Story” of Black Canada.<sup>11</sup>

Still not ready to embrace the Movement, Sayshelle is nonetheless keen on doing community work from the very beginning. As the author writes, “the late 1960s and 1970s saw unprecedented community work in Toronto” (Prince 2001c: 59), and she goes on to cite numerous initiatives undertaken in the period, mostly in the educational ambit. The community, though, is not presented in ideal terms in the novel. Soon enough Sayshelle realises its gender bias, which is one of the reasons for her reluctance about committing herself in full (145). Her initially vague apprehensions only increase in time, when she verifies again and again that women are mostly expected to cook, sew, and, basically, be companions to men, who are the leaders. Apart from this, the community is very critical of the members’ individual initiatives: “...if you wanted to belong in the Black community, you had to be seen doing the right things” (146). Its verge on dogmatism is further underscored later on:

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<sup>11</sup> “The Story” as defined by Prince is related to an “elder Voice Lineage [which] rejects the foolishness of starting anew” for Black people (Prince 2001d, 91).

And besides the larger society, the critics within the family of the Black community were harsh. You had to do the right thing, and be the right thing, and say the right thing, and be clear on everything [...] everything [...] even if you had only just seen it in you or outside of you for the first time. (194)

In spite of this straitjacketing, the community seems to be the right means to channel its members' efforts. For instance, through the organisation of boycotts of certain firms who had investments in South Africa so as to put economic pressure on the Apartheid regime. Injustices against Black people worldwide are at the time denounced by leaders like Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King in films shown in the community meetings which caused a deep impact on the young woman: "After hearing these voices of truth, there was no way to just 'keep on keeping on' as if nothing was happening in the world around me" (147).

Sayshelle meets Cicero Finley at the tail end of the Black Power Movement (140). Meeting him becomes a landmark in her life; his presence helps her overcome the pain of being an immigrant: "From the day I met him, I framed time in a different way. Whereas I had previously defined everything in terms of 'before I left Antigua' and 'after I came to Toronto,' now ... I measured time as 'before meeting Cicero Finley' and 'after meeting Cicero Finley'" (143). She thus falls desperately in love with him. For Sayshelle, however, Finley is more than a lover: he is a comrade, a brother-in-arms (147). They read the same authors: Mao, Marx, Engels... He knows all about the Movement, and even tells her that he was present in two of the most relevant events of the period that had taken place in Canada: the congress of Black writers in Montreal in 1968 and the computer hall take over at Sir George Williams University (later Concordia University) in January-February 1969, which is actually signalled by Dionne Brand as the spark which ignited the Black Power Movement in Canada (Brand 1994: 29). The lovers also discuss Canadian racial politics in relation to those in the US:

I enjoyed the closeness and I enjoyed our arguments about politics; about whether Canada would allow racism to take hold even more acutely than it already had. I felt a hope he did not share—that Canada could benefit from the example of its neighbour to the south. (149)

Sayshelle marries this apparently perfect man. But her happiness will be short-lived, as she will soon learn of betrayal. The first disenchantment happens at a purely personal level, when on the day of Jimmy Hendrix's death, also in 1970, she discovers that Cicero Finley has another family, composed of a wife and a four-year-old daughter. The fact that the first wife is dying of cancer, and that she commits suicide as soon as she deposits her daughter safely in Sayshelle's hands, only adds to the complexity of the situation and certainly does not repair the pain of betrayal. This discovery is only the beginning, since betrayal is reproduced at a political level as well, when eventually Cicero Finley is discovered to be an undercover agent hired by the CIA and the RCMP to spy on the Canadian Black community and the Black

Power Movement. Thus, the man Sayshelle had chosen to love in the best way known to her turns out to be a mercenary, whose real cause is money and not the fight against racism –of which, after all, he obviously is but another victim. The fact that these two lies are discovered virtually at the same time suggests that Sayshelle’s failure at this point reproduces her father’s defeat, it is simultaneously personal and political, only now it takes place in a different context. “I had fought white racism,” writes Sayshelle, “but had succumbed to Black male oppression in the guise of sweet love” (163).

After these events, Sayshelle’s sense of filiation with the Black community and her feeling of belonging, which had steadily solidified since her arrival and especially since meeting the man she would marry, suddenly collapse: “I could not shake a feeling of vulnerability. My sense of security as a member of a community based on skin was shattered by this experience. I was not protected; no one was protected. We were at the mercy of all and sundry who claimed to be Black” (187). Cicero Finley’s betrayal carries a moral: it does away with any perceived homogeneity of the Black community, either in Canada or elsewhere. *Black* is effectively unmasked and signalled to be a constructed category altogether vague; a screen which blurs difference, and thus hides the multifarious faces and facets of real people:

In Toronto [...] colour of skin was what mattered. It was the new story that was wrapped around us all. And it was buttoned around us just in a certain way. So even though I was learning about other Black people for the first time, it was assumed that we were all one and the same. And we were not. I enjoyed knowing them, but we were not alike. I had learned about a Black man who had sold his soul for money, selling out Black people so that his life could be saved. This was a new kind of creature in my world, an entirely unknown quality. (193)

Blackness is thus revealed as an construct imposed by the context and absorbed by individuals; a category insufficient to account for the diversity of identities, yet perpetuated as a means of identification not only by outsiders but by the Black community itself, “for it was not just white folks who identified me as Black—I had identified myself as Black. Black was my fiction” (194).

The text points out how Blackness is focused on skin colour while also limited to it. Prince is conclusive about this also in her theoretical writing: “Black is not an ideology; it is the colour of skin. So when ‘blackness’ is being “shaped,” I ask: “whose blackness, in what historical context, in whose eyes, and to what end?” I need to know these things” (Prince 2001c: 63). The construction of Blackness in Canada and the delicate question of essentialism have been explored as well by Rinaldo Walcott, who recalls that “[i]n Canada, Black communities proliferate, constituted of continental Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Black Canadians and others who share certain histories, but who also claim divergent and sometimes antagonistic narratives of the past” (2000: 43). The heterogeneity of experiences of Black Canadians needs therefore to be put at the front.

After this severe deception, Sayshelle discovers herself to be mature enough and ready to follow her father's example and completely engage in political action: "At this time, I needed to hear every chord of Papa Emmanuel's voice, standing up for justice against a great big machine that had eventually overtaken him" (195). She decides to eventually become part of the Movement, only not uncritically. The deep gender bias that she has always detected in the community, which held up her full involvement and of which she has been a victim, will not hinder her from now on. Rather, in this bias she finds her own cause to fight:

I wanted to be able to contribute in much more than the peripheral role to which women were relegated. I would not argue my way in; I would simply walk in. [...] And I would make a point of raising discussions concerning the distribution of labour. [...] I would raise the discussion of the distribution of labour between men and women in the Movement. I was not willing to tolerate being second to any man, even if he was Black. (194)

The narrative voice thus denounces the frequent complacency of groups and institutions with regard to gender distribution of roles, even when, as is the case here, their very purpose is to fight inequalities on other fronts.

Accepting "The Story" she has become part of with migration, but twisting it to suit her genuine needs and desires, Sayshelle is now determined fight for the rights of Black people, but more particularly for those of Black women, even if that means the need of confronting Black men. She is adamant about the need to redress the "double jeopardy" (Beal 1970) endured by Black women, from Black men and from white society:

Together, we were treated as second-class citizens by white society, but I did not even accept that position to which white people sought to relegate us. And even so, white society's perception of me and all like me did not give the Black man the right to put me in a second place. That would make me a twice undervalued person. (196)

## CONCLUSIONS

Sayshelle has always craved love: She is anxious to find in a man's eyes the light she had seen in her father's when he looked at her mother, or in her uncle Clifford's when he looked at Aunt Juniper Berry. But after her disastrous experience with Cicero Finley she despairs that love may ever come true. However, still more pungent is her need to feel that she belongs somewhere: "My life was led not by my heart, as I had thought, but by a deep desire to feel that I belonged. Now I felt that my

world was a broken world” (199). Thus, finally, when she receives the visit of Papa Emmanuel in her dreams, she knows that it is time for her to go back to Antigua.

In her birth place she finds the reassurance that she is simply Sayshelle, and that she is loved for her own sake. There she has the chance to attend her cousin Seleena’s funeral when her corpse, as mentioned earlier on, is miraculously found after years in the gutter. As already suggested, this carries a metaphorical dimension: Seleena incarnates social injustice and especially, being the product of rape, of gender oppression. Thus, the unfortunate child may finally rest in peace after her cousin’s decision to devote herself to the cause of the rights of Black women.

Before leaving Antigua for the second time, Sayshelle visits again her father’s tomb. She tells him all about her sad love story and also her plans for the future. These contacts with death before each of her journeys also have a symbolic dimension, denoting the death of Sayshelle’s older self and her birth anew as a different person. For once, during her visit to Antigua she has the chance to sit under the tree “that held the secret of [her] navel string” (206) and spend time in deep reflection. Also, she promises to go back to the island within six months to be the midwife for Juniper Berry’s delivery of her third child; in other words, this visit allows her to reassert her ties to her birthplace in different ways. This is crucial, precisely because it is right after this healing visit that she starts to feel ready to make a home for herself in her country of adoption:

By the time we were packed to return to Toronto, I felt like a new person. I was relaxed, calm, and at peace. I told myself that I was ready for the sale of my house, for purchasing a new *home*, for finding a job, and being involved in the movement. (210; my emphasis)

As argued in the first part of this essay, eventually the immigrant’s split heart is able to come to terms with her new situation, and to transform her sense of displacement into a less painful feeling of simultaneously belonging to several places. In the afore-quoted autobiographical essay by Althea Prince we find a proper conclusion to Sayshelle’s experience of migration: “Like many people who made their way here from every corner of the earth, [Toronto] has become home. It is a second home, and in some instances, a primary home” (2001c: 34).

*Loving this Man*, in conclusion, reads as a female migration narrative in the Caribbean tradition of Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* or Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, or, in the Canadian context, Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* or Makeda Silvera’s *The Heart Does Not Bend*. Its particularities lie in its careful exploration of the immigrant’s sense of displacement and readjustment; in its straightforward illustration of the political situation in 1960s Antigua; and in its singular presentation of the key period in the history of Black Canadian politics which were the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, the novel offers a careful analysis of the intricacies of gender relations in both contexts. Putting together the bits

of her past and her present, eventually the protagonist succeeds in coming to terms with her split migrant identity, her failed marriage, and the demands of her drive towards political action. Furthermore, after her emotional misadventures, in the very last line of her narrative Sayshelle confesses that she finally feels ready, once again, “to leap, on a single thread of faith, into the arms of a new love” (214).

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