

Discovering the Power of Narrative

The Collective Navigation of West Indian Migration to Vancouver



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Abstract

This project offers an analysis of the power of narrative amongst West Indian migrants in uncovering their settlement to Vancouver. It examines past and current experiences of migration as revealed through personal experience narratives. Six West Indian narratives ranging from three to thirty years of initial settlement highlight the various means in which the participants negotiate their identity in a virtually invisible and dispersed community. Through domesticating their experience as West Indians, they work towards connecting a larger community through the ongoing promotion of West Indian culture. West Indian-centered restaurants and events assist in building a larger public presence by increasing their visibility. I argue that though their experience as West Indian people is not publicly acknowledged, their need to reaffirm their identity is practiced and ritualized regularly. Narrative acts as a means to preserve and revitalize their being in ways which give them the liberty to evolve as West Indian Vancouverites.

[Narrative, Storytelling, Oral History, West Indian, Vancouver, Migration]

Discovering the Power of Narrative: The Collective Navigation of West Indian Migration to Vancouver

Introduction

I sat around the table as my grandmother and family members played board games and ate dinner. It had been a year since I had seen her last. I loved going to back home to Jamaica, not only for its wonderful food and beautiful scenery but for my grandmother. Although I had not grown up with her constant presence (as I did with my mother's mother), we still had a beautiful connection. What made this connection so special were the constant stories my father would tell me about my grandmother and of his childhood. Her stories nearly replaced her absence thus when we were reunited, we picked up where we had left off. The stories my father, siblings and other family members would recall helped me to understand her characteristics and personality very easily. She was a kind and loving woman who, through all adversity, continued to show love to her family, friends and those who did not have a home or family of their own. For a long time, she was the only and oldest lineage that I could trace on my father's side of the family. For this reason, I invested in listening to stories of her. Narratives of my grandmother's life served as the only constant solidifying our connection. Upon my return at the beginning of 2015, I looked forward to being in her presence. She was lovely. I recorded one of our conversations, where she spoke freely of her life and her becoming a Jehovah's Witness. Subconsciously, I placed a high value on the sound of her, words, laugh and expression. I loved hearing her speak. A part of me did not care too much for the pictures but for her sound. I craved her voice and her stories; it was one thing I wanted to remember.

On Sunday April 12, 2015, she passed, leaving me only with her words and the recording of our conversation. I knew the importance of narrative for my family but was very much

reminded of its power and relevance as a social and historical artifact the day of her passing. Since then, my occasions of emotional grief are pacified by listening to a few minutes of our recorded forty minute conversation. The importance of storytelling in West Indian culture acts as a social and historical marker of community presence. The motivation for this project was moving to Vancouver in 2010 and experiencing difficulty placing West Indian presence. I am interested in the narratives of West Indian migrants residing in Vancouver for their stories hold as much importance as my grandmother's. I wish to highlight their experiences as West Indian migrants and how they choose to share their story. Because narratives serve to unveil the depths and details behind and surrounding relocation, the role of oral history should be used as a method to mark the presence of West Indian communities residing in Vancouver.

I wish to take a qualitative approach, drawing attention to the realities of uprooted families to foreign spaces and how coping with this change manifests itself in a variety of ways and through different channels of their lives. I will begin with my story—recounting my family's narrative and recent return to Jamaica for a family reunion. I will then focus in particular on West Indians who have relocated to Vancouver, providing an in-depth analysis of their story. Comparing and contrasting my own experiences with those of my own and that of participants will hone in on socioeconomic class and privilege but will ultimately stress the value of storytelling as a cultural coping mechanism and as a social and cultural artifact.

Research Purposes

The purpose of this study was to examine a portion of the collective story of West Indians who have migrated to Vancouver; taking each story as a contributing piece to fit together a puzzle that has been dismantled and dispersed throughout the years. I relied not upon traditional

archival documents but rather on the words and stories of transmigrant families.

The importance of storytelling and oral history is a channel through which stories of migration live freely, transcending through generations falling upon many ears. Highlighting these stories promotes a history that has become more difficult to trace in communities where migrants have been dispersed, such as Vancouver.

The collection of these narratives assisted in uncovering past and current perceptions of migration, the realities and outcomes that have altered family dynamics and the role of transnationalism. The intent of this study is to fill the gap where academic literature regarding the story of West Indian has failed. Creating an emphasis on West Indian Vancouverites shines a spotlight on their experiences that has not yet been granted the coverage it deserves.

Research Statement

The goal of this study is to explore the importance of narrative amongst West Indians migrants of different socioeconomic classes residing in Vancouver. It examines the past and current experiences of migration, revealed through personal experience narratives.

Type of Study

In order to fully work through the complexities of my experiences as well as those residing in Vancouver, I accounted for their stories. According to Corinne Glesne's (2014) "Becoming a Qualitative Researchers", taking a critical theoretical approach allows for a critique of the "beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy" (Glesne 2014; p. 9). My research seeks to provide a "transformation of those conditions" (Glesne 2014; p. 9). Applying qualitative methods granted me with an opportunity to make sense of all the collected narratives, conversations and observations I assembled throughout the course of my research.

Adapting qualitative methods allowed me to look for patterns in the stories I was given and the experiences of West Indian communities in Vancouver. It provided descriptive interpretations that applied directly to the minority population in question (Glesne 2014: p. 8).

Theoretical Context

I examined literature that suggested and validated the importance of oral history as a method of collecting narratives. For the purpose of filling a historical gap in West Indian immigration, a number of the literature pointed to the role narrative. Understanding the role of transnationalism served to ground the connection between transmigration and narrative. Though personal stories are often skewed in their accuracy, it is the 'why' that should peak our interest. Uncovering what the importance is behind a memory serves to prove why an experience is understood in a particular form. The majority of works point to a concern for narrative to move past its literal translations and focus on the historical significance of language amongst West Indians and the formative nature of storytelling. This study took a look at the role of narrative amongst West Indians who have settled in Vancouver and how they maintain their identity in a community with low-visibility.

Research Question

I focused on four central guiding questions to ground my research:

1. What are the realities and outcomes that migrants have encountered migrating to Canada
2. How are migrant's experiences related to current and past immigration policies in place in the past and present (where is/what is the correlation)
3. Who migrated to Vancouver, from which class/socioeconomic statuses?
4. What is the importance of storytelling for West Indian migrants?

As my findings became clearer, I was able to collect an array of observations and experiences that reflected the experiences, outcomes and realities of West Indians migrating to Vancouver.

Upon the collection of these narratives, my research questions guided me to answers not only to my initial questions but broadened my findings through their personal accounts and my own observations.

Literature Review

Anansi is a spider; Anansi is a man; Anansi is a lazy one; Do as little as he can (Gerald McDermott 1990)

I would religiously be obligated to recite this poem to my mother growing up. I would constantly question my mother's motives for this—it was not like it was as vital as knowing my multiplication tables. Though it was used to primarily work on sharpening my memory, many of these cultural works served to sharpen my memory while enhancing my cultural awareness and education. Poems, plays, family stories and music became a cultural mechanism of expression that formed the way I experienced West Indian history and culture. The majority of my understanding of Jamaican and West Indian culture was performed rather than written. It was a very oral experience (amongst others), from reciting famous Jamaican plays to knowing songs dating back to the 1950s.

My story and experiences from childhood to adulthood are a product of transnationalism. Since the majority of my family had either been raised in Jamaica or still live there, the only connection that served to define my West Indian identity is through my familial narratives. Jones' (2008) book "Jamaican Immigrants in the United States and Canada", explores Jamaican transnationalism to Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. Transnationalism is defined as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Jones 135). These connections have changed as technological advancements have been made, making it much easier for relatives to stay in

contact with one another. Transnational relationships are not only conditioned through time but also through space. Depending on where West Indian migrants are located, their methods of expressing transnational behaviour vary (137). This articulation takes place through a variety of channels, one being the intent of return:

Self-defined national identity and the intention to return to live in Jamaica suggest their relative attachment to or detachment from their home country (137).

Conversations regarding the return home uncover a piece of the collective West Indian narrative that has taken place in the U.K., the U.S. and in the eastern regions of Canada (Toronto). I agree with her claim but offer criticism for her lack of acknowledgment surrounding the possible dynamics in findings when moving across the country. While there are a number of migrants (as my father) who long for the return home, this has proven to not necessarily be the case for my research participants. Many of them do not find the need to “return home” and intend to remain abroad. This is where academic literature regarding West Indian migrants residing in Canada had left a huge gap in untapped research. The settlement of Jamaicans and West Indians shows a heavy correlation between immigration policies and relocation while in Vancouver, there seems to be less of a possibility that that is the case. This will be further discussed upon analysis.

For research purposes, oral history has been gaining significance amongst academia in order to transfer the oral to textual, in the fear of losing the story of vanishing cultural and ethnic groups. Patricia Leavy (2011) discusses its importance as a “multidisciplinary method” (Leavy 4) used in multiple fields including “humanities, social sciences, cultural studies and gender studies” (4). Oral history has earned its rightful place and serves a multitude of disciplines, only enhancing its validity within academic research. Before entering further discussion, Leavy

(2011) clarifies the confusion between oral history and oral tradition. She defines an oral tradition as one in which a story is passed down through generations while oral history refers to a method of collecting narratives from individuals for the purpose of research (4). For the purpose of qualitative research participant and researcher become co-creators in knowledge building. Researchers seek to gather information that varies but involves: personal experiences, memories of events, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives (9). Qualitative research follows an inductive and open-ended interview model. For the purpose of collecting West Indian narratives, interviews that are fully structured would only cause participants to limit their answers and shift the power dynamic between researcher and research participant. I go even further than Leavy (2011) to contest the term oral history interviews but rather oral history conversations. While structure does prove beneficial, it is often limiting when inviting participants to share personal information. A researcher must provide a participant with the platform they require in order to achieve a complete narrative. Remembering that it is a conversation, reminds the researcher that the participant's voice should be recognized when they are building and recalling their life story. For the purpose of this project, we bear witness to filling in a historical record (17). Our objective is to document firsthand accounts of West Indian immigration in Vancouver while they are still available in order to account for those who have borne witness (17). As Leavy recognizes, this research is imperative for it provides firsthand accounts of events (migration)—firsthand accounts that would otherwise die with the individuals because it cannot be properly understood without firsthand renderings (17). Not only does oral history provide firsthand knowledge, it also speaks to the importance of narrative in validating research.

Abrams (2010) discusses the role of narrative in “Oral History Theory” as a distinguishing feature referring to the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the

world (Abrams 21). She describes narrative as a form used to translate knowing into telling (21). Narrative allows for a story to be arranged and dramatised with a variety of elements: “speech, diversions, commentary [and] reflection” and follow certain codes of structure distinctive to the storyteller’s culture (21). These codes and distinctions were key tools used to guide conversations in order to draw attention to cultural norms in need of explanation and deconstruction. With West Indians speaking in a variety of English dialects, patois and creoles, it highlighted a distinctive structure and manner of recounting migration. Even through transcription and translation, orality and narrative qualities are very distinct from normative Western models. Not only was I aware of the structure but also the historical significance of language in the West Indian nations that I included.

Alleyne’s (1988) “Roots of Jamaican Culture” traces the power relations surrounding language and the multilingual assimilation that occurred in the subordinate language. Through colonization, indigenous languages became near to extinct because of the dichotomy between subordinate and dominant languages present (English and Indigenous Creole). The presence of two languages often turns into English replacing the “subordinate” (Alleyne 121) language—a process that I would term verbal colonization. A number of West Indian nations underwent similar instances of unidirectional takeover, nearly erasing their historical presence. This invasion is a product of many of the patois and creoles present in the West Indies to date. Therefore, extra attention was taken when collecting narratives from West Indian participants, as there is a cultural and historical significance to the way they chose to formulate sentences and structures (possibly out of a subconscious rebellion against Western-imposed language assimilation).

Contributing further to language consciousness, Abrams (2010) continues to be mindful of the historical function of narration. Narratives have a past of historical elitism that often blurs the contribution and experiences of those not deemed of historical importance, erasing distinctive “ways of speaking by non-elite groups” (21). Because oral history narrative has a sharper connection to ways of speaking and remembering within societies, it is fundamental that while using oral history, we are aware of the essential nature of oral sources (22). Being aware of the nature of oral sources also means to recognize such sources as memory documents. According to Abrams (2010), many historical documents are laden with biases and frailties which often threaten accuracy and biases. However, for the purpose of oral history, it presents a rich opportunity:

Memory, with all its imperfections, mutability and transience is at the heart of...practice and analysis.

For our sake, we concerned ourselves with the need to know why people remember or forget things they do. This sets oral historians apart from others because it wishes to expose the “fallibility of memory” and the “ability for memory to change over time” (23). It is the process of memory being so fallible that peaks our interests. More specifically related to my research, the respondent’s ability to borrow ideas serves to reveal a collective memory of migration: family, West Indian identity and culture. Honeyghan (2000) utilizes the role of memory in order to recall her personal narrative of what she titles “Rhythm of the Caribbean”. Honeyghan (2000) serves as a leading example of the power of narratives as she shares her experiences, growing up in a small village in Jamaica and the strong presence of rhythm:

I grew to appreciate the music in language and the recurring rhythms that resonated through my world. The sounds came through the movements all around me, and I responded to the rhythms in the everyday sounds of such things as stories, the ‘biggest

lie', riddle-rhymes, and even the sad sounds at the death of someone dear (Honeyghan 406).

She worked through her experiences with sounds and rhythms framing it as an integral piece of interpreting family and community literacy and how teachers can best build upon those foundations (411). Her memory serves to draw upon larger connections to literacy engagement through multiple forms (home, community and church). Honeyghan's (2000) narrative focuses on her experiences which also reveal connections that can be transferred to various frameworks of being and knowing.

The literature discussed provides a detailed understanding of the place and validity of oral history in contemporary research. Oral history proves remarkably beneficial when bearing witness to a collective story, not yet been given the space to flourish. Though I was provided with sufficient theoretical examples, there has not yet been evidence of such research being performed involving the West Indian community in the Greater Vancouver Area (GVA). This is where my work opposes national generalizations of West Indian experiences and attempts to bridge the gap between east and west transmigration. The reader is provided with various dimensions of understanding oral history, offering a tangible knowledge of concepts while building the West Indian narrative of Vancouver.

Research Methods

Research Site

Due to the difficulty in attempting to pin down a potential research site, I tackled the challenge of finding a research site from all angles. Utilizing my knowledge as a member of the West Indian community in Vancouver to explore and navigate through different Caribbean events and initiatives. I chose following sites.

Caribbean-centered events

When warm weather is near, a number of Caribbean events take place often leading up to the long anticipated *Caribbean Days* festival (to be taken place July 25th-27th, 2015). With my already established connections, I attended five events that celebrated and encouraged Caribbean presence. I attended one concert of a prominent reggae artist by the name of Chronixx on his West Coast tour. I also took part in four Caribbean activities. My goal was to observe who attended these events, which parts of the city they are hosted in and the atmosphere that they generated.

For the scope of this project I selected only events that were in close proximity to my home. For the length and scope of this project, I chose to focus only on events that I had directly participated in. One of the limitations I experiences was not being able to access events held where transit is inaccessible. A number of evening events are held predominantly in Surrey rather than downtown, proving a more difficult commute. In order to rectify this issue, I arranged transportation when needed to ensure safe and convenient travel to and from events.

Sampling Strategies

For the purpose and scope of my research, I chose to use homogenous sampling. Glesne (2014) defines homogenous sampling (Glesne 2014, p. 45) as the selection of similar cases in order to describe a particular subgroup in-depth. I focused on West Indians living in Vancouver who have migrated within the past thirty years. I chose to concentrate my research on this select group to gain a better understanding of the intersectionality within the group of research

participants. By examining their accounts, I was able to apply my data to broader structural forces that magnified their relationships between space and time.

Data Collection Techniques

Most qualitative approaches depend on a variety of methods for obtaining data. I use three qualitative data-gathering techniques Glesne (2014) discussed in the second chapter of “Becoming Qualitative Researcher” to assess my data: autobiography, observation and interviews. Due to ethical restrictions, participant observation has only been undertaken with my family members at the family reunion and my father’s mother. Therefore, I conducted observations through casual meetings with four of my Jamaican friends (and one Bahamian) in public settings. Since my group of friends are fairly recent migrants to Vancouver, I also attended West Indian events.

In order to develop a concrete foundation, I had to answer questions that I had brewing in my mind since I moved to Vancouver (in 2010): where are all the Caribbean people? Coming from a prominent West Indian community in Toronto, I had great difficulty adapting to the far proximities I had undertaken in order to have a glimpse of familiarity again. I began this quest last December. I would often ask those whom I already knew if they knew of any other Jamaicans in Vancouver (since it seemed as though we had already found all of the Jamaicans who attended the university). My curiosity and conversations led me to stories including friends of friends who knew where most of the community had settled and currently resided. New Westminster and Surrey proved to be the two places where I encountered a predominant West Indian presence. These connections led me to research sites as well as interview participants interested in the research project.

Before beginning observations, I briefly analyzed short films and creative literature. Short films (predominantly retrieved from YouTube) will highlight the migration of Caribbean people to the United Kingdom, the realities and stories of their settlement. British Pathe Newsreels (June 2011) documents the migration of West Indians to London (and surrounding areas) in the 1950s, showing footage of different migrants, their living and labour accommodations. Though the footage is called “Our Jamaica Problem” (1955), it is not limited to only the Jamaican experience but rather the West Indian experience as a whole. Miss Lou’s poetry is well renowned throughout the West Indies for her bold phrases and tenacious critique of Jamaica’s changes politically, economically and socially from the sixties through to the nineties. A selection of her pieces will be analyzed to bridge the effects of transnationalism. I utilized these documents in order to ground the historical significance of relocation to the West, aligning these experiences with my own.

Early this year, I attended my family reunion in the hills of Adelphi, Saint James (Jamaica). It was the first time I had met family members that my grandmother and cousin told me stories about when I was little. It marked the first time that I was able to put faces to names. Such a profound experience served to document my family history in real time. I highlighted this experience in my autobiographical section.

With the combination of participant-observation and autobiography, I am provided with strong grounds of data analysis. It also enabled potential cross-referencing to verify the validity of my findings. Interviews with West Indian migrants based in Vancouver act as the glue; fusing history, settlement and experience together. Narratives will be collectively highlighted for analysis. The following are my interview participants:

Onkar: Onkar, a Montréal native born from a Punjabi father and Guyanese mother moved to Vancouver in his childhood years. He shares his story as a West Indian and Punjabi descendent and how he maintains connection with his West Indian roots.

Mr.B: Mr. B is a Grenadian native who moved to Vancouver in 2001 to join his family who already resided in Vancouver. He shares his experiences with settlement and how he continues to keep his culture alive.

Ramona: Canadian-born, Grenadian-raised Ramona is the co-founder of Carnival Sensations. A non-profit organization committed to promoting Caribbean culture across Vancouver. She shares her story of leaving Grenada, and the successes and challenges she has had settling in Vancouver.

Peter: Peter, a Jamaican native has resided in Vancouver for nearly two decades. He shares his longing to live in Vancouver and expresses how he maintains his connection to Jamaica.

Crystal: Crystal was born and raised in Trinidad. She left in 2001 to pursue her education in Toronto. After living in Toronto for several years, she made the move to Vancouver in 2013. She shares her experience as a new Vancouverite and what differences she notices between Toronto and Vancouver.

Suzan: Suzan is a family friend that took me in upon my arrival in 2010. She lives in North Vancouver with her husband and three children. She moved to Vancouver from England in the late nineties, and settled here with her husband and her two boys. She is a Trinidadian native.

I chose to use a homogenous sampling technique for a variety of reasons. First, I was interested in depth and personal experiences over quantity. I aimed to build a collective life narrative of West Indian migrant experience in Vancouver therefore depth and detail was crucial to utilize

data for coding similarities and differences. Secondly, all participants I chose fall within my target population, that being West Indian migrants living in Vancouver from three to thirty years. Lastly, because of time restrictions, I limited myself to fewer participants, selecting only those that I know I could attain immediate access to. Though they range from across the islands and their experiences may not be the same, I was able to examine the diversity in their experiences while bridging their narratives to larger commonalities.

Data Analysis Procedure

Once all data was collected, participant's information was reviewed for key concepts and themes that are prominent in their accounts. After all data was analyzed, the relationship between participants, migration, their personal accounts, and socioeconomic class was codified and connected to larger concepts to show commonality (and their differences) in their distinct experiences. Data collected was re-examined to find correlations between presented concepts and theories.

Research Ethics

In order to maintain the validity and reliability of my research, I selected a regional variety of West Indians who have resided in Vancouver (GVA) over a span of thirty years who contributed their life stories to the collective West Indian narrative. Their experiences addressed social, cultural and factors—providing a wide range of diversity. Though this may be less likely to pose issues, friendly relations helped me to gain access to intimate information given to me in the context of friendship rather than researcher. A researcher-participant relationship developed because of the continued flow of interactions between myself and the participants at West Indian events for the purpose of gaining access to narratives and conversations. A great deal of my

observations relied on my ability to submerge myself within conversation. I continuously had to renegotiate my dual role as researcher and as West Indian. Though I was a researcher, community members forgot or were welcoming of my interest in researching our population. As a way to maintain ethical soundness, I provided ongoing informed consent anytime I felt it necessary. Verbalizing how well their story aligned with my research served as a reminder to myself and participants that their story is not only intended for research purposes, but to highlight their narrative.

Throughout the course of the research, I was heightened in my decisions and mindful of the role I played as a researcher; maintaining confidentiality, anonymity and trust to the best of my abilities without hindering my research objective. In order to combat the uneasiness, I would evoke my part in the research as someone who is also a member of the West Indian community and is willing to work with them to share their story in a manner most safe and comfortable for them. In order to combat the discomfort, I showed understanding and reminded them that they are more than welcome to end the interview at any time. My West Indian identity and experiences provided participants with a platform of commonality and demonstrated my understanding, empathy and gratitude as they shared their story and experiences.

Research Validity

Threats

There are two threats that have potentially altered the success of my research: organizations and interviewees. Because I have used both as a tool for insight into building a West Indian narrative amongst those residing in Vancouver (and surrounding areas), they ultimately had control over the validity and amount of information I had access to personally.

A second threat is the validity of participant's experiences. I connected with a number of

West Indian community members. Being West Indian, there is an importance placed on privacy. It was not likely that they would openly share their story to someone they perceived as an outsider. Though I am West Indian, my roots trace back to a specific nationality and resettled West Indian community (Toronto). My position as a Jamaican did not hinder access to information or skew the validity of their narrative. This put the validity and my access to information into the hands of the participant. I was only given information based on what the individual was comfortable sharing.

The majority of my concerns did not hinder or threaten the validity of my research for I showed continuous transparency to minimize unease and enhance the depth of my research.

Data Analysis

Autobiography: The Family Reunion

After returning back to Toronto for yet another winter break, I was eager to escape the cold and head to Jamaica! My parents had surprised me with a trip back as a birthday present (since I am always away from home during that time of year). I packed my bags the day before and headed to the airport **on** Boxing Day (December 26th) morning.

Though I had been to Jamaica several times, this trip felt different. This was my first time travelling to Jamaica in the winter and my first time meeting family members that I had heard stories of my whole life. I was filled with anticipation as I imagined what my uncles, aunts and cousins would be like. But before we made our way



Fig 1: First meal at father's mother's house in New Kingston (Dec 2014).

to St. James, we fulfilled our family tradition of visiting my father's mother in New Kingston. As we arrived, she welcomed us with open arms and a big smile. "I had a feeling you were coming so I bought a few beers", she said to my dad. After all these years living away from her son, she still had a paternal instinct that signaled her son's presence. We all sat as plates of rice and peas, stew chicken and homemade coleslaw lined the table. As we ate, conversations began to form, eager to exchange updated information about our lives. I was excited to talk to my grandmother about updated graduation plans and how much fun we were going to have. On the other end of the house was my extended family shouting "that's not a word! Google it!" as they continued to play a lively game of Scrabble. After dinner, my cousins and I began to plan out what we would do while I was in town.

"Yuh affi cum a di New Years pawty [you have to come to the New Year's party]!"

"Yuh nah cum sting tonite [Aren't you coming to Sting tonight]?"

"Ye mek we go an get we ticket tomorrow [Yes, let's go get tickets tomorrow]"

The room was filled with excitement and anticipation for our upcoming plans.

After dinner, we returned to my Aunt Betty's house (who lives not too far from my grandmother) where we continued our conversations and spent the night. I woke up to the smell of an array of spices and the sound of boiling and frying cast iron pots. Once I fully came to my surroundings, the space filled itself with a different familiarity and brought comfort to my

being. I walked out of the room to the kitchen where my family was-to greet me with a plate of liver, callaloo, boiled provisions and tea. As we prepared for our long journey ahead, we had our final send-off and promised to see each other when we returned from Adelphi.



Fig 2: Traditional Jamaican breakfast at Aunty Betty's house (Dec 2014)

The journey to Adelphi was filled with sporadic stops through the country to pick up and visit relatives along the way. Rhythmic melodies-echoed through the car, fueling our excitement to be reunited with old and new family members. My grandmother and cousins had already made it to Uncle Tummy’s house and eagerly awaited our arrival. The roads, sounds and route felt familiar until we reached Salem. My senses heightened as this became a moment which peaked my interest. “Where am I?” I asked as I watched my father navigate our way through traffic, following my uncle up ahead of us. My curiosity peaked even further when my father said “but dat anno Bev an John cyar [but that’s not Bev and John’s car]”—the silver Toyota Camry that we so diligently followed behind, ended up leading us off further than we expected. Once we reconnected through diligent phone instructions, the directions became more uncertain than my first navigational inquiry. “Turn up there! Make a left at the light. Follow the roundabout, keep left. When the ‘y’ splits, stay on the left side and keep going straight.” Before then, I thought that I knew what it meant to travel to more rural areas in the island, but after a half hour of following a road with no real direction, I was proven wrong.

After passing our 20th goat, fourth cow and sixth bar, we finally reached my Uncle Tummy’s house. The panoramic view overlooked the acres of land he owned into the more populated regions. A family member rushed over to open the property gates where the festivities had already began the night before. There was a strange feeling of unfamiliar love; an



Fig 3: Front walkway of Uncle Tummy’s House (Dec 2014)

authentic exchange of family ties. We moved through the mosaic-tiled driveway, passing a fountain to an open piece of land where more family members were seated by their cars socializing. The smell of burning wood signaled to my senses that dinner preparations were underway. Speaker boxes as tall as the house and as wide as the length of my aunt's Toyota Camry lined the driveway parallel to the fountain. As I stepped out of the car, I noticed what beautiful homes my uncle had built for himself; a one-story bungalow to my right and a two-story pink house with white elaborate grills in the entrance where he resided. If I know anything about my uncle, it is that he is proud of his country and his Rastafarian religion; he had school-sized flag poles in the middle of his lot where he flew the Jamaican and Rastafarian flag high above the houses. "He's a Rasta?" I thought to myself as my cousin Miss Cherry quickly approached us with her warm greeting.

"What's up girl? Mi long fi see you [it's good to see you]!"

I reciprocated the excitement and gave her a big embrace.

Miss Cherry is my grandmother's cousin who is not only related to her on her mother's but also her father's side.

We are like double cousins! Miss Cherry's siblings had all put together the reunion as her brother (Uncle

Tummy) agreed to host the family. As my parents went off along their own paths, Miss Cherry took me to see my Grandmother and introduced me to her siblings that I had

heard endless stories about. For a long time I had etched images of what they might look like—would they be as fair-skinned as Miss Cherry or as tall as Uncle Kelvin? I scanned my memory



Fig 4: Miss Cherry and I (Dec 2014)

for the collection of family faces that I had met on my trips back to Jamaica as a child. From that, I made calculated decisions of what I thought my new family members would look like.

My cousins all appeared similar and yet distinct. I immediately found a younger cousin that had the same resemblance and got to meet my cousin's granddaughter that I had heard so much about. As night drew nearer in the hills, music and food made their way into ears and onto plates. Groups of cousins were dancing, while myself and my cousins from Toronto sat with Miss Cherry's grandchildren. We headed over to the liquor table where Miss Cherry had found a bottle of champagne and insisted on sharing it with us. Drinks refilled and the driveway became occupied by myself and other family members dancing along to the tunes the deejay selected. Shortly after, Uncle Tummy insisted that I have something to eat from the outdoor serving area. He introduced me to other family members that I didn't know and explained my relation to them. "This is girlies' granddaughter!"

Their faces lit with recognition as they figured out who I belonged to. After that came recognition of an unprecedented love that bonded us together as family. Being identified as Girlies' granddaughter broke down the wall of unfamiliarity and opened up a support system that worked to keep the importance of family alive. It was through stories that I was given the key to connect with my cousins and the way they connected with me. It was then (for the first time) that the importance of narratives spoke to me. It not only offers familiarity for those across transnational borders but provides a glue that connects individuals to a network of stories that are continuously shared between immediate family members.

I open my research with this trip to highlight what narratives mean to me and my family and the key role they play in West Indian culture and communities. In my case, the effects of transnationalism stresses a constant reliance on narratives in order to revitalize and rejuvenate

familial connections for younger generations raised overseas. Had it not been for the elders in my family telling stories of our family, I would not share the same connection to Jamaica as my elders do. For that, I am grateful for narratives, as they have bridged the gap between age and cultural differences—a tongue binding of our stories through space and time.

For the remainder of this piece, I will take you through my own narrative as I work through my late grandmother's passing, and later working towards exploring the experiences and presence of West Indian migrants residing in Vancouver.

The Passing

April 12, 2015

I sat in my room as I put the final touches on my thesis presentation. I was in obvious work mode, trying to put my last minute thoughts together. I read through the section that included my conversations with my grandmother and felt warmth and reassurance that she was with me as I typed each word. As I added my third slide to my PowerPoint presentation, my phone lit up, revealing a notification I had not thought I would see so soon, "Grandma is gone." A strong weight fell down on me and pushed me to the ground. I had never felt so weak and heavy at the same time. My hands shook as I promptly texted my cousin back begging her to reiterate what she had told me. It was then that I learnt what internal hurt felt like. I wept from within, not for my external presence but for my soul. I wept for myself. As strange as it sounded, I felt sympathy for myself. Since all of my family was located in the east coast (Toronto), I learned how to self-console. I crawled to the bathroom floor, putting my head to the toilet. My body went into auto-pilot and began to purge. Nothing made sense. I kept replaying our last

conversation and the genuine flow of our words. I pacified myself with the stories I recorded of her the first day of the New Year. Every time I felt myself slip into isolation, I listened to her soothing melodic voice. Her sound was sweet to the tongue and easy on the ears.

Since I had not grown up with my grandmother constantly at reach, I had connected with her much differently than her children and other grandchildren. We had a connection through narratives. I would exchange pictures with her as she reciprocated her content with words of love. Therefore, the few times we got to spend more than a day together; our voices would embrace like long lost friends. I was never able to remember much about how my grandmother looked because her physical appearance changed over the years due to her cancer treatments. I learned to rely on her voice for that was the one thing that never changed about her. When spending the day with her turned into a mini sleepover, I woke up to her footsteps and her voice. “Where’s my favourite granddaughter?”

I woke up with a smile on my face for we both understood what our voices meant to each other. Now that she is gone, the only thing I have left of her are her stories—of her family, religion and her discernment of Caillou. Our last day spent together was filled with mini-stories that flew freely from her tongue. None coerced, just free. The power of her story taught me a lot about the lady I called my grandmother. Though I had not been able to touch her, stand next to her or speak to her very often, our ability to connect through narrative made our relationship special. She heard me and I heard her.

The Wake

The traditional West Indian way of going through a death in the family is through a “wake”. Though I heard from my cousins that my grandmother was not into big celebrations of much of the magnitude as many Jamaican funerals, we still decided to prepare a get together after the funeral. I left Vancouver on a red-eye flight, heading to Toronto to meet my mother where as we set off to Jamaica. We landed in the early afternoon, meeting my father and aunts (Aunt Betty and Aunt Joan). There was a blissful peace and yet a dark looming cloud of reality that soon disrupted our excitement.

As plans were made for my departure to say my final farewells to my dearest grandmother, I began to see clearly what narrative meant to me. I had no sacred item that I would keep to remember her, nor her ashes; I just had stories. The stories she had told me, that my family would tell me and that she told her closest friends would be a scared reminder of the woman I had only really known through narrative.

Upon arriving at my Aunt Betty’s house, we settled in and started to make our routine phone calls to family members and friends announcing our arrival. Aunt Betty’s spacious three bedroom bungalow became filled with immediate and extended family members as the hours went by. My mother and father took the room in the very front of the house while my aunt, cousin and I occupied Aunt Betty son’s room. My two other male cousins would float around the shared spaces from air mattress to couch.

The day before the funeral was the most hectic. We spent the day running errands, cleaning and getting the house in order for funeral day. I swept and tidied



Fig 5: Aunt Joan preparing food for guests after the funeral service (Apr 2015)

up my room as my uncle made calls and arrangements for the food and cooks that were hired for funeral day. Chairs, tables and a large canopy were set up at the front lot of the driveway. Coolers, Styrofoam plates, cups and cutlery were placed on the front table. Close friends and family members filed in and throughout the house, making their brief greetings then shouted as they passed by “Mi soon come [I’ll



Fig 6: Preparation for after funeral service

be back soon]!” The house was filled with life. Goat, chicken and pork were being cleaned and cut while reggae music absorbed the soundscape, mixed with random bursts of laughter. This was comfort. As night came, the house calmed and prep was nearly complete. Since I knew I had an exhausting day ahead of me, I went to bed early that morning with the house still rustling with amusement.

That morning I woke up with a heavy heart and severe denial. I constantly had to remind myself that I was not in Jamaica for vacation (like a few months earlier) but to say goodbye to my grandmother. My stomach was in knots the entire morning at the house. I concealed my nerves with my usual smile and funny conversation with my family. I took my time to get ready and waited for my Aunty Betty to signal our departure. As we left Hellshire Glades, I became overwhelmed with sadness. Every few minutes, I would have to remind myself that my grandmother had passed and I was heading to her funeral. As we pulled up to the church, a rush of nerves overcame my body. “Robyn, you and T hand out programs and greet people”, Aunt Betty said as she tended to other matters.

My little cousin and I stood at opposite ends of the door, greeting and thanking people for coming. From time to time, I would peak up to the front of the room where my grandmother laid in the coffin dressed in purple. At that time I thanked God that I was nearsighted and continued to hand out programs as friends and family poured in. From time to time, guests would ask who I was to Sister Quest and I would promptly respond that I was her granddaughter from Canada. Their faces lit up with intrigue so I would further explain that I was Michael's daughter, Mrs. Quest eldest son. With my explanation and my dad's introductions, everyone seemed to know who I was before the service started.

Once eleven o'clock struck, the room calmed and the pastor took his place on the elevated platform behind my grandmother's casket. I walked up through the aisle and felt tears fall with every step and every blink. We sat in the front row and the pastor began his sermon. After a few minutes, he became a voice in the back of my head.

"She leaves behind granddaughters: Princess, Kimsue, Bionca, Lynconia...and Robyn." The pastor recited stories that her



Fig 7: Guests greeting each other at the end of service

grandchildren chose to exemplify the type of woman Mrs. Myrtle Adina Quest was. In that moment, I found out that my grandmother was an avid cricket player and taught my cousin Bionca how to bat a ball. Combining the impression my grandmother left on me and the impact she had in other people's lives, I was convinced that she was extraordinary! As the pastor closed his sermon, he signaled for those who wanted to have their last views to come up and do so now. As the tears ran down my face I went up to the casket and put my hand on the closed portion.

Though no words could come out, the only thing that played on a loop in my head was “thank you”. I thanked her for everything, for my father, for her love, for her stories, for loving me.

As I watched them carry out my sweet lady, I let go of my sorrow and knew that she had left me with enough of an impression to help guide the rest of my life—I was reassured.

We headed back to Aunt Betty’s house, emotionally exhausted and hot but there was no time to rest for it was time to host and feed all those who had come to the funeral. No matter how much or little they may have known my grandmother, it was our responsibility to make sure that they were fed and well hosted. My cousins and mother shared plates of food while myself, Aunt Betty and other cousins gave out plates of food. This was the most exhausting part of the funeral, feeding not only your family but

also guests that neither my cousins nor I knew. Food is how we thanked them for their time and support. As the guests became more and more full, we became more hungry and irritable. I started to collect



Fig 8: Guests seated outside Aunt Betty’s house after funeral service (Apr 2015)

plates with scraps of curry goat and chicken bone, I was stopped by an older lady who looked at me with a smile.

“Are you Sister Quest’s granddaughter from Canada?”

I replied eagerly to her response.

“She was planning to come to your graduation in October, she was so happy!”

I felt comfort in the lady’s words. I had not known who she was, her name or her relation to my

family but she had been the only one to sooth my pain with her words. I may not ever see this lady again but I will never forget her words and the reassurance she gave me.

As the night winded down, I reflected on the events of the day and came to terms with my new reality: I had lost my grandmother, she would not be coming back nor to my graduation no matter how many times I had told her or my parents that I wanted her there. The only thing that calms my nerves is knowing that I will always have stories of the amazing woman she was and knowing that she is who I emulate every day.

My two trips back to Jamaica helped to set up a clearer direction and solid foundation for this project. I learned and further understood the power of narrative for West Indians only through experiencing and living through the loss of my grandmother every day. With my mom's mother falling sick only a month after my grandmother's passing, I am a strong believer in the power of narrative, its impact and significance in West Indian communities. In my family, storytelling works to preserve, rehabilitate and revitalize West Indian families and networks. It acts as a glue that binds the young and old together through shared experiences—her story becomes our story.

For the remainder of this piece, I will explore the use of narrative along with other indicators of West Indian presence throughout the lower mainland analyzing shared and different experiences to that of my own. I ask you to join me on this journey as we explore West Indian presence in Vancouver and the ways in which it ripples throughout the lower mainland.

Chronixx Concert

Still uncertain of where I would find large clusters of West Indians, I was fortunate enough to attend a concert of one of my favourite reggae artist. Chronixx, often compared to the

new Bob Marley, has been taken the reggae world by storm and made his way to Vancouver for his West Coast Redemption Tour. The event took place in the Downtown East Side area, at a quaint concert venue. I stepped out of the car to be greeted to different Caribbean dialects conversing outside the concert doors. I found the Caribbean people! This was the first time in five years that I was surrounded with people that looked and spoke like me—I was the majority! I stepped into line and was greeted with nods of recognition and smiles. For some reason, West Indians were able to recognize other West Indians, regardless of their nationality. The sound of heavy bass hit me as I walked through the doors into the concert hall. I had almost forgotten what it felt like to be at a reggae concert. I paced through the crowd, eager to find my two friends who had chosen to come meet me. We took our places at the front corner of the stage, retrieving drinks and waiting patiently for the main act to arrive.

I had no clue who would attend a reggae concert other than those who were familiar with the artist but as I gazed across the crowd I found a number of interesting groups of people I was able to categorize. There were the



Fig 9: Chronixx and Zincfence band at Imperial (March 2015)

Caribbean people (like myself) who were fans of Chronixx; the non-Caribbean crowd who were also fans of Chronixx and those who had very little knowledge of Chronixx but enjoyed reggae. This last crowd became apparent to me when Chronixx shouted out to the crowd “bun up Babylon [burn out corruption/the system]” and a member of the non-West Indian crowd

questioned with confusion, “what is Babylon?” This solidified my initial categorization and continued to show its truths throughout the evening.

After a couple opening artists warming up the crowd, the band began to play one of Chronixx’ biggest hits as he humbly graced the stage. The crowd roared and as he placed his mouth to the microphone the crowd opened with **coos** and chants alike. It was a beautiful experience, one much different from that I would expect in Toronto. The power of his lyrics not only drew fans together but had the ability to bring the very dispersed West Indian community together.

This brings me to observe the role of music within Vancouver’s West Indian community and understand its potential as it draws the community together like no other medium. I knew that because the Caribbean community is so dispersed, I would only achieve contact through informal gatherings taking place throughout the course of the summer.

The Chronixx concert became the basis for how I planned to find participants as well as observe our presence as a community while collecting data. In order to find the West Indian community, I had to go to them. I chose to attend many events of the like in order to find a variety of participants. If I wanted to research the West Indian story, I had to insert myself into one of their chapters. From there, we began the process...

Peter’s Recollections

While on my way home from a meeting downtown one Thursday evening, I stepped off the bus awaiting my next transfer. As I stepped to walk in the direction of the familiar benches, I noticed a middle-aged man plopped in the same spot I had intended to capture. He looked at me with a smile and motioned for me to occupy the seat next to him. We looked at one another, studying our similarities and differences. His crow’s feet and graying mustache gave away his

age. He wore a *Kangol* hat with the holes of his white mesh marina peeping through his crisp white t-shirt. The gold rings on his middle, pinky fingers and thick gold chain around his neck gave his West Indian identity away. I listened as he started small conversation with me, trying to pinpoint where I recognized his accent. I could not bother to guess anymore so I asked him, “Where are you from?” With a slight smile he replied “Trinidad”. I paused for a few seconds, knowing that he did not sound like a Trinidadian when he burst into laughter. “Mi frum yawd [I’m from Jamaica]”. We both laughed and continued our conversation. As time limited the extent of our conversation, we exchanged numbers and promised to meet up in the near future. One afternoon, Peter and I went to a pizza place close to the bus stop where we originally met. There, he began to strike up a conversation about my background and my family. We exchanged family names and locations where our families resided in Jamaica, concentrating our conversation to his settlement in Vancouver:

Mi live all ova Canada [I’ve lived all over Canada]”, he said when I asked him where he had migrated to from Jamaica. We have foundation for Toronto man, dats [that’s] why we couldn’t stay deh [there] (Peter June 12, 2015).

Peter had lived with his family in Toronto in the late seventies. Due to bad influences at the time, Peter decided to move out to Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and later Vancouver for personal preferences and work availability.

His experience as a Jamaican living in Vancouver is rather interesting compared to those that I often frequented in Toronto. Peter limited his exposure to Jamaican cuisine and events in the city until his next trip home.

Mi nuh eat Jamaican food suh di only way mi ago eat it is if you cook it [I don’t eat Jamaican food out here so the only way I’ll eat it is if you’re cooking it]. Beca mi nuh eat frum nobody mi nuh go ah nuh restaurant fi nobody {Because I don’t eat from anybody or go to any [West Indian] restaurants}... Beca from dem poison Bob Marley an

dem tell mi seh ah sintin kill em... Yuh know a ya suh him did deh [Because since they poisoned Bob Marley and something killed him...you know he was here when he got sick] (Peter June 12, 2015).

He went on to ask me about where I was from in Jamaica which ignited stories of his expeditions across the island. He continued to recall earlier times in Vancouver when he would book a flight to Toronto just to see a Supercat or Ninja Man show—two of Jamaica’s prominent Deejays in the nineties. He recounted stories of the popular Deejays and the sound clashes that took place. With every word, he sounded more and more impressed with the caliber of music these Deejays were able to create, providing me with a few lyrics and a nostalgia that only someone years older than me would feel and understand. He called out some of his greatest memories of attending street dances at Yonge and Bloor, crowded with people who eagerly anticipated the Deejays to hit the microphone. The dance was so “sweet” that he recalled the whole ceiling being full of bullet holes from the men who would fire off shots in the air to express their sheer enjoyment.

Dancehall serves an important role in his memories, documenting a time etched into his past. He spent a good portion of our conversation recounting his memories of parties he had attended in the past, from the late eighties to the early millennium, when the Toronto dancehall scene was booming. Stone Love sound, Kilimanjaro and other memorable soundmen ignited his nostalgic reconnaissance, his face beaming with pleasure from the past. Though he recounted lively snippets of his travels, he remained grounded in his decision to settle in Vancouver:

If yuh nuh [you are] careful here people will use you but mi go tru wah mi go tru and mi give tonks and praise [but I went through what I went for a reason]. Right now mi juss wan enjoy mi self [I just want to enjoy myself]... mi nuh sweat nutin [I don’t worry about anything]...Noe weh yuh nah do an which pawt yuh fi be [Know what you won’t do and where you’re supposed to be]. It hard yes, but it’s an easy task if you have yuh head straight (Peter June 12, 2015).

Life for Peter has not been one without tribulations, however he remains confident in his struggles and advised me to be firm in my understanding of myself and where I wanted to be. As our conversation continued I shared my frustrations of inaccessibility and inconvenience of staying in touch with my West Indian heritage here in Vancouver. As he nodded his head in agreement, I asked him how he continued to maintain such strong connections to his culture. Listening to his music, attending the annual Caribbean Days parade and frequent trips back to Jamaica are responsible for revitalizing and maintaining his connection to his culture. His wide knowledge of reggae music provided the most constant, accessible and a 'quick fix' to ease his cravings.

Kizomba with Crystal

While attending an African dance class downtown, my gaze met the body of a Chinese-presenting woman who moved similar to me as we tried to catch on to the various moves the instructor coached. I looked over as we met each other's gaze and instantly knew that we were one in the same. There is a particular sense alerting West Indians when they are in the presence of another West Indian, offering a sense of connection and comfort. We blurted out comments of the similarities between African and Caribbean dances and continued to enjoy our little piece of home for the remainder of the class.

Once dismissed, we struck up conversation introducing ourselves and where we were from. Crystal had just recently migrated to Vancouver late last year from Toronto. Her energetic personality ignited our conversation with her first venture to Canada:

I moved... Well it's been a while now, maybe fourteen years now. I moved to Toronto first for university [from Trinidad] in 2001. Umm so I was nineteen then and um I was in Toronto for quite a while. So I did university, graduated, worked there in Toronto and then planned to go to Vancouver about two years ago umm just to change my lifestyle

from the crazy, busy stuff then I moved here. It's just here (sigh) [has] a more laid back lifestyle which is perfect because it's more like back home—near to the ocean and everything (Crystal June 21, 2015).

Over the span of fourteen years, Crystal's decision to migrate to Canada, more specifically, migrate within Canada held different meanings and significance for the different stages and pursuits in her life. Her initial migration to Toronto from Trinidad for educational purposes presents a different context to which she chose to later migrate to Vancouver. Her move to Toronto was a decision made by her and her parents based on the network they had in the east. For safety concerns, as 9/11 had happened right after she left Trinidad, her parents preferred she attend university in a city where she could call upon family friends if she was in need. She expressed appreciation for those family friends, who would invite her to all holiday gatherings and events they hosted, providing her with a home away from home.

Unlike myself, who has a significant portion of my family living in Toronto, Crystal had only her two brothers who resided in Toronto during her years of study. One of her brothers just recently moved back to Trinidad while the other remains in Toronto. Other than her one brother living in Toronto, all of her family still resides in Trinidad. Though she has family friends located in Toronto and Vancouver, Crystal has no familial lineage in Canada. Her rationale for making her second move to Vancouver was an independent and personal decision—embarking on a well-needed change of pace and lifestyle. She moved to Vancouver to be more in touch with a way of life that she is familiar with. She compares the pace of living in Vancouver to that of Trinidad and is confident in her decision to settle in a city that feels more like home.

When I asked her how she maintains this sense of home, she took a moment to herself to think of how she has evolved in her two years living in Vancouver:

It's a lot harder here in Vancouver because they don't... I don't have my Trini group here and they don't have many Trinis out here or Caribbean people. I have rarely met much, like you're one of the ones that I've met. In Toronto, when I first went into university, umm my first year there were a lot of, like seven Trinis in my residence. So that was great because we would all get together. So throughout my four years, there was a group of us that would get together every now and then. We'd cook up food and we would have a Trini lime [hangout]. So that helped a lot and you know we would go watch Caribana together. I played in Caribana like twice in Toronto. Umm, we'd go to some fetes [Soca parties] together, things like that right? So that helped a lot...But it's harder so every time I go home it comes back and I get a little dose ah Trini still [laughter] to keep me going... it's hard to keep it up for sure (Crystal June 21, 2015).

The majority of Crystal's memories of staying in touch with her "Trini" roots points to her years spent in Toronto. The events she attended and the friendships she made served to preserve her culture and keep in touch with the community. The relationships she developed in university with her group of Trinidadian friends got her through her university years but as they all completed their studies and moved back to Trinidad, she slightly lost her dosage of "Trini-ness". Her move to Vancouver diminished her connection with her culture due to the small number of Caribbean people and public presence compared to that of Toronto.

The accessibility of West Indian cultural commodity only hinders her understanding of what it means to be West Indian in Vancouver. Once in a while, she goes to The Roti Shack (located in New Westminster) but realizes that it is not the healthiest to consume on a daily basis. She reserves those indulgences as a treat or when she is in the area. Though she listens to some Soca, she makes it a priority to go back to Trinidad once a year to visit her family. When much of what she is culturally accustomed to is fleeting, she relies on her Trinidadian accent to remain intact—reminding her partner that she must preserve her accent. Because she presents as Chinese, she always reminds herself and others that she is Trinidadian first. Her non-West Indian

partner helps to keep her culture alive through his genuine interest and enjoyment for everything Trinidadian.

Unlike her move to Toronto, where being West Indian holds a public representation, she resorts to sharing her West Indian identity on a personal level, within private settings and with those who share cultural similarities. Though she enjoys the Vancouver lifestyle, she expresses the difficulty of filling a cultural void that makes it easier to assimilate to the popular way of life in Vancouver. Without continuing to maintain her cultural identity, she feels pressure to adapt. Save of her constant connection to her home and the support of her partner to maintain this part of herself, she continues to work through her realities in her new city.

Speaking with Suzan

Like Crystal's move to Toronto for university, my experience replicated that of her and her parents making the decision to send their daughter away for school. While I had made the decision to attend SFU, my mother was not entirely convinced. Once the final decision was made, my mother turned to her network to find anyone that she knew who lived in British Columbia. Up north, in Prince George, was a family friend who connected me to a Trinidadian family in North Vancouver. I met the Gilberts my first year of university in 2010. When Richard and Suzan picked me up, I was surprised to how intact Suzan's accent was. She greeted me with a smile and open arms. Five years later, she still greets me with the same smile and warm welcome every time we cross paths. "I did not come directly from Trinidad to Canada. You can draw my map [laughter]" (Suzan June 19, 2015).

Suzan, unlike the others, has lived in several other countries before settling which deepens her journey to Vancouver. While working in Trinidad in the computing field, she was assigned to evaluate a particular computing software for the interest of the company. The petroleum engineers were asking her to help them find software to do their well management and refining. When she started to look up the software, she realized that it was not just wire software, easily transmittable to any front, there was a whole field of study on the matter. The more she tried to find the right software, the more she realized that that was where her passion lied. In that time, her husband Richard went to England to spend the last days with his grandfather.

Once Richard had settled in, Suzan went on to apply to the University of Nottingham where she was accepted. Once she received her acceptance, she moved to join Richard in England at the age of 32. She left as a mature professional who had already established herself in her designated field. When she arrived to England, she describes her experience of Nottingham:

... When we got to Nottingham, I hated it! And everything was Maid Mary and Robin Hood and his merry men. Every single thing! Every street, everything was named out of the books. F*** everyting [everything]! Every street, every side street, every alley [laughter]! Every building has a reference, a word, a picture from Robin Hood and his merry men. They even had the forest where they supposed he did everything. Oh my God, it was annoying! And when I went to meet the professors, they wanted me to do research on spiders in head roves. I just came from an oil company doing oil spills management, why am I going to do spiders in head roves in Northern England? [laughter] (Suzan June 19, 2015)

When she and Richard attended the lecture and saw the professor right out of a story book, they both looked at each other and made the decision to go to London. When she phoned the

University of South London to inquire about her application, she found out it had been sent to the Birkbeck campus. Once the attendant called back regarding her application, they accepted her application and asked her if she could be there on Monday—leaving her two days to pack up from Nottingham and move to London. From there, her life took off. She spent five years there finishing her degree, had two children in 1993 and 1995 and worked for the university.

After settling in London, Richard and Suzan debated the idea of moving to Canada. They had the choice of moving back when the children were young (before they started school) or once they finished high school. Though they had thought of moving back to Trinidad so their children could acquire the culture, they decided to move to Canada. She made a deliberate decision to quit the university and get a position in a corporation of her choice before moving because she did not want to start over again as they had insisted when she worked in Nottingham. She worked for *Oracle* in the U.K. and once a position opened up in Seattle, she transferred to a North American company in 1997. The entire family moved with her and was given accommodations until they found more permanent housing, Richard had difficulties finding a job in Seattle. As his search widened, he found a job in Vancouver as a forensic economist. He would stay in Vancouver during the week and visit his family on weekends. The back and forth lasted for three months until Suzan got a transfer in her same qualifications to Vancouver with the company:

We came at the level on which we were accustomed. And I stayed here and worked for Oracle for another two years then went other places...My story is not the typical immigrant story, because the typical West Indian immigrant does not get moved with a company that allows you to maintain your seniority. So I was able to maintain my seniority, my salary, my living to which I was accustomed in my whole transition. And my transition was easier even more so because Richard lived here so I didn't have to initially figure out what the hell is going on...because Richard grew up here. Neither were the children because they were so young. Everything was maintainable (Suzan June

19, 2015).

Suzan's initial migration to North America and later Vancouver occurred laterally. Other than her difficulties in England, she made it her priority to stay at a standard of living she was accustomed to in Trinidad. Her transition to Vancouver was comforted by her husband and his family who already lived in Vancouver for many years.

I was fascinated with her ability to remain grounded in her Trinidadian identity while moving across continents and settling in Vancouver where the West Indian community is hidden amongst the rest of the population. With admiration I asked her and with a smile she replied:

I have parties, and I invite my Trinidadian and other [non-West Indian] friends. So maybe four times a year...I have a big New Year's party where I cook only West Indian food. I do the curry goat the chicken the channa, potato, pelou, barbeque, callaloo...roast pork, roast beef, macaroni pie, our key dishes. So I do that. And I cook every day, the West Indian way. I do do other things but you know. I make soup most Saturdays. So I cook so the kids know the foods. I go back on holidays; I try and go back every two and a half to three years. Now that Facebook is in...I feel as if I'm taking part in all the stuff and what's going on at home. I go to the Caribbean Days festival. That's my weekend, I don't care about anybody [laughter] as long as I can go and jump up for de [the] two days in de [the] week I'm good (Suzan June 19, 2015).

Suzan's connection and membership to the B.C. Trinidadian association and its networks assists in keeping in touch with the West Indian community in British Columbia. She also looks forward to spending two days with friends and family at the Caribbean Days Festival. While she



Fig 10: Suzan's West Indian home decor

communicates with friends and family back home, she uses her home as a cultural sphere. Not only does she only cook West Indian meals, her home is decorated with West Indian books, art and pictures of her immediate and extended family. With my many visits to her house, I had not noticed its cultural appropriateness because of its similarities to my parent's home. My mother decorates her home with similar books, art, pictures and aromas. Suzan's house is my home away from home. She uses her domestic space as a portal that feels like home. She captures that essence of what being Trinidadian means to her and instills all those in her space with a sense of belonging.

Uncovering Onkar

I met Onkar a week before the SocaCize Vancity and Anmoni Costumes band launch for Caribbean Days in April. I had been signed up to model one of the t-shirt options they had in the band and was anxious for the opportunity to model in front of an audience. We met at a martial arts studio in Burnaby to go through our designated routines, rehearsed timing and group positioning. Throughout rehearsal, we continued to crack jokes and dance to the songs selected. Towards the end of rehearsal, I connected with Onkar and planned to meet after the band launch for a coffee.

Onkar is of Guyanese decent born in Montréal. His mother, uncle and grandmother moved directly from Guyana to Montréal in the eighties to get out of their impoverished area in Georgetown. After his mother's father past away when she was seventeen, they lost the sole income in the house which encouraged them to make the decision to go to Montréal where his eldest aunt had already visited. They lived in an apartment and were hired in accordance to their trades—his mother being a seamstress and his uncle in upholstery. The ease in finding work was attributed to the amount of Italians in Montréal who owned most of the furniture and clothing

shops at the time. Their trades provided an easy transition to their new life and reduced the fear of unemployment upon arrival. A few years later, Onkar's mother met his Punjabi father who also migrated from India to Montréal during the same time. They got married, worked for a couple of years and in 1995, moved from Montréal to Vancouver to be nearer to his father's family. He explains this as a sense of change once he moved to Vancouver that altered the way he understood his identity as a Guyanese-Punjabi Canadian:

It was easier out that side [Montréal] because there was a little more of a community but then, at the same time, you have the French... Me especially, I was torn in my household. It was like, dad is Punjabi, mom is Guyanese, [and I am] born in Montréal. So I had to soak in the French culture and all that and then, you know, obviously touch roots with mom's side, touch roots with dad's side so it was like all mixed. So it was a little easier when I came out here [Vancouver] to just kind of pick one side initially the Punjabi side because the majority out here is Punjabi right? But then, I got tired of the Punjabis and went back to my Guyanese side [laughter] (Onkar July 5, 2015).

When I asked him to elaborate he explained:

...the Guyanese side, the West Indian side is definitely more open... to everyone. They're not culturally close minded so to speak. Like they mesh well with everyone. West Indians in general I find are more inviting people. We could meet a different person with different ways and cultures and we're cool with them. But in Punjabi culture it's very closed off and they're very to their own. But I still identify with those roots too but more so my Guyanese side. It's kind of balanced now (Onkar July 5, 2015).

For the time he spent in Montreal as a young child, he had to take on multiple identities in order to connect to family, friends and the city he lived in. With Montréal being a francophone city, he needed to be knowledgeable in French language and culture while maintaining a constant connection with his Punjabi and Guyanese roots.

Though he has established a balance now in his later years, he still continues to associate himself with his Guyanese heritage. Being that the majority of his community in Vancouver was Punjabi, he references his first recollection of the first Guyanese family he met in Vancouver:

My mom met her randomly. They were in a store in the checkout line and the lady in front of her was asking one of the attendants for a 'dropcord' [laughter]. Then my mom immediately noticed that there was another Guyanese right there and told them that the lady is looking for an extension cord. And they became friends and we'd go to their house and kinda got into it from there (Onkar July 5, 2015).

The family his mother connected with in the store became lifelong family friends. For Onkar, cuisine plays a significant role in keeping his connection with his heritage. He told me, as a young child, he always hung around the kitchen while his mom prepared meals. Now as an adult, he admits that cooking is where he has the most fun. He puts on some music and reenacts the way his mother used to prepare meals. Although he enjoys the parties and festivals, he believes that food is his primary source of reestablishing his cultural ties; "food is what connects you...you can almost taste a bit of what your roots are. Your roots are in all of those flavours you put together, you know what I mean" (Onkar July 5 2015).

Cooking tells a story of a time and place. The influences within the cuisine highlights different groups of people who migrated to the region. Cuisine provides a particular truth that unites those influences, only making the distinction of nationality rather than race or class. Food becomes an integral and most intimate piece to keeping Onkar's West Indian identity intact. While Onkar relies on his food to keep in touch with his roots, he also enjoys listening to West Indian music –reggae, Soca and Chutney. Before Caribbean presence was noticeable in his community, he depended on introducing his non-West Indian friends to Soca, Reggae and chutney (Bungra-Soca mix). It was a new and refreshing sound that differed from the regular

musical content that played in Vancouver. Music was one way that he shared his culture within his circle of friends and gave them the opportunity to learn more about him. It kept him from falling into the category of “just another Punjabi kid” (Onkar July 5, 2015) and gave him more liberty and flexibility to publicly explore his identity through music.

After high school, he became more in tune with music which provided more incentive to attend various West Indian events. He describes his love for the music as similar to his love for cooking. “When different humans work together, beautiful things can happen” (Onkar July 5, 2015). Onkar praises the diversity of the West Indies and lives by educating others on the different facets of West Indian culture. Because of his experience with close-mindedness within his Punjabi community, he appreciates and praises West Indian culture for its ability to embrace different races which form West Indian identity.

Onkar’s negotiation with his multiple identities speaks to the intersectionality of West Indian first generation Canadians. Not only did he have to personify what it meant to be a Montréal Canadian, he also has to remain true to his mixed heritage. His ability to work through his Punjabi identity by adapting West Indian beliefs and mentality aided in discovering a balance that worked for him. He continues to work through his Punjabi culture but uses his Guyanese roots as a foundation for further discovery.

SocaCize Band Launch

Mona-Lisa and Joy are two friends of mine that I met my first year on campus. They were members of the African Caribbean club responsible for showcasing African and Caribbean presence on campus. Every walk back to my dorm, I would timidly peep into their club room to see if anyone was inside. Once we got to know each other, we became close friends. In the recent

years, they have trained to be certified SocaCize instructors. SocaCize is a mixture of aerobics and Zumba. It incorporates moves from both while maintaining true to its Caribbean roots.

This year, they joined with another costume band (Anmoni Costume and Design) and brought two t-shirt sections to the Caribbean Days Festival this year. In April, they put together a launch of the costumes and t-shirts, followed by black light fête. Those who were modeling a costume, like myself, met the week of to rehearse positioning and musical



Fig 11: The Reef food truck (April 2015)

cues. Though I volunteered to model, it was my first time attempting modeling in front of an audience. While rehearsing, I was stiff and nervous to dance in front of any crowd. “Loosen up nuh Robyn”, Joy instructed from behind the deejay table. I tried to take her advice and moved around a lot more fluidly than my initial go on stage. Once we felt we had enough practice, we went through our routines once more and eagerly awaited the weekend.

When I arrived at the venue for dress rehearsal, a Caribbean food truck called The Reef was parked outside. I ordered their special jerk chicken sandwich and headed in to meet the others. It was dark but one could see the decorations spread across the room. Balloons covered the floor freely, bouncing from the bar to the seating area. Huge Bristol boards covered the top of



Fig 12: SCV and ACD Band launch (Apr 2015)

the stage with ocean waters, the name and theme of the band. The bar personnel prepared the bar lining cups, napkins and straws by his station. Onkar and the other models had just made it to the venue while Joy and Mona-Lisa arrived shortly after. The projector screen showcased images of all the costumes and the various available arrangements. We filed to the backroom to change and get ready for the launch. False eyelashes, eye shadow and jewels were put on my face to match the colour of my t-shirt. They placed my headband on and tied it at the back. I was ready for the stage! Others did last minute run-throughs and costume alterations as we prepared for the most anticipated event of the evening.

Once in position, the showcase started. I filed behind the person ahead of me and waited for my cue to enter the stage. As I was being introduced, I took a deep breath and stepped forward into the bright lights and alluring crowd. I could not see much but I took Joy's advice, moved, danced around and posed until it was my turn to go back on the stage with the group. As I turned my back to the audience, I took a breath of relief and prepared for my next cue. We enjoyed our time on stage moving across the floor singing along to the songs they played and joined the crowd in applause. The music began its decrescendo, which gave the audience the opportunity to take pictures of the costumes and cheer for the great effort.

We headed off the stage to greet the audience and encourage them to purchase a costume for the Caribbean Days parade. We remained in our costumes for an hour then got changed to join the black light party. The deejays played mix of Soca and Reggae to cool down the crowd. The atmosphere was fast-paced, filled with liveliness. We enjoyed the West Indian vibes and partied until the early hours of the morning. The energy geared everyone up for the anticipated Caribbean Days parade at the end of July.

Car Free Vancouver Day/ Carnival Sensations' Outdoor Fete (June 21, 2015)

Mona-Lisa invited me to one of Vancouver's many street festivals taking place over the course of the summer. She explained to me that another Caribbean



Fig 13: Car free day/CS outdoor fete (Jun 2015)

organization would be hosting an outdoor Soca party in promotion of the Caribbean restaurant on Main Street. Fascinated to see our culture on display publicly for the first time in the summer, I attended eagerly with my camera in hand. I imagined there would be a good turnout for the Car Free Day event, but never anticipated the amount of people gathered by the Caribbean tent. As I made it closer to the crowd, I heard booming basses carrying along the tune, accompanied by whistles and clapping. Spectators formed a half circle around the group decorated in Caribbean costumes. Routinely, they group in the middle performed a choreographed number to various Soca songs. The crowd applauded and moved to the music, mimicking moves that the group had performed.

I walked through the crowd, searching for Mona-Lisa and Joy. We stood at the opening of the half circle, watching our friends perform and observed the crowd's reactions. People of all backgrounds danced to the music and even got their children involved. Though few came to the Carnival Sensations tent to inquire about the organization, large amounts stopped to enjoy the music and take pictures of the costumes.

As I watched the crowd, I noticed individuals munching on different West Indian foods. Jamaican patties, assorted jerked meats and fried dumplings filled my nose with familiar yet distant aromas. I followed the scents to a food tent stationed directly in front of The Reef Caribbean Restaurant. They had set up shop outside to sell West Indian snacking foods and had their dine-in restaurant readily available for those who needed to further fulfil their Caribbean food cravings.

After indulging in a beef patty, I took a moment to scan the area once more. When I first entered the space, I noticed all of the non-West Indian even non-Caribbean people, intrigued with our culture. However, I had managed to overlook onlookers like myself, Mona-Lisa and Joy, who are Caribbean. Once I returned to Joy and Mona-Lisa, I took another look around me to notice that all the Caribbean people grouped together (amongst themselves) while all others participated voyeuristically. Initially, I had not noticed this division and held myself responsible for overlooking my subjectivity. I continued to analyze the other Caribbean people within close proximity.

There was the group I associated with—the student crowd, ranging from early twenties to mid-thirties. Parallel to us was a slightly younger crowd who came with friends. The last crowd behind us appeared to be the West Indian crowd that had settled in Vancouver for a number of years. Most had brought their families along and stationed themselves quietly next to the deejay booth. This crowd appeared as the most reserved and yet did not express any displeasure to being a part of the festivities. However odd the separations appeared, we all represented the West Indian and larger Caribbean community. We all acknowledged one another's presence and enjoyed the company of being in a space dedicated to celebrating our culture. The outdoor fete allowed for the opportunity to not only enjoy the West Indian vibes but connect with the other

members of the community who live out of the city or maintain their culture within their private sphere.

Exploring Relocation with Ramona

Ramona and I met in my first years at university. She would support the African Caribbean events hosted on campus and always invited me to various events her organization, Carnival Sensations, hosted. Ramona was born in Canada to a Canadian (Caucasian) mother and Grenadian father. At the time of Ramona's birth, Grenada had been going through revolution. Due to the state of flux the country was in, they evacuated all Canadians (including her mother) out of the country. While her mother was able to evacuate the country, they forbid her Grenadian father (also a Canadian citizen) from leaving the country. "They actually held my dad in Grenada, held his Canadian passport which he had" (Ramona July 10, 2015). Roughly three months later, her eldest brother, sister and parents moved to Montserrat. They lived in Montserrat for six years where her father worked in the hotel industry. She moved back to Grenada in 1987 where she completed all of her primary, elementary and high school studies, finally moving to Vancouver in 1999. Out of my own curiosity, I asked her to describe life in Montserrat:

Montserrat is a really tiny island. If you think Grenada's small? You try to dust off the map and see if you can try and find Montserrat and they can't even make a shape. You think it's dust, nope that's Montserrat...It's just a really small island. The last home that we lived in we had a garden and...eating the fresh fruit and really like. We were just running all over the place, half naked most of the time. Like that was pretty much it but I was really young (Ramona July 10, 2015).

When she returned to Grenada, she only had extended family to return to for her father's siblings had all migrated to North America. Family was not really present in Grenada at that time. Every

Sunday, her family would visit her great aunt who still lived on the land her father owned in Saint David's. Sunday was family day and permitted time to explore the island.

Ramona's Canadian citizenship and Grenadian roots tells the story of the decision her father had made in his return to Grenada. Ramona's father came from a poor family. He attended school but later drop out to support his family. The Rotary Club, noticed him and offered him a scholarship to further his education in Vancouver at BCIT. While attending school, he met Ramona's mother and got married. His vision was always to return to Grenada to raise his family which led to Ramona's close connection to her West Indian roots even though she is Canadian born. Her father's mission to come back and develop his country played an integral role in the initiatives she was involved in:

My dad moved back [to Grenada] worked in the hotel there, really developed it. It's now arguably the top hotel in Grenada. Through the hotel, offered scholarships to elementary students so students who had done their common entrance exams [were selected]. They got all of their books and whatever that they needed to be successful in school fully paid, including their A levels (Ramona July 10, 2015).

Ramona had taken on this project with her father; going through report cards, buying books and supplies. After Ramona completed her entry level studies, she and her siblings went abroad to study. When Ramona was ready to attend university, the arts program was still very new to the university which encouraged her decision to go to Canada. Ramona's mother had made a promise to her mother to return to Canada to take care of her in her old age since she had sacrificed her family to raise a family of her own family. Though Ramona did visit her grandmother and father's sister in the summers, there still was a plan to settle in Canada in their later years.

Once Ramona had moved to Vancouver she explained her experience as shockingly different. Luckily her eldest sister had already moved to Vancouver which helped her with the process of acquiring the proper detailed documentation of transcripts and courses. She was accepted into Douglas College but later got an acceptance from the University of British Columbia. She made the decision to go straight into university. She details her university experience not with difficulties of being racially ambiguous but her shock with spatial differences:

It was so big! I would describe to friends ‘there’s traffic lights at the campus!’ UBC was huge and I didn’t know any one because my sister went to SFU. So I would just go there the week before school and go hangout, hoping to meet somebody and I did! And it just slowly [built up]” (Ramona July 10, 2015).

She was excited to meet new people and make new friends. But had difficulty transitioning from the freedom she was accustomed to. Her university experience changed completely when she and two other Caribbean’s decided to form an African Caribbean club on campus. From then on, her understanding of what it meant to be West Indian in Vancouver changed. The club hosted African and Caribbean events on campus, bringing the community together and creating a space for individuals to be themselves and acknowledge one another.

Presently, Ramona is involved as an alumni member to the club she co-founded and is currently one of the founders of Carnival Sensations. She is vital member of the club, creating West Indian public presence while remaining inclusive to those who show interest in the culture: “My sister and I travelled for carnival every year and we would go back home for carnival... Vancouver had nothing! I didn’t even go to the parade until I took part in it. Caribbean days was

[popular] on the Sunday. Nobody went on Saturday. We realized man, we're here in Vancouver but we're scattered. Let's do something" (Ramona July 10, 2015).

Carnival Sensations July'Vert

In my summers spent in Toronto, I would always hear of Carnival Sensations' annual J'ouvert. Joy and Mona-Lisa would brag about how much fun they had, encouraging me to stay for the summer to enjoy the festivities. This year, I was able to attend. J'ouvert is a traditional West Indian party that happens the night before the parade. People wear their most comfortable clothing that they would not mind getting dirty to prepare for the paint, water and powder that they end up covered in by the end of the party. I have attended two of these parties in Toronto during their Caribana festivities but was still very new to the process. I eagerly awaited the day, going through outfits that I wouldn't mind getting dirty.

I packed a towel, a Ziploc bag to put my phone in, a change of clothes and headed for Fraser Foreshore Park in Burnaby. After navigating through the park, I finally heard a melody leading me to the Carnival Sensations tent. When I arrived, people were already covered in an array of colours. A group filled buckets of paint into empty water bottles. Not long after I arrived, a paint war broke out, red paint flew from the water



Fig 14: Patrons enjoy music at CS July'Vert (Jul 2015)

bottle, landing on the back of young lady's neck. She screeched and ran for her bottle filled with blue paint ready for revenge. They all laughed and danced around but continued to stay on guard should any surprise paint attacks break out.

I put my bag down to retrieve my Ziploc bag, Ramona (the Co-Founder to Carnival Sensations) poured green paint onto my chest and made sure to rub it in. I screeched as loud as the young lady and let out a laugh. Though outside was hot, the paint was cold and gave me instant goosebumps. Joy, Mona-Lisa and Ramona all laughed while I ran to the sun to warm up. We continued the ritual, throwing paint on friends and dancing to the songs the deejay played. Once we were sufficiently covered in paint, we decided to fire up the barbeque grill. Chicken, macaroni pie, wings and potato salad filled each corner of my plate. Joy, Mona-Lisa, their husbands and myself gathered together and enjoyed the cuisine.



Fig 15: Mother and child enjoy July-Vert (Jul 2015)

Mr. B's Bright Opportunities

Mr. B is one of the eldest participants and who is Ramona's father. His story varies from the majority of the narratives for it highlights a different time and opportunities of migration in the West Indies. The first time he left Grenada was in 1969 for a trip to Toronto. He stayed there for a couple of months and continued to visit friends that he met working in the hotel industry. Mr. B had always wanted to go abroad to study but did not have many resources that permitted him to travel for his education. Living in Saint David's only diminished his opportunity to pursue his education:

I wanted to study abroad but I couldn't afford it so I went to work in the hotel industry. Tried to improve my education as best as I can. So that took me to come to Canada, then I went back... My next time in Canada I was awarded a scholarship from the Rotary Club International. This is when I first got my break and that took me to Vancouver. I wrote to several places and BCIT answered first of all the colleges and universities that was recommended through the Rotary Foundation (Mr. B July 24, 2015).

He received a scholarship from the Rotary Club to study hotel management. During the mid-seventies, Grenada had been experiencing political unrest thus the Rotary Club of Grenada wrote to the head office in Chicago asking permission to extend his study period. He was granted an extension, stayed, graduated in Vancouver and went on to do his practicum with the Hyatt Regency in 1974. He worked through the ranks and went back to Grenada in 1979 to take on the position of managing all the government-owned hotels in Grenada. Coinciding with Ramona's birth, he came back to Canada in 1981 to be reunited with his family. Within a couple of months, Mr. B was offered a job in Montserrat. He worked and lived there, managing a hotel for six years before he and his family moved back to Grenada. He spent fifteen years in the hotel industry there before returning to Canada with his wife in 2001.

Mr. B's passion for travel led him to different corners of the world. Being a part of the hotel business and an educator opened doors for new experiences and opportunities. As he is a well-travelled man, I asked Mr. B how he maintained his Grenadian culture in Vancouver: "I've always been a Caribbean person. I never get carried away with the cultures. I don't lose my culture, I respect people's cultures here...I've worked with people from all over the world but I never let this overtake my true roots and culture. Up to this day I still eat local foods. I still encourage local things, I teach local foods. So I've never lost it" (Mr. B July 24, 2015).

Mr. B's strong connection to his roots speaks to his affirmation and confidence in his identity. He speaks of the individuals who have migrated and have chosen to assimilate but knows that he is still very in tune with his heritage. He points out that when one conforms to the norm, they lose confidence and become "copycats". If one loses their identity, they have nothing more to hold on to that is true to their being.

We grappled with the argument of there being a lack of public presence and agreed that though there is a public presence, we have not yet "taken our culture to higher heights" (Mr. B. July 24, 2015). Though there are a few events that take place over the summer, he regrets the lack of year round consistency. Other than one of the most well-known Caribbean promoters (Melo B Productions), no one has yet to continue what he has started. Mr. B explains that there is still an individualistic mentality that only serves to differentiate rather than unify West Indian and more largely, Caribbean culture:

We have that kind of a rivalry and up here you have the Trinidad association, the Bajan association, the Saint Kits and Nevis association. There's so many different associations [and] we all seem to be scattered. I do not think we have utilized the whole Caribbean to bring it here (Mr. B July 24, 2015).

He highlights the success of other cultures in essentially bringing their culture with them and notes that we have not yet made that collective step as Caribbean people to bring our culture to the forefront. There has yet to be an authentic Caribbean representation that promotes our culture. Though individuals like Ramona offer a great form of representation, Mr. B argues that there are more internal conflicts within each Caribbean organization that hinders its growth and prosperity. With that being said, Mr. B believes that the future of Caribbean and West Indian presence lies within West Indian-born youth and those descendants.

SocaCize and Caribbean Days Festival

A week before the Caribbean Days Festival, Joy and Mona-Lisa invited me to a Caribbean Days preparation SocaCize workout class. It was a complimentary class offered to

those who had purchased a t-shirt to participate in the festival. I walked into the martial arts studio, greeting all of the familiar faces. I changed into appropriate workout gear and prepared myself for what I thought to be a dance workout. The seven of us organized in window



Fig 16: Socacize class with Joy and Mona

formation facing Joy. The music played as Joy demonstrated our warmup exercises. I prepared for what I thought would be an easygoing dance class however, within ten minutes, I had met my match. I gasped for air, begging Joy for a break. In between water breaks, I would look around the class, astonished by how in shape everyone was. With every exercise from there on I stared at Joy begging her to have mercy for her new apprentice. Once the half way mark approach, Mona-Lisa took the front of the room leading more exercises. I continued reluctantly and even modified a few of the exercises to fit my needs.

“And come up!”

“Go down, hold it, hold it!”

I looked around in despair and tried my best not to tap out. We danced around the room, waving our rags and blowing whistles. Once the two hour mark came near, Mona-Lisa switched off the core portion to Joy. We worked our abdominals, crunching, planking and alternating leg raises. She continued and after ten minutes, closed off our core session. Mona-Lisa returned to the front of the room to instruct our stretching session. The music changed from fast-paced melodies to an old school R&B classic. Everyone sang along as we stretched and calmed our bodies from the rigorous fast-paced cardio. As we ended our session, Joy, Mona-Lisa and I laughed at how out of

breath I was throughout the entire session. They joked around, calling me an old lady and warned me to be prepared for Caribbean Days. I laughed but knew I had to make sure I prepared for the parade.

I arrived at the parade in the morning to meet the rest of the band on the road. The journey to North Van was far but worth the trek. Various floats lined the parade route with individuals dressed in multicultural clothing. Both sides of the roads were blocked off to diverge car traffic and offer space for spectators. There were people from different backgrounds who came to enjoy the cultural

festivities. As different floats paraded down the road, I looked for the Caribbean groups. The first one that caught my attention was Ramona's Carnival Sensation band who looked stunning and



Fig 17: SC and ADC Masqueraders at Caribbean Days Festival

vibrant in their costumes. They chipped (coordinated foot stamping) down the road with rags and whistles in hand, interacting with the spectators on the sideline. As they continued down the road, other cultural organizations made their way down, playing music and dancing in their cultural garments. In the distance, I heard a familiar bass and sounds of blowing whistles. As they came nearer, I walked passed the barricade to join Mona-Lisa and Joy in their section. Blue, black, silver, coral, gold feathers and flags occupied my surroundings. Masqueraders jumped up in excitement and danced their way down the route. We followed the music from our truck singing along to the popular Soca songs. Joy and Mona-Lisa alternated on the microphone, introducing the band and giving us dance moves to follow along. We continued on the route

dancing and enjoying each other's company. Spectators joined in, following the masqueraders in the fun. Cameras snapped pictures of the moment, capturing the energetic atmosphere of the band.

Towards the end of the route, Joy called for all masqueraders to move to the stage area, located at the central grounds. Food trucks advertising authentic West Indian cuisine had line ups that stretched far from their tent. People walked through the park with bags of purchased West Indian products they would not normal get in the year. Local vendors of Caribbean goods displayed their products while onlookers showed interest. As we waited to be called to the stage, the MC introduced the band and gave signal for us to take our places in front of the stage for our performance. The judging segment evaluated the energy of the band and aesthetic appeal of costumes. Joy took the center once again, instructing moves as we moved to the music. We danced for the entire song and enjoyed the energy of the crowd.

After our masquerade duty was complete, we moved to our tent where beverages and Jamaican patties awaited. I sat down and ate, slightly drained from exertion. I walked around the grounds and met with Suzan, Richard and their family. They had set up a tent the night before for the weekend. We conversed and made plans to get together for the Caribbean Days family picnic held the next day. I navigated through most of the grounds, observing various tents and products. They had everything from contemporary African clothing to local ginger beer. I ran into Trinidadians, Grenadians, Jamaicans and made connections with West Indians who have been living in the Lower mainland for decades. We enjoy our conversations and parted ways. After leaving the park, I decided to head back over the waters and prepare for the next day.

Caribbean Days festival not only showcased West Indian culture but also highlighted broader Caribbean and less known cultures. It is not only a celebration of Caribbean culture but a celebration of multiculturalism in Vancouver. It gave less known cultures a platform to showcase a piece of their identity and give the public a tangible understanding of different cultures.

Caribbean Days and its organizers take the opportunity to not only showcase their culture but offer others the same opportunity to celebrate their differences with the public. It allowed for West Indians to connect and spend time with one another over the course of the weekend while giving others the opportunity to celebrate their own identity through diversity.

Findings

Throughout the course of the project I collected: six interviews, five observation sites as well as reflecting on my own narrative. My autobiography provided a valuable understanding regarding the importance of documenting personal narratives of a culture that has most recently incorporated written literature as a source of tracing West Indian history. My epistemological position within the project enhances researcher transparency, making it much easier for readers to point to areas where I might overlook my position as a subjective researcher.

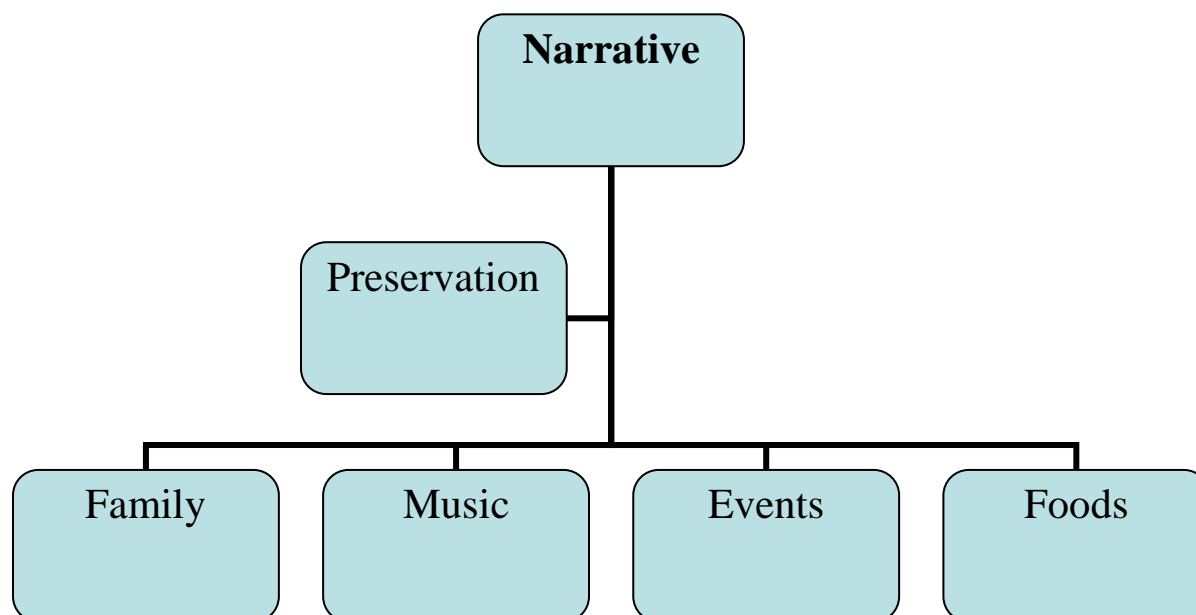


Fig 18: Data analysis chart

Glesne's (2014) definition of thematic analysis proved to be the most fitting for my research. Though many of my participants are generally of similar ethnic makeup, there are a variety of different participants and perspectives, providing a heterogeneous mixture of experiences and practices. Constant case comparison (Glesne 2014, p. 187) (commonly used in grounded theory) puts me in a position to look for how cases vary in terms of events, participants, settings and the use of narratives (Glesne 2014, p. 187). I purposely chose participants and sites to showcase the different experiences individuals encounter in Vancouver, picking out any similarities or variances throughout the analysis.

Much of my coding process began as I led conversations. The use of narrative as a vehicle for discovery led me to various themes pointing towards a need for West Indian preservation of culture and identity. Through my analysis, I found five overarching key themes that has framed my coding analysis. The six conversations I had with West Indian participants pointed me to different ways they continue to preserve their identity as West Indian migrants. Narrative is ultimately used as a mechanism for preserving West Indian culture. Narratives point

to multiple arrangements they make in their life as settled migrants that renegotiate their being as a settled Vancouverite. Their narratives lead to stories of initial settlement and sentiments of their new homes. The preservation of cultural identity is practiced through a re-enactment of various practices that resemble those from back home. They do their best to replicate these practices in order to solidify their being as West Indian Vancouverites.

Onkar and Suzan are dependent on family to continue to keep their West Indian identities intact. They both use family and food as a way of relaying their culture onto others and within their close family. By keeping the majority of their cooking West Indian, they ritualize their customs as a means of retaining a piece of their culture alive. Onkar's connection to his mother and her cooking play a role in retaining what it means to be Guyanese. Suzan's strict West Indian cooking helped her children and others to familiarize themselves with West Indian cuisine, performing various traditional cooking on specific days of the week, as she did living in Trinidad. The pictures of her family that decorate her walls, personifies what it means to feel at home.

Like many West Indians, our music conjures a nostalgic sincere feeling of home. Music brings about a recollection of a time before settlement and of different stages in one's life. Peter uses music as his own oasis to get away from the outside world. He listens to his music in the comfort of his home, as a form of relaxation and a longing for return. He listens to his classic Reggae and early Dancehall, remembering a time in his prime when Dancehall was booming. It also gives him a temporary fix, until he can afford a trip back home.

Suzan, Ramona and Mr. B host West Indian-centered events, fostering a public audience that shows interest in cultural gatherings and events. Though Ramona (with the help of Mr. B) hosts events on a larger scale—centered around bringing West Indian culture to the forefront,

Suzan attracts friends into her home on a more personal level which both serve the same purpose. The continuous promotion of West Indian culture turns into a shameless promotion of West Indian identity. The organizations they are members of fade to the background while their presence within the organizations is a mere extension of the work they accomplish.

Although participants do preserve their cultural identity in similar ways to one another, they all express agency in choosing which method of preservation is more feasible and enjoyable to fit their needs. They continue to practice different ways but enjoy the flexibility and limitless possibilities to exploring their West Indian identity in Vancouver.

Outcomes

In my initial quest for answer, I posed four questions:

1. What are the realities and outcomes migrants have when migrating to Canada
2. How are migrant's experiences related to immigration policies in place in the past and present (where's/what's the correlation)
3. Who migrated to Vancouver, from which class/socioeconomic levels?
4. What is the importance of storytelling for Caribbean migrants?

I highlighted these questions in my initial quest for uncovering migration patterns however, there were no definite or single answers that indicated a solid understanding of West Indian migration to Vancouver proper. The realities and outcomes do vary but there is a particular mindset for the need to remain true to one's West Indian Identity while respecting Canadian culture.

Migrant's experiences related to immigration policies appear to be more common upon earlier migration than those who have migrated recently. Mr. B's sponsorship from the Rotary club to pursue his education indicated a particular type of migration while Suzan was transferred into the same ranking to Vancouver for work purposes.

Based on the access of participants, there is a higher number of Trinidadians easily available as I found it most difficult to get in contact with those from the smaller islands of the West Indies. All of my participants fell into the working-middle class. Though they may have started off struggling economically, they eventually found their financial footing and live comfortably in Vancouver. Most of them often travel back and forth to their countries of origin at least once a year for familial reasons or when they need a break from the city. Moreover, storytelling plays a major role in gatherings. Stories become dependent on special events that take place in their immediate and extended family or here in the Vancouver West Indian community. Stories of individuals travel to far corners of the city and helped in tracking down individuals located in various islands through events taken place around the city.

I observed a variety of events and held several conversations to uncover that West Indian culture in Vancouver is extremely domesticated in comparison to Toronto. Therefore the use of narrative is an integral piece to fitting West Indian culture and migration together. Though there is an effort to connect the West Indian community in Vancouver, they are still dispersed across the province which explains the incentive to preserve their culture privately. The need for written documentation becomes integral in capturing West Indian experience for it has not yet been academically discussed. Our history is highly dependent on narration passed on from generation to generation. By examining the use of narrative amongst West Indians, I create a space for documenting oral history as a means of creating meaning academic discussion and recognition regarding our settlement and presence in Vancouver.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the importance of building a collective narrative amongst West Indians residing in Vancouver (GVA). The findings allow for a detailed and immediate conversation regarding experiences and life stories. These narratives were

collected in order to increase the visibility of West Indian communities in Vancouver within academic research literature. This pointed to a refusal of essentialist West Indian immigrant experiences, adding depth and complexity to our narratives. Data was only collected from accessible participants, as per distance and lack of availability. Therefore, a residual need for such research to be conducted in the peripheries of British Columbia exists, in order to add to the collective narrative already driven by West Indian settlement in Toronto. By presenting their life stories, the West Indian narratives from Vancouver take their place in academic spaces and conversations, making their history more accessible to the public.

While the experiences of West Indians in Vancouver based on geographical origins, there is a collective desire to preserve their stories. As Mr. B said, if you lose your identity, what is left to hold on to? We cross borders, we raise families, and we make new homes in hopes of bettering our circumstances, what we hold on to in the end defines the significance of our heritage. We hold on to the tales of opportunity, the experiences of the unknown and the power of tongue. With the passing of my father's mother in April, and the recent prognosis of my other grandmother's terminal illness, I find myself deeply saddened. Although our weekly phone calls consist mostly of mumbles and laughs, she is still able to sneak in a story before hanging up. No material or emotional consolation can ease the pain of knowing that I will have to say goodbye. However, I take solace in knowing that I carry her words in my role as a storyteller.

I will never forget the woman who placed me on her lap and rocked me as she told me tales about the three jobs she had to work in order to provide for her family.

I will never forget the tales of independence about this woman and her three houses.

I will never forget the laughter and determination displayed by the stories about my grandmother putting her six children through school.

I will never forget the face of the dear old woman who still tells



me every day that we will run away together, leaving everybody else behind. It is my role as a granddaughter to continue to remind her of the many stories she has told me, and their importance, until she is able to tell stories again.

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Why should you take part in this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your insightful perspective on your first-hand or second-hand experiences with police officers .We are doing this study to learn about ways to improve minority relations with police officers.

Why are we doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how police officers and minority relationships are at a disadvantage based upon racial discrimination, stereotyping and a lack of trust between minority communities and police officers. We are trying to gain insight to ways this relationship can be improved by gathering stories and insight of participants' experiences with authorities in the past and present.

Study Procedures

Participants will be asked to a series of interview questions about their (or second-hand) experiences with police officers and their sentiments towards them as it stands to date. Interview questions should be an estimated time of 30 to 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded to ensure data collection accuracy. After recording, the interview will be transcribed into a written document for further analysis. You may be contacted for further information if necessary. A pseudonym will be used to ensure confidentiality and will only be accessed by the researcher.

Is this study harmful?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. Some of the questions we ask may bring back memories of unsettling time. Please notify the interviewer at any time if you have any concerns.

What are the benefits of participating?

No one knows whether or not you will benefit from this study. There may or may not be direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. Your experience will potentially provide insight to the gaps in our police system regarding minority issues and concerns.

How will your identity be protected?

Your confidentiality will be respect. All documents will be identified only by the pseudonym and kept on a USB stick with a protected security code to gain access.

What if I decide to withdraw my consent to participate?

You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reason or being penalized. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

Study results

The results of this study will be reported in a final research report for an undergraduate course; Honours Research Proposal (CMNS 497) at SFU for grading purposes.

